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The interplay between circular business models and digitalisation in large European companies: a cross-sectoral analysis

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The concept of circular economy has recently gained the attention of scholars, policymakers, and business-people, who see it as a novel approach for addressing the economic and environmental issues caused by the traditional linear model of production and consumption. In this vein, the scientific literature suggests that companies can innovate their business models – and therefore creating value – by introducing circularity elements with the support of digital technologies, which can improve efficiency in resource utilisation. However, there is a lack of empirical studies investigating the state of the art of digital technologies utilization for enabling circular economy; in particular, it is unclear how much digitalisation is intertwined with circularity in the strategic agenda of businesses. This research focuses on large companies, because of their leadership in global markets and capacity to influence other stakeholders, to address the above research gaps. By analysing the most recent (2021) corporate sustainability reports of the companies included in the Dow Jones Sustainability Index Europe, we use content analysis to conduct both a semantic and relational analysis of the text and identifying the relationship linking the salient concepts. Our results show that, despite the recent interest towards circular economy in business, the connection between digitalisation and the circular economy is still largely absent in large European companies' business models. We confirm the existence of an ongoing trend – especially in some industrial sectors – but an organic discussion in the strategic-organizational dimension for designing and implementing circular business models is not emerging.

Keywords

Circular Economy, Digitalisation, Sustainability, Content Analysis, Corporate Sustainability Report

Topics

- Applications of network analysis in multidisciplinary fields

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