

Digitalization and Its Consequences on Human Labour in Cameroon

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ABSTRACT

The rise in digitalization has also been experienced in Cameroon and it has positive and negative consequences in the job market. This paper is to unravel the fact that, increase in new technologies has actually caused a shift from human labour and to verify the extent and the various types of jobs that are being threatened by new technologies.

The fact is that, digitalization has brought new jobs as well but these jobs are high skilled jobs, such as computer engineering, Cyber Security Experts, Soft Wares Engineers, Computer Programming Experts and others.

Nevertheless, digital tools such as mobile phones, laptops, internet connections, computers, Automatic Teller Machines (ATM) and others, have caused a shift from human labour, but this shift in human labour is observed in low and middle skilled jobs such as Administrative Assistants, Cashiers, Bank Tellers, Data Entry Clerks, Translators, Customer Service Representatives, Security Guards, and others.

Therefore, in as much as digitalization has caused a shift from human labour, it has created new jobs as well in the digital sector. The challenge is to reskill and train low and middle skilled workers to be able to occupy these high tech jobs in the labour market. By so doing, there will be no mismatch in the labour market and the gap will gradually be closed, since new skilled workers will be able to take up jobs in the digital sectors, thereby reducing structural unemployment.

Keywords: Digitalization; Consequences: Human; Labour.

INTRODUCTION

Digitalization has brought a lot of improvement in the field of communication, banking, education and others. With the proliferation of digital devices such as smartphones, Laptops, tablets, USB keys, computers, Cameroonians have also benefited to use the internet and explore the digital era. Digitalization is a change driven by current technological content. It involves adapting to all market requirements by efficiently managing processes and activities that can be automated. {1}

Smartphones have multiple functions, they are used for electronic banking such mobile money transactions, this has shift human labour in the banking sector, since clients do not necessarily need to visit the counter to withdraw or deposit cash, this can be done at the Automatic Teller Machines (ATM's) as a result of new technologies {2} where cash can be withdrawn or deposited efficiently and accurately by customers.

Those performing clerical and administrative roles are the most affected by new technologies, white collar and desk based support jobs are realizing a decline in the job market in Cameroon with high vulnerability in clerical support 8.5/10 risk score {3} Official tracking by groups such as Nkafupolicy Institute noted that, the broader work force struggle is define by a training in employment mismatch and a massive informal sector rather than a technological displacement. {4}

Additionally, with the use of the internet, we have access to many online platforms to gather information especially from Google, making it easy to access electronic books, have electronic learning, free online

translations from one language to the other, universal news can be obtained online without buying newspapers from street Vendors.

Everything can be traceable by the use of the internet, postal services are no more vibrant as before because letter writing has been replaced with electronic mails (emails) which is very fast and accurate and is interconnected universally from one computer to the other. With the use of smartphones one can do electronic marketing, buying and selling of goods is very common, nowadays payment of bills are done online as well through mobile money transfer. Roughly 80% to 90% of total employment in Cameroon is informal which insulates a vast portion of the current work force from gradual displacement by new technologies. {5}

As concerns the entertainment industry, Musicians and film vendors are finding it hard because their product can be gotten online for free by the use of Google search, people no longer buy Cassettes, or Players as it was in the past, everything is available online and almost free of charge. The work of an Author is accessed without prior authorization, all these free access online has caused a shift from human labour. Nevertheless, the development in new technologies has not totally erode human labour, far from it, it has created new jobs in the digital field but the new challenge is a mismatch that is creating a gap, {6} those with low skilled labour have the obligation to go for reskilling in the tech field to cope with the available jobs in the field of Information and communication Technology (ICT).

The Internet and Human Labour

The internet is a massive global network of interconnected computers and devices. It disseminates information with a speed of light universally. It facilitates communication in an efficient and accurate manner. Nevertheless, its impact on human labour cannot be undermined, it has rendered the mail service Agencies in Cameroon almost obsolete. In Cameroon, the rise of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has transitioned traditional postal roles to digital platforms. While manual jobs such as mail sorting, and manual banking have declined. Digital expansion has created new roles in digital finance-commerce logistics and IT management under the Ministry of Post and Telecommunication (MINPOSTEL).

Digital messaging has significantly reduced the need for manual mail sorting and traditional mail carriers and in – person teller operations at the Cameroon Postal Services. There has been a shift to digital logistics and finance, the postal sector has shifted as well to e-commerce and digital financial inclusion, this requires a more savvy workforce than manual labourers. Transitioning workers to digital systems has faced hurdles, since physical post office workers has to be integrated in to the modern digital framework. Traditional state run postal jobs have dropped and the rise in digitalization has facilitated a surge in private courier and mailing operators creating new sector employment opportunities.

Digital Banking

Digital banking is a financial transaction carried out online through digital platforms by the use of the internet alongside computers, lap tops, smartphones. Digital banking sector in Cameroon are reducing traditional ,entry level jobs, such as bank tellers, Clerks, and Messengers, due to the rise in mobile banking ATM,s and digital wallets .Nevertheless, this shift is simultaneously driving a demand for a new tech centric roles, resulting in work force transformation rather than an absolute loss of employment. Clerical staffs have been reduced in banks in Cameroon, because funds transfers, bills payment, and deposit can now be completed outside of physical branches, this shift has decreased the need for clerical staff and branch tellers.

The wide spread adoption of Mobile money has facilitated financial transactions between individuals mobile money account, it is easier to transfer fund from one person to the other, it does not need a bank account, all we need is a mobile money account and is free of charge, therefore such a system is convenient because it reaches clients even in the hinterlands. This system has made bank tellers to be less important in the banking sector, therefore causing a shift from human labour.

Again, Automatic Teller Machines (ATM,s) are being stationed at banks outlet for dispensing cash to their customers, this does not need human labour, it is an electronic transaction, therefore making human labour irrelevant at some point.

Artificial Intelligence and its impact on human labour

Artificial intelligence are those tools which perform the work of man .Nowadays with the proliferation of new technologies, digital devices such as mobile phones, lap Tops, can be used alongside the internet to access online platforms such as Google search, this platform can provide all sort of information .With the use of the internet one can search for Google translation which has curbed the job of physical Translators and Interpreters. Job displacement caused by innovative production processes and labour saving organizational solutions is a form of structural unemployment that reduces the need for human labour. {7}

Education and learning are done digitally nowadays; there is access in online tutorials. Lectures are performed electronically, there is a shift from human labour, and physical teachers are being displaced somehow, though the new system has created modern avenues for digital learning.

Furthermore, Authors are finding it difficult for the sale of their books because books can be gotten online and reading is possible online as well, coupled with online course and certification, there is a shift from traditional teaching to online education. Digitalization has eroded the ‘human’ in labour by replacing deep cognitive functions with automation, reducing complex interpersonal relationships to digital transactions, and shrinking human agency to fit rigid algorithmic systems. Workers are increasingly pressured to match the speed and efficiency of machines. Digitalization has erode human element of labour,the loss of deep cognition diminished attention spans and the ‘Google Effect’ and reliance on software for instant information have shortened attention spans and degraded our ability to deeply process complex information. Human thinking is diminishing, relying on algorithms and artificial intelligence for problem solving has caused a decline in traditional skills like delayed gratification, retention, and human led strategic reflection. There is the erosion of empathy and impersonality of communication, face to face communication which relies on body language and emotional intelligence is increasingly substituted by brief, sterile digital messaing.Similarly, virtual togetherness and remote work has led to social detachment, hindering the development of essential interpersonal soft skills and making collaboration feel artificial. There is the devaluation of human agency and creativity; digitalization has led to algorithmic control, micromanagement through performance tracking software strips workers of autonomy, turning humans in to mere extensions of digital systems.

Again, when repetitive tasks are fully automated, employees are frequently expected to focus only on output, stripping the labour process of creative fulfillment and personal investment. There is techno-stress and burnout constant connectivity, the boundary between work and personal life has disappeared, leading to techno-stress, anxiety and severe burnout.

There is fear of obsolescence, the rapid pace of digitalization has created chronic job insecurity, forcing workers to constantly up skill simply to survive in the digital economy. Artificial intelligence induces technical unemployment, jobs are created but displacing human labour.{8}

The Impact of Information Communication Technology (ICT) on Human Labour

The impact of information communication technology (ICT) on postal labour in Cameroon cannot be undermined. Reduction in traditional roles, the wide spread adoption of Emails, and digital messaging has significantly reduced the need for manual mail sorting, traditional mail carriers, and in – person teller operations at the Cameroon postal services. Shift to digital logistics and finance has been realized since the postal sector is also adapting to digital communication, this requires a more tech savvy workforce rather than manual labourers.There have been work force challenges ,transitioning workers to digital system has had some hurdles, integrating some physical post office workers in to the modern digital framework.

The decline of newspapers in Cameroon is heavily driven by the rise of information and communication Technology, (ICT) specifically with the proliferation of smartphones, social media and digital news platform.

There is a surge in demand for technology driven roles, shifting the labour focus towards knowledge work and away from routine or human labour. {9} This digital shift has negatively impacted the print media industry in several ways because there is a shift in reading habits, Readers now consume news instantly, through platforms such as Facebook, independent online blogs reducing the demand for physical newspaper purchases, thereby reducing the jobs for physical newspapers vendors.

Additionally, there is a loss in advertising revenue, as traditional print circulation drops, corporate advertisers have directed their marketing budgets to digital platforms and social media influencers whereby they can reach clients more effectively. There is digital transformation pressure; publishers have struggled to transition from physical distribution to digital format, forcing industry groups like the Cameroon Newspaper Publishers Federation (FEDIPRESSE) to organize workshops on how to adapt the digital era. There is a rising cost and supply chain issues, the print media's reliance on imported newsprint has been severely affected by global shipping disruptions and inflation. Making the cost of physical production prohibitively expensive for local publishers. While Information Communication Technology (ICT) has made news faster and accessible to the Cameroonian public, it has as well decimated the revenue streams and operational viability of traditional print journalist. However to stay afloat, many local publications have had to launch digital editions and increase their social media presence. The rise in new technologies also known as digitalization has cause a transition from traditional industrial economy to a digital one. {10}

Electronic Marketing

Approximately 23% of Cameroonians has used e-commerce platforms to purchase goods .Digital marketing has seen an 18% increase in annual revenue with electronic and fashionable products dominating household purchases. This is good for modern marketing but it creates a shift from human marketing, especially low skilled labourers who are not versed with information communication Technology. Electronic commerce is on the rise, about 20% of businesses in Cameroon have made sales through digital marketing and 18% of companies have made online purchases. Market growth through digital marketing has record an 18% growth as of recent evaluation. {11} Nevertheless, it creates an impact on human labour marketers since they are being threatened by digital marketing.

Over 65% of all online orders in Cameroon are placed using online mobile phones, heavily facilitated by the growth of mobile money. Electronic marketing use the internet, data analytics, and artificial intelligence to reach consumers. This shift has driven a decline in 'human marketing', traditional face to face consumers engagement by replacing interpersonal sales conversation with automated, algorithm driven experiences designed to optimize conversions and reduced operational cost. Electronic marketing is dominating human marketing because of precision targeting, algorithms can track consumers behaviour, allowing businesses to target buyers based on exact demographic data and online activity.

Additionally, digitalization has cost efficiency, since running digital ad campaigns and utilizing automated customer service chatbots is significantly cheaper than employing large teams of human sales representatives. Human marketing is declining due to loss of personal connection, traditional sales rely on relationship building, empathy, e -marketing often reduces the consumer to data point, prioritizing quick transactions over long term loyalty. Nowadays, there are automated interfaces, physical sales staff are increasingly substituted by self – service portals, online checkouts, and artificial intelligence recommendations. Artificial intelligence has affect mid skilled labour that cannot instantly replace high tech jobs, {12}

Digitalization vs. Physical Doctor Gap

There is a tension between rapidly advancing digital health technologies and the irreplaceable need for in-person, hands on medical care. While telehealth and artificial intelligence improve accessibility and efficiency, they risk widening inequities and compromising the empathy of the traditional physician patient relationship. Navigating this gap involves understanding its key drivers, the challenges it creates and how the medical field is working to balance both worlds. There is a promise in digital health; technologies like wearable devices, artificial diagnostics, and telemedicine reduce travel burdens for routine check-ups and help detect diseases earlier. Nevertheless, certain medical needs inherently require in-person care. Physical examinations, hands-on

diagnostics and procedures cannot be fully digitalized. Again, the human connection and empathetic interaction a doctor provides during a physical consultation is vital for holistic healing and patient trust. Artificial intelligence and automation displace low skilled human labour, nevertheless, they drive productivity, lower cost and create new roles, consequently, net employment figures may not drastically suffer^{8} though the labour market faces ongoing transformation.

Telehealth and digital tools assume patients have reliable internet, smartphone and digital literacy to use them, for vulnerable populations such as older adults, low income households and those living in rural areas, these barriers can lead to missed care.^{13} There is doctor burnout detachment, while electronic health records and digital platforms streamline data, they are often time consuming to document. Patients may perceive their doctors as un-empathetic or distracted when they spend more time looking at a screen than making direct eye contact. Over reliance on clinical data models can lead to emotional detachment, making it harder to treat the patient holistic needs rather than just analyzing symptoms. The most effective modern approach blends digital monitoring with face to face visits. For instance, a patient might monitor chronic conditions at home and visit the office when specific evaluations are required, ensuring a balance between convenience and thorough care.

Medical institutions are increasing focusing on digital training for health care professionals to ensure they can interpret digital data accurately while maintaining empathetic personal care during consultations.\

RESULTS

There is no or empirical statistical percentage for a fall or decline in Cameroon's traditional labour force due to digitalization, Instead digital transformation have triggered steady revenue diversification and major expansions in digital inclusion for digital transactions as can be seen in commercial banks. Mobile money services spearheaded by telecom operators like MTN and Orange boast over 30 million accounts in Cameroon. This has significantly expanded financial inclusion rather than causing a market crash. Despite the massive surge in mobile money volume, accounting for more than 70% of CEMAC operations, traditional banks still handle the highest values in transactional volume.

From all evaluations in the field, digitalization has not totally shift human labour, it is a problem of mismatch that has caused structural unemployment, the new tech jobs created by new technologies such as, software engineering, cyber security engineering, computer engineering, cannot be instantly performed by unskilled labourers, therefore there is the need for reskilling and training in order to take up the new jobs in the digital field.

Limitation of the Study

This research paper has some limitations; certainly not all digital devices were investigated to evaluate the strength on how they displace human labour. Some devices such as mobile phones, laptops are predominantly essentially than other digital devices since they incorporate multiple digital functions. Information was easily gathered from the urban areas where digital users are numerous and easy to access.

Users of digital devices are numerous and are subjected to various kinds of digital operations. Their priorities differ from one person to the other. Therefore priorities can never be uniform in the use of these gadgets.

CONCLUSION

Conclusively, digital development has shifted human labour but this is for low and unskilled labourers who cannot perform the new jobs created by new technologies. Digitalization has also created new jobs; therefore there must be reskilling and training for the middle or low skilled workers in order to take up these high tech jobs. Digitalization is shifting human labour for those with middle and low skilled jobs and new jobs are resurfacing in the digital sector such software engineers, Cyber security experts, computer engineers, Security experts, and many others, there, we need to develop skills in the digital sector to fill these new jobs created by digitalization.

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