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LAUREN GOODE PETER RUBIN GEAR 09.09.2021 12:00 PM

Facebook's New Camera Glasses Are Dangerously Easy to Use

The company has partnered with Ray-Ban to make a pair of video-capturing Wayfarers. They're everything you hoped for and feared in smart glasses.

FACEBOOK IS NOTORIOUS for borrowing ideas from other tech companies, then taking advantage of its massive global platform and its expertise in building sticky apps to bring those ideas into the mainstream. Some of Facebook's most egregious lifts have been from Snap, née Snapchat, whose 24-hour disappearing stories and technically sophisticated augmented-reality filters later showed up as copycat features inside Instagram. And like Snap, Facebook has in recent years declared itself to be a camera company, with Mark Zuckerberg proclaiming on a 2016 earnings call that he believed "a camera will be the main way we share."

Facebook's latest foray into "*Wait, haven't I seen this before?*" is a pair of photo- and video-capturing sunglasses, à la Snap Spectacles. They're called Ray-Ban Stories, with Ray-Ban appearing first and Facebook second in most of the product branding. Even though this is a product collaboration between two globally recognizable brands, these are *Facebook* glasses. This is Facebook's first piece of wearable tech designed for casual use—not just specialized VR applications, which is what Oculus is for—and the sunglasses are designed for completely frictionless media capture of the world around you. They go on sale today for \$299.

It's the "effortless" part that will raise eyebrows behind the plastic frames. Facebook has made a pair of smart glasses—even if they're not true AR glasses—that people might actually want to wear. (Giaia Rener, Ray-Ban's global brand director, even describes them as "the first smart glasses you're going to want to wear.") If the ultimate goal of wearable-tech makers has been to develop something at the intersection of comfort, invisibility, and invisible data capture, then Facebook seems to have accomplished this.

Cameras are everywhere now; a person doesn't even need to pull out their phone to digitally memorialize a moment. The question is whether Facebook should own even more of those moments.

Double Exposure

The new Ray-Bans come in both tinted and clear-lensed versions. PHOTOGRAPH: RAY-BAN

Where Snap's design team has leaned into the Burning Man aesthetic for its Spectacles, Facebook and Ray-Ban went normcore. If you ignore the fact that they have cameras and wireless connectivity, Ray-Ban Stories are just a pair of Wayfarers. WIRED received two review pairs. We weighed one of the pairs, which measured 49.3 grams—just shy of the stated 49.6 grams cited in the specs, and around 5 grams more than the original Wayfarers they're modeled after. Crucially, that extra weight is distributed well, and both of us (Peter and Lauren) remarked that it was easy to forget you were wearing tech-laden shades.

Most smart glasses have unusually large temples to accommodate all the necessary sensors and chips and batteries. The arms on the Ray-Ban Stories glasses are slightly wider than a normal pair, but they don't look geeky. (They also don't have a waveguide, or a microprojector for display optics, since they're not powering AR overlays). Packed into the arms are a power button, a capture button, a three-microphone array, two tiny speakers, and a touch panel. On the front of the specs are two 5-megapixel cameras, as well as a barely-there LED indicator light that lets people know the wearer is recording.

A sample video (provided by Facebook) captured with the Ray-Ban camera glasses.
COURTESY OF JACQUES SLADE

Capturing media is easy. You long-press the button to take a photo, and a shutter sound comes through the built-in speakers to indicate a photo has in fact been snapped. Press quickly on the same button and the glasses start recording a 30-second video. You can also walk around saying "Hey, Facebook" and speaking your capture commands if you have no shame whatsoever. The videos are crisp and stable (even if they're square); the photos, which are only captured after a maddening half-second shutter lag, measure 2,592 by 1,944 pixels, with plenty of room for editing. All images and clips export into Facebook's View app using the glasses themselves as a temporary Wi-Fi hot spot for faster sharing. At this point, you can edit and share photos and videos directly to Facebook or Instagram, or usher them out of the walled garden by adding them to your photo roll.

The glasses' nicest surprise might be the tiny speakers embedded in the rear of each temple. These not only provide audible cues for media capture, but let you stream music from your phone into your ears. Playing music through the glasses tends to eat up the battery, though. Ray-Ban and Facebook claim a battery life of six hours of "moderate" usage, which they define as an hour of audio, 30 minutes of calls, 10 photos and 10 videos captured and imported, and with the glasses' "Hey Facebook" wake word activated. After one three-hour session using the glasses to take sporadic photos and video, Peter's battery was still at 70 percent. Lauren noticed, when she accidentally had music streaming to her glasses, that battery life drained more quickly.

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Naturally, the way you charge your Facebook Ray-Bans is very similar to the charging mechanism for Snap's Spectacles: You charge the case, with the glasses nestled inside.

Public Image Unlimited

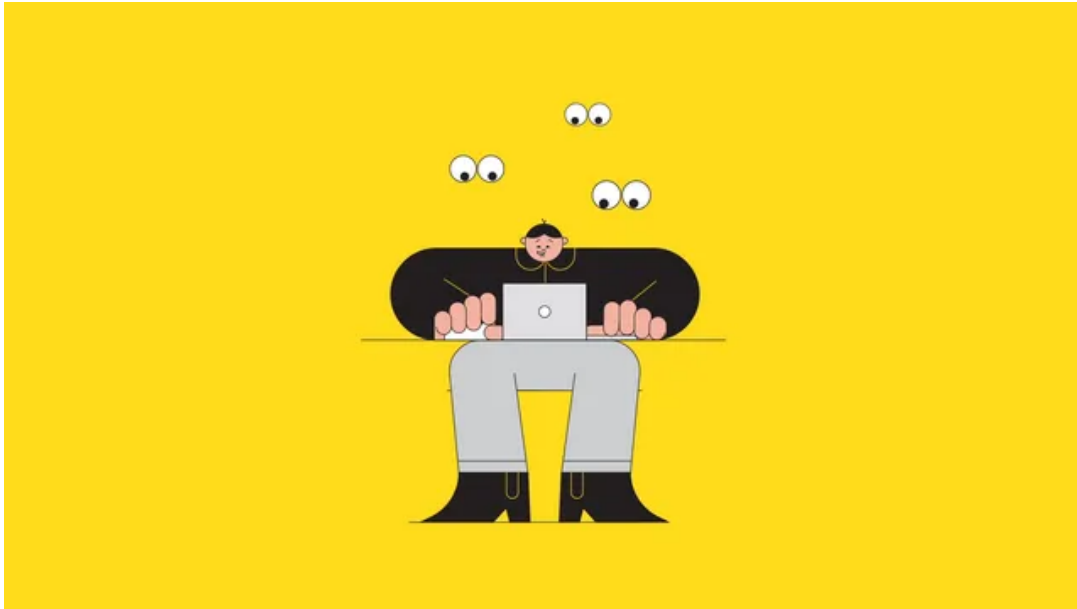
The camera lenses and indicator light on the Ray-Bans are easy to miss. PHOTOGRAPH: RAY-BAN

Snap first launched sunglasses with an integrated video camera in September 2016. Over five years, the company has released iterative updates to the Spectacles, which haven't sold particularly well. But then, this spring, Snap made a leap by revealing actual augmented-reality glasses. Sure, they're limited to developers, and they have poor battery life, but they offer a true volumetric AR experience. Facebook, meanwhile, has been working on these Ray-Bans since at least 2019, and it almost certainly will take a swing at AR glasses in the future. But in terms of both commercial availability and advanced features, the new Facebook Ray-Bans are years behind Snap's glasses.

Facebook's slowness may have been intentional; Andrew Bosworth, who runs the company's Reality Labs, has said multiple times that the company doesn't want to "surprise" people as it introduces new technologies. This has been in response to Facebook's move-fast-and-break-things mantra, its questionable data-collection practices, and its cascade of somewhat impotent privacy settings.

But if Facebook doesn't want to surprise people, it might have built a much more obvious indicator light into its latest product. During a dinner with friends last weekend, Peter wore the Ray-Ban Stories the whole time—and it wasn't until he pointed out the tiny sensors

embedded at the temples that friends noticed. Once they did, though, Facebook's biggest issue didn't take long to surface: "So, you've been recording the whole time?" one friend asked, only half joking. Similarly, Lauren recorded (then deleted) a conversation with an editor while fumbling with the glasses. The editor never noticed.



The WIRED Guide to Your Personal Data (and Who Is Using It)

Information about you, what you buy, where you go, even where you *look* is the oil that fuels the digital economy.

BY LOUISE MATSAKIS

Also, while the models we were given to test were sunglasses with tinted lenses, Facebook is offering 20 different configurations with three Ray-Ban frame shapes (Wayfarer, Round, and Meteor), including clear-lensed versions. So while our dark-lensed Ray-Bans were more at home outdoors—in public places, where photographing others without their consent is generally allowed—buyers could choose a pair of glasses that could be worn night and day, indoors and out.

All of which brings up a serious question: How are people *not* going to use this technology to create sensitive, violent, or otherwise controversial content? We're not saying people won't use the glasses to save memories of family reunions or a day at the beach—we're just saying they also happen to be wearing the best sex-tape camera in the history of the world, one that records without the now-accepted social cue of holding a phone up in front of your face.

The other questions all stem from that presupposition, and are both less rhetorical and much thornier. Are Facebook and Instagram prepared to handle the influx of said content?





What happens if the person creating said content is doing so without the express consent of anyone else in the images and clips? And above it all are the questions that arise with *any* piece of connected hardware coming from Menlo Park: How much of your data does Facebook get when you capture video on these glasses and share it through the stand-alone Facebook View app?

You *can* turn the glasses off, which cuts power to the camera and microphone. The glasses monitor your battery status, your Facebook login, and your wireless connection; those are the only nonnegotiables. Anything else the glasses and View app can do—sharing how long you spend recording videos, the number of clips and images you've captured, using Facebook Assistant for voice control, and storing those transcripts—is an opt-in setting, communicated during the app setup process. Similarly, the company says that anything you capture is encrypted on the glasses. It has even put out a one-sheet outlining its privacy policies for Ray-Ban Stories, and it built what it calls a "privacy microsite" for people visiting Ray-Ban's website.

As for content moderation, Facebook spokespeople say that the same rules apply for the glasses as they do for any other content creation tool. They point out that using Ray-Ban Stories or Facebook View requires agreeing to abide by Facebook's Community Standards, which includes a robust subsection devoted to "Objectionable Content"—and that Facebook, Instagram, and Messenger all use "a combination of automated technology, human review, and reporting tools" to identify and remove anything that violates those standards.

To hear Facebook talk about it, it sounds so easy. Maybe too easy.

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[Lauren Goode](#) is a senior writer at WIRED covering products, apps, services, and consumer tech issues and trends. Prior to WIRED she was a senior editor at The Verge and worked at Recode, AllThingsD, and The Wall Street Journal before that. Goode is a graduate of Clark University and Stanford... [Read more](#)

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Contributing editor Peter Rubin writes about pop culture, sports technology, and AR/VR for WIRED. His book, *[Future Presence: How Virtual Reality is Changing Human Connection, Intimacy, and the Limits of Ordinary Life](#)*, was published in April 2018.

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