Study: Majority reject ads on smart speakers

A new online survey of US adults from NetElixir found that the majority of respondents don’t want ads on virtual assistants or in voice search results. The study is problematic, however, because it fails in most instances to distinguish between experiences on smartphones and smart speaker devices. Despite this, there are some interesting findings.

The survey found that just under two-thirds of users were conducting voice searches on their smartphones (63 percent)

compared with smart speakers (35 percent) at home. And just under half (46 percent) were using voice search at least once daily.

Device used for voice or interactions

Source: NetElixir “Search without screens” report (2018)

Among other things, the survey asked about purchase behavior using voice and virtual assistants. Roughly 28 percent said they had used “voice search” to find information related to a purchase. This finding is probably more closely tied to smart speakers than voice on smartphones. If the latter were isolated the numbers would likely be much higher (i.e., people initiating purchase-intent searches using voice).

In terms of what types of purchases people made using voice, the majority cited “entertainment,” with “everyday household items” coming in second. Again, we don’t know what percentage of these purchases were made through smart speakers compared with smartphones.

There are a number of surveys and reports out citing numbers about purchases on smart speakers. For example, last year one report from Walker Sands argued that 19 percent of consumers

had made a smart-speaker purchase, with the number growing to 43 percent for millennials.

Categories where purchases made using voice

Source: NetElixir “Search without screens” report (2018)

The inclination to purchase using a virtual assistant is an important topic because the question of how smart speaker content will be monetized is unresolved. Will it be a version of advertising, transactions or both? The answer is, of course, both. Google is experimenting with transactional models as an alternative to conventional ads, in part because of potential consumer resistance to advertising on smart speakers.

Accordingly, the most interesting finding in the NetElixir survey report addresses consumer receptiveness to advertising.

The survey asked, “Under which circumstances would you welcome sponsored content or advertised product suggestions while using voice search on your virtual assistants?”

Receptiveness to ads/sponsored content

Source: NetElixir “Search without screens” report (2018)

The positive responses mostly resemble a paid-search model: “When I ask to make a purchase,” “When I am researching products or info” and so on. Overall, 38 percent said they were open to ads if they were “relevant.” That means, by implication, that 62 percent were not receptive to ads — again, it would have been useful to understand the device context.

NetElixir made additional observations about the data, indicating strong resistance to an ad model among many respondents:

> *However, the raw responses to this question told a somewhat different story. We found 129 raw responses that explicitly rejected ads with voice search. These responses tended to be emotional and uncompromising in nature, such as "No conditions – I'll stop using voice search first." and "I'm already paying to use the device; do not want sponsored content on top of it."*

The full study is available here (after registration).

About The Author

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