Metadata is a set of data (information) that describes and gives information about other data. In other words, information about information. For example, an image may include metadata that describes how large the picture is, colour depths, image resolution and so on, or a document may contain metadata about how long the document is, how large, when it was written and the author. This is a summary of basic information about data which can make finding and working with data easier in some instances, by helping organise and find details.

Most online fraud involves identity theft, which is why businesses that operate on the web have a keen interest in distinguishing impersonators from genuine customers. Passwords help. But many can be guessed or are jotted down imprudently. Newer phones, tablets, laptops and desktop computers often have beefed-up security with fingerprint and facial recognition. But these can be spoofed. To overcome these shortcomings, the next level of security is likely to identify people using things which are harder to copy, such as the way they walk.

Many online security services already use a system called device fingerprinting. This employs software to note things like the model type of a gadget employed by a particular user; its hardware configuration; its operating system; the apps which have been downloaded onto it; and other features, including sometimes the Wi-Fi networks it regularly connects through and devices like headsets it plugs into.