



## Nusantarazation Theory of Stakeholder Engagement: Decolonizing and Indigenizing Stakeholder Relations in the Malaysian- Indonesian World

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### **Abstract**

Stakeholder engagement has become a dominant framework within management, governance, sustainability studies, and corporate social responsibility (CSR) discourse. Nevertheless, mainstream stakeholder engagement literature remains heavily shaped by Euro-American epistemological assumptions emphasizing managerial rationality, institutional authority, contractual relations, and market-centered governance. This article introduces the Nusantarazation Theory of Stakeholder Engagement as a decolonial and indigenizing theoretical framework grounded in the socio-civilizational realities of the Nusantara world, particularly Malaysia, Indonesia, and Brunei. Using a critical-conceptual approach informed by decolonial theory, Global South epistemology, and indigenous governance perspectives, the article argues that stakeholder engagement within Nusantara societies is fundamentally relational, communal, moral-spiritual, and culturally embedded rather than merely procedural and transactional. Drawing upon indigenous concepts such as musyawarah, gotong-royong, adat, kekitaan, merantau, and Islamic ethical principles, the article critiques the epistemic limitations of mainstream stakeholder engagement scholarship and reconstructs stakeholder theory through Nusantara-centered analytical lenses. The article also integrates contemporary discussions concerning migration, cultural heritage, humanitarian activism, food systems, and CSR practices within the Malaysian-Indonesian world to demonstrate the practical relevance of Nusantarazation Theory across diverse organizational and social contexts. Ultimately, the study contributes a theoretically grounded framework capable of expanding stakeholder scholarship toward a more culturally embedded, epistemically plural, and decolonized understanding of organizational engagement.

**Keywords:** Nusantarazation Theory; Stakeholder Engagement; Decolonization; Decoloniality, Indigenization, Nusantara; CSR; Indigenous Governance; Relational Stewardship; Global South Epistemology

## 1. Introduction

Stakeholder engagement has become one of the most influential concepts within contemporary organizational studies, governance, sustainability, development research, and corporate social responsibility (CSR). Since the publication of *Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach* by R. Edward Freeman (1984), stakeholder-oriented approaches have increasingly challenged shareholder-centered models of governance by emphasizing the importance of organizational relationships with employees, communities, governments, suppliers, civil society actors, and other affected groups.

Over time, stakeholder engagement evolved into a dominant governance mechanism within corporate management, environmental governance, tourism studies, public administration, higher education, and CSR practices. Engagement processes such as consultation, participation, dialogue, collaboration, and partnership-building are commonly presented as universal mechanisms for organizational legitimacy and governance effectiveness.

Despite its global expansion, however, stakeholder engagement scholarship remains deeply embedded within Euro-American epistemological assumptions. Mainstream frameworks commonly conceptualize engagement through managerial rationality, institutional coordination, procedural participation, contractual governance, and strategic negotiation (Parmar et al., 2010). Stakeholders are often positioned as actors whose interests are mediated through formal institutional systems controlled by organizations or governing authorities.

This article argues that such assumptions are insufficient for understanding stakeholder engagement within the socio-cultural and civilizational realities of the Nusantara world, particularly Malaysia, Indonesia, and Brunei. In a general sense, Nusantara is the civilizational-geographical space of the Malay Archipelago. Social relations within these societies are historically shaped by indigenous governance systems, communal ethics, kinship obligations, adat institutions, migration traditions, Islamic moral philosophy, and relational social structures. Consequently, stakeholder engagement in Nusantara societies frequently prioritizes communal harmony, moral legitimacy, relational continuity, and collective dignity rather than merely procedural participation or strategic bargaining.

To address this epistemic gap, the article introduces the Nusantarization Theory of Stakeholder Engagement. The theory seeks to reconstruct stakeholder engagement through indigenous Nusantara worldviews and local wisdom traditions while simultaneously contributing to broader decolonial efforts within organizational studies and social science. Rather than merely localizing Western stakeholder frameworks, Nusantarization Theory positions Nusantara civilizational experiences and indigenous epistemologies as legitimate foundations for theoretical production.

The intellectual orientation of Nusantarization is closely aligned with decolonial and indigenization perspectives which have been articulated by earlier works such as the one in “Nusantarization: Liberating Malaysia and Indonesia through Decolonization and Indigenization of the Societal and Environmental Paradigms” (2023), which argues that Southeast Asian societies (at least in the Malay-archipelagic space) should actively reconstruct knowledge through Nusantara-centered analytical paradigms rather than relying exclusively on imported Western epistemologies. Within this perspective, the Nusantara world should not merely function as a site for applying external theories but as a producer of original theoretical frameworks rooted in its own civilizational experiences.

This article therefore seeks to answer two major questions. First, how does mainstream stakeholder engagement scholarship reproduce Eurocentric assumptions concerning governance and participation? Second, how can indigenous Nusantara concepts contribute toward reconstructing stakeholder engagement through a decolonial and indigenized framework relevant to organizational governance and CSR?

## ***2. Stakeholder Engagement, CSR, and the Coloniality of Organizational Knowledge***

Stakeholder engagement emerged from broader developments within Stakeholder Theory that challenged neoclassical assumptions associated with shareholder primacy. Milton Friedman (1970) argued that the primary social responsibility of business was profit maximization within legal constraints. In contrast, Freeman (1984) argued that organizations exist within networks of social relationships involving multiple stakeholders whose interests deserve recognition.

Subsequent developments produced normative, instrumental, and descriptive approaches to Stakeholder Theory (Donaldson & Preston, 1995). Normative perspectives emphasized ethical obligations toward stakeholders, instrumental approaches connected stakeholder management with organizational performance, while descriptive approaches examined organizational behavior toward stakeholder groups.

Within these developments, stakeholder engagement became operationalized through concepts such as consultation, dialogue, participation, collaboration, trust-building, and partnership governance. Influential frameworks such as the stakeholder salience model proposed by Mitchell, Agle, and Wood (1997) emphasized power, legitimacy, and urgency as determinants of stakeholder influence.

CSR scholarship similarly evolved toward stakeholder-oriented governance. Organizations increasingly adopted CSR initiatives involving community development, sustainability programs, ethical branding, and social partnerships. However, mainstream CSR discourse often remains managerialized and procedural, emphasizing institutional compliance, corporate reputation, and performance metrics.

This reflects what Quijano (2000) describes as the coloniality of power, whereby Western epistemologies become universalized as globally authoritative forms of knowledge. Mignolo (2011) similarly argues that coloniality persists through epistemic domination privileging Western rationalities while marginalizing indigenous knowledge systems and non-Western ontologies.

Within stakeholder and CSR scholarship, this epistemic hierarchy often marginalizes relational, communal, spiritual, and customary dimensions of governance deeply embedded within Nusantara societies. The consequence is that stakeholder engagement is frequently measured through institutional procedures while overlooking indigenous concepts of legitimacy, social harmony, communal reciprocity, and moral obligation.

## ***3. Decolonization, Indigenization, and Nusantarazation***

Decolonization refers to efforts aimed at dismantling colonial structures of knowledge, representation, and intellectual authority that continue to shape contemporary social science. According to Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012), decolonization requires reclaiming indigenous intellectual traditions and repositioning marginalized knowledge systems as legitimate foundations for scholarship.

Indigenization involves reconstructing theories through local socio-cultural realities rather than mechanically importing external analytical frameworks. Indigenization therefore seeks contextual relevance and epistemic balance within knowledge production.

Nusantarazation extends beyond localization by grounding theory within the civilizational experiences, historical memory, indigenous institutions, and socio-cultural realities of the Malay-Indonesian world. The concept emphasizes the liberation of societal and environmental paradigms from excessive dependency upon Eurocentric frameworks while reconstructing knowledge through Nusantara perspectives (“Nusantarazation,” 2023).

Nusantarazation therefore positions Nusantara societies as active producers of theory rather than passive recipients of Euro-American organizational paradigms. Within stakeholder engagement, this

perspective requires shifting from managerial coordination toward relational stewardship rooted in communal ethics, moral-spiritual responsibility, and indigenous governance systems.

#### **4. Core Assumptions of Nusantarazation Theory of Stakeholder Engagement**

The Nusantarazation Theory of Stakeholder Engagement is built upon five foundational assumptions.

First, stakeholders are relationally interconnected rather than atomistically individualistic. Social relations within Nusantara societies are historically shaped by kinship obligations, communal identity, reciprocity, and relational continuity.

Second, legitimacy emerges not solely from institutional recognition but also from communal trust, *adat* (custom) structures, moral authority, and cultural embeddedness.

Third, engagement prioritizes relational harmony and social cohesion rather than adversarial bargaining and procedural competition.

Fourth, participation involves shared stewardship and collective responsibility rather than merely consultative inclusion.

Fifth, knowledge itself is epistemically plural. Indigenous governance traditions and local wisdom systems possess equal analytical legitimacy alongside Western organizational frameworks.

These assumptions collectively distinguish Nusantarazation Theory from mainstream stakeholder engagement models rooted primarily in managerial rationality and procedural governance.

#### **5. *Musyawah* as Consensus-Centered Engagement**

The concept of *musyawarah* occupies a central position within Malay-Indonesian socio-political traditions. Although frequently translated as consultation or deliberation, *musyawarah* represents a much deeper relational philosophy emphasizing consensus-building, emotional restraint, collective dignity, and social harmony.

Unlike adversarial negotiation models associated with liberal governance systems, *musyawarah* seeks relational continuity rather than competitive victory. Decision-making processes are ideally oriented toward *mufakat* or consensus rather than dominance by the majority.

Within Nusantarazation Theory, stakeholder engagement therefore becomes a process of relational stewardship rather than strategic bargaining. Stakeholders are understood not as external actors competing for influence but as interconnected members of a shared communal ecosystem.

This orientation is particularly relevant to CSR governance within Nusantara societies where community acceptance frequently depends upon relational trust, communal legitimacy, and moral credibility rather than contractual consultation alone.

#### **6. *Gotong-Royong* and Relational Stewardship**

The Indonesian concept of *gotong-royong* reflects mutual cooperation, shared responsibility, and collective labor within communal life. Historically embedded within village governance systems across the Nusantara world, *gotong-royong* conceptualizes social participation as collective stewardship.

Within Nusantarazation Theory, stakeholders are co-custodians of communal well-being rather than isolated interest groups negotiating individual benefits. Governance therefore becomes a shared

social responsibility involving reciprocal obligations between organizations, communities, and institutions.

This perspective aligns with relational approaches emphasizing interdependence rather than atomistic individualism (Escobar, 2018). Organizational legitimacy is consequently tied not merely to institutional compliance but to the ability to sustain social reciprocity, communal trust, and collective responsibility.

The relevance of this perspective becomes visible in CSR practices among micro-businesses in Malaysia. Wong and Bustami (2020), in their study of micro-businesses in the Jelutong Wet Market in Penang, demonstrate that small-scale commercial actors frequently engage with CSR through relational community obligations and localized trust networks rather than through formalized corporate governance mechanisms. Their findings illustrate that stakeholder engagement in Nusantara contexts often operates through informal communal ethics rather than bureaucratic CSR structures.

### **7. *Adat and Communal Legitimacy***

Mainstream stakeholder engagement frameworks commonly conceptualize legitimacy through institutional recognition and legal authority. Nusantarazation Theory expands this understanding by incorporating *adat* as a substantive governance framework.

*Adat* encompasses customary law, communal ethics, conflict resolution systems, ecological responsibilities, and socio-political authority structures deeply embedded within Nusantara societies. In many indigenous and rural communities across Malaysia and Indonesia, legitimacy derives not solely from state institutions but from recognition within *adat* systems and communal networks.

Organizations that satisfy formal bureaucratic requirements yet ignore local *adat* structures frequently encounter resistance despite procedural compliance. Stakeholder legitimacy within Nusantara contexts is therefore relationally and culturally embedded rather than purely institutional.

The importance of cultural legitimacy can also be observed in heritage governance. Suhaimi and Bustami (2024), in their study on organizational marginalization within UNESCO George Town heritage-related CSR projects, demonstrate how ethnic composition and institutional structures may marginalize Malay communities despite formal inclusion processes. Their findings reveal that procedural participation alone does not guarantee equitable stakeholder engagement when cultural legitimacy and communal representation are neglected.

Similarly, “The Representation of Bunga Emas in Selected National Museums in Peninsular Malaysia” (2025) illustrates how cultural symbols and historical memory continue to shape collective identity and legitimacy within Nusantara societies. Such cultural dimensions are rarely incorporated into mainstream stakeholder engagement frameworks.

### **8. *Kekitaan, Migration, and Relational Ontology***

The concept of *kekitaan* reflects a philosophy of collective belongingness emphasizing “we-ness” rather than atomistic individualism. Stakeholders are not understood as isolated contractual actors but as participants within interconnected social relationships.

This relational ontology fundamentally transforms the meaning of stakeholder engagement. Engagement becomes moral and communal rather than merely strategic and transactional. Trust emerges through long-term relational embeddedness rather than contractual guarantees alone.

Migration traditions within the Nusantara world further demonstrate this relational worldview. Wekke, Ladiqi, and Bustami (2019), in their study of Bugis and Madura migration, show how religiosity, communal harmony, and identity formation shape social relations among migrant communities across the Nusantara region. Their findings demonstrate that mobility within the Malay-Indonesian world is not merely economic but also relational and civilizational.

Similarly, “Migrants in Nusantara: Indonesian and Malaysian Perspectives” (2016) highlights the interconnected social identities and cross-border cultural relationships characterizing migration within the Nusantara region. The concept of *merantau* further reinforces the importance of relational continuity, communal responsibility, and identity preservation across geographic mobility.

The relevance of these ideas is also visible in “*Merantau to Malaysia: Perspectives of Indonesian Migrant Workers in Penang*” (2025), which demonstrates how Indonesian migrant workers maintain social solidarity, moral obligation, and communal support systems within transnational migration experiences. These relational dynamics challenge stakeholder models based solely upon contractual labor relations.

### **9. Spiritual-Moral Responsibility in Nusantara Stakeholder Relations**

An important limitation of mainstream stakeholder engagement scholarship is its predominantly secular orientation. In contrast, stakeholder relations within Nusantara societies are deeply shaped by religious and spiritual traditions, particularly Islamic ethical philosophy within the Malay world. Although Islam plays a vital role especially in last few centuries in this region, other religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism contributed meaningfully to the collective foundational belief system.

Concepts such as *amanah* (trustworthiness), *ukhuwah* (social solidarity), *ihsan* (moral excellence), and *maslahat* (public good) significantly shape understandings of governance and leadership. Organizational legitimacy is therefore evaluated not only through procedural efficiency but also through moral integrity and ethical conduct.

In Malaysia, Indonesia, and Brunei, stakeholder relations frequently involve expectations regarding humility, communal responsibility, social harmony, and ethical accountability. Governance is therefore inseparable from moral-spiritual obligations.

The importance of well-being and communal harmony can also be observed within cultural practices. “Therapeutic Harmonies of Angklung Music and Enhancement of Well-being for the Elderly in Nusantara” (2025) demonstrates how indigenous cultural practices contribute toward social well-being, collective identity, and emotional connectedness. Such perspectives broaden stakeholder engagement beyond managerial governance toward holistic communal welfare.

The moral dimensions of stakeholder relations are also increasingly visible in contemporary consumer and CSR studies. Tahir et al. (2023), in their study of Generation Z perceptions toward fast food product safety and health, demonstrate that younger consumers increasingly evaluate organizations through ethical, health, and social responsibility considerations. This suggests that stakeholder legitimacy within Nusantara societies is becoming increasingly intertwined with moral accountability and societal well-being.

### **10. Humanitarian Activism, CSR, and Decolonial Participation**

Nusantarization Theory conceptualizes participation not merely as consultation but as co-stewardship grounded in relational solidarity and communal responsibility.

This perspective is particularly relevant to humanitarian activism involving migrant workers and vulnerable communities. Maksun and Bustami (2025), in their study of non-state humanitarian activism and migrant workers in Malaysia, demonstrate how civil society organizations construct solidaristic forms of engagement grounded in humanitarian ethics, communal responsibility, and social advocacy.

Such findings challenge managerial stakeholder models that reduce participation to institutional procedure. Within Nusantarazation Theory, participation involves moral obligation, relational solidarity, and collective responsibility toward vulnerable stakeholders.

Similarly, Zhang and Bustami (2026), in their systematic review of stakeholder perceptions within sustainable food systems, emphasize the importance of trust, labeling, cultural variation, and ethical interpretation in shaping stakeholder responses to CSR initiatives. Their findings reinforce the argument that stakeholder engagement within diverse cultural settings cannot be adequately understood through universalized managerial frameworks alone.

### **11. Nusantarazation Theory as a Global South Contribution**

The Nusantarazation Theory of Stakeholder Engagement represents more than cultural adaptation. It constitutes a decolonial intervention into global organizational theory.

Modern stakeholder scholarship frequently assumes the universality of Euro-American governance rationalities. Organizational legitimacy is commonly measured through managerial coordination, institutional procedure, and strategic communication. Such assumptions marginalize indigenous governance systems and non-Western epistemologies.

Nusantarazation Theory challenges this epistemic hierarchy by demonstrating that Nusantara societies possess sophisticated governance philosophies capable of generating original theoretical contributions. The theory aligns with broader Global South scholarship advocating epistemic pluralism within contemporary social science (Connell, 2007).

Rather than rejecting global theory entirely, Nusantarazation advocates dialogical plurality where multiple civilizations participate equally in theoretical production. The theory therefore contributes not only to stakeholder scholarship but also to broader debates concerning decolonization, indigenous governance, migration studies, CSR, and Global South epistemology.

### **12. Conclusion**

This article has introduced the Nusantarazation Theory of Stakeholder Engagement as a decolonial and indigenizing framework grounded in the socio-civilizational realities of the Malay-Indonesian world. The theory challenges Eurocentric assumptions embedded within mainstream stakeholder engagement and CSR scholarship and reconstructs stakeholder relations through relational, communal, moral-spiritual, and culturally embedded perspectives.

By incorporating concepts such as *musyawarah*, *gotong-royong*, *adat*, *kekitaan*, *merantau*, and Islamic ethical philosophy, the theory offers an alternative understanding of stakeholder engagement based upon relational stewardship, communal legitimacy, consensus-centered participation, and epistemic pluralism.

The integration of contemporary studies concerning migration, humanitarian activism, cultural heritage, food systems, and CSR practices further demonstrates the empirical and conceptual relevance of Nusantarazation Theory across diverse organizational and societal contexts.

More broadly, Nusantarazation Theory contributes toward the pluralization of organizational knowledge by demonstrating that the Nusantara world contains rich intellectual traditions capable of generating original theoretical frameworks for contemporary social science.

Ultimately, the Nusantarazation Theory of Stakeholder Engagement seeks to reposition the Nusantara world from the margins of knowledge consumption toward the center of theoretical production within global organizational, CSR, and governance studies.

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