Editorial

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Literature, *Journal of International Accounting, Auditing and Taxation*, *Managerial Auditing Journal*, *Asian Review of Accounting*, and *Pacific Accounting Review*.

The Middle East and North African (MENA) region broadly covers the countries of Algeria, Bahrain, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, Palestine, Turkey, Iran, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen (Dabrowski and Domínguez-Jiménez, 2021). Geographically, these countries extend over a large area and are connected to several diverse economies (Ghali et al., 2022). Most of them have a privileged economic location. These countries are at different levels of development and economic growth. Nevertheless, their development potential has yet to be fully realised (Dhaoui, 2022).

Significant reforms have been implemented by these countries to increase their openness to international economies, diversify their sources of income and investment funds, and strengthen the private sector (Kabbani and Ben Mimoune, 2021). This trend continued despite the turmoil and instability witnessed in the latest years in countries such as Syria, Libya, Yemen and Iraq (Fraihat and Yaseen, 2020).

The reforms had significant implications for the development of financial systems in the MENA in terms of liquidity, performance, efficiency, and capitalisation (Almeshari et al., 2023). The economies of these countries have also witnessed significant growth and development, especially with the increasing integration among MENA countries' markets, as well as their integration with leading economies and their financial markets (World Bank, 2020). Latest reforms also encouraged foreign direct investment flow to the MENA countries, which has largely increased in the last few decades.

This trend mandated that the accounting and reporting standards and practices are formalised further, to document the tremendous increase in business and financial transactions experienced in the last few decades. Unfortunately, these areas are still under-scrutinised in both academic and applied research. As such, this special issue attempts to increase awareness about the current status of finance and accounting research in MENA, together with outstanding and contemporary issues in both these areas.

In this regard, the study titled 'Forward-looking disclosure and short-term liabilities: evidence from Oman' examines the possible association between forward-looking disclosure (FLD) and short-term liabilities (STL) in the annual reports of Omani companies. The study is based on content analysis of 204 firm-year observations of Omani financial institutions listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange over the 2014–2019 period. The findings revealed that FLD is positively associated with STL, which suggests that FLD reduces information asymmetry between companies and their stakeholders.

The study 'Financial contagion during the COVID-19 pandemic: the case of African countries' investigates pure financial contagion and interdependence between MENA stock markets and selected emerging markets during the COVID-19 pandemic. The MENA countries covered in the study are Tunisia, Egypt and Morocco, and data is spanning from 2016 to 2021. Using VAR and VECM models, the study found 11 cases of pure contagion, including seven cases in the short term and four cases in the long term. Furthermore, six cases of financial interdependence were identified, including two cases in the short term and four in the long term.

The study 'Evaluation of non-performing financing of non-oil sectors: a case of Bahraini Islamic banks' analyses the speed of adjustment of non-performing financing in multiple sectors in Bahrain. Using Johansen cointegration and VEC models, the results revealed evidence of cointegration between the sectors considered in the analysis. The findings also showed that some non-performing financing in Bahraini non-oil sectors made greater efforts to re-establish equilibrium in the face of a short-run shock, whereas some others adjusted at a relatively slow pace. On the other hand, some non-performing financing showed no indication of the rate of adjustment. Moreover, the findings suggested that the Bahraini Islamic finance industry should reduce non-performing financing further because most of the speeds of adjustment are either slow or non-existent.

The study 'Determinants of national IFRS adoption: evidence from the Middle East and North Africa region' explores the determinants of the adoption of international financial reporting standards (IFRS) in 23 MENA countries. Following the neo-institutional theory, the study used three forms of isomorphic pressures, namely, coercive, mimetic and normative isomorphism. The findings supported that mimetic and normative isomorphism, measured respectively by the foreign trade and the educational level, significantly influence the decision of national IFRS adoption in the MENA region. On the other hand, the coercive pressure, the reports on the observance of standards and codes (ROSC), and accounting and auditing (AA) significantly influence the national IFRS adoption in the Middle Eastern countries, but not the North African countries.

The study 'Is the financial information still useful in issuing stock recommendations? Evidence from the Tunisian financial analysts' analyses the relevance of different information types in explaining financial analysts' recommendations of Tunisian listed firms. The study used content analysis and logistic regression methods. The findings revealed that financial information is still significantly useful in the Tunisian context. Particularly, buy and hold recommendations rely on information such as leverage, dividend payout, earnings, and market position. In contrast, sell recommendations appear to be mainly associated with dividend payout and earnings.

The study 'Competition, stability and the efficiency channel in the Tunisian banking system' examines the competition-stability nexus in the Tunisian banking sector between 2005 and 2020 and investigates whether the cost efficiency affects this nexus. The results revealed that competition reduces stability, supporting the competition fragility thesis with an insignificant efficiency channel. In addition, fragility heightens as banks become larger, with a neutral role for liquidity or diversification. On the other hand, inflation, GDP growth and the rule of law influence bank stability. Furthermore, government, foreign, and private banks do not differ in stability, suggesting that non-government ownership may operate with goals other than stability-enhancing.

The study 'The effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on the performance of Turkish banks: a comparative panel data analysis' investigates the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the performance of conventional and participation banks in Turkey. The study covered 10 banks between 2015 and 2021 and used panel regression for data analysis. The findings revealed that there was no impact of the pandemic on the profitability for either category of banks. Similar results were observed when the analysis was conducted on both groups separately. In contrast, a negative impact on the operational efficiency of banks was observed when the analysis was conducted on the two groups of the banks combined. Moreover, the results showed that the pandemic had a negative impact on the operational efficiency of participation banks but not on that of conventional banks when the analysis was conducted on the two groups separately.

The study 'The effect of financial inclusion on poverty alleviation and economic growth: a view from an emerging market' investigates the impact of financial inclusion on Egypt's economic growth and poverty reduction. The study covered the period from 2000 to 2020 and applied the auto-regressive distributed lag (ARDL) model for data analysis. The results showed that increased financial inclusion and government spending growth lead to increased economic growth. Nevertheless, an increase in trade openness reduces the rate of economic growth, indicating that trade openness occurs in the direction of consumer imports. Furthermore, increasing financial inclusion increases the poverty rate, and an increase in the concentration of income for a group less than 20% of the society reduces the poverty rate.

The study 'Operating performance of initial public offerings: empirical evidence from Oman' analyses the operating performance of IPOs issued on the Muscat Stock Exchange. The study covered 12 IPOs between 2007 and 2018. The regression results revealed that there exists a significant impact of more than one identified independent variable on companies' operating performance as measured by companies' return on equity, return on sales and return on assets. Even though the post-IPO period registered a decline in operating profit, the paired sample results revealed no significant difference in the operating performance of sample companies during the pre-and post-IPO periods.

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