How Consumers Are Acclimating to Automation

A majority think it has improved the shopping experience

ARTICLE | **SEPTEMBER 26, 2018**

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The world is becoming more automated—from self-driving delivery vehicles to subscription commerce—but is tech creating convenience or concern for consumers?

According to an August 2018 Ipsos survey of US consumers, in the past year negative attitudes towards automation have softened a bit, especially among seniors and the employed. Security concerns, worries about isolation and fears that robots will take our jobs all shrunk year over year.

The number of positive sentiments around automation making products and services more accessible (70%), making life easier (67%) and improving the quality of products and services (53%) have all increased.

While a majority of consumers think automation has improved the shopping experience (56%), this was down from 58% in 2017. Upon closer examination, there were notable differences by age. The 18-to-24 age group was most in agreement with the statement (67%), followed close behind by those ages 25 to 34 (66%), while the most negativity came from consumers ages 50 to 64 (46%).

Do US Internet Users Feel that Automation Has Improved the Shopping Experience?
% of respondents, by age, Aug 2018

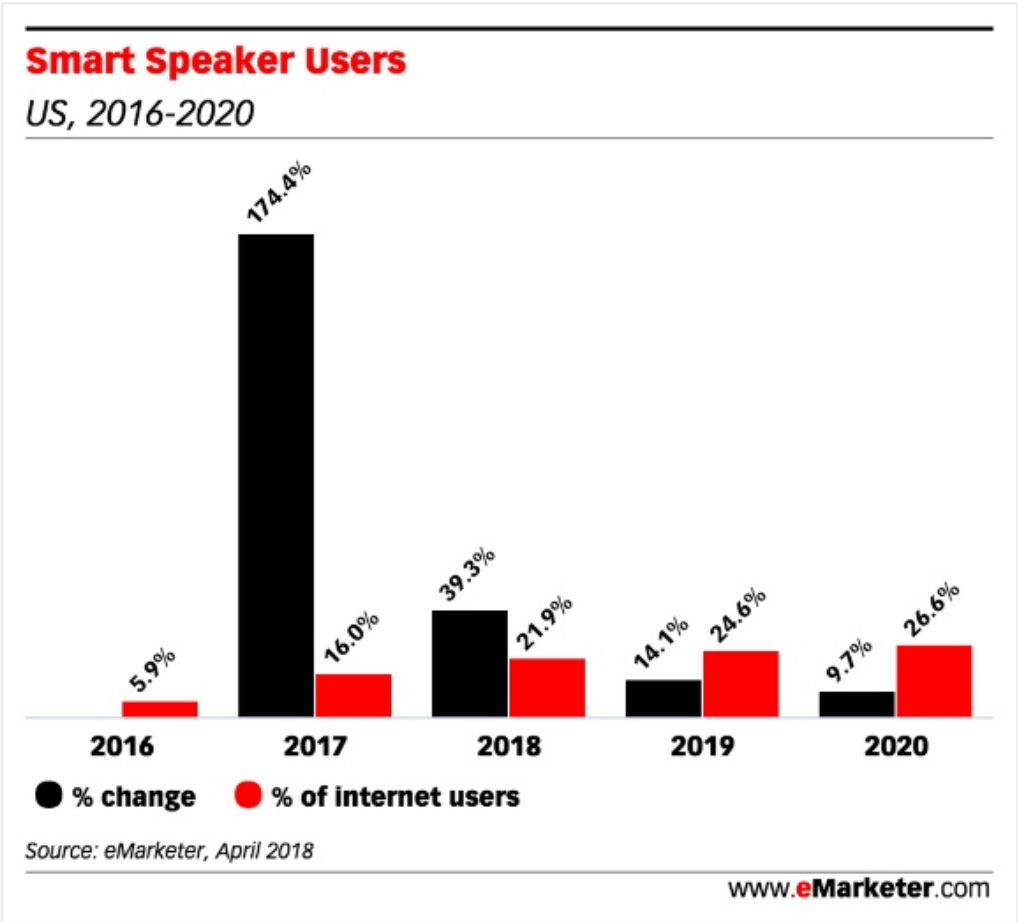| Age	%
18-24	67%
25-34	66%
35-49	58%
50-64	46%
65+	50%

Note: includes responses of "strongly agree" and "somewhat agree"
Source: Ipsos and the University of Virginia McIntire School of Commerce, "Americans' Attitudes Toward Automation in 2018," Sep 6, 2018
241719 www.**eMarketer**.com

However, the oldest cohort of consumers—those ages 65 and older—were more likely to view automation as beneficial as opposed to having drawbacks than 35- to 64-year-olds, as well as making life more interesting. Perhaps it takes graduating from middle age to gain a new perspective.

Ipsos hypothesizes that the growing comfort with automation overall stems from exposure to smart speakers. By our measures, smart speaker penetration increased rapidly over the past two years. In 2018, 21.9% of US internet users employed a smart speaker monthly, up 39.3% over 2017. But going forward, that growth will be tempered.

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Smart Speaker Users
US, 2016-2020

2016: 5.9% (% change), 16.0% (% of internet users)
2017: 174.4% (% change), 16.0% (% of internet users)
2018: 39.3% (% change), 21.9% (% of internet users)
2019: 14.1% (% change), 24.6% (% of internet users)
2020: 9.7% (% change), 26.6% (% of internet users)

● % change ● % of internet users

Source: eMarketer, April 2018

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The survey didn't delve into specific applications of automation on the shopping experience, and that's where a schism emerges. Consumers might not perceive benefits of ordering paper towels using Alexa, downloading mobile checkout apps or providing retailers with preferences, but many could be swayed if automation made it easy to create shopping lists verbally, walk out of a store with purchases without waiting in line or receive accurate, timely product recommendations.