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CLEARING THE AIR AROUND FACIAL RECOGNITION AND TRAVEL

Airport Security

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.

60% of respondents to the "Biometrics Institute Industry Trend Tracker 2018" global survey feel that privacy and data protection concerns are restraining the biometrics market.

Yet, consumer privacy advocate groups, the media and some travelers are expressing valid questions and concerns.

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

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

Airlines don't 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. Once verified, 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.

Secure documents like digital passports, traditional and other digital IDs 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.

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

Guardrails are in place to deter government overstep. For example, U.S. citizens can opt out of any program incorporating facial recognition for boarding. Also, 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.

Biometrics in travel are primarily used for identity management to create a secure, convenient experience for travelers. In the instance of U.S. exit, the entire process is done via capture and match right at the gate as opposed to the airline tracking you through the airport. **At the gate, the face must match the digital image on file with CBP Traveler Verification Services.** No additional data is gathered and nothing leaves the transaction.
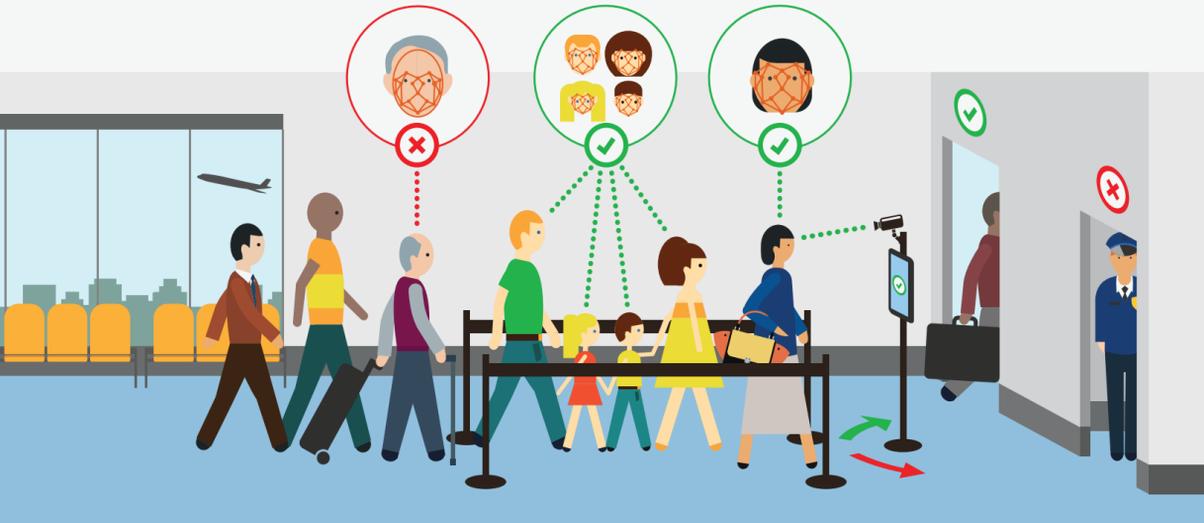
Live face at the gate

CBP Traveler Verification Services

IDENTITY VERIFIED

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

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.***

*Results from the 2018 Biometric Technology Rally sponsored by the Department of Homeland Security Science and Technology Directorate.

Facial recognition isn't ready for "lights out" scenarios, which is why a human expert constantly backs it up. However, it also isn't subject to the same biases that skew human judgment.

Studies have shown that the combination of facial recognition with an officer or agent provides a high level of security. The goal is not to replace agents and officers but provide them tools and security enhancements to increase our border security.
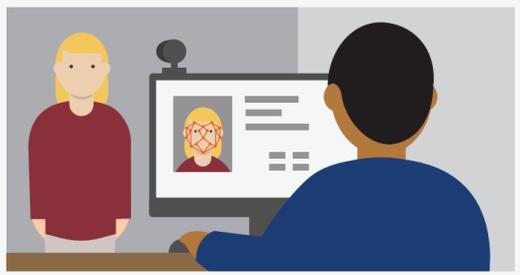
New developments in AI and machine learning will continue to advance facial recognition's capabilities and increase accuracy.

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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