

COVID-19 safety requirements may give facial recognition a lifeline

Barcelona-based facial-recognition firm Herta has leveraged its technology to monitor compliance with coronavirus behavioural restrictions, earning it the European Commission's COVID-19 Response Seal of Excellence.

Temps de lecture : minute

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The company has augmented its software to spot whether a crowd is adhering to social distancing guidelines, determine whether an individual is wearing a face mask and also identify the person, with the potential to alert authorities in the case of a breach. [Herta](#) is marketing its product to businesses and places where security is of importance, such as airports and retailers.

Why does it matter? With concerns persisting about the [ethics of facial-recognition technology](#), do COVID-19 safety requirements potentially present an opportunity for it to be used in a limited fashion?

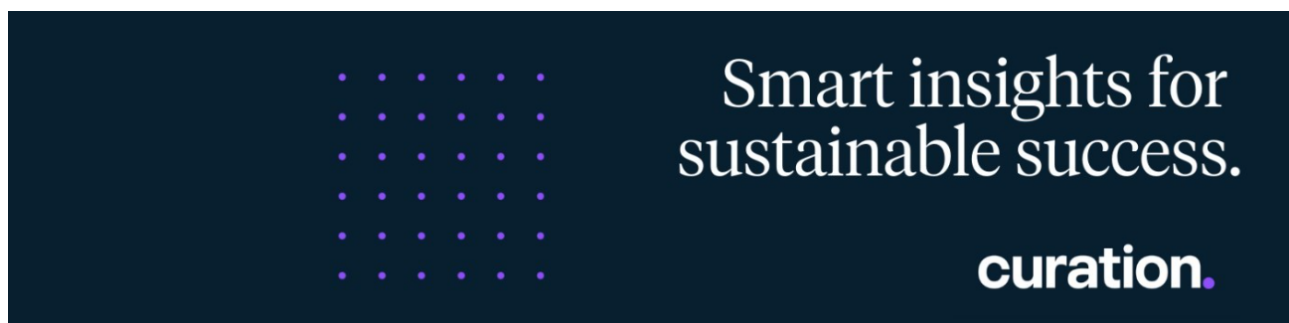
Hitherto, facial recognition's deployment has been marred by data faults which have caused racial bias in multiple systems - such as [Amazon's](#) - and, as we've previously discussed, prompted a number of technology companies to [stop selling](#) their software. Additionally, facial recognition systems gather personal biometric data - something that can't be changed in the same way a password can, sparking major [data privacy](#) concerns.

Any data collected obviously has to be handled with care. Facial recognition works by identifying features, depending on what the algorithm has been trained to recognise, such as eyes and cheekbones. The scanning of personal features, therefore, classes the information as biometric data which GDPR categories as “sensitive personal data”.

Features detailed above, however, don't necessarily need to function to identify whether someone is wearing a mask or whether people are standing in a group that contravenes social distancing regulations. Personal information also doesn't have to be stored if a system has been augmented to check for compliance rather than determine identity.

As noted previously, the use of facial recognition raised some concern at the beginning of the pandemic, but, with the world emerging from lockdown, the technology may have been handed a lifeline, so long as it can operated at a limited level.

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