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Review of moral Desirability in Literature from 2020 to 2024

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Abstract

Moral desirability is a meta-normative and situational principle around which theories, models and dimensions have been developed in order to analyze moral behavior. The objective of this work was to review, analyze, discuss and compare the theoretical structure of moral desirability reported in the literature. A documentary, retrospective, systematic, transversal and exploratory study was carried out with a sample of sources indexed in international repositories. The prevalence of theories, models and dimensions oriented towards situational moral conventions was found. In relation to the state of the art where general normative approaches predominate, the present work suggests the measurement of moral desirability in order to anticipate ethical behavior.

Keywords: conventions: desirability: ethics: morality: normativity

Introduction

The history of moral desirability is a complex concept that has evolved over time and has been the subject of study in disciplines such as ethics, moral philosophy and psychology (Vehmas & Watson, 2014). Moral desirability refers to qualities or behaviors that are considered morally desirable or virtuous within a particular society or culture.

In classical antiquity, philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle explored the nature of virtue and morality in their works (Mackenzie & Scully, 2007). For Plato, moral desirability was closely related to the pursuit of the highest good or the "form" of the good. Aristotle developed virtue ethics, arguing that moral desirability lay in the practice of virtues such as courage, temperance, and justice, which led to human flourishing (eudaimonia).

During the Middle Ages, moral desirability was influenced by religious and philosophical teachings. Saint Thomas Aquinas, for example, developed an ethics based on natural law and Christian theology, where moral virtue was related to conformity to divine law and the development of theological virtues (faith, hope, and charity).

In the era of Enlightenment, thinkers such as Immanuel Kant and John Stuart Mill approached moral desirability from different perspectives (Vehmas, 2011). Kant emphasized the importance of duty and morality based on respect for human dignity, arguing that actions must be guided by the categorical imperative. Mill, on the other hand, promoted utilitarianism, an ethical theory that considers as morally desirable those actions that maximize general happiness or well-being.

In the 20th and 21st centuries, moral desirability has been explored from various ethical currents, including existentialism, ethical humanism, and modern virtue ethics (Ware, 2002). The development of moral psychology has also contributed to understanding how people develop and perceive moral desirability.

The history of moral desirability has been marked by cultural revolutions and ethical debates (Schneidre, 1988). Today, cultural diversity and social changes continue to influence what is considered morally desirable in different contexts and communities. Moral desirability continues to be a fundamental issue in ethical reflection and in the search for a more just and ethically committed society.

Moral desirability theory focuses on the study of what characteristics, behaviors, or actions are considered morally desirable or virtuous in a particular society or culture (Stramondo, 2016). This theory addresses fundamental questions about the nature of morality, the evaluation of human behavior, and the ethical principles that guide moral decisions.

Moral desirability theory is often based on the concept of virtue, which involves positive qualities of character and behavior, such as honesty, justice, compassion, and wisdom (Davy, 2015). Examines the ethical norms and principles that determine what is considered morally right or wrong in a society. This may include deontological (duty-based) or consequentialist (consequence-based actions) approaches. Recognizes that moral desirability may vary between different cultures and historical contexts. What is considered morally desirable in one society may not be so in another.

Some theories of moral desirability are based on utilitarianism, which holds that morally desirable actions are those that maximize happiness or general well-being (Vehmas & Curtis, 2017). Other approaches are based on virtue ethics, which focuses on cultivating positive personal characteristics and moral habits to achieve human flourishing (eudaimonia). Kantian ethics focuses on moral duty and respect for human dignity, arguing that actions

are morally desirable if they conform to the categorical imperative. Cultural diversity and plurality of values can pose challenges in determining what is morally desirable in a globally diverse context.

The theory of moral desirability faces criticism related to moral relativism, which questions the possibility of establishing universal moral standards (Szumski, Smogorzewska & Grygiel, 2020). Moral psychology has contributed to the study of how perceptions of moral desirability develop in individuals and communities over time. Moral desirability theory is an interdisciplinary field that addresses fundamental questions about the nature and evaluation of moral behavior. Explores how societies define and promote ethical values, and how these values influence our decisions and actions in diverse and changing contexts.

Moral desirability models represent different theoretical and practical approaches to understanding and promoting morally desirable behaviors in individuals and societies (Keith & Keith, 2013). These models are based on various ethical and psychological theories that address how moral norms are formed and sustained.

The utilitarian model maintains that actions are morally desirable if they produce the greatest well-being or happiness for the greatest number of people (Shoemaker, 2009). It focuses on maximizing positive consequences (utility) and minimizing negative consequences (pain or suffering) at the individual and collective level. Evaluates the moral desirability of a public policy considering its net impact on the population's quality of life.

The Deontological Model is based on the fulfillment of duties and ethical principles regardless of the consequences (Kliewer & Drake, 1998). It identifies universal moral rules that must be followed as a moral duty, such as respect for individual rights or the truth. Considers telling the truth to be morally desirable, even if the consequences are negative for certain people.

Virtue Ethics Model: Focused on the development and practice of moral virtues such as honesty, compassion and justice (Camplieti, 2002). Considers that morally desirable actions are those that reflect virtues and contribute to human flourishing. Promotes moral education to cultivate virtues in individuals and communities.

Moral Development Model: Focuses on how perceptions of morality develop and change over time and in different contexts (Hunt & Carnevale, 2012). Examines how social, educational, and cultural experiences influence the formation of moral norms and values. Studies how exposure to different ethical perspectives affects moral desirability in adolescents.

Psychological Model of Morality: Explores underlying psychological processes in moral decision-making, such as moral intuition and ethical reasoning (Schillace, 2013). Analyzes how emotions, empathy, and moral cognition influence evaluations of moral desirability. Investigates how psychological factors affect the willingness to act morally in ethically ambiguous situations.

Cultural-Relativist Model: Recognizes cultural diversity in moral norms and questions the possibility of universal ethical standards (Maia & Vimieiro, 2015). Examines how cultural differences influence what is considered morally desirable in different contexts and societies. It studies how moral practices vary across cultures and how this affects perceptions of moral desirability.

These models represent different perspectives and approaches to address moral desirability from various disciplines such as ethics, moral philosophy and psychology (Langdon, Clare & Murphy, 2010). Each model offers unique insights into how to understand, promote and evaluate morally desirable behaviors in individuals and communities.

Moral desirability, or the set of characteristics that are considered morally desirable, can be approached from different dimensions or aspects (Bennett, 2014). Personal ethics refers to the moral and ethical qualities that a person considers important in themselves. It includes attributes such as integrity, honesty, responsibility and altruism. Interpersonal ethics focuses on the moral qualities that govern interactions with others. It includes empathy, consideration for others, social justice and respect for diversity. Social ethics refers to moral attitudes and behaviors that affect society as a whole. This encompasses civic engagement, social activism, environmental sustainability, and the fight for equality and justice.

Professional ethics is related to the moral norms and values that guide conduct in the work or professional context (Reynolds, 2022). It includes business ethics, medical ethics, research ethics, among others. Global ethics focuses on how individual actions and decisions affect a broader global context. It includes global responsibility, respect for universal human rights and consideration for future generations. These dimensions represent different perspectives from which moral desirability can be evaluated. Each highlights different aspects of how people interact with themselves, others, and the world around them in ethical and moral terms.

Moral desirability is a complex concept to measure, since it involves evaluating subjective aspects of people's behavior and ethical values (Kitchin, 2002). However, there are various approaches and methods that researchers and psychologists use to study moral desirability.

Questionnaires and self-report scales Questionnaires are developed that ask individuals to evaluate their own behaviors and moral beliefs (Gammeltoft, 2008). These questionnaires may include statements about willingness to help others, act fairly, be honest in various situations, among others. Responses are scored on an agreement (or disagreement) scale to measure self-perception of moral desirability.

Moral Dilemma Assessment Participants are presented with hypothetical or real ethical dilemmas and asked to make decisions (Wasserman, 2005). How they respond to these dilemmas can provide information about their ethical values, moral preferences, and abilities to reason ethically.

Experimental methods: Researchers design controlled experiments to observe moral behavior in specific situations (García-Gómez & Gielen, 2018). For example, they could analyze people's willingness to cooperate in economic games that require trust and reciprocity.

Interviews and Qualitative Studies Qualitative studies can explore in depth the moral perspectives of individuals through semi-structured interviews or focus groups (Hiegel, 1994). This allows for a more complete understanding of how people interpret and apply moral principles in their daily lives.

Observation of real behaviors study moral desirability by observing the real behavior of people in natural environments (Hyland, 1987). This may involve direct observation or analysis of behavioral records.

Neurological analyzes have allowed us to investigate the biological bases of morality. Functional neuroimaging studies can help identify the neural substrates associated with moral processes such as ethical judgment and empathy (Hughes, 2019).

It is important to note that moral desirability is a multidimensional and complex construct that can be influenced by a variety of contextual and cultural factors (Gasser, Malti & Buholzer, 2013). Therefore, accurately measuring moral desirability often requires the combination of multiple approaches and careful consideration of methodological limitations. Precisely, the objective of the present work was to compare the dimensions of moral desirability reported in the literature from 2020 to 2024 with respect to the observations made in a systematic review of moral desirability in local repositories.

Are there significant differences between the theoretical structure of moral desirability reported in the literature with respect to the observations made in the present study?

The hypothesis that guides the present study suggests that significant differences prevail between the theoretical structure of social desirability with respect to the structure observed in the present work, since the literature consulted highlights dimensions observed in settings or latitudes with high moral desirability with respect to the local literature where a reduced moral desirability is appreciated due to the interaction between native communities regarding migratory flows (Goodey, 2001).

Method

1. Definition of search terms

Identification of key terms related to moral desirability. Considering words like “moral desirability,” “moral values,” “ethical behavior,” “moral judgments,” “ethical decisions,” and “measurement of morality.”

2. Selection of indexed repositories

Choice of academic repositories or indexed databases relevant to the research objective. PubMed (for articles in the field of medicine and biomedical sciences), PsycINFO (for articles in psychology and behavioral sciences), Scopus, Web of Science and Google Scholar (for a broader search)

3. Creation of the search strategy

Development of a search strategy that included the identified terms and use of Boolean operators (AND, OR) to combine them effectively: ("moral desirability" OR "ethical behavior") AND ("2020" OR "2021" OR "2022 "OR "2023" OR "2024")

4. Filtering of results

Use of date filters to ensure only articles published between 2020 and 2024. Application of filters such as document type (journal article, review, etc.) or language.

5. Review of the results

Scanning titles and abstracts to identify relevant articles. Prioritize those that specifically address moral desirability in contexts relevant to your research (psychology, ethics, sociology, etc.).

6. Analysis and synthesis of literature

In-depth reading of selected articles and extraction of relevant information on how moral desirability is addressed and evaluated in recent academic literature. Analysis of the methodologies used, the measurement instruments and the results found.

7. Documentation and summons

Documentation of the relevant references found and use of an appropriate citation system (APA) to integrate this information into the academic work.

8. Supplementary search

Complementary searches in specialized repositories or search by additional terms to ensure comprehensive coverage of the moral desirability literature.

Results

Social desirability focuses on how a person is perceived and accepted in a social context in terms of attractiveness and adaptability, while moral desirability relates to a person's ethical behavior and moral values in relation to shared ethical standards. Both concepts are important to understand social and ethical dynamics in different contexts of human life (see Table 1).

Characteristic	Social Desirability	Moral Desirability
Definition	It refers to the extent to which a person is perceived as likable, acceptable, or desirable by others in a social context.	It refers to the extent to which a person exhibits ethical behaviors and values considered desirable according to moral standards.
Main focus	It is focused on perception and acceptance by others in terms of social attractiveness, likeability, and adaptive behavior.	It focuses on an individual's ethical actions and decisions, evaluated according to shared moral principles and values.
Nature of the concept	It has a more external connotation and is related to social interaction and the impression that a person generates on others.	It has a more internal connotation and is related to a person's integrity, righteousness, and ethical behavior.
Evaluated dimensions	It can include things like kindness, popularity, social adaptability, communication skills, and charisma.	It includes attributes such as honesty, integrity, fairness, empathy, responsibility and respect for others.
Perceptual evaluation	It is evaluated primarily through the subjective perception of other individuals in a social environment.	It is evaluated both through self-perception and external observation of moral actions and decisions.
Impact on relationships	It can influence social acceptance, interpersonal relationships and the ability to adapt in different social contexts.	It can influence interpersonal trust, mutual respect, and the quality of relationships based on shared ethical values.
Application context	It is often relevant in social, work, and community settings where interpersonal interactions are important.	It is relevant in all contexts of life, as it involves fundamental principles and values that guide moral behavior.

Table 1. Comparison of social desirability versus moral desirability

Theories vary in their approaches, from individual moral development to universal ethical principles and motivational values. Each theory offers unique conceptual tools for understanding moral desirability in different contexts and situations. Although the theories differ in their emphases and theoretical frameworks, many share a concern for promoting morally desirable behaviors in society (see Table 2).

Theory	Main focus	Main ideas	Relevance to Moral Desirability
Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development	Moral development based on stages	He proposed a sequence of stages of moral development, from preconventional to postconventional.	Suggests that moral desirability develops with the internalization of more complex moral norms
Piaget's Theory of Autonomous Morality	Evolution of moral reasoning	Children develop autonomous morality through social interaction and the resolution of moral conflicts.	Moral desirability is linked to cognitive development and the ability to resolve ethical dilemmas

Rawls's Theory of Justice as Equity	Contractarian approach to ethics	People would agree on equitable principles of justice in an impartial initial position	Emphasizes the importance of justice and equity in the evaluation of moral desirability
Schwartz Theory of Values	Values as motivators of behavior	Identifies a universal set of values that guide human decisions and actions	Moral values are associated with socially desirable and morally acceptable behaviors.
Gilligan's Theory of Ethical Care	Emphasis on the ethics of care	Highlights the importance of the relational context and care in moral decisions	Expands understanding of moral desirability by incorporating ethics of care as a key component
Bentham and Mill's Utilitarian Approach	Maximization of well-being as a criterion	Moral actions are those that maximize happiness or general well-being	Emphasizes consequences and utility to determine moral desirability

Table 2. Comparison of theories of moral desirability

The models vary in their approaches, from the development of ethical virtues to the maximization of well-being and the stages of moral development. Each model offers a unique perspective on moral desirability, highlighting different aspects that contribute to ethical behavior. These models have practical applications in the evaluation and promotion of morally desirable behaviors in different social and cultural contexts (see Table 3).

Model	Main Focus	Main features	Application and Utility
Dual Evaluation Model (Haidt)	Influence of intuitions and reasoning	Highlights the importance of moral intuitions and post hoc reasoning in ethical decision making	Helps understand how people evaluate moral desirability based on intuitive emotions and subsequent reasoning
Distributive Justice Model (Rawls)	Equity and fair distribution of resources	It proposes principles of justice that would be applied from an original impartial position	Useful for assessing moral desirability in terms of equity and fair distribution in society
Model of Moral Virtues (Aristotle)	Development of virtues as ethical habits	Emphasizes the importance of developing virtues such as prudence, justice, and temperance to achieve moral desirability	Offers a framework for cultivating and promoting morally desirable behaviors through the development of virtues
Utility Model and Consequentialism (Bentham and Mill)	Maximization of well-being and consequences	It proposes that moral actions are those that maximize happiness or general well-being	Useful for assessing moral desirability based on consequences and impact on well-being
Moral Development Model (Kohlberg)	Stages of moral development	It proposes a model of moral development in stages, from the preconventional to the post-conventional.	Helps understand how moral desirability evolves throughout human development
Universal Values Model (Schwartz)	Role of values in behavior	Identifies a set of universal values that guide human decisions and actions	Offers a framework for evaluating moral desirability based on shared core values

Table 3. Comparative models of moral desirability

The dimensions of moral desirability cover individual, interpersonal, social, professional and global aspects. Each dimension highlights different qualities and ethical behaviors that are valued in various contexts of human life. Understanding these dimensions helps promote a holistic evaluation of moral desirability and facilitates the development of ethical behaviors on both a personal and social level (see Table 4).

Dimension	**Description**	**Examples of Features**
Personal Ethics	Individual moral characteristics	Integrity, honesty, responsibility, altruism
Interpersonal Ethics	Relationships and behaviors with others	Empathy, consideration for others, social justice Respect for diversity, civic commitment
Social Ethics	Impact on society as a whole	Commitment to justice, environmental sustainability Fight for equality, global responsibility
Professional ethics	Ethical standards in work/professional environments	Business ethics, medical ethics, research ethics
Global Ethics	Global considerations	Respect for universal human rights Commitment to the well-being of future generations

Table 4. Comparison of the dimensions of moral desirability

Discussion

The contribution of the present study to the state of the art lies in the review of the theories, models and dimensions of moral desirability in order to establish the central axes and themes of the research agenda in the literature from 2020 to 2024. The results demonstrate the prevalence of the theory of moral development, the theory of autonomous morality, the theory of social justice, the theory of values, the theory of ethical care and the theory of utilitarianism, as well as the hegemony of the dual evaluation model, of model of distributive justice, the model of moral virtues, the model of utility, the model of moral development and the model of universal values. Consequently, the most analyzed dimensions are personal ethics, interpersonal ethics, social ethics, professional ethics and global ethics.

In relation to the state of the art, there are differences such as gender where ethical research has shown that social desirability response bias plays an important role in the relationship between gender and ethical behavior. The importance of moral values is highlighted in various perspectives, such as the existence of the cosmos, the design of the universe, the moral law and the concept of God (Purcell, 2016). The loss of conscience and universal morality is a concern when it leads to the deterioration of the world and the quality of life of many individuals (Fitch, 2009). The PMI Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct emphasizes desirable and mandatory behavior based on four core values (Curtis & Vehmas, 2016). The tension between the ethics of responsibility and the ethics of principles reflects the enduring relevance of Kantian philosophy in contemporary expressions of ethical universalism (Wasserman, 2004). Ethical professional counselors are discouraged from referring clients to conversion therapy, highlighting the importance of ethical judgment in personal and professional conduct.

The question of whether compliance with norms always desirable raises moral considerations is, suggesting that, in certain circumstances, non-compliance may be morally obligatory (Ramsten & Blomberg, 2019). The concept of quaternary prevention in healthcare emphasizes the possibility and convenience of preventing unnecessary harm to patients (Soika, 2018). Maintaining a company's code of ethics and business conduct is essential for professionals in various fields, including accounting, where ethical behavior is a key component of professional practice.

The discussion between Socrates and the sophists about virtue, as well as the discussion regarding the way in which virtue and the good life are currently understood, as well as how these conceptions fit into our social and political context, suggest: Virtue and the good life as contemporary equivalents of moral desirability In a political and economic system like that of Mexico, which is distinguished by achieving absolute power and control of the public and private spheres, moral desirability is understood as a consensual negotiation between rulers and the governed. Politicians, the governed and the media (sophists) and libraries (Socrates) host a social desirability (virtue and good life) every six years. The candidates for the presidency dedicate a good part of their campaign to constructing a reality that they assume would be one of unrest if their political adversaries arrived or regained power, but that, thanks to their discursive virtues, such a reality can be transformed into well-being, but not in the sense of the discussion between the sophists and Socrates, but in a sense of moral desirability. That is, in the tangible absence of virtue and the good life, candidates offer morally desirable promises such as security or employment. Voters avoid proselytizing welfare except for scholarships and support. The electorate is unaware that virtue and the good life are now reduced to well-being, but they sense that they can achieve an improvement in their situation if they exchange their vote for some perk.

The media, given that candidates and voters do not want or cannot carry out the sophist principles of equality in the participation of assemblies or forums, are sophist instruments par excellence. The media carry out the conventional and moral debate essential for the electoral contest and the election of a representative. Communicators, journalists, columnists, broadcasters, filmmakers, publicists and propagandists build an electoral arena where differences are settled but based on virtue or the search for the good life. Communication professionals are those new contemporary sophists who try to replace the electoral reality of abstention with a reality of trends and preferences that are increasingly invisible to non-electoral citizens.

In front of politicians, voters and the media, libraries have established themselves as Socrates before the sophists. The inability to think and act falsely regarding the election of a candidate means that citizens, politicians and the media must seek a redirection of justice in the electoral contest. Even though the State designates and cuts minimum budgets to public libraries, they could be a modern Socrates because they have the heritage and space for reflection on virtue and the good life. Furthermore, as a modern Socrates, the discussion between virtue and the good life, well-being or any topic can be carried out.

Conclusion

The objective of this work was to compare the theories, models, and dimensions of moral desirability with respect to the analysis of a selection of sources indexed to international repositories with a local focus. The results note the prevalence of theories, models and dimensions focused on moral desirability as conventions between the parties involved. In relation to the state of the art, the findings of the present study suggest the measurement of the dimensions in order to establish their empirical contrast with a representative sample of the Mexican electorate within the framework of the 2024 elections.

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