



## **Perceived Artificial Intelligence as a Strategic Enabler: A Conceptual Framework Linking AI Perception to Sustainable Competitive Advantage**

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Submission date 10.10.2025    Acceptance -08.12.2025    Publication -28.02.2026

### **Abstract:**

This systematic integrative review examined how perceived artificial intelligence functions as a strategic enabler of sustainable competitive advantage through the integration of Resource-Based View, dynamic capabilities, and strategic cognition perspectives. The analysis demonstrates that AI does not independently generate sustainable advantage. Instead, competitive durability emerges from a multi-layered process beginning with managerial perception and strategic cognition, progressing through dynamic capability activation, stabilized by governance mechanisms, and amplified through internal and ecosystem resource orchestration.

By repositioning AI as a cognitively interpreted strategic resource embedded within governance and orchestration structures, this study offers a comprehensive framework capable of explaining performance heterogeneity in AI adoption contexts. In doing so, it advances theoretical integration in AI strategy research and provides a foundation for future empirical validation.

**Keywords:** Perceived Artificial Intelligence; Sustainable Competitive Advantage; Dynamic Capabilities; Strategic Cognition.

### **1. Introduction**

Artificial intelligence (AI) has evolved from a specialized technological tool into a central strategic asset shaping competitive dynamics across industries. Organizations increasingly deploy AI-driven systems to enhance decision-making, automate processes, optimize supply chains, and support innovation initiatives. Empirical and conceptual research consistently suggests that AI capabilities can enhance organizational performance, agility, and sustainability outcomes (Almheiri et al., 2024; Cai et al., 2025; Liu et al., 2024). However, despite substantial investments in AI technologies, firms exhibit considerable variation in their ability to translate AI adoption into sustainable competitive advantage (SCA) (Farooq et al., 2024; Niveditha et al., 2024).



The dominant explanation within the strategic management literature relies on the Resource-Based View (RBV) and Dynamic Capabilities (DC) framework. From an RBV perspective, AI is conceptualized as a valuable, rare, and potentially inimitable resource capable of generating competitive advantage when effectively deployed (Berg et al., 2023; Sun et al., 2024). Complementing this view, dynamic capabilities theory emphasizes that AI enhances organizational sensing, seizing, and transforming processes, enabling firms to adapt to environmental turbulence and sustain superior performance over time (Fano et al., 2025; Liu et al., 2024; Wamba-Taguimdje et al., 2020).

While this integration has advanced theoretical understanding, it remains incomplete. A critical yet underexplored dimension concerns how AI is perceived and interpreted by organizational decision-makers. Emerging research indicates that managerial cognition, executive IT experience, and human–AI collaboration significantly influence how AI capabilities are developed and leveraged (Csaszar et al., 2024; Shan et al., 2025; Siaw & Ali, 2024). AI does not create value autonomously; rather, its strategic impact depends on how leaders interpret its potential, assess its risks, and orchestrate complementary resources. Moreover, recent studies highlight the mediating roles of AI governance, ethical frameworks, and knowledge management processes in translating AI capabilities into sustainable performance outcomes (Cai et al., 2025; Riti et al., 2025; Shahzaib et al., 2025). These mechanisms suggest that AI must be embedded within organizational structures that ensure transparency, accountability, and effective knowledge integration. However, these dimensions are often treated as peripheral considerations rather than central components of AI strategy.

Despite the rapid expansion of artificial intelligence research within strategic management, the prevailing explanatory logic remains predominantly technology-centric. Existing studies largely conceptualize AI as an objective organizational asset whose value derives from its technical sophistication, data-processing capacity, or integration within operational systems. Within the Resource-Based View (RBV), AI is framed as a potentially valuable and inimitable resource, while Dynamic Capabilities (DC) theory positions it as an enabler of sensing, seizing, and transforming processes. Although this integration has significantly advanced the field, it implicitly assumes that AI’s strategic value is inherent and transferable across contexts once the appropriate capabilities are deployed. This assumption obscures a fundamental yet under-theorized question: why do firms with comparable AI investments and technical infrastructures exhibit substantial heterogeneity in long-term competitive outcomes? The dominant RBV–DC nexus explains how resources are mobilized, but it insufficiently explains how those resources become strategically activated in the first place. In particular, the cognitive foundations through which decision-makers interpret AI—as transformative opportunity, operational tool, or strategic necessity—remain conceptually peripheral rather than central.

Moreover, governance and ethical mechanisms are frequently acknowledged as important contingencies, yet they are rarely modeled as structural enablers within the competitive advantage logic. Similarly, the literature often treats internal capability development and ecosystem-level orchestration as parallel streams rather than interconnected processes. As a result, the pathway linking AI adoption to sustainable competitive advantage remains theoretically fragmented, lacking a multi-level architecture that integrates cognitive

interpretation, capability activation, governance stabilization, and cross-boundary orchestration.

Consequently, the core theoretical problem is not whether AI enhances dynamic capabilities, but how perceived AI functions as a cognitive–strategic mechanism that conditions capability development, legitimizes governance structures, and shapes resource orchestration processes. Without explicitly integrating this perceptual dimension, existing frameworks risk overstating technological determinism and understating the interpretive foundations of AI-enabled competitive advantage.

## **2. Methodology of the Systematic Integrative Review**

### **2.1 Review Design**

This study adopts a systematic integrative review methodology, combining structured literature selection procedures with theory-building synthesis. Unlike traditional narrative reviews, integrative reviews aim to critically evaluate, compare, and synthesize theoretical and empirical contributions in order to develop new conceptual frameworks. This approach is particularly appropriate for emerging domains such as AI strategy, where research is fragmented across theoretical perspectives including the Resource-Based View (RBV), Dynamic Capabilities (DC), strategic cognition, governance, and ecosystem orchestration (Sunarjo et al., 2025; Jafari et al., 2025).

The review specifically focuses on examining how perceived artificial intelligence functions as a strategic enabler of sustainable competitive advantage, integrating RBV, dynamic capabilities, and strategic cognition perspectives.

### **2.2 Literature Search Strategy**

The literature selection process followed a structured multi-step procedure. First, the original research question was transformed into multiple targeted search statements to ensure comprehensive coverage of relevant constructs.

This process initially identified 457 studies. Through backward and forward citation chaining, an additional 40 studies were identified. After relevance scoring and screening, 497 studies were deemed relevant, of which 31 were classified as highly relevant for deep synthesis. Articles were screened based on:

- Theoretical integration of AI with RBV and/or dynamic capabilities ;
- Examination of mediating mechanisms (e.g., knowledge management, governance, ethics) ;
- Consideration of strategic cognition or human–AI collaboration ;
- Explicit linkage to sustainable competitive advantage or long-term performance ;
- Studies focusing solely on technical AI development without strategic implications were excluded.

The review focuses on organizational-level AI strategy. While individual-level behavioral AI studies were considered when relevant to strategic cognition, purely psychological or technical studies were excluded. Similarly, although AI applications span multiple sectors, this review synthesizes cross-industry findings to develop a generalized theoretical framework rather than sector-specific prescriptions.

The synthesis followed a three-stage analytical process:

**Stage 1: Thematic Coding;** Key themes were identified across studies, including:

- RBV–DC integration;
- AI-enabled dynamic capabilities;
- Knowledge management mediation;
- Governance and ethical calibration;
- Human–AI collaboration;
- Internal vs. ecosystem resource orchestration;
- Sustainability and ESG integration.

**Stage 2: Chronological Mapping ;** The evolution of the field was mapped across four phases:

- Foundational RBV–DC integration (2020–2021);
- Domain expansion to supply chains and innovation (2022–2023);
- Empirical validation and governance attention (2024);
- Ecosystem and integrative multi-theory perspectives (2025).

**Stage 3: Theoretical Triangulation ;** Findings were triangulated to identify:

- Areas of theoretical convergence
- Contradictions and unresolved debates
- Underexplored mediating and moderating mechanisms
- Gaps requiring integrative conceptual development

This triangulation enabled the development of a multi-layered conceptual framework linking perceived AI to sustainable competitive advantage through cognitive, capability, governance, and orchestration mechanism

### **3. Evolution of AI Strategy Literature**

#### **3.1 Phase I: AI as a Strategic Resource**

Early integration of AI into strategic management literature emphasized its role as a valuable organizational resource aligned with RBV assumptions (Gallego-Gomez & De-Pablos-Heredero, 2020; Wamba-Taguimdje et al., 2020). AI capabilities were conceptualized as drivers of operational efficiency and process optimization. However, this perspective primarily treated AI as an asset rather than a dynamically evolving capability.

#### **3.2 Phase II: AI as a Dynamic Capability Enabler**

Subsequent research extended this view by embedding AI within the dynamic capabilities framework. Studies demonstrated that AI enhances sensing through analytics, seizing through data-driven decision-making, and transforming through automation and reconfiguration (Liu et al., 2024; Sullivan & Wamba, 2024). Empirical work confirmed that dynamic capabilities mediate the relationship between AI capability and firm performance (Almheiri et al., 2024; Farooq et al., 2024).

#### **3.3 Phase III: Strategic Cognition and Human–AI Complementarity**

More recent research recognizes that AI value creation depends on managerial interpretation and cognitive alignment. Studies show that CEO IT experience, managerial cognition, and

human–AI complementarity significantly influence AI-enabled capability development (Csaszar et al., 2024; Shan et al., 2025; Siaw & Ali, 2024). This phase shifts the focus from technological determinism to cognitive mediation.

### **3.4 Phase IV: Governance, Ethics, and Ecosystem Orchestration**

The most recent wave integrates governance, ethics, sustainability, and ecosystem orchestration perspectives (Cimino et al., 2025; Pardede et al., 2025; Riti et al., 2025). AI governance and ethical frameworks are increasingly recognized as necessary for ensuring trust, legitimacy, and sustainable competitive advantage. Simultaneously, ecosystem-level resource orchestration has gained prominence in platform-based and SME contexts (Fano et al., 2025; Zhang et al., 2025).

## **4. Theoretical Foundations and Conceptual Clarifications**

### **4.1 Reframing Artificial Intelligence as a Perceived Strategic Resource**

The dominant AI strategy literature conceptualizes artificial intelligence as an organizational capability embedded within technological infrastructure and data assets (Almheiri et al., 2024; Berg et al., 2023). Within the Resource-Based View (RBV), AI is treated as a valuable and potentially inimitable resource when integrated with complementary organizational assets (Sun et al., 2024). However, this perspective often assumes that AI's strategic value is objective and inherent.

Emerging research challenges this assumption by emphasizing the interpretive role of managerial cognition in shaping technology deployment (Csaszar et al., 2024; Shan et al., 2025). AI does not generate value independently; rather, its strategic implications depend on how decision-makers perceive its transformative potential, competitive necessity, and associated risks. Studies examining AI in strategic decision-making contexts demonstrate that executive interpretation influences investment intensity, integration depth, and capability alignment (Jafari et al., 2025; Kurter, 2025).

Building on this synthesis, perceived artificial intelligence (PAI) can be conceptualized as:

*« The managerial cognitive evaluation of AI as a strategically relevant, capability-enhancing, and competitively necessary resource within the firm's strategic architecture ».*

### **4.2 Dynamic Capabilities as the Primary Transformation Mechanism**

Dynamic capabilities theory provides the dominant explanatory mechanism linking AI to performance outcomes. Empirical evidence consistently demonstrates that AI enhances sensing (data analytics and environmental scanning), seizing (decision optimization and opportunity exploitation), and transforming (process reconfiguration and innovation) (Liu et al., 2024; Sullivan & Wamba, 2024).

Multiple studies confirm that dynamic capabilities mediate the relationship between AI capability and firm performance (Almheiri et al., 2024; Farooq et al., 2024; Fano et al., 2025). AI-enabled knowledge management systems further reinforce dynamic capability development by accelerating learning cycles and enhancing organizational adaptability (Cai et al., 2025; Cui, 2025).

However, while dynamic capabilities explain how AI resources are mobilized, they do not fully explain why some firms activate these capabilities more effectively than others. This gap directs attention toward cognitive and governance-based microfoundations.

### **4.3 Strategic Cognition and Human–AI Complementarity**

Recent scholarship integrates strategic cognition into AI-enabled competitive advantage. AI augments decision-making processes, enhances scenario analysis, and reduces cognitive biases when appropriately integrated (Csaszar et al., 2024). Managerial IT expertise and executive cognitive framing significantly influence the degree to which AI complements rather than substitutes human intelligence (Shan et al., 2025; Siaw & Ali, 2024).

The literature reveals a nuanced substitution–complementarity debate. While AI may replace routine cognitive tasks (Trachuk & Linder, n.d.), its strategic value is amplified when combined with human judgment, tacit knowledge, and contextual interpretation (Shahzaib et al., 2025; Siaw & Ali, 2024).

Therefore, human–AI complementarity can be conceptualized as a moderating cognitive mechanism that strengthens the translation of AI-enabled capabilities into adaptive and innovative outcomes.

### **4.4 AI Governance and Ethical Calibration as Enabling Capabilities**

As AI adoption expands, governance and ethical considerations increasingly shape strategic outcomes. Studies highlight explainability, transparency, and ethical calibration as prerequisites for stakeholder trust and sustainable performance (Riti et al., 2025; Shahzaib et al., 2025).

AI governance extends beyond compliance; it constitutes a capability that structures data management, accountability, and risk mitigation processes (Agbodike, 2025; Pardede et al., 2025). Responsible AI deployment enhances legitimacy and reduces reputational vulnerabilities, thereby reinforcing long-term competitive positioning (Moser et al., 2024).

Despite growing recognition, governance is rarely integrated formally into RBV–DC frameworks. This review positions AI governance capability as a structural mediator that stabilizes and legitimizes AI-enabled transformation processes.

### **4.5 Resource Orchestration: Internal and Ecosystem Perspectives**

Most AI strategy studies emphasize internal resource development, focusing on capability building within organizational boundaries (Almheiri et al., 2024; Dash et al., 2025). However, digital ecosystems and platform-based models increasingly shape competitive advantage dynamics (Fano et al., 2025; Zhang et al., 2025). Ecosystem orchestration enables firms to access complementary AI assets, share data infrastructures, and co-create innovation. Studies in SME and platform contexts demonstrate that external collaboration enhances ambidexterity and adaptive resilience (Cimino et al., 2025; Sun et al., 2025).

Therefore, competitive advantage emerges from a dual orchestration logic:

- Internal capability integration ;
- External ecosystem collaboration.

### **4.6 Sustainable Competitive Advantage in the AI Context**

Within AI strategy literature, sustainable competitive advantage (SCA) is associated with:

- Persistent performance superiority (Farooq et al., 2024) ;
- Innovation continuity (Cai et al., 2025) ;
- Organizational agility (Mariani & Mancini, 2025) ;
- ESG and sustainability alignment (Singh et al., 2025; Wang & Zhang, 2024) ;



- Unlike short-term efficiency gains, AI-driven SCA depends on continuous capability renewal and adaptive reconfiguration (Liu et al., 2024).

This dynamic interpretation aligns with DC theory but requires integration with governance, cognition, and orchestration mechanisms to ensure durability.

### 5. Integrative Conceptual Framework Development

Synthesizing the reviewed literature, this study proposes a multi-layered integrative framework structured across four interdependent levels:

**Table 1. Integrative Theoretical Synthesis**

<b>1. Cognitive Layer</b>	Perceived AI. Strategic cognition Human–AI complementarity.	↓
<b>2. Capability Layer</b>	AI-enabled dynamic capabilities. AI-driven knowledge management. AI governance capability.	↓
<b>3. Orchestration Layer</b>	Internal resource orchestration. Ecosystem orchestration.	↓
<b>4. Outcome Layer</b>	Sustainable competitive advantage. Performance persistence. Innovation sustainability. Adaptive resilience ESG alignment.	←

**Source:** based on the extant literature.

This section represents the core theoretical contribution of the study, as it synthesizes the previously reviewed literature into a coherent, multi-layered model explaining how perceived artificial intelligence translates into sustainable competitive advantage. Rather than treating AI as an inherently valuable technological resource, the framework conceptualizes competitive advantage as emerging from a sequential and configurational process that begins with managerial perception and strategic cognition (cognitive layer), progresses through the activation of AI-enabled dynamic capabilities and governance mechanisms (capability layer), extends to internal and ecosystem-level resource orchestration (orchestration layer), and ultimately culminates in multidimensional sustainable outcomes such as performance persistence, innovation sustainability, adaptive resilience, and ESG alignment (outcome layer). By structuring the model across these interdependent layers, the framework integrates RBV, dynamic capabilities, strategic cognition, governance, and ecosystem perspectives into a unified explanatory architecture, demonstrating that AI-driven competitive advantage is not technologically deterministic but strategically constructed through aligned cognitive interpretation, capability development, institutional stabilization, and cross-boundary resource coordination.

This layered model advances prior research by:

- Positioning cognition as the starting point of capability activation.



- Embedding governance within capability transformation processes.
- Integrating ecosystem orchestration into AI-driven advantage logic.
- Reconceptualizing SCA as a multi-dimensional adaptive outcome.

## 6. Theoretical Propositions

Building on the integrative synthesis developed above, this section articulates a set of theoretically grounded propositions linking perceived AI to sustainable competitive advantage through cognitive, capability, governance, and orchestration mechanisms.

### 6.1 Perceived AI and Strategic Cognition

The literature demonstrates that AI adoption outcomes vary significantly across firms despite similar technological investments (Farooq et al., 2024; Niveditha et al., 2024). This variation suggests that technological capability alone does not determine competitive outcomes. Instead, managerial cognition plays a pivotal role in interpreting AI's strategic value (Csaszar et al., 2024; Shan et al., 2025).

When AI is perceived as strategically transformative rather than operationally supportive, firms are more likely to allocate resources toward deep integration and capability development (Jafari et al., 2025). Conversely, when AI is framed narrowly as a cost-reduction tool, its transformative potential remains underexploited.

Based on the foregoing, the following proposition can be advanced: Perceived AI positively influences strategic cognition, shaping managerial interpretation of AI as a transformative strategic resource.

### 6.2 Strategic Cognition and AI-Enabled Dynamic Capabilities

Dynamic capabilities—sensing, seizing, and transforming—are frequently identified as mediators between AI capability and firm performance (Almheiri et al., 2024; Liu et al., 2024). However, capability activation depends on managerial interpretation of environmental signals and opportunity framing (Siaw & Ali, 2024). Firms whose leaders cognitively integrate AI into strategic reasoning are more likely to leverage analytics for sensing, algorithmic modeling for seizing, and automation for transforming processes (Sullivan & Wamba, 2024).

Accordingly, the following proposition is proposed: Strategic cognition mediates the relationship between perceived AI and AI-enabled dynamic capabilities.

### 6.3 AI Governance as a Structural Enabler

AI governance and ethical calibration mechanisms are increasingly recognized as critical for sustaining AI-driven value creation (Riti et al., 2025; Shahzaib et al., 2025). Governance frameworks enhance legitimacy, reduce risk exposure, and foster stakeholder trust (Agbodike, 2025; Moser et al., 2024).

Without governance structures, AI-enabled transformation may generate short-term gains but expose firms to reputational, legal, or operational risks. Thus, governance capability stabilizes dynamic capability development. Building on the above arguments, the following proposition is advanced: AI governance capability strengthens the positive relationship between AI-enabled dynamic capabilities and sustainable competitive advantage.

### 6.4 Human–AI Complementarity as a Moderating Mechanism



The substitution–complementarity debate underscores that AI does not uniformly replace human cognition (Trachuk & Linder, n.d.). Instead, its strategic value emerges when human judgment complements algorithmic intelligence (Shahzaib et al., 2025; Siaw & Ali, 2024).

Organizations that cultivate human–AI complementarity enhance knowledge integration, innovation quality, and adaptive resilience. Based on the foregoing, the following proposition can be advanced: Human–AI complementarity positively moderates the relationship between AI-enabled dynamic capabilities and innovation sustainability.

### **6.5 Resource Orchestration and Ecosystem Integration**

While internal capability building dominates the literature (Almheiri et al., 2024; Dash et al., 2025), ecosystem orchestration increasingly shapes AI-driven competitive advantage (Fano et al., 2025; Zhang et al., 2025). Participation in digital innovation ecosystems facilitates access to complementary data assets, platform infrastructure, and collaborative innovation opportunities (Cimino et al., 2025; Sun et al., 2025).

Building on the above arguments, the following proposition is advanced: The integration of internal resource orchestration and ecosystem orchestration mediates the relationship between AI-enabled dynamic capabilities and sustainable competitive advantage.

### **6.6 Multi-Level Interaction Effect**

The integrative review indicates that sustainable competitive advantage in AI contexts is not the product of isolated mechanisms. Instead, it emerges from the interaction between cognitive interpretation, dynamic capability activation, governance stabilization, and multi-level orchestration (Liu et al., 2024; Mariani & Mancini, 2025).

Based on the foregoing, the following proposition can be advanced: Sustainable competitive advantage arises from the configurational alignment of cognitive, capability, governance, and orchestration mechanisms.

## **7. Theoretical Contributions & Managerial Implications**

This review advances AI strategy literature in four primary ways :

**7.1 From Technology-Centric to Cognition-Centric AI Strategy :** While prior research emphasizes AI capabilities as resources (Sun et al., 2024), this study repositions perceived AI as the cognitive starting point of strategic: transformation.

**7.2 Extending RBV–DC Integration :** Existing integration of RBV and dynamic capabilities explains resource mobilization (Fano et al., 2025), yet underdevelops governance and cognition. This framework embeds AI governance and strategic cognition as formal components of competitive advantage formation.

**7.3 Introducing Multi-Level Orchestration Logic :** The literature often treats internal and ecosystem orchestration separately (Pardede et al., 2025). This study integrates both into a unified strategic architecture.

**7.4 Reconceptualizing Sustainable Competitive Advantage :** Rather than equating SCA with performance persistence alone (Farooq et al., 2024), this review conceptualizes SCA as a multidimensional construct incorporating innovation sustainability, adaptive resilience, and ESG alignment (Singh et al., 2025; Wang & Zhang, 2024).



The findings suggest that AI investment without cognitive alignment is insufficient. Managers must:

- Frame AI strategically rather than operationally;
- Develop governance structures alongside technological capability;
- Foster human–AI complementarity through training and cultural alignment;
- Balance internal capability building with ecosystem collaboration;
- AI should be treated as a strategic transformation program rather than a technological upgrade initiative.

## 8. Conclusion

This study set out to reconceptualize artificial intelligence not merely as a technological capability, but as a cognitively interpreted strategic resource whose competitive value depends on how it is perceived, structured, and orchestrated within the organization. By synthesizing the Resource-Based View, dynamic capabilities theory, and strategic cognition perspectives, the review advances a multi-layered framework explaining how perceived AI activates capability development, governance mechanisms, and orchestration processes that collectively shape sustainable competitive advantage.

The central insight emerging from this integrative analysis is that AI does not constitute a source of advantage in isolation. Instead, sustainable competitive advantage arises from the alignment between managerial cognition, AI-enabled dynamic capabilities, governance structures, and ecosystem-level resource orchestration. This configurational perspective challenges deterministic assumptions that technological sophistication alone guarantees superior performance. Rather, it positions perception and interpretation as foundational microfoundations of AI-driven transformation. Furthermore, the framework contributes to AI strategy literature by formally embedding governance and ethical calibration within the competitive advantage logic. In doing so, it shifts the debate from short-term performance gains toward durability, legitimacy, and adaptive resilience. Sustainable competitive advantage in AI-intensive contexts is therefore conceptualized as a dynamic, multi-dimensional outcome—encompassing performance persistence, innovation sustainability, and ESG alignment—rather than a static efficiency differential.

The study also underscores the importance of human–AI complementarity. The evidence synthesized suggests that AI’s strategic value is amplified when integrated with human judgment, contextual intelligence, and organizational learning processes. Consequently, firms must move beyond substitution narratives and cultivate cognitive and structural conditions that enable synergistic human–AI interaction. Nevertheless, as a conceptual integrative review, this study is bounded by its reliance on existing literature. Future research should empirically test the configurational propositions advanced here, explore longitudinal cognitive evolution during AI adoption, and examine cross-industry variations in governance and orchestration structures.

In conclusion, competitive advantage in the age of artificial intelligence is not a technological artifact but a strategically constructed outcome. It emerges from how organizations perceive AI, embed it within dynamic capabilities, govern its deployment



responsibly, and orchestrate resources across organizational and ecosystem boundaries. By placing perception at the center of AI strategy, this study offers a more nuanced and theoretically integrated explanation of how firms can convert AI investments into sustainable competitive advantage.

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