

# Correlates of Stakeholders Engagement towards Government Programs (GP) in Malaysia

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**Abstract:** The implementation of government's program is vital to the development and economic growth of a country. Stakeholder engagement theory posits that the successful implementation of policies and programs will depend on how well the programs are accepted by both internal and external stakeholders. This study looks into the external stakeholders, namely the citizens of Malaysia and their engagement towards government programs. This study is carried out using survey research method via self-administered questionnaires on 361 respondents in the Klang Valley, Malaysia. Research questions were formulated to answer the following: to what extent is the level of participation among the stakeholders in government programs; to identify what factors that are related to stakeholders' engagement; and to determine which predictors contribute most to stakeholder engagement. From the survey, it was found that several important factors were related to the stakeholders' engagement towards government programs. Among the correlates were media dependence, governmental proximity, leadership, community integration and perception of current issues. The study found that governmental proximity and leadership are the most important predictors of stakeholder engagement. The study implied that strong participation empowered the people to be engaged either physically or virtually towards the implementation of the government programs. It is recommended that future government programs include peoples' participation in terms of idea contributions and decision making for the successful implementation of the programs.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The early Stakeholder Engagement theory (SET) is concerned with the understanding of relationships between organisation and individuals and groups who can affect it or be affected by it, which could be engineered to achieve success (Freeman, 1983). Stakeholder engagement has become an important factor in organisations, both private and public, and findings from research have shown a strong link between engagement and outcomes of organisations. Nalick et al. (2016) found in their study that there is an intersection between organisation and stakeholders where there is a two-way information flow and this will encourage acceptability among the stakeholders through sustained collaborative relationships. Studies by various researchers (Freeman and McVea, 2001; Greenwopod, 2007; Saks, 2006; Ali and Sonderling, 2017) have shown that the key drivers of engagement are communication, bottom-up information flow, and

proximity or close relationship between stakeholders and committed organisational leaders. These studies have also identified gaps and issues pertaining to predictors of engagement and the factors that could help to increase engagement. Studies also showed that much of the research has been done in the U.S and hence more research is needed to explore in other countries where the concept of engagement is still in its infancy.

Employee voice can be defined as the capacity for employees to provide ideas and views into decisions that are made by organisations for the wellbeing of the people (Bahtiar et al., 2018). It has been found that one of the main drivers of employee engagement is for the employees to have the chance to provide feedback from bottom-up (Truss et al., 2006). In an organisational setting, employee involvement is considered as a 'soft' strategy by the leaders to tap greater participation and productivity. Likewise, in a larger organisation such as the government, it is imperative

to get people's engagement in policies and governmental programs in order to achieve optimum output for the effort and initiatives invested. According to Ali and Sonderling (2017), lack of genuine participation in development process could be one of the major reasons for the failure of development projects in achieving their goals.

## 2 BACKGROUND OF STUDY

Stakeholder engagement, also known as 'Citizenship Participation' is an important element in nation building and maintaining an equitable power balance in an organisation or a country is vital (Greenwood, 2007; Ihugba and Osuji, 2011). Stakeholders, who can be categorised as internal and external stakeholders according to Hill and Jones (2001), are defined as "those groups and individuals who can affect or are affected by the achievement of an organisation's objectives" (Freeman and McVea, 2001).

Strategic use of stakeholder engagement will result in cost effective investment and successful implementation of programs or policies by an organisation or a country. This study looks at the relationship of selected factors with stakeholders engagement in the implementation of the Malaysian government programmes (GP) under Pakatan Harapan (PH). The Malaysian corporate entities and the higher echelon have been talking about engagement in recent years ever since US former President Barack Obama introduced global engagement in his country's foreign policy. Where Malaysia is concerned, stakeholder engagement in GP is a necessity since it may lead to the successes or failures of programs initiated by the government. Hence, it is important to explore to what extent stakeholders engagement contribute to the successful implementation of government programs and to what extent are the relationships between the critical factors and stakeholders' engagement.

## 3 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Stakeholder engagement is a crucial factor in national development and nation building. Various studies in this area have found that stakeholder engagement can positively benefit both the organisation and society (Freeman and McVea, 2001; ?; Sandeep et al., 19; Ihugba and Osuji, 2011; Faridah et al., 2019). Likewise, Noland and Philips (2010) argued that stakeholders engagement must be integral to an organisation's strategy if it is to achieve real success (Noland and Philips, 2010; Idris, 2018).

Malaysia as a nation that can be considered as "an organisation" has implemented various programs for the sake of national development. Under the previous government, the Government Transformation Program (GTP), through GTP 1.0 and 2.0, were aimed at improving the quality of life of Malaysian citizen. Earlier studies by the Performance Management Delivery Unit (PEMANDU) of Malaysia found that more than half of the respondents were aware of GTP's trajectory and goals. However, on average the rakyat's perception of the GTP came in at 7.4 out of 10. This study by PEMANDU surveyed 2040 respondents to assess the general public awareness and perception of the GTP. However, the study did not dwell into factors that predict stakeholder engagement towards government's program.

Among the developing countries, Malaysia has always embarked on major reform and modernisation in most of their development programmes. From the past government to the current new government under PH, much attention has been given to improve the quality of life of the citizen. With the change of government, more programs are initiated with similar goals and expectations. However, these programs will not be successful without the full support and commitment from the people. To ensure that there is return of investment, the government needs to strategise in its planning and implementation. Therefore, it is timely that such a study be conducted to investigate the important correlates and predictors of engagement. The following research questions were formulated to address this problem:

## 4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- To what extent is the level of engagement among the people towards Government programs?
- Are there significant relationships among selected factors with stakeholders' engagement?
- Which of the predictors contributes the most to stakeholder engagement?

## 5 LITERATURE REVIEW

In an early definition, Kahn (1990) described engagement as to be psychologically as well as physically present when occupying and performing a role in an organisation or other setting. Truss et al. (2006) defined employee engagement simply as "passion for work". Robinson et al. (2004) defined engagement as 'one step up from commitment' and has often likened

the term to established constructs such as 'organisational commitment' and 'organisational citizenship behaviour' (Robinson, 2006). Therefore, organisational commitment differs from engagement in that it refers to individuals' attitude and attachment towards their organisations. Kahn (1990) argued that the employees or people in the organisation feel obliged to be more deeply involved in their performance as a form of repayment in exchange for the resources they received from their organisation. If organisation fails to provide these resources, individuals are more likely to withdraw or disengage themselves from these roles. There is also a general understanding that there is a connection between employee engagement and organisation and that the outcomes of engagement are positive (Saks, 2006).

Gallup Organisation (2004) cited an international survey which showed encouraging evidences that organisation can only reach their full potential by emotionally engaging employees and customers. The Gallup findings also showed that higher workplace engagement predicts higher earnings among their publicly traded business. However, findings on engagement at the international level showed some interesting trends. Findings from a global survey by Towers Perrin (Seijts and Crim, 2006) showed that Mexico and Brazil had the highest percentages of engaged employees, while highly developed countries such as Japan and Italy had the largest percentages of disengaged employees. This research also indicated that the employees expressed far more empowerment especially in tasks that affected their work and lives. It was found that leaders at these highly engaged organisations, created a trusting and challenging environment, in which employees were motivated to innovate in order to move the organisations forward. This indicated that good leadership is an important element in enhancing engagement among organisational members and people as a whole.

According to the Towers Perrin survey, building engagement is a continuous process and that the vital factors for engagement include strong leadership, accountability, autonomy, a sense of control over one's environment and opportunities for development. The research also showed evidence that the most important driver of engagement is leader's interest in the people's well-being.

In the current globalised world, with the proliferation of new media technology, there is a tremendous improvement in information dissemination. Creating proximity with the people and providing adequate information are one of the ways to engage with the people. Hong (2013) found that a vast majority of US politicians has a Twitter account as an instru-

ment of engagement (Hong, 2013). Ali Salman et al. (2018) reiterated that people have moved to a new internet-based medium and digital media for political engagement and support in Malaysia. This view is supported by Samsudin (2018) who contended that the emergence of internet facilities had influenced and changed the ways citizens participate. Bahtiar et al. (2018) suggested that participation provide citizens of a country to express their views and aspirations and be able to participate in decision making that may affect their future. Likewise in Indonesia, Ika (2018) reported that technologies had transformed governments to become more transparent and more accessible to citizens.

However, despite the benefits and advantages of the social media, the government is facing challenges due to the fact that social media are difficult to control and monitor as compared to conventional or traditional media. While the new media have the potential to disseminate information quickly and benefit the users, the content could create doubt making it difficult for users to believe. Social media is blamed for promoting immorality and usage of inappropriate language (Ali and Sonderling, 2017; Salman, 2009; Salman et al., 2018). Along similar lines, Ika (2018) also argued that neither government nor citizens benefited from feedbacks and collaboration that new technology could facilitate because the government are still doing their jobs of spreading the same old propaganda through new forms of technologies. Hence, it can be seen that the conventional media that are usually handled by professional and trained journalists have the upper hand.

## 6 METHODOLOGY

This study embarked on a quantitative research using survey method via questionnaire to collect data. A total of 361 respondents in the Klang Valley, Malaysia, were surveyed through self-administered questionnaires. The questionnaires were distributed to respondents from a sample chosen based on stratified sampling in which four zones in Klang Valley were selected namely Ampang, Kajang, Shah Alam and Lembah Pantai. The duration for data collection was three weeks in the month of April 2019. The questionnaires were constructed based on the research questions identified from the problem statement and literature reviews. The following research questions acted as the baseline for this study:

- To what extent is the level of participation among the people towards Government programs?

- Are there significant relationships among selected factors with stakeholders' engagement?
- Which of the predictors contributes the most to stakeholder engagement?

## 7 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 7.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

The focus of this research is on the external stakeholders namely the citizens. A total of 360 respondents answered a self-administered questionnaire. All of the respondents were located in the Klang Valley, Malaysia. The respondents comprised of 45.7% (165) male and 54.3% (196) female. A majority of them were Bachelor and Masters degree holders 46% (166), followed by the rest who were school-leavers. About 70.4% (254) were from urban areas, 19.1% (69) from sub urban and 10.5% (38) from rural areas.

In terms of age, majority of the respondents were from the younger adults between the age of 26-25 years (36.8%), 24 years below (34.4%), the adults from the age range of 36-45 years recorded 13.6% and above 46 years, 15.2%. Majority worked in the private sectors (64.3%) compared to public sectors (4.7%) and the rest were students and business people. About 95% received their education locally and only 5% foreign educated. Majority received monthly income between RM2000 to RM4000 (35.1%), followed by below RM2000 (30.2%) above RM4001 (18%) and no income (16.9%) mainly from the students' group.

### 7.2 Reliability Test

To answer the research questions, items for the selected variables (both Dependent and Independent variables) were analysed. All of the items were measured using 5-point Likert scales ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. A reliability test was conducted to check on the appropriateness, acceptability, reliability and dependability of the instruments. Table 1 showed the reliability for the selected variables used in this study. The Cronbach's alpha for all items recorded a high score within the range of .70 to .80 indicating the appropriateness and the reliability of the items used.

### 7.3 Level of Engagement

The extent in the level of engagement among stakeholders was analysed using descriptive analysis. Ta-

Table 1: Reliability Test.

Variables	Number of Items	Cronbach's alpha
Current issues	11	.808
Participation/Engagement	14	.784
Traditional media	6	.791
New Media	6	.798
Governmental proximity	14	.752
Leadership	9	.766
Community Integration	10	.799

ble 2 showed the differences in the average mean illustrated by the selected variables. The results indicated that community integration recorded the highest mean 3.49 (SD=0.505), followed by new media dependence with the mean score of 3.47 (SD=0.609). The third is current issues which recorded mean 3.39 (SD=0.444). The fourth is leadership which recorded mean 3.133 (SD=0.723). Leadership came forth place with mean score of 3.134 (SD=0.723). Traditional media recorded the lowest mean 2.89 (SD=0.678). These findings indicated that the respondents' community integration, new media exposure, current issues, leadership, governmental proximity received encouraging mean scores with a small dispersion indicated by the standard deviation.

For the community integration domain, stakeholders across all levels agree that they belong to the community; know the rules, feel accepted by the community; can be independent, feel close to others, know the people well and like where they lived. For the governmental proximity, the stakeholders agreed that the government's work positively impacted their lives, satisfaction with the benefits package, mutual trust and respect, and the government-people work relationship. In terms of leadership, the agreement level is for teamwork, concern for the people's wellbeing, commitment to work, bridging the people with government and practicing of uniform rules.

For the media dependence domain, the computed mean for the traditional media and new media do not show a big difference. The stakeholders used both media to get information regarding government programs and also to update their knowledge and getting in-depth and instantaneous information. They also seek the media for clarification on information pertaining to the government programs. For the current issues domain, much have been highlighted on the stakeholders' agreement on several political, eco-

conomic and social factors such as rate of employment, corruption, crime, rise in petrol prices, Sales and Services Tax - SST 2.0, and media freedom.

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation of Selected Variables in Relation to Stakeholder Engagement.

	Computed Mean	Computed Std. Deviation
Current issues	3.380	0.444
Traditional Media	2.892	0.678
New Media	3.465	0.609
Govt. Proximity	3.036	0.589
Leadership	3.134	0.723
Community Integration	3.488	0.505

### 7.4 Correlates of Stakeholders' Engagement

Correlation analysis using Pearson one-tailed was used to determine if there is any significant relationship between engagement (dependent variable) and the independent variables namely current issues, dependence on traditional media and new media, government proximity, leadership and community integration. Table 3 showed the correlation between the identified variables with stakeholder engagement. The study found that four factors were significantly correlated to engagement in the implementation of government programs. Based on Guildford (1956) rule of thumb, the relationships between the government proximity ( $r=0.670, p<0.05$ ) and leadership ( $r=0.570, p<0.05$ ) with stakeholder engagement are moderately related. Three variables of the selected variables (traditional media:  $r=0.361$ ; current issues:  $r=0.147$ ; community integration  $r=0.158$ ) are weakly related to stakeholder engagement. It is interesting to note that dependency on new media showed no relationship with stakeholder engagement ( $r = 0.089$ ). The study supports earlier findings by Kahn (1990) and Seijts & Crim (2006) that emphasized on the importance of leaders' encouragement and proximity between leaders and people in enhancing engagement among organisational members and people as a whole. Traditional media had a weak relationship with stakeholder engagement whilst new media had no relationship prove to show that the stakeholders depend more on the traditional media to obtain information on government programs compared to the new media. This could be due to the level of trust they have on the new media which are said to be quite

loose in terms of control and too often were equated with the usage of inappropriate words. The results supported earlier observations by Ika (2018) and Ali Salman et al. (2018).

Table 3: Correlations Between Selected Variables and Stakeholder Engagement (N=361).

Variables	r	Significance
Current issues	0.147	.005*
Traditional media	0.361	.000*
New Media	0.089	.090
Government proximity	0.670	.000*
Leadership	0.570	.000*
Community Integration	0.158	.003*

### 7.5 Predictors of Stakeholder's Engagement

The results of the regression analysis (stepwise) for the predictors of stakeholder were presented in table 4 (Appendix).

Prior to the test, several tests were undertaken to check on normality and multicollinearity. The results showed all items of the date were normally distributed and there was no issue of Multicollinearity.

The criterion variable, engagement was tested using six predictors which were, current issues, dependence on traditional media and new media, governmental proximity, leadership and community integration. The regression analysis showed four models which were statistically significant. As shown in Model 1, the best predictor was governmental proximity which showed  $\beta=0.670, p<0.05$ . This means that governmental proximity accounted for 67% of explained variance. Model 2 identified two variables mainly governmental proximity ( $\beta=0.526, p<0.05$ ) and leadership ( $\beta=0.219, p<0.05$ ). The two variables accounted for 74.5% of explained variance, showing an increase of 6.20%. Model 3 identified three variables which includes governmental proximity ( $\beta=0.498, p<0.05$ ), leadership ( $\beta=0.202, p<0.05$ ) and traditional media ( $\beta=0.115, p<0.05$ ). The three variables accounted for 81.2% of explained.

Model 4 identified four variables namely governmental proximity ( $\beta=0.515, p<0.05$ ), leadership ( $\beta=0.215, p<0.05$ ), dependence on traditional media ( $\beta=0.112, p<0.05$ ) and community integration ( $\beta=0.079, p<0.05$ ). The four variables accounted for 92.1% of explained variance, showing an increase of 25.1%. The stepwise regression models showed that with the inclusion of three variables in model 4, the

Table 4: Regression Analysis (Stepwise) between Engagement and Selected Variables (N=361).

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	6.035	1.975		3.055	.002
	Govt. proximity	.780	.046	.670	17.091	.000
2	(Constant)	4.072	1.982		2.055	.041
	Govt. proximity	.612	.059	.526	10.344	.000
	Leadership	.322	.075	.219	4.299	.000
3	(Constant)	1.494	2.164		.690	.490
	Govt. proximity	.579	.060	.498	9.679	.000
	Leadership	.297	.075	.202	3.974	.000
	Traditional Media	.271	.096	.115	2.829	.005
4	(Constant)	5.467	2.954		1.851	.065
	Govt. proximity	.599	.060	.515	9.910	.000
	Leadership	.317	.075	.215	4.219	.000
	Traditional media	.263	.096	.112	2.750	.006
	Community Integration	-.150	.076	-.079	-1.967	.050

a. Dependent Variable: Participation 3

variance explained is only 25.1% compared to model 1 that showed governmental proximity alone contributed 67.0% of the variance. This proved that governmental proximity is the best predictor for stakeholder engagement. This is followed by leadership. The two predictors, governmental proximity and leadership came out as the strongest predictor variables for stakeholder engagement.

These findings have supported various mainstream findings from scholars in stakeholder engagement (Kahn, 1990; Bahtiar et al., 2018). Kahn (1990) argued that the employees or people in the organisation feel obliged to be more deeply involved in their performance as a form of repayment in exchange for the resources they received from their organisation.

Hong (2013) found that a vast majority of US politicians has a Twitter account as an instrument of engagement. Creating proximity with the people and providing adequate information are one of the ways to engage with the people. These findings also supported other Stakeholder Engagement theorists (Freeman, ; Freeman, 1984; Freeman, 1984; Freeman and McVea, 2001; Greenwood, 2007; Saks, 2006; Ali and Sonderling, 2017) who argued that the key drivers of engagement are communication, bottom-up information flow, and proximity or close relationship between stakeholders and committed organisational leaders.

The basic tenet of stakeholder engagement such as participation, proximity, leadership, media dependence, community integration, state of current issues is selected as the baseline to analyse the data in this study. The findings of the study revealed that governmental proximity which is an indication of close government-citizen relationship had formed a catalyst

that make stakeholders want to be engaged with the government in the implementation of various governmental programs. The good and positive relationship were basically due to trust, respect, inclusivity of the government, satisfaction with work culture and the benefits package provided. Another important factor is that the stakeholders believed that the government's work had positively impacted their lives. According to Nalick (2016) Stakeholder Engagement theory stressed that there is a point of intersection between the government and the stakeholders on certain programs and activities. Such a situation had encouraged acceptability and triggered engagement among the stakeholders which in turn will sustain collaborative governmental-citizen relationships (Nalick et al., 2016).

The stakeholders were positive and accepting towards the efforts made by the government to enhance their wellbeing. This is in line with various studies in this area which have found that stakeholder engagement can positively benefit both the organisation and society (Freeman & McVea 2001; Greenwood, 2007; Ihugba & Osuji 2011). Similarly, the findings of this study supported the views expressed by these scholars that proximity and closeness of the governmental-citizen relationship had positively led to engagement. This study also found participation which stressed the stakeholder's involvement in decision making, the freedom to voice out complaints about pressing issues as well as giving feedbacks and suggestions is an important element in engagement. Ali and Sonderling (2017) had identified in their study that genuine participation is the missing link in the development process that had caused failure of development

projects in achieving their goals. Bahtiar et al. (2018) also suggested that participation provide citizens of a country to express their views and aspirations and be able to participate in decision making that may affect their future.

This study also identified the prevalent role of leadership as an enhancement factor in stakeholder's engagement in the implementation of GP. The findings showed strong leadership that emphasised mutual trust and respect, commitment to a good work culture, teamwork and a sense of social responsibility, and the use of uniform policies are essential elements that had charted a positive path towards engagement. This is similar with the views by Robinson et al. (2004) who identified key factors associated with stakeholder engagement included behaviors such as effective leadership, two-way communication, high levels of collaboration and teamwork, a commitment to stakeholder wellbeing and clear, accessible policies and practices (?; Simmons, 2003).

On the other hand, the findings of this study showed interesting revelations. Despite the benefits and advantages of the new media which contributed tremendously to the current global societies, this study found that the traditional media have a competitive edge over the new media. Traditional media which include newspapers, television and radio showed a weak relationship with stakeholder engagement in the implementation of GP while new media have no relationship with stakeholder engagement. Traditional media were sought by stakeholders in this study to obtain information especially in-depth and instantaneous information on government programs, update knowledge also seek clarification. This finding echoed earlier contention by Ali Salman (2009) who argued while the new media have the potential to disseminate information quickly and benefit the users, the content could create doubt making it difficult for users to believe. Some of the reasons identified were immorality and usage of inappropriate language. Hence, it can be seen that the traditional or conventional media that are usually handled by professional and trained journalists are more acceptable when it comes to the transmission of governmental programs.

## 8 CONCLUSIONS

The results of this study via survey clearly indicate the positive responses of the respondents towards stakeholder's engagement in the implementation of government program. Much of the responses were subjected to how they perceived their proximity with the

government and the effective leadership exhibited by the government via the appointed leaders and representatives as front-liners. The stakeholder's engagement in this study is also triggered by their exposure and media dependency especially the conventional media. Also play an important role in engagement is their level of community integration that dwell into their sense of belonging and comfort living in the environment. Apart from that, how they perceive the current situation in the country politically, economically and socially, also spelled out their engagement. Negative perception will lead to disengagement, unproductive venture and even hostility. In conclusion, this study is able to address the level of engagement among the stakeholders and what are the factors that correlate and predict engagement in the implementation of government programs. This study has successfully showed that engagement of stakeholders is predominant in the successful implementation of programs by the government. It is hoped that future implementation of government programs will take into account the necessity to engage with people for a healthier return of investment and the betterment of the nation's people in the future.

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