

## Can anyone halt the menacing creep of facial recognition technology?

### Level 2 • Upper intermediate

#### 1 Warmer

In which of these places do you expect to see security cameras? Do you agree or disagree with their use in each case? Think of reasons.

1. in airports
2. in restaurants
3. in the street
4. on buses or trains
5. at sports venues
6. in department stores

#### 2 Key words

Fill the gaps in the sentences using these key words from the text. The paragraph numbers are given to help you.

preference  
ethnic group

deterrent  
blurred

suspect  
accurate

surveillance  
erosion

algorithm  
anonymous

1. If someone is \_\_\_\_\_, no one knows who they are. (para 1)
2. A \_\_\_\_\_ is someone who the police believe has committed a crime. (para 3)
3. \_\_\_\_\_ is the process of carefully watching people who might be involved in criminal activity. (para 4)
4. A \_\_\_\_\_ is a feeling of liking or wanting something more than something else. (para 4)
5. An \_\_\_\_\_ is a set of rules used by a computer to solve problems or make calculations. (para 6)
6. If something is \_\_\_\_\_, it is correct or true in every detail. (para 6)
7. An \_\_\_\_\_ is a set of people with the same culture and traditions who live in a place where most people have a different culture and different traditions. (para 6)
8. A \_\_\_\_\_ is something that makes people decide not to do something by making them realize that something unpleasant could happen to them. (para 8)
9. If the boundaries between two things become \_\_\_\_\_, those things become more similar so that you are no longer sure that they are clearly different. (para 11)
10. \_\_\_\_\_ is the gradual reduction of something important. (para 12)

#### 3 Find the information

Find the following information in the text as quickly as possible.

1. How many people were at the pop concert in China where a suspect was identified by facial recognition technology?
2. According to estimates, how many CCTV cameras are there in the UK?
3. Why does a bar in London use facial recognition technology?
4. When did UK governments start supporting the use of CCTV cameras?
5. Which city recently became the first in America to ban facial recognition?
6. In which two regions of the UK have police forces completed trials of facial recognition technology?

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13 August, 2019

- 1 Compared with living in a small village, where everyone knows you, you can be anonymous in a big city. It is a place where you can remain unnoticed in the crowd and where you can reinvent yourself if you want to.
- 2 Except if you decide to go for a walk at the King's Cross development in central London, that is. The owners of the site confirmed recently that facial recognition technology was being used "in the interest of public safety and to ensure that everyone who visits has the best possible experience". It's not clear how many facial recognition-enabled cameras there are, how long they have been there or exactly what the technology is used for.
- 3 The use of facial recognition technology is increasing fast. Recently, a bar in London proudly announced that it was using the technology to identify customers who are queuing. In China in 2018, police arrested a suspect singled out by the technology in a crowd of 50,000 people at a pop concert. And so the examples continue.
- 4 Facial recognition is a pretty cool form of surveillance technology. It allows us to unlock our phones by taking a quick selfie. At a growing number of hotels, high street shops and airports around the world, it enables us to feel quite exclusive. We can be singled out for special treatment – barriers in the airport lift as we approach, and shop staff know our preferences before we even speak.
- 5 The use of facial recognition at locations such as the King's Cross development relies on one of the big improvements in facial recognition in recent years. Rather than just matching a still image, modern facial recognition systems can now work with live video. They can also cope with variable light, which makes them attractive for surveillance systems.
- 6 However, there are good reasons to be worried about facial recognition's increasing presence. A number of researchers have noted that facial recognition algorithms can be less accurate in identifying people from certain ethnic groups. This increases the number of false positives – particularly damaging when the technology is being used for security purposes.
- 7 But even if these faults are addressed, this story still highlights the growing use of facial recognition, whether large numbers of people want it or not. The UK is, in many ways, the perfect testing ground for such technologies. For a long time, it's been one of the most watched countries in the world. There is estimated to be one CCTV camera per 11 people in the UK, with considerably more in crowded cities.
- 8 Most of these belong to private businesses, although different UK governments have also supported the use of the technology since the 1990s. Governments ignore evidence to the contrary and have frequently accepted the idea that video surveillance works as a deterrent and an identifier.
- 9 Facial recognition is simply the latest example of these tools, which have already become a part of everyday life in the UK. Perhaps that's why police trials of facial recognition technology by London's Metropolitan Police and South Wales Police were hardly noticed by most people.
- 10 In 2019, San Francisco became the first city in America to ban facial recognition. The ban covers only city agencies like the police department and not private businesses, but it's an important symbolic step that could trigger similar laws in other places.
- 11 Could something similar happen in the UK? Already used in many private businesses, the use of facial recognition in a semi-public area like the King's Cross development shows how blurred the boundaries between public and private space can become. According to a report from the *Financial Times*, similar technology may also soon be introduced in other semi-public locations.
- 12 "We can't place the responsibility on normal people to act on this; there needs to be robust regulation put in place soon to protect us all," Lee Waters, a Welsh Assembly Member said. "But the UK government is paralysed by Brexit, so this is another area we are neglecting." We cannot know yet whether this is the start of a genuine public conversation on this subject or simply the continued erosion of public privacy.

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First published in *The Guardian*, 13/08/19

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#### 4 Comprehension check

Are these statements true (T) or false (F) according to the text?

1. Shops can use facial recognition to know customers' preferences before they speak.
2. Facial recognition systems cannot yet work with live video.
3. Facial recognition is less accurate when identifying people from some ethnic groups.
4. People can use facial recognition to unlock their phones.
5. Private businesses in San Francisco are not allowed to use facial recognition technology.
6. Lee Waters believes consumers should be responsible for taking action on facial recognition technology.

#### 5 Find the word

Find the following words and phrases in the text.

1. a two-word verb phrase meaning *change the way you behave so that people think of you as a different kind of person* (para 1)
2. a two-word phrasal verb meaning *choose one person from a group for special attention* (para 3)
3. an adjective meaning *able to be changed* (para 5)
4. a verb meaning *try to deal with a problem or question* (para 7)
5. a two-word noun phrase meaning *a place or situation used to try out ideas or products* (para 7)
6. a verb meaning *not consider something or not let it influence you* (para 8)
7. a verb meaning *make something happen* (para 10)
8. an adjective meaning *strong and successful* (para 12)

#### 6 Two-word phrases

Match the words in the left-hand column with those in the right-hand column to make expressions from the text.

- |            |                 |
|------------|-----------------|
| 1. video   | a. safety       |
| 2. facial  | b. image        |
| 3. public  | c. group        |
| 4. private | d. recognition  |
| 5. still   | e. surveillance |
| 6. ethnic  | f. business     |

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### 7 Word-building

Complete the table using words from the text.

	verb	noun
1.	treat	
2.	deter	
3.	erode	
	adjective	noun
4.	crowded	
5.	secure	
6.	private	

### 8 Discussion

Discuss the statements.

- People who obey the law have nothing to fear from surveillance cameras.
- It would be easy to fool this technology by growing a beard, using make-up or wearing sunglasses.

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### KEY

#### 2 Key words

1. anonymous
2. suspect
3. surveillance
4. preference
5. algorithm
6. accurate
7. ethnic group
8. deterrent
9. blurred
10. erosion

#### 3 Find the information

1. 50,000
2. one for every 11 people
3. to identify customers who are queuing
4. in the 1990s
5. San Francisco
6. London and South Wales

#### 4 Comprehension check

1. T
2. F
3. T
4. T
5. F
6. F

#### 5 Find the word

1. reinvent yourself
2. single out
3. variable
4. address
5. testing ground
6. ignore
7. trigger
8. robust

#### 6 Two-word phrases

1. e
2. d
3. a
4. f
5. b
6. c

#### 7 Word-building

1. treatment
2. deterrent
3. erosion
4. crowd
5. security
6. privacy