The Millennial Researchers’ Ethical Decision Model: A Psychoanalytic Approach

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Little is known on the psychoanalytic approach underlies ethical decision impetus of millennial researchers in Malaysia, let alone an integrated model of ethical decision making due to dearth of empirical support to further understand their ethical tolerance. The undervaluation of ethical dimensions has caused practical disability of researchers to describe social activities accurately, and to employ adequate justification of social hope and moral justification. Accordingly, this study is important to synthesize the underlying factors of ethical decision making for millennial researchers. This paper focuses on the triangulation of moral development theory, theory of reasoned action, and psychoanalytic theory to support the third thrust of National Higher Education Strategic Plan wherein to enhance research and innovation. The model will address the gap between theory, practice, and process that allows for the construction of complementary perspectives on ethical decision making in interdisciplinary research. Thus, it enriches the understanding to adequately explain social reality. This approach helps to generate a more complete knowledge about the contemporary issues in research.

Keywords: Millennial researcher, Ethical decisions, Psychoanalytic Theory, Moral Development Theory, Theory of Reasoned Action

1. INTRODUCTION

Numerous studies have been conducted to further understand how theory transformed into practice in philosophical-psychological ethical decision making studies. Nevertheless, these studies have neglected to clarify the generational characters of moral confidence that appear to be significantly affects ethical motivation and intent in decision making. As a result, the majority empirical findings are mainly concentrated into demographic variable of age, gender and experience that need to be further investigated to examine the generational moral gaps in decision making.

The majority of Malaysia-based ethical decision studies were centered around university students and selected professions particularly accounting students1, and business students2, sales managers3, nurses4, information technology employees5, internal auditors6, human resource executives7, and managers8,9 because of abundance of evidences underpinned their ethical decision making process in trying to comprehend the way they think and act when confronted with moral issues at work10. However, the only handful of studies focused on researcher to further appreciate their moral decision in doing research. Notwithstanding, little is known about the underlying ethical decision stimulus11,12 of millennial researcher in Malaysia due to the complexity of the multifaceted normative-descriptive-prescriptive factors in ethical philosophical-psychological context. Thus, the research gap is fragmented and needs for further consideration to incorporate these factors into the millennial ethical decision making model. To date, the ramifications of ethical decision making beyond the experimental-based research, utilizing the psychoanalytic method has yet to be investigated.

The millennial or Gen Y is alluding to those born after the year 1980 or reaching age 32 and below in which representing 40 percent of the total Malaysia population of 30 million. The generational factors are fundamentally imperative in light of the fact that millennial is more ambitious, confident, independent, and achievement-oriented thus, made generational contrasts in ethical preferences as a soft scrutiny moral agent in maximizing the outcome13 that aligns with their

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ethical confidence. Empirical findings in the previous studies have discovered that the millennial attributes are to be less ethical reasoning tolerant. This is particularly valid with the challenging development of a theoretical framework because of multifaceted and the multitude that varied the constructs of millennial researchers in ethical practices. Considering indistinct and variation in the development process of ethical decision making, the presence of psychoanalytic approach to further comprehend millennial research endeavor is sensible to unearth the enriching contribution of experiences, the oblivious desire, and resistance components that makeup the dominant part of person's identities, and exemplify general psychological approaches and inspirations that have been unexplored extensively in the previous ethics and behavioral decision making research. As indicated by Danforth, practicality outlines the inability of the researcher to depict the social movement precisely. The moral development theory remedy drawback in age and maturity through individual thought that develop to be a conceivable element of moral confidence as a thrust of social trust and moral imagination. On the other hand, the theory of reasoned action contemplating society as part of the cultural character (organization and social) and its impact of identity to improve moral reflection. These theories are reciprocally intermingled to address the breaking points in psychoanalytic approach that have neglected to incorporate evidence of the effect of environment on the individual cognitive development, insufficient causality empirical data due to excessive deals with the laboratory examination, inadequate deliberation on the important role of culture that impact identification of ethical competency. Additionally, Prescott reasoned that working circumstances require moral reasoning because the disappointments to utilize sufficient moral rationalization on unconscious desire will cause in the undervaluation of ethical competence.

In this manner, the paper intends to integrate psychoanalytic approach on the millennial researcher to complement the limitation of the existing model of ethical decision making and to examine the multifaceted causality of normative-descriptive-prescriptive factors in ethical philosophical-psychological context in the form of ethical decision making model in doing research. The hypothesis model is proposed to provide a framework for ethical sustainability of research and innovation that support the third thrust of National Higher Education Strategic Plan (NHESP) in which to enhance research and innovation.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

A synthesis is a process that involved a generation of ideas from a capacity to collect and examined data from various sources. Thus, it serves as an important element in psychoanalytic to section experiences to address oblivious and forceful drives of human identities. Nevertheless, morals are about understanding human qualities and its conduct, and vigorously depending on interdisciplinary yet the unique psychology and management approach.

2.1 Moral Development Theory (MDT)

The context of organizational ethics requires an understanding of individual's moral choices that may influence decision making. However, the culture and climate of organizations somehow affect how people deciding their ethical choice. Kohlberg assumed that the ethical decision making is a linear process and age matters in moral judgment. MDT offers an ethical reasoning framework and theorized that ethical behavior is progressively deteriorating with maturity. Bergman argued that moral development theory is greatly influenced by Piaget's Cognitive Theory that focuses on philosophical-psychological inclusivity in the human psychology. Like its successor, cognitive theory emphasizes on the nature of knowledge rather than self-learning stages at early ages. The gradual reorganization of mental process is resulting from environment experiment and biological maturity. Nevertheless, Kohlberg has made an improvement on his framework via an introduction of more formal structure of moral judgment and moral action than symbolizing the different stages in age development.

Hoffman argued that Kohlberg's work inadequately clarified the cognitive aspect of moral behavior because the motivation factor that caused the unconscious desire in human nature is not present. Accordingly, Kohlberg's work does not propose any proactive activity to evade upsetting choices in lieu to one's ethical judgment. Moreover, Kohlberg accepted that the degree of ethical thinking is steady over all problems. contended that ethical judgments are unstructured and differed according to individual's objective and circumstances. Rest asserted that ethical decision can be illusive, thus, chronological approach proposed by (MDT) can be impulsive.

As a remedy, he introduces four psychological processes that empowered individuals to diagnose moral domain from different angles to distinguish the intensity of moral decision. However, this approach has overlooked the tendency of individuals to be deliberative and experimental in ethical making decision.

Furthermore, Rest et al. claimed that the Kohlberg model is only sufficed for adolescent. This model become obsolete once in-depth cognition is required to assess the complexity of socio-environment causation. Thus, maturity deemed to be fit factor in ethical reasoning as ethical decision entails a certain degree of knowledge, and experienced associated with culture, norms and values they work with, as explained in the Theory of Reasoned Action. Generally, MDT is critiqued for being deficient as failed to include the dispositional attribution of beliefs, intentions, attitudes,
desires and the like driving by motivation. Furthermore, this theory is underscoring justice as a prime factor rather than the coherent aspect of morality that intensifies with the socio-environment. As a result, the obligations, and consequences of morality is undefined and the chain of reaction that impact individual ethical reasoning and behavior is unknown.

### 2.2 Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA)

Past studies have demonstrated that TRA has offered an imperative structure in anticipating and appreciating social behavior in ethical decision making processes. The three domains of TRA: (1) behavioral intention, (2) attitude, and (3) subjective norm have provided a fundamental understanding on the socio-environmental nature of behavior that can be defined and alter morally due to its cognitive reasoning. TRA explains that behavioral intention lies in attitude influenced by subjective norms and driven the behavior. This theory assumes that behavior can be controlled and the relative strength to engage with ethical or unethical behavior is resulted from the behavioral intention that can be predicted from one’s desire.

Attitude comprises of beliefs based on subjective value perceived when performing the behavior. A subjective norm is assumed to be motivated from the socio-environment influenced that shared the same norms in the similar culture. Hence, ethical decision of a person can be predicted by behavior intention and how they perceived this behavior will bring an expected value that shared by others.

TRA is focused around the recommendation that individual behavior can be predicted through its intention and shared norms in performing it. described that the assessment of the consequences is underlined by beliefs about the value of the outcome. This caused by the social perception on the shared values of outcomes that motivate the behavior compliance. However, the ability to discrete the behavioral intention from expectation norm and attitudes permits clarification of insufficient factors on the attitudinal impact in TRA. Nevertheless, TRA is evidenced to have weak associations with attitude measures and performance of the violation behaviour. argued that socio-environment is the major player that influenced individual behavior due to its shared subjective norms. Furthermore, individual ability to fake their attitudes to comply with subjective norms shared will result to lesser behavioral intention contribution in anticipating ethical or unethical decision.

contended that TRA is unable to predict the goal intention and behavioral intention because an individual needs to choose among alternative available to make a decision and presented in behavior. Even though TRA strongly argues that the consequences and obligation that supported by reward and punishment of the behavior presented will influence the ethical decision making, but, the unconscious desire to predict the value of needs and rewards that justify the individual attitudes and behaviour intention may not align with shared subjective norms as the culture and values of an individual are differ and an in varying degree. These are the factors that failed to be addressed in TRA. As a result, the complexity of philosophical-psychological aspects of ethical decision making in this theory is fragmented.

### 2.3 Psychoanalytic Theory

The prevailing concept of psychoanalytic theory in the ethical decision making process is not recent. Psychoanalytic theory that evolves from cognitive theory has embodied and demanded in a multidisciplinary approach of ethical decision making to further understand the nature and heritages of human intuitions to comprehend its complexities in ethical decision making processes. Decision and behavior have been the core characteristics of ethical decision making. The process is comprises of human thought related to socio-environmental responses, which include psychological consequences of experiences and forthcoming events. Integration between beliefs and reactions towards those events are a principle of decision making that has possible impact on individual moral and ethical values.

The dynamic of personality development that has distinct characteristics towards moral and ethical values have inspired the psychoanalytic theory by Sigmund Freud. Even though psychoanalysis has been introduced for psychological treatment discourse, and the validity has been criticized widely, but in interdisciplinary behavioral science this approach can be utilized beyond the experimental and clinical pathology boundaries. The characteristics of psychoanalytic are observed to be important in the ethical decision process due to its approach in recognizing of individual experience event that could potentially influence the ethical mental state and functioning in reasoning. Despite the fact that this theory emphasizes the childhood experiences, but it has addressed and highlighted the importance of unconscious desire that aggressively drives the majority of human behaviour. Furthermore, it has explained the morality subject in the actions of unconscious act and how individual reacts differently to similar situations.

The personality structures of an individual driven by the interrelationship between reward values of internal needs. However, the instinctive factor of this structure can be impulsive and often unaware of its implications of actions. As a result, the unpleasant consequences of ethical decision and morality principle will be avoided. Even though socially acceptable moral principle may limit individual sense of wrong and right using guilt to inspire socially acceptable behavior, but the shared subjective norms of behavioral intention will cloud...
individual true feelings, emotions and thoughts of the individual. The utilization of psychoanalytic approach will remedy the lack of motivation factor in MDT and fake behavioral intention and attitudes motivated by socially acceptable behavior in TRA through an understanding of the individual subconscious by the means of cognitive approaches. Exploring and understanding the manifest content of unconscious desire can surface their moral knowledge and attitudes towards ethical reasoning and decision making. Irrespective the benefit of this approach, psychoanalytic theory has failed to include the impact of the socio-environment on the individual. This is due to its approach towards childhood experiences that have limited association with socio-environment comparable to adulthood. Furthermore, this theory lacks to consider culture and its influence on the behavioral decision making of individual. 

2.4 Millennial and Ethical Decision Model

Khalid\textsuperscript{14} claimed that age is a paramount element in deciding the ethical decision making determinant. Previous studies have evidenced that individual with age 29 years old and younger have more tendency to be less ethical in making decision\textsuperscript{49-52}. The paradigm of maturity in the behavioral decision making has become critical because age does impacts ethical decision process with a person less than 40 years of age is affirmed to have less moral tolerance\textsuperscript{14,49}. These empirical findings are consistent with meta-analysis of 35 studies by Borkowski and Ugrass\textsuperscript{50} that established maturity in age is significantly explained by the socio-environment experience that may influence the development in critically measuring moral values to be decided in ethical decision making. They elaborated that as the age increase, the ethical assessment gets to be more sensible. Despite the fact that past studies have confirmed the causation relationship between age and ethical decision, but prior studies have proven that age somehow is an inconsequential factor towards ethical decision\textsuperscript{51,52}. As age alone does not explain the mental state of an individual, thus, the socio-environment factor that subject to shared subject norms to behave intentionally will responsible for the development of maturity. An individual experiences that will be measured by the means of value needs and rewards will be the intervene level of wisdom and ethical values, that in turn will be developed to be a norm and value of its own. Thus, it varies from one person to another. However, under-assessment of motivation and experience, and exclusively relying on age as an ethical decision evaluation will cause in mixed result\textsuperscript{53}. Thus, the elements of motivation and intention in ethical decision making are important to further highlight the variety of ethical assessments\textsuperscript{14}. Arnaud\textsuperscript{54} asserted that ethical judgment is an impression of Kohlberg\textsuperscript{27} idea of cognitive moral development. Beekun et al.\textsuperscript{55} contended that Kohlberg’s idea of cognitive moral development offers a thrust for ethical decision making processes. McDevitt et al.\textsuperscript{56} recommended that the sophistication of ethical decision inquiries will impact the manner the ethical dilemmas been solved, and thus this aspect should be the paramount of research. However, most of the studies have failed to consider the benefits of theory, practice and process in justifying ethical knowledge, choice, and action. Thus deliberation and experimental process driven by the knowledge that be shared and practices in shared norms, values and culture are ignored and the potential benefits of research hinders the mindful of ethical decision making.

The millennial researchers are shown to be unfaithful to philosophy of life\textsuperscript{57}. As a result, they tend to drop their moral value to adopt the shared subjective norms once employed. This factor needs to be given attention as generational characteristics that well exposed to technologies are superficial and lack of perseverance to ethical values due to economic factors\textsuperscript{58}. Rest\textsuperscript{59} asserted that individual ethical behavior are lies in the psychological process of reasoning before can be explicitly behaved. However, the over-ambitious and achievement-oriented assisted by their technology savviness have made the millennial to be less tolerant to socio-environment experience\textsuperscript{10}, and thus impedes the motivation-attitudes-intention aspect in modelling ethical decision. Study of meta-ethics proposed that most researchers are emphasized on ethical judgment, and ethical intention, but overlook the role of ethical awareness and ethical motivation due to an independent structure of each component in the ethical decision making model\textsuperscript{10,60,61}. Research endeavor is needed to further understand the causal relationships of the ethical components of awareness, motivation, judgment and intention since there is no empirical studies have attempted to establish the understanding and linking to philosophical-psychological theory in this manner. Lind\textsuperscript{62} claimed that earlier ethical decision making model are overloaded with post-conventional moral reasoning and disregarded the moral cognitive and affective aspects.

3. CONCLUSIONS

This paper will address the gap existed between theory, practice and process as the cognitive processes concern with moral thinking as an enabler for the ethical structure of subjective norms, in which will be tagged as a perceived value in the ethical decision process. Since ethical decision making is a dynamic process, it is pivotal to critically identify the factors that explain and influence the compositions of ethical decision model\textsuperscript{63}. Triangulation theories and concepts will allow for the construction of complementary perspectives to enrich the understanding of ethical decision making elements of researchers. By appreciating the limitations of these theories,
different perspectives can be integrated to examine the organizational-societal expectation in ethical decision interactions. This is important as once society expectation changes; it merges into self-regulatory norms that often get encapsulated in the organization. Thus, this paper will offer an extensive view in investigating the ethical decision structures. Ethical decision making factor will be highlighted in this manner to reflect the significance of interdisciplinary research. Particularly, this study will draw attention that the ethics tend to be multifaceted and hence sufficiently explain the social reality. This approach serves to generate a suffice knowledge about the contemporary ethical decision issues. The integration of theoretical models of individual decision making especially in research based institutions will offer a significant comprehension on the relevant theories to enable for re-definition of ethical decision conceptualization to overcome the ignored components that have may influence and intervene the ethical decision making process in doing research.

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