

TED TALK LESSON

WE'RE BUILDING A DYSTOPIA JUST TO MAKE PEOPLE CLICK ON ADS

TEACHER'S NOTES

CREATED BY
ESLDEBATES.COM



Zeynep Tufekci · Techno-
sociologist Techno-sociologist
TEDGlobal>NYC

https://www.ted.com/talks/zeynep_tufekci_we_re_building_a_dystopia_just_to_make_people_click_on_ads

Vocab matching answers

1. a
2. k
3. c
4. d
5. f
6. m
7. g
8. n
9. h
10. e
11. i
12. j
13. b

Vocab gap-fill answers

1. Succumb
2. Infer
3. Surveillance
4. Advertise
5. Matrices
6. Entice
7. Machine-learning algorithms
8. Bury
9. Persuasion
10. Dystopia
11. Prioritize
12. Artificial Intelligence
13. Demographics
14. Ad

Ted Talk video answers

1. It's a great book. It's hitting the bestseller lists again, but it's not the correct dystopia for the 21st century.
2. What we need to fear most is not what artificial intelligence will do to us on its own, but how the people in power will use artificial intelligence to control us and to manipulate us in novel, sometimes hidden, subtle and unexpected ways.
3. Much of the technology that threatens our freedom and our dignity in the near-term future is being developed by companies in the business of capturing and selling our data and our attention to advertisers and others: Facebook, Google, Amazon, Alibaba, and Tencent.
4. In the digital world, persuasion architectures can be built at the scale of billions.
5. Facebook collects every status update we ever typed, every Messenger conversation, every place we logged in from, and all our photographs that we uploaded there.
6. No, it is not. YouTube has a column on the right that says "Up next" and it automatically plays something. It's an algorithm picking what it thinks that you might be interested in and maybe not find on your own. It's not a human editor.
7. YouTube started recommending and auto playing white supremacist videos in increasing order of extremism.
8. Last year, Donald Trump's social media manager disclosed that they were using Facebook dark posts to demobilize people, not to persuade them, but to convince them not to vote at all.
9. Facebook also algorithmically arranges the posts that your friends put on Facebook, or the pages you follow. It doesn't show you everything chronologically. It puts the order in the way that the algorithm thinks will entice you to stay on the site longer. The algorithm is prioritizing some of them and burying the others.
10. These algorithms can quite easily infer things like your people's ethnicity, religious and political views, personality traits, intelligence, and happiness, use of addictive substances, parental separation, age and genders, just from Facebook likes.
11. These algorithms can identify protesters even if their faces are partially concealed. These algorithms may be able to detect people's sexual orientation just from their dating profile pictures.
12. If the people in power are using these algorithms to quietly watch us, to judge us and to nudge us, to predict and identify the troublemakers and the rebels, to deploy persuasion architectures at scale and to manipulate individuals using their weaknesses and vulnerabilities, that authoritarianism will envelop us like a spider's web and we may not even know we're in it.

Warmer questions

- Are ads intentionally targeted?
- How exactly is advertising manipulating our spending habits?
- To what extent is our Internet experience affected by the machine learning algorithms?
- What would life be like in an advertising-free world?

Reading section

Battling for attention

Machine learning (ML) is a subfield of artificial intelligence that allows software applications to be more precise in predicting results. The main objective of machine learning technology is to predict an acceptable output value by building algorithms. But while these algorithms have brought important changes to the World Wide Web, advertisement and Persuasion Architecture (PA) and have also played an important role in the user's internet experience.

Online advertising, or web advertising, is a form of marketing which uses the Internet to deliver promotional advertising messages (ads) to online consumers. Most consumers view online advertising as an unwanted interference with hardly any benefits and, for a variety of reasons, have increasingly turned to ad blocking. Many common online advertising practices are controversial and increasingly subject to regulation.

Successful PA, on the other hand, is based on the research marketers perform to map out what motivates customers through each step of their purchase experience. PA is nothing new, though. Physical retailers have used it in their stores for decades. The layout of aisles and the location of products on shelves are all prearranged to draw attention, gain interest, encourage desire, and to persuade customers to buy what they offer.



The “AIDA” Test

AIDA stands for Attention, Interest, Desire, and Action. It is a cognitive model that describes buying and selling by helping marketers appeal to the consumers’ emotional and social needs. To aid in the process of turning visitors into buyers, persuasion architecture applies AIDA to websites making the following questions:

WHO are we trying to persuade?

WHAT action do we want our customers to take?

HOW do we persuade our customers to take the action?

Questions to consider

- Does the website grab our customers’ attention?
- Does the website stimulate our customers’ interest?
- Does the website encourage the desire to take the action of clicking deeper toward a purchase? Is taking action obvious and easy?

Over the years, persuasion architecture has proven to be meaningfully effective in alluring customers and persuading them to buy their products. However, some detractors might argue, and with good reason, that PA is all about manipulation. At this point, it is worth mentioning that the difference between persuasion and manipulation lies in:

- The intent behind the persuasion,
- The straightforwardness and transparency of the process, and
- The benefit or impact on individuals.

Manipulation thus implies persuasion with the intent to fool; in this case, having customers buy something that could potentially leave them either harmed or without benefit. So, are machine-learning ads and persuasion architecture targeted at manipulating us or are they just trying to persuade us into buying what is in our best interests?



Vocabulary matching

Using the words on the left match them to their real definitions.

- | | |
|--------------------------------|--|
| 1. Dystopia | a. An imagined state or society in which there is great suffering or injustice, typically one that is totalitarian or post-apocalyptic. |
| 2. Artificial intelligence | b. Put or hide underground. |
| 3. Ad | c. An advertisement. |
| 4. Succumb | d. Fail to resist pressure, temptation, or some other negative force. |
| 5. Persuasion | e. A rectangular array of quantities or expressions in rows and columns that is treated as a single entity and manipulated according to particular rules. |
| 6. Infer | f. The action or fact of persuading someone or of being persuaded to do or believe something. |
| 7. Demographics | g. Statistical data relating to the population and particular groups within it. |
| 8. Machine-learning algorithms | h. It is a category of algorithm that allows software applications to become more accurate in predicting outcomes without being explicitly programmed. |
| 9. Matrices | i. Close observation, especially of a suspected spy or criminal. |
| 10. Surveillance | j. Determine the order for dealing with (a series of items or tasks) according to their relative importance. |
| 11. Entice | k. The theory and development of computer systems able to perform tasks that normally require human intelligence, such as visual perception, speech recognition, decision-making, and translation between languages. |
| 12. Prioritize | l. Attract or tempt by offering pleasure or advantage. |
| 14. Bury | m. Deduce or conclude (information) from evidence and reasoning rather than from explicit statements. |
| | n. Describe or draw attention to (a product, service, or event) in a public medium in order to promote sales or attendance. |



Video section

We're building an artificial intelligence-powered dystopia, one click at a time, says Techno-sociologist Zeynep Tufekci. In an eye-opening talk, she details how the same algorithms companies like Facebook, Google and Amazon use to get you to click on ads are also used to organize your access to political and social information. And the machines aren't even the real threat. What we need to understand is how the powerful might use AI to control us – and what we can do in response.

https://www.ted.com/talks/zeynep_tufekci_we_re_building_a_dystopia_just_to_make_people_click_on_ads



Watch the video and then answer the questions below:

1. What is George Orwell's "1984"?
2. What does the speaker think we need to fear most?
3. What is being developed by companies now?
4. How many persuasion architectures can be built in the digital world?
5. What is the data that Facebook has on us?
6. Is YouTube autoplay feature a human editor?
7. What did YouTube autoplay during the rallies of then-candidate Donald Trump in 2016?
8. What did Donald Trump's social media manager discover last year?
9. What is Facebook doing algorithmically?
10. What can these algorithms infer just from Facebook likes?
11. What can these algorithms identify?
12. What if the people in power are using these algorithms?

The advantages of machine learning

- **Identifies trends and patterns:** Machine learning algorithms can easily analyse large volumes of data and determine specific trends and patterns that would not be apparent to the human eye.
- **No human intervention needed:** Since machine learning means giving machines the ability to learn, ML makes predictions and also improves the algorithms on their own. ML is also good at recognising spam.
- **Continuous improvement:** As ML algorithms collect more data, they keep improving in accuracy and efficiency. This lets them make better decisions and more accurate predictions faster.
- **Handling of multi-dimensional and multi-variety data:** Machine learning algorithms handle large volumes of data that are multi-dimensional and multi-variety in dynamic or uncertain environments.
- **Wide applications:** ML holds the capability to help deliver a more personal experience to customers while also targeting a massive number of consumers.

The disadvantages of machine learning

- **Data acquisition:** Machine learning requires massive data that should be already unbiased and of good quality. There can also be times where algorithms must wait for new data to be created.
- **Time and resources:** ML needs time for the algorithms to learn and develop enough to fulfil their purpose with a significant amount of precision and relevancy. It also needs massive resources to function. So, additional requirements of computer power and other technical supplies may be necessary.
- **Learning time:** The bigger the data and the longer a machine learning system is exposed to these data, the better it will perform. ML learns through historical data to make better predictions and decisions.
- **Interpretation of results:** to precisely interpret results generated by the algorithms and to carefully choose the algorithms for a certain purpose represent another challenge, too.
- **High error-susceptibility:** ML is autonomous but highly susceptible to errors. Companies may end up with biased predictions coming from a biased training set. This may lead to irrelevant advertisements being displayed to customers, for example.
- **Limitations of predictions:** ML systems do not understand context. Hence, depending on the given data used for training, machine learning is also vulnerable to hidden and unintentional biases. Human input is thus important to better evaluate the outputs of these machine learning systems.

Task

Given how AI and machine learning are becoming mature technologies what social or national changes do you think will occur and how can we be prepared for it?

Extended discussion questions

1. Can internet algorithms really predict what we want or need?
2. Or, are internet algorithms leading us towards what they “think” our likes and needs should be?
3. Are targeted ads stalking us?
4. If we can't afford a premium internet experience, how can we stop ads?
5. Are ads really creating a parallel world for us?
6. Are we doomed to live in an everlasting advertising bubble?
7. Is persuasion architecture shaping our sense of taste?
8. Would we be lost if the ads weren't showing us their buying options?

Potential debating topics

1. I don't have time to surf the web. Ads save me a lot of time.
2. Clicking to get rid of the endless ads is dreadfully time-consuming.
3. I feel flattered and important every time I come across an ad customised with my personal info.
4. I find it preposterous that advertisers use my personal data to lure me into buying their products.
5. Facebook, Google, Amazon, Alibaba, and Tencent's machine-learning algorithms should be subject to rigorous censorship.
6. The machine-learning algorithms of companies like Facebook, Google, Amazon, Alibaba, and Tencent are helpful and beneficial for most Internet users.



DEBATING PLANS

PREMIUM 30-PAGE DEBATING LESSONS ON DOZENS OF TOPICS

These lessons are extensive and includes a magazine-like introduction, a 2-page article, vocabulary section, grammar exercises, and images for discussion. To help students organize their debate, worksheets are included for appropriate language and pros and cons to get them started. In total these lesson plans offer 30 pages of activities and tasks for students.

Environmental Crimes

Debate Lesson Plan

Created by Balvinder Kataora for esldebates.com © 2018



Should natural features be given legal rights to protect them from pollution? This debate will target issues relating to how to legally protect the environment and criminalise pollution.

Food Tax

Debate Lesson Plan

Created by Balvinder Kataora for esldebates.com © 2018

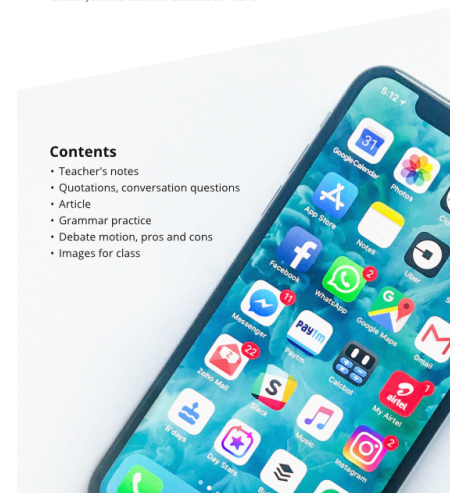


What are the best ways to tackle obesity? Some people advocate better food education, while others want to tax people to change their spending habits. Which is the most effective?

Social Media

Debate Lesson Plan

Created by Balvinder Kataora for esldebates.com © 2018



People are becoming increasingly concerned about social media. Discuss the main issues and find out what your students think and why.