

# 'Huge opportunities' for harvesting data shown

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New research by experts at The University of Manchester has highlighted 'massive new opportunities' for harvesting information from digital and administrative data.

Drs Mark Elliot and Kingsley Purdam say huge quantities of useful data are now being created as a by-product of processes such as traces from [internet users](#), Twitter and Facebook.

However, much of it is owned by commercial companies or public bodies.

Dr Elliot said: "These new forms of data are a huge opportunity for understanding more about the big questions that face us all, such as [health inequalities](#), discrimination and [environmental change](#).

"Twitter, when linked to [health record](#) data for example, could help us to understand people's attitudes, behaviour and well being.

"What is so exciting is this new information can be made available in real time as it is created.

"In fact, there's so much going on out there, it's fair to say the boundary between researcher and researched is becoming blurred: who's researching whom?

"However, our evidence suggests there is a risk that social research will

be less reliable if commercial companies and organisations restrict access to these rich data sources.

"This is because to carry out robust research, we need to validate, replicate and peer review research effectively. At the moment the data world can seem a bit like the wild west."

Drs Elliot and Purdam carried out a series of interviews and a survey with leading academics, highlighting the use of the new types of data.

But they also revealed challenges to privacy amid concerns over links and data sharing between commercial companies and also government bodies.

Citizens, they say, are often not aware of the data they generate through using, for example, social media and how this is then used.

Academics, they say, need to make the case for the regulation of data and the reliability and validity of analyses and claims made of them.

Provided by University of Manchester

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