

BBC News

Technology linked to happiness, study claims

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Social media and mobile phones were highly valued.

There are positive links between access to technology and feelings of well-being, a study claims.

BCS, the Chartered Institute for IT, analysed the results of a survey of 35,000 people around the world.

Access to communication devices was found to be the most valued.

It found that women in developing countries, and people of both sexes with low incomes or poor education, were most influenced emotionally by their access to technology.

It is partly because women tend to have a more central role in family and other social networks, said researcher Paul Flatters of Trajectory Partnership, which conducted the research on behalf of the BCS.

"Our hypothesis is that women in developing countries benefit more because they are more socially constrained in society," he added.

"The next phase of our research is to test that."

Ageless appeal

The study also found that the correlation does not appear to increase with age, despite the efforts of various countries to get their older populations online.

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Paul Flatters

"Whether young or old, we're all social beings, we all have a need for the things IT access facilitates," said Mr Flatters.

The research team's findings contradict the views of psychologists such as Yair Amichai-Hamburger, director of the Research Center for Internet Psychology at the Sammy Ofer School of Communications in Israel.

In an opinion column for New Scientist magazine last year, Mr Amichai-Hamburger wrote that technology had a negative impact on people's well-being by blurring professional and personal time.

"We need ways to help recover those increasingly large parts of our lives that we have ceded to technology, to regain mastery over technology and learn to use it in a healthy and positive way," he said.

The results of the BCS study are "slightly counter-intuitive," admitted Mr Flatters.

"A lot of things that are written about IT are negative," he said.

"But we were puzzled by the fact that people are attached to their IT as well - how do you square that circle?"

Ownership of technology is a status symbol in many cultures, according to Kathi Kitner, senior research scientist at Intel.

While having a computer is considered synonymous with a good education worldwide, the emerging middle classes of India think it is also a sign of prosperity, she said.

"Whether that prosperity in terms of monetary returns actually materialises is not documented, but it is very real in terms of perception," she said.

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