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Alumni Relationship Management as a Dynamic Capability: A Systematic Literature Review and Research Agenda

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Abstract– ***Alumni relationship management (ARM) has been studied predominantly as an operational fundraising function, leaving its strategic and organisational dimensions theoretically underspecified. This study maps the intellectual structure of the ARM literature in higher education and synthesises it through the lens of the Dynamic Capabilities (DC) framework (Teece, Pisano, & Shuen, 1997), proposing the first integrative ARM–DC framework and articulating a future research agenda. A dual-stream design combining bibliometric analysis (Stream A, n = 208 articles) and a systematic literature review (Stream B, n = 41 articles) was employed. Both streams drew on Scopus (2010–2026), with the selection process governed by PRISMA 2020 guidelines. Bibliometric analysis was conducted using VOSviewer and Biblioshiny; thematic synthesis of the SLR corpus was structured around the DC micro-foundations of sensing, seizing, and reconfiguring. The ARM literature has evolved across three phases foundational (2010–2014), expansion (2015–2019), and acceleration (2020–2026) and remains dominated by philanthropy and education journals to the exclusion of strategic management outlets. Critically, "dynamic capability" appears as an author keyword in none of the 208 bibliometric corpus documents, providing direct empirical evidence of the theoretical gap this study addresses. Thematic synthesis reveals that effective ARM institutions sense alumni value through segmentation, organisational identification monitoring, and sensemaking; seize it through diversified financial, co-creative, and diplomatic strategies; and reconfigure their structures, technologies, and cultures accordingly. Seven research gaps are identified: theoretical, geographic, methodological, institutional, technological, equity-related, and measurement. The ARM–DC framework provides institutional leaders with a sequenced, evidence-based roadmap for developing alumni engagement as a strategic organisational capability rather than a set of transactional activities. This is the first study to explicitly theorise and synthesise ARM as a dynamic capability, bridging the strategic management and higher education management literatures. The empirical confirmation of the ARM–DC gap through bibliometric evidence strengthens the study's contribution to both fields.***

Keywords: alumni relationship management, dynamic capabilities, higher education institution, systematic literature review, bibliometric analysis, sensing, seizing, reconfiguring.

I. INTRODUCTION

Higher education institutions (HEIs) across the globe are navigating an increasingly turbulent operating environment characterised by the retrenchment of public funding, intensifying global competition for students and reputation, and mounting demands for accountability and demonstrable social impact [1], [2]. In this environment, the population of an institution's graduates has come to be recognised as far more than a sentimental constituency: alumni represent a strategic reservoir of financial resources, professional knowledge, social capital, and reputational legitimacy that few other stakeholder groups can match. The scale of alumni philanthropy alone is substantial; in the United States, charitable contributions to higher education reached US$61.5 billion in the 2023–2024 fiscal year, with alumni giving recording the largest single increase among all donor categories at 7.5 per cent (Council for Advancement and Support of Education [CASE], 2025. Yet the value of alumni extends well beyond donations to encompass mentorship, employability support, curriculum input, industry linkage, and advocacy, forms of contribution that resist easy quantification but are no less consequential for institutional sustainability [3], [4].

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Despite this strategic significance, the management of alumni relationships has been treated predominantly as an operational function rather than as a strategic capability. The scholarly literature on alumni relationship management (ARM) has developed largely within the traditions of fundraising, advancement practice, and relationship marketing, where the dominant concern is the optimisation of giving rates and event participation rather than the cultivation of an organisational capability that generates durable competitive advantage [5], [6]. This framing is not merely a matter of emphasis. By conceptualising ARM as a set of discrete activities campaigns, reunions, communications rather than as an integrated and evolving organisational competence, the existing literature has obscured the mechanisms through which some institutions build alumni relationships that compound in value over decades while others fail to do so. The theoretical apparatus needed to explain this divergence has, to date, been absent from the ARM literature.

Strategic management offers an established framework for precisely this kind of question. The dynamic capabilities (DC) perspective, introduced by [7] and elaborated subsequently by [8], [9], explains how organisations create and sustain competitive advantage in changing environments through three interrelated capacities: sensing opportunities and threats, seizing opportunities by mobilising resources, and reconfiguring organisational assets to maintain alignment with the environment. The DC framework has been applied extensively in corporate strategy and, more recently, in public and non-profit settings [10], [11], yet its potential to illuminate the strategic management of alumni relationships in higher education has gone unexplored. This is a notable omission, because the characteristics that define a dynamic capability path dependence, experiential learning, the integration of internal and external competences, and the generation of long-term rather than transactional value appear, on inspection, to describe precisely how effective alumni relationship management operates.

The absence of any connection between these two literatures is striking and can be demonstrated empirically rather than merely asserted. A systematic search of the Scopus database combining alumni relationship management terminology with the language of dynamic capabilities returned no documents whatsoever, and a marginally broader combined search returned only four. This near-total absence is not a limitation of the present study but rather its central justification: the explicit theorisation of ARM as a dynamic capability represents a genuine and unoccupied space in the scholarly landscape. Addressing this gap is both timely and consequential, given the accelerating financial and competitive pressures on HEIs worldwide and the recent surge of scholarly interest in alumni engagement as a distinct field of inquiry.

This study therefore pursues a dual objective: to map the intellectual structure and evolution of the ARM literature in higher education, and to synthesise that literature through the lens of the dynamic capabilities framework in order to construct an integrative ARM–DC framework and identify the most pressing directions for future research. To accomplish these aims, the study combines a bibliometric analysis with a systematic literature review, a mixed-method design increasingly favoured for the rigorous mapping of emerging fields [12], [13], conducted in accordance with the PRISMA 2020 reporting guidelines [14]. Three research questions guide the inquiry. The first asks how the ARM literature in higher education has developed and how its intellectual structure is configured. The second asks how higher education institutions build and leverage alumni relationship management as a dynamic capability. The third asks what gaps remain in the existing literature and where future research should be directed.

In addressing these questions, the study makes three contributions. Theoretically, it offers the first integrative framework that conceptualises ARM as a dynamic capability, thereby building a bridge between the strategic management and higher education literatures that have hitherto developed in isolation. Methodologically, it provides a comprehensive and replicable mapping of the ARM field that combines the breadth of bibliometric analysis with the depth of systematic thematic synthesis. Practically, it furnishes institutional leaders with an evidence-based account of how alumni relationships can be cultivated as a strategic capability rather than managed as a series of transactional activities. The remainder of the paper proceeds as

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follows. The next section develops the theoretical background by elaborating the dynamic capabilities framework and the concept of alumni relationship management. The third section details the methods. The fourth and fifth sections present the results corresponding to the three research questions. The sixth section discusses the theoretical and practical implications, and the final section concludes by summarising the contributions, acknowledging limitations, and articulating a research agenda.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

To address the research questions guiding this study, this section establishes the dual theoretical pillars upon which the subsequent analysis and synthesis rest. First, it traces the conceptual evolution of alumni relationship management (ARM) within the higher education literature. Second, it explicates the dynamic capabilities (DC) framework, from its origins in corporate strategy to its application in non-profit and public sector contexts. The section concludes by articulating the theoretical logic for integrating these two hitherto disconnected domains and by positing the propositions that structure the subsequent synthesis.

2.1 Alumni Relationship Management in Higher Education

The concept of managing relationships with an institution's graduates is not novel, yet its conceptualisation has undergone a significant, if incomplete, evolution [5], [15]. Historically, activities now subsumed under ARM were framed narrowly as *alumni affairs* an administrative function oriented toward organising reunions, publishing class notes, and maintaining rudimentary contact directories. Within this operational framing, the alumni population was viewed as a sentimental constituency to be placated rather than a strategic asset to be cultivated [15].

A substantive shift occurred with the professionalisation of university advancement, particularly in the Anglo-American context, where declining public subsidies intensified the imperative for private philanthropy [5]. This gave rise to a philanthropy-centric model of ARM in which the graduate relationship is managed primarily as a donor pipeline. Within this paradigm, scholarly inquiry focused heavily on the antecedents and mechanisms of alumni giving: the quality of the student experience, the strength of affective ties to the institution, and the efficacy of solicitation strategies [6], [15], [16]. While this literature generated robust empirical insights into donor behaviour, its narrow focus on financial outcomes obscured the broader strategic potential of the alumni relationship.

A more recent, though still emergent, stream of scholarship advances a relational and co-creative model of ARM. Drawing on relationship marketing theory [17] and social capital theory [18], [19], scholars began to reconceptualise alumni not merely as donors but as ongoing stakeholders capable of contributing professional expertise, mentorship, curriculum advice, and reputational endorsement [4], [20]. Within this perspective, the institution-alumni relationship is understood as a form of long-term social exchange in which both parties accrue value the institution through diversified resources and the alumni through continued connection to their alma mater.

Despite this evolution, a critical review of the ARM literature reveals a persistent capability blind spot. Whether framed through a philanthropic or co-creative lens, existing research predominantly treats ARM as a set of discrete activities solicitation campaigns, mentorship programmes, reunion events rather than as an integrated, organisation-wide competence. The literature ably describes *what* institutions do to engage alumni but offers little theoretical vocabulary for explaining *how* some institutions develop the capacity to learn about, respond to, and evolve with their alumni populations while others do not. It is precisely this explanatory gap that necessitates engagement with strategic management theory.

2.2 The Dynamic Capabilities Framework

The dynamic capabilities framework, originating in the work of [7] and subsequently refined by [8], [9], was developed to explain how firms achieve sustainable competitive advantage in rapidly changing environments. In contrast to the traditional resource-based view, which emphasises the possession of valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable resources [21], [22], the DC perspective foregrounds an organisation's ability to *integrate, build, and reconfigure* internal and external

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competences in response to shifting environmental conditions.

The framework decomposes this higher-order capability into three distinct but interrelated micro-foundations [9]. Sensing refers to the activities through which an organisation identifies, interprets, and prioritises opportunities and threats emanating from its external environment. This encompasses environmental scanning, investment in analytical systems, and the cultivation of learning processes capable of detecting weak signals of change before they become apparent to rivals. Seizing involves the mobilisation of resources to capture value from identified opportunities. Seizing encompasses the design of appropriate models for value creation, the deployment of governance mechanisms that enable decisive and timely action, and the investment in products, services, or competences that exploit identified opportunities. Reconfiguring entails the continuous transformation of the organisation's tangible and intangible assets to maintain alignment with the environment. It includes organisational restructuring, knowledge management, and the capacity to divest from declining assets while building emergent ones.

Crucially, dynamic capabilities are not routine processes: they are themselves shaped by organisational history (path dependence), learning mechanisms, and the quality of managerial cognition [23]. They are most pronounced in environments characterised by high-velocity change but remain strategically relevant in moderately dynamic settings such as public sector and non-profit contexts where shifts in funding, regulatory expectations, and stakeholder demands are less volatile but no less consequential [10], [11]. This observation is significant because it establishes the theoretical licence for applying the DC framework beyond its corporate origins.

2.3 Theorising ARM as a Dynamic Capability: The Bridging Argument

The central theoretical contention of this paper is that alumni relationship management, when examined through the lens of strategic management, exhibits the defining characteristics of a dynamic capability. This proposition is grounded in three conceptual lines of reasoning.

The first concerns the nature of the environment in which HEIs operate. Higher education institutions face precisely the kind of dynamic, non-equilibrium conditions that the DC framework was designed to address: fiscal austerity, intensifying global competition for students and research resources, and rising demands for accountability and demonstrable social impact [1], [2]. In such environments, sustaining competitive advantage requires not merely possessing resources but continually sensing shifts in the external landscape, responding to them through targeted resource mobilisation, and reconfiguring organisational assets accordingly. ARM, as the primary mechanism through which HEIs cultivate and leverage their graduate population, must therefore operate as a dynamic rather than static function if it is to generate durable institutional advantage.

The second line of reasoning concerns the strategic character of the alumni population as an organisational resource. Viewed through the resource-based view [21], alumni satisfy all four VRIN criteria: they are *valuable* (as sources of financial, social, and intellectual capital), *rare* (each institution's alumni community is idiosyncratic and cannot be replicated by competitors), *inimitable* (the relationships that underpin alumni engagement are embedded in institutional history, culture, and trust that cannot be easily copied), and *non-substitutable* (no other stakeholder group provides an equivalent combination of proximity, loyalty, and diverse forms of contribution). However, the RBV alone is insufficient because it explains the *existence* of alumni as a strategic resource but not the *processes* by which institutions capture and renew the value of that resource over time. It is precisely this gap between possessing a resource and dynamically leveraging it that the DC framework is designed to fill [7], [8].

The third line of reasoning draws on the knowledge-based view of the firm [24]. Alumni embody and circulate tacit knowledge that connects institutions to industry, professions, and civil society in ways that cannot be replicated through formal market transactions. Managing this knowledge relationship effectively requires active, evolving organisational processes systematic processes for knowledge sensing, selective mobilisation, and institutional recombination that are, by definition,

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dynamic in character. The knowledge-based view's emphasis on knowledge creation and recombination as the ultimate source of sustained competitive advantage [24], [25] maps directly onto the reconfiguring dimension of the DC framework and provides additional theoretical grounding for treating ARM as a higher-order capability rather than a bundle of operational routines.

Together, these three lines of reasoning establish that the theoretical machinery required to explain why some institutions develop superior ARM capabilities while others with comparable alumni populations do not already exists in strategic management scholarship. What has been missing is the deliberate application of this machinery to the ARM domain. The absence of this theoretical framing has left the ARM literature fragmented across disciplinary silos philanthropy studies, relationship marketing, social psychology each illuminating a facet of alumni engagement without a unifying architecture capable of explaining its strategic logic. The integrative ARM–DC framework proposed in this paper is designed to supply that architecture.

Table 1. Operationalisation of Dynamic Capabilities dimensions in the ARM context

DC Dimension	Definition (Teece, 2007)	Conceptual manifestation in ARM
Sensing	Identifying, interpreting, and prioritising external opportunities and threats	Scanning alumni motivations; monitoring alumni–institution identification; environmental scanning for alumni value
Seizing	Mobilising resources to capture identified opportunities	Deploying targeted engagement and fundraising strategies; mobilising alumni as co-creators; building alumni ambassador networks
Reconfiguring	Transforming and recombining assets to maintain environmental alignment	Restructuring alumni offices; transforming CRM infrastructure; cultivating institutional philanthropy culture

2.4 Theoretical Propositions

Building on the foregoing analysis, the theoretical architecture of this study proceeds as follows. Alumni relationship management is defined as the set of organisational activities, routines, and processes through which a higher education institution systematically identifies, cultivates, and mobilises value from its graduate population over time. Drawing on the dynamic capabilities framework, four theoretical propositions guide the subsequent synthesis.

Proposition 1. Effective ARM requires a sensing capability the systematic capacity to identify alumni motivations, potential contributions, and changing engagement needs without which institutions cannot differentiate their engagement strategies or direct resources toward the highest-value opportunities.

Proposition 2. Effective ARM requires a seizing capability the capacity to mobilise alumni value in its multiple forms (financial, intellectual, social, and reputational) which demands not merely the existence of engagement programmes but the organisational architecture to activate and sustain them.

Proposition 3. Effective ARM requires a reconfiguring capability the capacity to transform institutional structures, technologies, and cultures on the basis of accumulated learning from alumni interactions which enables ARM to develop incrementally as a path-dependent, experience-shaped competence rather than remaining a static set of procedures.

Proposition 4. The three dimensions of ARM as a dynamic capability are interdependent and mutually reinforcing: sensing without seizing yields data without institutional action; seizing without

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reconfiguring produces short-term returns without capability growth, reconfiguring without sensing risks transformation that is misaligned with actual alumni needs and motivations.

These propositions are not tested statistically in this study but function as organising devices that structure the thematic synthesis reported in Section 4. The remainder of this paper elaborates and refines them through a systematic analysis of the empirical ARM literature.

III. RESEARCH METHODS

3.1 Research Design

This study employs a two-pronged methodological approach that combines a bibliometric analysis with a systematic literature review (SLR), following the integrated design advocated by [12], [13]. Bibliometric analysis is deployed to answer RQ1 by mapping the intellectual structure and evolution of the alumni relationship management (ARM) literature in higher education. The SLR component, grounded in thematic synthesis, addresses RQ2 and RQ3 by examining how ARM functions as a dynamic capability and identifying remaining theoretical and empirical gaps. The two components are not treated in isolation but are designed as complementary lenses: the bibliometric analysis provides a macro-level panorama of the field, while the SLR supplies the conceptual depth required to construct an integrative ARM–Dynamic Capability (DC) framework. The entire review process is reported in accordance with the PRISMA 2020 guidelines [14].

3.2 Search Strategy and Data Sources

All literature was retrieved from Scopus (Elsevier), selected for its comprehensive coverage of peer-reviewed journals in management, education, and social sciences and its compatibility with the bibliometric tools employed in this study. The search was conducted on 27 April 2026 and confined to journal articles published between 2010 and 2026, written in English. The lower temporal boundary reflects the period in which ARM began to receive sustained scholarly attention as a distinct research domain, while the language restriction was imposed to ensure consistency in interpretation and coding.

Two independent search streams were constructed. Stream A, designed for the bibliometric component, targeted the broadest possible representation of the ARM literature in higher education. The search string combined terminology related to alumni relations, engagement, and network management with terms denoting higher education contexts:

TITLE-ABS-KEY ("alumni relation*" OR "alumni engagement" OR "alumni management" OR "alumni affairs" OR "alumni network*" OR "alumni program*" OR "alumni outreach" OR "alumni giving" OR "alumni philanthropy" OR "graduate relation*" OR "graduate engagement" OR "former student engagement"), and ("higher education" OR "universit*" OR "college*" OR "academic institution*" OR "tertiary education" OR "post-secondary" OR "business school*") and pubyear > 2009 and pubyear < 2027 and doctype (ar) and language (english) and srctype (j)

This query returned 208 documents, all of which were retained for bibliometric analysis without further content screening, as the Scopus filters (article type, language, journal source) were considered functionally equivalent to first-stage eligibility screening.

Stream B, designed for the SLR core, extended the Stream A query by adding a third conceptual cluster of strategic and organisational terms to capture articles that examine ARM from a management or capability perspective:

TITLE-ABS-KEY (
("alumni relation*" OR "alumni engagement" OR "alumni management" OR "alumni affairs" OR "alumni network*" OR "graduate relation*"OR "alumni giving" OR "alumni philanthropy")
and ("higher education" OR "universit*" OR "college*" OR "academic institution*" OR "business school*") and ("strateg*" OR "capabilit*" OR "competitive advantage"OR "knowledge management" OR "institutional performance" OR "resource*" OR "organizational") and pubyear > 2009 and pubyear < 2027 and doctype (ar) and language (english) and srctype (j).

This string returned 85 documents. It is important to note that a more targeted search combining ARM terminology directly with "dynamic capability" or "dynamic capabilities" produced zero results in Scopus, while a slightly broader combined string returned only four documents. This near-zero yield was not treated as a methodological failure but

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rather as empirical confirmation that the explicit integration of ARM with the Dynamic Capabilities framework constitutes a genuine and unoccupied research space one that this study is designed to fill.

3.3 Eligibility Criteria

Articles were eligible for inclusion in Stream B if they were peer-reviewed journal articles published in English between 2010 and 2026, primarily concerned with alumni relations, engagement, management, or networks within higher education institutions, and engaged at least partially with strategic, organisational, or managerial dimensions of these relationships. Articles were excluded if they addressed alumni in non-educational contexts (e.g., corporate or military alumni), focused exclusively on primary or secondary education, treated alumni engagement as a purely technical fundraising activity without any broader institutional or strategic dimension, were duplicates of another record in the dataset, or lacked a discernible research methodology or identifiable theoretical contribution (Table 2).

Table 2. Eligibility criteria for Stream B (SLR core)

Criterion	Inclusion	Exclusion code
Publication year	2010–2026	E1
Language	English only	E2
Document type	Peer-reviewed journal article	E3
Subject/context	Alumni in higher education	E4
Content focus	Strategic or organisational dimension of ARM	E5
Methodology	Identifiable research design and theoretical contribution	E9
Duplication	Unique record	E7

3.4 Study Selection

Records retrieved from Stream B were screened in two sequential stages. In the first stage, titles and abstracts of all 85 retrieved records were reviewed against the eligibility criteria, after removing one duplicate (E7). Of the 84 records screened, 41 were excluded: 36 because they addressed topics unrelated to the strategic management of alumni in HEIs (E4), four because the content was purely operational in nature without a strategic or organisational dimension (E5), and one because no discernible research methodology could be identified from the abstract (E9). The remaining 43 records advanced to full-text eligibility review. At this stage, two additional articles were excluded: one presidential address essay that lacked any empirical methodology (E9; Scott, 2013), and one study in which ARM functioned as a secondary construct secondary to doctoral education linkages rather than as the primary focus of inquiry (E5; Etomaru & Ofoyuru, 2025). The final corpus for the SLR comprised 41 articles. The complete selection process is represented in Figure 1 (PRISMA 2020 flow diagram).

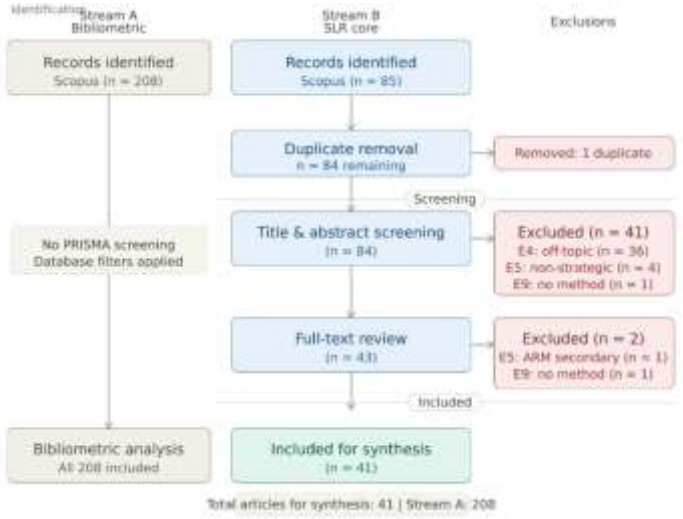


Figure 1. PRISMA 2020 flow diagram of the dual-stream literature search and selection process.

3.5 Bibliometric Analysis

The 208 documents comprising Stream A were analysed using VOSviewer [26] and the bibliometrix package in R [27]. The analysis encompassed publication trend analysis (annual output and growth rate), geographic distribution of authorship, source-level analysis (top journals by productivity), and science mapping through keyword co-occurrence networks. Keyword co-occurrence analysis was performed on author-supplied keywords with a minimum frequency threshold of two occurrences, yielding a network from which thematic clusters were identified using the modularity-based

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community detection algorithm native to VOSviewer. Co-citation analysis was used to identify the most influential intellectual foundations of the ARM field. These bibliometric outputs collectively address RQ1 and provide contextual grounding for the subsequent thematic synthesis.

3.6 Data Extraction

Data were extracted from each of the 41 included articles using a structured extraction form comprising 18 fields: author(s), year, title, journal, citation count, access type, research methodology, sample size, theoretical framework, key findings, limitations, relevance to each of the three research questions, the Dynamic Capability dimension(s) addressed (sensing, seizing, reconfiguring, or combinations thereof), specific ARM practices described, institutional type, geographic context, organisational outcomes, and research gaps identified by the authors. For articles where full-text access was available (n = 22), extraction was conducted from the complete manuscript. For the remaining 19 articles, extraction drew on detailed abstracts supplemented by metadata available through Scopus; this limitation is acknowledged in the study's constraints.

3.7 Synthesis Method

The synthesis of the 41 included articles follows a narrative synthesis approach [28], structured around the three-dimensional DC framework of [7] — sensing, seizing, and reconfiguring — to answer RQ2. Thematic analysis proceeded inductively within each DC dimension, with recurring patterns across articles grouped into sub-themes and supported by convergent evidence from multiple studies. Cross-cutting antecedents and contextual moderators that emerged across multiple sub-themes were treated as a fourth analytical category. The synthesis for RQ3 employed a gap-mapping technique, systematically cataloguing theoretical, methodological, contextual, institutional, technological, equity-related, and measurement gaps identified within or across the 41 articles. A meta-analysis was not considered appropriate given the substantial heterogeneity of research designs, outcome measures, and contextual settings across the included studies.

IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

4.1 RQ1: Intellectual Structure and Evolution of the ARM Literature

4.1.1 Overview of the Corpus

The bibliometric corpus (Stream A) comprises 208 peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2010 and 2026, spanning 16 countries, with a total citation count of 1,876 (mean = 9.0 per article; median = 4.0). The most cited article in the corpus is Plewa et al. (2015), with 126 citations, followed by Meer and Rosen (2011) at 58 and English et al. (2021) at 42. The concentration of citations in a small number of articles reflects a field still consolidating around foundational works. Article-in-press publications account for 11 documents (5.3%), indicating continued growth at the time of the search. The 41 articles constituting the final SLR corpus (Stream B) exhibit similar citation characteristics (mean = 9.3; median = 4.0), with no statistically meaningful difference in scholarly impact between the two streams.

4.1.2 Publication Trends: Three Developmental Phases

Annual output data reveal three discernible phases of development in the ARM literature (Figure 2). During the **Foundational Phase** (2010–2014), output was modest, averaging fewer than eight articles per year, and the literature was dominated by single-institution case studies and conceptual essays primarily from the United States and Ireland. Seminal contributions in this period include [29] foundational argument for ARM beyond philanthropy and [30] archival reconstruction of Harvard's first fundraising campaign, both of which established the intellectual anchors for subsequent empirical work.

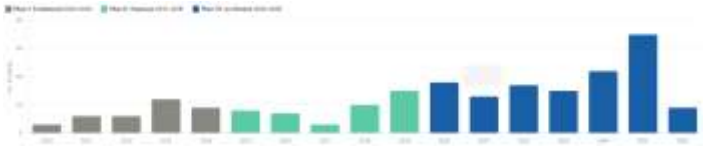


Figure 2. Annual publication output in the ARM literature, 2010–2026 (Stream A, n = 208), showing three developmental phases.

The expansion phase (2015–2019) witnessed moderate growth averaging approximately 9.7 articles per year, with the first signs of geographic diversification into East Asia and Northern Europe

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and methodological diversification toward structural equation modelling and data analytics. The three-year period from 2017 to 2019 also saw the emergence of studies employing social capital and organisational identity frameworks, signalling growing theoretical ambition within the field.

The Acceleration Phase (2020–2026) represents the most significant shift. Annual output rose sharply from 18 articles in 2020 to a peak of 35 in 2025, with 2025 alone accounting for 16.8% of the entire corpus. Articles published between 2020 and 2026 collectively represent 62.0% of Stream A. This surge correlates with two converging pressures: the fiscal disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, which intensified institutional interest in alternative revenue streams, and the broader strategic turn in higher education management toward evidence-based alumni engagement. Of note, 22.4% of Stream B articles were also published in 2025, confirming that the strategic and organisational dimensions of ARM have attracted heightened scholarly attention only very recently.

Table 3. Publication distribution across three developmental phases (Stream A, n = 208)

Phase	Period	Articles	Percentage
Foundational	2010–2014	36	17.3%
Expansion	2015–2019	43	20.7%
Acceleration	2020–2026	129	62.0%

4.1.3 Geographic Distribution and Country Collaboration Network

The country co-authorship network derived from Stream A reveals a highly asymmetric structure of international scholarly engagement in the ARM literature (Figure 3).

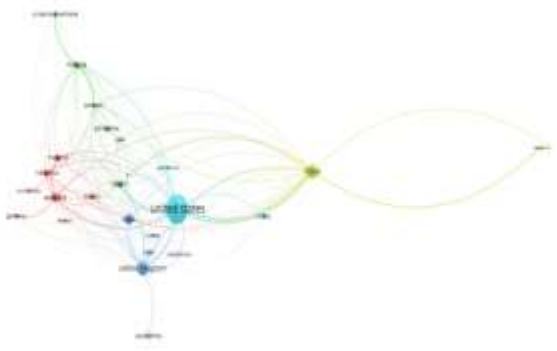


Figure 3. Geographic distribution of ARM publications in the SLR corpus

The United States occupies an unambiguous position as the central hub of the network, reflecting its status as the source of 41% of all publications in the corpus. Its node is substantially larger than all others and maintains the highest density of inter-country links, connecting to virtually every other node in the network. This centrality is not merely a matter of volume but also of structural position: the United States acts as a broker between otherwise disconnected research communities, a pattern consistent with the broader dominance of North American scholarship in higher education management research.

China constitutes the second most prominent node, positioned at the right periphery of the network with a relatively large node size but notably fewer co-authorship ties to other countries, suggesting that Chinese ARM scholarship has developed in relative isolation from the Anglo-American mainstream rather than in active dialogue with it. The United Kingdom, Ireland, Australia, and India cluster closer to the American centre, forming an interconnected Anglo-Commonwealth sub-network with multiple overlapping links.

A distinct regional cluster is visible on the left side of the network, comprising Southeast and South Asian countries Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Pakistan alongside South Korea and, at the outer margin, the United Arab Emirates. While these countries show some internal co-authorship ties, their connections to the dominant Anglo-American cluster are comparatively sparse. This structural peripherality is significant: it implies that ARM scholarship from these regions is produced largely in response to or in parallel with, rather than in direct collaboration with, the research traditions that set the field's theoretical agenda. Countries including Turkey, Canada, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Egypt, Finland, Spain, Switzerland, and Austria appear in the wider network but with small node sizes and limited connectivity, indicating isolated or emerging contributions rather than sustained research programmes.

The network structure substantiates and extends the geographic gap identified through article counts. The concentration of co-authorship ties within the Anglo-American cluster means not only that most

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ARM publications originate from Western institutions but also that the collaborative infrastructure of the field — the relationships through which methodological choices, theoretical frameworks, and research agendas are negotiated — is disproportionately shaped by those same institutions. Higher education systems in Southeast Asia, South Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa therefore face a dual marginalisation: they are absent not only from the published record but from the co-authorship networks that produce it.

4.1.4 Most Productive Journals and Source Landscape

The journal landscape reinforces the observation that ARM has been claimed primarily by philanthropy and education scholars rather than by the strategic management community. *Philanthropy and Education* is the most productive source in Stream A, contributing eight articles, followed by *Research in Higher Education* (five), and *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management* and *Journal of Applied Research in Higher Education* (four each). None of the top ten journals belongs to the strategic management or organisational behaviour literature. This source landscape means that readers of journals such as *Journal of Business Research*, *Strategic Management Journal*, or *Journal of Higher Education* have had limited exposure to ARM as a strategic construct, reinforcing the disciplinary silo that this study aims to bridge.

4.1.5 Thematic Clusters and Keyword Co-occurrence

The keyword co-occurrence network generated from Stream A (Figure 4) identifies six discrete thematic clusters, each representing a distinct research tradition within the ARM literature. The network's structure confirms the field's theoretical fragmentation and, crucially, the complete absence of strategic management vocabulary from its intellectual terrain.

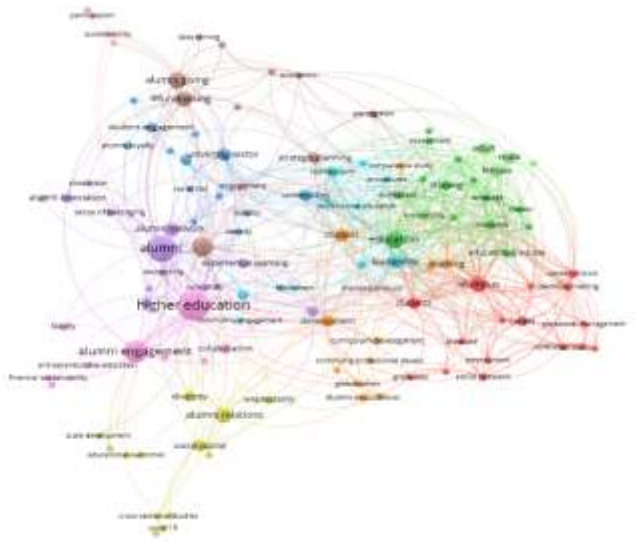


Figure 4. Keyword co-occurrence network map of the ARM literature in higher education, 2010–2026 (Stream A, n = 208)

The largest and most densely connected cluster rendered in pink is anchored by the three most frequently occurring keywords in the corpus: "higher education," "alumni," and "alumni engagement." This cluster groups together the core vocabulary of alumni relations practice, encompassing terms such as "alumni network," "alumni association," "alma mater," "sense of belonging," "community engagement," "mentorship," and "collaboration." It also contains more recently emergent terms including "financial sustainability" and "entrepreneurship education," suggesting that this dominant cluster has begun to absorb concerns about institutional sustainability that were previously peripheral. The centrality and density of this cluster confirm that the ARM literature's conceptual core remains firmly embedded in the language of institutional practice rather than strategic management theory.

The second cluster, rendered in blue, consolidates the field's fundraising and institutional advancement tradition. Its core nodes "fundraising," "alumni giving," and "alumni loyalty" co-occur with "strategic planning," "university sector," "curriculum," "student engagement," "social ties," and "experiential learning." The presence of "strategic planning" and "curriculum" within this cluster is

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noteworthy: it suggests that even the most strategically oriented vocabulary in the ARM literature remains embedded in a fundraising rather than a capability-building frame.

The third cluster, rendered in green, represents a sub-tradition concerned with professional and continuing education outcomes: "adult," "male," "female," "training," "teaching," "mentor," "interview," "workplace," and "professional education." This cluster is more loosely connected to the ARM core, and its presence partly accounts for the volume of articles excluded during title and abstract screening on the grounds of topical irrelevance: studies of alumni outcomes in clinical and professional education settings have been indexed under alumni-adjacent keywords despite having little substantive connection to ARM as an organisational function.

The fourth cluster, in red, addresses career and employment outcomes: "alumnus," "career," "career choice," "decision making," "graduate," "employment," "social network," and "controlled study." This cluster reflects a strand of educational outcomes research that tracks graduates' post-graduation trajectories and is only tangentially related to the institutional management of alumni relationships.

The fifth cluster, in yellow-olive, captures the relational and social capital dimensions of alumni engagement: "alumni relations," "social capital," "diversity," "employability," "alumni associations," "educational outcomes," "globalization," "curriculum development," and "covid-19." The co-occurrence of "covid-19" within this cluster reflects the disruption of established engagement models during the pandemic period and the subsequent reconfiguration of alumni relations toward digital and hybrid formats. The inclusion of "diversity" signals an emerging equity dimension within this research strand.

The sixth and smallest cluster, in brown, groups methodological and contextual terms — "data mining," "economics," "sustainability," "perception," "thematic analysis," "development," and "leadership" — representing a heterogeneous body of work that employs quantitative and analytical approaches to ARM questions.

Two observations from this network structure merit particular emphasis. First, the most prominent node in the entire corpus is "higher education," not "alumni management" or "dynamic capability" — a reminder that the ARM field is institutionally located within education research rather than strategic management. Second, and most consequentially for the theoretical contribution of this study, neither "dynamic capability" nor "dynamic capabilities" appears anywhere in the keyword co-occurrence network across all 208 documents. This absence is not incidental. It constitutes direct bibliometric evidence that the theoretical vocabulary through which this study analyses the ARM literature sensing, seizing, reconfiguring has never been applied to this domain. The research gap motivating this study is therefore not a claim based on logical inference alone but an empirically demonstrable structural absence in the field's collective intellectual vocabulary.

4.2 RQ2: ARM as a Dynamic Capability

4.2.1 Profile of the SLR Corpus

The 41 articles constituting the final SLR corpus span qualitative (n = 16; 39%), quantitative (n = 15; 37%), conceptual (n = 5; 12%), mixed-methods (n = 2; 5%), and practitioner or archival approaches (n = 3; 7%). In terms of geographic origin, the United States accounts for 17 articles (41%), followed by China (four), Australia (four), Ireland (three), Pakistan (two), and Indonesia (two), with remaining articles distributed across a further ten countries. Cross-sectional designs predominate (76% of studies), while longitudinal designs are rare (n = 3: Borden et al., 2014; Allen & Turner, 2024; Wang, 2024). A substantial majority of articles (76%) examine a single institution, limiting the generalisability of their findings but facilitating contextual depth.

Table 4. Methodological and geographic profile of the 41 included articles

Characteristic	Category	N	%
Methodology	Qualitative	16	39%
	Quantitative	15	37%
	Conceptual/Review	5	12%
	Mixed Methods	2	5%
	Archival/Practitioner	3	7%
Geographic origin	USA	17	41%
	Asia	12	29%
	Europe & Oceania	11	27%

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	Latin America	1	2%
Research design	Cross-sectional	31	76%
	Longitudinal	3	7%
	Conceptual	7	17%

4.2.2 ARM as a Sensing Capability

The first and most foundational dimension of ARM as a dynamic capability is *sensing* the systematic identification of alumni value, motivation, and engagement potential. Across the corpus, this dimension manifests in three analytically distinct sub-themes.

The first concerns alumni segmentation as a mechanism of sensing. Rattanamethawong et al. (2018), deploying k-means cluster analysis on 300 alumni records at a Thai university, identify three meaningfully differentiated alumni segments Activist Mainstreamers, Family-Oriented Achievers, and Senior Engaged Leaders each requiring distinct engagement strategies. At the methodological frontier, [31] develop a finite-mixture model that simultaneously predicts donation likelihood (Bernoulli component) and expected gift amount (Gaussian component), substantially outperforming conventional logistic regression approaches in identifying high-value prospects. Their sister paper [32] demonstrates that this model can be integrated directly into CRM systems for real-time prospect management. [33] add dynamic texture to these segmentation approaches through a typological model that distinguishes Rational, Emotional, Social, and Obligatory givers, showing that donor type is not fixed alumni can migrate across types over their post-graduation lifecycle, making continuous sensing a necessity rather than a one-time exercise.

The second sub-theme concerns organisational identification (OI) as a sensing signal. [34], through a survey of 148 alumni from U.S. universities, demonstrate that the quality of instructor-student rapport during enrolment is a robust predictor of post-graduation OI, which in turn predicts financial giving, volunteering, and institutional advocacy. [35] large-scale structural equation study (n = 3,791) extends this insight by showing that OI operates differently in public versus private institutions: in public universities, student-university identification meaningfully predicts alumni support, whereas private university alumni exhibit a more transactional, customer-oriented orientation in which affective identification plays a lesser role. This finding implies that effective sensing must be calibrated to institutional type rather than deployed uniformly. [36] further identify faculty and staff who are also alumni of their institution as an entirely overlooked sensing target a group whose OI consistently predicts giving behaviour across a three-year longitudinal panel.

The third sub-theme elevates sensing to the level of organisational sensemaking. [37], drawing on Weick's sensemaking theory within the context of community engagement professionals in HEIs, argues that effective ARM operatives do not merely collect alumni data but actively help the institution *interpret* that data and build shared understanding around its strategic implications. This sensemaking function helping institutional leaders understand why alumni behave as they do and what that implies for resource development aligns closely with the cognitive dimension of sensing described by [7], who frames sensing as a collective organisational capability rather than an individual or departmental activity. Complementing this, [38] develop an Alumni Rating Index composed of 12 institutional performance dimensions, deployed through a monitoring dashboard that enables real-time feedback from alumni a concrete technological instantiation of sensing as an ongoing organisational process.

4.2.3 ARM as a Seizing Capability

Seizing the mobilisation of resources to capture identified opportunities is the dimension most thoroughly represented in the corpus, with evidence spanning financial resource acquisition, academic value co-creation, and strategic influence at national policy levels.

Within the domain of financial resource mobilisation, the most influential evidence comes from [39], whose natural experiment at a U.S. research university demonstrates that personal solicitation by volunteer alumni ambassadors substantially increases giving probability over impersonal mass appeals. The quality of the contact mechanism, not just its volume, determines seizing effectiveness. [40] shows that social exchange theory explains alumni giving behaviour even at community colleges institutions long neglected by ARM research where alumni from modest economic backgrounds nevertheless donate when they perceive the institution

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as having contributed to their post-graduation success. [41] models the optimal incentive mix for overseas alumni using evolutionary game theory, finding that tax incentives deliver the greatest short-run increase in donation probability while reputational returns are more sustainable over longer time horizons. At the institutional level, [42] documents how Prairie View A&M University, a Historically Black College, achieved more than a 15% increase in alumni giving during the 2008 recession by restructuring its development function to include all ten academic units evidence that seizing is amplified when the organisational architecture aligns with the engagement strategy.

Beyond financial giving, a substantial strand of the corpus documents alumni as co-creators of academic and institutional value. [43], in the corpus's second most-cited study, advance an "outside-in approach" in which alumni function as strategic informants who communicate market needs and curriculum gaps back to the institution, reversing the conventional unidirectional communication model. [44] elaborate this co-creation logic through a 3C Framework Connect, Contribute, Co-create derived from interviews and focus groups with alumni and institutional leaders across Indian engineering colleges. Their data expose a seizing gap of substantial proportions: while 58% of alumni expressed willingness to serve as mentors, only 12% had ever received a formal invitation from their institution, a disparity that represents forgone value on an enormous scale. [45] document a curriculum-embedded model in which alumni participate directly in a Student Managed Investment Fund, generating bidirectional value through the transfer of industry expertise and the maintenance of alumni institutional connection.

A third strand of seizing evidence operates at the macro level of national strategy and soft power. [46], drawing on elite interviews with Australian government officials, show how Australia operationalised alumni engagement as a mechanism of soft power in its international education strategy. [47] traces the subsequent evolution of this approach from passive soft power attraction to active knowledge diplomacy, in which international alumni are repositioned as mutual partners in research collaboration and bilateral influence rather than as passive recipients of Australian cultural influence. This body of work extends the seizing logic beyond individual institutions to the level of system-wide resource capture, suggesting that ARM can function as a dynamic capability not only for individual HEIs but for national higher education systems operating competitively in the global knowledge economy.

4.2.4 ARM as a Reconfiguring Capability

Reconfiguring the continuous transformation of organisational structures, processes, and cultures is the dimension most readily overlooked when ARM is treated as an operational rather than a strategic function. Three sub-themes characterise reconfiguring in the corpus.

The first concerns organisational restructuring of alumni offices and governance structures. [48], in a multiple case study of three major Chinese universities, trace the transformation of alumni offices from what they term "nursing agencies" passive administrative units maintaining alumni contact lists into active strategic departments with departmentalised structures, volunteer coordination, and social capital mobilisation functions. [49], examining an Irish Catholic college, frames the emergence of alumni as significant philanthropic donors as the arrival of a "third master" alongside the state and the Church, necessitating a renegotiation of institutional governance.

Perhaps the most theoretically resonant evidence of ARM as reconfiguring capability comes from [30] archival reconstruction of Harvard's first fundraising campaign (1915–1925). His analysis of approximately 40,000 archival documents reveals that the professional fundraising function did not precede the campaign but *emerged from it* arising through contentious negotiation among competing alumni groups, academic units, and administrators rather than through deliberate organisational design. This historical evidence is entirely consistent with Teece's (1997) characterisation of dynamic capabilities as path-dependent processes that are learned through experience and shaped by organisational history.

The second sub-theme involves digital transformation and CRM reconfiguration. [50], through a grounded theory investigation of HEI CRM professionals, find that only 22% of surveyed institutions maintain a structured CRM system for alumni tracking, and that the majority rely on

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informal social media groups and event-driven communications without any sustained engagement infrastructure.

This finding reveals that most HEIs have not yet undertaken the digital reconfiguration that would be a prerequisite for effective sensing and seizing. Their analysis of generative AI applications in HEI CRM identifies three implementation phases communication personalisation at scale, predictive giving analytics, and automated alumni stewardship each of which represents a distinct reconfiguring movement. [38] provide a complementary perspective through the development of a twelve-dimension Alumni Rating Index deployed on a real-time monitoring dashboard, which constitutes a concrete data-infrastructure reconfiguration that converts alumni feedback into actionable institutional intelligence.

The third sub-theme addresses institutional culture as the deepest form of reconfiguration. [51], examining the transformation of Irish higher education philanthropy through the intervention of Atlantic Philanthropies over more than a decade, argues that creating a culture of giving in an institution or a national higher education system without prior philanthropic tradition requires not a campaign but a generational transformation spanning ten to twenty years. [52] approach cultural reconfiguration from a different angle, documenting how COVID-19 functioned as a forced reconfiguring event that accelerated digital ARM transformation in Polish and broader European Union universities that had previously resisted change. [3], in a case study of Stockholm University, show that effective ARM in a Nordic context required reframing the value proposition from institutional fundraising a culturally foreign concept to mutual professional benefit, a reconfiguration that proved far more effective with Nordic alumni.

4.2.5 Antecedents and Moderators of ARM as a Dynamic Capability

The synthesis identifies two sets of conditions that shape the development and effectiveness of ARM as a dynamic capability: internal antecedents and contextual moderators (Table 4).

Table 5. Antecedents and contextual moderators of ARM as a dynamic capability

Category	Variable	Key evidence	Direction
Internal antecedents	Leadership type	[53]	Positive
	Organisational identity	[34], [54]	Positive
	Institutional gratitude culture	[55]	Positive
Contextual moderators	Institutional type (public/private)	[35]	Moderating
	Geographic/cultural context	[3], [56]	Moderating
	Crisis conditions	[42], [52]	Catalytic
	Equity and diversity	[57], [58]	Moderating

Among internal antecedents, leadership emerges as a particularly tractable lever. [53], analysing secondary data from 85 institutions over eight years, find that the prior professional background of the university president specifically, whether the president rose through academic or non-academic pathways significantly predicts alumni giving as a proportion of total fundraising. The mechanism, grounded in social identity and philanthropic mirroring theories, is that alumni self-categorise in relation to institutional leadership: presidents whose backgrounds resemble those of a broader alumni constituency generate stronger identification and higher giving rates.

Organisational identity functions as both an antecedent and an outcome of ARM [54] shows that identity-based ARM programmes those that explicitly cultivate alumni role identity or institutional identification outperform transactional approaches across both volunteering and financial giving metrics. [55] identify a further antecedent that the literature has largely neglected: the culture of gratitude cultivated between academic staff and students during enrolment, which alumni cite as the primary motivator for long-term engagement, yet which institutions systematically underutilise.

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Among contextual moderators, the distinction between public and private institutional types emerges as the most empirically grounded. [35] multigroup SEM analysis confirms that the affective engagement model performs well in public university contexts but substantially less so in private university contexts, where alumni exhibit customer-oriented rather than identity-based relationship orientations. Cultural and geographic context moderates the transferability of ARM models across national settings [3], [56], a finding with particularly significant implications for institutions in non-Western, non-philanthropic contexts seeking to adapt Anglo-American ARM practices. Crisis conditions appear to function as catalytic moderators both [42], [52] document instances in which economic recession and the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated ARM reconfiguration in ways that peacetime institutional inertia had previously impeded.

4.2.6 The ARM–DC Integrative Framework

Drawing together the evidence from the preceding sub-sections, an integrative ARM–DC framework can be articulated as follows. ARM constitutes a dynamic capability when it operates as an iterative, interconnected cycle across three dimensions: HEIs sense alumni value through systematic segmentation, monitoring of organisational identification, and sensemaking processes; they seize that value through diversified mobilisation strategies spanning financial giving, co-creation, and strategic partnership; and they reconfigure their organisational structures, technological infrastructure, and cultural orientation in response to what sensing and seizing reveal.

The framework's critical insight supported across 29 of the 41 included articles that exhibit all three DC dimensions is that no single dimension is sufficient in isolation: sensing without seizing yields data without action; seizing without reconfiguring yields short-term returns without sustained capability; reconfiguring without sensing risks costly misalignment with actual alumni needs and motivations. The full strength of ARM as a dynamic capability is realised only when the three dimensions operate as a reinforcing system (Figure 5).

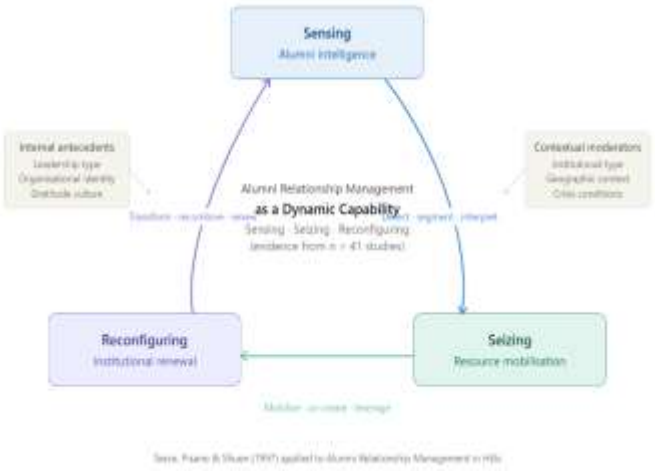


Figure 5. The integrative ARM–DC framework

Sensing, seizing, and reconfiguring as interdependent dynamic capability dimensions in higher education institutions (Teece et al., 1997; based on synthesis of n = 41 studies).

4.3 RQ3: Research Gaps and Agenda

Systematic gap-mapping across the 41 included articles, triangulated with the bibliometric evidence from Stream A, identifies seven distinct gaps in the existing ARM literature. The most fundamental is a theoretical gap: none of the 41 articles applies the Dynamic Capabilities framework or any other strategic management theory as its primary lens for analysing ARM.

The literature is theoretically fragmented across disciplinary silos: marketing (brand community theory, relationship marketing), social psychology (organisational identification), economics (charitable solicitation), and communication (engagement theory). While each of these frameworks illuminates a facet of ARM, none provides the strategic management architecture needed to understand how ARM creates and sustains competitive advantage at the institutional level. This study's central contribution is precisely to provide that architecture.

A geographic and contextual gap follows logically. With 63% of the corpus originating from Anglo-American contexts, the existing literature embeds assumptions about philanthropic culture, alumni wealth, institutional advancement infrastructure, and government-funding independence

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that do not travel easily to emerging economy settings. Asia Tenggara, home to some of the world's fastest-growing higher education systems, is almost entirely absent from the ARM scholarly conversation. A methodological gap is evident in the dominance of cross-sectional, single-institution designs. Only three of the 41 studies employ longitudinal methods, yet ARM by its very definition as a dynamic capability is a developmental, path-dependent process that cannot be captured in a single-point snapshot. The field needs multi-institutional, longitudinal studies capable of tracking the emergence and evolution of ARM capabilities over time.

An institutional gap reflects the field's preoccupation with elite research universities. Community colleges, polytechnics, vocational institutions, and non-elite teaching universities which collectively enrol the majority of students globally are marginalised in a literature built largely on the fundraising successes of research-intensive institutions with wealthy and highly networked alumni.

A technology gap is increasingly salient. Only two articles in the corpus address digital transformation and artificial intelligence in ARM, despite the fact that these technologies are reshaping constituent relationship management across the sector. Crucially, [50] report that no institution in their study had yet produced measurable outcomes from generative AI implementation in ARM meaning that the empirical literature on digital ARM effectiveness is effectively nonexistent.

An equity gap emerges from the analysis of how ARM practices systematically underserve alumni from historically underrepresented populations. [57], in a portraiture study of Black alumni giving at a predominantly White institution with a history of association with slavery, demonstrate that transactional ARM approaches fail when the relationship between the institution and a particular alumni community is burdened by structural injustice. [58] similarly documents the particular barriers facing first-generation college graduates, whose ARM engagement requires culturally adapted, community-centred approaches that existing models do not provide.

Finally, a measurement gap reflects the absence of consensus on how ARM effectiveness should be assessed as an organisational capability. The field has defaulted to financial proxies — giving rates, participation rates that capture only a fraction of the value that ARM as a dynamic capability can generate. Two measurement instruments are proposed in the corpus [38], [59], but neither has been validated across multiple institutional contexts or cultural settings. The development of a validated, multi-dimensional ARM effectiveness framework remains an outstanding priority.

Table 6. Research gaps and future directions

Gap	Core finding	Priority research directions
Theoretical	No DC or strategic management framework applied to ARM	Empirical validation of ARM–DC framework; multi-level capability models
Geographic/contextual	63% Anglo-American; ASEAN = 3 articles	ARM in emerging economies; culturally adapted frameworks
Methodological	76% single-institution; 7% longitudinal	Multi-institutional longitudinal studies; quasi-experimental designs
Institutional	Elite research university bias	ARM in community colleges, polytechnics, and non-elite HEIs
Technological	Only 2 articles on digital/AI ARM	Empirical AI-ARM outcomes; privacy-efficiency

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		tradeoffs
Equity	3 articles on DEI in ARM	Critical race approaches to ARM; first-generation and low-income alumni
Measurement	No validated multi-dimensional ARM scale	ARM capability maturity model; balanced scorecard for ARM

.

Discussion

4.1 ARM as a Dynamic Capability: Theoretical Implications

The central contribution of this review is the demonstration that, although the alumni relationship management (ARM) literature has never explicitly invoked the Dynamic Capabilities framework, the cumulative body of evidence describes precisely the sensing, seizing, and reconfiguring mechanisms that Teece, Pisano, and Shuen (1997) identified as the constituent elements of dynamic capability. Institutions that succeed in alumni engagement are shown to detect alumni value through systematic segmentation and the monitoring of organisational identification [34], [35], [60], to mobilise that value through differentiated resource-acquisition and co-creation strategies [39], [43], [44], and to transform their structures, technologies, and cultures in response to what they learn [48], [50], [51]. Reframing ARM in these terms relocates it from the operational vocabulary of fundraising and events into the strategic vocabulary of capability building, where its contribution to long-term institutional advantage becomes analytically visible.

This reframing extends the Dynamic Capabilities framework into a setting in which it has rarely been applied. The framework was developed to explain competitive advantage among profit-seeking firms in volatile markets, yet the evidence assembled here indicates that capability building of an equivalent kind occurs in higher education institutions whose primary motive is not profit but institutional sustainability and mission fulfilment.

The historical evidence is especially instructive in this respect: Kimball's (2014) archival reconstruction of Harvard's first fundraising campaign shows that the professional advancement function emerged not from deliberate strategic design but from contentious negotiation among competing constituencies, a path-dependent, experientially learned process that closely matches Teece's (1997) account of how dynamic capabilities form. ARM, in other words, appears to develop in HEIs through the same evolutionary logic that characterises capability formation in firms, even though the institutional context and value criteria differ substantially.

4.2 Explaining the Paradox of an Unrecognised Capability

A striking puzzle emerges from the synthesis: ARM operates substantively as a dynamic capability, yet has never been conceptualised as one. Three explanations help account for this paradox. First, the ARM literature has been authored predominantly by advancement practitioners and higher education scholars whose disciplinary training lies outside strategic management, with the consequence that the theoretical apparatus of capability theory was simply not part of the available conceptual repertoire [29], [37].

Second, the field has been published almost entirely in philanthropy and education journals rather than in management outlets, producing a disciplinary silo in which ARM scholarship and strategic management scholarship have developed in mutual isolation. Third, the persistent framing of ARM around short-term fundraising outcomes has obscured the longer-term, cumulative dimension of capability that only becomes visible across extended time horizons [30], [51]. This review functions as a bridging contribution that connects two literatures which, despite their evident complementarity, have not previously been brought into conversation.

4.3 The Role of Context in Developing ARM as a Dynamic Capability

The evidence makes clear that ARM as a dynamic capability is highly context-dependent, and that the dominant Anglo-American models cannot be transferred uncritically to other settings. Studies

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conducted outside the Anglo-American core consistently report that the philanthropic assumptions embedded in mainstream ARM scholarship do not hold where giving traditions are weak or differently configured [3], [56]. In Nordic universities, alumni engagement became effective only when reframed from institutional giving a culturally unfamiliar concept to mutual professional benefit (Ebert et al., 2015). In Pakistani public institutions, the shift required was from treating alumni as peripheral to recognising them as strategic partners in institutional sustainability (Nisar et al., 2023).

These findings carry particular significance for emerging-economy higher education systems, where value creation through alumni may take the form of mentorship, curriculum co-design, and industry linkage rather than the financial philanthropy that dominates Western models (Sundaram et al., 2026). For institutions in Southeast Asia, where relational and collective norms shape alumni-institution ties more strongly than individualistic philanthropy, ARM may need to be reconceptualised around culturally congruent forms of reciprocity [61].

Institutional type constitutes a second important contextual moderator. The finding that affective engagement models work well in public universities but less effectively in private universities, where alumni adopt a more customer-oriented orientation, indicates that the sensing and seizing dimensions of ARM must be calibrated to the institutional relationship logic rather than applied uniformly (Liang, 2025). The marginal attention paid to community colleges and non-elite institutions further suggests that the prevailing models, built largely on the experience of research-intensive universities with wealthy alumni, may misrepresent the ARM possibilities available to the broader population of higher education institutions [40].

4.4 Technology as a Catalyst for Reconfiguration

The synthesis indicates that digital transformation represents both the most underdeveloped and the most consequential frontier for ARM as a dynamic capability. The finding that only a minority of institutions maintain a structured constituent relationship management system for alumni tracking suggests that most HEIs have not yet undertaken the technological reconfiguration that effective sensing and seizing presuppose [50]. Where analytics capabilities have been developed, they materially improve the precision of alumni segmentation and solicitation [31], [32], and dashboard-based monitoring instruments convert alumni feedback into actionable institutional intelligence [38].

Generative artificial intelligence is positioned as the next reconfiguring frontier, with potential applications in personalised communication at scale, predictive giving analytics, and automated stewardship, though the absence of implemented cases with measurable outcomes means that this potential remains, for now, unverified (Marcinkevage & Kumar, 2025). The development of a digital reconfiguring capability thus appears to be a prerequisite for, rather than an adjunct to, the effective operation of ARM as a dynamic capability in the contemporary environment.

4.5 The Equity Imperative in ARM

A further implication concerns the distributive consequences of ARM practice. Because resource-acquisition logics direct institutional attention toward alumni with the greatest financial capacity, ARM that is not deliberately designed for inclusion risks reinforcing existing inequalities through a self-perpetuating feedback loop in which already-advantaged constituencies receive disproportionate engagement (Boatwright & Salinas, 2023). The evidence indicates that transactional approaches fail with alumni communities whose relationship with the institution is mediated by histories of structural injustice, and that community-centred, trust-based approaches are required instead [57].

Similarly, first-generation graduates face distinctive barriers to engagement that culturally adapted, peer-oriented strategies are better positioned to address (Toney, 2024). An equity-centred reconfiguration of ARM, in which segmentation is organised around motivation and circumstance rather than financial capacity alone, therefore emerges as both an ethical and a strategic priority.

4.6 Practical Implications for Higher Education Institutions

For institutional leaders, the framework developed in this review suggests a sequenced agenda. The sensing dimension calls for investment in

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alumni data infrastructure, systematic segmentation, and the regular assessment of organisational identification, so that engagement decisions rest on evidence rather than assumption (Rattanamethawong et al., 2018; Frisby et al., 2019).

seizing dimension calls for a deliberate broadening of engagement beyond fundraising to encompass mentorship, curriculum co-creation, and professional networking, recognising that alumni willingness to contribute frequently exceeds the institution's capacity to invite such contribution (English et al., 2021; Sundaram et al., 2026). The reconfiguring dimension calls for periodic review of the structure and remit of alumni offices, a deliberate roadmap for digital transformation, and patient investment in the long-term cultivation of an engagement culture [48], [51].

Cutting across all three dimensions, the evidence underscores the importance of leadership alignment, given the demonstrable influence of senior leadership on alumni giving outcomes (Allen & Turner, 2024), and the value of cultivating institutional gratitude as a relational foundation for sustained engagement [55].

V. CONCLUSION

This study set out to map the intellectual development of the alumni relationship management literature in higher education, to synthesise that literature through the lens of the Dynamic Capabilities framework, and to identify the gaps that define the field's future research agenda. The findings corresponding to each of the three research questions are summarised here.

With respect to RQ1, bibliometric analysis of 208 peer-reviewed articles published between 2010 and 2026 reveals that the ARM literature has developed across three phases: a foundational period of modest, conceptually oriented output dominated by Anglo-American scholarship; a phase of gradual expansion characterised by geographic and methodological diversification; and a phase of acceleration from 2020 onward, in which publication output surged to unprecedented levels, reaching its peak in 2025. The intellectual structure of the field is organised around five keyword clusters philanthropy and fundraising, alumni engagement and relational management, networks and social capital, institutional strategy, and technology and analytics of which the first remains dominant. The absence of "dynamic capability" or "dynamic capabilities" as an author keyword in any of the 208 documents provides direct empirical confirmation that the integration of ARM with strategic management theory constitutes a genuine and unoccupied scholarly space.

With respect to RQ2, the thematic synthesis of 41 included articles demonstrates that ARM, while never explicitly conceptualised as such, exhibits all three dimensions of a dynamic capability as defined by Teece, Pisano, and Shuen (1997). Institutions that succeed in alumni engagement sense value through systematic segmentation, the monitoring of organisational identification, and sensemaking processes; they seize that value through differentiated strategies spanning financial mobilisation, academic co-creation, and strategic diplomacy; and they reconfigure their structures, technologies, and cultures in response to accumulated learning. The synthesis further identifies leadership type, organisational identity, and institutional gratitude culture as internal antecedents, and institutional type, geographic context, crisis conditions, and equity considerations as contextual moderators, of ARM effectiveness.

With respect to RQ3, seven research gaps are catalogued: a theoretical gap reflecting the absence of strategic management frameworks in ARM scholarship; a geographic gap reflecting the dominance of Anglo-American contexts and the near-total absence of emerging-economy scholarship; a methodological gap reflecting the prevalence of cross-sectional, single-institution designs; an institutional gap reflecting the disproportionate attention to elite research universities; a technology gap reflecting the virtual absence of empirically validated digital and AI-enhanced ARM research; an equity gap reflecting the underrepresentation of historically marginalised alumni populations; and a measurement gap reflecting the absence of a validated, multi-dimensional ARM effectiveness framework.

The seven gaps identified in this review generate a concrete and prioritised agenda for future scholarship. The most pressing requirement is for empirical studies that directly test the ARM–DC framework proposed here ideally through multi-institutional survey designs or longitudinal case

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studies capable of tracking capability development over time. The geographic gap calls for systematic research on ARM in emerging-economy HEIs, particularly across Southeast Asia, Latin America, and Sub-Saharan Africa, where the ARM models documented in the Anglo-American literature cannot be assumed to transfer.

The measurement gap demands the development and cross-cultural validation of a multi-dimensional ARM effectiveness instrument that captures financial, intellectual, social, and reputational value simultaneously rather than privileging giving rates as a sole proxy. The technology gap, given the scale of current institutional investment in CRM and generative AI tools, is arguably the most time-sensitive: rigorous empirical assessment of the outcomes, privacy trade-offs, and equity implications of AI-enhanced ARM is needed urgently.

Finally, the equity gap calls for researchers to apply critical theoretical perspectives critical race theory, first-generation student scholarship, and intersectional frameworks to the study of ARM, ensuring that the field's future development does not inadvertently replicate and entrench the inequalities that higher education institutions are, in principle, designed to address.

The proposition advanced in this paper that alumni relationship management is not merely a fundraising function but a dynamic capability through which HEIs create, sustain, and renew competitive advantage has the potential to reorient how institutions think about their graduates and how scholars study that relationship. Realising this potential requires scholars from both strategic management and higher education to step across the disciplinary boundary that has separated them. This review is offered as an invitation to do so.

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