

# Facebook and smartphones: New tools for psychological science research

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Whether you're an iPerson who can't live without a Mac, a Facebook addict, or a gamer, you know that social media and technology say things about your personality and thought processes. And psychological scientists know it too – they've started researching how new media and devices both reveal and change our mental states.

Two recent articles in the journal [Perspectives on Psychological Science](#), a publication of the Association for Psychological Science, explored how trends in technology are changing the questions psychological scientists are asking and the ways they ask them.

## A Review of Facebook Research in the Social Sciences

With Facebook preparing to sell shares on Wall Street for the first time next week, investors aren't the only ones who want a piece of this social media giant. Social scientists have recognized Facebook and its 800-million-plus users as a gold mine for data about people's social relationships, and many researchers have incorporated it into their research programs. Psychological scientists Robert E. Wilson, Samuel T. Gosling and Lindsay T. Graham compiled all social-science studies involving Facebook and took a look at the types of questions researchers are asking.

Overall trends in the research indicate that people are drawn to Facebook because they can maintain connections both with close friends

and distant friends in an informal manner. Researchers have also shown that Facebook users tend to portray themselves accurately in their profiles, making Facebook profiles an excellent source for employers to evaluate job candidates and for businesses to find new consumers for their products. Companies who decide to use Facebook to collect information should be wary, though, because studies have demonstrated that Facebook users are becoming increasingly concerned about their privacy over time. Scientists also have to assess privacy issues when they design their Facebook studies, but Wilson and his colleagues believe that the value of the data collected from Facebook outweighs the challenges scientists have to overcome to obtain it.

More information about the growing list of [Facebook](#) research studies can be found on their website at [www.facebookinthesocialsciences.org](http://www.facebookinthesocialsciences.org).

## **The Smartphone Psychology Manifesto**

Smartphones may be getting cheaper, but their value to psychological scientists is priceless. Because people are constantly on the go, one of the biggest challenges researchers face is collecting data in real time in people's everyday environments. Sure, scenarios can be recreated in the laboratory, but psychological scientist Geoffrey Miller asks why should scientists rely on simulations when they could tap the power of smartphones instead?

One advantage of smartphones is that people tend to carry them almost everywhere they go. The sensors on smartphones can also provide a wealth of information beyond a user's location, including whether a person is moving, how they are moving, and whether an individual is in close proximity to other smartphone users. By using "psych apps" that users download to their phones, Miller suggests that scientists would be able to obtain a more accurate representation of how environments influence behavior. One app already in use is "[Mappiness](#)," which

combines your location, ambient noise level, and your mood to find out how your environment influences your mood. Miller also predicts that smartphones could eventually be equipped to detect other things, such as temperature, radiation levels, and pollution.

There are downsides to smartphone research, including the limited battery life of smartphones, having to account for different phone models, and the fact that focusing on smartphones would only allow researchers to study individuals who could afford them (i.e., young, well-to-do people). Yet Miller believes that it is not a question of whether there will be a [smartphone](#) revolution in [psychological science](#) research, it is a question of when the revolution will happen.

Provided by Association for Psychological Science

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