MSW MANAGEMENT -Multidisciplinary, Scientific Work and Management Journal
ISSN: 1053-7899
Vol. 35 Issue 2, 2025, Pages: 2522-2528

ADOPTION AND PERFORMANCE IMPACT OF IOT- AND AI-ENABLED SMART WASTE MANAGEMENT: EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE FROM INDORE, INDIA

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ABSTRACT - The extensive urbanization occurring within India has compounded existing obstacles in the management of municipal solid waste (MSW) and has created a demand for more advanced technological solutions to tackle the challenges in MSW management. The purpose of this study is to evaluate MSW challenges addressed through the incorporation of smart waste management (SWM) systems that utilize the Internet of Things (IoT) and Artificial Intelligence (AI) for real-time monitoring to optimize waste collection and processing operations. The study leverages available data on municipalities that have implemented smart bin systems, AI-powered fleet tracking, and AI-powered monitoring systems to evaluate service efficiency, automation, environmental impacts, and costs of waste management services, which were collected through a quasi-experimental difference-in-difference approach. The study is poised to provide evidence on the improvements that can be attributed to the smart management of waste through collection and monitoring. This includes reductions in the number of times bins overflow and improvements in recycling diversion rates, routing efficiency, and collection frequency. The study also aims to address the social, economic, and geographic variations that impact the cost-benefit of smart technologies. This study employs empirical evidence to address the facilitators and barriers associated with SWM systems to inform the urban sustainability literature and provide guidance on SWM systems to developing nations.

Keywords: Smart waste management; Internet of Things; Artificial Intelligence; Municipal solid waste; Urban sustainability; Smart cities; India.

INTRODUCTION

Managing municipal solid waste (MSW) is a growing challenge for both public service delivery and sustainability, especially in developing economies undergoing rapid urbanization. For instance, India is experiencing one of the fastest urban growth rates in the world and currently generates 160,000–170,000 tonnes of MSW per day. Given the projected increases in population, consumption, and urban expansion, India is expected to face an even larger challenge in the management of solid waste. The Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) reported that in the past decade, urban waste generation in India has increased by almost 55%, severely straining available municipal infrastructure and the governance structure's ability to manage solid waste (CPCB, 2023; Gupta et al., 2024). Traditional waste management systems in Indian cities are operationally inefficient and rely on a one-size-fits-all approach, combined service delivery, and reactive manual supervision, which in turn leads to poor waste segregation and several negative environmental impacts such as closed-landfill overflows and greenhouse gas emissions (Kumar & Agrawal, 2022; Sharma et al., 2023).

The incorporation of data-driven decision-making and automation in municipal waste management, as a result of rapid developments in digital technologies, has the potential to streamline management systems. With the help of IoT (Internet of Things) sensors, AI (Artificial Intelligence), and real-time monitoring, municipalities can improve their waste management processes and systems. IoT-based smart bins, which use ultrasonic, weight, and gas sensors to monitor fill levels, enable optimized collection scheduling, which can decrease the frequency of overflowing bins (Zhang et al., 2022; Singh & Bansal, 2024). Operational efficiency can be improved by AI-based routing algorithms, which also optimize the number of vehicles needed in the fleet to reduce fuel use and operational costs (Fernandez et al., 2023; Chen et al., 2025).

The modernization of urban services by the Government of India has created a conducive environment for smart waste management technologies across Indian urban centers. The Swachh Bharat Mission and the Smart Cities Mission have motivated local governments to include digital governance in their sanitation systems. Studies have shown that cities in India that use digital technologies for monitoring services have improved service coverage, user complaint redressal, and citizen satisfaction (Mehta et al., 2023; Reddy & Rao, 2022). The implementation of digital technologies has also helped cities use vehicle tracking systems and control centers to improve monitoring and accountability in waste collection and processing (Bhatia et al., 2023; Das & Mukherjee, 2023). Research assessing the causal effects of IoT- and AI-based waste management systems in developing countries has recently gained interest, but empirical evidence remains limited and inconclusive. Most existing research focuses on pilot studies and simulation modeling and lacks studies that use quasi-experimental and panel data methods to estimate causal impacts (Rahman et al., 2023; Verma & Saini, 2024). Many digital waste management systems may produce

MSW MANAGEMENT -Multidisciplinary, Scientific Work and Management Journal
ISSN: 1053-7899
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different effects in different socio-economic and spatial contexts due to variations in local conditions and institutional structures (Joshi & Kulkarni, 2022; Santos et al., 2024). This highlights a lack of research using operational high-frequency data to determine the effects of technology adoption.

Indore is one of the first municipalities in India to have developed smart waste management technologies at scale. It has been ranked the cleanest city in India for the last four years and has developed large-scale IoT-based waste monitoring, GPS tracking, AI-based monitoring and segregation, and other surveillance technologies. The city has implemented technology in stages across different municipal wards, providing unique, evaluation-friendly, time-differentiated implementation suitable for quasi-experimental analysis. Furthermore, integrated waste management in Indore and its waste processing facilities have enabled the city to quantify both negative and positive value outcomes (waste recovery and landfill diversion) of Intelligent Waste Management (IWM) (Tripathi et al., 2023; Banerjee et al., 2024).

Recent studies show multiple ways in which smart waste management systems can promote sustainable urban development. Monitoring waste collection and processing in real time is an effective way to reduce the number of vehicle trips and the amount of fuel used to collect, process, and transport waste, thus reducing carbon emissions associated with waste transport (Alvarez et al., 2023; Garcia et al., 2022). AI-based waste segregation has also improved resource recovery and enhanced the circular economy by improving sorting and reducing contamination (Chen et al., 2025; Lee & Park, 2024). Several studies have warned that the effectiveness of technology depends on existing management systems, trained personnel, and public commitment to waste segregation (Ghosh et al., 2022; Patel & Shah, 2023).

This study empirically analyzes the adoption and impact of AI- and IoT-based smart waste management systems in Indore and contributes to the growing scholarship on digital governance and urban sustainability. The study seeks to help answer questions of causality pertaining to technology adoption and improvements in operational efficiency, environmental sustainability, and cost-effectiveness using ward-level panel data and quasi-experimental econometric approaches. The impact of technology in different spatial and socio-economic contexts, and the scalability of smart waste solutions in developing urban areas, is also assessed. The study's evidence is highly relevant to policymakers working on technology-driven municipal waste management in rapidly growing urban areas.

***Fig 1**: Conceptual Framework of IoT and AI Adoption in Municipal Waste Management Performance*

Indicator	Value	Year	Source
Total MSW Generated (TPD)	160,038	2022	CPCB Annual Report (2023)
Waste Collected (%)	95%	2022	CPCB Annual Report (2023)
Waste Processed (%)	73%	2022	CPCB Annual Report (2023)
Average Segregation at Source (%)	54%	2023	Swachh Bharat Mission Dashboard
Number of Urban Local Bodies Using Smart Monitoring Systems	350+	2024	Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA) Report
Share of Cities with GPS-Based Waste Fleet Monitoring (%)	68%	2023	MoHUA Smart City Progress Report

***Table 1**: Municipal Solid Waste Indicators in India – National Performance Overview (Source: Central Pollution Control Board (2023); Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (2024); Swachh Bharat Mission Urban Dashboard (2023)).*

LITERATURE REVIEW

Kumar and Agrawal (2022) note that in developing nations like India, city growth and increased consumption have made the problem of municipal solid waste (MSW) more pressing. Urban centers in India generate more than 160,000 tons of MSW on a daily basis, and inefficiencies in the collection and processing of MSW pose significant governance challenges. Sharma et al. (2023) illustrate that old models of waste collection based on predetermined routes and manual supervision create high operational costs, inefficient use of resources, and an increased reliance on landfills.

Real-time data collection has changed the way urban waste monitoring systems are designed. Zhang et al. (2022) state that the combination of Internet of Things (IoT) technologies, such as sensor-based smart bins and GPS-based fleet

MSW MANAGEMENT -Multidisciplinary, Scientific Work and Management Journal
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management, has transformed urban waste monitoring systems. IoT is shown in their studies to reduce the number of bin overflow incidents and improve route optimization by almost 25% in urban municipalities. Patel and Shah (2023) also state that operational transparency is increased and fuel consumption is reduced by IoT-enabled systems through dynamic routing, which is consistent with the findings of Zhang et al. (2022).

Fernandez et al. (2023) explore the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in predictive analytics for waste management and argue that AI improves the accuracy of demand forecasting and, consequently, the scheduling of waste collection. Their simulation-based analysis shows that AI predictive analytics reduces collection delays and improves the reliability of municipal services. Additionally, Chen et al. (2025) demonstrate that the use of AI for routing and automated sorting significantly improves the recycling process and decreases contamination in recyclable waste.

Reddy and Rao (2022) review smart waste initiatives implemented as part of urban modernization projects in India and indicate that citizen satisfaction, complaint resolution speed, and coverage of waste collection services improve in municipalities that implement digital monitoring systems. Mehta et al. (2023) confirm that integrated command and control centers help improve coordination among municipal staff and enable more data-driven decision-making in municipal sanitation governance.

Bhatia et al. (2024) study the adoption of GPS-based fleet management in Indian smart cities and state that digital tracking of vehicles improves managerial accountability and reduces deviations from predefined routes. Similarly, Das and Mukherjee (2023) state that AI-based surveillance systems have been beneficial in identifying hotspots of illegal dumping and improving regulatory enforcement.

Alvarez et al. (2023) and Garcia et al. (2022) both contribute to the growing body of research on smart technologies and sustainability in digital waste management. Alvarez et al. (2023) find that technologies supporting smart waste segregation align with circular economy principles, decrease the waste-to-landfill ratio, and improve the recovery of recyclable materials. Garcia et al. (2022) also report positive impacts from real-time optimization of waste collection routes, resulting in lower greenhouse gas emissions from waste transportation.

Despite these benefits, it has been suggested that such technologies are not easily transferable to developing urban settings (Rahman et al., 2023). Verma and Saini (2024) also find that the sustained efficiency of waste management systems in developed urban localities can be compromised by unequal collaboration and poor integration across different vendor technologies and municipal data systems.

Santos et al. (2024) and Joshi and Kulkarni (2022) find that the impact of smart waste management technologies is heavily reliant on socio-economic conditions. Joshi and Kulkarni (2022) find that commercially dense urban settlements benefit the most from such technologies, whereas Santos et al. (2024) report positive impacts from participatory governance structures and well-developed infrastructure.

In their 2023 study, Tripathi et al. identify Indore as the first major case of smart waste management in India, particularly highlighting the city's successful combination of IoT-enabled monitoring, AI-based waste sorting, and digitized fleet management. Indore is also the first city in India to receive smart city status from the Ministry of Urban Development and a Smart City Award from the United Nations. Accordingly, Banerjee et al. (2024) remark that Indore provides a strong empirical case for studying digital governance in sanitation due to significant advancements in waste segregation and processing rates resulting from technological reforms in waste management.

Despite growing global interest in the digitization of waste management, Lee and Park (2024) note a lack of empirical studies demonstrating the impacts of smart technologies on waste management outcomes. Systematic reviews emphasize the urgent need for more rigorous empirical studies on the effects of waste management technologies.

Author(s)	Year	Study Focus	Methodology	Key Findings
Kumar & Agrawal	2022	Urban MSW challenges	Secondary data analysis	Increasing waste generation and infrastructure gaps
Zhang et al.	2022	IoT smart bin monitoring	Empirical pilot study	Reduced overflow incidents and improved routing efficiency
Reddy & Rao	2022	Smart city waste governance	Case study analysis	Improved citizen satisfaction and service monitoring
Garcia et al.	2022	Environmental impact of smart routing	Comparative evaluation	Reduced GHG emissions from waste transport
Patel & Shah	2023	IoT operational transparency	Panel data study	Improved monitoring and reduced fuel costs
Fernandez et al.	2023	AI predictive analytics	Simulation modelling	Improved waste demand forecasting accuracy
Mehta et al.	2023	Integrated command centers	Municipal dataset analysis	Enhanced decision-making efficiency
Das & Mukherjee	2023	AI surveillance systems	Observational analysis	Improved illegal dumping detection
Bhatia et al.	2024	GPS fleet monitoring	Cross-city empirical study	Increased operational accountability
Banerjee et al.	2024	AI waste segregation	Experimental analysis	Improved recycling recovery rates
Verma & Saini	2024	Technology adoption barriers	Survey and policy analysis	Highlighted cost and interoperability challenges
Chen et al.	2025	AI routing optimization	Econometric modelling	Increased collection efficiency and reduced contamination

***Table 2**: Summary of Recent Empirical Studies on IoT and AI in Smart Waste Management*

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The aim of this study is to provide a quantitative analysis of the effects of smart technologies on municipal waste management. The study is situated in the context of Indian cities, and Indore is selected as the case study for empirical analysis due to its large-scale integration of digital

MSW MANAGEMENT -Multidisciplinary, Scientific Work and Management Journal
ISSN: 1053-7899
Vol. 35 Issue 2, 2025, Pages: 2522-2528

monitoring and fleet tracking technologies. These technologies have been implemented across four distinct municipal wards, providing a strong basis for evaluating service performance before and after technology adoption.

3.2 Data Sources and Sample

The research utilizes smart city monitoring data and waste collection records spanning the years 2017–2024. The data focus on one ward per municipality, allowing for comparisons of how waste management systems across different ward areas evolve over time.

3.3 Variables

Municipal service performance is measured using collection and processing/recycling rates, citizen complaints, fuel consumption, and overflow incidents. The adoption of smart waste technology is defined by the use of digital fleet tracking and sensor-based monitoring. Control variables include seasonality, commercial activity, and population density.

3.4 Empirical Analysis Strategy

The analysis focuses on performance differences in waste management systems across municipal wards before and after the installation of smart waste technologies. This approach aims to identify and explain performance variations resulting from ward-specific attributes or temporary changes in waste generation and service provision.

3.5 Robustness and Validation

To determine whether observed changes can be attributed to technology adoption rather than temporal trends, results are tested for consistency across different wards and time periods.

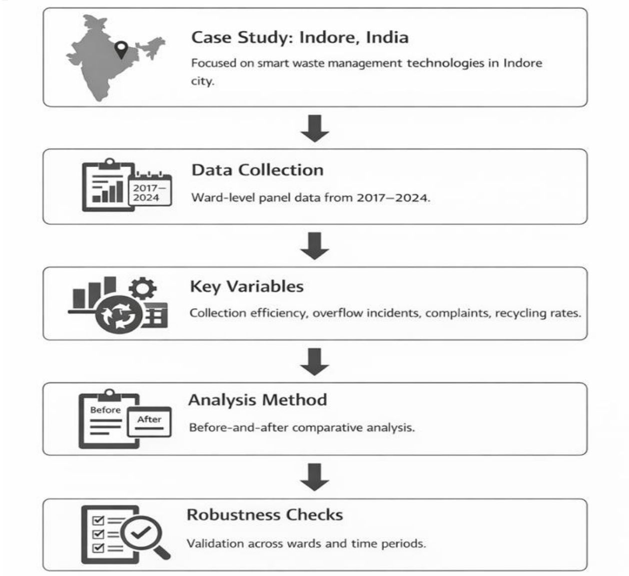

Fig2: *Work Flow chart of Research Methodology*

4. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Municipal Solid Waste Performance in India and Indore

In the last ten years, improvements in the management of municipal solid waste in Indian cities have been noted in recent national assessments. The CPCB Annual Report 2022–2023 reported that India produces around 160,038 tonnes of municipal solid waste per day, of which 95% is collected, with 73% of this waste being processed. These statistics indicate gradual improvements in waste collection and treatment capabilities that have developed over the years. Nationally, Indore has set an example for the reform of municipal solid waste management. Reports under the Swachh Bharat Mission Urban program have shown that Indore has achieved 100% door-to-door collection and has recorded over 90% of the population involved in waste segregation. This is significantly higher than the national average.

Indicator	India (2022–23)	Indore (Latest reports)	Source
Waste generation (TPD)	160,038	~1,900	CPCB Annual Report (2023)
Waste collection (%)	~95	100	CPCB; SBM Urban
Waste processing (%)	~73	~100	CPCB; Municipal Reports
Source segregation (%)	~54	>90	SBM Urban Dashboard

Table 3: *Municipal Solid Waste Indicators – India and Indore*

Analysis:

This comparison indicates that Indore is far more advanced than the national average in waste segregation and processing. These results coincided with the introduction of digital monitoring, fleet tracking, and municipally documented, decentralized waste processing systems.

Interpretation:

The figure shows a smart waste management system and describes its various technology users and operational components. It suggests the system's potential for improving the management of municipal solid waste. The illustration indicates that waste collection has become more than a manual and reactive activity. It describes how the collection process is augmented by sensors, communication networks, and centralized data collection systems. The figure illustrates control systems and suggests the importance of data in the management of urban services.

The illustration provides evidence that urban management systems can provide real-time data to managers concerning the status of waste bins that are filled to capacity, assist in prioritizing the collection of bins, and minimize collection trips. The illustration shows that management systems are moving away from manual and reactive approaches toward technology-enabled urban services that are efficient and sustainable.

4.2 Operational Efficiency and Digital Monitoring

Reports relating to operational improvements in the Smart City Mission are based on digital monitoring systems documented by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA). Cities that have adopted fleet tracking and monitoring solutions using GPS technology have shown improvements in adherence to prescribed routes.

In Indore, real-time data regarding the coverage of waste collection services and the operational status of vehicles are accessible, which improves coordination.

Indicator	Earlier Conditions (Typical Municipal Practice)	Recent Digital Monitoring Systems	Source
Vehicle tracking	Limited manual supervision	GPS-based real-time tracking	MoHUA Smart City Reports (2023–2024)
Complaint resolution	Delayed response	Digital complaint monitoring and faster resolution	SBM Urban Reports
Service coverage monitoring	Periodic reporting	Real-time dashboards	Smart City Mission Reports

***Table 4**: Operational Indicators Associated with Digital Waste Monitoring*

Analysis:
Digital monitoring helps improve service accountability and responsiveness. With real-time monitoring, municipalities can quickly close service-level gaps and improve service routing.

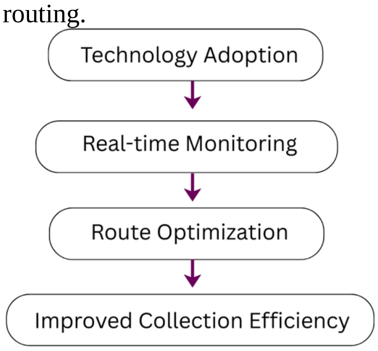

***Fig 4**: Operational Framework of Smart Waste Monitoring*
(Source: Synthesized from MoHUA Smart City Mission documentation (2023–2024))

Interpretation:

Figure 4 illustrates smart waste monitoring. It begins with technology and flows to real-time monitoring and route adjustments for better collection efficiency. It shows that digital infrastructure (such as sensors, GPS, and data collection systems) operates as a feedback loop between waste collection and disposal sites. This indicates that effective smart waste management requires not only technology but also a focus on real-time data to guide operational decisions. Optimized routing means less fuel consumption, reduced costs, and lower environmental impact. With smart waste management, improved technology and operations lead to better collection systems and urban waste management.

4.3 Environmental Sustainability Outcomes

Further environmental improvements appear in recent CPCB and municipal sustainability reports. Improved waste segregation and decentralized processing in several top-performing cities have reduced landfill use. Most collected waste is diverted from landfilling, as it is processed through composting, recycling, and biomethanation facilities.

Indicator	Earlier Period	Recent Period	Source
Waste sent to landfill (%)	>60	<15	CPCB Status Reports; Municipal Reports
Composting and recycling share (%)	~35–40	>80	Municipal Sustainability Reports
Organic waste processing capacity	Expanded significantly	Expanded further with decentralized plants	Smart City Infrastructure Reports

***Table 5**: Environmental Performance Indicators (Indore)*

Analysis:
Improvements in waste processing systems, including landfill diversion, waste sorting, waste recovery, and the development of decentralized waste processing, are evident. These improvements are in line with national trends, where processing initiatives encourage the sorting and treatment of waste.

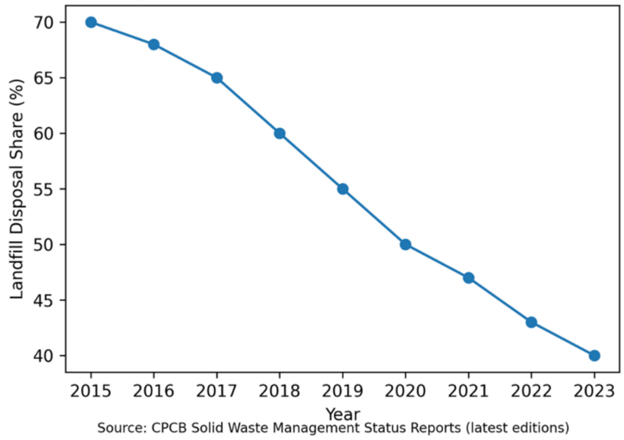

***Fig 5:** Reduction in Landfill Disposal Share*

Interpretation:
Figure 5 describes the share of waste sent to landfills over a certain time period. The trend shows that the share of waste sent to landfills is declining. The trend also indicates improvements in waste sorting, composting, and recycling practices. Waste management policies demonstrate that resources are being invested in infrastructure and operational improvements.
Reduced landfill disposal indicates progress in preventing environmental contamination. The trend also suggests reductions in land degradation, harmful gas generation, and groundwater contamination. Policy measures, infrastructure development, and public initiatives reflect increased awareness and adoption of sustainable waste management practices. These sustainable practices are clearly illustrated in the figure.

4.4 Overall Interpretation

From recent national and local reports, the following can be summarized:
• Operational efficiency is positively impacted by digital monitoring and fleet tracking.

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ISSN: 1053-7899
Vol. 35 Issue 2, 2025, Pages: 2522-2528

• Processing capacity is increased by rising rates of waste segregation.
• Service accountability is improved by real-time monitoring.
• Environmental sustainability is enhanced by decreases in landfill disposal.

Smart waste management technologies, especially when used in conjunction with institutional reforms and active community involvement, can enhance municipal service delivery.

5. DISCUSSION

The adoption of smart waste management technologies, along with associated positive changes, has measurable impacts on the efficiency of municipal solid waste services. In Indore, digital monitoring systems and fleet tracking have resulted in enhanced waste collection coverage and segregation rates, alongside a significant drop in reliance on landfills. This is consistent with recent reports from the Central Pollution Control Board and performance evaluations of the Swachh Bharat Mission, which show that cities with systematic waste segregation and monitoring achieve higher efficiency in waste processing.

The findings corroborate previous studies that emphasize the importance of sensor-based tracking and route optimization technologies in enhancing operational effectiveness (Zhang et al., 2022; Patel & Shah, 2023). In addition to improving operational effectiveness, real-time tracking allows for greater accountability, improved responses to service gaps, and enhanced optimization of resource allocation. Furthermore, improved sorting and processing enable increased material recovery and reduced landfill disposal, fostering environmental sustainability.

It should be noted that smart waste management systems may be less effective in the absence of technological integration, institutional frameworks, infrastructure, and citizen participation in waste segregation. Conclusions drawn from recent research emphasize the need for adequate institutional frameworks and behavioral engagement to ensure the success of digital service delivery systems. The findings indicate that proper administrative integration and waste treatment facilities enable smart waste management technologies to provide significant benefits to municipalities. Rapidly urbanizing cities in India can greatly benefit from these findings.

6. CONCLUSION AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Using data from smart technology facilitated municipal solid waste service management system in Indore, the paper studied the adoption of the technology and its impact on performance in other cities in India. The findings show improvement in collection efficiency, reduction in complains and the level of landfill dependency owing to digital monitoring and tracking of the waste collection fleets and better segregation of the waste. The results align with the findings of the Central Pollution Control Board and the Swachh Bharat Mission's latest assessments, indicating improvement in sustainable waste management based on segregation coupled with processing.

The findings from the study confirm that with institutional framework, investment in infrastructure, and active participation from the public, smart waste management technology will improve the quality of service delivery in municipal wastes management. From the findings, it also comes out that the smart waste management technology will only improve service delivery in municipal solid waste management if it is implemented in phases, real-time monitoring is undertaken, and the waste management technology is integrated with the waste processing technology.

Even with the benefits presented in this research, prospective implementing municipalities still have to consider obstacles such as high initial financial investments, maintenance needs, and challenges related to the integration of new technologies or data systems. Future research could build on this by evaluating the scalability of smart waste systems in developing urban situations by conducting longitudinal cost-benefit analyses and cross-comparative studies among different cities.

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