



The Impact of Automation on the Employment Structure of Travel Agencies and Tour Operators in Shillong

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Abstract. Automating is a technological advance that Shillong's tourist industry uses to increase output, client satisfaction, and the level of service. This paper aims to understand how employment in travel agencies and tour operators is impacted by automation in Shillong. A qualitative research approach is used through an in-depth semi-structured interview for fifty participants including managers, staff, accountants, and HR personnel were interviewed to find out how automation is affecting job descriptions, skills, and employment trends in these companies. Nvivo15, and Braun and Clare's (2006) six steps for thematic analysis were followed to analyze the data collected.

The findings reveal the need for a shift from non-technical roles to roles requiring higher technical competence and knowledge. In particular, the study points to the fact that daily work that was done by the employees has had to be done more efficiently e.g. online booking, data analysis, and customer relationship management. In addition, while automation has improved the efficiency of operations and performance, there is a need for constant learning and upgrading to avoid job displacement and to make the workforce ready as shown by the study. Planning is essential to ensure that the workforce is equipped to handle the new technological challenges posed by Automation in the Shillong Tourism industry. This indicates that this study has implications for the need for industry and education collaboration, specialized training programs, and policy changes to address workforce transition and employment sustainability in Shillong's travel and tourism sector.

Keywords: Automation, Impact, Employment Structure.

1 Introduction

The tourist and travel industry is not the way automated systems are changing sectors around the globe. A few instances of how automation technology is transforming the manufacturing and shipping of products and services include the use of computerized ticketing systems (crs), global distribution system (gds), 3d printing technology, virtual assistants for dealing with clients, self-service vending machines, and artificial intelligent reserving platforms for the effortless issue of plane tickets and programmed pricing selections [1, 2, 3]. These developments have improved the level of service, increased productivity, and simplified procedures, but they have also upended established job categories and demands for skills [4,5]. In many fields, including programmed flight ticketing and chatbot customer service, advances in automation are replacing traditional manual labor [4,6]. While the automation boosts effectiveness, earnings, and productivity, it also removes employment opportunities, particularly in positions that require repetitious and routine duties [7, 8]. Employee expectations are raised and new skill sets are required as a result of this "replacement effect" [9]. Consequently, the incorporation of automated technologies is redesigning job functions, generating fresh prospects, and, in certain situations, dismantling conventional responsibilities [3,4]. Automation's effects on jobs are a major concern, particularly in developing nations and industries where technology is advancing quickly [10]. Automation calls for major adjustments in worker capabilities even though it presents chances for greater efficiency and customer value [8]. However, the majority of

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current research concentrates on worldwide patterns, which leaves a knowledge gap on the local impacts of automation, especially in areas where employment and economic growth are significantly dependent on tourism.

A fairly large section of the population in Shillong is employed by the travel and tourism sector, which is an important part of the local economy. [11,12]. As mentioned by Lyngdoh (2022) [16] tourism contributes 7% (approx.) to the GDP of the state. Despite its significance, little is known about the precise implications of automation on Shillong's travel agencies' and tour operators' employment structures. By investigating how automation has changed work positions, impacted employment patterns, and transformed skill needs in Shillong's tourism industry, this study seeks to close this gap. It also seeks strategies employed by workers in the industry to alleviate the unfavourable effects of automation and elevate sustained employment growth.

Despite the increasing trend of automation in the tourism sector, there is limited amount study on its effects on employment structures, especially in regional markets, such as Shillong. Current research is focused on large-scale tourism sectors and does not capture how small and medium-sized tour operators and agencies respond to technological disruptions.

In addition, the effect of automation on the transfer of required skills across different tourism related jobs has not been thoroughly evaluated. Despite the fact that methods to promote long lasting workers growth in the face of technology have been studied in more general settings, little is known about particular approaches employed by Shillong's industry of tourism to address its issues and guarantee that its personnel can modify. Given how travel is one of Shillong's main revenue streams, it is essential to understand how automation impacts how employees are employed in this industry. Therefore, by examining how automation is impacting position descriptions and demand for expertise in travel firms and organizations, this study aims to help close the understanding shortage.

2. Materials and Methodology

In order to investigate how it impacts of technology on labor frameworks, changes in position assignments and skills needed, employment growth techniques, and the views and recommendations of Shillong's tourism businesses and travel organizations, the study employed a live interview approach, one of the techniques used for qualitative studies. In order to render the study special, a few more inquiries were added to informal interviews.

2.1 The Approach to Research

To better comprehend the experiences, opinions, and tactics of members of the industry, the study used an interactive speculative approach. This method works well for comprehending complicated issues, like how modern technology affects jobs [13].

2.2 Population and sample size

A total of 50 participants from Shillong's travel agencies, tour operators, and Hotel Accommodations participated in in-depth interviews, including 25 managers, 18 staff members, 2 accountants, 1 Operation Manager, and 4 Human resources (HR) of the hotel accommodation. Sample technique: Because the study sought to target persons with more in-depth understanding of automation and technology in the business, participants were chosen using the "purposeful sampling" technique.

2.3 Data Collection

The participants in this study were asked three demographic questions and eleven open-ended questions. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted by adding several questions that made the study unique [5]. The rationale for conducting semi-structured interviews is that this method may result in more questions being asked of the study, even though the questions have been predetermined.

2.4 Data collection process

The information was gathered in February 2025. The managers of Vanrap Travel, Sheba Travel and other Travel Agencies, Tour Operators, and Hotel accommodations which are situated in Shillong's Police Bazar, the city center, were interviewed first. Next, the travel companies, Tour Operators, hotel accommodations in Laitumkhrah, Jail Road, and Laban were interviewed, and so on. 50 semi-structured in-person interviews were conducted in English, Khasi, and Hindi. Each interview lasted roughly 25-30 minutes. Some interviews were restricted to researcher notes, while others were voice-recorded with permission to record the response [13,14] and then transcribed.

2.5 Data Analysis

The data analysis process began with the transcription of audio records and research notes [15], which were then loaded into Nvivo 15, a qualitative data analysis program, for coding and analysis by using the six steps as familiarized by Braun & Clare (2006) [17].

3. Results

3.1 Demographic Overview of Travel and Tourism Professionals

The information in Table 1 sheds light on the experience levels, job functions, and business sizes of those employed in the travel and tourist sector. Professionals differ greatly in their levels of experience; the most seasoned person has 32 years in the field, while the least experienced one has only one year. The staff is a well-seasoned and informed group of professionals, with an average of 15 years of experience.

According to an analysis of employee strength and firm sizes, the majority of travel agencies fall into the small-business category, usually employing three to six people. In contrast, medium-sized businesses often employ five individuals, but three-star hotels typically employ sixteen to twenty-two workers. This demonstrates how independent travel companies and larger hospitality establishments operate on different scales. There are many different employment roles, such as managers, executives, travel consultants, human resources associates, and accountants. Nonetheless, managerial positions are prevalent, with at least one head of operations and several professionals serving as managers. This shows that in the travel and tourist industry, administrative know-how and leadership are essential for efficient operations and company expansion.

Table 1. Demographic data

Category	Details	Number
Gender	Male	30
	Female	20
Type of Establishment	Travel Agency and Tour Operators	25
	Hotel Accomodation	4
Position within the establishment	Head of Operations	1
	Manager	25
	Staff members	18
	Accountants	2
	HR Associates	4
Years of Experience	1 - 5 Years	7
	6 - 10 Years	8
	11- 15 Years	9
	16-20 Years	7
	21-25 Years	8
	25-30 Years	6
	31-35 Years	5
Company size	Small & 3 starts	25
	Medium & 4 starts	4

Automation including online booking systems, AI powered chatbots and auto ticketing has revolutionized employment structures in the travel industry to the present day. In Fig. 1, Out of 50 respondents, the majority (54%) said that automation has affected their agencies to a large extent, 22% said the impact was mild. A smaller proportion (14%) described the effect as moderate, and only 10% said that automation has no effect. The change to the digital platforms has led to a decline in walk-in customers which in turn has reduced the need for manual bookings and the traditional travel consulting jobs. A number of travel agencies have suffered from a great loss of revenue, with some indicating that they have experienced a decrease of 60-90% due to low direct sales and more reliance on online channels that are paid for by commissions. This has negative implications on job opportunities and structural changes in employment relationships. However, there are some agencies that have identified the operational benefits of automation. It has enhanced effectiveness, reduced the manpower requirements, improved the customer relations and promoted better marketing with the help of data analysis. Small enterprises seem to be less influenced in this case; nevertheless, they continue to fight on two fronts: to meet the challenges of competition and to achieve sustainable development. In conclusion, automation has both positive and negative impacts on employment: it could eliminate works but it could create something new. The future of travel agencies lies in the integration of digital strategies with personal touch to meet the challenges of changing customer preferences.

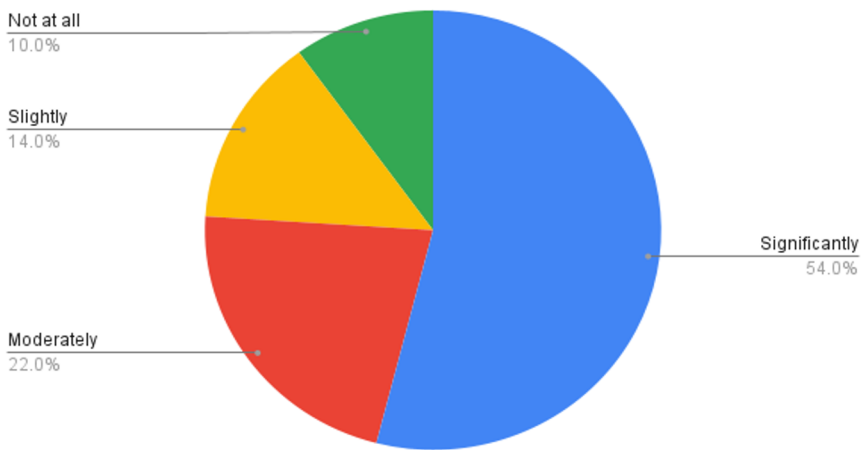


Fig.1. Impact of Automation on Employment in the Travel Industry

3.2 Changes in the role of work through Automation in the Travel Industry

The survey results (Fig. 2) highlight varying public opinions on change in the role of work through automation in travel industry. The majority of fifty individuals who responded (30%) voiced skeptical thinking, with worries about losing their jobs being cited as the main worry. On the other hand, 24% of respondents thought the computerization was a good thing and that technological advances helped them be more productive. 20% of those surveyed took an equitable strategy, stressing the importance of improving to adapt to advances in technology. While automation boosts productivity, it reduces contact between people, according to 12% of those who participated who focused on the client's perspective. Lastly, 10% of the people surveyed believed that technology might assist the business grow by reducing costs. These findings show the variety of reactions to automation, with concerns about secure employment being countered by knowledge of its benefits and the need for skill development. All things considered, technology has altered the dynamics of job duties in travel related sectors by reducing the demand for traditional jobs and creating opportunities for organizations ready to adapt and use digital approaches.

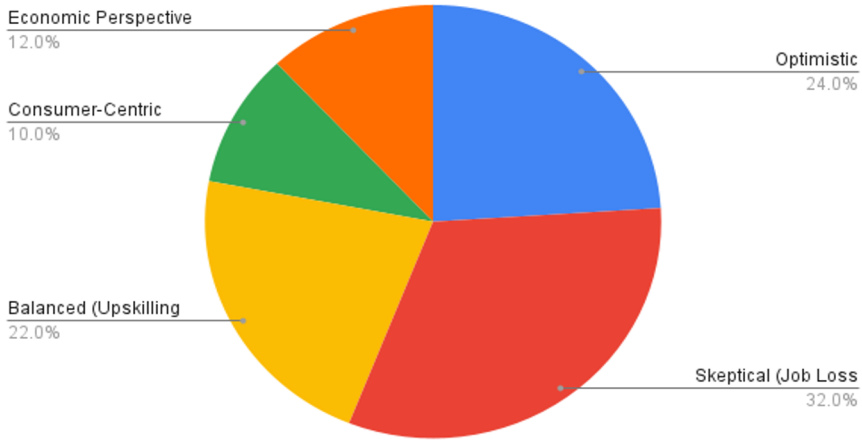


Fig.2. Views on Job Role Changes Due to Automation in Travel Industry

3.3 Changes in Job Roles and Skill Requirements Due to Automation

As automating becomes better connected, experts in the travel industry need to learn new skills to stay relevant. In accordance to the research findings (Fig. 3), social networking and internet marketing are the most sought after skills as corporations shift toward communication via the internet and personalized marketing (38%). The next need, Travel & Booking Software Proficiency (20%), emphasizes the importance of proficient use of systems such as Amadeus and Sabre. Because of the industry's reliance on automated customer support, AI & Chatbot Management (16%) is likewise becoming more and more significant. In the meanwhile, protecting consumer data and transactions requires a high level of cybersecurity awareness (14%). Last but not least, proficiency with digital literacy and computer skills (12%) is still necessary for using digital tools efficiently. These results highlight how the travel industry's skill set is changing and how flexibility and technological know-how are essential for long-term employment.

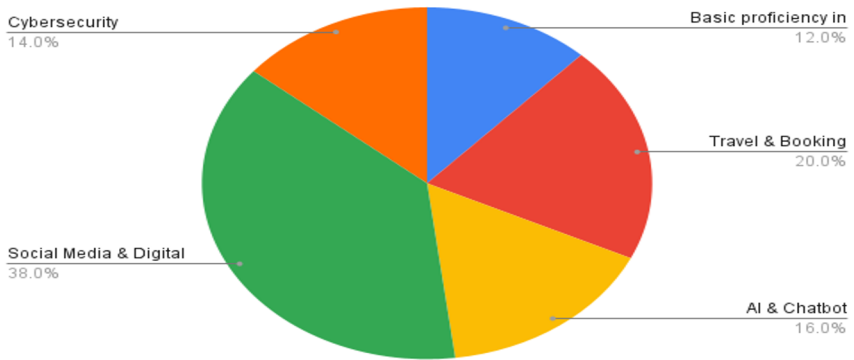


Fig.3. Skills Required to Stay Relevant & Thrive in Automated Travel Industry

3.4 Skills Becoming Less Important or Obsolete Due to Automation

According to the responses, the majority of workers do not believe that any certain important skill is becoming obsolete because of technology and automation. Instead, they see automation as a way to improve conventional abilities rather than replace them. Plenty of replies emphasize that while basic skills remain essential, they may shift or evolve over time.

Some employees argue that basic abilities like proficiency with computers continues to be useful even in the face of technological advancements. By leading out how acquiring computing devices years ago continues to assist them adapt to newer systems, a participant highlighted the importance of continuing education instead of eliminating outmoded skills.

However, a number of those interviewed acknowledge that the value of some skills has evolved, particularly in personal accounting and reserving. Workers notice that as electronic reservation systems have supplanted manually operated registration, the necessity of hand-held booking skills is decreasing. However, because technological advances is not entirely capable of creating company plans and communicating with customers, specific positions, like advertising and selling, still require human effort in spite of this change.

In addition, as accuracy must be guaranteed by typing in data manually, employee oversight remains crucial even in fully computerized systems. A lot of participants stated that technology complements traditional workers methods as opposed to substitutes them, which supports the idea that manual and machine productivity need to coexist.

In the end, basic skills like proficiency with computers, revenue, and client service are still essential even though automation has lessened the importance of manually operated booking and some aspects of accounting. Employees largely see automating as a productivity instrument instead of a replacement for skills, underscoring the need for adaptability in a rapidly evolving the internet landscape.

3.5 The organizations' Approaches to Handling automation related Issues

The results of the study (Fig.4) showed the various strategies used by businesses to help employees cope with the challenges presented by automated processes. A significant portion of those surveyed (28%) stated that no specific steps were taken to address these recent events. Software that is offered being certified training (16%) and additional instruction plans (12%) were the two most popular strategies among the companies implementing preventative measures, highlighting the importance of legally binding education and skill broadening. Essential methods which point out regular instruction and staff involvement were also mentioned, including educational and upskilling initiatives (16%), guidance and collaboration among peers (14%), and rewards for developing abilities (14%). These findings suggest that even though some businesses are investing in employees adaptations, there currently is still a notable deficiency in employees' preparedness for the evolving technological landscape in the hospitality sector.

Based on the responses, the methods employed to address automating and technology related challenges in the travel, tourism, and hospitality sector have been viewed favorable. Significant percentage of those surveyed attribute increased service delivery, staff assistance in acclimating to new systems, and increased productivity to education and skill acquisition programs.

Many employees emphasize that proper training ensures more effective operations and helps staff overcome technological challenges. In accordance to one respondent, instruction fills the skill gaping that occurs when a workers lacks it, increasing completion of tasks and efficiency. Yet another respondent claims that automated technology has made their jobs easier by streamlining bookings, dealing with clients through electronic channels, and transportation regional cooperation. In general, the findings show that well crafted educational efforts frequently succeed in addressing automation related problems; however, technological advancements and marketplace rivalry continue to pose challenges for businesses going through the digitization process.

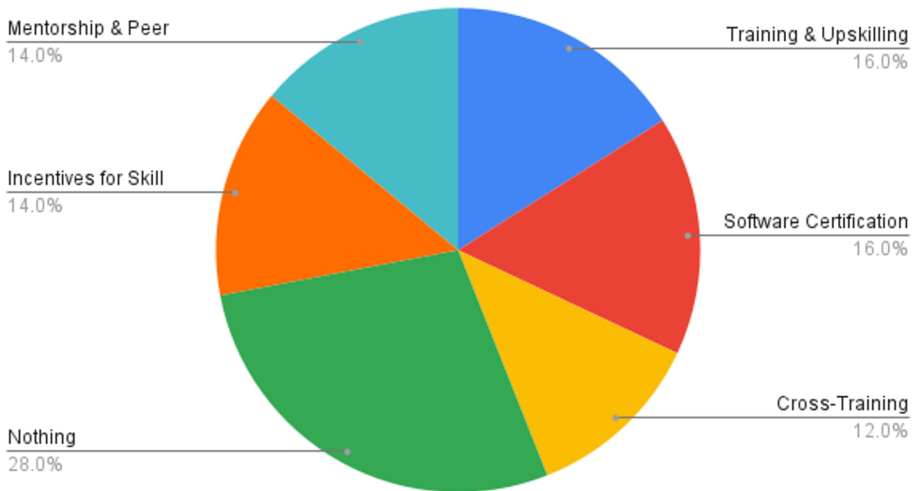


Fig.4. Strategies Agencies Adopting to Help Employees Adapting to Automation

3.6 Effect of Implementing Workforce Development Strategies

Due to their less extensive staff members and lesser degrees of competence, startups tend to report less difficulty with the implementation of labor force growth strategies in lodging and travel firms. One of the main problems mentioned is a declining staff, since numerous companies have reduced staff due to fewer reservations and budgetary constraints. Some businesses that once employed more than seven people have had to downsize, which has made them less focused on staff growth as they fight to stay in business.

Two other significant issues are the widespread utilization of modern technologies and the education curve for new computerized procedures. Some employees require extra instruction and time to become accustomed to automatic reserve status and registration systems. Furthermore, employees frequently ignore how the framework functions, so they rely on traditional note-taking methods to complete tasks accurately.

Additionally, a significant barrier remains workforce opposition to transformation, as certain workers are reluctant to embrace technologically advanced tools and prefer more traditional methods. This hesitancy can impede efficiency gains and slow the adoption of new technology. Some agencies have obstacles related to regulations and compliance in addition to technological ones. Managing industry standards and governmental laws may be a challenging process that influences the way workforce development and training initiatives are carried out. But not every firm faces these challenges. There are number of smaller agencies who assert that they have no workforce development issues because they have small, well-trained staff. According to this research (Fig. 5), 26.7% of the respondents claimed that these initiatives had no effect at all, whereas 40% of respondents claimed that they had been extremely beneficial, and 33.3% of the respondents were quite or moderately effective.

Generally, the size of a company and the degree of digital adaptation have a significant impact on workforce development issues. While smaller companies typically operate with little need for staff development, larger organizations or those making the switch to automation frequently experience learning challenges, resistance to change, and regulatory complexity. Financial limitations brought on by heightened online competition further restrict some agencies' capacity to make investments in employee development and growth, highlighting the necessity of strategically adjusting to technology breakthroughs.

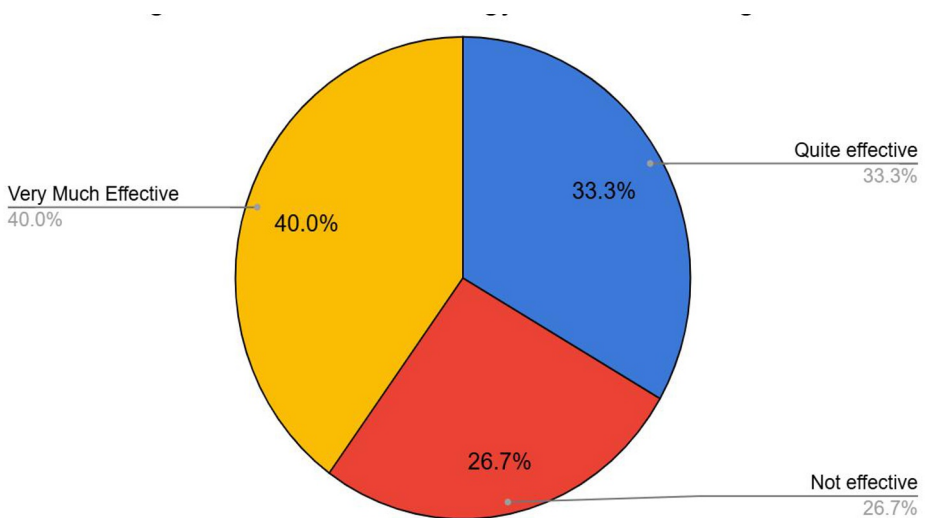


Fig.5. Count of How effective have these strategies been in addressing automation/Technology-related challenges

3.7 Future impact of automation and technology on Shillong’s travel and tourism Industry

The responses suggest (Fig. 6) that automation and technology will significantly transform the Travel and Tourism industry in Shillong over the next 5 to 10 years. One of the key anticipated changes is the streamlining of processes, making travel bookings, accommodations, and transport arrangements more efficient. Several respondents believe that increased awareness and accessibility through online platforms will drive higher tourist inflow, as people can now book their entire trip—including hotels, taxis, and flights—before arriving in Shillong.

However, some concerns are raised regarding the loss of human interaction and personalized service in the industry. Automation is expected to enhance efficiency, but there is a fear that it might diminish the passion and personal touch traditionally offered by travel agencies. While technology will continue to expand, respondents stress the need for controlled and paced integration to balance automation with human involvement.

The future of tourism may also be influenced by Shillong's expanding hotel sector. As more individuals visit the city, automation developments may improve the reservation process and boost total tourism income. One important example given was the rise in online reservations during big events, like the Ed Sheeran concert that took place on February 12, 2025, which showed how internet platforms may enhance sales during busy times.

Traditional travel agencies still have a lot of obstacles to overcome. The impact of automation will not be consistent across all client categories because older generations and government officials continue to rely on offline travel agents, even though younger travelers and students prefer online bookings. Respondents also point out that because online travel platforms and third-party partners now receive a significant amount of income, travel firms' profit margins are decreasing. Agencies may be forced by this tendency to change their business strategies, either branching out into other sectors or moving toward car rental services.

Most people agree that Shillong's travel sector will be significantly impacted by automation, which will spur more online reservations and technology developments. However, there are still many unanswered questions regarding issues like small travel agencies' viability, lack of personal interaction, and profitability. Businesses must adopt digital strategies and continue to provide individualized services to meet the varied interests of their clientele if they want to prosper in this changing environment.

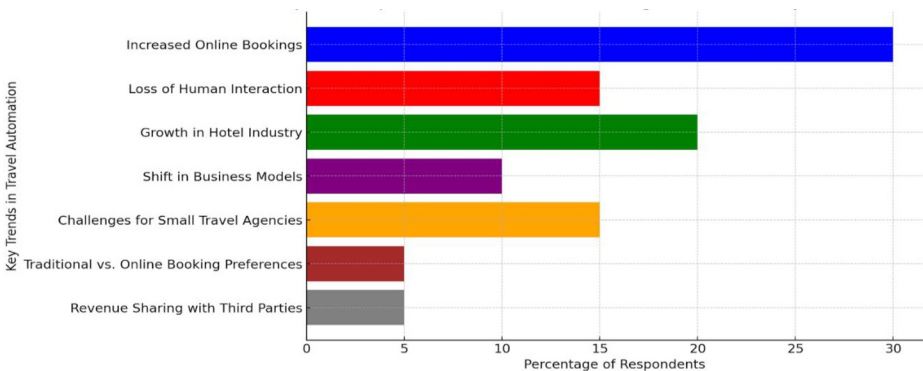


Fig.6. Projected Impact of Automation on Shillong’s Travel Industry (Next 5-10 Years)

3.8 Measures to Address Challenges Posed by Automation and Technology

According to the replies (Fig. 7), finding an acceptable compromise between automating and employees is necessary to keep tourism businesses and hotels sustainable. The cost of implementing and maintaining automated systems is one of the main problems, and it can be extremely burdensome for tiny companies. Many of the participants believe that partially automated, in which digital tools and human resources collaborate, may be a cheaper and more feasible approach than fully depending on technological advances.

The necessity of continual modifying and changes has been identified as a major barrier. Industries must constantly innovate and acquire new things to stay like rivals as innovation changes rapidly. A lot of people stress how important it is to alert with new changes and adapt to marketplace shifts in order to stay forward of the circle.

The capacity of smaller organizations to stand out is also thought to depend on government bodies and aviation support. In accordance to some the participants, smaller businesses find it difficult to compete with larger travel agencies because they are able to access unique airline tickets deals. They advise airlines to offer similar cost elements to all organizations in order to create a level playing surface. Others emphasize that even though automating tends to limit insight to the most famous destinations, regional brokers are able to offer more customized and thorough trip experiences, so federal intervention is necessary to direct tourists to regional travel companies.

Advertisement and promotional methods are also regarded as vital instruments for travel companies and hotels in order for competing with large platforms on the internet. By successfully advertising their goods and services, startups can attract direct customers and reduce their reliance on external reservations platforms that restrict their margins of profitability.

Last but not least, keeping employment in the travel industry is still a major concern. The majority of respondents are worried about loss of jobs due to full computerization, especially for traditional travel agencies. They advise developing innovative approaches that use technological advances to boost earnings while maintaining human expertise in arranging trips and interaction with customers.

Generally speaking, businesses accept that technological evolution is inevitable, but they stress the need for careful planning, financing, continual training, and employment safety measures to ensure automated process benefits both business owners and employees without compromising the importance of people in transportation services.

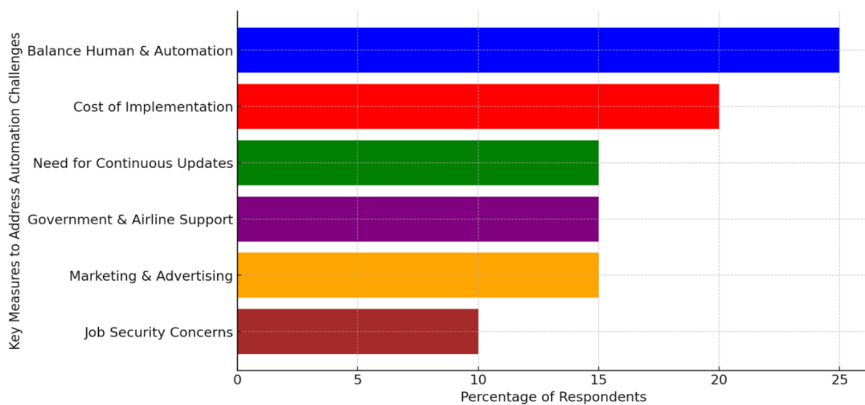


Fig.7. Suggested Measures to Address Automation Challenges in Travel Industry

4. Discussion

The findings reveal that automation is reshaping employment structures in Shillong's travel and tourism sector aligning with global trends of skill-biased technological change [18] while presenting unique regional challenges. Below, we interpret essential themes in relation to prior literature.

4.1. Demographic Adaptability to Automation

Consistent with Lyngdoh's (2022) [16] observations on Shillong's tourism-dependent economy, our data highlight disparities in workforce adaptability. Younger, tech-savvy employees (e.g., digital marketers) transitioned more smoothly to automated systems than older staff reliant on manual processes—a pattern mirroring studies in Asian tourism hubs [19]. This underscores the need for age-targeted upskilling to mitigate inequities.

4.2 Job Role Transformation

Automation's "replacement effect" [20] is evident in the decline of traditional roles (e.g., walk-in booking clerks), while demand grows for hybrid skills (e.g., AI-driven customer analytics). Notably, 54% of respondents reported significant job restructuring (Fig. 1), corroborating global findings on **polarization** (low- and high-skilled roles growing, mid-skilled shrinking) [8]. However, Shillong's small-scale agencies face acute pressures, as online platforms (e.g., Airbnb Experiences) divert revenue—a challenge less documented in metropolitan contexts.

4.3 Skill shift and training gap

The rise of digital marketing (38% prioritization; Fig. 3) reflects the sector's pivot to online engagement, yet only 28% of firms implemented formal training (Fig. 4). This aligns with Yang et al.'s (2021) [21] critique of reactive (vs. proactive) upskilling in SMEs. Paradoxically, while workers acknowledged automation's efficiency gains (e.g., AI chatbots), 30% feared job loss (Fig. 2), suggesting psychological barriers to adoption that warrant HR interventions.

4.4 Policy and Industry Implications

To address the work transitions, this paper proposes Public-private training partnerships, leveraging Shillong's educational institutions (e.g., NEHU) for certification program in GDS/AI tools. Subsidized digital infrastructure for SMEs, mitigating cost barriers (cited by 40% of respondents; Fig. 7). Labor policies incentivizing automation-adjusted job roles (e.g., "digital travel consultant").

5. Limitations of the study

Despite its contributions, this study acknowledges some limitations to consider, including sample size for testing. This study interviewed 50 participants, providing rich qualitative data; however, it limit the generalizability of the results to the entire population of travel agencies and tour operators in Shillong. A research with a larger sample and quantitative method would be beneficial to confirm the findings and provide more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon further. Also the use of purposive sampling for identifying participants with relevant experience may have introduced bias to the selection process, the participants included in the study may possibly aware of or receptive to automation than a broader population of travel professionals. Therefore, future studies should consider using random sampling techniques to reduce this bias.

Another limitation is that this study focuses on Shillong only, allowing the transferability of the results to be restricted to other regions in Meghalaya and other parts of the counties. Future research may explore the impact of automation in other tourism destinations to identify commonalities and differences. This study was based on self-reported data obtained via an in-depth semi-structured interview may limit the exploration of the individual experience and perspective that may be subjected to potential social desirability bias and recall bias. Future research may incorporate triangulation methods like observational data or company records, to validate the findings.

The study also lacks of Longitudinal data as this study looked at a single point in time. A long-term study could show how automation affects jobs, skills, and employee experiences over time, offering a deeper understanding. The study explored the general impact of automation, however, did not focus on the specific effect of technologies like AI-powered chatbots, robotics process automation etc on different job roles. Examination of specific effect of automation should be conducted further.

6. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that automation's impact on Shillong's travel agencies is double-edged: while boosting operational efficiency (e.g., online bookings), it exacerbates skill mismatches and job insecurity among traditional workers. Crucially, the sector's sustainability hinges on strategic collaboration between policymakers, educators, and businesses to reskill vulnerable demographics (e.g., older employees), integrate automation with human-centric services (e.g., hybrid agent-bot customer support), Monitor longitudinal effects of AI/chatbots on small-agency viability. Future research should expand to rural Meghalaya and incorporate quantitative metrics (e.g., employment elasticity to automation investment).

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