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Cultural, Social, Emotional and Cognitive Aspects of Corruption in Turkey

Kültürel, Sosyal, Duygusal ve Bilişsel Açılardan Türkiye’de Rüşvet Olgusu

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to contribute to an improved understanding of the role played by psychology and social psychology in corruption in Turkey using ethnographic methods. The social psychological elements are very strong in bribery transactions, linked to the concept of **obedience and conformity**. Previous works rely on survey questions. However, survey responses may not reflect true experiences in actual corruption scenarios. From this perspective, it is the first ethnographic academic research on corruption. The research questions concern a) in which context corruption occurs, b) what are the physical, cognitive, emotional, social, and cultural situations, and c) what people’s motivations are and why people give into bribery. Knowing people is about gaining an empathic understanding of people’s thoughts, feelings, and needs by interacting. Immersing yourself in people’s bribery transactions and keenly listening to their bribery stories can provide valuable insights which are sometimes quite surprising and nonobvious. To get to such valuable insights, we should focus on everything that people do, say, and think during their bribery transaction; we should deeply understand people’s motivations, and overall experiences when we implement policies.

Keywords: Corruption, social psychology, psychology, ethnography, developing economies

ÖZ

Bu makale Türkiye’de rüşvet olgusunu kültürel, sosyal, duygusal ve bilişsel açılardan etnografik metodları kullanarak açıklamayı hedeflemektedir. Rüşvetin ekonomik, hukuki ve siyasi boyutu kadar psikolojik ve sosyal psikoloji boyutu mevcut. Sosyal psikolojik unsurlar, **itaat ve uygunluk** kavramına bağlı olarak rüşvet işleminde çok güçlüdür. İnsanlar vicdanlarını rahatlatmak için kullandıkları sebepler başkalarının da böyle davrandığı yönündeki inaçlarıdır. Daha önceki çalışmalar anketlere dayalıdır. Halbu ki, rüşvet hadisesindeki gerçek davranış ve deneyimleri yansıtmamaktadır. Bu açıdan rüşvet konusundaki ilk etnografik akademik araştırmadır. Etnografik

arařtırmada, farklı alanlarda rüşvet veren kişilerle derin duygusal, kültürel, sosyal ve bilişsel deneyimlerini ortaya koymaktadır. Arařtırma soruları a) hangi bağlamda yolsuzluğun meydana geldiđi, b) fiziksel, bilişsel, duygusal, sosyal ve kültürel durumların neler olduđu ve c) insanların neden rüşvet verdikleri ve motivasyonları ne olduđu yöndedir? Empatik bir anlayıř kazanma insanları anlamak düşüncelelerini, duygularını ve ihtiyaçlarını dinleyerek, gözlemleyerek, etkileşerek ve analiz ederek kazanılır. İnsanların rüşvet hikayelerini dikkatli bir şekilde dinlemek, çok şaşırtıcı ve açık olmayan çok değerli gerçekleri açığa çıkarabilir. Böyle değerli bilgilere ulaşmak için insanların yaptıđı, söylediđi ve düşündüđü her şeye odaklanılmalı; Bir siyasi politikayı uygularken insanların faaliyetlerini, ihtiyaçlarını, motivasyonlarını ve genel deneyimlerini derinlemesine zihnimizde olmalı.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Rüşvet, sosyal psikoloji, psikoloji, etnografi, kalkınmakta olan ülkeler

1. Introduction

We used the ethnographic method to interview people who had directly offered bribes to officials to analyze the cultural, social, emotional, and cognitive aspects of bribery transactions. When fighting against corruption, the legal framework will not work where society accepts corruption as acceptable and natural behavior and where individuals offer bribes without considering it to be breaking the law or without questioning this unethical behavior. This paper aims to contribute to an improved understanding of the role played by psychology and social psychology in corruption in developing countries using ethnographic methods.

Corruption issues have already been investigated in economic, legal, political, and cultural contexts. Authors have used macro and micro data based on survey questions and establishing a perception index (Mo, 2001; Mauro, 1995; Rose-Ackerman & Palifka, 2016; Gelbrich, Stedham, & Gätke, 2016).

Economically, corruption is found to be a low return investment and thus involves lower gdp per capita (Mauro, 1995). Mo (2001) calculated that a rise in bribery levels by 1% decreases the growth by 0.72%. People's aim, capacity and energy will be oriented to rent-seeking actions instead of industrious investments. Bribery diminishes the size of physical and human capitals (Mo, 2001).

Economically, there are some measures to fight against corruption. Economic development, higher import (Treisman, 2000), privatization, decentralization (Caselli & Morelli, 2004), the redistribution of income, the reduction of inequality, and the control of extractive industries (Husted, 1999; O'Higgins, 2006), raising public officers' wage (Waller, Verdier, & Gardner, 2002) lower corruption. Indeed, corruption is an important factor in understanding poverty since public officials ask for bribes due to low income (Theobald, 2002).

Politically, corruption works for the benefit of a class of people that causes income inequalities and political instability caused by bribery is crucial (Mo, 2001). The prevention of corruption depends on the probability of getting caught and punished (Treisman, 2000). Additionally, the democratic system controls the political elite through the association and the press (Treisman, 2000). Therefore, democracy may lower corruption (Treisman, 2000). Stronger and more effective public institutions, competition among parties, accountability, and transparency reduce corruption (Everett, Neu, & Shiraz, 2007; Huang & Wei, 2006).

Legally, corruption exists, where institutions are weak, and legislation are inefficient. inefficiency (Mo, 2001; Dollar & Levin, 2006). The key term behind the corruption is "entrusted power," which refers to the tasks to perform—reviewing permit applications, passing laws, hearing legal cases—according to certain rules.

Certainly, the economic, political, and legal frames are intertwined. Low income countries don't have economic resources to implement legal institutions (Beets, 2005). They may have less sophisticated legal systems related to property rights. Political support and strong regulations are crucial to prevent corruption (Quah, 1999).

2. Culture, Psychology, and Social Psychology

A variety of studies examined the relationship between corruption and culture (Beets, 2005; DiRienzo, Das, Cort, & Burbridge, 2007; Getz & Volkema, 2001; Husted, 1999; Chandler & Graham, 2010; Martin, Cullen, Johnson, & Parbotheeah, 2007).

Previous empirical work on corruption and culture has used country-level corruption. By using micro data on survey questions, various works of research have directly measured power

distance, individualism, individual characteristics, gender's impact, conviction, values and risk to assess the factors of corruption (Lee & Guven, 2013).

Cultural values have a great influence on corruption (Sanyal, 2005). Hofstede's cultural concepts are widely used (Hofstede, 2001). Hofstede explains that in high-power distant countries, people accept authority and dependence whereas in low-power societies the ties between individuals are weak and membership of a group becomes less significant (Hofstede, 2001). High-power distance concept can refer to information-oriented and relationship-oriented cultures (Cateora, Gilly, & Graham, 2009). Chandler and Graham (2010), Husted (1999) and Park (2003) claim that high-power distance and relationship-oriented societies facilitate bribery.

The relationship between gender and corruption has been researched but the correlation between them is ambiguous (DiRienzo et al., 2007; Getz & Volkema, 2001; Sanyal, 2005). It is argued that women do not behave more ethically but are more risk averse (Schulze & Frank, 2003; Rivas, 2011; Getz & Volkema, 2001).

Harrison (2000) explains that the corruption perception difference is based on progressive cultures and static cultures. Progressive cultures value merit, productivity, fairness, hardwork, attainment, and education. However, static cultures value hierarchal connections, family ties, and justice to link wealth. There is more corruption tolerance in static cultures (Harrison, 2000).

Riggs (1997) and Khera (2001) argue that cultural differences regarding corruption can be due to economic development. Tolerance towards corruption can be higher where economic development is still in transition.

Due to social hierarchy, corruption can be justified for the advancement in social and nepotic structures (Izraeli, 1997; Maingot, 1994; Khera, 2001).

3. Doubts About the Perception Index and Cultural Involvement

Uncertainties regarding the reliability of corruption and transparency perception indices exist. Several researchers have argued that perceived corruption and transparency indices are perception and they do not actually reflect corruption experiences (Svensson, 2005). Razafindrakoto & Roubaud (2010) compare expert opinions with the ongoing corruption practices in sub-Saharan African countries and find that experts overestimate the actual corruption level (Lee & Guven, 2013).

An example of survey questions ("*How often, if ever, have each of these things happened to you in the last five years?*") (Lee and Guven, 2013):

1. *Has a public official ever asked you for a favor or a bribe in return for a service?*
2. *How often, if ever, have you offered a favor or bribe to a public official in return for their services?*
3. *How wrong is a public official asking someone for a favor or bribe in return for their services?*

There are many deficiencies in surveys questions. Survey responses may not reveal actual compartments in corruption transactions (Chandler & Graham, 2010). They do not reflect how a bribe giver or taker is really thinking (Lee & Guven, 2013). Miller (2006) found, when considering survey data from Eastern Europe, that people strongly criticize corruption in a hypothetical situation. However, many accept getting involved in such transactions. Furthermore, they would consider giving bribes if it was required, or would accept them if there was an offer. So, statements under external pressures are different to their thoughts and values (Lee & Guven, 2013). However, they did not research deeply into insights on the behavioral analysis of people. Our research fills this gap and reveals what bribe givers actually think and feel.

4. Research Methodology and Approach: Ethnography

Anthropology is a discipline to explain human behavior in a cultural scope. The research methodology of anthropology is ethnography, which is used to understand how people interact with other people. It provides the user experience to understand people's behavior (physical, cognitive, social, cultural, and emotional) (Kumar, 2012).

The current methodology in corruption research is to investigate the aggregate data at a macro level and the survey questions transparently at a micro level without a deep insight into people's thoughts, feelings, and circumstances. However, ethnographic research revolutionizes understanding of what is the deep motivation of users (Whitney, 2001). It will be "human centered" rather than "data centered" (Kelley & Kelley, 2013; Brown, 2008; Lietdka, King, & Bennett, 2014). The ethnographic research is "activity centered" where many human interactions, feelings, and thoughts occur before, during, and after the transactions.

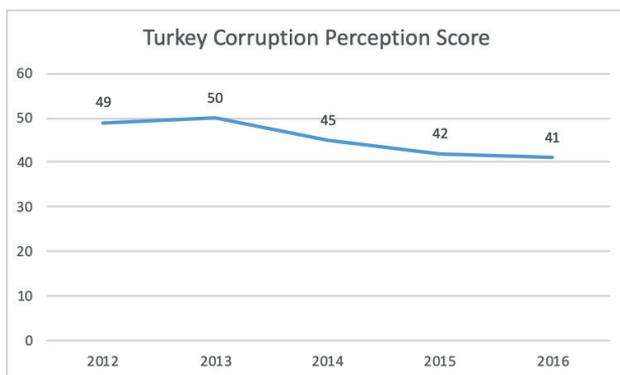
Ethnographic methodology is increasingly being used in many different fields, such as marketing and management, to understand unfamiliar cultures and markets (Harrel & Prabhu, 1999). The survey questions do not reflect deep cognitive and emotional expectations (Slavador, Bell, & Ken, 1999). To understand human centered knowledge, companies' research shifts from "product" to "activities".

The goal of ethnographic research is to help policy makers gain "insights into citizens' motivations" and thereby exchange innovative strategies for policies. The research questions are a) in which context corruption occurs, b) what are the physical, cognitive, emotional, social, and cultural situations, and c) what the motivations are and why people give into bribery. Knowing people is about gaining an empathic understanding of people's thoughts, and feelings by interacting. Immersing yourself in people's bribery transactions and keenly listening to their bribery stories can reveal valuable insights which are sometimes quite surprising and nonobvious. To get to such valuable insights, we should focus on everything that people do, say, and think; we should deeply understand people's activities when implementing public policies (Kumar, 2012, Kelley & Kelley, 2013; Brown, 2008; Lietdka *et al.*, 2014). We should be on the lookout for understanding the problems of business they face which drive them towards bribery, the workarounds they do, challenges they overcome, and the needs they express and those they do not express. Knowing people well can lead us to entirely new categories of corruption fight strategies that essentially address people's needs and create significant new value in public services.

In this study, first, we offer a unique approach to the ethnographic research regarding bribe givers' experiences. Second, we contribute to the development of the proces by demonstrating how the incidents start and end. Third, we contribute to understanding how psychological, social psychological, and cultural conditions promote corruption.

5. Turkey: An Intensely Corrupted Country

According to the corruption perception index, Turkey ranked 75 out of 176 countries in 2016 (graph 1) (Transparency Internatioanl, 2017).



Graph 1. Perception Score

Source: Transparency Organization (Lower the grade higher the perception)

Rankings higher than 60 are classified as the least corrupted countries. As graph 1 shows, Turkey's corruption perception score is overall deteriorating each year. It fell from 49/100 in 2012 to 41/100 in 2016.

Turkey has the laws and the agencies required to curb corruption but in reality, the implementation is weak. According to the transparency institute, the failing is due to the excessive power of the executive branch over the legal system, and the suppression of press freedom (Transparency International, 2017). The perception index also reveals institutional weaknesses (Transparency International, 2017).

Turkey must improve its institutional framework, remove the significant rigidities that exist in its labor markets, and strengthen the efficiency and stability of financial markets (World Economic Forum, 2017).

Based on these reports, the main reason of failure is due to the institutional weakness. However, none of these reports search for the cultural root of corruption, namely the legitimization and general belief in the validity of corruption by society. Therefore, the improvement of the institutional framework will not be enough to reduce corruption because of the lack of public support.

6. Interview Forms

Due to the sensitivity and illegality of the corruption, we kept the interviews strictly confidential and anonymous. Given the great benefits of ethnographic research, it is very difficult to find and convince people to share entire bribery stories while being recorded. Therefore, we could not record audiotapes, videotapes, photos, only use field notes. It was not commented on negatively or positively. All the statements were their own words. We asked bribe givers to narrate stories and we filled in forms based on their answers (Table 1). In particular, we focused on the user experience element to understand their emotions, values, and thoughts.

6.1. Interviews: Some Topics of Corruption Activities

Some interviews notes are presented below:

First interview: "A state owned electric company visited the place where I work to cut off the electricity due to unpaid bills. I asked them to extend the payment deadline in exchange for a payment, and they accepted and wrote on their report that they had attended our company but couldn't find anybody!"

Second Interview: “I was working in a logistics firm as a general director. In this sector, vehicles should be consistently operating for transport synchronicity. One of our trucks was held at a border due to a lack of several documents. I immediately went to the border city to meet the director. I informed him that we could solve this issue with a gift. He accepted and released the truck.”

Third interview: “I was driving between two cities. I was caught on police radar and they stopped my car. They told me that I had exceeded 120 km/h. The officer informed me that I would be penalised. I told him that we could solve this problem in another manner. I put money inside my driving licence and he smiled and told me to have a nice trip.”

Fourth interview: “My partner and I are in the construction business. In an area popular for summer vacations, we started to construct a resort. After we started, we faced several obstacles on the construction side. My partners and I went to the mayor to talk. The mayor told us that if we paid for the cost of building a new local school, they would waive the construction requirements. We built the school and all the problems were resolved.”

Fifth interview: “I think that judges have so many many legal cases to manage that they cannot be as careful as they need to be. I visited a judge’s office before my recent case. I left some money on the judge’s table and asked him to read our case more carefully. The judge put the money in his briefcase while smiling at me.”

Sixth interview: “One construction firm needed to get approval from the municipal inspection department. However, the report did not proceed. Therefore, I placed some money into an envelope. As a result, we received our payment in two days.”

Eight interview: “Companies need to get credit to pay debts. However, the credit rating of our company was low. The director of our bank said that the loan would be approved in exchange for 15% commission. We made an agreement and we got our credit.”

Ninth interview: “I met with an accident after drinking alcohol. The police wanted to check my alcohol level. I asked them not to measure it since the insurance company will not compensate the damage. I paid the police to not record my alcohol limit.”

6.2. User Experiences

There are five categories of user experiences: **physical, cognitive, social, emotional, and cultural**. Psychological and social psychological reasons are the main elements of user experiences. Physical places or physical obstacles are not related to bribery. The physical experience is negligible in this transaction. People expressed the places as generally being quiet, comfortable, and large depending on the hierarchies of the public officers.

6.2.1. Cognitive

At a cognitive level, economic reasons still play a role. The human brain calculates that the cost of paying fines is higher than the cost of a bribe. Corruption is considered to be a necessary part of bureaucracy, which accelerates government services, and it allows firms to overcome inefficient regulations. From this perspective, corruption works to improve the efficiency of an economy (Mo, 2001; Leff, 1964; Huntington, 1968; Acemoglu & Verdier, 1998). Business is based on profit and profit is possible if the operation is on track. To avoid any delays or to fill a gap in legal or administrative requirements, it needs to gain time.

The statement “**boss approval**” can be related to **obedience to authority** based on the concept developed in Milgram’s shock experiment (1974). Milgram shows that people can carry out illegal

action since an authority figure (boss, teacher, officer, etc) said so. According to Milgram, “the essence of obedience is in the fact that a person comes to view himself as the instrument for carrying out another person’s wishes, and he therefore no longer sees himself as responsible for his actions.”

Relaxation of the brain plays an important role in being successful in bribery transactions. The stress levels are more relaxed due to the perception that corruption is prevalent. Typical statements such as **“everyone offers bribes”** control the emotions while offering bribes. Especially, when there is a time interval before the offer, they firmly prepare themselves. **Appropriate speech is needed before offering bribes.** Otherwise, the tension, emotion, and stress of the situation might paralyze their behaviors. They only focus on the transaction by repeating these words (and thereby justifying their actions): **“the task should be taken anyway.”** So, they run away from their responsibilities and their consciousness of the moral issues.

6.2.2. Social

The psychological and social psychology aspects of the interview demonstrate that the bribe givers’ behaviors are influenced by society’s culture and norms (Apport, 1985).

Bribe givers accept that corruption is unethical and shameful. However, there are two social psychological elements coming into play: **conformity and obedience.** We have already discussed **obedience** in the Milgram study (Milgram, 1974). Statements such as **“impossible to avoid”** demonstrate the **obedience** to existing rules.

Conformity is to behave or reflect like other members of a group. The similarity of members within a society regarding status, similarity, expertise, prior commitment, and accountability to the society help to determine the degree of conformity of an individual (Elliot, 2008; Forsyth, 2006). Their statements such as **“the system is already setup”**, **“we need to adjust into the system”**, **“the system works like this”**, and **“the salary of public officials is low and this is how to compensate”** are examples of accepting the norms and systems of society.

6.2.3. Emotional

Those who offer bribes can be stressed and concerned by the potential reactions of government employees. Stress occurs first while mentioning and then during the payment. Later, the **fear** continues since this illegal activity might be revealed for some, as yet, unknown reason. At the initial introduction and payment stages, stress comes from not knowing how an official might react and then, even if the officer accepts the bribe, they might not carry out their promises (Rose-Ackerman & Palifka, 2016).

Shame exists as an emotion, but this negative feeling ends faced with the **“every one is performing as the same way”** social experience perception (**conformity**).

When individuals and companies make a payment for a deficiency, they are happy to avoid a bigger cost; however, when they make a bribery payment because of an unfair situation, they become angry.

Some types of illegal payments go to public services rather than to officials’ pockets. This form of payment prevents shame and anger.

6.2.4. Cultural

Everyone else is doing it mind set is a typical characteristic of the belief system. As a major finding of our more in depth interviews, payment of bribes is a pre-condition to business.

Statements such as **“I know that the majority of professionals in my field are following the same procedure”** indicates the perceived norms of their group. As we discussed, these statements

show the strength of **conformity and obedience** in the perception of an individual who is influenced by his group (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

Additionally, the issue of compensation for public servants is sometimes mentioned. In some cultures, there is a level of empathy for public officials, who accept bribes to avoid starvation (Beets, 2005). Getz & Volkema (2001) used "*attribution theory to explain that situational exigencies allow for atypical behavior.*" Society does not approve of theft but stealing trivial amounts to feed one's family can be considered acceptable.

6.2.5. POEMS Analysis

POEMS stands for the people, object, environment, messages and services involved in this study.

• People

There were a variety of people involved in bribery: a general director of an electricity company, a mayor, a customs director, a police officer, a bank director, a businessman, a financial controller, a judge, lawyers and a driver.

• Objects

Objects were not very relevant to our analysis. The interviewees usually mentioned office items – tables in particular.

• Environment

The environment was usually inside an office but sometimes it was outside of the office. It was usually quiet.

• Message

The title of the officer involved and the name of their department were written. There were no significant messages inside offices.

• Services

There were a variety of services delivered such as electrical work, customs operations, judicial services, security, and so on.

6.2.6. Motivation

The main motivation was economical. Economic reasons were to win a public bid, to use opportunities to pay less, get rid of bankruptcy, prevent possible harm from occurring, realize bigger business, grow business, and setting things right.

7. Conclusion and Policy Recommendation

The aim of this paper was to contribute deep insights into people who are involved in bribery. The first contribution of the paper is that it used the ethnographic method summarized under user experiences to explain economic and developmental problems. The second contribution is to reflect all conflicted emotions and thoughts such as stress, fear, happiness, and anger presented during the bribery process. The third contribution is to indicate the link of obedience and conformity with corruption. **Based on these interviews, two specific issues - psychological and social psychological aspects - play such important roles, a country cannot fight without considering them.**

To comprehend the social psychology of bribery or how bribery becomes part of the rules, we need first to understand the processes by which people feel uncomfortable about involving themselves in corruption and the factors engaged. The role of physical, emotional, social, cultural, and cognitive experiences have been neglected in the literature on corruption.

The social psychological elements are very strong in the bribery transaction, statements such as **“they are already expecting this offer”**, **“business keeps moving with these small payments in the construction sector”**, and **“the system works like this”** are linked to the concept of **obedience and conformity**.

Our policy recommendations fall into these categories:

- i) Obedience leads to the idea of being in a minority. Those who refuse a bribe should not be considered as being in a minority, rather they need to think and feel that society approves of their refusal. They acted heroically and responsibly. They have to be honored. Emphasizing in particular the honorable aspect of the job is crucial.
- ii) Obedience is fed by system perceptions. When a citizen breaks the law, he has one solution in his mind: find a government employee and corrupt him. The mindset of “how the system works” should be changed. The system works without corruption. Any type of illegal payments (including supporting a public service should be prohibited).
- iii) Some bribery forms are shaped under the banner of public service support (i.e. a construction firm builds a public school) and such practices should also be banned. Citizens should not rely on (or justify) public service sponsorship of an illegal business.
- i) Prevention of contact is essential. Before corruption is proposed, the general subject introduction sentence is **“we can solve the problem between us.”** Avoidance of contact or electronic or non-electronic supervision would partly curb corruption. Inspections of headquarters could be strengthened. Staff should be continuously changed. Hidden cameras might be helpful in spotting illegal activities.
- ii) The banking industry can be taken as a model where money is heavily involved but corruption is very rare. Bank compensations and inspections could be taken as a new structure for public organizations. Alternatively, many public duties (construction supervision, customs operations,...) could be privatized.
- iii) Conformity is a result of acceptance of peers or social groups. Norms of professional association should be firmly determined and the code of ethics should emphasise the issue of corruption. For example, the code might be very strong in some institutions such as legal and academic operations. Therefore, we might not detect any corruption in a state university where the salaries are low but ethic codes are strong.
- iv) Culturally, corruption can be labeled as an immoral attitude and the word corruption itself could be associated with a widely accepted immoral act (i.e., social thief)
- v) Public relations and advertisements might play effective roles in gaining public support. Their main subjects have to focus on why corruption is stealing from our future and what the consequences are. The anti-corruption campaign should show that those who offer and receive bribes are to be seriously punished (high fines, terminating one’s government employee status including pension rights).

This research has one caveat. Interviewing private citizens is relatively easier than government employees who automatically refuse our requests to talk. However, it would be very useful to understand their user experience in the corruption event. What do they think and feel when they actually receive the bribe? Are they afraid of being caught? What is their conscience saying about this illegal payment? How are they justified? What are their motivations to receive bribes? What will the consequence be if they refuse to receive the bribe? These are the tough questions to ask and match up with the answers that we received from those offering bribes.

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