Briefing Document Overview: *How People Use ChatGPT*

Introduction

This study examines how individuals around the world use ChatGPT, the most widely adopted generative AI chatbot. Despite intense public debate about its economic and social effects, systematic evidence on how people actually use these tools has been scarce. Drawing from de-identified internal data on consumer plans (Free, Plus, Pro), the authors classify and analyze over a million conversations between May 2024 and mid-2025, supplementing usage data with aggregated demographic and employment information.

The central findings highlight that:

- Adoption is unprecedentedly rapid—10% of the world's adults were active users within less than three years.
- Non-work usage outpaces work usage, even though professional use is substantial.
- The dominant applications are **practical guidance, information seeking, and writing**, not coding or companionship.
- Usage patterns vary by age, gender, education, occupation, and national income level.
- ChatGPT's value appears to lie primarily in decision support, especially in knowledge-intensive professions.

Scale and Growth of Adoption

ChatGPT launched publicly in November 2022. By July 2025, weekly active users (WAU) had exceeded **700 million**, sending **18 billion messages per week**—about **29,000 per second**. This equates to roughly 10% of the global adult population, with growth driven by both new sign-ups and increasing intensity of use among existing cohorts.

- **Early adoption**: Initial users skewed heavily male and young.
- **Sustained engagement**: Unlike many digital products, engagement per user increased over time as models improved and people discovered new use cases.
- **Comparative scale**: ChatGPT far outstripped rivals such as Anthropic's Claude or Microsoft's Copilot in message volume.

This rate of global diffusion has no precedent for consumer technologies, surpassing the early trajectories of smartphones, social media, or search engines.

Methodology and Privacy

The study is notable for its **privacy-preserving analytic approach**:

1. **Automated classification**: All messages were de-identified, scrubbed of personal information, and classified by LLMs, never reviewed by humans.
2. **Contextual analysis**: Classifications incorporated up to ten preceding messages for conversational context.
3. **Employment and education data**: Aggregated through a secure data clean room, with strict thresholds to prevent identification of small groups.

By relying entirely on automated classifiers, the researchers matched or exceeded privacy standards in prior work on chatbots and digital platforms.

Work vs. Non-Work Usage

A primary classification distinguishes between **work-related** and **non-work-related** messages.

- **June 2024**: ~47% work, 53% non-work.
- **June 2025**: ~27% work, 73% non-work.

Non-work usage grew much faster, reflecting widespread integration of ChatGPT into personal life—education, hobbies, health, creative projects, and everyday problem-solving. Importantly, this shift is not explained by new cohorts alone: even long-time users increasingly relied on ChatGPT outside of work.

For economic analysis, this suggests that **consumer surplus in household and leisure contexts may rival or exceed productivity gains in workplaces**.

Dominant Topics of Conversation

Using a refined taxonomy, the study groups conversations into seven high-level categories. Three dominate:

1. **Practical Guidance (~29%)**
    - Tutoring, teaching, creative ideation, how-to advice.
    - Example: customized fitness plans, lesson support, brainstorming.
2. **Seeking Information (~24%)**
    - Inquiries about facts, products, current events, recipes.
    - Functions as a close substitute for web search, but often tailored.
3. **Writing (~24%)**
    - Drafting, editing, summarizing, critiquing, and translating.
    - Accounts for ~40% of work-related usage. Notably, **two-thirds of writing tasks involve editing or improving user-supplied text**, rather than generating from scratch.

Other categories are smaller:

- **Technical Help (5%)**, including programming (~4.2%), math (~3%), and data analysis (<1%).
- **Multimedia (7%)**, which spiked after new image-generation tools were introduced in 2025.
- **Self-Expression (2.4%)**, including relationships, reflection, games, and role play.

This breakdown contradicts public perception that coding or companionship are the dominant uses. Instead, ChatGPT functions largely as a **knowledge assistant and writing partner**.

User Intent: Asking, Doing, Expressing

A second classification examines **user intent**:

- **Asking (49%)**: Seeking information or advice to support decision-making.
- **Doing (40%)**: Having ChatGPT perform a task (e.g., write, code, produce a table).
- **Expressing (11%)**: Conversational, social, or emotional expression.

Over time, **Asking has grown faster than Doing**, reaching 52% of all usage by mid-2025. For work contexts, Doing dominates (56%), particularly in writing tasks.

This distinction underscores that ChatGPT is both a **co-pilot for decision support** and a **co-worker for content creation**. The balance varies by context: in professional work, tangible outputs are central; in personal or educational use, advice and guidance predominate.

Work Activities (O*NET Mapping)

The researchers mapped work-related messages to the **U.S. Department of Labor's O*NET work activity taxonomy**. Two clusters account for ~81% of usage at work:

1. **Information processing**: Obtaining, documenting, and interpreting information.
2. **Decision support**: Making decisions, giving advice, solving problems, and creative thinking.

These activities are common across occupations, suggesting ChatGPT addresses **generalizable white-collar tasks** rather than niche technical ones.

Interaction Quality

Satisfaction was assessed via automated sentiment classifiers.

- **Good interactions** are increasingly common: by mid-2025, positive follow-ups were more than four times as frequent as negative ones.
- **Highest ratings**: Self-expression conversations (ratio 7:1 good to bad).
- **Lowest ratings**: Multimedia and technical help (~2:1).
- **Intent differences**: Asking received higher ratings than Doing, suggesting that **ChatGPT excels at advice and guidance more consistently than at task execution**.

Demographic Patterns

Gender

- Early adoption skewed heavily male (~80%).
- By June 2025, usage had equalized, with slightly more active users having typically feminine first names.

- Topic differences:
    - Women → more Writing and Practical Guidance.
    - Men → more Technical Help, Information Seeking, and Multimedia.

Age

- Nearly half of all messages came from users under 26.
- Older users are more likely to send work-related messages.
- Across all age groups, the share of work usage declined over time.

Geography

- Adoption spread globally, with particularly strong growth in **low- and middle-income countries** ($10k–40k GDP per capita).
- As barriers to access declined, global uptake broadened beyond high-income early adopters.

Education

- Work usage rises with education: ~37% of messages for users without a bachelor's degree vs. ~48% for those with graduate education.
- More educated users are slightly more likely to send Asking messages and Writing-related queries.

Occupation

- **Computer-related jobs**: highest work usage (57%), with strong emphasis on technical help.
- **Management/business**: heavy focus on writing (~52% of work usage).
- **Other professions (education, healthcare)**: writing also central (~49–50%).
- **Nonprofessional occupations**: less work usage overall (40%).

These results reinforce that ChatGPT use is shaped by occupational needs, yet across sectors, writing and decision support remain universal.

Key Findings and Implications

1. **Unprecedented adoption**: ChatGPT's diffusion is unmatched in technological history.
2. **Work vs non-work**: While professional use is significant, personal and educational usage now dominate, suggesting broader welfare implications.
3. **Core applications**: Practical guidance, information seeking, and writing account for ~80% of conversations. Coding and companionship are marginal.
4. **Decision support as value driver**: ChatGPT's main contribution is improving problem-solving and decision-making, especially in knowledge-intensive work.
5. **Demographic convergence**: Gender gaps have closed, age differences are narrowing, and global uptake is accelerating in lower-income countries.
6. **Occupational universality**: Despite differences in emphasis, ChatGPT's utility spans diverse professions, with writing as the unifying function.
7. **High user satisfaction**: Positive ratings outweigh negatives, with particular strength in advice and guidance tasks.

Conclusion

The study provides the clearest evidence to date of how people actually use generative AI chatbots. Far from being dominated by coders or hobbyists, ChatGPT has become a **mainstream global tool for writing, advice, and information**. Its economic value lies less in replacing specific tasks and more in **broadly augmenting human decision-making and communication across contexts**.

For policymakers, educators, and businesses, the findings imply that generative AI is shaping not only workplaces but also education, leisure, and household production. Its most transformative role may be as a general-purpose knowledge and writing assistant, democratized across demographics and geographies.