Symbolic Interaction and Rationality in Digital Transformation in Saudi Arabia: A Comparative Study within the Framework of Vision 2030

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Abstract

This research seeks to explain and critique the concepts of both rationality and symbolic interactionism, highlighting their similarities and differences and the criticism directed at constructivist theory. It examines their role in understanding the ongoing changes in Saudi society and how both theories contribute to achieving the goals of Vision 2030. Through an analysis of digital policies and social activities, this study explores how social structures are organised to promote sustainable change. It also examines the role of rationality and symbolic interactionism in analysing the social changes witnessed by Saudi society, especially in light of the major transformations associated with Vision 2030. Drawing on classical theories, such as the concept of rationality and symbolic interactionism, this research explores the multiple dimensions of social change within the context of digital and economic transformation in the Kingdom. It analyses how Saudi society is progressing toward a modern model emphasising efficiency and effectiveness, thus contributing to the goals of Vision 2030. Through real-life examples of economic and social activities, the study aims to understand how adopting rationality has influenced the ongoing transformations in Saudi Arabia.

Keywords: rationality, symbolic interactionism, Saudi society, Vision 2030.

Symbolic interactionism and rational choice theory are two foundational theories in sociology that provide frameworks for understanding social interactions and the behaviours of individuals and groups. Symbolic interactionism captures the meanings individuals attribute to their experiences, offering insights into the formation of identity and belonging (Blumer, 1969). In contrast, rational choice theory emphasises individuals as decision-makers striving to achieve their interests, often through strategic choices based on available resources and information (Coleman, 1990). In the Saudi context, linking these two theories is crucial to understanding the ongoing social transformations associated with Vision 2030.

This study focuses on analysing the intersections between these two theories and examining the formation of social elements within Saudi society, particularly in relation to the influence of Vision 2030. By identifying the similarities and differences between symbolic interactionism and rational choice theory, this research aims to deepen our understanding of social interactions and

organisational behaviours in Saudi Arabia. The study also explores how these theories operate within the broader context of Vision 2030's goals, such as economic diversification, cultural transformation, and modernisation (Al-Fuhaid, 2018; Al-Rasheed, 2020).

Previous studies have combined symbolic interactionism and rational choice theory to explore various social contexts. While each theory offers distinct insights, they are often complementary in understanding complex social dynamics (Giddens, 2009). For instance, symbolic interactionism helps explain how individuals derive meaning from social interactions, which shapes identity and collective behaviours, while rational choice theory provides insights into how individuals make decisions based on perceived costs and benefits (Boudon, 2003). This combination of theories is particularly useful when analysing the mutual influence between individual decisions and societal changes under broader structural conditions like those outlined in Vision 2030.

The significance of this study lies in its potential to provide a theoretical framework that can guide social strategy design in Saudi Arabia. It aims to offer valuable insights for policymakers, researchers and social designers seeking to understand and address the national needs and challenges presented by rapid transformation. By drawing on both symbolic interactionism and rational choice theory, this research contributes to the ongoing development of a more nuanced understanding of social behaviour in the Saudi context (Al-Dosari, 2021).

This study is the first of its kind to combine these two theories and apply them specifically to Saudi society. It presents an approach to understanding contemporary social contexts, serving as a valuable resource for scholars, practitioners and policymakers interested in Saudi Arabia's evolving social landscape.

This study addresses the need for a deeper understanding of the complex social dynamics arising from interactions between individuals and groups, particularly in the context of the major transformations experienced by Saudi society. The nation faces significant challenges related to profound cultural changes, which are rooted in historical values while also driven by an ongoing process of modernisation. These transformations are especially relevant in the context of Vision 2030, which seeks to transition the country from an oil-dependent economy to a more diversified and modernised one.

The main research question guiding this study is: What are the similarities and differences between symbolic interactionism and rational choice theory, and how do they shape social interactions in Saudi society within the framework of Vision 2030?

Symbolic Interactionism and Rational Choice: Differences and Similarities ⸮⸮⸮

Symbolic theory focuses on interactionism and the micro perspective, including an individual's interactions, everyday life, symbol meanings, how people interpret interactions and how people interact with each other based on their interpretation. Symbolic theory is highly subjective, rooted in meanings, understanding and experiences, and tends to ignore social structure and societal constraints. Symbolic interactionists see language as a vast system of symbols. Some symbolic theorists focus on 'self' and self-image, such as Mead (1934) and Goffman (1967).

Goffman, as cited by Blumer, describes life as a stage, as in theatre, where a person

(the self) presents the version of themselves they want others to see, based on societal roles, beliefs and personal perspectives. Goffman explains the difference between what people expect us to do and what we may want to do; he calls this the 'front stage', which may be similar to Mead's 'me', and the 'back stage', which may correspond to Mead's 'I'. This idea is logical and accurately describes people's daily life. The front and back stages may reflect both emotional preferences and physical activities and different people bring out different sides of us.

Hochschild's (2003) idea suggests that people often present themselves as objective, although they are inherently more subjective. Blumer defines the term 'symbolic interaction' as the distinctive character of interaction, focusing on how people define each other's actions rather than merely reacting to them (p. 352). In other words, people's reactions depend on the meaning and symbolism they assign to others' actions, both verbal and non-verbal, which may include body language.

Similarly, Goffman (1967) expands on the concept of 'face-to-face' interaction, where facial expressions are of significant value in communication, a view similar to Schutz's. The face is crucial in interactions between individuals and groups, as it shows expressions and indicates emotional responses. However, facial emotions may not always reflect people's true feelings, especially in jobs where individuals feel compelled to display insincere emotions. For example, a hostess may hide or manage her true feelings for her salary, a phenomenon known as 'emotional labour', which may require more of the 'me' than the 'I' (Hochschild, 2003). This concept also applies in other social relationships and throughout social life, not only in the work environment.

Goffman (1967) also describes in the article 'Out-of-frame activity' how society expects individuals to respect societal norms (1967, p. 108). In Doing Gender, West and Zimmerman (2011) explain the differences between 'gender', a social construct, and 'sex', a biological construct. They argue that people's everyday actions reflect the 'role' required by their gender from an early age, as seen through clothing, colours, behaviours and so on (2011, p. 329).

While symbolic theory focuses on the self, meaning and interactions at the micro level, rational choice theory starts with the individual as the basic unit to explain the transition from individual actions to larger social groupings and systems (macro/societal processes). Blau connects individual and group interactions by explaining that individuals tend to join groups where they receive more rewards, such as political groups (p. 272). Rational choice theory posits that individuals act on self-interest to maximise benefits, often without regard for others (Coleman, 1988, p. S96). The choices they make are motivated by maximising the potential for rewards.

Symbolic theory appears to reference a psychological perspective, while rational choice theory aligns with an economic perspective. Both theories view society as constructed through people's interactions; for example, institutions are produced based on people's interactions, forming groups and societies. This aligns with rational choice views, where actors have some autonomy, making unique and independent choices. However, both theories identify external stimuli, such as reflecting another's actions in symbolic theory, while Coleman emphasises that constraints in rational choice theory are based on the distribution of resources among actors.

Competition occurs within the system, as well as individuals' actions that create systems, where sanctions may come in the form of social approval and disapproval. Coleman describes how some individuals may have self-interests that differ from or conflict with societal interests, such as in the case of the mafia, where they continue their actions because the personal benefits and rewards are greater than the costs. Additionally, some may receive public benefits without contributing to the public good because others allow it by choice and awareness.

Coleman describes the difference between social capital and group openness. Groups characterised by closure are likely to have greater social capital because choices are limited and norms are strictly enforced, unlike open groups, such as the difference between closed Catholic schools and open public schools. Coleman also focuses on social capital, defining it as a feature of social structures that facilitates certain actions by actors. Social capital shapes people's behaviour and is not always an individual resource; it can also be derived from others.

Both theories recognise the importance of socialisation but in different ways. For example, Mead's idea of how the self develops in childhood through the play and game stages, influenced by the relationship between language and logic, may explain why social isolation affects individual development. Rational choice theory identifies how a close relationship between parents and children leads to higher social capital compared to weaker relationships with fewer and lower-quality conversations.

Blumer believes that changes happen based on the modification of meaning through the interpretation of situations, while Coleman's rational choice theory focuses on

changes that impact people's behavior. Coleman emphasizes close conversations and strong relationships. In symbolic theory, people generalize others and react based on others' actions (Mead) or facial expressions.

Both sociologists recognize the importance of the human ability to think. However, in symbolic theory, people are not always acting rationally (i.e., thinking before acting); for example, Blumer, James and Schutz focus on 'habits' and unconscious actions. In other words, not all interaction involves conscious thought.

The exchange theory by Homans (1964) is somewhat related to rational choice. Homans used economic logic to argue that individuals' behaviours and actions are based on 'self-interest' and the management of rewards and costs, suggesting that people act rationally (i.e., thinking before acting). He also emphasises the quality of treatment toward others, which creates 'stability'. In other words, people treat others well due to self-interest, wanting others to treat them well in return. He also highlights the idea of give and take, where people receive as much as they give, an important principle in many social relationships, often called 'interest relations', or rational thinking, by choosing options with the lowest cost and highest benefits, as Weber described.

When Homans argues that self-interest does not equate to selfishness, he means that self-interest can coexist with altruism. Blau explains 'altruism' further, stating that some individuals may act without seeking physical or mental rewards, although such 'saints' are rare. Most actions are influenced by personal interests; even people who volunteer or help others often expect psychological rewards, such as a good feeling or the sense of being a

good person, or social rewards, such as an improved reputation (Blau, p. 268).

Blau, like Homans, affirms the idea that individuals receive benefits from interactions, although not always equally; some participants may gain more benefits than others. However, based on my interpretation, he implies that both participants consent to engage in the interaction, which raises questions about coercion, age of consent or interactions entered under false pretenses.

Critiques of Structural Functionalism by Symbolic Interactionists and Rational Theory and Exchange Theory

Symbolic Interactionists

Most Symbolic theorists criticize the method used by Functionalism to analyze society, particularly how Functionalism focuses on the large scale of society. For example, Blumer was opposed to Functionalism and criticizes theories that emphasise social-structural views, such as the way Functionalism analyses society by focusing on the objective and collective aspects. He criticizes functional theories for not studying society as composed of acting units, instead viewing social interaction as an expression of structural values and social norms. This critique is based on Blumer's idea that discrepancies highlight symbolic interaction and focus on the subject's meaning (Blumer, 1962, p. 350).

Blumer begins by analysing the person as a unit and then transitions to discussing the actions of people who collectively build society. He argues that human society consists of people acting together to form the whole picture of social structure, which contrasts with the idea of Functionalism (p. 353). Viewing society as a whole from a symbolic interactionist perspective is completely subjective. In other words, society is structured by people, and human society consists of individuals constructing individual and collective actions based on interpretations of 'situations'. This suggests that individuals do not act solely within the context of structures but rather respond to situations, indicating that people create social reality through both collective and individual actions, contrasting with the idea proposed by Functionalism.

In addition, Blumer claimed that large-scale theorists ignore the role of interpretive behaviour through the process of interpretation, as well as changes in how people act over time (p. 365). However, Blumer's idea seems somewhat similar to the Functionalist view on norms, as he also highlights the importance of norms within the social system, including how culture and social stratification influence actions.

Goffman (1967) does not specifically discuss or critique Functionalism. However, like Blumer, he analyses the customary organisation of social interaction (p. 45). West and Zimmermann critique Parsons' role theory, which is considered a Functionalist approach to explaining gender roles (pp. 328–29). They argue that gender is constituted by interaction. This view could be seen as somewhat similar to the Parsonian view of structure's functioning; even though they emphasise that gender roles are the product of interaction, the social environment may still influence actors' interests. However, their focus on interaction and performativity emphasises active interpretation rather than mindless conformity.

Hochschild (2003) does not directly critique Structural Functionalism. However, in her work, she considers Parsons' ideas on 'affectivity'. She uses the concept of the

'signal function of emotion' to explain how emotions act 'as a messenger from the self', connecting what people observe with their expectations and how this transforms into emotional labour for a wage. Functionalism may still offer insights, as many of its foundational assumptions continue to inform symbolic theory, including aspects of Parsons' work.

Symbolic interactionist theorists argue that focusing on the individual and interactions between people is essential for advancing social theory. This differs from Parsons' emphasis on norms as a structuring force, shifting attention to norms as a basis for negotiating interactions, which can lead to reinterpretation and behaviours that are actively achieved rather than passively conformed to.

Rational Theory and Exchange Theory

Homans (1964) criticizes sociology as an independent science and challenges sociologists who focus on the collective whole of society while overlooking smaller units, such as individual actions and behaviours, which he believes deserve deeper theoretical analysis. He argues that previous social theories have focused more on the results than the causes of an individual's actions within the broader social system, which he views as ineffective for preventing behaviours (Homans, 1964, p. 180). He claims that functional theories aim to explain interrelationships and why people behave as they do but lack clear propositions.

Homans argues that Functional Theory does not truly 'function' and fails to connect roles and institutions. He criticizes its reliance on the role as the primary unit of social analysis, suggesting instead that the acting individual should be the main focus (Homans, 1964, p. 809). Homans incorporated

psychological propositions, especially from Skinner, as references, believing psychologists might better analyse individual actions and behaviours than sociologists. He also argues that Functionalism overlooks subjectivity, such as emotions, by focusing solely on functioning.

In an earlier work, Homans (1958) also discusses the frequency of interactions between people as an important function of verbal behaviour. He contends that structural-functional theory assumes equilibrium to explain social system characteristics, which he finds flawed (Homans, 1958, pp. 599-601). For this reason, he suggests sociology should prioritise patterns of reinforcement over a focus on social structures and institutions.

Blau connects individual and group interactions by explaining that individuals tend to join groups where they receive more rewards and benefits, attempting to bridge the gap between group and individual perspectives (p. 272). Similar to Homans, Coleman (1986) criticizes Parsons' work and other collective sociological theories for overlooking the actor's role as the 'engine of action', or the foundational source of societal structure. He argues that such theories ignore individuals' motivation to engage within society (1986, p. 1,310).

Coleman views the main reason for the shift in research focus from collective to individual needs as stemming from society's shift toward a more individualistic structure. Coleman (1986) highlights issues in connecting micro and macro research, arguing that a key weakness in theory is its inability to explain the association and direction between these levels (1986, p. 1,321). He describes how actions evolve from the individual to the collective level.

In other words, Coleman believes that individual choices are the primary drivers of collective outcomes; for example, individual dissatisfaction within groups can be a catalyst for revolution (1986, p. 1321). Although Coleman criticizes Parsons, he acknowledges that the social environment can influence people's actions, shaping actors' interests, which aligns with Parsons' views on structure's function. Additionally, he claims that elements such as 'the social context: norms, interpersonal trust, social networks, and social organisation' are essential to understanding individual choices (1988, p. S96).

Coleman connects individuals to institutions and back to individuals, while Blau demonstrates how organisations and inter-organisational networks emerge from individual actions.

Limitations of the Functionalist Approach in Explaining KSA Society

Both symbolic interactionism and rationalism criticize functional constructivism for several reasons, related to the limitations of the functionalist approach in explaining society and individual and social interactions.

Functional constructivism focuses on society as a whole and how the social system is stabilized through specific roles and fixed functions. However, symbolic interactionism, for example, views society as shaped by the daily interactions of individuals, and that meanings are not imposed from the outside but are constructed through these interactions. Therefore, the neglect of everyday individual dynamics in functional constructivism is a form of oversimplification that undermines the nature of social relationships. (Blumer,1969) In addition, Functional constructivism tends to emphasize the stability of society and the balance of its parts, considering that each element serves a specific function to maintain equilibrium. However, this assumption does not adequately address social conflicts and changes, which other theories—such as rationalism—view as a natural part of society. Rational theory suggests that individuals seek to fulfill their interests, even if this conflicts with social values or expectations, which may lead to conflicts or changes in the system (Ritzer, 2008).

Functional constructivism posits that society "imposes" its functions and roles on individuals and that individuals act according to these roles to maintain balance in the social system. In contrast, symbolic interactionism asserts that individuals themselves assign meaning to roles and events through social interaction, constantly shaping society through processes of negotiation, interpretation, and interaction. Functional constructivism tends to focus on the functional role of social elements (such as family, education, and religion), overlooking the intrinsic meanings and motivations that drive individuals. From the perspective of symbolic interactionism, the symbols and meanings individuals construct are crucial for understanding society, as they provide insight into how individuals understand their roles and interact based on this understanding Goffman, 1959). Meanwhile, in rational theory, individuals are seen as rational beings who make decisions based on a cost-benefit calculation, regardless of their specific "functions."

Functional constructivism views conflict as an undesirable phenomenon that disrupts social balance, focusing instead on stability and gradual change, followed by adaptation to this change. However, other theories, such as rational theory, regard conflict as a natural part of social behavior, where individuals compete

to achieve their interests, potentially leading to fundamental changes in the social system. This change is considered the result of individual decisions guided by rationality or symbolic interactions that reflect new meanings forming within society (Turner, 2003& Homans, 1961).

Therefore, symbolic interactionism and rational theory critique functional constructivism because they offer a rigid and fixed explanation of social relations, while both theories seek to understand society from a more flexible perspective that considers the individual as an active agent, allowing for the interpretation of complex human interactions and social change.

Both symbolic interactionism and rational theory can offer a more nuanced analysis of the social, economic, and cultural changes taking place in Saudi Arabia, especially in the context of the rapid transformations under Saudi Vision 2030. Traditions and customs play a significant role in KSA, functional constructivism views individuals as following specific functions within society to maintain stability, such as traditional roles in the family or education. However, from a symbolic interactionist perspective, we can examine how individuals are creating new meanings related to their identities and social roles due to changes in daily life. This includes cultural openness and the increasing participation of women in the labor market. These shifts contribute to the formation of flexible identities that blend traditional values with modern needs, rather than adhering solely to fixed roles.

On the other hand, functional constructivism focuses on stability and tends to view conflict as a destabilizing force. However, the transformations occurring in Saudi Arabia have produced significant social changes and new interactions between genders and generations. From the perspective of rational theories, these changes can be seen as decisions driven by individuals and groups, however, they may sometimes lead to conflicts over values or interpretations of tradition. This could drive that change is intrinsic to society and not simply a disruption of stability.

While the functionalist view may explain current economic and social transformations in Saudi Arabia as roles intended to achieve social balance and keep up with global developments, symbolic interactionism offers a deeper analysis. It can help to explore how individuals are constructing new meanings and thinking around their roles and norms in their society. To illustrate, Saudi youth are reshaping their cultural identity through interactions with digital media symbols. They perceive digital transformation as a symbol of openness and personal and social progress, more than as a mere response to external changes.

Reliance on rationality in individual decision-making in Vision 2030

Saudi Vision 2030 encourages individuals to become active economic agents, thereby promoting rational decision-making. The government has motivated individuals to enter new fields such as entrepreneurship and investment. Through rational theory, the participation of young people in business and investment initiatives can be understood as an effort to maximize individual gains. This reflects the individuals' ability to make rational decisions based on personal calculations to achieve self-interest, rather than simply adhering to traditional roles.

Culture and social symbols in transformations

Cultural and religious symbols are integral to identity in KSA. As social changes occur, these symbols have begun to interact with modern values. Symbolic interactionism helps explain how individuals in Saudi Arabia are reconstructing new meanings around traditions, such as engaging in non-traditional recreational and educational activities that align with the renewed sense of national identity. Thus, while traditional symbols remain present, they are adapting to the new social context.

Changing family roles in light of social transformation

Functional structuralism places the family as the core unit of social stability. However, changes in Saudi society suggest new family roles emerging due to shifts in work and education. From a symbolic interactionist perspective, it is possible to study how family members—husbands, sons, and mothers—are reinterpreting their roles within the family in response to new variables, such as women's education and their entry into the workforce. This reshapes family dynamics and reveals new roles that are based on interaction and mutual agreement, rather than a strictly defined, traditional distribution of roles.

Combining rational theory with symbolic interactionism to interpret Saudi society offers a more dynamic understanding of the ongoing changes. It allows for a deeper exploration of how individuals reconstruct social meanings and roles in response to personal interests and cultural shifts, thus providing a more flexible and insightful analysis of the complexities of modern Saudi society.

By combining the two theories, a more integrated view of digital transformation analysis can be achieved, as symbolic interactionism helps explain the subjective meanings and social symbols associated with technology use, while rational theory explains how individuals and organizations make calculated decisions to achieve the best possible outcomes in the context of digital transformation. Rational theory allows help to better understand individuals' and organizations' decisions toward digital transformation based on benefits and costs. The two theories can be combined to study how individuals make decisions about technology use based on expected gains, such as efficiency or convenience, while at the same time understanding how these decisions are loaded with social and subjective meanings, such as the desire to express personal identity or belonging to the digital community.

In addition, individuals may make decisions beyond purely rational thinking due to social and symbolic influence. For example, some platforms or applications may have social meaning that makes individuals use them even if they are not the most rational regarding efficiency. The two theories can explain how individuals make decisions driven by social symbols and meanings while evaluating the expected rational benefits.

Furthermore, Symbolic interactionism provides an understanding of the symbolism of social interaction in Saudi culture, while rational theory can explain how customs and traditions adapt to digital transformation when it makes sense for individuals and society. For example, the shift to remote education and work in Saudi Arabia can be interpreted as a rational response, but cultural and religious symbols still play a role in how these technologies are used. In addition, Rational theory provides an important dimension in understanding how individuals evaluate ethical challenges in the digital world from the perspective of personal costs and benefits. Symbolic interactionism adds a deeper

understanding of how individuals' attitudes about privacy and security are shaped by social values and meanings.

Symbolic Interaction and Rationality in Digital Transformation in Saudi Arabia

Vision 2030 demonstrates how rationality can be applied to organizing modern society by enhancing efficiency and effectiveness in government administration. Digital transformation initiatives, such as the adoption of government platforms such as 'Absher', embody rationality in practical terms, as they simplify procedures, reduce bureaucracy and increase transparency. According to Max Weber, this shift towards modern bureaucracy is an inevitable development for societies aiming for efficiency (Weber, 1978).

The major transformation in Saudi Arabia towards adopting rationality across various fields reflects a strong commitment to modernizing society, making it more efficient and advanced. These changes contribute to building a society founded on logical and rational thinking, which is evident in policies related to administration, economy, and education. These transformations align with Vision 2030, which aims to achieve sustainable development and social justice while also enhancing public welfare and advancing governmental and economic performance within Saudi society.

Linking Rationality to the Activities of Saudi Society

The theory of rationality emphasises organizing social, economic, and political life based on logical and rational rules rather than on traditions or emotions (Weber, 1978). Applying this to KSA, rationality is especially evident in the country's economic and administrative development trends. Within the framework of Vision 2030, these efforts aim to transform society into a modern model emphasizing efficiency and effectiveness.

Rationality in Government Administration

Vision 2030 places significant emphasis on restructuring government administration to improve efficiency and increase transparency. This is evident in the adoption of modern management systems, such as e-governance, aimed at enhancing service efficiency and reducing bureaucracy. One clear example is the creation of electronic platforms that expedite transactions and bridge the gap between citizens and the government. By way of example, the 'Absher' platform, which offers various electronic services to citizens and residents, exemplifies the rationalisation of government services by reducing paper procedures and accelerating transaction processes (Alshahrani, 2020).

Rationality in Economic Development

Through Vision 2030, the Kingdom is focused on diversifying its economy beyond oil dependence by developing non-oil sectors such as tourism and entertainment. This diversification is based on rational planning to promote sustainable development and generate new job opportunities.

By way of example, the 'NEOM' project, envisioned as a smart city driven by modern technology, reflects the Kingdom's commitment to rational urban and economic development. Every aspect of the city is planned according to the criteria of efficiency and sustainability, embodying a rational approach to designing large-scale projects (Alharbi, 2021).

Rationality in Education

The Kingdom aims to create an educational system that fosters critical thinking and innovation. By updating

curricula and adopting teaching methods focused on rational analysis and problem-solving, Saudi Arabia seeks to prepare a generation capable of systematic and rational thinking.

As an example, the initiative to reform educational curricula under Vision 2030, aimed at enhancing students' analytical and critical thinking skills, highlights the focus on rational education designed to equip qualified candidates for the modern job market (Ministry of Education, 2019).

Symbolic Interactionism and the Reformulation of Social Identity

Symbolic interactionism offers a deeper understanding of how individuals reshape their identities and social meanings through everyday interactions. In the Saudi context, this is evident in the social transformations surrounding women's roles, where new meanings are negotiated in areas such as work, education and economic participation. According to Blumer (1969), identities and social meanings are shaped through continuous interaction between individuals and society, resulting in new dynamics in the interpretation of social roles.

Integration of Rationality and Symbolic Interactionism

Although rationality and symbolic interactionism may appear contradictory, their integration provides a more comprehensive understanding of the ongoing transformations. Rationality emphasises structure and order, whereas symbolic interactionism focuses on individuals and meanings. In Saudi Arabia, this integration is reflected in how individuals interact with new structures, such as digital platforms, where social meanings are redefined within these frameworks.

Sociocultural Challenges

Rapid social changes may face resistance or difficulties in adaptation. The main challenge lies in balancing the modernization of social structures with the preservation of cultural and religious identity, particularly in a society such as Saudi Arabia, where religion plays a central role. Rationalism promotes rapid modernization, while symbolic interactionism seeks to understand how individuals accept and integrate these changes into their daily lives.

Conclusion

This research provides a comprehensive framework for analyzing social transformations in Saudi Arabia by integrating two classical sociological theories. By examining digital and social changes, the study enhances our understanding of how modern societies are built and how they balance technological advancement with the preservation of cultural identities.

1. Applying Rationality: The study highlighted how digital government initiatives have enhanced efficiency and transparency in public services. For instance, the government has digitized 97% of services, accelerating processes and reducing bureaucracy.

2. Symbolic Interactionism: The research showed how social identity is reshaped through daily interactions in new digital contexts, such as the increased participation of women in the labor market and the redefinition of their social roles.

3. Integration between the theories: The findings indicated that combining rationality with symbolic interactionism offers a deeper insight into social transformations, as new structures are organised rationally while allowing flexibility within daily social interactions.

4. Challenges: The study emphasised the challenges of balancing modernisation with the preservation of cultural and religious identity in Saudi society.

In conclusion, the ongoing transformations in Saudi Arabia represent a unique model of applying rationality within a culturally rich context filled with symbols and social meanings. These changes contribute to achieving the development goals of Vision 2030, with an ongoing need to consider social interaction and the acceptance of these changes.

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