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DIALOGUE, DEBATE, AND DISCUSSION

A Rejoinder to: 'Questioning the Appropriateness of Examining *Guanxi* in a *Wasta* Environment: Why Context Should Be Front and Center in Informal Network Research – A Commentary on "De-Linking from Western Epistemologies: Using *Guanxi*-Type Relationships to Attract and Retain Hotel Guests in the Middle East"'

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Rejoinder

This rejoinder responds to a commentary (Horak et al., 2023) on our article 'De-Linking from Western Epistemologies: Using *Guanxi*-Type Relationships to Attract and Retain Hotel Guests in the Middle East' (2022). We thank the authors for engaging with our work and are grateful to the editor for the chance to respond. Firstly, we do not accept the central assertion that we imposed the Chinese concept of *guanxi* on a Middle Eastern context. Some aspects of *guanxi* extend beyond China, and we consider it part of our role as researchers to explore universal behavioral aspects that transcend specific cultural settings. While we described *guanxi* to introduce the variables, we drew a clear distinction between *guanxi* itself and *guanxi*-type relationships, and provided on page 859 an explicit statement about what we meant by the term '*guanxi*-type relationships', i.e. the networks of interpersonal ties found in the Middle East. While this distinction could have been more clearly emphasized in places, we consider that the article as a whole made it abundantly clear.

Moreover, *wasta* cannot be considered a suitable generic term for our study. While our own detailed knowledge of *wasta* is evidenced in prior work by some of the same authors (e.g. Shaalan, Tourky, Barnes, Jayawardhena, & Elshaer, 2021), the term is culturally inappropriate in some of the 17 countries studied on this occasion (i.e., Iran and Turkey) and excludes other networks such as *Et-Moone* (Abosag & Lee, 2013) and *ma'arifa* (Yahiaoui & Zoubir, 2006). Indeed, Abosag and Naudé's (2014) study, cited by the authors to back their criticism that we had not focused on *wasta*, is itself about *Et-Moone* rather than *wasta*, and compares *Et-Moone* to *guanxi*. Given this nuanced picture, we felt that the inclusive term '*guanxi*-type relationships' permitted exploration of diverse networks without creating regional cross-cultural complexities. While discussing this reasoning, and mentioning *wasta* and other local networks, would have been a beneficial addition to avoid any confusion over our aims, we do not agree that the discussion of Arab culture in parts of the article could reasonably be construed as describing people from Turkey and Iran as Arab, as the research setting was clearly defined as the Middle East.

We also reject the assertions that 'face' is a solely Chinese construct and that Abosag and Naudé (2014) did not include it because it is a very Chinese concept. Abosag and Naudé (2014) did not

state this and found 'social reputation' to be statistically significant in Saudi Arabian as well as Chinese samples. We understand that 'social reputation' represents 'face', which has been described as the public image of a person's or one's own prestige and reputation (Tsang, 1998) and as social status attained by playing recognized social roles in a community (Li, Zhou, Zhou, & Yang, 2019). Other scholars see face as an important part of Arab culture (e.g. Abuznaid, 2006; Berger, Herstein, McCarthy, & Puffer, 2019), especially since collective cultures are sensitive about losing face (Al-Omari, 2003, 2009; Barakat, 1993). In addition, we refute the statement that '*the term "guanxi-type relationships" has not been utilized in previous research studies nor have the authors cited any study using this specific term*'. In fact, we cited '*Exploring guanxi-type relationships in the Arab world*' by Shaalan, Weir, Reast, Johnson, and Tourky (2014).

Regrettably, it is also inaccurate to claim we did not conduct face or content validity for the items. We conducted a lengthy pre-test and pilot test of the questionnaire to ensure face and content validity, as supported by prior scholars (e.g. Blair & Presser, 1992; Churchill, 1995; Reynolds & Diamantopoulos, 1998; Zikmund, 2000). This process is briefly noted on page 873.

Finally, regarding the concerns that our research design may encourage inappropriate exploration of foreign concepts, we appreciate the flattering suggestion of a global impact, but emphasize we were investigating diverse networks across 17 countries, not one network in one country. Where only one network exists, of course this is an appropriate research focus (e.g. Shaalan et al., 2021); complex cross-cultural research may require a different approach.

We again thank the commentators for their interest in our work to expand knowledge of interpersonal ties and relationship marketing.

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