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Consumption in the Circular Economy: A Literature Review

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Abstract

A circular economy (CE) aims at decoupling value creation from waste generation and resource use by radically transforming production and consumption systems. Recent reviews on the topic of the circular economy have indicated that cultural barriers are a significant factor hindering the diffusion of so-called circular business models, particularly the lack of consumeror useracceptance. However, none of them has provided an overview of the existing literature addressing such issues that can help academics and practitioners better understand consumption considerations when addressing the circular economy. Motivated by these observations, this paper presents the results of a literature review that summarises and discusses insights from 111 articles in terms of the problem area, theoretical approaches, methods, and tools that have been used to collect and analyse data, the main issues, and identified research gaps. The results show that most of the existing scientific work on the circular economy and circular solutions addressing consumption has focussed on identifying factors that drive or hinder the consumption of circular solutions. A smaller but expanding set of articles has focussed on offering insights into the nature, meaning, and dynamics of consumption in the context of the circular economy. According to this set of articles, consumption in the circular economy is anonymous, connected, political, uncertain, and based on multiple values, not only utility. A smaller set of papers has explored the integration of user and consumer perspectives into design processes. Although these contributions are relevant, opportunities for further research are still open, particularly regarding socio-material and cultural aspects of consumption in the context of the circular economy, and the role of digitalisation. In addition, more work could be done regarding strategies to foster not only acceptance but also the adoption and diffusion of the circular economy. Based on the findings of this literature review, some ideas for a research agenda on the issue of consumption in the circular economy are outlined.

Keywords: circular economy, consumption, consumer acceptance, circular business models, user acceptance, cultu

Full text

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