

Technology

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Australia says U.S. facial recognition software firm Clearview breached privacy law

By Byron Kaye



REUTERS/Mike Blake

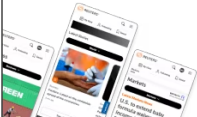


SYDNEY, Nov 3 (Reuters) - An Australian regulator on Wednesday ordered U.S. facial recognition software company Clearview AI Inc to stop collecting images from websites and destroy data collected in the country after an investigation found it breached privacy laws.

Privately owned Clearview, which cross-references photos scraped from social media websites with a database of billions of images, collected Australians' sensitive information without consent and without checking its matches were accurate, the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner (OAIC) said.

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The finding shows a growing backlash by regulators against the controversial technology, which is being used or tested by law enforcement agencies around the world. In June, a Canadian regulator found that country's police broke the law by using Clearview's technology until it was **banned there.**



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The OAIC is investigating the Australian Federal Police (AFP) over a trial of Clearview software it ran between October 2019 and March 2020. The office added on Wednesday that it was still finalising that investigation.

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The New York-based company's actions fell "well short of Australians' expectations" and carried "significant risk of harm to individuals, including vulnerable groups such as children and victims of crime, whose images can be searched on Clearview AI's database", Information Commissioner Angelene Falk said in a statement.

"The covert collection of this kind of sensitive information is unreasonably intrusive and unfair," she added.

A lawyer for Clearview in Australia, Mark Love, said the company would seek a review of the decision with the Administrative Appeals Tribunal and that the finding showed the information commissioner misunderstood its business.

"Not only has the commissioner's decision missed the mark on Clearview AI's manner of operation, the commissioner lacks jurisdiction," Love said in an email.

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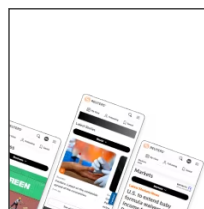
"Clearview AI has not violated any law, nor has it interfered with the privacy of Australians. Clearview AI does not do business in Australia (and) does not have any Australian users."

The AFP did not respond to a request for comment.

The OAIC ordered Clearview to "cease collecting facial images and biometric templates from individuals in Australia, and to destroy existing images and templates collected from Australia".

The U.K. Information Commissioner's Office, which worked with the Australians on the Clearview investigation, said it was considering next steps because the countries have different privacy laws.

This week Facebook Inc (**FB.O**) said it was shutting down its facial recognition software because "regulators are still in the process of providing a clear set of rules". [read more](#)



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