



## RESEARCH ARTICLE

Section: *Philosophy and Religion*

## Applying Habermas's theory to Vision 2030 initiatives to promote national identity: A critical analysis

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\*Correspondence: [sialsharif@iau.edu.sa](mailto:sialsharif@iau.edu.sa)**ABSTRACT**

This study applies the principles of Habermas's theory of communicative action to the initiatives outlined in Saudi Vision 2030, focusing on the role of effective communication in fostering national identity. The research provides a comprehensive review of Vision 2030 documents and policies related to community dialogue and communication, including news archives, public initiatives and programs, and government announcements. Additionally, the study explores the role of e-government platforms in enhancing communication between the government and citizens and how they contribute to a more transparent and participatory decision-making process. The findings suggest that Habermas's principles, particularly those related to communicative action, can significantly enhance community dialogue and foster mutual understanding among different cultural groups within Saudi society. These principles can strengthen national identity by integrating diverse voices and perspectives into the broader societal discourse.

Via creating platforms for open communication, Vision 2030's initiatives encourage active engagement and inclusivity—key elements in building a cohesive and united nation. The study recommends increasing investments in community communication and interaction programs, particularly training individuals in practical communication skills. Such training will empower citizens to engage in constructive dialogues, promoting mutual understanding and supporting the achievement of Vision 2030's overarching goals. The research also highlights the critical importance of expanding media use to facilitate open discussions on a range of social, cultural, and political issues, reinforcing transparency and fostering a more informed and engaged citizenry.

**KEYWORDS:** community dialogue, effective communication, e-government platforms, Habermas, national identity, Saudi Vision 2030, teaching quality

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## 1. Introduction

Habermas (1970) highlights the pivotal role of communication in modern society, arguing that human interaction and the concept of “communicative action” are fundamental to achieving mutual understanding. According to Habermas, communicative action involves five key forms of validation in communication, emphasizing the importance of shared knowledge and individuals’ ability to achieve their goals through dialogue. This process relies on accurately understanding facts, acting in accordance with societal expectations, and clearly expressing one’s motives. As communication evolves, individuals continually adjust their understanding of others’ standards based on personal experiences, with each person interpreting situations differently.

In capitalist societies, communication is increasingly influenced by a focus on individualism and self-interest, often transforming interactions into transactional exchanges rather than fostering genuine human connections. Marx critiques this feature of capitalist societies, using it to advocate socialism (Marx, 1867; Marx & Engels, 1848). In contrast, Habermas focuses on the potential for new communication methods to promote equality, self-awareness, peace, and environmental consciousness. He argues that changes in communication are a response to the evolving needs of society, where individuals seek to understand others and adjust their actions accordingly.

The current paper applies Habermas’s theory to analyze the role of Saudi Arabia’s Vision 2030 in promoting community dialogue and leveraging modern media. Through a comprehensive review of Vision 2030 policies, government initiatives, news archives, and public programs, the study explores the extent to which these efforts embody the principles of transparency and participatory decision-making. This research also assesses how e-government platforms could facilitate communication between the government and citizens, enhancing the overall democratic process (Center for Research and Intercommunication Studies, 2014).

Vision 2030 places significant emphasis on fostering rational communication and social interaction, particularly through creating platforms where citizens can engage in meaningful dialogues. One such platform is the annual Saudi National Cultural Festival, which promotes cultural diversity and national unity by showcasing various regions’ arts, performances, traditional crafts, and cuisines. In addition, the government has implemented initiatives such as the Cultural Exchange Program, which encourages collaboration between Saudi artists and international creatives, facilitating cross-cultural dialogue and understanding. These programs align with Habermas’s theory by encouraging inclusive participation and promoting mutual understanding among diverse cultural groups (Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage, 2024).

Furthermore, Saudi Arabia’s Vision 2030 supports using modern media to facilitate dialogue and enhance communication among various cultural communities, which aligns with Habermas’s view of rational communication as a means of achieving social consensus and participation. The strategic application of digital platforms, including government apps such as Tawakkalna and Najm, encourages public engagement by enabling citizens to provide feedback, access services, and participate in national policy development. Notably, the Tawakkalna system was awarded the 2022 United Nations Public Service Award in the category of Institutional Resilience and Innovative Responses to the COVID-19 Pandemic (Digital Government Authority, 2022).

Integrating Habermas’s theory into the analysis of Vision 2030 reveals the significant potential for community dialogue in building a cohesive national identity and promoting social cohesion within a rapidly changing social landscape. Vision 2030’s emphasis on transparency, participation, and use of modern media reflects an evolving approach to communication that strives to include all segments of society, ensuring that diverse voices are heard. This approach not only strengthens the democratic process but also contributes to the formation of a unified Saudi identity based on shared values and collective understanding. The application of Habermas’s communicative theory to the initiatives outlined in Vision 2030 highlights the critical role of dialogue in shaping an inclusive and cohesive society. Using media and digital platforms, the vision provides a framework for fostering rational communication, enhancing transparency, and promoting active citizen participation. These efforts contribute to developing a national identity that embraces diversity while fostering a sense of unity and belonging, which aligns with Habermas’s vision of communication as a tool for achieving mutual understanding and social progress.

Many countries have implemented principles similar to those of Habermas. For example, several municipalities in Sweden implemented a model based on citizen participation in local decision-making and grounded in principles akin to those elaborated by Habermas in his theory of the public sphere and

communicative rationality. A comparative analysis was conducted between these municipalities and others that rely on traditional administrative methods, wherein decisions are made centrally without direct citizen engagement.

Specifically, the Swedish model involved the establishment of a digital public sphere and organizing regular local forums providing platforms for citizens to discuss local policies and propose improvements. This approach emphasizes transparency and open dialogue among all stakeholders, including citizens, local officials, and the private sector. In contrast, the municipalities that utilized the traditional system confined decision-making to a closed circle of local officials without regular mechanisms for citizen participation and administrative processes that depend primarily on technical analysis and managerial discretion rather than active community involvement.

The experience revealed a significant increase in citizens' satisfaction and trust in municipalities that adopted the dialogical model; residents felt they played an active role in shaping policy. Moreover, collective participation resulted in a more accurate identification of issues and the proposal of innovative solutions aligned with the community's needs, thereby positively impacting the quality of the services provided. It was also demonstrated that decision-making through open dialogue reduced administrative conflicts and fostered better coordination among various stakeholders (Andersson & Lundström, 2006).

## **2. Literature Review**

### ***Habermas's Theory of Communicative Action***

According to Habermas, communication is not merely subjective. Truth and falsehood are part of human communication, with each actor seeking to correct their perceptions of the world around them and their relationships with others. Additionally, an actor can attempt to change something in the outside world and may or may not succeed. In both cases—forming assumptions and trying to change the outside world—communication is focused on an objective reality. Based on this context, Habermas discusses two types of interaction: between an actor and the outside world and between an actor playing a role and themselves. The actions an actor takes toward others or themselves are a symbolic expression of their relationship.

Simultaneously, multiple perceptions of an action may be correct, which accounts for the ambiguity in interpretation. Communicative action can occur at various levels of strategic action, with all group members following guidelines derived from overarching rules. In addressing the objective world, Habermas includes the actors as role-playing subjects. To achieve the goal of mutual understanding, an actor must be willing to act based on the potential for rationality between the objective, social, and subjective worlds, creating intersubjective understanding. The relationship between an actor and the world is shaped by truth and efficacy. Interactions regarding normative rules include relationships between the actor and the objective and social worlds. The relationship between the actor and the totality of their legitimate interpersonal relations, as well as their self as a role-playing subject, regulates the interactions among them.

One of Habermas's (1970) most important concepts is that of the "lifeworld," which dictates when the economy and state are deficient through communicative action (p. 374). Both communicative and nonverbal actions are essential components of speech, contributing to substantive and instructive rationality in the lifeworld through successful communicative exchanges. Habermas sees language as key to creating expectations and a tool for action. He adds that legitimacy in institutions is vital to social order, i.e., institutions should respect individuals so long as individuals support the institutions. However, legitimacy may also become "colonized" and navigate away from a community's lifeworld. The use of media in modern society—along with the associated money and power—transforms the lifeworld into an institution through positive law. In this way, the lifeworld can become colonized by the systems of the modern world, and influential people may take actions to distort the lifeworld.

Marcus (1985) proposes that inner freedom and individual unconsciousness are components of public opinion and suggests that industrial societies possess more ideology than ever before. Habermas (1996) attempts to analyze this issue through the concept of the public sphere, which he considers a structure of communication networking for public opinion within a lifeworld. Problems in the public sphere arise only through political decision-making, as politics strongly influence it. The public sphere is initiated by an "action actor" who forms opinions that reflect an interest in the general public's collective expression. These ideas are based on private life

experiences, such as those related to family, and on experiences in public spaces where one can communicate with other people face-to-face, such as religious institutions or coffee shops.

The public sphere helps make problems visible. However, according to Habermas, it is more suited to negotiation than problem-solving. The public sphere helps move problems away from civil society—the structure of associations and organizations focused on societal issues influenced by political systems (Habermas, 1989)—to create change. It is positioned between political power and cultural institutions and practices. Civil society institutionalizes problem-solving and can reach the public sphere through the media to influence the political sphere, helping citizens become involved in politics and ensuring the political system respects them. Correspondingly, there are two types of actors: local actors, who try to solve the problems in the public sphere, and external actors, who have political or other power.

Habermas (1996) criticizes the idea of norms and states that the public sphere does not fit into the traditional sociological idea of a “social order,” as it is not an institution or organization. His ideas and philosophical approach also extend to political philosophy. He integrates the philosophy of history with critical theory by addressing the agency–structure issue and analyzing individuals’ needs alongside the overall structure of the state, explaining how we can make changes while simultaneously incorporating society’s economic and material aspects.

### *Critiques*

Horkheimer (1972) argues that merely using the public sphere for theoretical practice and then applying those abstract ideas to the real world does not necessarily lead to genuine freedom. He contends that without a critical understanding of social structures and power dynamics, such a process fails to address the deeper conditions of human oppression and domination. According to the concepts of the public and civil spheres, the public sphere includes only negotiation power, while the civil sphere includes only state power. Therefore, the state is able to change the desires of local actors, meaning they cannot overcome all barriers to human freedom, at least through critical social inquiry. The transformation of capitalism into a “real democracy” has failed in terms of social equality, and decision-making remains ideal because power is linked to money. To create change, local actors can negotiate only in the public sphere, which is not easily related to real-world political institutions, especially in complex societies. Horkheimer’s criticism may be used as a starting point to consider the voices of minorities and individuals from different classes, who are the focus of postmodernity and postcolonial studies. Fraser (1990) critiques Habermas for his focus on a bourgeois model without a public sphere separate from the bourgeois. In other words, Habermas fails to consider class distinctions, social strata, social equality, cultural diversity, and participatory democracy, which are all important to critical theory. As such, the bourgeois still controls the dynamics that lead to unequal empowerment for minorities, such as women. Fraser argues that we should consider more than one public sphere so that all stratified groups can create their own subaltern counter-public to help make their voices heard.

Furthermore, Fraser (1990) disagrees with Habermas’s definition of the public sphere, claiming it has four problems. First, Habermas believes social equality is unnecessary for democracy, which Fraser argues cannot be true. Second, Habermas believes that sociology should analyze only a general public sphere instead of several spheres. This idea is problematic because it means some participants, such as those from lower classes, will not have their voices heard. The ideas and expectations of the public also vary among different regions and cultures. In addition, Habermas refers only to the “common good,” or what is best for society as a whole. Fraser argues that sociology should sometimes analyze the individual good, such as in the case of abusive situations, which needs to be addressed on a case-by-case basis and requires that the needs of the individual be placed before those of the group. Third, Fraser points out that Habermas assumes that the government and the public will always have different goals, which is not necessarily true. An example of this could be a religious government and a religious society, where societal expectations and government mandates are identical. Finally, Fraser takes issue with Habermas’s assumption that the public sphere does not have cultural attributes and that the dominant group is the most important one to analyze sociologically.

In analyzing and critiquing Habermas’s concept of deliberative democracy, Young (1996) argues that, in a democracy, all participants should have equal opportunities to make their voices heard without any domination from powerful groups, which aligns with the goal of deliberation as a whole rather than decisions based on

private preferences. Deliberative democracy is defined as a normative model of democratic decision-making that emphasizes open, inclusive, and rational dialogue among equal participants, with decisions emerging from collective deliberation rather than mere aggregation of preferences (Dryzek, 2000). Young also suggests that “communicative democracy” highlights democratic discussion based on interest and identifies what policies and rules incentivize voting among greater numbers of people. In this context, differentiation and overcoming it are the leading resources in a communicative democracy.

Young (1996) also states that the concept of democracy should be broader than forms and styles of speaking that involve deliberative political discussion, which is insufficient to achieve the outcomes theorists usually envisage. He argues that these processes should be referred to as “communicative” rather than “deliberative,” as deliberation is not equally accessible to all individuals who assert it. Sometimes, this description better fits a specific group of people, and norms of deliberation may not reach vocal or emotional expression. Furthermore, Young (1996) considers learning as objective rather than subjective. It involves discovering where we operate subjectively, learning to separate feelings from objective facts, and accepting both (constructing unity). Effective criticism of society requires insight into shared understanding and the use of commonalities within that society. Self-destructive rationality is the key feature of Enlightenment rationality, implying that Enlightenment thinking and modern society are not truly rational because they create self-destructive environments based on economic benefit rather than considering long-term consequences. These values further lead to inequality in work and education for women compared with men. Habermas (1971) also discusses the conflict between technology and ethics. Science often assumes “neutrality,” or the idea that scientific advancement should take place apart from any favoritism, which is problematic in terms of its moral implications.

### **3. Habermas’s Theory and Saudi Vision 2030**

Habermas’s theory of communicative action underscores the importance of rational discourse, transparency, and mutual understanding in fostering cooperation among individuals and groups. According to Habermas (1971), communicative action occurs when individuals engage in dialogue while adhering to principles of rationality, fairness, and respect for others’ opinions. In the context of Saudi Vision 2030, Habermas’s theory may provide valuable insights into how dialogue can contribute to achieving the vision’s goals, particularly as they relate to social integration, national identity, and effective governance.

#### ***Strategic Action and Cooperation***

Habermas’s concept of strategic action refers to coordinated efforts among individuals based on clear goals and rules. This concept is central to implementing and achieving the objectives of Vision 2030, requiring effective communication and collaboration among government agencies, the private sector, and civil society, particularly in education, healthcare, and economic development. As Habermas (1971) suggests, rational dialogue among stakeholders fosters the integration of efforts, enhancing the effectiveness of collective action. Vision 2030 can promote the rational coordination essential for Saudi Arabia’s sustainable development by ensuring all parties engage in communication guided by shared principles.

#### ***The Public Sphere***

A key element of Habermas’s theory is the public sphere—a space where individuals and groups gather to discuss societal issues, exchange opinions, and advocate for change. Vision 2030 emphasizes community participation and open dialogue, providing platforms for citizens to discuss critical national issues with the government. This public dialogue enables citizens to influence policy decisions and strengthens the social contract between the government and its people. In facilitating open communication, Vision 2030 supports the development of a more inclusive, transparent, and participatory society.

#### ***Applying Habermas’s Theory to Saudi Vision 2030***

Habermas’s theory of communicative action offers a valuable lens through which to understand how dialogue contributes to Vision 2030’s realization. Effective communication, transparency, and public participation are key to achieving the vision’s ambitious goals. By fostering an environment where rational discourse can occur, Saudi Arabia can create a more informed, participatory, and cohesive society. Through dialogue, both between

citizens and the government and among diverse cultural groups, Vision 2030 may succeed in developing a more sustainable, prosperous future for the Kingdom. The emphasis on transparency, mutual understanding, and rational interaction is reflected in the practical steps outlined in Vision 2030. As Saudi Arabia continues to implement its strategic objectives, Habermas's insights on communicative action will play a crucial role in guiding the nation toward achieving its goals of economic diversification, enhanced education, and improved quality of life (Center for Research and Intercommunication Studies, 2014).

Saudi Vision 2030, launched by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 2016, is a strategic blueprint designed to transform the national economy and promote sustainable development. A core component of this vision is emphasizing dialogue as a key instrument to achieve its ambitious goals. In this context, Habermas's theory of communicative action provides a valuable framework for understanding how dialogue can foster transparency, trust, and effective cooperation between the government and its citizens, which is essential for successfully implementing Vision 2030.

The Vision 2030 plan has specific objectives that highlight the importance of dialogue in achieving development.

1. **Diversifying the economy:** Vision 2030 seeks to reduce dependence on oil by developing non-oil sectors. Achieving this goal requires active communication between the government, the private sector, and civil society to identify opportunities and challenges, enhancing cooperation among these stakeholders (Khan & Al-Shahrani, 2021).
2. **Enhancing education and training:** Aligning educational curricula with labor market needs is a central focus of Vision 2030 and requires ongoing dialogue between academic institutions and employers to ensure that graduates are equipped with the necessary skills in various sectors (Al-Osaimi, 2020).
3. **Improving quality of life:** Vision 2030 envisions better living conditions through community participation in decision-making. Dialogue with citizens is crucial to identify their needs and expectations of public services (UNDP, 2020).
4. **Implementation through dialogue:** Vision 2030 aims to create platforms for public discourse, allowing citizens to express their opinions and participate in decision-making processes. These forums, events, and initiatives are designed to promote effective communication between different segments of society (Al-Fadhli, 2019).

Dialogue is, therefore, an essential component of Vision 2030. It not only fosters transparency and trust between the government and citizens but also underscores the significance of cultural diversity. Dialogue offers an opportunity for diverse groups to contribute to shaping the nation's future (Saudi Vision, 2016).

#### **4. Dialogical Methods and Their Impact**

The following examples illustrate how various forms of dialogue—through technology, face-to-face communication, or transparent processes—could play a vital role in fostering effective communication between citizens and the government. These instances reflect the essential themes of transparency, participation, and rational dialogue, which are fundamental in promoting mutual understanding and cooperation within society. The *Absher* platform, for instance, exemplifies how modern technology can enhance communication between citizens and the government. The platform fosters transparency and encourages active participation by offering citizens easy access to public services and information, which aligns with Habermas's theory of communicative action, where citizens engage with the state in an open and accessible manner, facilitating trust between both parties. In this sense, technology becomes a crucial tool in bridging the gap between the government and its citizens, reinforcing the importance of communicative action in the process of governance (Habermas, 1971). Similarly, the National Dialogue Forum can serve as a model of Habermas's concept of the public sphere, which provides a space for individuals to engage in free and rational exchanges of ideas. This forum facilitates direct interaction among citizens, enabling them to discuss national issues and cultural differences. Such dialogue is fundamental in promoting social cohesion and inclusivity, particularly in a rapidly changing society. By encouraging open discussion and mutual respect, this platform embodies Habermas's vision of rational communication, where diverse perspectives come together to foster a collective understanding.

Similarly, the potential publication of government budget data demonstrates how transparency in

government processes could lead to greater public trust and active participation in decision-making. Allowing citizens to engage with financial data and participate in monitoring government activities enhances the legitimacy of the government. This practice aligns with Habermas's principles of communicative action by enabling citizens to contribute to a decision-making process that directly affects their lives. When citizens are empowered to actively participate in such matters, it strengthens the democratic fabric of society and nurtures a sense of shared responsibility and understanding (Habermas, 1971).

These examples collectively underscore the profound potential of dialogue—whether facilitated through technology, public forums, or transparent processes—in shaping a more communicative and inclusive society. By embedding the principles of transparency, participation, and rational discourse into the fabric of governance, these practices support the formation of a cohesive, unified society. They align with Habermas's vision of communication as a tool for achieving mutual understanding, social progress, and democratic participation. Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 seeks to foster social dialogue and engagement across different segments of society in alignment with Habermas's principles of communicative action and transparency. The Kingdom's strategic use of digital tools enables citizens to express their opinions and actively participate in the policymaking process. One of the key initiatives is the Absher e-government platform, which provides citizens with easy access to government services and allows them to offer feedback. A 2023 study conducted by the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology revealed that 89% of citizens were satisfied with the platform's accessibility, thereby enhancing transparency and encouraging public participation (Ministry of Communications and Information Technology, 2023).

In the context of cultural identity development, Vision 2030 emphasizes the preservation and celebration of Saudi Arabia's diverse heritage. Initiatives such as the Saudi Heritage Festival showcase traditional cultural practices and foster understanding among different cultural communities (Saudi Press Agency, 2017). This festival creates a platform for dialogue on national identity and aligns with Habermas's view of the public sphere as a space for rational discourse (Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage, 2023). The festival not only preserves the nation's heritage but also promotes intercultural dialogue, helping build bridges among Saudi society's diverse communities and reinforcing social cohesion.

Additionally, programs like the Saudi Cultural Exploration Program play a significant role in promoting cross-cultural dialogue. This program facilitates collaboration between Saudi artists and international creatives, fostering cultural exchange and mutual understanding. These interactions help break down cultural barriers and encourage acceptance of diversity, which aligns with Vision 2030's goals of strengthening social bonds and promoting an inclusive society (Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage, 2024).

Through these cultural initiatives, Saudi Arabia is not only fostering national pride but also creating opportunities for continuous interaction among various cultural groups, enhancing the fabric of Saudi society (Saudi Press Agency, 2017). These initiatives reflect the Kingdom's commitment to nurturing a national identity rooted in inclusivity, which aligns with Habermas's theory, which emphasizes the importance of dialogue and communication in fostering a society that values diversity while promoting unity.

Technology and media have become integral to facilitating communication and dialogue between diverse social groups, and this is reflected in Vision 2030's promotion of digital innovation. Government applications like Tawakkalna and Najm serve as prime examples, providing citizens with essential services while also offering platforms for feedback and public engagement. These applications enhance communication between the state and its citizens, promoting transparency and participation in decision-making, which aligns with Habermas's concept of communicative action (Ministry of Communications and Information Technology, 2023).

By integrating technology into public engagement, Vision 2030 promotes dialogue and social cohesion, ensuring that all segments of Saudi society are actively involved in the development process. This commitment to dialogue and transparency strengthens the government's legitimacy and contributes to a more democratic, inclusive society (Imam Mohammad bin Saud Islamic University, 2022). As seen in the implementation of the Absher platform, digital tools are essential for fostering public participation and enabling citizens to contribute to governance, in keeping with Habermas's belief that communication plays a crucial role in creating a democratic society.

These initiatives not only illustrate the practical application of Habermas's theory of communicative action but also demonstrate how Saudi Arabia is building a cohesive, inclusive society where diverse voices are

heard and respected, thus aligning with the broader goals of Vision 2030.

### ***Case Study: The King Abdulaziz Center for National Dialogue***

Partnerships, memoranda of understanding, and cooperation agreements are integral to the work of the King Abdulaziz Center for National Dialogue. Recognizing the importance of collaboration, the center has made efforts to engage with ministries, governmental institutions, and public and private organizations to foster a culture of dialogue and stimulate interactive discussions across all segments of society. As part of this commitment, the center has established approximately twenty-four partnerships with various ministries and organizations, including the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Labor and Social Development, the General Secretariat of the Council of Senior Scholars, the Shura Council, and the General Presidency for the Affairs of the Two Holy Mosques (King Abdulaziz Center for National Dialogue, 2021).

In addition, the center has signed memoranda of understanding with prominent universities such as Princess Nourah University, King Saud University, Imam Muhammad Ibn Saud University, King Abdulaziz University, and several other higher education institutions. The center has also formed collaborations with several organizations, including the Saudi Pro League, the Saudi Organization for Technical and Vocational Training, the Economic City of Knowledge, and the Saudi Arabian Scouts Association. These partnerships have helped ensure balanced representation across various social sectors, including scholars, academics, intellectuals, media figures, athletes, as well as youth, students, and learners. Over the years, numerous joint meetings and events have been organized in cooperation with these entities (King Abdulaziz Center for National Dialogue, 2021).

In addition, the center's efforts extend beyond local partnerships to include agreements with internationally renowned institutions that have extensive experience in cultural, intellectual, and dialogical work, including the United Nations Education, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the Arab Organization for Education, Culture, and Science (ALECSO), and the World Organization of the Muslim Scouts. Additionally, visits by ambassadors from European, Asian, and Arab countries have further elevated the center's profile, with many diplomats praising the center's various programs and dialogical activities that engage diverse segments of society (King Abdulaziz Center for National Dialogue, 2021).

UNESCO has particularly praised the center's effective dialogical approach following a visit from a group of its experts in 2017. The organization acknowledged the center's diverse programs, which engage different generations and social groups, offering dialogue in an accessible and popular format (UNESCO, 2017). Since its inception in 2003, the King Abdulaziz Center for National Dialogue has undergone significant transformations spurred by political, social, and cultural shifts. The center began its national dialogues by addressing critical issues such as extremism, national unity, and international treaties, offering a social rejection of violence and extremism. Today, the center's focus has evolved to emphasize community coexistence, supporting national efforts in countering regional and global challenges, and strengthening the sense of national solidarity (King Abdulaziz Center for National Dialogue, 2021).

As a key institution, the King Abdulaziz Center for National Dialogue can be linked to Habermas's theory of communication interaction and the public sphere in the following ways:

- **Enhancement of the public sphere:** The center aims to promote a culture of dialogue and respect for differences of opinion (King Abdulaziz Center for National Dialogue, 2024), consistent with Habermas's concept of the public sphere as a space for rational debate. It has also established a Youth Programs Administration that provides a platform for youth to participate in public dialogue, thus expanding the circle of participants in the public sphere.
- **Communicative action:** The center seeks to address national issues, including culture, society, education, and the economy, by discussing and presenting them through channels of intellectual dialogue (King Abdulaziz Center, 2024), consistent with Habermas's concept of communicative work aimed at mutual understanding.
- **Communicative rationality:** The establishment of the Dialogue Academy for Training aims to develop dialogue skills, enhancing the communicative rationality emphasized by Habermas.
- **Legitimacy through dialogue:** The launch of the National Dialogue Award encourages consolidation of

the values of dialogue and tolerance, which contribute to building legitimacy through communication, as suggested by Habermas.

Through its programs, the King Abdulaziz Center for National Dialogue could achieve several key goals based on Habermas's theory of interactive communication. First, it may strengthen public spaces to create spaces for independent dialogue between the various elements of Saudi society, which do not currently align with Habermas's concept of the public sphere as an arena for free discussion among free people (King Abdulaziz Center, 2024). In this way, it strives to enhance communication between different sections of society by encouraging interaction through organizing dialogue and workshops. It has organized "ten intellectual dialogues, in which more than 9,000 citizens from different social and age groups participated" (King Abdulaziz Center, 2024). These efforts align with Habermas's theory, which stresses the importance of effective interaction in building societal consensus.

The King Abdulaziz Center for National Dialogue (2024) also aims to build rational consensus to understand people's opinions and define the values of tolerance and national characteristics. This goal is consistent with Habermas's idea of creating a consensus among society members through open dialogue. Moreover, the center is working toward developing special dialogue skills training programs for young people, focusing on training young people to communicate with other groups and cultures (King Abdulaziz Center, 2024). This initiative supports Habermas's vision of the importance of communication in the public sphere. Finally, the center focuses on influencing the public by monitoring the results of the work (King Abdulaziz Center, 2024), reflecting Habermas's concept of the role of the public sphere and the power of public influence.

## **5. Limitations of Habermas's Theory**

While Habermas's theory provides a robust framework for understanding the influence of the media, it does not fully consider modern media's complexities. Media has become a means of communication and a set of commercial platforms influenced by economic and political pressures, which may lead to the marginalization of critical voices in public debates. Habermas's theory provides an understanding of how dialogue and communication affect identity formation, but it has also been criticized for its lack of depth in addressing the social and political dimensions that influence these dynamics.

Moreover, the theory lacks consideration of social discrimination, which can cause feelings of powerlessness among minorities. This can lead to an inability to engage in constructive dialogue with the greater society, which contradicts the theory's basic premise that rational communication can contribute to identity formation. To understand this context, Habermas's ideas must be combined with other concepts, such as multiculturalism, which reflects the complexities of cross-cultural interaction, and social constructionism, which highlights how social contexts shape identity. This integration may provide a more comprehensive vision, helping highlight challenges and opportunities and enhance individuals' ability to develop an integrated identity in a diverse society. Critics such as Fraser (1990) and Benhabib (1996) have argued that Habermas's framework fails to fully account for social discrimination and power imbalances, thereby limiting the inclusivity of communicative action.

Despite these limitations, Habermas's theory can still contribute to understanding how the media might act as a positive force for dialogue and understanding or how it might pose challenges related to bias and misinformation. Modern societies must develop strategies to ensure that the media promotes rational communication and positively supports the public sphere. A study by the Social Research Center at King Abdulaziz University (2022) examined the impact of media on shaping social identity in multicultural societies. The researchers found that while media can enhance the understanding of cultural diversity, it may also contribute to reinforcing stereotypes or cultural exclusion in some cases. These findings align with Habermas's critiques regarding media's influences on public discourse (1971).

## **6. Discussion**

This study explores the application of Habermas's theoretical principles in the context of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, emphasizing the pivotal role of communication in fostering national identity and social cohesion. Habermas's framework, which centers around communicative action, highlights the significance of dialogue

in building trust and mutual understanding within a society. As Saudi Arabia embarks on its ambitious vision, the country faces a complex social environment marked by diverse cultural backgrounds and varying opinions. Habermas's concepts of the lifeworld and the public sphere offer valuable insights into navigating this complexity, as they help provide a space wherein individuals can engage in rational discourse and collective decision-making. One of the central elements of Vision 2030 is promoting dialogue, which is key to achieving its goals of sustainable development and economic diversification. Effective communication strategies based on inclusivity and the recognition of diversity are essential to creating a more integrated society. This inclusivity is reflected in various initiatives under Vision 2030, such as cultural events and community programs designed to foster open discussion, which provide platforms for diverse groups to express their views, enhancing societal diversity. However, applying Habermas's principles faces challenges, particularly concerning the influence of power dynamics that may hinder free and equal communication. Social and cultural barriers, such as differences in education, access to resources, and societal norms, must be carefully considered to ensure that communication remains effective and inclusive.

Furthermore, rapid technological advancements in media have transformed the communication landscape, making social and digital media platforms essential tools for fostering dialogue. These platforms facilitate the exchange of ideas and create opportunities for individuals from different cultural backgrounds to connect, share perspectives, and promote mutual understanding. In the context of Vision 2030, the use of media may be further optimized by aligning with Habermas's principles, which stress the importance of rational discourse and deliberative communication.

### ***To What Extent Do These Platforms Reflect a True Public Sphere in the Habermasian Sense?***

Habermas's concept of the public sphere is one of the foundational elements for achieving communicative action, as it refers to an environment where individuals can freely discuss public issues and influence decision-making through dialogue based on rationality and logical reasoning (Habermas, 1989). In the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, platforms such as Absher and the King Abdulaziz Center for National Dialogue provide effective means of communication between the government and citizens. However, the question remains: To what extent do these platforms reflect a true public sphere in the Habermasian sense?

From a Habermasian perspective, effective communicative action requires that all participants are equal in their ability to influence the public discourse without social and economic disparities creating an imbalance in the dialogue (Habermas, 1998). In the Saudi context, where society is characterized by significant cultural diversity and noticeable economic inequalities, some groups may face challenges in actively participating in public discourse, whether due to cultural determinants or disparities in access to technology and information. For instance, while Vision 2030 aims to empower women and enhance their participation in public life, some studies indicate that women in certain regions still face challenges regarding actual representation on national dialogue platforms, which may affect the inclusivity of communicative action. Additionally, there is a noticeable lack of empowerment in volunteer work, further limiting their ability to contribute to social change and dialogue. However, it is important to assess whether volunteer work is a primary avenue of engagement for most women or if other areas, such as entrepreneurship or education, play a more dominant role (Masoud, 2006).

However, a study by the King Abdulaziz Center for National Dialogue found that approximately 86% of women participants feel that the nation values their contributions to society, indicating that all social groups support women's empowerment in the Kingdom. Additionally, 89% believe that the government meets their needs in terms of healthcare services, which highlights the Kingdom's commitment to providing free healthcare to all citizens. Furthermore, 91% of the Saudi women in the study sample believe that the government meets their needs regarding educational opportunities, confirming the Kingdom's dedication to ensuring that every citizen has access to free education. Meanwhile, 79% believe that the government fulfills their needs regarding access to adequate housing, reflecting the effectiveness of national housing programs, which have had a particularly positive impact on Saudi women (2022).

### ***Reconsidering the Adaptation of Habermas's Theory to Non-Western Contexts***

This analysis raises a deeper question about the applicability of the communicative action model proposed by Habermas to non-Western contexts, where cultural and religious factors play a fundamental role in shaping

patterns of dialogue and social interaction. Some researchers argue that applying Habermas's theory in societies with different cultural structures requires adjustments that account for the prevailing ethical frameworks and social values. Therefore, the Saudi model for national dialogue could be unique in that it aligns with the principles of rational communication but requires a more contextually adaptive conceptual framework to address Saudi society's cultural and social particularities.

### ***Enhancing Governance and Transparency through Reporting and Complaints Mechanisms: A Habermasian Approach***

Providing official channels for submitting complaints and reporting issues is one of the effective mechanisms for enhancing transparency and accountability, aligning with the requirements of communicative action in Habermas's framework. These mechanisms enable individuals to directly and freely communicate their opinions and demands to the government. Within the framework of Vision 2030, Saudi Arabia has developed advanced systems for receiving complaints, particularly in governmental institutions such as the Ministry of Education, thus strengthening effective communication between citizens and official entities.

According to the theory of communicative action, ensuring the existence of an effective public sphere requires transparent communication channels that allow citizens to express their concerns and interact with governmental institutions rationally and objectively (Habermas, 1996). The Ministry of Education in Saudi Arabia has developed specialized systems for receiving complaints and suggestions through accessible electronic platforms, such as the Tawasul Platform, which allows citizens to submit complaints and feedback directly regarding educational services (National Saudi Platform, 2022). In addition, the Unified Phone Number (Ministry of Education, 2021) and the Electronic Reporting System allow reporting of administrative and educational violations, thereby enhancing the governance of the academic sector and giving citizens a supervisory role in educational performance.

### ***The Habermasian Application of These Mechanisms in Vision 2030***

Clearly, these channels are not just administrative tools but also represent a practical application of the theory of communicative action, as they promote transparency, participation, and accountability. According to Habermas, individuals must be able to freely communicate their ideas and participate in decisions that affect their daily lives (Habermas, 1989). Thus, empowering citizens to easily submit complaints contributes to creating a dynamic public sphere that allows for the exchange of issues and finding solutions collaboratively between the state and society, narrowing the gap between the government and citizens and enhancing trust in public institutions.

To effectively promote dialogue and support networks, several key recommendations can be drawn from this study:

1. Create digital and intellectual dialogue platforms allowing citizens to express their opinions and discuss pressing issues. These platforms, whether digital or philosophical, can serve as public spaces where diverse perspectives are shared, ultimately enhancing societal engagement and encouraging constructive dialogue.
2. Organize dialogue workshops and discussion groups focusing on cultural identity, diversity, and societal integration at schools, universities, and local communities to foster mutual understanding and promote respect for differences, laying the foundation for a more inclusive society.
3. Design policies to encourage diversity and inclusion, ensuring that the voices of marginalized and diverse groups are heard. By creating a political framework that prioritizes cultural and social inclusion, Saudi Arabia can strengthen social ties and promote unity across different communities.
4. Supporting local community initiatives, including cultural and artistic events, as they create opportunities for cultural exchange and provide a platform for diverse groups to engage in dialogue, deepening mutual understanding and promoting cultural appreciation.
5. Establishing support groups for mixed families, who are often caught between different cultural norms and expectations. These groups could offer emotional and social encouragement, creating a space to share experiences and build stronger ties within the community.
6. Encouraging young people to participate in volunteer programs aimed at promoting cultural understanding

and communication between different social groups. Such initiatives can help break down barriers and build bridges between diverse communities, reinforcing the shared goals of Vision 2030.

Implementing these recommendations focusing on education, media, and community engagement may contribute to developing a more inclusive and cohesive society and support the successful realization of Vision 2030's goals, which rely heavily on active participation, open dialogue, and mutual respect among Saudi citizens. The strategic inclusion of these principles, rooted in Habermas's theories, will foster the development of a well-informed, participatory public sphere that can effectively address the challenges of a diverse and rapidly changing society.

## **7. Conclusion**

This study has underscored the pivotal role of effective communication, grounded in Habermas's principles, in the context of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 initiatives. The findings highlight that communication is not only a mechanism for fostering mutual understanding but also a fundamental tool for strengthening national identity and creating a cohesive, integrated society.

This research emphasizes the necessity of enhancing community dialogue programs and recommends increasing investments in initiatives that prioritize training individuals in effective communication skills. These programs should be inclusive, ensuring that all segments of society are equipped to express their opinions and engage in meaningful discussions. Raising awareness about the media's role as a platform for dialogue is also crucial, as it may provide significant opportunities for intercultural interaction and idea exchange.

Ultimately, this study affirms that Habermas's principles of communicative action could significantly contribute to realizing the social objectives of Vision 2030. In fostering a society that values cooperation, mutual understanding, and cultural diversity, these principles offer a framework for building a more unified nation. Through continuous dialogue and interaction, national identity may evolve and strengthen, enabling Saudi Arabia to effectively address future challenges and progress toward its ambitious goals. Effective communication, underpinned by Habermas's theories, thus emerges as the cornerstone for achieving the transformative vision of Vision 2030.

As exemplified by the Ministry of Education, the development of official mechanisms for receiving and addressing citizen complaints is a key step toward effectively applying the theory of communicative action within the framework of Vision 2030. These mechanisms not only contribute to improving the quality of government services but also reinforce the principles of transparency and participation, creating a more just and effective communicative environment. Therefore, enhancing the use of these platforms and expanding their scope to include other sectors could represent an advanced model for integrating communicative action principles into modern governance, overcoming some of the criticisms related to the limitations of traditional public spheres, and contributing to building a more open and communicative society.

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