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İÇİNDEKİLER

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THE EFFECT OF PERCEIVED ORGANIZATIONAL POLITICS ON WORK OUTCOMES: A COMPARATIVE AND MODERATING ANALYSIS ACROSS GENERATIONS X AND Y

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Abstract

This study examines the relationships between perceived organizational politics (POP) and job stress, job satisfaction, cyberloafing, and self-efficacy among Generation X and Generation Y employees, and further tests whether generation functions as a boundary condition in these relationships. Data were collected from 312 white-collar employees working in manufacturing firms in Istanbul and Kocaeli, Türkiye, and analyzed through correlational, regression-based, group-comparison, and moderation procedures. The findings indicate that POP is positively associated with job stress and negatively associated with job satisfaction and self-efficacy. POP also has a positive but weak relationship with cyberloafing. Generation Y employees report higher levels of job satisfaction and cyberloafing than Generation X employees, whereas no significant generational differences are observed for POP, job stress, or self-efficacy. Moderation results show that generation does not significantly condition the relationships between POP and job stress, job satisfaction, or cyberloafing; however, the negative relationship between POP and self-efficacy is stronger among Generation Y employees. By integrating attitudinal, behavioral, and psychological outcomes, the study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of employee responses to politically perceived organizational climates across generational cohorts.

Keywords: Cyberloafing, Job satisfaction, Job stress, Perceived organizational politics, Self-efficacy.
Article Type: Research Article

ALGILANAN ÖRGÜTSEL POLİTİKANIN İŞ SONUÇLARI ÜZERİNDEKİ ETKİSİ: X VE Y KUŞAKLARI ARASINDA KARŞILAŞTIRMALI VE DÜZENLEYİCİ BİR ANALİZ

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Özet

Bu çalışma, algılanan örgütsel politikanın (AÖP) X ve Y kuşağı çalışanları arasında iş stresi, iş doyumu, sanal kaytarma ve öz yeterlilikle ilişkisini incelemekte ve kuşağın bu ilişkilerde bir sınır koşulu olarak rol oynayıp oynamadığını test etmektedir. Veriler, İstanbul ve Kocaeli'nde faaliyet gösteren imalat işletmelerinde çalışan 312 beyaz yakalı çalışandan toplanmış; ilişkisel, regresyon temelli, grup karşılaştırmalı ve moderasyon analizleriyle değerlendirilmiştir. Bulgular, AÖP'nin iş stresiyle pozitif, iş doyumu ve öz yeterlilikle negatif ilişkili olduğunu göstermektedir. AÖP ile sanal kaytarma arasında ise pozitif fakat zayıf bir ilişki bulunmaktadır. Y kuşağı çalışanları X kuşağı çalışanlarına kıyasla daha yüksek iş doyumu ve sanal kaytarma düzeyleri bildirirken, AÖP, iş stresi ve öz yeterlilik açısından anlamlı kuşak

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farklılıkları görülmemiştir. Moderasyon sonuçları, kuşağın AÖP ile iş stresi, iş doyumu ve sanal kaytarma arasındaki ilişkileri anlamlı biçimde koşullandırmadığını; buna karşın AÖP ile öz yeterlilik arasındaki negatif ilişkinin Y kuşağı çalışanlarında daha güçlü olduğunu göstermektedir. Çalışma, tutumsal, davranışsal ve psikolojik sonuçları bütüncül biçimde ele alarak politik olarak algılanan örgütsel iklimlere verilen çalışan tepkilerinin kuşaklar bağlamında daha ayrıntılı anlaşılmasına katkı sunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Algılanan örgütsel politika, iş doyumu, iş stresi, öz yeterlilik, sanal kaytarma.
Makale Türü: Araştırma Makalesi

1. INTRODUCTION

In contemporary organizations, competitive advantage depends not only on financial, technological, and physical resources but also on how employees interpret organizational processes and respond to those interpretations. When decisions about promotion, rewards, resource allocation, and performance evaluation are perceived as opaque or interest-driven, employees may experience the work environment as uncertain, unfair, and difficult to control. For this reason, perceived organizational politics (POP) has become a central construct in organizational behavior research for explaining employee attitudes, psychological resources, and workplace behaviors (Ferris et al., 1989; Kacmar & Ferris, 1991; Vigoda, 2000).

POP refers to employees' perceptions that organizational decisions are influenced by personal interests, power relations, and informal alliances rather than by merit, performance, or objective criteria. As such perceptions intensify, employees may conclude that advancement within the organization depends less on competence and contribution and more on political behavior. This type of work climate can weaken trust, increase strain, reduce satisfaction, and encourage psychological or behavioral withdrawal from the organization (Chang et al., 2009; Miller et al., 2008).

The consequences of POP are therefore not limited to traditional attitudinal outcomes such as job satisfaction or job stress. Politically perceived work environments may also shape employees' behavioral choices and personal resources. In digitally mediated workplaces, one possible behavioral response is cyberloafing, defined as the use of the internet or digital technologies for non-work purposes during working hours. At the same time, political climates may undermine self-efficacy by weakening employees' belief that effort, competence, and performance will be recognized (Bandura, 1997; Blanchard & Henle, 2008; Lim, 2002).

A generational perspective may further clarify these relationships. Generations are commonly understood as cohorts shaped by similar historical, social, economic, and technological conditions, which may influence work values, expectations, and organizational responses (Lyons & Kuron, 2014; Mannheim, 1952). Generation X is often associated with stability, work experience, and job security, whereas Generation Y is commonly linked to expectations for flexibility, feedback, personal development, and meaningful work (Costanza et al., 2012; Smola & Sutton, 2002; Twenge et al., 2010). These differences raise an important empirical question: Do employees from different generations perceive and respond to political organizational climates in the same way?

At the same time, the generational literature is contested. Differences attributed to generation may overlap with age, tenure, career stage, occupation, organizational context, and cultural conditions (Parry & Urwin, 2011; Rudolph et al., 2021). Thus, generation should not be treated as a fixed explanatory category that automatically produces uniform employee responses. A more cautious approach is to examine generation both as a comparison variable and as a potential boundary condition that may strengthen or weaken the association between POP and employee outcomes.

Accordingly, this study examines the relationships between POP and job stress, job satisfaction, cyberloafing, and self-efficacy among Generation X and Generation Y employees. It also tests whether the two cohorts differ in the main variables and whether generation moderates the relationships between POP and work outcomes. In doing so, the study integrates psychological, attitudinal, and behavioral outcomes and offers a broader empirical account of POP in the workplace.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Generation Theory, Generation X, and Generation Y

The concept of generation refers to a group of individuals born within a particular historical period and exposed to similar social, economic, technological, and cultural conditions. From a generational theory perspective, individuals are shaped not only by biological age but also by formative events and social transformations experienced during key periods of life (Mannheim, 1952). Members of the same cohort may therefore show similar tendencies in work values, sources of motivation, and organizational expectations. However, such similarities should be interpreted as empirical tendencies rather than as rigid categories that homogenize all members of a generation.

Generation X generally refers to individuals born between 1965 and 1980 and is frequently associated with independence, responsibility, job security, and accumulated work experience (Howe & Strauss, 1991; Tulgan, 2009). In organizational settings, Generation X employees are often described as relatively familiar with formal structures and hierarchical rules, and they are believed to value stability and task responsibility (Lyons & Kuron, 2014; Smola & Sutton, 2002). Still, the assumption that Generation X employees are necessarily more resilient to organizational adversity is an oversimplification, because position, tenure, industry, and organizational climate may also shape their work attitudes.

Generation Y, often referred to as Millennials, includes employees born between 1981 and 1996 in the operational classification used in this study. This boundary is consistent with widely used generational definitions that distinguish Millennials from Generation Z, which begins in 1997 (Dimock, 2019), and it is also compatible with applied generational research in organizational settings (Twenge et al., 2010). Generation Y employees are generally described as placing greater emphasis on individual development, career advancement, feedback, flexibility, and meaningful work (Ng et al., 2010; Twenge et al., 2010). Their stronger familiarity with digital technologies also makes cyberloafing particularly relevant in generationally oriented workplace research.

Although prior research suggests that Generation X and Generation Y employees may differ in work values and expectations, the size and consistency of these differences remain debated (Costanza et al., 2012; Parry & Urwin, 2011). For this reason, the present study treats generation as an empirically testable comparison variable rather than as a deterministic causal mechanism. This approach allows the study to evaluate whether meaningful differences exist between the two cohorts in POP and work outcomes without assuming that such differences are universal or context-free.

2.2. Perceived Organizational Politics

Perceived organizational politics refers to employees' judgments about the extent to which organizational decisions, resource allocation, promotion and reward systems, performance evaluations, and interpersonal relations are shaped by fairness, transparency, and objective criteria (Ferris et al., 1989; Kacmar & Ferris, 1991). In organizations perceived as highly political,

employees may believe that formal rules and merit-based principles are weakened and that outcomes are influenced by personal interests, power relations, and informal connections (Pfeffer, 1981; Vigoda, 2000).

The effects of POP are closely related to how employees interpret organizational events. When decisions are perceived as unpredictable or unfair, employees may view the work environment as threatening and difficult to control. Such perceptions can increase strain, reduce positive attitudes toward the job, and foster withdrawal-oriented responses. Meta-analytic evidence has shown that POP is associated with a wide range of employee attitudes, psychological strain, and workplace behaviors (Chang et al., 2009; Miller et al., 2008).

POP may also influence employees' personal resources. In political work environments, employees may question whether competence and effort are sufficient for success. When employees believe that outcomes depend more on informal influence than on performance, their sense of personal effectiveness may weaken. POP should therefore be understood as a broader organizational context variable that affects not only work attitudes but also employees' beliefs about their own capacity to succeed (Harris et al., 2007; Vigoda-Gadot, 2007).

2.3. Job Stress, Job Satisfaction, Cyberloafing, and Self-Efficacy

Job stress refers to psychological strain that arises when employees perceive workplace demands, role expectations, time pressure, or uncertainty as exceeding their available coping resources (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). In politically perceived organizations, employees may feel that rules are inconsistently applied and that desired outcomes cannot be secured through effort alone. Such perceptions reduce control and predictability, two conditions that are central to the cognitive appraisal of stress.

Job satisfaction reflects employees' overall evaluation of their job, work conditions, and work experience (Locke, 1976; Spector, 1997). Employees are more likely to be satisfied when they perceive their organization as fair, supportive, and predictable. Conversely, when promotion, reward, and performance evaluation processes are perceived as political, positive job evaluations are likely to decline. Nevertheless, the strength of this relationship may vary across contexts, depending on how employees interpret or adapt to political behavior in their workplace.

Cyberloafing refers to the use of the internet or digital tools for personal, non-work-related purposes during working hours (Lim, 2002). This behavior should not be understood only as a matter of individual self-control; it may also reflect employees' perceptions of organizational fairness and reciprocity. Social exchange theory suggests that employees who feel unfairly treated may reduce their work-related contributions or engage in withdrawal behaviors (Blau, 1964). From this perspective, politically perceived environments may create a climate in which cyberloafing becomes more likely.

The spread of digital technologies has made cyberloafing a more visible and complex workplace behavior. Some research suggests that brief digital breaks may support recovery and mental replenishment, whereas excessive or uncontrolled cyberloafing can undermine time management and productivity (Koay & Soh, 2019; Lim & Chen, 2012). The managerial issue, therefore, is not merely to prohibit digital use but to create fair and trust-based work environments in which digital behavior is governed by clear and legitimate expectations.

Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in the ability to perform tasks and cope successfully with difficulties (Bandura, 1977, 1997). Employees with stronger self-efficacy tend to show greater persistence, resilience, and confidence in their capacity to influence work outcomes

(Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998). In contrast, politically perceived environments may weaken self-efficacy by signaling that competence and effort are not sufficient for success.

2.4. Development of Hypotheses and Research Model

The hypotheses were developed by conceptualizing POP as employees' appraisal of organizational processes in terms of fairness, transparency, and objectivity. Ferris et al. (1989) and Kacmar and Ferris (1991) emphasized that organizational politics involves the interpretation of decision processes through personal interests, power relations, and informal influence. As POP increases, employees may perceive the work environment as less predictable and may believe that promotion, performance evaluation, and resource allocation depend more on political behavior than on merit. POP is therefore expected to shape employees' psychological reactions, work attitudes, and workplace behaviors (Chang et al., 2009; Miller et al., 2008; Vigoda, 2000).

The relationship between POP and job stress can be explained through uncertainty and reduced control. According to the cognitive appraisal approach, stress increases when individuals interpret work demands as threatening and as exceeding their coping resources (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). In highly political environments, employees may experience stronger stress because they believe that rules are applied inconsistently and that their efforts will not be rewarded objectively. Accordingly, the following hypothesis was developed:

H1: Perceived organizational politics is positively and significantly associated with job stress.

Job satisfaction is a core work attitude that captures employees' affective and evaluative orientation toward their job (Locke, 1976; Spector, 1997). When POP increases, employees may perceive promotion, reward, and evaluation systems as less fair and less transparent. Prior studies indicate that POP is generally associated with unfavorable employee attitudes (Chang et al., 2009; Cropanzano et al., 2001; Miller et al., 2008; Vigoda, 2000). Based on this reasoning, the second hypothesis was formulated as follows:

H2: Perceived organizational politics is negatively and significantly associated with job satisfaction.

Cyberloafing may be interpreted as a behavioral response to the work environment. Employees who perceive the organization as unfair or politically driven may reduce their level of contribution or disengage through non-work-related digital activities (Askew et al., 2014; Blanchard & Henle, 2008; Koay & Soh, 2019; Lim, 2002). Drawing on social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), the following hypothesis was developed:

H3: Perceived organizational politics is positively and significantly associated with cyberloafing behavior.

The relationship between POP and self-efficacy can be understood through perceived control and personal effectiveness. In political environments, employees may believe that performance outcomes are not determined by competence or effort. Such a perception can weaken the belief that one can successfully influence work-related outcomes. Because self-efficacy is grounded in beliefs about personal capability and control, the following hypothesis was developed:

H4: Perceived organizational politics is negatively and significantly associated with self-efficacy.

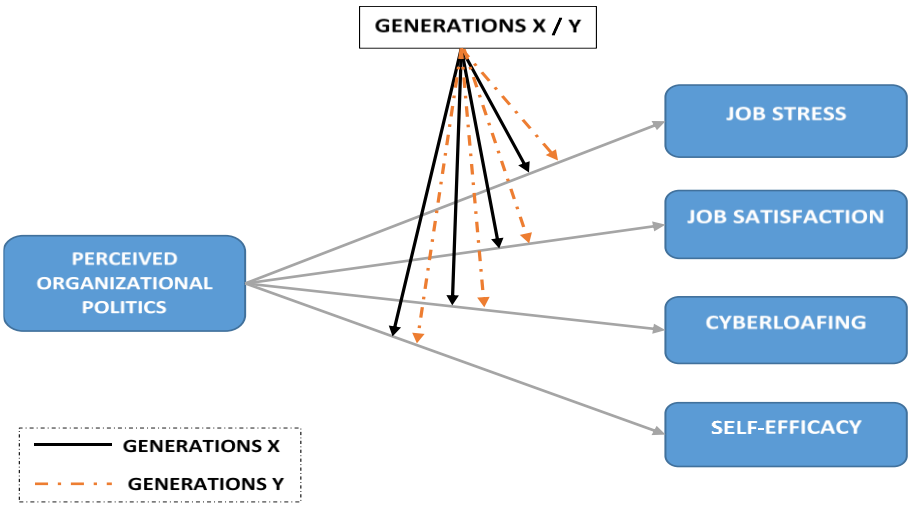
Generation was included to examine whether employees from Generation X and Generation Y differ in POP and work outcomes. Although prior literature identifies potential generational differences in work values, it also cautions against treating these differences as universal or fixed (Costanza et al., 2012; Lyons & Kuron, 2014; Parry & Urwin, 2011; Rudolph et al., 2021).

Accordingly, H5a–H5e propose that Generation X and Generation Y employees differ significantly in POP, job stress, job satisfaction, cyberloafing, and self-efficacy.

The study also examines whether generation moderates the relationship between POP and work outcomes. Generation X employees may interpret political environments through the lens of stability, organizational norms, and long-term employment, whereas Generation Y employees may react more strongly when political climates appear to restrict feedback, development, fairness, or career progress (Deal et al., 2010; Ng et al., 2010; Twenge et al., 2010). Therefore, H6a–H6d propose that generation moderates the relationships between POP and job stress, job satisfaction, cyberloafing, and self-efficacy.

Finally, gender, marital status, and tenure were examined as supplementary group comparison variables outside the main research model. These variables may shape employees' work experiences, career stage, and evaluations of the organizational environment. Therefore, H7 proposes that the study variables differ by gender, H8 proposes differences by marital status, and H9 proposes differences by length of employment. The research model is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Research Model



Source: Authors' own elaboration.

3. METHOD

3.1. Research Design and Sample

A quantitative, cross-sectional, correlational, and comparative research design was adopted. A cross-sectional design enables the examination of relationships among variables at a specific point in time, but it does not allow strong causal inference (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Saunders et al., 2019). Therefore, the results were interpreted within a relational and explanatory framework. Ethical approval was obtained from the Human Research Ethics Committee of Gebze Technical University (Approval Date: April 30, 2026; Session/Decision No: 2026/08-02).

The sample consisted of 312 white-collar employees working in manufacturing firms in Istanbul and Kocaeli, Türkiye. The inclusion criteria were being a white-collar employee, actively participating in working life, and falling within the age or birth-year ranges used to classify Generation X and Generation Y. Data were collected voluntarily through a structured online questionnaire. A convenience sampling method was used because participation depended on

accessibility and voluntary response from white-collar employees in manufacturing firms. Of the participants, 123 were classified as Generation X and 189 as Generation Y.

Generational classification was based on the age or birth-year information reported by participants. Participants coded as categories 1 and 2 in the dataset were classified as Generation Y, whereas participants coded as categories 3 and 4 were classified as Generation X. Thus, Generation Y represents employees born between 1981 and 1996, and Generation X represents employees born between 1965 and 1980. These boundaries were used as operational classifications aligned with the structure of the dataset and should not be interpreted as absolute or deterministic cohort divisions.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of the Research Sample

Variable	Category	Overall n (%)	Generation X n (%)	Generation Y n (%)
Gender	Male	168 (53.8)	79 (64.2)	89 (47.1)
	Female	144 (46.2)	44 (35.8)	100 (52.9)
Marital status	Single	117 (37.5)	7 (5.7)	110 (58.2)
	Married	195 (62.5)	116 (94.3)	79 (41.8)
Length of employment	1-5 years	77 (24.7)	0 (0.0)	77 (40.7)
	6-10 years	74 (23.7)	0 (0.0)	74 (39.2)
	11-15 years	59 (18.9)	24 (19.5)	35 (18.5)
	16 years and above	102 (32.7)	99 (80.5)	3 (1.6)

3.2. Measurement Instruments

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire composed of scales with established use in the literature. The first section included demographic questions on gender, marital status, generation or age group, and length of employment. The second section measured perceived organizational politics, job stress, job satisfaction, cyberloafing behavior, and general self-efficacy. All scale items were rated on a five-point Likert-type response format, with higher scores indicating higher levels of the relevant construct. The questionnaire was administered in Turkish. Previously validated Turkish forms were used where available; for items originally developed in English, semantic equivalence was reviewed through a forward-translation and back-translation procedure, a commonly used technique for cross-cultural research instrument adaptation (Brislin, 1970), before data collection.

Perceived organizational politics was measured with the 12-item scale developed by Kacmar and Carlson (1997). The scale assesses perceptions of political behavior, self-interest-oriented relationships, unfair practices, and informal influence in organizational decision-making. A sample item is: “Employees in this organization engage in various political behaviors to protect their own interests.”

Job stress was measured with the 7-item scale developed by House and Rizzo (1972) and adapted to the Turkish context by Efeoğlu (2006). The scale captures psychological strain related to workload, role ambiguity, time pressure, job responsibility, and working conditions. A sample item is: "Issues related to my job create a considerable amount of stress for me."

Job satisfaction was assessed with the 5-item short form originally developed by Brayfield and Rothe (1951) and shortened by Yoon and Thye (2002). The scale measures employees' overall satisfaction with their jobs and positive evaluations of their work. A sample item is: "Overall, I am satisfied with my job."

Cyberloafing was measured with the 14-item scale developed by Örücü and Yıldız (2014), based on the work of Lim (2002), Blanchard and Henle (2008), and Özkalp et al. (2012). The scale assesses the frequency of using the internet and digital tools for personal purposes during working hours, including behaviors such as checking personal e-mail, using social media, online shopping, and accessing entertainment content.

Self-efficacy was measured with the 10-item General Self-Efficacy Scale developed by Schwarzer, Mueller, and Greenglass (1999). The scale captures general perceived self-efficacy rather than job-specific or task-specific occupational self-efficacy; therefore, it assesses individuals' broad confidence in dealing with difficulties, solving problems, and achieving goals across situations. A sample item is: "When I encounter difficult situations, I believe that I can find solutions."

3.3. Data Analysis

Reliability analysis and exploratory factor analysis were conducted in the first stage of data analysis. The suitability of the dataset for factor analysis was assessed using the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure and Bartlett's test of sphericity. Descriptive statistics, skewness-kurtosis values, and normality assumptions were then examined. Because skewness and kurtosis values were generally within the ±2 range, the distributions were considered acceptable for parametric analyses (George & Mallery, 2010; Gravetter & Wallnau, 2014).

Relationships among the variables were examined using Pearson correlation analysis. Simple regression analyses were conducted to test the relationships between POP and work outcomes, with POP specified as the focal predictor and job stress, job satisfaction, cyberloafing, and self-efficacy specified as outcome variables. Independent samples t-tests and Mann-Whitney U tests were used together to evaluate differences between Generation X and Generation Y. For the moderation analyses, POP was mean-centered, generation was dummy-coded as 0 = Generation X and 1 = Generation Y, and the interaction term was computed by multiplying the centered POP score by the Generation Y dummy variable (POP × Generation Y). The interaction term was entered into regression models together with the main effects of POP and generation. Supplementary analyses were also conducted for gender, marital status, and length of employment.

4. FINDINGS

4.1. Factor Analysis Results

Table 2 presents the reliability and exploratory factor analysis results. Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranged from .899 to .967, exceeding the .70 threshold commonly accepted for internal consistency in social science research (Nunnally, 1978). The KMO value of .926 and the significant Bartlett's test result, χ^2 (1128) = 15508.021, $p < .001$, indicate that the data were

suitable for factor analysis. The total explained variance was 69.189%, supporting the adequacy of the measurement structure for subsequent analyses.

Table 2. Reliability and Exploratory Factor Analysis Results of the Scales

Scale	Number of Items	Factor Loading Range	Cronbach's α
Perceived Organizational Politics	12	.463-.789	.927
Job Stress	7	.446-.727	.899
Job Satisfaction	5	.760-.816	.967
Cyberloafing	14	.402-.836	.922
Self-Efficacy	10	.611-.870	.948
Overall factor solution	—	KMO = .926; Bartlett's $\chi^2(1128)$ = 15508.021, p < .001	Total variance explained = 69.189%

KMO = Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure; χ^2 = Bartlett's test of sphericity.

4.2. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Table 3 reports the means, standard deviations, and correlations among the study variables. POP is positively and strongly correlated with job stress (r = .692, p < .01). It is negatively correlated with job satisfaction (r = -.659, p < .01) and self-efficacy (r = -.500, p < .01), and positively but weakly correlated with cyberloafing (r = .114, p < .05). These findings suggest that POP is more closely related to psychological and attitudinal outcomes than to cyberloafing in this sample.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics and Pearson Correlation Matrix

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4
Perceived Organizational Politics	2.69	0.74	—			
Job Stress	3.09	0.83	.692**	—		
Job Satisfaction	3.61	1.00	-.659**	-.700**	—	
Cyberloafing	1.97	0.66	.114*	.060	.150**	—
Self-Efficacy	4.07	0.58	-.500**	-.240**	.480**	-.090

**p < .05. **p < .01.*

4.3. Regression Analyses

Table 4 presents the simple regression results. POP positively and significantly predicts job stress (B = .77, p < .001, R^2 = .479), indicating a strong explanatory role for political perceptions in employee stress. POP also negatively and significantly predicts job satisfaction (B = -.89, p < .001, R^2 = .434) and self-efficacy (B = -.39, p < .001, R^2 = .250). The effect of POP on cyberloafing is positive and statistically significant, but the explained variance is very small (B = .10, p = .045, R^2 = .013); therefore, this result should be interpreted as a weak but significant association rather than as a strong explanatory effect.

Table 4. Results of Simple Regression Analyses on the Relationship Between Perceived Organizational Politics and Work Outcomes

Dependent Variable	B	t	p	F	Model p	R^2	Result
Job Stress	.77	16.874	<.001	284.530	<.001	.479	Supported
Job Satisfaction	-.89	-15.432	<.001	238.042	<.001	.434	Supported

Dependent Variable	B	t	p	F	Model p	R^2	Result
Cyberloafing	.10	2.011	.045	4.052	.045	.013	Supported (weak effect)
Self-Efficacy	-.39	-10.172	<.001	103.491	<.001	.250	Supported

POP = perceived organizational politics; R^2 = explained variance.

4.4. Generational Interaction and Differences Between Generations

To test the moderating role of generation, POP was treated as the focal independent variable, generation was coded as a dummy variable (0 = Generation X; 1 = Generation Y), and a mean-centered POP × Generation Y interaction term was included in the regression models. As shown in Table 5, generation does not significantly moderate the relationships between POP and job stress, job satisfaction, or cyberloafing. However, the interaction is significant for self-efficacy (B = -.25, SE = .08, 95% CI [-.40, -.10], p = .002). This finding indicates that the negative relationship between POP and self-efficacy is stronger among Generation Y employees than among Generation X employees.

Table 5. Generation × Perceived Organizational Politics Interaction Tests

Dependent Variable	B (POP × Gen Y)	SE	95% CI	t	p	F	R^2	Result
Job Stress	.13	.09	[-.05, .31]	1.40	.162	49.32	.492	Not supported
Job Satisfaction	-.14	.12	[-.38, .10]	-1.17	.244	42.88	.458	Not supported
Cyberloafing	-.08	.10	[-.27, .11]	-0.84	.399	11.66	.187	Not supported
Self-Efficacy	-.25	.08	[-.40, -.10]	-3.18	.002	20.16	.284	Supported

Generation X was treated as the reference category; Generation Y was coded as the comparison category. POP was mean-centered before the interaction term was computed. SE = standard error; CI = 95% confidence interval.

Table 6 presents the mean comparisons between Generation X and Generation Y employees. No significant differences are found for POP, job stress, or self-efficacy. In contrast, Generation Y employees report significantly higher job satisfaction and cyberloafing than Generation X employees. The cyberloafing difference is consistent with the possibility that Generation Y employees' stronger familiarity with digital technologies may make non-work-related digital behavior more frequent; however, this interpretation should be treated as contextual rather than deterministic.

Table 6. Difference Analyses for Generation X and Generation Y

Variable	Gen X Mean ± SD	Gen Y Mean ± SD	t-test p	MW p	Effect Size	Result
Perceived Organizational Politics	2.71 ± 0.74	2.68 ± 0.74	.686	.510	d = 0.05	Not supported
Job Stress	3.06 ± 0.84	3.10 ± 0.82	.682	.597	d = -0.05	Not supported
Job Satisfaction	3.43 ± 1.03	3.73 ± 0.96	.012	.004	d = -0.30	Supported Y > X
Cyberloafing	1.72 ± 0.55	2.14 ± 0.67	<.001	<.001	d = -0.66	Supported Y > X
Self-Efficacy	4.04 ± 0.52	4.09 ± 0.62	.462	.181	d = -0.08	Not supported

MW = Mann-Whitney U test; d = Cohen's d.

4.5. Supplementary Findings and Hypothesis Results

Table 7 summarizes the hypothesis testing results. Supplementary analyses show that the study variables do not differ significantly by gender within either generation. Marital status comparisons reveal significant differences in job stress, job satisfaction, and cyberloafing among Generation Y employees, whereas only cyberloafing differs significantly within Generation X. The latter finding should be interpreted cautiously because the number of single participants in Generation X is limited. Regarding length of employment, no significant differences are observed within Generation X, while stronger differences in job stress and more limited differences in job satisfaction and self-efficacy emerge within Generation Y.

Table 7. Summary of Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Hypothesis Statement	Main Finding	Result
H1	POP is positively related to job stress.	B = .77; p < .001; R^2 = .479	Supported
H2	POP is negatively related to job satisfaction.	B = -.89; p < .001; R^2 = .434	Supported
H3	POP is positively related to cyberloafing.	B = .10; p=.045; R^2 = .013	Supported; weak effect
H4	POP is negatively related to self-efficacy.	B = -.39; p < .001; R^2 = .250	Supported
H5a	Generations differ in terms of POP levels.	t p=.686; MW p=.510	Not supported
H5b	Generations differ in terms of job stress.	t p=.682; MW p=.597	Not supported
H5c	Generations differ in terms of job satisfaction.	Y > X; p=.012 / .004	Supported
H5d	Generations differ in terms of cyberloafing.	Y > X; p < .001	Supported
H5e	Generations differ in terms of self-efficacy.	t p=.462; MW p=.181	Not supported
H6a–H6c	Generation moderates the relationship between POP and stress, satisfaction, and cyberloafing.	Interaction p > .05	Not supported
H6d	Generation moderates the relationship between POP and self-efficacy.	B = -.25; p=.002	Supported
H7	Variables differ according to gender.	p > .05 in all comparisons	Not supported
H8	Variables differ according to marital status.	Significant differences in some variables	Partially supported
H9	Variables differ according to length of employment.	Limited/specific differences in Generation Y	Partially supported

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study examined the relationships between POP and job stress, job satisfaction, cyberloafing, and self-efficacy among Generation X and Generation Y employees. The findings show that POP is strongly and positively associated with job stress. This result is consistent with the argument that political work environments increase uncertainty, distrust, and loss of control (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Miller et al., 2008; Vigoda, 2000). When employees believe that decisions are shaped by power relations and personal interests, they are more likely to interpret the workplace as threatening and stressful.

The negative relationship between POP and job satisfaction is also theoretically meaningful. When promotion, reward, and performance evaluation practices are perceived as unfair or non-transparent, employees' positive evaluations of their jobs are likely to decline. This finding is consistent with prior evidence linking POP to less favorable employee attitudes (Chang et al., 2009; Harris et al., 2007). It also reinforces the importance of fairness, transparency, and reciprocity in sustaining job satisfaction.

The cyberloafing result requires a more cautious interpretation. Although POP significantly predicts cyberloafing, the explained variance is very low, indicating a weak but statistically significant relationship. This suggests that politically perceived environments may contribute to withdrawal-oriented digital behavior, but cyberloafing is not explained by POP alone. Digital work habits, workload, technology-use norms, supervision, and individual self-regulation may also shape this behavior (Koay & Soh, 2019; Lim, 2002; Lim & Chen, 2012).

A particularly notable finding is the negative relationship between POP and self-efficacy, together with the significant moderating role of generation in this relationship. In political organizational climates, employees may believe that their skills and efforts are not objectively recognized. Such a belief can weaken perceived personal effectiveness. The stronger negative association among Generation Y employees may reflect this cohort's stronger expectations for fair feedback, development opportunities, and objective career progression.

The generational comparison results show no significant differences between Generation X and Generation Y in POP, job stress, or self-efficacy. However, Generation Y employees report higher job satisfaction and cyberloafing. The job satisfaction result may reflect contextual features of the sample, whereas the cyberloafing result may be related to greater digital familiarity among Generation Y employees. Still, these findings should be interpreted carefully because apparent generational differences may also reflect age, tenure, career stage, working conditions, and the observed demographic imbalance between cohorts in marital status and length of employment (Parry & Urwin, 2011; Rudolph et al., 2021).

The study contributes to organizational behavior research by examining multiple consequences of POP within a single empirical framework. Rather than focusing on one outcome, it considers psychological strain, job attitude, digital withdrawal behavior, and personal efficacy together. In addition, examining generation both as a comparison variable and as a moderator responds to calls for a more cautious and evidence-based approach to generational research.

From a practical perspective, the findings highlight the importance of fair, transparent, merit-based, and trust-oriented management practices. Managers should clarify the criteria used in promotion, reward, and performance evaluation decisions and communicate these criteria consistently. Because the self-efficacy of Generation Y employees appears to be more vulnerable to political climates, organizations should provide regular feedback, visible development opportunities, and objective career paths. Cyberloafing should also be managed through balanced

policies that combine clear expectations with attention to fairness, workload, and organizational trust.

This study has several limitations. First, the cross-sectional design prevents causal conclusions. Second, because the data were collected through self-report measures, common method bias may be a concern. Third, the use of convenience sampling and the focus on white-collar employees working in manufacturing firms in Istanbul and Kocaeli limit the generalizability of the findings to other sectors, regions, and blue-collar employees. Fourth, generation overlaps with age, tenure, and career stage. In addition, Generation X and Generation Y employees in this sample differ notably in marital status and length of employment, which makes it difficult to attribute all observed group differences solely to generational membership. Therefore, findings related to generational differences should be interpreted with caution.

Future research could use longitudinal designs to examine how POP shapes work outcomes over time. Multi-source data and diverse sectoral samples would also help clarify whether the observed relationships remain stable across organizational settings and cultural contexts. In particular, the moderation finding for self-efficacy suggests a promising direction for research on how political organizational environments influence employees' personal resources. Overall, the study demonstrates that POP is a consequential workplace experience that shapes not only employee attitudes but also behavioral responses and perceptions of personal capability.

STATEMENTS/DECLARATIONS

Ethics Statement: Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Human Research Ethics Committee of Gebze Technical University (Approval Date: April 30, 2026; Session/Decision No: 2026/08-02). In case of detection of a contrary situation, Journal of International Management Research and Applications has no responsibility and all responsibility belongs to the author (s) of the study.

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STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT: THEORETICAL EVOLUTION, CORE FRAMEWORKS, AND CONTEMPORARY FRONTIERS

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Abstract

Strategic management research has evolved through multiple theoretical perspectives that offer complementary explanations of how firms create, capture, and renew competitive advantage. This study provides an integrative thematic review of the field's intellectual development, focusing on the transition from the design and positioning schools to the resource-based view, dynamic capabilities, and contemporary approaches centred on artificial intelligence, digital transformation, platform ecosystems, and sustainability. The review draws on searches conducted in Scopus and Web of Science covering peer-reviewed articles, books, and book chapters published between 1959 and mid-2026. Approximately 340 records were screened, of which 26 theoretically central and directly relevant sources were retained for thematic synthesis. The findings indicate that industry positioning, firm-specific resources, and dynamic capabilities should not be treated as competing explanations of superior performance. Rather, they form an interconnected system in which firms identify attractive competitive positions, deploy valuable and difficult-to-imitate resources, and continuously reconfigure those resources as environmental conditions change. Building on this synthesis, the study identifies three increasingly prominent frontiers AI-enabled strategic decision-making, ecosystem-based digital competition, and ESG-oriented strategy and explains how they extend established theories of competitive advantage. The review contributes by presenting an integrative framework that links external positioning, internal resource orchestration, and strategic renewal, while outlining research questions concerning AI governance, ecosystem dependence, digital capability development, and the conditions under which sustainability capabilities generate durable advantage.

Keywords: Strategic Management, Competitive Advantage, Resource-Based View, Dynamic Capabilities, Algorithmic Strategy
Article Type: Research Article.

STRATEJİK YÖNETİM: KURAMSAL EVRİM, TEMEL ÇERÇEVELER VE ÇAĞDAŞ ARAŞTIRMA ALANLARI

Atıf: Balcıoğlu, Y. S & Bayraktar, Ü. (2026). Stratejik yönetim: kuramsal evrim, temel çerçeveler ve çağdaş araştırma alanları., and comtemporary frontiers. *Uluslararası Yönetim Araştırmaları ve Uygulamaları Dergisi*, 5(1), 17-29.

Özet

Stratejik yönetim araştırmaları, firmaların rekabet avantajını nasıl yarattığını, elde tuttuğunu ve yenilediğini açıklayan birbirini tamamlayıcı teorik perspektifler doğrultusunda gelişmiştir. Bu çalışma, alanın entelektüel gelişimine ilişkin bütüncül bir tematik inceleme sunmakta ve tasarım ve konumlandırma okullarından kaynak temelli görüşe, dinamik yetenekler yaklaşımına ve yapay zekâ, dijital dönüşüm, platform ekosistemleri ile sürdürülebilirlik odaklı çağdaş yaklaşımlara uzanan teorik dönüşümü incelemektedir. İnceleme, 1959 ile 2026 yılının ortaları arasında yayımlanan

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hakemli makaleleri, kitapları ve kitap bölümlerini kapsayan Scopus ve Web of Science taramalarına dayanmaktadır. Yaklaşık 340 kayıt değerlendirilmiş ve bunlardan teorik açıdan merkezi öneme sahip, araştırma konusuyla doğrudan ilişkili 26 kaynak tematik sentez için seçilmiştir. Bulgular, endüstri konumlandırması, firmaya özgü kaynaklar ve dinamik yeteneklerin üstün performansın birbirine rakip açıklamaları olarak değerlendirilmemesi gerektiğini göstermektedir. Bunun yerine bu yaklaşımlar, birbirine bağlı bir sistemin unsurları olarak görülmelidir. Bu sistemde firmalar cazip rekabetçi konumları belirlemekte, değerli ve taklit edilmesi güç kaynakları kullanmakta ve çevresel koşullar değiştikçe bu kaynakları sürekli olarak yeniden yapılandırmaktadır. Bu sentezden hareketle çalışma, giderek daha fazla önem kazanan üç araştırma alanını ortaya koymaktadır. Bunlar yapay zekâ destekli stratejik karar verme, ekosistem temelli dijital rekabet ve ESG (çevresel, sosyal ve yönetişim) odaklı stratejidir. Çalışma ayrıca bu alanların rekabet avantajına ilişkin yerleşik teorileri nasıl genişlettiğini açıklamaktadır. Araştırma, dışsal konumlandırma, içsel kaynak orkestrasyonu ve stratejik yenilenmeyi bütünleştiren bir çerçeve sunarak literatüre katkıda bulunmaktadır. Bunun yanında yapay zekâ yönetişimi, ekosistem bağımlılığı, dijital yeteneklerin geliştirilmesi ve sürdürülebilirlik yeteneklerinin hangi koşullar altında kalıcı rekabet avantajı yarattığına ilişkin gelecekteki araştırmalar için önemli sorular ortaya koymaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Stratejik Yönetim, Rekabet Avantajı, Kaynak Temelli Görüş, Dinamik Yetenekler, Algoritmik Strateji
Makale Türü: Araştırma Makalesi.

1. INTRODUCTION

Strategic management is the field concerned with the major, resource-committing choices that determine an organisation's long-run performance: which markets to compete in, how to compete, what capabilities to build, and how to adapt as conditions change (Barney & Hesterly, 2019; Porter, 1980; Wernerfelt, 1984). Its defining question is deceptively simple: why do some firms persistently earn returns above their cost of capital while rivals in the same industry do not? Six decades of theory have produced a sequence of answers, each illuminating part of the puzzle and each, in turn, exposed as incomplete by a changing economy.

This thematic review has three aims. First, it reconstructs the intellectual trajectory of the discipline so that today's debates can be read against the paradigms they extend or contest. Second, it synthesises the field's foundational frameworks into a single integrative model of competitive advantage. Third, it examines the frontiers that are most actively reshaping research and practice in 2025–2026 artificial intelligence (AI), digital transformation, and sustainability assessing where each genuinely changes the logic of strategy rather than merely supplying new examples of old principles.

Although strategic management research offers a wide array of perspectives on how firms are organized, governed, and adapted over time, there remains limited consensus on how these perspectives are theoretically integrated. Early foundational studies largely treated these approaches as distinct or competing explanations of firm performance (Rumelt, 1991; Barney, 1991; Teece et al., 1997). Subsequent scholarship has increasingly moved toward theoretical convergence, highlighting complementarities between the resource-based view and dynamic capabilities perspective, particularly in relation to how firms develop, deploy, and renew resources over time (Foss & Knudsen, 2013; Helfat & Martin, 2015). More recent research extends this integrative agenda by examining how digital transformation, artificial intelligence, and platform ecosystems are reshaping the boundaries between established strategic frameworks and their applicability in contemporary contexts (Jacobides et al., 2019; Vial, 2019; Nambisan et al., 2019). Nevertheless, despite this growing body of integrative work, a fully coherent understanding of how these frameworks jointly operate under conditions of technological turbulence and sustainability-related pressures remains underdeveloped.

The review adopts a thematic rather than chronological-only structure. After outlining scope and method (Section 2), it presents the evolution of strategic thought (Section 3) and an integrative

synthesis of the core frameworks (Section 4). Sections 5 and 6 turn to the contemporary frontiers and their sector and geographic incidence. Section 7 draws out implications for strategists, and Section 8 concludes with an agenda for future research.

2. SCOPE AND METHOD

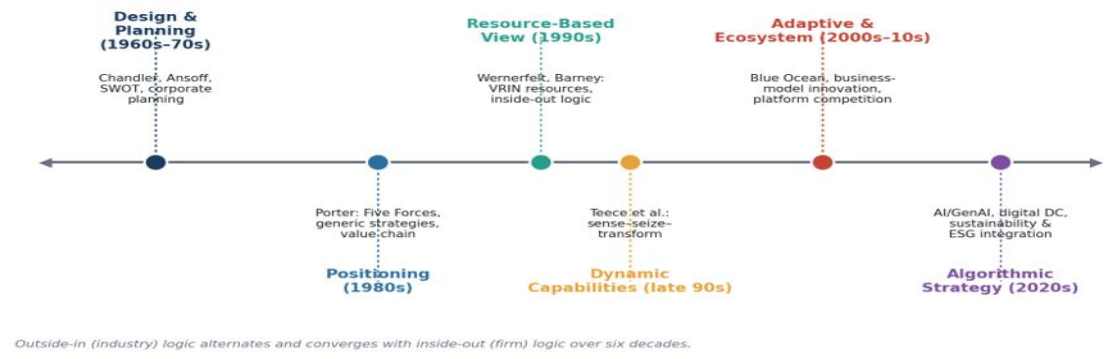
The unit of analysis is the firm and its strategy, examined at the level of themes rather than individual companies. "Strategic management" is treated as encompassing strategy formulation (analysis and choice), strategy implementation (structure, capabilities, and execution), and strategy renewal (adaptation over time). The review is conceptual and integrative: it organises established theory and recent scholarship into a coherent map of the field, rather than testing a single hypothesis.

Evidence is drawn from foundational works in the discipline and from recent peer-reviewed literature and bibliometric reviews published in 2024–2026, including studies appearing in the Strategic Management Journal and related outlets. The review is classified as an integrative thematic synthesis. The literature base was assembled through searches of Scopus and Web of Science using the search strings ("strategic management" AND ("resource-based view" OR "dynamic capabilities" OR "competitive advantage")) and ("strategic management" AND ("artificial intelligence" OR "digital transformation" OR "ESG" OR "platform ecosystem")), restricted to English-language peer-reviewed articles, books, and book chapters published between 1959 and mid-2026. An initial pool of approximately 340 records was screened by title and abstract; 26 sources were retained on the basis of theoretical centrality, citation impact, and direct relevance to the synthesis themes. Practitioner reports were included selectively as supplementary context where peer-reviewed coverage was nascent. Thematic categories were derived inductively from repeated patterns in the retained literature and then organised deductively against the three-paradigm structure (positioning, RBV, dynamic capabilities). All sources are cited in author–date (APA 7th edition) format, with full entries in the References section.

3. THE EVOLUTION OF STRATEGIC-MANAGEMENT THOUGHT

The field's history can be read as a pendulum swinging between two explanations of advantage. An "outside-in" tradition locates the source of profit in industry structure and competitive position; an "inside-out" tradition locates it in the firm's own resources and capabilities. Figure 1 summarises the principal paradigms and their leading contributors.

Figure 1. The evolution of strategic-management paradigms across six decades.



Outside-in (industry) logic alternates and converges with inside-out (firm) logic over six decades.

3.1. Design and planning (1960s–1970s)

Early strategic management was prescriptive and analytical. Chandler's (1962) thesis that structure follows strategy, Ansoff's (1965) product–market growth matrix, and the SWOT logic of matching internal strengths and weaknesses to external opportunities and threats framed strategy as a deliberate, top-down planning exercise. Its weakness was an assumption of relative environmental stability.

3.2. The positioning school (1980s)

Porter (1980, 1985) recast strategy through the lens of industrial-organisation economics. The Five Forces framework explained industry profitability as a function of rivalry, the threat of entry and substitutes, and the bargaining power of buyers and suppliers; the generic strategies of cost leadership, differentiation, and focus, together with the value chain, gave managers a structured way to choose and defend a position. The positioning view dominated practice for a decade but was later criticised for treating industry structure as relatively fixed and for saying little about why firms in the same industry differ (Pangarkar, 2024).

3.3. The resource-based view (1990s)

Building on Penrose's (1959) theory of the firm, Wernerfelt (1984) and Barney (1991) argued that advantage stems from resources that are valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable (VRIN criteria); Barney's (1991) later reformulation added the role of the supporting organisational context to yield the VRIO framework, in which the "O" (organisation) dimension determines whether the firm can exploit the resource's potential. Attention shifted inward, from where a firm competes to what it uniquely owns or controls. The RBV explained intra-industry performance differences that positioning could not, but it was, in turn, charged with being static good at describing the resources behind an existing advantage, weaker at explaining how firms renew advantage as markets shift (Teece, Pisano, & Shuen, 1997).

3.4. Dynamic capabilities (late 1990s onward)

Teece, Pisano, and Shuen (1997) defined dynamic capabilities as the firm's ability to integrate, build, and reconfigure internal and external competences to address rapidly changing environments. Teece's (2007) later micro-foundations sensing opportunities, seizing them, and transforming the asset base explicitly addressed the RBV's static limitation by focusing on how resource configurations are renewed over time. Dynamic capabilities are higher-order routines that govern the evolution of ordinary capabilities, and the framework remains one of the most generative streams in contemporary strategy research (Cristofaro, Helfat, & Teece, 2025; Teece, 2023).

3.5. Adaptive, ecosystem, and algorithmic strategy (2000s–present)

As digital technologies lowered entry barriers and blurred industry boundaries, scholarship broadened to business-model innovation, blue-ocean (uncontested-market) strategy, platform and ecosystem competition, and most recently the use of AI in the strategy process itself (Digital Strategy Institute, 2025; Doshi, Bell, Mirzayev, & Vanneste, 2025). These developments do not discard earlier paradigms; they extend them to settings characterised by rapid technological change, network effects, and cooperative as well as competitive relationships.

Table 1 contrasts the three paradigms that continue to anchor the field, clarifying what each takes as the primary source of advantage and where each is strongest and weakest.

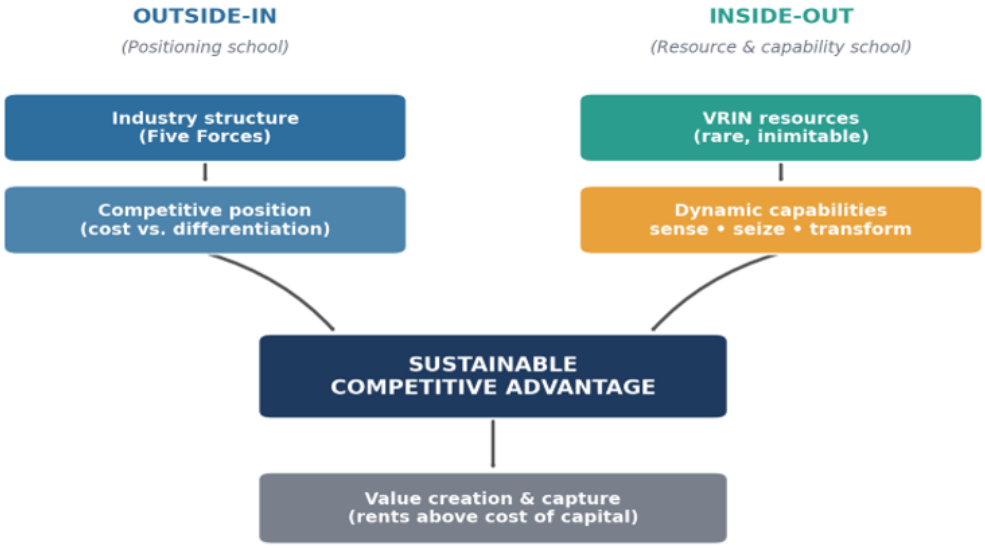
Table 1. The three anchoring paradigms of strategic management compared.

Paradigm	Source of advantage	Core constructs	Principal limitation
Positioning (Porter, 1980)	Favourable industry structure & defensible position	Five Forces; generic strategies; value chain	Treats structure as relatively fixed; quiet on firm heterogeneity
Resource-based view (Wernerfelt, 1984; Barney, 1991)	Ownership of VRIN resources	Valuable, rare, inimitable, non-substitutable resources	Largely static; weak on resource renewal
Dynamic capabilities (Teece et al., 1997)	Ability to reconfigure resources as conditions change	Sensing, seizing, transforming; higher-order routines	Constructs hard to measure; definitional ambiguity

4. CORE FRAMEWORKS: AN INTEGRATIVE SYNTHESIS

The apparent rivalry between the positioning and resource/capability schools has, in mature scholarship, given way to integration. The two logics answer different parts of the same question: positioning explains how attractive the competitive arena is and where to stand within it, while the resource and capability view explains why a particular firm can occupy that position profitably and hold it. Figure 2 represents this convergence.

Figure 2. Integrative model- the outside-in and inside-out logics converge on sustainable advantage.



Read together, the frameworks imply a sequence rather than a contest. Industry analysis identifies where economic profit is available and how it is threatened; the resource-based view asks which of the firm's assets are genuinely valuable, rare, and hard to imitate; and dynamic capabilities ask whether the firm can keep reconfiguring those assets as the environment moves. Advantage is

sustainable only when all three align: a well-chosen position, defended by distinctive resources, continually refreshed by strong sensing, seizing, and transforming routines. Recent empirical work increasingly combines the resource-based view and the dynamic-capabilities view explicitly, for example in studies of how small and medium-sized enterprises pair digital resources with adaptive routines to improve both competitiveness and sustainability performance (Chen & Wang, 2024; Fülöp et al., 2025).

5. CONTEMPORARY THEMATIC FRONTIERS

Three themes dominate the strategic-management research agenda in 2025–2026: artificial intelligence in the strategy process, digital transformation and ecosystem competition, and the integration of sustainability and ESG into the core of strategy. Recent bibliometric reviews report a marked rise in scholarship on AI, digital transformation, and sustainability, alongside the continued centrality of the resource-based and dynamic-capabilities streams (Sunardjo et al., 2025; Tran, 2025). Table 2 summarises the directional shift in research attention across the principal thematic streams between the early 2010s and the mid-2020s.

Table 2. Directional trends in strategic-management research attention, early 2010s to mid-2020s.

Research theme	Early 2010s	Mid-2020s	Direction of change
Resource-based view / dynamic capabilities	Dominant	Dominant	Sustained / expanding
Industry positioning (Porter)	Moderate	Moderate	Stable
AI and algorithmic strategy	Nascent	Rapidly growing	Strong upward
Digital transformation / platforms	Emerging	Prominent	Upward
Sustainability / ESG integration	Peripheral	Prominent	Strong upward

Note: Directional assessments are author-derived qualitative propositions based on the bibliometric patterns reported in Sunardjo et al. (2025) and Tran (2025). They are intended to convey relative change in research attention, not absolute publication counts.

Table 3. Summarises the drivers, the dominant theoretical lens, and the principal tension within each frontier.

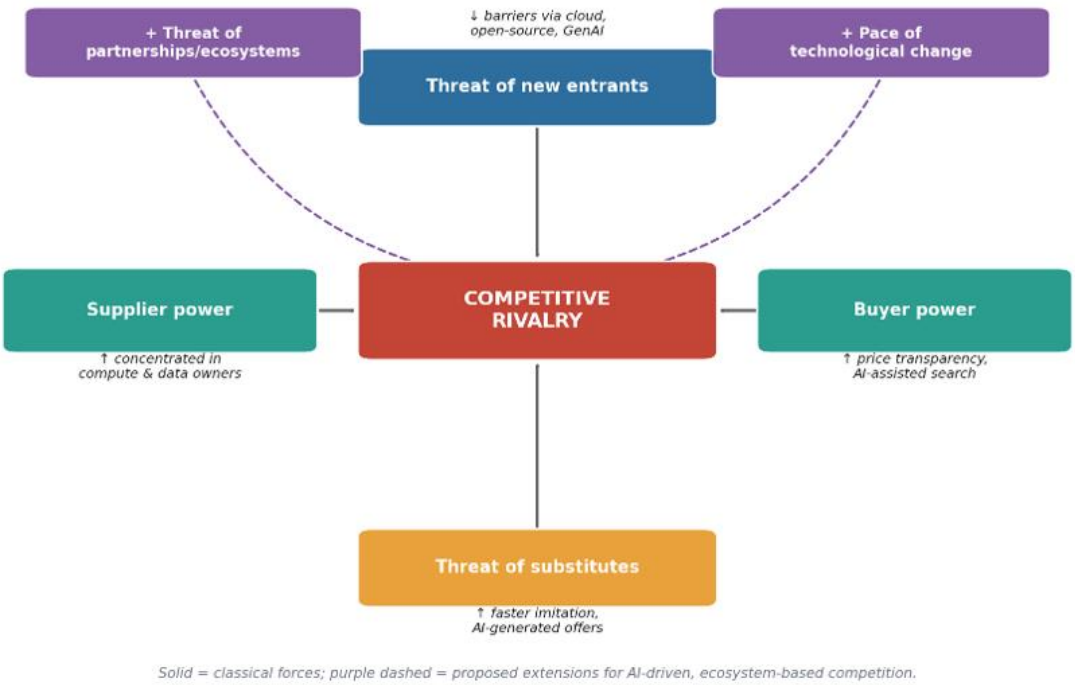
Frontier	Key drivers	Dominant lens	Central tension
AI & algorithmic strategy	Generative AI; predictive analytics; falling cost of analysis	Dynamic (managerial) capabilities; decision theory	Augmentation vs. automation of the strategist
Digital transformation & ecosystems	Platforms; APIs; network effects; data assets	Business-model innovation; ecosystem theory	Cooperation vs. competition (“coopetition”)
Sustainability & ESG	Regulation; investor & customer pressure; resource constraints	RBV + dynamic capabilities; stakeholder theory	Compliance cost vs. source of differentiation

5.1. Artificial intelligence and algorithmic strategy

AI is moving from an operational tool to a participant in the strategy process itself. Empirical work shows that large language models can evaluate strategic alternatives ranking business models in ways that, while individually inconsistent and prone to bias, converge toward expert human judgement once aggregated (Doshi et al., 2025). Other research develops hybrid models combining transformer architectures with reinforcement learning to support strategic decisions in volatile markets (Pu, Li, & Hou, 2025), while qualitative studies find that AI can democratise and accelerate decision-making in small and medium-sized firms, even as adoption remains cautious and incremental (Aiudi, Francioni, Kyrdoda, & Amerio, 2025).

AI also re-shapes the classic industry-analysis lens. Commentators argue that the Five Forces, designed for relatively fixed industry boundaries, understate the role of partnerships, platforms, and rapid technological change in AI-driven markets, and have proposed extending the framework with additional forces such as the governance of platform ecosystems and complementor relationships, as well as the pace of technological advancement (Mass Technology Leadership Council, 2025). Figure 3 visualises this reconfiguration: entry barriers fall as cloud and open-source tools spread; supplier power concentrates among owners of compute and proprietary data; buyer power rises with AI-assisted price transparency; and substitutes proliferate as imitation accelerates.

Figure 3. AI-era reconfiguration of Porter's Five Forces, with proposed extensions for ecosystem-based competition.



The unresolved question is whether AI augments or displaces the human strategist. The weight of current evidence favours augmentation AI as a powerful input to judgement under uncertainty while raising governance concerns around accountability, bias, and data privacy that the literature is only beginning to address (Doshi et al., 2025).

5.2. Digital transformation and ecosystem competition

Digital transformation is the comprehensive reworking of a firm's strategy, organisation, and processes around digital technologies. Large surveys report that a substantial majority of senior leaders are rebuilding business models around AI and have accelerated digital investment, yet only about a third of digital-transformation initiatives realise their intended outcomes a persistent gap between aspiration and execution (Digital Strategy Institute, 2025). This gap is itself a dynamic-capabilities problem: technology is necessary but insufficient without the sensing, seizing, and transforming routines to convert it into value.

Strategically, the most consequential shift is from firm-versus-firm to ecosystem-versus-ecosystem competition. Value increasingly accrues to those who orchestrate platforms, open APIs, and data-sharing partnerships rather than those who optimise a single value chain in isolation. This blurs industry boundaries and elevates cooperative strategy alongside competitive strategy precisely the dimension critics find missing from the classical positioning model (Digital Strategy Institute, 2025; Pangarkar, 2024).

5.3. Sustainability and ESG integration

Sustainability has moved from the periphery of corporate responsibility toward the centre of strategy. A growing body of work frames ESG not as a compliance cost but as a potential source of differentiation and resilience, and links digital transformation to improved ESG performance through innovation and servitisation (Chen & Wang, 2024; Liu & Wang, 2025). Practitioner research similarly argues that embedding societal value into products, processes, and ecosystems creates new modes of competition rather than a trade-off against profitability (Boston Consulting Group, 2025).

Theoretically, the sustainability frontier is being absorbed into the existing apparatus rather than replacing it. Recent studies combine the resource-based view and the dynamic-capabilities view to explain how firms orchestrate digital and traditional resources to improve ESG performance, and introduce constructs such as "digital dynamic capabilities" to capture the conversion of digital insight into sustainability outcomes (Fülöp et al., 2025; Xiao et al., 2026). The central tension remains empirical: under what conditions does sustainability investment become a durable, inimitable resource rather than a cost that rivals can match?

6. SECTOR AND GEOGRAPHIC INCIDENCE

The three frontiers do not affect all sectors equally. Table 4 offers a sector-impact matrix a directional reading of where the combined AI, digital, and sustainability themes most reshape competitive dynamics. The assessment is qualitative and intended to orient analysis, not to provide investment guidance.

Table 4. Sector-impact matrix for the combined AI, digital, and sustainability themes (directional).

Sector	Impact	Direction	Horizon	Primary mechanism
Technology & software	High	Positive	Near-term	AI-native products; platform ecosystems
Financial services	High	Mixed	Near-term	Algorithmic decisions; data & compliance
Industrials & manufacturing	Medium	Positive	Medium-term	Digital twins; servitisation; ESG supply chains
Energy & utilities	High	Mixed	Medium-term	Energy transition; sustainability capex
Consumer & retail	Medium	Mixed	Near-term	AI-assisted search; price transparency
Healthcare	Medium	Positive	Medium-term	Decision support; data governance constraints

Geographically, the incidence of these themes reflects differences in regulation, capital, and technological capacity. Table 5 sketches the broad pattern reported in recent macro and strategy commentary, in which AI factors into nearly every major corporate decision and growth diverges between AI "winners" and "losers" (Accenture, 2025; Frost & Sullivan, 2025). The geographic assessments in Table 5 are author-derived qualitative propositions grounded in the practitioner literature cited; they are not the product of systematic cross-country empirical analysis and should be read accordingly.

Table 5. Regional-exposure matrix for the combined AI, digital, and sustainability themes (directional).

Region	Exposure	Net direction	Key factors
United States	High	Positive	Deep capital markets; AI leadership; flexible labour
European Union	High	Mixed	Strong ESG/AI regulation; slower scaling of platforms
China	High	Mixed	State-directed AI investment; export-led price pressure
Emerging Asia	Medium	Positive	Digital leapfrogging; manufacturing reconfiguration

7. IMPLICATIONS FOR STRATEGISTS

Three implications follow from the synthesis. They are framed as analytical priorities, not recommendations to buy, sell, or pursue any specific course of action.

- **Treat advantage as a system, not a single lever**

Position, resources, and renewal capability must align; investment in any one without the others tends to erode quickly. The integrative model in Figure 2 is the practical test a strong position undefended by distinctive, continually refreshed resources is not durable.

- **Build dynamic capabilities deliberately around AI and digital assets**

The execution gap in digital transformation is a capability gap. Sensing (scanning AI and market shifts), seizing (committing resources to new models), and transforming (reconfiguring the organisation) are the routines that convert technology into advantage (Digital Strategy Institute, 2025).

- **Frame sustainability as a potential resource, not only a constraint**

Where ESG capabilities are valuable, rare, and hard to imitate, they can differentiate; where they are easily matched, they are merely table stakes. The strategic task is to identify which is which in a given context (Boston Consulting Group, 2025).

8. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Strategic management has progressed not by discarding paradigms but by layering them: positioning, resources, and dynamic capabilities now form a connected explanation of how firms create, capture, and renew advantage. The contemporary frontiers AI, digital transformation, and sustainability are best understood as stress tests that extend this apparatus into faster, more boundary-less, and more stakeholder-conscious environments, rather than as a clean break with it.

Several questions remain open. How should the strategist's role be redefined when generative AI can generate and evaluate strategic alternatives (Doshi et al., 2025)? Which dynamic capabilities are decisive for closing the digital-transformation execution gap? And under what conditions does sustainability investment become an inimitable resource rather than a matchable cost? Progress on these questions will likely come from work that integrates the resource-based and dynamic-capabilities views with theories of ecosystems, decision-making under uncertainty, and stakeholder value the direction in which the most recent scholarship is already moving (Cristofaro et al., 2025; Fülöp et al., 2025; Tran, 2025; Xiao et al., 2026).

More specifically, future research should pursue four directions. First, scholars should investigate how generative AI alters the micro-foundations of dynamic capabilities: if AI can perform sensing and evaluation tasks previously reserved for human strategists, the locus of sensing, seizing, and transforming routines may shift, raising new questions about managerial cognition, accountability, and the boundary between augmentation and automation. Second, longitudinal empirical work is needed to identify the specific organisational routines and learning mechanisms that distinguish firms which successfully close the digital-transformation execution gap from those that do not; survey-based cross-sectional designs are insufficient for this purpose. Third, the conditions under which sustainability investment becomes a durable, VRIN-grade resource rather than a quickly matched compliance cost remain underexplored, particularly across industries with divergent regulatory regimes and competitive structures. Fourth, and integrating the sector and geographic dimensions of this review, comparative studies examining how the interplay of AI, digital transformation, and ESG strategies differs across institutional contexts for example, between tightly regulated European markets and more market-driven economies would substantially advance both theory and practice. Each of these directions calls for research designs that combine resource-based and dynamic-capabilities frameworks with institutional theory, decision science, and stakeholder perspectives.

It is equally important to recognise that the impact of artificial intelligence, digital transformation, and sustainability on competitive dynamics is not uniform across sectors or geographies. As the sector-impact matrix and regional analysis in Sections 6 demonstrate, technology-intensive industries and capital-rich regions are positioned to capture disproportionate early benefits from AI and digitalisation, whereas energy-transition pressures and ESG regulatory frameworks create both constraints and differentiation opportunities that vary markedly between the European Union, the United States, China, and emerging Asian economies. These asymmetries carry direct implications for strategic decision-making: a strategy that leverages AI-driven sensing and seizing routines in a software-native environment may require substantial adaptation before it generates equivalent value in a capital-intensive manufacturing or healthcare context. Similarly,

sustainability investments that constitute a durable, inimitable resource in tightly regulated European markets may function only as compliance cost in markets where regulatory enforcement remains limited. Practitioners and researchers alike should therefore resist the temptation to treat the three contemporary frontiers as universally applicable prescriptions; instead, they should calibrate the depth and sequencing of AI adoption, digital transformation initiatives, and ESG integration to the specific institutional, competitive, and technological conditions of the sector and region in question.

STATEMENTS/DECLARATIONS

Ethics Statement: This study is based on secondary data obtained from previously published literature indexed in Scopus and Web of Science. Therefore, ethical committee approval was not required.

Author Contributions Statement: 1st author's contribution rate 50%, 2nd author's contribution rate 50%.

Conflict of Interest: There is no conflict of interest among the authors.

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