

## Et-Moone () versus Wasta ()

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**Et-Moone (مبانة) versus Wasta (واسطة): Understanding the Concept of Et-Moone-Based**

**Wasta**

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# **Et-Moone (ميانة) versus Wasta (واسطة): Understanding the Concept of Et-Moone-Based Wasta**

## *Abstract:*

Most studies on business relationships in the Middle East have predominantly focused on the key concepts of Et-Moone (ميانة) and Wasta (واسطة). Such focus on these two concepts raises the questions about the relationship, if any, between these two concepts. Surprisingly, there has been no study that compares and contrasts the two concepts. Hence, the literature lacks understanding on the connections between these concepts. Do they occur in isolation from each other? Or do they overlap? Or do these concepts complement each other? This paper is aiming to answer the abovementioned questions. To do this, we use the theory of social capital, networks theory and social exchange theory. Our theoretical evaluation and comparison of both concepts enabled us to identify areas of differences and overlapping. Thus, and in addition to the differentiation between the two concepts, we advance the current literature by generating new understanding around the new concept of Et-Moone-based Wasta and their connection to social exchange and network theories.

*Key Words:* Wasta, Et-Moone, theory of social capital, Et-Moone-Based Wasta, network theory.

**Highlights:**

- This is the first study to compare and contracts the concepts of Wasta and Et-Moone.
- Evaluates the similarities and differences between both concepts.
- Identifies the important concept of Et-Moone-based Wasta.
- First discuss the differences between soft-hard-Et-Moone-based Wasta.

## Introduction

The concept of social networks as the essential structures upon which both formal and informal communication are based was first introduced by Chandler (1962). Formal networks are defined with reference to the management-generated structures and are usually linked to corporate strategy and mission, whereas informal networks are defined as the unsanctioned organic structures linking an unbounded group of individuals (Mintzberg, 1979). Interactions within formal networks are based on organisational structures and policies, while interactions within informal networks are based on personal networks and community (Knippen, 1974) and are governed by emotional and relational aspects such as trust, interpersonal familiarity, and affection (Van Maanen and Schein, 1977). Focusing on informal social networks, in business “most work just cannot get done without some informal communication”, in which “people override the regulated systems to advance their personal needs” (Mintzberg, 1979, p. 49-50). Thus, informal social networks are essential to the success of business-to-business relationships (Nichelson et al., 2001) and are manifested differently because they are based on cultural and social values (Abosag and Lee, 2013). Several concepts of informal social networks that have profound effects on B2B interactions and relationships include *yongo* and *inmaek* in Korea (e.g., Horak, 2014), *blat/sviazi* in Russia (e.g., Ledeneva, 1998), *guanxi* in China (e.g., Yen, Barnes and Wang, 2011; Li et al., 2019), *old boy network* in America (e.g., McDonald, 2011), *compadrazgo* in Latin America (Velez-Calle, Robledo-Ardila and Rodriguez-Rios, 2015), and *wasta/et-moone* in the Middle East (Ramady, 2016; Abosag and Lee, 2013).

Like other informal social networks which concern interpersonal connections, Et-Moone (ميانة) and Wasta (واسطة) are concepts that have been linked to social capital theory (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998; Putnam, 2000). Wasta has more relevance within networking theory

(Johanson and Vahlne, 2009) whereas Et-Moone is based more on social exchange theory (Homans, 1958; Blau, 1964). Whilst Wasta has been studied for about three decades, Et-Moone only emerged a little over a decade ago (Hutchings and Weir, 2006; Abosag and Lee, 2013). This means Wasta has received greater attention and has generated interest from diverse disciplines such as psychology (e.g., Punshi and Jones, 2016; Alwerthan, Swanson and Rogge, 2018), sociology (e.g., Hutchings and Weir, 2006; Hertog, 2010), economics (e.g., Barnett, Yandle and Naufal, 2013), and business and management (e.g., Harbi, Thursfield and Bright, 2016).

This multidimensional take on Wasta has not only provided a better picture on the functionality of the Wasta system within Middle Eastern societies. Whilst early studies on Wasta focused on explaining the root of Wasta within the Arabic cultural norms, more recent studies are focused on identifying the positive and negative impacts of Wasta (e.g., Loewe, Blume and Speer, 2008; Ramady, 2016; Weir, Sultan and Bunt, 2016). Interestingly, these studies have identified more negative impacts of Wasta than positive impacts, which raises the question of why Wasta has been a popular concept to study. Some studies have been ‘innovative’ and extended the concept of Wasta to include various entities with some intermediary effects such as brand, corporate reputation, and even country of origin that are not unique to Middle Eastern business practices (e.g., Al-Shamari, 2011; Alwerthan, 2016).

The concept of Et-Moone, on the other hand, has been identified as a unique concept that is key to successful interpersonal and interorganisational relationships (Abosag and Lee, 2013). Unlike Wasta that was created for someone that may be outside the network, Et-Moone was directly developed as a result of close interaction within the network. From the limited number of studies, Et-Moone plays a more positive and significant role in interorganisational networks (Abosag, 2015; Albin Shaikh, Purchase and Brush, 2019). Thus, and unlike Wasta, there have been no studies that examined the dark-side of Et-Moone in business relationships.

Both Wasta and Et-Moone are thought to have significant impact on business networking and interorganisational relationships (Albin Shaikh et al., 2019). Yet, the relationship between these two concepts has not been explored or discussed fully. Hence, this paper aims at comparing and contrasting the concepts to find out whether they occur in isolation of each other, overlap or complement each other. To answer these questions, we provide a thorough examination of the existing literature with specific focus on the role that Wasta and Et-Moone play in business and management. This study is the first to provide in-depth understanding of the similarities and differences between Wasta and Et-Moone. In addition, we identified the powerful concept of ‘Et-Moone-Based Wasta’, which is the result of our examination of the combination of Wasta and Et-Moone within a single B2B relationship. In discussing this concept, we differentiated between ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ Et-Moone-based Wasta. The discussion of the concept of ‘Et-Moone-Based Wasta’ provides insight into the pros and cons for businesses and their competitiveness as well as the way it contributes to current understanding of B2B and informal ties. In addition, we discuss the dark-side of the concept of ‘soft/hard Et-Moone-based Wasta’ and the implications for other businesses and the marketplace.

We will first provide discussion on the contextual roots of both concepts. Given the fact that most of the literature on Wasta has overwhelmingly indicated the negative impact of Wasta, this needs a closer look within business relationships and network literature. On the other hand, the Et-Moone concept has not been fully explored and we will thus look into its roots and consequences that would enable us to compare and contrast these two concepts. Furthermore, this study will provide an understanding about how managers can effectively leverage the benefits from both concepts in managing their business relationships.

## **Theoretical Background on Informal Ties**

Almost all informal social networks have been grounded within the theory of social capital, which itself is considered as informal in nature (Woolcock, 1998; Adler and Kwon, 2002). Social capital has been defined as the ‘privileged access to rare resources’ (Portes, 1998; Adler and Kwon, 2002). To understand the informal nature of social capital, researchers distinguished informal from formal elements (e.g., North, 1990). The concept of social networks reflects the formal and informal exchanges (Chandler, 1962) that coexist and interact with each other within organisations (Horak et al., 2019). Such exchanges are best explained by the social exchange theory that is considered as “one of the oldest theories of social behaviour” (Homans, 1958, p. 597) and regards any aspect of interaction between people as an exchange of resources. Social exchange theory is particularly useful for explaining businesses’ relational exchanges (e.g., Anderson and Narus, 1984) as it argues that the exchange parties develop and maintain relationships because of the expectation that they will be rewarding (Blau, 1964). Thus, issues such as interpersonal relationships, interdependence, trust and commitment are essential to the understanding of both informal and formal interactions between individuals and their organisations (Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Horak et al., 2019).

Whilst social exchange theory deals with “social interaction as an exchange process” (Chadwick-Jones, 1976), network theory deals with the process of an individual or a firm trying to enter a network and becoming an insider rather than an outsider to such network in order to exploit opportunities (Hakansson and Snehota, 1995; Holm, Johanson and Kao, 2015). Network theory differentiates between opportunity recognition, which is the depth of relational embeddedness that determines the type and nature of opportunity that can be discovered (Johanson and Vahlne, 2009), and opportunity exploitation - if an opportunity cannot be exploited then it is non-existent. Thus, network position influences how an



opportunity is recognised, developed, and exploited. One needs to have the connections necessary for exploiting such an opportunity. Exploiting an existing opportunity can enable individuals/firms to add new relationships to their network and further strengthen their position within the network (Andersson, Holm and Johanson, 2006; Alvarez, Barney and Anderson, 2013).

Informal social networks emphasise the importance of trust, interpersonal similarity, collaboration and reciprocity. Early B2B literature provided insights into interfirm adaptation and reciprocity and states that firms that use relational approaches have high interdependence and have a mutual control over their resources (Hakansson, 1982; Webster, 1992; Fang, 2001). Mutual dependence means that “each party must recognise the fact that they need each other to meet their stated goals and that both parties must work together to achieve those goals” (McQuiston, 1997). This aim is achieved by a mutual exchange and fulfilment of promises (Gronroos, 1994). Reciprocity helps firms to achieve their objectives (Buchanan, 1992) and resolve conflicts (Dwyer, Schurr and Oh, 1987), when based on mutual trust (Anderson and Weitz, 1989). Svensson (2005) found that reciprocity strengthens relationship commitment.

Although both Wasta and Et-Moone are well founded within the social capital theory (Abosag and Naudé, 2014; Ramady, 2016), the concept of Et-Moone is well explained by social exchange theory mainly because of the strong interpersonal attachment between relational parties (Abosag, 2015; Alalwan, et al., 2021) However, Wasta is best explained by network theory because of the recognition of an opportunity for which connections are developed to exploit such an opportunity (Al-Fasial and Abdullellah, 1993). Wasta and Et-Moone use informal and formal networks differently.

Wasta has received greater attention than Et-Moone. Although Wasta has received some attention since the 1990s, studies focusing on its impact on business and management have only emerged and accelerated over the past decade or so. As can be seen in Table 1 below, studies have largely focused on the role of Wasta within and between organisations. Almost all studies use social capital and network theory. Networking using Wasta relies on similar social doctrines between individuals regardless of whether Wasta is used within or between organisations. On the other hand, studies on Et-Moone are solely focused on business-to-business relationships using social exchange theory. Yet, the number of studies on Et-Moone is small compared to the number of studies on Wasta. Table 1 contains a summary of studies on Wasta and Et-Moone from the business and management literature.

**Table 1** Summary of Studies of Wasta and Et-Moone from Business and Management Perspective.

Authors/ Year	Wasta /Et- Moone	Publication	Theory	Approach	Method	Key Findings
Kropf & Newbury-Smith (2016)	Wasta	<i>Book chapter</i>	Social capital – network theory	Sociocultural perspective of Wasta	Literature-base	Social capital and <i>wasta</i> overlaps quite considerably, and more than Western proponents of professional networking
Alwerthan, Swanson & Rogge (2018)	Wasta	<i>International Journal of Psychology</i>	Self-determination theory (SDT)	Psychology	Empirical – quantitative	Modelling the needs for autonomy, competency and relatedness as mechanisms linking <i>wasta</i> to psychological distress
Velez-Calle, Robledo-Ardila & Rodriguez-Rios (2015)	Wasta	<i>Thunderbird International Business Review</i>	Social capital	Conceptual + comparison	Literature-base	Highlights the similarities among <i>wasta</i> , <i>guanxi</i> , and the Latin American <i>compadrazgo</i>
Harbi, Thursfield & Bright (2017)	Wasta	<i>International Journal of Human Resource Management</i>	Social networks	Interpretive - organisation and human resources	Qualitative	Western models of performance appraisal rooted in rationality and objectivity conflict with aspects of Saudi Arabian culture.
Tlaiss & Kauser (2011)	Wasta	<i>Journal of European Industrial Training</i>	Social networks	Business and human resources	Quantitative & Qualitative	- <i>Wasta</i> displays similarities and differences compared with networking and mentoring. - Negative <i>wasta</i>

						networking practices that would be deemed unethical in a Western setting
Alsarhan & Valax (2020)	Wasta	<i>The International Journal of Islamic and Middle Eastern</i>	Social capital – network theory	Organisational behaviour	Qualitative	Identified negative consequences of <i>wasta</i> on overall performance of organisations, satisfaction, turnover, image and reputation of the individuals and organisation alike
Berger et al. (2015)	Wasta	<i>Journal of World Business</i>	Social network	Business-to-business	Quantitative	Identified and measured three types of sub-dimensions of <i>wasta</i> : Mojamala, Hamola and Somah and their influence on relationship satisfaction and performance
Aldossari & Robertson (2016)	Wasta	<i>International Journal of Human Resource Management</i>	Social network	Psychological contract	Qualitative: two-case comparative study	<i>Wasta</i> psychological contract can be viewed as highly context specific, as well as a person-centred phenomenon
Al-Ma'aitah, Soltani & Liao (2021)	Wasta	<i>Book chapter</i>	Social exchange & networks	Supply chain relationships	Quantitative	Long-term buyer-supplier relationship is significantly affected by <i>wasta</i>
Khakhar & Rammal (2013)	Wasta	<i>International Business Review</i>	Network theory	International Business	Qualitative	Business managers use referent power ( <i>wasta</i> ) in international business negotiation
Shaan et al. (2020)	Wasta	<i>Journal of Business &amp; Industrial Marketing</i>	Network theory	Relationship marketing	Quantitative	<i>Wasta</i> attracts customers, nurturing early relationships and enhancing relationship quality, but does not influence the retention of customers
Al-Hussan, Al-Husan & Alhesan (2015)	Wasta	<i>IMP Conference</i>	Social capital and network	Business-to-business	Qualitative	<i>Wasta</i> is a pre-requisite for the successful management of key accounts
Barnett, Yandle & Naufal (2013)	Wasta	<i>Journal of Socio-Economics</i>	Economics - social dynamics	Hayek's concept & Coase's work	Literature-based	Shows marginal benefit and marginal cost relationships for extending the use of <i>wasta</i> across transactions involving tribal activity.
Albin Shaikh, Purchase & Brush (2019)	Wasta/ Et-Moone	<i>Journal of Business &amp; Industrial Marketing</i>	Social capital – network theory	Business-to-business – wasta, ehsan & et-moone	Qualitative	<i>Wasta</i> , ehsan and et-moone align closely with the three social capital dimensions (structural, cognitive and relational)
Abosag & Lee (2013)	Et-Moone	<i>International Business Review</i>	Social exchange theory	Business-to-business	Qualitative	Describes the foundation of <i>Et-Moone</i> in business relationships. Finds that trust and commitment are major factors in establishing <i>Et-Moone</i> relationships.
Abosag & Naudé (2014)	Et-Moone	<i>Industrial Marketing Management</i>	Social Exchange theory	Business-to-business – comparison of et-moone and guanxi	Quantitative	Although there are differences, this study found that interpersonal liking plays an essential role in the development of <i>Guanxi</i> and <i>Et-Moone</i>
Abosag	Et-	<i>Industrial</i>	Social	Business-to-	Quantitative	Confirms the importance

(2015)	Moone	<i>Marketing Management</i>	Exchange theory	business		of interpersonal liking to the establishment of <i>Et-Moone</i> business relationships
Abosag (2008)	Et-Moone	<i>Journal of Scientific Management</i>	Social exchange theory	Business-to-business	Qualitative	First to identify the <i>Et-Moone</i> concept as a unique and powerful concept in business relationships

The above studies within Table 1 clearly show the extensive use of network theory by studies focusing on Wasta. This is due to the nature and functionality of Wasta as will be clearly explained in the sections below. Studies on Et-Moone focus on the business relationships between organisations, business-to-business, hence they use social exchange theory which focuses on understanding relational interactions between managers and organisations. This is due to the nature of Et-Moone which can only be developed between two managers/individuals; unlike Wasta, Et-Moone does not require any introduction or mediator between individuals/managers.

### **Roots and Definitions**

Both Wasta and Et-Moone stem from the Arabic culture. Whilst Et-Moone “has been an integral part of Arabic culture for hundreds of years” (Albin Shaikh et al., 2019, p. 415), it is not clear when Wasta emerged as part of the Arabic culture. What is certain is that Wasta has been practiced since the second half of the twentieth century. Wasta is an attempt to attain privileges or resources from a third party through a middleman (Cunningham and Sarayrah, 1993), through doing favours to grant one with advantages (Loewe et al., 2008), based on personal connections; it often originates from family, tribal relationships and other social networks of interpersonal relationships (Hutchings and Weir, 2006). Unfortunately, in defining Wasta, many authors have mixed the purposes of Wasta, its process, and the way in which it functions. This has led to rather different definitions and emphasis of the meaning of

Wasta. It has been defined based on its purpose ‘favouritism’ (e.g., Mohamed and Mohamad, 2011), its process ‘connection’ between an inferior member of the society and a powerful member (e.g., Al-Fasial and Abdullellah, 1993) and its functionality as ‘middleman’ (e.g., Hutchings and Weir, 2006). In order to help achieve the aim of this paper, the definition and distinction between these Wasta and Et-Moone concepts should be based on the purpose, process and functionality of these two concepts. Table 2 below provides a comparison of the characteristics of Wasta and Et-Moone.

**Table 2** Defining Wasta and Et-Moone.

<b>Et-Moone</b>	<b>Wasta</b>
Form of solidarity and personal loyalty	Form of favouritism
Strong social bond between two business partners	Social bond between the middleman and the decision maker
Dyadic ties	Middle, mediation, moderation
Relational embeddedness	Network embeddedness
Intimate relationship	Distant relationship but can be generated by Et-Moone relationship
Strong emotional attachments	Some attachment but not necessary
High degree of interpersonal liking	Some interpersonal liking but not necessary
High degree of trust and commitment	Sufficient degree of trust and commitment
‘some reciprocity’	‘some reciprocity’
Long-term investment	Mostly short-term investment
Solidarity	Short-term commitment
Doing favours	Doing favours
Close/deep friendship	Third/middle party effect
Informal/formal ties	Informal/formal ties
Personal loyalty	Some loyalty

The “purpose” of Wasta is thus to achieve a favour. Its “process” involves the usage of the middleman’s connection, power, and certain social or economic ties essentially to help someone. The “functionality” of Wasta is manifested in the form of favouritism that exists

because of the need for a ‘*middleman*’ to ‘*help*’ someone by seeking a favour from someone with decision-making power. This can be in the shape of nepotism or cronyism. The term ‘Wasta’ stems from the Arabic word “middle” or “medium”. Thus, Wasta is the name of the ‘*middleman*’ who seeks a favour from a decision-maker for someone that the ‘Wasta’ (middleman) is keen to help. Defining Wasta as a form of favouritism is more accurate because its process and functionality are designed to achieve a favour. Thus, based on the “purpose”, “process” and “functionality” of Wasta, Mohamed and Mohamad’s (2011, p. 412) definition adequately reflects the meaning of Wasta as “a form of favouritism that provides individuals with advantages not because of merit or right but because of who they know”. Table 3 shows the definitions of Wasta and Et-Moone based on their purpose, process and functionality.

**Table 3** Defining Wasta and Et-Moone based on the purpose, process, and functionality.

	Purpose	Process	Functionality
Wasta	Achieve favouritism for someone in a social network: - Nepotism (favours to family members) - Cronyism (favours to friends)	Use of connection, power or certain social or economic leverages/ties – Essentially, it is a <i>helping</i> process.	Through a mediator – a middleman who is happy to initiate the process (use of connection, power or certain social or economic leverages/ties) on behalf of someone (family, friends, and tribe) through someone with a decision-making power.
Et-Moone	Develop solidarity and cooperation for bad and good times.	Continuous investment in developing interpersonal liking, self-disclosure, deep friendship, personal loyalty, trust, and mutuality.	Significant sharing of knowledge and information, allows for sharing power, favouritism, and greater flexibility in business relationships. In ‘deep Et-Moone’ may allow for unilateral business decision making.

Et-Moone is defined by Abosag and Naudé (2014, p. 889) as “higher order cooperation, where partners give special attention to the cooperative relationship through the emphasis on the special personal relationship that exists between them”. Whilst Wasta involves the use of

a middleman, effectively a network of a minimum of three individuals, the “purpose” of Et-Moone, which focuses solely on the two individuals making both sides of a relationship, is the substantial increase of cooperation, commitment, and solidarity. The “process” of establishing and maintaining an Et-Moone relationship involves a continuous investment in developing interpersonal liking, self-disclosure, deep friendship, personal loyalty, trust, and mutuality (Abosag and Naudé, 2014).

The “functionality” of Et-Moone relationships is typically manifested through greater flexibility in business relationships and more sharing of knowledge and information about the relationship itself but also about the market. It allows for sharing of decision making and some levels of power needed to take and implement decisions and allows both parties in the Et-Moone relationship to carry out favours for each other within the relationship or with other business relationships that one of the partners may need. Abosag and Lee (2013) indicated that there are potentially different levels of Et-Moone. Abosag and Naudé (2014) pointed out that there are at least two levels - namely a “soft” (low level) Et-Moone and “hard” (high level) Et-Moone. “Soft” Et-Moone aims to develop “high commitment combined with total trust and high level of likability (that) can lead to the development of an (soft) Et-Moone relationship” (Abosag and Lee, 2012, p. 608). This means that soft Et-Moone is a significant increase from what can be described as a ‘normal business relationship’ in Western countries. As described by Abosag and Naudé (2014, p. 889), soft Et-Moone is used by business partners to “express the importance of the relationship and to distinguish this relationship from other relationships”. In “hard” Et-Moone, business partners “devote resources, support and commitment to each other as if their businesses were jointly owned by themselves” (Abosag, 2015, p. 151). In addition, according to Abosag and Lee (2012) and Albin Shaikh et al. (2019) who described “hard” Et-Moone as ‘high level of Et-Moone’, “hard” Et-Moone can lead the partners to use unilateral decision making because of stronger solidarity amongst

Et-Moone partners. Again, the examination of the varying levels of Et-Moone is yet to be properly examined. Nonetheless, there are clearly two levels of Et-Moone - soft and hard.

### **Do Wasta and Et-Moone Increase the Dark-Side of Business Relationships?**

The term 'deviant' has rarely been used to describe cultural behaviour. Instead, the literature on business relationships often uses terms such as dark-side (Abosag, Yen and Barnes, 2016), negative behaviour (Moorman, Zaltman and Deshpande, 1992), adverse behaviour (Strandvik and Holmlund, 2008), unethical behaviour (Vitell and Davis, 1990), ethical compromise (Tangpong, Li and Hung, 2016), misconduct (Jensen, 2010), relationship unrest (Good and Evans, 2001), destruction and co-destruction of value (Smith, 2013; Chowdhury, Gruber and Zolkiewski, 2016), and detrimental behaviour (Pressey, Tzokas and Winklhofer, 2007). Behavioural science suggests that reducing the negative behaviour has a greater impact on the success of the firm than investing purely in developing positive relationships (Baumeister et al., 2001). Thus, the literature has long recognized the need to engage in managing and reducing the dark-side of business relationships (e.g., Gaski, 1984; John, 1984).

The dark-side of the concept of Et-Moone has not directly been examined in the literature. However, Albin Shaikh et al. (2019, p. 416) suggested that "a high level of Et-Moone may negatively influence the giving and taking of constructive criticism". Abosag (2015, p. 151) pointed out that relationship commitment in Et-Moone relationships can be 'excessive' to the point of producing monopolistic behaviour. The literature has not identified any negative side of Et-Moone beyond the impact of excessive commitment and monopolistic behaviour. Thus, there is clear lack of understanding of the dark-side of Et-Moone. The hard/high level of Et-Moone may suggest that there is a misuse of the social capital which may mean there are other negative outcomes of Et-Moone yet to be unveiled. Although Et-Moone has emerged



from the cultural norms and values of the society, the high level of Et-Moone may lead to some forms of deviant and negative behaviour resulting in the use of Wasta. Clearly, there is a need to directly examine the dark-side of Et-Moone.

On the positive side, Et-Moone is a source of relational stability within business relationships, providing greater flexibility, ease of communication and decision making, and motivates cooperative behaviour based on a high level of trust and commitment. Importantly, Et-Moone relationships reduce relational uncertainty, relational conflicts, diminishes opportunistic behaviour and switching intention and transaction costs (Abosag and Lee, 2013; Abosag, 2015). Et-Moone relationships are the strongest form of business relationships and they enhance positivity and reduce negativity in relationships. Table 4 below shows the differences between Wasta and Et-Moone in terms of the positive and negative characteristics.

**Table 4** The Positive and Negative Sides of Wasta and Et-Moone.

<b>Wasta</b>		<b>Et-Moone</b>	
<i>Positive</i>	<i>Negative</i>	<i>Positive</i>	<i>Negative</i>
Secure benefits because of connections	Suppresses merit and competence within organisations	Eases decision making	Excessive commitment to the relational partner
Extending help and support to friends and family	Abuse of power to meet private ends	Eases communication between the relational partners	Monopolistic behaviour in the marketplace by the relational partner
Demonstrating loyalty and trustworthiness of the middleman	Causes inequality and inefficiency within and between organisations	Strong cooperation between the relational partners	Can be a strong source for Wasta for one of the relational partners
Cement social ties for all who use Wasta	Reduces productivity of organisations	High levels of trust and commitment between the relational partners	Provides unfair advantage to one of the relational partners
Save time and cost for those gaining from Wasta	Has negative image for all involved in the Wasta and their organisation(s)	Enhances competitiveness for both or one of the relational partners	
Can be effective in solving conflicts between individuals/organisations	There is a stigma on all those who use Wasta	Reduces relationship uncertainty	
Overcome bureaucracy	Becomes an endemic problem	Radically reduces conflict, opportunism and switching intention between the relational partners	
	Promotes corruption	Long-term relationship	
	Provides unfair advantage to those who use it		
	Hampers economic development		
	Deplored by others who do not use it or have been disadvantaged because of it		

Wasta, on the other hand, is a clear deviant behaviour that promotes inequality, inefficiency, and corruption (e.g., Ramady, 2016; Weir et al., 2016). Unlike Et-Moone, the dark-side of Wasta has been directly examined and the overall findings from these studies show an overwhelmingly negative impact on individuals, organisations, and the wider society (e.g., Tlaiss and Kauser, 2011). Key negative impacts of Wasta include suppressing merit and competence, abuse of power, reducing productivity, encouraging corruption and unfair advantages, and hampering economic development (e.g., Alwerthan et al., 2018). Significantly, Wasta is seen as promoting a corrupt culture deplored by many in the society,

as it is becoming an endemic problem that is difficult to eradicate (e.g., Kropf and Newbury-Smith, 2016). Within business and management literature, the area of human resource management has particularly focused on the use of Wasta in employment, employees' relations, promotion, and industrial relations (e.g., Gurrib, 2016; Alwerthan et al., 2018). Similarly, the literature on organisational studies has examined the role of Wasta on organisational behaviour, productivity, efficiency, fairness, psychological distress (e.g., Kropf and Newbury-Smith, 2016). This literature has largely repeated similar negative impacts of Wasta on organisations and employees.

In addition, within business-to-business relationships' literature, there is an emergence of a trend that ridicules the use of Wasta (Weir et al., 2019). In fact, any individual who uses his/her social capital to carry out a Wasta (requesting a favour) may be successful the first time but then may completely lose his/her social capital or face (similar to the concept of face in China) if they decided to repeat Wasta a second or more times with the same individual with whom no Et-Moone relationship existed. This suggests that Wasta is a short-term act that may burn out social credit of the Wasta (middleman). Hence, there is a cost for whoever decides to carry out Wasta for someone else. Furthermore, as suggested by Coleman (1990), misusing social capital could lead to negative consequences for the third party in the Wasta process who has the power for making decisions (deciding on granting the requested favour by the middleman).

The positive side of Wasta is debatable because those who were able to find and use Wasta that would enable them to secure the favour they need are likely to view Wasta as 'positive' (Loewe et al., 2008). However, those who could not secure Wasta and would rely on the fairness of the system would be very likely to view Wasta as 'negative' (Tlaiss and Kauser, 2011). Importantly, the literature appears to indicate that Wasta does cement social ties. Whilst this may be true for some successful Wastas where there are some mutual rewards, the

general perception of Wasta is rather more negative for the abovementioned reasons. However, Wasta can be used to solve conflicts just like any other mediation between parties. The literature is right to argue that Wasta has been more popular because it overcomes bureaucracy (saves cost and time) that exists in most institutions, but this is typically at the expense of others parties.

### **Distinct (in Isolation), Overlap or Complement?**

As mentioned earlier, the relationship between Wasta and Et-Moone has not been properly examined in any significant depth, with the exception of the very recent study by Albin Shaikh et al. (2019) who provided some limited insights into this relationship. To understand the nature of the relationship between these two concepts one must discuss the extent to which they are distinct from each other. The fact that both concepts stem from the Arabic cultural norms and values may suggest some degree of complementarity or overlapping in the meaning, process, or functionality of these concepts. The earlier discussion on the roots and definitions of these concepts shows the concepts to be largely distinct. The purpose, process and functionally are largely different. However, the concepts do overlap in the area of favouritism. Albeit Wasta focuses on establishing connection for the purpose of achieving favouritism, favouritism is not a purpose for Et-Moone. Favouritism is only one of functionalities of Et-Moone. Hence, there is an overlapping between the two concepts based on favouritism.

Interestingly, favouritism clearly is an important term in Arabic culture. Whilst the entire Wasta system is designed to achieve a favour, within an Et-Moone relationship favouritism only emerges later as one of the tools that can be used by one of the parties in the Et-Moone relationship to achieve more privileges through a very committed and loyal friend. Thus, Et-

Moone partners can indeed carry out Wasta for each other with an external individual(s) or organisation(s). Wasta that is motivated/requested by an Et-Moone partner typically is more successful mainly because of the devotion that means the Wasta (middleman) who is an Et-Moone partner would make strong endeavours to ensure the requested favouritism is successfully realised by the Et-Moone partner. This relationship between Wasta and Et-Moone is supported by Albin Shaikh et al. (2019, p. 412), “Et-Moone will assist managers to develop and use Wasta”. Although Albin Shaikh et al. (2019, p. 412) argued that “Et-Moone appears to have a positive influence on Wasta use”, one would need to keep an open mind about the dark-side of both Wasta and Et-Moone. Such dark side is likely to increase when the concepts are combined within a relationship. This is because Et-Moone exacerbates the dark-side of Wasta, mainly because of close and intimate friendship that exists between the two sides of Et-Moone relationships. Therefore Et-Moone could lead to a more monopolistic behaviour as mentioned earlier.

### **The Concept of Et-Moone-Based Wasta**

To understand the overlapping between Wasta and Et-Moone, it is important to understand the effect of the strength and levels of Et-Moone on initiating Wasta, as the combination of both (Et-Moone and Wasta) can ensure that such Wasta is successful. Like individuals/managers in social/professional networks who use Wasta, individuals/managers who have an Et-Moone relationships can also use Wasta. We call this combination an “Et-Moone-based Wasta”. We suspect that this combination/Et-Moone-based Wasta is most powerful in terms of success in achieving the goal(s) from the use of Wasta. This is because of the close nature of the relationship between the Et-Moone’s partners. The early discussion on the levels (soft/hard) of Et-Moone is essential to the understanding of Et-Moone-based

Wasta. The hard Et-Moone can significantly impact the success of Wasta in achieving its goals. Albin Shaikh et al. (2019, p. 422) argued that “a high level of Et-Moone (hard Et-Moone) between parties seems to be important to develop considerable Wasta capital from each other”. Thus, strong devotion through resources’ mobilisation, strong coordination, and collaboration of the members of Et-Moone relationships can ensure success of their Wasta. Et-Moone partners can use their resources and capabilities including the use of power of position if needed. They may engage others in their networks if needed to help the transmission of social capital resources such as reputation, trust and tribal and social ties. This type of Et-Moone-based Wasta can be more permanent than any other types of Wasta that tend to be short-term. Hard-Et-Moone-based Wasta is capable of going beyond the short-term favouritism to a more long-term project of favouritism that can be attached to the structure of exchanges within the market. Hence, it may lead to monopolistic behaviour that is hard to deal with because hard Et-Moone-based Wasta is characterised by strong coordination and collaboration within the Wasta process to achieve certain outcomes for the network.

Et-Moone-based Wasta can grow in size to include other Et-Moone relationships with other players in the marketplace through their Wasta connections. Such a network of Et-Moone-based Wastas can form strong connections and control through which members of such a network can transmit social capital resources for their own advantages. They can then provide help and support to each other ensuring such advantages are maintained for longer. Benefits of high level ‘hard’ Et-Moone-based Wasta may include awarding of contracts and subcontracts, greater dependence on each other’s resources, coordination of market moves, enhancing each other’s brand image, codirecting the future development of the market, and providing greater protection against other competitors. Table 5 below shows the differences between soft and hard-Et-Moone-based Wasta.

**Table 5** Soft vs. Hard Et-Moone-Based Wasta.

	<b>Soft Et-Moone</b>	<b>Hard (high level) Et-Moone</b>
<b>Et-Moone- Based Wasta</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Will ‘certainly try’ attitude.</li> <li>- Time will be committed.</li> <li>- Some coordination and collaboration to achieve the favour.</li> <li>- May transmit some social capital resources to others to help out.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Devotion to make Wasta successful.</li> <li>- Mobilisation of resources (time, money, etc.).</li> <li>- Strong coordination and collaboration to achieve the favour.</li> <li>- May use power to create more favourable outcomes.</li> <li>- Will transmit social capital resources to others to help out.</li> <li>- The outcome of this Wasta may last much longer than other Wasta types.</li> </ul>

On the other hand, “soft” Et-Moone-based Wasta is common, within which Et-Moone partners will endeavour to achieve the requested favour but will do what is ‘sufficient’ in terms of time, coordination and collaboration and use of social capital resources. If the Wasta is successful, then it will enhance the Et-Moone relationship further. However, if this soft-Et-Moone-based Wasta is not successful then it is unlikely to undermine the Et-Moone relationships as long as the efforts made are clearly noticed by both parties of the Et-Moone relationships. Soft-Et-Moone-based Wasta does not require significant time and resources; hence it is more of a short-term effort with some sincerity to achieve the desired outcomes. This type of Et-Moone-based Wasta goes beyond the normal Wasta through greater use of personal reputation, follow up on the initial communication, provision of regular feedback on progress, explanation of reasons for the success/failure of the Wasta, and suggestions for future considerations. However, soft-Et-Moone-based Wasta, though aiming to be helpful, will not use critical social capital resources to invest in the success of the Wasta as these will be reserved for hard-Et-Moone partners.

## **Conclusion and Future Research**

The concepts of Et-Moone and Wasta are essential in business relationships in the Middle East. Yet, prior studies have not provided any conceptual evaluations of these two concepts. Thus, this study has provided an important initial examination of both concepts with the aim of understanding areas of similarities, differences and overlapping. Such examination resulted in the identification of the important concept of Et-Moone-based Wasta which arguably provides the strongest Wasta that can be implemented. An important distinction between soft and hard/high level of Et-Moone-based Wasta is essential to the understanding, not only of this type of Wasta, but also to the way in which Et-Moone and Wasta can have a combined effect on business relationships resulting in greater success in the relationship and in the competitiveness in the marketplace. Despite the importance of the contributions from this study and considering the identification of Et-Moone-based Wasta, there are several areas that still need further examination. Thus, future research needs to consider the following key areas.

Firstly, future studies should solely and empirically examine Et-Moone-based Wasta. Much of the literature is focused on the general concept of Wasta and closer inspection of Et-Moone-based Wasta will be hugely beneficial.

Secondly, the two types of Et-Moone-based Wasta (soft/hard) should be examined with the aim to understand the type of social capital resources that are invested in each type. It is imperative to distinguish between the two types of Et-Moone-based Wasta so that understanding can be gained about the level of devotion committed to ensuring the success of such Wasta.



Thirdly, studies on the concept of Wasta have identified several negative impacts on individuals, relationships and organisations. Future research needs explore and investigate the negative impact of Et-Moone-based Wasta on individuals, relationships and organisations. Because hard-Et-Moone Wasta involves the highest degree of devotion, commitment and sharing of resources, special attention must be paid to the understanding of the negative impacts of hard-Et-Moone Wasta. This study has already identified key areas of concerns, but future empirical research is needed.

Fourthly, whilst both type of Et-Moone-based Wasta can only be achieved through close personal relationships between Arab managers, the extent to which foreign managers can secure an Et-Moone relationship with Arab managers is unknown. Hence, future research should aim to understand if it is at all possible for foreign managers to reach such special relationships with their Arab counterparts.

Fifthly, most studies on Et-Moone have focused on the positive side of Et-Moone. Future research needs to examine the concept of Et-Moone with specific focus on its dark-side.

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