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THE IMPACT OF GENDER AND PROFESSIONAL STATUS ON PERCEPTION OF ETHICAL BEHAVIOR IN PERSONAL SELLING

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the different perceptions of salespersons in personal selling and salesforce candidates (students) in personal selling, and to compare their perceptions toward gender. An empirical study was conducted as part of the hypothesis testing on perception differences of selling ethics based on gender differences and on perception differences between personal seller and personal seller candidates (students). A questionnaire was distributed to 200 respondents in Bandung in early 2013 and in Jakarta in mid-2013. Using mean test, validity test, and reliability test instruments, data was analyzed to answer the hypotheses. The results indicate general differences between male and female students in four ethical dimensions, namely: moral development, ethical value system, ethical issues sensitivity, and ethical behavior. However, the empirical research showed that gender is not a significant determinant in testing ethical behavior in general. Significant differences are found in terms of personal selling ethics and personality trait.

INTRODUCTION

Business has evolved rapidly nowadays, especially due to the tight competition in all industries (Dobbs, Koller, Ramaswamy, Woetzel, Manyika, Krishnan, & Andreula, 2015). To sustain and achieve competitive advantage, company managers must select the best business strategy, particularly in marketing strategy where companies must be able to understand their customer behavior to increase their products' or services' attractiveness and convenience in using them (Porter, 1987). One of the best ways to achieve such objective is undertaking personal selling techniques.

Personal selling is a very important marketing tool (Alam, Almotairi, & Gaadar, 2013). Sometimes, to achieve a high sales target, a salesperson may

do all actions that may cause violation of business ethics and moral standards. Any effort and actions to attain the target should align with the right moral dimensions for creating a harmony (Murtanto & Marini, 2003). Without ethics, sales will not generate benefits; real life examples have shown that business ethics ensure high returns for companies (Ramesh & Goel, 2014). Moreover, personal selling is undertaken not just for accomplishing revenue targets, but also for conveying products and company's information to customers.

Personal selling demands salespeople to work professionally. Therefore, they are encouraged to understand and apply their professional principles in business. There is a view stating that gender differences in business environment will affect ethical issues. Gilligan (1977, 1982) propose that male and female have a different basic moral orientation. Empirical evidence showed that male and female are different in four dimensions of ethics: moral development, ethical value system, ethical issues sensitivity level, and ethical behavior. Gender differences have been debated in business ethics literature (Hoyt, 2010; Kahreh, Babania, Tive, & Mirmehdi, 2014; Krambia-Kapardis, & Zopiatis, 2008). Although much research has been conducted, the similarities and differences between male and female in terms of ethics are still underexplored. For example, research on personality is particularly useful for understanding psychological differences between males and females. Personality is often conceptualized as the extent to which someone displays high or low levels of specific traits. Someone who scores high on a trait will exhibit psychological states related to that trait more often and to a greater extent than individuals who score low on that trait. Gender differences in personality traits are often characterized in terms of which gender has higher scores on that trait, on average (Weisberg, DeYoung, & Hirsh, 2011). Consequently, in this study, we aim to explore different and similar perceptions of males and females toward business ethics. We argue that perception differences have a decisive impact on managers and researchers.

Another aspect to be considered when someone is forced to act ethically is environment. One of the examples is education environment. Hence, it is important to explore students' and salespeople's understanding of ethical issues, especially ethical issues in the current time and in the future. Courses given at universities consisting of moral and ethics will be beneficial for the development of personal seller profession. This research also aims to help personal seller candidates (students) gain awareness of ethical issues and knowledge so that they can work in a professional manner based on professional ethics. Students' attitudes toward different ethic aspects of the business world and their ethics beliefs have been researched in different studies. Special attention has been given to students of business schools. Therefore, this research compares business students' perceptions to personal sellers' perceptions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Many ethics violations which develop into more complex issues emerge in the business world. Therefore, activities of businessmen are aimed to achieve high integrity and competency (Abdullah & Halim, 2002). According to Chua, Perera, and Mathews (1994), professional ethic is related

to limited moral behavior toward ethical standards that is determined for a particular profession. Every public service profession should be aligned with its ethical code which consists of some moral principles managing several professional behaviors (Agoes, 1996).

Professional Ethic Dimension

Women's role in an organization has evolved, particularly in business and management (Demartini & Paoloni, 2012; Hoyt, 2010; Paoloni & Demartini, 2016). Research in business and social science has discussed gender difference in relation to business organization (Setiadi, Boediprasetya, & Wahdianan, 2012). In this study, a traditional approach (based on perception) for evaluating gender differences in ethic is used. Additionally, this study provides different perspectives based on professional status to ethic and the implication of the approach.

Gender differences in business lead to some ethical issues. Much research supports this perspective (Demartini & Paoloni, 2012; Hoyt, 2010; Paoloni & Demartini, 2016). Evidence showed that male and female are different. From fourteen studies comparing genders in terms of their ethical behaviour, seven studies indicated that females are more ethical than males. The other seven studies found no significant difference between females and males in terms of their ethical behavior (Kum-Lung & Tek-Chai, 2010). Furthermore, there are four ethical dimensions: moral development, ethical value system, ethical issue sensitivity and ethical behavior.

Moral Development

One of ethical dimensions is moral development. According to Gilligan (1977, 1982), there are major differences between males and females in terms of their sexual orientation toward moral. She refused Kohlberg's view (1981) about stages in moral development. Kohlberg stated that someone's morality is formed on criteria of justice to someone whose comprehension of moral is higher. Another study also supported this aspect (White, 1992, 1994) although most of the times, moral orientation differences between male and female study have not been explored (Pratt et al, 1988).

Ethical Value System

Gender differences in managerial values, which are closely related to ethic, have been found. For example, Chusmir, Koberg, and Mills (1989) described that there were no significant differences of managerial style and value system between males and females. They found that females consistently scored higher than males on pride value and inner harmonization. Furthermore, Betz, O'Connell, and Shepard (1989) found gender differences on business values, while Ameen, Guffey, and McMillan (1996) discovered that males had more ethical behavior and cynicism than females.

Ethical Issue Sensitivity

Gender differences enable sensitivity differences on ethical issues, for instance, to what extent someone knows that an event encompasses ethical issues. Khazanchi (1995) found that women are abler to determine ethical issues and unethical behavior in the scenario related to system information management. Exceptionally, females are more accurate in identifying ethical

issues of disclosures, integrity, and conflict of interest. Ameen *et al.* (1996) identified that female students were able to recognize 18 to 23 questions about ethic, for instance, cheating during exam, and copying others' homework, as unethical behavior while male students are less able to recognize those. Mason and Mudrack (1996) found that among part-time individuals, women have a better ability to pinpoint remarks about ethic, such as document faking, lying to coworkers to protect company, as unethical attitudes compared with men.

Ethical Behavior

Some research has showed that women behave more ethically than men (Manan, Kamaluddin, & Puteh Salin, 2013). Sayre, Joyce, and Lambert (1991) observed that saleswomen tend to be less involved in unethical selling practices than salesmen. Tyson (1990) discovered that in several situations, it is likely that women do not contribute to unethical practices in order to achieve targets or aims. Moreover, Betz *et al.* (1989) stated that male tends to be more involved in unethical behavior such as taking a shortcut in doing certain procedures, manipulating costs, getting involved in illegal funds transaction, and buying illegal drugs. However, females are unlikely to conduct "do as it is instructed", "doing nothing", loyal in unethical matter; they tend to avoid those behavior (Jones & Gaultschi, 1988).

Based on the literature review, the research questions are: are there any different perceptions between personal sellers and students (personal seller candidates) toward business ethics? Are there any different perceptions toward selling ethics based on demographic aspect and gender? The objectives of this study are to obtain information about perception differences between personal sellers and students, and to compare their perceptions based on demographic aspect. This study contributes to both theories and practices. As Woolley (1910) stated, research on integrity and ethics related to gender and cultural differences is still rare. Using a conventional approach, this study identifies and analyses gender differences with regard to business ethics. Additionally, this study aims to present some views regarding different perceptions of personal sellers and personal seller candidates or students. The results of this research may describe important aspects in personal selling. So, the research can benefit managers, researchers, and educators. It is also useful for curriculum development.

Hypothesis

Some views describe that women are unique in terms of managerial quality, skills and attitude in managerial style (Grant, 1988; Loden, 1985). As a result, males and females show several different behaviors and responses with a very different way in administering business organizations (Lueptow, 1981; Veroff, 1977).

Gender differences may affect the development of moral structure and value system of an individual. For example, Boldizar, Wilson, Deemer (1989) demonstrated a process where education, work, and marital status interacted to affect adults' moral development differently between males and females. On the other hand, Schminke and Wells (1999) found that women are more vulnerable to a change in ethical orientation as a result of group interactions compared to men.

According to the above viewpoint, some hypotheses are formulated to investigate perception differences based on demographic and professional status aspects.

H1: There is a significant difference between males and females in terms of perceptions toward selling ethics

H2: There is a significant difference between personal selling persons and candidates (student) in terms of business ethics

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research data were collected using a questionnaire and in-depth interviews. The questionnaire was distributed to personal sellers and personal selling candidates (students) in Bandung and Jakarta in order to explore the perceptions of personal sellers toward ethics. On the other hand, in-depth interviews involved personal sellers and personal seller candidates (students) to explore their personalities. This study comprises two categories; the first is to identify different perceptions toward ethic based on gender and professional status (personal selling person and candidate). This research employs the same approach used by Ameen et al. (1996), Betz et al. (1989), and Mason and Mudrack (1996). The approach used in this paper emphasized on female and male differences and structural way or profession socialization. In analyzing the data, some statistical tools were used to test the hypotheses. Firstly, hypothesis test was conducted using *Mann-Whitney U* test, because the tested samples consist of two independent groups. Secondly, *mean* calculation was used for examining the respondents' perceptions to investigate which perception is better among all groups of tested samples.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

A total of 200 questionnaires were administered. From this number, 200 responses were received and considered for the study.

Table 1 *Total Sample*

Professional Status	Gender		Total
	Male	Female	
Personal Seller Candidate (student)	60	40	100
Personal Seller	56	44	100
Total	116	84	200

As Table 1 shows, 60% of the respondents were male and 40% of the respondents were female for personal seller candidates category, while 56% of the respondents were males and 44% were female for personal sellers category. The first test conducted was Validity Test. To describe variability among the observed samples, the validity test was conducted using *Statistical Factor Analysis*. *Factor loading* used was 0.4, meaning if *factor loading* result scores >0.4 then the question is valid (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 2006).

From Table 2, it was inferred that *factor loading* scores for questions about ethic in business perspective ranged between 0.512 and 0.837. From the total of 21 questions, only 13 questions were marked as valid to be used as a measurement of perception on ethic. *Factor analysis* yields 4 factors or dimensions which can be identified as: factor 1 which is named “ethical issues sensitivity” dimension which consists of 4 questions; factor 2 is named “ethical behavior” which consists of 3 questions; factor 3 is named “ethical value system” which consists of 3 questions, and factor 4 consists of 3 questions called “moral development” dimension.

Furthermore, from table 3, it can be analyzed that factor loading score for personality dimension ranged from 0.77 to 0.043. From 9 questions, only 6 questions are marked as valid to be used as a measurement for personality dimension. *Factor analysis* produced 1 factor or dimension which can be identified as personality factor.

Table 2 *Validity Test Result – Business Ethics*

	Component			
	1	2	3	4
Giving the best solution for customers' problems	0.804	0.321	0.089	0.134
Maintaining customers' funds without concerning the amount of fund saved at the bank	0.710	0.166	0.075	0.367
Not plunging customers to harmful things	0.701	-0.012	0.409	0.024
Keeping the promises to customers	0.593	-0.415	0.164	0.155
Guiding customers to make the best and effective solution for investment	0.077	0.837	-0.052	-0.021
Providing a comfortable service to customers	-0.145	0.729	-0.286	0.204
Providing adequate information for customers	0.395	0.664	0.207	-0.087
Being polite to every customers	-0.056	0.035	0.790	-0.024
Using a proper manner in conveying information to customers	0.146	-0.200	0.774	0.224
Being responsible in doing tasks	0.508	-0.130	0.545	0.096
Providing information to customers either negative or positive information	-0.148	-0.032	0.001	0.727
Greeting customers in personal selling	0.202	-0.021	0.015	0.616
Talking to customers with a proper and polite language	0.143	0.108	0.297	0.512

Table 3. *Validity Test Result – Personal Seller Personality*

	Component Matrix ^a
	Component
	1
I usually try to be sensitive to other people's needs and views	0.770
I tend to be cynical to other people's opinions	0.616

If I do not like people I will show them	0.616
Some people argued that I am self-centered and selfish	0.551
I believe that most people will take advantage from you if you let it happens	0.545
I prefer to cooperate with other people than to compete with them	0.441
Some people argued that I am a cold person and full of calculation	0.389
I try to be polite to every person I meet	-0.045
I am often involved in argument with family and coworkers	0.043

The second test conducted was a reliability test. If the score is higher than 0.6 then the research instrument is reliable (Hair et al., 2006). Table 4 presents the reliability test results for each dimension of personal selling ethic and personality.

Table 4. *Reliability Result*

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Dimension</i>	<i>Cronbach's alpha</i>	<i>Number of Questions</i>
Perception toward ethic	1. Ethical Issue Sensitivity	.719	4
	2. Ethical Behavior	.617	3
	3. Ethical Value System	.655	3
	4. Moral Development	.521	3
Personality	Personality	.650	6

Following the reliability test, a hypothesis test was conducted. The answer of the first hypothesis is based on the statistical calculation results presented in Table 5.

Table 5. *Independent Samples Test for H1*

		Levene' Test for Equality of Variances				t-test for Equality of Means				
		F	Sig.	t	d.f.	Sig.(2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence interval of the difference	
									Lower	Upper
Ethical behavior	Equal variance assumed	1.53	0.21	1.30	198	0.19	0.14	0.10	-0.07	0.35

	Equal variance s not assumed			1.31	187.0 0	0.18	0.14	0.10	-0.07	0.35
Moral develo pment	Equal variance s assumed	0.02	0.88	4.46	178.2 5	0.00	0.23	0.05	0.13	0.34
	Equal variance s not assumed			4.45	198	0.00	0.23	0.05	0.13	0.34
Ethical issue sensi tivity	Equal variance s assumed	13.4 8	0.00	- 1.67	196.6 6	0.09	-0.11	0.06	-0.24	0.02
	Equal variance s not assumed			-0.17	198	0.08	-0.11	0.06	-0.23	0.01
Ethical value system	Equal variance s assumed	6.21	0.01	0.45	150.2 6	0.65	0.03	0.08	-0.12	0.19
	Equal variance s not assumed			0.43	198	0.66	0.03	0.08	-0.13	0.20
Person ality	Equal variance s assumed	0.26	0.60	1.94	186.8 2	0.05	0.18	0.09	-0.00	0.37
	Equal variance s not assumed			1.97		0.05	0.18	0.09	-0.00	0.37

Results from hypothesis testing 1 as shown in Levene's Test for Equality of Variances column from Table 5 showed that there were two ethical dimensions scored as not significant (Sig.>0.05) which means H_{01} is accepted. This means there is no significant difference between males and females in terms of their perceptions toward ethical behavior and moral development dimensions. Meanwhile, for ethical issues sensitivity and ethical value system, the level of significance was below 0.05 which means that H_{a1} is accepted. It can be concluded that there were significant differences between males and females in terms of perceptions toward both business ethics dimensions. Moreover, from the *Mean* calculation result for each of the sample group (Table 6), it was found that the male group scored higher than the female group in terms of Ethical Value System. In contrast,

for ethical issue sensitivity, the female group scored higher than the male group.

Table 6. *Mean and Deviation Standard*

Dimension	Statistic indicators	Gender		Professional Status	
		Male	Female	Student	Personal Seller
Ethical Behavior	Mean	3.8966	3.7540	3.7900	3.8833
	Std. Dev.	.7917	.7283	.7808	.7541
Moral Development	Mean	4.6315	4.3929	4.5150	4.5475
	Std. Dev.	.3722	.3748	.3969	.3854
Ethical Issue Sensitivity	Mean	4.4195	4.5317	4.3367	4.5967
	Std. Dev.	.5109	.4012	.4773	.4271
Ethical Value System	Mean	4.1839	4.1466	4.1200	4.2167
	Std. Dev.	.5057	.6531	.5329	.6055
Personality	Mean	3.1221	2.9345	3.1833	2.9033
	Std. Dev.	.6955	.6410	.6060	.7189

To answer the second hypothesis, the statistical process results presented in table 7 are used as a basis.

Table 7. *Independent Samples Test for H2*

		Levene' Test for Equality of Variances				t-test for Equality of Means				
		F	Sig.	t	d.f.	Sig.(2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence interval of the difference Lower Upper	
Ethical behavior	Equal variances assumed	0.29	0.59	-0.86	198	0.39	-0.09	0.10	-0.30	0.12
	Equal variances not assumed			-0.86	197.76	0.39	-0.09	0.10	-0.30	0.12
Moral development	Equal variances assumed	0.48	0.48	-0.58	198	0.55	0.03	0.05	-0.14	0.07
	Equal variances not assumed			-0.58	197.82	0.55	0.03	0.05	-0.14	0.07

	es not assume d									
Ethical issue sensitiv ity	Equal varianc es assume d	0.00	0.99	- 4.05	198	0.00	- 0.26	0.06	-0.38	-0.13
	Equal varianc es not assume d			- 0.40	195.61	0.00	- 0.26	0.06	-0.38	-0.13
Ethical value system	Equal varianc es assume d	2.30	0.13	- 1.19	198	0.23	- 0.09	0.08	-0.25	0.06
	Equal varianc es not assume d			- 1.19	194.85	0.23	- 0.09	0.08	-0.25	0.06
Persona lity	Equal varianc es assume d	2.45	0.11	2.97	198	0.00	0.28	0.09	0.09	0.46
	Equal varianc es not assume d			2.97	192.48	0.00	0.28	0.09	0.09	0.46

By using Levene's Test for Equality of Variances, it was found that ethical dimensions and personality gave a significant level above 0.05 which means that H_02 was unaccepted. This means that there was a significant difference between Business students and personal sellers on personal selling ethic and personality. In addition, by analyzing the *mean* test results of perceptions (table 6), it can be concluded that business students had lower level of perception compared to personal sellers. This indicates that personal sellers' experience showed a better comprehension of value system, moral development, ethical issues sensitivity, and ethical behavior in responding to their dynamic business environment.

CONCLUSIONS

From the testing of the hypotheses, only hypothesis 2 shows that there is a significant difference between business students' perceptions and personal sellers' perceptions on personal selling ethic and personality (Sig. > 0.05). This result aligns with research conducted by Boldizar et al. (1989) which

showed that education, work, and marriage process interacted to influence adults' moral development toward business ethic. However, there is a tendency that business students had better personality than personal sellers. Meanwhile, the result from the testing of hypothesis 1 supports the study by Woolley (1910) on integrity and ethic which has not answered key questions related to gender and cultural differences although it was conducted over a century ago.

Furthermore, this study shows that there is no significant difference between males and females in terms of perceptions toward ethical behavior and moral development. On the other hand, for ethical issues sensitivity and ethical value system dimension, there was a significant difference. The results of this study are consistent with the results of research by Deaux (1984) which concluded that gender is not a differentiating factor in social behavior.

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