

# Health-conscious future could stem from smartphones

December 14 2010, By Tom Yencho

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The latest smartphones are equipped with a range of technologies that can pinpoint your location. It's only a matter of time before they'll also be able to detect your every movement, says Reetika Gupta, assistant professor of marketing.

The evolution toward mobile [sensing devices](#) has already begun. The first wave of baby boomers turns 65 this year, and nearly 80 million will follow them into retirement over the next 20 years -- a “geriatric tidal wave,” according to *The New York Times*.

To prepare for this generational change, the healthcare industry has already partnered with computer scientists to create a mix of sensory technologies that will essentially monitor any changes of health. The technologies will allow quicker and more effective treatment for the elderly.

But those mobile sensing technologies have far greater potential, says Gupta. Within five years, all smartphones could very well be equipped with applications that track physical activity. The devices will not only monitor whether you're sitting or walking, but they'll also detect any changes to your workout regimen or physical fitness.

“The big question becomes how people will react to these technological and cultural changes,” Gupta says. “These types of mobile applications will rely on the collection of personal data that many will consider an intrusion on their personal lives, regardless of the long-term benefit.

There's a fine line to walk.”

That fine line is what interests Gupta the most. An expert in consumer behavior and technological development, she says there's been little marketing research to show just how consumers will adapt to the impending changes and whether such changes will impact consumers' lifestyle decisions.

### **‘A part of our conscience’**

The advent of mobile sensing technologies couldn't come at a better time for the United States. While the devices may have a direct influence on the growing number of elderly Americans, they may also become important preventative tools for the country's unfit youth, Gupta says.

Most estimates show the one out of every three Americans is obese—a problem that is trending in the wrong direction. These sensing technologies could promote personal responsibility by making sure at-risk children and young adults can see for themselves their personal health data, and adjust their daily physical activities and lifestyles accordingly.

“Smartphones are no longer just phones. For better or worse, they've become a part of who we are—part of our conscience,” Gupta says. “From a marketing perspective, mobile sensory technologies may help us all develop a different mindset, one that is more health-conscious.

“It will require a new way of learning and a different way of thinking that will be foreign to many Americans, even five or 10 years down the road. Successfully communicating those changes—and the impact they'll have on people's lives—will be key to its success.”

Provided by Lehigh University

Citation: Health-conscious future could stem from smartphones (2010, December 14) retrieved 27 April 2024 from

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