

Commissioner Julie Brill
Federal Trade Commission
U.S.-China Internet Industry Forum
Privacy Implications of Social Media
December 7, 2011

Good morning. I am truly honored to be here today among such esteemed participants from both the U.S. and Chinese governments, as well as industry, academia and civil society. A particularly warm welcome to our visitors from China who traveled a long way to be here.

Social media has changed the way we communicate and interact with our friends and

One of our most talked-about recommendations is the development of “Do Not Track” mechanisms in connection with behavioral advertising—the practice of collecting information about an individual’s online activities in order to serve advertisements tailored to that individual’s interests. Our vision for Do Not Track is that it would allow consumers to have some meaningful control over how their online behavioral information is used. And over whether their online behavioral information is collected in the first place.

Since the report was issued last year, we have been closely examining the more than 400 comments that we received. A follow-up report is planned and we expect that report to be issued in the coming months.

Focusing more specifically on privacy and social media, a preliminary question we need to ask is this: Isn’t social media all about sharing? Don’t people use social media because they want to share? They do indeed. But unless a consumer has made the choice to share information with everyone, social media should be about developing your social networks and choosing what to share and with whom. Social networks give consumers the ability to choose how much to share and with whom, and social networks need to honor these choices.

Last week, as many of you already know, the Federal Trade Commission announced its preliminary approval of a consent agreement from Facebook.³

Our complaint against Facebook alleges a number of deceptive or unfair practices in violation of the FTC Act. These include the 2009 changes made by Facebook so that information users had designated private became public. We also address Facebook’s inaccurate and misleading disclosures relating to how much information about users apps operating on the site can access. We also allege the company was deceitful about its compliance with the U.S.-EU

It is critical that we ensure that consumers' notification rights in connection with credit reports are implemented and honored for all types of reports amassed about consumers and used for sensitive purposes, like credit, employment, housing and insurance.

I started out my talk today with a reference to Brandeis and snapshot photography to memorialize our faces forever. Our faces are unique to us and that makes them a powerful tool.

Later this week, the FTC is hosting a public workshop on facial recognition technologies.⁷ We'll be examining the current state of facial recognition technology, where it's headed, and what the privacy implications are for consumers. The workshop discussions will inform our thinking as we move forward into another aspect of the brave new world surrounding privacy issues.

So with that, again, I'd like to thank Microsoft for having me today and I hope the discussions throughout the forum are productive.

⁷ See <http://www.ftc.gov/opa/2011/11/facefacts.shtm>.