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Can Emerging Tech Help with Consumers' High Expectations?

Shoppers are open to cashierless checkout and chatbots

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Consumers are more connected through always-on tech, and they have lofty expectations for companies to recognize them across channels and provide personalized experiences. But according to a MuleSoft survey of internet users worldwide, there's room for improvement on this front; 81% said organizations provide a disconnected experience.

The results were less bleak for retailers, though. The percentage feeling disconnection fell to 56% for the retail industry. And in the US, specifically, 57% feel they receive personalized experiences from retailers, higher than the global average (50%) as well as the five other countries included in the survey.

Consumers were also very open to emerging tech to streamline interactions with businesses. A majority (60%) of consumers worldwide said they would prefer an Amazon Go-like shopping experience where they could simply walk out with what they wanted and be charged automatically. Like with many things, skepticism rose with age; just 42% of those 55 and older would like to shop this way, while 77% of those 18 to 34 would.

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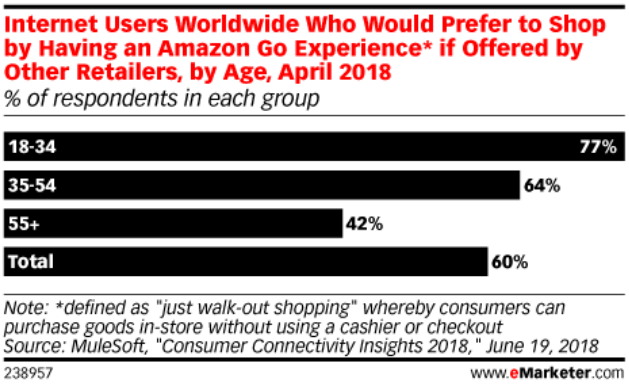

Amazon's cashierless tech has captured a lot of attention, but no one has mastered it at scale yet. It's too soon to tell if this is the wave of the future or a concept retailers can learn from. In addition to the Seattle prototype, Amazon Go will soon launch in San Francisco and Chicago. Reuters reported that Microsoft has been working on its own version and has been in talks with Walmart.

As far as more direct lines of communication, 51% would like to be able to connect with retailers on messaging apps, and the vast majority had high hopes for chatbots. Seventy-nine percent thought AI-powered helpers would be able to deliver superior customer service in the future, though only 27% had interacted with a retail chatbot in the past 12 months.

Just a few years ago, chatbots were thought to have potential for facilitating digital commerce transactions. In 2016, retailers like H&M and Sephora experimented with narrowing down a user's taste and recommending products via chatbots on Kik, but these uses for AI haven't taken off in the way that customer service applications have.

According to consumers in the MuleSoft survey, the biggest hypothetical benefits of using chatbots in this way were that they would be available 24/7 (48%), they wouldn't have to wait on the phone (46%) and they would get queries answered faster (37%).

However, only 38% of those who had used chatbots had their issue resolved. This is in line with recent findings from Helpshift, which found that 47.5% of US internet users said they received too many

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unhelpful responses. The biggest challenge cited, though, was that chatbots kept users from speaking to a live person (50.7%).

This split between consumers who say they want connection through automation vs. those who desire human interaction is a dichotomy that marketers must contend with. If chatbots and cashierless tech were to become more intelligent, it could make using them less of an either/or proposition.

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