Influence of Family and Peers towards Youth Religious Practice and Moral Values

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ABSTRACT

The goal of national education in Malaysia is to produce a generation of global-minded and professional community with strong and superior religious beliefs and high moral values. Moral deterioration among youth is a social challenge that requires attention in order to shape the development of human capital especially with the influence of family and peers in the manifestation of being religious. As such, this study employs Social Capital Theory that associates the practice of religious activities with the development of human capital through the influence of individual's relationship with parents and peers. The objective of this study is to identify whether family and peers inspire the youth to perform religious activities which may impact their social interaction, beliefs and shared vision that led to the formation of moral values. A quantitative study was applied by using a structured King and Furrow's questionnaire that was distributed to students at a public university. The analysis involved SEM approach through AMOS software and the results of the study found that family and peers influence the relationship between youth religious practices and social interaction. The study findings are expected to help identify specific strategies in the development of youth human capital.

Keywords: Religious; social interaction; trust; shared vision; moral values

INTRODUCTION

Human civilization is built on human development. The important role of religion and morals helps to develop the society in achieving perfection of human life by staying away from despicable qualities that can damage human life in general. The relationship between worship, faith and morality is very close and cannot be separated. Worship gives the meaning of righteous deeds which is the implementation of faith towards God while morality is the result of all these things [1]. In Islam, the Al-Quran mentions that a believer is considered a righteous person as mentioned in Surah Al-Asr verse 1-3 which stated that "By Time! Indeed! Humankind is in loss. Excluding those who are righteous and follow the path of Truth and Patience".

As stated by [2], individuals who perform religious practices would be able to prevent themselves from committing heinous and evil acts. This has also been emphasized in 2050 National Transformation (TN50) initiative in producing a globally minded and professional generation of society that possesses strong and superior religious beliefs [3]. In addition, religious aspects in terms of human values, respect for other religions and the well-being of the people are emphasized in Federal Constitution [4].

Based on the Malaysian Youth Policy 2015-2035, future youth generation is expected to face social challenges in terms of spiritual and religious aspects due to the increase of moral decline cases like illegitimate births, rape cases and youth prisoners. Moral deterioration issue among youth is the manifestation of spiritual inequality within them. On top of that, [5] claimed that religious practice among Malaysian youth is still debatable despite the justification that religion is perceived in a positive context.

Researchers [6] applied religious aspects in social capital theory while asserting that religion is part of the social aspects that influence the moral behaviour of individuals. The model includes the construct of social capital which focuses on three aspects namely social interaction, trust and shared vision. Social interaction is defined as the exchange of information between two or more individuals in a society [7]. Trust is one of the characteristics of social organization along with norms and networks that can increase the efficiency of society by facilitating integrated action [8], while shared vision refers to common values or goals in a cooperative relationship that includes collective purpose and aspiration of organizational members [9]. The more ethical an individual is, the higher the degree of professionalism formed in them [10].

The term social capital is defined as a bond of relationship among people [11] with the characteristics of social networks, reliability and norms of life that are capable of producing positive external effects and improving the efficiency of individuals or society [12]. Social capital indicators involve information and norms that can improve the functioning of an individual as well as the skills of a community [13]. According to [14], individuals with social capital can realize goals better through their involvement to achieve the desired goals. Therefore, research needs to be carried out to examine the factors that influence an individual's development of social capital as well as its connection with the practice of religious activities. According to [15], the practice of religious activities can influence an individual to do good and have an impact on the personality and excellent performance in life.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The moral landscape among today's youth reflects significant changes influenced by various societal factors. This deterioration can be observed through several examples like disrespect and disregard for elders. There has been a noticeable decline in respect for elders, with young people often disregarding their advice and authority, and exhibiting behaviours such as verbal abuse towards older generations, which can lead to increased familial tensions and societal discord [16]. In addition, there is a growing trend of antisocial behaviour among youth, including bullying, gang involvement, and violence. These actions not only disrupt social harmony but also indicate a deeper moral crisis that affects community safety and trust [16]. Another instance of youths' moral deterioration is unethical behaviour like cheating or dishonesty in academic setting, which is caused by intense pressure to succeed academically, leading the students to prioritize grades over integrity [17]. On top of that, [18] investigated the prevalence of drug and substance use among Malaysian youth through a comprehensive nationwide survey involving 9,818 respondents aged 15 to 40 years. The study concluded that 5.5% of Malaysian youth reported lifetime use of drugs, while 3.5% are current users, having used drugs in the past 30 days [18], indicating that the increase of drug use at younger age has reached an alarming level. This behaviour not only reflects a lack of moral guidance but also poses significant health risks and contributes to broader societal issues such as crime and violence [16].

Moral values are closely related to human actions or behaviour when they are in a conscious or unconscious state [19]. According to Imam al-Ghazali in Ihya Ulumuddin, the meaning of morality is "a form of expression embedded in the soul that gives rise to easy and simple actions without the need for thought and consideration" [20]. It not only emphasizes the human relationship with God alone, but it also includes moral relationships with oneself, society and the environment. A religion that has comprehensive guidelines in relation to human relationships can help build social capital. Moral and cultural values are usually practiced from one generation to another through the education of parents, adults or teachers at school. In today's life, these values are also influenced by modern technology through media such as television, music and the internet [21].

Religious practice is considered as an effective solution to produce well-behaved people in all aspects of social, cultural and economic development which will empower social capital [22]. In addition, the formation of a person's identity is also influenced by the environment through significant individuals such as parents, family members and peers [23]. This has also been supported by Imam al-Ghazali in which he emphasized the importance of having social association with pious individuals as a method to acquire noble characters [24].

Social capital theory presents a conceptual model in recognising the positive outcomes of social context which included the three dimensions of structural, relational, and cognitive [25]. Structural dimension relates to social

interaction which involves location and frequency of contacts in social structure, relational dimension refers to trust that illustrates the quality of a relationship while cognitive dimension involves shared vision that facilitates common understanding of collective goals for acting in a social system [25]. In addition, the theory posits three domains of relationships which are individual relationships with parents, friends and surrounding community [12].

Individual development through moral empowerment and self-identity is a catalyst for human development. This is because religious knowledge does not only prevent individuals from engaging in unhealthy social activities, but it can also develop pure spiritual attributes. Applying the social capital theory, [6] divided the measurement of religious aspects into three areas; namely the importance of religious practice, the frequency of participation in religious activities, and the importance of participating in religious activities while positive attributes are measured from the evaluation of respondents based on altruism and empathy. Their study found that religious youths possess higher levels of social capital resources while the influence of youths religiousness on moral outcomes is mediated by social capital resources [6].

A study by [26] explained the relevant relationship between religion and self-control which supported another study's finding that individuals who practice religion have a more organized lifestyle [27]. In addition, [28] also proved that a low level of religious practice is one of the main causes of an individual engaging in unhealthy activities. However, an individual should strive to practice religion comprehensively because a simple level of religious knowledge is still not enough to ensure that the individuals can go through life perfectly and successfully [29].

In the perspective of moral value development, family members are the first and main source of informal education for an individual. It is the responsibility of families, especially parents, to educate their children to be morally acceptable individuals. A study by [30] found that families experience conflict due to a lack of interaction and good communication between family members. This shows the importance of social capital aspects such as social interaction, trust and shared goals in ensuring the well-being of families and communities.

On top of that, the result of [31] found that the aspect of belief and faith has a strong influence on the moral development of students since the tendency of students to perform religious practices plays an important role in determining the quality of their moral judgment. Moreover, [32] concluded that students who practice religious teachings have a higher level of relationship with their parents, while students who do not have religious beliefs have a much lower level of relationship. As such, students' participation in religious practices results in a better network of relationships with their parents, friends and teachers [33].

Based on literature review, this study adapted Social Capital Theory [12] and the study of [6] to investigate the relationship of the variables as shown in the research model of Figure 1. It should be noted that [6] formulated three rational relationship models that are linked close to an individual, which is the relationship with family, peers and important people around the individual. However, this study only examines the influence of individual's relationship with family and peers in the formation of moral values. Therefore, for each family and peer relationship, the objective of this study is to identify whether:

1. Religiosity has a significant relationship with social interaction

2. Religiosity has a significant relationship with belief

3. Religiosity has a significant relationship with shared vision

4. Social interaction has a significant relationship with moral values.

5. Trust has a significant relationship with moral values.

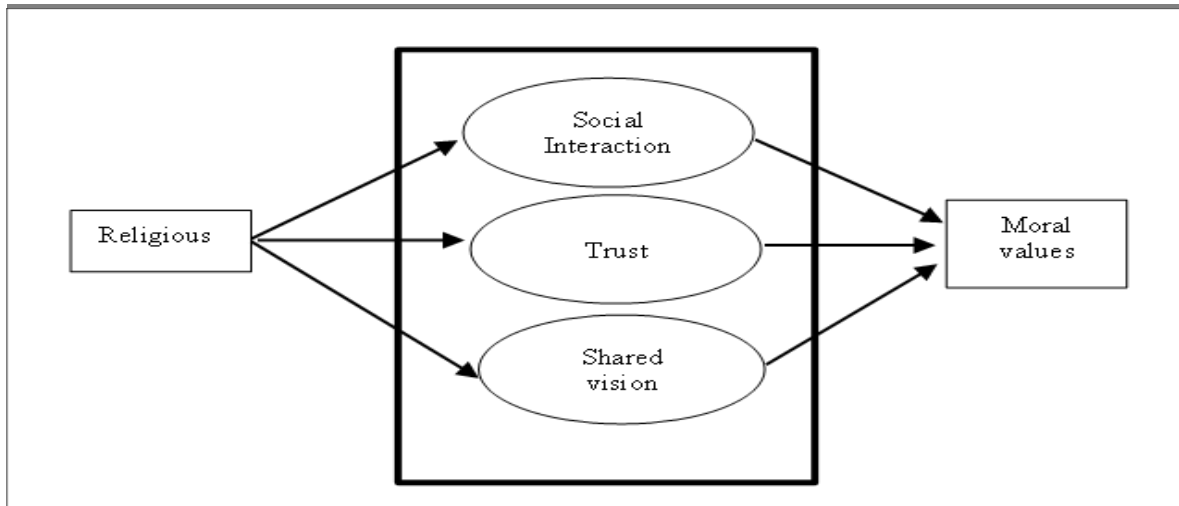6. Shared vision has a significant relationship with moral values.

Fig. 1 Research Model

METHODOLOGY

This study applied quantitative approach through the usage of a structured questionnaire adapted from [6]. The questionnaire contains variables consisting of religiosity (4 items), social interaction (7 items), trust (10 items), shared goals (8 items) and moral values (10 items) which are measured using a six-point Likert scale from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'. All variables except moral values (endogenous variables) have two sets of questions that refer to family and peer influence.

The respondents of the study were selected from a higher education institution in Kelantan, Malaysia. According to [34] table, the sample chosen was 300 respondents from a total population of 1382 students. The questionnaire was distributed to the respondents via Google form through the application of Telegram. For data analysis, Statistical Package for Science (SPSS) and Structural Equation Model (SEM) were utilised to assess descriptive statistics and examine the research hypotheses which involved the analysis of measurement models and structural models.

FINDINGS

Table 1 shows the demographic profile of this study. A total of 169 questionnaires were successfully obtained from a sample of 300 students with a response rate of 56.3 percent. The respondents consisted of 143 female students (84.6%) and 26 male students (15.4%) who belong to the age group of 20-21 years old (111 respondents) and 22-23 years old (58 respondents). Majority of them live with their families (136 people), have less than 4 siblings (100 respondents) and have volunteering experience (144 respondents). Even though 153 respondents (90.5%) agreed that the practice of religious activity is very important, only 104 respondents (61.5%) admitted they are involved in youth religious activity. In addition, majority (98.8%) acknowledged the importance of religious activities in the mosque, but only 52 respondents (30.8%) claimed they have attended religious activities in the mosque.

Table 1. Demographic Profile

Item	Criteria	Total (Percentage)
Gender	Male	26 (15.4%)
	Female	143 (84.6%)
Age	20 – 21 years	111 (65.6%)
	22 – 23 years	58 (34.4%)

Living with family	Yes	136 (80.5%)
	No	33 (19.5%)
Number of siblings	≤ 4 persons	100 (59.2%)
	5 - 9 persons	63 (37.2%)
	≥ 10 persons	6 (3.6%)
Volunteering experience	Yes	144 (85.2%)
	No	25 (14.8%)
Practicing religious routine	Very important	153 (90.5%)
	Rather important	16 (9.5%)
Involved in youth religious activity	Yes	104 (61.5%)
	No	65 (38.5%)
Importance of religious activity at mosque	Very important	124 (73.4%)
	Rather important	43 (25.4%)
	Not important	2 (1.2%)
Attending religious activities at mosque	Yes	52 (30.8%)
	No	5 (3.0%)
	Rarely	112 (66.3%)

Table 2 shows the results for factor analysis of the study variables. The reliability of the variables is fulfilled since the Cronbach alpha values exceed 0.6 [35]. The validity of the data is also achieved using Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) value of 0.735 which is greater than 0.6 and the significance of Bartlett's Sphericity test ($p < 0.05$) [36]. The analysis also shows that all eigenvalues exceed the value of 1 while total variance explained showed that 63.11 percent of the variance was explained by the moral value variable.

Table 2. Factor Analysis

	Religious	Social Interaction	Trust	Shared Vision	Moral Values
Cronbach alpha	.868	.859	.859	.914	.786
KMO	.735				
Bartlett's Sphericity Test	Chi-square=9328.864; p-value=.000				
Eigen-value	4.238	4.747	7.265	7.456	4.445
Total variance explained	55.88%	50.08%	58.57%	65.07%	51.40%
	63.11%				

The next analysis was conducted using Structural Equation Model (SEM) through the Analysis of Moments Structure (AMOS) software. Before the variable relationship was determined, confirmatory factor analysis was conducted using the measurement model to assess the model fit of the framework. The analysis was conducted

for two model frameworks that refer to the respondent's relationship with family and peer.

After items with low communality values were dropped, both measurement models fulfilled the model fit requirement as the indices for each fit index reached the minimum values. Table 3 displays model fit indices for model frameworks of family and peer. The indices values for CMIN/df index were less than 3.0 (1.684 & 1.691), RMSEA were between 0.05 and 0.08 (0.064), CFI were more than 0.9 (0.924 & 0.940), AGFI were more than 0.8 (0.832 & 0.827) and PNFI were more than 0.5 (0.660 & 0.730) [35].

Table 3. Model Fit for Family and Peer Frameworks

Fit Index	Fit Criteria	Indices (Family)	Indices (Peer)
Chi Square (χ^2)		286.995	270.272
Degrees of freedom (df)		166	185
P-value (probability)		0.000	0.000
CMIN (χ^2)/df	≤ 3.0	1.684	1.691
RMSEA	between 0.05 and 0.08	0.064	0.064
CFI	≥ 0.9	0.924	0.940
AGFI	≥ 0.8	0.832	0.827
PNFI	≥ 0.5	0.660	0.730

Note: CMIN/DF = Minimum Discrepancy Function by Degrees of Freedom divided; RMSEA = Root Mean Square Error of Approximation; CFI = Comparative Fit Index; AGFI = Adjusted Goodness of Fit; PNFI = Parsimony Normed Fit Index

The next analysis involved reliability and validity of the model frameworks. Construct reliability was achieved when the Cronbach alpha values exceeded 0.70 [35], while convergent validity was measured through factor loading, average variance extracted (AVE) and composite reliability (CR). Based on [35], a high factor loading (over 0.5) indicates high convergent validity while an AVE value over 0.5 fulfils convergent validity. Discriminant validity is achieved when the variance-extracted estimates are higher than the squared correlation estimate for each compared item of the construct [35]. Table 4 and Table 5 show the reliability and validity analysis for both family and peer model frameworks.

Table 4. Reliability and Validity Analyses – Family

Variable	Factor loading	Cronbach alpha	CR	AVE	T	R	SI	SV	MO
T	0.619-0.854	0.877	0.843	0.523	0.723*				
R	0.611-0.804	0.784	0.766	0.527	-0.282	0.726*			
SI	0.606-0.695	0.737	0.876	0.719	0.222	-0.349	0.848*		
SV	0.698-0.843	0.865	0.858	0.548	-0.410	0.070	-0.174	0.741*	
MO	0.647-0.754	0.790	0.753	0.507	0.142	0.216	-0.326	-0.109	0.712*

Note: T- trust, R – religious, SI – social interaction, SV – shared vision, MO – moral values

*Square root of AVE for discriminant validity

Table 5. Reliability and Validity Analyses – Peer

Variable	Factor loading	Cronbach alpha	CR	AVE	T	R	SI	SV	MO
T	0.773-0.876	0.933	0.934	0.669	0.818*				
R	0.632-0.756	0.785	0.760	0.516	-0.227	0.718*			
SI	0.597-0.748	0.801	0.723	0.568	0.227	-0.637	0.754*		
SV	0.731-0.860	0.904	0.905	0.656	-0.364	0.081	-0.155	0.810*	
MO	0.642-0.764	0.790	0.752	0.507	0.120	0.287	-0.208	0.111	0.712*

Note: T- trust, R – religious, SI – social interaction, SV – shared vision, MO – moral values

*Square root of AVE for discriminant validity

The next analysis involved the creation of structural model to examine the relationship between the independent variables (religion, social interaction, trust and shared goals) and the dependent variable (moral values). The results of the study are divided into the influence of individual's relationship with family and peers in forming their moral values. For the influence of family, there is a significant relationship between religious and social interaction as well as social interaction and moral values. Meanwhile, for the influence of peers, only religious has a significant relationship with social interaction. Table 6 shows the results of each hypothesis test for both model frameworks.

Table 6. Hypotheses Testing Analysis

Relationship	CR	P Value	CR	P Value
	Family		Peer	
Religious → Social Interaction	-4.534	***	-5.870	***
Religious → Trust	-3.122	0.002	-2.759	0.006
Religious → Shared Values	1..175	0.240	1.438	0.150
Social Interaction → Moral Values	-3.331	***	-2.739	0.006
Trust → Moral Values	2.195	0.028	2.552	0.011
Shared Values → Moral Values	-1.580	0.114	1.671	0.095

 Note: *** significant at p<0.01

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The results of the study support the assertion of other researchers who found that family and peer influence the relationship between religious and social interaction of an individual [32], [37], [38]. Nevertheless, the negative value of CR regression coefficient means that if an individual's religious practice is high, then the individual's social interaction is low. According to [38], social interaction means a two-way active role between two or more people in a communication process. Based on a hadith of the Prophet (pbuh), it narrates that a person who believes in Allah and His messenger should speak good words, and if there is nothing good to say, they should just remain silent [39]. This shows that people who practice religious deeds will limit their social interactions to important things like imparting knowledge to the community and reminding those who are negligent.

The relationship between religious and trust is not significant for both family and peer conditions, which is contrary to the result of [37]. The insignificant finding means that an individual's religious practice does not affect their level of trust in family and peer. In other words, performing religious activities with family and peer does not guarantee the individual's trust in them. On top of that, the negative value of CR regression coefficient concurs to the study of [40] which concluded that even though individuals have faith and enjoy interacting socially with people who have a high level of religiosity, their trust is limited to those who have faith in the same religion.

The analysis also shows that being religious does not affect the sharing of individual goals with other people which corresponds to the study of [41] where individuals with a high level of religiosity but adhere to different religions have dissimilar goal sharing with other people. For this study, the insignificant relationship shows that even though the individual performs religious activities with family and peers, it does not mean they share the same goals. According to [42], family is a unit that shares the same life experiences, issues and challenges; however, the imbalance between family's demands and ability to meet those demands may cause the individual not to share the same goals with the family. Likewise, the individual may experience different goals with peers which makes them feel embarrassed to share the goals.

Next, the relationship between social interaction and moral values was found to be significant for the influence of family which means that social activities done with the family affect the moral values of the individual. However, it does not agree with the result of [44] which found that there is no significant relationship between family interpersonal communication and teenagers' moral understanding due to the way the family behaves which may not have a positive effect on them. As for the influence of peer, the result of this study found that the relationship is not significant, which means that the implementation of social activities with friends does not affect the formation of the individual's moral values. The result is contrary to [44] which found that the individual's involvement with peers to some extent affects the formation of the individual's character.

Other insignificant relationships are found between trust and moral values as well as shared goals and moral values for both family and peer influence. This finding is contrary to the result of [31] which found that the dimension of trust plays a strong influence in the moral judgment of religious high school students. Differences in results may be due to respondents who have different backgrounds in different fields of study.

Referring to the study of [6], the three variables of social interaction, trust and shared goals represent social capital that affects an individual's moral value. Their results indicated that youths practicing religious activity have higher levels of social capital resources while the influence of youths religiousness on moral values is mediated through social capital resources. In contrast, [45] concluded that the influence of family is not significant for the relationship between religious and positive youth development. It should also be noted that individuals with a high level of religiosity and fulfil the characteristics of social capital are more inclined to engage in volunteering activities [46], which may lead them to become highly moral people.

The current study has provided explanation on the positive association of youths religion with moral development through the element of social capital. As such, religion should not be ignored as an important developmental setting in shaping the individual's social norms, beliefs, and actions. Subsequently, programs should be designed and conducted to foster the relationship of the individual with family and peers by spending more time together through religious activities. The program should also consider the practice of trust and shared goals so that the individual would be able to nurture a higher level of moral values.

Considering the different results found in this study as compared to literature pertaining moral values, it is recommended that other researchers identify the extent to which the findings can be used to help families, communities, organizations and the government in shaping the development of human capital among the youths in Malaysia. Further research is also suggested to explore the unique contributions of religiousness to moral behaviours and other contextual resources that may affect the youth moral development.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

It is confirmed that there are no conflicting interests and that the research was conducted impartially and ethically. The conclusions presented in the manuscript are solely based on the analysis of the data collected during the study.

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