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**IDEALISM AND GENDER IN MODERATING LOVE OF MONEY,
MACHIAVELLIANISM, AND EMPLOYEES' ETHICAL
PERCEPTION IN BUSINESS (Accounting Sample)**

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to analyze key traits and attitudes that business practitioners, entrepreneurs, or anyone working in an organization possess, influencing their daily management and long-term practices that may even cause unexpected result like financial scandals. International financial scandals (like Enron and WorldCom) and national ones (such as Garuda and Jiwasraya) highlight the severe consequences of unethical practices, often resulting in substantial financial losses. Using questionnaire survey, SEM analysis is conducted to test the traits among accountants from Public Accounting Firms sampled as 269 respondents. The result reveals that while love of money does not significantly affect employees' ethical perceptions, Machiavellianism has a negative impact, which can be mitigated by idealism. Gender showed minimal influence on moderating these effects. The findings also emphasize the importance of moral development in the accounting profession, suggesting that fostering ethical reasoning is more effective than simply following regulations.

Keywords: *idealism; gender; love of money; Machiavellianism; employees' ethical perception; accounting; business*

1. Introduction

A financial scandal occurs when financial resources are used in an unethical manner, resulting in negative implications for third parties that are extensively publicized (Toms, 2019). Financial scandals on the year 2002 was a turning point in the accounting profession due to major company collapses in the US, which Enron and WorldCom highlighted the serious consequences of unethical behaviour. Enron alone, made more over \$90 million in illegal proceeds in 2001. Specifically, Enron's former Chairman and CEO returned approximately \$70 million in Enron shares to the business to settle financial advances on an uncontrolled Enron line of credit (Clark & Thomsen, 2004). Therefore, Enron's fraudulent accounting practices led to a dramatic drop in its stock price from \$83 to \$0.67 per share, resulting in a staggering \$63 billion loss in shareholder value (Petra & Spieler, 2020). As for WorldCom, according to Beresford et al. (2003), the company restated its financial accounts for 2001 and the first quarter of 2002 after discovering \$4 billion in unlawful transactions. Initially reported as \$3.8 billion, the actual fraud eventually totalled approximately \$11 billion, making it one of the largest accounting scandals in U.S. history (Petra & Spieler, 2020).

These financial scandals have brought attention to the ethical aspects of the business world and the various factors that influence it. These factors include those resulting from individual development and socialization (e.g. personality, views, beliefs, employment, etc.) as well as those resulting from birth (e.g. nationality, sex, age, etc.) according to Ford and Richardson (1994).

A prior study by Maggalatta and Adhariani (2020) examined the impact of love of money and Machiavellianism on accounting students' ethical perceptions, considering these variables' influence on those who have not yet entered the professional work environment. The findings indicated that both factors have a detrimental effect on students' ethical perception. The preceding study's sample, however, was restricted to undergraduates at a reputable university so it might not accurately reflect the general population. This study then expand the research by proposing individuals who were already employed in an accounting environment as the research subject, also considering idealism which serves as a moderating factor in individuals' ethical perceptions to counteract love of money and Machiavellianism tendencies. Additionally, this study investigate the difference in gender that moderates the relationship between love of money, Machiavellianism, and ethical perception.

The significance of accounting ethics has significantly increased due to the corporate scandals. These occurrences demonstrate a basic lack of ethics in public accountability as well as financial reporting, which is supposed to provide external users of financial statements with an honest and fair depiction (Poje & Groff, 2022). To prevent future corporate scandals, many legal amendments were already implemented, including the Sarbanes-Oxley Act, Directive 2006/43/EC, Directive 2014/56/EU, and Regulation 537/2014. The International Ethics Standards Board for Accountants (IESBA) also published a new Code of Ethics for Professional Accountants, but creating policies alone is insufficient to affect behaviour and thinking. Although rules and regulations are able to be taught, ethical behaviour is determined by ideas and beliefs, most of which are formed by contact to the outside world (Kowaleski et al., 2020).

2. Literature review

Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA)

The TRA is a cognitive theory that aims to explain the relationship between attitudes (A) and subjective norms (SN) with human behaviour (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). It implies that the best indicator of whether or not someone will engage in a particular action is their desire to do so, also could be defined as the individual's "motivational factors," signifying their willingness and effort to engage in a specific action.

An individual's readiness to perform a behaviour (behavioural intention) is directly influenced by their overall attitude towards behaviour. This attitude, in turn, is a product of both their beliefs about the potential consequences of the action (instrumental) and their judgment of the value of those consequences (evaluative). Additionally, subjective norm is the term used to describe a person's opinion of whether or not important people around them believe they should or shouldn't engage in certain behaviours. Subjective norm combines both normative beliefs (beliefs about what others think) and motivation to comply (the importance placed on others' opinions). This idea states that each individual is conscious of their activities while doing behaviours if they have the intents. Moreover, research by Rahman (2020) suggested that TRA is related to ethical behaviour of employees in the accounting environment.

Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)

Because the TPB model implies that behaviour is planned, it anticipates intentional behaviour (Ajzen, 1985, 1991). The TRA (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) was the previous model from which the TPB is developed. The model was modified to include perceived behavioural control (PBC) as a result of the realization that behaviour is not always controllable and is not entirely voluntary. The apparent ease or difficulty of carrying out an action is known as perceived behavioural control, which isn't something that an individual can control. On 2005, Buchan found high indirect relationship of subjective norms, and strong direct relationship of attitude to ethical intentions for accounting professionals.

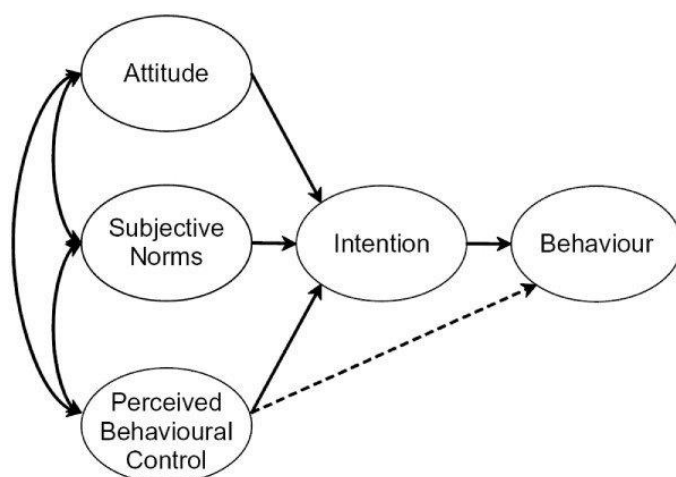


Figure 1. Planned Behaviour Model

TPB model above suggests that stronger intentions to perform a behaviour are more likely to lead to actual behaviour, with these intentions influenced by personal attitudes, social pressures, and perceived behavioural control. In addition, the perception of behavioural control directly influences behaviour, independent of its influence on intentions. A person is inclined to have a compelling reason to engage in an action when they believe they have significant influence over carrying out that behaviour.

Gender socialization theory

Oakley (1972) was the first one to introduce ‘sociology of gender’, gender socialization theory is a sociological concept that explains how individuals learn and internalize the cultural norms, behaviours, and expectations associated with their gender. It emphasizes the role of social interactions, institutions, and media in shaping an individual's understanding of gender roles. Gender socialization starts at birth, with families typically treating newborns differently based on their gender. According to Dawson (1995), this theory suggest that males are more socialized into principles concerning aptitude, personal development, and aggression, whereas females are more socialized into concepts involving compassion and an overall concern for the well-being of others. It also states that males and females carry different moral principles and ideals to the job. As for recent research, Mubako et al., (2021) suggested that females are less prone than males to act unethically referring to gender socialization theory.

Hypothesis development

Love of money and ethical perception

The phrase "the love of money" was first used in psychology by Tang (1992). This novel concept aims to measure an individual's subjective feeling towards money. According to Tang and Chen (2008), materialism—the love of money, or the desire and ambition for money, is more strongly associated with immoral activity than the pursuit of the good life by consumption or goods. This confirms the notion that "the love of money is a root cause of all sorts of evil" (1 Timothy, 6:10), rather than simply having money itself. Alongside Chen and Tang (2006) research which indicated that these characteristics may contribute to unethical behaviour, Tang and Chiu (2003) discovered a clear link between an employee's love of money and unethical behaviour in Hong Kong. Recent research by Prabowo and Widanaputra (2018) and Maggalatta and Adhariani (2020) as well showing that the love of money has a detrimental effect on the ethical perception of accounting students. According to prior research and the trait of individual that “loves money”, the researcher proposed:

H₁ Love of money negatively influences the ethical perception of employees in the accounting environment.

Machiavellianism and ethical perception

A characteristic of Machiavellianism is the absence of the conventional characteristics of integrity, decency, and trust and is characterized by expediency, manipulation, abuse, and cunningness (Christie & Geis, 1984). What is meant by "Machiavellianism" is the tendency of an individual to be indifferent, emotionless,

dishonest, doubtful, and manipulative; therefore, individuals with a higher level of Machiavellianism tend to exhibit less ethical behaviour and are more inclined towards accepting unethical practices for their personal gain. This is consistent with Tang and Chen (2008) assertion that Machiavellianism has a correlation with immoral behaviour, which corroborates the study by Maggalatta and Adhariani (2020). According to the prior research and Machiavellian traits, the researcher then proposed:

H₂ Machiavellianism negatively influences the ethical perception of employees in the accounting environment.

Idealism and ethical perception

A person with idealistic attitudes considers all harm to others to be preventable (Forsyth, 1992). Some people have an idealistic presumption that desired outcomes can always be achieved with the "right" conduct, and those with less idealistic perspectives acknowledge that terrible outcomes will frequently be mixed in with good outcomes (Forsyth, 1980). Idealism is an ideology of thought that emphasizes the moral excellence of a deed. It holds that doing someone else ethically wrong and that one should always examine how their actions will affect other people. Additionally, idealists hold an optimistic perception regarding ethical acts: they firmly believe that these acts will always produce positive consequences on whoever is affected by them. On recent research by Verwey and Asare (2022), idealism positively influences the perception of ethical judgement on fraud by which individuals assess and determine what is ethically appropriate or inappropriate in a certain circumstance. According to Machiavellianism's personality traits and prior research, idealism stands in stark contrast to individuals driven by love of money and Machiavellianism, for whom the opposite effect can be observed; thus the researcher proposed:

H₃ Idealism positively moderates the relationship between love of money and ethical perception of employees in the accounting environment.

H₄ Idealism positively moderates the relationship between Machiavellianism and ethical perception of employees in the accounting environment.

Gender and ethical perception

Following Dawson's statement in 1995 regarding gender socialization theory statement, Dawson (1997) found that females are more reactive to relational issues—those that include or influence other people—but not to non-relational issues—those that are mostly limited to one's own conscience,. Also using gender socialization theory as theoretical support, Smith and Oakley (1997) found that women express stronger ethical reactions for situations involving social and interpersonal concerns, such as sexual harassment, employee treatment, and bigger social issues. Additionally, data collected from more than 20,000 respondents across 66 samples shows that women are more inclined than men to think that certain hypothetical business practices are immoral (Franke et al., 1997). With a match between prior and recent research by Mubako et al., (2021), the researcher then proposed:

H₅ Females positively moderates the relationship between love of money and ethical perception of employees in accounting environment.

H₆ Females positively moderates the relationship between Machiavellianism and ethical perception of employees in accounting environment.

Age and ethical perception

In a professional setting, there may be notable differences in the cognitive processes between individuals of different age groups. Kohlberg's (1981) model of ethical reasoning suggests that people tend to develop stronger moral values as they mature. Past research also shown that elderly people tend to be more morally upright than younger people (e.g. Vitell, 2003). For example, study by Rawwas and Singhapakdi (1998) found that adults aged 20 to 79 are more ethical than teenagers, Ruegger and King (1992) found that older students were shown to be more morally upright than younger ones, and Beji et al. (2021) found that older directors display higher moral reasoning than the younger ones.

Religion and ethical perception

It is more concerning to consider the link between religious or spiritual concerns and moral principles than the connection between social science and ethics, as noted by Winter (1968). Religions have different approaches to explaining ethics, and some of them may overlap. Because Indonesia is a religiously diverse country, with Islam being the predominant religion alongside other faiths such as Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism, the rich tapestry of religious traditions in Indonesia provides a unique opportunity to observe

how diverse ethical viewpoints among religions within the same cultural and national setting highlights the nuanced ways in which various belief systems influence the moral landscape. A research by Sharabi (2017) posits that Christians hold interpersonal relations, referring to how individuals treat and relate to others, in the highest regard, contrasting with Muslims who assign it the lowest value, akin to Jews. Additionally, self-interest and self-satisfaction are of utmost importance to Jews, slightly more significant than to Christians and notably more crucial than to Muslims.

Education level and ethical perception

Kohlberg on 1984 claims that making more acceptable moral decisions is facilitated by contact with and exposure to increasingly complicated and sophisticated moral circumstances. To put it succinctly, education enhances one's capacity for moral reasoning. In accordance with that statement, research has indicated that those with greater education levels generally make more moral judgements (Kelley et al., 1990). Recently, Beji et al., (2021) demonstrates a significant correlation between highly educated directors and CSR., which deeply rooted in ethical considerations and reflects an organization's commitment to behaving ethically taking into account the broader influence of their actions on society and the environment.

Marital status and ethical perception

Past research on the correlation between marital status and ethical perceptions has shown inconsistent results. Rawwas and Isakson (2000) discovered no association between marital status and ethics. However, other research indicates that married customers vary ethically from single, divorced, or widowed consumers. For instance, Erffmeyer et al. (1999) found that married customers were more likely than single consumers to be categorized as relativistic or Machiavellian, and that single consumers were also more likely to become victims of fraud, whereas married people were more likely to be the offender, according to Kadoya et al. (2021).

In accordance to this research's hypotheses, the researcher then develop the following research framework:

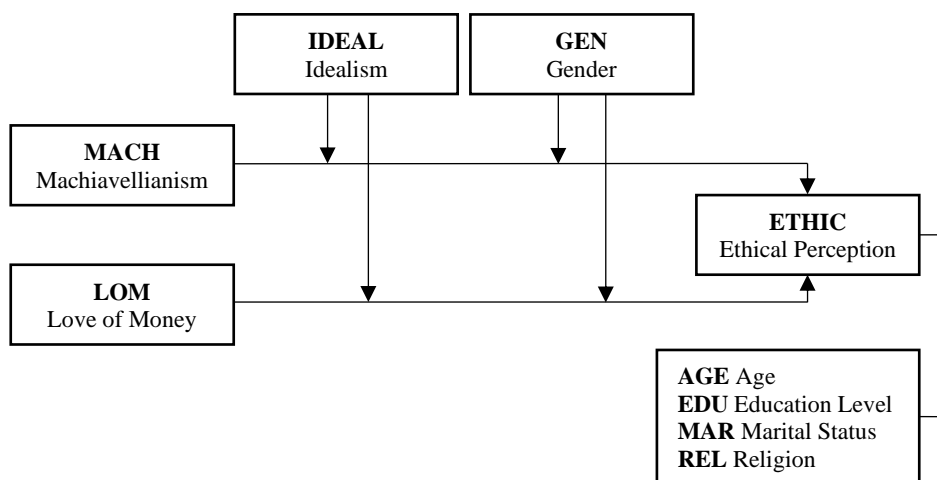


Figure 2. Research Framework

3. Research method

Primary data collecting and processing

The research subject in this study are the employees working in public accounting firms (KAP) located in Jakarta, by the reason that Jakarta has the most public accounting firms located in Indonesia which are 269 in total (Direktori Kantor Akuntan Publik & Akuntan Publik 2023 - IAPI, 2023). Researcher then use purposive sampling technique for this research in which the characteristics:

- Employees who work in public accounting firms in Jakarta city
- Services provider in the firm (e.g. staff/senior/manager auditor, tax, consulting)

This research subject provides a more realistic and accurate portrayal of employees' ethical perception in the accounting environment, as it takes into account their work experience and real-life situations. By doing so, the researcher can gain a better understanding of how employees' ethical perception may differ between those who have theoretical knowledge versus those who have practical experience in the field.

The researcher proceed with distributing pre-test questionnaires to 30 participants. This sample size aligns with recommendation from Perneger et al. (2015) for testing the effectiveness of research methodology using pre-tests. The main test analysis then entails the selection of minimum 200 participants to effectively represent the population as advised by Hair et al. (2010) which suggested 100-200 sample size.

Variables and measurement

This study employs a non-experimental quantitative research approach, collecting primary data through the distribution of online questionnaires (utilizing Google Forms) via various social media platforms. Additionally, the questionnaire are translated into Indonesian to ensure its effectiveness among Indonesian respondents. The data collected then uses Structural Equation Model (SEM) approach using Partial Least Square (PLS) software, SmartPLS 3. Each statement which presented to the responder is given a score on a 5-point Likert scale (Blumberg et al., 2014) ranging from strong disagreement to strong agreement to assess a person's or a group's views, opinions, and perspectives on social issues. Table I shows the scores for the possible answers to the questionnaire that is submitted for affirmative statements.

Table 1. Likert Scale

Score	Description
1	Strongly Disagree
2	Disagree
3	Neutral
4	Agree
5	Strongly Agree

Measurement

The questionnaire used to measure the level of love for money, a modified version of the Money Ethics Scale (MES) from 1992, The Love of Money Scale (LOMS) by Tang and Chiu (2003). Then, with the use of the Mach IV questionnaire created by Christie and Geis (1984), the degree of Machiavellianism are determined. Additionally, the idealism degree are measured by idealism scale derived from Ethics Position Questionnaire (EPQ) by Forsyth (1980). Moreover, the ERATING instrument, developed by Richmond (2001) as a further development of eight ethical vignettes from prior studies, is used in this study to assess employees' ethical perception.

4. Research model

Based on the hypotheses stated in this research, the mathematical equation is visualized as:

$$ETHIC_i = a + b_1LOM_i + b_2MACH_i + b_3LOM_i * IDEAL_i + b_4LOM_i * GEN_i + b_5MACH_i * IDEAL_i + b_6MACH_i * GEN_i + b_7AGE_i + b_8EDU_i + b_9MAR_i + b_{10}REL_i + \varepsilon$$

Where:

ETHIC = Ethical perception;

LOM = Love of money;

MACH = Machiavellianism;

IDEAL = Idealism;

GEN = Gender;

AGE = Age;

EDU = Education level;

MAR = Marital status;

REL = Religion.

Main-test validity and reliability test

Based on completion of a pre-test involving 30 research subjects, which shows satisfactory results with minimal inaccuracies, it is determined that the researcher can advance to the main-test phase, aiming to involve a minimum of 200 respondents. The same criteria for the tests are applied in the main-test.

Table 2. Main-Test - Internal Consistency Reliability and Convergent Validity

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho a)	Composite reliability (rho c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
ETHIC	0.952	0.952	0.960	0.748
IDEAL	0.936	0.938	0.946	0.635
LOM	0.968	0.970	0.970	0.659
MACH	0.955	0.958	0.959	0.540

Based on the table presented above, it's evident that all AVE exceed 0.5, and both Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability scores are well above 0.7. Therefore, it can be concluded that ethical perception, idealism, love of money, and Machiavellianism demonstrate robust convergent validity and internal consistency reliability.

Table 3. Main-Test - Discriminant Validity

	ETHIC	IDEAL*L OM	IDEAL* MACH	IDEAL	LOM	MACH
ETHIC						
IDEAL*LOM	0.495					
IDEAL*MACH	0.103	0.660				
IDEAL	0.644	0.564	0.467			
LOM	0.683	0.654	0.455	0.969		
MACH	0.887	0.474	0.323	0.841	0.848	

Based on the table provided above, it is evident that most HTMT values remain below the 0.9 threshold. Although there is one that above 0.9, according to Franke and Sarstedt (2019), only the value HTMT = 1 must be deleted. Therefore, it can be concluded that ethical perception, idealism, love of money, and Machiavellianism pass the discriminant validity test.

Table 4. Main-Test - Indicator Reliability

	Outer loadings		Outer loadings
ETHIC1	0.855	LOM11	0.801
ETHIC2	0.847	LOM12	0.779
ETHIC3	0.875	LOM13	0.794
ETHIC4	0.886	LOM14	0.818
ETHIC5	0.874	LOM15	0.813
ETHIC6	0.867	LOM16	0.820
ETHIC7	0.851	LOM17	0.826
ETHIC8	0.867	MACH1	0.666
IDEAL1	0.806	MACH2	0.734
IDEAL2	0.774	MACH3	0.736
IDEAL3	0.780	MACH4	0.744
IDEAL4	0.784	MACH5	0.758
IDEAL5	0.798	MACH6	0.618
IDEAL6	0.805	MACH7	0.694
IDEAL7	0.814	MACH8	0.797
IDEAL8	0.809	MACH9	0.678
IDEAL9	0.790	MACH10	0.732
IDEAL10	0.805	MACH11	0.775
LOM1	0.885	MACH12	0.713
LOM2	0.811	MACH13	0.770
LOM3	0.799	MACH14	0.747
LOM4	0.804	MACH15	0.771
LOM5	0.814	MACH16	0.721

LOM6	0.818	MACH17	0.797
LOM7	0.790	MACH18	0.730
LOM8	0.805	MACH19	0.727
LOM9	0.819	MACH20	0.759
LOM10	0.801		

The outer loadings presented above suggest that the majority of questions are reliable, with some indicators falling short of the 0.7 threshold which are MACH1, MACH6, MACH7, and MACH 9. The unreliable indicators then are removed before the researcher proceed to hypothesis testing. The main-test outlined can be depicted through below model.

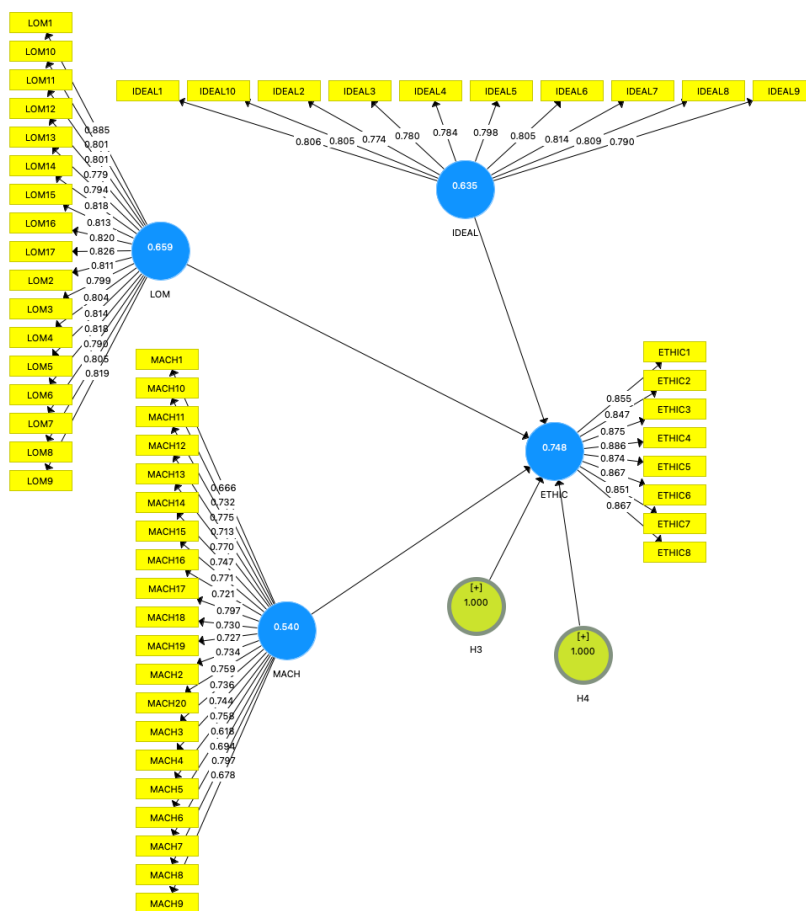


Figure 3. Main-Test Model

Hypothesis testing

According to Hair et al. (2019), hypotheses are determined using P Values < 0.05. Path coefficients are then used to observe whether the effect is positive or negative. The findings related to the main hypothesis of this research are displayed in the table below.

Table 6. Hypothesis Test – H₁-H₄

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	p-Value
IDEAL*LOM -> ETHIC	0.477	0.477	0.000
IDEAL*MACH -> ETHIC	-0.396	-0.396	0.000
LOM -> ETHIC	0.126	0.127	0.257
MACH -> ETHIC	-0.841	-0.846	0.000

Based on the specified criteria, it can be concluded that the love of money does not (0.257) influence employees' ethical perceptions. Therefore, the first hypothesis (H_1) is rejected. This conclude that there isn't enough evidence and the data tested is not strong enough to reject the null hypothesis.

Shown on table too, Machiavellianism negatively (-0.841) influences (0.000) employees' ethical perceptions. This supports the proposed hypothesis that Machiavellianism, characterized by a tendency to manipulate and exploit others for personal gain, lowers ethical perceptions. Therefore, the second hypothesis (H_2) is accepted. In such situation, Machiavellian individuals likely have a positive attitude towards deceitful behaviour, viewing it as beneficial and justifiable for achieving their goals. This aligns with the idea that attitudes influence intentions on TPB and TRA. Their positive evaluation of deceitful acts (e.g., believing that deceit is a useful strategy) enhances their intention to engage in such behaviour.

Idealism, proposed by the researcher as a counterbalance to both the love of money and Machiavellianism, is also tested. The results show that idealism strengthen (0.477) the relationship between the love of money and ethical perception and has a moderate effect (0.000). Therefore, the third hypothesis (H_3) is rejected. The contradiction of idealism that supports initial hypothesis of love of money could be explained by the other side of 'love of money' according to Learned Industrious Theory (LIT; Eisenberger, 1992), which posits that rewards have a significant impact on an individual's performance. It states that rewards are tied to an individual's performance and serve as a catalyst for them to fulfil performance expectations. This theory also proved by Susanto (2020) for that love of money positively influences initiative work behaviour. Therefore, the effect of idealism on a love of money can lead to heightened motivation to work diligently and ethically.

On the other hand, idealism is proven (-0.396) to be the counteract for the negative influence of Machiavellianism on ethical perception, and it shows a moderating effect (0.000). The test shows that idealism weakens the relationship between Machiavellianism and ethical perception. Therefore, the fourth hypothesis (H_4) is accepted. Following the second hypothesis acceptance, Idealism, by promoting positive attitudes and ethical norms, can mitigate the manipulative tendencies associated with Machiavellianism. This finding underscores the idea that idealism not only counterbalances the negative impacts of the love of money but also acts as a buffer against Machiavellian tendencies. This align with ethical standards supports the notion that individuals with idealistic beliefs are more likely to uphold ethical norms and exhibit ethical behaviour in various contexts.

To test gender, as it's a categorical variable, the researcher utilize Multi-Group Analysis (MGA) to differentiate the result of male and female respondents instead of using dummy variable. Using dummy variable can indicate if gender has an effect, but it might not clearly show how different paths in the model are affected by gender.

Table 7. Hypothesis Test – H_5 - H_6

	Path Coefficients (Male)	Path Coefficients (Female)	p-Value (Male)	p-Value (Female)
LOM-> ETHIC	0.084	-0.075	0.390	0.560
MACH-> ETHIC	-0.945	-0.804	0.000	0.000

The difference in the responses from male and female respondents about the relationship between the love of money, Machiavellianism, and ethical perception is shown in above table. The relationship between the love of money and ethical perception is not substantially influenced by gender, as indicated by the moderation coefficients for both genders, which are 0.560 for females and 0.390 for males. As the result, fifth hypothesis (H_5), which proposed gender as a moderating factor, is rejected. This means that the tested evidence is not enough to reject the null hypothesis which gender has no moderating effect.

On the other hand, the moderation analysis shows that gender significantly moderates the relationship between Machiavellianism and ethical perception, with p-values of 0.000 for both gender groups. Females are shown to weakens (-0.804) the relationship between Machiavellianism and ethical perception. Therefore, the sixth hypothesis (H_6) is accepted. However, males evidenced to influence similarly (-0.945) to females. This findings indicates that gender may not be a significant factor in shaping ethical perceptions in the context being studied. According to Bertrand (2020), perceived differences between genders stem from historical gender gaps in education and labour force. Gender is becoming more and more recognised in the twenty-first century as a variable that has little bearing on decisions-making process.

Age

For control variables that are categorical variable including age, the researcher uses dummy variable to represent each category. In this case, the researcher made the age <25 as the baseline for the test.

Table 8. Control Variable - Age

	Original Sample (O)	p-Value
21 – 25	0.061	0.092
26 – 30	0.128	0.000
>31	0.958	0.000

As the benchmark for interpretation is the age <25, it can be concluded from the table above that those who aged >31 significantly (0.000) has higher (0.958) ethical perception from those who aged <25. In conclusion, those who are older have the highest ethical perception according to the findings, referring to Kohlberg's (1981) ethical reasoning model.

Religion

Since the researcher didn't mention any consistent prior study results regarding the difference between each religion ethical perception, it is essential to approach this variable with a neutral stance. The researcher made the religion Protestant as the baseline for the test.

Table 9. Control Variable - Religion

	Original Sample (O)	p-Value
Catholic	-0.025	0.000
Muslim	-0.956	0.000
Hindu	-0.126	0.000
Buddhist	-0.661	0.000
Confucian	-0.208	0.000

From the table shown above, it can be concluded that the highest ethical perception holder is from Protestant, followed by Catholic, Hindu, Confucian, Buddhist, and Muslim. The negative path coefficients suggest that, compared to Protestant, the ethical perceptions associated with other religions shown above are lower. Nonetheless, it is important to recognize that these findings should not be taken to broadly generalize the ethical perceptions inherent to each religion. The results pertain to the specific sample and context of this study, and they highlight the need for further research to understand the nuanced ethical views within each religious tradition.

Education level

The researcher eliminated the elementary school level as there were no respondents from that educational background. Thus, the analysis focuses on the educational levels with the most respondents, namely associate degree (*D3*), advanced diploma (*D4*), and bachelor's degree (*S1*). This time, the researcher made junior high school level as the baseline for the test.

Table 10. Control Variable - Education Level

	Original Sample (O)	p-Value
High School (<i>SMA/SMK</i>)	0.009	0.000
Associate Degree (<i>D3</i>)	0.005	0.000
Advanced Diploma (<i>D4</i>)	0.030	0.000
Bachelor's Degree (<i>S1</i>)	0.697	0.000
Master's Degree (<i>S2</i>)	0.355	0.000
Doctorate Degree (<i>S3</i>)	0.269	0.000

Taking into consideration the distribution of respondents, it can be concluded that the highest ethical perceptions are possessed by those who have bachelor's and master's degrees. Furthermore, all the educational levels presented above show higher ethical perceptions than those with a junior high school background as the test's benchmark. This finding aligns with the initial statement that education enhances one's capacity for moral reasoning.

Marital status

In this variable, the researcher made those who are not married as the baseline for the test.

Table 11. Control Variable - Marital Status

	Original Sample (O)	p-Value
Married	-0.059	0.634

From the table above, the results suggest that the evidence isn't strong enough for the researcher to draw a definitive conclusion about the existence of difference between married and unmarried people to ethical perception. This is due to the significant variability in the responses.

5. Conclusion

The findings of this study reveal several important insights into the ethical perceptions of employees in the accounting environment. Firstly, the influence of the love of money on ethical perception cannot be proven due to insignificance of the test. On the other hand, Machiavellianism negatively influence ethical perception of employees in the accounting environment, proving initial hypothesis. However, this negative impact can be mitigated by idealism, which aligns with the initial hypothesis that idealism can counteract the Machiavellian tendencies. Additionally, this study found minimal differences between male and female employees in moderating Machiavellianism and ethical perception, which indicates insignificant of gender in shaping ethical perceptions. When comparing this research's results with the prior study by Maggalatta and Adhariani (2020), Machiavellian relationship with ethical perceptions of those who are in still studying and those who are already exposed to professional environment are aligned. However on the other hand, whereas love of money on accounting students negatively influence ethical perception; employees, especially those with substantial work experience, have likely faced numerous ethical dilemmas and have developed their moral reasoning and ethical standards over time, which concluded that love of money isn't strong enough to influence ethical perception of accounting employees. In concluding this research, it is imperative to emphasize the importance of moral development within the accounting profession rather than relying solely on teaching rules and regulations. While regulations provide necessary guidelines, they alone are insufficient to shape behaviour, perceptions, and intentions effectively. Promoting moral reasoning empowers individuals to critically evaluate their decisions in light of ethical principles, fostering a proactive commitment to ethical conduct beyond mere compliance with laws.

Limitations

This study is confined to public accounting firms located in Jakarta city. This geographical restriction means that the findings may not be generalizable to public accounting firms in other cities or regions. Different cities might have varied economic conditions, firm cultures, regulatory environments, and employee dynamics that could influence the results differently. Additionally, due to time constraints, this study's research subject is limited to 236 respondents. While this sample size can provide valuable insights, it may not capture the full diversity and complexity of the employee experiences within the public accounting firms in Jakarta. Response bias may occur when the pool of respondents is small. The 236 respondents who opted to participate may possess particular traits or opinions that are not typical of the larger workforce in Jakartan public accounting companies. This can distort the outcomes and reduce the findings' general applicability.

Suggestions

Public accounting businesses from other regions outside of Jakarta should be considered by future academics. With a more thorough grasp of the perspectives and experiences of accounting personnel, this wider scope would aid in capturing regional variations in economic situations, cultural influences, and regulatory settings. An even more comprehensive understanding of the accounting profession may be obtained by including personnel from other accounting professions, such as government and private accounting. Knowing whether and how employee experiences and views vary across different accounting industries will be made easier with the support of this diversity.

Increasing the sample size can also improve the validity and reliability of the study results. Further study attempts have to strive for a sample size that facilitates the identification of minute variations and the

investigation of subsets within the workforce. Future studies may include moderating or extra variables, such as religiosity and narcissism, as these variables may be related to business ethics.

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