

Consumers Warm Up to Facial Recognition to Keep Them Safe, but for Marketing and Advertising, No Thanks

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Victoria Petrock

As facial recognition systems become increasingly accurate, more governments and law enforcement organizations are tapping them to verify people's identities, nab criminals and keep transactions secure.

In recent months, France's government announced a nationwide facial recognition ID program, a UK court ruled that live facial recognition doesn't violate privacy rights and research revealed that the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agency and the FBI are using facial recognition to apprehend undocumented immigrants.

Most of this activity is undertaken in the name of safety and security, but it is also raising major red flags among privacy advocates. They argue that the technology—which can scan and identify faces without consent in crowded streets, retail stores and sports stadiums—is predatory and invasive.

Among consumers, the jury is still out. People appear to be warming to the use of facial recognition in situations where they think it can keep them safe. A June 2019 survey by Pew Research Center found that 65% of US adults trusted law enforcement agencies to use the technology at least somewhat responsibly. These sentiments were higher among older, white and Hispanic demographics.

Do US Adults Trust Law Enforcement Agencies to Use Facial Recognition Technology Responsibly?
% of respondents, by demographic, June 2019

	A great deal	Somewhat	Total
Age			
18-29	15%	34%	49%
30-49	15%	38%	52%
50-64	18%	41%	59%
65+	23%	44%	67%
Race/ethnicity			
White	19%	41%	61%
Hispanic	16%	41%	56%
Black	11%	32%	43%
Total	23%	42%	65%

Source: Pew Research Center, "More Than Half of US Adults Trust Law Enforcement to Use Facial Recognition Responsibly," Sep 5, 2019

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However, they are drawing the line at most other uses of facial recognition, especially by the private sector. Just 36% of respondents agreed that it was acceptable for apartment landlords to track people’s comings and goings from their buildings, and 30% said the same for companies tracking employees’ attendance, per Pew Research Center. But, a majority (54%) agreed that it was not acceptable for advertisers to use facial recognition to gauge people’s reactions to public ad displays, and just 18% of respondents trusted advertisers in any situation to use the technology responsibly.

Do US Adults Think that Facial Recognition Technology Is Acceptable in Select Situations?

% of respondents, June 2019

	Acceptable	Not acceptable	Not sure
Law enforcement assessing security threats in public spaces	59%	15%	13%
Apartment building landlords tracking who enters or leaves their buildings	36%	34%	15%
Companies automatically tracking the attendance of their employees	30%	41%	15%
Advertisers seeing how people respond to public ad displays	15%	54%	16%

Note: ages 18+; numbers do not add up to 100% due to the exclusion of responses from those who have not heard of facial recognition technology
 Source: Pew Research Center, "More Than Half of US Adults Trust Law Enforcement to Use Facial Recognition Responsibly," Sep 5, 2019

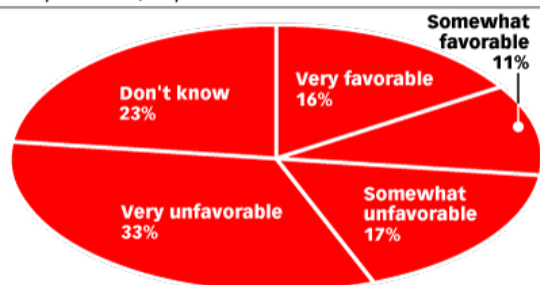
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These findings are consistent with previous research. A September 2018 survey conducted by The Brookings Institution found that US internet users were reasonably open to safety-focused uses of face identification in airports, stadiums and schools. However, just 27% of respondents had favorable views about its use in retail stores to prevent theft.

How Do US Internet Users Feel About Using Facial Recognition Software in Retail Stores to Prevent Theft?

% of respondents, Sep 2018



Note: ages 18+; respondents used their own knowledge/definition of facial recognition software
 Source: The Brookings Institution, Oct 8, 2018

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Another study, conducted in 2018 by [Gartner](#), found that more than 70% of US and UK consumers felt comfortable with AI analyzing their vital signs and identifying their voice and facial features to keep transactions secure. However, 52% of respondents were not comfortable with AI analyzing their facial expressions in an attempt to

understand how they felt, and 63% did not want AI to take an “always-on” listening approach to learn more about them.

The use of facial recognition and other biometric data outside of law enforcement has significant potential, but companies using biometric data—especially for marketing and advertising—run the major risk of alienating and driving away consumers. They can, however, take the first steps toward future success by being transparent with consumers and cultivating their trust.

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Report by Victoria Petrock Oct 03, 2019

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Victoria Petrock
Contributors: Ben Clapp/Chicago, Lauren Hulse/Chicago, Leah Nash, New York, New York
Yoon Kim/Chicago

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