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Zendle and Bowen-Jones are correct when they point towards methodological shortcomings in research that aims to understand the impact of social media [1]. However, these observations also apply to related research, which considers the impact of technology use more generally. Designs typically involve asking people to consider their personal experience with technology [2] and this reflects a general shift away from behavioral measurement in psychology [3,4]. In a recent article, we tested the predictive ability of popular assessment inventories used to quantify smartphone usage. These inventories did not align well with even the most basic measures of objective behavior, including those associated with compulsive use (e.g., rapid checking) [1,5]. It remains unclear exactly what these assessment inventories are measuring. Interestingly, survey items are conceptually very similar to depression and anxiety scales. This alone may explain small negative associations between technology use and mood.

Alongside these limitations, narratives surrounding the mass adoption of new technologies are almost always negative. In response, researchers might want to start asking themselves exactly why or how the use of social communication technology would cause harm and develop more suitable measures accordingly. Social media is certainly not the first technology to be associated with potentially ‘addictive’ or negative societal impacts [6,7], nor will it be the last. Moral panics concerning new technology (e.g., the printing press, the telephone, microwaves, the internet, social media) are, historically speaking, either overblown or demonstrably false.

Understanding the impact of technology on people and society remains crucial, but clinicians and researchers might also want to consider what drives ‘technophobia’ in the first place.

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