

Book review

Edited by Maria Chiara Carrozza

Springer Nature

2019

66pp.

ISBN: 9783319977669

Review DOI

10.1108/JTF-09-2019-089

Today, robots have multiple uses: agriculture (horticulture needs, such as harvesting and picking, weeding, spraying pesticide and monitoring the growth of plants); medicine and surgery (surgical robots, rehabilitation robots); assisted living (robots designed for use in healthcare and elder care settings); education (robotic toys); assembly line robots (car production, electronics); security and crime fighting; duct cleaning; investigating hazardous environments; underwater and space exploration.

Robots are also surfacing in hospitality and tourism. One of the most challenging technological developments within the travel industry in recent years has been the increasing presence of robots: robot receptionists, room service and concierge (automated guided vehicles to carry out delivery services, from drinks to towels, in hotel rooms); robot assistant for airports and hotels; mobile robots designed to educate and entertain people in public places (such as museum tour guide robots entertainment; crowd attractions); security robots for airports; robot for travel agencies; chatbots for flight or hotel bookings; robotic floor cleaners.

Humans are still reluctant to trust robots and artificial intelligence. If, on the one hand, automation is often treated as a global opportunity, on the other hand anxiety and suspicion worldwide have been growing in recent years due to the growing trend in automation and the advent of AI technology. Some people would think that the rise of machines era might be threatening various jobs: one common fear people have is that robots will take over many of the jobs that

humans perform and leave many unemployed. Another common fear is about machines performing many of the tasks done by humans and taking control of human lives. Other people would wonder if replacing human beings with robots, would kill service quality and personalization, especially in activities and jobs that require human interaction. Using robots, especially in the realm of healthcare and medicine comes with obvious ethical questions: for example, people can be afraid of robots taking over children or elderly care. However, robots can be handy when they are tasked with basic activities, such as identifying objects, picking them up, transporting them; performing repetitive assembly tasks or completing dangerous tasks that may pose a threat to humans, helping with household chores; greeting guests, helping them with their bags, and guiding them to their rooms.

Research shows that not every person is equally afraid of the new technology. With the generational turnover, the trust in robots and AI seems to be growing. The younger generations (Millennials, Gen Z and Gen Alpha) like experimenting with robots. Millennials are, in general, most likely to choose hotels with robotic service. Millennial parents also have more trust in AI for diagnosing and treating their children than the previous generations. Due to the fact that Millennials are more acquainted with new technology, it will be easy for family hotels to start using robots.

The concise and interesting book by Maria Chiara Carrozza helps us increase our trust in robots. The book is clearly written, accessible and informative. It is 66 pages long, organized into five chapters, including a preface and a conclusion: *Are We Going Through a Real Revolution?*; *On the Way to Robotics*; *The Socialization of Robotics*; *Our Friend the Robot*; *The Robot Inside Us*. The book is based on a series of lessons held by the author at the School of Politics in Rome in 2016 and is intended for an educated, though not-specialist, audience. The book offers a fascinating journey through robotics in its way

The Robot and Us: An “Antidisciplinary” Perspective on the Scientific and Social Impacts of Robotics

© Elisabetta Ruspini. Published in *Journal of Tourism Futures*. Published by Emerald Publishing Limited. This article is published under the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY 4.0) licence. Anyone may reproduce, distribute, translate and create derivative works of this article (for both commercial and non-commercial purposes), subject to full attribution to the original publication and authors. The full terms of this licence may be seen at <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/legalcode>

toward its evolution from industrial to social applications. The book specifically focuses on the interaction between humans and robots, and on the social aspects of the integration of robots with humans in their everyday life. By doing this, the book fosters a discussion on the ethical considerations of human-robot relationships and discusses whether these bonds between humans and robots could contribute to a better life. The book addresses several issues related to human-robot interaction: from safety, to security, to sentience and adaptability, to legal and ethical issues. As stated in the book, there is a need to ensure that the interaction between the robot and the human takes place safely and without damage or injury. Another key issue discussed by the book is the sustainability of the production of robots and the materials they are made of, in terms of developing a circular economy. A third, crucial need is to prepare children and young people to face the challenge posed by the increasing presence of socially-interactive robots in everyday environments. As the author writes, robots are gradually leaving the factories and entering hospitals, schools, streets (self-driving cars), the field of entertainment, leisure and hobby and, finally, our homes: domestic infrastructure, home robotic chefs, cleaning robots. Robotics is becoming “social.” This revolution brings along with it both challenges, benefits and opportunities. As

regards tourism, one advantage is the ability for robots in the hospitality industry to offer support (such as information for tourists about local hotels, shops and restaurants) using a variety of different languages. An autonomous car-also known as a robotic car or driverless car-is another positive example. It can pick up guests at the airport and, if they have not checked into the hotel, can check them in and set up their smartphone to use as a key. The car can also make suggestions regarding restaurants and shops and make reservations for the guests. One further example are robots to help disabled people and older adults travel safer, providing tailored assistance based on each user’s needs.

In short, the book discusses the need to shape the ethical, scientific, and social perspectives of robotics, and facilitates the design of responsible robotics and the successful introduction of robots into our society, while still maintaining human customer service. This is a book that helps us prepare for the robotic revolution in every domain of life, including tourism.

Elisabetta Ruspini

Elisabetta Ruspini is based at the Department of Sociology and Social Research, University of Milano-Bicocca, Milan, Italy.