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56th Chapter 3 - Development of internet applications

◀ 56th Chapter 1 - Development and use of basic internet resources

56th Chapter 3 - Development of internet applications ▶

Chapter 2 Internet user population and composition

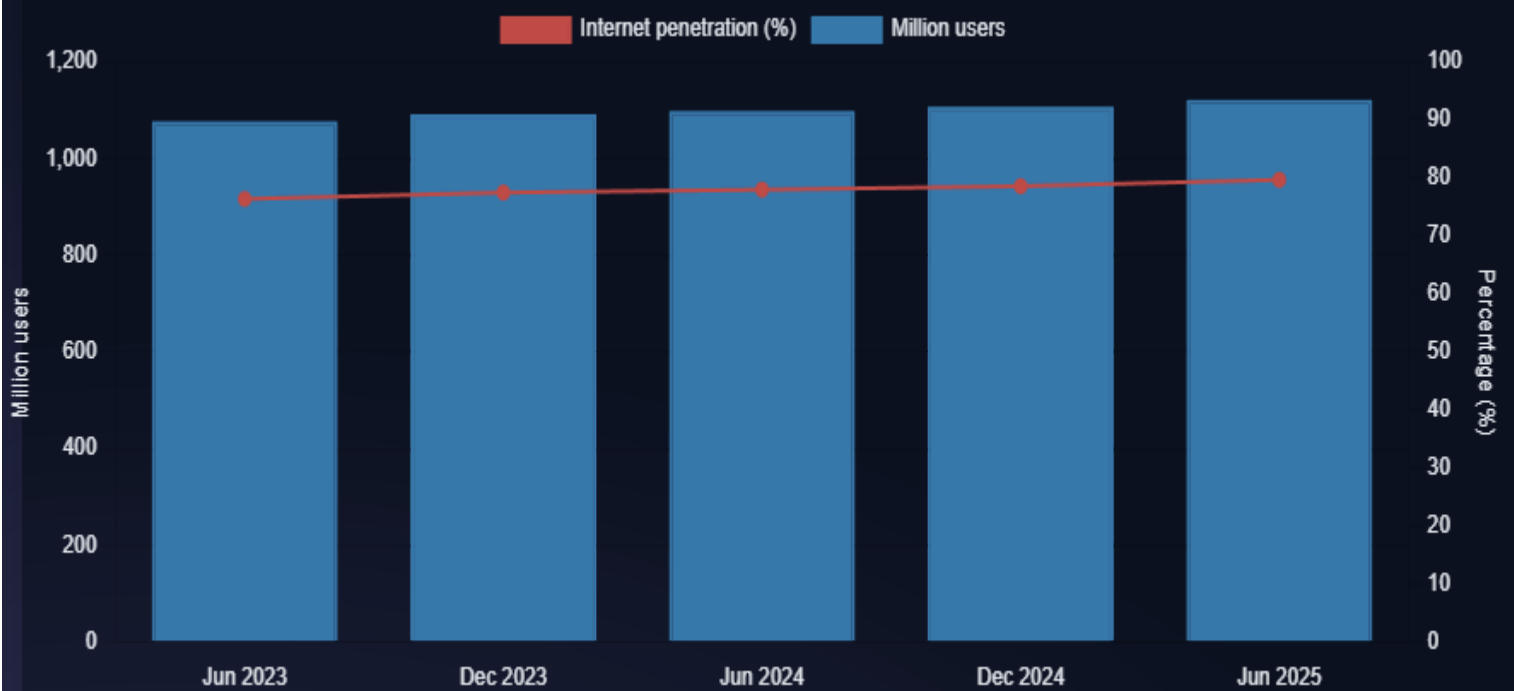
In the first half of 2025, China's internet user population reached 1.123 billion, with 14.36 million additional users and internet penetration of 79.7%. Digital infrastructure improved in both scale and quality, the digital economy continued to deepen, and generative artificial intelligence stimulated a wave of innovation. Internet applications continued to expand and diversify, supporting steady growth in user numbers and digital literacy and skills, and demonstrating renewed vitality in the digital and intelligent era.

1 Internet user population

Overall internet user population

As at June 2025, China had 1.123 billion internet users, an increase of 14.36 million³⁰ compared with December 2024. Internet penetration reached 79.7%, up 1.1 percentage points.

Figure 9 Internet users and internet penetration



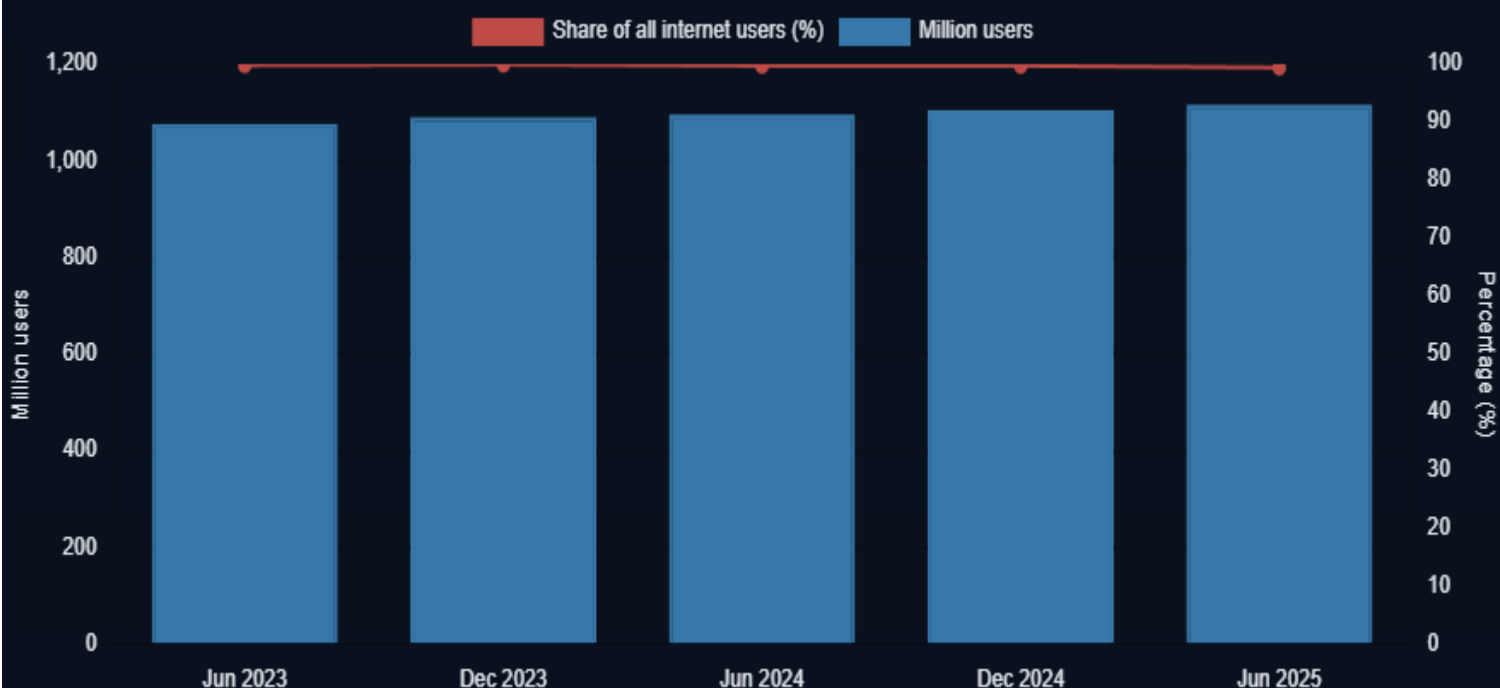
Unit: Million users; right axis: percentage.

Source: Statistical Survey on Internet Development in China, June 2025.

► [View chart data](#)

As at June 2025, China had 1.116 billion mobile internet users, an increase of 11.61 million compared with December 2024. Mobile phones were used to access the internet by 99.4% of internet users.

Figure 10 Mobile internet users and their share of all users



Unit: Million users; right axis: percentage.

Source: Statistical Survey on Internet Development in China, June 2025.

► [View chart data](#)

In the first half of 2025, digital infrastructure strengthened the foundations of development, the digital economy supported growth and technological innovation broadened applications, together helping the internet continue to deliver inclusive benefits.

First, digital infrastructure improved in both scale and quality, with coordinated development of communications networks. China vigorously promoted the spread of 5G and gigabit optical networks, providing a firm foundation for internet access and use. In January, the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology issued the Notice on Launching 10-Gigabit Optical Network Pilot Projects, proposing pilot programmes to guide the orderly transition from technological trials to deployment and use. By June, China had built approximately 4.55 million 5G base stations, bringing gigabit connectivity to every county, 5G to every township and 5G coverage to more than 90% of administrative villages.³¹

Second, consumption-promoting policies supported the spread of internet use through smart devices. The silver economy and green economy developed rapidly under these policies, increasing sales of smart devices and encouraging wider internet adoption. The 2025 Government Work Report called for vigorous development of the silver economy. In June, the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology and two other departments published the Catalogue for the Promotion of Smart Health and Elderly Care Products and Services, 2024

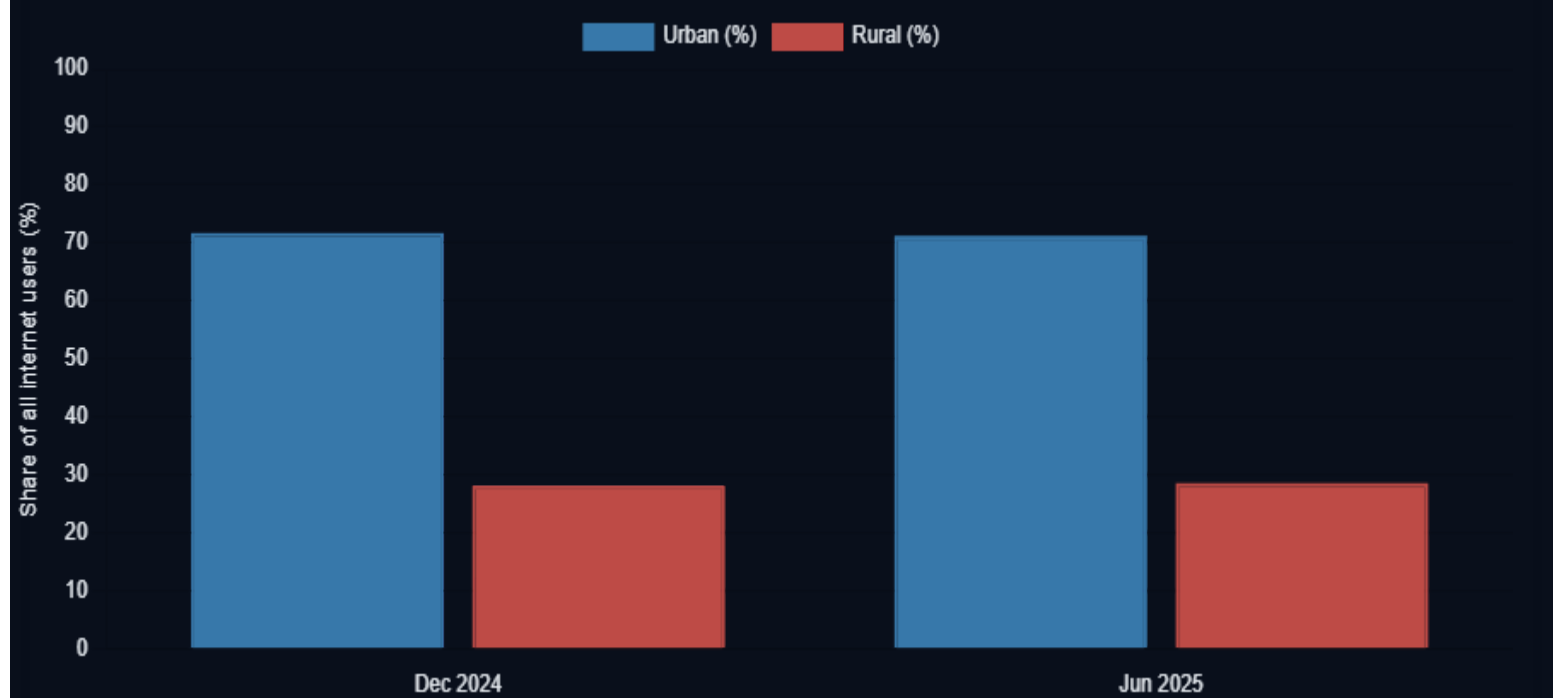
edition. This will further encourage the production and sale of smart elderly-care devices and help older people share more fully in the benefits of informatisation. By June, internet penetration among older people had reached 52.0%. In March, the General Office of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and the General Office of the State Council issued the Special Action Plan to Boost Consumption, calling for greener and smarter upgrades to major durable consumer goods such as cars and household appliances. Trade-in policies increased the market penetration of smart new-energy vehicles and smart household appliances, encouraging household internet access and use.

Third, digital technologies stimulated innovation and artificial intelligence applications attracted widespread attention. Generative AI created new internet application scenarios, with a continuing flow of new products improving people's experience of innovative technologies. Large AI models such as DeepSeek and Kimi, alongside autonomous driving, personal office assistants and everyday-life assistants, broadened internet applications and helped translate technological innovation into services for people's daily lives. Smart hardware became a focus of digital consumption, and AI-enabled phones accounted for a rapidly increasing share of shipments. China's AI smartphone shipments were forecast to reach 118 million in 2025, up 59.8% year on year.³² Wearables and home devices incorporating generative AI were creating new consumer markets and encouraging further internet adoption.

Urban and rural internet users

As at June 2025, China had 801 million urban internet users, representing 71.3% of all internet users, and 322 million rural users, representing 28.7%.

Figure 11 Urban and rural composition of internet users



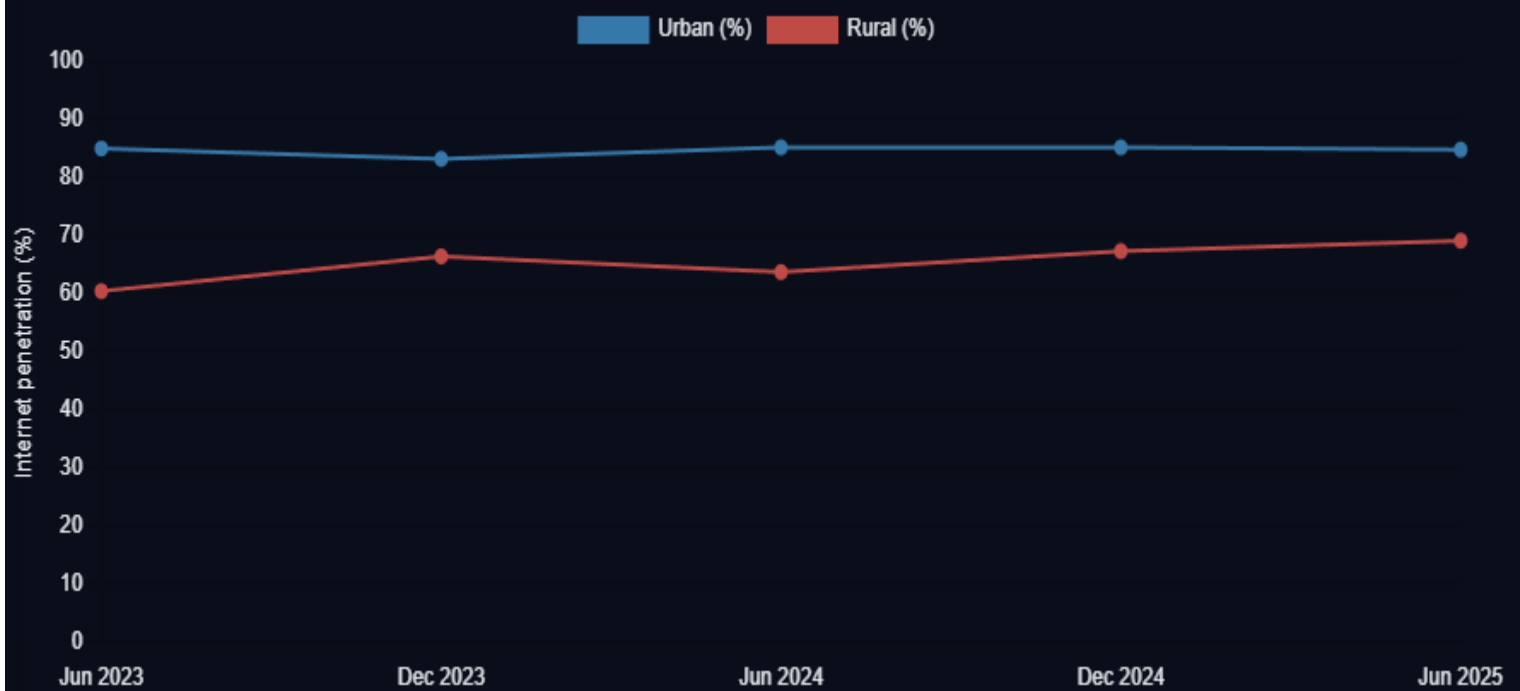
Unit: Share of all internet users (%).

Source: Statistical Survey on Internet Development in China, June 2025.

► [View chart data](#)

As at June 2025, internet penetration was 84.9% in urban areas and 69.2% in rural areas. Rural penetration increased by 1.9 percentage points compared with December 2024.

Figure 12 Urban and rural internet penetration



Unit: Internet penetration (%).

Source: Statistical Survey on Internet Development in China, June 2025.

► [View chart data](#)

The 2025 No. 1 Central Document, Opinions of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and the State Council on Further Deepening Rural Reform and Steadily Advancing Comprehensive Rural Revitalisation, called for scientific and technological innovation to guide the concentration of advanced production factors, the development of new quality agricultural productive forces suited to local conditions, and a special digital countryside action to strengthen agriculture, benefit farmers and increase their incomes. These measures provided stronger institutional support and momentum for deeper internet use in rural areas.

Smart agriculture was being deployed at scale, with the internet enabling further agricultural digitalisation. First, technological support and standards continued to strengthen. By March 2025, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs had supported 34 national digital agriculture innovation centres and sub-centres, establishing an initial smart agriculture innovation system. Seventeen additional related industry standards had been approved for development and six issued and implemented, while work advanced on establishing centres to test smart agriculture technologies and equipment.³³ Second, smart agricultural equipment and technologies significantly improved production efficiency and evidence-based decision-making, supporting high-quality agricultural development. Applications such as drone-based crop protection, driverless agricultural machinery and Internet of Things monitoring expanded.

Wider coverage of connected smart equipment created more opportunities for farmers to participate in smart agriculture. Agricultural digitalisation projects established three-dimensional monitoring networks, substantially reducing agricultural input costs and energy consumption and improving crop germination, helping grain production reduce costs and increase output and efficiency.

Industries that increased county-level prosperity developed, and the internet opened up new digital lifestyles for rural residents. First, closer integration of rural culture and tourism broadened digital employment and income opportunities. New models such as tourism combined with live streaming continued to emerge, delivering significant benefits for rural revitalisation. During the 2025 Spring Festival, county-town hotel bookings on travel reservation platforms increased by 40% year on year, while bookings for high-star-rated hotels doubled.³⁴ Aggregated online platform data showed that rural tourism product bookings increased by 52% year on year in March 2025.³⁵

Second, higher-quality rural distribution and retail systems stimulated digital consumption, increasing spending and upgrading its composition. In the first quarter, rural destinations accounted for 30% of national express delivery volume,³⁶ making rural areas a new source of growth in online consumption. E-commerce platforms used county-level consolidated purchasing and distribution centres to reduce delivery times to under 24 hours. Rural instant-retail orders rose substantially, and orders for everyday services in counties nationwide increased by 42.1% year on year.³⁷ Demand for smart homes continued to grow, and the stock of new-energy vehicles in rural areas exceeded 7 million,³⁸ making rural consumption increasingly technology-enabled and comfortable.

People who do not use the internet

As at June 2025, China had 286 million non-internet users, 15.75 million fewer than in December 2024. Of these, 216 million were aged six or above. Older people remained the largest group among non-users: people aged 60 or above accounted for 52.1% of non-internet users in June 2025.

Lack of skills, limited educational attainment, insufficient equipment and age were the main reasons people aged six or above did not use the internet. Among non-users, 38.8% cited not understanding computers or the internet; 20.0% cited educational limitations such as not knowing pinyin; 17.5% cited being too old or too young; and 10.3% cited lacking a computer or other internet-access equipment.

2 Internet users demographics devices and digital skills

Gender composition

As at June 2025, the male-to-female ratio among internet users in China was 50.4 to 49.6.

Figure 15 Gender composition of internet users



Unit: Share of internet users (%).

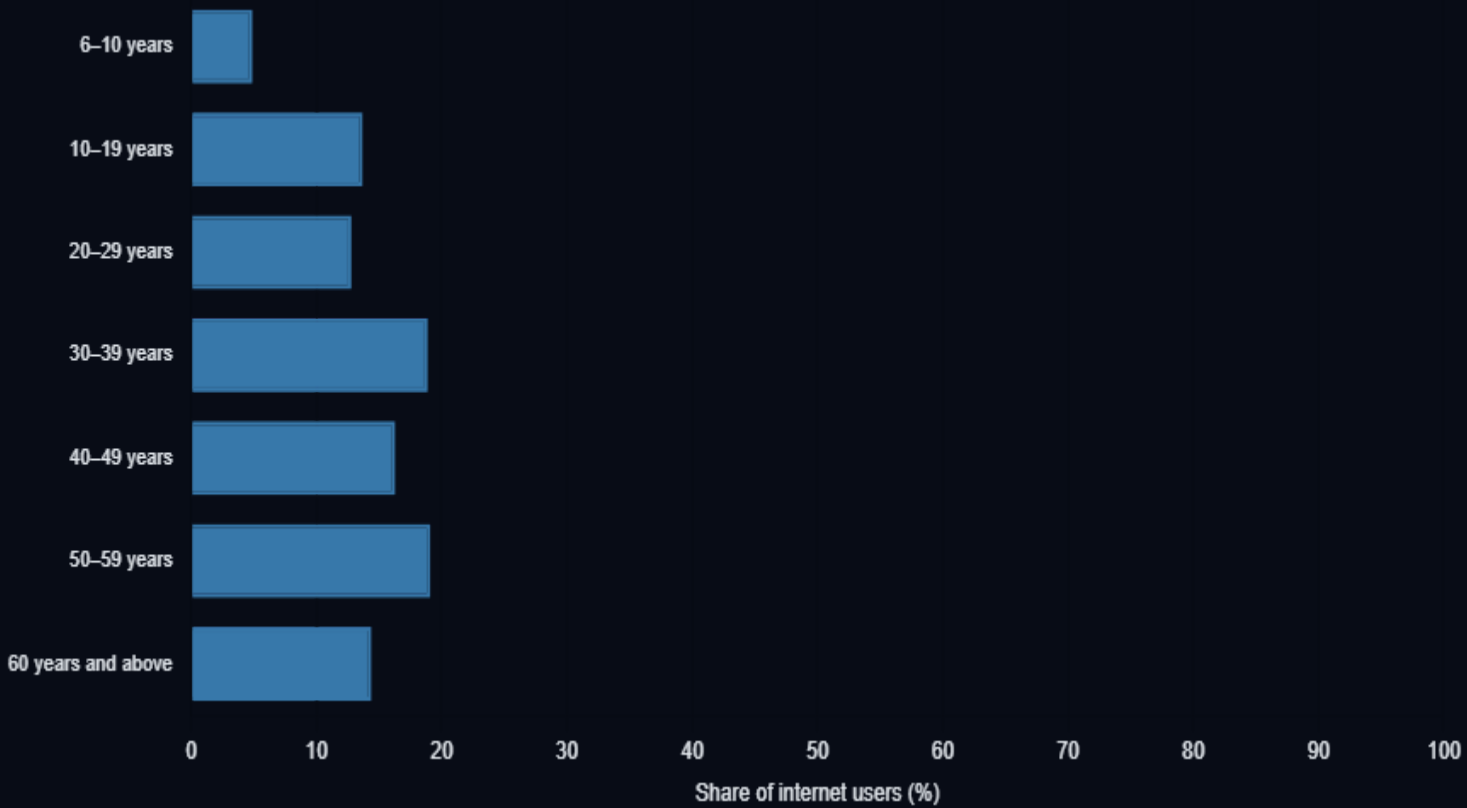
Source: Statistical Survey on Internet Development in China, June 2025.

► [View chart data](#)

Age composition

As at June 2025, China's internet users were concentrated mainly in younger and middle-aged groups. Users aged 10–19, 20–29, 30–39 and 40–49 accounted for 13.7%, 12.8%, 18.9% and 16.3% respectively. Users aged 50 or above accounted for 33.5%.

Figure 16 Age composition of internet users



Unit: Share of internet users (%).

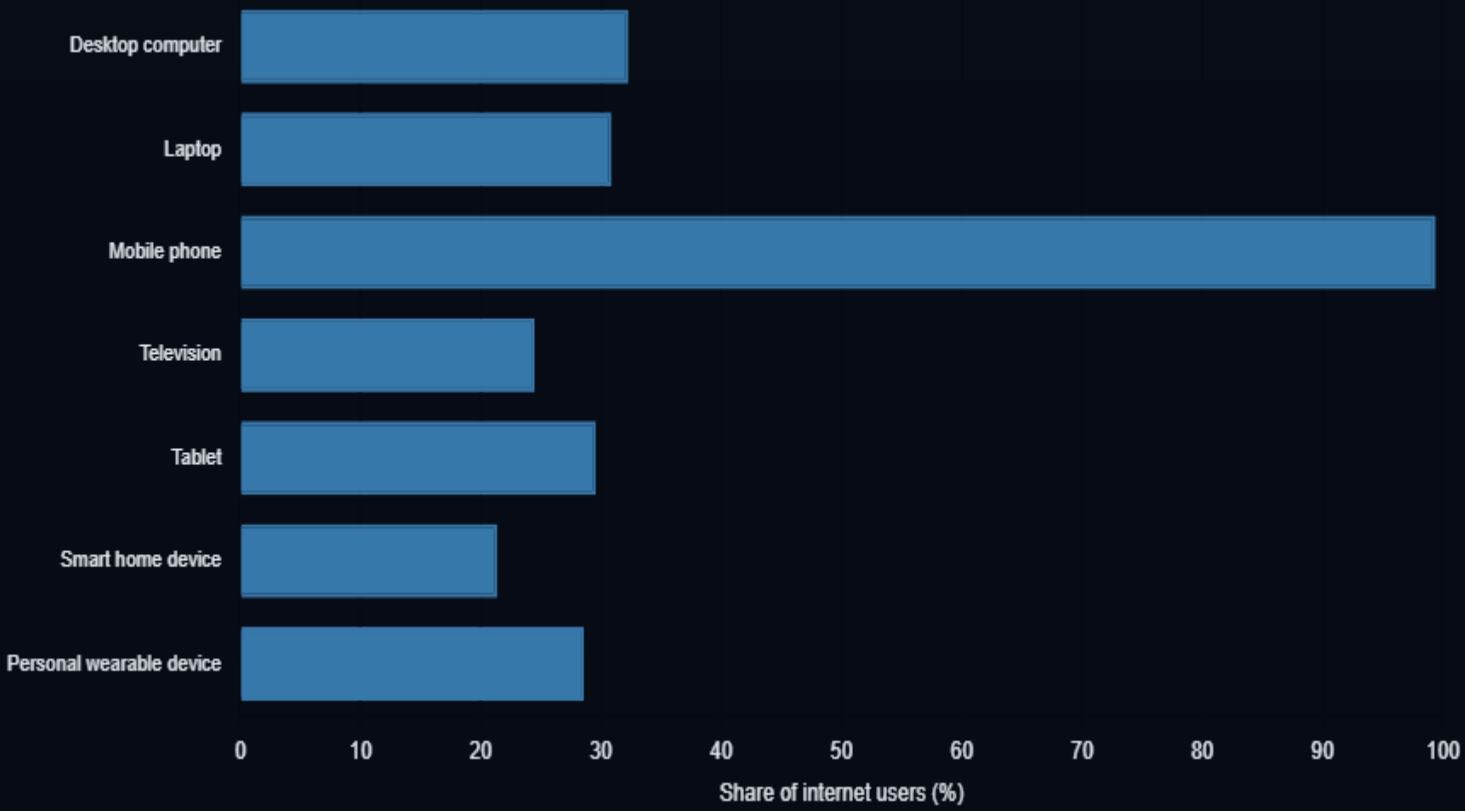
Source: Statistical Survey on Internet Development in China, June 2025.

► [View chart data](#)

Internet access devices

As at June 2025, 99.4% of internet users in China accessed the internet through mobile phones. Desktop computers, laptops, televisions and tablets were used by 32.3%, 30.9%, 24.5% and 29.6% respectively. Smart home devices and personal wearable devices were used by 21.4% and 28.6% respectively. The number of users accessing the internet through personal wearable devices grew significantly, increasing by 56.99 million compared with December 2024 to reach 321 million.

Figure 17 Devices used to access the internet



Unit: Share of internet users (%).

Source: Statistical Survey on Internet Development in China, June 2025.

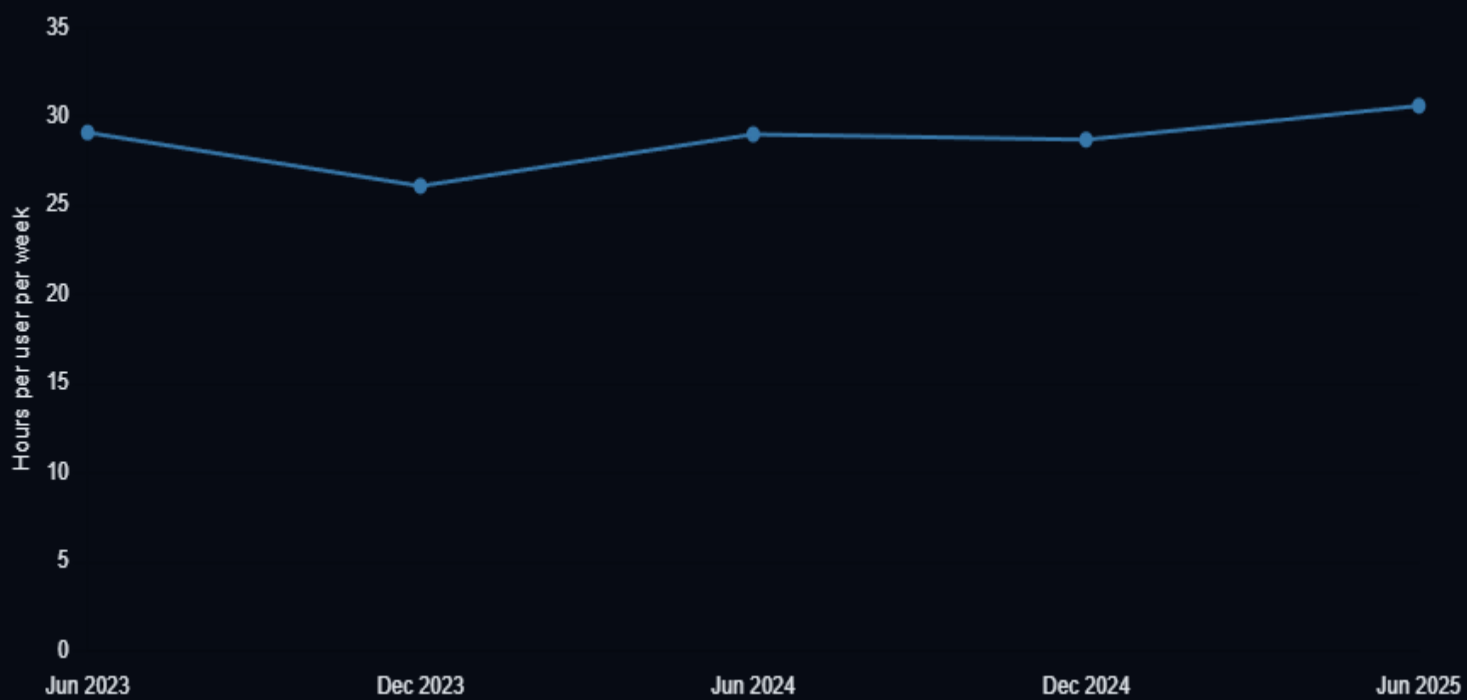
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Time spent online

Average weekly time spent online

As at June 2025, internet users in China spent an average of 30.6 hours online per week,³⁹ an increase of 1.9 hours compared with December 2024.

Figure 18 Average weekly time spent online



Unit: Hours per user per week.

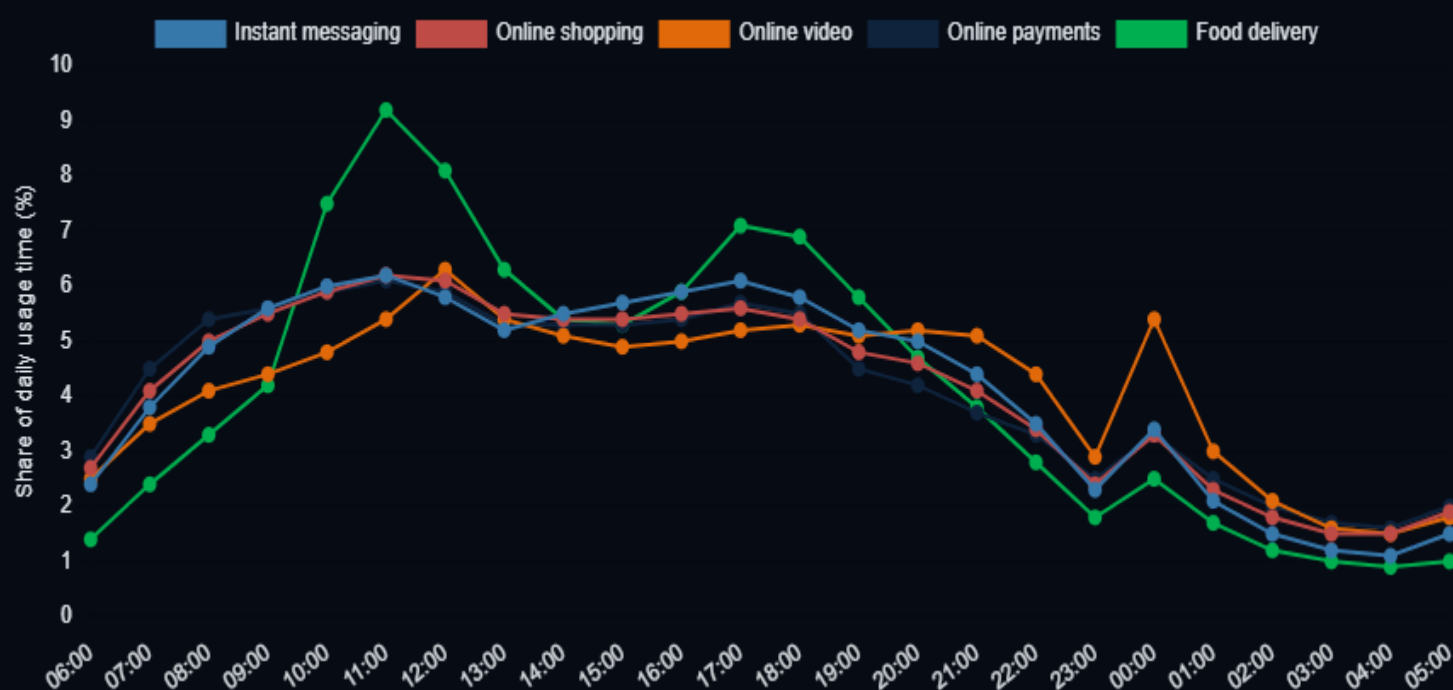
Source: Statistical Survey on Internet Development in China, June 2025.

► [View chart data](#)

Distribution of usage times across application categories

In June 2025, among the five categories of apps commonly used by mobile internet users, instant messaging use was distributed relatively evenly between 08:00 and 20:00, with each hourly period accounting for more than, or close to, 5% of usage time. Online video use peaked between 11:00 and 13:00, between 17:00 and 21:00, and at midnight. Online shopping and online payment apps showed similar patterns, with more than 80% of total usage time falling between 07:00 and 22:00. Online food delivery apps had pronounced peaks closely linked to mealtimes, occurring between 11:00 and 12:00 and between 17:00 and 18:00.

Figure 19 Usage times for five categories of apps ⁴⁰



Unit: Share of daily usage time (%).

Source: China Unicom, June 2025. Hourly values are approximated from the plotted source chart and rounded to one decimal place.

► View chart data

3 Development of internet users digital literacy and skills

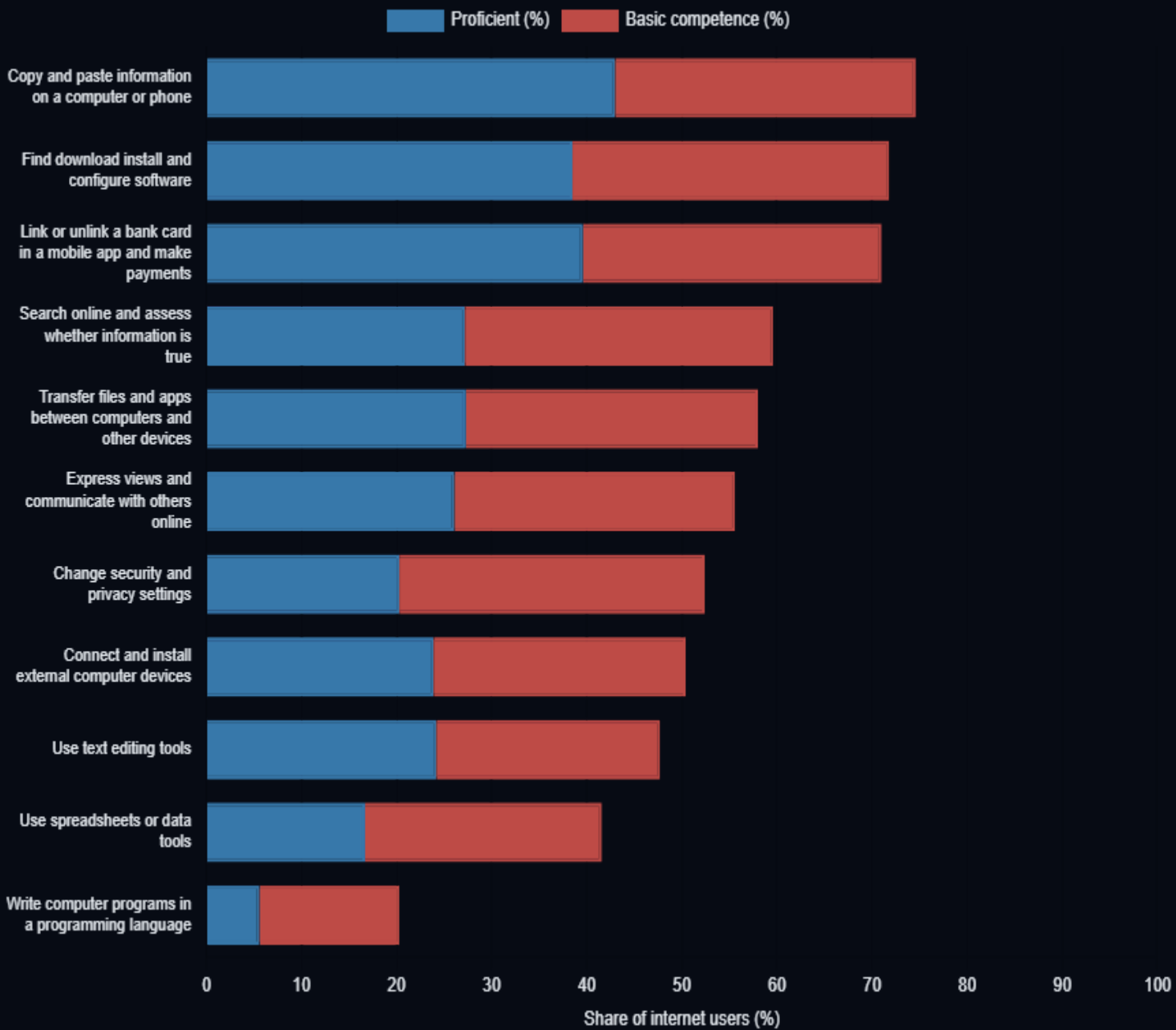
In the first half of 2025, digital literacy and skills⁴¹ among internet users in China developed steadily, reflecting the positive effects of digital infrastructure development, the digital transformation of the economy and society, and efforts to make digital services more convenient and beneficial. Survey data⁴² showed that, as at June 2025, 54.5% of internet users were proficient in at least one of the digital literacy or skills items surveyed.⁴³

First, internet users were gradually acquiring a range of capabilities suited to the digital era. Among basic digital skills, copying and pasting information on a computer or mobile phone had the highest proficiency rate, at 43.0% of all internet users. Among advanced skills, 5.6% could proficiently write computer programs using a programming language, an increase of 2.0 percentage points compared with December 2024. In relation to specific occupational skills, 15.4% of internet users employed in manufacturing or production enterprises could proficiently use intelligent industrial production tools, an increase of 3.8 percentage points compared with December 2024.

Second, younger internet users continued to improve their digital literacy and skills. By age group, users aged 20–29 and 10–19 performed particularly well, with 86.4% and 75.2%

respectively proficient in at least one surveyed digital literacy or skills item. The proportions able to write computer programs proficiently using a programming language were 10.0% and 14.4% respectively, both higher than in December 2024. Among internet users aged 60 or above, 9.5% could proficiently use the older-person mode in mobile apps. Differences remained between urban and rural users: 63.1% of urban users and 31.7% of rural users were proficient in at least one surveyed item.

Figure 20 Selected digital literacy and skills



Unit: Share of internet users (%).

Source: Statistical Survey on Internet Development in China, June 2025.

► View chart data

Notes and sources

²⁵ Traditional generic top-level domain and new generic top-level domain data were supplied with assistance from domestic domain name registrars. Figures for .CN and .中国 represent worldwide registrations.

²⁶ Other domains include .BIZ, .CO, .TV, .CC, .ME, .HK and .PW.

²⁷ Here, .CN refers to second-level domain names registered directly under .CN.

²⁸ .ADM.CN is a virtual second-level domain category collectively covering all administrative-region second-level domains under .CN.

²⁹ From February 2024, industry totals include China Broadcasting Network Group Corporation Limited (China Broadnet) figures for 5G mobile subscribers, 5G mobile internet traffic and 5G mobile internet users.

³⁰ All figures in this report drawn from the Statistical Survey on Internet Development in China are rounded.

³¹ Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, https://www.miit.gov.cn/xwfb/bldhd/art/2025/art_ee70dcf2aa474bd791a7b290e7617635.html, 18 July 2025.

³² IDC, <https://my.idc.com/getdoc.jsp?containerId=prCHC52894524>, 17 December 2024.

³³ People.cn, <https://finance.people.com.cn/n1/2025/0401/c1004-40451254.html>, 1 April 2025.

³⁴ China News Service, <https://www.chinanews.com.cn/cj/2025/01-12/10352080.shtml>, 12 January 2025.

³⁵ CCTV, <https://news.cctv.com/2025/03/30/ARTITOAskpHHmzVwEQvjY8Sj250330.shtml>, 30 March 2025.

³⁶ CCTV, <https://news.cctv.com/2025/04/28/ARTIFI5s3l634nCVzXKM2koK250428.shtml>, 28 April 2025.

³⁷ People.cn, <http://finance.people.com.cn/n1/2025/0226/c1004-40426148.html>, 26 February 2025.

³⁸ CCTV, <https://news.cctv.com/2025/04/28/ARTIFI5s3l634nCVzXKM2koK250428.shtml>, 28 April 2025.

³⁹ Average weekly time online is the average number of hours spent online per day over a seven-day week during the preceding six months, multiplied by seven.

⁴⁰ Usage-time distribution means the distribution of total app usage duration across time periods. For example, if a user spends 15 minutes (0.25 hours) on instant messaging between 06:00 and 07:00 and four hours on instant messaging during the day, the share is calculated as 0.25 divided by 4.

⁴¹ According to the Outline of Action for Improving Digital Literacy and Skills for All, issued by the Central Commission for Cybersecurity and Informatisation, digital literacy and skills comprise the capabilities required for learning, work and daily life in a digital society, including acquiring, creating, using, evaluating, interacting with, sharing and innovating with digital information, as well as security, ethics and moral responsibility.

⁴² To understand the development of digital literacy and skills among internet users in China, CNNIC drew on relevant International Telecommunication Union research when surveying abilities to use digital products and services, create digital content and protect online security.

⁴³ In this report, having a skill includes both proficiency and basic competence.

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Last modified: v5.1 – 20 October 2026