

Facebook promises to delete over 1 billion face scans, but law enforcement still has the data

Article

The news: Facebook said it will shut down its facial recognition system, delete more than a billion facial scans of users, and no longer recognize them in photos, per Insider.

Why this matters: Facebook was one of the sources that facial recognition company Clearview AI scraped for a searchable database used by police and law enforcement. Clearview AI amassed facial data of billions of users without their consent and packaged them as part of their service. US law enforcement and federal agencies are using facial recognition services with little or no oversight.

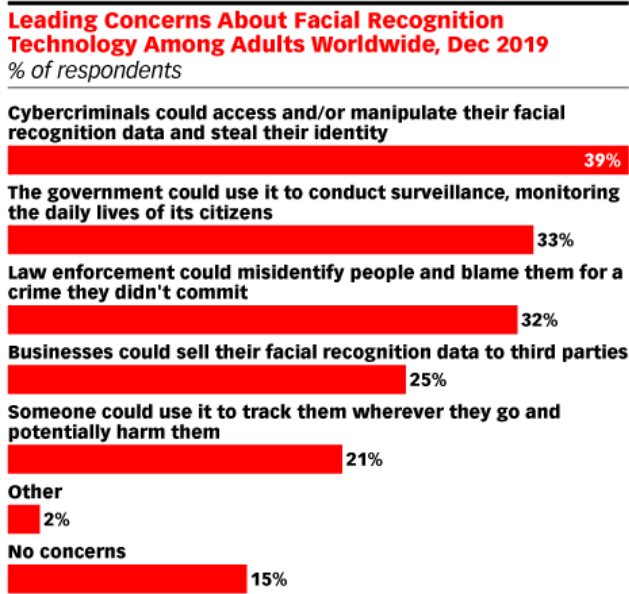
- Clearview AI scraped more than **3 billion personal photos** from Facebook, YouTube, Venmo, and millions of other websites. Its permanent searchable database is accessed by more than 2,400 police agencies including US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).
- Clearview AI uses an algorithm to extract unique features in the human face to create a trackable “faceprint.” The EU has stringent personal privacy standards, including the GDPR and the Right to Be Forgotten, which are in conflict with Clearview AI’s methods.
- Facial recognition technology has received substantial backlash for its racial bias and inaccuracy, which have resulted in numerous **false arrests**. At least 14 US cities have banned facial recognition use, and Maine and Massachusetts passed statewide laws banning the tech from law enforcement.
- Despite these issues, 18 of the 24 federal agencies surveyed in a new **Government Accountability Office (GAO) report** use a facial recognition system, and at least **six use the technology to generate leads in criminal investigations**.

The bigger picture: Facebook, which rebranded to Meta last week, is distancing itself from more controversial business units and products, especially as it faces increased scrutiny and abysmal public trust.

- A name change alone does little to move the needle for Facebook, but taking decisive steps to shut down its more questionable technologies can help cement the idea that Meta is a better version of Facebook.
- Facebook’s VP of artificial intelligence, Jerome Pesenti, said the social network needs to “weigh the positive use cases for facial recognition against growing societal concerns, especially as regulators have yet to provide clear rules.”

What’s the catch? Companies like Clearview AI still possess billions of facial scans. While it likely violated Facebook’s policies, it’s unclear if anything can be done to remove and delete

facial scans that have become data sets for law enforcement.



Source: NortonLifeLock, "2019 Cyber Safety Insights Report Global Results" conducted by The Harris Poll, March 31, 2020
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