

Consumers Are Still Split on Facial Recognition

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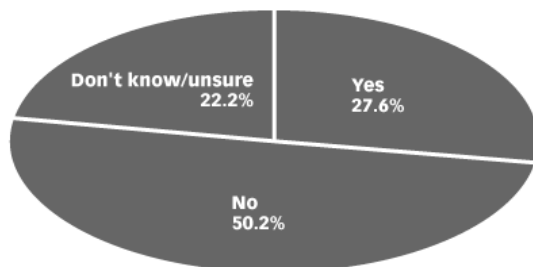
Rimma Kats

While some consumers are warming up to retail tech, others aren't as charmed by it—even if it results in more personalized experiences.

According to a December 2019 poll by Toluna, roughly half of US internet users said they weren't comfortable with retail stores using facial recognition to better personalize point-of-sale advertisements.

Would US Internet Users Be Comfortable with Retail Stores Using Facial Recognition Technology to Better Personalize Point-of-Sale Advertisements?

% of respondents, Dec 2019



Note: n=1,013 ages 18+
Source: Toluna, "2019 Pre-CES Survey," Jan 2, 2020

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Only 27.6% of respondents said they would be, while the remaining group was unsure.

Toluna's survey isn't the only one illustrating apprehensive attitudes toward facial recognition technology.

When Pew Research Center asked US adults which groups they trusted to use facial recognition responsibly, more respondents cited law enforcement agencies—and even tech companies—over advertisers. One-third of respondents had no faith that advertisers would use the tech responsibly.

Do US Adults Trust Select Groups to Use Facial Recognition Technology Responsibly?
% of respondents, June 2019

	A great deal	Somewhat	Not too much	Not at all
Law enforcement agencies	17%	39%	17%	12%
Technology companies	5%	31%	30%	20%
Advertisers	2%	16%	34%	33%

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 attitudes haven't changed much since 2018, when The Brookings Institution released a similar study. Half of US internet users polled said they had concerns with facial recognition in retail stores to prevent theft.

For the most part, consumers have used some form of biometrics—typically based on facial recognition technology—either to unlock their mobile devices or as a form of payment. However, privacy concerns continue to play a substantial role in consumer apprehension, particularly when brands and retailers leverage the technology to better understand who their customer base is and how they can better target them.

Lawmakers have already begun regulating the technology. Last year, San Francisco became the first US city to impose a ban on the use of facial recognition by government agencies. Furthermore, Washington state Sen. Reuven Carlyle **proposed a bill to require companies** that make facial recognition tech to first obtain consumer consent, and notify those consumers that when they walk into a store or access a website, it's in use.

"Despite concerns, retailers are exploring biometric technology, including behavioral tracking and facial and voice recognition, for advertising and promotional targeting," said Victoria Petrock, principal analyst and author of our "[Biometric Marketing 2019](#)" report published last year. "These systems can identify and track shoppers in brick-and-mortar stores and learn their preferences, like how online retailers use cookies. The information can then be used to interact with them via their phones, in-store signage or in other ways."

Perry Kramer, senior vice president of BRP Consulting, who was also interviewed for the report, predicted that facial recognition will likely catch on if consumers are confident that a retailer will protect their privacy or if sharing their information will make their life simpler. "If you walk into an Apple store and they know who you are, it's probably not as scary as walking into a Kohl's store and they know who you are," he said. (Editor's Note: Kramer has since joined Retail Consulting Partners as managing partner.)