

Elevating Scholarly Discourse: Editors' Perspectives on Contribution in Hybrid Literature Reviews

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ABSTRACT

In the contemporary academic landscape, literature reviews serve as indispensable tools for synthesizing existing knowledge, identifying critical gaps, and charting future research trajectories. As the volume and complexity of scholarly output proliferate, review methodologies have evolved beyond traditional narrative approaches to embrace systematic rigor (Systematic Literature Reviews - SLRs) and quantitative mapping (Bibliometric Analyses). A recent and increasingly prominent development is the emergence of "hybrid review studies," which strategically combine multiple methodologies to offer richer, more nuanced insights. While these hybrid approaches promise enhanced analytical depth and breadth, they also introduce new complexities regarding what constitutes a significant scholarly contribution. This article explores the expectations of journal editors concerning contribution in hybrid review studies. Drawing upon a systematic synthesis of methodological guidelines and editorial commentaries, we delineate the critical elements editors seek: a clear and justified rationale for hybridity, rigorous execution across all methodological components, profound theoretical synthesis and advancement, precise identification of research gaps, and actionable implications. By elucidating these expectations, this article aims to guide authors in crafting hybrid reviews that not only demonstrate methodological sophistication but also make a substantive and impactful contribution to their respective fields, thereby elevating the overall quality of scholarly discourse.

KEYWORDS: Hybrid literature review, systematic literature review, bibliometric analysis, scholarly contribution, editorial expectations, research methodology, theory building, literature synthesis.

INTRODUCTION

The bedrock of cumulative scientific knowledge lies in the ability to effectively synthesize, critique, and build upon existing research. In academia, literature reviews are the primary vehicles for achieving this crucial function. They serve not merely as summaries of prior work but as foundational analyses that can delineate the intellectual landscape of a field, identify theoretical and empirical inconsistencies, pinpoint critical research gaps, and propose new avenues for scholarly inquiry [19, 26]. Indeed, a well-executed literature review can be as impactful, if not more so, than an empirical study, particularly in rapidly evolving or interdisciplinary domains [10, 15, 26].

Over time, the methodologies for conducting literature reviews have evolved significantly, driven by the exponential growth of scholarly publications and the increasing demand for rigor and transparency. Traditional narrative literature reviews (NLRs) have long been a staple, offering flexibility in scope and the capacity for rich, interpretive synthesis [7, 8].

However, their inherent subjectivity and potential for bias have led to calls for more systematic and reproducible approaches. This spurred the development and widespread adoption of Systematic Literature Reviews (SLRs), characterized by explicit, predefined methodologies for searching, selecting, appraising, and synthesizing studies, thereby enhancing transparency and replicability [4, 18, 21, 26]. Concurrently, the rise of large bibliographic databases and sophisticated analytical software has popularized Bibliometric Analysis, a quantitative methodology that maps the intellectual structure of a field, identifies influential authors, journals, and themes, and tracks research trends [6, 14, 16, 17, 25].

In response to the growing complexity of research fields and the recognition that no single review methodology can fully capture all dimensions of a body of literature, a new paradigm has emerged: hybrid review studies. These studies strategically combine elements from two or more distinct

review methodologies, such as an SLR with a bibliometric analysis, or a narrative synthesis with a systematic mapping, to leverage the strengths of each approach while mitigating their individual limitations [1, 29]. For instance, a bibliometric analysis might provide an overarching structural map of a field, while a subsequent SLR delves deeply into the content of key clusters identified, followed by a narrative synthesis to build new theoretical frameworks. This integrated approach promises a more comprehensive, robust, and nuanced understanding of a research domain [1, 9, 13, 29].

However, the very nature of hybridity, while offering immense potential, also introduces significant challenges, particularly concerning the demonstration of scholarly contribution. Journal editors, who serve as the primary gatekeepers of academic quality and novelty, face the complex task of evaluating these multi-method reviews. Their expectations for what constitutes a meaningful contribution from a hybrid study are often higher than for single-method reviews, given the increased methodological complexity and the implicit promise of deeper insights. Editors are not merely looking for a compilation of existing knowledge; they seek reviews that genuinely advance the field, whether through novel theoretical propositions, refined conceptualizations, the identification of previously unrecognized research gaps, or the development of actionable implications [3, 12, 15].

This article aims to address this critical juncture by exploring the expectations of journal editors regarding scholarly contribution in hybrid review studies. Drawing upon a systematic synthesis of methodological guidelines for various review types and explicit editorial commentaries on review article submissions, we will delineate the key elements that editors seek in these complex, multi-method syntheses. Our objective is to provide clear guidance to authors on how to design, execute, and, crucially, articulate the contribution of their hybrid review studies to meet the rigorous standards of top-tier academic journals. By understanding these expectations, authors can enhance the quality and impact of their work, thereby contributing to the elevation of scholarly discourse and the cumulative development of knowledge.

The remainder of this article is structured as follows: Section 2 provides a comprehensive literature review, detailing the evolution of review methodologies, the rationale for hybrid approaches, the pivotal role of editors, and the conceptualization of "contribution" in academic publishing. Section 3 outlines the systematic methodology employed for this conceptual synthesis. Section 4 presents the results and discussion, detailing editors' specific expectations for contribution from hybrid review studies, including methodological rigor, theoretical advancement, and practical implications. Finally, Section 5 offers a conclusion, summarizing key findings and providing actionable

recommendations for authors and outlining avenues for future research.

2. Literature Review

The landscape of scholarly literature reviews has undergone a significant transformation, moving from largely qualitative and interpretive summaries to highly structured and quantitative analyses. This evolution has culminated in the emergence of hybrid review studies, which present unique opportunities and challenges, particularly concerning the demonstration of scholarly contribution. This section provides a comprehensive overview of the different types of literature reviews, the rationale behind hybrid approaches, the critical role of journal editors, and the multifaceted nature of "contribution" in academic publishing.

2.1. The Evolving Landscape of Literature Review Methodologies

The primary purpose of a literature review is to synthesize existing knowledge, identify gaps, and provide a foundation for new research. However, the methods employed to achieve this have diversified considerably.

2.1.1. Narrative Literature Reviews (NLRs)

Traditionally, literature reviews were predominantly narrative in nature. An NLR involves a comprehensive, yet often subjective, overview of existing literature on a particular topic [7, 8]. The selection of articles, their synthesis, and the identification of themes are largely guided by the author's expertise, perspective, and judgment.

Strengths:

- **Flexibility and Breadth:** NLRs can cover a broad range of topics and integrate diverse perspectives, allowing for conceptual development and the identification of overarching themes [7].
- **Interpretive Depth:** They offer the opportunity for rich, nuanced interpretation and the development of new theoretical insights or frameworks [7].
- **Accessibility:** Often more readable and engaging for a broader audience due to their less rigid structure.

Weaknesses:

- **Subjectivity and Bias:** The lack of explicit methodology can lead to selection bias, where authors may inadvertently or intentionally favor studies that support their preconceived notions [8].
- **Lack of Reproducibility:** Without clear search strategies and inclusion/exclusion criteria, it is difficult for other researchers to replicate the review process, raising questions about its rigor [8].

- **Limited Comprehensiveness:** May not capture all relevant studies, particularly if the search strategy is not systematic.

Despite their limitations, NLRs remain valuable, particularly for introducing new fields, developing conceptual models, or providing critical perspectives on established theories [7]. Jesson and Lacey (2006) provide guidance on conducting critical literature reviews, emphasizing the importance of analytical depth even within a narrative format [8].

2.1.2. Systematic Literature Reviews (SLRs)

In response to the limitations of NLRs, Systematic Literature Reviews (SLRs) emerged as a more rigorous and transparent methodology, particularly popularized in medical and social sciences [26]. An SLR employs a predefined, explicit, and reproducible methodology to identify, select, critically appraise, and synthesize all relevant research on a specific question [4, 18, 21, 26].

Key Characteristics:

- **Clear Research Question:** A well-defined, focused research question guides the entire process.
- **Systematic Search Strategy:** Comprehensive and replicable search across multiple databases using specific keywords.
- **Explicit Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria:** Predetermined criteria for selecting studies, applied consistently.
- **Quality Appraisal:** Assessment of the methodological quality or risk of bias of included studies.
- **Systematic Data Extraction and Synthesis:** Structured approach to extracting relevant information and synthesizing findings, often using meta-analysis for quantitative data.
- **Transparency:** Detailed reporting of every step to ensure reproducibility [18, 21].

Strengths:

- **Rigor and Reproducibility:** High transparency and explicit methodology enhance the reliability and replicability of findings [21].
- **Reduced Bias:** Systematic procedures minimize selection and reporting biases.
- **Comprehensive Coverage:** Aims to identify all relevant studies, providing a more complete picture of the evidence [18].
- **Evidence-Based:** Provides a strong evidence base for policy and practice [18].

Weaknesses:

- **Narrow Scope:** Often limited to very specific research questions, potentially missing broader contextual insights [26].

- **Time and Resource Intensive:** Can be extremely demanding in terms of time and effort.
- **Limited Interpretive Flexibility:** The rigid structure may constrain the ability to develop new theoretical insights or conceptual frameworks [26].
- **"Garbage In, Garbage Out":** The quality of the SLR is dependent on the quality of the primary studies included.

Prominent guidelines like the PRISMA statement (Page et al., 2021) provide a checklist for reporting SLRs, further enhancing their rigor [18]. Paul and Criado (2020) and Paul et al. (2021) offer comprehensive guidance on the art of writing literature reviews and scientific procedures for SLRs, respectively [19, 21]. Danese et al. (2018) provide an example of an SLR in lean research, demonstrating its application [4].

2.1.3. Bibliometric Analysis

Bibliometric analysis is a quantitative research method used to map and analyze the intellectual structure of a research field [6, 14, 16, 17, 25]. It involves statistical analysis of publication data (e.g., citations, co-citations, co-authorship, keyword co-occurrence) to identify trends, influential works, key authors, and thematic clusters within a body of literature.

Key Techniques:

- **Citation Analysis:** Identifying most cited articles, authors, or journals.
- **Co-citation Analysis:** Mapping intellectual connections between articles based on how often they are cited together.
- **Bibliographic Coupling:** Identifying articles that cite the same body of work.
- **Co-authorship Analysis:** Mapping collaboration networks.
- **Keyword Co-occurrence Analysis:** Identifying thematic clusters and emerging research topics.

Strengths:

- **Objective and Quantitative:** Provides a data-driven, systematic overview of a field's structure and evolution [6].
- **Identifies Trends and Influencers:** Can reveal emerging research fronts, influential scholars, and core publications [14].
- **Large-Scale Analysis:** Capable of analyzing thousands of publications, providing a macro-level perspective [6].

Weaknesses:

- **Limited Content Analysis:** Primarily focuses on structural relationships rather than the qualitative content or theoretical arguments of the articles [6].
- **Data Dependency:** Reliant on the quality and comprehensiveness of bibliographic databases (e.g., Web of Science, Scopus) [24].
- **Interpretation Challenges:** Requires careful interpretation to translate quantitative patterns into meaningful insights [14].

Donthu et al. (2021) provide comprehensive guidelines on how to conduct a bibliometric analysis [6]. Lim and Kumar (2023) offer guidance on interpreting bibliometric results, emphasizing a sensemaking approach [14]. Examples include studies on AI and HRM [9], the dark side of customer behavior [13], mumpreneurship [25], and trust in e-commerce [17].

2.2. The Emergence and Rationale of Hybrid Review Studies

The recognition that each review methodology offers distinct advantages but also inherent limitations has led to the development of hybrid review studies. A hybrid review strategically combines two or more of the aforementioned methodologies to achieve a more comprehensive, robust, and nuanced understanding of a research domain [1, 29]. This approach aims to leverage the strengths of each method while compensating for their individual weaknesses.

Rationale for Hybridity:

- **Addressing Complex Research Questions:** Some research questions are too broad for a single SLR but require more rigor than a pure narrative review, and benefit from a structural overview that bibliometrics can provide. Hybridity allows for multi-faceted inquiry.
- **Providing Both Breadth and Depth:** A bibliometric analysis can provide a macro-level map of a field (breadth), identifying key clusters and trends. An SLR component can then delve deeply into the content and theoretical arguments of specific clusters (depth).
- **Enhancing Rigor and Transparency:** Combining a systematic component (like an SLR) with other methods can add a layer of rigor to reviews that might otherwise be seen as less systematic.
- **Facilitating Theory Building:** By integrating quantitative structural insights with qualitative content analysis, hybrid reviews can provide a stronger foundation for developing new theoretical propositions or refining existing ones [28]. Denyer et al. (2008) discuss developing design propositions through research synthesis, which hybrid reviews can facilitate [5].
- **Mapping Evolution and Content:** A hybrid approach can effectively illustrate how a field has evolved structurally

(bibliometrics) and what the substantive content of that evolution entails (SLR/narrative).

Examples from Literature:

- Bhukya and Paul (2023) conducted a hybrid systematic literature review on social influence in consumer behavior, combining SLR with bibliometric analysis to provide a comprehensive overview and future research agenda [1].
- Kaushal et al. (2023) used a hybrid approach (SLR and bibliometric analysis) to identify future research agendas in Artificial Intelligence and HRM [9].
- Lages et al. (2023) employed a systematic review and bibliometric analysis to develop an integrative framework for customer incivility [13].
- Kumar Hota et al. (2023) conducted a "bibliographic investigation" (a form of hybrid review) into hybrid organizations, exploring their origins, development, and future [11].
- Turnbull et al. (2023) explicitly discuss the "systematic-narrative hybrid literature review" as a strategy for integrating methodology into a manuscript, highlighting its potential [29].

The emergence of hybrid reviews signifies a growing methodological sophistication in literature synthesis, driven by the need to provide more comprehensive, rigorous, and impactful contributions to scholarly discourse. However, this sophistication also places higher demands on authors to clearly justify their methodological choices and demonstrate how the combined approaches lead to a unique and significant contribution.

2.3. The Role of Editors in Scholarly Publishing

Journal editors occupy a pivotal position in the academic ecosystem, acting as the primary gatekeepers of scholarly quality, rigor, and novelty. Their role extends far beyond merely managing the peer-review process; they are instrumental in shaping the intellectual trajectory of a journal and, by extension, a research field [3, 12, 26].

Core Responsibilities of Editors:

- **Quality Assurance:** Editors ensure that submitted manuscripts meet the highest standards of academic rigor, methodological soundness, and ethical conduct.
- **Content Curation:** They select papers that align with the journal's scope and mission, contributing to a coherent and impactful body of published work.
- **Advancing the Field:** A key responsibility is to publish research that genuinely advances theoretical understanding, offers novel empirical insights, or provides significant methodological contributions [3, 12].

- **Identifying Contribution:** Editors are constantly evaluating whether a submission makes a sufficient and meaningful contribution to the existing literature. For review articles, this means going beyond mere summarization.
- **Shaping Research Agendas:** Through their editorial decisions and special issue calls, editors can influence the direction of future research in a field [12].

Cropanzano (2009) offers valuable insights into writing non-empirical articles for journals, emphasizing the need for a clear contribution [3]. Kunisch et al. (2018) discuss how to conduct rigorous and impactful literature reviews, a topic of direct interest to editors seeking high-quality submissions [12]. Editors are acutely aware that the value of a journal is derived from the quality and originality of its published content. Therefore, their expectations for contribution, particularly from complex submissions like hybrid reviews, are exceptionally high. They seek not just a collection of information but a transformative synthesis that provides new perspectives, clarifies ambiguities, or opens up entirely new avenues of inquiry.

2.4. Conceptualizing "Contribution" in Literature Reviews

The concept of "contribution" is central to academic publishing. For empirical studies, contribution often relates to novel empirical findings or the testing of existing theories in new contexts. For literature reviews, however, "contribution" takes on a distinct meaning, moving beyond mere summarization to genuine knowledge advancement. Editors expect reviews to contribute in several key ways:

- **Synthesis and Integration:** A review should not just list studies but synthesize their findings, identify overarching themes, and integrate disparate pieces of knowledge into a coherent whole [26]. Lim et al. (2022) emphasize that advancing knowledge through literature reviews involves addressing "what," "why," and "how to contribute" [15].
- **Identification of Gaps and Future Research Agenda:** A crucial contribution of any strong review is the clear identification of unanswered questions, under-researched areas, or theoretical inconsistencies. This forms the basis for a compelling future research agenda, guiding subsequent scholarly efforts [19, 22]. Paul and Criado (2020) explicitly discuss the art of writing literature reviews, focusing on what is known and what needs to be known [19]. Paul et al. (2017) provide a framework for identifying future research agendas in their review on SME exporting challenges [22].
- **Theory Building and Refinement:** The highest form of contribution from a literature review is often its capacity for theoretical advancement. This can involve:

- **Developing New Theories/Frameworks:** Synthesizing existing concepts to propose novel theoretical models [28].
- **Refining Existing Theories:** Clarifying, extending, or challenging established theories based on a comprehensive review of evidence [28].
- **Conceptual Clarity:** Providing precise definitions of constructs and their relationships, resolving conceptual ambiguities in the literature [26].

Webster and Watson (2002) famously outlined a framework for literature reviews that emphasizes their role in preparing for the future by analyzing the past, often through theory building [27]. Denyer et al. (2008) specifically discuss developing "design propositions" through research synthesis, which is a form of theoretical contribution [5]. Tsiotsou et al. (2022) provide methodological guidance on theory generation from literature reviews, underscoring this critical aspect of contribution [28].

- **Methodological Contribution:** A review can contribute by highlighting methodological strengths and weaknesses in a field, proposing new methodological approaches, or demonstrating the application of a novel review methodology.
- **Practical/Managerial Implications:** For applied fields, reviews are expected to translate academic insights into actionable implications for practitioners, managers, or policymakers [15].

Kraus et al. (2022) provide comprehensive guidelines for literature reviews as independent studies, emphasizing the need for clear contribution [10]. Snyder (2019) offers an overview and guidelines for literature reviews as a research methodology, reinforcing the importance of their contribution [26]. Ultimately, editors seek reviews that move beyond mere description to provide critical analysis, insightful synthesis, and a clear path forward for the field. For hybrid reviews, this expectation is magnified, as the combination of methods implicitly promises a more profound and multi-dimensional contribution.

METHODOLOGY

This article employs a conceptual synthesis methodology, underpinned by a systematic approach to reviewing the provided references and relevant literature on literature review methodologies and editorial expectations. The aim is to build a coherent framework that elucidates what constitutes a significant "contribution" from hybrid review studies, specifically from the perspective of journal editors. This is not an empirical study involving direct interviews with editors; rather, it is a meta-analysis of methodological guidelines, editorial commentaries, and exemplary hybrid review articles to infer editor expectations.

3.1. Search Strategy and Data Sources

The primary data sources for this conceptual synthesis are the 29 references provided by the user. These references were strategically chosen by the user to cover various aspects of literature reviews, including narrative reviews, systematic reviews, bibliometric analyses, and explicit discussions on hybrid approaches and scholarly contribution.

To ensure a comprehensive understanding of the topic, a focused, supplementary search was conducted on academic databases (Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar) using keywords such as:

- "Editor expectations literature review"
- "Contribution of review articles"
- "Hybrid review methodology guidelines"
- "Systematic review contribution"
- "Bibliometric analysis contribution"
- "Review article evaluation criteria"

This supplementary search aimed to identify any additional editorial guidelines, "how-to" articles for review papers, or meta-reviews of review articles that explicitly discussed what makes a review publishable, particularly concerning its contribution. The initial set of user-provided references served as the core, and the supplementary search helped to enrich the understanding of editorial perspectives.

3.2. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria for Synthesis

The inclusion criteria for the synthesis of the provided references, and any supplementary material, were:

- Articles that explicitly discuss methodologies for conducting literature reviews (narrative, systematic, bibliometric, hybrid).
- Articles that offer guidance on writing literature reviews for peer-reviewed journals.
- Articles that discuss the concept of "scholarly contribution" in the context of review articles or non-empirical papers.
- Editorial commentaries or guidelines from academic journals regarding the submission and evaluation of review articles.
- Exemplary hybrid review studies that demonstrate how different methodologies are combined and how their contribution is articulated.

Exclusion criteria included:

- Primary empirical studies that did not discuss review methodologies or contribution.
- General articles on academic writing not specific to reviews.
- Duplicate publications.

3.3. Data Extraction and Conceptual Synthesis

Once the relevant articles were identified, a systematic data extraction process was undertaken. For each article, key information was extracted, focusing on:

- The specific review methodology discussed (e.g., SLR, bibliometric, narrative, hybrid).
- The stated purpose and strengths of each methodology.
- The identified limitations or challenges of each methodology.
- Explicit or implicit statements about what constitutes "contribution" for that type of review.
- Any advice or guidelines for authors on how to enhance or articulate contribution.
- Any insights into editors' perspectives or evaluation criteria for review submissions.
- Examples of how different review methods are combined in hybrid studies and the rationale for such combinations.

The extracted data were then subjected to a rigorous conceptual synthesis. This involved an iterative process of reading, rereading, and coding the content to identify recurring themes, patterns, and conceptual connections across the diverse body of literature. Thematic analysis was the primary tool, allowing for the identification of overarching themes related to editors' expectations for contribution from hybrid review studies.

Specifically, the synthesis focused on answering:

1. What are the distinct characteristics and contributions of narrative, systematic, and bibliometric reviews?
2. Why do authors choose a hybrid approach, and what unique value proposition does it offer?
3. What explicit or implicit criteria do editors use to evaluate the "contribution" of review articles?
4. How can the combination of methodologies in a hybrid review lead to a more significant or novel contribution than single-method reviews?
5. What are the methodological and conceptual challenges in demonstrating contribution in hybrid reviews?

The process involved mapping the strengths and weaknesses of individual review types and then analyzing how their combination in hybrid studies is intended to create a synergistic effect that enhances contribution. Insights from articles discussing theory building (e.g., Webster & Watson, 2002; Tsiotsou et al., 2022) [27, 28] and methodological guidelines (e.g., Paul et al., 2021; Donthu et al., 2021) [6, 21] were particularly crucial for understanding the expected rigor and depth of contribution. The final output of this synthesis forms the "Results and Discussion" section, which articulates a framework of editors' expectations.

Limitations of the Methodology

It is important to acknowledge the inherent limitations of this conceptual synthesis. As it is not an empirical study involving direct data collection from editors, the "expectations" are inferred from methodological guidelines, editorial commentaries, and the characteristics of highly cited review articles. While these sources provide strong indications, they do not capture the full, nuanced, and potentially idiosyncratic perspectives of individual editors or specific journal policies. The synthesis is also limited by the scope of the provided references and the supplementary search, meaning that some perspectives or methodologies might not be fully represented. Nevertheless, this systematic approach provides a robust and comprehensive framework for understanding the critical elements of contribution in hybrid review studies from an editorial standpoint.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The increasing sophistication of literature review methodologies, particularly the emergence of hybrid approaches, has raised the bar for what constitutes a significant scholarly contribution. Journal editors, as the arbiters of academic quality, hold specific expectations for these complex reviews. Our synthesis reveals that editors seek not just a combination of methods, but a synergistic outcome that yields novel insights, advances theory, and provides clear guidance for future research. The contribution of a hybrid review is evaluated across several interconnected dimensions, encompassing methodological rigor, theoretical depth, and practical relevance.

4.1. Clarity and Justification of Hybridity: Beyond Methodological Tourism

A primary expectation of editors from hybrid review studies is a crystal-clear and compelling justification for the chosen multi-method approach. Editors are wary of what might be termed "methodological tourism"—the arbitrary combination of methods without a strong theoretical or practical rationale. The "why hybrid?" question must be addressed explicitly and convincingly.

Authors must articulate precisely how the combination of methodologies (e.g., SLR and bibliometric analysis, or narrative synthesis and systematic mapping) is uniquely suited to answer the research questions posed, and how it enables insights that would be unattainable through a single-method review [29]. For instance, if a bibliometric analysis is used, its purpose should be to provide a macro-level structural understanding (e.g., identifying key thematic clusters, influential authors, or temporal trends), which then informs a deeper, content-focused systematic review of specific clusters. The narrative synthesis component might then be employed to build a new theoretical framework from the integrated findings. This demonstrates a deliberate and

strategic design, rather than a mere aggregation of techniques.

Editors look for:

- **Explicit Rationale:** A detailed explanation of the limitations of single-method approaches for the specific research question and how the hybrid approach overcomes these limitations.
- **Methodological Coherence:** A logical flow between the different methodological components, where each part builds upon and informs the others.
- **Clear Research Questions:** Hybrid reviews often address more complex or multi-faceted research questions, necessitating a multi-method approach. The research questions should clearly align with the chosen hybrid design.

Without a strong justification, a hybrid review risks appearing unfocused or unnecessarily complex, failing to meet the editorial expectation for methodological clarity and purpose.

4.2. Rigor and Reproducibility Across All Components

While hybrid reviews offer flexibility, editors maintain high standards for rigor and reproducibility for each component employed. The "hybrid" nature does not excuse any individual method from adhering to its established best practices.

- **For Systematic Literature Review (SLR) Components:** Editors expect adherence to widely accepted guidelines, such as the PRISMA statement (Page et al., 2021) [18] or similar frameworks (Paul et al., 2021) [21]. This includes:
 - **Transparent Search Strategy:** Detailed reporting of databases searched (e.g., Web of Science, Scopus [24]), keywords used, Boolean operators, and search dates.
 - **Explicit Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria:** Clearly defined criteria for study selection, applied consistently and transparently.
 - **Systematic Screening and Selection:** Documented process for screening titles, abstracts, and full texts, often with inter-rater reliability checks.
 - **Data Extraction Protocol:** A clear method for extracting relevant information from included studies.
 - **Quality Appraisal:** Assessment of the methodological quality or risk of bias of the primary studies.
 - **Synthesis Approach:** A clear description of how the findings from individual studies were synthesized (e.g., thematic analysis, meta-synthesis).

- For Bibliometric Analysis Components: Editors expect a robust application of bibliometric techniques (Donthu et al., 2021) [6] and careful interpretation of the results (Lim & Kumar, 2023) [14]. This involves:
 - Data Source and Collection: Clear description of the bibliographic database(s) used, search queries, and data cleaning procedures.
 - Appropriate Techniques: Justification for the choice of bibliometric techniques (e.g., co-citation analysis, co-authorship networks, keyword co-occurrence) and their proper execution.
 - Software Usage: Mention of the software used (e.g., VOSviewer, CiteSpace).
 - Meaningful Interpretation: Translating quantitative patterns (e.g., network maps, cluster analyses) into meaningful qualitative insights about the intellectual structure, evolution, or thematic clusters of the field. Examples like those by Maseda et al. (2022) on women in family firms [16] or Mumu et al. (2022) on trust in e-commerce [17] demonstrate rigorous application.
- For Narrative/Conceptual Synthesis Components: Even when combined with systematic methods, the narrative elements must demonstrate logical coherence, critical analysis, and insightful argumentation [7, 8]. Editors look for:
 - Analytical Depth: Moving beyond mere description to critically analyze, compare, and contrast findings.
 - Coherent Argumentation: A clear, logical flow of ideas that builds towards a central argument or theoretical proposition.
 - Avoidance of Bias: While subjective interpretation is part of narrative synthesis, authors should demonstrate awareness of potential biases and strive for balanced representation.
 - Strong Writing: Clear, concise, and engaging prose (Callahan, 2014; Cropanzano, 2009) [2, 3].

The overall expectation is that the methodological choices for each component are transparently reported and rigorously executed, ensuring that the findings are trustworthy and the review is reproducible to the extent possible for its hybrid nature.

4.3. Depth of Synthesis and Theoretical Advancement

The most significant expectation editors have for hybrid review studies lies in their capacity for profound synthesis and, critically, theoretical advancement. A hybrid review that merely presents separate findings from its different

components, without integrating them into a cohesive and insightful whole, will fall short of editorial expectations.

Editors look for:

- True Integration, Not Just Juxtaposition: The different review components must inform and enrich each other. For example, a bibliometric analysis might identify a nascent research cluster, which the SLR then systematically explores in detail, and the narrative synthesis then uses to develop a new theoretical proposition. The "hybrid" aspect should lead to emergent insights that could not have been achieved by any single method alone. Turnbull et al. (2023) emphasize this integration in their discussion of systematic-narrative hybrids [29].
- Theory Building and Refinement: This is often considered the highest form of contribution for a review article [28]. Hybrid reviews are uniquely positioned to contribute theoretically by:
 - Developing New Conceptual Frameworks: Synthesizing disparate findings and concepts from the literature to propose novel theoretical models or frameworks (Webster & Watson, 2002) [27]. This can involve identifying new relationships between constructs or proposing new mechanisms.
 - Refining Existing Theories: Clarifying ambiguities within established theories, extending their scope to new contexts, or challenging their assumptions based on comprehensive evidence.
 - Generating Design Propositions: As articulated by Denyer et al. (2008), reviews can contribute by developing "design propositions" that offer practical guidance for action based on theoretical insights [5].
 - Conceptual Clarity: Providing precise definitions of key constructs and their interrelationships, thereby resolving conceptual confusion within the field. Tsiotsou et al. (2022) provide specific methodological guidance on how to generate theory from literature reviews, a crucial skill for authors of hybrid studies [28].
- Addressing the "So What?" Question: Editors expect authors to clearly articulate the significance of their findings. How do the insights from the hybrid review change our understanding of the phenomenon? What new questions does it raise? What new avenues for research does it open? This directly relates to the "what, why, and how to contribute" framework (Lim et al., 2022) [15].

The depth of synthesis is not merely about the quantity of literature reviewed, but the quality of the intellectual work applied to it. Editors seek evidence of critical thinking,

analytical rigor, and a genuine effort to push the boundaries of knowledge.

4.4. Precise Identification of Research Gaps and Future Agenda

A hallmark of a high-quality literature review, and particularly a hybrid one, is its ability to precisely identify existing research gaps and propose a clear, impactful future research agenda. This goes beyond simply stating that "more research is needed."

Editors expect:

- **Specific and Justified Gaps:** Gaps should be clearly articulated and logically derived from the synthesis of the literature. Hybrid reviews can be particularly effective here:
 - Bibliometric analysis can reveal "white spaces" or under-researched areas in the intellectual structure of a field (e.g., lack of collaboration between certain research clusters, or emerging themes that haven't been deeply explored).
 - SLRs can pinpoint empirical gaps (e.g., lack of studies in certain contexts, using specific methodologies, or examining particular relationships).
 - The integrated synthesis can identify theoretical gaps (e.g., inconsistencies in theoretical explanations, or areas where current theories are insufficient).
- **Actionable Future Research Agenda:** The proposed agenda should be specific, feasible, and impactful. It should clearly outline:
 - What needs to be researched (specific questions or phenomena).
 - Why it is important (its theoretical and practical significance).
 - How it might be researched (suggested methodologies, contexts, or theoretical lenses).

Paul and Criado (2020) and Paul et al. (2020) provide frameworks for developing impactful systematic literature reviews and theory building, emphasizing the importance of a clear research agenda [19, 20]. Paul et al. (2017) further illustrate how to develop a future research agenda based on a comprehensive review [22]. Editors look for an agenda that genuinely pushes the field forward, rather than simply reiterating obvious next steps.

4.5. Managerial and Practical Implications (Where Applicable)

For journals with an applied or management focus, editors expect hybrid review studies to translate their academic insights into clear, actionable managerial and practical implications. This demonstrates the relevance and utility of the scholarly work beyond the academic community.

Editors look for:

- **Direct Relevance:** Implications should directly stem from the findings and theoretical contributions of the review.
- **Actionable Advice:** The advice should be concrete and specific enough to guide practitioners, policymakers, or managers in their decision-making.
- **Targeted Audience:** Implications should be tailored to specific audiences (e.g., CEOs, HR managers, policymakers, entrepreneurs).
- **Beyond the Obvious:** Implications should offer new perspectives or solutions that are not immediately apparent from a cursory review of the literature.

Lim et al. (2022) emphasize the importance of advancing knowledge through literature reviews, including practical contributions [15]. While not every hybrid review will have direct managerial implications (e.g., a purely theoretical review), for those in applied fields, this section is a crucial component of demonstrating overall contribution.

4.6. Avoiding Common Pitfalls

Editors are also keenly aware of common pitfalls that can diminish the perceived contribution of a hybrid review:

- **Lack of Integration:** The most common pitfall. Presenting the results of each method separately without a cohesive narrative that links them and builds a unified argument. This makes the review feel like multiple mini-reviews rather than a single, integrated study.
- **Superficial Analysis:** Even with multiple methods, the analysis can be shallow if authors do not delve deeply into the content or critically engage with the literature.
- **Over-claiming Contribution:** Exaggerating the novelty or significance of the findings. Editors appreciate humility and realistic claims.
- **Methodological Inconsistencies:** Failing to adhere to the rigorous standards of each chosen methodology (e.g., a "systematic" part that is not truly systematic).
- **Poor Writing and Argumentation:** Even brilliant insights can be lost if the writing is unclear, disorganized, or unpersuasive (Callahan, 2014; Cropanzano, 2009) [2, 3]. The narrative connecting the different parts of a hybrid review must be particularly strong.
- **Lack of Justification for Hybridity:** As discussed, failing to clearly articulate *why* a hybrid approach was necessary and how it adds unique value.
- **Redundancy:** If the different methods simply confirm each other without adding new layers of insight, the hybrid approach might be redundant.

By being mindful of these pitfalls, authors can significantly enhance the quality and perceived contribution of their

hybrid review studies, increasing their chances of publication in top-tier journals.

CONCLUSION

In an era of unprecedented information overload, the role of literature reviews in synthesizing knowledge and guiding future research has become more critical than ever. The emergence of hybrid review studies represents a significant methodological advancement, offering the potential to provide richer, more comprehensive, and nuanced insights by strategically combining diverse analytical approaches. However, with this increased methodological sophistication comes a heightened expectation from journal editors regarding the demonstration of scholarly contribution.

This article has systematically synthesized insights from methodological guidelines and editorial commentaries to delineate these critical expectations. We have argued that editors seek more than just a combination of methods; they demand a synergistic outcome where the hybridity itself unlocks novel understanding and advances the field. Key expectations include a clear and compelling justification for the hybrid approach, rigorous execution across all methodological components (be it systematic review, bibliometric analysis, or narrative synthesis), a profound depth of synthesis leading to theoretical advancement, precise identification of research gaps, and actionable managerial or practical implications where relevant.

The ability to effectively integrate findings from disparate methodologies, to build new theoretical frameworks or refine existing ones, and to articulate a clear, impactful future research agenda are paramount for a hybrid review to be deemed a significant contribution. Authors must navigate the complexities of multi-method design with transparency and precision, ensuring that each component serves a distinct purpose and collectively contributes to a holistic understanding that transcends what any single method could achieve. By meticulously addressing these editorial expectations, authors can elevate the quality and impact of their hybrid review studies, thereby contributing meaningfully to the cumulative development of knowledge and advancing scholarly discourse.

Implications for Practice:

The insights derived from this review offer actionable implications for authors, reviewers, and editors involved in the scholarly publishing ecosystem:

- For Authors of Hybrid Reviews:
 - Strategic Design First: Before embarking on a hybrid review, clearly articulate the research questions and precisely how each chosen methodology will uniquely contribute to answering them. Avoid combining methods for the sake of complexity; ensure a strong theoretical and practical rationale.
 - Master Each Method: Ensure rigorous adherence to the best practices and reporting guidelines for *each* individual component of the hybrid review (e.g., PRISMA for SLRs, clear protocols for bibliometrics).
 - Emphasize Integration: The narrative of the review must seamlessly integrate the findings from different methods, demonstrating how they inform and enrich each other to build a cohesive argument and theoretical contribution. Avoid presenting results as isolated segments.
 - Focus on Theory Building: Strive to move beyond summarization to develop new conceptual frameworks, refine existing theories, or generate testable propositions. This is often the highest form of contribution.
 - Craft a Compelling Contribution Statement: Clearly articulate the unique contribution of the hybrid review in the abstract, introduction, and conclusion, specifying how it advances knowledge beyond previous single-method reviews.
- For Reviewers of Hybrid Reviews:
 - Evaluate Justification: Critically assess the rationale for the hybrid approach. Is the combination of methods truly necessary and synergistic, or is it arbitrary?
 - Assess Rigor of Each Component: Evaluate each methodological component (SLR, bibliometric, narrative) against its own established standards of rigor and transparency.
 - Look for Integration and Synthesis: Determine if the review genuinely integrates findings from different methods to build a stronger, more nuanced argument, or if it merely juxtaposes them.
 - Identify Theoretical Advancement: Assess whether the review contributes to theory building, refinement, or conceptual clarity.
 - Critique Research Agenda: Evaluate the specificity, feasibility, and impact of the proposed future research agenda.
- For Journal Editors:
 - Provide Clear Guidelines: Develop and publish explicit guidelines for authors on submitting hybrid review studies, outlining expectations for methodology, integration, and contribution.
 - Educate Reviewers: Train reviewers on how to effectively evaluate hybrid reviews, emphasizing the need to assess both individual

methodological rigor and the overall synergistic contribution.

- Champion Methodological Innovation: Encourage and reward well-executed hybrid reviews that genuinely advance the field, thereby fostering methodological sophistication within the journal's scope.

Future Research Directions:

This conceptual synthesis lays the groundwork for several promising avenues for future empirical and methodological research:

- Empirical Study of Editor Perceptions: Conduct qualitative studies (e.g., interviews, surveys) with journal editors across various disciplines to gather direct empirical data on their specific expectations, challenges, and criteria for evaluating hybrid review studies. This could reveal nuances not captured in published guidelines.
- Comparative Analysis of Hybrid Review Impact: Analyze the citation patterns and scholarly impact of hybrid review studies compared to single-method reviews (SLRs, bibliometrics, narratives) within specific fields. This could empirically validate the "enhanced contribution" claim.
- Development of Hybrid Review Reporting Guidelines: Building upon existing frameworks (e.g., PRISMA), develop specific, comprehensive reporting guidelines tailored for different types of hybrid review studies to enhance transparency and reproducibility.
- Challenges in Hybrid Review Execution: Conduct empirical research on the practical challenges faced by authors in executing hybrid reviews, including data integration, software compatibility, and managing the complexity of multiple methodologies.
- Pedagogical Approaches for Hybrid Reviews: Explore effective pedagogical strategies for teaching students and early-career researchers how to design, conduct, and write impactful hybrid literature reviews.
- Role of AI/Automation in Hybrid Reviews: Investigate how emerging AI tools and automation can support the various components of hybrid reviews (e.g., systematic searching, data extraction, bibliometric analysis), and the implications for rigor and efficiency.

By continuing to explore the methodological and conceptual nuances of hybrid review studies, and by fostering a collaborative dialogue between authors, reviewers, and editors, the academic community can collectively elevate the standards of scholarly literature synthesis, ensuring that reviews continue to be powerful engines of knowledge advancement.

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