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Fear and Backlash Build over Smart Glasses and Privacy

Source: Queenie Wong, *Los Angeles Times*, August 7, 2026

Meta wants its smart glasses to be a big hit, but the high-tech specs have also turned into a liability, as some are calling the gadget “pervert glasses.” The social media giant dominates the market for smart glasses, which allow people to capture photos and videos, listen to music, take phone calls and ask questions to an artificial intelligence assistant.

Some people are using the glasses — which look like a pair of regular spectacles — to record people without their knowledge and publish the videos on social media. The users secretly videotape and share what happens when they try to pick up women. Now, a growing number of people are worried they could be covertly recorded at the gym or even during sex.

While Meta’s glasses have a flashing white light on their frames to notify people they’re being recorded, some users have been hiding or disabling the light by hiring people to drill into their eyewear so they can record in stealth mode.

The backlash has prompted Meta to update its glasses to address privacy concerns, and some places have banned them, adding to the angst surrounding technology that’s rapidly evolving. It’s too early to tell whether the criticism will dent sales of smart glasses, said Jitesh Ubrani, a director at the market research company IDC.

“A headline cycle like this is exactly the kind of thing that could slow momentum with mainstream buyers, even if early adopters don’t blink,” he said.

Artificial intelligence seems to be popping up everywhere, fueling the advancement of hardware beyond the smartphone but also debate about its use.

“We’re at a very sensitive time for the tech industry in terms of trying to really preserve that positive consumer sentiment that’s taking a bit of a hit due to AI, and it’s absolutely applicable to smart glasses,” said Jacob Bourne, a technology analyst at eMarketer.

With tech giants such as Apple, Google, Samsung and Snap working on or planning to release high-tech eyewear, they too will have to navigate privacy concerns surrounding smart glasses. But more than two-thirds of the smart glasses being sold were made by Meta.

Gaby Luisa was standing outside a dance club in Arizona earlier this summer when a man wearing glasses threw out a pickup line.

“Did I just run into my future wife?” he asked.

She politely let him know she wasn’t interested and moved on with her evening.

She was shocked to find out later that their interaction was recorded and posted on YouTube without her knowledge or permission, using smart glasses that, she said, looked like Meta’s glasses.

“It’s really weird to monetize off of people, and they’re not even aware that they’re being recorded,” she said in an interview.

Meta sells smart glasses online and at major retailers like LensCrafters and Best Buy. Prices range from roughly \$224 to \$800 depending on the version. The company has been opening new Meta Lab stores in Los Angeles and other cities, and has teamed up with Ray-Ban, Oakley and well-known celebrities such as Kylie Jenner and Jennie from the popular K-pop group Blackpink to sell them.

Meta made up approximately 69% of the smart glasses market in the first quarter of this year, according to IDC. That quarter, the global market value of certain types of smart glasses more than tripled from a year earlier.

Concern about the glasses has exploded as more videos of interactions with people who don’t know they’re being recorded go viral on social media. On Instagram, some videos depict people getting approached in malls and grocery stores and on college campuses and sidewalks. While the videos are portrayed as jokes, the people filmed don’t appear to know they’re being recorded and sometimes seem uncomfortable, telling the strangers to leave them alone or stop harassing them.

The outcry has spread beyond social media, with comedian Jimmy Kimmel calling the Meta devices “pervert glasses” on national television and singer Lorde telling concertgoers that smart glasses are “not sexy.”

A spokesperson for Meta said people use its AI glasses because they're "genuinely helpful" for tasks such as listening to music, live translation or hands-free calls. Meta last month updated the software in its smart glasses so cameras get disabled if they've been tampered with. Meta plans to strengthen these protections as the glasses become more capable.

"The people who use them and those around them need to trust them. That's why we built privacy into our AI glasses from the ground up," the spokesperson said in a statement.

Instagram, which is owned by Meta, has been disabling accounts and taking down some of these pickup or prank videos for violating the platform's rules against harassment and bullying.

In April, the American Civil Liberties Union and more than 70 organizations sent a letter to Meta urging the company to commit to not releasing any facial recognition features in smart glasses and elsewhere, noting it poses a "serious threat to privacy and civil liberties."

A spokesperson said that "no final decision has been made" and that Meta will approach the rollout of any new feature thoughtfully and transparently.

Smart glasses have faced public backlash before. More than a decade ago, early adopters of Google Glass encountered criticism if they used the \$1,500 pair of smart glasses in socially unacceptable ways, such as secretly recording people and staring off into space while they browsed websites. Their nickname: Glassholes. Snap, which unveiled more powerful \$2,195 augmented-reality glasses this year, sold video-recording glasses in bright yellow vending machines in 2016, but the product flopped.

The revolt brewing against smart glasses has made some users more wary about where they're wearing the gadget and potential awkward encounters.

Ben Cook, a New York creator who posts about watches on TikTok, uses his Meta smart glasses to listen to music on runs and take hands-free calls. Family and friends, though, have asked if his "spy glasses" are recording.

"I don't wear them to social events because I don't really want to get into that conversation," he said. "I'm not using it to record anybody."

During a high-profile social media addiction trial in February at the Los Angeles County Superior Court, Judge Carolyn B. Kuhl warned people in the courtroom to take off any smart glasses, raising concerns that the jury could be identified. Use of recording devices, including phones, isn't generally allowed in courtrooms.

Last year, the University of San Francisco issued a safety advisory about a man wearing Meta Ray-Ban sunglasses who was approaching women with "unwanted comments and inappropriate dating questions." The man might have been trying to post pickup videos on social media platforms, the notice said.

Businesses are making their own calls about smart glasses. The 5 Point Cafe in Seattle, which banned Google Glass in the past, has banned Meta glasses from its diner and dive bar.

"Leave your Meta-SpyBan Display at home, they are officially Ray-Ban-ned from all of our restaurants. We serve privacy, not side-eye surveillance," a 2025 Instagram post from the business states. The restaurant also doesn't allow people to talk on their phones inside.

Meanwhile, people are finding new ways to figure out whether others nearby are wearing smart glasses.

Yves Jeanrenaud created an app to alert people if smart glasses could be nearby after learning about people being recorded without their knowledge. Released in February, the app has roughly 110,000 downloads on Android, with most of the users in the United States and Canada, he said. Users who have downloaded his app include a strip club owner, a Buddhist monk and parents.

"It's a social problem that we encounter," Jeanrenaud said. "That we don't value privacy, that we feel entitled to use others for our entertainment or our private gain, and technology amplifies that."

Jeanrenaud, who lives in Germany, has used his app, Nearby Glasses, and received an alert about smart glasses on a train, though he couldn't figure out who was wearing them.

Possible Response Questions

- What are your thoughts about the emergence of smart glasses? Explain.
- Did something in the article surprise you? Discuss.
- Pick a word/line/passage from the article and respond to it.
- Discuss a "move" made by the writer in this piece that you think is good/interesting. Explain.