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Opinion Article

Revolution in Production: Considering Additive Manufacturing Effect

Khaled Farouk*

Department of Additive Manufacturing, Suez University, Suez, Egypt

DESCRIPTION

Additive Manufacturing (AM), commonly known as 3D printing, has transformed the landscape of manufacturing. Unlike traditional subtractive manufacturing, which involves cutting away material from a solid block to create objects, AM builds objects layer by layer from the ground up. This innovative approach has opened up new possibilities in design, customization, and production efficiency, impacting various industries from aerospace to healthcare. Numerous AM technologies have emerged, each with unique advantages. These include Selective Laser Sintering (SLS), Fused Deposition Modeling (FDM), and Direct Metal Laser Sintering (DMLS), among others. Each technique has contributed to the rapid evolution of 3D printing, making it more versatile and accessible. Stereo lithography is one of the earliest and most widely used AM technologies. SLA is known for producing high-resolution parts with smooth surface finishes, making it ideal for prototypes and models that require intricate detail.

Fused Deposition Modeling (FDM) also known as Fused Filament Fabrication (FFF), is the most common type of 3D printing technology, especially in consumer-grade printers. Selective Laser Sintering (SLS) employs a laser to sinter powdered material, typically nylon or other polymers, fusing the particles together to form a solid structure. SLS does not require support structures because the surrounding powder provides the necessary support, allowing for complex geometries and overhangs. It is widely used in industrial applications for functional prototypes and end use parts. Direct metal laser sintering is similar to SLS but uses metal powders instead of polymers. It is capable of producing fully dense metal parts with excellent mechanical properties. This technology is pivotal in industries such as aerospace and medical devices, where high-performance and customized metal parts are essential. The aerospace industry has embraced AM for its ability to produce light weight and complex components that are difficult or impossible to make with traditional manufacturing methods. Parts such as engine components, brackets, and ducting can be optimized for weight and strength, leading to significant fuel savings and performance improvements.

The automotive industry leverages AM for rapid prototyping and the production of custom parts. It allows for faster iteration and testing of new designs, reducing the time and cost associated with developing new vehicles. Additionally, AM enables the production of lightweight components that improve vehicle efficiency and performance. Additive manufacturing is also making its mark on the consumer goods sector. It allows for the creation of customized products, from personalized jewelry and eyewear to bespoke furniture. Traditional manufacturing imposes constraints on what can be produced due to tooling and machining limitations. In contrast, AM enables the creation of complex geometries, internal structures, and intricate details that would be impossible or cost-prohibitive to achieve otherwise. Additive manufacturing is inherently more material efficient than subtractive methods. By building objects layer by layer, it uses only the material necessary for the part, significantly reducing waste. This efficiency is not only cost-effective but also environmentally friendly, aligning with sustainable manufacturing practices.

For low to medium production volumes, AM can be faster and more cost-effective than traditional manufacturing. It eliminates the need for expensive tooling and molds, reducing lead times and upfront costs. AM excels in producing customized and one-off items. In industries like healthcare and consumer goods, this capability is invaluable. Customized medical implants, dental prosthetics, and personalized consumer products can be manufactured quickly and precisely to meet individual needs and specifications. Despite its numerous advantages, additive manufacturing also faces several experiments. Material limitations, especially for high-performance applications, remain a significant hurdle. While the range of materials suitable for AM is expanding, there are still gaps compared to traditional manufacturing materials.

Correspondence to: Khaled Farouk, Department of Additive Manufacturing, Suez University, Suez, Egypt, E-mail: khaled@gmail.com

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