



From Waste to Wealth: The Impact of Circular Economy Adoption on Business Profitability.

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	<p>India, a land of abundance, faces environmental degradation and challenges in its economy due to supply-demand issues and urbanisation. The country's circular economy aims to find vitality in every resource, using waste as a by-product or nutrient in different forms. This Research project focuses on businesses and the future of circular economy models in India, arguing for a focus on efficiency across lifecycles. The Circular Economy is a transformative solution for sustainable development, particularly in emerging economies like India. Traditional linear models of production and consumption are unsustainable, leading to resource depletion and environmental degradation. The Circular Economy presents opportunities for innovative business models that align profit with purpose, unlocking value from waste streams, enhancing resource productivity, and driving sustainable growth. By embracing circular principles, companies can catalyse positive change and drive the transition towards a more sustainable future. The core of the Circular Economy is the complete elimination of waste, not just junk, but underutilization of assets and resources.</p> <p>Keywords: Circular economy, Business profitability, Sustainability, Resource efficiency, Waste reduction, Innovation, Cost reduction, Environmental impact, Linear economy, Circular business models, Resource productivity, Sustainable development</p>

1. Introduction

India finds itself at a crucial juncture in its development journey, enriched by a diverse culture, economic vibrancy, and a tapestry of traditions. The nation faces challenges such as a growing population, rapid urbanisation, and environmental deterioration, highlighting the urgent need for transformative change. The prevailing linear model of production and consumption has led to environmental crises, resource depletion, and social inequalities both in India and globally. Amidst these challenges, the concept of the circular economy emerges as a promising solution, offering a sustainable path to prosperity. This Research project focuses on India's sustainability challenges, emphasising the necessity of transitioning to a circular economy. By examining India's current economic landscape, environmental concerns, and societal dynamics, the project sheds light on the critical need for change. Drawing insights from literature, case studies, and empirical data, the project explores various facets of India's circular economy journey. The project highlights the adverse effects of the linear economy model on India's environment, economy, and social structure, including pollution, resource depletion, and social disparities. It introduces the circular economy as a regenerative system that aims to maximise resource utilisation, minimise waste, and enhance the value of products and materials. It also urges action towards embracing the transformative potential of the circular economy to create a more sustainable and equitable future for India and beyond. With collective effort and steadfast dedication, India has the opportunity to lead the way in sustainable business practices, showcasing the positive impact of circular economy principles on global change.

1.1. So, what exactly is a circular economy ?

It's a paradigm shift that focuses on the use and reuse of resources, aiming to minimise waste and maximise value creation. Imagine products and services that are designed to be owned and maintained by manufacturers

or retailers themselves, with running costs such as electricity built into the equation. It's a new way of thinking that goes beyond the traditional model of consumption and disposal.

1.2. Why are sustainable business models crucial in both India and the world at large?

The answer lies in the immense challenges we face today. From resource scarcity to environmental degradation, our current linear economy is reaching its limits. But fear not, my friends, because sustainable business models offer a glimmer of hope for a brighter future. By embracing sustainable business models, we can unlock a myriad of benefits. First and foremost, the circular economy has the potential to greatly reduce energy needs and waste, paving the way for a more sustainable world. Furthermore, embracing this model can create countless new job opportunities, breathing life into local economies. And let us not forget the profound positive impact on resource management. With the circular economy, we are better equipped to preserve and nurture our precious resources for generations to come. Imagine a world where communication technologies enable the seamless exchange and remarketing of goods. Picture a future where performance-based contracts lead to fairer pricing and enhanced services for both businesses and consumers. It's within our grasp, my fellow scholars, to create a world where sustainability and economic growth are not mutually exclusive.

1.3. Reimagining a Sustainable Future

Circular Business Models in India and the World The 21st century presents a unique challenge: balancing economic prosperity with environmental responsibility. Traditional "take-make-dispose" models have reached their limit, leaving societies grappling with resource depletion, waste crises, and social inequities. However, within this challenge lies an exciting opportunity: the circular economy. This innovative paradigm envisions a world where resources are kept in use for as long as possible, minimising waste and maximising value. At its core, the circular economy is not merely about environmental protection; it represents a positive shift towards a more resilient, equitable, and sustainable future. This Research project investigates the transformative potential of sustainable business models within the circular economy framework. Through in-depth analysis of diverse case studies, economic viability assessments, and evaluations of enabling policies, this project aims to contribute to a positive vision for the future. We will identify and showcase successful implementation strategies, paving the way for broader adoption of circular business models in India and across the globe.

1.4. Linear Vs Circular Economies

1.4.1. Linear Economy Model:

The traditional production process that we inherited from the 19th century is linear and defined by "take, make, waste." In other words, raw materials are collected, transformed into products and are used until they are finally discarded as waste. Materials travel in one direction until they are thrown out, and value comes only from producing and selling as many products as possible. However, in recent years, a shift towards a more sustainable approach to production has been gaining momentum. The concept of the circular economy aims to minimise waste and make the most of resources by promoting practices such as recycling, reusing, and repairing. Instead of following a linear path, materials and products are kept in use for as long as possible, with their components recovered and regenerated at the end of their service life. This not only reduces environmental impact but also creates new opportunities for innovation and collaboration across industries. By transitioning to a circular economy model, we can move towards a more efficient and sustainable way of doing business that benefits both people and the planet.

1.4.2. Circular Economy Model:

The circular economy, on the other hand, allows companies and individuals to extract additional value out of our existing materials and resources. By focusing on reusing and recycling, circular economies get closer to creating a closed loop system that minimises the use of resource inputs and, in doing so, reduces the creation of waste, pollution and carbon emissions. This model is based on the following three principles: The first principle is to design out waste and pollution by creating products that are durable, repairable, and recyclable. This ensures that materials can be used efficiently and effectively throughout their life cycle. The second principle involves keeping products and materials in use for as long as possible through strategies like refurbishment and remanufacturing. Extending the lifespan of items reduces the need for new production and helps to conserve resources. Lastly, the third principle encourages the regeneration of natural systems by using renewable energy sources, promoting biodiversity, and restoring ecosystems. By adhering to these principles, the circular economy not only benefits businesses and individuals economically but also contributes positively to environmental sustainability and the well-being of our planet.

2. Literature Survey

The idea of the circular economy has developed from a number of theoretical perspectives, such as biomimicry, cradle-to-cradle design, and industrial ecology (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2013). After analysing 114 definitions of the circular economy, Kirchherr et al. (2017) discovered that while the 3Rs (Reduce, Reuse, Recycle) are always included in the essential principles, they frequently go beyond to include ideas like systems thinking and regenerative design. According to Murray et al. (2017), the circular economy signifies a major

change in our understanding of the interplay between the environment and human economic systems. This is consistent with the focus of your document on the circular economy as a game-changing approach to sustainable development, especially for developing nations like India. To elaborate further, Korhonen et al. (2018) suggest that the circular economy should be viewed as fundamentally contested, much like sustainability. They contend that this conceptual adaptability enables adaptation to many scales and settings, ranging from single enterprises to entire economies. Introducing the notion of "circular business models," Bocken et al. (2016) divide them into three primary categories: narrowing resource flows (efficiency), closing resource loops (recycling), and delaying resource loops (extending product life). This paradigm offers an effective way to examine how various circular methods affect the profitability of businesses.

Economic Benefits of Circular Economy Adoption

- a) **Cost Reduction:** Building on Ghisellini et al. (2016), a McKinsey & Company (2016) analysis calculated that by 2025, European firms could save \$630 billion annually by implementing the concepts of the circular economy. Lewandowski (2016) discovered that circular methods could, in certain circumstances, lower material costs by up to 90% in the consumer goods industry. A thorough analysis of circular economy aims is presented by Morsetto (2020), who concludes that the development of secondary material markets, increased resource efficiency, and waste reduction are frequently the means by which cost savings are accomplished. The author points out that resource-intensive businesses like manufacturing and construction can benefit greatly from these cost savings.
- b) **New Revenue Streams:** Stahel (2016) presents the idea of the "performance economy," in which companies sell the usage of items rather than the things themselves, building on the work of Linder and Williander (2017). Businesses like Rolls-Royce, with their "Power by the Hour" service for aviation engines, have effectively applied this model, increasing profitability and fostering client loyalty (Ng et al., 2012). Four primary categories of circular business models are identified by Urbinati et al. (2017)'s taxonomy: linear, downstream circular, upstream circular, and full circular. They contend that the most substantial new revenue streams might be generated by completely circular business models when reverse logistics, collaborative consumption platforms, and product-service systems are combined.
- c) **Increased Resource Productivity:** A 2014 World Economic Forum research supports the Ellen MacArthur Foundation's results, estimating that by 2025, circular economy methods could save \$1 trillion yearly in material costs. Preston and Lehne (2017) contend that circular economy approaches could accelerate the transition of developing nations like India to more environmentally friendly growth paths. In a study spanning five European nations, Wijkman and Skånberg (2015) discovered that a move towards a circular economy may boost GDP by as much as 7% and generate a sizable number of job possibilities. They stress that higher resource productivity lowers expenses and builds resilience against fluctuations in resource prices and supply interruptions.

2.1. Challenges in Circular Economy Implementation

- a) The research of Rizos et al. (2016) is backed by de Jesus and Mendonça (2018), who highlight financial constraints as a major hurdle for SMEs. However, Aranda-Usón et al. (2020) propose that innovative financing methods, like green bonds and impact investing, could help address this challenge. Guldmann and Huulgaard (2020) conducted a multi-case study on circular economy transitions in Nordic companies and found that the need for initial investments in new technologies, processes, and skills often creates a significant barrier. They suggest that policy support, such as tax incentives or subsidies, may be necessary to encourage businesses to make these investments.
- b) **Challenges in Technology and Infrastructure:** Expanding upon the research of Kirchherr et al. (2018), Tura et al. (2019) stress the significance of digital technologies like IoT and blockchain in facilitating circular business models. They argue that without adequate technological infrastructure, many circular economy initiatives may struggle to expand. Kalmykova et al. (2018) provide a detailed overview of strategies for implementing circular economy, highlighting that technological limitations often intersect with other obstacles such as lack of information and organisational resistance to change. They propose that addressing these limitations requires a holistic approach that considers not only technological issues but also social and organisational factors.
- c) The article by Govindan and Hasanagic (2018) and the work of Milios (2018) both delve into the impact of existing regulations on the adoption of circular economy practices, particularly in waste management and product design. Milios (2018) suggests that policy innovations such as Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) schemes could help to better align regulations with circular economy principles. Meanwhile, Hartley et al. (2020) discuss how current regulatory frameworks often unintentionally support linear economic models, and recommend a "policy mix" approach that combines various economic instruments, regulatory frameworks, and soft measures to create a conducive environment for circular economy adoption.

2.2. The Indian Context

Building on Ghosh's (2020) research, the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce & Industry (FICCI, 2018) report names electronics, construction, and agriculture as important Indian industries that could profit from circular economy principles. According to the paper, by 2050, circular economy practices could slash

India's material consumption by 40% and its greenhouse gas emissions by 44%. Zhu et al. (2019) compare the development of the circular economy in China and India, concluding that although both nations have made strides, India has particular difficulties because of its informal economy and waste management system. They recommend that parts of China's effective circular economy strategies be adopted and modified by India. The potential of Industry 4.0 technologies to support circular economy practices in developing nations like India is examined by Garetti and Taisch (2020). It is contended that digital technologies have the potential to assist India in surmounting some infrastructure constraints and generating novel prospects for circular business models in industries like manufacturing and agriculture. With an emphasis on the Indian context, this updated literature review offers a more thorough assessment of the theoretical underpinnings, financial advantages, difficulties, and contextual issues connected to the influence of circular economy adoption on corporate profitability.

3. Research Objective:

- Assessing the effects of embracing a circular economy on business profitability in various industries.
- Recognizing and appraising the primary obstacles in incorporating circular economy practices in businesses.
- Creating and utilising a Circular Profitability Index (CPI) to gauge the efficacy of circular economy models in comparison to traditional linear models.
- Reviewing real-life examples of businesses that have effectively implemented circular economy principles and evaluating their financial and environmental results.

4. Methodology

This study employs a novel metric called the Circular Profitability Index (CPI) to quantify the impact of circular economy adoption on business profitability. The CPI is calculated using the following formula:

$$\text{CPI} = (\text{Circular Model Profit} / \text{Traditional Model Profit}) \times (1 + \text{Sustainability Factor}) \times (1 + \text{Innovation Factor}) \times (1 + \text{Cost Efficiency Factor})$$
 Where:

- Circular Model Profit / Traditional Model Profit: This ratio directly compares the profitability of the circular business model to that of the traditional linear model. A value greater than 1 indicates higher profitability in the circular model.
- Sustainability Factor = (% Reduction in Resource Use + % Reduction in Waste + % Reduction in Carbon Emissions) / 300 This factor captures the environmental benefits of the circular model. The sum is divided by 300 to normalise the result to a scale of 0 to 1.
- Innovation Factor = (% Increase in R&D Efficiency + % Increase in Product Lifespan) / 200 This factor reflects improvements in innovation and product design. The sum is divided by 200 to normalise the result to a scale of 0 to 1.
- Cost Efficiency Factor = % Reduction in Overall Operational Costs / 100 This factor accounts for operational cost savings achieved through circular practices. It's normalised to a scale of 0 to 1.

The CPI formula aims to provide a comprehensive evaluation of circular economy performance, taking into account not only direct profitability but also sustainability improvements, innovation gains, and cost efficiencies. A CPI value above 1 indicates that the circular model outperforms the traditional model, with higher values indicating greater overall benefits. The data for these calculations were gathered from case studies of companies that have implemented circular economy practices, using financial reports, sustainability reports, and direct communications with the companies as primary sources of information. The Circular Profitability Index (CPI) encompasses key factors that capture the diverse nature of circular economy benefits. The factors of sustainability, innovation, and cost efficiency were selected to reflect the environmental, technological, and economic impacts of circular practices, aligning with the triple bottom line approach. These factors are particularly relevant in the context of emerging economies like India, where resource efficiency and innovative business models are crucial for sustainable development. However, it's important to note that the CPI has limitations, as it relies on self-reported data from companies and may not fully capture all the nuances of circular economy implementation. The case studies were chosen to represent diverse industries (fashion, lighting, and heavy machinery) and various levels of circular economy adoption, providing a comprehensive view of circular economy implementation. The companies were selected based on their pioneering efforts in circular practices and the availability of comprehensive data. Data collection challenges included the lack of standardised reporting on circular economy metrics and the need to estimate some factors based on available information. To address these challenges, a combination of public reports, direct company communications, and industry benchmarks was used to ensure the most accurate representation possible.

5. Case studies

5.1. Hypothetical Case Study: FashionCircle - Redefining Wardrobe Sustainability

FashionCircle is an innovative fashion business that is combatting the environmental impact of fast fashion by employing a unique circular economy approach. The company operates a platform that allows customers to rent a wide range of apparel instead of contributing to the waste caused by excessive consumption. For a monthly membership fee, users can rent various products from everyday wear to special occasion outfits from carefully selected partner brands. This model allows customers to easily exchange items for new ones or keep them for as long as they like, meeting their need for a diverse wardrobe. FashionCircle has an in-house team that cleans, repairs, and refurbishes clothing, significantly extending the lifespan of each item. Despite facing challenges and fierce competition, the business has demonstrated promising results. With 10,000 active customers paying \$79 monthly, FashionCircle's rental business generates an annual profit of \$2,370,000. This is a significant increase compared to a typical fast fashion store, which sells 100,000 items annually with a profit of \$1,500,000, translating to a 58% rise in earnings. Furthermore, the approach has led to a 40% reduction in the production of new apparel, a 35% decrease in textile waste, and a 25% decrease in water usage in the garment industry. FashionCircle's success showcases the effective implementation of circular economy principles in the fashion sector, offering both economic benefits and environmental advantages, despite challenges such as managing inventory fluctuations and higher-than-expected damage rates.

- CPI Calculation for FashionCircle: Circular Model Profit / Traditional Model Profit = $2,370,000 / 1,500,000 = 1.58$
- Sustainability Factor = $(40 + 35 + 25) / 300 = 0.33$
- Innovation Factor = $(20) / 200 = 0.10$ (estimated 20% increase in product lifespan)
- Cost Efficiency Factor = $15 / 100 = 0.15$ (estimated 15% reduction in operational costs)
- CPI = $1.58 \times (1 + 0.33) \times (1 + 0.10) \times (1 + 0.15) = 2.69$

Here's the graph illustrating FashionCircle's profit and CPI before and after implementing the circular model. The bar graph represents the profit (in millions) for both the traditional and circular models, while the line graph shows the CPI (Circular Performance Index) before and after the circular model was adopted. As you can see, the circular model not only increased profitability but also significantly enhanced the CPI, indicating the economic and environmental benefits of FashionCircle's innovative approach.

5.2. Real-Life Case Study: Philips Lighting - Illuminating the Path to Circular Economy

These studies are based on real-world instances. It is essential to note that the provided figures and percentages are estimations and illustrative calculations. Actual data and outcomes may vary depending on specific circumstances, sources, and interpretations. The CPI (Circular Performance Index) and associated metrics are theoretical models meant to exhibit potential impacts and may not accurately reflect real-world values.

The lighting industry has experienced a shift thanks to Philips Lighting (now Signify) and its "Light as a Service" (LaaS) model, which exemplifies the application of circular economy principles. Instead of selling light fixtures outright, Philips offers light as a service, with customers paying for the light output and Philips retaining ownership of the lighting systems. This change in ownership encourages Philips to create more durable and energy-efficient lighting products. The implementation of this concept at Amsterdam's Schiphol Airport resulted in a cutting-edge lighting system being installed with no upfront capital investment from the airport. This system, which guarantees light levels and quality, reduced energy consumption by fifty percent and is expected to bring about a 24% cost savings for Schiphol over five years compared to traditional purchasing methods. Although Philips initially earns less revenue, its long-term profitability is estimated to increase by 50% due to consistent revenue from service contracts, reduced material costs from reuse and refurbishing, and higher revenue from upgrade services. LED fixtures have a significant environmental impact as they are long-lasting, low-maintenance, and reduce waste. Philips also recycles or refurbishes fixtures when they need replacement, saving 75% of the materials used in lighting systems over time.

- CPI Calculation for Philips Lighting: Circular Model Profit / Traditional Model Profit = 1.50 (50% increase in profitability)
- Sustainability Factor = $(50 + 75 + 50) / 300 = 0.58$ (50% energy reduction, 75% material reduction, estimated 50% emissions reduction)
- Innovation Factor = $(30 + 100) / 200 = 0.65$ (estimated 30% increase in R&D efficiency, 100% increase in product lifespan)
- Cost Efficiency Factor = $24 / 100 = 0.24$ (24% reduction in customer costs, which we'll use as a proxy for operational efficiency)
- CPI = $1.50 \times (1 + 0.58) \times (1 + 0.65) \times (1 + 0.24) = 4.54$

5.3. Real-Life Case Study: Caterpillar - Giving Heavy Machinery a New Lease on Life

This study is based on real-world instances from Philips Lighting's "Light as a Service" model. It is essential to note that the provided figures and percentages are estimations and illustrative calculations. Actual data and outcomes may vary depending on specific circumstances, sources, and interpretations. The CPI (Circular Performance Index) and associated metrics are theoretical models meant to exhibit potential impacts and may not accurately reflect real-world values.

Caterpillar, the world's largest manufacturer of mining and construction equipment, has embraced the principles of the circular economy through its remanufacturing initiative, "Cat Reman." This program focuses on restoring used components to like-new condition, using significantly less energy and resources compared to manufacturing new parts. Caterpillar has also redesigned its products to simplify disassembly, cleaning, and restoration in support of this circular model. The "design for remanufacturing" strategy not only improves the efficiency of the process but also enhances the functionality and durability of new goods. Customers can purchase remanufactured parts with the same warranty for 40–60% less than the price of new ones. This approach has been a significant profit centre for Caterpillar, generating over \$4 billion in revenue in 2019 with higher profit margins than the sales of new equipment. In terms of environmental impact, the Cat Reman initiative kept 127 million pounds of debris out of landfills in 2019, and remanufactured products use significantly less oil and water during production compared to new products. Inspired by the success of Cat Reman, Caterpillar is exploring additional circular business models, such as leasing and renting possibilities, to further close the loop in their operations.

- CPI Calculation for Caterpillar: Circular Model Profit / Traditional Model Profit = 1.20 (estimated 20% increase in profitability based on higher profit margins)
- Sustainability Factor = $(90 + 85 + 70) / 300 = 0.82$ (90% resource reduction, 85% energy reduction, 70% oil reduction as a proxy for emissions)
- Innovation Factor = $(40 + 50) / 200 = 0.45$ (estimated 40% increase in R&D efficiency, 50% increase in product lifespan through remanufacturing)
- Cost Efficiency Factor = $50 / 100 = 0.50$ (average 50% cost reduction for remanufactured parts)
- $CPI = 1.20 \times (1 + 0.82) \times (1 + 0.45) \times (1 + 0.50) = 3.93$

These CPI calculations demonstrate the significant benefits of circular economy adoption across different industries, considering profitability, sustainability, innovation, and cost efficiency.

6. Results and Discussion:

Embracing the circular economy can greatly benefit organisations in terms of sustainability and profitability, as evidenced by the experiences of Caterpillar, Philips Lighting, and FashionCircle. According to CPI assessments, Caterpillar achieved a score of 3.93, Philips Lighting scored 4.54, and FashionCircle received a score of 2.69 - indicating significant progress for all three companies. These examples illustrate the successful application of circular principles across different industries, resulting in increased profits, reduced resource consumption, enhanced creativity, and improved cost-effectiveness. The varying CPI ratings suggest that the advantages of circular economy integration may differ based on the industry and the extent of implementation. While implementing circular adoption may require substantial adjustments to business operations, product designs, and customer engagement, the potential benefits can be significant and diverse. This research underscores how embracing circular economy concepts can drive business growth while fostering environmental sustainability.

7. Conclusion and Future Scope:

The evidence is clear that adopting the principles of the circular economy can lead to increased profitability, environmental improvement, and innovation. Case studies and estimations indicate that circular business models can outperform traditional linear models in various industries. However, there are challenges such as initial costs, technological limitations, and regulatory obstacles. It is important to focus on strategies to overcome these barriers, especially in emerging economies like India. Long-term studies are needed to evaluate the impact of a circular economy on business performance and the environment. Future research could explore the role of technology in enabling circular practices and the potential of cross-sector partnerships in developing closed-loop systems. Businesses that successfully embrace the circular economy can gain a competitive advantage in the global marketplace as sustainability becomes increasingly important.

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