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WhatsApp's Reign and Email's Consistency: A Longitudinal Study of Communication Preferences of Study Beginners at TU Graz (2011-2023)

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Full paper

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Agenda

- Background
- Research Question and Design
- Results
- Discussion and Outlook

Background: TU Graz

Higher Education in Austria, Europe
- 9 million inhabitants, ❤️ of Europe
- 22 public universities (51,000 students) (plus 21 universities of applied sciences, teacher training colleges and private universities)
- Most students attend public universities with comparably low fees (similar to Germany)

Graz University of Technology (TU Graz)
- Founded in 1811
  More than 13,700 regular students
- 7 faculties, 97 institutes, 3 campus locations
- About 180 Million Euro federal budget, 80 Million third-party funds

Background: Welcome Days (1/2)

- Welcome Days: Introduction days for first-year students (BA) at Graz University of Technology.
- Aim: Provide essential information for a successful start to studies and introduce students to the engineering profession.
- Longitudinal Survey: Conducted since 2009 to gather data on IT equipment and communication tool usage.
- Topics Covered: IT equipment, communication tools, and more.
- Results: Published annually in the EdMedia Proceedings.

Background: Welcome Days (2/2)

- Unique Study: No similar longitudinal survey on IT equipment in higher education.
- Valuable Insights: Reveals trends and changes in IT equipment ownership among students.
- Importance: Understanding students' technology preferences and needs.
- Implications: Informing decision-making processes related to technology infrastructure and support.
- Future Research: Opportunities for further exploration and analysis based on the survey findings.

Research Questions

1. How has the digital equipment of first-year students at TU Graz evolved over the past 12 years (2011-2023)?

2. How is the utilization of digital communication and social media applications shifting among first-year students at TU Graz?
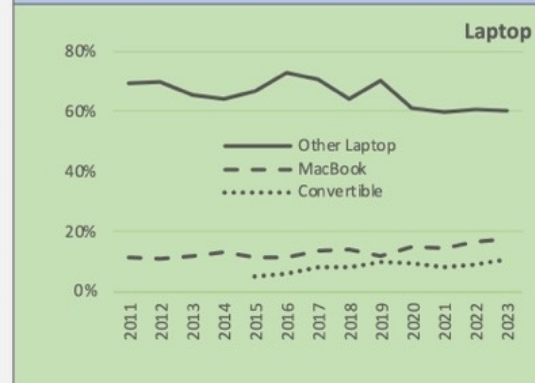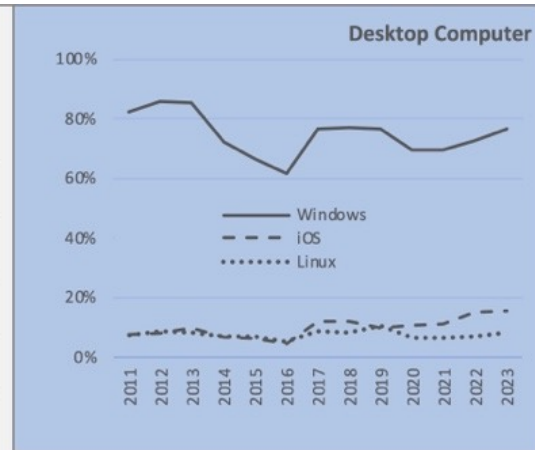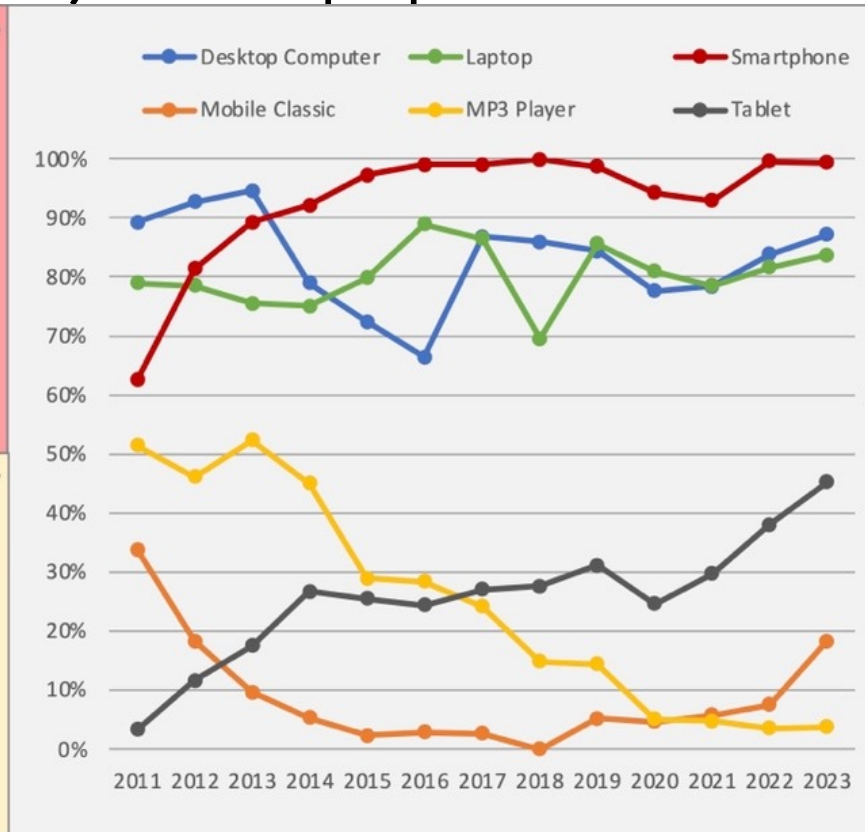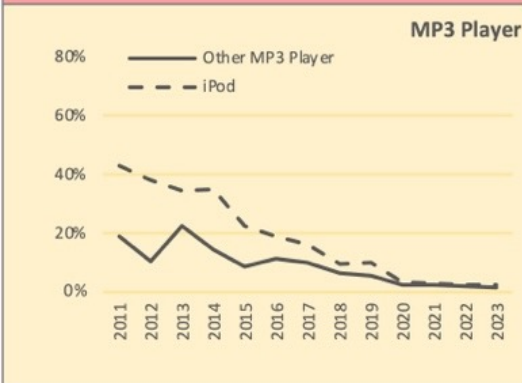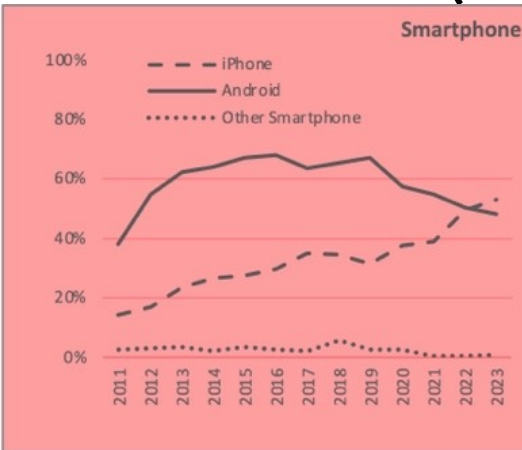
3. Which role does AI play?

Research Design

- Annual survey amongst study beginner at Welcome Days at TU Graz
- Paper-Pencil-Based
- In 2023 1,102 participants (of 1,845 study beginners)
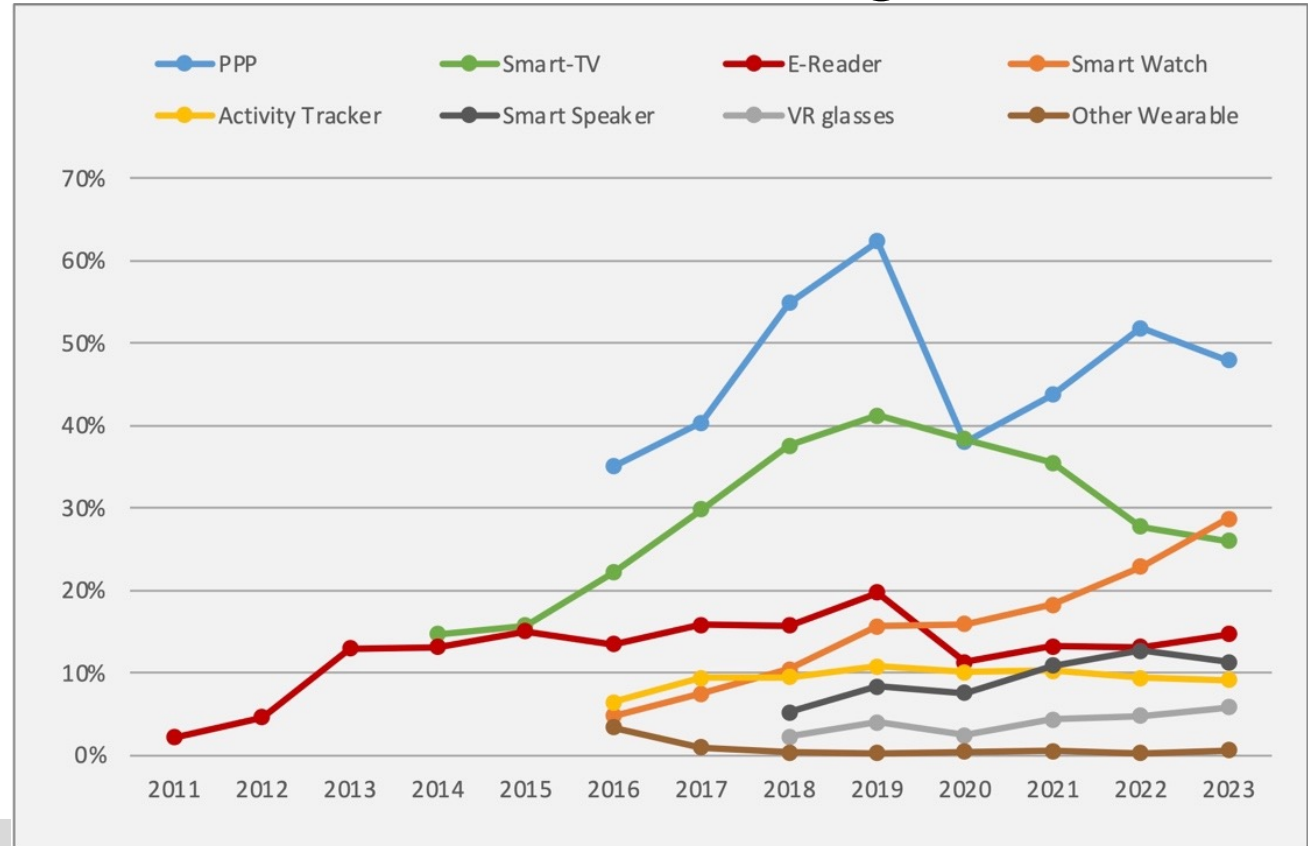
Results (1/8): Participants

Table 1: Gender and age of survey participants in 2023

Key characteristics of the study beginners		2023
Number of evaluable questionnaires (N)		1,102
Gender (in percent)	female	36.5%
	male	62.5%
	others	0.5%
	(not answered)	0.8%
Age	mean	20.232
	standard deviation	3.601
	min	17
	median	20
	max	67

Results (2/8): IT Equipment

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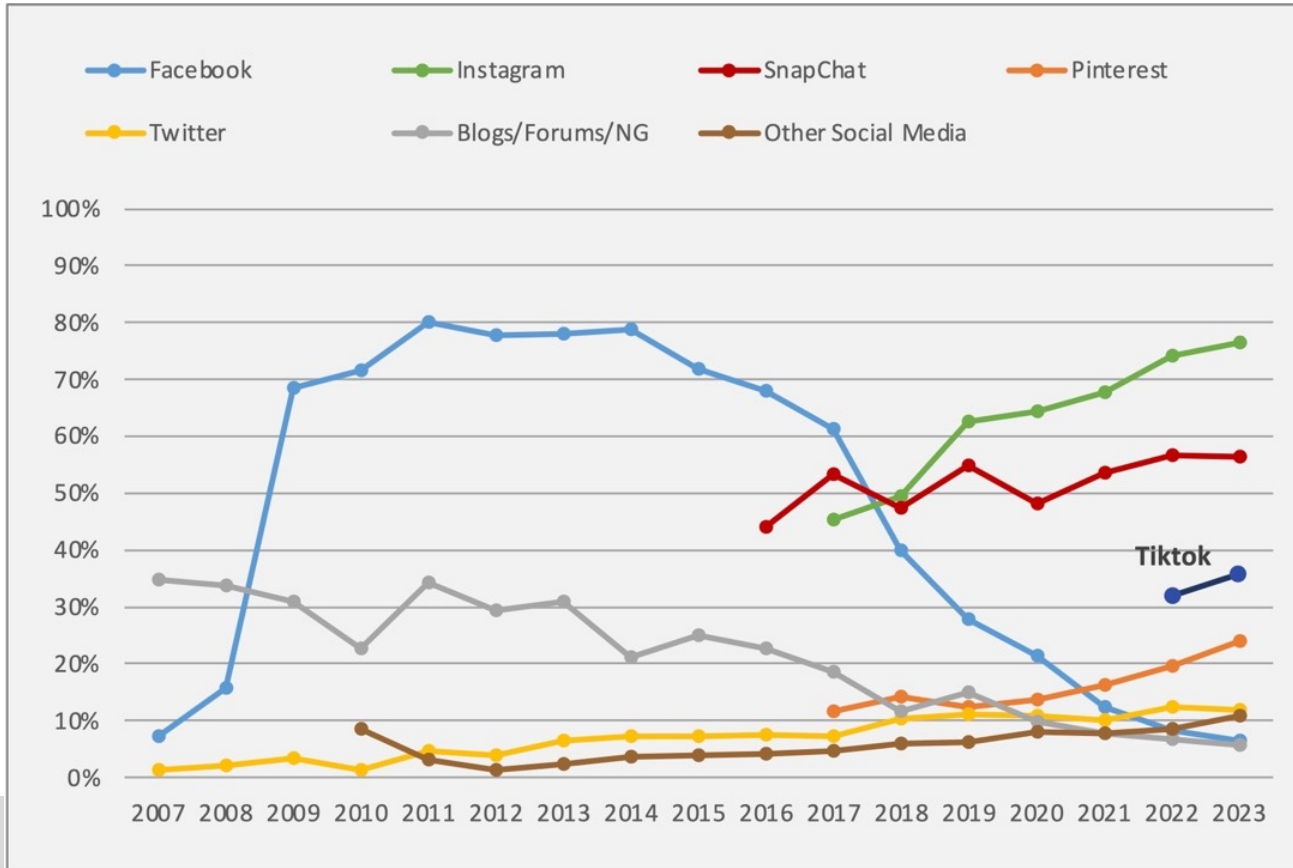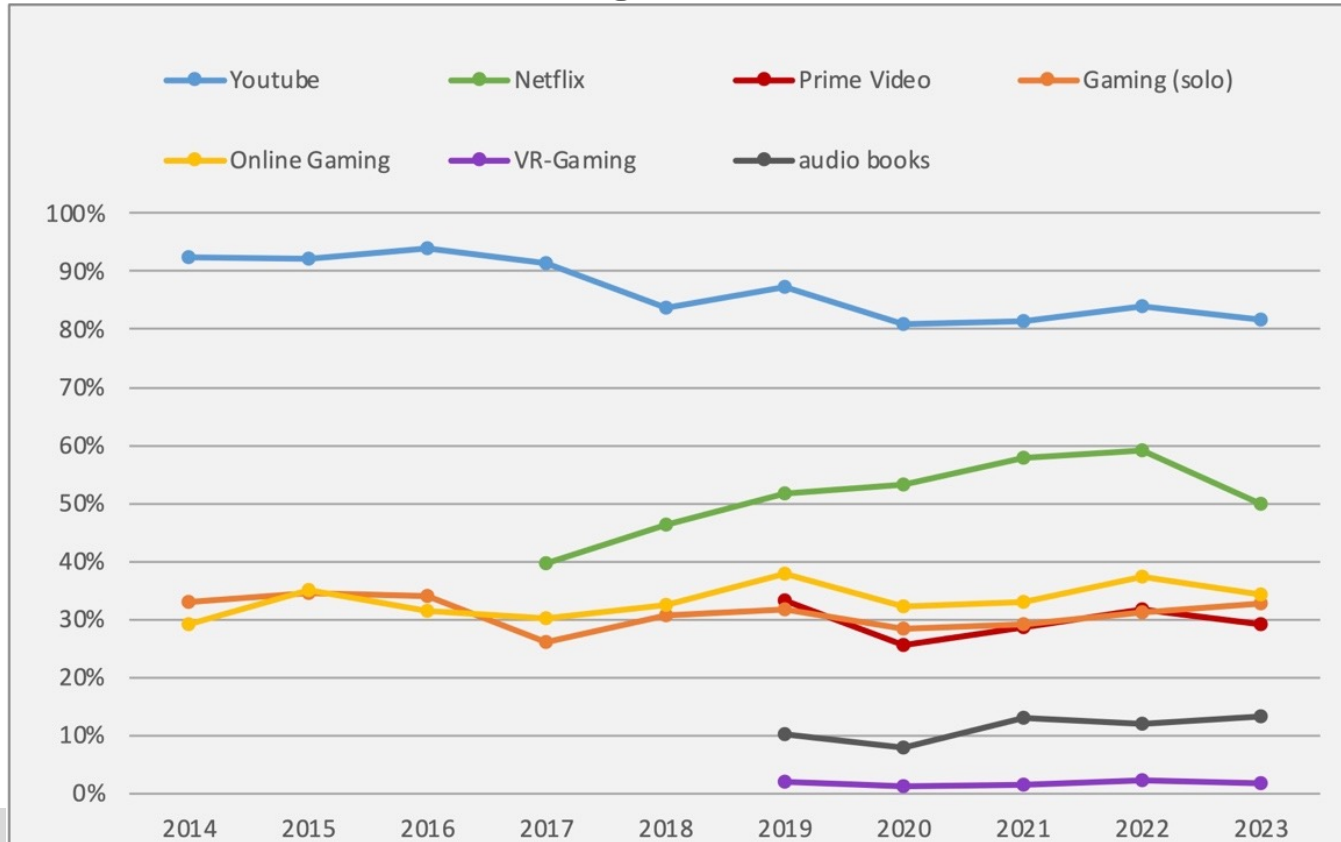
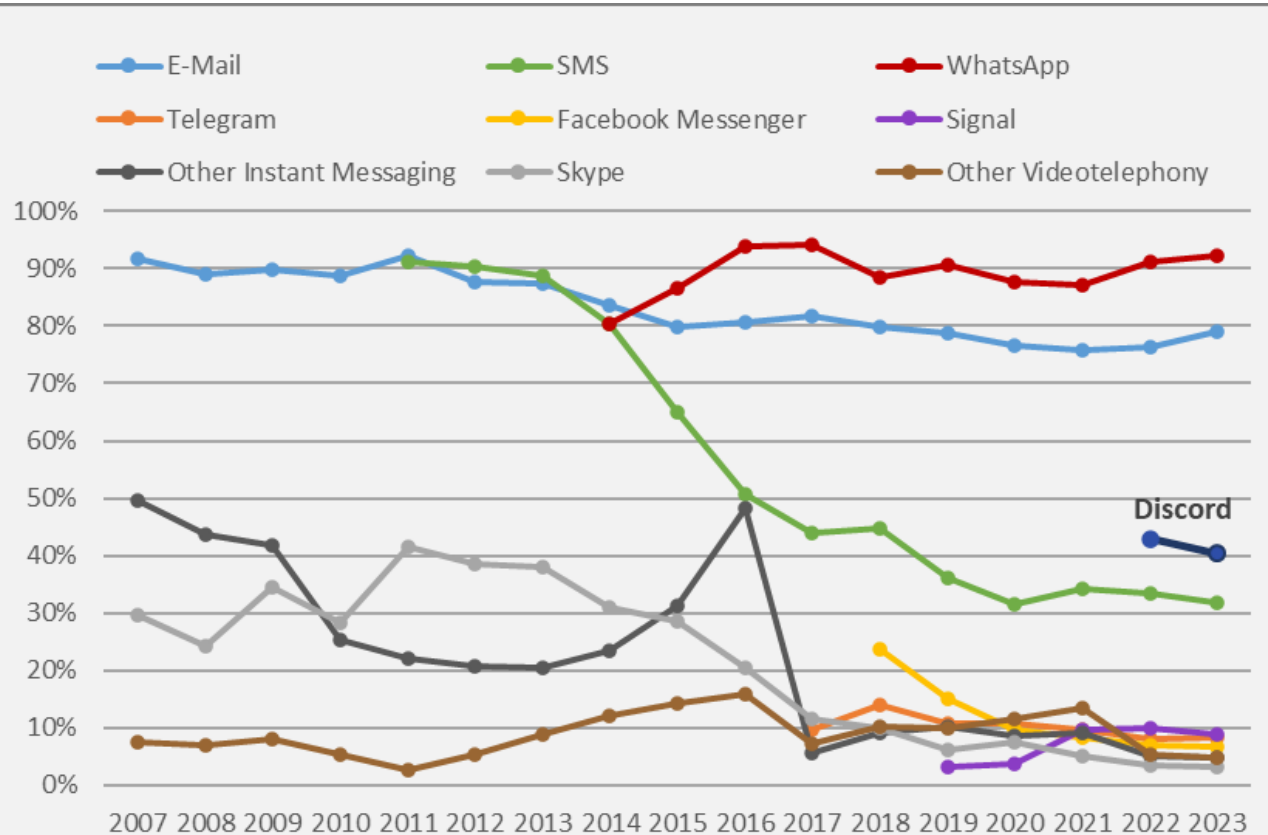# Results (3/8): Wearables and other digital equipment
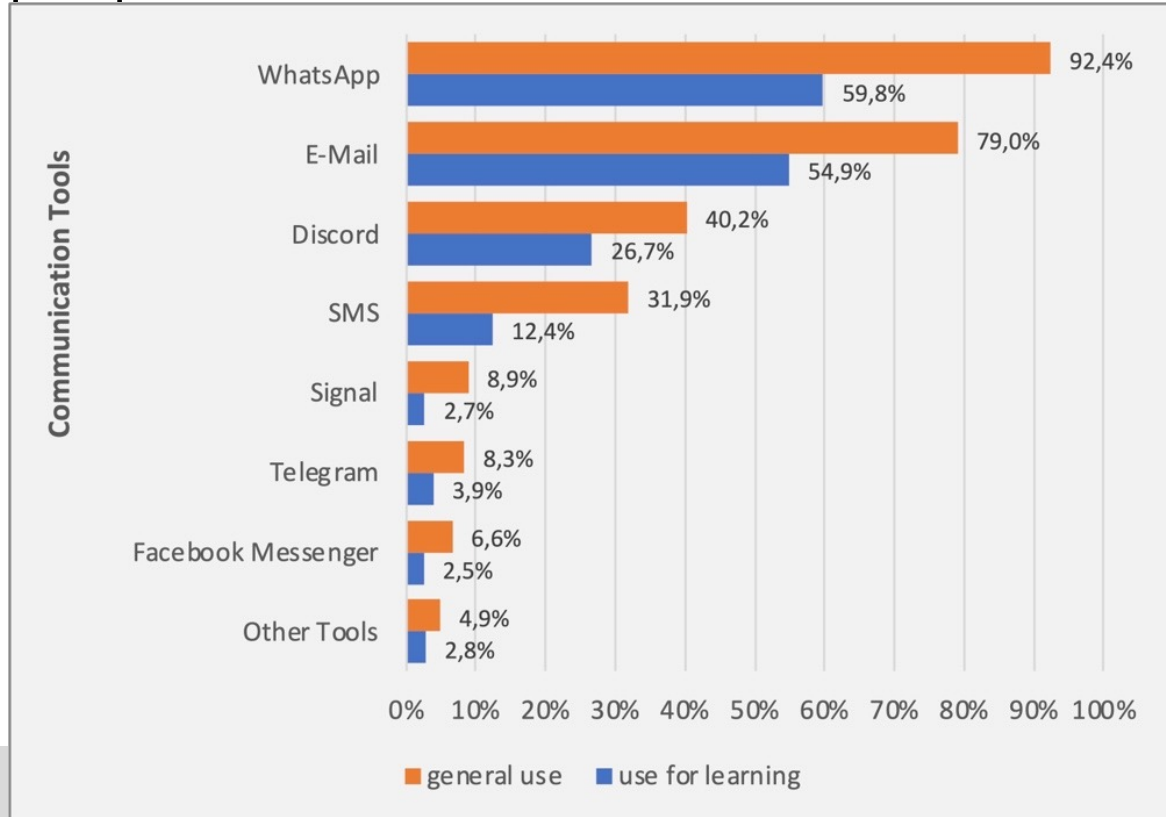
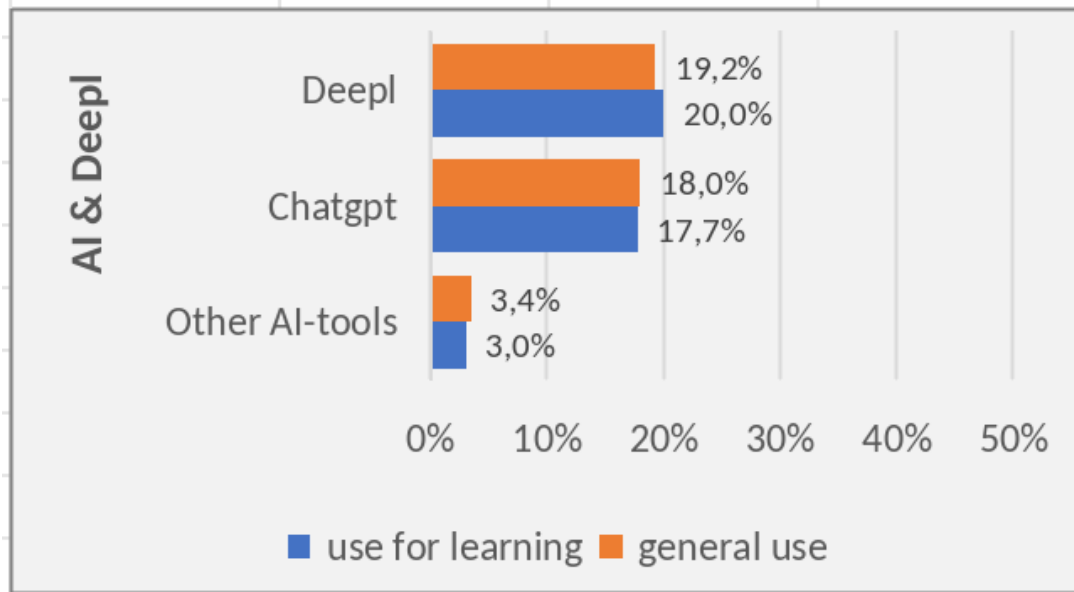# Results (4/8): Social Media tools

Results (5/8): Digital leisure

Results (6/8): Communication applications

Results (7/8): General use and use for learning purposes of communication tools

Results (8/8): Role of AI (first time asked)

Discussion and Outlook

- Expectation: AI experiences and usage will grow
- Similar to the last years, the clear preference for a variety of messaging apps like WhatsApp, despite their non-official status, shows the challenge of communication with students.

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