

New facial recognition apps concern researcher

February 4 2014, by Angie Hunt

Brian Mennecke is not surprised to see developers using facial recognition technology to create new apps for smart phones and tablets. In fact, Mennecke and his colleagues at Iowa State University predicted this would happen through their research on 'mavatars,' or marketing avatars.

Mennecke, an associate professor of information systems, says [facial recognition technology](#) creates opportunities, but there are also risks. Privacy invasion, identity theft and misuse are among the top concerns, specifically with peer-to-peer applications. And trying to safeguard one's privacy or identity is similar to fighting a war on terror, Mennecke said.

He points to the upcoming release of the Name Tag [app](#) as a good example. The app allows users to take a picture of a stranger and find information about that individual by scanning pictures on social media sites and other online sources.

"Our research focuses on the perceived risks and the potential for misuse by other users with this kind of technology. The challenge is that when these applications are released for public use, the potential for abuse is great because it will be virtually impossible to opt out," Mennecke said.

That's not to say all facial recognition apps are necessarily bad. It really depends on who's accountable. For example, apps that are connected to a business or organization will ultimately be accountable to their customers, stockholders and regulators. Mennecke says that's not always

the case with peer-to-peer applications.

"The challenge with peer-to-peer applications is that there will ultimately be no one entity to hold responsible," Mennecke said. "In many ways, there is an analogy to military operations; when a military force opposes another army, everyone knows who is on each side. When anyone can run rogue facial recognition applications on their own, it is more like a war on terror because any one individual doesn't know whether someone is using [facial recognition](#) for good or bad and, ultimately, there is no one organization that can be held accountable."

Provided by Iowa State University

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