CLEARING THE AIR AROUND FACIAL RECOGNITION AND TRAVEL

Biometrics are showing up in airports and border crossing points across the country, promising to enhance security, as well as improve and expedite air travel. The Department of Homeland Security’s Customs and Border Protection (CBP) agency has selected facial recognition and is providing Traveler Verification Services (TVS) to biometrically identify passengers throughout their international journey.

However, opinions on the topic are split. Secure documents like digital passports, traditional and other digital ID will still be used. TSA agents will continue to manually inspect physical identity and travel documents for the near future. Boarding passes could potentially be phased out, as they have little security value and biometrically identifying the passenger increases security and decreases the burden of authentication on the airline gate agent.

Here are some of the MYTHS and FACTS surrounding facial recognition for travel.

**MYTH:** Airlines will keep passengers’ identities and facial data on-file.

**FACT:** Airlines do not want to store any more personally identifiable information (PII) than needed because of IT burden, expenses and liability. Facial images for CBP’s TVS are collected from foreign nationals upon stateside arrival or from previously provided U.S. passport photos and then used to compare to live faces as they depart the country. The captured images will be wiped from the system to ensure privacy for all passengers.

**MYTH:** Facial recognition is aimed at replacing all current security measures.

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**MYTH:** Facial recognition could lead to Big Brother scenarios in airports and beyond.

**FACT:** Guardrails are in place to deter government overstep. For example, U.S. citizens can opt out of any program in preparing facial recognition for boarding. If you are not already known and identified by a facial recognition system, you cannot be identified or matched if you appear in its field of view.

**MYTH:** The technology isn’t currently reliable enough to be trusted.

**FACT:** Facial recognition has been fine-tuned in controlled scenarios and put through rigorous real-world field tests. In less than five seconds facial recognition has shown a 99.44% successful acquisition rate.*

New developments in AI and machine learning will continue to advance facial recognition’s capabilities and increase accuracy.

Facial recognition may help increase airport security. Separate the facts from the myths to consider, debate, discuss and form an informed opinion on biometrics in travel.

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*Facial Recognition Test in Multiple Airports. Testing carried out on behalf of the Department of Homeland Security's Science and Technology Directorate.