**Article of the Week #1**

**Directions:**

1. **Show evidence of a close reading (highlighting key points and making notes in the margins – can be questions, thoughts, confusion, etc.)**
2. **Answer the question at the bottom of the article in paragraph form.**

**The Future of Digital Marketing Is You (excerpt)**

February 18, 2014, 9:41 pm ET by [Sarah Childress](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/author/sarahc/) – on Frontline PBS website

Every minute, the world’s 2 billion Internet users upload staggering [volumes of data to the web](http://mashable.com/2012/06/22/data-created-every-minute/): an estimated 200 billion emails, 48 hours of YouTube videos, 684,478 posts on Facebook. And then there’s Tweets, Instagram photos, text messages and blog posts.

But what happens when what seems like social media ephemera enters into the vaults of Big Data, where everything we do online, and increasingly offline, is collected and stored for analysis?

“Those who have access to and control the platforms have the largest, most powerful source of information about human behavior that anyone has ever had in human history,” Mark Andrejevic, deputy director for the University of Queensland’s Center for Critical and Cultural Studies in Australia, who studies surveillance and the web, told FRONTLINE. “And that’s information that they are going to use for their ends, whatever those might be.”

Today, companies reach consumers with targeted marketing — placing ads based on your web searches, the content of your Gmail messages, or your purchasing history. Every time you log into a site like Amazon, the recommendations you see are based not only on your purchase history and items you’ve viewed, but also an algorithm that factors in the preferences of people with similar buying histories. Companies also use retargeting: blanketing the ad space with images of products you’ve viewed as you move on to browse other sites.

But as the volumes of data we add to the web keeps multiplying — one estimate [projects it will grow 300 times by 2020](http://www.emc.com/leadership/digital-universe/iview/executive-summary-a-universe-of.htm) — it becomes more difficult for marketers to figure out who to target with which ads and when. So companies are turning to computer models that analyze these massive pools of information to make inferences about your health, personality traits, and even mood in real time, in order to help them predict, and ultimately influence, your next purchase.

**Data Knows How You Feel**

Soon it won’t be enough for companies to know what you might want. The most sophisticated want to know *when* you’re most likely to want it. Last month, Apple [submitted a patent application](http://appft.uspto.gov/netacgi/nph-Parser?Sect1=PTO1&Sect2=HITOFF&d=PG01&p=1&u=%2Fnetahtml%2FPTO%2Fsrchnum.html&r=1&f=G&l=50&s1=%2220140025620%22.PGNR.&OS=DN/20140025620&RS=DN/20140025620) for technology that could make inferences about people’s mood in real time. “If an individual is pre-occupied or unhappy, the individual may not be as receptive to certain types of content,” Apple said.

The company’s solution: Figure out how a person is feeling at any given moment, and target content — ads — to be delivered at the right time and place. To do this, the company could establish a baseline profile of each user, and then make inferences about a person’s mood based on deviations from that baseline.

Studies suggest that many people already unwittingly reveal a lot about mood and behavioral characteristics online. A team of researchers at Microsoft Research in Redmond, Wash. used Twitter to [predict major depression](https://research.microsoft.com/pubs/192721/icwsm_13.pdf) with 70 percent accuracy in users by analyzing the time, content and frequency of their tweets. In another study, three researchers from that team predicted with 71 percent accuracy whether a woman would [develop post-partum depression](https://research.microsoft.com/en-us/um/people/horvitz/predicting_postpartum_changes_chi_2013.pdf) based on her online behavior before she delivered her child.

**Are You Creeped Out Yet?**

Digital marketers say that all of this data collection and analysis is designed to improve the experience for the consumer by offering more of what they want, or at least what companies think they want.

Salesforce, for example, can help companies offer personalized product recommendations for users who visit the company website, or daily deals based on a user’s travel history and hotel preferences, according to its promotional videos. Or they can text a coupon to a customer’s phone when they come within range of a company store.

Privacy advocates worry that consumers aren’t getting fair deal for their data. “The idea that any of this actually matches people’s expectations is that just wrong,” said Lee Tien, a senior staff attorney at the Electronic Frontier Foundation, a nonprofit group that advocates for individual rights online. Tien points to security breaches, like the [recent hack of Target’s customer data](http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424052702304703804579381520736715690), as an indication that not all companies are responsible with the data they collect. The lack of transparency into what’s being collected, and by whom, he says, makes it more difficult to hold companies or individuals responsible for what they do with our data — or even to know how much data is out there and whether it’s accurate.

Some companies have already seen a backlash when the curtain is drawn back on their data collection. A few years ago, Target began [analyzing purchase histories](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/19/magazine/shopping-habits.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0) to determine when women were pregnant, and then sending them ads for baby products. Then, one of those fliers went to the home of a high-school student whose father didn’t know she was pregnant. Target apologized, and later scaled back its advertising to make the fliers look less conspicuous.

“We do have so much information that we could, absolutely get creepy,” Eden said, adding that Target’s flier was clearly a “miss.” “You have to be responsible with that information. … It’s a delicate dance. For most of our customers, for our clients, we’re hired to drive results. So it’s a barometer that we have. We have to be good stewards of their brands. But at the same time, if they invest a dollar in digital, they’re looking to get five dollars back.”

**Response Question (answer in paragraph form and staple to this sheet): Do you agree that companies should have a right to collect data on your internet activity? Why or why not?**