



Are we really ready for smart glasses?

Mathures Paul on a tech trend and the tensions at the heart of it

The market for smart glasses is expected to accelerate, according to HSBC Holdings Plc analysts. They highlight the early success of the glasses made by EssilorLuxottica in collaboration with Facebook parent Meta Platforms.

This union of technology and fashion is seen on New York's Fifth Avenue shopping promenade as much as on Calcutta's Park Street.

According to EssilorLuxottica, the parent company of Ray-Ban and Oakley, over seven million pairs were sold last year, and McKinsey's 2026 State of Fashion report predicts that smart frames will "redefine the wearables landscape in 2026".

That growth is being driven by competition. Meta is not alone in the game. Google has invested in partnerships with Kering (the parent company of Saint Laurent, Gucci and Balenciaga), Gentle Monster and Warby Parker, all of which are planning to introduce smart glasses this year.

Samsung has partnered with Google to create glasses with exterior cameras, a microphone and a speaker, enabling the wearer to talk to Google's Gemini chatbot.

This is why smart glasses are being seen as the next step up from the smartphone; they may eventually be used for calls and messages, with all sorts of information flashing before the eyes as sound is directed into the ears.

The Consumer Electronics Show floor in Las Vegas, US, reflected this momentum, packed this year with devices at exactly this stage. There are cameras that can film, with microphones built in. The glasses can also be used as audio sunglasses for listening to music or chatting with someone on the phone. And there are plenty of features based around AI.

Among the standout entries, Halliday's glasses take a different approach. They have a screen on which words can be read. This makes translations easier to grasp and can even help the user answer questions during conversations, making him or her sound clever.

Nuance Audio smart glasses solve a different problem. There are many people who could benefit from wearing a hearing aid but sometimes do not because they do not want it to show. This pair of smart glasses, which also has speakers on the side, offers an invisible alternative, amplifying the sound around the wearer and boosting people's voices. The accompanying smartphone app allows the user to choose

the right settings for his or her environment.

The Qwen Smartglasses S1 takes the screen idea further still, with a Waveguide display inside the lens. Users can scroll through apps by swiping on the right frame of the temple. When the translate app is opened, it can automatically detect if somebody is speaking in a different language.

These benefits are real. The technology helped someone like Tilly Dowler, who has Stargardt disease and only about 10 per cent useful vision, participate in a marathon in the UK.

But the same camera that helped Dowler navigate is also what makes smart glasses easy to weaponise. A few weeks ago, former *Wall Street Journal* reporter Joanna Stern, who recently became an independent content creator, posted a video of finding herself in a stranger's garage in the US where a drill and a

AI & You



The device helped the UK's Tilly Dowler, who has Stargardt disease and only 10 per cent vision, participate in a marathon

dental probe were being used to turn smart glasses into spy glasses. On Ray-Ban Meta smart glasses, a white light comes on when the user records a video. She said there are services being offered in, at least 30 states in the US where garage mechanics have found a way to do away with the glowing light, for a fee.

That tampering has already produced its own subculture. Adding to the problems this creates is rizz-camming, the practice of hitting on people while secretly recording the interaction through smart glasses. These interactions are then put out on social media for millions to watch. Not all rizz-cammers disable the light, and not everyone who disables the light is a rizz-cammer. Such glasses can also be used to record sensitive political rallies without drawing attention.

In London, a woman was approached by a man wearing smart glasses, who recorded their interaction without her knowledge. He uploaded the video on social media and refused to take it down unless she paid him.

Meta told Stern that the company "aggressively targets anyone advertising tampering tools". Covert recording is illegal. The backlash has already produced countermeasures: apps have appeared that use Bluetooth to scan for nearby camera glasses, such as NoGlasshole. PimEyes, a subscription-based service, uses facial recognition technology to find online photos of a person.

The future of these AI-driven smart glasses depends on which side of the story the user is on.