WIA Industry Insights

The Wireless Pulse of American Life and the New Frontier of AI

A MARKET STUDY

DISCLAIMER

This report is meant to be an educational tool and does not reflect Wireless Infrastructure Association policy.

Published First Quarter 2026

CONTENT

The Wireless Pulse of American Life and the New Frontier of AI

Introduction

Over the last four decades, wireless connectivity has become the invisible thread stitching together the fabric of daily life for Americans. From bustling city streets to quiet suburban homes, people rely on a constellation of connected devices - smartphones, tablets, laptops, smart TVs, wearables, gaming consoles and, increasingly, vehicles - to navigate, communicate, and create. Now, wireless infrastructure is driving consumers' connections to the wide range of AI tools, apps, and services that are making their way into work, social, and personal lives.

To gain insights into the importance of connectivity, both indoors and outdoors, and the impact of AI, WIA surveyed U.S. adults aged 18 – 65 years balanced by age and gender and region across the nation about how, where and when they use their connected devices.

AI: The New Frontier

Artificial Intelligence is rapidly becoming part of everyday wireless experiences:

- **74 percent of US consumers** use AI apps and services.
- **Younger adults (18–34):** 78 percent adoption rate.
- **On-the-go AI use:** 59 percent of adults use AI outside home, work, or school.
- **Mobile data is key:** 28 percent use 4G/5G to connect to AI apps; another 28 percent use both mobile data and Wi-Fi.

AI is seen as a productivity booster (44 percent), a creativity enabler (36 percent), and a tool for developing ideas (38 percent). Yet, concerns remain about accuracy (56 percent), security (51 percent), and employment impacts (38 percent).

AI Traffic Increasingly Driving Wireless Network Spending

At the end of 2025, WIA estimates that AI traffic on U.S. wireless networks accounts for at least 4.2 percent of total wireless traffic. In terms of U.S. wireless network operational cost and network investment, this means that AI in 2025 accounts for just under $3 billion of wireless network operational expense and capital expenditure.

WIA's analysis shows that AI traffic over wireless networks is increasing rapidly and that the $3 billion estimate will only grow over the coming months and years (WIA is tracking this growth and will publish periodic updates to these statistics).

CONSUMER USE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE
AND HOW THEY CONNECT WITH AI APPS

PREPARED BY THE WIRELESS INFRASTRUCTURE ASSOCIATION

AI APPS AND SERVICES ARE USED BY 74% OF ADULT U.S. CONSUMERS

Used by 78% aged 18-34 • Used by 75% aged 35-49 • Used by 65% aged 50-65

59% OF ADULTS USE AI APPS AND SERVICES WHILE **ON-THE-GO** *(out of school, home, or work)*

15% of adults use AI at least once ***per day*** while on-the-go

44% of adults use AI at least once ***per week*** or more while on-the-go

28% OF ADULTS **USE DATA (4G OR 5G)** TO CONNECT TO AI APPS AND SERVICES

28% use ***both*** 5G and Wi-Fi to connect to AI apps and services

65% of 18-34 year olds use mobile data (4G or 5G) ***and/or*** Wi-Fi to connect to AI apps

45% OF ADULTS **STAYING AT A HOTEL** USE AI MULTIPLE TIMES A WEEK OR MORE

20% use ***only*** mobile data (4G or 5G) to connect to AI apps and services

37% use mobile data ***and*** Wi-Fi to connect

34% OF ADULTS **AT A STADIUM OR ARENA** ARE USING AI APPS AND SERVICES

69% use mobile data (4G or 5G) ***and*** Wi-Fi to connect to the AI apps and services

WHEN IT COMES TO AI-DRIVEN FUNCTIONS IN COMMON APPS (SUCH AS MICROSOFT WORD, EXCEL, ZOOM, PHOTOSHOP, ETC.)

43% OF ADULTS HAVE USED THEM **AT LEAST ONCE**

18% USE THESE FEATURES **REGULARLY**

BENEFITS U.S. ADULTS SEE WITH AI

45%	Improves my productivity at work, at school, or in personal life
38%	Helps me formulate and develop ideas I have
36%	Allows me to be more creative
32%	Let's me better use the apps and services I already use
17%	Helps me communicate with others at work and in my personal life
13%	Other

CONCERNS ABOUT AI

56%	Potential wrong answers and inaccuracies
51%	Lack of security – others may see what I am doing or have access to my work
38%	Use of AI apps will lead to significant reduction in employment and cause a rise in unemployment
27%	The more I use it, the less value my employer will see in my contributions
18%	If I do not use AI apps, my employer will think I am not efficient or technically aware
3%	Other

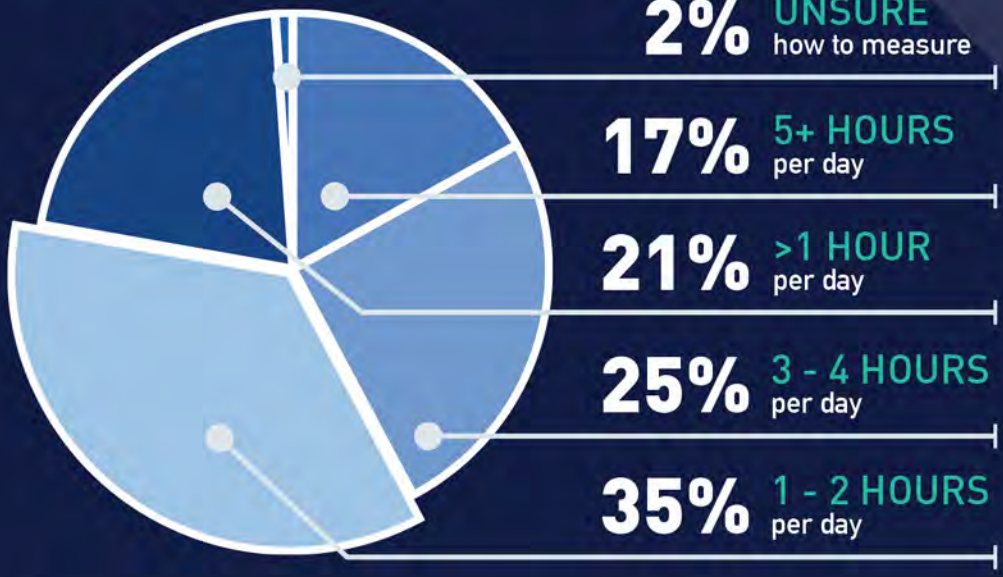
WHAT U.S. ADULTS THINK ABOUT AI OVERALL

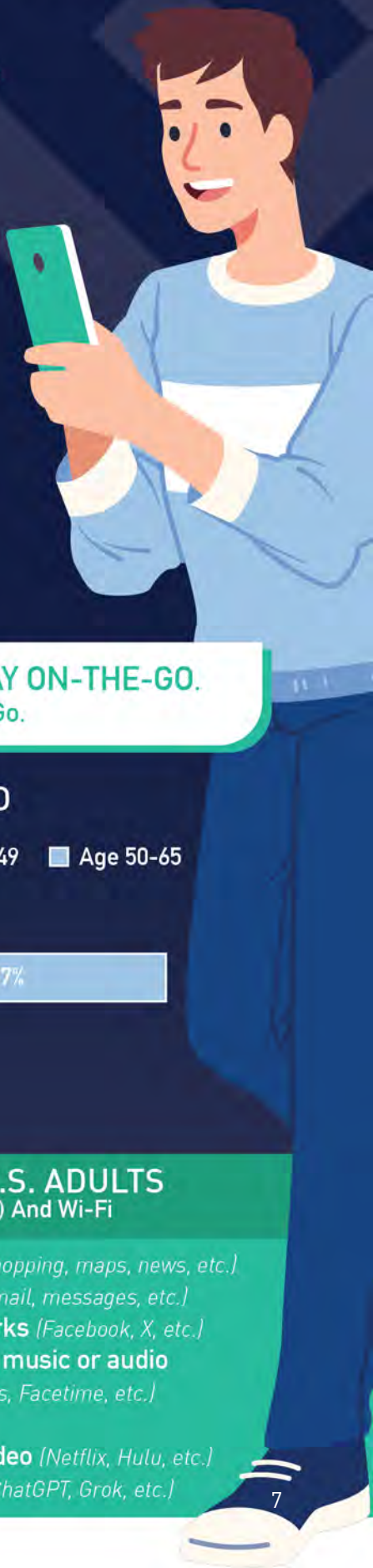
42%	AI has some place in the work place and in personal lives but in a limited capacity
32%	AI is the future and will be as prevalent as smartphones are today
17%	I do not think about AI – it has no impact on my life
9%	The current AI fad is all hype, AI will not have a lasting impact

CONSUMERS ON-THE-GO

PREPARED BY THE WIRELESS INFRASTRUCTURE ASSOCIATION

TIME SPENT BY U.S. ADULTS ON-THE-GO*

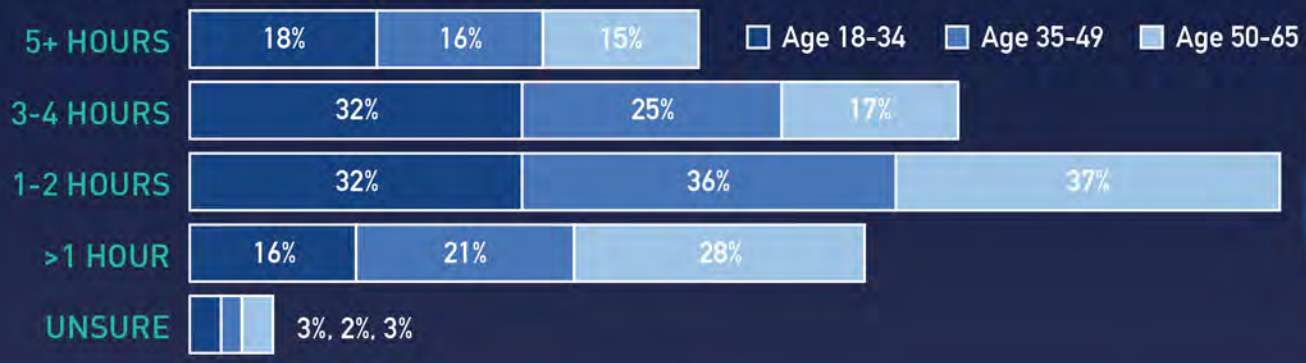




42% OF U.S. ADULTS SPEND MORE THAN 3 HOURS PER DAY ON-THE-GO.

On average, U.S. adults spend 2.5 hours per day On-The-Go.

YOUNGER ADULTS SPEND MORE TIME PER DAY ON-THE-GO



ON-THE-GO ACTIVITIES

Performed Multiple Times Per Week Or More

- **75%** Communications *(email, messages, etc.)*
- **68%** Check social networks *(Facebook, X, etc.)*
- **66%** Listen to streaming music or audio
- **66%** General data use *(shopping, maps, news, etc.)*
- **43%** Watch streaming video *(Netflix, Hulu, etc.)*
- **39%** Play online games
- **33%** AI apps / services *(ChatGPT, Grok, etc.)*
- **28%** Video chatting *(Teams, Facetime, etc.)*

PERCENTAGE OF U.S. ADULTS

Using Mobile Data (4G Or 5G) And Wi-Fi

- **72%** General data use *(shopping, maps, news, etc.)*
- **72%** Communications *(email, messages, etc.)*
- **70%** Check social networks *(Facebook, X, etc.)*
- **68%** Listen to streaming music or audio
- **61%** Video chatting *(Teams, Facetime, etc.)*
- **58%** Play online games
- **56%** Watch streaming video *(Netflix, Hulu, etc.)*
- **56%** AI apps / services *(ChatGPT, Grok, etc.)*

*On-The-Go is defined as anytime not at home, work, or school.

Life On-The-Go: Connectivity Beyond Home, Work, and School

Americans are increasingly "on-the-go," spending significant time outside traditional settings. According to the survey, 42 percent of U.S. adults spend more than three hours per day on-the-go—shopping, commuting, attending events, or simply moving through public spaces. On average, adults spend 2.5 hours daily in these mobile moments.

- **Younger adults (18–34)** are the most mobile, with 50 percent spending three or more hours on-the-go each day.
- **Wireless connectivity** is essential during these times, enabling everything from navigation and shopping to staying in touch with loved ones.

How Americans Connect: Mobile Data and Wi-Fi

- The survey reveals that Americans use both mobile data (4G/5G) and Wi-Fi to stay connected while on-the-go.
- But increasingly, and for a variety of reasons, consumers also disconnect from Wi-Fi and solely rely on 4G and 5G.

What Americans Do Online—From Nearly Anywhere

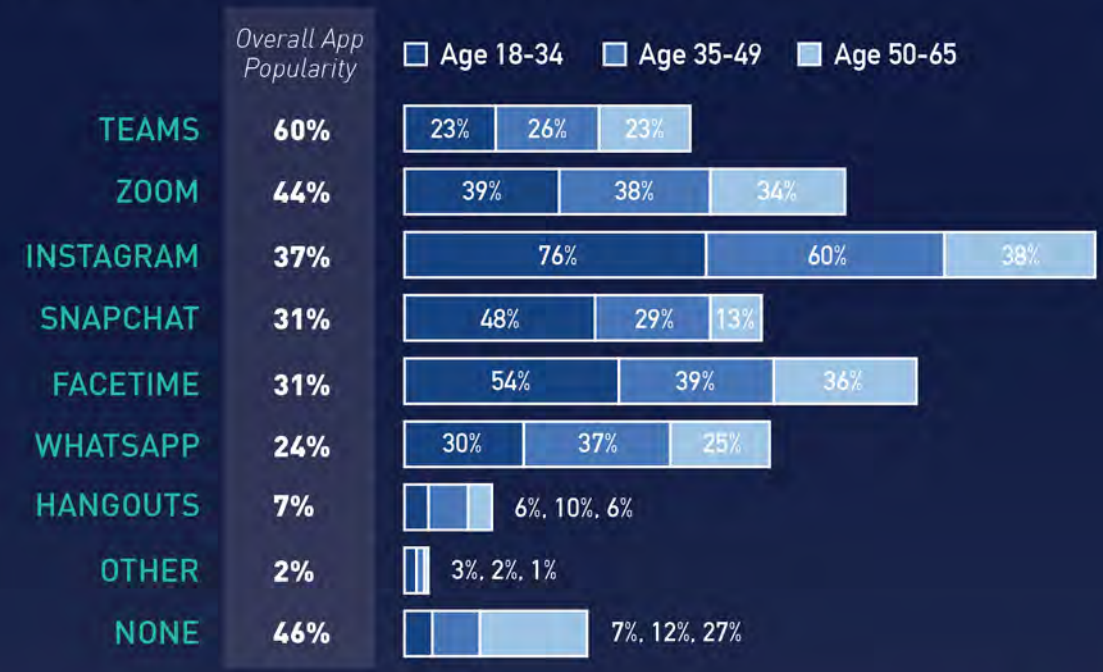
Wireless networks empower a wide range of activities – from general communications to social networking, streaming music and videos to online gaming and AI apps - especially when people are away from home:

- **General data use:** 72 percent rely on mobile data and/or Wi-Fi to browse the web, use a map, catch up on news/sports and email and messaging.
- **Social Networking:** 70 use wireless networks to check/update social networking sites.
- **AI applications:** 56 percent use these networks for AI services.
- **Video chats:** 61 percent connect via wireless networks.
- **Streaming music/audio:** 68 percent use wireless connectivity.
- **Online gaming:** 58 percent use wireless networks.

CONSUMERS' USE OF VIDEO COMMUNICATIONS APPS AND SERVICES

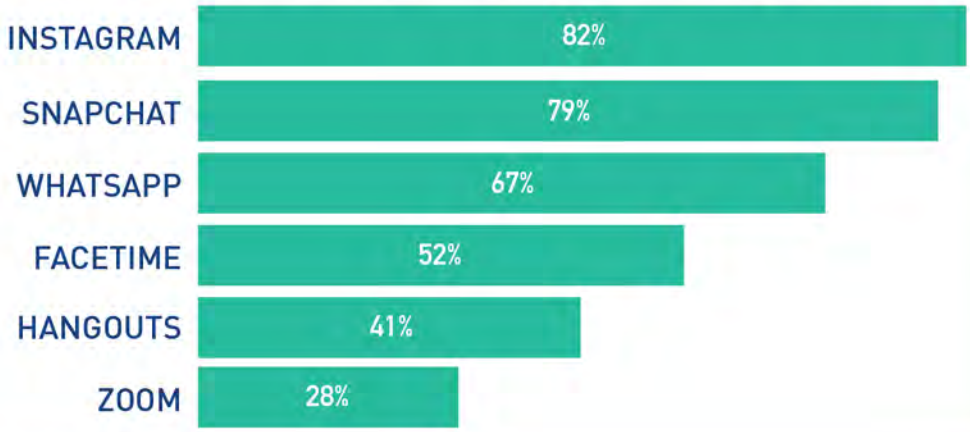
PREPARED BY THE WIRELESS INFRASTRUCTURE ASSOCIATION

YOUNG PEOPLE USE MORE ZOOM, INSTAGRAM, SNAPCHAT, AND FACETIME THAN OLDER GENERATIONS



MOST FREQUENTLY USED COMMUNICATIONS APPS

Percentage Of U.S. Adults Using Specific Apps Multiple Times Per Week



92%

OF U.S. ADULTS USE THEIR SMARTPHONE FOR THESE COMMUNICATIONS APPS / SERVICES

While only
19% use a tablet
38% use a laptop

The Rise of Video Communications

A striking 86 percent of U.S. adults use video and communications apps like Zoom, Teams, Instagram, Snapchat, and FaceTime. Usage is highest among younger adults:

- **Instagram:** 76 percent of 18–34-year-olds use it, compared to 38 percent of those 50–65.
- **Snapchat:** 48 percent of younger adults vs. 13 percent of older adults.
- **FaceTime:** 54 percent of younger adults vs. 36 percent of older adults.

As may be expected, smartphones are the primary device for these apps—92 percent of adults use their phone for communications, compared to 38 percent on laptops and 19 percent on tablets.

The Connected Home

Wireless connectivity isn't just for the road—it's central to home life:

- **Smartphones:** 99 percent of households have at least one.
- **Tablets:** 72 percent of households own one; 13 percent have more than three.
- **Laptops:** 86 percent have at least one; 16 percent have more than three.
- **Smart TVs:** 84 percent have at least one; 28 percent have more than three.
- **Wearables:** 56 percent have at least one; 28 percent have more than two.
- **Gaming consoles:** 67 percent have at least one; 18 percent have more than three.

The more devices a household has, the more likely its members are to use AI apps and see them as aids to productivity and creativity.

HOW CONSUMERS USE THEIR CONNECTED DEVICES

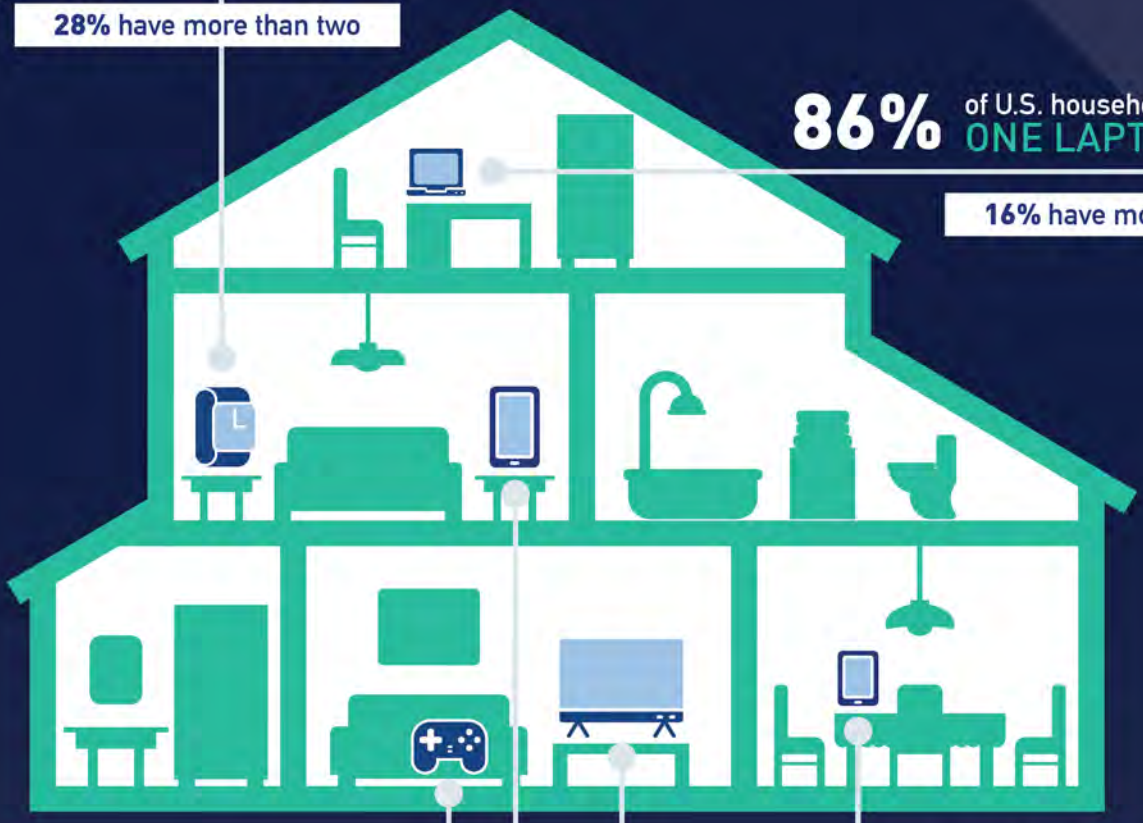
PREPARED BY THE WIRELESS INFRASTRUCTURE ASSOCIATION

56% of U.S. households have at least **ONE WEARABLE DEVICE**

28% have more than two

86% of U.S. households have at least **ONE LAPTOP**

16% have more than three



99% of U.S. households use **SMARTPHONES**

67% of U.S. households have at least **ONE GAMING CONSOLE**

18% have more than three

84% of U.S. households have at least **ONE SMART/CONNECTED TV**

28% have more than three

64% have no conventional TV *(i.e. not Internet connected)*

72% of U.S. households have at least **ONE TABLET**

13% have more than three

THE MORE CONNECTED DEVICES HOUSEHOLDS USE, THE MORE LIKELY THEY ARE TO USE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) APPS AND SERVICES.

Likewise, the more connected devices households use, the more likely they are to see AI as being an aid to productivity and creativity in their professional and/or personal lives.

Wireless Connectivity as a Way of Life

Americans are living in a world where wireless connectivity is not just a convenience - it's a necessity. And increasingly wireless connectivity is enabling the use of more and more AI. Wireless connectivity powers their mobility, entertainment, work, creativity, and social lives. As AI and video communications become more integrated, and as device ownership continues to rise, wireless networks will only grow in importance—shaping how Americans experience and interact with the world every day.

Appendix:

AI Wireless Traffic Impact Methodology

In building the model for the amount of AI traffic on U.S. wireless networks, WIA used data from multiple sources, made several assumptions and also reviewed the results with the members of the WIA's Innovation & Technology Council. This methodology outlines the general approach taken and the major assumptions made – for a more detailed discussion of the methodology, please contact Iain Gillott, WIA's Vice President of Innovation & Technology.

AI traffic on U.S. mobile networks today comes in three forms:

1. People using AI apps/services on their mobile devices or at home connected by Fixed Wireless Access - think Chat GPT, Grok, Claude, Gemini, etc.

2. IoT, industrial devices connected to AI apps/services - this could be IoT sensors in agriculture measuring moisture, etc and connected to cloud AI apps/services or in a factory or warehouse connecting robots or guided vehicles to AI apps.

3. Traffic on the mobile network itself due to AI apps used to manage/optimize the network - AI-RAN, etc.

The third use of AI IN the wireless networks is being designed and deployed but at the end of 2025, the impact on the networks is minimal and does not significantly impact the model. This will change in coming years as the world moves to 6G and more AI processing moves to the edge of the mobile networks.

Industrial use of AI over wireless networks is very difficult to quantify and, again, is minimal at present and does not materially impact the model. Again, this will grow in the future as there are more IoT/machine sensors providing data for AI apps, and more video or image data from a remote camera that is being analyzed by AI, etc.

The main focus of the WIA's model is therefore the first AI activity: U.S. consumers using AI applications, services and tools from their mobile devices, connecting over mobile networks. This could be people using their mobile devices to take images, upload them and have them analyzed. Or asking Gemini a question on their smartphones. Or working on their laptop in a hotel room using Chat GPT or Co-Pilot. All of this activity, although small today, is growing and is significant. The WIA's model quantifies this activity.

Methodology Used:

Wireless networks empower a wide range of activities – from general communications to social networking, streaming music and videos to online gaming and AI apps - especially when people are away from home:

- Quantify the amount of AI activity in the U.S. today from public sources – this includes statistics released by the major AI platforms, financial filings and disclosures, financial analyst reports and briefings, and other AI industry sources.
- WIA's detailed survey of U.S. consumers of adults aged 18 – 65 years, balanced by age and gender and geography; sample is representative.
- Correlate the survey data to AI industry activity to normalize the results (the two data sets were amazingly close and little normalization was needed) and show the percentage of consumers using AP applications and services and the type of activity.
- Model the amount of time per day consumers use their mobile devices to access AI applications, tools and services, and quantify the type of AI traffic generated or uploaded (text, image, video, etc).
- Assume an average AI prompt generates 20MB of mobile data traffic.
- Calculate the overall amount of U.S. mobile data traffic attributable to AI and convert to a percentage of total mobile traffic (using Ericsson's published statistics).
- Review the model in detail with members of the WIA's Innovation & Technology Council, incorporating feedback to adjust the model accordingly.