

ISURVEY

EVOLUTION OF THE INTERNETS ROLE IN STUDENTS DAILY LIVES

5 YEARS AFTER THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC



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INTRODUCTION

For our fifth instalment on students' digital needs and uses, we have chosen to take a time-based approach: comparing data collected in 2020 with that from 2025.

Since the pandemic, digital technology has become even more prevalent in students' daily lives: online courses, interactive platforms, instant messaging, artificial intelligence tools, a plethora of mobile apps, and more.

In five years, student life has become profoundly digitalised. But behind this acceleration, which changes are proving to be long-term?

The 2025 edition of our survey highlights some constants, such as the importance of WiFi and the preference for studying from one's bedroom, but also some notable developments: new uses of communication platforms, a transformed perception of distance learning, and a transformed relationship with digital tools.

By comparing the perspectives of 2020 and 2025, we offer a valuable framework for understanding the current expectations of students , helping institutions design digital solutions that are relevant, responsible and adapted to the realities on the ground.

METHODOLOGY

2,156 students living in student accommodations equipped by Wifirst responded to a 40-question online survey.

The survey was conducted between the 2nd and 30th May 2025.

01

Connected students: the standard student profile

Between the widespread use of smartphones, the presence of WiFi, and now well-established digital habits, students are highly connected. Some habits have remained stable since 2020, while others, shaped by the pandemic, confirm that digital technology now structures their daily lives.

KEY POINTS

- **99%** of students own a smartphone, confirming that it remains the most essential digital device, far ahead of all other devices.
- **73%** say they could not live without WiFi, revealing an increasingly strong dependence on the Internet.
- The findings related to personal data protection are striking in their consistency: **59%** of students say they are 'somewhat vigilant', a score almost identical to 2020 (**58%**).

1/ DEVICES AND INTERNET ACCESS

The profile of respondents has become slightly younger: the average age has fallen from 24 in 2020 to 22 in 2025. The majority remain female (55%, compared to 54% five years earlier). In terms of education, the sample is stable, with a majority having completed two years of higher education.

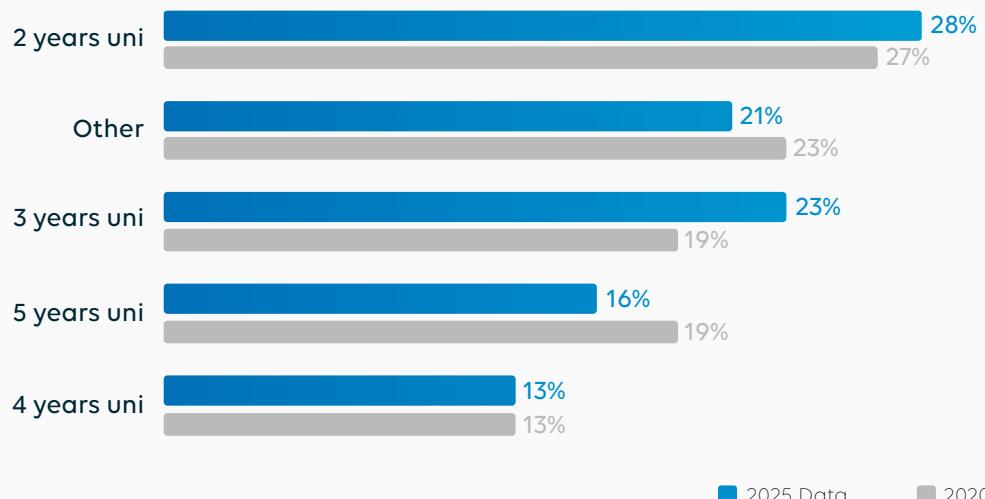
Unsurprisingly, young people are no more likely to use landlines than they were five years ago, and the future of landlines seems more uncertain than ever! Conversely, smartphones have confirmed their status as the king of devices: 99% of students now own one (98% in 2020). Almost universal, it combines all the key functions: communication, entertainment and access to information. Even during Covid, when laptops and connected speakers gained ground, no device has dethroned the smartphone. Comparing the results for 2025 with those for 2020, we see

a decrease in the maximum time spent daily on the Internet: 18% of students say they spend between 9 and 12 hours a day online, compared to 24% in 2020. The proportion of students who spend between 3 and 6 hours a day online is on the rise, now representing more than 30% of the sample.

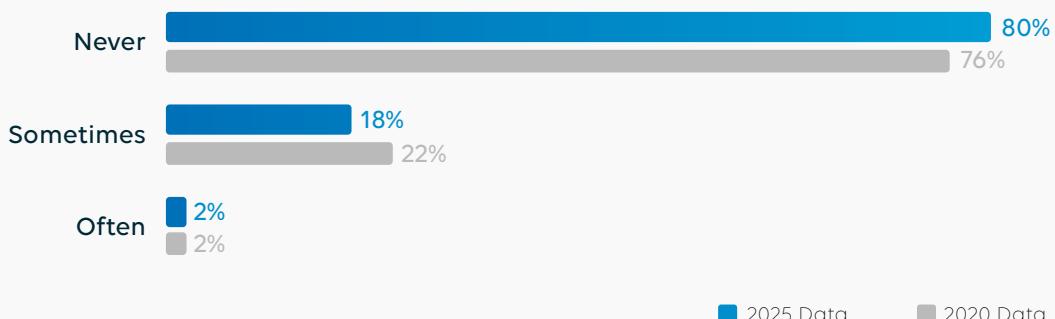
During the pandemic, the Internet was at the centre of everything: remote working, distance learning, video conferencing and digital entertainment all played a major role in daily life. Today, with the return to face-to-face learning and a growing desire to limit screen time, usage patterns have naturally readjusted. However, the Internet remains essential for the majority of students.

Nevertheless, we are still a long way from achieving true, sustainable digital sobriety.

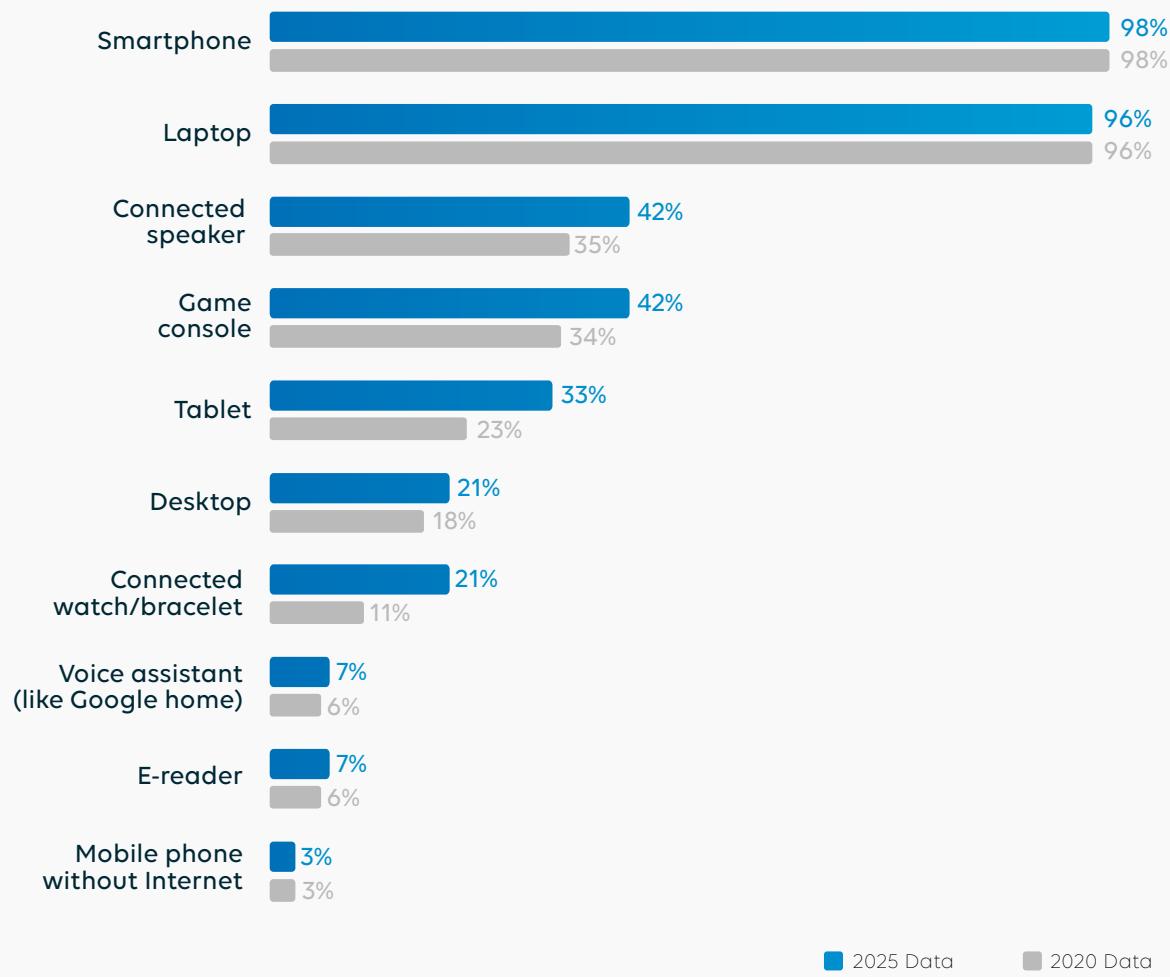
What is your level of education?



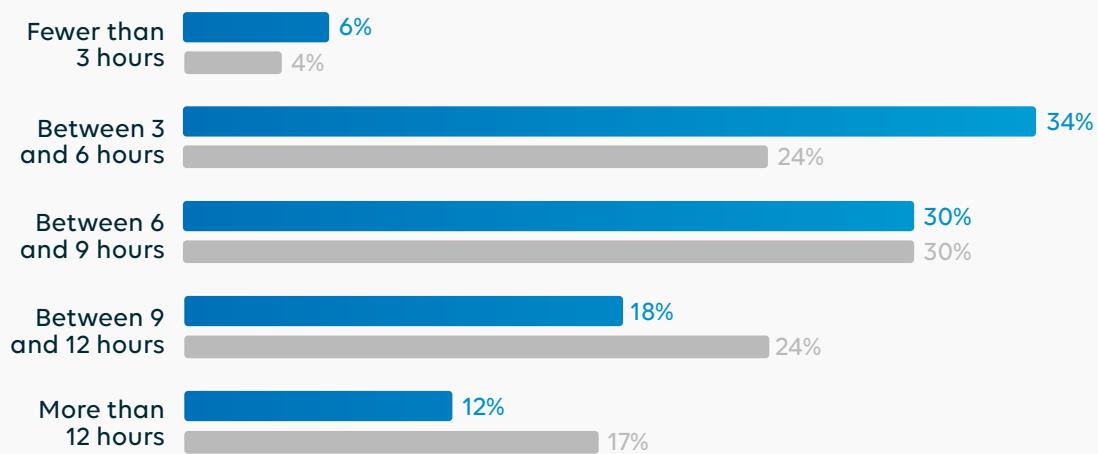
Do you use a landline phone?



Which of the following electronic devices do you own?

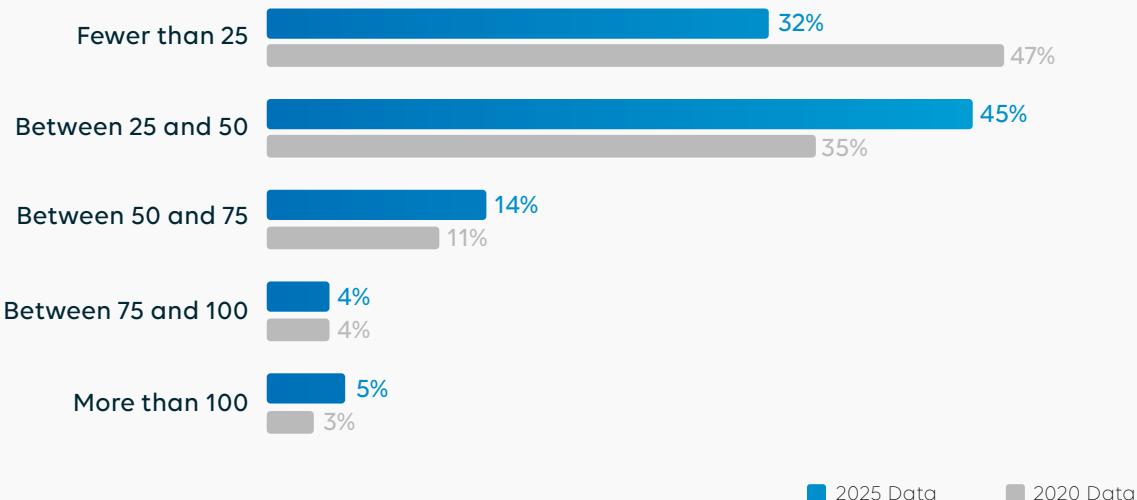


Counting the time spent on your applications, audio and video streaming platforms, and your web browser, how much time per day do you think you spend using the Internet?



2/ DAILY DIGITAL HABITS

How many apps do you have on your smartphone?

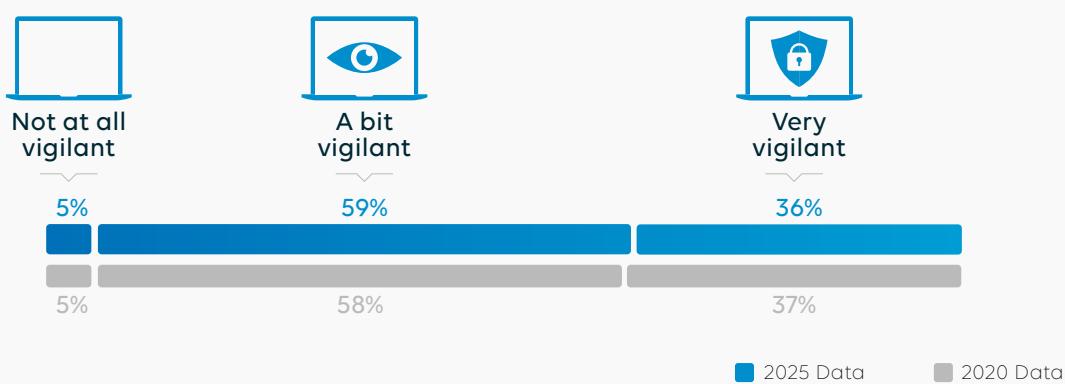


The data shows a clear increase in the number of applications installed on smartphones. In 2020, the majority of students (47%) used fewer than 25 applications. Five years later, this category has declined significantly (32%), while the '25 to 50 applications' bracket has become dominant (45%). This reflects two related phenomena:

- Digitalisation of habits: the pandemic has cemented the habit of using apps for all aspects of daily life (studies, health, leisure, sport, food and mobility).
- Strengthened habits: far from being a passing trend, this proliferation of apps reflects a lasting transformation in lifestyles.

However, this expansion raises questions: is it a functional adaptation (more tools to better manage daily life) or an increased dependence on smartphones, which have become a genuine "remote control for life" ?

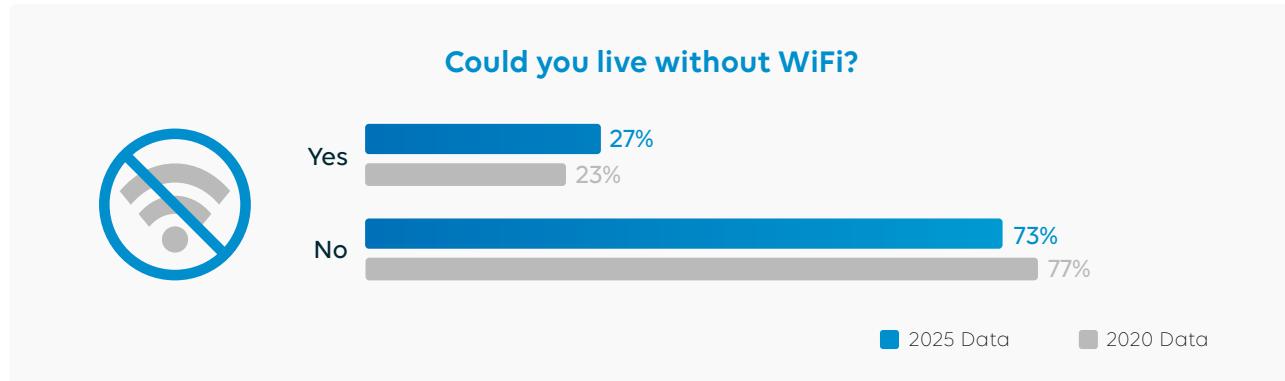
Are you vigilant about protecting your data on the Internet?



The results relating to personal data protection are strikingly consistent: 59% of students say they are 'somewhat vigilant', a score almost identical to that of 2020 (58%). This finding highlights a generational pattern:

- Students are aware of the issues surrounding data
- Behaviour remains lax in terms of protection (weak settings, acceptance of default terms of use and low use of protection tools).

This can be seen as a form of resignation in the face of the complexity of the system (technical parameters, opaque algorithms) and a feeling of powerlessness against the major digital players. In other words, the culture of digital responsibility remains underdeveloped, despite the omnipresence of digital technology in their lives.

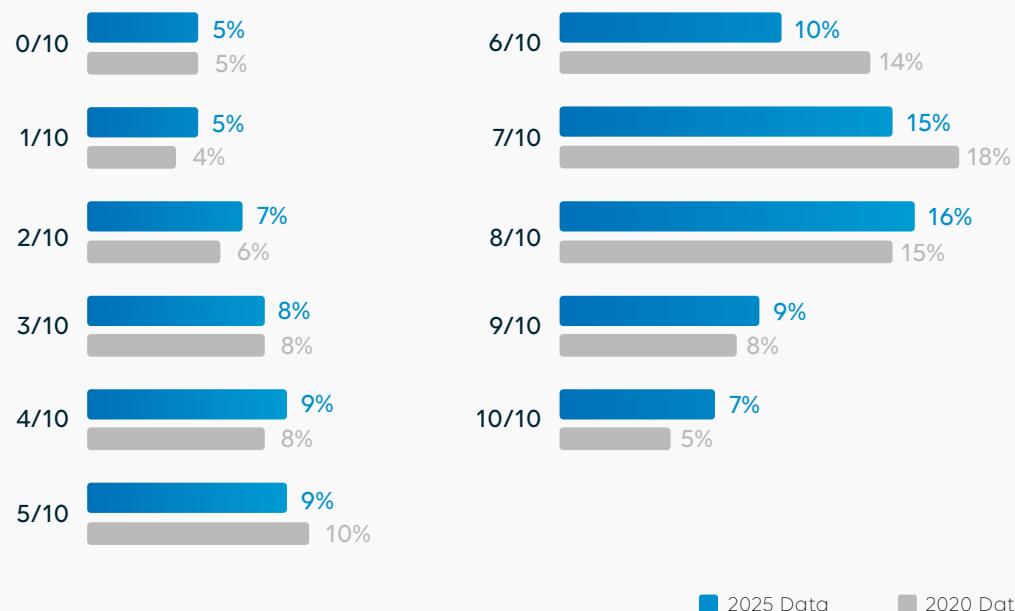


The answers to the question 'Could you live without WiFi?' reveal a subtle but significant change. In 2020, 77% of students said they could not do without it, compared to 73% in 2025. Conversely, the proportion of those who think they could live without WiFi has increased from 23% to 27%. This change can be explained by several factors. On the one hand, the return to physical interactions after the pandemic has reduced the need for constant connectivity. On the other hand, some students seem to have developed an awareness of their digital consumption seeking to regain balance and limit their dependence.

This response also highlights an obvious fact: digital technology, however ubiquitous it may be (remote working, videoconferencing and streaming), can never replace basic needs.

Nevertheless, the fact that nearly three-quarters of respondents still say they will not be able to do without WiFi in 2025 confirms that connectivity remains essential in everyday life, whether for work, study, communication or entertainment. The dependence is massive.

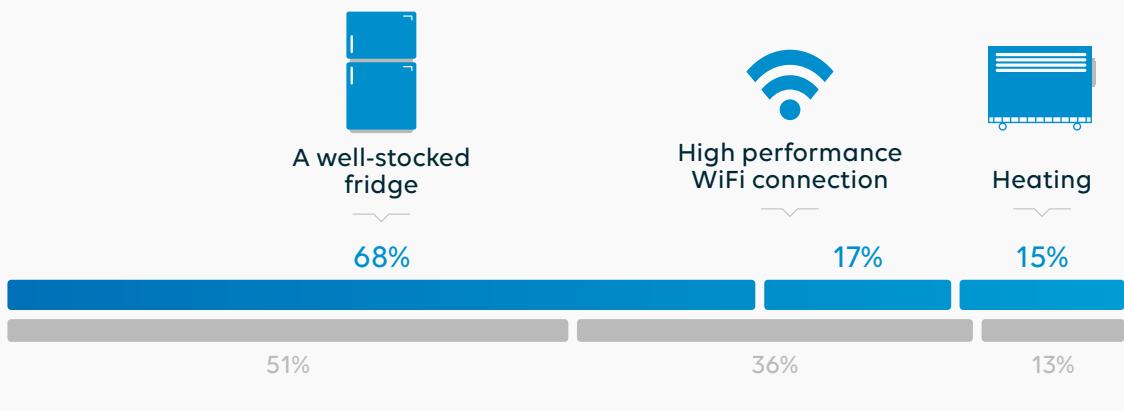
**How satisfied are you with the WiFi network in your residence?
(10 being very satisfied)**



■ 2025 Data

■ 2020 Data

In 2025, the best thing to have in a residence is...



■ 2025 Data

■ 2020 Data

02

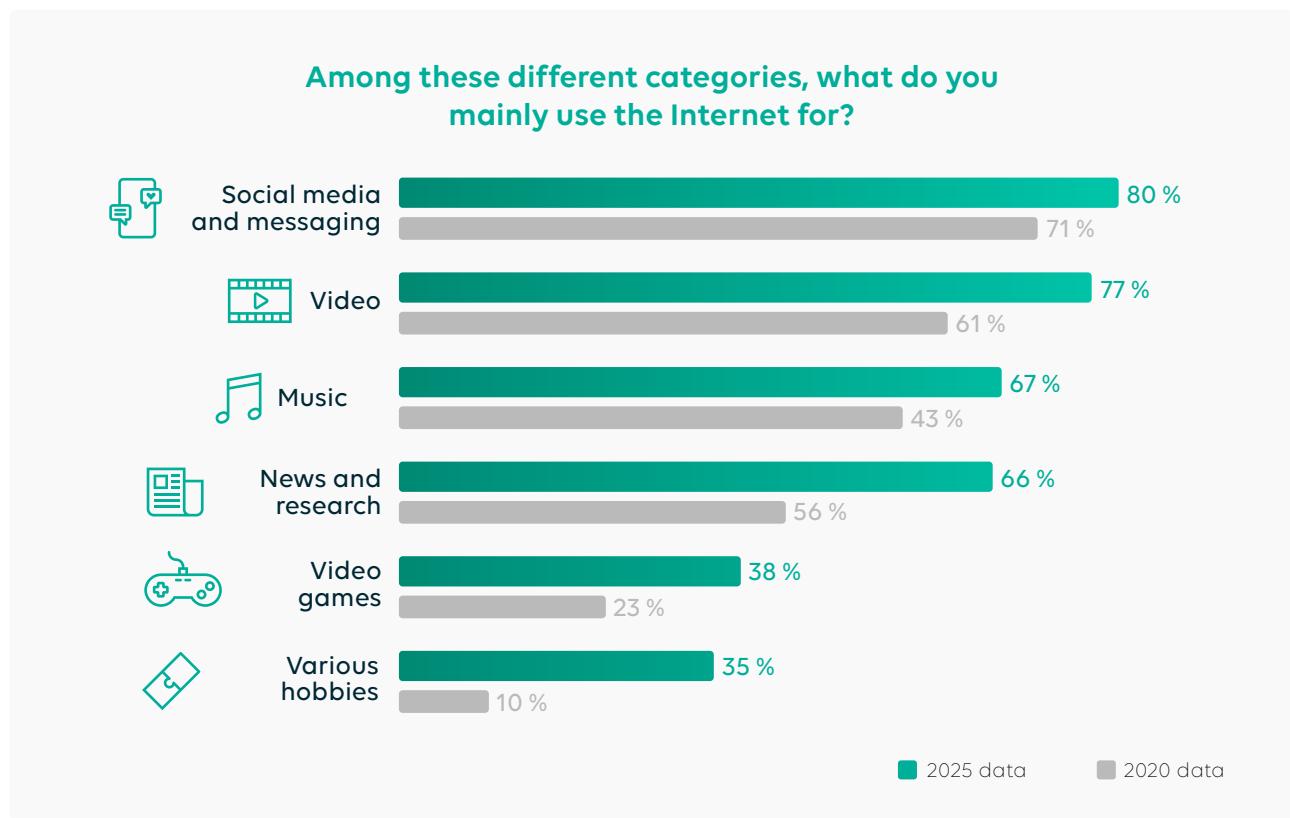
Platforms & studies : every day life in the digital age

Young people's daily lives are now punctuated by all kinds of platforms: social media, streaming, music and games. Usage is intensifying and diversifying, and new generational reflexes are emerging, driven by immediacy and personalisation.

KEY POINTS

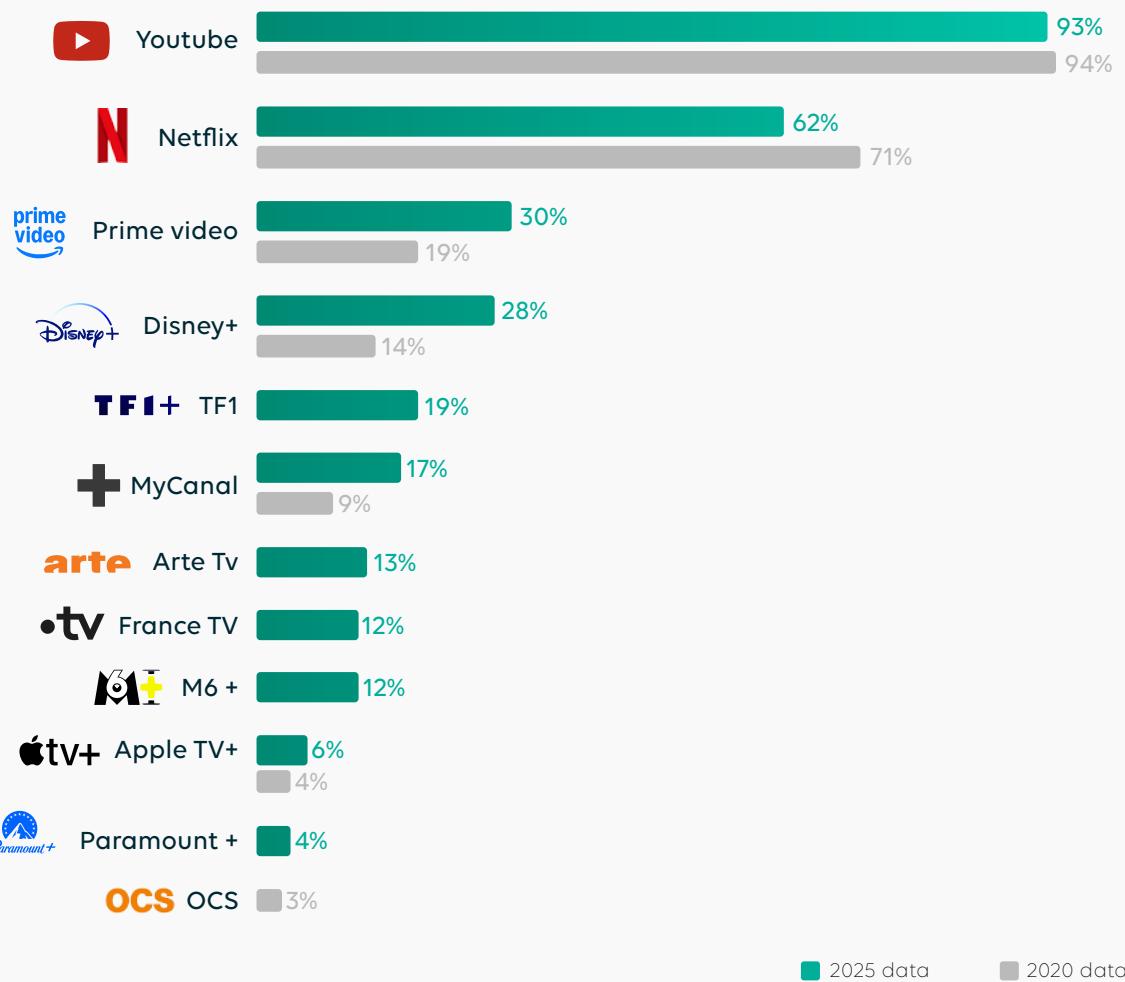
- A video-first generation: YouTube, Instagram and TikTok shape consumption and content creation.
- Diversification rather than exclusivity: students use multiple platforms, both for streaming and social media.
- Nearly one in three students (**27%**) use AI several times a week.

1/ BREAKDOWN OF USES AND DOMINANT PLATFORMS



The data confirms a significant increase across all categories of platforms: social media, video, music and games. These uses, which began or intensified during lockdown, have become firmly established. Digital technology is no longer just a tool for keeping students occupied or a substitute for other activities: it has become a fundamental part of everyday student life, meeting a wide range of needs (learning, entertainment, communication and future planning).

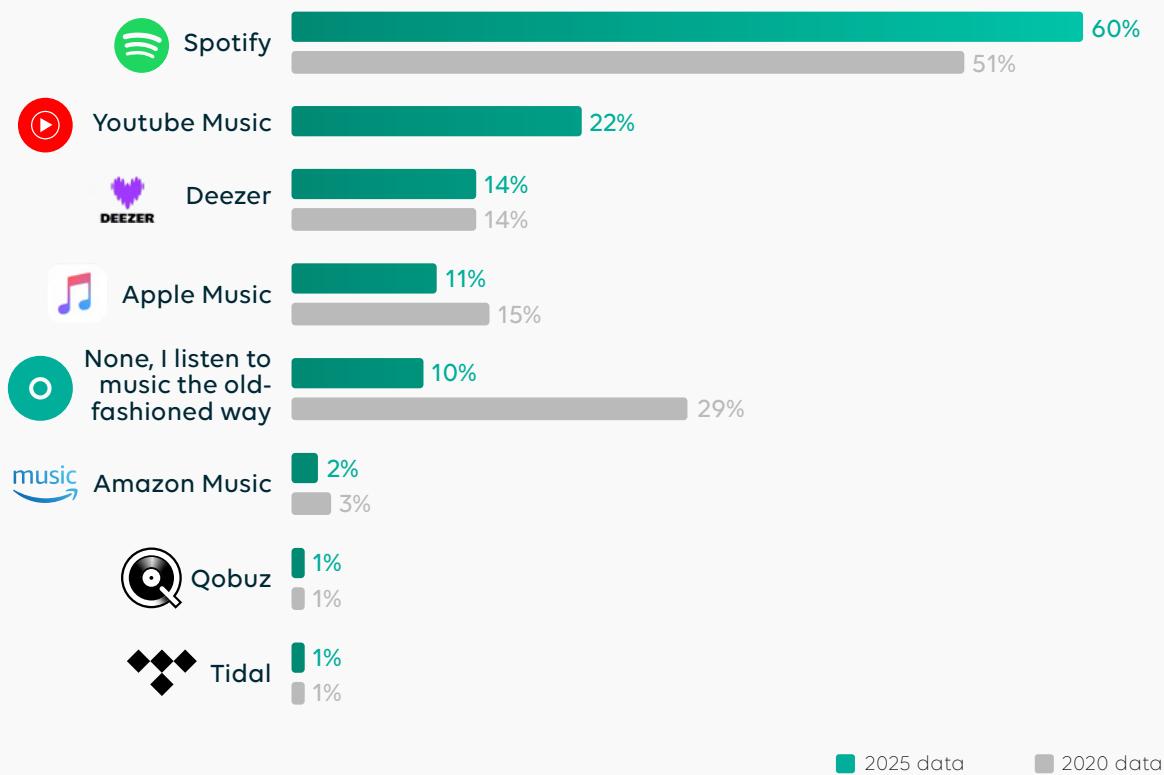
Which video streaming platforms do you use?



The student market is now characterised by fragmented subscriptions and a tendency to switch between content providers. The pandemic has accelerated this diversification, normalising the idea of having several platforms simultaneously.

- YouTube retains its undisputed dominance.
- Netflix is losing ground, facing competition from Prime Video and Disney+, which have capitalised on their differentiated catalogues.
- Traditional channel platforms (TF1 and MyCanal) are growing, demonstrating their successful adaptation to digital consumption.

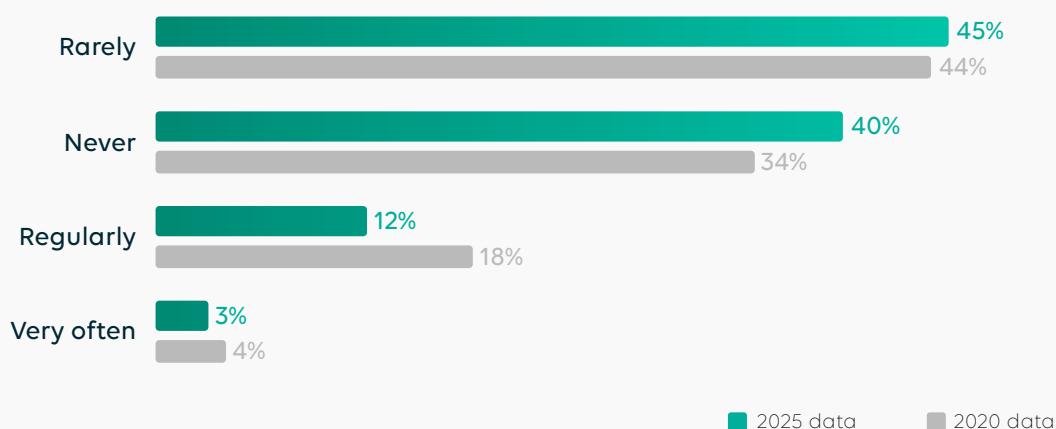
Which audio streaming platforms do you use?



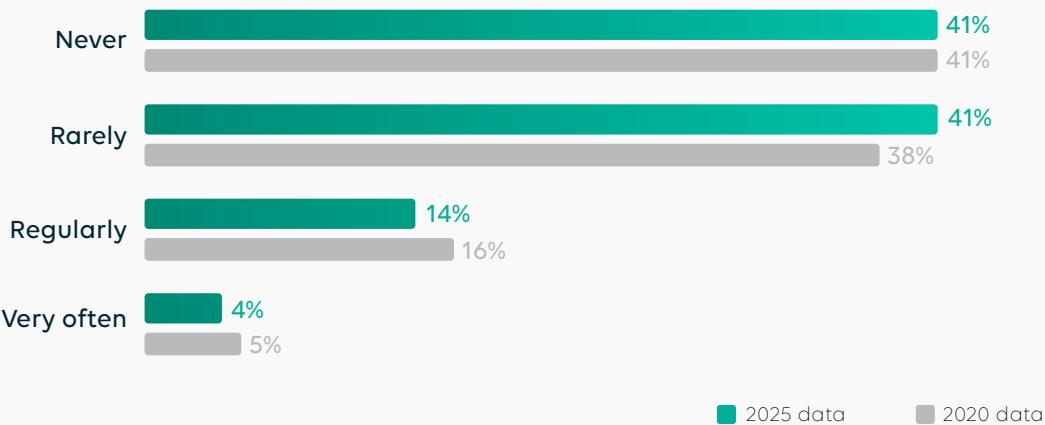
Spotify maintains a clear lead, thanks to a hyper-personalised listening experience (algorithms, interface and continuous updates).

At the same time, a small core group of students (11%) remain loyal to 'old-fashioned' listening (vinyl and CDs). Behind the digital explosion, there is a small minority who feel the need to disconnect and seek more authentic experiences, which serve as a counterpoint to the digital world.

Do you watch live television channels?



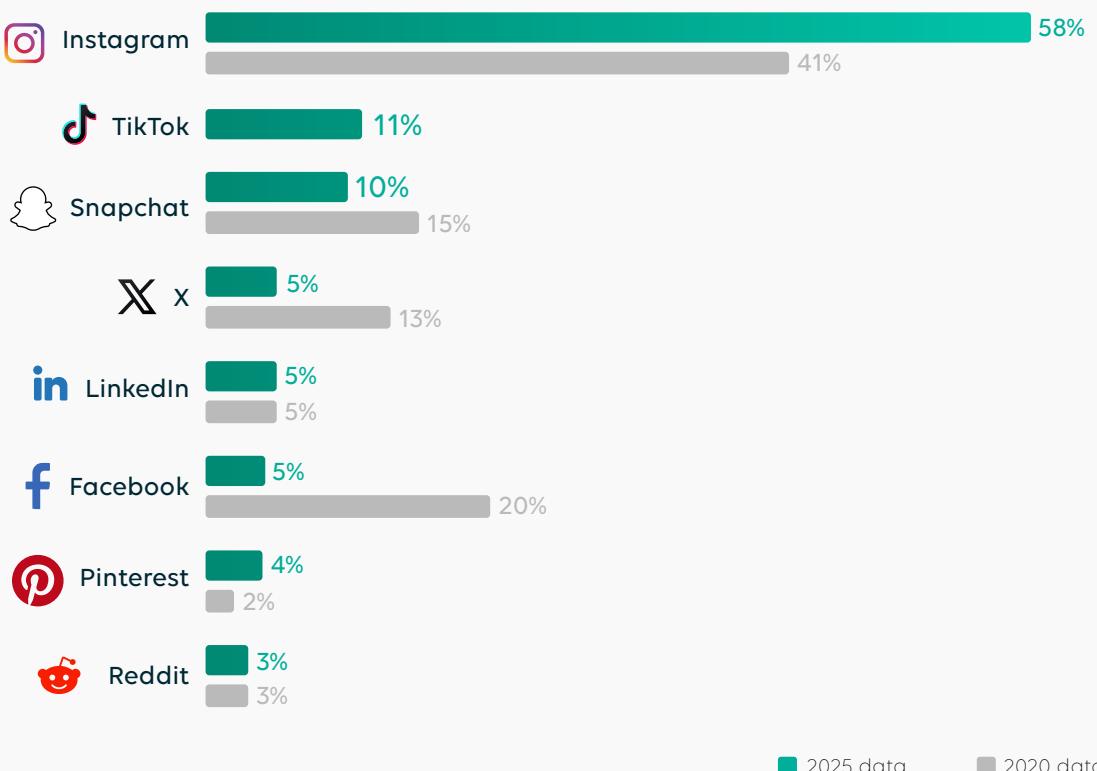
Do you watch TV channels on demand?



On the television front, the decline now seems irreversible! Even Covid, which could have strengthened the role of traditional television, has not reversed the trend. As a result, traditional television now appears to be a secondary medium, out of sync with on-demand consumption.

- Live: in 2025, 45% will rarely watch it and 40% will never watch it.
- Replay: same downward trend, competing with streaming platforms.

If you could only keep one social network, which one would it be?

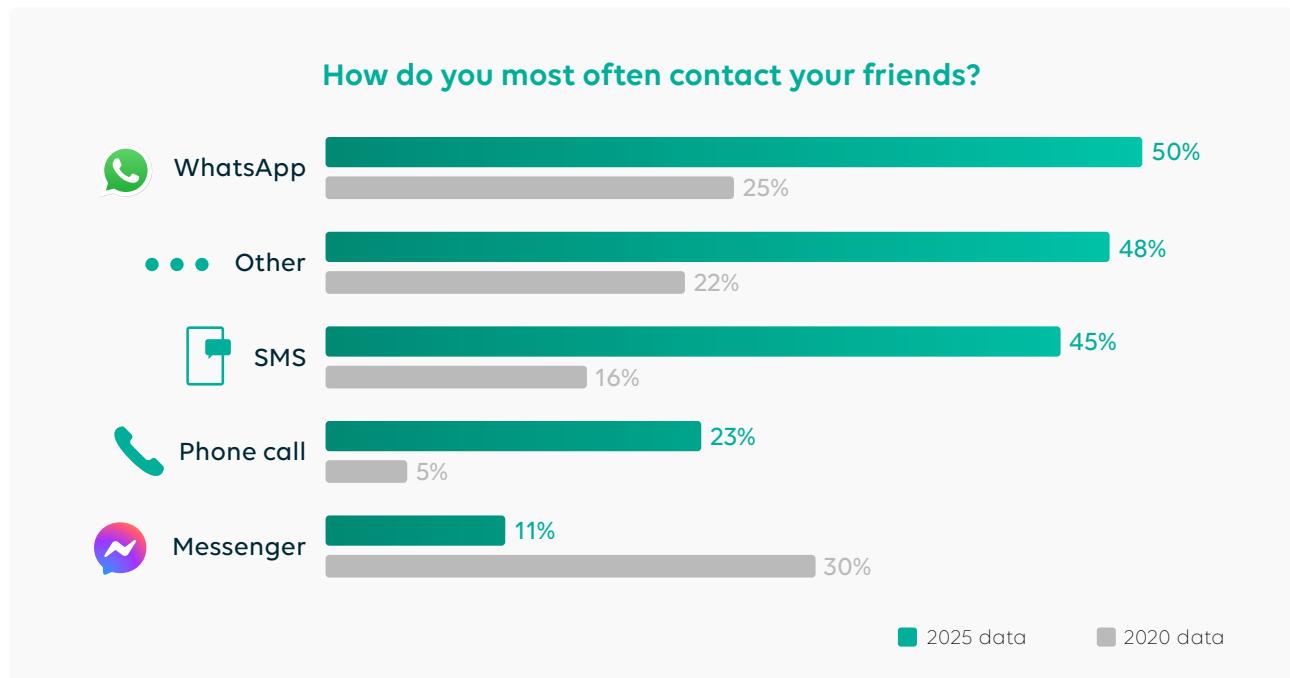


Analysis of the question "If you could only keep one social network, which one would it be?" reveals major changes in students' preferences.

- Instagram consolidates its supremacy, growing from 41% to 58% in five years, boosted by its short formats (Stories and Reels).
- TikTok exploded, growing from virtually non-existent to 11%, thanks to its viral videos.
- Facebook, Snapchat and X continue their decline.

The social landscape for students is thus being reshaped, with a dominance of visual and immersive platforms focused on short video formats and immediacy.

2/ NEW GENERATIONAL HABITS



Five years ago, Messenger dominated students' use of messaging apps for chatting with friends (30%), while WhatsApp lagged behind. Today, the trend has completely reversed: WhatsApp is now the clear leader, with 50% of all respondents citing it as their preferred app. There are several reasons for this shift. On the one hand, Messenger remains closely associated with Facebook, a social network

that young people are gradually abandoning it. On the other hand, WhatsApp offers a more comprehensive experience: in addition to messaging, the app makes it easy to make voice and video calls, a feature that has become indispensable, especially since the Covid-19 pandemic, which has profoundly changed the way we communicate remotely.

Have virtual interactions remained a part of your daily lives?

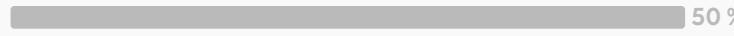
Yes  68%

No  32%

 2025 data  2020 data

As for virtual interactions, 68% of respondents consider it to be part of their daily routine. This figure shows that habits formed during the Covid-19 pandemic (video calls, instant messaging, social media and collaborative platforms) have largely remained in place.

Do you use Internet to access your residence's services? (booking spaces or equipment, communicating with the manager via instant messaging, ect.)

Yes  53%
 50 %

No  47%
 50%

 2025 data  2020 data

The survey also highlights a change in the use of the Internet for residential services: whereas five years ago, 50% used the Internet to book services, today there is a clearer majority, with 53% of respondents giving a positive answer.

Far from being a statistical anomaly, this change reflects a normalisation of digital practices, strongly catalysed by the pandemic. Pandemic restrictions pushed students and managers to adopt online tools en masse for booking spaces, mana-

ging services and communicating, transforming an optional service into a real necessity. This forced adoption has demonstrated the practicality and effectiveness of these solutions, establishing new uses for the long term. However, the fact that the percentage is not higher shows that some physical interactions cannot yet be replaced by digital tools!

03

Studying after Covid19: a permanent shift

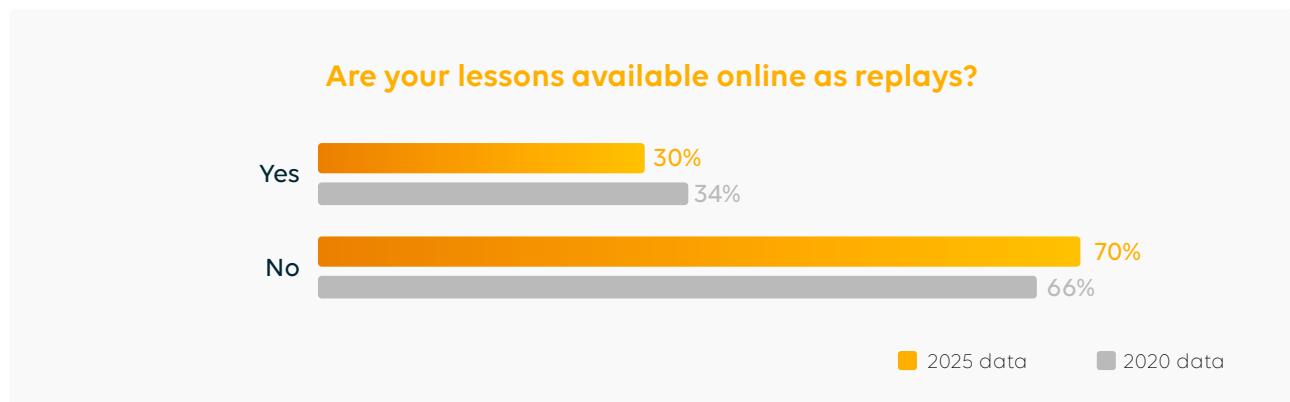
Although online courses are no longer as widespread as they were in 2020, digital tools continue to play a very important role in academic life. Replays, videoconferencing and educational platforms are now part of the landscape, even though students show a marked preference for face-to-face teaching.

KEY POINTS

- 7% of students still use video conferencing platforms for group work, compared to 35% five years ago.
- The proportion of institutions offering “everywhere” WiFi access has increased significantly, **from 55% to 70%**.
- The perception of WiFi quality at university has improved **from 35% to 41%**.

1/ LEARNING TOOLS AND HYBRID FORMATS

The proportion of distance learning courses has fallen sharply since the pandemic, confirming the return of face-to-face learning as the norm.



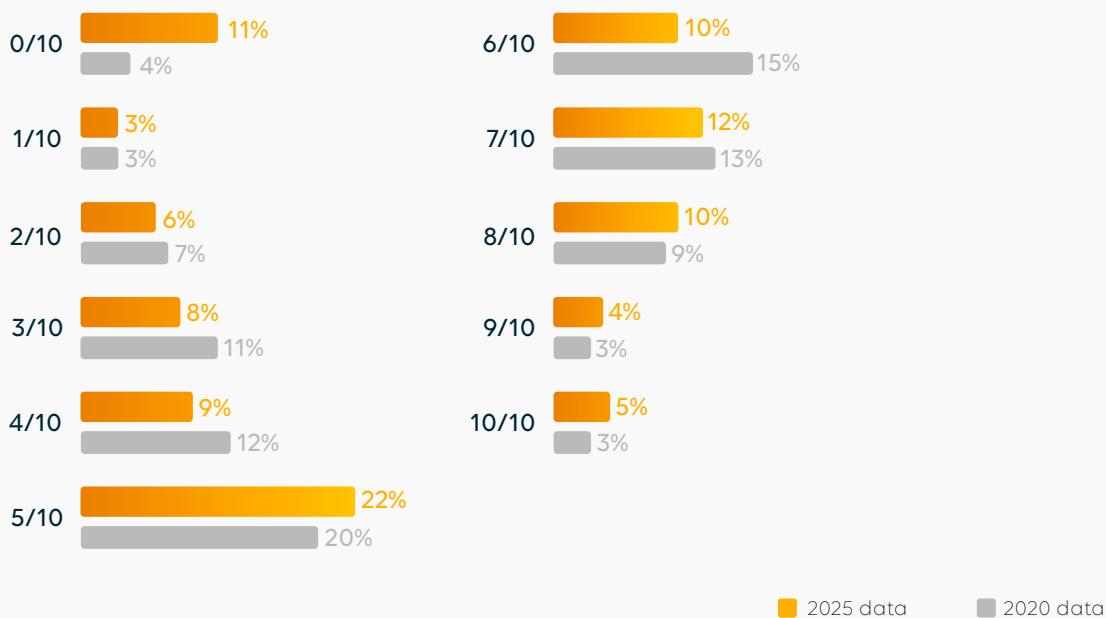
This decline, which may seem counterintuitive after a period in which distance learning became the norm, can be explained by several factors. During the pandemic, many institutions urgently deployed playback solutions to ensure educational continuity. Once the crisis was over, the return to face-to-face teaching became a priority once again, and the systematic provision of playback for all courses was not always maintained.

Added to this are logistical and technical

constraints (cost of equipment, additional workload and supplementary material for teachers) as well as teaching choices aimed at encouraging live participation.

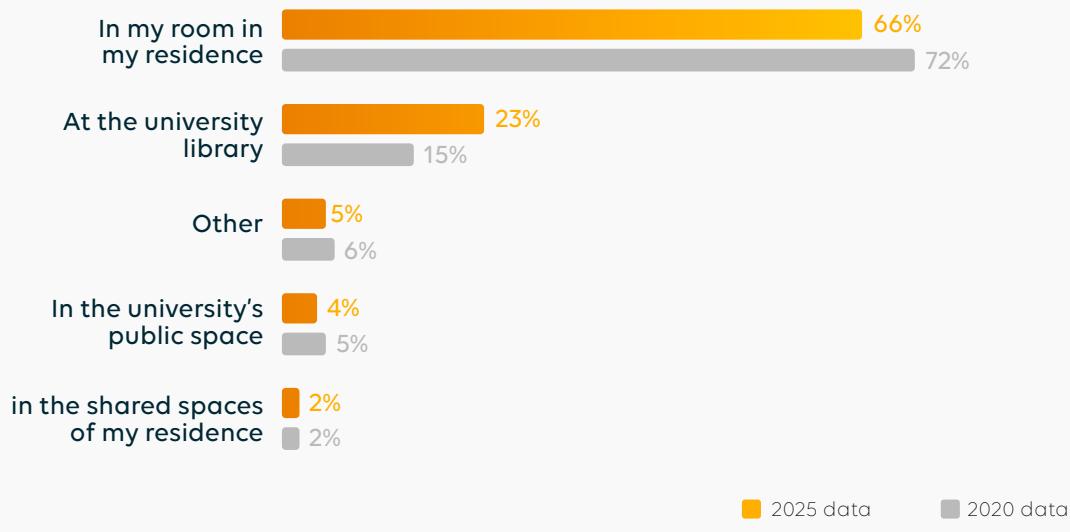
Finally, some universities may have preferred to focus on other digital formats (course materials, interactive exercises, online resources) rather than systematically recording sessions. These factors help explain why a large majority of students still answer 'No' to the question of replay accessibility.

How would you rate the quality of online courses compared to face-to-face courses? (10 being very satisfactory)



Five years ago, students rated the quality of online courses at an average of 5/10, compared to 4/10 today. This slight decline reflects not only a perceived lack of progress in terms of quality, but also, most certainly, a weariness with distance learning.

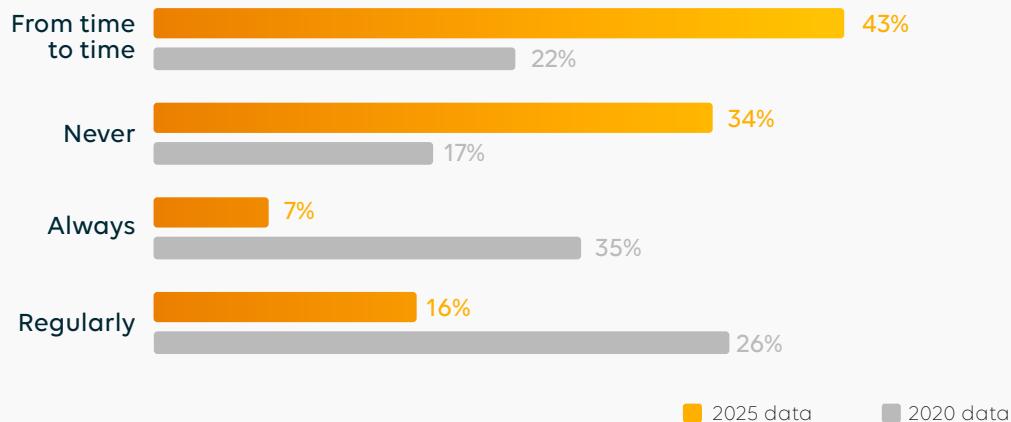
Where is your favourite place to study?



A study of students' preferred study locations shows a decline in the use of student halls of residence (from 72% to 66%) in favour of university libraries (from 15% to 23%). Following the pandemic, which forced students to work from home, they are now seeking more structured environments that are conducive to concentration. The library is thus regaining its central role, offering a suitable environment and a clear separation between private life and studies.

2/ PERCEPTION AND USE OF DISTANCE LEARNING

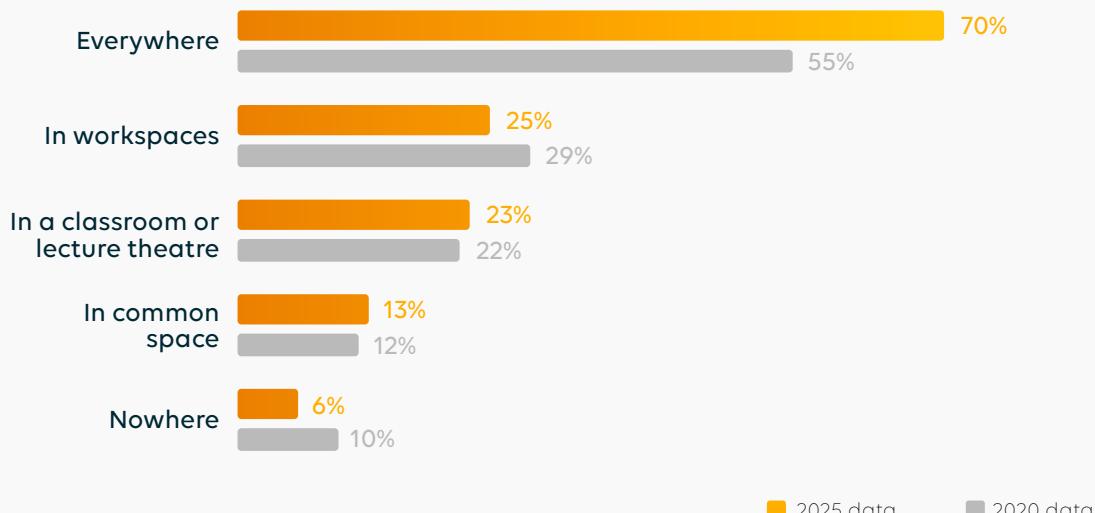
Do you use platforms such as Zoom, Google Meet, or Microsoft Teams for your group meetings?



Five years ago, 35% of students routinely used videoconferencing platforms such as Zoom or Google Hangouts for their group work, and 26% used them regularly. Today, these practices have declined significantly: only 7% still use them, 16% use them regularly, while the majority use them occasionally (43%) or never (34%). This decline reflects a

conscious return to face-to-face meetings, which are considered more relaxed, human and effective for group work. The pandemic temporarily imposed video conferencing as the norm, but it did not create a lasting habit: face-to-face exchanges promote cohesion and efficiency.

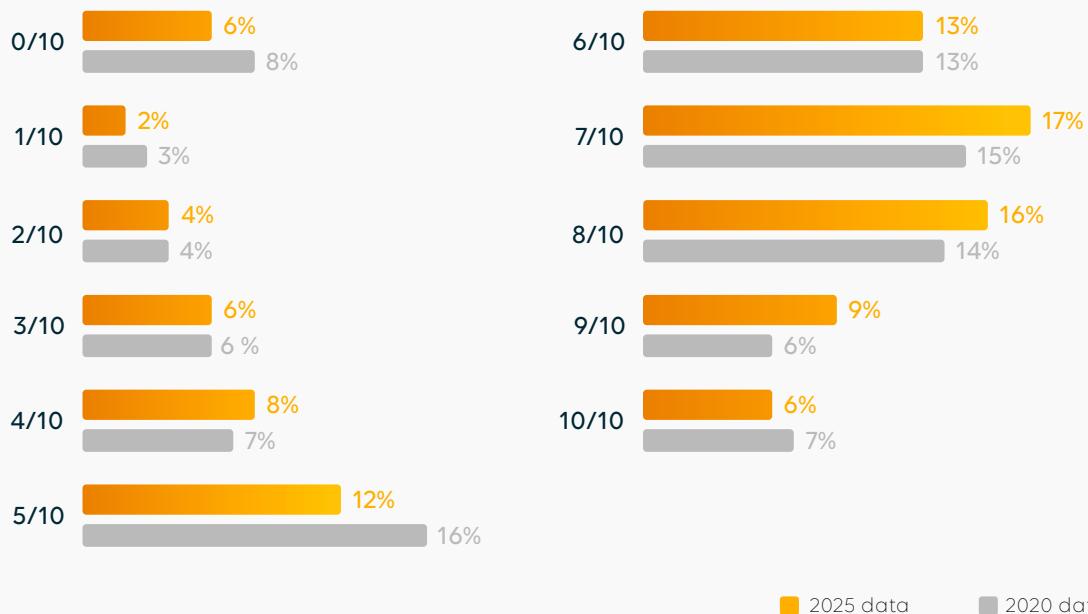
Does your school or university have WiFi access?



WiFi access in schools and universities has improved significantly over the past five years. The proportion of institutions offering 'everywhere' WiFi access has increased considerably, from 55% to 70%. Similarly, the proportion of students reporting 'nowhere' WiFi access has also decreased, from 10% to 6%.

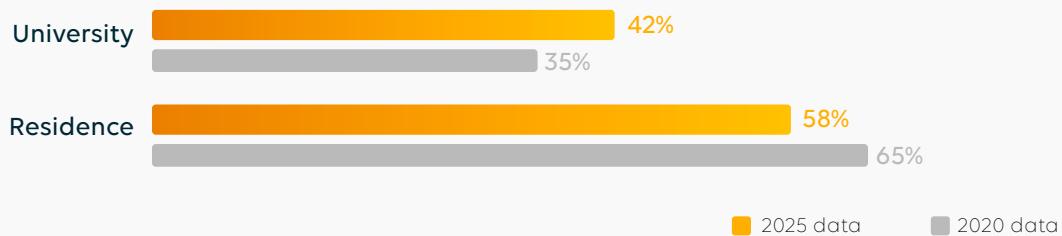
The Covid-19 pandemic has shown how essential WiFi has become for distance learning, hybrid working and enjoying student life. The slight decline in the use of "workspaces" (from 29% to 25%) shows that WiFi is now accessible everywhere in institutions.

How satisfied are you with the WiFi network at your school or university? (10 being very satisfied)



The results show a slight increase in satisfaction ratings, from 5 to 7 five years ago to 7 to 8 today, with broadly similar percentages. This reflects the fact that establishments have taken the need for reliable WiFi seriously. Despite the increase in the number of users and higher expectations, service quality has remained stable, reflecting good management and appropriate infrastructure.

Do you think you have a better WiFi connection at home or at university?



The university has thus progressed from 35% to 42%, reflecting a perceived improvement in network quality in this environment. This change can be explained by investment in infrastructure, better traffic management, or adaptation to post-Covid usage, which is more intensive on campuses. However, one question remains: the increase could also reflect a differentiated saturation effect. Campuses experience significant peaks in traffic, with a concentration of simultaneous users.

04

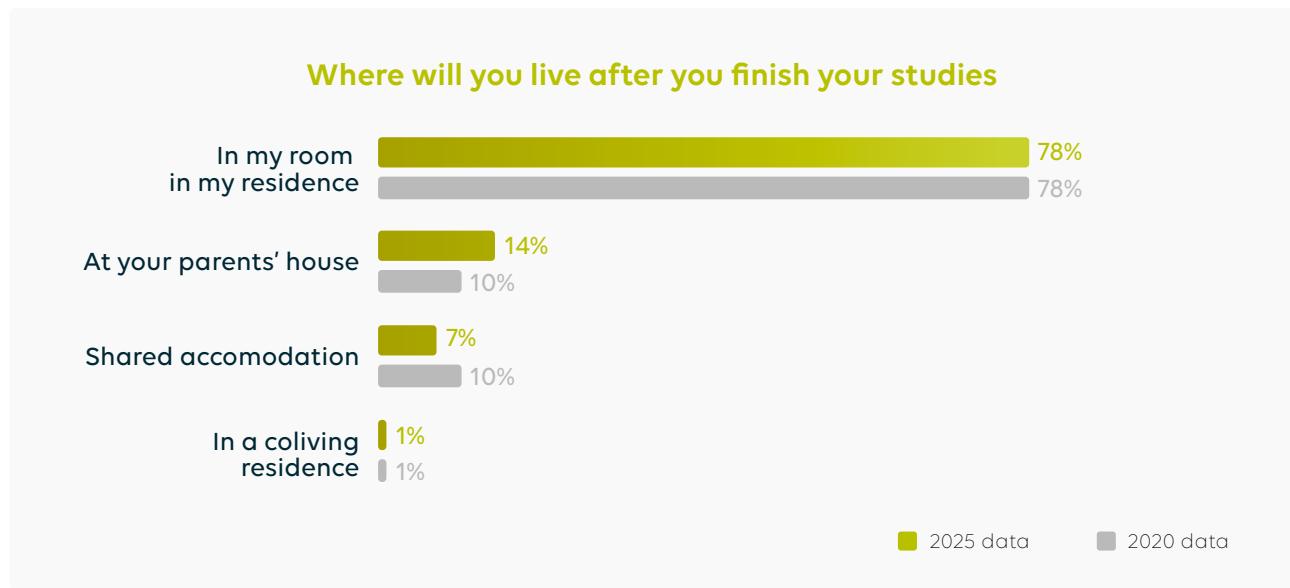
Towards a more conscious connection

Between the desire to limit screen time, environmental awareness and expectations of digital players, a more thoughtful approach to connectivity is emerging. Technology remains central, but its use is becoming more critical and selective.

KEY POINTS

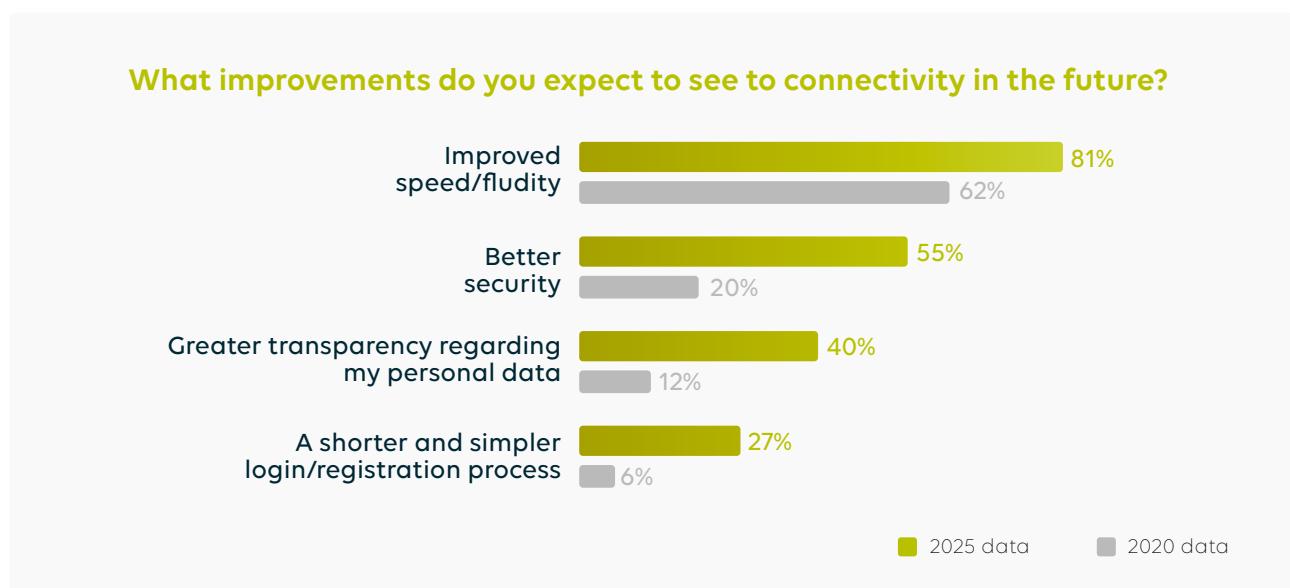
- **81%** of students consider speed and seamlessness to be essential, compared to **62%** five years ago.
- Data security has become a priority for 55% of respondents.
- **93%** of students believe that digital players have a role to play in the ecological future.

1/ EXPECTATIONS OF DIGITAL INSTITUTIONS AND PLAYERS



The pandemic has clearly influenced students' housing choices after graduation, with more returning to live with their parents and a slight decline in flat-sharing. The Covid-19 crisis has created economic uncertainty and a tighter job market.

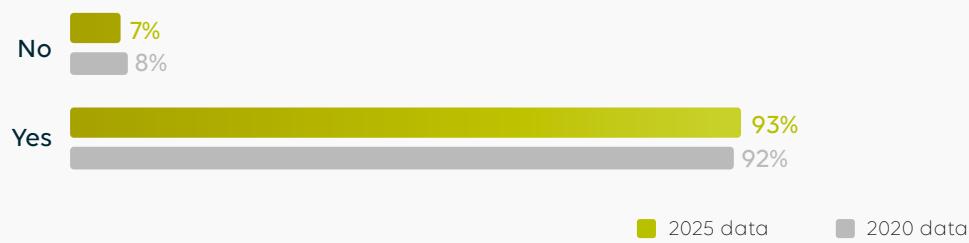
competitive and a higher cost of living, making access to independent housing more difficult. In this context, the parental home appears to be a safer solution for this period of transition between student life and working life.



There has been a widespread and marked increase in students' expectations regarding connectivity. However, the most notable change concerns the security and transparency of personal data. The demand for enhanced security has jumped from 20% to 55%, while the demand for greater transparency on the use of data increased by 12% to 40%.

This change can be explained by the widespread digitisation of daily life since the pandemic, which has highlighted the risks associated with sharing data online (cyberattacks, leaks and misuse). Students are now much more vigilant and demanding when it comes to protecting their privacy.

Do you think that digital players have a role to play in our ecological future?

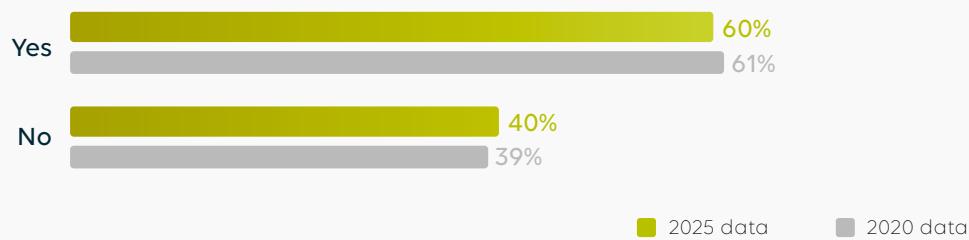


The question of the role of digital players in the ecological future confirms a consensus that was already very strong five years ago, with 92% to 93% of students responding 'Yes'. This near-unanimity reflects a growing environmental awareness among the younger generations.

Students perceive digital technology in its twofold role: its ecological footprint (energy consumption

of data centres, production of electronic waste) and its potential to accelerate transition (energy optimisation, environmental monitoring tools, facilitation of remote working). The Covid-19 pandemic has further reinforced this vision, highlighting both the fragility of our ecosystems and the ability of technology to address global challenges.

Does the fact that streaming and data centers consume a lot of energy change your Internet habits?



Despite growing environmental awareness, students remain divided. While 60% say that environmental awareness will change their digital habits, they are reluctant to compromise on the visual or audio quality of their devices. Their increased dependence on digital technology since the pandemic and their demand for comfort explain this

conflict. For many, the main effort must first come from the platforms themselves (optimisation of data centres and more modest streaming formats), rather than from individual sacrifices that are perceived as restrictive.

CONCLUSION

Our survey aimed to decipher the profound changes in students' digital habits and expectations since the pandemic, beyond the use of distance learning. The results reveal a major transformation: in five years, the accelerated development of infrastructure has made it possible to meet new academic and everyday demands.

Far from the traditional distinction between in-person and remote learning, students now favour a controlled balance. They demand a seamless combination of high-quality human interaction and powerful, intuitive digital tools. This 'phygital' approach is no longer a constraint, but a way of life, reflecting a greater maturity in their relationship with technology.

The pandemic has made students more digitally savvy. Security and transparency in the handling of personal data have become non-negotiable prerequisites. At the same time, a strong awareness of the ecological impact of digital technology has emerged. However, a paradox remains: while environmental awareness has increased, individual practices are struggling to evolve. This discrepancy highlights the crucial role of institutions and platforms to provide the levers for a more sustainable digital world and drive change.

The future of the student experience rests on a three-fold alliance: robust infrastructure, agile teaching tools and valued human interaction. By orchestrating this synergy, we will create learning ecosystems that are not only effective, but also ethical, secure and responsible. The ultimate goal is to offer every student a stimulating environment in which to acquire knowledge, while forging their critical thinking skills and awareness as digital citizens