
Reconsidering the implementation of Artificial intelligence in call centre jobs: Ethnographic study

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Abstract

In recent decades, the workforce has faced a challenging landscape due to implementing artificial intelligence (AI) in the workplace. While some workers struggle to cope with the rapid pace of change in the workplace, others question the necessity of such changes (PWC, 2024). This situation highlights that the graduate job market in Romania reflects greater uncertainty than ever regarding young university graduates' career trajectories. Romania, a hub for numerous outsourcing companies, often employs young university graduates whose skills and education do not align (World Bank 2020). Despite numerous narratives about decent work, Romanian literature on the sociology of work and employment has overlooked the precarity of outsourced work, AI implementation, and workplace negotiations. This ethnographic study explores the urgent and crucial impact of AI implementation on young university graduates working as customer support representatives (CSRs) in Romanian outsourcing companies. The findings reveal how AI affects social interactions, communication patterns, and teamwork among CSRs, as well as between CSRs and AI systems. The results reveal CSRs challenges, such as education-job mismatches, increased workloads, job security concerns, and emotional labour hardships. The study also highlights how CSRs adapt to these changes by developing new practices, cultural norms, forms of resistance, strategies, and responses from management and organizations. This article contributes to the understudied area of AI implementation in the workplace. It provides insights into AI negotiation's complex social dynamics, ultimately informing strategies for a more equitable and sustainable future.

Keywords: Artificial intelligence, call centres, customer support, Romania

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