# MAPPING THE INTERSECTION OF STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY

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**Abstract.** *The merging of strategic management and sustainability has become a focal point in both academic inquiry and corporate practice, reflecting growing recognition of the need for long-term value creation that integrates environmental, social, and governance (ESG) concerns. This paper maps the intellectual structure of this intersection through a systematic literature review and bibliometric, drawing on data from the Web of Science Core Collection and analyzing over a decade of scholarly output between 2015 and 2025, the study identifies key themes, theoretical anchors, and clusters of research that define this interdisciplinary space. The findings show the evolution of the field from early studies emphasizing corporate social responsibility (CSR) and environmental management to more recent work integrating sustainability into the core of strategic planning, innovation, and performance management. These highlight how firms navigate complexity and uncertainty while aligning strategic objectives with sustainability imperatives. By visualizing the knowledge structure, the paper not only clarifies the fundamental literature but also uncovers emerging frontiers such as circular economy strategies, sustainable innovation, and the role of digital transformation in advancing ESG outcomes. This bibliometric review offers valuable insights for researchers and practitioners aiming to integrate sustainability deeply into strategic decision-making processes. The paper concludes by suggesting future research directions to address underexplored areas and promote cross-disciplinary collaboration that fosters holistic, actionable approaches to sustainable strategy.*

**Key words**: *bibliometric review, strategic management, sustainability, VosViewer, Web of Science*

**JEL: C80, M10, Q01, Q56**

## 1. Introduction

In recent decades, the concepts of strategic management and sustainability have increasingly converged, reflecting a growing awareness of the need for organizations to align long-term planning with environmental, social, and economic responsibilities. This literature review explores the historical and theoretical evolution of strategic management from Chandler Jr.'s foundational insights on organizational structure, through Ansoff's systematic planning models, Porter's competitive frameworks, Barney's resource-based view, and more recent contributions such as David's multidimensional sustainability strategy. The discussion highlights how sustainability, once a peripheral concern expressed mainly through Corporate Social Responsibility, has become central to business strategy, particularly in light of global environmental challenges and societal expectations. As demonstrated by researchers like Tuerk, Centobelli, Ching, and Barbosa, integrating sustainability into strategic decision-making now involves complex interdependencies - spanning technological innovation, supply chain management, governance structures, and public health implications. This study aims to map the academic intersection of strategic management and sustainability by analyzing scientific publications indexed in the Web of Science database between 2015 and 2025. Using

bibliometric tools such as VOSviewer and Web of Science's analytical instruments, the research investigates citation trends, geographic distribution, key research domains, keyword networks, and contributions to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Through this analysis, the study provides an evidence-based overview of how academic discourse has evolved at the nexus of strategy and sustainability, offering insights for both researchers and practitioners.

## 2. Literature review

This literature review explores how strategic management and sustainability have increasingly intersected over time. It will underline the evolution of strategic management from Chandler Jr.'s and Igor Ansoff's foundational work on organizational structure and planning, through Michael E. Porter's market-based frameworks, Jay B. Barney's resource-based view of internal capabilities and, finally, to Barbosa's sustainable management models in existing research. Chandler emphasized the alignment between organizational structure and strategy, highlighting how administrative frameworks influence corporate performance (Chandler, 1962). Building on this foundation, Ansoff introduced a systematic approach to business growth, his work providing tools for firms to navigate complex market environments through strategic planning (Ansoff, 1965). Porter's contributions further shaped the field: he introduced the Five Forces framework, offering insights into industry structure and competitive dynamics (Porter, 1980). Jay B. Barney's article presented the Resource-Based View (RBV), emphasizing the strategic importance of unique firm resources in achieving long-term success; this perspective shifted focus from external market positioning to internal capabilities. (Barney, 1991). Talking about sustainability as a strategic concern, the present literature review start with the Brundtland Commission's definition of sustainable development. (Brundtland Commission, 1987). But sustainability entered the business discourse after the Brundtland Report, which defined sustainable development as meeting present needs without harming future generations; initially, companies responded through Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR).

Tuerk (2004) pointed out that corporate sustainability involves an internal development process, requiring skills and resource managers to lead and mediate with stakeholders. The impact of emerging technologies like Communications Technology (ICT), Nanotechnology, and Biotechnology offer innovative yet potentially risky solutions for sustainability. Tuerk explores corporate sustainability strategies for ICT through case studies in mobile computing, e-banking, and online music, comparing their resource consumption with traditional services using the MIPS concept, identifying key factors influencing resource intensity; he emphasizes the growing impact of user behavior, highlighting the need for new governance structures (Tuerk et al., 2004).

In Werbach's opinion, socially responsible companies should have sustainability in the core of its strategy. He believed that thinking just only in terms of the environment was no longer suitable. Thus, a strategy called "moving from green to blue" must incorporate all sides of sustainability: social, economic, environmental and cultural. According to Werbach, the true sustainability is composed by four crucial components: social, economic, environmental, and cultural. So, it is about developing and executing an organization's strategy that considers all aspects of sustainability, involving all employees and the whole community in all parts of the process (Werbach, 2009).

Nowadays, to succeed in an increasingly complex and competitive environment, all organizations, whether they are formal or informal, large or small, public or private, must adopt a proactive and strategic-management approach that empowers employees, sets clear goals, anticipates change, and replaces intuition with logical, systematic planning, because only through deliberate direction can they effectively determine and reach their desired future. The strategic-management process embodies this approach to decision making. It represents a logical, systematic, and objective approach for determining an enterprise's future direction. The strategic-management process, being synonym with strategic planning, embodies this approach to decision making. It represents a logical, systematic, and objective approach for determining an enterprise's future direction (David, 2011).

Analysing the long-term impact of environmental factors on public health in Ukraine, using

sustainable natural resource management to ensure strategic development of environmental health, Koval (2021) developed a model that considers well-being gains, the relationship between pollution, environmental conditions and public health damage, focusing on the rational management of natural resources and its negative impacts on health and investment.
In 2021, Centobelli discussed the relationship between social pressure, environmental commitment, green economic incentives, supply chain relationship management, sustainable supply chain design and CE capabilities to promote CE strategies. He developed a model exploring the relationships between these factors and the result confirmed the positive impact of environmental commitments and green environmental incentives on supply chain relationship management and sustainable design, highlighting their role in improving the CE capabilities of SMEs (Centobelli, 2021).
Ching explored the use of industry 4.0 technologies to support sustainable production, establishing the relationship between the 15 identified functions and their contribution to the economic, environmental and social dimensions of sustainability (Ching et al., 2022).
It is importand to understand the four key areas of innovation, namely business model innovation (BMI), sustainable BMI, ecosystem innovation and sustainable ecosystem innovation and the fact that a business model innovation (BMI) has a decisive impact on business ecosystems, society and the planet (Snihur, 2022)
Ivars-Baidal establishes a comprehensive and applicable set of smart destination indicators at strategic, relative, instrumental and applied levels which can be used as a tool for the business and public organisation management and control of any economic activity. The results show that destinations perform differently across key areas such as sustainability, online marketing, and connectivity, and help measure how much progress each one is making toward becoming smart and sustainable (Ivars-Baidal et al., 2021).
Sustainability is crucial for societal development, pushing organizations to balance competitiveness with their responsibility to reduce social and environmental impacts. For small businesses, this challenge is even greater due to limited resources and a lack of established sustainable management models in existing research (Barbosa et al., 2020).

## 3. Analysis and discussions

In this bibliometric review the main objective is to analyze the relationship between the concepts of strategic management and sustainability in academical scientific papers. Web of Science database was used for gathering data and the search keywords were: "strategic management "AND „sustainability". The analysis was performed for a 10 years period, from 2015 until 2025, including articles, proceedings papers and review articles types, resulting in 807 results. VOSviewer and Web of Science Analysis tool were used for reviewing the gathered data, resulting into the following analysis: Times cited and publications over time, Geographical spread, Document types, Categories, Research areas, Keyword map network visualization, Keyword map overlay visualization, Keyword map density visualization, Authors rank, Most cited papers, Sustainable Development Goals.

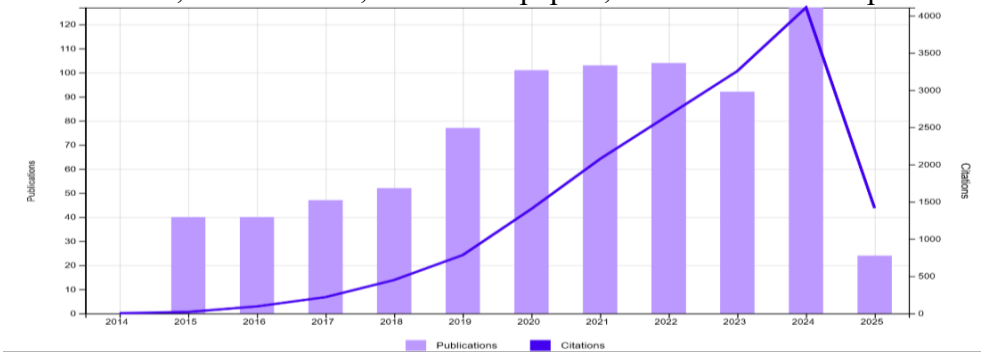


**Figure 1. Times cited and publications over time**
*Source: Web of Science database*

Figure 1 illustrates a progressive trend of publications and citations over the years. Between 2014 and 2019 it is registered a steady and stable growth, starting with 2019 until 2024 it is observed a boosting of both publication and citation numbers. The 2025 decrease is explained by the present ongoing activity. Overall the above graph shows the maturity of the analyzed field and its academic relevance.

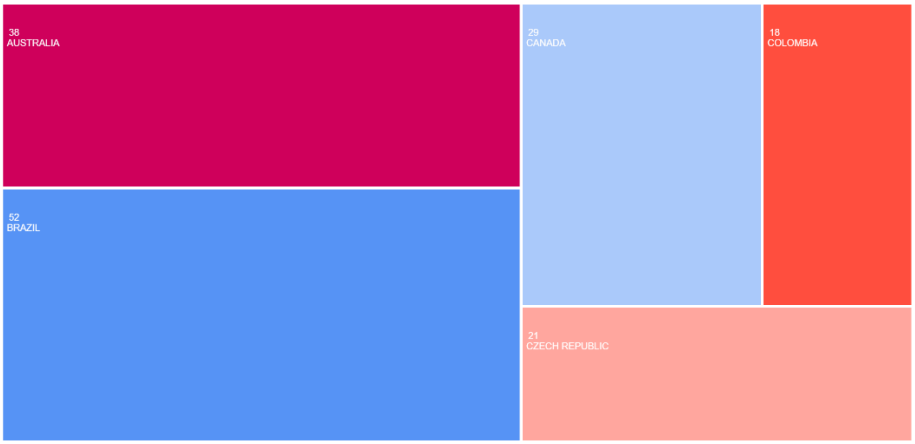


**Figure 2. Geographical spread**
*Source: Web of Science database*

Geographical spread figure shows an increase interest of countries such as Brazil, Australia and Canada, Check Republic and Colombia, confirming the global interest in the field of sustainability and strategic management.


**Figure 3. Document types**
*Source: Web of Science database*

The analyzed documents are mainly articles (670), followed by proceeding papers (81) and review articles (57), illustrating an intersection between highly theoretical, empirical papers with interactions at the level of academical communities.


**Figure 4. Categories**
*Source: Web of Science database*

Figure 4 shows the interdisciplinarity of the field of study, highlighting the following domains: Management (2017 papers), Green Sustainable Science Technology (199 papers), Environmental Sciences (198 papers). This demonstrates that sustainability and strategic management concepts were studied from diverse perspectives, such as managerial, social, ecologic and technologic point of view.

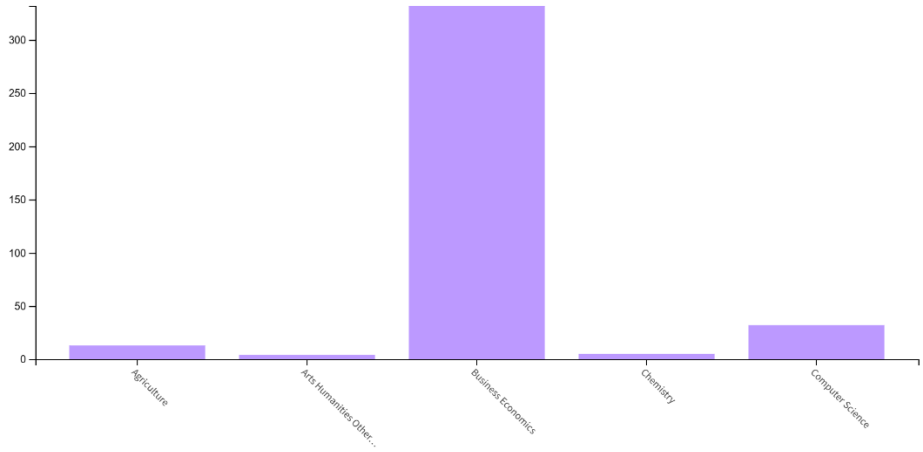


**Figure 5. Research areas**
*Source: Web of Science database*

Business Economics represents the dominating research area with the focus on organizational processes, corporative sustainability, economic governance and sustainable business models. Computer science with the focus on green technology and digital transformation represents another top research area, followed by agriculture, chemistry and Art and humanities areas.

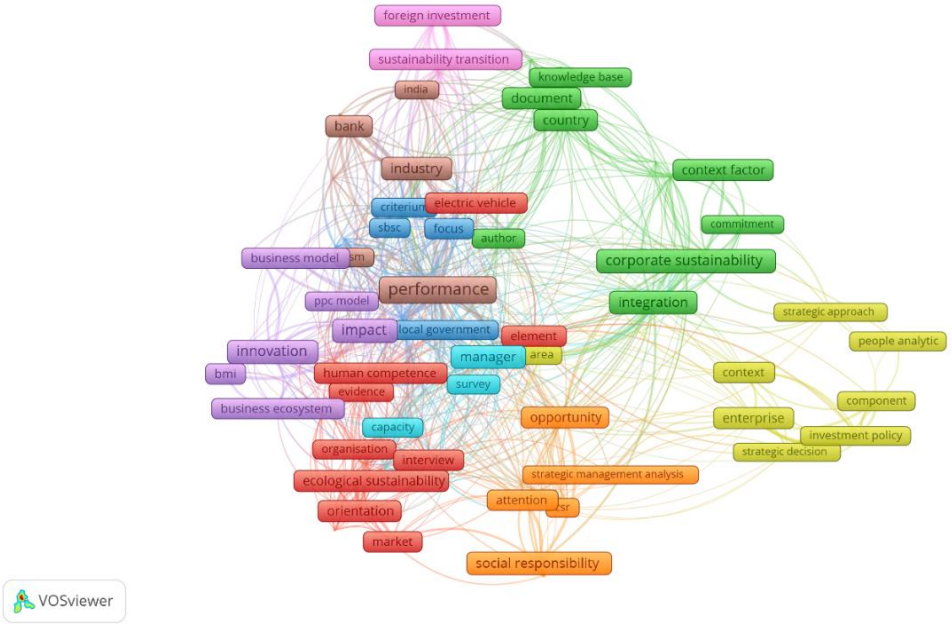


**Figure 6. Keyword map network visualization**
*Source: Vos Viewer*

Figure 6 illustrates the keyword map, constructed from 101 items, 9 clusters, 839 links and 3884 total link strength. The main clusters are organizational governance and performance, corporative sustainability, social responsibility, innovation and business models, innovation and ecological sustainability. The organizational governance and performance cluster with keywords such as performance, impact, manager, local government indicates how the organizations are impacted by the decisions, human factors and managerial competences. The corporative sustainability cluster has the following keywords: corporate sustainability, context factor, knowledge base, document and explains the efforts of integrating the sustainability principle into policies. Social responsibility cluster has people analytics, enterprise, component, social responsibility keywords and discusses the themes related to the impact of sustainability strategies on the society. Innovation and business models cluster with the keywords business ecosystem, innovation demonstrates the interest on transforming the structure of the businesses, whereas the ecological sustainability clusters focuses on ecology.

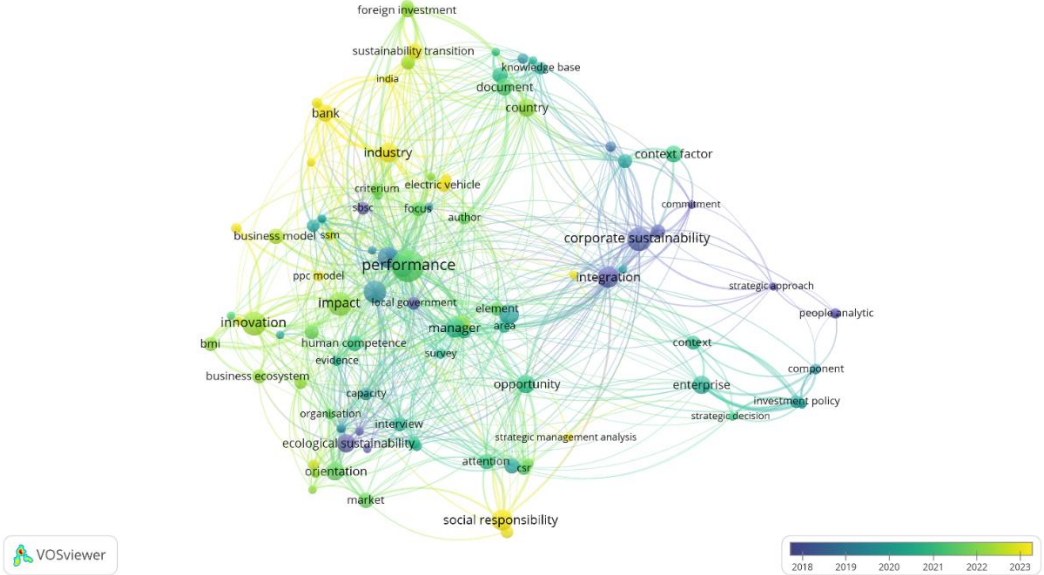


**Figure 7. Keyword map overlay visualization**
*Source: Vos Viewer*

The overlay visualization of the keyword map shows the time evolution of the keywords, therefore the older keywords such as strategic approach, commitment, people analytic, ecological sustainability indicate the fundamental themes from the field, followed by performance, focus, manager, opportunity, knowledge base keywords and ending with emergent keywords such as social responsibility, impact, sustainability transition indicate the new directions for research.

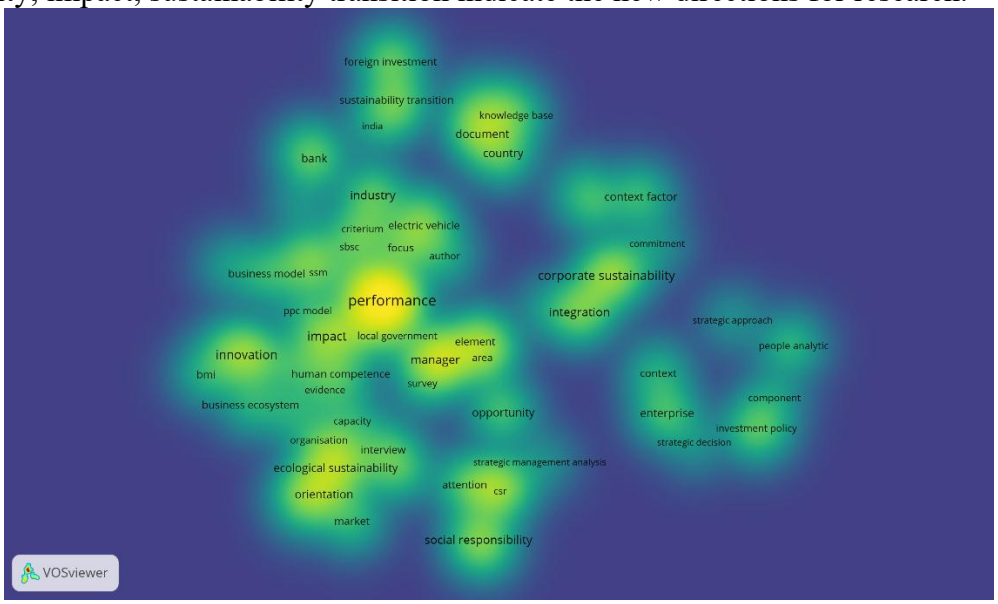


**Figure 8. Keyword map density visualization**

*Source: Vos Viewer*

Density visualization of the keyword map highlights the most used keywords and their frequency. Performance is the central keyword, followed by corporate sustainability, innovation, manager, impact, social responsibility and integration keywords.

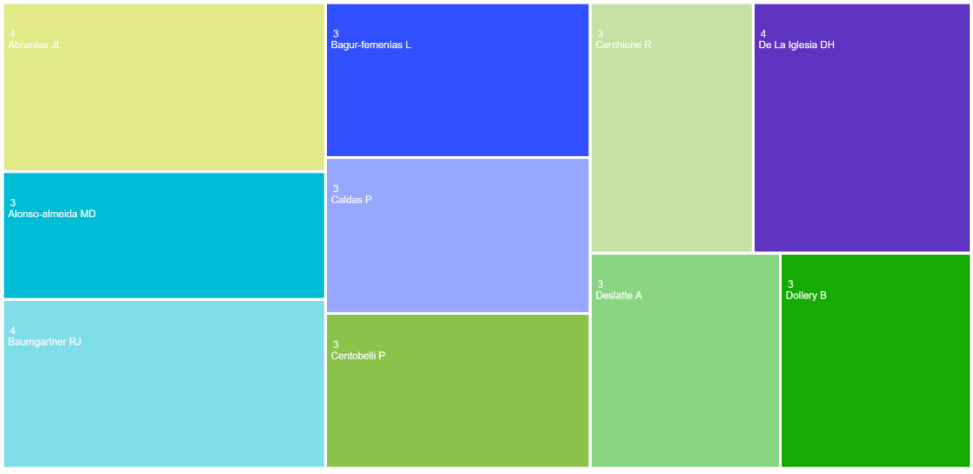


**Figure 9. Authors rank**

*Source: Web of Science database*

The top 10 most prolific authors are illustrated in the above figure, noticing that in this field doesn't exist a single main author voice, but rather an equilibrated and collaborative contributions.

*Scrutiny, Norms, and Selective Disclosure: A Global Study of Greenwashing* article written by Marquis, C., Toffel, M.W. and Zhou, Y.H. (DOI 10.1287/orsc.2015.1039) has the highest numbers of citations, gathering a total number of 568 citations, analysis greenwashing and the legislative importance. Second position is occupied by *Green Product Innovation in Manufacturing Firms:*

*A Sustainability-Oriented Dynamic Capability Perspective* article written by Dangelico, R.M., Pujari, D. and Pontrandolfo, P. (DOI10.1002/bse.1932), followed by *Designing business models in circular economy: A systematic literature review and research agenda* article written by Centobelli, P., Cerchione, R., (...), Urbinati, A. (DOI 10.1002/bse.2466). All three articles are published in prestigious journals, Organization Science and Business Strategy and the Environment.
The analyses papers align to Sustainable Development Goals, the main SDG goals encountered are Industry Innovation and Infrastructure, followed by Affordable and Clean Energy, Good Health and Wellbeing, demonstrating a strategic connection between scientific production and global priorities.

## 4. Conclusions and Future Directions

This study has mapped the intellectual intersection between strategic management and sustainability, revealing it as a dynamic, multi-faceted field that has moved from minimal concern to central strategic focus. We identified core themes—such as stakeholder engagement, dynamic capabilities, and CSR—as well as conceptual shifts toward integrated value creation models. This transformation reflects an evolving consensus: that companies must align long-term strategic objectives with broader societal and environmental outcomes (Porter & Kramer, 2011; Elkington, 1997). One of the central conclusions is that sustainability, once viewed primarily as a compliance issue or reputational concern, is increasingly promoted as a driver of innovation, risk management, and competitive advantage. This reframing is particularly evident in the growing interest in how companies develop sustainability-oriented capabilities and metrics, and how they engage with stakeholders to co-create resilient strategies in volatile contexts (Hart & Dowell, 2011). However, the field still faces several challenges. The fragmentation of concepts, varying definitions of sustainability, and the tension between short-term financial metrics and long-term ESG goals suggest the need for more integrated theoretical frameworks. Additionally, there is a gap in research connecting strategy-sustainability integration to performance outcomes in diverse institutional and sectoral contexts.
Future research should pursue the following directions:

- Contextualization: Examine how strategy-sustainability integration varies across industries, geographies, and governance models, especially in emerging economies.
- Longitudinal studies: Investigate the long-term performance implications of sustainability-driven strategies using mixed methods and multi-level analysis.
- Interdisciplinary frameworks: Combine insights from innovation studies, systems thinking, and behavioral strategy to enrich theoretical and practical understandings.
- Digital transformation: Explore the enabling role of digital technologies (e.g., AI, blockchain) in supporting sustainable business models and ESG reporting.
- Impact assessment: Develop more robust tools and metrics to evaluate the real-world impact of strategic sustainability initiatives beyond financial returns.

By identifying both the existing intellectual foundations and future research avenues, this paper contributes to building a more coherent, actionable, and future-ready understanding of how strategic management can meaningfully advance sustainability agendas.

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