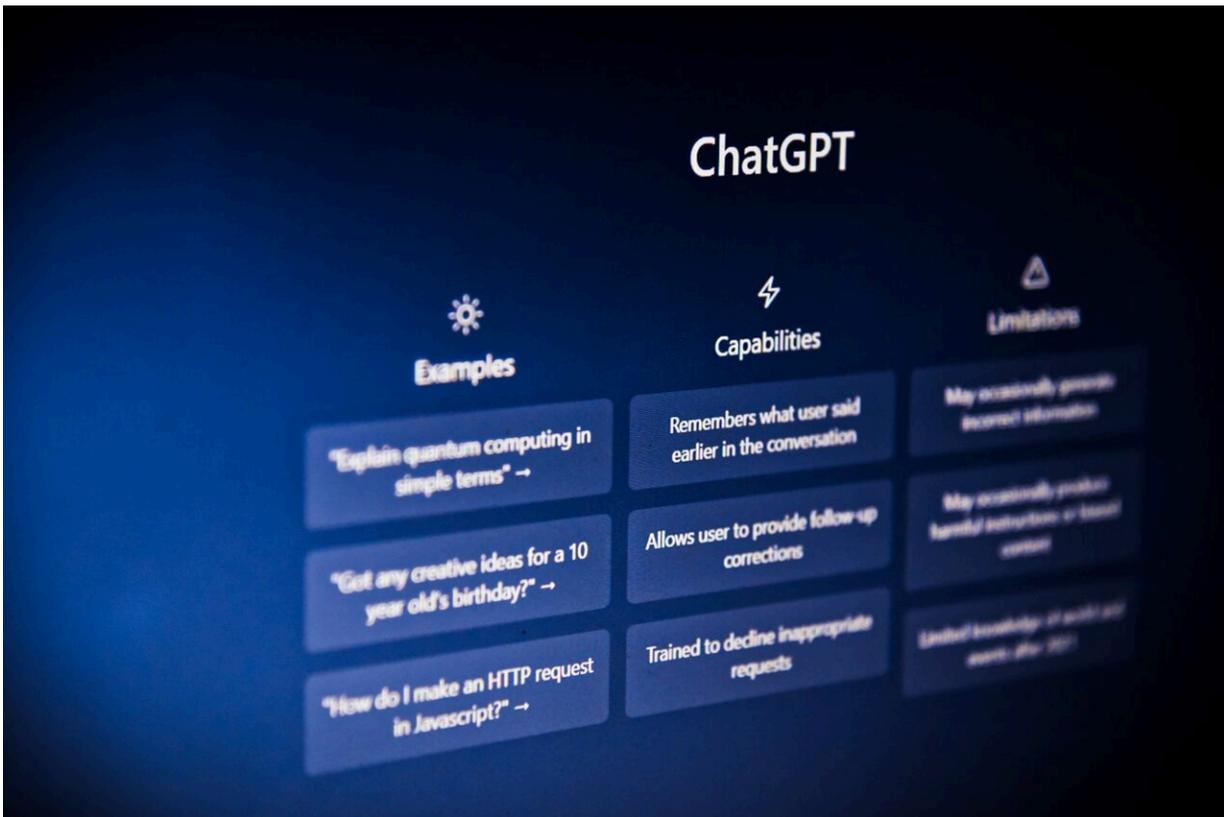


Will generative AI change the way universities communicate?

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Is artificial intelligence an unprecedented opportunity, or will it rob everyone of jobs and creativity? As we debate on social media (and perhaps use ChatGPT almost daily), generative AIs have also entered the

arena of university communication. These tools—based on large language models that were optimized for interactive communication—can indeed support, expand, and innovate university communication offerings.

Justus Henke has analyzed the situation of German realities about six months after the launch of ChatGPT 3. "The research was conducted about a year ago when enthusiasm was high, but it was still early for people to understand the potential of the medium," he explains.

This initial early monitoring showed that usage was already widespread at that point. Henke distributed a questionnaire to all press/communication offices of the country's universities, receiving 101 responses, about a third of the total. Practically all those who responded declared that they make some use of generative AIs.

Translations, text corrections and text generation are the main uses recorded by Henke. The other functions suggested in the questionnaire—image creation, slide production, or document analysis—are instead marginal.

"What we observe in this initial work is that as far as communication is concerned, [artificial intelligence](#) is adopted by universities mainly to increase process efficiency, for example, to speed them up, doing more things in less time," explains Henke.

What also emerges, especially in some open answers, is a certain caution and growing awareness towards ethical aspects. An example is data protection. "For instance, one wonders whether it is wise, or right, to feed these intelligences—owned by private companies—with university data. The issue of privacy is also important," says the researcher.

In this sense, "more and more universities in Germany are releasing their

own instances of generative AI chatbots, on dedicated servers," precisely to try to maintain control over these delicate aspects.

"There is not only a technological shift underway but also a cultural one," adds Henke. "Usually the [early adopters](#) tend to be younger and fresher in the profession, more open to change."

The problem highlighted, however, is that there is no policy that works for everyone. Many are also worried by the possibility that these technologies could replace jobs. "You need the social aspect of technology adoption to be taken seriously," Henke says.

Henke, who is now working on a new survey to assess the situation a year after the first, believes he will observe further evolution of the situation: "I know that the use of generative AI tools is bound to increase," he says.

"Last year people were experimenting, but in the comments, they also explained that sometimes they were not satisfied with the results. It was probably a matter of competence. They didn't know, for example, how to make an effective prompt for their goals.

"Probably today this aspect will have improved. We have to now turn our head and focus on a more strategic and integrated AI approach," especially in light of the continuous updates and advancements of these tools (ChatGPT-4o was launched recently, sparking new controversies regarding security, even among the staff of Open AI, the company that owns Chat GPT).

Henke believes it is important that universities learn to use these new instruments without calling into question the work they have done so far and the future goals they have already planned.

"Communication is about building relationships and trust. In particular, one of the main purposes of science communication (of which university communication is a particular case) serves to build trust and relationships between the public and scientific research.

"If you compromise these relationships using 'automated' [press releases](#) or mainly use bots to talk to the public, the latter will end up losing interest or worse, start having doubts about the institution itself.

"It's important that humans remain part of the process. Artificial intelligence should enhance communication, not replace it," says Henke.

The findings are [published](#) in the *Journal of Science Communication*.

More information: Justus Henke, Navigating the AI era: university communication strategies and perspectives on generative AI tools, *Journal of Science Communication* (2024). [DOI: 10.22323/2.23030205](https://doi.org/10.22323/2.23030205)

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