

# Social Media and New Technologies in Survey Research



RTI International focuses expertise in survey methodology, advanced technology, and communications to assess the role of social media and new technologies in survey research. We have conducted more than three million surveys on handheld devices and are studying how new forms of communication and social interaction—like Facebook and Twitter—can best be used to provide answers instantly and efficiently. RTI is rigorously evaluating the potential value—and possible pitfalls—of emerging data sources to turn knowledge into practice.

## Overview

Despite the rapid adoption of mobile technologies and social media platforms in recent years, the majority of survey research continues to be done using telephone, mail, in-person, and “traditional” Web survey techniques. Survey response rates are in decline, landline telephone coverage is dropping annually, and controlled access and other technologies are limiting our ability to contact respondents. At the same time, communications are being revolutionized through the proliferation of social networking and mobile technology. As the public adapts to new technologies, so too must survey research.

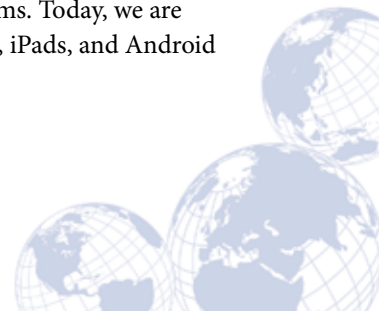
To capitalize on the opportunities afforded by these changes, RTI is developing a suite of solutions that use new platforms as data sources, including Facebook, Twitter, Second Life, Google Trends, mobile apps, and geolocation services. These systems have great potential for recruiting respondents, pretesting instruments, conducting surveys, and processing the abundance of secondary source information like Internet searches and “Tweets” through opinion mining and sentiment analysis. “What are people saying about the new mammography guidelines?” “What drugs are emerging and gaining popularity among youth?”

“Can avatars function as survey interviewers?” These are just a few examples of questions that can be explored in novel ways, and at greater depths, through the lens of social media.

## Areas of Expertise

RTI’s survey researchers focus on the identification and resolution of methodological, measurement, and data collection challenges. Our capabilities in survey methodology provide survey managers and subject matter experts with a valuable resource to aid in the development of appropriate survey questionnaires, forms, designs, and analyses. As social research expands to use new technologies for analyzing public sentiment, our expertise in opinion capture and measurement will allow us to take an informed look at these new forms of communication.

RTI was an early adopter of handheld computers for collecting survey data, developing handheld screeners in 1999. That expertise has given us the ability to quickly adapt to new data collection platforms. Today, we are developing applications for iPhones, iPads, and Android devices.



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Our experts in health communication and health information technology have training and experience in developing, implementing, and evaluating social media communication plans. We use interactive forums, emerging technologies, and Web-related resources to promote and evaluate health communication initiatives.

## Research Highlights

Furberg, R.D. (2011). SMS and health: A systematic review of the uses of mobile phone text messaging in management of chronic disease. Presented at the 8th Annual World Health Care Congress, Washington, DC.

Murphy, J., Dean, E., Hill, C.A., & Richards, A. (2011) Social media, new technologies, and the future of health survey research. Presented at the Tenth Conference on Health Survey Research Methods. Peachtree City, GA.

Squiers, L., Holden, D.J., Doline, S., Kim, E., Bann, C.M., & Renaud, J.M. (2011). The public's response to the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force's 2009 recommendations on mammography screening. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 40(5): 497-504.

Zhang, Y. (2011) A Personal Health Record Application Using Android Platform and Microsoft HealthVault. Presented at the International Field Directors and Technologies Conference. Scottsdale, AZ.

Dean, E.F., Cook, S.L., Keating, M.D., & Murphy, J.J. (2009). Does this avatar make me look fat? Obesity and interviewing in Second Life. *Journal of Virtual Worlds Research*, 2(2): 3-11.

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RTI International is a trade name of Research Triangle Institute.

