Press release dated 18.11.2026, embargoed until 19.11.2026, 00:01
Zurich University of Applied Sciences (ZHAW)

Embargoed until 19 November 2026, 00:01

AI becoming a go-to source of information for young people

Two-thirds of young people in Switzerland regularly use artificial intelligence (AI) as an information source – three times as many as in 2024. These are the findings of the 2026 JAMES Study conducted by Zurich University of Applied Sciences (ZHAW) and Swisscom. While smartphone usage remains high, sport, family and friendships continue to play an important role in young people's leisure time.

No area of young people's media use has changed more dramatically over the past two years than artificial intelligence. During the study, which took place between the end of April and mid-June 2026, ZHAW surveyed a total of 1,088 young people aged between 12 and 19 from the three major language regions. Whereas only 22 percent regularly used AI applications such as ChatGPT as a source of information in 2024, this figure has now risen to 66 percent. This ranks AI as the third most popular source of information, after search engines and messaging apps. Many young people have rapidly embraced AI as part of their everyday lives. They should therefore learn how such answers are generated and why it is important to cross-check them against independent sources," says Gregor Waller, ZHAW media psychologist and lead author of the study.

Top apps continue to dominate

Little has changed since 2024 with regard to the most popular apps, with WhatsApp, Instagram, TikTok and Snapchat still topping the rankings. On the other hand, there has been a sharp decline in the use of BeReal: only four percent of young people still regularly use this app compared to around a third in 2024. Messaging apps and social networks are becoming increasingly aligned in their functions. Young people primarily use both of these to chat as well as to view and like other people's posts. Only a small minority post their own content online.

Smartphone usage high but sport, friendships and family remain important

According to their own estimates, young people use their smartphones for an average of about three hours per day on weekdays and about four hours per day on weekends. Despite this intensive use of media, young people still make varied use of their leisure time: seven out of ten young people take part in sport regularly and almost as many regularly spend time outdoors or meet friends. The number of young people who regularly spend their free time with their family is also increasing, with statistics rising from 16 percent in 2010 to 29 percent in 2024 and 38 percent this year. "Despite the rise in young people's use of digital media in their spare time, for most this is not replacing either sport or their friends or family," says Jael Bernath, co-author of the study.

Smartphones for all but not streaming or AI subscriptions

Practically all young people (99 percent) now have their own smartphone irrespective of their family's socioeconomic status. Differences can, however, be seen when it comes to subscription services: households with a lower socioeconomic status are less likely to have subscriptions for film and music streaming, daily newspapers or AI applications. This is particularly evident with regard to AI, for example: whereas 44 percent of households with a high socioeconomic status have an AI subscription, the same can only be said of 23 percent of those with a low socioeconomic status.

Differences in terms of digital access are now less evident with regard to the ownership of devices than with regard to access to digital subscription services. “There is a risk of a gap opening up between wealthy and poorer families when it comes to AI literacy. Politicians need to pay close attention to ensuring that equal opportunities are maintained,” says Michael In Albon, youth media protection officer at Swisscom.

Musical diversity: the most popular artists among young people

Music permeates the leisure time of all young people in Switzerland, with around 77 percent even listening to it daily. During this year’s survey, young people were asked about their three favourite musicians and bands. The results show a wide variety of musical preferences: the 2,524 answers included 907 different artists. “The clear differences between the language regions show that language and cultural region have a significant influence on people’s choice of favourite artists,” explains Lilian Suter, ZHAW media psychologist. With *Eminem*, *Drake* and *Pashanim* topping the rankings, German-speaking Switzerland predominantly favours international, English-speaking artists. In French-speaking Switzerland, there is a clear focus on French-speaking rap and hip-hop, with *Werenoi*, *PNL* and *JUL* taking the top spots. In Italian-speaking Switzerland, Italian rappers dominate the music scene, with *Shiva* and *Sfera Ebbasta* most popular (followed by *Drake* in third).

Many young people experience verbal abuse and harassment – open conversations are important

59 percent of young people have been insulted or verbally abused in private messages at least once over the last two years. More than a quarter have had strangers ask them about their physical appearance or address them with unwanted sexual advances, with girls affected far more often than boys. For example, 28 percent of girls and eleven percent of boys had strangers ask them to send erotic photos of themselves. These results show that negative online experiences remain at a similar level to 2024. “Young people need adults who they can tell about difficult online experiences without worrying about getting into trouble. And they need good role models. Parents and teachers should be interested in the digital world of young people and initiate conversations,” says Michael In Albon.

The **Media Literacy guide** from ZHAW and the national ‘Youth and media’ platform provides parents and caregivers with specific recommendations on the safe use of digital media. This is available free of charge at www.jugendundmedien.ch and www.zhaw.ch/psychologie/medienkompetenz. Experts from ZHAW, Pro Juventute and Swisscom also explain how parents can support their children in the online parents’ evening “Cybermobbing – zwischen Chat und Pausenplatz” (“Cyberbullying – between chats and the playground”), available at swisscom.ch/elternabend and youtube.com/swisscom.

Further information

- JAMES Study 2026 (ZHAW website)
- JAMES Study 2026 (Swisscom website)

Contact

- Swisscom Ltd, Media Service, 3050 Bern, tel. +41 (0)58 221 98 04, e-mail media@swisscom.com
- Nina Aemisegger, Communication, ZHAW Applied Psychology, tel. +41 (0)58 934 80 35, e-mail nina.aemisegger@zhaw.ch

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/

JAMES Study commissioned by Swisscom

Swisscom has set itself the target of supporting more than 2 million people in Switzerland a year with their media usage. It does this, for example, through courses in schools, guides and its online explanatory and help videos. 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.