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The Information Systems Infrastructure for a Global Circular Economy: Bridging Governance, Supply Chain Learning, and Platform Orchestration

Bryan Reinicke
breinicke@saunders.rit.edu

Sindhu Munugoti
sm4460@rit.edu
Rochester Institute of Technology
Rochester, NY 14623 USA

Abstract

The global economy faces a critical resource crisis. At present, circularity rates are estimated at only 7.2% of the 100 billion tons of materials extracted annually(Hlortu et al., 2026; Parinaz et al., 2026). In other words, 92.8% of material used in the global economy is new – something which is not sustainable. Transitioning from a linear "take-make-dispose" model to a regenerative Circular Economy (CE) requires more than technical recycling solutions; it demands a systemic overhaul of information flows and governance structures(Allioui et al., 2026; Jena et al., 2026). This paper argues that Information Systems (IS) research is uniquely positioned to inform the critical overlaps between organizational behavior, supply chain management, and technological innovation. By examining the role of digital platforms as meta-organizations, the implementation of "Discontinuation Governance" via AI, and the evolution of Circular Supply Chain (CSC) learning through digital traceability, this paper provides a roadmap for IS-driven circularity. It concludes that the integration of digital technologies—such as the Internet of Things (IoT), Blockchain, and Artificial Intelligence (AI)—is the essential "fuel" for closing the circularity gap and achieving a sustainable industrial future. This, in turn, presents a unique opportunity for a new stream of Information Systems research in implementing and integrating these systems.

Keywords: circular economy; supply chain; sustainability; innovation; digital platforms.

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1. INTRODUCTION: THE INFORMATIONAL CHALLENGE OF CIRCULARITY

The Circular Economy (CE) seeks to decouple economic growth from resource depletion by circulating products and materials at their highest utility for as long as possible (De Chiara, 2025; Jena et al., 2026). Central to this paradigm shift are the "R-frameworks," which prioritize strategies such as Refuse, Rethink, and Reduce over lower-order recovery methods like Recycling (Petrik et al., 2025; Sharma et al., 2025). However, operationalizing these strategies across fragmented global value chains presents a massive coordination challenge (Fares et al., 2025; Sarkis, 2026).

These changes are going to become more and more important for firms globally for a variety of reasons. Among these are new regulations coming out of the EU that will require more trackability for products throughout their life cycle, something which fits well with the ideas behind the CE. Other factors that will push companies in different industries to look for new solutions in these areas include the increased costs of shipping and logistics (making a CE model more financially attractive) and the current overwhelming demand for data storage and memory chips from the push for Artificial Intelligence (which shows no sign of abating). As more companies and countries begin to react to these external factors, there will be increasing pressure on Information Systems departments to make these changes possible.

Digitalization is increasingly recognized as the primary enabler of this transition (Mojdeh et al., 2026). Information systems provide the visibility and traceability required to manage complex reverse logistics and secondary material markets (Anjom et al., 2026; Kazancoglu et al., 2025). IS research, therefore, serves as the "connective fabric" that integrates technological capabilities with organizational strategy and regulatory mandates (Eckert et al., 2026; Parinaz et al., 2026). Despite this, there has been only a limited amounts of research done in information systems regarding the circular economy.

In this paper, we present an overview of some of the research frameworks that exist within the field of the CE and present opportunities for researchers in information systems to begin work in these areas.

2. THE IS-GOVERNANCE NEXUS: AI AND DISCONTINUATION CAPABILITIES

A significant overlap in current research exists between sustainability transitions and corporate governance. Within business, most of the research on CE has been done within the areas of Management (De Chiara, 2025) and Economics (Giordano et al., 2024), but it has started to appear in other research areas as well, including Accounting (Kwarteng et al., 2022) and Supply Chain Management (Anjom et al., 2026). Most CE studies focus on the adoption and implementation of sustainable practices in specific industries. Where we believe IS research can make a significant contribution is in looking at ways to exchange information across various industries, taking the learnings from each of these different areas and incorporating them into an information systems framework. IS research can also inform a more critical cross-industry dimension: the termination of entrenched, unsustainable routines (Allioui et al., 2026).

2.1 Discontinuation Governance Capability (DGC)

Research in sustainability has introduced the concept of Discontinuation Governance Capability (DGC), defined as an organization’s capacity to detect, escalate, and stop harmful routines (Allioui et al., 2026). Under conditions of power asymmetry—where firms may be dependent on unsustainable platforms or suppliers—AI-mediated governance serves as a countervailing mechanism (Allioui et al., 2026). Here again, the research done to date has been focused primarily on single industries or businesses.

IS research can inform this area by designing automated decision-support systems that enhance

 ISSN: 2473-4901
v12 n6954

accountability and transparency, ensuring that AI agents support circular goals rather than reinforcing linear inefficiencies (Allioui et al., 2026; de Lucas López et al., 2026). We also believe that by examining the research done across various industries that IS research could identify commonalities. The use of various Information Systems or technology make it easier for firms to adopt Circular models by reducing the effort and cost of switching to these models.

2.2 Top Management Team (TMT) Commitment

The effectiveness of green IT capital is heavily moderated by the commitment of the Top Management Team (TMT) (Aftab et al., 2025). IS research bridges the gap between Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and operational environmental performance by demonstrating how "green philosophy" can be hard-wired into IT infrastructure and personnel management (Aftab et al., 2025; Kapoor et al., 2024). This is another area for future research in Information Systems. Developing a framework that could not only measure the environmental impact of the IT infrastructure, but also demonstrate how these systems can help or hurt corporate environmental pledges. This could leverage the work that has been done in accounting, supply chain and management on CE models and their impact. As an inherently cross disciplinary field, we believe that Information Systems researchers could be uniquely positioned to leverage the knowledge and research from multiple areas to make a greater impact.

3. PLATFORM ORCHESTRATION: ARCHETYPES FOR CIRCULAR ECOSYSTEMS

Digital platforms act as central hubs in circular ecosystems, facilitating the exchange of products, waste, and information between diverse (Blackburn et al. 2023), as cited in (Petrik et al., 2025)). IS research informs the design of these platforms through morphological analysis and taxonomy development (Petrik et al., 2025). However, most of these models have focused on how to exchange information within a single industry. We believe that more research should be done to try to develop a common platform that would word across industries. This is the type of work that could serve in multiple industries to enable reuse and identify additional areas of overlap. Again, this type of research could lead to a platform that would reduce the economic costs for firms that wish to enter a circular economic model.

3.1 CE Platform Archetypes

A recent study identified six primary archetypes for CE platforms through a meta-analysis of the literature on CE (Petrik et al., 2025). These included reuse and resale hubs, circular operations enablers, reusable packaging trackers, waste management optimizers, waste trading platforms and circular traceability platforms (Petrik et al., 2025). Each of these types uses different technologies to facilitate different functions within the CE ecosystem. IS research explores "ontological reversal" in this context—where digital platforms do not just represent physical reality but actively shape it by embedding rules and facilitating informed decision-making at scale (Baskerville et al., 2020, as cited in Petrik et al., 2025). We believe that this would be an excellent area for future exploration in Information Systems research – looking for the common technical artifacts across these platforms to find ways to more easily transfer information, and through that, materials.

3.2 Bridging Information Asymmetries

CE platforms mitigate the "lemon market" problem in second-life applications by providing verifiable data on product condition and history (Petrik et al., 2025). For instance, blockchain-based platforms ensure data integrity, reducing the risk of fraud in recycled content claims (Khan et al., 2025; Sharma et al., 2025). Again, there has been limited research in information systems in this area. This would be a natural area where information systems research could help to ease entry into a circular economic model, thereby increasing participation of firms in the circular economy.

4. OVERLAPS IN SUPPLY CHAIN LEARNING AND IDENTITY

Not surprisingly, Supply Chain Management is an area that is actively researching the CE and how to support it. The transition to Circular Supply Chains (CSCs) is not merely a technical task; it is an identity-based and interpretive challenge (Anjom et al., 2026). IS research can inform and learn from the intersection of Supply Chain Learning (SCL) and organizational identity (Hlortu et al., 2026).

ISSN: 2473-4901
v12 n6954

4.1 Circular Supply Chain Identity

A shared "circular identity" among supply chain partners acts as a relational-symbolic bridge, transforming motivation into coordinated action (Anjom et al., 2026). Digital traceability capability (DTC) acts as a selective moderator in this relationship (Anjom et al., 2026). Interestingly, when digital traceability is mature, circular routines become guided by formal data-based systems rather than motivational signals alone, suggesting a "substitution effect" that IS research must further investigate (Anjom et al., 2026). Information systems researchers could play a critical role in shaping research in this area.

4.2 Big Data Analytics (BDA) in Logistics

Big Data Analytics (BDA) provides the predictive power needed for demand management and production planning in highly uncertain circular environments (Kazancoglu et al., 2025; Mojdeh et al., 2026). In sector-specific overlaps—such as the food supply chain—BDA drivers include governmental incentives and management team capability, highlighting the need for IS research in policy frameworks (Kazancoglu et al., 2025) and presenting another area for IS research within the CE. It should be pointed out that the possibility for research in BDA in the CE is not limited to Logistics. Indeed, there are a number of areas where this type of approach could be used to identify synergies within and between firms involved.

5. TECHNICAL INTEROPERABILITY: THE DIGITAL PRODUCT PASSPORT (DPP)

One of the most critical overlaps between technology, policy, and practice is the Digital Product Passport (DPP) (Fares et al., 2025). Mandated by upcoming European regulations, the DPP is a structured digital record that accompanies a product throughout its lifecycle (Eckert et al., 2026; Parinaz et al., 2026). This presents obvious possible research areas within information systems, some of which are explored below.

5.1 Harmonization and Standards

IS research is essential for developing the Reference Architectures (e.g., ISO 59000 family) and data ontologies required for DPPs (Fares et al., 2025; Jena et al., 2026). Without standardized data structures, the proliferation of private information systems increases transaction costs and creates “data silos” (Fares et al., 2025; Laubinger & Börkey, 2021). Here, the requirements of the European Union present an incentive for companies to examine the CE more closely and create possibilities in IS research to look at how companies could turn this requirement into a potential competitive advantage.

5.2 Challenges to Adoption

IS research must address the persistent barriers to DPP implementation, including data privacy concerns, unresolved questions regarding IP rights, and the technical complexity of integrating AI and blockchain with legacy ERP systems (Fares et al., 2025; Parinaz et al., 2026; Ye et al., 2026). The fact that this will be a requirement for all companies doing business in the EU moving forward points to how important this research will be from a practical standpoint.

6. EMERGING FRONTIERS: INDUSTRY 5.0 AND HUMAN-CENTRICITY

The emergence of Industry 5.0 represents a shift from pure automation to human-centric, sustainable manufacturing (Jena et al., 2026; Parinaz et al., 2026). IS research informs this overlap by exploring how technologies like Digital Twins and Augmented Reality (AR) can empower workers rather than replace them (Mohsen & Behrooz, 2025; Mojdeh et al., 2026; Parinaz et al., 2026).

6.1 Strategic Orchestration via AI

AI is evolving from a peripheral process optimizer into a strategic orchestrator of regenerative production systems (de Lucas López et al., 2026). Generative AI, for instance, can virtualize eco-design processes, evaluating thousands of material combinations before a physical prototype is even created (de Lucas López et al., 2026; Mojdeh et al., 2026).

ISSN: 2473-4901
v12 n6954

6.2 Resilience and Adaptive Infrastructure

Information systems must act as adaptive infrastructures that respond to sudden supply chain disruptions, such as those seen during the COVID-19 pandemic (Eckert et al., 2026; Sarkis, 2026). By situating IS at the intersection of feasibility and political ambition, researchers can translate macro-level sustainability goals into micro-level operational reality (Eckert et al., 2026).

7. CONCLUSION: A FUTURE RESEARCH AGENDA FOR IS IN CE

Moving more businesses and industries to a CE model has the potential to reduce the consumption of energy and materials for production. For information systems researchers, this is an opportunity to engage in research that could impact not only corporate earnings, but global environmental trends as well.

Through this research, we have identified several promising research areas for information systems, which are presented in the table below, along with a sample of citations from these areas.

Research Area	Key Research Themes	Relevant Sources
Information Systems & Digital Technologies	**Digital enablers** (AI, IoT, Blockchain, Big Data) for circularity; **Digital Product Passports (DPP)** for lifecycle tracking; **Digital Twins** for real-time simulation; **Platform orchestration** and meta-organizations; **AI-mediated governance** and accountability.	(Allioui et al., 2026; Alshubiri & Hammami, 2026; de Lucas López et al., 2026; Eckert et al., 2026; Fares et al., 2025; Giordano et al., 2024; Mohsen & Behrooz, 2025; Parinaz et al., 2026; Petrik et al., 2025)
Supply Chain Management	**Circular Supply Chains (CSC)** as a systemic backbone; **Reverse logistics** and waste recovery optimization; **Supply Chain Learning (SCL)** and capacity building; **Digital traceability** and supplier commitment; **Multi-tier supply chain** leadership.	(Anjom et al., 2026; Hlortu et al., 2026; Kazancoglu et al., 2025; Mojdeh et al., 2026; Sarkis, 2026; Sharma et al., 2025)
Entrepreneurship & Organizational Behavior	**Circular entrepreneurship** (founder expertise, open innovation, social capital); **Start-up support** and university-led incubators; **Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)** and green IT capital; **Top Management Team (TMT)** commitment and environmental performance.	(Aftab et al., 2025; De Chiara, 2025; Kambanou et al., 2025; Kapoor et al., 2024; Qin et al., 2026)
Governance & Sustainability Transitions	**Discontinuation Governance Capability** (terminating harmful routines); **Circular cities** (urban metabolism, urban mining); **ISO 59000 series** and standardization for circularity; **Policy mixes** and regulatory enablers.	(Alevizos et al., 2026; Brglez et al., 2024; Dentoni et al., 2026; Jena et al., 2026)
Consumer Behavior & Societal Impact	**Public awareness** and pro-environmental behaviors; **R-framework strategies** (Refuse, Rethink, Reduce, Recycle); **Cultural and demographic influences** on circularity engagement; **Employee green behavior** and psychological empowerment.	(Fritsch et al., 2025; Gonella et al., 2024; Zhi, 2026)
Sector-Specific Transformations	**Automotive industry** 2050 carbon neutrality backcasting; **Sustainable hospital operations** and green healthcare; **Food supply chain** BDA drivers; **Construction sector** waste management and BIM.	(Eckert et al., 2026; Gianpaolo et al., 2026; Kazancoglu et al., 2025; Walzberg et al., 2023)

Table 1: Key Research Themes by Area

 ISSN: 2473-4901
v12 n6954

We have also identified a number of areas of overlap with other disciplines for research in this area. Information Systems is naturally a boundary spanning discipline, and we believe that this table can help point to research areas where collaboration with other disciplines is a natural fit.

Summary of Research Overlaps

The Technology-Governance Intersection:	Information systems research informs the **governance of circular ecosystems** by providing mechanisms for **discontinuation governance**, where AI and digital platforms help identify and terminate unsustainable routines.
The Supply Chain-Identity Nexus:	Research on **Circular Supply Chain Identity** suggests that digital traceability capability acts as a moderator, bridging the gap between a firm's internal green motivation and actual circular logistics adoption across the chain.
The Entrepreneur-Ecosystem Link:	Circular entrepreneurship is not just an individual endeavor but is fueled by **cross-fertilization of expertise** and **open innovation**, which are increasingly facilitated by regional digital platforms and incubators.
The Policy-Implementation Gap:	Sector-specific research, such as the **backcasting for the automotive industry**, highlights how technologies like **Digital Product Passports** translate macro-level sustainability policies into micro-level operational data flows.

Table 2: Summary of Research Overlaps between areas

The transition to a digital circular economy is a governance-dependent process that relies on the strategic integration of technology, people, and policy (Allioui et al., 2026; Jena et al., 2026). What could be more in the wheel house of information systems researchers?

Future IS research should prioritize:

- Longitudinal studies that track the impact of digital enablers on firm-level circularity metrics over time (de Lucas López et al., 2026; Parinaz et al., 2026).
- Comparative research on how different socioeconomic contexts (e.g., SMEs in emerging vs. developed economies) influence digital CE adoption (de Lucas López et al., 2026; Hlortu et al., 2026).
- Design science research aimed at creating interoperable platforms that balance data transparency with intellectual property protection (Eckert et al., 2026; Petrik et al., 2025).
- Cross disciplinary research that leverages knowledge and research from the areas identified above

By addressing these overlaps, Information Systems research can move beyond describing the circular transition to actively engineering the informational foundation for a regenerative global economy (Eckert et al., 2026; Jena et al., 2026; Petrik et al., 2025).

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