

Increasing skepticism against robots

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In Europe, people are more reserved regarding robots than they were five years ago. This is shown in a new study published by scientists from Linz and Würzburg.

Robots performing surgeries, robots in automobile production, and robots in caregiving... In some areas, the machines are already well-established, in others they are on the rise. The psychologists Timo Gnams from Johannes Kepler Universität Linz (Austria) and Markus Appel from Julius-Maximilians-Universität Würzburg (Germany) believe that we are on the brink of a robotic era.

There are more and more robots in everyday life. But how do people feel about robots? Apparently increasingly uncomfortable, as the two professors show in the journal *Computers in Human Behavior*. According to their cross-European data analysis, robots were evaluated more negatively in 2017 than five years before.

Increasing skepticism about robots at the workplace

The skepticism about robots at the workplace has grown in particular. This may be due to the fact

that the topic of [job losses](#) due to robotic systems has been increasingly discussed in the public, the researchers say. However, the use of robots at the workplace is still rated more positively than the use in surgeries or autonomous cars.

Gnams and Appel analyzed the 2012, 2014 and 2017 Eurobarometer data. This is a representative survey on current topics; their findings are based on 80,396 citizens from 27 European countries.

How interviews were conducted

In the interviews, the respondents first saw a general description of robots as machines that can assist people with everyday activities, such as cleaning robots. Or as machines that are working in environments which are too dangerous for humans, such as rescue missions. When the interviewees subsequently had to judge robots, the results were still relatively positive.

Another picture emerged as soon as respondents were confronted with specific applications, such as surgeries, caretaking robots or self-driving cars. Then they evaluated robots more negatively.

It seems that Europeans are relatively positive about robots as long as they have a more or less theoretical concept in mind. They are increasingly critically when the [robot](#) is specified and personal interactions appear imminent.

The study gives some notable insights. It shows that men tend to see robots as positively, while women are more skeptical. Blue-collar workers have more [negative attitudes](#) towards robots than people with office jobs. And in countries with a high proportion of older people, the attitudes towards robots are more positive.

Warning signal for business and politics

Taken together, the Linz and Würzburg scientists identified the trend that [skepticism](#) towards robots in Europe has grown between 2012 and 2017. This

should be a warning sign for politics and business – and a motivation to counteract reasonable fears about our robotic future. Not least, negative attitudes towards new technologies may be a sign that these technologies will not be accepted later on and will not prevail on the market.

More information: Timo Gnambs et al. Are robots becoming unpopular? Changes in attitudes towards autonomous robotic systems in Europe, *Computers in Human Behavior* (2018). [DOI: 10.1016/j.chb.2018.11.045](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2018.11.045)

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