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VALUE-SEMANTIC ATTITUDE TO BRIBERY AND
PERSONALITY TRAITS OF STUDENTS AND WORKING
ADULTS

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Abstract

The paper presents the results of a study into value-semantic attitudes towards bribery, being a form of grassroots corruption, and personality traits exhibited by the subjects of attitudes – 120 university students (19–22 years old) and 102 working adults (22–34 years old) in the south of the Russian Federation. The attitude to bribery is considered as a purposeful value-semantic focus of individuals, in which bribery is presented in human conscience as a substitution of objectives or means required for certain needs and values. The paper presents the empirically established types of this attitude including “business economic transaction” and “instrumental value”. It provides insights into specific contents of each of the cognitive, emotional-evaluative, conative elements constituting one or another type of attitude that students and working adults demonstrate. It outlines personal characteristics of students and working adults – subjects demonstrating each type of attitude. The “business economic transaction” attitude is typical of students whose leading personality traits are above-limit socialization value of friends over its availability and high internal control; the same type of attitude is characteristic of working adults whose leading personal characteristics are significant socialization value of friends and dissatisfaction (frustration) with their own physical health. The “instrumental value” attitude is typical of students whose leading personality traits are dissatisfaction (frustration) with the way of life they lead and high self-acceptance. The “instrumental value” attitude is found to be present among working respondents who treasure the individualization value of active life and the adaptation value of health.

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Keywords: Bribery, components of attitude, personality traits, students, value-semantic attitude



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1. Introduction

At the present stage of social development, corruption has become one of the most pressing global challenges. Many theorists examining historical, ethnocultural, economic, political, legal and psychological prerequisites for corruption and its impacts have long said that we should study attitudes towards corruption among diverse communities (Pestruilov & Rudakov, 2016; Vasyakin et al., 2016). Tolerant attitudes to corruption exhibited by various strata of the population of the Russian Federation (Fan, 2014; Repetskaya, 2011) significantly reduce the effectiveness of anti-corruption measures and generate a specific request for constant monitoring.

2. Problem Statement

Foreign and Russian publications reviewed on citizens' attitudes towards corruption (Abun et al., 2020; Gorsira et al., 2018; Harris & van der Merwe, 2012) covers a number of patterns.

In most studies, corruption at large is an object of this attitude. However, corruption has various dimensions, which affects people's attitudes. Researchers emphasize that citizens harshly condemn high-profile corruption (Abun et al., 2020; Dzhaneryan, 2016; Fan, 2014; Vasyakin et al., 2016), although the same citizens sometimes initiate and unconsciously support their own 'rent-seeking behavior' (Fan, 2014). Therefore, it is expedient to focus on attitudes toward grassroots corruption that is well known among public. Grassroots corruption is generally committed by officials at lower and middle levels of the career ladder (Golubovskiy & Sinyukova, 2015). It covers people's daily lives, supporting discrimination against Russian citizens in terms of their living standards and social status (Rimsky, 2003). In modern Russia, grassroots corruption is most massively represented in the form of bribery. It involves offering, promising, giving, accepting by an official to take some material values (items, money, services, other property benefits) or a bribe for an action or inaction in the interests of a bribe giver (Golubovskiy & Sinyukova, 2015). Bribery is characterized by a relatively small denomination of bribes (Repetskaya, 2011), but its massive character in a number of professional groups (doctors, teachers, customs officers, firefighters) displays this form of corruption in first place in the shadow turnover (Olyunina & Rezer, 2020).

A methodological toolkit rests on the ideas about psychological (Myasishchev, 2011) and value-semantic attitudes (Dzhaneryan, 2016) of individuals.

Psychological attitudes are rooted in real-life relationships, represent a well-tailored framework of individual, selective, conscious ties linking individuals with various aspects of life, stem from the entire history of human development and background, and internally determine their actions and experiences. They are characterized by selectivity, potentiality, latency, ternary character, species specificity, and have a semantic nature. The substance of attitudes is expanded through a measure of significance the object has for the subject (Myasishchev, 2011). The value-semantic attitude is considered as a purposeful psychological focus of the subject onto a particular phenomenon, in which this phenomenon (or its individual aspects) is depicted in human conscience as desirable, due (value) or as a substitution of objectives or means in human life, in enjoyment of needs and values (Dzhaneryan, 2016).

In certain studies, attitudes to corruption are directly or indirectly meaningfully denoted or classified against the criteria of tolerance (Hernandez & McGee, 2014; McGee et al., 2016; Nikolayev, 2011; Vasyakin et al., 2016), ethics (Benk et al., 2017; McGee et al., 2016), functionality, instrumentality (Nikolayev, 2011; Vannovskaya, 2009), whereas its object is comprehended as a mechanism promoting social adaptation (Vannovskaya, 2009), a forced response to objective circumstances (Vasyakin et al., 2016), and a specific value (Nikolayev, 2011). These positions indicate the relevance of psychological attitude to be addressed through its object (bribery), namely, a measure of its significance for meeting human needs, the consideration of attitude to bribery as a value-semantic attitude, and some attempts to provide its typology by the meaning of bribery. In this respect, its object appears to have a fixed meaning for the subject and is depicted in their conscience as an idea of the meaning (place, role, functional purpose) of bribery to achieve objectives set by the subject. In other words, the value-semantic attitude to bribery is purposeful, in which bribery is interpreted as a tool in achieving objectives set by the subject and meeting their needs.

In most studies, the attitude to corruption is considered as a three-component structure made up of cognitive (defining corruption or solving special cases and scenarios presented by an experimenter to assess corruption-generating potential), emotional (evaluating the rate of corruption by respondents in cases and scenarios or rating their own emotions towards corruption), behavioral (evaluating the signs of corrupt scenarios by respondents, self-assessing implications for being involved, the acceptability of various forms of corruption for respondents) (Abun et al., 2020; Harris & van der Merwe, 2012; Juravlyov et al., 2017). The paper discloses the attitude to grassroots corruption as a synergy of its three components – cognitive (interpretation of bribery and its functions), emotional and evaluative (emotions about bribery and its impact on the state, social groups, subject; prevention), conative (reasons for giving and accepting bribes). The cognitive component (in particular, the leading interpretation of bribery) is crucial to ensure designation and subsequent analysis of its types.

Almost all researchers who believe that it is impossible to completely eliminate corruption, still hope to streamline its rate by transforming a tolerant attitude to corruption into an intolerant attitude (Golubovskiy & Sinyukova, 2015; Olyunina & Rezer, 2020; Vannovskaya, 2018). To be purposefully addressed, this challenge suggests consideration of personality traits of subjects who demonstrate one or another value-semantic attitude towards grassroots corruption. The psychological attitude as such is closely related to the personality traits of a person, expressing the way it is demonstrated (Myasishchev, 2011). Studying psychological mechanisms of corruption, researchers focus on personal characteristics of those involved in corrupt deals (Vannovskaya, 2018), subjects with pronounced “bribe-taking” features (Garifullin, 2013), and anti-corruption resilience (Vannovskaya, 2018; Vannovskaya, 2009). Based on the surveys, there appear to be demographic, religious, gender and age, psychological characteristics of people inclined to giving a bribe (Juravlyov et al., 2017; McGee et al., 2016; Shafiq, 2015; Zhao et al., 2016), taking a bribe (Benk et al., 2017; Gorsira et al., 2018), accepting or rejecting corruption (Shafiq, 2015). However, personality traits of subjects expressing one type or another of a holistic attitude towards grassroots corruption hardly ever become the subject of independent study. A scientific task of monitoring attitudes towards bribery should be supplemented with the task that would address the

personal characteristics of subjects demonstrating this attitude. This will contribute to the adequacy of the design, implementation and assessment of the effectiveness of anti-corruption policies.

A number of studies focus on monitoring options for attitudes towards bribery among young people (Dzhaneryan et al., 2017; Shirin, 2015; Vannovskaya, 2018). Young people (in Russia, the age of young people is referred to the period from 14 to 35 years), having difficulties in various spheres of life, are one of the most vulnerable social groups. Their attitude to different aspects of life, including bribery, is extrapolated into the spheres of activity they have mastered so far. In the light of anti-corruption agenda and education, constant monitoring of different attitudes towards bribery among young people is an independent social challenge that must be addressed.

3. Research Questions

The subject of research was personality traits of the subjects exhibiting the value-semantic attitude towards bribery. The study involved 120 university students (aged between 19 and 22) and 102 working adults (aged between 22 and 34) in the south of the Russian Federation.

4. Purpose of the Study

The paper aims to establish types of value-semantic attitude to bribery and personality traits of subjects.

5. Research Methods

Research methods include surveys (author's questionnaire for studying the substance of cognitive, emotional-evaluative, conative components constituting attitudes to bribery), content analysis of open-ended questions, testing ("The Level of Value-Accessibility Correlation in Various Spheres of Life" methodology by Fantalova); a "moral normativity" scale of "Adaptability" personality questionnaire by Maklakov, Chermianin; social frustration questionnaire by Wasserman, Iovlev, Berebin; methodology for the diagnosis of social and psychological adaptation by Rogers, Diamond; personal semantic differential (as adapted by the staff of Bekhterev Psychoneurological Research Institute, 1992); the Differential Emotions Scale by K. Izard; statistics solutions (factor analysis by principal component analysis, multiple linear regression (R , $p < 0.01$), Wilcoxon's, Friedman's criteria ($p < 0.05$), Spearman's rank correlation coefficient; descriptive statistics, quartiling procedure, binomial criterion.

Content analysis was called upon to study the responses received to open-ended questions. It included pilot coding of responses through categories and their indicators; determination of the adequacy of selected category indicators using expert assessments (10-point scale for assessing each of the indicators to be referred to a corresponding category); determination of the consistency of expert assessments (5 psychologists); selection of the final indicators in a particular category (indicators were accepted with an average expert rating equal to or exceeding 6 points, and correlation coefficients, as a measure of consistency of expert assessments, were equal to or exceeded 0.7); determination of a relative frequency of a particular category for each respondent.

Based on the results, meaningful and semantic interpretations of bribery were established, including an “economic transaction” (giving money for any services provided, etc.), “instrumental value” as a universal means of satisfying everyday needs and “illegal act”.

The functions of bribery involve an elimination function as preventing a likelihood of administrative and criminal liability; a resource function as saving time and personal resources; a totally instrumental function that a bribe has in solving everyday problems (except for professional and career spheres); a career-instrumental function in solving career-related issues; a destructive function expressed in the formation of negative personality traits, expectations, etc. Giving a bribe can be spurred by some forced necessity; illegal actions; professional and career factors; personal characteristics (dullness, laziness); situational coping strategies aimed at time management and saving personal resources (desire to speed up the process, unwillingness to waste energy); interpersonal relationships (to grease, to get in contact).

The following factors were considered as stimuli for receiving a bribe like a response to some illegal actions from a briber; professional and career factors; personal characteristics of subjects; incentives to attain material wealth; demonstration of power.

The general, specific and single impacts of bribery were considered as varying effects on subjects. The respondents believe that as for the state the bribery affects the economy, activities of the authorities, and ideology. For social groups, the impacts of bribery were viewed as deskilling of professional positions, destruction of interpersonal (social) relations. The effects of bribery on an individual were disclosed by describing the development of their personality traits, subjectively significant positive results.

Preventive measures against bribery are presented by the respondents in the form of criminal penalties, administrative control, rise in wages; personal position (“not to give or take bribes”), anti-corruption education.

Key emotional experiences against bribery were recorded using the Differential Emotions Scale (K. Izard).

Significant and accessible values were diagnosed as personality traits of the respondents. They were evaluated based on value types with predominant values of adaptation (materially secured life, health), socialization (work, happy family life, friends, love), individualization (active day-to-day living, freedom, confidence, cognition, creativity) (Yanitsky, 2012). Personality traits of the respondents involved the factors of adaptability, self-acceptance, acceptance of others, emotional comfort, external and internal control, domination, escapism (the method of diagnosing socio-psychological adaptation); moral normativity (“Adaptability” personality questionnaire); assessment (self-esteem), strength (volitional self-control), proactive attitude (extraversion) (Personal Semantic Differential). Social frustration of the respondents was diagnosed as the level of personality frustration in the spheres of family, communication, educational and professional spheres, as well as the level of frustration with the socio-economic status, health and performance (social frustration questionnaire).

Personality traits of the subjects exhibiting different attitudes to bribery were determined using multiple linear regression as a measure and sign indicating a direct effect of individual personality traits and their intensity on individual factor assessment made by the subject of a particular attitude to bribery.

Different variants of regression results were analyzed and taken, which to the fullest extent reflected the effect on the individual factor assessment made by the subject of certain variables – values and personality traits of the subject (Table 05). As for working respondents demonstrating the attitude of instrumental value, functional (correlation) links alone were established between the intensity of individual factor assessment and subjects’ personality traits.

Factor and regression analysis, as well as testing the assumptions about the normality of distributions, were performed in the modules of Factor Analysis, Multiple Regression, Descriptive Statistics s (Shapiro-Wilks’ W-test, Kolmogorov-Smirnov normality criterion for populations with Lilliefors probabilities adjusted for sample observations) provided by the Tibco statistica 13.3 software.

6. Findings

Factor analysis involved relative frequencies of categories denoting the bribery. In doing so, the authors proceeded from their ideas about the meaning of bribery that is interpreted in the cognitive component of the attitude, about the importance of the cognitive component for designation and subsequent analysis of the value-semantic attitude to bribery.

Table 1. Content and values of factor loadings for bribery interpretations

Interpretations of bribery	Factor 1	Factor 2
Business economic transaction	0.96724	-0.25385
Illegal act	-0.90146	-0.43285
Instrumental value	-0.14624	0.98925

A resulting two-factor solution explained 99.9 % of the variance (Table 01). The types of attitude to bribery were further designated based, according to the respondents, on the leading definitions of bribery with high factor loadings > 0.9.

Type 1 (Factor 1) – “Business economic transaction” (63.3 % of students, 67.5 % of working respondents), here bribery is understood as social interaction, exchange of services and consecutive remuneration.

Type 2 (Factor 2) – “Instrumental value” (36.7 % of students, 32.5 % of working respondents), here bribery is understood as a universal means of satisfying various human deficiency needs. Then, an individual factor assessment was calculated. Based on the factors with higher value (quartiling procedure was used) groups of respondents were distinguished with a dominance of the corresponding attitude. Further, the leading content of each component of the attitude was analyzed (Friedman’s, Wilcoxon’s criteria, $p > 0.05$).

Regardless of the type of attitude and social status of the respondents, they attribute a totally instrumental function to bribery. Emotions of interest and disgust dominate in absolute intensity, as does an opinion about tougher criminal punishment for bribery. Situational factors are considered as factors for giving a bribe (Tables 02, 03, 04).

Table 2. Cognitive component of respondents' attitudes to bribery

Type of attitude	Respondents	Function
Business economic transaction	Students	Totally instrumental Resource
	Working adults	Totally instrumental Resource
Instrumental value	Students	Totally instrumental Resource
	Working adults	Totally instrumental

Each component has a certain specific character, depending on the type of attitude and social status of the respondents. This can be seen in leading interpretations and functions of bribery (cognitive component), in messages about the impacts of bribery for subjects, emotional assessments of bribery (emotional and evaluative component), in messages about the factors of accepting a bribe (conative component).

Table 3. Emotional and evaluative component of respondents' attitudes to bribery

Type of attitude	Respondents	Implications for			Emotions	Prevention
		State	Social groups	Individual		
Business economic transaction	Students	N/a	Destruction of interactions Deskilling	Personality traits Positive effect	Disgust Interest	Administrative control Criminal punishment Anti-corruption education
	Working adults	Economy	N/a	Personality traits Positive effect	Disgust Interest	Administrative control Criminal punishment
Instrumental value	Students	N/a	N/a	Personality traits	Disgust Interest Surprise	N/a
	Working adults	Economy	N/a	N/a	Disgust Disdain Surprise Sorrow Interest	Administrative control Criminal punishment Anti-corruption education

With “business transaction” attitude in place, students, unlike working respondents, demonstrate variability of ideas about the implications of grassroots corruption for the state and unanimity in their views on these likely consequences for social groups, point up the incentives to attain material wealth as the mainspring for accepting a bribe, relate corruption anti-corruption education to the factors of prevention.

With “instrumental value” attitude in place, students, unlike working respondents, relate a resource function to bribery, demonstrate the variability of ideas about the impacts of grassroots corruption for the state and for social groups, as well as about possible prevention. Among emotional assessments made positive emotions (interest, surprise) against bribery prevail.

Table 4. Conative component of respondents' attitude to bribery

Type of attitude	Respondents	Factors of giving a bribe by a briber	Factors of accepting a bribe by a bribe taker
Business transaction	Students	Situational strategy	Incentives to material wealth Personality traits
	Working adults	Situational strategy Forced necessity	Incentives to material wealth Forced necessity Power
Instrumental value	Students	Situational strategy	Variability
	Working adults	Situational strategy Forced necessity	Variability

The intensity of “business transaction” attitude towards bribery among students is positively influenced by indicators of correlations between the significance and availability of such values as “friends” (leading positive effect), “job”, “creativity”; out of personality traits, indicators of internal control (leading positive effect) have a positive effect. A negative effect was found to be present for indicators of non-acceptance of others and emotional comfort (Table 05).

The intensity of “business transaction” attitude to bribery among working respondents is positively influenced by the indicators of the importance of the “friends” and “family” values (leading positive effect), frustration with physical health (leading positive effect), living conditions, and family relations. A negative effect was found to be present for indicators of frustration with leisure, relations with superiors and social status.

Table 5. Regression results on the relationships between respondents’ personality traits and their attitude to bribery

Type of attitude	Multiple linear regression coefficient (R)	Personality traits	
		Positive effect	Negative effect
Business transaction	Students R=0.569; p<0.0037	Internal control (Beta=0.437; p<0.015)	Non-acceptance of others (Beta=-0.493; p<0.0025) Emotional comfort (Beta=-0.612; p<0.0017).
	Students R=0.551; p<0.0069	Correlations between significance and availability of values: “Friends”, (Beta=0.381; p<0.014), “Job”, (Beta=0.315; p<0.039), “Creativity” (Beta=0.292; p<0.05)	-
	Working adults (R=0.692; p<0.000)	Significance of values “Friends” (Beta=0.640; p<0.000) “Family” (Beta=0.524; p<0.003) Frustration with family relations (Beta=0.401; p<0.02)	-
	Working adults R=0.874; p<0.000	Frustration with relationships with friends (Beta=0.360; p<0.027) Frustration with physical health (Beta=0.94; p<0.0000) Frustration with living conditions (Beta=0.272; p<0.07)	Frustration with relations with superiors (Beta=-622; p<0.0017) Leisure frustration (Beta=-537; p<0.002) Frustration with social status (Beta=-615; p<0.005)
	Students R=0.44; p<0.045	Self-acceptance (Beta=0.44; p<0.045) Frustration with a way of life (Beta=0.597; p<0.013)	-
	Students R=0.874; p<0.0016	Frustration with social status (Beta=0.425; p<0.04) Frustration with financial situation (Beta=0.444; p<0.01)	Frustration with family relations (Beta=-0.982; p<0.0003) Frustration with studies (Beta=-0.388; p<0.02) Leisure frustration (Beta=-508; p<0.014)
	Instrumental value	Working adults	Significance of the value “Active life” (r=0.793)
Availability of the value “Health” (r=0.757)			Frustration with relationships with friends (r=-0.59) Frustration with living conditions (r=-0.597) Escapism (r=-0.811)

Notes: **R** – multiple linear regression coefficient. **Beta** – standardized regression rate. **r** – Spearman’s rank correlation coefficient; p<0,04.

The intensity of the “instrumental value” attitude to bribery among students is positively influenced by indicators of frustration with a way of life (leading positive effect), social status, financial situation; and also indicators of self-acceptance (leading positive effect). The indicators of frustration with family relations, studies, and leisure have a negative effect (Table 05).

The intensity of the “instrumental value” attitude among working respondents is positively related to indicators of significance of the “active life” value, availability of the “health” value; and is negatively associated with indicators of frustration with peers relations and living conditions, as well as with indicators of escapism.

Based on the maximum positive **Beta** values (standardized regression rate), as well as positive *r* values (rank correlation coefficient), one can talk about subjects’ leading personality traits that strengthen the intensity of a certain attitude to bribery. The “business transaction” attitude is clearly traced in students whose leading personality traits are above-limit “friends” socialization values over its availability and high internal control. The “business transaction” attitude is characteristic of working adults whose leading personality traits are the importance of “friends” socialization values and dissatisfaction (frustration) with their own physical health.

The “instrumental value” attitude is typical of students whose leading personality traits are dissatisfaction (frustration) with a way of life they lead and high self-acceptance. The intensity of the “instrumental value” attitude is inherent in working respondents, who are characterized by the importance of “active life” individualization value and the availability of “health” adaptation value.

To date, corruption in the Russian Federation is combated in accordance with the Federal Law (Federal Law of December 25, 2008 No. 273-FZ “On Combating Corruption”), which is broadly discussed in scientific literature through political, legal, economic, informational, etc. anti-corruption measures. Along with this, different theorists emphasize the importance of psychological and pedagogical measures to prevent corruption, aimed, among other things, at anti-corruption education, outreach and awareness-raising activities for students and young professionals, at the formation of dislike to corrupt practices. It is obvious that growing effectiveness of such measures may depend on the personal determinants of subjects of a particular type of value-semantic attitude towards grassroots corruption.

7. Conclusion

The types of value-semantic attitude to grassroots corruption in the form of bribery were established among university students and young working adults. They fall into “business economic transaction” and “instrumental value”. There appeared to be specific character in the cognitive, emotional and evaluative, conative components of each type of attitude, demonstrated by students and young working adults.

The personality traits of the subjects demonstrating a particular type of attitude were addressed.

The “business transaction” attitude to bribery was demonstrated by the students with such leading personality traits as above-limit “friends” socialization value over its availability and high internal control. The same attitude was demonstrated by working adults whose leading personality traits are the importance of “friends” socialization value and dissatisfaction (frustration) with their own physical health.

The “instrumental value” attitude to bribery was demonstrated by the students with such leading personality traits as dissatisfaction (frustration) with a way of life they lead and high self-acceptance. The intensity of the “instrumental value” attitude is visible among working respondents, for whom the “active life” individualization value and the availability of “health” adaptation value are highly significant.

The types of value-semantic attitude to bribery were empirically established as a form of grassroots corruption, as well as the personality traits of students and working adults determining each type of attitude. It is necessary to respect the identified personality traits of university students and working young people to ensure the development, organization and implementation of anti-corruption policies.

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