



The Indian Journal for Research in Law and Management

Open Access Law Journal – Copyright © 2026

Editor-in-Chief – Dr. Muktai Deb Chavan; Publisher – Alden Vas; ISSN: 2583-9896

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FASHION STATEMENT OR MASS SURVEILLANCE: CRITIQUE OF THE RAY-BAN META GLASSES

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ABSTRACT

Emerging technology on the market has become a fashion statement in the modern era. A recent trend observed is the rise of camera-embedded eyewear such as the Ray-Ban Meta Glasses. From the backlash against Google for violating individual privacy to the acceptance of Meta glasses as part of a technological revolution, there has been a stark shift in public perception of hands-free recording devices. Some praise the glasses for promoting accessibility, whereas critics scrutinize them for violating privacy. The glasses claim to be designed to promote privacy, multiple instances have been recorded of users being unaware of being recorded. Furthermore, Meta claims that footage recorded through the glasses will be reviewed and used solely to train AI; multiple reports have found that the footage is human-reviewed by third-party subcontractors, which has raised concerns regarding transparency of the footage review. While it is an integral aspect of evolving technology, it is crucial to understand all the risks it poses. The conversation around consent with respect to being filmed in public has increased due to threats of privacy breaches, increasing the risk of exploitation. This article explores the dangers of Meta glasses to individual and digital privacy and whether these glasses are merely a fashion statement or tools for surveillance.

INTRODUCTION

Privacy is an essential component for an individual to enjoy life with personal liberty. While every individual has their own perception of privacy, it also includes the right to be informed when being filmed in public and the authority to consent to the publication of the footage. Technological advancements have often been criticized for being a grey area in the realm of privacy. Wearable cameras have played an integral part in the development of hands-free

technology. Recently, the rise in camera-embedded eyewear has taken over the world. The evolution of camera-embedded glasses can be observed through the launch of Google Glass in 2013 and the recent launches of Ray-Ban Meta Glasses. This article analyses the risks to individual privacy posed by the rise in popularity of wearable glasses marketed as fashionable accessories.

Ray-Ban Meta glasses have seen a surge in popularity since their launch, capturing footage from your perspective without holding your phone to your eye level. It also makes mundane tasks such as calling, texting, and listening to audio with the help of built-in speakers even simpler with voice commands. We can narrow down one of the major causes of the rise in demand for these glasses to the popularity of influencer culture. Famous influencers globally have been promoting these glasses, creating a fashion statement while making content creation seem more accessible. These glasses provide a sense of anonymity while capturing content that might be impossible using visible devices, such as digital cameras or phones.

FEATURES AND DRAWBACKS

Features include a built-in camera, open-ear audio, live translation, an AI assistant, and calling and texting in the Ray-Ban Meta Glasses. They are designed for users to capture hands-free photos or video, listen to music or a podcast, stream directly through social media, and make calls. By default, media is stored locally and imported automatically. Footage can only be shared with others or uploaded to cloud services if the user explicitly authorizes it, except when the user actively uses the hands-free livestreaming tool to broadcast directly to Facebook or Instagram. If you opt in to Meta AI features, your footage and voice commands are processed in the cloud. Meta's policy specifies that these cloud-processed images and videos may sometimes be reviewed by third-party subcontractors to improve AI models and the user experience.¹

The nature of the camera in Meta's glasses can be so unobtrusive that even their wearers have been caught off guard by what and when they are recording, and where those recordings are going.² According to an investigation by a Swedish newspaper, *Svenska Dagbladet*, the data shared by users with Meta to improve its AI is human-reviewed by a subcontractor in Kenya.

¹ Thorin Klosowski, *Think Twice Before Buying or Using Meta's Ray-Bans*, ELECTRONIC FRONTIER FOUNDATION: Deeplinks Blog (Mar. 10, 2026), <https://www.eff.org/deeplinks/2026/03/think-twice-buying-or-using-metas-ray-bans>.

² Kali Hays, *Smart glasses are 'an invasion of privacy' - Meta's are selling better than ever*, BBC (May. 13, 2026), <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cj37z8357e5o>.

The workers reviewing this footage have observed that some users were unaware of being recorded, as they observed multiple instances of intimate and sensitive footage, such as nudity, sexual content, and people using bathrooms.³ There have been numerous instances in which users have recorded strangers without their consent, leading to increased violations of individual privacy. It has also been reported that multiple users are tampering with the camera's built-in LED light, which lets others know the camera is recording, undermining its anonymity.

A prevalent reason for backlash is concerns about a rise in voyeurism, paedophilia, and women's safety. For a woman, the dangers here are obvious. Men have recorded interactions with women in which they try to flirt with them and then post the videos on TikTok and Instagram without the women's permission or even knowledge.⁴ An instance, as reported by the BBC, concerns a woman being extorted for money to remove a video filmed during a sexual encounter without her consent from social media by a man.⁵ This exemplifies an underlying concern about the gradual exploitation enabled by smart glasses.

FALSE ADVERTISING AND CONSUMER PROTECTION

The glasses are marketed as "Designed for Privacy, controlled by you", indicating that the user has control over their footage being shared and reviewed. This raises the question of whether this is misleading advertising under the Consumer Protection Act, 2019. Misleading advertisement has been defined as a "falsely describes such product or service; gives a false guarantee to, is likely to mislead the consumers as to the nature, substance, quantity or quality of such product or service; conveys an express or implied representation which, if made by the manufacturer or seller or service provider thereof, would constitute an unfair trade practice; deliberately conceals important information."⁶ The company creates an illusion of privacy for consumers by obtaining consent for AI training purposes, yet does not disclose that human reviewers may access the footage. Furthermore, it has been observed that users involuntarily record intimate moments, raising concerns about whether these glasses are merely for accessibility or whether their purpose extends far beyond that.

³ Sarah Perez, *Meta sued over AI smart glasses' privacy concerns, after workers reviewed nudity, sex, and other footage*, TECHCRUNCH, (Mar. 5, 2026), <https://techcrunch.com/2026/03/05/meta-sued-over-ai-smartglasses-privacy-concerns-after-workers-reviewed-nudity-sex-and-other-footage/>.

⁴ Tayo Bero, *Smart glasses are deeply creepy. Why are celebrities like Kylie Jenner endorsing them?*, THE GURDAIN, (Jul. 17, 2026, 1:00 PM), <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2026/jul/17/ai-meta-smart-glasses>.

⁵ Georgia Poncia, *Woman covertly filmed for 'humiliating' social media content- then told to pay*, BBC, (May. 7, 2026), <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cwy87wqz0q9o>.

⁶ The Consumer Protection Act, 2019, § 2(28), No. 35, Acts of Parliament, 2019 (India).

Misleading advertisements are punishable under Section 89 of the Consumer Protection Act stating, “Any manufacturer or service provider who causes a false or misleading advertisement to be made which is prejudicial to the interest of consumers shall be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend to two years and with fine which may extend to ten lakh rupees; and for every subsequent offence, be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend to five years and with fine which may extend to fifty lakh rupees.”⁷

DATA PROTECTION AND HUMAN REVIEW

With the advancement of technology, data protection is a grave concern for users. In India, digital data is governed by the Digital Personal and Data Protection Act, 2023 (DPDP Act). Under this legislation, every individual or service provider responsible for processing the data is a “Data Fiduciary”⁸, whereas any individual to whom the data relates is a “Data Principal”⁹. The Act obligates data fiduciaries to only process the data consented to by the data principal for use. These smart glasses pose a threat to the protection of data in public places. When a Ray-Ban Meta glasses user records content in a crowded or public place, it is almost impossible for them to obtain consent from every individual present in the frame. It is often that data principals find out they have been recorded through social media platforms when the footage has been uploaded.

Upon investigations into this matter, there have been reports indicating that most of the shared data with Meta is being scrutinized by humans via subcontractors. Meta maintains that human review is essential for training AI models and that the data is anonymised, but whistleblowers claim the blurring of faces is inconsistent.¹⁰ This poses a greater question regarding the liability of data fiduciaries that is being reviewed overseas. The DPDP Act also governs data being processed outside the territory of India, if the processing is connected to data principals within the territory of India.¹¹ This makes any company processing the data collected by data principals liable under this legislation to pay a fine.

PRIVACY CONCERNS

⁷ The Consumer Protection Act, 2019, § 89, No. 35, Acts of Parliament, 2019 (India).

⁸ The Digital Personal and Data Protection Act, 2023. § 2(i), No. 22, Acts of Parliament, 2023 (India).

⁹ The Digital Personal and Data Protection Act, 2023. § 2(j), No. 22, Acts of Parliament, 2023 (India).

¹⁰ Samreen Wani, Why Meta’s Ray-Ban smart glasses are causing a privacy scandal, FORBES INDIA, (Mar. 5, 2026, 4:43 PM), <https://www.forbesindia.com/article/ai-tracker/why-metas-ray-ban-smart-glasses-are-causing-a-privacy-scandal/2991937/1>.

¹¹ The Digital Personal and Data Protection Act, 2023. § 3(b), No. 22, Acts of Parliament, 2023 (India).

The Supreme Court has affirmed privacy as a fundamental right under Article 21 of the Constitution in the judgment of *K. S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India* (2017).¹² Previous privacy scrutiny has primarily focused on the misuse of data after collection. However, these glasses introduce a new risk by enabling the live collection of data. It has been observed that many content creators are using these glasses to film strangers anonymously and post that footage on social media, which has seen a significant rise in online harassment and personal information revealed about the victims.¹³ These glasses create a fear in the public's mind about being anonymously scrutinized in public and the end of public anonymity, and are violative of the very fundamental right guaranteed by the Constitution.

Another security consideration involves the potential dangers to an individual's biometric and identity. If the footage contains biometric information such as faces, documents, or other identification features, it risks misuse of data and possibly the victimisation of cybercrimes. Code reviewed by *WIRED* uncovered an unreleased face-recognition system embedded in Meta's smart glasses platform. It's designed to identify people via biometric data stored on users' phones.¹⁴ Currently, Indian legislation does not have a particular statute governing the use of biometric data; however, the DPDP Act governs all personal data collected in non-digital form and digitized subsequently¹⁵, broadening the ambit to biometric data.

CONCLUSION

Earlier, Google was slammed for launching Google Glass in 2013, which they eventually had to shut down two years later. Today, however, with the success of Ray-Ban Meta Glasses, other tech companies are jumping on the bandwagon of launching smart glasses. The LED light tampering was compounded in April 2025, when Meta updated its privacy policy, enabling AI features by default and removing the option for users to prevent voice recordings from being stored.¹⁶ This raises concerns among the general public related to the end of individual privacy. The emergence of smart glasses has shed light on a grave concern in the legal landscape related to the evolving technology and laws governing it. While we have laws such as the DPDP Act,

¹² *K. S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India* (2017) 10 SCC 1.

¹³ Samreen Wani, Why Meta's Ray-Ban smart glasses are causing a privacy scandal, *FORBES INDIA*, (Mar. 5, 2026, 4:43 PM), <https://www.forbesindia.com/article/ai-tracker/why-metas-ray-ban-smart-glasses-are-causing-a-privacy-scandal/2991937/1>.

¹⁴ Amanda Hoover, *Meta's Smart Glasses Can Now Be Used to Do the One Thing Big Tech Feared*, *WIRED* (Oct. 1, 2024), <https://www.wired.com/story/meta-smart-glasses-face-recognition-nametags-connections/>.

¹⁵ The Digital Personal and Data Protection Act, 2023. § 3(a)(ii), No. 22, Acts of Parliament, 2023 (India).

¹⁶ Samreen Wani, Why Meta's Ray-Ban smart glasses are causing a privacy scandal, *FORBES INDIA*, (Mar. 5, 2026, 4:43 PM), <https://www.forbesindia.com/article/ai-tracker/why-metas-ray-ban-smart-glasses-are-causing-a-privacy-scandal/2991937/1>.

IT Act, 2000, Consumer Protection Act, etc., currently governing the use of such technology in the country, it is crucial for lawmakers to recognise and form laws specifically governing such advanced technology to safeguard individual rights, ensure appropriate redressal for aggrieved parties, and hold infringing parties accountable for their actions.

Public awareness plays a crucial role in the rise of advanced technologies. It should be mandated that companies issue a guideline before the release of the product for the general masses on how to identify if an individual is recording them. Even after such reforms are made, it still poses an ethical dilemma for the users of such glasses: whether these glasses are merely functioning as a fashion statement and helping in reducing and effectively managing time, or are they tools of mass surveillance, exposing them to legal liabilities if the content is misused.