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Editorial: Balancing Continuity and Change in Operations and Supply Chain Management Research

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1. Introduction

The *International Journal of Operations & Production Management* (IJOPM) stands as one of the premier journals in empirical operations and supply chain management (OSCM). Since its foundation in 1980, successive editorial teams have shaped IJOPM into the influential publication it is today. As the new Co-Editors-in-Chief (Co-EiCs), we are honored to build upon this legacy and to steward the journal's continued growth in the years ahead, in close collaboration with Emerald as our publishing partner.

We extend our deepest appreciation to the outgoing editorial team: Constantin Blome, Robert D. Klassen, Tobias Schoenherr, and Martin C. Schleper, whose leadership over the past seven years has elevated IJOPM to a position of exceptional standing and impact within the OSCM community. Their commitment and contributions have set a high bar, and we are grateful for the foundation of excellence they have passed on to us.

As the incoming editorial team, we are guided by a clear vision and strong aspirations to uphold and further strengthen IJOPM's tradition of excellence. Our focus will be on maintaining the journal's rigorous publication standards, reinforcing research integrity, fostering a dynamic and thriving global academic community, and supporting IJOPM's continued growth as a leading empirical OSCM journal. Stepping into this role, our commitment is twofold: (i) to ensure continuity; and (ii) to drive change where needed. The transition to a new editorial team reflects this balance, exemplified by Professor Martin C. Schleper's progression from Editorial Assistant to Co-EiC, ensuring that vital procedural knowledge is preserved while welcoming new perspectives brought by the incoming team members – Professors Jens K. Roehrich and Hugo Lam (Co-EiCs), as well as Drs Desirée van Dun and Byung-Gak Son (Managerial Editors - MEs).

Supported by IJOPM's dedicated and newly/re-assigned Associate Editors (AEs), Editorial Review Board (ERB) members, and ad-hoc reviewers, our strategic agenda centers on five key priorities to further elevate the journal:

(1) Strengthening the research pipeline by encouraging impactful, high-quality submissions that push the boundaries of OSCM scholarship while maintaining the highest standards of research integrity.;

(2) Enhancing operational excellence to reinforce IJOPM's global position and visibility.;

(3) Promoting thought leadership through expanded academic dialogues including webinars, workshops, talks, and invited contributions that collectively advance our field.;

(4) Enhancing outreach and engagement by deepening connections among academia, business, policy, and society. This includes fostering closer collaboration and knowledge exchange to translate real-world business, not-for-profit, and policy practices into academic insights—and, conversely, applying academic knowledge to practice—through initiatives such as Impact Pathways, Special Issues, and social media engagement.; and

(5) Nurturing an inclusive and diverse OSCM research community, ensuring broad representation across geographies and cultures, career stages, and methodological and theoretical perspectives.

Together, these initiatives reflect our vision of a journal that not only leads but continually evolves in step with the field.

We are excited to collaborate with the IJOPM and broader OSCM community to ensure that the journal not only sustains its position among the leading OSCM journal outlets but also expands its reach and influence. A key priority will be to enhance IJOPM's scholarly and practical impact by attracting high-quality submissions and upholding fair and efficient processes in review, manuscript development, and publication. Particularly, we aim to further strengthen IJOPM's vibrant communities of reviewers and researchers, while extending meaningful support to scholars from underserved regions. This commitment to inclusivity will help ensure more diverse representation within OSCM scholarship. Through these efforts, we seek to elevate the journal as a platform that amplifies diverse voices and delivers research that is both academically rigorous and practically relevant.

In this inaugural editorial, we reflect on the first year of editorial leadership and present a roadmap for achieving our goals for IJOPM's continued growth and impact. We offer transparency into the journal's review and publication processes and emphasize the need to uphold research integrity. Most importantly, we put forward theses on three major trends, i.e., (1) globalization and trade issues; (2) sustainability, ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance), and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) topics; and (3) artificial intelligence (AI), which we believe will shape the future of OSCM and the journal's content in the near to medium term. While these themes are not new to the field (i.e., continuity), we aim to explore them through a fresh and more provocative lens; one that encourages unconventional and forward-thinking research in OSCM (i.e., change).

As we embark on this journey, we look forward to working closely with the IJOPM community. We invite you to share with us your ideas, enthusiasm, and energy, and to join us in a productive and collaborative partnership to achieve these shared ambitions.

2. Demystifying the publication process

IJOPM places strong emphasis on both theoretical contributions and practical relevance. We welcome research that advances OSCM theory by engaging rigorously with specific empirical phenomena while offering insights that extend beyond their immediate context. Contributions should deepen understanding and enrich ongoing scholarly debates within the field. At the same time, OSCM is an applied discipline. We therefore value research that addresses real-world challenges. Not only within firms and supply chains, but also in their broader connections to policy and society. Practical relevance does not require prescriptive advice; instead, we seek thought-provoking and non-obvious insights that can meaningfully engage managers, policymakers, and/or other key stakeholders. The true test of relevance is whether the research can spark a compelling and substantive conversation beyond academia.

To achieve this, IJOPM supports a wide range of empirically grounded approaches and maintains a strong commitment to rigor in the development, application, and refinement of diverse theoretical perspectives. We are particularly committed to promoting methodological plurality and epistemological diversity, welcoming qualitative, quantitative, mixed-methods, and emerging approaches that reflect the complexity of real-world OSCM challenges. Through this inclusive and forward-looking stance, we aim to foster a vibrant academic community where diverse voices contribute to innovative and impactful research that advances theory, informs practice, and addresses critical issues across business, policy, and society. Furthermore, we carefully refreshed the AEs, ERB members, and ad-hoc reviewers who share this commitment.

The academic peer-review process is a cornerstone of scholarly communication and a vital part of developing high-quality research. At its core, it ensures the rigor, credibility, and relevance of published work by subjecting manuscripts to expert evaluation and development. Peer review plays a critical role in identifying methodological limitations, enhancing theoretical contributions, and ensuring that research meaningfully advances our collective understanding of OSCM. However, the process is not without challenges. These include implicit and explicit biases, variability in review and development quality, and the increasing pressure on reviewer teams amid rising submission volumes.

At IJOPM, we see peer review not as a gatekeeping mechanism but as a vital developmental tool that benefits both authors and reviewers. For authors, thoughtful feedback can sharpen research questions, improve methodological rigor, and enhance the clarity and impact of their contributions (to theory, practice, policy, and society). For reviewers, the process offers an opportunity to engage with emerging research, deepen subject-matter expertise, and actively contribute to shaping our field. We also recognize the important role peer review plays in

supporting academic careers, particularly for early-career researchers. A structured and constructive review process can help hone critical thinking, strengthen scholarly work, and foster professional growth. By continually enhancing the transparency, fairness, developmental value, and timeliness of our review process, we aim to support individual scholars while advancing the broader field of OSCM research.

Throughout the publication process, we seek to provide clear, constructive feedback and developmental guidance to help authors refine their work and uncover new research opportunities. During rounds of revision, we set specific expectations and offer actionable suggestions to support authors in advancing their manuscripts. Authors are expected to respond to all comments from reviewers, the AE, and the handling Co-EiC in a thorough and respectful manner. Each comment should be addressed either by clearly outlining the revisions made—indicating their specific location in the manuscript—or by providing a well-reasoned explanation for why a particular suggestion was not incorporated. We encourage authors to refrain from copying extensive sections of the manuscript into their response letters. Instead, revisions should be summarized succinctly, with responses focused directly on the issues raised. Replies should remain professional, concise, and free from unnecessary elaboration. Most importantly, authors should keep the manuscript's central goals and contributions in view while carefully engaging with all feedback to strengthen the overall quality and impact of their research study.

As part of the initial submission, we recommend that authors include a brief and focused cover letter. A well-crafted cover letter serves as an important complement to the manuscript, helping the editorial team to understand quickly the core contributions, theoretical positioning, methodological approach, and practical relevance of the work. It allows authors to clearly point out why IJOPM is the authors' target journal (i.e., its alignment with current debates in IJOPM), and contextualize their submission within the journal's scope, highlight its novelty, and clarify and flag unique aspects or potential sensitivities related to the submission (e.g., prior publications, previously used data, received funding, and conflicts of interest).

A brief schematic overview of IJOPM's peer-review process is presented in Figure 1.

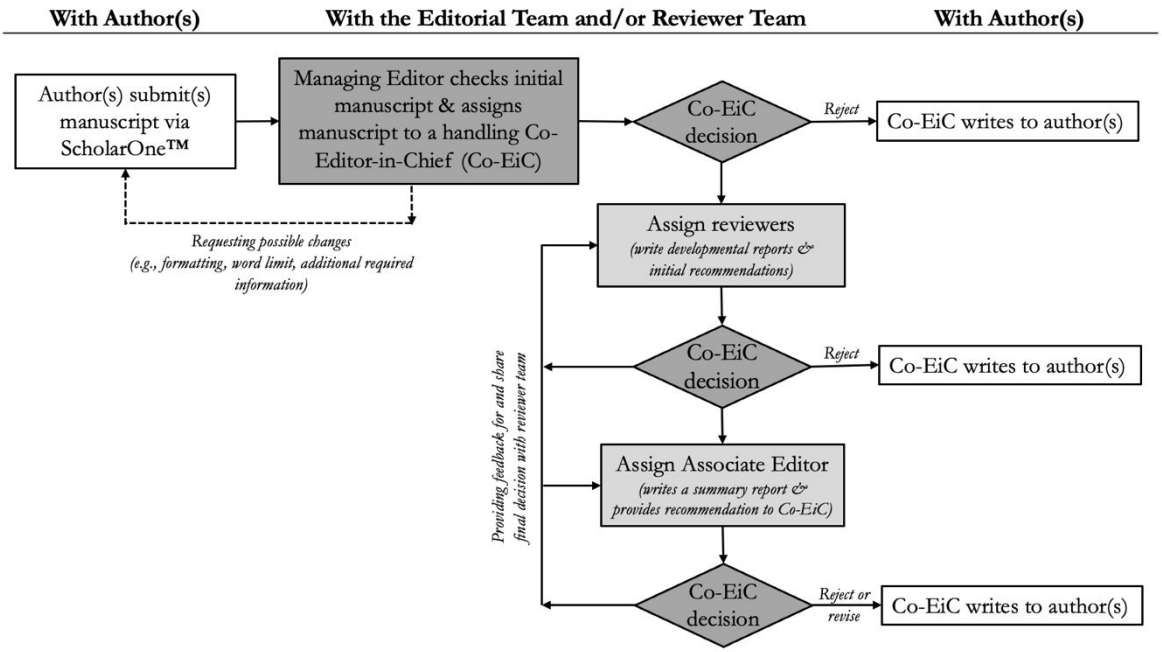

Figure 1. IJOPM's peer-review process (first round of submission) (source: authors' own work).

While Figure 1 outlines the process for the first round of submission, revised manuscripts are, in most cases, evaluated only by the handling AE and the Co-EiC(s). In practice, most authors have a clear indication of their paper's likely acceptance by the R2 or R3 stage, as possible R4 and subsequent rounds typically involve only minor revisions.

3. Upholding research integrity

Research integrity is fundamental to IJOPM's identity as a leading empirical OSCM journal. As submission volumes continue to rise (IJOPM has seen average annual growth exceeding 10% in recent years), and as predatory and unethical publishing practices become more visible (Laine et al., 2025), we reaffirm our commitment to maintaining the highest ethical standards across all stages of the publication process. These standards are essential to ensuring that IJOPM remains a trusted and credible platform for academic scholarship.

While recent anecdotal discussions on professional platforms such as LinkedIn and during Meet-the-Editor sessions have drawn attention to these questionable publishing practices, we recognize that scrutiny extends beyond the academic community. Non-academic stakeholders, including business leaders, policymakers, and the wider public, are increasingly alert to issues of research misconduct. In some cases, political actors have even weaponized isolated incidents to undermine the credibility of science as a whole. This makes it more important for us, as researchers and editors, to remain vigilant and uphold the highest standards of integrity in academic research

and publishing.

Hence, we expect all authors and submissions to adhere to best practices in responsible research conduct, including transparency in data collection and analysis, appropriate citation of prior work, and honest reporting of findings. Authors must clearly disclose any prior use of data featured in earlier publications. While such reuse is not inherently problematic, full transparency is essential. Editorial decisions will be guided by the novelty of the research and the unique contribution it makes to OSCM literature and practice.

We are also increasingly vigilant toward unethical publishing practices, which have become more visible (or more readily detectable) in recent years. These practices include plagiarism, salami-slicing, data fabrication, and other forms of academic misconduct (a useful overview and taxonomy of these behaviors is provided by Hall and Martin, 2019). IJOPM applies rigorous editorial checks and relies on the diligence of AEs, reviewers, and plagiarism-detection software to identify and address such misconduct. We are also mindful that certain questionable practices may become more prevalent with the increasing use of Large Language Models (LLMs) and other forms of AI. To support responsible use and help delineate misconduct related to these technologies, IJOPM has joined a collective initiative with other leading OSCM journals, including the *Journal of Operations Management*, *Production and Operations Management*, *Journal of Business Logistics*, *Decision Sciences*, and others to endorse a shared AI policy (available here: https://sites.google.com/view/policy-on-ai?usp=sharing%C2%A0). While this policy serves primarily as guidance for authors, reviewers and for evaluating individual cases, it is intentionally designed to be dynamic and will be updated as LLM and AI technologies evolve.

In addition, we are particularly concerned about questionable authorship practices that distort merit-based recognition and erode trust in the scholarly record. These include gift authorship, where individuals are listed as co-authors despite having made minimal or no substantive contribution to the work; authorship inflation, where the same large teams repeatedly appear on multiple publications without a clear rationale; and systematic authorship networks or 'authorship rings', where reciprocal inclusion artificially boosts publication or citation records. While difficult to detect, such patterns increasingly draw scrutiny and concern within the academic community. At IJOPM, authorship must reflect meaningful intellectual contribution to the conception, design, execution, or interpretation of a study. We will continue to scrutinize unusually high publication rates, recurring author teams, and questionable contribution patterns, particularly when they raise doubts about the integrity of the research work or the authenticity of claimed involvement. Where concerns arise, the editorial team will act in accordance with the publisher and COPE (Committee on Publication Ethics) guidelines and, if necessary, take appropriate

corrective steps including desk rejection, retraction, or notification of institutional authorities.

Finally, we, as the editorial team, are particularly concerned about recent cases of misconduct and retractions linked to Special Issues (SIs). While SIs continue to play a vital role in IJOPM's publishing portfolio by highlighting emerging themes, fostering new scholarly dialogue, and building momentum around high-impact topics, they also present distinct risks if not managed carefully. We have observed growing concerns across academia and publishing related to SIs, including inconsistent review standards, unflagged conflicts of interest, guest editors neglecting their responsibilities, gift authorship, and pre-arranged cross-publication agreements. These practices threaten the credibility of the scholarly record and compromise the integrity of the journal and ultimately the OSCM community.

To address these challenges proactively, we have formalized and strengthened our procedures for SIs to ensure full alignment with IJOPM's editorial standards. This includes clear selection criteria for SI topics and guest editor teams, detailed process guidelines, and close oversight by the IJOPM editorial team throughout the entire SI process. Our aim is to ensure that SIs contribute meaningfully to our field while upholding the same rigor, fairness, and ethical standards expected of regular submissions.

4. The portfolio of publications in IJOPM

IJOPM is committed to publishing high-quality, rigorous, and novel research through two complementary approaches. The 'inside-out approach' draws on phenomenon-driven insights from business leaders, policymakers, and/or society to shape impactful research agendas and actionable contributions – a specific example is our "Impact Pathways" section (see Caniato et al., 2023). In parallel, the 'outside-in approach' explores how established theories–often developed in different contexts–evolve when underlying assumptions are challenged. This perspective generates new conceptual insights, particularly in response to major OSCM-relevant disruptions such as pandemics, geopolitical shifts, or other global crises (e.g., Burgess et al., 2025; Golgeci et al., 2025; Kim et al., 2025).

The journal offers a variety of publication formats designed to advance OSCM scholarship and practice in meaningful ways:

(1) Empirical manuscripts, which are IJOPM's foundation. These manuscripts may draw on diverse data sources and methodological approaches to uncover novel phenomena, challenge established assumptions, and/or extend existing theories.

(2) Conceptual manuscripts. While less common, these manuscripts are highly valued when they present well-developed theoretical arguments that shape the future of the field. These

contributions should offer a high-level perspective on important themes or emerging debates. As they lack empirical evidence, their logical flow and argumentation need to be particularly strong and coherent.

(3) Impact Pathways articles. This specific format of short manuscripts (no longer than 4,000 words) aims to bridge academic insight and practical application by offering actionable frameworks that inform future scholarly work while delivering relevant implications for business, policy, and society (see Caniato et al. (2023) and the journal's website for more information).

(4) Manuscripts submitted to IJOPM's Africa Initiative (AfIn; see Essuman et al., 2025). These submissions are encouraged to explore critical OSCM-related challenges faced by individuals, teams, firms, not-for-profit, governments, supply chains/networks, and systems located on the African continent. These contributions aim to strengthen global inclusivity and spotlight underrepresented voices, cultures, and contexts in OSCM research.

(5) SIs, including the annual EurOMA Conference SI. These thematic SIs offer timely opportunities to explore novel and high-impact topics and to catalyze dialogue around different research domains. Additionally, the annual EurOMA Conference SI is dedicated to IJOPM's close relationship to EurOMA which was pivotal in the journal's birth and development.

(6) Finally, invited contributions (editorials and research papers) from guest authors, Consulting Editors, and members of the editorial team will provide thematic perspectives, methodological insights, or guidance on evolving academic, business, policy and/or societal priorities.

Together, these publication formats empower authors to contribute to and expand the OSCM knowledge base in impactful ways and drive progress in theory, practice, policy, and society.

Next, we provide an overview of articles published in IJOPM in the past ten years from 2015 to 2024 (i.e., Volumes 35-44). As shown in Table 1, a total of over 800 articles were published during this period. The annual number of publications ranged from 53 to 106, with an average of 81 per year. From 2015 to 2020, IJOPM published 12 issues annually; since 2021, this has increased to 13 issues with the addition of a dedicated open access (OA) issue each year. We intend to maintain broadly a similar publication pattern in the coming years.

Year	Volume	Articles	Issues	Articles per Issue
2024	44	89	13	6.8
2023	43	88	13	6.8
2022	42	91	13	7.0
2021	41	84	13	6.5
2020	40	77	12	6.4
2019	39	53	12	4.4
2018	38	106	12	8.8
2017	37	81	12	6.8
2016	36	75	12	6.3
2015	35	63	12	5.3
Mean		**80.7**	**12.4**	**6.5**

Note: The total number of articles is 807, including all article types.

Table 1. IJOPM Publications in 2015-2024 (Volumes 35-44) (source: authors' own work).

Over the past decade, the majority of IJOPM authors have been affiliated with institutions in the United Kingdom (UK) and, more broadly, across Europe, as shown in Table 2. The same table further shows that all of the Top 10 author affiliations were located in the UK and Europe for 2015-2024. This is unsurprising, given IJOPM's strong reputation in these regions—for instance, its consistently ranked as an 'ABS 4' in the CABS Academic Journal Guide since 2015, its status as the official journal of EurOMA, and its annual special issue linked to the EurOMA conference. Nevertheless, if we focus on IJOPM articles published in the more recent five years (i.e., 2020-2024; not tabulated), some non-European countries, such as Australia and Canada, have appeared in the Top 10 author countries list. Similarly, some universities based in China, such as Zhejiang University and University of Nottingham Ningbo China, have entered the Top 10 author affiliations list during this five-year period. Alongside submissions from often under-represented countries and regions, this trend reflects the growing diversity of IJOPM's authorship in recent years. We are committed to further advancing this inclusivity through new initiatives and activities, such as the previously mentioned IJOPM AfIn and paper development workshops organized by our Associate Editors and Editorial Review Board members around the world.

Top 10 Authors' Countries (affiliation)	Top 10 Authors' Universities
United Kingdom	University of Sussex
United States	University of Groningen
China	Lancaster University
Italy	University of Liverpool
Netherlands	University of Warwick
Germany	Cranfield University
Spain	Aston University
Finland	University of Bath
France	University College Dublin
Denmark	University of Cambridge

Table 2. IJOPM author distribution for 2015-2024 (Volumes 35-44) (source: authors' own work).

We also analyzed the content of the 807 articles published between 2015 and 2024 to gain a better understanding of what has been published in IJOPM. Specifically, we downloaded all papers, systematically analyzed and synthesized these articles to draw out common research methods, theories, and topics in Table 3.

In terms of research methods, prior IJOPM publications have featured a broad range of approaches. Both qualitative methods (e.g., case studies, process studies) and quantitative methods (e.g., surveys, experiments) are well represented, alongside mixed method designs that combine multiple approaches (e.g., case studies with surveys). In recent years, studies using secondary data sources—such as company datasets, annual reports, or social media data—have become increasingly prevalent. While literature review methods (e.g., systematic reviews, meta-analyses) also appear in IJOPM, we wish to stress that review papers will normally be rejected if they merely summarize existing studies without offering strong theoretical advancement or conceptual insight. Similarly, we do not consider manuscripts based solely on mathematical modeling approaches (e.g., stochastic programming, queuing theory, game theory, etc.).

Common Research Strategies & Methods	Common Theories	Common (Broad) Topics
Survey	Institutional Theory	Sustainability
Case Study	Dynamic Capabilities	Lean Management
Interview	Resource-Based View	Buyer-Supplier Relationships
Structural Equation Modeling	Transaction Cost Economics	Servitization
Experiment	Resource Dependence Theory	Resilience
Regression Analysis	Contingency Theory	Performance Measurement
Econometric Analysis	Signaling Theory	Blockchain
Event Study	Agency Theory	COVID-19
(Systematic/Comprehensive) Literature Review	Paradox Theory	Digitalization
Mixed Methods	Knowledge-Based View	Quality Management

Table 3. IJOPM research methods, theories, and topics for 2015-2024 (Volumes 35-44) (source: authors' own work).

As shown in Table 3, the common theories used in prior IJOPM studies are not specific to OSCM; rather, they are often borrowed from other disciplines such as strategy, sociology, and economics. Similar observations have been reported in other OSCM journals (e.g., Schmenner et al., 1998; Carter et al, 2015; Ralston et al., 2023). For example, Ralston et al. (2023, p. 142) note that "SCM scholars have rightly borrowed theories from other disciplines such as economics, marketing, and strategic management in order to conduct research examining supply chain phenomena." Nevertheless, we encourage researchers to develop domain-specific theories that help advance our understanding of OSCM phenomena, particularly in areas "for which existing theory and scholarship do not offer strong insights" (Miller, 2024, p. 1).

Table 3 shows that IJOPM studies published in the past ten years have continued to address classic OSCM research topics such as performance measurement and lean management, which have been focal areas for IJOPM authors for several decades (e.g., Karlsson and Åhlström, 1995; Neely et al., 1995). At the same time, several emerging topics have become mainstream in IJOPM over the past decade. In particular, sustainability-related themes such as social sustainability and sustainable SCM have gained prominence during this period. Research on resilience (e.g., firm or supply chain resilience) and new technologies (e.g., blockchain, big data analytics, social media, Industry 4.0) has also increased significantly, reflecting both major supply chain disruptions and rapid technological advancements in recent years. In the next section, we extend this discussion by proposing three theses for future OSCM research.

5. Three theses about the future of OSCM

In the following section, we propose three theses that we believe will shape OSCM research in the coming years, each aligned with a major trend: (1) globalization and trade issues; (2) sustainability, ESG, and DEI; and (3) AI. While these themes have long been part of the OSCM discourse–reflecting a sense of continuity – we also observe important shifts within each which open new and timely avenues for research. These developments present compelling opportunities for the OSCM field at large and for IJOPM in particular, highlighting themes where continuity meets change.

5.1 Globalization and trade issues

Thesis 1: Globalization is continuing, but it is being redefined.

The notion that globalization is in retreat has gained traction in public discourse, particularly in light of recent geopolitical and economic disruptions (Di Sano et al., 2023; World Economic Forum, 2024). However, from an OSCM perspective, globalization is neither disappearing nor collapsing but evolving. Global trade volumes continue to grow, albeit at a slower pace, and global supply chains are adapting rather than disintegrating (Roscoe et al., 2022; Kent et al., 2025). Moreover, digital globalization is accelerating, as data flows, digital services, AI collaboration, and remote work weave new forms of global interconnectedness. At the same time, addressing systemic challenges, such as climate change, pandemics, and supply chain resilience, requires cross-border coordination, reinforcing the continued relevance of global collaboration (Canal Viera et al., 2025; Duong et al., 2025; Ellram and Tate, 2025; Harju et al., 2025; Luo and Xu, 2025).

This shift is increasingly described as a movement from hyper-globalization to what some have termed "slowbalization", a more fragmented, politically influenced, and regionally bounded form of global integration (IMF, 2023). In this new landscape, global supply chains are not dissolving but are being restructured around geo-economic blocs, where trade, investment, and sourcing strategies are increasingly shaped by political alignments and national security concerns.

Yet, while globalization endures, it is being fundamentally redefined by rising risk and the pursuit of resilience, especially in the OSCM context. The past few years have seen a marked shift toward economic nationalism and protectionism, a trend intensified by events such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the U.S.–China trade tensions, Russia's war against Ukraine, and broader geopolitical fragmentation (Bednarski et al., 2025; El Baz et al., 2025; Golgeci et al., 2025; Wieland et al., 2025). Trade barriers have proliferated, with thousands of new tariff measures introduced since 2018 as exemplified by the latest round of tariffs imposed by the U.S. administration in 2025 (Miller et al., 2025). Globally, governments are intervening more heavily in markets, deploying industrial policy,

subsidies, and export controls to safeguard strategic sectors, such as semiconductors, green technologies and critical raw materials (Spring et al., 2017; Shen et al., 2021; Bhamra et al., 2025; Xiong et al., 2025).

For OSCM, this transformation marks a paradigm shift from efficiency to resilience. The dominance of lean, globally dispersed "just-in-time" supply chains is giving way to more robust, diversified "just-in-case" configurations (Choi et al., 2023). Concepts like regionalization, friend-shoring, nearshoring, and de-risking are becoming mainstream strategies, as firms seek to mitigate geopolitical risk and reduce dependencies on politically adversarial regions (Chakkol et al., 2024; Charpin and Cousineau, 2025; Day et al., 2025; Moradlou et al., 2025; Zheng et al., 2025b; Zhu et al., 2025). Strategic decoupling is already underway in sensitive sectors such as defense, chip manufacturing, and utilities (especially energy), while national policies increasingly emphasize sovereignty, self-sufficiency, and security of supply (Bednarski et al., 2025; Golgeci et al., 2025).

These developments present rich opportunities for OSCM research. As globalization slows and is redefined, OSCM scholars are uniquely positioned to interrogate this evolving landscape - not only to explain how firms adapt, but to shape how resilience is designed, governed, and enacted in the global economy. Table 4 presents an overview of potential research questions related to these thematic areas.

Thematic areas	**Potential research questions**
Resilience vs. efficiency trade-offs	♦ How are firms balancing resilience with cost-efficiency in "just-in-case" supply chain configurations? ♦ What are the operational consequences of regionalizing versus globalizing supply networks? ♦ How do risk-aware sourcing strategies alter inventory, lead time, and agility trade-offs? ♦ What new capabilities are needed to orchestrate multi-regional supply chains in a de-globalizing world?
Geopolitics & policy influence	♦ How do trade wars, tariffs, and industrial policy shape sourcing and investment decisions in OSCM? ♦ What role do government subsidies and export controls play in reshaping global supply networks? ♦ How do firms respond operationally to conflicting regulatory requirements across geo-economic blocs? ♦ How does political alignment (e.g., friend-shoring) affect supplier selection and governance models?

Digital & data globalization	♦ How do data flows, digital platforms, and AI redefine global operations under "slowbalization"? ♦ What operational risks and opportunities emerge from digital decoupling (e.g., in US-China tech rivalry)? ♦ How are service operations evolving in globally distributed, digitally mediated environments? ♦ How do remote work and virtual teams affect cross-border operations coordination and resilience?
Strategic planning & structural change	♦ How are global firms reconfiguring their supply chains in response to political fragmentation? ♦ What decision frameworks help evaluate when to decouple, diversify, or nearshore operations? ♦ What role do supply chain design choices play in maintaining competitiveness amid growing protectionism? ♦ How are strategic sectors (e.g., semiconductors, green tech, energy) operationalizing resilience at the global level?

Table 4. Potential research avenues around globalization and trade issues in OSCM (source: authors' own work).

5.2 Sustainability, ESG, and DEI

Thesis 2: Sustainability, ESG, and DEI are continuing, but their trajectory is becoming divided.

Sustainability has become a foundational concern in OSCM, encompassing not only environmental impact, but also social responsibility and DEI (e.g., Shevchenko et al., 2024; Asokan et al., 2025; Kroes et al., 2025; Nakamura et al., 2025; Ratsimandresy and Miemczyk, 2025; Matthews et al., 2025a; Meqdadi and Pagell, 2025). Yet recently, we have observed a growing divergence in how ESG and DEI initiatives are treated across regions – a trend with important implications for OSCM research and practice.

In North America, particularly the US, ESG and DEI initiatives are increasingly subject to political, legal, and cultural backlash. The percentage of S&P 500 firms that link DEI metrics to executive compensation has fallen sharply from 57% in 2023 to 22% in 2025 amid pressure from legislators and activist investors (Reuters, 2025c). Shareholder proposals targeting social and environmental objectives have also lost traction. Between 2021 and 2024, anti-ESG proposals quadrupled among Russell 3000 firms, and early 2025 data show a record low in shareholder support for ESG-related measures (The Guardian, 2025c).

This backlash is reshaping corporate priorities. Legal challenges, political rhetoric, and regulatory uncertainty are prompting some firms to scale back or eliminate DEI programs (Reuters, 2025a), abandon or weaken their net zero commitments (The Guardian, 2025b), and to deprioritize ESG targets in decision-making, also known as "green hushing" (Business Insider,

2024; Guercini et al., 2025). These developments mark a significant shift from the widespread ESG enthusiasm of the early 2020s and raise questions about the future role of sustainability metrics in business performance and governance, at least in certain jurisdictions.

This pullback, however, is not global. In other parts of the world, sustainability, ESG, and DEI are not only holding ground, but they are also gaining strategic importance. In Australia and New Zealand, for instance, investors and firms increasingly frame ESG as a source of competitive advantage, not a compliance burden (The Australian, 2025). Australian and Southeast Asian markets are seeing increased ESG integration in capital allocation, procurement standards, and supply chain design. Asia has emerged as a key player in sustainable finance, with corporate and official sector bond issuance increasing four- and sevenfold respectively from 2015-2019 to 2020-2024. Green bonds dominate this growth, accounting for the majority of sustainable issuance in the region and positioning Asia at the forefront of global sustainability financing efforts (OECD, 2025).

Unclear will be the role of Europe and specifically the European Union (EU) in the coming years. Having been a long-standing leader in due diligence, ESG, and sustainability policies, the recent rollback of major sustainability-related legislations raises concerns about the future trajectory (The Guardian, 2025a). The 2025 'EU Omnibus' initiative – originally intended to simplify and harmonize the ESG regulatory landscape - has sparked concern among policymakers, NGOs, and scholars alike. While it includes a two-year delay in implementation for certain Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) and Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD) requirements, it also opens the door to further scope reductions, lighter reporting obligations, and exemptions for thousands of firms (European Parliament, 2025; Hogan Lovells, 2025). These developments suggest a potential shift from a regulatory to a more market-driven model of sustainability governance, reflecting growing tensions between competitiveness goals and climate ambitions.

Importantly however, many firms themselves have warned against weakening the EU's sustainability framework, citing the need for legal certainty, harmonized standards, and long-term climate alignment. In a public letter in early 2025, over 130 businesses (including Unilever, IKEA, Nestlé, and H&M) urged the EU not to delay or dilute due diligence obligations, arguing that robust sustainability rules are essential for fair competition, risk management, and global supply chain integrity and legitimacy (Business & Human Rights Resource Centre, 2025; Zeitler and Schwarzkopf, 2025). Industry groups have echoed these concerns, emphasizing that sudden reversals or rollbacks may create confusion and undermine investments already made in compliance systems and ESG integration. This corporate pushback reveals that the debate is not

a simple binary of regulation versus business, but a more complex negotiation between short-term flexibility and long-term strategic alignment. At the same time, civil society organizations and European oversight bodies have raised alarms about the weakening of environmental and social safeguards. The EU Ombudswoman launched an official inquiry in mid-2025, citing procedural concerns and insufficient stakeholder engagement in the fast-tracked revisions (Reuters, 2025b). The trajectory of EU policy thus remains contested. On the one hand, some member states and businesses are advocating for greater flexibility; on the other, the European Parliament and regulatory agencies are calling for the preservation of the EU's global leadership in sustainability governance.

This emerging schism in sustainability, ESG, and DEI trajectories creates a fragmented global landscape and presents critical opportunities for OSCM research (Table 5). What is clear is that grand challenges and sustainability issues will prevail, and that joint effort will be needed to solve them. Topics like climate change, carbon reduction, net zero/net negative supply chains (e.g., Matos et al., 2024; Canal Viera et al., 2025; Cole et al., 2025; Ellram and Tate, 2025), modern slavery and labor exploitation in supply chains (e.g., Geng et al., 2022; Marques et al., 2025; Stephens et al., 2025; Yu et al., 2025), and the need for effective regulations, initiatives, and supply chain due diligence (e.g., De Freitas et al., 2025; Matthews et al., 2025b; Zeitler and Schwarzkopf, 2025) will not go away.

Understanding the schism and surrounding dynamics will be essential for developing robust, context-sensitive frameworks that align operational performance with long-term environmental and social value creation.

Thematic areas	**Potential research questions**
Regional divergence, regulatory shifts in governance	♦ What OSCM practices can firms enable to remain consistent in their sustainability commitments across divergent jurisdictions? ♦ What are the long-term implications of a shift from regulation-based to market-driven sustainability governance in certain regions? ♦ How do firms respond to regulatory reversals in sustainability regulations, and what operational risks arise from such shifts? ♦ What governance models enable global supply chains to balance harmonization with local responsiveness in ESG implementation?
Strategy, stakeholder alignment & performance	♦ Why do some firms continue to invest in sustainability and DEI despite political backlash, while others scale back? ♦ How do firms navigate tensions between stakeholders, regulatory compliance, and social responsibility across regions? ♦ What are reputational and financial impacts from various stakeholders when firms "green-hush" or discontinue sustainability

	and DEI initiatives? ♦ How does uncertainty in sustainability regulation affect long-term supply chain planning and investment decisions?
Justice, voice & power in global supply chains	♦ How do rollbacks in sustainability and DEI regulation affect marginalized stakeholders, such as lower-tier suppliers or workers in the Global South? ♦ To what extent do ESG standards empower or exclude specific actors in supply networks? ♦ How do shifts in corporate sustainability and DEI commitments redistribute power among internal and external stakeholders, such as executives, employees, activist investors, regulators, and marginalized communities? ♦ How do powerful multinational firms influence the global trajectory of sustainability and DEI?
Due diligence, supply chain transparency & reporting	♦ How are due diligence practices evolving in response to political rollback and corporate pushback? ♦ What is the role of third-party audits, certifications, and technology in sustaining transparency amid weakening regulation? ♦ What new forms of sustainability reporting or metrics are emerging as firms face increasing "green hushing" and political polarization? ♦ How should ESG performance be measured when firms voluntarily scale back public disclosures?

Table 5. Potential research avenues around sustainability, ESG, and DEI in OSCM (source: authors' own work).

5.3 AI

Thesis 3: AI is reshaping OSCM, but not without creating new risks and tensions.

AI is no longer a mere enabler of operational efficiency; it is emerging as a strategic actor that redefines the boundaries, decision logic, and resilience mechanisms of OSCM (e.g., Dai et al., 2025; Lu et al., 2025; Zheng et al., 2025a). From demand forecasting to capacity planning, from supplier selection to inventory optimization, AI applications are transforming the foundations of operational decision-making across industries (e.g., Fosso Wamba et al., 2021; Helo and Hao, 2022; Sharma et al., 2022; Jazairy et al., 2025). But beyond incremental optimization, we are now witnessing a more structural shift: AI is beginning to reshape how operational systems sense, decide, and adapt - often in ways that displace traditional human judgment and organizational routines. This transformation spans not only goods contexts, but also services contexts (e.g. Spring et al., 2022; Guo et al., 2025), affecting what decisions are made as well as how they are justified and by whom.

The promise of AI-driven OSCM is compelling: faster reaction times, better resource allocation, improved visibility across supply chains, and more resilient production and service

systems (Belhadi et al., 2024; Culot et al., 2024). Yet, this transformation comes with a less discussed but equally important counterpoint: AI systems are not neutral tools, but embedded infrastructures that create new forms of dependency, opacity, and concentration of control (Rana et al., 2022).

For example, the increasing reliance on proprietary AI models and cloud-based platforms controlled by a handful of large tech providers is raising concerns about vendor lock-in and erosion of internal decision autonomy (Hao and Demir, 2025). In parallel, the shift toward algorithmic decision-making, especially in sourcing, pricing, and risk prioritization, has introduced a new layer of algorithmic opacity, where neither managers nor regulators may fully understand how or why certain decisions are made, and where managers might be better or worse off making algorithms transparent to the users they affect (Wang et al., 2023). This is particularly salient in global supply networks, where AI-driven decisions may inadvertently reinforce existing inequalities, for example, by de-prioritizing high-risk suppliers in low-income countries or in service operations, where customer-facing decisions are increasingly governed by opaque optimization logics (Cameron and Rahman, 2021).

Moreover, cybersecurity has emerged as a major concern in contemporary supply chain management, as increasingly interconnected digital systems expose organizations to multifaceted and evolving threats (Sodhi et al., 2025; Zheng et al., 2025a). Vulnerabilities within third-party vendors, software dependencies, and data exchange protocols often provide entry points for malicious actors, leading to operational disruptions and breaches of sensitive information (Kumar and Mallipeddi, 2022; Melnyk et al., 2022). It is important to note that the relationship between AI and cybercrime operates in multiple directions—AI can be exploited to commit, but also to prevent, or respond to cyberattacks. Hence, addressing these risks calls for a holistic cybersecurity strategy encompassing proactive risk assessment, continuous system monitoring, and collaborative governance across the entire supply chain network.

The implication for OSCM is twofold. First, the governance of AI itself, including explainability, fairness, and accountability, must now be treated as an operational and supply chain design variable. Second, the field needs to move beyond the narrative of AI as a purely performance-enhancing tool and engage more critically with the organizational, ethical, and structural implications of algorithmic operations (De-Arteaga et al., 2022). This is not to reject AI (or any other technology), but to recognize that its deployment is not value-neutral and requires deliberate alignment with broader strategic, human, and societal goals.

The growing infusion of AI into OSCM represents more than a technological shift. It marks a new era of algorithmic intermediation, where optimization is inseparable from questions of

transparency, responsibility, and strategic dependence. The task ahead is not just to harness AI, but to shape it before it shapes OSCM in ways that become irreversible. For OSCM research, this opens up important new directions (Table 6).

Thematic areas	Potential research questions
Governance, ethics & accountability	♦ How can responsibility for AI-driven decisions in operations be distributed across human and machine agents? ♦ What governance structures are effective for ensuring ethical alignment of AI decisions in service operations? ♦ How should organizations audit algorithmic decisions in complex OSCM settings? ♦ Do AI systems reinforce existing supply chain inequalities, for example by deprioritizing smaller, or lower-income, suppliers? ♦ How does algorithmic decision-making influence bargaining power across supply chain tiers? ♦ What are the risks of marginalization when service workers, or local suppliers, are excluded from AI feedback loops?
Algorithmic design & decision-making	♦ How can AI models in OSCM be designed to balance predictive accuracy with explainability for operational decision-makers? ♦ What trade-offs emerge when using centralized vs. federated AI architectures in global supply chains? ♦ To what extent does real-time threat intelligence improve incident response and risk mitigation across supply chain networks? ♦ In what ways can AI systems integrate tacit operational knowledge, and where do they fall short?
Disruption, resilience & adaptability	♦ How do AI-driven supply chains perform under systemic disruptions (e.g., pandemics, geopolitical shocks) compared to human-led systems? ♦ What are the most effective cybersecurity frameworks for mitigating risks in digitally integrated supply chains? ♦ Can AI models adapt fast enough to "unknown unknowns", or do they amplify brittleness in global operations? ♦ What role can hybrid human-AI teams play in enhancing operational resilience? ♦ How do cybersecurity vulnerabilities in third-party suppliers impact the overall resilience of global supply chains?
Metrics, performance & learning	♦ How should we redefine KPIs in AI-augmented operations and supply chains? ♦ How do learning systems affect performance trade-offs in just-in-time versus just-in-case strategies? ♦ What biases or blind spots emerge in AI performance when trained on legacy operational data? ♦ What capabilities must operations managers develop to supervise effectively AI-driven systems? ♦ How does AI adoption shift learning dynamics in operations teams? ♦ What forms of resistance or adaptation emerge in frontline service operations when AI systems are deployed?

Table 6. Potential research avenues around AI in OSCM (source: authors' own work).

6. Continuing the journey, embracing the change

As a leading empirical journal in OSCM, we are dedicated to high-quality, rigorous, and impactful manuscripts and a developmental review process that benefit our field and community. We prioritize a culture of development, inclusion, and ethical standards, fostering collaboration and shared growth for OSCM and beyond. We encourage you to engage with us, IJOPM, and the broader OSCM community, working together to contribute to the advancement of our body of knowledge as well as practical, policy, and societal insights that shape OSCM practices. Meet us at conferences, webinars, and workshops to discuss ideas, contribute to initiatives, and build and strengthen connections. The future of OSCM lies with our authors, reviewers, and contributors. Your efforts in reviewing, publishing, and driving wider activities are vital investments that shape our collective knowledge, elevate scholarship, and drive practice, policy, and society forward. We look forward to our collaborations along our IJOPM journey.

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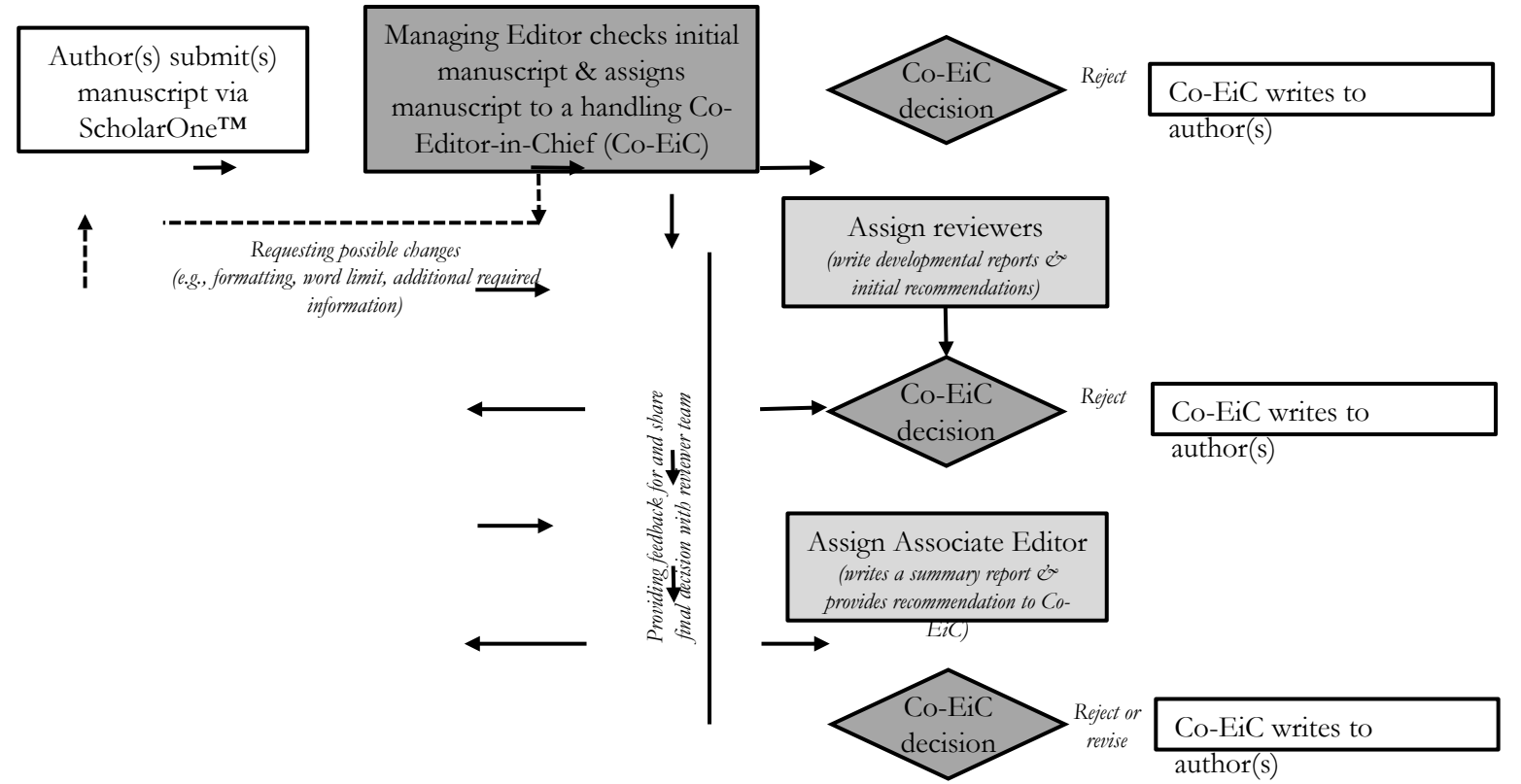
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