

REPAIRABILITY INDEX: ENVIRONMENT

NEWS: The right to repair movement in India | Explained

WHAT'S IN THE NEWS?

The Repairability Index (RI) scores consumer electronics based on how easy they are to repair, aiming to reduce e-waste and promote sustainability, though India's current model leans more towards industry cooperation than consumer rights.

Repairability Index (RI): What Is It?

1. Definition and Purpose:

- The Repairability Index (RI) assigns a numerical score to consumer electronics and appliances based on how easy they are to repair.
- It is designed to help consumers make informed choices and encourage manufacturers to create more sustainable and serviceable products.

2. Key Evaluation Criteria:

- Availability of spare parts
- Cost of repairs relative to product cost
- Access to software updates
- Availability of repair manuals and technical documentation

3. Objective:

- To reduce e-waste, promote a circular economy, and enhance consumer empowerment by making repair a viable alternative to replacement.

Planned Obsolescence and Manufacturing Trends:

1. Durability Decline:

- Modern appliances are often less durable than older models due to planned obsolescence – a strategy where manufacturers intentionally design products with limited lifespans to drive sales of newer models.

2. Cost-Cutting Pressure:

- Rising raw material costs, especially for imported metals like copper, have led to:
 - Leaner engineering designs
 - Reduced robustness
 - Decreased repair-friendliness of devices

3. Resulting Impact:

- Today's devices are often harder and costlier to repair, contributing to higher turnover of goods, increased e-waste, and consumer dissatisfaction.

RI in the Larger Context: Circular Economy and Durable Wealth

1. Circular Economy Alignment:

- Repairability supports reuse and longevity, central to the circular economy model.
- Components are reintegrated into the value chain, reducing dependence on virgin raw materials.

2. Environmental Gains:

- Encourages e-waste reduction and conservation of resources.
- Reduces the need for energy-intensive mining and production.

3. Durable Wealth Concept:

- Older appliances, though bulky, often lasted longer and are considered "durable wealth"—providing long-term value and utility.
- In a world where technological improvements are incremental, longer-lasting devices make ecological and economic sense.

Right to Repair: Global vs Indian Context

1. Global Meaning of Right to Repair:

- Grants consumers the ability to:
 - Access spare parts and manuals
 - Use third-party repair services

- Modify or fix products without voiding warranties
- Strong consumer protection ethos in countries like the U.S. and EU.

2. India's Current Approach:

- The Indian government has adopted a non-confrontational model:
 - Launched the Right to Repair portal under the Department of Consumer Affairs (DoCA).
 - Portal provides repair manuals and links to authorized service centres.
- Approach appears to favor manufacturer cooperation over consumer autonomy.

3. U.S. Case Study – Stronger Pushback:

- U.S. consumers and activists have pushed against:
 - Corporate monopolies on repair (e.g., Apple's restrictions)
 - Cases like Taylor Co.'s exclusive repair contract for McDonald's ice cream machines have become symbolic examples of restricted repair access.

Tensions Between Consumers and Manufacturers:

1. Manufacturer Resistance:

- Repair has become a major revenue source for many brands.
- Fears include:
 - Loss of ecosystem control
 - Safety liabilities
 - Loss of intellectual property

2. Indian RI Committee Concerns:

- Predominantly composed of industry representatives, raising questions of bias in scoring methodology.
- However, inclusion of consumer rights advocate Pushpa Girimaji suggests some balance in representation.

Way Forward and Implications:

1. Balanced Implementation Strategy:

- The government aims to promote RI without discouraging innovation or increasing compliance burdens.
- Seeks to balance ease of doing business with consumer protection.

2. Industry Impact:

- Brands may be pressured to improve product design, ensuring:
 - Modular construction
 - Longer software support
 - Easier part replacement

3. Consumer Empowerment:

- Increases transparency and allows buyers to compare products based on repairability as a key decision-making factor.

4. Bridging Rights and Interests:

- RI is a step towards aligning consumer rights with sustainability goals, pushing manufacturers to act more responsibly.

Conclusion:

- The Repairability Index (RI) represents a progressive move toward sustainable consumption and circular economic principles.
- While India's model is industry-cooperative, ongoing reform and inclusive representation are essential to ensure genuine consumer benefit.
- The RI could serve as a powerful tool to reshape manufacturing trends, foster eco-conscious consumption, and ensure longer-lasting, serviceable products.

Source: <https://www.thehindu.com/business/Industry/the-right-to-repair-movement-in-india-explained/article69572632.ece>