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EDITORIAL

Special issue guest editorial: "Advancing broad and deep understanding in innovation management: Meta-analyses and literature reviews"

1 | INTRODUCTION

While the "glamorous" part of extending a research field is often focused on breaking new ground through explicating new constructs and empirical relationships, just as important is the need to solidify our understanding of what we think we know from past research. A clear grasp of this foundation is essential if we are to look forward to new insights. Reflective review research can take many forms, including thematic literature surveys, bibliometric analyses, systematic reviews, meta-analyses, and others. The *Journal of Product Innovation Management* (*JPIM*) has a strong history of these types of articles (see Spanjol et al., 2024, for a listing of selected review articles published in *JPIM*).

With new streams emerging across a range of subfields in innovation management research (e.g., artificial intelligence, business model innovation, corporate entrepreneurship, digital technology, and others), the time is right for a curated reflection on where we stand and future research opportunities in these and other areas. This project began with a call for papers in the spring of 2021. Using an optional paper proposal process, we invited interested authors to send us short form summaries of their ideas for this issue and receive comments and suggestions. That seemed to be quite successful in quickly stimulating interest in the special issue and getting authors to put pen to paper. To start laying out ideas for many of the papers that you will see here (nine total[1]), authors submitted such proposals for feedback from the special issue editors. While not all of these proposals resulted in papers in this issue, all did receive extensive feedback from multiple members of the editorial team. We do believe this feedback was valuable regardless of the ultimate disposition of the paper, and we encourage authors to pursue such opportunities when given the chance around a special issue. We believe there is particular value in receiving commentary over a short form summary of a paper rather than its full 50-page incarnation. This lets the review team focus on the core contribution of a piece, which is typically the reason for its ultimate acceptance or rejection at any journal.

The deadline for submissions to the issue was April 2022, resulting in approximately 40 full submissions. While this was around an average number of submissions for a special issue, we found the quality of this set to be exceptional. The significant labor needed to produce a state-of-the-art review piece requires author teams to be skilled in advanced review research methods and to invest significant time in the work. Thus, we were fortunate to receive the high-quality group of submissions we share with you in this issue.

Next, we consider some of the attributes that make for an exceptional review research contribution and how they are reflected in this issue's papers. Many of the nuances on the state-of-the art vary by paper type. Examples of excellent guidance provided to scholars include Hulland (2024) for bibliometric analyses, Tranfield et al. (2003) for systematic reviews, Elsbach and van Knippenberg (2020) for integrative reviews, Habersang and Reihlen (2024) for meta-syntheses, as well as DeSimone et al. (2021) for meta-analyses, among others. Thus, we do not seek to provide a detailed exposition of quality standards in this editorial. Instead, in the next section we highlight selected state-of-the-art characteristics of the papers included in this special issue. We then thematically discuss the contributions to the special issue with some reflections on common threads and future directions that arise from this work.

2 | STATE-OF-THE-ART CHARACTERISTICS IN INNOVATION MANAGEMENT REVIEW RESEARCH IN THIS ISSUE

2.1 | General quality characteristics of review research

The potential for papers that survey, analyze, and synthesize literature in a particular domain to create an

[1]Two of the final nine articles were originally submitted for general consideration but were moved to this issue based on their excellent fit with the theme.

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important contribution is substantial, with some fields (such as medicine) building entire databases dedicated to reviews (e.g., Cochrane Library) to inform and advance practice. In the management domain, there are also entire journals (e.g., *Academy of Management Annals* and *International Journal of Management Reviews*) or annual issues (e.g., in the *Journal of Management*) dedicated to literature reviews. Yet, review papers often fall short of their contribution potential. Some of the most common reasons include not moving beyond summarizing and describing the domain of interest (see Barczak, 2017; Elsbach & van Knippenberg, 2020), remaining unclear about the review's specific objectives (Kunisch et al., 2018), not specifying the type of review being conducted and how the chosen method aligns with the review objectives (Palmatier et al., 2018; Post et al., 2020), using vague sampling criteria (Hiebl, 2023), not fulfilling the methodological requirements of the chosen review approach (Aguinis et al., 2023; Pugliese et al., 2024; Rousseau, 2024), and not spelling out implications and recommendations for future research (Elsbach & van Knippenberg, 2020; Short, 2009). As a result, a number of helpful editorials and method pieces have been published, identifying standards of quality and guidelines for different types of literature reviews, many of which have been followed by authors in this issue.

Table 1 provides a summary of the nine review papers in this issue. The diversity of review approaches represented in this issue aligns with the perspective that review research represents a multitude of approaches and epistemological underpinnings. Review research embodies "a class of research inquiries that employ scientific methods to analyze and synthesize prior research to develop new knowledge for academia, practice and policy-making" (Kunisch et al., 2023, p. 5), employing both qualitative and quantitative methods. As a result, quality standards need to be aligned with the type of review research being conducted. Yet, regardless of the type of literature review being conducted, two aspects are central to rigorous review research with compelling conclusions: (1) demonstrating alignment between research objectives and the chosen review approach, and (2) ensuring clarity and appropriateness of sample construction (e.g., Hiebl, 2023; Kunisch et al., 2023; Palmatier et al., 2018; Rousseau, 2024).

Considering the first of these essential elements, the papers in this issue demonstrate the importance of research objective-review approach fit. For example, a domain of research might be developing in a fragmented manner, with different conceptualizations emerging and pockets of studies developing independently, missing critical insights to consolidate and move knowledge forward. A review seeking to bring coherence to a disparate field will thus aim to synthesize existing literature systematically into a unifying framework, serving as a launching pad for future research. For example, Gradillas and Thomas (2025) identify 26 different definitions of the related concepts "digitization" and "digitalization" from across 825 peer-reviewed journal articles, highlighting the definitional fuzziness across disciplines and journals, arguably hindering the progress of effective knowledge creation. To resolve this conceptual deficiency, the authors thematically analyze the collection of definitions and provide a framework explicating not only the conceptual boundaries of digitization versus digitalization, but also their relationship to each other, nondigitized precursors, digital artifacts, and socio-economic transformation (see figure 5 in Gradillas & Thomas, 2025). Similarly, Athaide et al. (2025) corral a seemingly disparate literature (294 empirical studies) on digital technologies enabling marketing innovation, offering a classification building on core marketing activities of data acquisition, data analysis, and data activation.

The second key consideration relates to sampling, one of the many decisions to be made by review researchers designing a project. For the papers included in this issue, Table 1 summarizes key sampling decisions taken by authors: Composition of search strings, selection of database(s) searched, and type(s) of literature included. Importantly, authors must explain these sampling decisions and how they are aligned with their research objectives in a transparent and accessible manner (Kunisch et al., 2023; Rousseau, 2024). Across articles in this issue, appendices offer much-needed transparency and replicability, either provided within the articles themselves or as web appendices. For example, both Athaide et al. (2025) and Spieth et al. (2025) provide detailed information on the included articles along with the search procedure in the relevant web appendix.

2.2 | Key attributes of quantitative review research

Meta-analysis is a quantitative review technique that helps a field take stock of knowledge by (1) combining findings across studies, (2) comparing study findings, and (3) generating and testing theoretical propositions (Hedges & Cooper, 1992). The eclectic and interdisciplinary nature of innovation management research provides a rich basis in which meta-analysis techniques can be most useful, as demonstrated in the three meta-analysis papers accepted for this special issue. These three articles provide good examples of meta-analyses that follow the recommendations of method pieces that outline guidelines for successful applications of this technique (e.g., Aguinis et al., 2011; Geyskens et al., 2009).

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TABLE 1 Overview of reviews published in this issue.

Authors	Review focus and approach	Sample size	Key sampling decisions			Contribution
			Search terms used	Database(s) searched	Type(s) of literature included	
Athaide, Jeon, Raj, Sivakumar, and Xiong	Marketing innovation and digital technologies (*qualitative review*)	194 empirical studies	Detailed keywords and phrases referring to specific digital technologies	WoS SSCI	Peer-reviewed articles	Classifies digital technologies across marketing objectives showcasing opportunities for innovation
Gama and Magistretti	Artificial Intelligence (AI) and innovation capabilities (*qualitative review*)	62 empirical studies	Detailed keyword combinations reflecting specific disciplinary literatures	Scopus	Peer-reviewed empirical articles	Provides a taxonomy of AI applications across innovation capabilities
Gradillas and Thomas	Digitization versus digitalization in innovation (*qualitative review*)	825 articles	Broad search strategy using "digitization" and "digitalization"	WoS SSCI	Peer-reviewed articles	Conceptually clarifies digitization versus digitalization and offers theoretical framework of digitization/digitalization in broader processes of socio-economic change
Maier and Baccarella[a]	Psychological and behavioral consequences from customer engagement in new product development (*qualitative review*)	66 studies	Detailed keywords and phrases reflecting specific types of customer engagements	Scopus	Peer-reviewed articles	Identifies four customer empowerment situations and distinct psychological and behavioral consequences from each
Reynolds, O'Dochartaigh, Secchi, Marshall, and Prothero	Innovation frames and framing processes in innovation (*qualitative review*)	73 studies	Broad search strategy using "frame" and "innovation" terms	WoS SSCI	Peer-reviewed articles, conference proceedings and books	Identifies and organizes innovation frame types, frame characteristics, and framing processes across levels of analysis and integrates these into a conceptual framework
Saeed, Alasadi, Yousafzai, and Zahra	Corporate entrepreneurship and top management teams (*quantitative review*)	128 effects from 57 independent samples	Broad search strategy with key terms such as "executives," "CEO," "top management team (TMT)," "upper echelons, "corporate entrepreneurship," "firm-level entrepreneurship," and "strategic entrepreneurship"	ABI/INFORM, PsycINFO, EBSCO, EconLit, ERIC, JSTOR, Science Direct, Wilson Business Abstracts, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses, arXiv, social science research network (SSRN)	Peer-reviewed and unpublished quantitative empirical articles	Meta-analytically tests top management team characteristics' relationship with corporate entrepreneurship, identifying conditional effects

(Continues)

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TABLE 1 (Continued)

Authors	Review focus and approach	Sample size	Key sampling decisions			Contribution
			Search terms used	Database(s) searched	Type(s) of literature included	
Spieth, Breitenmoser, and Röth	Business model innovation (*qualitative review*)	253 studies	Detailed keywords and phrases reflecting business model innovation-related terms and synonyms	WoS SSCI	Peer-reviewed articles	Categorizes business model innovation (BMI) literature into streams and provides a 2 × 2 framework with the dimensions of BMI openness and relatedness
Stettler, Moosauer, Schweiger, Baldauf, and Audretsch	Absorptive capacity and innovation (invention and commercialization) under different knowledge environments (*quantitative review*)	145 studies covering 434,985 firms and 798,650 firm-year observations	Broad search strategy using the phrase "absorptive capacity"	EBSCO, EconLit, Elsevier Science Direct, ProQuest, Google Scholar, JSTOR	Peer-reviewed and unpublished quantitative empirical articles	Meta-analytically tests knowledge-rich environments offer greater innovation benefits from absorptive capacity than knowledge-scarce environments
Wu and Fan[a]	Internationalization and multinational enterprise (MNE) innovation (*quantitative review*)	298 effect sizes from 222 studies	Detailed keywords and phrases reflecting multinational focus in innovation	ABI/Inform, EBSCO, Google Scholar, JSTOR, ProQuest, WoS SSCI	Peer-reviewed quantitative empirical articles	Meta-analytically tests the relationship between internationalization and MNE innovation, identifying country-level contingencies

Note: Articles are listed in alphabetical order by the first author's last name.

Abbreviation: WoS SSCI, Web of Science Social Science Citation Index.

[a]Articles included in this issue, but not processed by the special issue editors.

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The first stage of the meta-analytic research process is the problem formulation stage—probably the most challenging step since it involves identifying the questions that will be answered by a meta-analysis. In this special issue, the authors identified three interesting research questions relevant for researchers in the innovation management field by focusing on specific relationships: absorptive capacity and innovation under different knowledge environments (Stettler et al., 2025); corporate entrepreneurship and top management teams (Saeed et al., 2025); internationalization and MNE innovation (Wu & Fan, 2025). The second critical step that determines the quality of a meta-analysis is the data collection stage that involves the identification of journal articles/studies in the literature. The three meta-analyses published in this special issue provide detailed information about the databases searched, types of articles included in their meta-analyses, search strings/keywords used for their searches, as well as their inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure a systematic and replicable research process. In particular, Wu and Fan (2025) is at the cutting edge of this step with their Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) flowchart in figure 2 that provides detailed information about the literature research process.

The third stage of a meta-analysis is the data evaluation stage that involves the coding of effect sizes that summarize the main findings of each study of interest. This stage primarily involves the coding of one or more statistics in each study that summarize the main findings in the database in order to have a common basis of comparison across studies. Since the objective of this stage is to create a database of information on primary studies, a protocol specifying the information to be extracted from each study should be prepared to reduce possible coding error in this stage and to ensure that the replicability of the findings (Hedges & Cooper, 1992). In this Special Issue, we and the reviewers particularly appreciated the tables that provide detailed information about the coding protocol outlining the information to be extracted from the studies, as well as the use of multiple coders to extract information from original studies.

The fourth key attribute of a good quality meta-analysis involves the univariate and multivariate techniques employed in the meta-analysis to provide insights into the average magnitude, statistical significance, and variance of the relationships among the variables of interest. At this stage, in addition to the calculation of mean effect sizes, additional analyses, such as outlier analysis, tests of homogeneity, availability bias, and analysis of variance across reported effects, should be included to provide descriptive information about the meta-analytic data set. While all three meta-analysis papers in this issue met the basic requirements by including tables that provide descriptive statistics and correlations among the variables investigated, Wu and Fan (2025) conducted several additional tests to consider the potential publication bias and the robustness of findings, which also provide good examples of how researchers can check the stability of their meta-analytic results. Moreover, the meta-analytic structural equation modeling approach of Saeed et al. (2025) is noteworthy as this approach allows for a more nuanced and in-depth examination of all variables within a single model.

Finally, another key attribute of a high-quality meta-analysis involves its results section, where univariate and bivariate analyses are interpreted, discussed, and integrated with prior literature. Given the main objective of a meta-analysis is to provide a quantitative and integrative review of prior literature by combining and comparing findings across studies, the interpretation and discussion of the results deserve special attention. In this regard, Saeed et al. (2025) demonstrate that organizational outcomes are largely reflective of top management team (TMT) attributes, extending the upper echelons theory by providing a nuanced empirical examination of how specific TMT attributes influence corporate entrepreneurship. Similarly, Wu and Fan (2025) use meta-analysis to resolve inconsistent findings around the relationship between internationalization and innovation of MNEs. Specifically, their study shows that the internationalization–innovation relationship is overall positive, but contingent on types of MNEs, diverse contexts, and research settings.

3 | THEMATIC OVERVIEW OF THE SPECIAL ISSUE

The nine papers in this issue cover a wide range of innovation-related research areas (see Table 1 for an overview). We do not think full summaries are needed here (the abstracts in these pieces are better for that), but we do want to note some broad themes. We loosely group these works into focuses on: Technology, Organizational Issues, and Business Models and Strategy. On the surface, these broad concepts do seem to capture much of what the field of innovation management has covered in recent years, so we are not surprised to see this representation in these review research papers.

Considering technology, Gama and Magistretti (2025) were able to already identify 62 studies examining the use of AI tools in innovation despite the nascency of this area. They offer an excellent example of using a systematic and multidisciplinary literature review to help organize a fragmented stream. Through several elements of their paper, they are able to codify understanding and

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lay excellent groundwork for future research. In another technology-focused study, Athaide et al. (2025) consider the effects of various digital technologies on marketing innovations. With their systematic review, this paper considers an ambitious scope of research, including work in artificial intelligence, augmented reality, the Internet of Things, blockchain, and others. We appreciated the organizing framework they developed to organize this body of research, as it helps consider the downstream consequences, in particular, of digital technology deployment. We suspect that with the proliferation of new technologies and technology-driven innovation management research, more review papers on technology—innovation connections will likely emerge in the years ahead.

The largest grouping of papers in this issue considers reviews of various types of organizational issues that influence innovation outcomes. Saeed et al. (2025) explore how the characteristics of top management team members affect their ability to identify and capitalize on entrepreneurial opportunities such as innovation. Their meta-analysis finds that the level of discretion offered to the TMT moderates many of the factors that arose across their subject papers. Thus, this paper is an excellent example of using review (here meta-analysis) techniques to sift through myriad existing papers to identify consistently influential factors, offering meaningful advances for the stream. Even more boldly, Reynolds et al. (2025) study the framing of innovation success, failure, and transformation, a goal that required them to make linkages between prior papers that likely would not have previously been considered in the same stream. This illustrates one of the needed qualities of an adept review scholar—to be able to go beyond simple dictionaries and synonyms to find deep connections within existing literature that might not have seemed apparent. Stettler et al. (2025) take a particularly strategic view by performing a meta-analysis of the linkage between absorptive capacity and innovation. They illustrate a slightly different (but quite valuable) approach to these analyses by not just identifying influential moderators of a known main effect from prior work but in developing then empirically testing hypotheses related to a new conceptual model. Finally, Maier and Baccarella (2025) examine the organizational decision to empower customers in the innovation process. This review paper does an exceptional job of not just learning from the past but also extending theory in several directions with their novel insights on different forms of customer empowerment and their downstream implications for innovation.

A third grouping in this special issue explores issues related to business models and strategy and their implications for innovation. Spieth et al. (2025) reach into the vibrant stream of business model research to identify work that connects with innovation in an integrative literature review. This approach is novel since it requires the researchers to consider theoretical insights and advances across multiple streams being integrated. In this case, we believe the authors have offered connections that should become permanent linkages between these streams, guiding future research efforts. Another interesting systematic review is offered by Gradillas and Thomas (2025), studying digitization and digitalization, two related and increasingly popular topics. Rather than integrating concepts, as is the focus of many papers in this domain, this paper aims to carefully tease apart the sometimes blurred usage of these terms in the past. In addition to cleaning up definitional ambiguity and conflation, the authors offer a robust exploration of the past uses of these concepts and a rich model explicating the terms. This paper is an excellent illustration of the ability of a systematic review to add value that goes well beyond simple organizing of past research efforts. Last in this set, Wu and Fan (2025) consider internationalization and innovation through consideration of national sentiments. This research delves into one of the messier challenges in innovation—how to innovate globally yet in a locally effective way. The authors guide us through insights on the interplay of internationalization, technologism, and nationalism as explanatory factors that can help explain mixed empirical results in the past. Through their meta-analysis and an organizational learning theory base, they show the generally positive effects of technologism and the negative effects of nationalism, helping researchers reflect on previous ambiguous results in the area.

4 | FINAL THOUGHTS

We are quite pleased to get to share this excellent special issue with you. While review-based research is increasingly published, it is not often done so in a collective and organized way as we have here. Doing so allows us to learn from different approaches and to consider the benefits of each. We hope this issue inspires even more review-based research in innovation management, an area that has seen a dramatic rise in research attention in recent decades and could benefit from more reflection as we move forward. Our editorial team took away a few general observations from this project and our reflection on past review work in innovation management:

First, there is scarcely any methodological review research in JPIM. Goffin et al. (2019) offer an insightful critique of over 800 examples of case study research, offering an evaluation template and key criteria for the format. They also took the informative approach of noting "exemplary studies" which were recommended as

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benchmarks for future research. This is a wonderful resource for case study researchers, but we need more of this kind of methods-focused, review-based research in a multitude of areas across innovation management research. Importantly, methodological reviews can offer both substantive insights and recommendations for improved practice within a surveyed literature (Aguinis et al., 2023). Methods research in innovation, and reviews of that research, are sorely lacking and we hope to see more in the future.

Next, we have not yet seen a meta-synthesis submitted to JPIM. A meta-synthesis aims to build theory from a set of largely qualitative case studies (Hoon, 2013). As with more quantitative meta-analyses, the fundamental aim of qualitative meta-studies is to extract value from multiple, independent research efforts through the identification of convergent findings (Habersang & Reihlen, 2024). Innovation management research questions are often quite amenable to qualitative methods (e.g., understanding the inner workings of a new product team, or novel innovation processes) so, not surprisingly, a large number of qualitative studies have been submitted and published by JPIM over the last 40 years. That rich base would seem to be ripe for meta-synthesis work, which would also help reinforce the journal's historic openness to new methods. We encourage more attention in this area.

Last, the idea of communal data repositories based on one or more research projects seems to be gaining traction. For example, Adler and Sarstedt (2021) provide the database and some exploratory analyses in an online repository, encouraging others to engage with the data. This is an admirable effort in the true spirit of scholarship. Meta-analyses are the obvious contributors to such work, perhaps by offering (in an open and online platform) more complete data details on the corpus from which they draw. This may even eventually allow for what is sometimes referred to as a meta-meta-analysis on popular topics (Cleophas & Zwinderman, 2017). We hope you enjoy this issue and appreciate all our field has already learned as you embark on exciting new research efforts!

ETHICS STATEMENT

The authors have read and agreed to the Comittee on Publication Ethics (COPE) international standards for authors.

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