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When Corruption is Glorified: A Socio-Cognitive Model of Uncorrupt Marginalization

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Abstract: *This study examined the socio-cognitive mechanisms through which corruption becomes normalized within communities and the consequent marginalization of individuals who refuse to engage in corrupt behavior. Drawing on social cognitive theory, institutional anomie theory, and the theory of normative social behavior, a cross-sectional quantitative survey was administered to 412 purposively selected respondents across urban and peri-urban communities in Uganda. Structured instruments measured the Corruption Glorification Index (CGI), the Uncorrupt Marginalization Score (UMS), Social Conformity Pressure (SCP), Cognitive Normalization Score (CNS), and Institutional Trust Index (ITI). Univariate analyses revealed alarmingly high levels of corruption glorification ($M = 3.84$, $SD = 0.97$) and marginalization of uncorrupt individuals ($M = 4.17$, $SD = 1.02$). Bivariate Pearson correlation analysis demonstrated strong, statistically significant associations between CGI and UMS ($r = .61$, $p < .001$), with CNS ($r = .67$), SCP ($r = .54$), and ITI ($r = -.49$) further corroborating the relational structure of the phenomenon. Multiple regression analysis indicated that CGI, CNS, SCP, ITI, and education collectively explained 58% of the variance in UMS ($R^2 = .58$, $F(5,406) = 112.3$, $p < .001$). Multilevel modeling across 40 community clusters confirmed that community-level corruption norms ($\beta = 0.38$, $p < .001$) and governance quality ($\beta = -0.41$, $p < .001$) exerted significant contextual effects, with an intraclass correlation of .40 signifying that 40% of the variance in marginalization was attributable to community-level factors. These findings underscore the urgent need for cognitive reorientation programmes, institutional trust-building reforms, and community-level anti-corruption norm disruption to protect and incentivize integrity in public and private life.*

Keywords: corruption glorification, uncorrupt marginalization, social cognitive theory, normative behavior, institutional anomie, multilevel modeling, Uganda

Introduction

Corruption is widely recognized as one of the most pervasive and destructive forces undermining governance, socio-economic development, and social cohesion across the globe, particularly in developing nations. While the scholarly literature has extensively examined its institutional causes, economic consequences, and policy remedies, comparatively little attention has been devoted to understanding a particularly insidious dimension of the corruption ecosystem: the phenomenon whereby corrupt behavior is not merely tolerated but actively celebrated, rewarded, and socially endorsed within communities (Karim et al., 2023; Ramoni-Perazzi & Romero, 2022). This glorification of corruption represents a paradigm shift in how societies relate to unethical conduct—transforming what was once morally condemned into a marker of social status, resourcefulness, and even heroism. Within such an environment, individuals who choose to maintain their integrity and refuse to participate in corrupt practices often find themselves paradoxically penalized, excluded, and marginalized by the very social systems that are ostensibly designed to reward virtue (Nguyen Chau et al., 2024; Schomaker, 2020; Setor et al., 2021). The present study introduced the concept of uncorrupt marginalization as a socially constructed outcome wherein honest individuals experience professional exclusion, social isolation, economic deprivation, and psychological distress as a direct consequence of their refusal to conform to corrupt norms. Rooted in social cognitive theory, institutional anomie theory, and the theory of normative social behavior, this research sought to develop and empirically test a socio-cognitive model capable of explaining both the glorification of corruption and the mechanisms through which such glorification precipitates the marginalization of uncorrupt actors (Gumisiriza & Kugonza, 2020; Pdu et al., 2023; Soni & Smallwood, 2024). By examining the interplay between individual cognition, peer conformity pressure, institutional trust, and community-level corruption norms, the study offered a holistic and multi-level understanding of how corrupt cultures sustain themselves and actively suppress integrity. This work is particularly timely given the mounting evidence from governance reports, citizen perception surveys, and anti-corruption commission data across Sub-Saharan Africa indicating a normalization of corrupt behavior at levels that threaten the foundational principles of democratic governance and equitable social organization (Hauser, 2019; Kirunda et al., 2024).

Background of the Study

The theoretical and empirical scaffolding for understanding corruption as a socially normalized phenomenon has evolved considerably over the past three decades. Bandura's social cognitive theory provides a foundational framework for understanding how individuals learn, internalize, and reproduce corrupt behaviors through observational learning, outcome expectancies, and moral disengagement mechanisms that allow actors to rationalize unethical behavior as necessary or even virtuous (Julián & Bonavia, 2022; Nambassa & Qodir, 2024). This theoretical lens is particularly powerful in explaining how high-profile displays of wealth, influence, and impunity by corrupt actors function as powerful social modeling experiences that recalibrate community members' perceptions of what constitutes acceptable and achievable conduct. Messner and Rosenfeld's institutional anomie theory further illuminates the structural dimensions of this problem by demonstrating how the dominance of economic goals over institutional norms—particularly in contexts characterized by weak state institutions and systemic impunity—creates conditions in which corruption becomes a rational and even obligatory adaptive strategy for economic survival and social advancement (Aduwo et al.,

2020; Mlambo, et al., 2019; Sheila et al., 2023). In Uganda and across much of Sub-Saharan Africa, decades of political patronage, resource capture, and impunity have produced institutional environments in which corruption is embedded in the fabric of public service delivery, business operations, and interpersonal relations. The Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index has consistently ranked Uganda among the more corruption-affected nations, with its 2023 score of 26 out of 100 reflecting deeply entrenched systemic challenges. Empirical studies conducted in comparable contexts—including Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya, and Zimbabwe—have documented not only the pervasiveness of corrupt practices but also the psychological and social processes through which populations come to regard corruption as inevitable, pragmatically necessary, and morally neutral (Phionah et al., 2023; Weeden & Pamment, 2024). What is conspicuously absent from this literature is a rigorous empirical investigation of how these normalization dynamics translate into active exclusion of those who resist them, and the specific socio-cognitive pathways through which community-level and institutional forces amplify or moderate individual-level corruption glorification and the resulting marginalization of uncorrupt individuals (Ariyo et al., 2023; Kenneth et al., 2023). The present study was positioned to address this gap by introducing and operationalizing the concepts of Corruption Glorification Index and Uncorrupt Marginalization Score within a multilevel socio-cognitive modeling framework.

Problem Statement

Despite a vast body of research on the causes and consequences of corruption, there remains a critical and largely unexplored gap in scholarly understanding regarding the social and cognitive processes through which communities not only normalize corrupt behavior but come to celebrate it, and the resulting systemic exclusion of individuals who uphold integrity (Haque et al., 2021; Kuddus et al., 2020). While anti-corruption scholarship has focused predominantly on structural enablers—weak institutions, poor governance, economic inequality—insufficient attention has been paid to the psychosocial mechanisms of corruption glorification and the lived experience of marginalization that uncorrupt individuals endure as a consequence (Jacob, 2024). This creates a blind spot in both academic theory and policy intervention: if honest individuals are actively penalized for their integrity through loss of social standing, professional opportunities, and economic resources, then conventional anti-corruption strategies that focus solely on deterrence and institutional reform are fundamentally incomplete. In Uganda, anecdotal evidence, investigative journalism, and governance reports increasingly describe situations where individuals who refuse bribes are sidelined in promotions, where whistleblowers face social ostracism, and where communities award higher social status to those who accumulate wealth through corrupt means. Without empirically grounded theoretical models that capture these dynamics, policymakers and civil society organizations lack the conceptual tools necessary to design interventions capable of disrupting corruption glorification cycles and protecting those who choose integrity. This study, therefore, addressed the following central problem: the absence of an empirically validated socio-cognitive model that explains both the glorification of corruption and the marginalization of uncorrupt individuals within community and institutional contexts in Uganda.

Objectives of the Study

Main Objective

The main objective of this study was to develop and empirically validate a socio-cognitive model explaining the glorification of corruption and the consequent marginalization of uncorrupt individuals within community and institutional contexts in Uganda.

Specific Objectives

1. To assess the levels of corruption glorification and uncorrupt marginalization among respondents across urban and peri-urban communities in Uganda.
2. To examine the socio-cognitive factors—including cognitive normalization, social conformity pressure, and institutional trust—associated with corruption glorification and uncorrupt marginalization.
3. To determine the contextual (community-level) predictors that moderate the relationship between corruption glorification and uncorrupt marginalization using multilevel modeling.

Research Questions

1. What are the prevailing levels of corruption glorification and uncorrupt marginalization among respondents in urban and peri-urban communities in Uganda?
2. What is the nature and strength of the relationship between socio-cognitive factors (cognitive normalization, social conformity pressure, institutional trust) and both corruption glorification and uncorrupt marginalization?
3. To what extent do community-level factors (community corruption norms and governance quality) moderate the relationship between individual-level corruption glorification and uncorrupt marginalization?

Methodology

This study adopted a quantitative cross-sectional research design rooted in the positivist paradigm to empirically examine the socio-cognitive determinants of corruption glorification and uncorrupt marginalization across urban and peri-urban communities in Uganda. A total of 412 participants were purposively and stratified randomly selected from 40 community clusters across five districts—Kampala, Wakiso, Mukono, Jinja, and Mbale—ensuring representation across gender, age cohorts, educational attainment levels, and occupational categories. Data were collected using a structured, self-administered questionnaire comprising five validated composite scales: the Corruption Glorification Index (CGI; 8 items, Cronbach's $\alpha = .89$), the Uncorrupt Marginalization Score (UMS; 10 items, $\alpha = .91$), the Social Conformity Pressure scale (SCP; 6 items, $\alpha = .84$), the Cognitive Normalization Score (CNS; 7 items, $\alpha = .87$), and the Institutional Trust Index (ITI; 5 items, $\alpha = .82$). All scales employed a five-point Likert response format, and the

questionnaire included socio-demographic items capturing age, sex, education level, employment status, and residential zone. Face and content validity were established through expert panel review involving five scholars in public administration, social psychology, and governance studies, and a pilot study with 40 participants was conducted to assess reliability and refine item wording. Three levels of statistical analysis were employed: at the univariate level, frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviations, and skewness statistics were computed to characterize the distribution of all study variables and to assess the levels of corruption glorification and marginalization in the sample; at the bivariate level, Pearson product-moment correlations were calculated to determine the direction, magnitude, and statistical significance of associations among all key constructs, with the correlation matrix providing the basis for identifying multicollinearity and theoretical coherence; and at the multivariate level, hierarchical multiple linear regression analysis was applied in two models—a bivariate model containing only the CGI predictor and a full model incorporating CGI, CNS, SCP, ITI, and education—to partition explained variance and identify the independent contributions of each predictor to UMS after controlling for confounders. Finally, two-level multilevel linear modeling (MLM) using restricted maximum likelihood (REML) estimation was employed to account for the hierarchical structure of the data, with individual respondents nested within community clusters, enabling estimation of both fixed effects of community-level predictors (community corruption norms and governance quality index) and random effects capturing between-community variability, as well as a cross-level interaction term between CGI and governance quality to test moderation hypotheses. All statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS Version 28 and R version 4.3.1 (lme4 package), with significance threshold set at $p < .05$ and all confidence intervals reported at the 95% level.

Results

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables (N = 412)

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Skewness
Corruption Glorification Index (CGI)	412	3.84	0.97	1.20	5.00	-0.31
Uncorrupt Marginalization Score (UMS)	412	4.17	1.02	1.00	5.00	-0.44
Social Conformity Pressure (SCP)	412	3.62	1.11	1.00	5.00	-0.18
Cognitive Normalization Score (CNS)	412	3.95	0.88	1.50	5.00	-0.27
Institutional Trust Index (ITI)	412	2.43	1.14	1.00	5.00	0.42
Age (years)	412	34.7	10.3	18	64	0.53
Years of Education	412	13.2	3.8	6	20	-0.09

Note: CGI = Corruption Glorification Index; UMS = Uncorrupt Marginalization Score; SCP = Social Conformity Pressure; CNS = Cognitive Normalization Score; ITI = Institutional Trust Index. All scale scores range from 1 to 5.

The univariate descriptive statistics presented in Table 1 revealed that both primary constructs of interest—corruption glorification and uncorrupt marginalization—exhibited notably elevated mean values within the study sample, signaling a context in which corrupt norms appear to have achieved substantial social embeddedness. The Corruption Glorification Index registered a mean of 3.84 (SD = 0.97) on a five-point scale, indicating that, on average, respondents leaned toward perceiving and endorsing corrupt behavior as socially desirable and praiseworthy, with a slight negative skewness (−0.31) suggesting a modest concentration of responses at the higher end of the scale and few individuals at the extreme lower end. Even more striking was the Uncorrupt Marginalization Score, which yielded the highest mean in the entire variable set at 4.17 (SD = 1.02), providing compelling descriptive evidence that the experience of being penalized, excluded, or socially disadvantaged for refusing to engage in corruption was both prevalent and acutely felt across the sample. The Cognitive Normalization Score (M = 3.95, SD = 0.88) indicated that the cognitive reframing of corruption as normal, inevitable, or pragmatically necessary was also highly prevalent, approaching the upper midpoint of the scale. Social Conformity Pressure was moderate to high (M = 3.62, SD = 1.11), reflecting meaningful levels of peer-driven influence compelling individuals toward corrupt compliance, while the Institutional Trust Index registered the lowest mean (M = 2.43, SD = 1.14), exhibiting positive skewness (0.42) consistent with a distribution where the majority of respondents held low trust in formal institutions—a finding theoretically congruent with the elevated corruption glorification observed.

These descriptive patterns collectively painted a sobering picture of the socio-cognitive landscape in which the study was embedded, offering preliminary validation of the theoretical model underpinning the research. The relatively narrow standard deviations on the CGI, UMS, and CNS suggested a degree of within-sample consensus regarding the normalization and glorification of corruption, which, while analytically significant, also indicated limited variance that could constrain effect size estimates in subsequent inferential analyses. However, the wider dispersion on SCP (SD = 1.11) and ITI (SD = 1.14) pointed to meaningful heterogeneity in conformity pressure and institutional trust experiences across respondents—variability that was expected to yield substantive predictive power in the regression models. The demographic profile of the sample—with a mean age of 34.7 years (SD = 10.3) and

a mean educational attainment of 13.2 years (SD = 3.8), roughly equivalent to post-secondary or early university exposure—suggested a relatively educated adult population, making the documented levels of corruption glorification and marginalization particularly notable, as educational attainment is conventionally theorized as a protective factor against corruption normalization. The descriptive results thus set a robust empirical foundation for the bivariate and multivariate analyses that followed.

Table 2. Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Matrix Among Study Variables

Variable	1. CGI	2. UMS	3. SCP	4. CNS	5. ITI	6. Edu.
1. Corruption Glorification Index	.					
2. Uncorrupt Marginalization Score	.61**	.				
3. Social Conformity Pressure	.54**	.48**	.			
4. Cognitive Normalization Score	.67**	.59**	.51**	.		
5. Institutional Trust Index	-.49**	-.52**	-.38**	-.44**	.	
6. Years of Education	-.33**	-.28**	-.21**	-.30**	.37**	.

Note: ** $p < .01$ (two-tailed). CGI = Corruption Glorification Index; UMS = Uncorrupt Marginalization Score; SCP = Social Conformity Pressure; CNS = Cognitive Normalization Score; ITI = Institutional Trust Index; Edu. = Years of Education.

The bivariate Pearson correlation analysis presented in Table 2 revealed a theoretically coherent and statistically robust pattern of associations among all key study constructs, with all hypothesized relationships attaining statistical significance at $p < .01$. The strongest association in the matrix was observed between the Cognitive Normalization Score and the Corruption Glorification Index ($r = .67$, $p < .001$), indicating that individuals who had cognitively reframed corruption as normal, acceptable, or pragmatically necessary were substantially more likely to also glorify and celebrate corrupt behavior. This finding aligned strongly with social cognitive theory's proposition that cognitive representations and belief systems serve as foundational mediators of behavioral endorsement. The relationship between the CGI and the UMS was also highly significant and positive ($r = .61$, $p < .001$), providing bivariate support for the study's primary hypothesis that environments characterized by high levels of corruption glorification are systematically associated with intensified experiences of marginalization for those who resist corrupt norms. Social Conformity Pressure demonstrated meaningful positive correlations with both CGI ($r = .54$) and UMS ($r = .48$), confirming that peer pressure dynamics constitute a significant conduit through which corruption glorification is transmitted and reinforced within social networks, and through which resistance to corruption becomes socially costly. Institutional Trust Index exhibited negative correlations with all corruption-related constructs—most notably with UMS ($r = −.52$) and CGI ($r = −.49$)—consistent with the theoretical expectation that low institutional trust creates a governance vacuum that enables and perpetuates corruption glorification cycles.

The educational attainment variable presented a pattern of inverse relationships with corruption-related constructs, registering negative correlations with CGI ($r = −.33$), UMS ($r = −.28$), CNS ($r = −.30$), and SCP ($r = −.21$), while maintaining a positive relationship with institutional trust ($r = .37$). These associations collectively suggested that higher educational exposure was modestly protective against corruption normalization, possibly because education expands access to civic knowledge, critical reasoning capacities, and exposure to anti-corruption norms—though the magnitudes of these correlations indicated that education alone was insufficient to overcome pervasive community-level corruption glorification cultures. Importantly, the correlation matrix revealed no values exceeding the conventional multicollinearity threshold of $r = .80$ between any pair of independent predictors, indicating that the variables could be entered simultaneously into regression models without unacceptable collinearity inflation. Variance Inflation Factors (VIFs) subsequently computed during regression analysis further confirmed the absence of problematic multicollinearity, with all VIF values falling below 3.0. The overall pattern of the correlation matrix thus provided strong bivariate validation for the theoretical model, confirming that corruption glorification, cognitive normalization, social conformity pressure, and institutional trust are all meaningfully and coherently interrelated constructs within the phenomenon of uncorrupt marginalization.

Table 3: Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Uncorrupt Marginalization Score

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p	95% CI LL	95% CI UL
Model 1: Bivariate ($R^2 = .37$, $F(1,410) = 241.8$, $p < .001$)							
Corruption Glorification Index	0.64	0.041	.61	15.55	<.001	[0.56,	0.72]

Model 2: Full (R^2 = .58, ΔR^2 = .21, F(5,406) = 112.3, p < .001)							
Corruption Glorification Index	0.48	0.043	.46	11.16	<.001	[0.40,	0.56]
Cognitive Normalization Score	0.31	0.052	.27	5.96	<.001	[0.21,	0.41]
Social Conformity Pressure	0.19	0.048	.19	3.96	<.001	[0.10,	0.28]
Institutional Trust Index	-0.22	0.046	-.22	-4.78	<.001	[-0.31,	-0.13]
Years of Education	-0.08	0.014	-.21	-5.71	<.001	[-0.11,	-0.05]

Note: N = 412. B = unstandardized regression coefficient; SE = standard error; β = standardized beta coefficient; CI = confidence interval; LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit. All p-values are two-tailed.

The hierarchical multiple regression results presented in Table 3 provided compelling multivariate evidence for the predictive validity of the socio-cognitive model developed in this study. In Model 1, the bivariate regression of UMS on CGI alone yielded a statistically significant result, with the Corruption Glorification Index explaining 37% of the variance in the Uncorrupt Marginalization Score (R^2 = .37, F(1,410) = 241.8, p < .001), and producing an unstandardized regression coefficient of B = 0.64 (β = .61, p < .001, 95% CI [0.56, 0.72]). This large effect size—exceeding Cohen's (1988) benchmark of f^2 = 0.35 for large effects—indicated that even in isolation, corruption glorification was a powerful and practically significant predictor of uncorrupt marginalization, with each one-unit increase in CGI associated with a 0.64-unit increase in UMS after accounting for sampling error. The introduction of the full set of predictors in Model 2 produced a significant and practically meaningful increment in explained variance (ΔR^2 = .21, p < .001), bringing the total variance explained to 58% (R^2 = .58, F(5,406) = 112.3, p < .001)—a large effect by any conventional standard—and demonstrating that the additional socio-cognitive and demographic predictors contributed substantial unique explanatory power beyond what CGI alone could account for.

In the full model, the Corruption Glorification Index retained its status as the strongest predictor (B = 0.48, β = .46, p < .001, 95% CI [0.40, 0.56]), confirming its centrality to the proposed model even after adjusting for competing predictors. The Cognitive Normalization Score emerged as the second most influential predictor (B = 0.31, β = .27, p < .001, 95% CI [0.21, 0.41]), indicating that the cognitive internalization of corruption as normal constituted an independent pathway to uncorrupt marginalization beyond the direct effect of glorification itself. Social Conformity Pressure also demonstrated a statistically significant independent effect (B = 0.19, β = .19, p < .001), consistent with the theoretical proposition that peer pressure dynamics amplify marginalization experiences by making social costs of non-compliance more salient and immediate. Institutional Trust Index was a significant negative predictor of UMS (B = −0.22, β = −.22, p < .001), confirming that higher trust in formal institutions served as a buffer against corruption-driven marginalization—plausibly because institutional legitimacy provides alternative normative frameworks and accountability channels that reduce the social power of corrupt networks. Years of education similarly exhibited a statistically significant negative effect (B = −0.08, β = −.21, p < .001), corroborating the view that educational attainment, while not a panacea, does provide some protective insulation against the marginalization effects of corruption glorification.

Table 4. Two-Level Multilevel Linear Modeling Results Predicting Uncorrupt Marginalization Score (N = 412 respondents nested in 40 communities)

Parameter	**Estimate**	**SE**	**df**	**t-ratio**	**p-value**	**95% CI**
Fixed Effects						
Intercept	1.87	0.21	38.2	8.90	<.001	[1.45, 2.29]
CGI (Level-1)	0.44	0.046	383.1	9.57	<.001	[0.35, 0.53]
CNS (Level-1)	0.27	0.051	377.4	5.29	<.001	[0.17, 0.37]
Community Corruption Norm (Level-2)	0.38	0.089	38.6	4.27	<.001	[0.20, 0.56]
Governance Quality Index (Level-2)	-0.41	0.094	37.8	-4.36	<.001	[-0.60, -0.22]
Cross-Level: CGI × Governance Quality	-0.19	0.061	380.3	-3.11	.002	[-0.31, -0.07]
Random Effects						
Variance (Intercept, Level-2)	0.31	0.082	—	—	—	—
Variance (Residual, Level-1)	0.47	0.033	—	—	—	—
ICC = .40; Conditional R^2 = .61; Marginal R^2 = .49						

Note: REML estimation. Level-2 units = 40 community clusters. ICC = Intraclass Correlation Coefficient. Conditional R^2 estimated using the Nakagawa & Schielzeth (2013) method.

The two-level multilevel linear model results presented in Table 4 extended the regression findings by formally partitioning the variance in uncorrupt marginalization into within-community (individual-level) and between-community (contextual) components, providing a more nuanced and contextually sensitive account of the phenomenon. The null model estimated prior to the full MLM revealed an intraclass correlation coefficient of .40, indicating that approximately 40% of the total variance in UMS was attributable to systematic differences between the 40 community clusters rather than individual-level characteristics—a finding that powerfully justified the multilevel analytical approach and underscored the importance of community context in shaping experiences of uncorrupt marginalization. Had this clustering been ignored in standard OLS regression, standard error estimates would have been substantially deflated, inflating Type I error rates and potentially yielding spuriously significant results. The fixed effects in the full multilevel model confirmed and extended the regression findings: the Level-1 effects of CGI (estimate = 0.44, SE = 0.046, t = 9.57, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.35, 0.53]) and CNS (estimate = 0.27, SE = 0.051, t = 5.29, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.17, 0.37]) remained strong and statistically significant predictors of UMS even after accounting for community-level variance, with slightly attenuated coefficients relative to the OLS estimates reflecting the proper partitioning of variance in the multilevel framework.

At the community level, the Community Corruption Norm index was a significant positive predictor of UMS (estimate = 0.38, SE = 0.089, t = 4.27, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.20, 0.56]), indicating that individuals residing in communities where corrupt behavior was collectively endorsed as normal experienced substantially more pronounced marginalization for maintaining integrity, over and above their individual-level cognitive normalization scores. Conversely, the Governance Quality Index at Level-2 was a significant negative predictor (estimate = −0.41, SE = 0.094, t = −4.36, $p < .001$, 95% CI [−0.60, −0.22]), establishing that communities characterized by higher quality governance exhibited significantly lower levels of uncorrupt marginalization—a finding with direct policy implications for institutional reform agendas. The cross-level interaction between individual-level CGI and community-level governance quality was statistically significant (estimate = −0.19, t = −3.11, $p = .002$), indicating that the positive effect of corruption glorification on marginalization was significantly weakened in communities with higher governance quality, suggesting a moderating role of institutional context on the individual-level CGI-UMS relationship. The conditional R^2 of .61 and marginal R^2 of .49 indicated that the model with all fixed and random effects explained 61% of total variance in UMS, while the fixed effects alone accounted for 49%—together demonstrating excellent model fit and confirming the substantial explanatory power of the proposed socio-cognitive multilevel model.

Conclusion

This study provided the first empirically validated socio-cognitive model of corruption glorification and uncorrupt marginalization, demonstrating through robust quantitative analysis spanning univariate, bivariate, multivariate, and multilevel methods that the glorification of corruption in community settings is a powerful, multidimensionally driven phenomenon that systematically produces measurable psychological, social, and professional marginalization for individuals who uphold integrity and refuse to participate in corrupt practices. The convergence of findings across all levels of analysis—from the alarmingly high descriptive means (CGI: M = 3.84; UMS: M = 4.17) to the strong bivariate correlations (r = .61), the substantial regression-explained variance ($R^2 = .58$), and the multilevel confirmation that 40% of marginalization variance was community-attributable, with community corruption norms and governance quality serving as significant contextual drivers—collectively established that uncorrupt marginalization is not merely an individual psychological experience but a socially constructed, institutionally conditioned, and cognitively mediated phenomenon that operates simultaneously at both individual and community levels. The cross-level moderation analysis further demonstrated that the harmful effects of corruption glorification on uncorrupt actors are not immutable but are significantly moderated by governance quality, offering a critical point of policy leverage: strengthening institutional quality and accountability does not merely reduce corruption directly but also protects those who resist it from the social costs of their integrity. These findings contributed new theoretical terrain to the literatures on corruption, social cognition, and institutional governance, and offered actionable guidance for policymakers, civil society organizations, and communities committed to reversing the normalization of corruption and restoring integrity as a socially valued and institutionally protected attribute.

Recommendations

Governments and civil society organizations should design and implement community-level Cognitive Reorientation Programmes targeting the mechanisms of cognitive normalization documented in this study, utilizing counter-narrative campaigns, community dialogues, and integrity-celebration platforms that publicly reward and socially elevate individuals who demonstrate honesty and resist corrupt inducements, thereby disrupting the corruption glorification cycle at its psychosocial roots.

Institutional reform agendas should prioritize rebuilding public trust in governance structures by strengthening accountability mechanisms, ensuring transparent and merit-based professional reward systems, and establishing formal whistleblower and integrity advocate protection frameworks, recognizing that governance quality was demonstrated in this study to be a significant moderator that reduces the marginalizing effects of individual-level corruption glorification.

Educational institutions at all levels should integrate governance, integrity, and anti-corruption content into curricula in ways that not only inform students about the illegality of corruption but actively build critical socio-cognitive competencies that enable students

to resist conformity pressure, identify cognitive normalization dynamics, and understand the structural costs of corruption glorification—thereby leveraging education's demonstrated protective role against the normalization and endorsement of corrupt behavior.

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