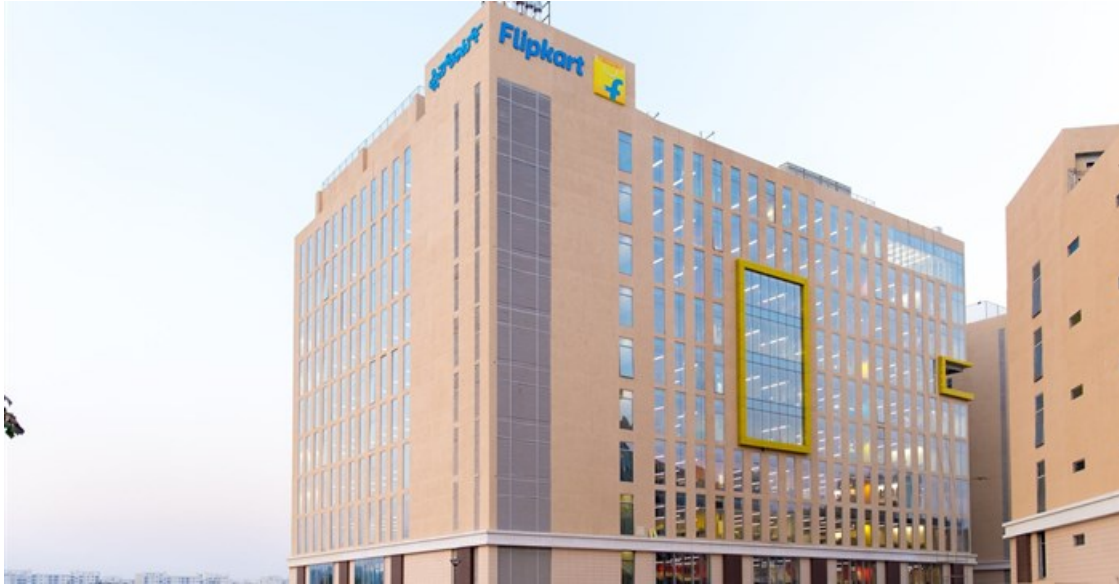


Flipkart unveils bilingual voice assistant for grocery shopping

Indian e-commerce giant Flipkart has debuted a voice assistant feature to make consumers' online shopping journeys "simpler and more natural". The capability was introduced in Flipkart's grocery store Supermart this week.



According to Flipkart, which is owned by Walmart, the AI-powered voice assistant will enable consumers to discover and buy products easily using voice commands in multiple languages, starting with Hindi and English.

Natural language understanding

The platform was built by Flipkart's in-house technology team with solutions for speech recognition, natural language understanding, machine translation, and text-to-speech for Indian languages. These solutions are capable of understanding vernacular languages such as Hindi, e-commerce categories and products, and tasks such as searching for a product, understanding product details, placing an order, etc.

Flipkart says the indigenously developed AI platform is built to automatically detect the language spoken by the user, and in real-time transcribe, translate, transliterate and understand the user's intent to have engaging shopping-related conversations in various Indian languages.



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The company notes that it undertook a detailed ethnographic study for over five months in multiple towns and cities to gather insights and opportunities which led to the development of the voice assistant for groceries. The research brought forward insights from users wanting to do a variety of tasks using voice while seeking easy accessibility of services.

With its ability to understand variations in commands in both English and Hindi while also responding to mixed language commands, the voice assistant will help consumers build their grocery basket by simply talking to the assistant, similar to talking to a shopkeeper.

As consumers shopping for groceries have a clear intent to buy with knowledge of specific products, Flipkart says its voice assistant will help users build their grocery baskets with multiple products "quickly and efficiently and make their journey seamless and natural".



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Video, vernacular and voice

Jeyandran Venugopal, chief product and technology officer, Flipkart, says, "As a homegrown e-commerce company, Flipkart has been at the forefront of building India-first innovations and video, vernacular and voice have been the key pillars of solving for the adoption of e-commerce in India. While we have seen great adoption for our video and vernacular offerings, the next step in that direction is to solve for the voice capability for e-commerce."

He adds, "The technology team at Flipkart travelled across the country to understand the various contours of building a voice capability and fine-tuned it to identify and respond to the different variations in Indian languages. The launch of Voice Assistant also aligns well with the growing adoption and comfort of consumers towards voice-based online commerce."



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Manish Kumar, SVP grocery and general merchandise and furniture, Flipkart, says, "Voice-led shopping is natural and we wanted to give our users a truly conversational experience, in the most natural way possible ... Grocery is one of the most underpenetrated categories in Indian e-commerce and has a huge potential to grow and solve for customer adoption."

The feature began rolling out to Android users on Tuesday, and the company says it is working on bringing it to its iOS app.