

Can AI save the planet? Older Canadians are most optimistic

IBM Canada national survey reflects a generational divide on the role of technology in protecting the planet.

Markham ON November 9, 2020 – According to the findings from a national IBM Canada survey on technology and the environment, different generations of Canadians have varying views on our progress in the fight against climate change, our personal contributions to the cause, and the potential for technologies like Artificial Intelligence and Quantum Computing to help protect the planet. The study also reveals differences in perception as to the impact COVID-19 is having on the country's environmental sustainability.

Even though Canadians over the age of 50 are more likely to believe COVID-19 has stalled progress in the fight against climate change, they aren't expressing any greater concern for the environment than a year ago. Conversely, two-thirds of young adults (under 30) seem increasingly pessimistic, indicating they are more worried about the environment now than before the pandemic. The statistics mark a 22% difference in the level of concern between the generations.

Some of that increased concern by younger Canadians may come from self-awareness over their COVID-19 habits. According to the IBM survey, respondents under the age of 30 admit they have engaged in much more non-environmentally friendly habits during the past seven months, including buying disposable masks, shopping online, and using more plastic bags and disposable cups.

Generational shopping habits could also be a root of the greater pessimism. The study revealed that younger Millennials and Generation Z adults expressed greater concern (22% more) than older Canadians over the environmental impact of increased shipping resulting from online shopping.

Solutions to drive sustainability and protect the planet – More Gen X and Baby Boomer optimism

Older Canadians are also most optimistic as to the potential for technology to overcome the climate crisis.

While the study revealed an overwhelming majority (75%) of Canadians believe the advancement of technologies such as Artificial Intelligence and Quantum Computing is important in protecting Canada's natural resources, Canadians over the age of 30 were more likely to believe they could help in actually reducing the country's environmental footprint. Older Canadians were also more optimistic that the development of these and other clean technologies are important in helping drive economic growth and creating more economic opportunities for the country.

Calls to Action – generations united

When questioned as to the responsibility of governments, businesses and other organizations in protecting the environment, Canadians across all age groups were alike in their calls to action. The majority of Canadians think there should be increased use of innovative technologies like AI, greater investment in research, and the integration of more clean technology into environmental strategies.

The survey also revealed that when it comes to finding new ways to protect the environment, Canadians are putting the onus on themselves as well. Nearly three-quarters – 74% – said they would personally adopt technology solutions that would help them live a more environmentally friendly lifestyle.

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About the IBM Canada technology and environment survey

This study was conducted between October 15 -17, 2020 by Morning Consult on behalf of IBM. The data represent the weighted results of 1,000 responses collected among adults 18 years of age and older, in Canada, stratified by age and gender, and then weighted by age, gender, education, region, and race (where appropriate) in Canada based on most recent national census projections in each country. The data has a margin of error of +/-3% at a 95% confidence level.

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