CURRENT AI USERS • n = 26,102

Favorable Stance Is Not Accuracy Trust

What current AI users reveal about reported use frequency - and why stance and trust should be measured separately.

A robustness-first secondary analysis of the 2025 Stack Overflow Developer Survey

Josh Penzell | Imagination Applied

The survey asks two different questions.

FAVORABLE STANCE

“How favorable is your stance on using AI tools as part of your development workflow?”

ACCURACY TRUST

“How much do you trust the accuracy of the output from AI tools as part of your development workflow?”

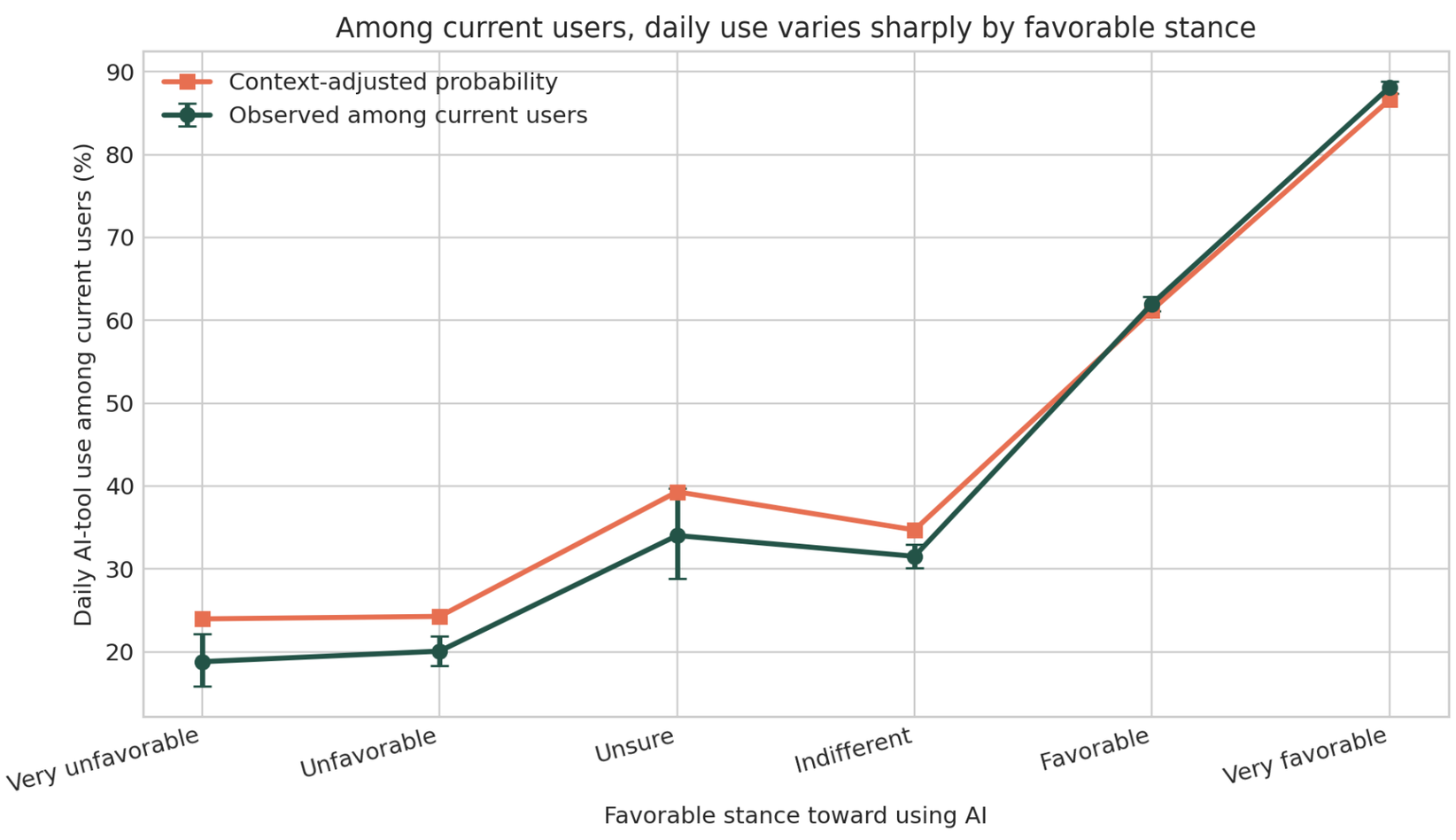
A user can value AI while still distrusting its answers enough to verify them.

Among current users, daily-use frequency separates sharply.

18.8%
Very unfavorable

31.5%
Indifferent

88.1%
Very favorable



The middle categories are not perfectly ordered. These are same-wave associations, not causal effects.

Even among current users who highly distrust AI accuracy…

17.7%
daily use among the very unfavorable

85.1%
daily use among the very favorable

Same accuracy-trust category. Very different reported frequency.
Favorable stance and accuracy trust are not synonyms.

Favorable stance carries more frequency information.

0.758

Stance-only ROC AUC

0.669

Trust-only ROC AUC

0.793

Context + trust + stance ROC AUC

Context + trust 0.704
Context + stance 0.790

Context + stance 0.790
+ trust 0.793

Five-fold cross-validation among current users. Classification inside one survey - not causal or future prediction.

The data do not prove the tempting story.

- Not causality: use may shape stance just as stance may shape use.
- Not a validated scale: favorable stance and trust are single survey items.
- Not an even ladder: unsure is slightly above indifferent among current users.
- Criterion proximity: favoring AI use is closer to reported use than accuracy trust is.
- Not universal: Stack Overflow respondents are a voluntary sample; 77.3% of complete cases identify as professional developers.
- Not blind trust: high trust may be unsafe when system reliability is low.

A better AI-adoption dashboard

1	**Behavior**	How often, where, and for what
2	**Favorable stance**	Whether AI feels valuable and workable
3	**Accuracy trust**	How much output is believed without added evidence
4	**Verification burden**	Review, testing, rework, defects, and time
5	**Outcomes**	Quality, speed, learning, risk, and customer impact

Measure these separately. Then test which ones actually move when a tool, workflow, or support changes.

IMAGINATION APPLIED RESEARCH SERIES

Access is not adoption. Trust is not stance. Use is not confidence.

Measure stance, trust, behavior, verification, and outcomes separately - then test what changes.

READ THE FULL REPORT

Adoption Without Confidence?

Josh Penzell | Imagination Applied | July 2026