

Too Early To Tell

In the world of poker, they're known as tells—those physical and verbal moves a player makes, which give competitors valuable insights on their hand.¹ In day-to-day life, our tells also divulge a lot about our behaviour and that's revealing a great deal more about our health.

With the aid of digital devices such as smartphones, wearables (e.g., fitness trackers), and smart speakers, we generate a rich trail of tells 24/7. For instance, the words we choose, the voice we use, how we sleep, how we play, where we go, how we tap the keyboard, all generate data central to a growing area of research. It's called digital phenotyping and it's helping solve one of the most significant missing pieces in medicine—the detailed understanding of ongoing patient behaviour. What we say in the doctor's office, by error or omission, can leave out important clues for diagnosis and treatment today, and over time. Now, consider that in one study “scientists have analyzed how people use their phones to predict Parkinson's disease with 100 percent accuracy.”²

Capturing massive amounts of passively produced user data is one thing, analyzing



it and producing meaningful results is a whole other algorithm-based job. Right now, digital phenotyping can be divided into three main streams of research and business development: screening and diagnosing patients, symptom monitoring and interventions.³

In keeping with the research, there's a growing digital health care market, expected to reach \$206 billion in 2021.⁴ Emerging digital phenotyping companies will be active participants. For example, companies such as Mindstrong, Inc., have developed an app that's meant to be a “smoke alarm” for people with mental health concerns. Monitoring over “1,000 smartphone related data points,” the app

looks for clues that often accompany depression.⁵

The potential opportunity for improving our health, for linking digital phenotyping with genetic research, for bridging the gap between behaviour and the growing trend of precision medicine—customizing treatments for each individual—is astounding.

Understandably, there's also room for questions about individual privacy, data usage and data ownership. Where do the boundaries lie now and how will that look in the future? Building a framework for balancing the integrity of data usage with the possibilities for better health is important. How we choose to behave will tell the story in more ways than one.

1. Zachary Elwood and Giovanni Angoni, “Common Poker Tells: How to Read People in Poker,” *PokerNews*, December 4, 2019, <https://www.pokernews.com>.

2. Lois Parshley, “Our phones can now detect health problems from Parkinson's to depression. Is that a good thing?” *Vox*, February 12, 2020, <https://www.vox.com>.

3. Lois Parshley, “Our phones can now detect health problems.”

4. Lois Parshley, “Our phones can now detect health problems.”

5. Natasha Singer, “How Companies Scour Our Digital Lives for Clues to Our Health,” *The New York Times*, February 25, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com>.



Fiduciary
Trust
Canada™

Calgary
335 Eighth Avenue SW,
Suite 1940, Calgary,
Alberta, Canada T2P 1C9
(800) 574-3822

Toronto
200 King Street West,
Suite 1500, Toronto,
Ontario, Canada M5H 3T4
(800) 574-3822

Montreal
1002 Sherbrooke Street
West, Suite 1940
Montreal, Quebec
Canada H3A 3L6
(800) 574-3822

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