

Artificial Intelligence Is Misreading Human Emotion

May 07, 2021

At a remote outpost in the mountainous highlands of Papua New Guinea, a young American psychologist named Paul Ekman arrived with a collection of flash cards and a new theory. It was 1967, and Ekman had heard that the Fore people of Okapa were so isolated from the wider world that they would be his ideal test subjects.

Like Western researchers before him, Ekman had come to Papua New Guinea to extract data from the indigenous community. He was gathering evidence to bolster a controversial hypothesis: that all humans exhibit a small number of universal emotions, or affects, that are innate and the same all over the world. For more than half a century, this claim has remained contentious, disputed among psychologists, anthropologists, and technologists. Nonetheless, it became a seed for a growing market that will be [worth an estimated \\$56 billion by 2024](#). This is the story of how affect recognition came to be part of the artificial-intelligence industry, and the problems that presents.

...