

Chatterbox #259 – TikTok and internet privacy

Episode description

In this week's Chatterbox episode, Andrew and Kassy discuss an important topic: internet privacy. We now live in a world where so much of our personal information can be found and manipulated with just a few clicks of the mouse. Tune in to hear what Andrew and Kassy have to say about this topic.

Fun fact

Read the fine print! Anytime you sign up for a new service or buy a new device, there's usually a Terms and Conditions page that one must read and agree to before using the service or device. However, most people simply scroll to the bottom of the page, click the Agree button, and move on without even glancing at the long lines of tiny print. This is not advisable, however, because you could have unknowingly given your permission for that service or company to sell your data to the highest bidder.

Expressions included in the study guide

- Spur of the moment
- To take off
- An influx of [something]
- Legalese
- To blow the whistle
- Flagged



Transcript

Note: The words and expressions that appear in **bold text** within the transcript are discussed in more detail in the Detailed Explanations section that follows the transcript. The transcript has been edited for clarity.

Andrew: Hello, everyone. My name is Andrew.

Kassy: And I'm Kassy.

Andrew: And this is the Culips English Podcast.

Andrew: Hello there, friends. Welcome back to Chatterbox, the Culips series that features completely, totally natural conversations between English native speakers talking about fascinating and interesting topics. Chatterbox is perfect for intermediate and advanced English learners who want to sharpen their English listening skills, build their vocabulary, and ultimately become fluent English speakers. And I'm not alone today. I am joined by my cohost, Kassy. Hey there, Kassy.

Kassy: Hey, Andrew.

Andrew: So before we get into our topic for today, which I think is really fascinating. It is about online privacy, and I know we both have lots to say about that, Kassy. But before we get into that, I did want to give a shout-out to one of our listeners, Olivia from the USA. And Olivia left us a nice message and nice ranking on Apple Podcasts. She said, "Love this already on the second day." So she must be a new listener. So welcome aboard. And she wrote, "I will keep listening to this podcast. And I feel confident that this will help me to improve my English." And, Olivia, we certainly hope that you can improve your English with us.

Andrew: And one more announcement everyone, that there is a study guide for this episode available for all Culips members on our website, which is Culips.com. And we recommend following along with the study guide while you listen along with us today. And if you're not a Culips member yet, but would like to see why our study guides are such an awesome resource for studying English, then just visit Culips.com. And you can navigate to the Study Guide Samples option under the Membership menu. And there you can download six free samples. Check them out and see if it would be a good fit for your English studies.

Andrew: All right, let's get into our main topic of conversation for today, which is internet privacy, internet privacy. And, Kassy, the reason why I wanted to talk about this today is that there is a big controversy brewing over a popular app called TikTok. TikTok, I'm not talking about the hands of a clock ticking back and forth, ticktock, ticktock, which is where this word comes from. But I'm talking about this new social media app. And so have you ever heard of TikTok before?

Kassy: Well, of course I've heard of TikTok, but I do not use it myself.

Andrew: So what do you know about it?

Kassy: I heard it's kind of like the new Vine. So Vine was a 6-second video, social media platform a couple of years ago that kind of failed. But TikTok is this new version, you know, like, short videos that really grab people's attention.

Andrew: Me as well, Kassy, I don't use TikTok. I'm not a TikToker. And mainly because I think I just have social media fatigue, like, signing up for a new app and making a new profile, finding new friends, it's just too much for me to do. But it's really, really popular. It's the top app in the world. It's beating Instagram, it's beating Facebook, it's beating Snapchat. And just like you said, it's an app that features short video clips. And a lot of people praise it because they feel like it's more authentic and spontaneous than Instagram. So, like, you know, when you go on Instagram, there are influencers. And it's very obvious that these people have put a lot of thought into the picture or the video that they're posting. Whereas on TikTok, it feels like kind of **spur of the moment**. People are just grabbing their phone and making a short video and uploading it. And I think for that reason, it has really **taken off** a lot.

Kassy: Yeah, I agree. I do think there's a lot of, I don't know, video editing on TikTok these days now, though. Maybe it was more spontaneous. But I feel like people are trying to grab the attention because there's such **an influx of users** these days. A lot of what I used to see on TikTok was, like, cool dance videos and, you know, spontaneous things. But it seems like these days, it's more video edited tricks that people do that you know are definitely not real.

Andrew: Yeah, well, as soon as it gains popularity, I think then you have people that are like, oh, I can make some money off this. So then if they treat it as a career, they're going to put a lot of effort into it.

Kassy: That's right.

Andrew: Absolutely. So TikTok is popular, but I mentioned it was controversial. So have you heard about the controversy at all, surrounding TikTok?

Kassy: You know, I haven't heard much. I just know that TikTok was made in China. And then I also know that Trump really hates TikTok.

Andrew: Yeah, so I think, originally, TikTok was an American app, actually. And then it was bought by a company called ByteDance. And ByteDance is a Chinese social media company that has several different apps. I was actually looking at their website yesterday and I was surprised to see that they have not just TikTok, but many different social media apps for different countries. So they have, like, an app that's big in India and a different app that's popular in Japan and one in Malaysia. So it's kind of an interesting company in that respect.

Andrew: But, really, I think people in the Western world—specifically the USA, but also in my country of Canada, as well—there was concern that ByteDance is a Chinese company and that, you know, when you upload your pictures, your videos, and when you give your phone access to that app, and then I guess, indirectly, you're giving the company access to your phone that way, then people are concerned about their privacy and where that data is going and whether ByteDance might feel pressured to share user data with the Chinese government.

Kassy: It's a deep topic. I think it's definitely an issue that we shouldn't take lightly. But I think we really do these days, you know, every time you sign up for an app like TikTok, Facebook, Instagram, they have a user agreement that, you know, is 500 pages long, but we simply hit the little box and get started.

Andrew: Yeah. Do you know anybody who reads the **legalese** in the user agreements?

Kassy: No, no one. Do you know anybody, Andrew?

Andrew: No, no, nobody's got time for that, right? It's just too much. So I guess this is the background of why I wanted to talk about internet privacy is that, you know, given the trade war that's happening right now, also, between the USA and China, it's just not a great time for relations between the two countries, unfortunately. And, yeah, there are many people talking about the internet privacy and the security issues regarding this app. So with that being said, why don't we move on to more our personal opinions and what we do to protect ourself, if anything, online. So, Kassy, in general, what do you think about internet privacy? Is it something that you think about at all? Is it on your mind? Or is it just not an issue for you in your life?

Kassy: I wish it was more of an issue in my life. I do think it's really important, but I get lazy, you know, I'm in a rush to do something or sign up for something. And I don't really care in the moment. But I think it's really important. And I think the things that we sign up for can really influence not just our life, but what we see. So I've heard that apps like TikTok and Facebook actually influence people's decisions, not just for buying things with advertisements, but also the way they think politically.

Kassy: I saw an amazing documentary that said the reason why a lot of the world is so contentious on issues now is because Facebook and TikTok and Instagram put posts on your news feeds that focus only on your ideas. So if you lean more conservatively, they only put conservative content on there to reinforce your belief that, oh, yeah, I'm right, see, I saw that on Facebook and Instagram and TikTok. But if you're more liberal, they'll do the opposite. They'll post news feeds that, you know, post that propaganda. So it's really interesting how it can kind of brainwash you, too.

Andrew: Yeah. I mean, all of these apps, what they're doing is trying to hold your attention for as long as possible, right? That's what they are in the business of. And I think, because of that, personally, I've tried to stay off some social media sites more and more, or definitely, I don't use it as a place to get news. I think Facebook is maybe not the best place to get your news these days, especially about the USA. I don't know about other countries. But we call this confirmation bias, Kassy, and that's when you are searching out for news or, you know, posts on social media that match your already established beliefs. So, like you said, if you are a conservative person and then you go onto Facebook and you see a bunch of conservative news stories that reaffirm what you already believe, then this is confirmation bias. And it's not true exposure to, you know, the variety of ideas that actually exist in the world.

Kassy: Another issue with these sites is that a lot of them download software immediately onto your phone that you don't even realize is on there sometimes. Like maybe once they'll ask access to your microphone or ask access to your location. And you might not realize that you pushed that button, but you did. So every time you go on that app, they know exactly where you are, exactly what you're saying. And maybe even who you're with, if their phone is also in the same location and also logged into one of those apps, which is kind of scary to think about.

Andrew: Yes, I agree. And it's funny that you mentioned that, because this week, my Apple software on my iPhone updated. And they have some stronger privacy and security features in the app now. And I guess I had given access to my bank app to track my location and Apple **flagged** it as being a privacy concern, because they said, whoa, within the last 15 minutes, your app has asked where you are seven times. Do you want to keep this happening? I was like, whoa, that is insane. No, I need to turn off this feature. Like, my bank shouldn't need to know where I am seven times within 15 minutes. I thought that was outrageous. So, yeah, some of these things, like you said, we don't read the **legalese**, we might just want to install an app quickly. We hit OK, OK, OK and then who knows what we've given these companies access to do.

Kassy: Exactly. I've noticed also that I get so much junk mail now after downloading these apps, because probably somewhere in their **legalese** that you mentioned, they have a clause saying is it OK if we share your information or your email address with other companies? And since we don't read it, it's part of our agreement. And then we get all of this junk from other user, other sites that we don't even care about.

Andrew: Yes, yeah. That's so annoying. The spam, the spam, right?

Andrew: OK, so with all of this being on the table, then, do you do anything to protect yourself or to stop this from happening?

Kassy: For me, after I download an app, I always go into my settings and make sure that location is turned off and microphone. And usually I also turn off advertisement software buttons so that they can't see what I'm buying. Sometimes I like it, so they can show me things that I might want to buy in the future, but.

Andrew: The algorithm's not always bad. I'm the same way. Like, sometimes if you want to sell me a product that I need and you can send me an ad that advertises that product at a cheap price, then that's actually a useful feature for me. But, yeah, most of the time, I use ad blockers and different apps to minimize how much advertising I see, and.

Andrew: I don't go as far as to tape my webcam, but I have occasionally put a sticky note over top of it. 'Cause, you know, after Edward Snowden came out several years ago talking about the NSA, and he made this big, I mean, he **blew the whistle**, right? As a warning to everybody about what the government and other companies can do and how much access they have to our information, through turning our phones on remotely and looking through our webcams and listening to our mics. That kind of freak me out a bit. So occasionally, I will cover up my webcam, or, you know, just put my phone under a pillow or something so that it's not always listening to me.

Andrew: I think that's, yeah, that's about what I do. But I don't know. It's hard, we have busy lives. How can we stay on top of everything? I wish these companies would just act a little more respectably.

Kassy: Yeah. Also, on top of that, I think this is getting a little bit conspiracy theory-ish, but—

Andrew: I love it. I love conspiracy theories.

Kassy: Information is power, right, Andrew? The more information they have, the more resources they have, the more influence they have in our lives and in our governments, the more power they have over everything. You know, a lot of these social media companies like Facebook, Google, Amazon—not social media, but similar—they're like giant monopolies right now that shouldn't be allowed to exist, but they do. And I'm sure they influence much more than we can even comprehend as an everyday citizen.

Andrew: Yes. And that that actually kind of brings up another issue that is raging right now in the USA regarding Twitter and their censorship of some tweets by Donald Trump.

Kassy: I've heard of this, yes.

Andrew: Yeah, by his press secretary, and people are getting banned all over the place. Right now, when we are recording this, everyone, it's just a couple of days after the American election and we're not sure who the new President is yet. It's just an interesting time to see how social media can craft reality, right? They can have a very strong effect, these private companies can have a strong effect on the political situation and who is able to send their message out and who is not. And this just brings up a host of ethical questions that are really interesting to think and talk about. But, Kassy, I think we'll save it for another day.

Kassy: I'm excited to do it.

Andrew: Yeah, yeah, we should definitely talk about that in an upcoming Chatterbox episode. So, everyone, thank you for listening today. If you found this conversation to be a little more challenging than our regular Culips episodes, don't worry, that's OK. This was a more advanced level conversation. And, again, we're speaking at our regular everyday speaking speed. So there's that factor, as well. But, nonetheless, thank you for studying English with us today.

Andrew: And to recap this episode, we talked about internet privacy and internet security. And our focus was on social media apps like TikTok and Instagram and the influence that they can have in our lives.

Andrew: So if you enjoyed this episode and found it educational and entertaining, then please support us. You can do that in a variety of ways. You could sign up and become a paid Culips member. And we are so appreciative of our members, because they keep us going. And without them, then, well, Culips wouldn't really be around. So thank you so much to all of our members. And you may be wondering what benefits you get when you sign up for membership. Well, you get unlimited access to our study guide library, ad-free episodes, and much more. So to find out all of the details, just visit Culips.com and you can sign up to become a member.

Andrew: But that's not the only way to support us, is it, Kassy?

Kassy: No, it's not, Andrew.

Andrew: You could also leave us a five-star rating and a positive review on your favourite podcast app. Or you could tell your friends about the Culips English Podcast. And, of course, you could follow us on social media, although you might not want to after listening to this episode.

Andrew: Our email is contact@Culips.com. And if you'd like to drop us a line and send us a message, we'd love to hear from you. Will be back soon with another brand-new episode and we'll talk to you then. Goodbye.

Detailed Explanations

Spur of the moment

Adjective

If something is done on the **spur of the moment**, it's done spontaneously without planning or prior thought. For example, a family on their way home from the park might suddenly decide to stop at an ice cream store on the way home; thus, they've made a **spur of the moment** decision to buy some ice cream. Anything that is planned in advance or considered for awhile is not **spur of the moment**.

Here are a couple more examples with **spur of the moment**:

Tyler: Where are you? Wanna grab a pizza?

Ralph: Umm ...I'm at the beach.

Tyler: The beach? On a Tuesday? The beach is 3 hours from here!

Ralph: Yeah, it was kind of a **spur of the moment** decision. I'll be back at work tomorrow. I just needed to get a way for a few hours, you know?

Tyler: Whatever, man. I'm still ordering a pizza, and I'm eating the whole thing!

Ralph: Ha! OK. Enjoy it. I'll see you tomorrow at the office.

Loralyn: Oh my goodness! I kissed Charles!

Kinda: What? No way! How did this happen?

Loralyn: It was just a **spur of the moment** kind of thing. He looked so handsome and there was a connection, so I just went for it!

Kinda: You go, girl! This is so exciting! Did he ask you out after that?

Loralyn: Yes! He said he was surprised at first, but he likes me, too. We're going on a date this Friday.

Kinda: Ah! I'm so happy for you! I can't wait to hear how your date goes.

To take off

Phrasal verb

To take off is to start to become successful or well-known and popular. For example, a business that is just starting to gain recognition and popularity is just starting to **take off**. Likewise, a man who landed his first role in a movie could say that his acting career is **taking off**.

The phrase **take off** is also used to describe an airplane that leaves the airport and starts to rise into the sky. Therefore, anything that is just starting to launch and rise in success or popularity can be described as **taking off**, just like an airplane rising towards the clouds.

Here are a couple more examples with **to take off**:

Lena: Junny, long time no see! How have you been?

Junny: Great, actually. I quit my job last year to start my own flower business and it's really **taking off**.

Lena: Wow, that's amazing news! Where's your shop? I'll try to stop by.

Junny: Oh, I don't have a physical store. Customers make orders online and I have it shipped to them. I'll send you the link, though.

Lena: Great. It was nice seeing you again, Junny. Take care.

Zico: Hey, Brad, it seems like you and Sarah are doing really well these days.

Brad: Yeah, we are. Our relationship has really **taken off** since we moved in together.

Zico: Now that you've moved in together, you're practically married.

Brad: Yeah, about that ... I think I'm going to propose next month.

Zico: No way! Congrats, man. I'm sure she'll say yes.

An influx of [something]

Phrase

An influx of [something] is a sudden arrival of many things or people at the same time. In this episode, Kassy says that TikTok has had **an influx of users** since its launch in 2016. In other words, many users—approximately 800 million worldwide—have joined in a relatively short amount of time.

Here are a couple more examples with **an influx of [something]**:

Logan: What are you doing?

Kadi: I'm just replying to emails. There has been an **influx of them** ever since Mr. Dall's video went viral.

Logan: What kind of emails?

Kadi: Things you would expect: fan mail, hate mail, invitations to parties, invitations to collaborate on YouTube, that kind of thing.

Nino: Drew, get back in here! We need you out front.

Drew: But I'm on my lunch break!

Nino: No time for lunch breaks today. An **influx of customers** just started pouring in 5 minutes ago. I think they came from a wedding or something.

Drew: All right. I'll be out in a minute.

Nino: OK, but hurry up. They're like an angry mob of zombies, but instead of brains they demand coffee and doughnuts!

Legalese

Noun

Legalese refers to the words and expressions used in legal documents that ordinary people find hard to understand. **Legalese** is often only understood by lawyers or people who are hired specifically to write and interpret legal documents such as contracts, liability forms, or terms and conditions agreements.

Here are a couple more examples with **legalese**:

Joshua: What do you mean I can't get a refund on this? I didn't even use it.

Store clerk: It was on the digital receipt you signed when you bought it: no returns, refunds, or exchanges.

Joshua: What? This is a scam. Nobody actually reads the **legalese** they throw at you on websites.

Store clerk: Well, that might be true, but I still can't offer a refund.

Joshua: You're all a bunch of crooks. That's what you are!

Libby: You know, just once I wish I wasn't married to a lawyer. Can I please just sign up for this one website without you browsing through all this stupid **legalese** first?

Carlos: No! That's how they get you. We let our guard down once, and next thing we know we've given our consent to have them sell our credit card information to the highest bidder.

Libby: C'mon. It's not like we're rich or anything. I doubt anybody would be interested in our accounts or info anyways.

Carlos: You are very wrong on that assumption. No one is safe from internet hackers. No one.

To blow the whistle

Idiom

To blow the whistle on someone or something is to let the public or authorities know of illegal or harmful actions that are being committed by that person or thing. For example, if an employee finds out that her company is stealing money from their customers and she tells the police, then she has **blown the whistle** on her company. A person who **blows the whistle** on someone or something is known as a **whistleblower**.

It can be dangerous **to blow the whistle** on big companies or powerful individuals. **Whistleblowers** are almost guaranteed to be fired from the company they **blew the whistle** on.

Here are a couple more examples with **to blow the whistle**:

Jared: Have you ever seen the movie Man of the Year?

Khalid: No. Is it any good?

Jared: It's pretty good. It's got Robin Williams in it. It's about a TV show host who wins the presidential election due to a computer error. Then he falls in love with the computer programmer who tries to **blow the whistle** on the computer error that her company tried to cover up.

Khalid: Wow, sounds like a perfect movie for this year, considering the recent elections in the United States and all the talk of voting fraud.

Jared: Yeah, that's true. This movie was fiction, but it's not really too far off from reality this year, huh?

Flora: Sarah, I saw you and Michelle cheating on the math test. I know your whole group of friends cheats all the time. I'm gonna tell Mrs. Sullivan.

Sarah: You're gonna **blow the whistle** on us? Have you ever heard the phrase snitches get stitches?

Flora: Are you threatening me?

Sarah: All I'm saying is that if you tell Mrs. Sullivan about us, you'd better watch your back.

Flagged

Past participle

To be **flagged** is to be marked as something, usually something negative. For example, in one's email account, advertisements are **flagged** as spam and sent to the junk folder. In this episode, Andrew talks about how Apple **flagged** his bank as suspicious for its odd tracking behaviour. In both examples, the word **flagged** can be replaced with **marked**; they are synonymous in these examples.

Here are a couple more examples with **flagged**:

Alice: Ugh. I hate getting **flagged** at the airport. It happens every time!

Beth: Well, did you bring back coffee again?

Alice: Of course, you know me. I love to pick up coffee on my travels. It's my version of a souvenir.

Beth: Well, that's why, then. I heard bags with coffee grounds in them are always **flagged**.

Alice: What? Why?

Beth: Because the strong scent of the coffee is known to cover the smells of illegal substances, like drugs.

Alice: Huh, I never would have imagined that was the reason. How interesting ... And annoying.

Roger: Sir, can you look at this? This report got **flagged** in our system. I was wondering if it's important?

Mr. Smith: Oh no, don't worry about that. Another analyst caught that a couple of days ago. We're working on it already.

Roger: OK, sir. Just wanted to make sure.

Mr. Smith: I appreciate your diligence. Have a nice day, Roger.

Quiz

1. To blow the _____ means to alert the public or authorities of illegal behaviour.
 - a) horn
 - b) fuse
 - c) whistle
 - d) gasket

2. What is a synonym for the underlined word? My account got flagged for suspicious activity.
 - a) marked
 - b) announced
 - c) blocked
 - d) deleted

3. What is the term for the difficult language that lawyers use in contracts?
 - a) lawteric
 - b) suit talk
 - c) gibberish
 - d) legalese

4. On the busiest shopping day of the year, stores have an _____ of customers?
 - a) influence
 - b) influx
 - c) exemption
 - d) apology

5. The phrase “take off” has several meanings. Which sentence does not make sense with the phrase “take off”?
 - a) the airplane took off at 3:00
 - b) my business is really starting to take off
 - c) Jake took off his car
 - d) Anna’s music career really took off when her song played on TV

Writing and Discussion Questions

1. What do you think about internet privacy? Is it a big issue for you? How so?
2. How many social media accounts do you have? Do you post on them regularly?
3. What is your favourite social media platform and why?
4. Have you ever been flagged at the airport, or do you know anyone who has been?
5. What business has really taken off in your neighbourhood these days? How so?

Quiz Answers

1.c 2.a 3.d 4.b 5.c

Episode credits

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