

More Social Media Time Does Not Always Mean Worse Wellbeing, New Gallup Data From 97 Countries Suggest

High use linked to lower life evaluation in high-income countries,
but not in other countries.

Washington, D.C. and Berlin — Oct. 11 — Most adults around the world use social media (a median of 81% across 97 countries). Among younger adults, nearly everyone does. Gallup’s new *State of the World’s Emotional Health 2026* report, released in partnership with the World Health Summit, examines what that widespread use may mean for wellbeing and finds a relationship that is more positive than negative, but far from straightforward.

The analysis reveals a modest, complicated relationship that varies by time spent, age and where people live. Compared with moderate use of social media, high use is associated with more negative emotions like stress, while low use is associated with lower life evaluation and fewer positive emotions like enjoyment. Life evaluation does not differ significantly between high and moderate use overall, but high use is associated with lower life evaluation in high-income countries.

These findings are observational, describing associations rather than cause and effect. Gallup measures how much time people spend, not whether their use is problematic, which platforms they use or what they encounter. Even with these limitations, this research is unprecedented in its global scale and challenges several assumptions about how social media use relates to wellbeing.

“The data push back on the idea that more time online always means worse wellbeing,” said Ilana Ron Levey, managing director at Gallup. “What stands out is that moderate social media use for adults is associated with better outcomes on many wellbeing measures, but the picture changes depending on the specific emotion and from one country to the next. Like so many things in life, moderation has benefits.”

Moderate Use Is Associated With Better Outcomes

For this study, Gallup groups people as low users (no use or under 30 minutes a day), moderate users (30 minutes to under two hours) and high users (two hours or more).

- The wellbeing differences between the three groups are generally small after accounting for age, income, health, education, social support and other factors. But wellbeing does not steadily get worse as time spent on social media increases.
- High users are more likely to report anger, loneliness, sadness, stress and worry than moderate users. They are also less likely to report being treated with respect. However, life evaluation does not differ significantly between the two groups.
- At the same time, adults in the low-use group have lower life evaluations and are less likely than those with moderate use to report enjoyment, smiling or laughing, feeling well-rested and being treated with respect. They are also slightly more likely to report anger.

High Use Is Linked to Lower Life Evaluation in High-Income Countries

- High use is generally associated with lower life evaluation than moderate use in high-income countries, but not in non-high-income countries. In the United States, for example, adults with high use rate their lives about 0.3 points lower on Gallup's 0-to-10 scale than moderate users.
- The pattern is not consistent even among high-income countries: there is no significant difference between high and moderate users in Germany or the United Kingdom.

Among Young People, It Depends Where You Live

- Young people use social media the most: A median of 47% of those aged 15 to 29 are high users (two or more hours a day), compared with 28% of those 30 to 49 and 12% of those 50 and older. Among the youngest users, 19% report five or more hours a day, roughly double any older group.
- Among young people, social media use tracks with notably lower life evaluation in 16 countries, including the United States, Canada, Australia, Israel and the Netherlands, but with higher life evaluation in 10 others, including Mexico, Poland and Ireland.

A Timely Look as Dozens of Countries Weigh Restrictions

- Almost 40 countries are weighing age-based limits on children's social media use; Gallup has 2026 data for adults for 10 of them. Use is high across all 10, but intensity varies: Brazil stands out, with 40% of adults in the high-use group, more than double Germany (17%) or Slovenia (15%).
- Gallup surveys respondents aged 15 and older and does not evaluate the policies or social media's effects on young children.

The report's throughline is *variation*: Social media's relationship with wellbeing differs sharply by how much people use it, by age and by country. In high-income countries like the United States, more time online is associated with lower life evaluation; in countries that are not high income, it is associated with higher ratings or has no effect at all.

The report also suggests social media may affect life in other ways beyond wellbeing, noting that social media use is associated with lower confidence in national government, a finding Gallup flags as warranting further study.

As governments and health leaders voice growing concern about social media's impact on mental and emotional health, the report brings the first large-scale global evidence to a debate that has so far run ahead of the data. Its release at the World Health Summit comes as health and wellbeing top the Summit's global agenda.

"The findings underline why we need a nuanced, evidence-based discussion about social media and health. The relationship between social media and wellbeing is not uniform, but varies across countries, populations and the wider circumstances of people's lives. At the World Health Summit, our role is to bring different perspectives together, create space for evidence-based debate, and connect knowledge with the people and institutions that can act on it," said Carsten Schicker, CEO of the World Health Summit.

About Gallup

Gallup delivers analytics and advice to help leaders and organizations solve their most pressing problems. Combining more than 90 years of experience with its global reach, Gallup knows more about the attitudes and behaviors of the world's constituents than any other organization.

About the World Health Summit

The World Health Summit is the leading global platform bringing together science, politics, civil society, and the private sector to catalyze collaborative and innovative solutions for key health priorities. Its flagship event is the World Health Summit (WHS) held annually in Berlin, attracting more than 4,000 participants on-site and 40,000 online. In addition, each year, a WHS Regional Meeting is hosted in a different part of the world to connect regional perspectives with global strategies.