

AI Robots serve restaurant customers in South Korea

September 15 2020, by Jung Yoon Kim



In this Sunday, Sept. 13, 2020, photo, a customer picks up a takeaway bag with food from a robot at No Brand Burger in Seoul, South Korea. These robotic services, with not a single face-to-face interaction, have been seen as a selling point amid the coronavirus pandemic and its restrictions. (AP Photo/Ahn Young-joon)

A burger shop in the South Korean capital is a bit different from typical fast food restaurants: Its key staff are robots.

From order to pick-up, customers don't need a single face-to-face interaction. All they need to do is to click the menu they want on a kiosk touchscreen, pay and wait for a serving [robot](#) to bring their takeout bag to the pick-up spot.

While waiting for their food, customers take photos or stare with curiosity at the capsule-shaped robots, reminiscent of the popular minions characters from the [animated film](#) "Despicable Me." The yellow and black accent colors of the No Brand Burger [restaurant](#) also give the place the look of a toy shop.

"This is the first time I've actually seen such robots, so they are really amazing and fun," said Shin Hyun Soo, a 31-year-old office worker trying out the service.

The restaurant's human manager, Bae Eunyoung, explained the process: When a customer orders at the kiosk, it is automatically sent to the kitchen. There, an automated cooking machine kicks in and heats the buns and patties.

The human staff do have a role to play, Bae explained, adding toppings to the cooked ingredients before wrapping them and passing them over to a robot to serve.



In this Sunday, Sept. 13, 2020, photo, a customer moves to pick up her takeout bag with food from a robot at No Brand Burger in Seoul, South Korea. These robotic services, with not a single face-to-face interaction, have been seen as a selling point amid the coronavirus pandemic and its restrictions. (AP Photo/Ahn Young-joon)

"The [customer](#) can take the food without any direct contact with the staff," Bae said.

That's been seen as a selling point amid the coronavirus pandemic and its restrictions.

Before it eased them on Monday, South Korea had for the last few weeks allowed restaurants to provide only deliveries and takeout meals

after 9 p.m. and franchised coffee shops like Starbucks to provide only takeout drinks.

The number of new reported coronavirus cases in South Korea almost doubled from 56 to 103 over two days in mid-August and continued to spike until it reached a peak of 441 daily cases on August 26. Since then the resurgence has slowed down but still climbs by at least 100 each day.

In August, takeout orders accounted for 58% of No Brand Burger's total sales, up by 16% from July, according to Shinsegae Food, the South Korean food company that operates No Brand Burger.



In this on Sunday, Sept. 13, 2020 photo, an employee, right, controls a robot to deliver a takeout bag with food to a customer at No Brand Burger in Seoul, South Korea. These robotic services, with not a single face-to-face interaction,

have been seen as a selling point amid the coronavirus pandemic and its restrictions. (AP Photo/Ahn Young-joon)



In this Sunday, Sept. 13, 2020, photo, a couple uses a touch screen kiosk to order food at No Brand Burger in Seoul, South Korea. These robotic services, with not a single face-to-face interaction, have been seen as a selling point amid the coronavirus pandemic and its restrictions. (AP Photo/Ahn Young-joon)



In this Sunday, Sept. 13, 2020 photo, an employee places a takeout bag with food at a robot at No Brand Burger in Seoul, South Korea. These robotic services have been seen as a selling point amid the coronavirus pandemic and its restrictions. (AP Photo/Ahn Young-joon)



In this Sunday, Sept. 13, 2020, photo, a robot carries a takeout bag with food at No Brand Burger in Seoul, South Korea. From order to pick-up, customers don't need a single face-to-face interaction. All they need to do is to click the menu they want on a kiosk touchscreen, pay and wait for a serving robot to bring their takeout bag to the pick-up spot. (AP Photo/Ahn Young-joon)



AI serving robot from KT carries a food, during a demonstration at a restaurant in Seoul, South Korea, Tuesday, Sept. 15, 2020. (AP Photo/Lee Jin-man)



AI serving robot from KT carries foods and drinks during a demonstration at a restaurant in Seoul, South Korea, Tuesday, Sept. 15, 2020. (AP Photo/Lee Jin-man)



Lee Youngjin, team leader of AI Platform Business Team at KT Corp., speaks about AI serving robot ahead of a demonstration at a restaurant in Seoul, South Korea, Tuesday, Sept. 15, 2020. (AP Photo/Lee Jin-man)

No Brand Burger isn't the only local restaurant using robots to serve customers.

South Korea's major IT company KT has partnered with the family restaurant chain Mad for Garlic to provide AI serving robots.

Using 3-D space mapping and other technology, the robot can freely move through the narrow lanes between tables and avoid obstacles to reach its destination, said Lee Youngjin, team leader of AI Platform

Business Team at KT.

The robot can serve up to four tables per trip.

"Children customers often like to see the robot. Also, customers in general feel it is fresher to receive their [food](#) through the robot because of the coronavirus," said Lee Young-ho, the manager of one Mad for Garlic restaurant using the robots.

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