Book review

Robots, Artificial Intelligence and Service Automation in Travel, Tourism and Hospitality

This is the first book to provide a focussed and balanced insight into the use of robots, artificial intelligence and service automation (RAISA) in travel, tourism and hospitality. Its strength lies in its ability, over 13 carefully edited chapters, to consider both the conceptual aspects of RAISA and its practical applications. This is achieved by engaging a wide range of contributors from research students to academics to software engineers and by using a two-part structure, the first examining theoretical issues and the second looking at industry uses of these technologies across hotels, restaurants, travel agencies, tourist information centres, museums and the events sector. Each contributor effectively manages to avoid the hype surrounding the topic to provide a considered view of the financial and non-financial benefits and costs of RAISA for both businesses and consumers. The book examines not only the technicalities of RAISA, such as the development of Gregg, the low-cost hospitality robot, but also focusses cleverly on the changing dimensions of service caused by the introduction and development of RAISA technologies.

The key elements of the host–guest relationship that are integral to service industries are carefully considered, respected and reaffirmed by the key theme running through the chapters being centred on how RAISA can be used to enhance and not just substitute human interactions in the delivery and receipt of service.

Existing models and frameworks, such as the guest cycle and SERVQUAL, are cleverly adapted to report on these topics, and new frameworks are being presented, such as the one which explores the economics of RAISA adoption. At times, it would have been beneficial for some of these figures to be printed in a larger size to improve clarity and readability. There is also some duplication of ideas across the different chapters, especially around the issue of consumer perceptions of RAISA technologies, but this in many ways aids to reinforce the most important element of RAISA technology adoption – customer acceptance.

This book is highly readable, either as a complete package or through engaging with individual chapters of interest. Throughout, there is a constant effort to comprehensively review other relevant literature which results in each chapter's reference list, providing an excellent resource for further reading both for researchers and students to investigate. However, as with many edited books, it would have been beneficial to have a concluding chapter to complete the story. Nevertheless, in general, its readability, mixture of theory and practice and calls for further research mean the book can be accessed at many different levels by different readers. The book would make an interesting starting point for academics in the field to guide exploration into new areas of RAISA research but would be just as useful as a course text for undergraduate and postgraduate students in tourism, hospitality and events management and for industry practitioners to gain insights into uses of RAISA in other areas of the sector to their own.

Finally, if you consider futurology from the perspective of what is happening now, such as self-serve check-in hotels, and what is likely to continue or plausibly change over time, for example, the development of "self-aware" robots, then this book provides a credible contribution to the future agendas in the tourism, hospitality and events sector. Arguably, the industry examples offered to the readers in the later chapters do tend to focus on what the sector is currently doing in terms of RAISA rather than on what future research and development it is engaged in, but the conceptual framework offered by the editors in chapter one should provide researchers with a sound basis for the exploration of new areas of interest within this constantly emerging field of theory and practice.

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