Meta just created a moderation nightmare for its smart glasses

Meta's smart glasses have been a PR headache for the company. Public backlash has been swift, and fierce; people are concerned about the erosion of privacy and expansion of surveillance. Some especially bad actors are using the glasses to film themselves "pranking" random strangers. Women have become unsuspecting social media content for men filming themselves hitting on them without their knowledge. When your product is being referred to as "pervert glasses," you have a problem on your hands.

On Thursday, *Business Insider* reported that Meta was taking the fairly extraordinary step of banning some content filmed with Meta glasses from the company's own platform. Instagram head Adam Mosseri recently said that content "taking advantage of people and harassing them, like a lot of these pickup line kind of videos," would be removed from Instagram.

Appreciate for a moment the bind Meta finds itself in: Its product allowed customers to behave so objectionably that the company responded with a content ban, as if to say "Stop making us look bad."

"We don't want people to be surreptitiously taking videos of other people and harassing them and then posting them on our platform," Mosseri said, according to *Business Insider.* "So we're trying to fight that every way we can."

But it's worth considering how we got here in the first place. And a policy like this also creates a whole new set of

questions that need to be untangled in order to understand what a ban on some smart glasses content actually means — and how it would be enforced.

We have little expectation of privacy in public spaces — you could become someone's Instagram Reel subject just for walking down the street, taking the train, or shopping in a store. The rise of short-form video has given new life to the man-on-the-street content format, which has proven time and again to be cheap and endlessly repeatable; there are "creators" whose whole schtick is going up to strangers to ask how much money they make or how much they pay in rent, or whether they can name a song. Some people simply take videos of strangers minding their own business; others run up on people to compliment them profusely and enthusiastically just to get a confused — or gracious — reaction on camera. Being in public has always meant sharing space with other people, but now we must also anticipate becoming video fodder for people who will later monetize it online.

It's no surprise that some of the earliest adopters of smart glasses have been content creators; making content creation even more frictionless is one of the primary functions of Meta glasses. Not everyone using Meta glasses to film content is doing it to harass service workers and women — some use glasses to film "day in the life"-style content, or their meals, or concerts. But between anodyne personal content and the now-banned harassment, there is a lot of gray area that isn't directly addressed by Instagram's new policy: What about accounts that mine homeless encampments for shock-value content, or silently film people in public who are in active addiction? Is it considered harassment if a man films women at the gym but doesn't approach them? And if you find yourself in a clip filmed without your knowledge or consent, is that grounds to ask Instagram to take the video down?

And what if someone is "surreptitiously taking videos of other people and harassing them," but in the old-fashioned way, *not*

using smart glasses?

Meta spokesperson Albert Aydin told *The Verge* in an email that the company is working on disabling cameras on glasses when tampering is detected and removing content from accounts associated with those devices. Aydin didn’t answer specific questions about whether a person who was filmed could appeal to Meta to have content removed; Aydin said Meta is trying to “fight surreptitious filming and LED tampering in every way we can.” Aydin also did not provide *The Verge* with a copy of the actual policy.

The anger over smart glasses is partially due to the especially egregious “pervert” use cases of glasses that Meta has had to denounce — but even more innocuous examples put people on edge, too. When it comes to smart glasses, it’s less about the specific content being filmed than it is about the capability to do so at all, without others realizing what’s happening. In saying the company will police the creepiest version of smart glasses content but sidestepping deeper questions, Meta is trying to have it both ways: It gets to tout its enforcement while creating the conditions for this content to exist in the first place.

https://www.theverge.com/report/970901/instagram-meta-glasses-prank-harassment-ban