Smart Glasses: Uses, Risks and Harms

Key Insights

Everyday Uses, Emerging Risks: Our analysis of 768 Instagram posts shows smart glasses being used across everyday activities, including work, travel, sport, entertainment and social interaction. However, even ordinary uses can create privacy and consent risks for people nearby.

Recording Is Often Difficult to Detect: Across the 583-post recording-capable sample, recording indicators were frequently not visible and verbal notification was uncommon. People may be recorded without recognising that filming is taking place.

Bystander Data Is Routinely Captured: Our research identified recordings containing identifiable strangers (48 posts), children (31 posts), and conversations involving apparently unaware individuals (23 posts). Wearable cameras can collect personal information about people who are not the intended subjects of a recording.

Privacy Risks Extend Across Everyday Spaces: Smart glasses were depicted recording in streets, cafés, homes, workplaces, gyms, educational settings and healthcare environments. Being in a public or semi-public place does not necessarily mean people expect to be recorded.

Recording Affordances Can Be Exploited for Harassment: A complementary analysis of 350 videos involving smart-glasses-enabled pick-up artistry shows how inconspicuous point-of-view recording can facilitate gendered harassment, sexual objectification and intrusive recording.

Harms Can Continue After Recording Ends: Footage can be edited, sexualised and circulated to online audiences, exposing recorded subjects to additional scrutiny, humiliation and abusive commentary.

Notice Is Not Consent: A recording indicator may alert people that filming is occurring, but it does not establish consent to recording, analysing or distributing their personal information.

Evidence & Analysis

Smart glasses integrate cameras, microphones and computational capabilities into everyday eyewear, enabling hands-free, point-of-view recording without the obvious physical cues associated with conventional cameras. This creates new opportunities for everyday use, but also raises concerns about privacy, consent and the collection of personal information. Our research examines two complementary Instagram datasets: 768 posts documenting everyday smart-glasses uses and privacy risks, and 350 purposively sampled videos examining smart-glasses-enabled gendered harassment.

Across the 583 posts involving recording-capable devices, most depicted ordinary activities, including work, travel, sport and social interaction. However, recording indicators were frequently not visible and verbal notification was uncommon. Recordings included identifiable strangers, children and conversations involving apparently unaware individuals. Recording also occurred in privacy-sensitive settings, including workplaces, gyms, educational facilities and healthcare environments.

Evidence & Analysis (cont.)

The second dataset demonstrates how the same affordances can facilitate gendered harassment. Smart glasses enabled creators to inconspicuously record interactions with women in public and semi-public spaces, sometimes continuing approaches following rejection or filming individuals in vulnerable circumstances. POV recording, sexualised framing and the absence of obvious recording cues created opportunities for intrusive capture.

Recorded encounters were subsequently edited using captions, music, sound effects and sexualised imagery, sometimes reframing women's discomfort or rejection as entertainment. Online circulation and audience commentary exposed some subjects to further objectification, ridicule and abuse. These findings demonstrate how wearable recording can facilitate interconnected harms extending beyond the original encounter.

Smart glasses create asymmetries of visibility, awareness and control between wearers and those being recorded. People may expect to be seen in public without expecting to be deliberately recorded, analysed or turned into online content. Recording indicators may provide notice, but notice alone does not establish consent.

Implications for Australian Policymakers & Law Enforcement

- Do existing privacy protections adequately address deliberate, intrusive recording of individuals in public and semi-public spaces, even where there is limited expectation of privacy?
- Should the law clarify that recording indicators provide notice but do not establish consent to audiovisual capture or subsequent use and distribution?
- Should privacy protections extend more clearly to personal information collected and published by individuals using wearable devices, rather than primarily applying to covered organisations?
- Should Australians have a qualified right to protection against deliberate, unreasonable and non-consensual targeted recording, with exceptions for legitimate public-interest, safety, security and accessibility purposes?

Further Reading

Stilinovic, M., Egliston, B., Tan, W., Carter, M., & Gray, J. (2026). Harm through the "#RizzCam": Smart glasses, ambient capture and invisible harassment [Preprint]. https://osf.io/preprints/socarxiv/wbj2x_v2

Egliston, B., Gray, J. E., Carter, M., Stilinovic, M., & Tan, W. (2026). Governing emerging technology: Lessons from extended reality (XR). Communication Research and Practice, 12(1), 138–143. https://doi.org/10.1080/22041451.2026.2646008

Gray, J. E., Carter, M., & Egliston, B. (2024). Governing social virtual reality: Preparing for the content, conduct and design challenges of immersive social media. Springer Nature.

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