

Majority of customers have a positive experience with customer services robots

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The majority of customers have a positive experience when dealing with service robots, according to new research from Durham University Business School.

The study found that interacting with robots triggers emotions of joy, love, surprise, interest and excitement for customers, whilst discontent is mainly expressed when customers cannot use service robots due to them malfunctioning.

This research was conducted by Dr Zhibin Lin, Professor of Marketing at Durham University Business School, alongside colleagues from Smith School of Business, Queen's University, Audencia Business School and Jimei University. The researchers wanted to understand consumers' emotions which arose as a result of robot-customer encounters, and whether these were positive or negative experiences.

To do so, the researchers extracted a sample of 9,707 customers reviews from two major social media platforms (Ctrip and TripAdvisor), encompassing 412 hotels in eight countries. By using a machine learning model to identify the hotels which had been reviewed on their own robot-powered customer service, the researchers were able to determine the emotion a customer felt when experiencing robot customer service i.e. joy, anger, surprise.

The feeling of 'Joy' was felt by over 60% of customers when dealing with robots in a customer service role. 'Fear' was the second most felt emotion by customers, encompassing 28% of the reviews. Whilst other feelings of anger (5%), neutral (4%) and sadness (1%) featured in the reviews.

The results of the study also showed that many customers chose these specific hotels due to the fact they operated with customer service robots, showing that hotels can not only use them for convenience but also a selling point to customers too.

Professor Zhibin Lin says,

"Service robots have been increasingly adopted in hospitality service settings in recent years and large hotel chains have gradually adopted their services for housekeeping and butler services, interacting with customers and fulfilling concierge and front-desk tasks. Previous opinion has been that customers felt uneasiness and discomfort when being served by robots, however this research suggests that customers actually, on the whole, have more positive interactions with robots and enjoy the experience of being served by one".

Catering to customer's emotions is particularly important in consumption experiences. In the hospitality industry it is important that customers are not just served, but they also have a positive experience too. For managers, this research offers insight into the type of experience that customers have when confronted with a robot server instead of a human one.

The research clearly shows that using robot servers can be a huge differentiator for a hotel chain,

creating a novel and unique experience for customers. The research states that the majority of customers have positive opinions and experiences with robot servers, showing strong support for the implementation of customer service robots.

However, negative experiences are still experienced. Therefore, Professor Lin warns that managers must learn from such occurrences and focus on improving service quality, increasing functionality and human-robot interactions.

The researchers also recommend that hotel chains ensure that the adoption of robots does not impact on employment numbers, and that they also do not promote themselves as a 'robot hotel', as this is likely to create high expectations and potentially disappoint customers.

If you would be interested in receiving the full research paper, or speaking with the professor, then please contact Peter Remon at BlueSky Education – peter@bluesky-pr.com +44 (0) 77 235 228 30.