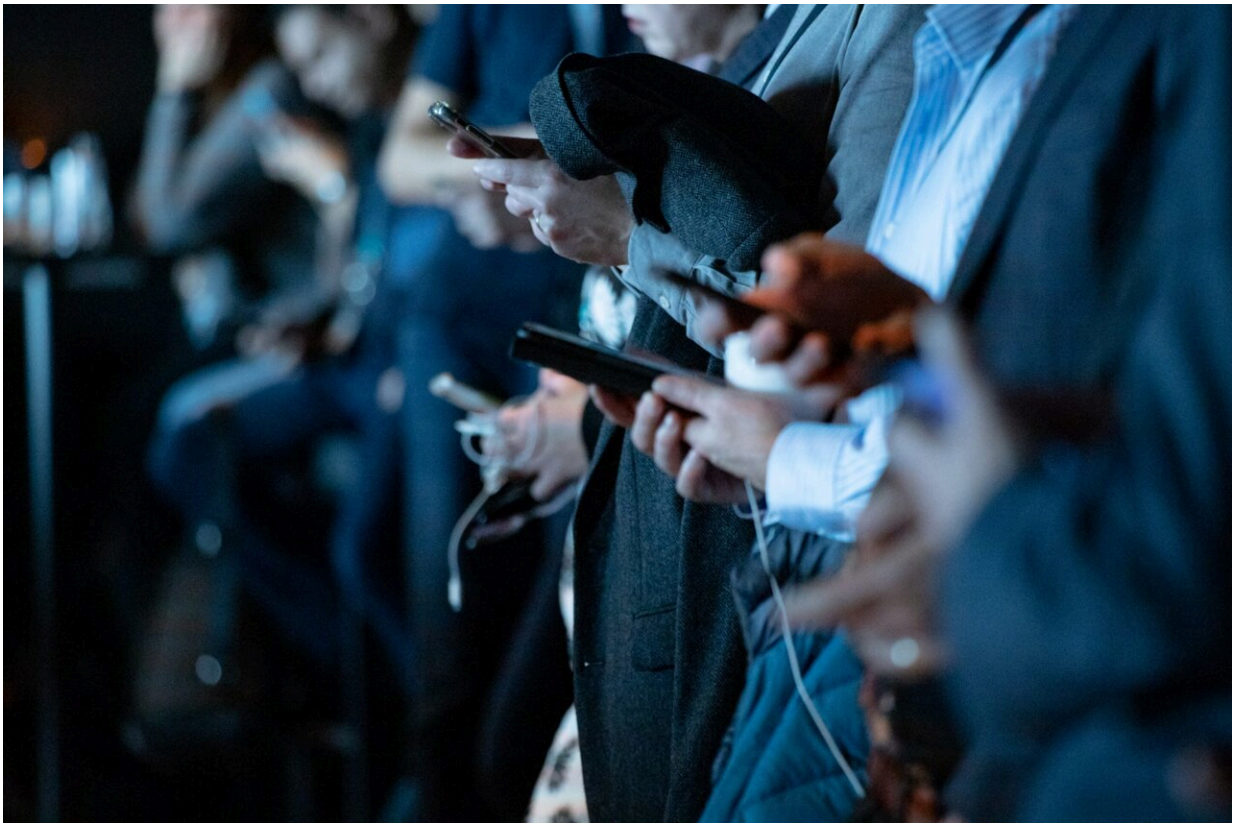


Fears over technology 'addictions' and 'disorders' may be unjustified

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Current measures of digital technology use are not fit for purpose say researchers.

Questionnaires and scales measuring how we interact with smartphones, [social media](#) and gaming should not be used to demonstrate links with [mental health](#) and well-being, according to research from Lancaster University and the University of Bath.

Surveys that ask people about their technology habits often suggest problematic use, even pointing towards the potential for "addictive" behaviors. But when researchers analyzed these questionnaires, they found that these measures were not advanced enough to confirm any such issues.

Published in *Computers in Human Behavior*, three separate studies analyzed the function of the scales and set out to investigate precisely what they measure, analyzing the Smartphone Addiction Scale, the Internet Gaming Disorder Scale, the Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale and the Problematic Series Watching Scale.

Psychologist Dr. Heather Shaw from Lancaster University said, "The scales are not developed in line with [best practices](#) yet allow researchers to quickly link mental health symptoms to technology use."

Despite claiming to identify unique issues to specific technologies, such as phobias or addictions, many scales are related to each other. For example, if a participant scored highly on a smartphone "addiction" survey they were also likely to score high on a scale that measured internet gaming "disorder."

"Many technology measures appear to identify a similar, poorly defined construct that sometimes overlaps with measures of well-being. However, we need more research to determine exactly what these scales measure," said Dr. Brit Davidson, from the University of Bath.

Dr. David Ellis, also from Bath, said, "Technology usage scales continue

to be developed at an alarming rate and yet we now know their foundations are shaky. This only serves to distract from genuine online harms, including online harassment, misinformation, and data security."

Dr. Davidson said: "While our attention is focused on alarming headlines we are not putting energy into truly understanding the impact of digital technology. Findings involving these widely used scales continue to drive research agendas, inform policy and are even attempting to define new clinical disorders."

The researchers say more research is needed to understand people's everyday experiences with [digital technology](#) alongside accurate measures of behavior from gaming and [social media platforms](#).

More information: Brittany I. Davidson et al, Fuzzy constructs in technology usage scales, *Computers in Human Behavior* (2022). [DOI: 10.1016/j.chb.2022.107206](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2022.107206)

Provided by Lancaster University

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