

Let's move on from today's dystopian tone

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Opinion Plus

Home appliances are (quietly) changing the modern world for the better writes Paolo Falcioni



A trip to the cinema today provides the public with plenty of opportunity to indulge in dystopia. Meanwhile at a recent event in Brussels I sensed commentators struggling to come up with a narrative that will convince people that there are good reasons to be cheerful.

I would like to offer an upbeat view of our future – through home appliances. Their record of achievement has “positive” written all over it.

My story is simple. We all need appliances. So how do we make appliances better? My leading character is a child, young, keen, eager and quick to learn, embarking on a journey of discovery as she moves around her home. The storyline? what appliances are is changing. Innovation responds, making home living better, more comfortable and more sustainable.

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This story actually started about one hundred years ago when farsighted innovators spotted the need to make household chores quicker, easier and less burdensome. It was then strongly influenced by the 20th Century's electronics revolution and more recently by the need for greater energy efficiency. Driving down energy consumption was going to be essential if we were all going to tap into the modern, comfortable way of living.

Energy efficiency remains important today. But now two characters have come to the front of the stage: Smartness and Circularity. Smartness is very young. He brings new solutions and approaches to making living more sustainable. He is very well connected and has an exciting role contributing to an innovative, people-based, energy revolution in Europe and across the world.

Smartness enables people to tap into clean renewable forms of energy – from the sun, the wind or water. Smartness will also help balance the supply and demand for energy connecting consumers to intelligent energy management systems that serve a wider community project.

Smartness will also make overtures towards Circularity. Circularity was actually there at the start and given the obvious economic and environmental imperative to avoid waste and reuse resources, he has contributed more and more to the sustainability project.

"Smartness enables people to tap into clean renewable forms of energy – from the sun, the wind or water"

Back to our leading character. Her name is Alexa. She's a young lady that lives through these exciting times of positive change and will benefit from the household equipment her parents installed. She will be encouraged by the message that, individual actions by people, within the home, make a real difference. She can do her bit. It makes her feel better, useful.

In the morning, she sees her mum go to Phoebe the fridge. Phoebe the fridge suggests ideas for breakfast, lunch and supper based on what remains from the previous food shop, and a possible shopping list based on needs established from family habits. Phoebe vocally reminds them both to close the fridge door to save energy and even bleeps if anyone leaves the lights on in the kitchen, little tools that encourage good habits.

Alexa's mum and dad also understand the usefulness of having a dishwasher around. Both the water and electricity bill has dropped sharply following its acquisition and her parents are evidently pleased to have one less chore to worry about each evening. They can even activate it from outside the home from a smartphone.

One evening Alexa's mum tells her about the time when she'd met dad. She smiles warmly as she recalls what happened when the lights went out. What's a blackout? Alex replies. Blackouts don't happen that often. Better energy management has made them rare. All those devices in the kitchen, living room, bedroom, all across the house, help those clever people that bring in the electricity through the sockets, she explains.

"The challenge of upgrading, improving and rethinking appliances within the home has brought and will continue to bring significant benefits"

Come to think of it, appliances actually have done a lot for this area, she says. The main local employer is a leading European home appliance manufacturing business. The area's attractiveness had grown. Other businesses had put down roots.

Alexa's home is just one of 200 million households that exist across our European Union. Over time, the challenge of upgrading, improving and rethinking appliances within the home has brought and will continue to bring significant benefits. They are also empowering citizens, giving them a positive role in their own society and greater ownership and responsibility over the technology that influences their lives... for the better.

So, film makers take note. While the focus on dystopia can seduce but there are other important and positive stories to tell. There is every reason to be positive - thanks to the efforts of industrial sectors such as the one we represent in Brussels.

About the author

Paolo Falcioni is the Director-General of CECED, the European Committee of Domestic Equipment Manufacturers

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