

A Systematic Literature Review of Ambidexterity and Performance: Integrative Insights and Future Pathways

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ABSTRACT

Ambidexterity, the ability to pursue exploration and exploitation at the same time, is increasingly recognized as an important factor in improving organizational performance in dynamic and complex environments. Organizations that balance innovation and operational efficiency are better able to adapt and sustain long-term competitiveness. However, achieving this balance remains difficult due to resource constraints, competing stakeholder demands, and varying organizational conditions. Based on a systematic literature review (SLR) of 192 peer-reviewed articles published between 2005 and 2025, this study examines how ambidexterity affects individual and organizational performance. Using bibliometric techniques, including co-citation and thematic analysis, the study identifies four dominant research clusters: organizational learning, methodology and measurement, innovation-performance dynamics, and strategic-organizational management. The findings show the growing importance of dynamic capabilities, ambidextrous leadership, and digital transformation in supporting ambidexterity. Although the field has advanced theoretically, gaps remain in multilevel analysis, contextual influences, and practical implementation. This study highlights the need for integrated and context-sensitive strategies to use ambidexterity effectively in building sustainable organizations.

JEL Classifications: M10, M40

Keywords: ambidexterity; exploration; exploitation; systematic literature review; performance; dynamic capabilities; bibliometric analysis

I. INTRODUCTION

Some organizations earn the label "ambidextrous" because they can sustain a rare balance: they run existing operations efficiently while responding quickly when their environment changes (March, 1991; Badu and Micheli, 2025). They do not simply protect what they already know. Instead, they refine what works while remaining open to what is new (March, 1991; Raisch and Birkinshaw, 2008). Ambidexterity refers to the capacity to use existing resources, such as people, tools, and systems, while also exploring new ideas, markets, or strategies (Kumalaningrum et al., 2023; Zahoor et al., 2024). Birkinshaw and Gupta (2013) note that this capacity has become more relevant because it helps organizations build durable strengths, adapt sustainably, and remain competitive.

Research consistently shows that balancing exploration and exploitation is crucial for organizational success (Uotila et al., 2008; He and Wong, 2004; Stettner and Lavie, 2013; Luger et al., 2018). Exploitation refers to optimizing current capabilities and improving existing processes, skills, and resources to increase efficiency, whereas exploration involves innovation, new ideas, experimentation, and a willingness to take risks (March, 1991; Roth and Corsi, 2023). This balance is difficult to achieve, especially when resources are limited and stakeholders expect immediate results (Kumalaningrum et al., 2023; Badu and Micheli, 2025). In many cases, the ability to explore new opportunities while using existing strengths determines an organization's long-term performance.

For multinational organizations, growth or cost reduction alone is no longer sufficient. Firms must generate new ideas while capitalizing on what they already know, often across borders. Managing resources across locations requires firms to navigate cultural barriers, regulatory diversity, and varying market conditions. It also requires careful planning to identify new opportunities without weakening existing strengths (Patel et al., 2013). One-way firms try to achieve this balance is through strategic alliances, which allow partners to share tools, knowledge, and risk. When managed well, these alliances can accelerate growth, improve performance, and reduce missed opportunities (Zahoor et al., 2024).

Beyond the organizational level, scholars have increasingly examined ambidexterity at the individual level. Two complementary forms have been identified. Contextual ambidexterity refers to a work environment that enables individuals and teams to innovate while improving existing processes (Gibson and Birkinshaw, 2004). Individual ambidexterity, in turn, refers to a person's capacity to move flexibly between trying new approaches and refining existing routines (Mom et al., 2019). Innovative incentive systems, supportive culture, and, importantly, ambidextrous leadership can help individuals manage these competing demands (Gianzina and Paroutis, 2025).

Combining exploration and exploitation is essential to sustainable performance (March, 1991; Floyd and Lane, 2000). But the two forces rarely coexist smoothly. Stakeholders often pull firms in different directions (Bisbe and Otley, 2004; Kruis et al., 2016; Badu and Micheli, 2025), while demands from departments, customers, partners, and regulators make it difficult to advance innovation and efficiency at the same time (Raisch and Birkinshaw, 2008; Birkinshaw and Gupta, 2013; Bedford et al., 2019). Achieving ambidexterity, therefore, requires negotiating tensions and trade-offs.

To support this negotiation, scholars have proposed strategies and control tools

that guide behavior, shape decisions, and create supportive structures. However, evidence on how these tools work in practice remains relatively limited (Bedford et al., 2019; Kruis et al., 2016). Burkert and Grossrieder (2025) recently observed that researchers also need to understand how control systems affect individuals. If employees are expected to balance innovation and refinement in daily work, the role of incentives, leadership, and feedback in enabling that balance must be specified. Their work suggests that supporting individuals in this way improves both employee outcomes and organizational performance.

More broadly, recent research supports the view that ambidexterity improves organizational performance. Leaders who skillfully combine exploration and exploitation across different parts of the business help firms manage complex challenges and achieve consistent results (Gianzina and Paroutis, 2025). Zahoor et al. (2024) show that applying an ambidextrous mindset to alliances generates value, drives revenue growth, and supports cost discipline. During the COVID-19 pandemic, organizations with strong ambidexterity also outperformed their peers (Kumalaningrum et al., 2023; van de Wetering, 2022). Across daily operations, strategic alliances, and crisis management, the ability to combine new and proven approaches consistently provides a performance advantage.

Despite this momentum, three gaps motivate the present review. First, existing reviews tend to focus on a single antecedent, such as ambidextrous leadership (Gianzina and Paroutis, 2025), a single context, such as Indonesian SMEs (Kumalaningrum et al., 2023), or a single outcome, such as individual ambidexterity and management controls (Burkert and Grossrieder, 2025). An integrative synthesis is still missing, particularly one that maps how dominant theoretical, methodological, and empirical streams relate to one another and how the field matured between 2005 and 2025. Second, most prior reviews are narrative or qualitative and do not combine bibliometric mapping with a thematic synthesis that clearly links clusters to performance outcomes. Third, recent advances in dynamic capabilities, digital ambidexterity, and ambidextrous leadership have not yet been integrated with classical exploration–exploitation theory in a way that can guide a forward-looking research agenda (Figueiredo et al., 2024; O'Reilly III and Tushman, 2013; van de Wetering, 2022). This study contributes to the literature in three ways. First, theoretically, it offers an integrated map showing how four co-citation clusters, organizational learning, methodology and measurement, innovation-performance, and strategy and organizational dynamics, jointly explain the ambidexterity-performance relationship rather than treating them as separate streams. Second, methodologically, it follows the PRISMA 2020 guideline (Page et al., 2021), the bibliometric protocol of (Donthu et al., 2021) and the SLR methodology of (Snyder, 2019) and (Hardies et al., 2024), while clearly explaining the rationale for using Scopus and ABDC A/A* journals. Third, practically, it develops an actionable agenda for managers working under conflicting demands by translating cluster-level insights into design choices for ambidextrous structures, leadership, and digital tools. Building on these gaps and contributions, this review is guided by three questions:

- RQ1. What is the research profile of studies linking ambidexterity to performance between 2005 and 2025?
- RQ2. How does co-citation analysis reveal the intellectual structure underlying the ambidexterity–performance relationship?
- RQ3. What gaps remain in the literature, and which directions should future

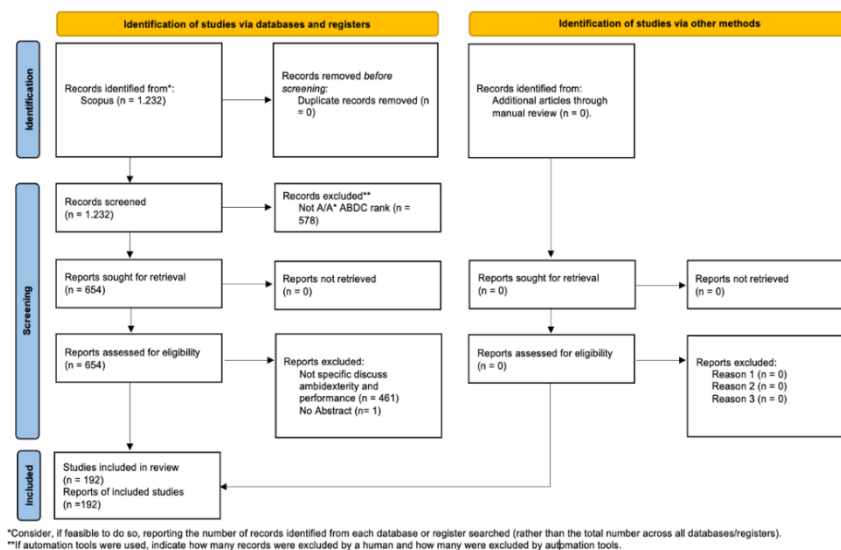
research take?

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. Section II describes the SLR methodology, including the search and screening protocol and the rationale for the selected database and journal quality criteria. Section III reports the results, structured around the three research questions, and develops an integrative synthesis across the four co-citation clusters. Section IV outlines a future research agenda derived from the integrative synthesis. Section V concludes the paper, while Sections VI and VII discuss the limitations of the review and offer specific suggestions for future research.

II. METHODOLOGY

A systematic literature review (SLR) is a transparent and reproducible procedure for identifying, evaluating, and synthesizing prior research on a defined topic (Fink, 2014; Snyder, 2019). Its strength lies in replicability, as independent researchers should obtain comparable findings when applying the same protocol, which strengthens the credibility of the conclusions (Kraus et al., 2022; Hardies et al., 2024). Beyond summarizing past work, an SLR helps researchers identify what is already known, where gaps remain, and which questions still need further study. It also encourages a critical re-examination of established assumptions. This review followed a four-stage protocol, consisting of planning, identification, screening, and synthesis, grounded in the framework of (Kraus et al., 2022; Hardies et al., 2024) and reported in line with the PRISMA 2020 guideline (Page et al., 2021). The full selection flow is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1
Protocol Review by PRISMA



The literature search was conducted exclusively in Scopus. Scopus was selected for three substantive reasons. First, it offers the broadest disciplinary coverage of peer-

reviewed business and management research and consistently performs strongly in source breadth while maintaining strict indexing standards (Mongeon and Paul-Hus, 2016; Singh et al., 2021). Second, Scopus exports complete and structured citation metadata, including authors, affiliations, abstracts, keywords, and references, in formats directly compatible with VOSviewer and the bibliometrix R-package. This enables reliable co-citation, co-word, and thematic analyses (Donthu et al., 2021). Third, Scopus is recommended by (Agapiou and Lysandrou, 2015) and (Birkle et al., 2020) for bibliometric reviews requiring breadth, citation completeness, and reproducible export. We acknowledge that relying on a single database may exclude studies indexed only in Web of Science, EBSCO, or regional databases. This limitation is revisited explicitly in Section VI and triangulated against complementary reviews (Kumalaningrum et al., 2023; Figueiredo et al., 2024).

To keep the search focused, the review combined keywords associated with the two core themes, ambidexterity and performance, in the title, abstract, and keyword fields. The Boolean expression was: (*"ambidext*" OR "exploration AND exploitation" OR "explorative AND exploitative"*) AND (*"performance" OR "performance measurement" OR "performance measurement system"*). No date restrictions were applied so that both foundational and contemporary work could be included. The initial search returned 6,612 documents.

Screening proceeded in four sequential filters. Articles were retained if they were written in English, classified under the Subject Area “Business, Management, and Accounting” (BMA), peer-reviewed, and explicitly addressed the relationship between ambidexterity and performance. After the language and subject filters, 1,440 documents remained. Books, theses, dissertations, conference papers, practitioner reports, and items without a retrievable full text were excluded, in line with the recommendation of (Podsakoff and Organ, 1986) that peer-reviewed articles offer greater methodological reliability for systematic synthesis. After this filter, 1,232 documents remained.

The third filter restricted the corpus to journals ranked A or A* on the Australian Business Deans Council (ABDC) Journal Quality List. This restriction was applied to reduce quality heterogeneity, since ambidexterity is a popular topic that has appeared in many low-citation outlets, and to anchor the synthesis in theoretically rigorous and empirically influential studies. ABDC was preferred because it is one of the most comprehensive subject-specific quality lists in business and management, is regularly updated, and has been widely used in prior bibliometric reviews (Kumalaningrum et al., 2023; Roth and Corsi, 2023; Zahoor et al., 2024). Applying this filter reduced the corpus to 654 documents. A final relevance check excluded items lacking abstracts or whose substantive focus was not aligned with the ambidexterity–performance link, leaving 192 documents for analysis. We acknowledge the trade-off: focusing on A and A* journals strengthens evidentiary quality but may underrepresent emerging, regional, or practitioner-oriented insights. This trade-off is examined in the Limitations and Future Research sections and is partly offset by the diversity of disciplines and geographies covered by the 75 source journals.

Table 1.
Frequency Distribution of Articles by Journals

Journal	SJR	JIF ^a	Year				Total	
			2005 -2009	2010 -2014	2015 -2019	> 2020		
Accounting, Auditing and Accountability Journal	Q1	1,85	6,34	0	0	0	1	1
Accounting, Organizations and Society	Q1	2,21	4,41	0	0	1	0	1
Asia Pacific Journal of Management	Q1	1,64	6,57	0	0	0	2	2
Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics	Q1	0,96	5,9	0	0	0	1	1
Business Strategy and the Environment	Q1	3,67	17,88	0	0	0	5	5
Construction Management and Economics	Q1	0,87	4,18	0	0	0	1	1
Current Issues in Tourism	Q1	1,92	10,23	0	0	0	1	1
European Journal of Information Systems	Q1	3,82	12,39	0	0	0	2	2
European Journal of Marketing	Q1	1,27	4,19	0	1	0	0	1
Family Business Review	Q1	2,58	11,26	0	1	0	0	1
Group Decision and Negotiation	Q1	0,66	3,61	0	0	0	1	1
Human Relations	Q1	3,6	8,2	0	1	0	0	1
Human Resource Management (US)	Q1	2,34	7,59	0	0	2	1	3
Human Resource Management Journal (UK)	Q1	2,69	7,94	0	0	1	0	1
IEEE Transactions on Engineering Management	Q1	1,2	4,99	0	1	1	9	11
Industrial Management and Data Systems	Q1	1,21	5,77	0	0	0	5	5
Industrial Marketing Management	Q1	2,71	8,58	0	2	2	4	8
Information and Management	Q1	2,59	10,27	0	0	1	0	1
International Business Review	Q1	2,55	7,16	0	1	1	6	8
International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management	Q1	2,84	11,63	0	0	1	1	2
International Journal of Hospitality Management	Q1	2,92	13,24	0	0	0	2	2
International Journal of Human Resource Management	Q1	2,08	7,72	1	0	2	1	4
International Journal of Information Management	Q1	5,78	24,28	0	0	1	1	2
International Journal of Operations and Production Management	Q1	2,54	9,07	0	1	1	4	6
International Journal of Production Economics	Q1	3,07	12	0	1	0	6	7
International Journal of Production Research	Q1	2,67	9,74	0	0	0	1	1
International Journal of Project Management	Q1	2,04	8,22	0	0	0	1	1
International Marketing Review	Q1	1,39	5,91	0	0	0	1	1
Journal of Business and Industrial Marketing	Q1	0,91	4,89	0	0	1	9	10
Journal of Business Research	Q1	3,13	13,52	1	0	5	9	15

Journal	SJR	JIF ^a	Year				Total	
			2005 -2009	2010 -2014	2015 -2019	> 2020		
Journal of Cleaner Production	Q1	2,06	11,08	0	1	0	2	3
Journal of Consumer Marketing	Q1	0,88	3,4	0	0	0	1	1
Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization	Q1	1,33	2,57	0	0	0	1	1
Journal of Hospitality Marketing and Management	Q1	3,35	15,39	0	0	0	1	1
Journal of Information Systems	Q2	0,54	2,48	0	0	1	0	1
Journal of Innovation and Knowledge	Q1	3,37	18,92	0	0	0	2	2
Journal of International Business Studies	Q1	4,6	10,02	0	0	1	0	1
Journal of International Management	Q1	1,83	7,23	0	0	0	1	1
Journal of International Marketing	Q1	2,18	5,98	0	1	0	1	2
Journal of Knowledge Management	Q1	1,79	8,06	0	0	1	7	8
Journal of Management	Q1	7,54	17,16	0	0	1	0	1
Journal of Marketing Management	Q1	1,45	3,79	0	0	1	0	1
Journal of Operations Management	Q1	3,01	6,49	1	0	0	0	1
Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management	Q1	1,03	4,68	0	0	0	1	1
Journal of Product Innovation Management	Q1	3,4	12,78	0	0	0	1	1
Journal of Professions and Organization	Q2	0,77	2	0	0	1	0	1
Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services	Q1	2,99	13,66	0	0	0	4	4
Journal of Service Research	Q1	4,95	14,31	0	0	1	0	1
Journal of Service Theory and Practice	Q1	1,31	4,45	0	0	0	1	1
Journal of Strategic Information Systems	Q1	3,23	8,43	0	1	1	0	2
Journal of Strategic Marketing	Q1	1,01	5,4	0	1	0	0	1
Journal of Supply Chain Management	Q1	3,22	12,51	0	1	0	0	1
Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science	Q1	7,19	14,09	0	1	0	0	1
Journal of World Business	Q1	3,49	11,07	0	0	0	1	1
Knowledge-Based Systems	Q1	2,22	8,47	0	0	0	1	1
Management Accounting Research	Q1	1,28	5	0	0	1	2	3
Management International Review	Q1	1,25	4,56	0	0	0	1	1
Management Science	Q1	5,44	5,57	1	0	0	0	1
Marketing Intelligence and Planning	Q2	0,96	5,27	0	0	1	0	1
MIS Quarterly: Management Information Systems	Q1	4,11	7,27	0	0	1	0	1
Organization Science	Q1	5,63	6,94	1	1	0	1	3

Journal	SJR	JIF ^a	Year				Total
			2005 -2009	2010 -2014	2015 -2019	> 2020	
Organization Studies	Q1 5,35	7,92	0	0	1	0	1
Personnel Review	Q1 1,23	5,35	0	0	2	3	5
Production and Operations Management	Q1 3,04	5,37	0	0	0	1	1
Production Planning and Control	Q1 2,02	10,23	0	0	0	2	2
Research Policy	Q1 3,22	9,18	0	1	0	0	1
Small Business Economics	Q1 2,53	9,48	0	0	0	1	1
Strategic Entrepreneurship Journal	Q1 3,63	6,38	0	1	1	0	2
Strategic Management Journal	Q1 7,82	10,52	1	2	2	1	6
Strategic Organization	Q1 3,91	7,32	0	0	1	0	1
Supply Chain Management: An international journal	Q1 2,51	9,72	0	0	0	2	2
Technological Forecasting and Social Change	Q1 3,12	15,54	0	0	1	7	8
Technovation	Q1 2,59	11,81	0	2	0	2	4
Tourism Analysis	Q3 0,34	1,37	0	0	0	1	1
Tourism Management	Q1 3,35	14,57	0	0	0	1	1
			6	22	39	125	192

As Table 1 shows, the 192 articles span 75 journals across accounting, such as *Accounting, Organizations and Society and Management Accounting Research*; HRM and organization studies, such as *Human Resource Management, Organization Science*, and *Strategic Management Journal*; entrepreneurship, such as *Strategic Entrepreneurship Journal*; marketing, such as *Industrial Marketing Management* and *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*; information systems, such as *MIS Quarterly* and *European Journal of Information Systems*; operations and supply chain, such as *Journal of Operations Management* and *International Journal of Production Economics*; international business, such as *Journal of International Business Studies*; tourism and hospitality; and sustainability and innovation, such as *Research Policy*, *Technovation*, and *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*. This breadth supports the multidisciplinary character of ambidexterity research and provides a strong basis for cross-domain synthesis.

Two complementary analytical strategies were applied to the 192 articles: descriptive profiling and content analysis. Profiling captured publication year, journal, publisher, ABDC rank, citation impact, and unit of analysis, providing the macro-level picture needed to answer RQ1. Content analysis followed (Weber, 1990) coding logic to identify dominant themes, theoretical lenses, methods, and geographies.

To map the intellectual structure of the field (RQ2), we triangulated three bibliometric techniques: (a) co-citation analysis using VOSviewer to detect clusters of jointly cited foundational works; (b) co-word analysis using the bibliometrix R-package (Aria and Cuccurullo, 2017) to identify conceptual relationships among keywords; and (c) thematic mapping, covering motor, niche, basic, and emerging themes, to assess the maturity of each research stream. The combined use of VOSviewer and bibliometrix follows the bibliometric guidelines of (Donthu et al., 2021), and the resulting visualizations are reported in Figures 6-9.

III. RESULTS

A. Research Profile of Ambidexterity–Performance Studies (RQ1)

To address RQ1, the research profile of ambidexterity–performance studies is mapped along four analytical dimensions: temporal evolution and growth dynamics, geographical distribution of scholarly production, citation structure indicating the field's most influential works, and the trajectory of research topics over time. Rather than treating these indicators as isolated descriptive statistics, we read them as interrelated signals of how the field has developed intellectually and where its analytical center of gravity now lies. The four sub-sections that follow present each dimension in turn, and each concludes with an analytical interpretation that links the empirical pattern to its theoretical and managerial implications.

1. General Information

Research on the relationship between ambidexterity and performance has grown substantially over the past two decades. As Table 2 reports, the corpus consists of 192 peer-reviewed articles published between 2005 and 2025 across 75 prominent journals, with an annual growth rate of 10.96% and an average document age of 5.45 years.

The 556 contributing authors produced an average of 3.36 authors per paper, and 51.04% of articles feature international co-authorship. The mean citation count per document is 82.49, drawing on a reference base of 15,622 cited works. All retained items are peer-reviewed journal articles that meet the quality criteria adopted for this review.

Table 2
Main Information

Description	Results
Timespan	2005- 2025
Sources (Journals, Books, etc)	75
Documents	192
Annual Growth Rate %	10,96
Document Average Age	5,45
Average citations per doc	82,49
References	15622
DOCUMENT CONTENTS	
Keywords Plus (ID)	530
Author's Keywords (DE)	688
AUTHORS	
Authors	556
Authors of single-authored docs	9
AUTHORS COLLABORATION	
Single-authored docs	9
Co-Authors per Doc	3,36
International co-authorships %	51,04
DOCUMENT TYPES	
article	192

The picture that emerges from Table 2 is of a research field simultaneously expanding and consolidating. Sustained growth alongside a recent average document age suggests that ambidexterity research is being actively renewed rather than merely accumulated, while the substantial citation density indicates that the field has produced an influential body of work on which subsequent scholars draw consistently. The high share of international co-authorship is equally telling, positioning ambidexterity as a topic of global rather than regional concern. This trajectory mirrors the one documented for dynamic capabilities research (O'Reilly III and Tushman, 2013) and strengthens the case for the cross-contextual applicability of ambidexterity-based managerial insights.

Figure 2
Annual Scientific Production

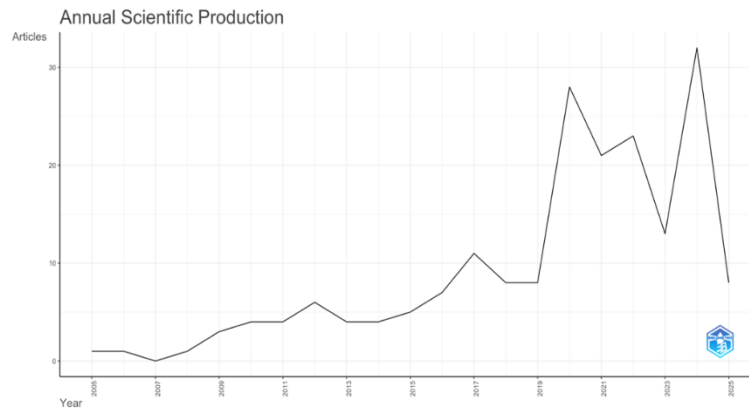
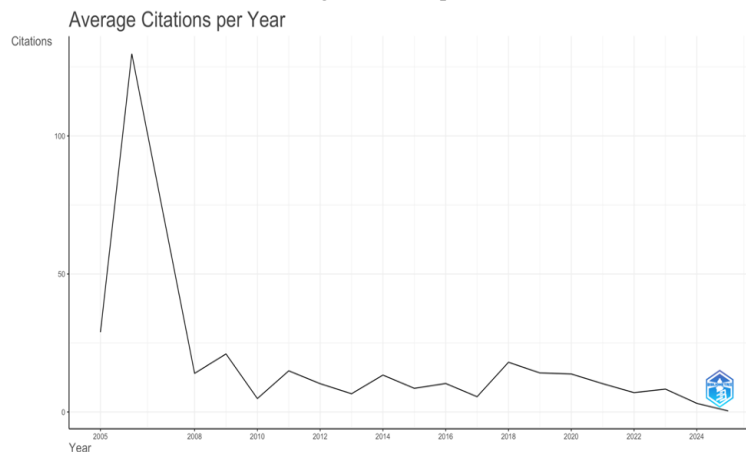
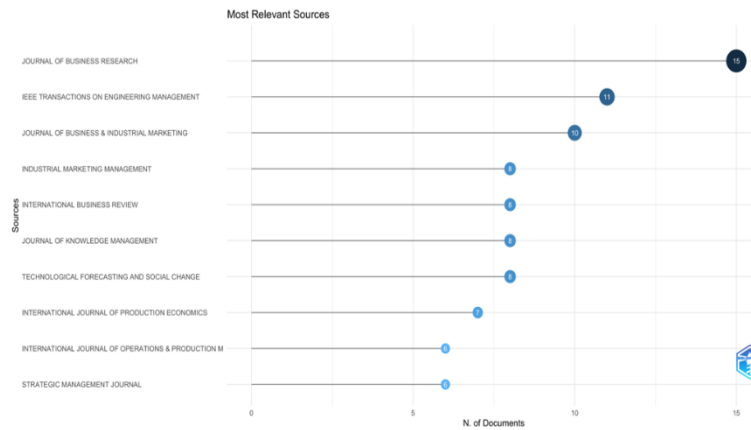


Figure 3
Average Citations per Year



Although the volume of publications has continued to rise, the average number of citations per year remains stable (Figure 3). This pattern suggests that quality and relevance have been maintained as the field has expanded. The most active outlets include the *Journal of Business Research*, *IEEE Transactions on Engineering Management*, and *Journal of Business and Industrial Marketing*, reflecting a multidisciplinary mix that fits the boundary-spanning nature of the topic.

Figure 4
Most Relevant Source



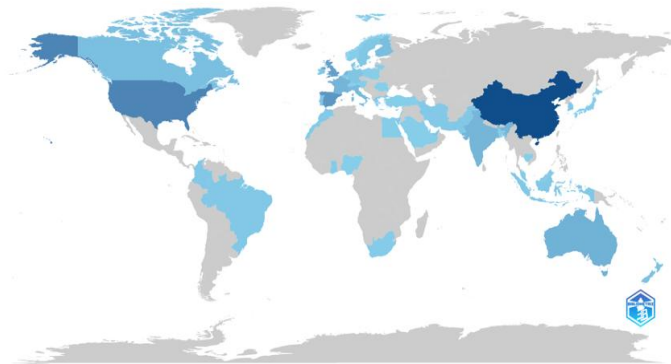
2. Geographical Distribution of Scientific Production

Scientific production is concentrated in a small number of countries. China leads with 136 documents, followed by the United States (75), Spain (56), the United Kingdom (47), Australia (29), France (26), India (25), the Netherlands (21), Italy (20), and Finland (16).

Table 3.
Countries' Scientific Production

Country	Freq
China	136
USA	75
Spain	56
UK	47
Australia	29
France	26
India	25
Netherlands	21
Italy	20
Finland	16

Figure 5.
Countries' Scientific Production
Country Scientific Production



The geographical concentration of research output is striking. China alone contributes nearly twice as many publications as the next-ranked country, and East Asia, North America, and Western Europe together account for the bulk of the field's output. This distribution is consistent with broader bibliometric observations on management research (Donthu et al., 2021), yet it also carries theoretical weight: the prominence of Chinese scholarship reflects the fact that firms operating in high-velocity and resource-heterogeneous environments are particularly motivated to study how exploration and exploitation can be balanced (Roth and Corsi, 2023). The near-absence of contributions from Africa, Latin America, and most of Southeast Asia is therefore consequential, because earlier work has shown that the ambidexterity–performance relationship is shaped by industry conditions and institutional context (Benner and Tushman, 2003; Auh and Menguc, 2005; Gupta et al., 2006; Kristal et al., 2010). Extending current findings to underrepresented regions remains problematic, and addressing this imbalance is a substantive priority that we return to in future research agendas.

3. Most Globally Cited Documents

As Table 4 shows, the corpus rests on a small set of highly cited works. Jansen et al. (2006), published in *Management Science*, lead with 2,593 total citations (129.65 per year), followed by Uotila et al. (2008) in the *Strategic Management Journal* (708 citations) and Auh and Menguc, (2005) in the *Journal of Business Research* (607 citations). More recent contributions by Wamba et al., (2017) and Ferreira and Coelho, (2020) each exceeds 500 citations, while additional influential studies include (Lavie et al., 2011; Stettner and Lavie, 2013; Soto-Acosta et al., 2016; Rialti et al., 2019; van de Wetering, 2022)

Three of these works function as the analytical anchors of the field. Jansen et al. (2006), Auh and Menguc (2005), and Uotila et al. (2008) supply both the conceptual logic that links exploration–exploitation to performance and the empirical templates that subsequent scholars have adapted. Set against this foundational base, more recent contributions on digital transformation (Wamba et al., 2017) and digital ambidexterity

(van de Wetering, 2022) have accumulated citations at rates that already exceed those of the anchor papers. This shift indicates that the field's attention is moving beyond traditional questions of organizational design toward the ways in which digital capabilities reshape the conditions under which exploration and exploitation can be pursued simultaneously, a theme developed further in Cluster 4.

Table 4.
Most Global Cited Documents

Paper	Total Citations	TC per Year	Normalized TC
JANSEN JJP, 2006, MANAG. SCI.	2593	129,65	1,00
UOTILA J, 2009, STRATEG. MANAG. J.	708	41,65	1,98
AUH S, 2005, J. BUS. RES.	607	28,90	1,00
WAMBA SF, 2020, INT. J. PROD. ECON.	516	86,00	6,24
FERREIRA J, 2020, TECHNOVATION	508	84,67	6,14
STETTNER U, 2014, STRATEG. MANAG. J.	352	29,33	2,19
LAVIE D, 2011, ORGAN. SCI.	352	23,47	1,57
SOTO-ACOSTA P, 2018, J. KNOWL. MANAG.	315	39,38	2,19
RIALTI R, 2019, TECHNOL. FORECAST. SOC. CHANG.	299	42,71	3,02
GU M, 2021, INT. J. PROD. ECON.	281	56,20	5,47

4. Trends in Research Topics

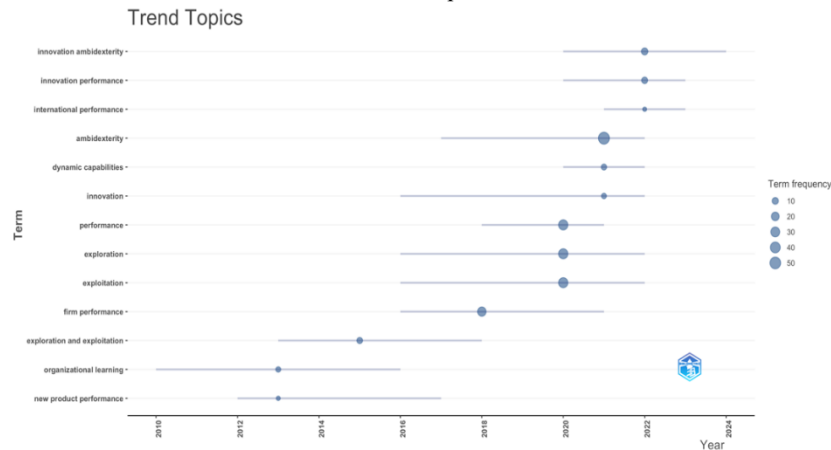
"Ambidexterity" is the dominant term in the corpus, particularly between 2017 and 2022, supporting the centrality of the concept in innovation and performance research. "Exploration" and "exploitation" appear with comparable frequencies, reflecting the duality at the core of ambidexterity (Kang and Snell, 2009). "Performance" and "firm performance" appear consistently, confirming the field's focus on outcomes (Gibson and Birkinshaw, 2004). "Dynamic capabilities" emerge from 2020 onward, while "innovation ambidexterity" and "innovation performance" rise sharply in the early 2020s (Gupta et al., 2006; Hill and Birkinshaw, 2014).

The temporal trajectory of keywords reveals a discipline that has moved past its founding stage and is now actively elaborating its core ideas. Whereas the earlier years of the corpus relied heavily on the original exploration–exploitation vocabulary, more recent work has refined this terminology into specialized constructs such as innovation ambidexterity, digital ambidexterity, and ambidextrous leadership, each frequently paired with dynamic capabilities. For scholars, this signals that the most productive contributions will increasingly come from research that bridges these constructs rather than treating any one of them in isolation. The same logic carries a practical message: interventions aimed at fostering ambidexterity are unlikely to succeed when designed as discrete initiatives; they need to operate as integrated systems that combine structural arrangements, leadership behaviors, and digital infrastructure.

Table 5.
Trend Topics

Term	Frequency	Year (Q1)	Year (Median)	Year (Q3)
Organizational Learning	6	2010	2013	2016
New Product Performance	5	2012	2013	2017
Exploration And Exploitation	8	2013	2015	2018
Firm Performance	25	2016	2018	2021
Exploitation	32	2016	2020	2022
Exploration	32	2016	2020	2022
Performance	32	2018	2020	2021
Ambidexterity	53	2017	2021	2022
Dynamic Capabilities	7	2020	2021	2022
Innovation	6	2016	2021	2022
Innovation Ambidexterity	11	2020	2022	2024
Innovation Performance	9	2020	2022	2023
International Performance	5	2021	2022	2023

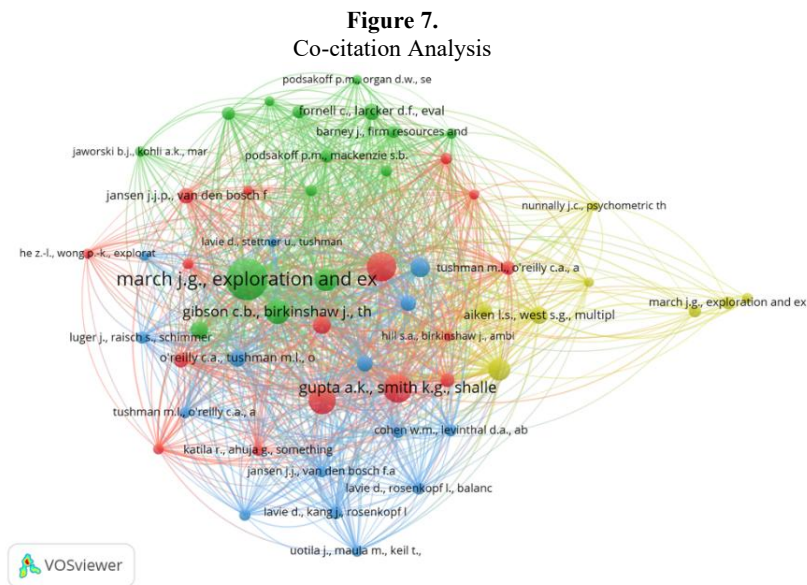
Figure 6.
Trend Topics



B. Intellectual Structure of The Field: Co-citation Analysis (RQ2)

To address RQ2, the intellectual structure that underlies ambidexterity–performance research is examined through co-citation analysis. By tracking the frequency with which pairs of references are cited together across the corpus, this technique identifies the foundational works that ambidexterity scholars treat as a shared reference base and reveals the latent communities of thought that organize this base into recognizable intellectual streams (Donthu et al., 2021). Applying the technique to the 192-article corpus using VOSviewer produces four cohesive clusters (Figure 7), each anchored by a distinctive theoretical orientation: organizational learning, methodology and measurement, innovation–performance dynamics, and strategy and organizational dynamics. Read together, these clusters show that ambidexterity is examined not through a single dominant lens but through a constellation of complementary perspectives spanning learning theory, measurement methodology, innovation outcomes, and strategic

adaptation. The subsections that follow examine each cluster in turn, identifying its anchor references, central argument, and contribution to the broader understanding of the ambidexterity–performance link.



1. Cluster 1: Exploration and Exploitation in Organizational Learning

Cluster 1 (red) groups studies on the balance between exploration, which involves discovery, experimentation, and innovation, and exploitation, which involves refinement, efficiency, and reliable production. The intellectual core is (March, 1991) who argues that organizations may risk long-term failure when they focus exclusively on either side. (Eisenhardt and Martin, 2000) extend this argument by framing dynamic capabilities as the means through which organizations reconfigure resources to manage both modes at the same time. (Gupta et al., 2006) emphasize the synergistic interaction between the two, and (He and Wong, 2004) provide empirical evidence that a balanced posture is associated with higher sales growth and performance. (Levinthal and March, 1993) caution that overemphasizing exploitation produces “myopia of learning,” while Sirmon et al., (2007) show that adaptive resource orchestration is the mechanism connecting balanced learning to value creation.

2. Cluster 2: Methodology and Measurement

Cluster 2 (green) brings together studies that establish how ambidexterity, exploration, exploitation, and performance should be measured. Anderson and Gerbing's (1988) two-step SEM approach and Bagozzi and Yi's (1988) evaluation criteria provide the methodological backbone. Podsakoff and Organ (1986) and Podsakoff et al. (2003) offer tools to detect and control common method bias, a recurring concern when constructs are

self-reported. Barney (1991) with resource-based view and Teece (2007) with dynamic capabilities theory anchor the conceptual scaffolding, while Atuahene-Gima and Murray (2007) provide empirical evidence on social capital as an enabler of exploratory and exploitative learning in new product development.

3. Cluster 3: Ambidexterity in Innovation and Organizational Performance

Cluster 3 (blue) focuses on managing the tension between exploration and exploitation as the basis for sustainable innovation and superior performance. Andriopoulos and Lewis (2009) treat this tension not as a problem to be removed but as a productive paradox. Cohen and Levinthal (1990) provides the cognitive basis for assimilating new knowledge. Jansen et al. (2006) demonstrate that organizational antecedents and environmental moderators jointly shape the innovation–performance relationship, while Junni et al. (2013) confirm a positive meta-analytic association between ambidexterity and business performance. Kristal et al. (2010) show that ambidextrous supply chain strategies enhance competitive capability, while Lavie et al. (2011) extend the argument to alliance portfolios. Raisch and Birkinshaw (2008) and Simsek et al. (2009) situate these insights within a multilevel design framework that spans individuals, teams, and units.

4. Cluster 4: Strategy and Organizational Dynamics

Cluster 4 (yellow) focuses on the strategic and structural mechanisms that enable ambidexterity. Aiken et al. (1991) supports the analytical operationalization of the interplay between exploration and exploitation. Eisenhardt and Martin (2000) emphasize sensing and reconfiguring under uncertainty, while Gupta et al. (2006) and He and Wong (2004) show that effective interplay drives growth. March (1991) and Levinthal and March (1993) underline the risks of imbalance, while Nunally and Bernstein (1978) and Sirmon et al. (2007) anchor the methodological and resource-management foundations. Recent additions to this cluster include ambidextrous leadership (Gianzina and Paroutis, 2025), digital ambidexterity (van de Wetering, 2022) and adaptive control systems (Kruis et al., 2016; Burkert and Grossrieder, 2025).

5. Integrative Synthesis Across Clusters

Read as an interconnected whole rather than as standalone domains, the four clusters form a layered framework in which each contributes a distinctive yet complementary perspective on the ambidexterity–performance relationship. Cluster 1, organizational learning, supplies the *conceptual core*: exploration and exploitation are dual learning modes whose balance drives long-run performance. Cluster 2, methodology and measurement, provides the *evidentiary scaffolding* that enables researchers to test this conceptual core. It specifies how to measure ambidexterity validly (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988; Bagozzi and Yi, 1988) and how to control biases that would otherwise inflate observed effects (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Cluster 3, innovation-performance, operationalizes ambidexterity at the firm and unit levels by connecting structural antecedents (Jansen et al., 2006), supply-chain configurations (Kristal et al., 2010), and alliance portfolios (Lavie et al., 2011) to specific innovation and performance outcomes.

Cluster 4, strategy and organizational dynamics, then links these mechanisms to *dynamic capabilities*, *ambidextrous leadership*, and *digital transformation* (Eisenhardt and Martin, 2000; van de Wetering, 2022; Gianzina and Paroutis, 2025), explaining how firms continually adjust the balance under turbulence.

Two integrative insights emerge. First, the four clusters are nested rather than parallel. Each one supplies the inputs needed to interpret the next, so studies that draw on only one cluster risk under-specify the ambidexterity-performance relationship. Second, the clusters jointly suggest that ambidexterity functions as a *multilevel meta-capability* that connects individual cognition (Cluster 1), construct measurement (Cluster 2), firm-level innovation routines (Cluster 3), and strategic adaptation (Cluster 4). This integrative reading provides a stronger theoretical contribution than single-cluster reviews and directly addresses the call for synthesis across research streams.

IV. FUTURE RESEARCH AGENDA (RQ3)

The findings reported in the preceding sections indicate that ambidexterity research, while theoretically substantial and methodologically diverse, still contains several unresolved tensions that constitute meaningful gaps in the literature. The bibliometric profile (RQ1) describes a body of work that is growing rapidly but remains geographically concentrated and increasingly fragmented across specialized constructs such as innovation ambidexterity, digital ambidexterity, and ambidextrous leadership. The co-citation structure (RQ2) shows that this conceptual fragmentation is reinforced by the field's intellectual architecture, in which four complementary clusters are rarely integrated within individual studies. Cross-reading these patterns with the thematic and evolution maps (Figures 8 and 9), which trace the field's progression from foundational learning models toward dynamic capabilities, performance evaluation, and digital transformation, helps to locate both the points at which the literature is well developed and the points at which critical questions remain unanswered. The directions set out below follow directly from this integrative reading; each addresses a specific juncture between the field's bibliometric profile, intellectual structure, and topical trajectory.

Six priority directions emerge from the integrative synthesis. First, future studies should examine contextual moderators, including market dynamism, competition intensity, life-cycle stage, and institutional setting, to clarify how they shape the ambidexterity-performance link across industries and regions (Auh and Menguc, 2005; Kumalaningrum et al., 2023). Second, multilevel designs are needed at the individual, team, business-unit, and firm levels to capture how ambidexterity emerges and moves across levels (Cao et al., 2009; Mom et al., 2019; Simsek, 2009). Third, ambidextrous leadership requires closer attention, particularly the leadership styles, behaviors, and HR practices that help individuals shift between exploration and exploitation under conflicting demands (Smith and Tushman, 2005; Probst et al., 2011; Gianzina and Paroutis, 2025). Fourth, digital and AI-enabled ambidexterity should be examined more directly. Big data analytics, AI, and digital platforms may extend ambidextrous capabilities while also introducing new biases, so future work should test how these technologies shape sensing, seizing, and reconfiguring (Brynjolfsson and McAfee, 2014; Wamba et al., 2017; van de Wetering, 2022). Fifth, alliance portfolios and ecosystems deserve further study because external ambidexterity requires careful attention to portfolio composition, governance, and value capture (Lavie et al., 2011; Zahoor et al.,

2024). Sixth, crisis resilience remains an important direction. Evidence from the COVID-19 pandemic suggests that ambidextrous firms are more resilient (van de Wetering, 2022; Kumalaningrum et al., 2023), but future research should generalize this finding to other shocks, including climate risks, geopolitical tensions, and supply disruptions.

Methodologically, future research should use longitudinal designs, multilevel modeling, configurational approaches, such as fsQCA, and digital trace data to capture the dynamic and contingent nature of ambidexterity (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

Figure 8.
Thematic Map

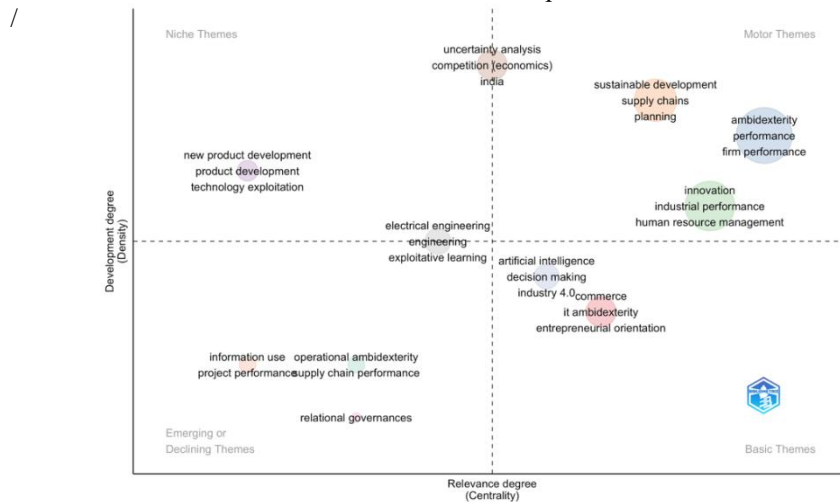
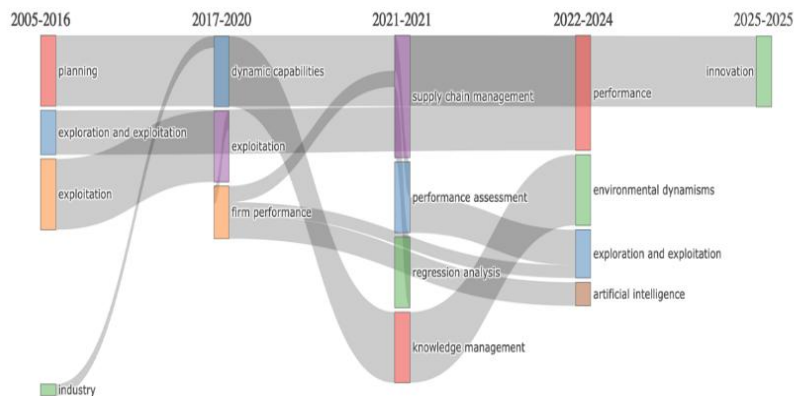


Figure 9.
Evolution Map



V. CONCLUSION

This systematic literature review of 192 ABDC A/A* journal articles published between 2005 and 2025 examines how ambidexterity relates to individual and organizational performance. The evidence supports the centrality of the exploration–exploitation balance as both a conceptual ideal and a practical necessity in dynamic, competitive, and uncertain environments.

The integrative synthesis offered here advances the literature in three respects. First, it shows that the four co-citation clusters, organizational learning, methodology and measurement, innovation-performance, and strategy and organizational dynamics, form a nested system rather than parallel silos, with each cluster supplying inputs to the next. Second, the thematic and evolution maps reveal a maturing field that is moving from foundational models toward dynamic capabilities, ambidextrous leadership, and digital ambidexterity. Third, the persistent gaps, including contextual moderators, multilevel designs, leadership behaviors, alliance and ecosystem effects, digital enablement, and crisis resilience, define a clear and actionable agenda.

In practice, the review highlights that fostering ambidexterity is a design problem. It requires the deliberate alignment of structures, incentive systems, leadership behaviors, and digital tools. For policymakers, especially in innovation-driven economies, institutional environments that reward experimentation while sustaining accountability are essential. For scholars, sophisticated multilevel and longitudinal designs combined with digital trace data are now within reach and should be used to capture ambidexterity in motion.

In conclusion, ambidexterity remains a cornerstone of contemporary management theory and practice, and its relevance continues to grow as organizations face the dual pressures to innovate and perform. Future research should address the dynamic, paradoxical, and context-specific nature of ambidexterity, opening new pathways for organizational resilience, strategic agility, and sustained performance.

VI. LIMITATIONS

Despite its rigorous protocol, this review has three limitations that should be made explicit. First, the analysis relied on a single database, Scopus. Although Scopus offers broad coverage of peer-reviewed business research and is preferred for bibliometric exports (Mongeon and Paul-Hus, 2016; Donthu et al., 2021). This choice may have excluded influential studies indexed only in Web of Science, EBSCO, or regional databases, particularly studies from underrepresented regions. Second, inclusion was restricted to journals ranked A or A* on the ABDC list. This filter strengthens evidentiary quality but may have excluded valuable grey literature, practitioner outlets, and emerging high-quality regional journals not yet ranked at A or A*. Third, the review synthesized conceptual and empirical patterns through bibliometric and thematic mapping. It did not conduct a meta-analysis to estimate effect sizes between ambidexterity dimensions and performance outcomes. The findings should, therefore, be interpreted within these design boundaries.

VII. SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future studies should expand data sources beyond Scopus to include Web of Science and EBSCO, along with carefully curated grey literature, to capture a more diverse picture of ambidexterity across sectors and regions. Comparative bibliometric reviews could analyze how the discourse varies across management, information systems, and organizational psychology, bringing forward new theoretical linkages and underexplored dimensions such as emotional ambidexterity and cultural variation. Multilevel and longitudinal designs are particularly promising for understanding how ambidexterity is enacted and sustained over time and across levels, as well as how digital transformation, environmental turbulence, and governance arrangements shape it. Integrating AI and big-data analytics into the study of ambidexterity offers further opportunities to examine real-time adaptation, feedback loops, and learning systems, creating pathways for richer theory and more actionable practice.

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