

ATOM TO BITS: SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS OF AN ECONOMY

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While it is becoming almost a cliché to refer to an event as ‘revolutionary’, advances in internet technologies and electronic commerce may arguably be one of those moments in history in which all the hyperboles may actually turn out to be true. Academic scholars, business executives, government officials, and others are only now beginning to come to grips with this dramatic economic and technological shift from what the director of the MIT Media Lab refers to as the global transition from ”atom to bits.”

The business implications of the transition to the e-world – at least in the U.S. – can perhaps be best captured in the formation of the so-called Internet economy: in less than ten years, the Internet economy has become a US\$300 billion sector rivaling traditional industries as energy (\$223 billion), automobiles (\$350), and telecommunications (\$270 billion)

The objective of this paper/presentation is to explore and analyze the emerging sustainability implications of the global e-economy. How and in what manner will the e-commerce market development affect the business and environmental management strategies of firms ? What kinds of sustainability conclusions – however preliminary - can one draw from the intersection of cyberspace and commerce ?

The expansion of the Internet economy has too many random interactions and complex feedback loops to allow for any easy predictions. But, e-commerce is more than a case of simple material substitution. Any business that can rival business leviathans like automobile and energy in such short span of time is bound to have an enormous impact on the global sustainability process.