NEWS RELEASE

OECD-Cisco research finds stark geographical and generational divides in AI uptake and digital well-being

2025-12-04

News Summary

- Emerging economies, particularly India, Brazil, Mexico, and South Africa, are leading global adoption of generative AI, with younger adults showing the highest usage, trust, and engagement.
- Significant generational and geographic divides exist, with under-35s far more likely to use and trust AI, while older adults remain less engaged and less certain.
- High recreational screen time, especially among youth in emerging markets, is linked to decreased well-being, highlighting the need for a balanced focus on digital well-being as AI becomes widespread.

SAN JOSE, Calif., Dec. 4, 2025 /PRNewswire/ -- Generative AI is moving rapidly from novelty to habit. But adoption rates may not tell the full story. Cisco, the worldwide leader in networking and security, partnered with the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) on the Digital Well-being Hub to study the relationship between technology's risks and benefits, and how AI is impacting people's lives. New data from the Hub reveals that, beneath the headlines of youthful enthusiasm for AI, geographic and generational divides are emerging, shaping who benefits from AI, who bears the risks, and how digital life can affect well-being. This research provides Cisco's Digital Impact Office with essential insights that can support its aim to connect millions of people to the digital economy, help close the digital divide, and build a global learning culture through initiatives like Cisco Networking Academy and Country Digital Acceleration programs.

AI adoption is only part of the story

According to the current research, young adults, globally, are voracious consumers of digital content, with under-35s showing the highest use of social media, online devices and active use of GenAI. But the real standouts are people in emerging economies, particularly India, Brazil, Mexico, and South Africa. They lead AI adoption globally with the highest usage rates, greatest trust levels, and most active

engagement in AI training. In contrast, those surveyed in European countries show less trust and more uncertainty around the use of AI. This marks a departure from historical trends where emerging economies are typically slower to access and use new technologies.

However, these same populations, in India, Brazil, Mexico, and South Africa, report the highest recreational screen time, greatest reliance on digital-only socializing, and the most pronounced emotional highs and lows from tech use, when compared to those surveyed in other countries. The research also shows that, globally, more than five hours of daily recreational screen time is associated with decreased well-being and lower life satisfaction. While correlation is not causation, it's clear we need to focus on digital well-being so advances in technology don't come at the cost of health and happiness.

"Empowering emerging economies with AI skills is not just about technology, it's about unlocking the potential of every individual to shape their future. With the rapid integration of AI into our daily lives and workplaces, we must ensure that these tools are designed responsibly, with transparency, fairness, and privacy at their core. AI's greatest potential can be realized if it enhances well-being, by streamlining tasks, improving collaboration, and creating opportunities for growth and learning. When technology, people, and purpose come together, we create the conditions for resilient, healthy, and thriving communities everywhere," said Guy Diedrich, Senior Vice President and Global Innovation Officer, Cisco.

From generative AI to generation AI

Generational splits are equally stark, tracking existing trends in digitalization. Younger adults worldwide report that most or all of their social interaction takes place online and they express higher confidence in AI's usefulness. More than 50% of under-35s surveyed actively use AI, more than 75% say it is useful, and almost half of 26 to 35-year-olds have completed some training.

In contrast, adults over 45 are less likely to view AI as useful, and more than half do not use it at all. Among over-55s surveyed, many say they "don't know" if they trust AI, suggesting their uncertainty may be driven by a lack of familiarity rather than outright rejection. This familiarity gap also mirrors differences in expectations for AI's impact on jobs, with under-35s and those in emerging economies anticipating the highest impact.

"Generational divides in digital and AI adoption are not inevitable, they are challenges we can all address through targeted action. While younger generations may readily embrace new technology, people of all ages bring their own unique and invaluable experience and insights," said Diedrich. "So far at Cisco, 26,000 of our staff have undergone AI training and we are a founding member of the AI Workforce Consortium, a group of 10 leading companies working to prepare the workforce to leverage the transformational opportunity of AI on ICT jobs across all industries. A key measure of AI's success should not be speed of adoption, but whether people across all ages, skill levels, and geographies can use AI to genuinely improve their lives. That way we can ensure 'Generation AI' truly includes everyone," he continued.

This research provides a call to action for citizens, business and government leaders worldwide to bridge the digital skills gap, foster digital literacy at every age, and prioritize well-being alongside innovation. Only then can we ensure the digital future we build is truly for everyone.

About the Digital Well-being Hub

In 2024, Cisco and the OECD launched a joint initiative, grounded in the OECD Well-being Framework

and aligned to Cisco's Country Digital Acceleration program, to present existing and emerging OECD data, and to examine the complex nature of digital transformation. The hub also features an interactive platform used to gather new statistics and people's insights on digital well-being, including the impact of the digital divide and inequalities in the uptake and use of digital technologies.

About the Research

This analysis was conducted using data from 14 countries (Australia, Brazil, Canada, France, Germany, India, Italy, Japan, Korea, Mexico, the Netherlands, South Africa, the United Kingdom, and the United States), collected in early 2025 by a specialized research agency in collaboration with Cisco. Data collection followed OECD best practices essential for ensuring data reliability, comparability, and national representativeness.

The data collection yielded statistically valid responses from 14,611 individuals and was selected to reflect a broad range of socio-economic and cultural contexts in each country. Each is represented by a sample of just over 1,000 respondents, except for India, which includes 1,500 respondents. All participants completed the full 20-question poll as well as the accompanying demographic and profile questions of the Digital Well-being Poll.

Additional resources:

* OECD Research: Screen time and subjective well-being
* OECD Research: How do people experience new technologies and generative AI?
* Guy Diedrich blog: Making sure AI becomes the global equalizer and not the great divider

About Cisco

Cisco (NASDAQ: CSCO) is the worldwide technology leader that is revolutionizing the way organizations connect and protect in the AI era. For more than 40 years, Cisco has securely connected the world. With its industry leading AI-powered solutions and services, Cisco enables its customers, partners and communities to unlock innovation, enhance productivity and strengthen digital resilience. With purpose at its core, Cisco remains committed to creating a more connected and inclusive future for all. Discover more on The Newsroom and follow us on X at @Cisco.

View original content to download multimedia:https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/oecd-cisco-research-finds-stark-geographical-and-generational-divides-in-ai-uptake-and-digital-well-being-302632283.html

SOURCE Cisco Systems, Inc.