

Organisational capability trajectories in contemporary resource-based view (RBV) scholarship: a field-level bibliometric, structural and thematic synthesis (2021–2025)

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to examine how publication temporality and citation impact jointly inform the contemporary evolution of organisational capability within the resource-based view (RBV) literature between 2021 and 2025. This study clarifies how theoretical thinking about firm resources has shifted towards novel forms of value-creating organisational capabilities and identifies the consolidation of theoretical themes and future research directions within the field.

Design/methodology/approach – This study analyses 4,232 peer-reviewed articles published between 2021 and 2025, a period that accounts for nearly 50% of all RBV literature published since 1984. This study uses a quantitative bibliometric and science-mapping methodology, including semantic co-occurrence analysis of author keywords, with overlay and density visualisations in VOSviewer. Overlay maps highlight the temporal relevance of organisational capability constructs, and density maps reveal their structural and conceptual influence. The dual-lens approach provides a diagnostic framework for interpreting the contemporary trajectory of RBV-based organisational research.

Findings – The findings reveal a structural shift in how RBV scholarship conceptualises organisational capability, through three distinct evolutionary trajectories. Firstly, core renewal, where digital transformation and artificial intelligence fuse with dynamic capabilities to create high-impact internal capability routines. Secondly, emergent experimentation, in which constructs such as entrepreneurship, early-stage resource bootstrapping and blockchain form exploration frontiers. Thirdly, stable influence, in which environmental performance, the natural resource-based view and corporate social responsibility are broadly accepted as baseline pillars. This paper demonstrates that there is an active reconfiguration of traditional resource logic within the RBV field, with organisational capabilities moving along divergent theoretical trajectories.

Research implications – This study offers a diagnostic framework for positioning future RBV research within organisational theory. It delineates which capability constructs are undergoing renewal, which peripheral themes merit further development and which established organisational vocabularies continue to anchor the field. The dual-lens approach reveals where visibility is rising, but citation influence lags, guiding scholars in prioritising constructs for theoretical extension, consolidation and empirical testing.



Practical implications – For strategists and corporate leaders, the findings reframe how competitive advantage is created and sustained in volatile, unpredictable environments. Instead of relying on static, capital-heavy physical asset stocks, strategic advantage requires dynamic resource orchestration – coalescing flexible digital capabilities, cross-border relational networks and alliances and ecological stewardship into hard-to-imitate organisational routines that drive resilient value creation.

Social implications – The findings indicate that contemporary RBV scholarship increasingly aligns firm capability building with societal demands for environmental sustainability, ethical governance and digital inclusion. The results categorise transient, emergent and enduring capability practices – including those within resource-constrained contexts – and provide policymakers with actionable insights to inform initiatives aimed at organisational resilience and sustainable economic development.

Originality/value – To the best of the authors' knowledge, this paper provides the first quantitative dual-lens structural and thematic synthesis of contemporary RBV literature published between 2021 and 2025 – a pivotal period accounting for nearly 50% of all RBV publications and 16% of all RBV citations since 1984. It introduces an integrative diagnostic framework that analyses the evolving theoretical identity of a leading strategic management theory. This study operationalises the divergence between publication recency and citation authority and advances a novel theoretical typology – core renewal, emergent experimentation and stable influence – that reveals how traditional firm resource logic has been actively reconfigured across the contemporary literature in response to technological disruptions, regulatory mandates and global shocks.

Keywords Resource-based view, Organisational capabilities, Systematic literature review, Science mapping, Strategic management, Bibliometric analysis, Digital transformation, Dynamic capabilities

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

The contemporary evolution of the resource-based view (RBV) builds on a foundational lineage that spans firm growth logic (Penrose, 1959), resource position barriers (Wernerfelt, 1984), strategic factor markets (Barney, 1986), strategic asset accumulation (Dierickx and Cool, 1989), sustained competitive advantage criteria (Barney, 1991), firm heterogeneity (Mahoney and Pandian, 1992), chronological timeline for competitive advantage (Peteraf, 1993), natural resource-based view (Hart, 1995), knowledge-based view (Grant, 1996) and dynamic capabilities (Teece *et al.*, 1997).

While the RBV continues to anchor strategic management, unresolved questions remain regarding its theoretical coherence, boundary conditions, thematic evolution and intellectual structure. Rapid developments in technology, governance, internationalisation, strategic alliances and artificial intelligence, as well as the systemic shocks of the COVID-19 pandemic (2021–2025), directly compound these boundary uncertainties. The post-pandemic period has introduced new pressures on RBV's theoretical framework and reconfigured resource categories, challenging RBV's assumptions about resource stickiness and prompting scholars to rethink what constitutes strategic value. For example, in volatile environments, ESG attributes (Bhandari *et al.*, 2022), supply chain flexibility (Agrawal *et al.*, 2023), digital capabilities (Chaudhuri *et al.*, 2022) and organisational resilience (Pratono, 2022) are increasingly recognised as drivers of competitive advantage. Consequently, the RBV framework must adapt and evolve in tandem with technological and institutional shifts to remain relevant (Beamish and Chakravarty, 2021; Khanra *et al.*, 2022).

Amid this background, the present study is guided by the following research question:

RQ. How do recency and citation impact across thematic clusters inform the trajectory and maturation of contemporary RBV scholarship in the period 2021–2025?

To address this question, our bibliometric synthesis of RBV literature published in the Web of Science Core Collection during 2021–2025 combines a structural lens (citation networks,

co-authorship patterns and cluster mappings) with a thematic lens (conceptual categories, evolving constructs and domain applications). From an operationalisation standpoint, overlay visualisations capture recency via average publication year per keyword, whereas density visualisations capture conceptual prominence via keyword frequency and total link strength (TLS). The quantitative analytical approach in the study moves the discussion on RBV scholarship beyond descriptive mappings, allowing the dual-lens design to provide an analysis closely tied to theoretical development that captures RBV's intellectual trajectory, identifies its reconfigured resource categories and assesses its relevance in light of the contemporary strategic pressures outlined earlier.

2. Resource-based view bibliometric literature review

A comprehensive scan of RBV literature in the Web of Science Core Collection (1984–2025) generated 72 search results, of which 32 bibliometric studies and reviews were identified as relevant (Table 1). These reveal five limitations. Firstly, many studies mention RBV as a guiding framework in domain areas such as HR training (Danvila-del-Valle *et al.*, 2019), talent management (Gallardo-Gallardo *et al.*, 2015), green innovation (Khanra *et al.*, 2022) and corporate entrepreneurship (Glinyanova *et al.*, 2021) but remain descriptive in nature and do not engage with its theoretical structure. Secondly, bibliometric mappings present clusters and citation analyses, but fail to integrate visual, structural and conceptual dimensions into their interpretations (Ferreira *et al.*, 2016; Zhang *et al.*, 2021). Thirdly, even when the RBV framework is substantively applied, such as in energy and sustainability (Razi *et al.*, 2024; Rodrigues and Franco, 2019), business model and portfolio restructuring (Sánchez-Riofrío *et al.*, 2015; Zhao and Pan, 2022), innovation and entrepreneurship (Karray *et al.*, 2025; Lopes *et al.*, 2021), data analytics (Novicka and Volkova, 2025) and international business (Bui *et al.*, 2025; White *et al.*, 2016), its integration is diluted by competing frameworks or left underexamined in terms of evolving structural logic. Fourthly, reviews remain siloed, presenting maps and charts without connecting them to thematic clusters or citation patterns (Bagherian *et al.*, 2024; Hao *et al.*, 2022). Fifthly, and perhaps most critically, no recent study has traced RBV's evolution in the 2021–2025 period, despite its exceptional trajectory of articles and citations.

While the foundational 1984–2005 period continues to hold the highest cumulative citation share due to its longevity, the 2021–2025 period stands out for its exceptional citation velocity. Despite being the most recent and having the shortest citation window, the total number of articles published was 4,232, accounting for 49.23% of all articles published from 1984 to 2025; furthermore, these 4,232 articles have received 81,533 citations, accounting for 15.73% of all RBV citations to date (Table 2). Strikingly, the contemporary five-year cohort (2021–2025) has already surpassed the absolute citation totals and percentage shares of both the 2006–2010 (15.44%) and 2011–2015 (15.64%) blocks, despite those earlier periods possessing up to two decades of additional accumulation time. The forward-weighted momentum signals immediate scholarly uptake and thematic resonance, suggesting that recent RBV contributions are not only prolific but also rapidly absorbed and actively shaping theoretical debates.

Two critical insights emerge from the analysis:

- (1) Prior bibliometric studies have emphasised descriptive metrics over explaining how the underlying theory is actively being shaped at the field level.
- (2) The 2021–2025 article and citation momentum present a distinct opportunity for a dual-lens bibliometric analysis that diagnoses the current state and projects the future evolution of the field.

Table 1. Bibliometric studies in RBV (1984–2025)

Author(s)	Journal	Years	Articles	Focus	RBV centrality	RBV utilisation
Anggadwita and Indarti (2023)	<i>European Business Review</i>	1994–2022	62	Women entrepreneurship in SME	Incidental	RBV is listed among the underpinning theories, not central
Bağış et al. (2023)	<i>International Entrepreneurship and Management Journal</i>	1996–2013	777	Family business	Incidental	RBV is mentioned among the dominant theories not central
Bui et al. (2025)	<i>Review of International Business and Strategy</i>	1991–2023	5664	International business research	Incidental	RBV is mentioned among multiple theoretical lenses
Correggi et al. (2024)	<i>Business Strategy and Environment</i>	2002–2023	602	Sustainable dynamic capabilities	Incidental	RBV is used for its relationship with the dynamic capabilities' framework
Danvila-del-Valle et al. (2019)	<i>Journal of Business Research</i>	1975–2016	931	Human resource training	Incidental	RBV is used as a theoretical support but not structurally analysed
Ferreira and Ferreira (2025)	<i>Management Decision</i>	1994–2022	226	RBV theory	Central	RBV is restricted to the field of management, business and economics
Ferreira et al. (2017)	<i>Scientometrics</i>	1957–2017	812	Spin-off research	Peripheral	RBV as a foundation but not thematically unpacked
Ferreira et al. (2022)	<i>Journal of Business Research</i>	1997–2019	523	Knowledge transfer in MNEs	Peripheral	RBV is a supporting lens to knowledge management in multi-national enterprises
Gallardo-Gallardo et al. (2015)	<i>Human Resource Management Review</i>	2001–2014	273	Talent management theory	Peripheral	RBV is listed among the dominant frameworks not structurally unpacked
Glinyanova et al. (2021)	<i>International Entrepreneurship and Management Journal</i>	1970–2020	674	Corporate entrepreneurship	Peripheral	The study identified RBV as a prominent theoretical lens
Karray et al. (2025)	<i>Management Decision</i>	1990–2022	2569	Innovation determinants	Yes	Intentional application of RBV as a theoretical frame to innovation
Lopes et al. (2021)	<i>International Journal of Entrepreneurial Venturing</i>	1990–2018	490	Entrepreneurship from RBV perspective	Central	Intentional application of RBV as a theoretical frame to entrepreneurship
Mazzieri and Soares (2016)	<i>International Journal of Innovation</i>	upto 2016	298	Big Data and value creation	Peripheral	RBV used as a framing lens to discuss value creation through big data
Molina-García et al. (2023)	<i>Review of Managerial Science</i>	2005–2020	88	Financial literacy in SMEs	Peripheral	RBV is integrated with multiple theories not isolated
Nayak et al. (2023)	<i>Journal of Business and Industrial Marketing</i>	1995–2021	103	RBV and IO theory	Central	Limited to the RBV–IO theory interface
Ndiango et al. (2025)	<i>Discover Sustainability</i>	2012–2024	127	Green and sustainable human resource management in supply chain	Peripheral	RBV is identified as a prominent lens and is limited to human resource management in the supply chain

(continued)

Table 1. Continued

Author(s)	Journal	Years	Articles	Focus	RBV centrality	RBV utilisation
Novicka and Volkova (2025)	<i>Sustainability</i>	2014–2024	898	Big data analytics and sustainability	Peripheral	RBV applied with a knowledge-based view as a theoretical framework limited to big data studies
Ogrean (2025)	<i>Studies in Business and Economics</i>	2000–2024	512	Dynamic capabilities and digital transformation	Incidental	RBV is identified as a historical conceptual base
Pereira and Bamel (2021)	<i>Journal of Business Research</i>	1994–2020	288	RBV and KBV in specific areas	Central	RBV studied in tandem with KBV and not as a standalone theory
Razi et al. (2024)	<i>Energy</i>	1994–2023	4450	Green finance and energy price volatility	Peripheral	RBV used alongside dynamic capabilities, game theory in specific domains
Rodrigues and Franco (2019)	<i>Sustainability</i>	upto 2019	97	Corporate sustainability strategy	Peripheral	RBV is used with market-based theory to study corporate sustainability
Sánchez-Riofrio et al. (2015)	<i>Scionometrics</i>	1993–2012	377	Business portfolio restructuring	Peripheral	RBV is listed among the key theories in business portfolio restructuring
Ribeiro Serra et al. (2013)	<i>Management Research – The Academy of Management Competitiveness Review</i>	upto 2011	104	Organisational decline and turnaround	Incidental	RBV is mentioned as a theory in organisational decline and not central
Singh (2025)		2013–2023	1070	Operations strategy	Peripheral	RBV is not central and is only identified as a research theme
White et al. (2016)	<i>Management International Review</i>	2000–2013	736	International strategic management	Peripheral	RBV is listed as one among many theories in international strategic management
Zhang et al. (2021)	<i>Journal of Business Research</i>	1991–2020	2771	RBT evolution and influence in specific research fields	Central	RBV is methodologically framed but limited to specific research fields
Khanra et al. (2022)	<i>Business Strategy and Environment</i>	Up to 2021	951	Green innovation as a strategic resource	Central	RBV is used as a central theoretical lens but is limited to green innovation as a resource
Shi and Shen (2022)	<i>Kybernetes</i>	1997–2021	132	Orchestration capability in inter-firm collaboration	Incidental	RBV is not intentionally engaged but emerges as an output and is limited to orchestration capability in business and management
Zhao and Pan (2022)	<i>Engineering, Construction, and Architectural Management</i>	1998–2020	744	Business models for green buildings	Incidental	RBV is not intentionally engaged but emerges as an output and is limited to the topic of business models

Source(s): Authors' own work

Table 2. Period-wise article and citation velocity in RBV scholarship (1984–2025)

Period	No. of articles published	% of total articles published	No. of citations received	% of total citations received
1984–2005	459	5.34	178,012	34.34
2006–2010	802	9.33	80,070	15.44
2011–2015	1,256	14.61	81,090	15.64
2016–2020	1,847	21.49	97,589	18.82
2021–2025	4,232	49.23	81,533	15.73
1984–2025	8,596		518,294	

Source(s): Authors' own work

3. Research methods

3.1 Data source, search protocol and PRISMA framework

The data set for this study was drawn from the Web of Science Core Collection, a database widely recognised for its comprehensive indexing standards and reliability in bibliometric science mapping (Huertas González-Serrano *et al.*, 2020; Li *et al.*, 2018; Matthews, 2025). Before executing the primary query, an iterative pre-search pilot study was conducted to validate the search string using phrases and terms used in research-based view literature. The finalised search query combined the terms “resource-based view” and “resource-based theory” across titles, abstracts and author keywords and was cross-checked with related variants such as “RBV” and “VRIN”, which showed near-complete overlap, confirming the sufficiency of the chosen string.

The search was conducted on 1 July, 2026, and, to ensure reporting transparency and replicability, the sample selection process adhered to the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines (Page *et al.*, 2021). The PRISMA guideline-based protocol flow diagram is shown in Figure 1. This initial identification query yielded a total of 10,698 records. Subsequently, filters were sequentially applied:

- A temporal restriction was imposed to search for the five years of interest spanning 2021–2025.
- A document-type filter restricted the sample exclusively to peer-reviewed journal and review articles to omit non-refereed conference proceedings, book chapters and editorial material to ensure methodological rigour and comparability across citation metrics (Block and Fisch, 2020; Mukherjee *et al.*, 2022).
- A language filter isolated English-only publications, resulting in a baseline dataset of 4,232 documents.

For the 2021–2025 period, the baseline data set collectively received 81,533 citations, averaging 19.27 citations per article, with an H-index of 112.

3.2 Document quality protocol: relevance check and duplicate assessment

To ensure maximum data set integrity prior to network visualisation, a multi-stage quality-control protocol was implemented for the baseline data set comprising 4,232 documents. The first phase involved a comprehensive duplication analysis of the entire sample of 4,232 documents, using conditional formatting in Microsoft Excel to remove duplicates, with digital object identifier (DOI) as the field criterion. The results flagged 41 documents that lacked DOIs,

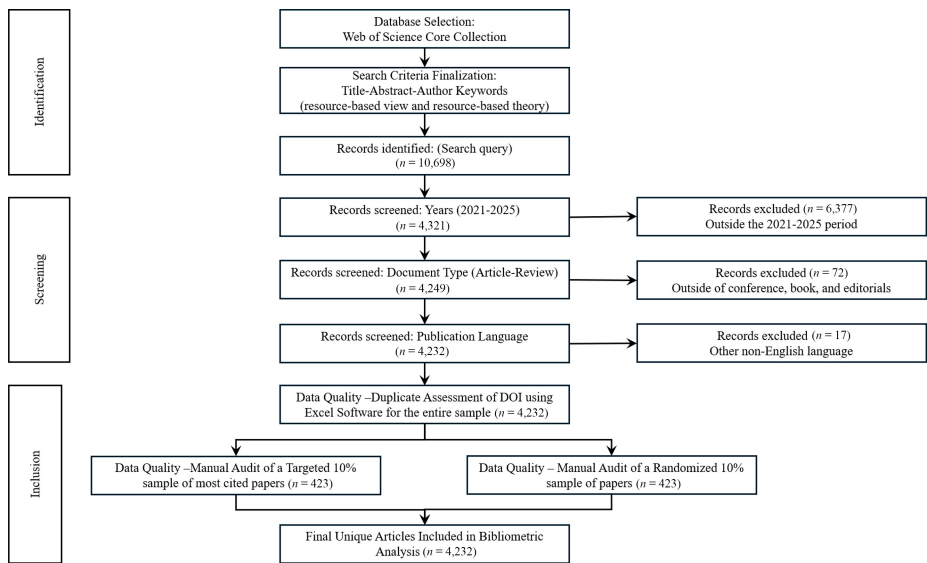


Figure 1. PRISMA guidelines-based protocol flow diagram
Source: Authors' own work using PRISMA guidelines

a typical occurrence during raw data exports. All 41 documents were manually analysed and cross-matched with other unique identifiers, such as title-author names and found to be valid, resulting in a zero-duplicate baseline. The clean sample of 4,232 documents then underwent a rigorous, parallel, dual-stage manual quality audit. Two subsets of articles were created: one comprising 10% of the most-cited documents in the sample ($n = 423$), and another comprising 10% of randomly selected documents from the sample ($n = 423$). Every document in both subsets was independently evaluated by the authors for relevance to the RBV, and all 846 articles across the subsets were deemed valid, resulting in a final corpus of 4,232 unique articles for the network software visualisation analysis.

3.3 Bibliometric technique selection rationale: overlay and density visualisations

To examine how recency and citation impact shape the trajectory of RBV scholarship, this study leverages a bibliometric co-occurrence technique with a focus on semantic mapping. Bibliometric methods are recommended as rigorous tools for science mapping in business research (Donthu et al., 2021) and have been shown to enhance rigour in management and organisation studies (Zupic and Čater, 2015). The data set comprises 4,232 documents from 2021 to 2025, extracted in accordance with the PRISMA protocol outlined earlier in the methodology section (Figure 1). By assessing how frequently specific author keywords co-occur within this corpus, this analysis uncovers the emergent and evolving vocabularies that are redefining RBV – reflecting both the introduction of new constructs and the re-articulation of established RBV themes. Unlike citation-based approaches that privilege historical influence, co-occurrence analysis captures the field's real-time discourse, enabling observation of how RBV constructs are actively reframed in response to contemporary challenges.

The central research question is operationalised directly through the combined deployment of overlay and density visualisations computed from the underlying keyword co-occurrence

matrix. These two visualisations evaluate the network through distinct yet complementary dimensions:

- (1) *The overlay lens*: This dimension captures temporal recency by calculating and mapping the average publication year associated with each keyword node, exposing which capability constructs are gaining immediate traction in current literature.
- (2) *The density lens*: This dimension captures the frequency and concentration of conceptual co-occurrences. It scales each node based on how often a keyword appears and how tightly packed it is within a cluster of related terms, visually separating the heavily crowded “core” domains of the literature from more sparse, peripheral research areas.

Together, these analytical dimensions provide an integrated, dual-lens, temporal–impact view of RBV’s shifting boundaries. This integrated mapping structure closely adheres to recent advanced interpretive guidelines, which emphasise that, to prevent descriptive superficiality, scholars must contextualise and synthesise overlay and density outputs in combination rather than treating them as isolated maps (Lim *et al.*, 2024; Mukherjee *et al.*, 2022). To mathematically construct and visualise these multi-layered semantic networks, VOSviewer software was used (Van Eck and Waltman, 2018).

3.4 Bibliometric protocol and configuration design: overlay and density mapping

Author keywords serve as intentional proxies for a field’s real-time conceptual boundaries and thematic evolution (Donthu *et al.*, 2021; Zupic and Čater, 2015). To generate the overlay and density maps from the 4,232 documents, the full counting method was used (Perianes-Rodriguez *et al.*, 2016). The full counting approach prevents the artificial deflation of connection strengths in descriptive papers with more keywords and directly maps the absolute, real-world frequency of interactions in contemporary RBV scholarship.

The authors followed established guidance in preparing the database for bibliometric analysis (Lim *et al.*, 2024; Marzi *et al.*, 2025). Firstly, words that referred to the same concept or idea or used different spellings, abbreviations or phrasing were merged with a common terminology accepted and used in the field. For example, “RBV”, “resource-based view (RBV)” and “resource based view” were combined under the single term “resource-based view”. Likewise, variants such as “small and medium enterprises” and “small- and medium-sized enterprises” were merged into “SMEs,” and closely related descriptors like “emerging economies” were standardised as “emerging markets”. In this way, the authors addressed the common practice of authors labelling concepts and terms differently and ensured that the maps did not split into multiple nodes of the same concept. Secondly, keywords that did not represent theoretical concepts or were unrelated to the RBV and had the potential to form clusters on the map driven by methodological, locational and other non-substantive factors were omitted from the analysis. These included research methods (“PLS-SEM”, “systematic literature review”, “meta-analysis”, “bibliometric analysis” and “case study”) and country names. A list of major author keywords identified and uploaded to VOSviewer is provided in the author keyword co-occurrence thesaurus criteria (Table 3).

A minimum co-occurrence threshold of 15 was used to generate the final maps, which contained 133 unique author keywords that appeared frequently enough to represent the field’s core conceptual vocabulary (Lim *et al.*, 2024). The keywords collectively formed 2,315 links with an aggregate TLS of 5,840. The threshold improved the map’s interpretability and reduced the risk of keyword creeping from rare or idiosyncratic terms. The seven thematic clusters were generated automatically by VOSviewer’s internal algorithm, with strategic calibration of the resolution parameters, using keywords based on their actual patterns of co-occurrence rather

Table 3. Author keyword co-occurrence thesaurus criteria

Label	Replaced by
Resource-based theory	Resource-based view
Resource-based view (RBV)	Resource-based view
RBV	Resource-based view
Resource-based view theory	Resource-based view
Resource based view	Resource-based view
Resource-based view	Resource-based view
Natural resource-based view theory	Natural resource-based view
Dynamic capability	Dynamic capabilities
Digital technology	Digital technologies
CSR	Corporate social responsibility
SME	SMEs
Small and medium enterprises	SMEs
Small- and medium-sized enterprises	SMEs
Family business	Family firms
Blockchain technology	Blockchain
Emerging economy	Emerging markets
Emerging economies	Emerging markets
0	(excluded)
l25	(excluded)
l26	(excluded)
PLS-SEM	(excluded)
Systematic literature review	(excluded)
Meta-analysis	(excluded)
Bibliometric analysis	(excluded)
Case study	(excluded)
Bangladesh	(excluded)
China	(excluded)
India	(excluded)
Malaysia	(excluded)
Pakistan	(excluded)
Vietnam	(excluded)

Source(s): Authors' own work

than on any subjective judgement by the authors. The metrics for the nodes within each cluster are consolidated in [Table 4](#) of the citation and temporal matrix of author keyword co-occurrences. The overlay and density visualisations are provided in [Figures 2](#) and [3](#), respectively, and were generated using the standard resolution settings in VOSviewer. The maps reflect distinct, data-driven themes and clusters that are analysed in the results section.

4. Results interpretation – overlay and density visualisations

The overlay and density visualisations ([Figures 2](#) and [3](#)) build on the same co-occurrence network of 133 keywords but introduce distinct analytical lenses to map the intellectual frontiers of contemporary RBV scholarship. The overlay map captures recency by shading each keyword according to the average publication year of the articles in which it appears, highlighting which organisational capability constructs are gaining immediate traction. In contrast, the density map reflects keyword frequency and TLS, consistent with VOSviewer's default density algorithm. Bright yellow regions indicate keywords that appear most frequently and have the strongest co-occurrence connections, and cooler green/blue regions represent keywords that appear less frequently or have weaker network connectivity, even if

Source(s): Authors' own work

Source: Authors' own work using VOSviewer



they have high citation averages. Citation influence is separately assessed through the average citation counts (*C_avg*) reported in Table 4. Together, the maps in Figures 2 and 3 and Table 4 metrics data reveal how RBV constructs vary in temporal relevance, conceptual prominence and scholarly impact, enabling a deeper interpretation of the field's contemporary evolution.

4.1 Cluster 1: digital technology, sustainability and operational performance

Overlay analysis: In this cluster, traditional terms such as performance ($Y_{avg} = 2023.55$) appear mostly in older papers, representing the field's established foundation, shown in cool blues and greens. In contrast, newer topics like sustainability ($Y_{avg} = 2023.82$), circular economy ($Y_{avg} = 2023.94$) and artificial intelligence ($Y_{avg} = 2024.38$) have emerged

recently, shifting the map into warm yellows. This timeline shows that RBV scholars are increasingly looking at how digital technologies intersect with sustainable operations. By mixing mature and emerging terms, researchers are exploring how digitalisation reshapes traditional frameworks – theorising digital tools not just as external trends but as internal resources that drive resilience, transparency and performance. This shift reveals that scholars are anchoring their work in proven operational fundamentals while testing new digital ideas that move beyond old, static definitions of a resource. As a result, digital transformation is no longer on the sidelines; it is now central to how researchers define competitive advantage. This pattern proves that RBV scholarship is not just borrowing tech terminology but actively updating its core logic to accommodate modern, technology-enabled capabilities.

Density analysis: The data shows a clear contrast between traditional and emerging topics. Well-established terms like sustainability form a large, bright core on the map because they appear in a large volume of papers (TLS = 385, $f=200$, $C_{avg}=22.80$), showing that classic concepts still anchor this research. In contrast, newer digital terms like circular economy (TLS = 173, $C_{avg}=37.94$) and artificial intelligence (TLS = 145, $C_{avg}=51.21$) appear in fewer papers overall but boast much higher average citation rates. However, despite their strong citation influence, these digital terms appear in cooler-density regions because their frequency and link strength are lower than those of foundational RBV terms. Thus, digital transformation is gaining conceptual traction, and emerging digital concepts demonstrate rising scholarly influence through high citation averages, even though they do not yet form bright density hotspots on the map.

4.2 Cluster 2: digitised strategy and competitive reconfiguration

Overlay analysis: Within this cluster, classic competitive positioning concepts establish the historical foundation. Terms such as competitive advantage ($Y_{avg}=2023.42$) appear consistently across earlier periods, shaded in cooler tones that reflect their long-standing presence in the RBV literature. This baseline transitions sharply into an exceptionally warm snapshot of the most recent years driven by the strong visual connectivity of digital transformation ($Y_{avg}=2024.38$). This connection reveals a clear pattern of strategic adaptation. Scholars are moving beyond old, physical-asset frameworks to explore how companies maintain a competitive edge using flexible, digital setups. The visual link between traditional competitive metrics and new digital terms proves that RBV's core vocabulary is getting a digital upgrade, shifting the focus from fixed physical configurations to flexible digital capabilities.

Density analysis: Density mapping shows that conceptual prominence in this cluster is heavily anchored by digital transformation, which forms a major high-density hotspot on the map due to its high frequency and network connectivity (TLS = 267, $f=176$). On the other hand, classic concepts like competitive advantage remain strongly connected to other words on the map (TLS = 264) but hold a lower baseline citation impact ($C_{avg}=18.65$). This gap shows that while classic strategic terms remain necessary to hold the network together, the actual field-level conceptual expansion is largely driven by papers that explore how companies digitise their assets.

4.3 Cluster 3: natural resource-based view, eco-innovation and green management

Overlay analysis: Comprising a highly integrated block of 25 dedicated keywords, the cluster tracks how environmental capability theory has evolved over time. Core terms such as natural resource-based view ($Y_{avg}=2023.68$), environmental performance ($Y_{avg}=2023.71$) and sustainable development ($Y_{avg}=2023.75$) anchor the cluster in the middle of the studied timeline, reflecting that NRBV vocabulary is already well-established within RBV scholarship. In contrast, newer terms like green innovation ($Y_{avg}=2024.12$) and sustainable performance ($Y_{avg}=2024.27$) are shaded in warm tones, signalling recent

research interest and thematic expansion. The resulting timeline maps out a clear path in which foundational environmental concepts remain central while expanding into proactive innovation and corporate performance domains. Rather than changing RBV's basic logic, researchers are broadening its scope to include non-financial value, such as ecological stewardship. The map shows that RBV is increasingly used to view sustainability as a core strategic capability embedded in daily company routines, rather than just basic regulatory compliance. Such a layout demonstrates how the theory adapts to include wider definitions of advantage in response to environmental and societal pressures.

Density analysis: The entire topic group displays a well-distributed, high-impact citation footprint across the network. Core NRBV terms such as environmental performance ($C_{avg} = 34.47$), green innovation ($C_{avg} = 31.48$) and natural resource-based view ($C_{avg} = 31.01$) appear in heavily cited documents, but their density colours are moderate because their frequency and link strength are lower than those of the most frequently occurring RBV terms. In contrast, related side topics, such as financial performance ($C_{avg} = 20.24$), attract fewer citations and appear with lighter shading. The strong citation footprint of NRBV terms reflects scholarly influence, while their density shading indicates moderate occurrence rather than high-density prominence. A highly cited core evidently supports these newer, developing offshoots. The foundational environmental terms are mature and widely respected, as evidenced by their remarkably high average citation scores (all well above the 25.0 threshold). Steady citation accumulation across the data set demonstrates that green management vocabulary has successfully consolidated its footprint and holds deep academic authority in modern strategy research.

4.4 Cluster 4: institutional foundations, corporate governance and CSR

Overlay analysis: Institutional and legitimacy-seeking behaviours form the core foundation of this cluster. Terms such as corporate social responsibility ($Y_{avg} = 2023.56$) and stakeholder theory ($Y_{avg} = 2023.56$) appear consistently throughout the time period, shaded in cooler tones that reflect their long-standing presence in RBV scholarship. Grounding the cluster in these terms establishes a stable baseline focused on how regulatory and societal acceptance creates resource advantages. By comparison, terms like institutional theory ($Y_{avg} = 2023.69$) transition towards the middle years of the timeline. Such a shift indicates an active conceptual bridge where institutional rules are being linked to broader strategic actions. Mixing mature and newer terms shows that researchers are expanding the theory into diverse new settings, using RBV to explain how companies build internal capabilities while managing strict corporate governance rules and complex stakeholder expectations.

Density analysis: While density mapping positions these terms in moderately dense green bands rather than the absolute centre of the network, the underlying matrix reveals that the primary conceptual influence in this cluster belongs to corporate social responsibility ($C_{avg} = 30.58$) and stakeholder theory ($C_{avg} = 30.24$), with both terms drawing heavy attention in the literature. Meanwhile, institutional theory acts as a connector to newer topics, receiving moderate citation support ($C_{avg} = 17.36$). The resulting pattern demonstrates that traditional concepts focused on legal compliance and stakeholder alignment remain dominant drivers of citation volume. Focusing on these core terms highlights how non-financial assets – such as a strong reputation, ethical governance and community trust – act as defensible resources that lower regulatory risk and insulate firms from market competition.

4.5 Cluster 5: foundational resource-based view, dynamic capabilities and knowledge networks

Overlay analysis: Serving as the primary structural anchor of the entire co-occurrence network, the cluster represents the data set's theoretical engine. Historical baselines such as internationalisation

($Y_{avg} = 2023.15$) and the parent construct, RBV ($Y_{avg} = 2023.44$), are shaded in cooler tones, reflecting their concentration in older publications. The profile climbs rapidly into middle and later temporal periods through the prominent co-occurrence of innovation ($Y_{avg} = 2023.63$) and dynamic capabilities ($Y_{avg} = 2023.87$). The temporal profile reflects RBV's ongoing adaptation to dynamic, knowledge-intensive environments. Scholars are retooling dynamic capability constructs to theorise how firms sense, seize and reconfigure resources within digital ecosystems, collaborative networks and volatile market conditions. The cluster sits at the intersection of theory and application, where RBV's static resource logic is being stretched to accommodate agility, learning and inter-organisational exchange. Rather than discarding RBV's foundational principles, researchers are embedding them within capability-based frameworks that emphasise responsiveness and renewal. The overlay map reveals a high-recency, high-agility trajectory, showing how RBV is evolving to explain strategic behaviour in contexts marked by rapid change and technological disruption. Thus, one finds evidence that thematic clusters mature not only through vocabulary expansion but also through conceptual reconfiguration, in which resource advantage is increasingly defined by a firm's ability to adapt, learn and innovate.

Density analysis: Density mapping shows a heavy concentration of keyword connections, reflecting high frequency and strong co-occurrence. The central keyword, resource-based view, holds the highest number of connections to other terms across the entire data set (TLS = 1,521, $f = 1,158$, $C_{avg} = 20.97$). The core baseline is supported by prominent keywords like innovation (TLS = 279, $C_{avg} = 21.01$) and dynamic capabilities (TLS = 261, $C_{avg} = 19.17$). Such data validates that combining internal resources with adaptability remains a highly researched and heavily cited area of strategy. For example, scholars frequently pair these terms in empirical studies of how firms manage cross-border knowledge transfers or how technological disruption affects long-term organisational survival. The strong density signal indicates high frequency and co-occurrence, indicating that the academic field continues to rely on these foundational concepts to examine how internal knowledge translates into market responsiveness.

4.6 Cluster 6: SME strategy, strategic orientations and emerging market contexts

Overlay analysis: Spanning a broad block of 40 keywords, the cluster captures how small businesses apply resource concepts when operating with limited funding or materials. Terms such as entrepreneurial orientation ($Y_{avg} = 2023.28$) and firm performance ($Y_{avg} = 2023.64$) establish a mature baseline, while keywords like SMEs ($Y_{avg} = 2023.69$) and emerging markets ($Y_{avg} = 2023.82$) show a transition towards warmer tones, signalling recent research interest. The timeline indicates that research into business mindsets is expanding rapidly, especially in response to post-pandemic market shifts. Scholars rely on RBV to explore how entrepreneurial traits help companies deploy limited resources to gain a competitive advantage. The mapping highlights a clear shift where researchers take standard resource principles and test them in fast-changing environments, such as developing economies. Such a layout demonstrates how the core theory adapts to explain business survival outside traditional, resource-rich corporate and developed-country settings.

Density analysis: Density mapping reveals a concentrated area of academic focus centred directly on firm performance ($C_{avg} = 26.34$) and SMEs (TLS = 431, $f = 239$, $C_{avg} = 22.72$). In contrast, geographic topics like emerging markets appear with lighter density on the outer edges of the map and hold a lower citation footprint ($C_{avg} = 14.05$). The data points to an uneven distribution of academic impact. While general small-business performance concepts are highly cited, specific geographic applications are still building scholarly traction. For instance, strategic papers that track how small firms innovate generally receive heavy citation, whereas studies limited to specific developing-nation

markets are still steadily accumulating citation weight. The trend illustrates how the vocabulary expands into new real-world settings before those specific geographic niches fully consolidate their citation footprint.

4.7 Cluster 7: entrepreneurial resource archetypes and early-stage frontiers

Overlay analysis: Representing an isolated, individual keyword focus, entrepreneurship ($Y_{avg} = 2024.00$) is shaded in the warmest tones across the sector, indicating its heavy concentration in recent publications. A highly recent timeline reflects an emerging trend where researchers apply RBV to early-stage start-ups and new business ventures. Compared with older clusters built on long-standing corporate vocabularies, the entrepreneurship node sits on the map's outer edges as an emerging topic. Scholars are actively exploring how resource logic functions during the actual launch of a business. Instead of studying large, established corporations, researchers focus on how resource bootstrapping – such as using personal savings or sharing equipment – can serve as distinct advantages at the nascent and developing stages of an entrepreneurial venture. For example, empirical studies examine how software start-ups leverage flexible founder skills rather than large capital investments to survive initial market entry. Future mapping will likely see these terms merge with agility and innovation as early-stage ventures navigate unpredictable economic environments. Testing RBV in these newer, resource-scarce terrains challenges traditional asset-based definitions of competitive advantage.

Density analysis: Consistent with its isolated visual position on the map, entrepreneurship appears in papers with lower citation averages ($TLS = 120$, $f = 69$, $C_{avg} = 11.77$), resulting in the lightest shading in the density view. An emerging, low-impact citation pattern indicates that the vocabulary is still developing and has not yet built up widespread citation weight. Tracking early-stage concepts provides a view of how RBV expands into fresh research niches before those ideas fully consolidate their citation footprint. For instance, studies on how newly founded firms build capabilities during a market crisis are intellectually novel but require time to be widely read and cited across the broader RBV literature.

4.8 Integrative synthesis – overlay and density maps

The overlay and density visualisations together reveal that RBV's thematic vocabulary is evolving through three distinct trajectories: core renewal, emergent experimentation and stable influence. Central keywords such as digital transformation and dynamic capabilities show dual prominence – as both recent and highly cited – indicating active theorisation and strong scholarly uptake. In contrast, newer constructs like entrepreneurship appear in recent publications but have yet to accumulate major citation weight, reflecting early-stage experimentation on the map's outer edges. Meanwhile, mature terms such as competitive advantage, corporate social responsibility and stakeholder theory retain high citation impact despite lower recency, underscoring their continued relevance as conceptual anchors. A dual-lens analysis confirms that recency and impact do not always align at the term level. While new keywords highlight trending topics, long-term academic impact still rests on classic terms that connect the entire map as the framework expands into new fields.

5. Research and practical implications

5.1 Research propositions for future resource-based view inquiries

The dual-lens trajectories identified in the integrative synthesis suggest a clear agenda for extending organisational capability theory. To guide future empirical and qualitative research, four distinct research questions are proposed based on the structural shifts observed in the analysis.

Research question 1 (core renewal):

RQ1. How do legacy dynamic capabilities reconfigure disruptive digital assets, such as generative artificial intelligence (average citation count: 51.21), without destabilising baseline operational performance?

Research question 2 (emergent experimentation):

RQ2. Under what network conditions can early-stage entrepreneurial bootstrapping strategies successfully transition into permanent, defensible strategic resources (average citation count: 11.77)?

Research question 3 (stable influence):

RQ3. Through which specific mechanisms do non-financial assets, such as stakeholder trust and ethical corporate governance (average citation counts of 30.0 or higher), mitigate regulatory risks during systemic macroeconomic shocks?

Research question 4 (contextual boundary shifts):

RQ4. How does the resource logic of competitive advantage change when applied to digital ecosystems in which resource ownership is decentralised across collaborative networks rather than internalised within a single firm?

5.2 Practical implications for managers and small- and medium-sized enterprises

For corporate decision-makers, the rapid evolution of the keyword network highlights the risk of relying purely on fixed, physical resource configurations. Value creation increasingly depends on data-driven agility and proactive ecological stewardship. SME managers operating in resource-constrained emerging markets should avoid heavy investments in physical infrastructure. Capital is more effectively deployed towards flexible, cloud-based digital tools and localised knowledge networks. Building these relational and digital capabilities allows small businesses to navigate post-pandemic supply chain disruptions, lower transaction costs and respond rapidly to sudden shifts in consumer demand without requiring large upfront capital outlays.

6. Contribution

This study contributes to RBV scholarship in four substantive ways. Firstly, it advances understanding of RBV's intellectual trajectory by categorising its discourse into core, experimental and emergent clusters. Secondly, it highlights the divergence between recency and citation impact, showing that some clusters exhibit strong overlay but low density, while others show high density despite limited recency. Thirdly, it demonstrates the value of a theory-specific bibliometric synthesis — an approach that integrates structural patterns (networks, clusters and citation trajectories) with thematic evolution (conceptual categories, emergent constructs and domain applications), thereby offering a forward-looking lens on the theory's trajectory and relevance.

Finally, the results from the bibliometric synthesis directly contribute to ongoing discussions in journals such as the *International Journal of Organizational Analysis*, in areas including artificial intelligence, intercultural communication, circular economy, green management, corporate governance, process automation and technologies such as blockchain. The empirical asymmetry in the results, where artificial intelligence commands high citation authority while

entrepreneurship remains an emergent, low-density frontier, explains why rigid managerial participation suppresses operational experimentation while high-impact digital assets require decentralised coordination configurations to realise strategic value (Fang *et al.*, 2025). The thematic mapping results empirically validate the conceptual integration of digital adoption, sustainable manufacturing and circular economy capabilities by indicating that these domains are converging into a unified, high-impact capability cluster within contemporary scholarship, with sustainability forming the traditional core and recent technological innovations in organisations generating the highest field-level citation momentum (Bag and Pretorius, 2022). The empirical analysis clarifies that dynamic capabilities and digital transformation are now fused as interconnected anchors of core renewal, and that digital reconfiguration within an organisation is treated as an enduring internal capability routine rather than a transient, outsourced event (Schlegel and Kraus, 2023). The results also affirm that workplace trust in corporate governance is a core pillar of organisational resilience and survival and plays a vital role in building the firm's capacity to manage risk and protect its long-term business value creation (Ashta *et al.*, 2025). The synthesis highlights that technologies like blockchain are highly recent but have a low absolute citation footprint, reflecting observations that organisations have yet to develop mature capability routines (Chillakuri and Attili, 2022). On the other hand, bibliometric mapping reinforces the idea that green management has consolidated into mature, high-impact anchors within the strategy literature and is now embedded in the discourse on sustainable organisations (Abu Assedeh, 2026).

7. Limitations and future research

Several limitations should be acknowledged. Firstly, the data set was restricted to the Web of Science Core Collection, which, although authoritative, excludes potentially relevant works indexed in Scopus, Google Scholar or regional databases. Future research could address these limitations by expanding database coverage, incorporating altimetric and other metrics to capture early visibility and conducting longitudinal analyses that track thematic clusters beyond 2025.

8. Conclusion

The study set out to address the fragmented treatment of RBV in prior bibliometric reviews by offering a theory-aligned synthesis grounded in dual-lens analysis. The findings underscore the importance of examining RBV not as a static framework but as a dynamic construct that adapts to digitalisation, sustainability and emerging-market contexts. For practitioners and policymakers, the results highlight how RBV's evolving vocabulary informs strategies of resilience, ecological stewardship and competitive advantage in turbulent environments.

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