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## Corruption – Why do they do it?

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### Abstract

The Corruption Perception Index (CPI) for Malaysia shows undesirable results, indicating the issue of corruption should be taken seriously. To address the corruption issue social constructionist perspective is employed, specifically qualitative methodology is used to gain an insight of the phenomenon. This qualitative study investigates the factors contributing to the occurrence of corruption in the Malaysian context. A total of twelve interviews were conducted. The respondents in the study were practitioners, representatives from government agencies and senior public sector officials. Several themes emerged as to why people are corrupt, including: power, opportunity and moral impurity. This study suggests determinants of individual acts of corruption in the Malaysian context. The findings will be useful for practitioners and regulators as the findings can provide insightful information to support the proactive measure to fight corruption.

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*Keywords:* Corruption; qualitative approach; opportunity; moral value; power

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### 1. Introduction

One certainty is that corruption is not a new phenomenon, neither is it a phenomenon that most of us like to talk about. However, it has been there in the system for a long time. Like it or not, it is a topic of concern. The concern for corruption is apparent for both developing and under developing countries. This statement is made based on our observations of the trend of corruption scores illustrated by the Corruption Perception Index (CPI) and the

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empirical evidence that supports the justification related to causal effect between corruption and these nations. The series of results produced by the Transparency International on CPI (based on Transparency International research from 2001-2013) indicate the trend of corruption that does not produce constructive scores for under developing and developing countries, hence implying corruption is becoming a critical issue in these nations.

Malaysia, as a developing nation, cannot be proud of its CPI result. The CPI result released by the Transparency International shows Malaysia is among the nations projected to have issues with corruption. Although improvement is seen in the 2013 CPI (Transparency International, 2013), the result does not mean Malaysia is in the comfort zone. This is because Malaysia's corruption reading, as shown in the series of corruption perception indices, is not too pleasing (from 60<sup>th</sup> place in 2011 to 56<sup>th</sup> place in 2012 and 53<sup>rd</sup> place in 2013), indicating corruption in Malaysia must be taken seriously.

Our reflection on the phenomenon - numerous initiatives has been designed by the Malaysian government to fight corruption and various measures have been implemented to achieve a cleaner business environment in Malaysia. Additionally, there are increasing awareness campaigns rigorously undertaken by the anti-corruption agency; this has however been like putting salt in the ocean. We ask this question, does more need to be done?

Despite all the efforts, the result of the CPI does not reflect that the efforts taken have paid-off. The question remains, why is that so? Our inquisitive mind worked on the possibility that perhaps we need to study the issue from a different angle. We foresee that the issue needs to be looked at from the micro-aspect, rather than the macro-aspect.

Our observation was affirmed when we conducted a review of the literature, where we noted that although there are several studies on corruption, little is known from the micro-aspect that supports the understanding of corruption. Available studies are often centred on the macro-aspect, i.e., economic-related contributions that link corruption to economic development. Our observation is supported by Budiman, Roan and Callan (2013), where they are of a similar contention that there are limited studies conducted in developing countries that examine corruption from a micro-perspective (focusing on individual context). They claim that where studies have been undertaken, explanation is more often than not espoused within 'a narrow set of factors that includes rent-seeking behaviours or self-interest' (p.140).

Considering the above, we aim to expand the literature on managing corruption, looking at it from the micro-context (studying the root cause based on individual perspective), rather than understanding the issue from a macro-perspective. As academicians, it is contingent on us to support the efforts emphasised in theory, where providing deeper understanding of the cause of corruption is essential at this point of time. So, we constructed our research question as such: why do they do it? Our conjecture is that getting to the root of corruption is essential for identifying the reasons why it happens. Olowu (1993, as cited in Agbiboa, 2012) attests that one of the possible rationalisations for the increasing level of corruption in Africa is due to diversion from understanding the problem and focusing on its remedy. This supports our intention to uncover the root of the issue, rather than adding on to the many available literature which provide remedies to solve the problem. Nonetheless, we would like to highlight that due to the limitations of getting the cooperation from the 'doers', we focused our understanding from the perspective of the professionals and authorities who have vast experiences in dealing with the 'doers' and managing the issue from the perspective of implementation, enforcement and policy. We perceived that the scope of our study (studying corruption from the micro-aspect) can advance the literature as it can contribute to increasing knowledge from the perspective of actors, rather than providing statistical comparison between nations. Rabl (2011), in his corruption study, points to similar limitations in corruption literature, where he mentions that there is an abundance of research to study corruption but little attention is given to the corrupt actors.

Our underlying purpose of taking this scope is that understanding the reason will direct us towards developing and implementing effective strategies and initiatives to manage corruption in the future. In doing so, we believe our strength to achieve the objective of this study (i.e., to explore the reasons for the occurrence of corrupt acts) is through an interpretive epistemology, where the value in getting rich data is attainable through interaction with people. We formed the opinion that interpretive epistemology is appropriate for complex and subjective topics such as this. Our view is supported by literature, where corruption is indeed perceived as a complex topic to study (Budiman, Roan & Callan, 2013), and the use of interpretive epistemology is appropriate for a study that is subjective in nature, as advised by Creswell (2007). Predominantly, the sensitivity of the issue (i.e., corruption), subjectivity of the problems and the complexity of the topic, inspire and make us feel confident to embrace the interpretivist epistemology, where social constructionist view is used as theoretical foundation to conduct the study

process. More importantly, using a social constructionist view, rather than testing assumptions, would provide us with deeper understanding, thus offering rich description of the event. We would like to point out that this is not wishful thinking, as our exploration would contribute to policy change and provide extensive understanding of the issue for future research, since the findings provide much needed evidence in corruption studies. The paper proceeds as follows: the following section presents a review of the literature. The subsequent section discusses the method undertaken by the researchers, followed by the description of the result. Finally, remarks that include summary, limitation of the study and future research are given.

## 2. Literature review

Various interpretations of the meaning of corruption are found in the literature, hence reaffirming the assertion made by several researchers about the complexity of the topic. Several researchers opined that interpretation of corruption and corrupt act varies according to region, local values and beliefs (such as Khan, 1998; Kristiansen & Ramli, 2006 as cited in Budiman, Roan & Callan, 2013). Therefore, it is not surprising that studies on corruption are sparse, particularly in the context of understanding corruption from an individual perspective. Even so, there is a significant amount of the literature devoted towards advancing the knowledge from a macro-perspective, particularly linked to country development. With the aim to delineate the trend of research in this area, we carried out our review of the literature from two aspects: the various meanings of corruption and the socio-economic trend of corruption studies, and ultimately, we provided an assessment of what has not been done in the field of corruption, context-specific to the Malaysian environment.

### 2.1 Corruption – the various meanings

As mentioned, there are many interpretations of corruption in the literature. A general perception is that these various meanings of corruption have resulted in subjectivity and complexity when studying corruption (Chandler & Graham, 2010; Budiman, Roan & Callan, 2013). Houston and Graham (2001, as cited in Chandler & Graham, 2010) assert that subjectivity and complexity of the topic arise due to the different culture and tolerances of corrupt activities in countries, consequently, producing various perceptions representing the definition. From the available literature, we affirm two core characteristics of the definition: explicit aspect and implicit aspect. The former, addresses corruption from the physical characteristics of the act, emphasising corruption based on the act as deviant behaviour; the latter addresses corruption in its the implicit form, where focus is centred on the process of showing the act.

From the explicit perspective, corruption is defined from the view of its physical character of the act that relates with two apparent elements, i.e. deviant behaviour and personal gain. Deviant behaviour describes corruption as an unethical behaviour of the act (Nwabuzor, 2005), while personal gain is described as the misuse of authority for personal or private gain (Beugre' 2010 as cited in Budiman, Roan & Callan, 2013; Alon & Hagemen, 2013). The latter, however, describes corruption from an implicit aspect, where it explains corruption based on the process of doing the act (as deviant behaviour and personal gain). When reviewing the literature, we noticed that the pattern of definition contains type of the corruption act, such as bribery and nepotism, and scope of corruption (expanded from personal to organisation gain and privilege), and extensiveness of the deviant behaviour (misuse of power, misappropriation, malpractice (Nye, 1967; Donleavy et al, 2008, as cited in Chandler and Graham, 2013). Noticeably, the most widely used definition, according to Agbibo (2012), is by Nye (1967, p. 419), who describes corruption as 'behaviour which deviates from the formal duties of a public role because of private-regarding (personal, close family, private clique), pecuniary or status gains; or violates rules against the exercise of certain types of private-regarding influence. This includes behaviour, such as bribery (use of reward to pervert the judgement of a person in a position of trust); nepotism (bestowal of patronage by reason of inscriptive relationship rather than merit); and misappropriation (illegal appropriation of public resources for private-regarding uses)'.

## *2.2 Socio economic trend of corruption research*

Researchers examining corruption affirm the detrimental effects of corruption. Most researchers (Pellegrini & Gerlagh, 2008; Ata & Arvas, 2011; Agbiboa, 2012) imply the damages and effects caused by corruption to economic growth. Other corruption research studies assess corruption across countries, and determinants of corruption, etc. More importantly, our review provides the perception that more often than not, corruption studies are focused on examining level of corruption across countries. Notably, the unit of analysis is often based on a country level, limited was found to study individual perspective. More so, previous studies have been from a positivist paradigm, where causal effect and quantifying measures are prominent; little has been written on providing in-depth understanding of the issue.

## *2.3 Detrimental effect of corruption*

It is an obvious fact that corruption causes a lot of detrimental effects. This assertion is supported by empirical evidence. Many researchers found corruption damaged the political, social and economic sectors of a country (Nwabuzor, 2005; Pellegrini & Gerlagh, 2008; Ata & Arvas, 2011; Agbiboa, 2012). Studies conducted by Transparency International from 2001 to 2013 produced similar trend of corruption ranking each year, where developing and under developing countries often produced undesirable scores (50 marks and below, 100 being good and 1 being bad). However, some findings reveal negative effect of the indices in judging the level of corruption. Warren and Laufer (2009), for example, suggest that corruption rankings in one aspect could cause a country's isolation and reduce possibility of investment. Although there is positive element in the ranking, on the other side of the coin, the ranking could damage a nation's reputation; such countries can carry a social label because they are stigmatised as countries that have corruption problem (as perceived from the indices). Although the truth may be hurtful, the reputation of a country can be damaging due to the stigma given in the ranking. Warren and Laufer (2009) criticised the ranking method of measuring corruption as they said there are other factors that need to be considered, such as: 1) the variance in the definition of corruption; 2) the lack of transparency in the measurement of corruption; and 3) inconsistent number of countries in the list of ranking as this could effect the developing and under developing countries more than developed countries as any new inclusion would make the difference in the number ranked. Concurring with Warren and Laufer (2009), we dispute the use of the CPI due to several reasons: possibility of stigmatising countries and more importantly, we think the ranking illustrates a kind of caste system, providing perception stratification which could result in affirmation action taken by investors. We observed the ranking and realised existence of isolation among developing and under developing countries. In 2013, for example, majority of the developing countries obtained more than 50 point scores. Malaysia, however, was ranked 53, with the country score of 50, indicating Malaysia falls within the category of countries with serious corruption problems. This is not good for the Malaysian image as it reflects badly on the nation.

## *2.4 Linking corruption with economic growth*

There is rich empirical evidence linking corruption and economic growth. Largely, the empirical evidence in this area focuses on investigating causal relationship between corruption and the level of economic growth. Synthesising prior work in this context, we found the common operationalisation of measurement conducted to achieve the researchers' goal of investigating causal effect between corruption and economic growth, was the corruption index and the Gross National Domestic Product (GDP), respectively. Generally, the results indicate corruption deterred economic growth. More importantly, findings often announced level of corruption with economic development (Ata & Arvas, 2011). In sum, research results within this context, suggest developing and under developing countries have connection with higher level of corruption (Ksenia, 2008; Transparency International, 2011, 2012, 2013). Although the findings are useful for economists, we figure the outcome is disputable (as it does not account for other factors), and hence, does not give a holistic and in-depth view of the situation. The corruption phenomenon requires studying the root cause of the problems in order to solve the issue. We find the causality between level of corruption and economic growth, showing higher corruption for under developing and developing countries, however developed countries showing lower level of corruption, is just

stating the obvious. With regards to the economic contribution, no doubt, the assessment of the level of corruption would be beneficial, but what is essential at present is the issue – regardless of the initiatives and regulations enforced, why is this issue still prevalent. We see the root of the problem remains under-studied. We justify our statement that the corruption index has its limitations as it is incapable of explaining the issue due to its straightforward procedure. We emphasise on the understanding of the issue by exploring the matter with purposively selected individuals who can express and share insights and stories, thus representing a socially constructed reality.

### *2.5 Determinant of corruption*

Many studies suggest corruption dampens development of a nation, as it is a threat to the government's legitimacy, particularly with regards to economic freedom (Nwabuzor, 2005). In addition, it has an effect on the society, where studies have proven corruption is related to poverty. Nwabuzor (2005), in this paper, said that corruption produces 'evil causes' to a country, where he mentions among others, regressive tax that badly affects the poor, misuse of skills and power, effect on goods and services and threatening legitimacy of the government (p.128). In addition, several other findings have been reviewed to identify the determining factors of corruption perspective. Some view situational and individual factors influence corrupts behaviour. Rabl's (2011) study supports this assertion. He examined several situational factors, such as size of bribery, time pressure and degree of abstractness of the business code with intention to perform the corrupt act. Surprisingly his finding produced mixed result, where his hypothesis that size matters with regards to the corruption act, was rejected. Size, based on this study referred to the amount of bribery (in monetary form). His study suggests size of bribery and time has no significant influence over corruption.

### *2.6 Relevant theory*

We note that corruption possesses inter-disciplinary features due to its visibility in studies conducted from various disciplines, such as economy, accounting, etc. Literature shows that corruption involves economic, political and social issues. Consequently, its inter-disciplinary nature provides a multi-theory explanation. For instance, in terms of political perspective, theory of legitimacy is the theory of choice that could explain the level of corruption with the codified law imposed. Pellegrini and Gerlagh (2008), who addressed the issue of relevancy of theories to predict corruption, point out that the level of corruption could be traced to legal theories that suggest law in place by different governments provides a link to the levels of corruption of the government. One interesting point made by the duo is that countries which adopted the British law code, would project lower levels of corruption. We do not agree with this contention. Our statement is supported by our observation of the CPI studies conducted by Transparency International (from 2001-2013), where the under developing and developing countries often categorised as among countries with serious corruption problems, are among the adopters of the British law code as they are Commonwealth nations, such as Malaysia, India, etc.

Another relevant theory that explains corruption is the labelling theory developed by Becker. The labelling theory has developed an interesting explanation on deviant acts. The theory explains that self-identity and behaviour of individuals could be determined by the description given to the individual. The theory points out that deviance are labelled by the majority who associate the individual to the deviant act. Self-fulfilling prophecy and stereotyping are the two concepts connected to stigmatising the individual ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Labeling\\_theory#Howard\\_Becker](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Labeling_theory#Howard_Becker)). Warren and Laufer (2009) pointed out the negative effect of social labelling using CPI to stigmatise countries. We agree with Warren and Laufer (2009) as we find there is an element of caste attached to stigmatisation of under-developing and developing countries.

Another theory that is relevant to individual and situational behaviour is the Model of Corrupt Action theory developed by Rabl (2011). Rabl (2011) used this theory to underpin his study in examining the situational impact of corruption on organisations. The model provides explanation based on the person determinant as a variable to predict corrupt acts.

Due to the nature of our study, i.e., interpretivist nature of seeking knowledge, we theorised our inquiry with the theoretical background explained from the ontological view of social constructionist perspective, or interchangeably termed as constructionist view. We support our justification of relying on the social constructionist view based on: the free flow acceptance of the reality, where in order to theorise an event or phenomenon, one should rely on the data, rather than be controlled by assumptions or hypothesis. In relation to this study, a social constructionist view implies that corrupt act is constructed based on social interaction and knowledge emerged based on construction of the mind from plural reality of understanding language based on single-minded theory assumption. We theorised our study based on Berger and Luckmann's (1966) explanation that knowledge is created by the interactions of individuals within the society, which he counts as expert knowledge, and people who devote themselves full-time to their subject. The description of our informants fit into the description given by Berger and Luckmann (1966) where our informants were selected based on their expertise and full-time commitment to the field (see criteria of selection of our informants in the methodology section). Another essential element justifying our use of social constructionist theory is the means of using conversation to gather data. Berger and Luckmann (1967) pointed out that conversation is crucial in performance of social reality, where concepts are shared with others. In our case, the conversation was used as a means of reconstructing the reality with the informant as experts and we as researchers in similar field of interest. We are of the view that social constructionist theory proposes that of corruption concentrates on socialisation and moral influence that shapes the doers. Essentially, our proposition is shared by the role of our informants who share their expertise and knowledge in narrating why the corrupters do what they do.

### 3. Methodology

Qualitative research appreciates how social reality is interpreted. Making sense of the reality is the ultimate objective of qualitative research. Needless to say, the objective of this study is to make sense of the meaning of corruption by studying the reason why people conduct the act. In doing so, qualitative research provides fruitful answers. Specifically, this study employed the Generic Inquiry Method. This is a method designed for a study that has certain characteristics, where it:

*'exhibits some or all of the characteristics of qualitative endeavour but rather than focusing the study through the lens of a known methodology they seek to do one of two things: either they combine several methodologies or approaches, or claim no particular methodological view point at all. Generally, the focus of the study is on understanding an experience or an event'* (Callie, Ray & Mill, 2003, p.3).

The characteristics described by Callie, Ray and Mill (2003) are appropriate for explaining the characteristics of this study, whereby the focus of this study is to understand the experiences and events related to the reason why one acts the way one does, i.e., be involved in corrupt acts.

As for the data collection procedure, this study used interview as primary data sources. In addition, documents mainly literature related to corruption, was gathered to support the validity of information gathered from the interviews. Face-to-face interview, with constant probing, was conducted with the informants. This study adopted the purposive sampling method in choosing the informants. Creswell (2007) recommended purposive sampling method as the best technique for qualitative research. Criteria, such as expertise, experience, skills and knowledge related to the informants' positions were adopted to set the standards of purposive sampling. Most of the informants have experience dealing with corruption cases and some of them are involved in the enforcement. Overall, twelve informants were interviewed, in order to achieve the objective of this study. Descriptions of our informants are as follows: Specifically, the informants are a forensic accountant who has vast experience in handling corruption cases (1); practitioners (2); Enforcers (2); Consultant (1); criminologist (1); Government Official (1); Internal Auditor (1); Anti Corruption Agencies (2); and Integrity Institute (1). Approximate duration of each interview lasted about 60 – 120 minutes. Prior to interviews, we contacted the informants personally to set appointment. We used tape recorder to record the data and soon after each interview, we transcribed the recording verbatim. Our focus during the interview was to obtain rich and in-depth narration of the informants' experience related to corruption (with the doers), with the ultimate aim of understanding the reason why people are corrupt. In order to enhance the quality of data gathered, all three researchers (with qualitative background) were present, with exception of a few occasions, when only two researchers were involved. We find two or more researchers enhance

the quality of data gathering as two heads are better than one. Soon after, we analysed the data (transcriptions and documents) both manually and by using NVIVO. Combining two tools (manually and using computer tool) in analysing the same data provides support for validation of codes and themes developed, as the process of comparing and contrasting can be validated between the two. Gbrich's (2007) technique of analysing data was employed in order to make sense of the data. Several processes had to be performed prior to making sense of the data. Gbrich (2007) illustrates data analysis based on thematic analysis procedure. The process of thematic analysis involves data reduction, where raw data is reduced into meaningful groupings (which is conducted by the 'block and file' approach). Example of the thematic analysis process adopted from Gbrich (2007) based on 'block and file' approach is as shown in Table 1:

Table 1: Thematic analysis: 'block and file approach'

Response to reason for corruption	Response to types of corruption
<p>Respondent: Ex-prosecutor            'I worked as a prosecutor before. I looked at it in the perspective of legal system, I think it is due to opportunity. If there is opportunity there is way to conduct corrupt act. Whether or not you want to take the opportunity depends on how it comes. First, there must be opportunity, then power'.</p> <p>Respondent: Anti corruption agency            'Manipulation of the system'</p> <p>Respondent: Criminologist            'Financial problem, desperate, environment, greed, others do it, if I do not than I will be at a loss.'            'opportunity and individual with power involved higher amount of corruption.'</p>	<p>Respondent: Anti- Corruption Agency            Many type of corruption, there are 3 prone areas that we called grand corruption, government procurement and regulatory and enforcement.</p> <p>Respondent: Enforcer            There are two types of corruption; bribery and illegal gratuity.</p>

### 3. Result

Based on the data analysis, all of the subjects voiced their concern with regards to corruption in Malaysia and view that corruption is not a new issue in Malaysia. Regarding the reason why corruption occurs, three patterns emerged from the data: power, opportunity and moral values.

#### 3.1 Power

When asked why corruption occurs in Malaysia, instantly the subjects responded, '*power*' (example: subjects no.4 and no.5). Power according to the subjects means '*people in privileged position who can do whatever they like*'. Most of the subjects (more than half of the total sample) voiced that power leads individuals to act corruptly. Insight of the data also revealed that power, combined with opportunity, would lead individuals to corrupt acts.

Further analysis indicates some people with power in Malaysia abuse their positions. They use their positions, driven by the opportunity available, to do corrupt acts. As said by one of the informants:

- '*it is more to the person that put up their hand*' When we asked why is that so, this is what he said, '*they can do whatever they like – untouchable and can do anything... I think many politician been in power for so long and they think that they have power to do so (practitioner no.1)*
- '*power*' (practitioner no.2)

Related to the issue, our data indicates power comes with position held by the doer as supported by:

- '*Particularly people in power looking after close associates, family and friends in the project (practitioner no.1)*

Detailed conversation held with the above informant indicated power is connected to bribery, exploitation and conflict of interest. Insights of the data also revealed power can be further categorised into three contexts: political

power ('political influence'), authority power ('people can do whatever they like with position and person that has the authority to request') and controlling power ('limited segregation of duties') lead towards corruption.

### 3.2 Opportunity

Another pattern that emerged is opportunity. Opportunity is very much associated with power. An example of a quotation from our informant:

- *'generally it is about opportunity. If there is opportunity people will do it. Whether or not they want to take the opportunity depends how it comes. First, opportunity then power'(ex-prosecutor)*

Generally, all of the subjects pointed to opportunity as one of the most significant factors why corruption occurs. Opportunity is the factor that influences corruption to happen. Interpretation of the data indicates opportunity exists when one has power. In the Malaysian context, opportunity to be involved in corruption mostly occurs in the government sector. A common avenue for opportunity is in the procurement of projects related to the government sector. The informants voiced political power is one factor creating opportunity to do corrupt acts.

### 3.3. Moral impurity

Another reason why people do corrupt acts is the lack of moral values. Lack of moral values in the finding is termed as moral impurity. Lack of integrity, selfishness, greed and temptation, as well as lack of principles and religion, are the themes identified as linked to moral impurity. Examples of quotations related to several of the variables are as follows:

- Lack of integrity - *'This is integrity problem' (enforcer no.1)*
- greed - *'a professor from [one of the public university] known as 5 percent man' has a house worth 5 million. I wonder how does he gets that kind of money? He is just a professor' (criminologist). 'it come to personal greedy' (consultant no.2).*
- temptation - *'now corruption is not in money form but gold bar (criminologist)*

### 3.4. Discussion

The findings in the study delineated three main factors (power, opportunity and moral impurity) as the focal point of why corruption happens. These three factors were found to be linked to corrupt acts. More interestingly, the data also revealed strength of doing the corrupt act increases with two factors collating with each other. Analysis of the data indicates an interesting connection between power and opportunity. More than half of our informants mentioned power combined with opportunity would induce individual(s) to conduct corrupt acts. To our surprise, data disclosed that opportunity combined with power leads to a high corruption level. Further probing related to this finding revealed that opportunity solely would not give confidence to the individuals, but with authorised power, the amount and frequency of corruption increase due to high confidence to conduct the act. A statement to support our interpretation related to this attestation is that authorised power, particularly creates opportunity for the individual to conduct corrupt acts as the person in power would have the rights to access the system and right persons, and hence be able to manipulate the situation easily. Further explanation given is that hollowness in the system can be easily noted as the individual in power normally has full authority over the system, hence explaining the created opportunity (due to the lack of internal control in the system as the main factor in reference to loop hole in the system). In addition, our informants related stories that pointed towards persons with wealth, position (job wise) and political influence create opportunity through their political, authorised and controlling power. Complementing this opportunity is the gap in the judiciary and legal system, which has become a haven for the individual to conduct corrupt acts. One of the examples shared by our informants is that often, the doers escape the corruption charged against them due to the technical gap in the legal system. Informants shared their stories that many doers would be acquitted due to technical issues. The statement expressed by our informant is that an individual can escape from the offences if one hires a good lawyer as good lawyers use technical issues to defend their client in court. Interpreting this evidence further, wealth and political



power were associated with the rationalisation of creation of opportunities. These findings are congruent with prior literature that opportunity, rationalisation and pressure influence fraud to occur. Zimmerman et al. (2012) found opportunity is one of the fraudulent elements, and combined with pressure and rationalisation, would lead to corrupt acts. In respect to this study, association between opportunity and power are apparent.

Individual factors were also found to have an association with corrupt acts. This finding supports a prior study conducted by Grieger (2005, as cited in Rabl, 2011), where he confirmed individual factors correlate with corrupt behaviour. We believe Grieger's (2005) findings confirm the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991), where it delineates that attitude, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control influencing individuals with intention to act, would perform the act regardless the act brings negative or positive effect. Aligned with our finding, data indicates opportunity would not be taken unless the individual has strong desire to do so. However, there is also empirical evidence that shows otherwise, where situational and individual factors have been attested to have no significant relationship with corrupt behaviour. This evidence is seen in Rabl's (2011) experimental study using Model of Corrupt Action; he found situational factors (size of bribery, time and degree of abstraction of business code) have no causal relationship to individuals performing the act, but there is significant difference noted between perceived behavioural control and corrupt acts. Interestingly, Rabl (2011) found high bribes seem to lead to a positive evaluation of corruption, thus illustrating strong desire to act corruptly. Similar justification was made by Trevino and Youngblood (1990, cited in Rabl, 2011) that high level of temptation is more likely to influence unethical behaviour. Such justification has basis as our data is also in similar vein as there is evidence indicating temptation is one of the moral impurities of an individual to perform corrupt acts. However, our findings provide additional factors to add value to the literature where it is found that apart from temptation, greediness, selfishness and lack of religious values are also moral impurity factors that initiate corrupt acts. Overall, our analysis proposes that moral impurity factors demonstrate a crucial point. Tian's (2008) study of Chinese business managers, also proved similar results as his study revealed correlation between Chinese business managers' moral philosophy and corrupt payment. Tian (2008) indicated moral relativism was positively related to bribery and kickbacks.

Apart from the above, the core contribution of this study, in actuality is related to social constructionist theory. Social constructionist theory emphasises on explaining events using conversation. As mentioned above, Berger and Luckmann (1991) point out that conversation is crucial in performance of social reality, where the concepts are shared with others. Adapting to this ontology, where conversation is used as a means of reconstructing the reality with the informant as experts and we as researchers in similar field of interest, a rich and fruitful description of findings has been uncovered, indicating, the view justified by the social constructionist theory that events should focus on socialisation and moral influence which shapes reality. The description of social reality represented by informants fits the description given by Berger and Luckmann (1991), where selection is made based on expertise and full-time commitment in the field. Essentially, the role of our informants is to share their expertise and knowledge in building the theory of why the corrupters do what they do.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The study begins with the aim of understanding corruption in Malaysia, focusing on the reason why people are corrupt. Several contributing findings were found, where three interesting themes emerged to support the reason for corrupt acts. The data revealed power, opportunity and moral impurity as among the reasons, which answered the research question. It is concluded that the findings support the expanding literature that observes the importance of understanding the corruption issue. This study contributes to social and economic aspects in terms of providing information to prevent corruption to a certain point. The findings provide efforts to mitigate corruption in Malaysia as understanding the root cause may aid regulators, practitioners and anti-corruption agencies to act upon the problem. Such analysis may provide ways towards improving policy. However, we would like to point out that during our process of finding the truth, there are several limitations. A major limitation was that due to the sensitivity of the issue, there were many failed responses from prospective respondents. We found that gaining the cooperation and participation from experts is crucial to obtain an insight of the story, thus

enhancing the results of the study. A minor limitation is the scope of the study, where given a choice, we would like to interview the doers themselves, hence a richer description of the story could be interpreted. Nonetheless, the study is a platform for future investigation into finding the truth about corruption issues in Malaysia. Thus, it is suggested future research should observe the corruption phenomenon using grounded theory and phenomenology method; in addition, a correlation study could be conducted to complement the findings gathered from the interpretivist view point.

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