

Smartphone Usage in Japan Is Growing, but Feature Phones Aren't Going Away

Simpler devices continue to hold their own with older mobile users

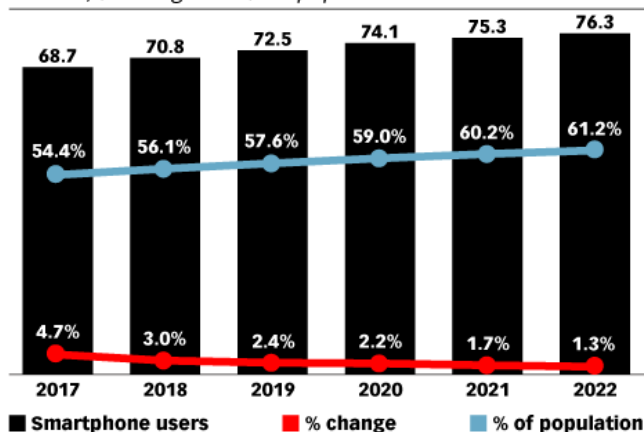
ARTICLE | MAY 08, 2018

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The number of smartphone users in Japan will increase 3.0% this year to 70.8 million, representing 56.1% of the population, according to eMarketer's latest media usage forecast.

Smartphone Users and Penetration in Japan, 2017-2022

millions, % change and % of population



Note: individuals of any age who own at least one smartphone and use the smartphone(s) at least once per month
Source: eMarketer, April 2018

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However, because of the country's affinity for feature phones and desktops/laptops, Japan's smartphone penetration rate will continue to trail many of its neighbors in Asia-Pacific. For example, the populations of South Korea and Singapore, which are both much smaller than Japan's, will each have smartphone adoption rates of more than 75% this year.

Japan underindexes on the smartphone front because of its older population—more than 25% of the country is over the age of 65. In addition, smartphones and data plans are more expensive in Japan compared with other countries in Asia-Pacific.

"The feature phone is still relevant in Japan thanks to the older population who have yet to find it necessary to purchase a smartphone," said Chris Bendtsen, senior forecasting analyst at eMarketer. "For this group, the desktop/laptop is the preferred portal to the online world, and there isn't a need for on-the-go access with a smaller device. The smartphone population is by no means a small number, but the fact that feature phones aren't a thing of the past is unique in Japan compared to other developed countries."