

*Press release of 28 November 2024*

*Zurich University of Applied Sciences (ZHAW) School of Applied Psychology in cooperation with Swisscom*

## **AI tools are taking over the daily lives of Switzerland's youth**

**AI tools have integrated themselves into the daily lives of young people faster than possibly any other medium ever. These are the findings of the 2024 JAMES study conducted by Zurich University of Applied Sciences (ZHAW) and Swisscom. Whereas many media-based activities have hardly shown any upward movement, gaming is becoming increasingly popular – although the latter is also coupled with hidden risks. Instagram, TikTok, WhatsApp and Snapchat are becoming firmly established as the big four among smartphone apps across all age groups. Boys are significantly more often both the perpetrators and victims of cyberbullying, while almost half of all girls have been sexually harassed online.**

AI tools are taking over the daily lives of young people at record speed, with about 71% having tried out ChatGPT or similar applications. A third of all young people already use AI tools at least once a week, even though the technology only came to widespread public attention in late 2022. These are the findings of the latest JAMES study, for which around 1,000 young people aged between 12 and 19 are surveyed every two years. "Never before has a medium integrated itself into our daily lives as quickly as AI tools have done. That's why it will be even more important in the future to critically question information," says ZHAW researcher and joint survey director Gregor Waller. He says that young people must be made aware of the issue and taught how to verify information.

### **The big four are becoming firmly established**

Instagram, TikTok, WhatsApp and Snapchat remain the most popular social networks and messaging systems among Switzerland's youth. This big four of digital communication have become a fixed element of our daily lives, regardless of age, gender and socio-demographic background. Even so, young people mainly consume social-media content without commenting, sharing it or regularly posting their own contributions. Together with other social networks, messengers and video portals, the big four are regularly used to obtain information and primarily for entertainment.

### **Signs of saturation in media use**

There are clear signs of saturation in media use by young people. Many media-based activities, like listening to music, using social networks or watching videos online, have become so deeply integrated into our daily lives that any further increase in their use seems



Applied  
Psychology

almost impossible. Such usage in schools, within vocational training as well as for non-media leisure and social pursuits appears to have reached a kind of natural ceiling. “These stable results may suggest that digital routines and habits have entrenched themselves in the daily lives of young people,” says ZHAW researcher and co-author Céline Külling-Knecht.

There has been a fall in the use of traditional media. Whereas a quarter of the young people surveyed in 2018 still regularly used magazine and newspapers portals to find information, that figure is now just 10%. Meanwhile, more than half (57%) of the young people in the latest survey use social networks as sources of information. Even though traditional news providers are also present on social networks, anyone can in principle distribute information on these platforms without any filtering. This increases the risk of fake news and could increasingly expose young people to false information and manipulation.

### **Gaming with pitfalls: the hidden risks**

Eight out of ten young people play games at least occasionally. Gaming is by far the favourite leisure activity among boys, who regularly engage in it about twice as often as girls. Free-to-play games such as the mobile app “Brawl Stars” are especially popular, followed by “Fortnite” and “Minecraft”. Part of the fascination with these games is due to so-called “dark patterns”: manipulative design strategies that aim to influence gamers’ behaviour. These include for example loot boxes (random rewards that encourage gamers to keep playing and purchasing) and complex in-game currencies that make it harder to get an overview of the actual costs. Other dark patterns within video games include temporary rewards and the resulting fear of missing out (FOMO), social obligations within the game (both of which increase the pressure to play regularly) and loss aversion (mechanisms that can cause players to lose earlier gains).

These games are monetised through micro-transactions, a payment model in which virtual goods can be bought while playing. About half of all the young people surveyed said that they had made at least one such purchase. “In view of these mechanisms, parents in particular have to keep an eye on a variety of games and openly address their children’s gaming habits,” says Michael In Albon, Swisscom’s Youth Media Protection Officer. What’s more, the authorities should monitor developments in dark patterns and take regulatory measures where necessary, as has already happened in several countries such as the Netherlands and the UK.

### **Preventing problematic media use**

Thirty-six percent of the young people surveyed said that they had been asked about their physical appearance at least once in the past two years, while about a third had experienced other users either wanting to discuss sex with them online or contacting them with unwanted sexual intents. The differences between boys and girls are considerable:



girls suffer various types of sexual harassment far more often. Almost half of them have already experienced attempts to initiate sexually motivated contact online in one form or another. The frequency of such incidents increases significantly with age. Michael In Albon's position on the matter is quite clear: "It's unacceptable for children to be harassed in this way. Platforms like Instagram or TikTok must be held more accountable on this matter so that young people are protected better."

Gender also plays a role in cyberbullying, with 28% of boys – almost twice the figure for girls – reporting that they have been berated or insulted online at least once. At the same time, boys are also far more likely to be the perpetrators of bullying. That's why there is little difference between the frequency with which cyberbullying is actively practised and that with which young people are affected by it. One possibility is that many young people both actively engage in bullying as well as being bullied themselves. "Because cyberbullying increases very little with age, it's a good idea to start preventative work on this issue in primary schools," says ZHAW research and co-author Céline Külling-Knecht.

### **Sport remains the main leisure pursuit**

When spending time alone, sports, audiovisual media and music are right at the top of the activities engaged in by young people. Sport in particular has gained in importance since the 2022 JAMES study. It is now listed as the most popular leisure pursuit.

Whereas gaming and sports clearly predominate among boys, girls prefer other cultural (reading and music) and creative (baking and drawing) activities. Similar numbers of young people to those surveyed in 2022 say that their most important leisure activities with friends are playing sport, spending time outdoors and joint activities. Talking to friends is also very important for young people.

Young people enjoy reading. This has been a constant in terms of media use in recent years. In addition, there is more and more book-related content on various platforms, such as TikTok, Instagram and YouTube. This content is so widespread that new terms – like "BookTok," "Bookstagram" and "BookTube" – have become established for these subcultures. That's why the 2024 survey asked participants about their favourite books for the first time since 2016. The Harry Potter series once again ranked first, as it has ever since 2012. Other popular publications in 2024 include "Diary of a Wimpy Kid," "The Three Investigators" and "One Piece." Since 2012, the favourite books have always been those that have also been made into films. One noticeable finding is that there is a particular gender difference in reading habits. Girls generally read more than boys and are more likely to list reading among their favourite leisure pursuits.

*Note: the prevalence figures for negative online experiences (cyberbullying, sexual harassment) cannot be compared with the data from previous surveys, as the data was collected differently. For the first time, the survey did not ask about the respondent's*



Applied  
Psychology

*general experience (“Have you ever experienced...”) but about frequency in the last two years (“How often have you experienced...”).*

#### **Downloads and other information**

- [www.zhaw.ch/psychologie/james](http://www.zhaw.ch/psychologie/james)
- [www.swisscom.ch/james](http://www.swisscom.ch/james)

#### **National study on youth media use**

The JAMES study surveys the use of media among young people in Switzerland. JAMES stands for “Jugend, Aktivitäten, Medien – Erhebung Schweiz” (Youth, Activities, Media – Survey Switzerland). Since 2010, the Zurich University of Applied Sciences (ZHAW) has been conducting this representative survey every two years on behalf of Swisscom, asking more than 1,000 young people between the ages of 12 and 19 in Switzerland’s three major language regions about their media use and leisure activities.

#### **The ZHAW School of Applied Psychology**

The ZHAW School of Applied Psychology is the leading centre of excellence for the teaching and practice of scientifically based applied psychology in Switzerland. It consists of the Institute of Psychology and the Institute of Applied Psychology (IAP). Through its Bachelor’s and Master’s programmes, research and development, and its consultancy and training services, the school makes research-based knowledge available to people and companies within their living and working environments.

<https://www.zhaw.ch/en/psychology/>

#### **Swisscom is a cooperation partner of ZHAW**

Swisscom has set itself the target of supporting more than 2 million people in Switzerland a year with their media usage. It does this through, for example, courses in schools, its Enter media advice service and its online videos providing help and explanations. The JAMES study, which is carried out by ZHAW every two years, is commissioned by Swisscom.

Details of Swisscom’s media skills and information services can be found at

[www.swisscom.com/campus](http://www.swisscom.com/campus).