

Review of: "Wasta: The Culture of Nepotism on the Arabian Peninsula"

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Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

The presented article offers an overview of Wasta in the Arab world, particularly within the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. It analyzes public perceptions of the phenomenon, employing Gadamer's hermeneutic method and Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) to meet its objectives. While the article achieves its stated goals, several lexical and stylistic shortcomings are noted:

1.1. The paper could benefit from avoiding repetitive phrasing in the introduction. For instance, "*These questions...*" and "*These states...*", or the repetition of "*striving*" in the last sentence of the first paragraph and the first sentence of the second paragraph.

1.2. The phrase "*the governments of oil-rich states are striving to eradicate corruption*" should be adjusted to "*some governments...*" unless all GCC states are uniformly discussed in terms of their anti-corruption efforts.

1.3. It is recommended to change "*remains a matter of debate*" to "*remains a subject of debate.*"

1.4. When introducing a term, such as '*wasta*', it is advisable to use quotations and italics initially. Upon repeated use, italics alone would suffice.

1.5. The phrase "*in the former Soviet Union*" should be revised to "*in the post-Soviet countries*" or "*in the post-Soviet environment.*"

1.6. The expression "*in an economy marked by scarcity*" would be better framed as "*in an economy marked by shortages,*" which more accurately reflects the economic context of the Soviet Union during the 1970s and 1980s, characterized by persistent shortages. "*Scarcity*" is a more general and neutral term that doesn't fully capture this situation.

1.7. Certain phrases are awkward, such as "*striving to diversify away.*" This could be rephrased for clarity.

1.8. It is suggested to change "*job market*" to "*labor market*" to maintain professional language.

1.9. The expression "*presence in social and economic life*" should be revised to "*presence in social and economic milieus*" (or "*environments,*" which is also acceptable).

1.10. The paper would benefit from maintaining a neutral tone, for example, by replacing "*unfortunately*" in the literature review's first paragraph with a more neutral term.

1.11. Consistency in English usage is recommended. Although the article predominantly follows British English, some American English terms are used, such as “criticize,” “polarized,” “mobilize,” “optimize,” “modernization,” and “globalization.”

Further recommendations pertain to the article's content:

2.1. The paper provides a comprehensive overview of Wasta and touches on the implications of corruption, highlighting both positive and negative aspects. However, the literature review could benefit from incorporating the “grease in the wheels” and “sand in the wheels” perspectives.

2.2. When discussing international alternatives to Wasta, the article elaborates on the origins of “blat” but does not delve into its mechanisms. In contrast, the Chinese, Brazilian, and Italian alternatives are discussed in terms of their mechanisms, without much reference to origins. The article would gain consistency by including a discussion on the mechanism of “blat.”

2.3. While the article makes a valid point that Wasta and similar concepts represent forms of social capital rooted in long-standing familial and social ties, this concept could be further explored, potentially linking it to the idea of inheritance.

2.4. The research question could be refined to focus on specific countries or members of a specific organization. The term “Gulf countries” is somewhat subjective and may lead to differing interpretations of the countries being analyzed.

Finally, there are several recommendations concerning the methodology:

3.1. The choice of YouTube and Reddit is well-justified, but the study could benefit from including X (formerly Twitter), as it is often the most common platform for social media network analysis. A clearer explanation for the choice of platforms, along with a discussion of the non-inclusion of alternatives (briefly mentioned in the objectives), would enhance the paper.

3.2. The article does not sufficiently describe the sampling criteria and offers limited discussion on the implications of the chosen sample size. The selected number of both videos and comments barely meets the standards for social media network analysis, where the total population is typically vast. These limitations raise concerns about the validity of the results, which are more illustrative than representative. A more detailed acknowledgment of these limitations would strengthen the study.

Overall, despite the noted limitations—many of which can be easily addressed—the article explores an interesting and relevant topic. It is believed that, with these revisions, the article will make an important contribution to the existing body of knowledge.

