

# An Interpretation of Jurgen Habermas' Views on Legitimation Crisis in the Context of the World Social Scenario

## Abstract

Jurgen Habermas, the famous German political thinker's views on Legitimation crisis and communicative action require a serious concern in the context of the contemporary world social scenario. A society is legitimate or a society is known to have legitimation so long as it is able to satisfy the needs of its members, and so long as the members of the society are content with the fulfillment of their basis needs, such as, food, clothing and housing. According to him, legitimation crisis occurs in a state when the people are not satisfied with the working of the administration and state, and when the state fails to fulfill the needs and requirements of the individuals. More or less the same situation exists in almost each and every country all over the world. In no country of the world the people are satisfied and every now and then legitimation crisis is faced everywhere. In fact, now Habermas' theory of legitimation crisis is approved worldwide and is interpreted not only politically but sociologically as well. Hence, though a political thinker initially, now he has won the status of being a great social thinker whose theory of legitimation crisis is a landmark.

Habermas' views on legitimation crisis have their roots in Talcott Parson's theory of social system and his AGIL paradigm wherein 'A' stands for Adaptation, 'G' stands for goal orientation, 'I' stands for Integration and 'L' stands for Latency. According to Talcott Parsons, the attribute of adaptation in the members of the society, goal-oriented actions, sense of integration and latency or unshaken faith of the members of the society in the social values make a social system successful. If any of the four fails in a social system, it gets disturbed and loses its successful existence. The paper is a theoretical study based on the use of secondary data collected from the various available sources. It makes a reflection on the contemporary world social scenario which produces the picture of the discontent members in every society of the world.

**Keywords:** Legitimation Crisis, World Social Scenario, AGIL Paradigm, Adaptation, Goal-Oriented Action, Integration, Latency.

## Introduction

Jürgen Habermas, a German sociologist and philosopher in the tradition of critical theory and pragmatism, is perhaps best known for his theories on communicative rationality and the public sphere. He is one of the "world's most leading thinkers. Associated with the neo-Marxist Frankfurt School, Habermas's work focuses on the foundations of social theory and epistemology, the analysis of advanced capitalistic societies and democracy, the rule of law in a critical social-evolutionary context, and contemporary politics, particularly German politics. Habermas's theoretical system is devoted to revealing the possibility of reason, emancipation, and rational-critical communication latent in modern institutions and in the human capacity to deliberate and pursue rational interests. Habermas is known for his work on the concept of modernity, particularly with respect to the discussions of rationalization originally set forth by Max Weber. He has been influenced by American pragmatism, action theory, and even poststructuralism.

In order to develop an understanding of the contemporary world social scenario, Habermas's views on legitimation crisis can be useful, and a fruitful evaluation and interpretation of the contemporary world social scenario can be made in a directional way.

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**Talcott's Agil Paradigm**

The AGIL paradigm is a sociological scheme created by American sociologist Talcott Parsons in the 1950s. It is a systematic depiction of certain societal functions, which every society must meet to be able to maintain stable social life.

1. Adaptation, or the capacity of society to interact with the environment. This includes, among other things, gathering resources and producing commodities to social redistribution.
2. Goal Attainment, or the capability to set goals for the future and make decisions accordingly. Political resolutions and societal objectives are part of this necessity.
3. Integration, or the harmonization of the entire society is a demand that the values and norms of society are solid and sufficiently convergent. This requires, for example, the religious system to be fairly consistent, and even in a more basic level, a common language.
4. Latency, or latent pattern maintenance, challenges society to maintain the integrative elements of the integration requirement above. This means institutions like family and school, which mediate belief systems and values between an older generation and its successor.

These four functions aim to be intuitive. For example a tribal system of hunter-gatherers needs to gather food from the external world by hunting animals and gathering other goods. They need to have a set of goals and a system to make decisions about such things as when to migrate to better hunting grounds. The tribe also needs to have a common belief system that enforces actions and decisions as the community sees fit. Finally there needs to be some kind of educational system to pass on hunting and gathering skills and the common belief system. If these prerequisites are met, the tribe can sustain its existence.

**Meaning of Crisis Legitimation Crisis**

A crisis is a state of jeopardy that arises because of contradicting motivations of the subsystems within a self-enclosed system. According to Habermas, the definition of crisis used in the social sciences is often based on the principles of systems theory. However, he argues that a crisis is properly understood in two dimensions, the objective and the subjective, though this connection has been difficult to grasp using conventional approaches such as systems theory or action theory.

Legitimation crisis refers to a decline in the confidence of administrative functions, institutions, or leadership. Jürgen Habermas, a German sociologist and philosopher, first introduced the term Legitimation crisis in 1973. Habermas expanded upon the concept, claiming that with a legitimation crisis, an institution or organization does not have the administrative capabilities to maintain or establish structures effective in achieving their end goals. The term itself has been generalized by other scholars to refer not only to the political realm, but to organizational and institutional structures as well. While there is not unanimity among social scientists when claiming that a legitimation crisis

exists, a predominant way of measuring a legitimation crisis is to consider public attitudes toward the organization in question.

**Glimpses of Legitimation Crisis In France, China, Africa, Europe, Tunisia, Libya, Yemen & The United States**

The events of the French Revolution, from 1789 to 1799, and the socio-political changes that it comprised can be classified as a legitimation crisis. The legitimation crisis in China took place after decades of power struggles and cultural shifts that had been in effect since the 1960s. The legitimation crisis, itself, was the result of several economic and political reforms made by the Communist Party of China (CPC) as part of an effort to salvage their reputation after the socialist policies and populist leadership of Mao Zedong in the 60s and 70s had left the Chinese economy in poor condition.

In the twentieth-century, as African states adjusted to postcolonial independence, legitimation crises and state collapse were constant threats.<sup>[78]</sup> While authority was passed from colonial to independent rule successfully in most African states throughout the continent, some attempts at transition resulted in collapse. In Eastern European countries where Stalinism was the system of domination, the legitimacy of the system was dependent on the instillation of fear among citizens and the charisma of the state leader.

The European Union (E.U.) is a governing body over 28 European countries. The E.U. does not have complete legitimacy over the citizens of the 28 countries given that it only governs in the realm of politics and economics. Ben Ali, former president of Tunisia, was deposed by the Tunisian people when the Arab Spring began in his state in late 2010. The Tunisian Revolution began with the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi on December 17, 2010, although it is also possible to consider the miner strike in the west central town of Gafsa in 2008 to be the official beginning of the movement.

Muammar Gaddafi, former leader of Libya, held power for four decades and fought violently against protestors during the 2011 Arab Spring uprising in Libya. Libya's revolution is also considered part of the Arab Spring, beginning February 15, 2011, just a few months after the events in Tunisia. The Yemeni revolution, also part of the Arab Spring, was brought about by the loss of legitimacy by Saleh's regime.

During the Cold War era, most European Countries respected the authority of the United States as an international leader. Europeans accepted the United States as the primary defender against the Soviet Union. After the Soviet Union fell, however, some scholars believe the United States was no longer needed by the Europeans for that purpose and therefore lost international legitimacy.

**Objectives of the Study**

1. To study and be familiar with Jürgen Habermas's contribution to sociology
2. To be familiar with his major works and theories, and particularly with his theory of legitimation crisis

3. To peep into past of the various social systems of the world, and to reflect on the legitimization crisis in the various countries of the world
4. To attempt to have an understanding of the contemporary world social scenario
5. To interpret the legitimization crisis theory of Jurgen Habermas in the context of the world social scenario.

**Review of Literature**

David Kerby (November 10, 2010). Habermas' Opus is Timely! The German political and social philosopher Jurgen Habermas is heir to the semantically rich tradition of Frankfurt School thinkers. These men (and sadly, they are mainly men, although Hannah Arendt is in some sense in this circle) were seriously threatened by the collapse of the Weimar Republic. Their decision to go into exile in the United States should probably be controversial. Habermas is profoundly influenced by Marx, Weber, Freud, and Talcott Parsons, and wrote this book in the context of uprisings against the Viet Nam War. What we are seeing right now, Bush versus Gore in a contested election in which the very structure of the United States government is being questioned, could be illuminated by careful study of this book. I commend it to the attention of anyone who would better understand a moment in United States history which has been described as a constitutional crisis.

Dillon, Michele (2013). "Chapter Four: Talcott Parsons and Robert Merton, Functionalism and Modernization" Talcott Parsons (December 13, 1902 – May 8, 1979) was an American sociologist of the classical tradition, best known for his social action theory and structural functionalism. Parsons is considered one of the most influential figures in the development of sociology in the 20th century. After earning a PhD in economics, he served on the faculty at Harvard University from 1927 to 1979. In 1930, he was among the first professors in its new sociology department.

LeQuire, Peter Brickey; Silver, Daniel (2013). "Critical Naïveté? Religion, Science and Action in the Parsons-Voegelin Correspondence". Between 1940 and 1944, Parsons and Eric Voegelin (1901–1985) exchanged their intellectual views through correspondence.

Steven H Propp (March 13, 2015). The German Social Philosopher Sketches a Theory of Social Evolution. He wrote in the Preface to this 1973 book, "The application of the Marxian theory of crisis to the altered reality of 'advanced capitalism' leads to difficulties. This fact has given rise to interesting attempts to conceive of the old theorems in new ways or, alternatively, to develop new crisis theorems in their place. In the preparatory phase of empirical projects ... we have also examined such approaches; the argumentation sketched in Part II of my essay sums up what I have learned from these discussions... referring to in-house working papers is intended ... to indicate the unfinished character of the discussions, which have by no means yet led to consensus.

Agnes Heller (December 17, 2017). A Dialogue between Agnes Heller & Jürgen Habermas

Habermas does not clearly distinguish between the transcendental and the empirical levels. On the one hand, it was possible to understand the 'universal validity claim' in empirical and historical terms because modern human beings claim universal validity in the sense of the Enlightenment. However, when Habermas counts as a condition for universal validity claims the counterfactual assumption of domination-free communication in the 'ideal communicative community', he speaks on a transcendental level. And yet he at least presupposes the possibility of a de facto universal consensus, i.e. he 'descends' again from the transcendental to the empirical level without accounting for this transition. That is to say, universal agreement, a consensus omnium, is empirically impossible. [In her comments Agnes Heller is referring to her book "Philosophie des linken Radikalismus" (VSA Verlag, 1978)]

All the above reviews throw an ample light on the contribution of both Tylor and Habermas to Sociology through their invaluable theories and views. They serve as the mirror of the intellectual personality of both the social thinkers whose theories are the landmark in the history of Sociology.

**Hypothesis**

1. Jurgen Habermas's theory of legitimization crisis is related not only to the political affairs but to the social affairs
2. Habermas's theory of legitimization crisis has a worldwide significance
3. Habermas's theory of legitimization crisis is an approved theory
4. The world at large is facing legitimization crisis in various forms
5. It can be helpful in the understanding of the state of legitimization crisis in the world
6. Habermas's theory of legitimization crisis can help the concerning persons and authorities arrive at some fruitful solution

**Research Methodology**

The study is purely a theoretical one based on the secondary data collected from the various sources, such as, texts, reference books, research theses, articles, research papers and internet sites. The researcher first went through some of the reviews made previously from time to time on Habermas and on his contribution as a thinker in order to get feedback on the subject; collected the secondary data from these sources; compiled the stuff and material required for the purpose; systematized it, and thus, arrived at the conclusion that Jurgen Habermas's theory of legitimization crisis is a very important theory that can be helpful in the understanding of the various causes and effects of legitimization crisis. While interpreting Habermas's theory of legitimization crisis, secondary data on Talcott Parson's AGIL paradigm were also collected and reviews were gone through for the purpose. The researcher observed strictly all the steps of social research prescribed by the eminent social scientists. Objectivity was observed in order to maintain the scientific spirit in the work. The formulated hypotheses helped the researcher conduct

his study in a directional way and arrive at the conclusions successfully.

### Conclusion

The famous German social and political thinker and writer is now a universal figure as his theories have unanimously been approved. The contemporary world social scenario witnesses various types of crisis which needs to be understood and controlled in order to provide a genuine social system in the world. Legitimation crisis, the term first used by Jurgen Habermas, is one of them. It arises in a society when the members of the society fail to get enough to eat, enough to wear and enough to live in. In other words, when the members in a society strongly believe that the government or state is unable to provide them what they need to be happy and safe; the administration's working is not fair and that they are insecure, they want some other government to exist at the place of the existing one.

It will not be an exaggeration to say that in all the ages in the world there has been legitimation crisis. It arises because of certain social, cultural and political reasons, and it essentially causes several shocking results. Hence, for the sake of providing security, good health and all the required things, it is essential to check the situation of legitimation crisis. For it, Habermas's theory can obviously be helpful and fruitful.

Like Talcott Parsons, Jurgen Habermas too believes that the adaptation quality of the individuals, goal-oriented actions of the individuals, integration among all the members of the society and an unshaken faith of all the members of the society in the long-existing and long established social, cultural, moral and religious values (Parson's AGIL paradigm of the social system) can give a perfect social system, and that if any of these features fails to exist, the social system cannot be claimed to be perfect.

In a nutshell, Jurgen Habermas's contribution to the understanding of the social system and to the understanding of the contemporary world social scenario which witnesses a horrible legitimation crisis, is so immense.

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