

SMART WELLNESS ROBOTS: HOW SERVICE ROBOTS AFFECT CONSUMER WELL-BEING

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ABSTRACT

Technologies, such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) and robotics are emerging as a new way to improve services, readjusting and impacting all business industries and relationships among people (Loureiro et al., 2021; Makridakis, 2017; Mingotto et al., 2020). The hospitality industry is no exception to this (Mingotto et al., 2020) since a quick growth in the use of robots and AI in this industry has registered a turnover of 249 million U.S. dollars (International Federation of Robots, 2021). However, very few of the existing studies highlight the customers' perspective and sentiments on service robots (Luo et al., 2021) or the robot-human interactions/ customer service experience (Choi et al., 2021). Thus, further studies in the enhancement of human well-being through transhumanistic technologies, close relationship marketing capabilities, and the evolution of the engagement process between humans and AI-enabled machines are necessary (Loureiro et al., 2021). This research intends to understand how different types of robots influence customers' perception of the service provided. Therefore, the following research questions are proposed; Can humans develop feelings of identification with a service robot? Can the identification that customers perceive between themselves, and service robots be strong enough to influence the creation of a close relationship between both parties? What are the features of service robots that heighten customer well-being?

A total of three studies have been conducted to explore the research questions in the current paper. In the first study we show that customer-robot identification positively influences the customer-robot relationship. Results also show that the customer-robot relationship positively influences customer well-being. Finally, we find that customer-robot identification has no direct effect on customer well-being, which suggests a full mediation of customer-robot identification. In the second study we replicate the same model of study 1 but consider different levels of anthropomorphism of the service robot. In the third study, we explore the features of the service robots that are more suitable to explain customer well-being.

This research gives relevant theoretical contributions to the research fields of robotics and AI within the marketing field. Indeed, the current study shows that one of the most

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important drivers of consumer well-being when interacting with service robots is the degree of bonding between humans and machines.

Keywords: Human-machine interaction, Artificial intelligence, Well-being, Robots

References Available Upon Request