

# RESEARCH REPORT

## A TEST ON AUDIT TENURE, AUDITOR SIZE, INDEPENDENCE OF AUDIT COMMITTEE AND THE ISSUANCE OF GOING CONCERN OPINION

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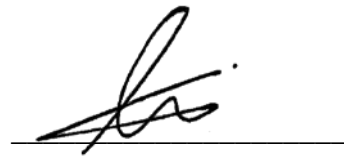
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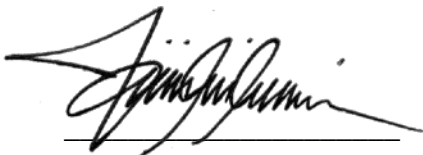
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# **A TEST ON AUDIT TENURE, AUDITOR SIZE, INDEPENDENCE OF AUDIT COMMITTEE AND THE ISSUANCE OF GOING CONCERN OPINION**

## **ABSTRACT**

The issue of audit tenure has been discussed since four decades ago. Nowadays, due to the recent corporate scandals in the United States, the issue is discussed together with auditor independence that led to companies' demise. Mandatory audit rotation debates come from the arguments that long audit tenure would create cosy relationship between auditors and clients and thus would lead to audit reporting failure such as in the case of bankruptcy. Therefore, this study attempts to investigate the situation in Malaysia whereby no empirical study using archival data has been done. Specifically, the current study examines the impact of audit tenure on the issuance of going concern opinion.

The result shows that the variable of audit tenure is positively significant in determining going concern opinion. Our findings also pointed that if a client never changes its auditor since listed, there is a tendency to issue a clean opinion though the client suffers apparent financial problems. Therefore, it can be said that, "auditor change would do well, but forcing an unrealistic auditor rotation might not yield what it hopes for". For the benefit of auditing profession, we echo the importance of self-regulation and *Laissez-faire* practice in Malaysia as a better alternative than a mandatory auditor rotation. Besides, the results show no significant impact of Big Five firms and independence of audit committee on auditor going concern opinion. Further sensitivity analyses show that the results are robust to different measurements.

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to examine the effect of auditor tenure on the issuance of going concern opinion in public listed companies (PLCs) on the Kuala Lumpur Stock Exchange. In addition, we examine the independence of audit committee and Big Five firms on the issuance of going concern opinion in the light of the new International Standard of Auditing 570 Going Concern (ISA 570). Prior to 1998, the Malaysian Institute of Accountants (MIA) did not adopt the IAG 23 on assessment of going concern assumption. Later, in 1998, the MIA adopted ISA 570 Going Concern by the International Federation of Accountants (IFAC), which was then revised in year 2000 and became operative from January 2002. Among significant changes between IAG 23 and ISA 570 include provision to assess going concern assumption in every audit engagement and additional prescription to guide practitioners in detecting going concern problem.

Since the auditor is an agent to the shareholders in monitoring managers' duties to create wealth for the principals (shareholders), auditor's failure to inform shareholders on the going concern of the principal's business is a serious matter. With the introduction of the US Sarbanes Oxley, auditor's relationship with client is now being regulated to at least of the engagement audit partner's tenure. The length of tenure of an audit firm maintains a client has long been an issue in the United States and other countries (Mautz and Sharaf, 1961; Shockley, 1981; Arrunada and Paz-Ares, 1997; and Geiger and Raghunandan, 2002). Such long-term relationships could, in reality or be perceived to make the audit firms too committed or beholden to the companies, thereby undermining its independence, compromising its objectivity, and reducing its effectiveness (*The Star*, 2002). Several countries in European Union such as Italy and Spain have required the audit firms to rotate by a certain time (Geiger and Raghunandan, 2002). However, even in such a mandatory audit rotation regime, there is insufficient evidence to suggest that audit quality is improved by this means. As evidence, the latest scandal involves a company namely Parmalat in Italy complied with a law that requires companies to change their auditors every nine years. The discovery of losses amounting to RM41.8 billion in Parmalat has provoked outrage across continent of Europe and proves that the law of auditor rotation still does not help to improve audit quality (*The News Straits Times*, Dec. 27,2003).



In the past few years, auditors had been blamed due to the role of themselves in the mega corporate scandals such as Enron Incorporation, WorldCom Incorporation, Global Crossing, ImClone Systems Incorporation and Tyco International. Such criticism had raised lots of questions regarding auditors' independence. Besides, such criticism was levelled against auditors because they audit their clients for a long time and subsequently concentrated more on non-audit services rather than audit. For example in the case of Enron, Andersen was the auditor since Enron was set up until collapsed. For that reason, there has been a call for sweeping changes in the auditing profession to ensure independence and therefore improve their audit quality (*The Star*, Aug, 12, 2002).

It is often argued that mandatory audit rotation is one of the solutions to solve auditor's cozy relationship with their clients. Auditor rotation supporters argue that its benefits stem from greater audit independence, which in turn improves audit quality. However, the cost of imposing mandatory audit rotation would lead to higher start-up cost, impedes learning curve as well as the failures to attract new-blood to the accounting profession and lower investment from the audit firms to enhance knowledge and expertise in certain industries (Petty & Cuganesan, 1996). And in the case of Malaysia where foreign direct investment is still a major economic contributor, the country looks less attractive than its neighboring counterparts (where there is no mandatory rotation except for Singapore which mandate audit partner rotation for PLC) since the appointment of auditors is usually of company affairs and not of regulators as stated under Section 9 (6) the Malaysian Companies Act 1965.

In ASEAN, the Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS) has requisitioned all banks incorporated in Singapore to change their audit firms every five years under a new ruling. The new audit requirement is one of a series of control measures on corporate governance introduced by the Singapore authorities (*The Star*, March, 14, 2002). According to Ravi Menon, executive director of the authority's supervisory policy and banking departments, the mandatory audit firm rotation would help prevent audit firms from having excessive focus on maintaining long-term commercial relationships with the banks they audit. However, in Malaysia there is no regulation binding the banks or the companies to change the audit firms within a certain period.

## **2.0 THE MOTIVATION OF THE STUDY**

The most important motivation to carry out this study is lack of consensus among the public, regulators and audit firms on the issue of mandatory audit firm rotation. Teoh and Lim (1996) found that in Malaysia, the public perceived auditor rotation would improve auditor independence. However, recently, Malaysian Institute of Accountants (MIA) suggests a more lenient way to regulate auditor independence. This calls for a mandatory rotation of the audit partners responsible for the audit of listed companies after a period of not more than seven years. Furthermore, the audit partner rotating after such period should not resume the role of audit engagement partner for the audit client until two years have elapsed. Prior to this pronouncement, in 1999, the MIA under its former president, Datuk Hanifah Noordin, called for a mandatory rotation of external auditors in every three or five years (New Straits Times, March 26, 1999).

Following the corporate scandals in the United States, the regulators in Malaysia such as the Malaysia Securities Commission (SC) and the Kuala Lumpur Stock Exchange (KLSE) became more concerned with the mandatory rotation of the audit firms. In view of the importance of the issue in question, the MIA and the Malaysia Institute of Certified Public Accountants (MICPA), which are the accounting bodies in Malaysia agreed to establish an MIA/MACPA joint Taskforce on Auditor Independence in May 2002. Both institutes agreed that the overall disadvantages of mandatory rotation of audit firms, including exorbitant costs, disruption and loss of accumulative knowledge, and a restriction on the freedom of companies to choose their own auditors, outweigh the benefits that may be derived from such rotation of audit firms (the Malaysian Institute of Accountants, 2002). Therefore this study tries to prove that whether these suggestions can be use in the current situation in Malaysia. The regulators must emphasize the impact of auditor tenure to the audit quality especially if there is a negative relationship between auditor tenure and audit quality. If this happen, it can be said that long time auditors are deemed to impair their independence when auditing their clients.

In addition, no empirical studies have been carried out in Malaysia regarding auditor tenure and audit quality. This study examines the local setting namely Malaysian companies listed in the Kuala Lumpur Stock Exchange (Main Board and Second Board). Hopefully, this study will

give new understanding on the auditing profession in Malaysia. The results from this study will be useful for the regulators in improving the independence of the auditor. Finally, the results can be used by the companies to improve both the effectiveness and efficiency of the audit that they undertake besides their relationship with the auditors in gaining the public trust.

Auditor quality has been the focus of concern in recent times due to several mega corporate scandals in the United States and the latest in Europe. For that reason our study contributes to the body of knowledge on current situations of audit quality by examining the financially distressed companies in Malaysia and by introducing a new variable which is the auditor change variable. This study would then serve as a feedback to the regulators regarding the mandatory rotation and the auditors' independence in Malaysia.

### **3.0 LITERATURE REVIEW & HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT**

This section highlights several studies that utilized auditor tenure as a variable and its effect to the audit quality. Deis and Giroux (1992) found that the audit quality decreases as auditor tenure increases. The reasons they gave were that the auditors become less challenged and therefore less likely to use innovative audit procedures and finally fail to maintain their competency.

Similarly, Stice (1991) found that the relationship between auditor tenure and a lawsuit against the auditor. In the study he found that auditor tenure was shorter for those audit engagements that resulted in a lawsuit against the auditor in the case of control sample that matched only on time period. However, the same is not true when compared to an industry pair-matched control sample.

De Angelo (1981b) also mentioned that the quality of auditors divided to two parts. First is to detect anything misleading in financial statements of the client and secondly is to report the misleading. The first quality is regarding the competence and skills of the auditors to detect any fraud while the second one is regarding the auditors' independence. In the case of long time auditor, it is argued that the auditor's independence will be reduced due to the fact that the

auditor feels comfortable with the clients whether in term of revenue and also their expertise on the clients' system. Subsequently they will not report any misleading information to ensure there is no any change of auditors. In that case, an unqualified report (clean report) will be issued.

In the point of view of regulators, long association between a corporation and an accounting firm may lead to impairing their independence (Geiger and Raghunandan, 2002). The United States regulators emphasized on this since 1976 under the Metcalf Committee report (the U.S. Senate, 1976) which suggested that mandatory auditor rotation as a way for the accounting profession to bolster their independence from clients. However, this was only a suggestion. Perhaps the current act, which has been enacted in the US, the Sarbanes-Oxley Act 2002 (SOX) will remedy this. Under this act, auditor independence is regulated through audit partner rotation but not for the case of audit firm as the whole. The lead audit or coordinating partner and the reviewing partner must rotate off of the audit every 5 years. However, in Malaysia, the MIA suggested 7 years to rotate the lead audit partner.

The studies of on auditor tenure could not separate from the auditor switching studies. Many studies found that financially distressed firms were more likely to switch auditors than non stressed companies due to the reason that these types of companies need to hire a new quality of auditor compared to the previous one (Krishnan, 1994; and Krishnan and Stephens, 1995). Sinason *et al.* (2001) found that auditor tenure is longer for clients who received unqualified or unqualified-modified opinions. Interestingly, Hashanah (1998) found in Malaysia such behaviour is less apparent using data from 1975-1995. In one extreme case, the auditor was not even replaced after issuing five consecutive times of a disclaimer opinion to a client. But, the results statistically equivalent, meaning that no evidence exists to indicate that auditor tenure is longer for clients with unqualified opinions.

Figure 1 shows relevant studies that have used the audit tenure variable in relation to auditors' reporting. It seems that audit tenure variable in empirical study is still new though debates on audit tenure have gone through times and tides for four decades. Results are inconclusive like many other researches in auditing and thus prompting for a need of a new study in a new environment especially in new emerging markets like Malaysia.

**Figure 1: Studies on audit tenure to auditor reporting**

Studies	Measurement of audit tenure	Country	Sample	Audit tenure to auditor reporting
Geiger & Raghunandan (2002)	Natural log of number of years	U.S.	117 stressed & bankrupt companies	Positive
Anandarajan, La Salle & Anandarajan (2001)	Dichotomous value, 1 for audit tenure of three years or less & 0 otherwise	U.S.	Two partition of 216 for financial service & 307 from non-financial service industry	Negative
Vanstraelen (2000)	Number of years	Belgium	146 match sample of stressed & non-stressed non-bankrupt companies	Negative
Louwers (1998)	Number of years	U.S.	808 stressed non-bankrupt companies	Not significant

Similarly, Krishnan (1994); and Krishnan and Stephens (1995) found that switching companies were no more likely to have their modified report removed than were similar companies that did not switch auditors. Therefore, it is argued that if the financially distressed firms still maintain the same auditors and by the same time, if an unqualified report is issued, it may be perceived that the auditors' independence is impaired. In addition, studies by Teoh and Lim (1996) found that retention of auditors for over five years would influence and impair audit independence.

It is argued that the longer the auditors audit their clients the larger that lead to such close relationship between audit firms and clients and thus would inhibits auditors power in audit conflicts i.e. going concern issues. Studies by Deis & Giroux (1992), O'Keefe *et al.*(1994) and Raghunandan *et al.* (1994) found that longer auditor tenure would decrease audit quality. Vanstraelen (2000) studied the effect of auditor tenure to auditor giving clean opinion and found negative effect of this relationship and thus provide supports for mandatory rotation. In addition, Anandarajan, La Salle and Anandarajan (2001) found evidence that short auditor tenure increases the likelihood of receiving a disclaimer going concern opinion. Longer tenure auditors are likely to only modify the opinion of an audit report when the issue of going concern is at stakes, which is less conservative. In an experimental setting, Dopuch, King & Schwartz (2001) found that auditors are less likely to impose a biased report if rotation is required,

however, it also increases the magnitude of investment to improve financial reporting quality.

In contrast, Petty & Cuganesan (1996) argued that when mandatory auditor rotation is regulated, clients might be forced to accept a lower quality of service from an auditor who is a generalist, especially if fewer auditors invest in specialized industries such as banking, insurance or natural resources. Moreover, studies by Louwers (1998) and Johnson *et al.* (2002) found no evidence of reduced financial quality for longer audit firm's tenures. Recently, Geiger and Raghunandan (2002) studied a sample of 117 bankrupt companies and suggest that auditors may be more influenced by their newly obtained clients in the earlier years of the engagement. Thus, audit independence issue or audit competence issue is at stake in early years of engagement and not in later years and would result in lesser going concern opinion to be issued by short time auditors.

Overall, prior researches suggested that there should not be any hard and fast rules on mandatory audit firm rotation. In U.S. many auditors have served their clients for more than twenty years (Geiger & Raghunandan, 2002) and some since listed in the stock exchange. In such cases, auditors would be under greater pressure from clients and thus would unlikely issue a going concern opinion. However, auditors may be argued to have in-depth knowledge and thus would be able to defend themselves if such difficult situation arise and thus would be able to advise their clients if going concern assumption is no longer appropriate. Therefore, the derived hypothesis as follows (in null form):

H<sub>0</sub>a: *Ceteris paribus*, there is no significant relationship between audit firm's tenure and the issuance of going concern opinion

H<sub>0</sub>b: *Ceteris paribus*, there is no significant relationship between companies, which never change their auditors since listed in Kuala Lumpur Stock Exchange (KLSE), and the issuance of going concern opinion

DeAngelo (1981b) theorized that bigger audit firms have superior audit quality since they invest more in audit technology and training. Thus, in term of audit competence, it could be argued that larger audit firm would be able to detect problems regarding going-concern assumption more accurately than smaller audit firms. In term of audit independence, larger audit firms have more spreads of clients base when auditing listed companies than smaller audit firms (See Atef & Ayoib, 2000) and thus have less dependence on particular client. Anandarajan *et al.* (2001) however, found no evidence of auditor size effect on auditor going concern reporting. Such finding warrant a further study, perhaps in Malaysia, since the public perceive differences exist in many aspects of auditing between bigger firms and smaller firms including going concern assumption and not tested in Atef et al. (2002). Hence, we propose second hypothesis in null form,

H<sub>02</sub>: *Ceteris paribus*, there is no significant relationship between auditor size and the issuance of going concern opinion

Audit committee has been made mandatory in Malaysia since 1993<sup>1</sup>. It is more likely that interaction between audit committee with external auditors may influence auditor's choice of issuing going-concern<sup>2</sup>. An independent audit committee could help mitigate such pressure by supporting the auditor in disputes with management (Knapp, 1987). Hence, we expect some characteristics of board of directors, especially non-executive directors, as public watchdog and audit committee will influence auditor's choice in going-concern.

Knapp (1987) found that in audit disputes, audit committee members tended to support the auditors rather than the management. However, several other researchers have provided the support for having more outside directors on audit committee (e.g. Cadbury Report, 1992; Carcello & Neal, 2000). Atef *et al.* (2000) found evidence that independent audit committee is associated with going concern opinion using the year 2000 data from the KLSE.

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<sup>1</sup> Beginning 31 August 1993, companies seeking listing on KLSE are required to have audit committee under s15A of KLSE listing requirement.

<sup>2</sup> Among main functions of audit committee are reviewing audit planning and audit procedures and discussing audit findings and report (MIA recommended practice guide on Audit Committee & section 344A KLSE listing requirements).

We argue that placing strategic executive directors on the committee may shadow a measurement of independence of audit committee by proportion of outside directors. We believe that a higher independence of audit committee, which is measured by non-existence of powerful directors especially the managing director and executive directors (see also Carcello & Neal, 2000) would lend better support for auditors.

Hence, we propose third hypothesis in null form,

H<sub>03</sub>: *Ceteris paribus*, there is no significant relationship between whole outsiders audit committee and the issuance of going concern opinion.

#### **4.0 RESEARCH DESIGN AND SAMPLE SELECTION**

##### *Sample and Data*

The sample comprises all non-finance distressed companies identified using a list of financial indicators under ISA 570 (revised) Going Concern. The year of 2002 is selected since the ISA 570 (revised) is applicable from 1 January 2002. We found 187 companies, which fulfilled the distress characteristics.

##### *Explanations of the Model*

This study replicates the model from the previous established studies in going concern audit opinion (see for example, Louwers, 1998; and Geiger and Raghunandan, 2002).

The research model (in logistic form) is as follows:

$$GC = a + b_1 \text{TENURE} + b_2 \text{AUDITSWITCH} + b_3 \text{BIGFIVE} + b_4 \text{ACOMOUT} + b_5 \text{ZFC} + b_6 \text{DEFAULT} + b_7 \text{LOGASSETS} + e$$

The measurements of the variables are as follows:

##### *Dependent Variable Measurement*

GC = 1 if auditor issued going-concern opinion, else 0



### *Hypotheses variables*

TENURE	=	Audit firm tenure in number of years
AUDITSWITCH	=	Dummy variable, 1 if client never change its auditor at least once since listed in the KLSE, 0 otherwise
BIGFIVE	=	Dummy variable, 1 if the auditor is the Big Five firm, and else 0
ACOMOUT	=	Dummy variable, 1 if the audit committee is comprised of all non-executive directors, else 0

### *Independent Variables Measurement*

ZFC	=	Probability of bankruptcy calculated from Zmijewski Financial Condition (1984)
DEFAULT	=	Dummy variable having a value of 1 if the company is in default, else 0
LOGASSET	=	Natural log of total assets of clients
e	=	Error term of residual
a <sub>i</sub>	=	constant (i = 0)
b	=	coefficients (i = 1,2,3,4,5,6,7)

## **Variables Definition and Discussion**

### *Auditor Tenure & Audit Switch*

Tenure is the hypothesis variable measured by the length of auditor tenure in years since the KLSE was established. Auditor tenure is measured by the length of years which auditors audit their clients (Louwers, 1998 and Vanstraelen, 2000). In the sensitivity analyses, we use logarithmic transformation to correct for non-normality in the distribution of the data (see Geiger & Raghunandan, 2002). Similarly, we argue that auditors are in greater pressures from clients especially if the auditors have served the clients since listing in the stock exchange for many years. Due to the mixed theories and empirical findings, we do not provide direction for this relationship.

### *Big Five*

Audit quality appears to be a factor that may enhance auditors' independence. It is argued that larger audit firms are of better quality than smaller one (DeAngelo, 1981b). Therefore, they will more likely to report the details of financial statement without bias, correctly and independently. In addition, Palmrose (1988) found that the larger audit firms were less likely to be involved in audit-related litigation than the smaller one. Alternatively, Big Five firms have greater risk of losing reputation, which may motivate a more objective audit reporting decision.

### *Audit Committees*

The role of audit committees is very important in influencing the audit opinion. Thus, independent audit committees will ensure that the audit opinion really gives a picture the situation of that company. In addition, audit committee members are more likely to support an auditor involved in a major dispute especially on audit report with management when the client is in weak financial condition (Knapp, 1987). Atef *et al.* (2002) used the dichotomous value of audit committee with whole outsiders and found that such requirement is associated to higher probability of receiving going concern opinion.

### *Probability of Bankruptcy*

Several studies found that a positive relationship between going concern opinion and probability of bankruptcy of a company. This is due to the fact that, the higher probability of bankruptcy, the higher the need of the auditors to issue going-concern opinion. Regardless of whatever bankruptcy model being employed in prior researches (see among others, Hopwood *et al.*, 1989; Vanstraelen, 2000) in going concern opinion, the results suggest that auditors do assess distress condition of their clients. Prior research in Malaysia by Atef *et al.* (2002) used Zmijewski Financial Condition (ZFC) as suggested by Zmijewski (1984) and they found significant result. Similarly, we employ ZFC to measure financial distress of the companies. Kleinman & Anandarajan (2001) suggested that a score, which exceed 0.28, is considered as financial distress. Therefore, there is a positive association between probability of bankruptcy and going concern audit report

### *Default*

In this present study, a company is classified a default company if the company is either in payment default or technical default or has breached loan covenants. Therefore, we employ dichotomous variable as suggested by Chen & Church (1992). Going concern is associated with default status as found in Atef *et al.* (2002). They argued that default status would send strong bad signal that potential and successful negotiation with banks or other creditors would be unlikely. In the absence of such supports, companies under financial distress would hardly stay as going-concern in future accounting period. Thus, there is a positive association between default status and type of going concern report.

### *Client Size*

Total assets is used in the present study due to the amount of assets, which are more consistent before the 1997 crisis and thereafter compared to those of revenues. However, Atef *et al.* (2002) found no evidence that size of clients measured by total assets has association with the type of going concern audit report. Other measurements of client size include market capitalization and a mixture of sales and assets. It is transformed to logarithmic data to control for non-normality. Consistent with the previous research, a negative relationship between this independent variable and going concern opinion will take place (Geiger and Raghunandan, 2002).

## **5.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

### *Descriptive Results*

From 187 companies, Arthur Andersen (AA) and Ernst Young (EY) audited 42.17% of distressed companies. Since the merger of these two former Big Five firms in July 2002, almost half of these troubled account or the lion's share lies with this new EY. All Big Five accounts 70.28% of the KLSE troubled firms. This figure is comparable with their total shares of the KLSE companies (See Atef and Ayoib, 2000). 77.5% or 145 on these companies received going concern audit opinion. Thus many problems and critics would lie in the case of non-receiving going concern opinion.

T-test in the following Table 1 confirms this preliminary finding that Big Five is different than non Big Five in term of audit opinion and tenure. Big Five generally have longer audit tenure and issued a slightly more going concern opinion than non-Big Five. However, this is only a univariate test-result, which needs to be interpreted with caution. To test for our hypothesis, a model that combines multiple variables such as regression procedure would unveil whether such relationship holds true in a multivariate analysis.

**Table 1: T-Test of B5 and Non-B5**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>B5 (means)</b>	<b>Non B5 (means)</b>	<b>t-value</b>	<b>Sig.</b>
TENURE (in years)	10.5	7.26	2.820	0.005*
GOING CONCERN	0.82	0.70	1.863	0.064*
ACOMOUT	0.33	0.26	0.910	0.364
DEFAULT	0.66	0.61	0.657	0.512
ZFC	15.63	22.99	-0.805	0.422
AUDITSWITCH	0.44	0.41	0.388	0.698
TASSETS (RM)	679,922,418	471,684,583	0.767	0.444

Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) figures are closed to unitary and thus conclude that multicollinearity<sup>3</sup> poses minimal threat to further regression analysis. In addition, further inspection on the condition index proves prior VIF test. Correlation matrix as in Table 2 between independent variables shows that multicollinearity is minimal. The highest is only 0.266 between TENURE and AUDITSWITCH at 0.01 significant levels.

<sup>3</sup> VIF ranges from 1.0408 to 1.441

**Table 2: Correlation Matrix**

	GC	TENURE	AUDIT SWITCH	BIGFIVE	ACOMOUT	ZFC	DEFAULT	TASSETS
GC	1	.229(**)	-.098	.128	.154(*)	.171(*)	.647(**)	.003
TENURE	.229(**)	1	.266(**)	.201(**)	.122	-.033	.249(**)	.085
AUDITSWITCH	-.098	.266(**)	1	-.033	-.031	.034	-.055	-.210(**)
BIGFIVE	.128	.201(**)	-.033	1	.039	-.060	.043	.055
ACOMOUT	.154(*)	.122	-.031	.039	1	.154(*)	.114	.039
ZFC	.171(*)	-.033	.034	-.060	.154(*)	1	.199(**)	-.101
DEFAULT	.647(**)	.249(**)	-.055	.043	.114	.199(**)	1	-.055
TASSETS	.003	.085	-.210(**)	.055	.039	-.101	-.055	1

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Going concern opinion has strong and significant correlation with audit tenure ( $r = 0.229$ ), default status ( $r = 0.647$ ), outside audit committee ( $r = 0.154$ ) and probability of bankruptcy ( $r = 0.171$ ). In contrast, correlation analysis did not find significant relationship between Big Five/non Big Five effect on going concern opinion as found in t-test. Likewise in prior t-test analysis, univariate results should be read with caution and act as a complement to multivariate analysis of logistic regression in this study.

### *Multivariate Regression*

We found similar results as in Geiger & Raghunandan (2002). Logistic regression results as in Table 3 shows that audit firm's tenure and audit switching variables have statistically significant relationship (at-two-tailed) with the occurrence of going concern opinion. Hence,  $H_01a$  and  $H_01b$  are rejected. This means that the longer an audit firm has audited a client the higher is the probability of issuing going concern opinion unlike the frequent arguments of negative audit tenure effects made by public and business community alike. However, our finding also pointed out that if a client never changes its auditors then the possibility of receiving clean opinion is higher.

**Table 3: Logistic Regression, n =187**

Variables	Predicted Sign	B	S.E.	Wald	Sig.	Exp(B)
TENURE	?	.169	.097	3.012	.083	1.184
AUDITSWITCH	?	-1.094	.660	2.749	.097	.335
BIGFIVE	+	.629	.653	.928	.335	1.877
ACOMOUT	+	.319	.696	.210	.647	1.375
ZFC	+	.606	.203	8.953	.003	1.833
DEFAULT	+	3.367	.820	16.851	.000	28.991
LOGASSETS	-	-.016	.491	.001	.975	.984
Constant	+/-	-1.287	4.071	.100	.752	.276

a Variable(s) entered on step 1: TENURE, AUDITSWITCH, BIGFIVE, ACOMOUT, ZFC, DEFAULT, LOGASSET.

Cox & Snell  $R^2 = 0.464$ , Nagelkerke  $R^2 = 0.714$ , Hosmer & Lemeshow = 0.947

Moreover, we found no evidence to reject  $H_{02}$  (auditor size) unlike in Behn *et al.*, (2001) and  $H_{03}$  (audit committee). Thus, conclude that audit firm size as surrogated by Big Five and non-Big Five dichotomous classification and audit committee independence have no significant influence over auditor reporting decision. Mutchler *et al.* (1997) found similar finding that auditor size has no significant effect on going concern decision though they did not provide any explanation. Thus, argument of perceived high quality by DeAngelo (1981b) is not apparent as generally supported in the case of audit fees research. It is quite possible that a better approach is not to use a dichotomous value in audit reporting studies (as a proxy of audit quality) unlike in audit fees studies where the perceived difference of audit quality can be captured by using dichotomous value of Big Five and non Big Five.

In our sample, 77.55% are companies, which have audit tenure of five years or more. We then conducted sensitivity analyses using a dichotomous value of tenure of more than three years, more than five years and found those results still holds. Thus, the call for mandatory audit rotation may not yield what it hopes for. We would say our results do not support auditor rotation and thus change of auditor should be made of necessary and reasonable grounds such as in the event of non-performance of auditors or change of substantial and controlling shareholders and others.

Using data sets of 2002, the results still support findings of prior study by Atef *et al.* (2002) related to debt-default status and serious financial distress variable. They used data in the year 2000. Both variables are strong determinants of auditor’s decision in issuing going concern in Malaysia. These findings also contribute to high pseudo  $R^2$  but it is still comparable with prior researches (Geiger & Raghunandan, 2002 had pseudo  $R^2$  0.33, Louwers, 1998 had pseudo  $R^2$  0.44). In addition, assets of the companies are proved to be insignificant factor in going concern issues unlike in many of audit fees studies. There are several explanations to this finding. Firstly, the auditor may investigate the quality of the assets and not just “any assets”. It is quite possible, if the distressed company has significant portion of assets, which have higher market value and demand such as investment in listed shares or has properties of high value would then helps the company to survive much better than others. Thus auditor may not issue a going concern opinion to such companies. Secondly, an alternative proxy for size in the case of going concern opinion such as revenue or turnover of the companies may yield different results.

**Table 4: Classification Table<sup>a</sup>**

Auditor's Actual Opinion	Model's predicted opinion		
	Standard	Going Concern	Percentage Correct
Standard	32	9	78.0
Going Concern	12	134	91.8
Overall Percentage	37.5%	6.7%	88.8

a. The cut value is .500

As in Table 4, model shows minimal change in term of accuracy from Atef *et al.* (2002). The model has high prediction power of 88.8%. Type II (6.7%) is lower than type I (37.5%) error, which shows that it is not a serious problem. Type II error leads to auditors to give a clean opinion whereby they should give a going concern opinion. Thus we can say that most of distressed companies in Malaysia received “warning” from their auditor regarding its going concern assumption.

Interestingly, it seems that in Malaysia, auditors are a little bit skeptical or very conservative on going concern assumption made by directors and thus they made low type II error and a

bit too high type I error. High type I error may lead to self-fulfilling theory which suggest that their clients may face difficulties in obtaining credit or financing facilities from bankers or investors. These factors, the auditors do take to the account in their audit opinion when issue going concern opinion. Such events would pose higher cost to the auditors i.e. clients switch their auditors but Hashanah (1998) found that going concern opinion alone would not precipitate such effect. Future research on value relevance of going concern audit opinion may unveil this effect.

## 6.0 CONCLUSIONS

Mandatory audit rotation debates came from the arguments that long audit tenure would create cosy relationship between auditors and clients and thus would lead to audit failure such as in the case of bankruptcy. We found no market wide evidence to support that argument in Malaysia but instead we found that longer audit tenure has positive significant association with auditor's reporting decision. In addition, we found that auditors in Malaysia made less serious error (type II) or audit failure compared to our model i.e. give clean opinion for clients who should be given going concern opinion when issuing going concern opinion. However, we did not test on other type of audit failure such as qualified opinion of non-going concern issues. In this study, we did not discriminate the different types of going concern opinion including modified opinion, qualified opinion or disclaimer opinion as stated in ISA 570 (revised 2000).

Our findings also pointed that if a client never changes its auditor since listed, there is a tendency to issue a clean opinion though the client suffers apparent financial problems. All in all, it simply read, "auditor change would do well, but forcing an unrealistic auditor rotation might not yield what it hopes for". Therefore, for the benefit of the auditing profession, we echo the importance of self-regulation and *Laissez-faire* practice in Malaysia as a better alternative than a mandatory auditor rotation. Perhaps current national undertakings by regulators such as strengthening audit committee in term of independence and competence, and the proposal for a peer audit review process by the MIA would inhibit unethical audit process in Malaysia.



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