APSSHS

Academic Publications of Social Sciences and Humanities Studies
2024, Volume 5, Issue 2, Page No: 198-207
Available online at: https://apsshs.com/

E-ISSN: 3108-4176

Annals of Organizational Culture, Leadership and External Engagement Journal

Mapping the Evolution of Corporate Social Responsibility and Stakeholder Engagement: A Bibliometric Review of Governance, Legitimacy, and Participation Research, 2017–2024

Sara Al-Fahd[1]*, Noura Al-Khalifa[1], Omar Al-Turki[2]

1. Department of CSR Evolution and Bibliometric Analysis, Faculty of Business, King Saud University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.
2. Department of Stakeholder Engagement and Legitimacy, Faculty of Management, King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals, Dhahran, Saudi Arabia.

Abstract

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) and stakeholder engagement have developed through increasingly interconnected literatures on governance, legitimacy, participation, sustainability, and organizational accountability. Yet the conceptual proximity of these domains can obscure important differences between stakeholder representation, substantive participation, deliberative quality, legitimacy, disclosure, and organizational outcomes. This bibliometric review examines the evolution of CSR and stakeholder-engagement research between 2017 and 2024 while maintaining those distinctions. The review combines performance-oriented bibliometric logic with intellectual-structure, conceptual-structure, and thematic-evolution perspectives, complemented by evidence-bounded interpretation of governance and participation scholarship. The analysis is organized to distinguish publication and citation visibility from research quality, co-citation proximity from theoretical agreement, and keyword co-occurrence from evidence of causal mechanisms. The interpretive synthesis indicates an increasingly differentiated research agenda in which conventional CSR and stakeholder-management concerns coexist with scholarship on deliberation, contestation, power asymmetry, marginalization, digital engagement, political context, and multi-stakeholder legitimacy. The principal contribution is a proposed integrative interpretation in which governance arrangements, participation processes, and legitimacy assessments constitute connected but non-equivalent dimensions of the evolving field. This framing avoids treating engagement itself as proof of democratic inclusion, legitimate governance, or effective CSR. The review also identifies methodological boundaries arising from database coverage, metadata standardization, citation-age effects, network thresholds, and researcher-mediated cluster interpretation. These boundaries constrain causal, evaluative, and cross-context conclusions and define priorities for subsequent longitudinal, multilevel, and comparative research.

Keywords: Corporate social responsibility, Stakeholder engagement, Bibliometrics, Governance, Legitimacy, Participation, Thematic evolution

How to cite this article: Al-Fahd S, Al-Khalifa N, Al-Turki O. Mapping the Evolution of Corporate Social Responsibility and Stakeholder Engagement: A Bibliometric Review of Governance, Legitimacy, and Participation Research, 2017–2024. Ann Organ Cult Leadersh Extern Engagem J. 2024;5(2):198-207. https://doi.org/10.51847/Vp056gsgyd

Received: 15 November 2024; **Revised:** 26 December 2024; **Accepted:** 27 December 2024
Corresponding author: Sara Al-Fahd
E-mail ✉ s.alfahd@ksu.edu.sa

Introduction

Corporate social responsibility and stakeholder theory occupy overlapping intellectual territory, but they are not interchangeable: stakeholder theory centers relationships between organizations and affected or influential parties, whereas CSR encompasses broader questions concerning corporate responsibilities toward society [1]. Stakeholder engagement adds a further layer because it has developed as a heterogeneous research domain incorporating communication, participation,

© 2024 The Author(s).
Copyright CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

relationship management, deliberation, and forms of organizational responsiveness rather than one uniform managerial practice [2]. Recent review evidence also connects stakeholder engagement increasingly with CSR development and Sustainable Development Goal-oriented scholarship, widening the institutional and societal scope within which engagement is studied [3].

Empirical research provides reasons to examine these connections while retaining evidential caution. International evidence has reported associations between stakeholder engagement and CSR performance, but such observational relationships do not establish a universally transferable causal effect [4]. Governance conditions further complicate interpretation because ownership arrangements and board independence can modify relationships involving engagement and CSR policy [5]. Likewise, sustainability reports can classify how organizations represent stakeholder engagement, yet reported engagement should not automatically be treated as evidence of substantive participation [6]. Regulatory context introduces another source of variation: European banking research illustrates how engagement may be shaped jointly by formal disclosure requirements and organizational governance choices [7]. These distinctions motivate a bibliometric analysis concerned not simply with growth in publication activity, but with how governance, legitimacy, and participation have become differentiated within CSR and stakeholder-engagement scholarship.

Review objectives and analytical questions

The review examines how CSR and stakeholder-engagement scholarship was organized and reconfigured across the 2017–2024 period. Its purpose is not to equate bibliometric prominence with theoretical validity or practical effectiveness, but to identify which intellectual and conceptual conversations became visible, how they related to one another, and where important distinctions emerged. Governance is treated as more than a formal organizational attribute because ownership incentives and managerial entrenchment can complicate the interpretation of ostensibly stakeholder-oriented strategies [8].

Accordingly, the analysis addresses four connected questions. First, how are publication activity, citation visibility, journals, authors, and documents distributed within the defined literature? Second, what intellectual relationships are recoverable through co-citation patterns, and what conceptual associations appear through keyword co-occurrence? Third, how do themes associated with governance, legitimacy, participation, dialogue, contestation, and inclusion change or intersect across the review period? Fourth, where does the literature preserve—or fail to preserve—boundaries between stakeholder representation and inclusion, engagement and legitimacy, disclosure and enacted practice, or bibliometric influence and evidential strength? These questions provide the analytical structure for interpreting the field without assuming that network position, citation frequency, or thematic emergence demonstrates causal importance.

Materials and Methods

The review follows a bibliometric design that distinguishes descriptive performance analysis from science mapping. Bibliometrix provides an integrated computational environment for bibliographic data management and established forms of science-mapping analysis [9]. Methodologically, performance indicators such as publication and citation patterns answer different questions from relational techniques such as co-citation and keyword co-occurrence; neither category should be interpreted as a direct measure of methodological quality [10]. Bibliometric evidence also requires theory-aware interpretation because network prominence or structural centrality does not independently validate a theoretical explanation [11].

The analytical strategy therefore separates three operations: construction and standardization of the bibliographic corpus; measurement of publication, citation, and entity-level visibility; and relational analysis of intellectual, conceptual, and temporal structure. Close reading of the approved theoretical and empirical literature is used to interpret bibliometric structures while preserving distinctions among association, conceptual proximity, governance mechanisms, normative propositions, and validated empirical effects.

Database and search strategy

The search strategy was designed around the intersection of CSR and stakeholder engagement rather than CSR in isolation. Previous bibliometric research demonstrates that CSR can be mapped productively within sustainable-development scholarship, while also showing that the resulting structure is shaped by the underlying query and thematic scope [12]. The present search boundary therefore prioritizes records in which CSR, corporate responsibility, stakeholder engagement, stakeholder participation, governance, legitimacy, deliberation, or closely related concepts form a substantive analytical focus. The temporal boundary is 2017–2024, allowing attention to recent changes while maintaining a common observation window for all included documents. Search logic is structured for title, abstract, keyword, and bibliographic metadata fields available through the selected bibliographic source. Document restrictions are limited to peer-reviewed journal articles consistent with the declared review design. Search terms are combined through concept blocks rather than a single literal title query so that research using adjacent but theoretically meaningful terminology can remain retrievable. At the same time, records in which

CSR or stakeholders appear only incidentally are excluded during eligibility assessment. Database provenance, restrictions, and subsequent metadata decisions are documented separately from substantive interpretation.

Eligibility and dataset construction

Eligibility was determined at the level of the article's substantive relationship to the review questions. This is important because CSR scholarship contains multiple research streams whose boundaries depend partly on the bibliographic corpus and analytical choices used to identify them [13]. An article was therefore considered relevant when its principal theoretical, empirical, methodological, or governance contribution addressed CSR together with stakeholder engagement or directly informed the interpretation of governance, legitimacy, participation, disclosure, deliberation, inclusion, or related stakeholder processes.

Adjacent material was excluded when stakeholder terminology was incidental or when the article could not contribute to the performance, intellectual-structure, conceptual-structure, thematic-evolution, or interpretive analyses. Version duplicates were treated as one publication record. DOI information was preferred for record identity, supplemented by normalized bibliographic fields when necessary. No quantitative transition or affected-record value was inferred when it could not be traced directly to the underlying bibliographic record set.

The corpus-construction logic is consolidated in **Table 1** so that retrieval boundaries, eligibility decisions, and standardization operations can be distinguished from later bibliometric interpretation.

Table 1. Provenance and standardization decisions governing construction of the 2017–2024 CSR–stakeholder bibliographic corpus

Dataset-construction operation	Applied analytical rule	Information examined	Record-count treatment	Resulting implication for the corpus
Search framing	Combine CSR/stakeholder concepts with governance, legitimacy, participation, and close variants	Searchable bibliographic fields	Count only from verifiable export	Defines the substantive retrieval boundary
Temporal restriction	Retain journal articles published during 2017–2024	Publication year; document type	Directly traceable when available	Creates a common temporal observation window
Eligibility assessment	Require direct relevance to CSR–stakeholder or specified governance/participation questions	Title, abstract, keywords, article focus	Exclusions recorded only when verifiable	Removes merely incidental stakeholder mentions
Duplicate control	Prefer DOI identity; use normalized bibliographic metadata when DOI matching is unavailable	DOI, title, authorship, year	No duplicate count inferred without record-level evidence	Prevents multiple versions from becoming separate analytical units
Source standardization	Harmonize resolvable journal-title and bibliographic variants	Source title and publication metadata	Operation documented qualitatively where counts are unavailable	Reduces artificial fragmentation of source-level analysis
Author standardization	Reconcile clearly identifiable naming variants without speculative identity merging	Author-name metadata	Ambiguous identities remain separate	Limits artificial inflation or collapse of author networks
Keyword standardization	Harmonize obvious lexical variants while preserving conceptually distinct terms	Author/index keywords and equivalent metadata	Transformation counts reported only when traceable	Supports interpretable co-occurrence relationships

Note: Bibliographic transformations are conservative: ambiguous author identities, conceptually distinct terms, and unverifiable record changes are not resolved by inference.

Data cleaning and bibliographic standardization

Bibliometric networks are sensitive to seemingly minor metadata inconsistencies. A single author may appear under different initials or name forms, a journal may be represented by abbreviated and full titles, and semantically equivalent keywords may be split by pluralization, spelling, punctuation, or acronym use. The cleaning procedure therefore follows a conservative standardization principle consistent with bibliometric data-management practice [9].

DOI matching provides the preferred basis for detecting exact publication duplicates. Where DOI information is unavailable, normalized combinations of title, authorship, publication year, and source metadata can support record-level inspection, but ambiguous cases should not be merged automatically. Journal names are standardized only when variants clearly refer to the

same source. Author identities are similarly reconciled only when bibliographic information supports the equivalence. Keyword cleaning removes superficial lexical fragmentation while preserving meaningful theoretical differences. Thus, "CSR" and "corporate social responsibility" may be harmonized when they refer to the same construct, whereas engagement, participation, deliberation, inclusion, and legitimacy remain separate because the review explicitly examines their non-equivalence.

Cleaning is consequently treated as an analytical decision rather than a clerical step. Aggressive normalization could artificially increase network connectivity, whereas insufficient cleaning could fragment genuine intellectual relationships. Both possibilities are considered when interpreting subsequent maps.

Bibliometric techniques and software

The analytical design combines performance measures with relational science-mapping techniques. Recent ESG bibliometric research illustrates how publication trends, source influence, conceptual patterns, and forward-looking interpretation can be brought together within a single review while remaining dependent on the corpus and analytical parameters used [14]. For the present study, performance analysis is separated from co-citation, keyword co-occurrence, and thematic-evolution analyses so that different forms of bibliometric structure are not treated as interchangeable.

Interpretation of governance-related structures is informed by cross-disciplinary multi-stakeholder research showing that participation, power, legitimacy, institutional design, and effectiveness constitute distinct and sometimes contested analytical concerns [15]. This literature functions as an interpretive reservoir rather than as a predetermined clustering template: empirical network structures must precede their substantive labeling.

Bibliometrix-compatible procedures provide the computational basis for corpus management and network analysis, while indicator selection, normalization, thresholding, and cluster interpretation remain explicit researcher decisions [9–11]. Consequently, a highly cited document can be influential within the corpus without being methodologically superior, and strongly co-occurring keywords can identify conceptual proximity without demonstrating a causal relationship between their underlying constructs.

Performance analysis

Performance analysis is treated as the descriptive layer of the review. Its purpose is to establish how publication activity, citation visibility, journal contributions, authorship, and document-level influence are distributed before relationships among publications or concepts are examined. Consistent with bibliometric guidance, these indicators are interpreted as measures of productivity, visibility, or position within the defined corpus rather than direct measures of scientific quality [10].

Annual publication patterns are therefore read as evidence of changing research attention, not proof that a topic has become theoretically more important. Citation accumulation is interpreted with particular caution because older documents have had more time to accrue citations and because database coverage can affect absolute values. Journal productivity is kept distinct from document impact, and author productivity is kept distinct from citation or network influence. Where entity-level rankings are subsequently presented, their meaning depends on the exact metric reported rather than on an undifferentiated concept of "importance."

This distinction also constrains later interpretation of the field. Performance analysis can show where scholarly attention and visibility are concentrated, but governance mechanisms, legitimacy claims, participation quality, or CSR effectiveness require evidence beyond publication and citation counts. The performance layer therefore serves as descriptive context for the intellectual, conceptual, and thematic analyses that follow rather than as their substantive validation.

Publication and citation development

Publication and citation development should be read as two related but non-equivalent signals of field evolution. Publication growth identifies changing scholarly attention, whereas citation accumulation reflects recognition under unequal exposure times and database conditions. Earlier CSR bibliometric work shows the usefulness of temporal mapping for identifying shifts in research activity [12]. At the same time, the existence of multiple CSR research streams means that aggregate growth can conceal movement between conceptual subfields rather than uniform expansion of one coherent literature [13].

For this reason, temporal interpretation is anchored to the defined 2017–2024 observation window and avoids treating recent publication density as proof of conceptual maturity. Citation prominence is likewise interpreted relative to publication age and the structure of the retrieved literature. A rising theme may gain network presence before becoming citation-central, while older foundational work may remain visible as governance and participation questions diversify.

Influential journals, authors, and documents

Influence is treated as metric-specific rather than as a single ranking property. Journal productivity, author productivity, document citations, and network position represent different forms of visibility. Bibliometric guidance therefore requires influence to be interpreted in relation to the indicator used and the corpus from which it is calculated [11].

Because reproducible named rankings cannot be asserted without verified corpus-level metric output, the analysis distinguishes the entity classes and interpretive meanings that any reported influence profile must preserve. **Table 2** prevents productivity, citation visibility, and network position from being collapsed into a generic hierarchy.

Table 2. Interpreting bibliometric influence across journals, authors, and documents

Entity class	Performance signal	Network or field role	Interpretive meaning	Required limitation
Journal	Publication contribution and citation visibility	Venue concentration or cross-cluster reach when verified	Locates publication outlets shaping the corpus	Journal prominence does not establish article quality
Author	Productivity and citation visibility	Collaboration, co-citation, or bridging position when verified	Identifies visible contributors or intellectual connectors	Productivity and network centrality are not interchangeable
Document	Citation visibility	Co-citation position or thematic linkage when verified	Identifies works with disproportionate bibliometric presence	Citation frequency does not validate methods, theory, or causal claims

Intellectual structure: co-citation analysis

Co-citation analysis is used to recover intellectual proximity among works that are cited together, but the resulting structure requires substantive interpretation. Recent stakeholder-engagement scholarship conceptualizes engagement as continuous and changing rather than as a fixed organizational attribute, providing one possible interpretive lens when dynamically oriented sources appear together [16]. Sectoral context can create another boundary: research on CSR in controversial industries shows that legitimacy problems and stakeholder responses are conditioned by the nature of the industry itself [17].

Accordingly, a co-citation cluster is interpreted as a pattern of shared intellectual attention, not as evidence that the clustered authors agree, employ equivalent constructs, or demonstrate the same mechanism. Cluster labels should arise only after examining the works represented within the network. The analytical value of co-citation therefore lies in reconstructing intellectual neighborhoods and bridges while retaining disagreements, contextual boundaries, and theory differences that a purely geometric reading of the network could conceal.

Conceptual structure: keyword co-occurrence

Keyword co-occurrence provides a complementary view of the field by locating concepts that repeatedly appear in proximity. The substantive meaning of those relationships cannot be inferred from proximity alone. Longitudinal research on shareholder engagement, for example, shows how dialogue can create common ground through communicative action under particular conditions [18]. By contrast, work on stakeholder value conflict emphasizes pluralism and discursive justification, indicating that engagement need not culminate in consensus [19].

These distinctions support a conceptual map in which dialogue, participation, conflict, legitimacy, and governance remain separate before cross-links are interpreted. **Figure 1** presents this evidence-bounded network logic. It treats network connection as conceptual association, while solid and dashed links distinguish literature-supported relationships from the article's proposed interpretive integration.

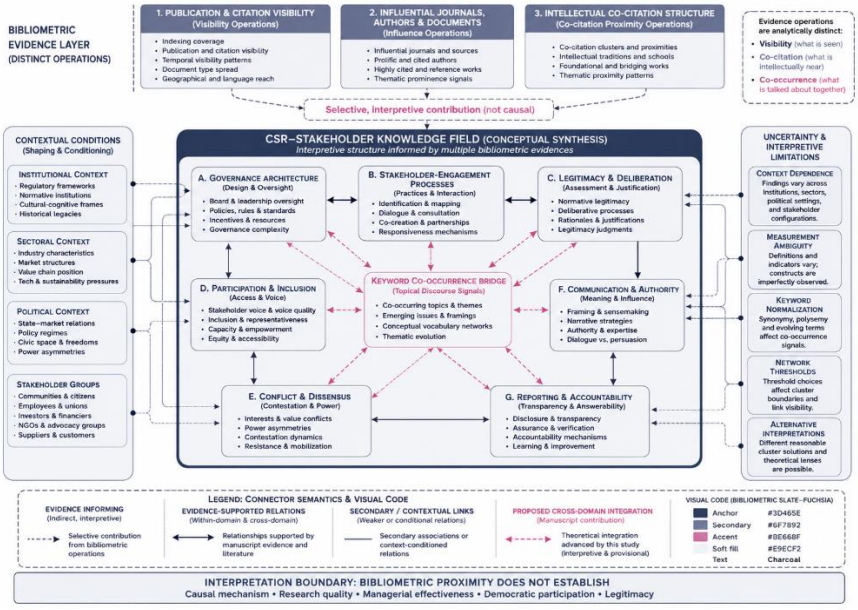

Figure 1. Governance, legitimacy, and participation organize distinct but connected CSR knowledge clusters

Thematic evolution across 2017–2024

The temporal reading of the literature suggests a broadening of the questions asked about stakeholder engagement rather than a simple replacement of older CSR themes. Contestation has been advanced as a potential contributor to democratic quality in multi-stakeholder governance under specified conditions [20]. Political CSR scholarship similarly introduces an agonistic perspective in which activism and disagreement coexist with deliberation [21]. Deliberation itself has subsequently been differentiated into multiple varieties, making it inappropriate to treat the term as a single stable mechanism [22].

Figure 2 translates this development into an evidence-bounded temporal architecture. It does not assign fabricated frequencies or imply that every theme follows the same trajectory. Instead, it represents the manuscript's proposed interpretation that the literature increasingly differentiates governance design, legitimacy criteria, participation quality, conflict, and contextual variation while retaining earlier CSR and stakeholder-management concerns.

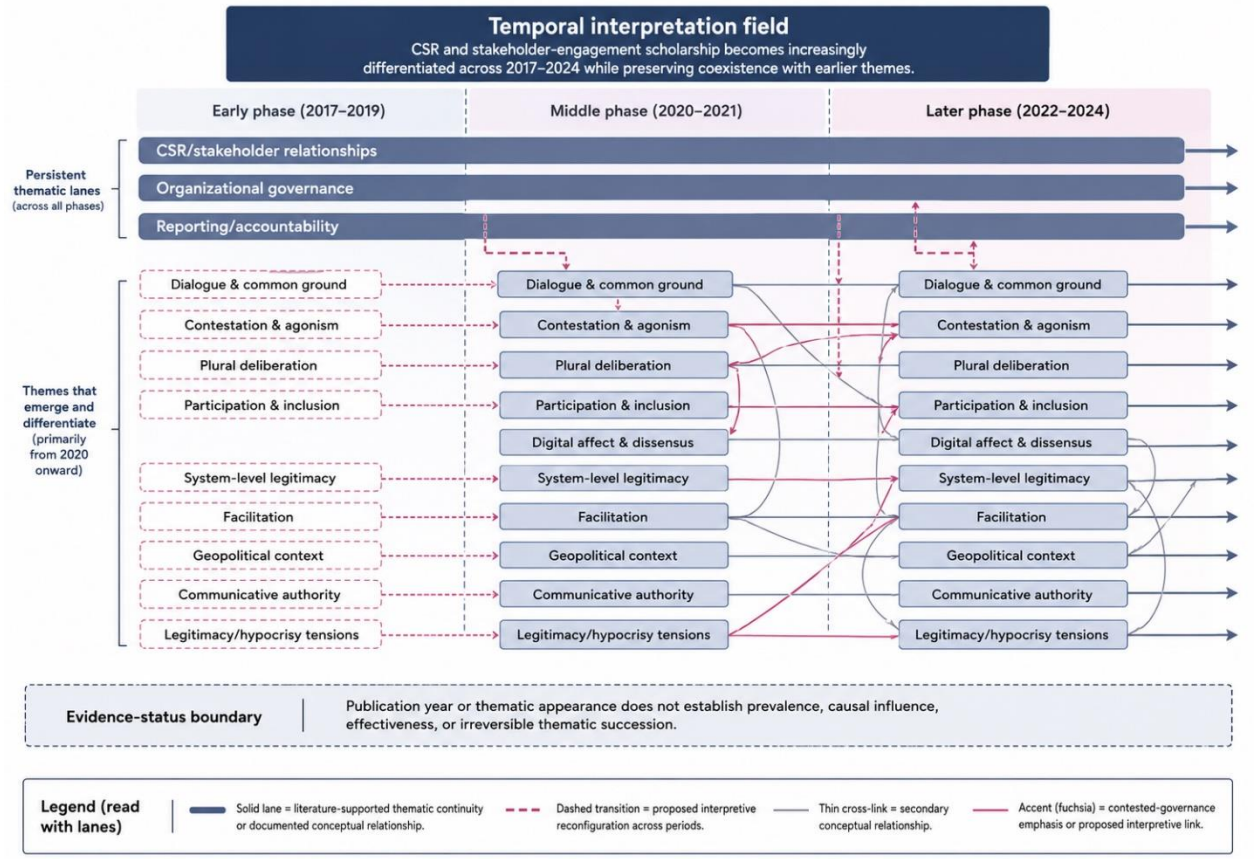

Figure 2. CSR and stakeholder-engagement themes reconfigure toward contested governance and differentiated participation across 2017–2024

Governance, legitimacy, and participation clusters

The literature most clearly resists conceptual collapse where participation is treated as evidence of legitimate governance. Deliberation can occur without satisfying broader democratic criteria [23], while SDG-oriented scholarship places multi-stakeholder engagement inside increasingly complex governance arrangements [24]. Digital engagement further demonstrates that participation can involve affect and dissensus rather than rational consensus alone [25]. Institutional design also matters: deliberative mini-publics have been proposed as a means of strengthening deliberative capacity, but that proposition should not be treated as universally validated [26].

Legitimacy therefore requires an evaluative layer beyond the existence of interaction. Research on corporate political activity illustrates the need for substantive legitimacy criteria [27], and shareholder-engagement evidence shows that conflict can have contingent effects depending on the quality of deliberative interaction [28]. Participation may also coexist with marginalization when local communities lack meaningful influence within multi-stakeholder initiatives [29]. A deliberative-systems perspective consequently shifts attention from single forums toward broader relationships through which legitimacy is produced or constrained [30]. Taken together, these sources support the distinction that participation architecture, conflict conditions, and system-level relations shape—but do not automatically establish—deliberative quality or legitimacy [23, 28, 30].

Table 3 translates these distinctions into cluster semantics without treating a keyword cluster as a validated mechanism.

Table 3. Semantic interpretation of governance, legitimacy, and participation domains in CSR stakeholder research

Interpretive domain	Anchor problem	Distinctive emphasis	Bridge to other domains	Principal blind spot
Governance architecture	Who structures participation and under what rules?	Institutional design, ownership, regulation, multi-stakeholder arrangements	Connects participation processes with legitimacy evaluation	Formal design may differ from enacted influence
Legitimacy and deliberation	When is engagement normatively or procedurally defensible?	Democratic criteria, justification, deliberative systems	Connects governance with conflict and accountability	Interaction alone does not establish legitimacy
Participation and inclusion	Who is represented, heard, or marginalized?	Community involvement, voice, access, power asymmetry	Links governance design with stakeholder experience	Representation may mask substantive exclusion
Conflict and dissensus	How are disagreement and plural values handled?	Contestation, agonism, affect, contingent conflict	Bridges participation with deliberative quality	Conflict is neither uniformly productive nor harmful
Communication and authority	How is common ground or authority constituted?	Dialogue, facilitation, communicative processes	Connects micro-interaction with organizational governance	Communicative success may be context-specific
Reporting and accountability	How is engagement represented and judged?	Disclosure, legitimacy claims, hypocrisy risk	Links organizational communication with external evaluation	Reporting cannot substitute for observed practice or outcomes

Emerging and declining research themes

Recent scholarship indicates several directions that warrant testing as possible emerging themes rather than being declared trends solely because of publication date. Facilitation has been examined as a process through which diverging stakeholder groups can build workable common ground [31]. Intergovernmental conflict adds geopolitical context by showing how political attributions can alter organizational engagement choices [32]. Shareholder-engagement research also treats authority as communicatively constituted rather than merely formal, particularly in engagement concerning carbon emissions [33]. In controversial sectors, reporting research increasingly links CSR communication with legitimacy, perceived effectiveness, and hypocrisy concerns while preserving the distinction between reporting and substantive impact [34].

These developments point toward a more context-sensitive field in which engagement is examined not only as organizational outreach but as a contested process involving facilitation, political interpretation, authority, accountability, and potential exclusion. Whether these topics constitute durable growth trajectories requires verification through temporal bibliometric results rather than inference from recency alone.

Integrative interpretation of the field

The evidence supports an interpretation in which governance, stakeholder engagement, sustainability performance, disclosure, participation, and legitimacy are interconnected but non-equivalent analytical dimensions. Corporate-governance evidence, for example, links board monitoring and stakeholder engagement with sustainability performance and disclosure choices while leaving those outcomes conceptually distinct [35]. This distinction is essential when interpreting bibliometric networks: closeness among terms or documents indicates an intellectual relationship, not evidence that one dimension causes another.

The principal synthesis proposed here is therefore a layered reading of the field. Bibliometric structure identifies where scholarly conversations concentrate and intersect. Close reading then specifies what those conversations mean, which mechanisms are empirical or proposed, and where contextual or normative boundaries apply. Governance concerns the architecture and distribution of decision authority; participation concerns the processes and opportunities through which stakeholders enter those arrangements; legitimacy concerns the standards by which those arrangements are evaluated. Reporting and performance constitute additional organizational outcomes or representations rather than substitutes for those three dimensions.

This interpretation is deliberately reversible rather than progressive. Evidence of participation can strengthen an engagement claim while simultaneously exposing marginalization; visible dialogue can coexist with unresolved conflict; and organizational disclosure can increase transparency without demonstrating substantive legitimacy. Bibliometric interpretation therefore requires theory-aware caution rather than causalizing structural prominence [11].

Future research agenda

Future research should test the conditions under which these domains converge or diverge. Comparative designs could examine digital stakeholder engagement, local-community participation, and engagement under intergovernmental conflict as analytically different contexts rather than treating stakeholder engagement as context-free [25, 29, 32]. Such comparisons should measure participation quality, influence, conflict, and legitimacy separately and examine whether similar governance forms generate different stakeholder experiences across institutional settings.

Longitudinal designs are particularly important because engagement can be continuous and changing rather than a stable organizational property [16]. Multilevel studies could connect interaction-level processes such as dialogue or facilitation with organizational governance and institutional legitimacy without assuming cross-level equivalence. Replication across sectors, countries, controversial and noncontroversial industries, and democratic and less deliberative settings would help identify which relationships are transferable. Bibliometric extensions should also test sensitivity to database choice, keyword normalization, network thresholds, clustering algorithms, and temporal slicing before treating identified structures as stable features of the field.

Implications for csr and stakeholder scholarship

The review implies that CSR and stakeholder scholarship benefits from greater construct discipline. CSR and stakeholder theory can overlap without becoming theoretically identical [1]; likewise, stakeholder engagement, participation, inclusion, legitimacy, disclosure, and organizational performance can be empirically connected while remaining conceptually distinct. This matters when scholarship shifts across organizational, community, and institutional levels.

Bibliometric prominence should therefore be used to locate conversations rather than adjudicate their validity. Citation counts, productivity, co-citation position, and keyword centrality answer different questions and should not be combined into an implicit hierarchy of scholarly worth [10]. For CSR research, this encourages a two-stage interpretation: first identify the structural organization of the literature; then assess what the underlying evidence actually establishes. Such discipline makes emerging governance and participation questions visible without converting visibility into managerial, ethical, or policy effectiveness.

Limitations

The review is bounded by the bibliographic database, search syntax, temporal window, document restrictions, and metadata available for standardization. Author, journal, and keyword normalization can change network structure, while alternative thresholds can alter cluster visibility [9]. Citation indicators also depend on exposure time and database coverage and therefore cannot establish methodological quality, causality, practical effectiveness, or legitimacy [10].

Interpretation introduces an additional boundary. Network algorithms organize relationships mathematically, but substantive cluster labels require researcher judgement and close reading [11]. Alternative normalization choices, cluster solutions, or conceptual labels may therefore yield different but defensible representations. The 2017–2024 window is appropriate for examining recent development but cannot reconstruct the complete historical genealogy of CSR or stakeholder theory. Finally, evidence from particular sectors, stakeholder groups, governance systems, and political environments should not be generalized across contexts without direct comparative validation.

Conclusion

This bibliometric review organizes the recent intersection of CSR and stakeholder-engagement scholarship around a central distinction: governance arrangements, participation processes, and legitimacy assessments are connected but not interchangeable. The field increasingly engages with deliberation, contestation, inclusion, marginalization, communication, political context, and accountability while retaining established concerns with CSR, stakeholder relationships, reporting, and performance. The proposed interpretation treats bibliometric structure as a map of scholarly attention rather than evidence of causal importance or practical effectiveness. Its contribution is therefore simultaneously structural and cautionary: it identifies how the field can be read while preserving boundaries between representation and inclusion, engagement and legitimacy, disclosure and practice, and bibliometric influence and evidential strength. Future validation requires reproducible corpus analysis, sensitivity testing, longitudinal and multilevel designs, and comparative research across institutional and stakeholder contexts.

Acknowledgments: None

Conflict of interest: None

Financial support: None

Ethics statement: None

References

1. Dmytriyev SD, Freeman RE, Hörisch J. The relationship between stakeholder theory and corporate social responsibility: Differences, similarities, and implications for social issues in management. J Manag Stud. 2021;58(6):1441-70. doi:10.1111/joms.12684
2. Kujala J, Sachs S, Leinonen H, Heikkinen A, Laude D. Stakeholder engagement: Past, present, and future. Bus Soc. 2022;61(5):1136-96. doi:10.1177/00076503211066595
3. López-Concepción A, Gil-Lacruz AI, Saz-Gil I. Stakeholder engagement, CSR development and SDGs compliance: A systematic review from 2015 to 2021. Corp Soc Responsib Environ Manag. 2022;29(1):19-31. doi:10.1002/csr.2170
4. Lopatta K, Jaeschke R, Chen C. Stakeholder engagement and corporate social responsibility (CSR) performance: International evidence. Corp Soc Responsib Environ Manag. 2017;24(3):199-209. doi:10.1002/csr.1398
5. Zaid MAA, Abuhijleh STF, Pucheta-Martínez MC. Ownership structure, stakeholder engagement, and corporate social responsibility policies: The moderating effect of board independence. Corp Soc Responsib Environ Manag. 2020;27(3):1344-60. doi:10.1002/csr.1888
6. Stocker F, de Arruda MP, de Mascena KMC, Boaventura JMG. Stakeholder engagement in sustainability reporting: A classification model. Corp Soc Responsib Environ Manag. 2020;27(5):2071-80. doi:10.1002/csr.1947
7. Cosma S, Leopizzi R, Pizzi S, Turco M. The stakeholder engagement in the European banks: Regulation versus governance. What changes after the NF directive? Corp Soc Responsib Environ Manag. 2021;28(3):1091-103. doi:10.1002/csr.2108
8. Yoshida K, Kurita K, Managi S. Stakeholder engagement as a sustainable development strategy: Managerial entrenchment for cross-shareholdings. Corp Soc Responsib Environ Manag. 2023;30(1):402-18. doi:10.1002/csr.2362
9. Aria M, Cuccurullo C. bibliometrix: An R-tool for comprehensive science mapping analysis. J Informetr. 2017;11(4):959-75. doi:10.1016/j.joi.2017.08.007
10. Donthu N, Kumar S, Mukherjee D, Pandey N, Lim WM. How to conduct a bibliometric analysis: An overview and guidelines. J Bus Res. 2021;133:285-96. doi:10.1016/j.jbusres.2021.04.070
11. Mukherjee D, Lim WM, Kumar S, Donthu N. Guidelines for advancing theory and practice through bibliometric research. J Bus Res. 2022;148:101-15. doi:10.1016/j.jbusres.2022.04.042
12. Ye N, Kueh TB, Hou L, Liu Y, Yu H. A bibliometric analysis of corporate social responsibility in sustainable development. J Clean Prod. 2020;272:122679. doi:10.1016/j.jclepro.2020.122679
13. Frerichs IM, Teichert T. Research streams in corporate social responsibility literature: A bibliometric analysis. Manag Rev Q. 2023;73(1):231-61. doi:10.1007/s11301-021-00237-6
14. Marie M, Qi B, Gerged AM, Nobanee H. Exploring environmental, social and governance research in the wake of COVID-19: A bibliometric analysis of current trends and recommendations for future research. Corp Soc Responsib Environ Manag. 2024;31(6):6131-49. doi:10.1002/csr.2909
15. de Bakker FGA, Rasche A, Ponte S. Multi-stakeholder initiatives on sustainability: A cross-disciplinary review and research agenda for business ethics. Bus Ethics Q. 2019;29(3):343-83. doi:10.1017/beq.2019.10
16. Fobbe L, Niss C, Hilletofth P. Continuous and changing stakeholder engagement for organisational sustainability: Proposing the stakeholder engagement flow model. Corp Soc Responsib Environ Manag. 2024;31(6):6061-74. doi:10.1002/csr.2908
17. Jansen L, Cunningham P, Diehl S, Terlutter R. Corporate social responsibility in controversial industries: A literature review and research agenda. Corp Soc Responsib Environ Manag. 2024;31(5):4398-427. doi:10.1002/csr.2813
18. Ferraro F, Beunza D. Creating common ground: A communicative action model of dialogue in shareholder engagement. Organ Sci. 2018;29(6):1187-207. doi:10.1287/orsc.2018.1226
19. Schormair MJL, Gilbert DU. Creating value by sharing values: Managing stakeholder value conflict in the face of pluralism through discursive justification. Bus Ethics Q. 2021;31(1):1-36. doi:10.1017/beq.2020.12
20. Arenas D, Albareda L, Goodman J. Contestation in multi-stakeholder initiatives: Enhancing the democratic quality of transnational governance. Bus Ethics Q. 2020;30(2):169-99. doi:10.1017/beq.2019.29
21. Dawkins CE. An agonistic notion of political CSR: Melding activism and deliberation. J Bus Ethics. 2021;170(1):5-19. doi:10.1007/s10551-019-04352-z
22. Dawkins CE. Varieties of deliberation: Framing plurality in political CSR. Bus Ethics Q. 2022;32(3):374-403. doi:10.1017/beq.2021.28

23. Barlow R. Deliberation without democracy in multi-stakeholder initiatives: A pragmatic way forward. J Bus Ethics. 2022;181(3):543-61. doi:10.1007/s10551-021-04987-x
24. Nonet GAH, Gössling T, Van Tulder R, Bryson JM. Multi-stakeholder engagement for the Sustainable Development Goals: Introduction to the special issue. J Bus Ethics. 2022;180(4):945-57. doi:10.1007/s10551-022-05192-0
25. Castelló I, Lopez-Berzosa D. Affects in online stakeholder engagement: A dissensus perspective. Bus Ethics Q. 2023;33(1):180-215. doi:10.1017/beq.2021.35
26. Pek S, Mena S, Lyons B. The role of deliberative mini-publics in improving the deliberative capacity of multi-stakeholder initiatives. Bus Ethics Q. 2023;33(1):102-45. doi:10.1017/beq.2022.20
27. de los Reyes G, Scholz M. Assessing the legitimacy of corporate political activity: Uber and the quest for responsible innovation. J Bus Ethics. 2023;184(1):51-69. doi:10.1007/s10551-022-05115-z
28. Beccarini I, Beunza D, Ferraro F, Hoepner AGF. The contingent role of conflict: Deliberative interaction and disagreement in shareholder engagement. Bus Ethics Q. 2023;33(1):26-66. doi:10.1017/beq.2021.46
29. Eikelenboom M, Long TB. Breaking the cycle of marginalization: How to involve local communities in multi-stakeholder initiatives? J Bus Ethics. 2023;186(1):31-62. doi:10.1007/s10551-022-05252-5
30. Apffelstaedt K, Schrage S, Gilbert DU. Multi-stakeholder initiatives and legitimacy: A deliberative systems perspective. Bus Ethics Q. 2024;34(3):375-408. doi:10.1017/beq.2023.12
31. Grimm J, Ruehle RC, Reinecke J. Building common ground: How facilitators bridge between diverging groups in multi-stakeholder dialogue. J Bus Ethics. 2024;194(3):583-608. doi:10.1007/s10551-023-05609-4
32. Esper SC, Barin-Cruz L, Gond JP. Engaging stakeholders during intergovernmental conflict: How political attributions shape stakeholder engagement. J Bus Ethics. 2024;191(1):1-27. doi:10.1007/s10551-023-05448-3
33. Slager R, Gond JP, Sjöström E. Mirroring and switching authoritative personae: A ventriloquial analysis of shareholder engagement on carbon emissions. Hum Relat. 2024;77(8):1209-37. doi:10.1177/00187267231174700
34. Acuti D, Bellucci M, Manetti G. Preventive and remedial actions in corporate reporting among “addiction industries”: Legitimacy, effectiveness and hypocrisy perception. J Bus Ethics. 2024;189(3):603-23. doi:10.1007/s10551-023-05375-3
35. Manning B, Braam G, Reimsbach D. Corporate governance and sustainable business conduct—Effects of board monitoring effectiveness and stakeholder engagement on corporate sustainability performance and disclosure choices. Corp Soc Responsib Environ Manag. 2019;26(2):351-66. doi:10.1002/csr.1687