

Tokyo trials digital billboards that scan passers-by

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A man walks past a digital advertising display at a Tokyo station. Digital advertising billboards being trialled in Japan are fitted with cameras that read the gender and age group of people looking at them to tailor their commercial messages.

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The technology -- reminiscent of the personalised advertisements in Steven Spielberg's sci-fi movie "Minority Report" -- forms part of the Digital Signage Promotion Project, which is currently in a test phase.

A consortium of 11 railway companies launched the one-year pilot project last month, and has set up 27 of the high-tech advertising

displays in subway commuter stations around Tokyo.

"The camera can distinguish a person's sex and approximate age, even if the person only walks by in front of the display, at least if he or she looks at the screen for a second," said a spokesman for the project.

If data for different locations is analysed, companies can provide interactive advertisements "which meet the interest of people who use the station at a certain time," the project said in a statement.

While in "Minority Report" advertisers recognise individuals such as Tom Cruise's character by name and make purchasing suggestions, the Japanese project does not identify people and only collates [demographic data](#).

The technology uses face recognition software to glean the gender and age group of passers-by, but operators have promised they will save no recorded images, only the collated data about groups of people.

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