Prediction: A Cashless Society in 2030?

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13 February 2020

The world of cash has been under enormous pressure. A tense 2018 led to a tumultuous 2019: Facebook's sudden announcement of plans to launch its Libra cryptocurrency with a consortium of companies caused consternation, uniting all regulators against the project. As the Cashless Society Working Party releases "A Cashless Society in 2019", its author Sabrina Rochemont shares her predictions for 2030, a decade on.

Cash use has continued to decline in developed countries. Governments that proactively managed the transition to a less-cash society have navigated the associated risks and issues effectively. Others have increasingly faced adverse occurrences with their payment infrastructure, consumer protection, digital and financial exclusion, as well as data security and privacy.

Central Banks have long taken responsibility for financial inclusion, as few ATMs and bank branches have survived the decade. Civic offices now hold a secure supply of cash in small denominations for use in the event of public emergencies.

Universal access to digital services is an accepted necessity, and smart devices that are restricted to accessing banking and utility companies have been provided to those who cannot access commercial internet services. These devices biometrically authenticate with a Digital ID; they are connected to a high-security financial services network that was built in 2025 to restore trust following multiple large-scale cyber attacks on financial services. Gradually, the general public has been adopting these optional but secure services, in spite of their privacy fears.

Instead of ATMs and bank branches, financial booths are housed within secure commercial and public premises, both in urban and rural areas. These booths enable consumers to access Internet banking, and to hold video calls with their banks for more complex needs. Users can also pay bills and manage their utilities contracts, as well as purchase and manage other financial services. Costs are pooled across banks, utilities and financial service providers. They support a buoyant market, despite early failures and recent consolidations in the payment ecosystem. Non-bank financial institutions are now on a par with banks for access to the marketplace.

Central Banks have barred Facebook's Libra and other budding stablecoins from public and private payment systems. Blockchain-based solutions now routinely power wholesale settlements, delivering efficiencies overall. Following the 2023 international agreement to define boundaries and restrict access to residents, several countries have deployed domestic retail Central Bank Digital Currencies (CBDC). Extreme climate and power supply events have convinced the People's Bank of China about the necessity to maintain physical, non-electronic money, in addition to the digital Yuan it launched in 2022.

All Eurozone countries deployed biometric digital IDs as part of the Eurosystem plans for the world's second major retail CBDC, the D-Euro that went live in 2024 after a two-year pilot in Austria, Germany and the Netherlands. The Pan-European Payment System Initiative (PEPSI) enables universal access to the D-Euro at the European Central Bank, that can only be used within the Eurozone, and bears zero interest. Commercial banks borrow these ECB deposits at interest rates that are relative to the banks' risk rating, a new supervisory instrument. A 2029 ECB review concluded that commercial banks managed to compete commercially for deposits through attractive interest rates and focused on their lending activities. Their branch closures have been tolerated as they are major contributors to the financial booths network, and they administer the D-Euro retail accounts on behalf of the ECB.

And what about cryptocurrencies? As the incumbent and Fintech payment services have improved through investments in the payment infrastructures, some of the claimed benefits of a cryptocurrency, such as the costs and speed of cross-border transactions, and financial inclusion, are no longer relevant. Short of a real-use case in the payments ecosystem, the industry has embraced the KYC, AML and Anti-Terrorism Financing regulations, and has enabled supervisory access to decentralised ledgers. These compliance improvements have asserted crypto assets as an investment class, disrupting traditional capital markets.

Mobile Money is now ubiquitous in developing regions. M-Pesa leads payments throughout Africa, as Vodafone committed to expansion (starting with Nigeria and Ethiopia), and withdrew from the Libra project in early 2020. The Pan-African payment infrastructure has helped reach 60% of cashless transactions in Africa by 2030.

How do you see the role of cash in 2030? Share with chronicle@cashlessworldinmotion.org.

Read our new paper "A Cashless society in 2019"