

Public service motivation research in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region: A systematic review of progress and implications for public administration theory and practice



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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 25 January 2023

Received in revised form

8 March 2023

Accepted 13 May 2023

Keywords:

Public service motivation

Middle East North Africa region

Systematic literature review

Methodological limitations

Contextual factors

ABSTRACT

The research on public service motivation (PSM) has seen a growing internationalization, necessitating efforts to organize and systematize its findings to assess research progress and enhance the value of PSM theory in various contexts, including public administration. This paper aims to review the progress of PSM research in the Middle East North Africa (MENA) region over the past decade. The primary methodology employed is a systematic literature review, where a total of 20 papers published between 2013 and 2020 were located and analyzed. The assessment of these papers includes an examination of their country of origin, publication source, underlying theory, research design, and lines of study. A critical evaluation of the findings is conducted, focusing on their theoretical and practical contributions to PSM scholarship. The key conclusion drawn from this review is that while PSM research in the MENA region is advancing, it reveals certain methodological limitations and underexplored themes that need to be addressed. Consequently, this paper significantly contributes to public administration research and PSM-specific studies by providing the long-awaited organization, systematization, and integration of regional research. The outcomes of this review enable the identification of relevant contextual factors that can enrich the conceptualization and operationalization of PSM on a regional basis. Additionally, this paper offers a comprehensive overview of existing PSM knowledge in the MENA region, thereby guiding future research in this domain. By acknowledging both the methodological strengths and weaknesses, as well as the thematic aspects of the reviewed studies, specific suggestions are put forth to enhance the quality and depth of future PSM research in the MENA region. This paper thus serves as a valuable resource for researchers seeking to further develop the understanding of PSM within the context of the MENA region.

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1. Introduction

Over the last two decades, there has been a remarkable surge in scholarly endeavors devoted to the exploration of public service motivation (PSM) (e.g., Marques (2021), Perry (2014), and Ritz et al. (2016)). A conventional definition of PSM posits it as "the inherent inclination of an individual to be influenced by motives primarily or exclusively associated with public institutions and organizations" (Perry and Wise, 1990). At the heart

of PSM lies the fundamental concept that particular individuals harbor an inherent urge to contribute to the betterment of the public and society. This intrinsic motivation stands in contrast to the assertions of public choice theorists, who contend that public servants are primarily driven by extrinsic factors and act predominantly in pursuit of self-interest (e.g., Rainey (1982) and Tullock and Wagner (1976)).

Since the publication of Perry and Wise's (1990) seminal work, substantial advancements have been made in the field of public administration concerning the exploration of the concept of PSM, its antecedents, and its consequences. Initially, early studies predominantly focused on the motivational aspect of public service workers in the United States and Europe. However, contemporary research has transcended these boundaries, adopting a more diverse and comprehensive approach. Ritz et al.

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(2016) note that PSM research has now evolved into an "international, multidisciplinary, and multisectoral" domain. This transformation is unsurprising, given that PSM fosters compelling motivational notions applicable in various contexts, both within and beyond the realm of public administration.

The rapid and dynamic progress in PSM research necessitates concerted efforts in organizing and systematizing the plethora of findings. Such endeavors are vital to effectively evaluate research advancements and reinforce the significance of PSM theory in the realm of public administration and other pertinent domains.

A natural approach to tackle the task of organization and systematization involves examining PSM literature related to different regions. Over a decade ago, [Vandenabeele and van de Walle \(2008\)](#) conducted a study investigating international variations in PSM. They discovered that while public service employees from various countries exhibited higher scores in PSM dimensions compared to their private sector counterparts, there existed considerable variability in specific motivation scores and dimensions among these nations. Consequently, this led to the formulation of a hypothesis suggesting regional disparities in PSM. By systematically analyzing regional literature on PSM, further insights can be gained into how this concept holds relevance in diverse socio-cultural and national contexts. However, it is noteworthy that research of this nature, particularly in non-Western contexts, remains scarce. [Van der Wal \(2015\)](#) conducted a systematic review of non-Western PSM scholarship, which was followed by a recent update ([Mussagulova and Van der Wal, 2021](#)). In both studies, the importance of context and vibrant opportunities for building regional PSM research were emphasized. However, those studies looked at the non-Western PSM scholarship in its entirety and only distinguished regional research for statistical purposes. As such, the only regionally focused non-Western literature review to the knowledge of the author is the one conducted in Africa by [Bawole et al. \(2019\)](#).

Acknowledging the necessity to enhance the systematic organization of the expanding body of PSM knowledge within non-Western contexts and the apparent dearth of such efforts concerning PSM research in the Middle East North Africa (MENA) region, this paper endeavors to address this gap in scholarly understanding. The primary objective of this study is to conduct a comprehensive and systematic review of existing PSM studies within the MENA region, guided by three principal goals. Firstly, the review aims to examine the general state of current research in this domain, encompassing factors such as the countries of origin of the studies, sources of publication, theories employed, dominant research design approaches, and the primary lines of inquiry pursued. Secondly, it will assess the extent to which the existing research aligns with the previously identified directions proposed in the

literature ([Perry, 2014](#); [Van der Wal, 2015](#)). In conclusion, the paper will conduct an in-depth analysis of both the strengths and weaknesses inherent in the research under review. This analysis will serve as a basis for proposing further research directions and potential practical implications for public administration in the MENA region.

The structure of the paper is organized as follows: Firstly, the study will provide context by offering a concise review of the MENA region, along with an exploration of the challenges faced by its public sector. Subsequently, a thorough review of the methodological approach employed in the reviewed studies will be presented. Next, the research will be categorized based on various factors, such as location, research design, and conceptual approaches utilized. Following this, the common themes emerging from the literature under examination will be presented. A critical evaluation of the research methods will ensue, aiming to ascertain the overall quality of the knowledge generated. The subsequent section will discuss the findings in-depth, and relevant conclusions will be drawn, incorporating practical recommendations and suggestions for future research endeavors.

2. Study context: The MENA region

The MENA region is situated at the confluence of Africa, Europe, and Asia and encompasses the Arab states that are bound by shared cultural ties, heritage, and developmental characteristics ([Davoodi and Abed, 2003](#)). While various classifications exist, the MENA region typically incorporates the Gulf Council Countries, Iran, Iraq, Syria, and several Islamic states in North Africa, characterized by a significant proportion of Arabic populations.

A number of features make the MENA region unique and distinguishable from other geographic regions of the world. These features also play an important role in the public administration process. To a large extent, the formation of what today is considered the MENA region has been driven by the spread of Islam and its gradual establishment as the major force that determined the majority of socio-cultural traditions and norms. Today, with over 90% of the regional population identifying as Muslims, Islamic rules and traditions are deeply ingrained in the social fabric and remain an essential element of the national political-administrative systems ([Beschel and Yousef, 2019](#); [Schomaker and Bauer, 2020](#)). The region was not an exception to the imperialistic inclinations of the European colonial powers, although many of the MENA countries developed strong autocratic systems as a means to counter them. According to [Sorensen \(2014\)](#), such systems, arising from tribalism ruling, have managed to strengthen national identities and eliminate the threats of re-colonization. At the same time, authoritarian governing traditions continue to dominate the region even today. Many researchers consider them at the core of many challenges faced

by the MENA nations in general and in public administration specifically (Bhuiyan and Farzmand, 2020; Dixon et al., 2018).

Due to predominantly autocratic regimes that historically dominated the MENA region, another unique feature has been the dominance of state ideologies and high levels of public authority centralization. As Jreisat (2009) noted, the majority of the MENA nations developed through the 20th century under strong central planning systems formulated and controlled by the state. In many cases, this has led to the creation of large public administration bodies that oversee government policy implementations in practically all spheres of life (Schomaker and Bauer, 2020). However, the effectiveness of these structures has been questionable. Endemic corruption, nepotism, excessive bureaucracies, and knowledge deficiency are some of the commonly mentioned aspects of public administration arising from over-centralized power in the MENA region (Dixon et al., 2018; Mansour and Thompson, 2020). This, in turn, affects the performance of institutions comprising the public sector. Large size, formalism, rigid rules, and overstaffing are common features of these institutions which makes them rather input than output-oriented (Schomaker and Bauer, 2020).

The aforementioned legacies, forces, and factors make the public administrative systems of the MENA countries different from other regional patterns. They also create a unique context for testing the PSM theory propositions and outcomes.

3. Methodology

This paper uses a systematic literature review (SLR) as the primary research method. According to Gough et al. (2017), such reviews are "undertaken according to a fixed plan or system or method" (p. 5). In contrast to traditional narrative reviews, SLR applies more rigorous methods which also make it possible to replicate the study (Littell et al., 2008). Further, in contrast to meta-analyses, SLR goes beyond the statistical examination of the research trends where one or few variables and their relationships are examined. Given the dominance of narrative and meta-analytical literature analyses in PSM, Ritz et al. (2016) proposed that SLR would be a "natural step" toward consolidating and expanding research (p. 415). Accordingly, the recent regional PSM reviews have used SLR methodology (Bawole et al., 2019; Mussagulova and Van der Wal, 2021; Van der Wal, 2015). Therefore, another reason to apply SLR in this study was to maintain consistency in literature review approaches to regional PSM research.

The studies considered for this review were collected through three distinct approaches. Firstly, an extensive keyword search was conducted across six prominent databases: Scopus, ABI/INFORM, JSTOR, ERIC, Public Administration Abstracts, and Business Source Complete. Secondly, a supplementary search was performed using Google

Scholar to ensure the inclusion of any potentially overlooked studies. Lastly, a meticulous examination of the reference lists of the studies chosen for the review was undertaken to identify any inadvertently omitted relevant studies.

To ensure a focused regional orientation of the search, the keywords "PSM," "Public Service Motivation," and "Public Employee Motivation" were combined using the Boolean operator "AND" with "Middle East," "North Africa," "MENA," and the specific countries constituting the region. Examples of both a general and a country-specific search string are provided below:

- General Search String: ('PSM' OR 'Public Service Motivation') AND ('Middle East' OR 'North Africa' OR 'MENA')
- Country-Specific Search String (e.g., Algeria): ('PSM' OR 'Public Service Motivation') AND 'Algeria' AND ('Middle East' OR 'North Africa' OR 'MENA')

The timeframe for the studies was between 2005 (the earliest non-Western PSM studies according to Van der Wal (2015)) and 2021. Only studies in English were included in the research. Following Ritz et al. (2016) and Mussagulova and Van der Wal (2021), only studies that conceptualized PSM based on Perry and Wise (1990) were selected. However, the research considered even the studies where PSM was measured differently from Perry's (1996) original scales if the conceptualization condition was met. This is because PSM literature has long recognized that the original scales, which were developed for the Western countries' contexts, are not always suitable for non-Western public administration contexts (e.g., Kim, (2009), Kim et al. (2013), and Vandenabeele, 2008). The review excluded the studies with unclear methodologies and/or incomplete papers. Grey literature was also excluded to maintain a higher quality standard of the studies. Finally, this study did not consider general motivation papers for public sector employees if they were not explicitly linked to PSM and its role in civil service job choice. The original database searches returned 153 articles. Another 13 articles were retrieved after additional Google Scholar search and reference list searches. After applying the aforementioned inclusion/exclusion criteria, 20 studies were found suitable for the review.

4. Systematic literature review and analysis

4.1. Time and geographic distribution

Fig. 1 demonstrates the PSM research progress in the MENA region with the absolute and cumulative number of papers published per year. The first PSM paper was published by Gould-Williams et al. (2015) although there has been relatively slow progress in research up until recently. Whereas, according to Van der Wal (2015), international PSM research

started picking up in around 2015, studies located in the MENA region increased only since 2019. While there is some room for optimism because of research expansion, it should be remembered that the region comprises 19 countries, meaning that the total number of studies is relatively small for such a population. Note that as of September, one paper

published in 2021 was found: The study by [Hassan and Ahmad \(2021\)](#) in Iraq. It is expected that additional studies could still be in the review process. Therefore, the number for 2021 is incomplete, although there is still an indication that PSM research continues in the MENA region.

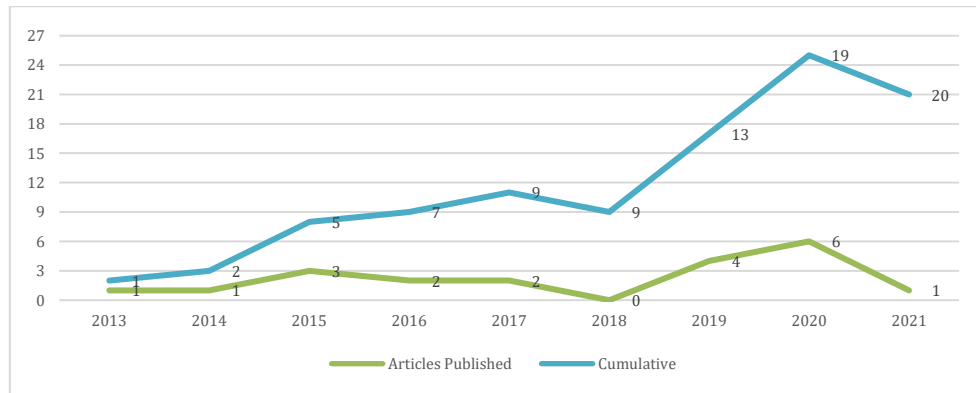


Fig. 1: Number of PSM publications in the MENA region, annually

Regarding geographical distribution, there exists an uneven concentration of PSM research within the MENA region. Egypt, where the first PSM studies were published, stands out as the primary research location, accounting for 7 published papers. Additionally, 3 papers were dedicated to populations in Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Lebanon, while Morocco was covered in 2 papers, and Iran in 1. A solitary paper by [Barsoum \(2021\)](#) provided a comparative analysis utilizing samples from Egypt, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia. Consequently, the total number of countries represented by the studies amounted to 7, corresponding to 36.8% of the region. This relatively low figure may, in part, be attributed to the socio-political upheaval experienced by certain countries in the region, such as Sudan, Syria, and Libya. However, the absence of PSM research in politically and economically stable countries like the UAE or Qatar remains puzzling. These nations potentially offer fertile ground for further investigations into PSM in the region.

An additional noteworthy observation pertains to the limited number of researchers engaged in the field. Consequently, a substantial portion of PSM research within the MENA countries is undertaken by a select group of dedicated scholars. While their contributions to advancing PSM theory and research are commendable, the field would undoubtedly benefit from an increased involvement of more researchers, thereby introducing fresh perspectives and expanding the knowledge base.

4.2. Publication source

Regarding publishing sources, the research on PSM in the MENA region demonstrates a diverse array of thematic journals in which PSM papers have been published. The majority of publications (totaling 7) logically originate from journals focusing on public administration and management. These

include esteemed outlets such as *Administration and Society*, *International Journal of Public Administration*, *International Review of Public Administration*, *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, *Public Administration Review*, *Public Policy and Administration Research*, and *Review of Public Personnel Administration*. General business and management publications (comprising 4 papers) are represented by *American Research Journal of Business and Management*, *British Academy of Management Publications*, *Journal of International Management Studies*, and *Organizational Culture Management*. Additionally, political science and economics are reflected in 2 publications: *International Journal of Political Science and Development* and *Reviews of Economic and Political Science*. Similarly, 2 publications stem from health-related journals: *British Medical Journal Open* and *International Journal for Equity and Health*. The remaining publications encompass disciplines such as *Developing Country Studies*, *International Journal of Innovation, Creativity and Change*, *International Transaction Journal of Engineering, Management, and Applied Sciences and Technologies*, and *Journal of Contemporary Iraq and Arab World*. Thus, PSM in the MENA region is explored not only within the field of public administration but also in various other academic domains, a trend that aligns with recent observations of PSM reviews in both Western and non-Western contexts ([Ritz et al., 2016](#); [Van der Wal, 2015](#)).

However, despite PSM studies in the MENA region being distributed across a diverse array of disciplinary journals, not all of these publications exhibit a high level of impact. Among the 19 represented publication sources, only 9 (47.4%) are indexed in the Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI), and merely 7 (36.8%) possess an impact score. This suggests that a significant portion of PSM research in

the MENA region may not receive the desired visibility. Hence, there is a distinct need to expand into publications with higher impact factors to enhance the dissemination and recognition of PSM research in this region.

4.3. Theoretical approaches

Following Van der Wal (2015) and Mussagulova and Van der Wal (2021), the studies in the review were classified according to the underlying theoretical approaches. In order to make the results comparable with other reviews, this study also did not consider PSM as a standalone theoretical approach. The basis for classification was employed by Ritz et al. (2016) with 11 distinct theoretical approaches identified. This list was added with some theories in the studies which did not readily fall into any of the categories provided. Examples are leadership theories, gender theory, and social determination. Table 1 provides a list of theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of the reviewed studies. Note that it is often the case that more than one approach is often applied in the studies which makes the total number of theories larger than the number of papers. For example, general motivation theories are often considered alongside public employee performance and outcomes. Likewise, job choice theories are often considered alongside employees' personal values, beliefs, and attitudes.

Overall, the findings are in line with the results provided by Van der Wal (2015), Mussagulova and Van der Wal (2021), and Bawole et al. (2019) in a sense that the MENA-oriented PSM research remains grounded in Western theoretical frameworks, such as general motivation theories and public administration. Still, there is some indication of culturally oriented research which is seen in the exploration of the role of religion (Belrhiti et al., 2019; 2020; Hassan and Ahmad, 2021), sectarianism (Shahda and Myers, 2017), and ethnic nepotism wasta (Alreshoodi and Andrews, 2015). Further, the dominance of general motivation and public administration approaches to studying PSM may be reflective of the transition that public sectors in many MENA countries are undergoing and the shifting focus towards public sector employees as the main source of successful implementation of public programs.

Table 1: Distribution of underlying theories

Theoretical underpinning	N	%
General motivation	7	23.3%
Public administration	6	20.0%
Attitudes, organizational behavior, psychology	4	13.3%
Job choice	3	10.0%
Ethics, values, religion, culture	3	10.0%
Leadership	2	6.7%
Institutions	1	3.3%
Organizational performance	1	3.3%
Gender theory	1	3.3%
Rational choice	1	3.3%
Social Determination	1	3.3%
Total	30	100.0%

4.4. Research design

Fig. 2 describes the studies by the type of research design they employed. The majority of the studies (15 in total, 75%) in the review employed a cross-sectional research design based on a survey. Four studies (20%) employed qualitative research design. Two of these studies (10%) employed interviews for data collection while the other two (10%) had embedded multiple case study design where focus group discussions were employed alongside interviews. Finally, one article (5%) was a review paper that did not employ empirical methods for investigation.

The majority of the studies in the review drew samples from public sector settings at different levels. Six studies (31.6%) drew samples from larger public sector populations, working primarily in education, healthcare, and social work. Three studies (15.8%) drew samples from ministries and government work. Five studies (26.3%) focused on healthcare settings: Public hospitals and clinics. Two studies (10.5%) drew samples from the general population: Barsoum (2016) focused on young unemployed individuals in Egypt while Zaazou (2020) focused on citizens who participated in funding the national projects. One study (5.3%) drew its sample from a student population, and one study (5.3%) drew samples from public and private organizations for comparative analysis. Finally, one study (5.3%) drew samples from different levels of public sector work (ministry, front line) with a focus exclusively on female respondents. Thus, it can be inferred that research on MENA PSM has not solely concentrated on public servants. Nevertheless, there is an opportunity for further enhancement through comparative analyses between employees in the private and public sectors, as well as by conducting additional studies encompassing underrepresented demographic groups. Another pertinent concern with the existing research lies in the prevalence of non-probability sampling methodologies. It was observed that a significant majority of studies utilized convenience sampling designs (15 studies, 73.7%), while a minority adopted purposeful sampling approaches (4 studies, 26.3%). Consequently, this may hinder the generalizability of the research findings. Hence, it is imperative to bolster the employment of rigorous and high-quality sampling techniques for PSM studies in the MENA region.

4.5. Measurement scales

One important aspect of PSM research is the approach to PSM conceptualization. The majority of the studies in the review rejected the original Perry (1996) scales in favor of questionnaires designed and validated for international context. Only one study out of 14 (7.1%) that used PSM measurements applied the original scales. Three more studies (21.4%) used an abridged version. The most popular scales were those developed by Kim et al. (2013)–

they were used in 5 studies (35.7%). Scales developed and validated by Kim (2009) and Giauque et al. (2011) were used two times each (14.3%). Finally, one study (7.1%) developed its own contextual scales for PSM measurement. While it is noticeable that the PSM researchers in the MENA region prefer measurements developed for non-Western contexts, there is still a lack of consistency in PSM measurement arising from different scales used. The research will likely benefit from the development of scales catering specifically to the regional specifics and universalizing approach to measuring PSM in the MENA countries.

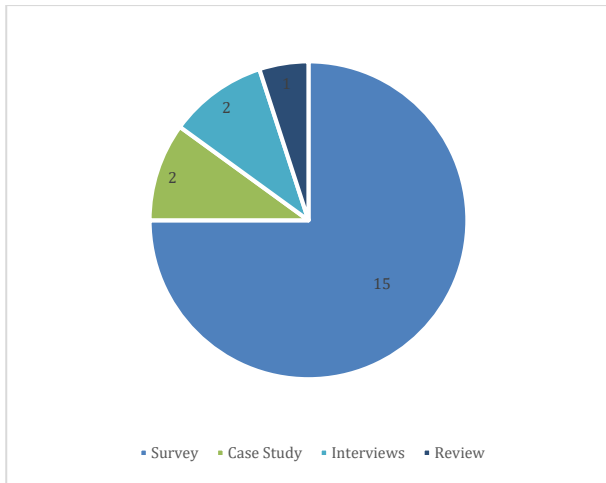


Fig. 2: Reviewed papers by research design

4.6. Methods of data analysis

Table 2 presents the distribution of the reviewed studies by analytical methods used. As is usually the case, some studies employed more than one type of analysis which means that the total number presented in Table 2 exceeds 19. All empirical studies in the review, including the ones applying qualitative methods, conducted descriptive statistics analyses. Factor analysis and reliability testing of the constructs were applied in 11 studies (57.9%). Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was the most common form of analysis to test the hypotheses formulated by the researchers: In total, 9 studies (18.4%) applied this method of data analysis. Among the studies, 4 (8.2%) used regression analyses to test the hypotheses. Finally, one study (2.0%) used t-test analysis to compare means and correlation analyses to test for association between the variables. It is notable that SEM as a method of multivariate analysis has been much more popular among PSM researchers in the MENA region in comparison to reports from other reviews. For example, among the studies reviewed by Ritz et al. (2016), only 5.6% of studies applied SEM, while Van der Wal (2015) and Mussagulova and Van der Wal (2021) reported 8.13% and 10.3% respectively. Among the reviewed studies, 4 (8.2%) applied qualitative data analysis approaches. Content analysis, thematic analysis, triangulation, and inductive reasoning were each represented once in the studies. Nevertheless, the

proportion of qualitative PSM research in the MENA region has also been much higher than in the existing reviews of PSM studies in both Western and non-Western contexts.

Table 2: Distribution of studies by analytical methods

Analytical method	N	%
Quantitative methods		
Univariate: Descriptive statistics	19	38.8%
Multivariate: Factor analysis and reliability	11	22.4%
Multivariate: SEM	9	18.4%
Multivariate: Regression	4	8.2%
Bivariate: Tests of differences	1	2.0%
Bivariate: Correlation	1	2.0%
Qualitative methods		
Content analysis	1	2.0%
Thematic analysis	1	2.0%
Triangulation	1	2.0%
Inductive reasoning	1	2.0%
Total	49	100.0%

4.7. Lines of study

Several distinct lines of study emerged from the analysis of the PSM research in the MENA region. A process model approach similar to that employed by Ritz et al. (2016) and Van der Wal (2015) was used to group the studies into several broad categories, which are listed in Table 3. As in previous analyses, more than a single classification was possible, meaning that the total number of instances is higher than the number of studies reported. An interesting observation from Table 3 is that the majority of the studies (6 studies, 18.8%) investigated a possible mediating role of PSM between antecedents and outcomes in various contexts. PSM as an antecedent was also explored in 6 studies (18.8%). There were 5 studies (15.6%) that looked into other variables influencing PSM. The same number of studies explored PSM theory and concept or attempted to integrate PSM with other theories. Slightly fewer studies (4 studies, 12.5%) analyzed PSM differences across industries, sectors, and different groups of workers. Three studies (9.4%) focused on conceptualizing PSM and developing scales for the specific context. Two studies (6.3%) considered PSM as a moderator. Finally, one study (3.1%) was a review paper that considered the potential benefits of hiring a PSM-driven workforce. Each line of study is discussed in detail below.

Table 3: Distribution of research by lines of study

Line of study	N	%
PSM as an antecedent	6	18.8%
PSM as a mediator	6	18.8%
PSM as an outcome	5	15.6%
Theoretical conceptualization, defining motives and dimensions, integration with other theories	5	15.6%
Differences in PSM (industries, sectors, groups)	4	12.5%
PSM construct/instrument development	3	9.4%
PSM as a moderator	2	6.3%
PSM Review	1	3.1%
Total	32	100.0%

4.7.1. PSM as an antecedent

The studies that explored PSM as an antecedent considered its effect on a number of different

variables, although such relationships have rarely been considered more than once. [Al-Taaia \(2020\)](#) explored the positive effect of PSM on moral relationships such as altruism and sympathy and commitment to public benefit. [Belrhiti et al. \(2019\)](#) found that PSM increased job satisfaction and motivation to work in public service. [Alreshoodi and Andrews \(2015\)](#) found a positive link between PSM and organizational commitment, but no relationship to job satisfaction and intent to quit. These findings were observed to be fully mediated by "wasta," a term referring to a form of indigenous Arabic nepotism. In another study conducted by [Alreshoodi \(2019\)](#), PSM was found to have a positive relationship with public service performance expressed through in-role behaviors (performing one's duties) and extra-role behaviors (assisting others at work). Person-needs supplies and person-organization fit partially mediated these relationships. [Zaazou \(2020\)](#) found that PSM influences sponsorship of the national projects. [Gould-Williams et al. \(2015\)](#) found a positive relationship between PSM and organizational citizenship behavior and a negative relationship between PSM and work stress as well as intention to quit. All these relationships were mediated by person-organization fit.

Aggregate findings from the studies suggest that PSM has a range of positive outcomes, both in public service and outside of it. In line with the previously reported aggregate findings (e.g., [Mussagulova and Van der Wal \(2021\)](#); [Ritz et al. \(2016\)](#), and [Van der Wal \(2015\)](#)), studies in the MENA region confirmed positive relationships of PSM to such important public service outcomes as organizational commitment, organizational citizenship, and performance as well as negative relationships to stress and intent to quit. Moreover, there is evidence that PSM has positive effects beyond public service which are epitomized in altruism, sympathy for others, and participation in national projects. At the same time, the role of mediating factors should not be ignored, as both positive (person-organization fit, person-needs supply) and negative (wasta) variables were found to play important roles in the relationships between PSM and its outcomes.

4.7.2. PSM as a mediator/moderator

A substantial proportion of PSM studies in the MENA region considered the role of PSM as either a mediator or a moderator variable, sometimes investigating such effects simultaneously.

Two studies considered PSM as a mediator/moderator in corporate social responsibility research. [Abdelmotaleb and Saha \(2019\)](#) confirmed the mediating role of PSM in the relationship between corporate social responsibility (CSR) perceptions and organizational citizenship behavior. A partial mediation was observed for internal CSR perceptions and a full mediation was observed for external CSR perceptions. In a later study, [Abdelmotaleb \(2020\)](#) observed a mediating

role of PSM in the relationship between organizational social responsibility and the organizational engagement of employees. However, the study did not confirm the proposed moderating effects of PSM. Two studies looked into a possible mediating role of PSM within leadership theories and approaches. [Askaripoor et al. \(2020\)](#) found positive mediation and moderation effects of PSM on the relationship between servant leadership and innovative work behavior. [Shojaei and Khalili \(2017\)](#) found that PSM mediated the relationship between transformational leadership and organizational citizenship behavior. [Alreshoodi \(2020\)](#) found a full positive mediation effect of PSM on the relationships between intrinsic motivation and intent to work in public service as well as between introjected regulation and intent to work in public service. Finally, [Mostafa et al. \(2015\)](#) found a partial mediation effect of PSM on the relationship between high performance human resource practices and affective commitment as well as organizational citizenship behaviors.

Aggregate findings suggest that in addition to direct positive effects on employee outcomes, PSM also can play an important mediating role. Notably, the significant mediation effects were observed within several distinct lines of study: Leadership, corporate social responsibility, social-determination theory, and high-performance human resource practices. At the same time, there is very inconclusive evidence regarding the possible moderating role of PSM with only two studies exploring such effects and arriving at different conclusions.

4.7.3. Antecedents of PSM

Fewer studies explored the antecedents of PSM in the MENA region. All of them considered different factors. [Belrhiti et al. \(2020\)](#) found that a mix of transformational, transactional, and distributed leadership had a positive effect on PSM as well as employee outcomes. PSM was considered important and necessary based on employee profile, task nature, and organizational culture. [Shahda \(2016b\)](#) found a small but significant impact of technology on PSM. [Alobaydi et al. \(2019\)](#) found that in challenging public sector environments, PSM is rather a product of knowledge of the community and citizens rather than institutions or professional experience. [Shahda and Myers \(2017\)](#) also found that socio-cultural variables, such as family and sectarianism, influenced PSM formation. Finally, [Hassan and Ahmad \(2021\)](#) found that Islamic work ethic is positively related to PSM.

Overall, the reviewed studies suggest that PSM in the MENA region could be influenced by various antecedent variables. A welcoming aspect in this regard is the presence of studies that investigated the impact of contextual, region-specific variables on PSM. The positive effect of family, sectarianism, and Islamic work ethic hint to culture-specific roots of PSM in the region. However, it is clear that more

research should be conducted in order to make any definitive claims about this.

4.7.4. PSM conceptualization and instrument development

A certain part of the PSM research in the MENA region has focused on refining the PSM concept to fit better with the regional and national contexts. Accordingly, some studies also proposed and tested revisions to the traditionally used PSM scales. [Alobaydi et al. \(2019\)](#) tested PSM dimensions and scales in what they called “a tough governance setting” marked by corruption, low public sector capacity, and unsafe political conditions. They found that in such settings, the only reliable PSM dimension was the pro-social, self-sacrifice dimension. [Belrhiti et al. \(2019\)](#) investigated the expression of PSM in Moroccan hospitals and also found partial confirmation for the original PSM scales. While nurses and doctors expressed high levels of affective motives (self-sacrifice and compassion), for doctors and administrative personnel, the only reliable scales were rational and norm-based (attraction to policy-making and commitment to public values). On the other hand, [Shahda \(2016a\)](#) found that the self-sacrifice dimension did not demonstrate sufficient levels of reliability and validity for Lebanese civil servants. The author also proposed and tested context specific scales of legal aspect, objectivity and neutrality, and merit principle; however, the findings suggested that there is a difference between what public servants say and actually do within these scales. Finally, the findings of [Barsoum's \(2021\)](#) research challenged the traditional attitudinal components of PSM and noted the importance of contextual factors in international PSM research, such as history, gender roles, country-specific institutes, and socialization patterns, as well as labor market conditions.

The aggregate findings from the reviewed studies suggest that PSM researchers in the MENA region are often critical of the traditional approaches to the conceptualization of PSM, as well as using the traditional scales to measure it. Instead, there are attempts and proposals to introduce additional PSM factors based on the local contexts. However, such efforts still lack empirical data to confirm the validity and reliability of the proposed dimensions.

4.7.5. Differences in PSM

Finally, several PSM studies in the MENA region looked into the differences in PSM and PSM expression based on individual or work-related characteristics. [Al-Taaia \(2020\)](#) found differences in PSM based on gender, length of service, and type of service. Specifically, higher PSM levels were attributed to women, those with larger lengths of service, and individuals in the education, healthcare, and social welfare sectors. Similarly, [Barsoum \(2021\)](#) found that women were generally more likely

to have higher levels of PSM, which was attributed to gender-specific roles and motives. Further, a study by [Belrhiti et al. \(2019\)](#) found that different aspects of PSM could be associated with different job types: Whereas affective motives were more typical for individuals engaged in face-to-face interactions in the course of public service, norm-based and rational motives were more pronounced among the administrative position holders. In another study, [Barsoum \(2016\)](#) found that individuals seeking positions in public service generally have higher levels of PSM, although, in view of job scarcity and good benefits, young individuals with lower levels of PSM would nevertheless seek public sector employment. On the other hand, [Hassan and Ahmad \(2021\)](#) found no significant differences in PSM levels among individuals employed in the public and private sectors. The aggregate findings from the studies paint an unclear picture of PSM differences. While it seems that such differences exist based on certain characteristics like gender, type of job, and length of service, some studies disconfirm differences based on sector type. This is, in fact, somewhat contradictory to the general theory of PSM which proposes the existence of intrinsic motives prompting a desire to serve the public. At the same time, the reviewed studies emphasized some important differences in which public sectors of the MENA countries operate. With high levels of job security, compensation, and benefits, work in the public sector could be as well strongly driven by extrinsic motives. Based on the reviewed literature, it seems that individual and job differences may play a stronger role in PSM than public/private sector employment.

5. Discussion

5.1. Critical assessment of the findings

The findings from the literature review of PSM studies in the MENA region can be considered within the proposed research trajectories formulated by the earlier studies of PSM in the international context. As such, [Perry \(2014\)](#) made four major propositions in the third wave of PSM scholarship that involves primarily non-Western contexts: 1) pursuing robust research designs; 2) developing context-relevant PSM scales; 3) considering multiple incentives; and 4) testing the efficacy of PSM strategies through applied theory and research findings. Further, [Van der Wal \(2015\)](#) proposed that the international PSM scholarship should

- involve more sociocultural values;
- consider the interplay of different motivators in the public service context; and
- investigate relations between PSM, institutions, and public service ethos.

Taken together, these distinct areas form a comprehensive analysis framework for this literature review findings.

5.1.1. Pursuing robust research designs

The studies in the review employed several distinct design types both quantitative and qualitative types. However, the dominant number of studies employed cross-sectional survey designs which do not allow to draw cause-and-effect conclusions (e.g., Kirk (2013)). They also pose a problem to make definitive claims about the directions of uncovered relationships. Speaking of robust research designs for PSM studies, Perry (2014) suggested more field research and laboratory-type studies. These, however, were absent among the studies in the review. In general, PSM research in the MENA region could draw from PSM studies conducted somewhere else which used such methods as randomized control experiments (Bellé, 2014; Pedersen, 2015) or longitudinal studies (Kim, 2021; Seider, 2012; Ward, 2014). The former could provide sufficient help in answering some unclear questions and relationships whereas the latter could offer useful insights into how specific PSM values and relationships may evolve or become cultivated over time in certain contexts. Finally, mixed research designs may address the weaknesses of quantitative and qualitative types of research to provide more valid insights into the role of PSM in the MENA region and the importance of specific socio-cultural and context variables.

5.1.2. Developing context-relevant PSM scales

A rather welcoming observation arising from the literature review was that the researchers questioned the uniformity and applicability of the original PSM scales. Much effort has been done previously to develop and validate internationally endorsed or context-specific scales (e.g., Kim et al. (2013) and Vandenabeele (2008)). However, as Ritz et al. (2016) noted, it remains to be seen which of these scales has stronger measurement properties. Therefore, developing context-specific PSM scales remains one of the important agendas of contemporary PSM scholarship. It could be that due to vast differences in socio-cultural, political, and economic conditions, region-specific scales would be more appropriate. Therefore, the efforts by Alobaydi et al. (2019), Belrhiti et al. (2019), and Shahda (2016a) in working on context-specific scales are quite beneficial. However, any new scales have to be consistently empirically tested consistently in order to be deemed valid and reliable. Further, any new dimensions should be checked against the strict theoretical boundaries of the PSM concept posed by Perry and Wise (1990).

5.1.3. Investigating the effect of sociocultural and contextual variables

In addition to context-relevant scales, regional PSM research would generally benefit from investigating the role of unique factors in PSM

development and expression. Studies in the review considered the role of institutional and contextual variables such as Islamic work ethic, *wasta*, sectarianism, religion, and family (Alreshoodi and Andrews, 2015; Belrhiti et al., 2019; Hassan and Ahmad, 2021; Shahda and Myers, 2017), which reflect the specifics of the environment in which individuals in the MENA countries live and work. However, in order to claim the link between these factors and PSM, it is necessary to conduct more empirical studies investigating the aforementioned relationships. Further, there is a certain degree of variability in the public sector settings in the MENA region. Whereas the majority of the Middle Eastern countries have more or less stable public service systems with good funding and control, countries like Iraq, Lebanon, or Sudan can be characterized as having “tough governance settings” with widespread corruption, service inefficiencies, and lack of funding are common (Alobaydi et al., 2019). Studies in such environments are often difficult to conduct, although their findings could substantially expand our understanding of PSM applicability and expression in difficult contexts.

5.1.4. Considering the effect of multiple incentives

Whereas PSM is a desirable trait for individuals seeking employment in public service, one particular aspect of such jobs in the MENA region is that they often offer better compensation, benefits, and job security than jobs in the private sector. Therefore, the role of extrinsic motivation cannot be ignored. Some studies in the review confirmed this notion (Barsoum, 2016; Hassan and Ahmad, 2021; Zaazou, 2020). These findings correlate with the previous studies in other non-Western contexts (e.g., Chen and Hsieh (2015), Rajibul and Kijima (2021), and Yung (2014)). This suggests that extrinsic forms of motivation in some non-Western countries' contexts may co-exist or even prevail over PSM. One way to explore this for the countries in the MENA region would be to conduct comparative analyses both within the region and with the countries in other regional contexts. Among the studies in the review, only Barsoum (2021) did comparative research across several countries, although it did not consider extrinsic motivation. Therefore, the incorporation of multiple incentives into PSM research in the MENA region would be beneficial.

5.1.5. Efficacy of PSM-related strategies

Finally, the major question that can be asked to any type of PSM research is “so what?": How do we apply the PSM-related knowledge in practice and to what observable outcomes? Unfortunately, the majority of the reviewed studies did not consider this question, while those that did, mostly provided a recommended course of action based on their findings. The researchers often repeated the previously stated notions about desirability of hiring

high-PSM individuals (Barsoum, 2016; Belrhiti et al., 2019; El Bedawy, 2014), creating appropriate organizational environments (Alreshoodi and Andrews, 2015; Gould-Williams et al., 2015), and using leadership and management techniques to incentivize PSM-related behaviors and performance (Belrhiti et al., 2020; Shojaei and Khalili, 2017). However, the efficacy of such recommendations is not obvious because the results are not there. Further, perhaps none of these recommendations is specific enough to translate into concrete management actions for extracting PSM-related value for public administration. Generally speaking, it can be concluded that the PSM concept and theory have not received visible practical integration with human resource management in the MENA public administration contexts. Ritz et al. (2016) called the discrepancy between PSM research findings and translating them into practice one of the major shortcomings of PSM research in general. This review has to acknowledge that this is still the case in the MENA region.

6. Conclusion and research agenda

The review of PSM studies in the MENA region presents a nuanced assessment. On one hand, it is encouraging to witness a growing number of studies, despite certain countries in the region grappling with significant issues related to public sector transformation and development. Such findings contribute to expanding our understanding of the applications of PSM in diverse settings. Moreover, researchers in the MENA region demonstrate a commendable effort in considering the specific socio-cultural and political context, investigating the impact of unique regional factors on PSM and its outcomes. This alignment with recent calls for more context-related PSM research (Perry, 2014; Ritz et al., 2016; Van der Wal, 2015) exemplifies their responsiveness to the field's evolving demands. Furthermore, the utilization of diverse research designs offers deeper insights into the nature of PSM and its role in the MENA region's public institutions. Additionally, the exploration of both direct and indirect relationships for PSM as an antecedent and an outcome facilitates a more comprehensive understanding of PSM's interplay with other domains such as leadership and organizational behavior.

On the other hand, certain issues emerge concerning the quantity and quality of research in the region. Although the number of publications in the reviewed period is comparable to some regions like Africa and Latin America, the total number of studies falls short of adequately representing the entire MENA region. For instance, the number of PSM studies in South Korea alone during the same period was higher (Mussagulova and Van der Wal, 2021), underscoring the need for a broader research presence. Furthermore, the distribution of studies across countries is uneven, with only approximately one-third of MENA countries being represented. In

terms of quality, the dominance of cross-sectional research designs and non-probability sampling techniques remains a concern, potentially limiting the generalizability of findings and hindering causal claims in relation to PSM's relationships with other variables. This becomes especially problematic considering the valuable insights that contextual variables could offer. Additionally, the inability to develop a valid regional PSM scale despite claims that the original Perry and Wise (1990) scales are partially ineffective in measuring PSM in the MENA countries is a noteworthy limitation.

It is crucial to acknowledge the limitations of this review. The inclusion of only English language articles may have excluded some valuable research published in domestic journals in native languages, thus potentially underrepresenting the full extent of PSM research in the MENA region. Furthermore, the inclusion of papers published in non-indexed journals might have implications for the visibility and citation of these studies but does not inherently signify lower quality. Despite these limitations, this review is a timely and valuable contribution, aligning with the calls for organizing and systematizing regional research on PSM (Perry, 2014; Ritz et al., 2016). While not providing all-encompassing answers to the current state of PSM research in the MENA region, it serves as a snapshot of existing knowledge, guiding future research endeavors in the field.

In conclusion, this review highlights critical research needs and directions derived from its findings, including overcoming methodological limitations, developing valid PSM scales tailored to the region, investigating the interplay between PSM and extrinsic motivation, exploring specific contextual factors, and providing practically-oriented, actionable findings. To advance the PSM scholarship in the MENA region, researchers should strive for meaningful and well-justified study approaches and topics that enhance the relevancy and quality of their contributions to both theory and practice.

Compliance with ethical standards

Conflict of interest

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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