

Youth perspectives on voice assisted technology



A report from Childnet, a partner in the UK Safer Internet Centre, into children's use and experiences of voice assisted technology

Executive Summary



Voice assisted technology is increasingly becoming part of our lives. From automated phone services to setting our alarm clocks in the morning, technology which is able to recognise and respond to human voices is becoming ever more sophisticated and present in our digital landscape. Children and young people are growing up in a digital world where services such as Alexa, Siri, Google Assistant or Cortana are allowing them to use voice assisted technology in a variety of ways including for entertainment, finding out information, advice and help.

This snapshot into how children and young people are using such technology is taken from answers from a poll conducted in February 2018 with over 1000 young people aged 8-17 in the UK. We also asked our Childnet Digital Leaders to give their thoughts and experiences of voice assisted technology, with 56 responding. The findings give us a clearer picture of how regularly young people use voice assisted technology, and the myriad of ways in which they use it.

Key findings

- **70%** of 8-17s reported **using voice assisted technology in the last year**, with this being very similar between the 8-12s and 13-17 age ranges.
- **92%** of those who had used voice assisted technology reported that they did so primarily to **find out information**, followed by using it to **ask funny questions (90%)**, **play music (73%)** and **get advice or help (73%)**.
- **On a daily basis 1 in 5** young people (20%) are using voice assisted technology to **play music** and **8%** are using it to **get advice or help**.

Methodology

Quantitative: An online survey of 1009 children aged 8-17 years conducted by Populus in February 2018 included a question about voice assisted technology.

Qualitative: Childnet coordinates a network of young people aged 8-18 years through the Childnet Digital Leaders Programme who undertake online training to become peer educators in their school communities. Digital Leaders act as role models to inspire the kind and responsible use of technology. They were invited to take part in an online consultation where they shared their experiences of voice assisted technology, what they liked about it and what they thought could be improved. 56 Digital Leaders aged 8-18 years participated.

"It shows what humans are capable of...it shows how fast to learn and create"

Boy, 13

"I use it to play music, find stuff out and more"

Boy, 10

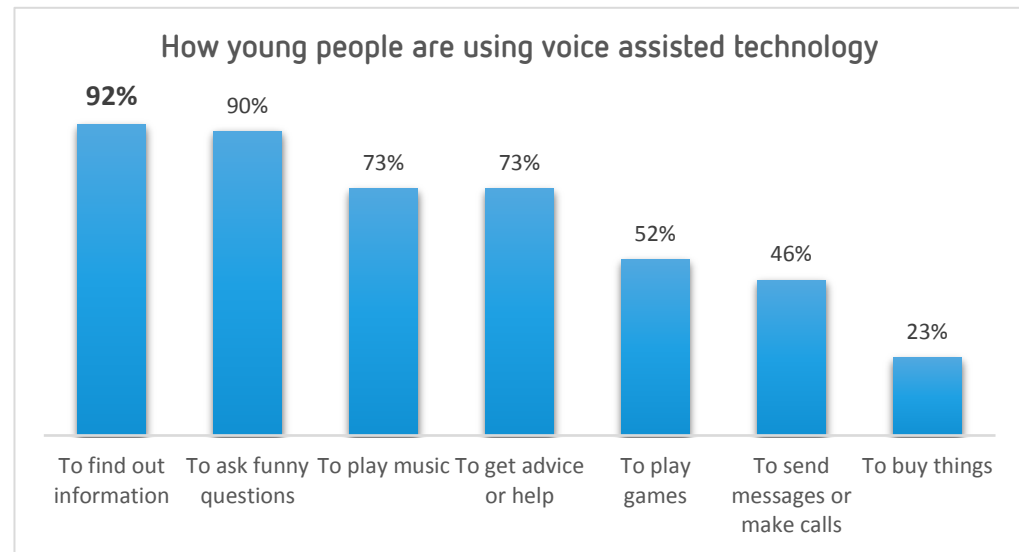
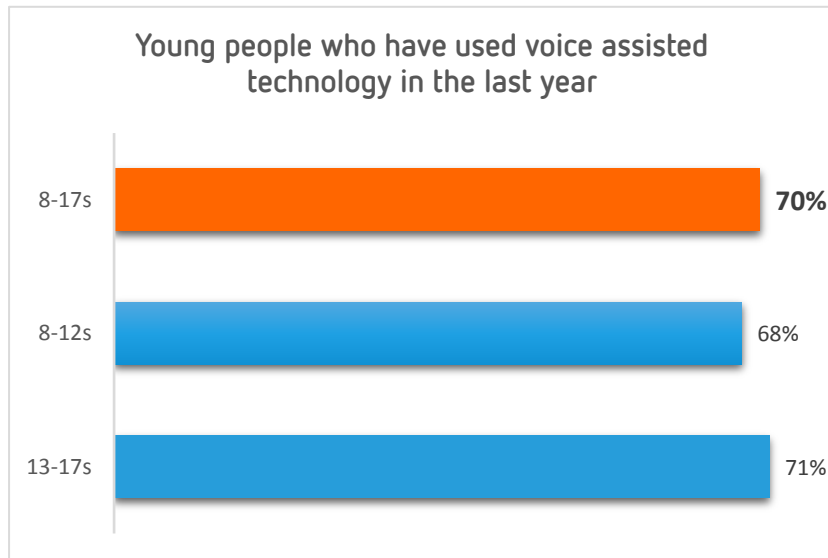
"I use Siri all the time and I think it is very helpful when I need to set reminders."

Girl, 10

How young people use and experience voice assisted technology

The majority of young people are using voice assisted technology, with 7 in 10 doing so in the last year.

Both age groups, 8-12s and 13-17s, report using voice assisted technology at very similar levels. Girls (67%) and boys (71%) also responded with little difference in use.



The most common reason overall for young people to use voice assisted technology is to **find out information (92%)**, closely followed by using it to **ask funny questions (90%)**, play music (73%) and **get advice or help (73%)**.

"I ask it questions to improve my knowledge or sometimes navigation" Boy, 11

To learn, get advice or help

92% of 8-17s say they use voice assisted technology to **find out information**. Of those:

- 13% say they do this on a daily basis.
- Over a third (34%) do this two or three times a week.

"I like using it because it can be helpful sometimes like if you are concerned about something it will tell you the answer."

Girl, age unknown

Almost three quarters (73%) of respondents aged 8-17 say they use voice assisted technology to ask for advice or help. Of those:

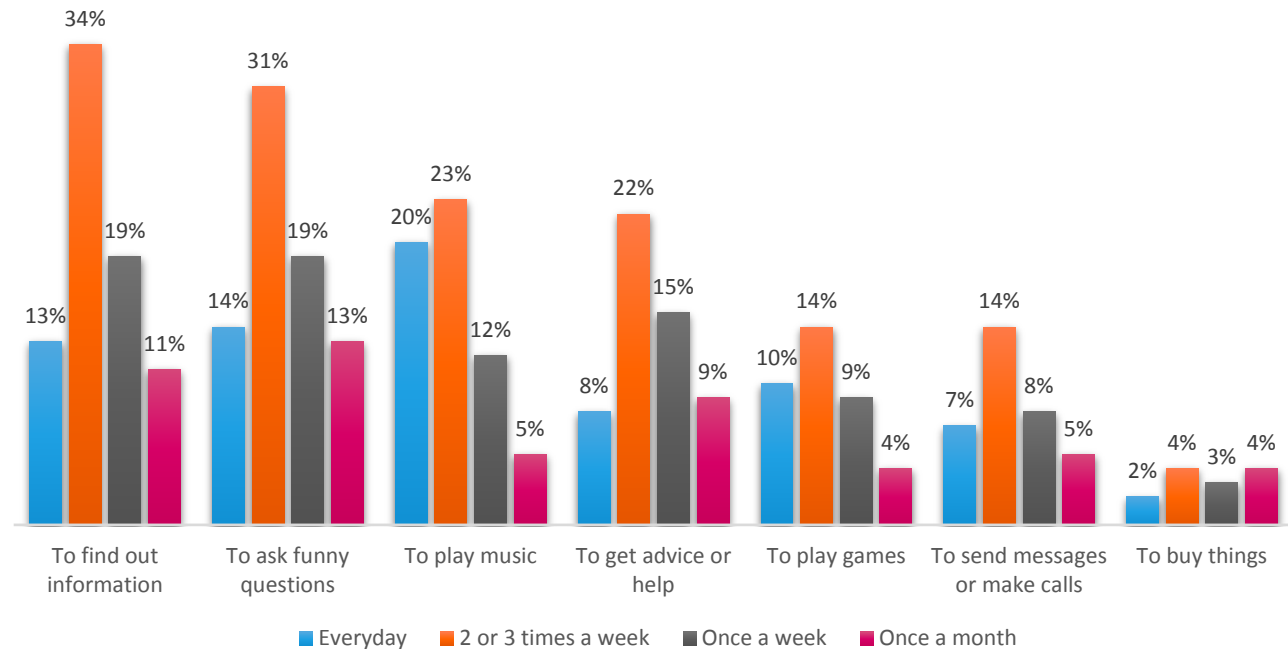
- 8% say they do this on a daily basis.
- Teens (13-17s) report as being more likely to use voice assisted technology for advice or help (76%) than those aged 8-12 (70%).

"I used Siri to help with my homework, I asked about certain facts I needed to know, I think it's a good educational tool." Girl, 14

"When I got stuck on some work I got forgot the maths formula to find an area of a triangle last year so I asked my Google Assistant what it was and replied the answer which was helpful as I didn't need to go get my textbook and look for the answer or search it on the internet." Girl, 13

"Checking for spelling and quick to use." Boy, 18

How regularly young people are using voice assisted technology and for what purpose



Fun and entertainment

Children and young people are using voice assisted technology to play games, listen to music and to ask funny questions.

Of those 8-17s who had used voice assisted technology in the last year:

- 90% use it to ask funny questions, with 14% doing so on a daily basis.
- 73% use it to play music, with it being the most common use of voice assisted technology on a daily basis (20%).
- 52% use it to play games, with a third (33%) doing this at least once a week.

"I like using it because it is really fun." Girl, 11

For practical reasons

Young people also reported that they use voice assisted technology to do things for them such as send messages or make calls (46%), or to buy things (23%). Teens are significantly more likely to use voice assisted technology to:

- **Send messages or make calls**, with over half (55%) of 13-17s saying they use it in comparison to 38% of 8-12s.
- **To buy things**, with teens being nearly twice as likely than younger children (29% of 13-17s in comparison to 16% of 8-12s).

"To read the news for me." Boy, 10

Why they like using voice assisted technology

When asked why they like using voice assisted technology, many of the Digital Leaders who responded highlighted the ease and efficiency with which they could use it.

"I like using assisted technology, because it's great to have extra help from your device and if it doesn't understand you have the chance to correct it so you can get the right search." Girl, 17

"I like it because it lets you ask questions efficiently." Boy 11

"You don't have to look at the screen, you can just say what you need from a click of a button." Girl, 10

"Some people might not be as strong or fit as others and some people could be disabled so this really helps people like that." Boy, 13

What young people thought could be improved and their concerns

"I think that if they grew more accustomed to accents then they would be more useful." Girl, 13

We asked our Digital Leaders what they thought could be improved and they mention accuracy, poor voice recognition and slow processing time as obstacles to using voice assisted technology effectively.

"I personally am a quick typer, this is the main reason why I don't use Voice Assisted Technology." Girl, 13

"I think it should be more child friendly for younger children." Girl, 11

"The results could be more accurate, rather than just providing a link to a google search, bearing in mind people want a result from this technology immediately, using it to avoid the hassle of scrolling down google." Girl, 13

They also cite privacy, how information about them could be given away and reliability of information as ways in which voice assisted technology can be improved.

"There should be more privacy settings on these as if anyone were to ask appointments times it would tell the person and other private information. [Also] artificial intelligence should be used as then maybe it would improve the quality of the answers given to you when you ask questions instead of reciting the first thing on Wikipedia." Girl, 13

"What information it gives you and how it listens to you protocol." Boy, 11

"I don't think they should be able to collect any data you enter, so for example, addresses or methods of payment." Girl, 15

"I think that it could be more secure and that your information could be protected more heavily." Girl, 15

5 tips from Childnet Digital Leaders

On using voice assisted technology

#1 Be clear and specific

"Be clear when you speak because otherwise your voice will not be recognised." Girl, 15

"Be careful what you ask, it. One misinterpretation, could expose you to horrible things" Girl, 11

Be specific about what you want - remember it is not a human!
Girl, age unknown

"If you use it correctly, it can be a very useful and easy tool to use for educational purposes, however, try not to reveal too much of your personal information as they may be harvesting your data." Girl, 14

Don't share anything personal with voice assisted tech because it will keep track of everything you say. Boy, 13

#2 Stay in control of your information

"Be careful as your voice-assisted technology can invade privacy by storing conversations and anyone can just ask it to buy something if it's linked to a credit card so I think you should disable that feature or install a password like on the Alexa (Amazon)." Girl, 13

#3 Think about where you are when you use it and watch out for it accidentally activating!

"Don't stream with it next to you" Boy, 10

#4 Be critical - information online can sometimes be unreliable

"Don't believe everything on the internet" Boy, 8

#5 Have fun and stay safe!

"Have fun and be careful" Girl, 9

"Don't ask anything you wouldn't ask your parents, use it sensibly and to benefit yourself" Girl, 9

"To always check with a parent or guardian before using voice assisted technology." Girl, 11

For more information visit:

www.childnet.com | www.digital-leaders.childnet.com | www.saferinternet.org.uk



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