



Book Review: The Psychology Of Money By Morgan Housel: Understanding Financial Behaviour And Its Relevance To Malaysian Financial Culture
(*Ulasan Buku: The Psychology Of Money Oleh Morgan Housel: Memahami Tingkah Laku Kewangan Dan Perkaitannya Dengan Budaya Kewangan Malaysia*)

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ABSTRACT

This review examines Morgan Housel's "The Psychology of Money," emphasizing its core topics of behavioural finance, risk, and emotional decision-making. It underscores the book's significance in the current era and contextualises its ideas within Malaysia, emphasising saving culture, generational perspectives, and financial taboos. The review offers an in-depth evaluation of the book's strengths and weaknesses, highlighting its accessibility, psychological complexity and relevance.

Keywords: Morgan Housel; psychology of money; behavioural finance; risk; emotional decision-making

ABSTRAK

Ulasan buku ini menganalisis "The Psychology of Money" karya Morgan Housel, menumpukan pada tema utamanya iaitu tingkah laku kewangan, risiko dan membuat keputusan emosi. Ulasan ini menggariskan kepentingan buku ini dalam era semasa dan memberi konteks relevan di Malaysia, menekankan budaya menabung, perspektif generasi dan pantang larang kewangan. Ulasan ini memberi pandangan yang mendalam tentang kekuatan dan kelemahan buku ini, yang menunjukkan betapa mudah dan rumitnya psikologi kewangan.

Kata kunci: psikologi kewangan; kewangan tingkah laku; risiko; membuat keputusan beremosi



INTRODUCTION

The book “The Psychology of Money: Timeless Lessons On Wealth, Greed, And Happiness”, written by Morgan Housel narrates the behaviour with money that focuses on financial decisions and having a better relationship with money. Over 8 million copies of the book were sold worldwide, making it one of the well-known books in the finance genre.

The book explores to deepen the reader’s knowledge on individuals’ attitudes, emotions, and behaviours that creates an impact to their financial decisions and outcome. Morgan Housel emphasizes throughout the book that financial success is not determined based on financial knowledge, but through behavioural management such as the management of greed, fear, and uncertainty

The book is highly relevant in this period as individuals are navigating through rising inflation and greater awareness of financial freedom. The author wrote the book in a way that is relatable to the reader through providing real life stories and lessons that provides the significance of patience, humility, and long-term thinking in wealth accumulation.

A comprehensive review of The Psychology of Money provides readers with insights into the psychological, emotional, and societal underpinnings that shape individual perceptions and management of wealth. This paper examines the key ideas of Morgan Housel’s findings on financial behaviour, luck, and human psychology and how the book relates within the Malaysian setting, where cultural norms and societal expectations significantly influence attitudes towards money.

CORE THEMES

Morgan Housel explored on several core themes that deepen the reader’s knowledge on financial psychology. One of the central themes of the book is the distinction between wealth creation and the pursuit of wealth. Morgan Housel emphasises that those with wealth is usually hidden, earned through patience, discipline, and the capacity to delay pleasure, but the desire for wealth is commonly associated with external validation and flashy expenditure. He states “Wealth is what you don’t see. It’s the cars not purchased, the diamonds not bought, the clothes forgone and the first-class upgrade declined” (Housel, 2020, p. 90) Housel argues that individuals frequently mistake the display of wealth with the possession of it, resulting in financial volatility despite substantial income. The theme urges the reader to be able to distinguish the difference between appearing rich and achieving financial freedom.

The other theme that has been emphasised throughout the Psychology of Money is luck, risk and the importance of long-term mindset. The author emphasises that “Luck and risk are both the reality that every outcome in life is guided by forces other than individual effort.” (Housel, 2020, p. 18). Effective investment and wealth accumulation need the following mindset and allowing wealth to grow. Along that, long-term contemplation is essential. The compounding of assets, withstanding market volatility, and allowing time for financial growth are crucial. According to Housel (2020, p. 19), “if you give luck and risk their proper respect, you realise that ... it's never as good or as bad as it seems.” which explains the ability to endure and thrive rather than seeking quick wins. The theme highlights the need of humility in achievement, caution in decision-making, and the discipline to maintain a long-term perspective



rather than pursuing immediate outcomes.

Morgan Housel also stated how crucial emotions and behaviours are in shaping financial decisions. The author highlights that financial successes are influenced far more by our behaviours and emotions than by our technical expertise or intellect. As Housel states: “A genius who loses control over their emotions can be a financial disaster. The opposite is also true. Ordinary folks with no financial education can be wealthy if they have a handful of behavioural skills that have nothing to do with formal intelligence.” (2020, pg. 2). Housel discusses that choices about saving, investing, or expenditure are profoundly influenced by experiences, fears, ego, and individual psychology. Recognising this requires understanding that the own financial conduct frequently mirrors emotional condition, background, and beliefs rather than being based on neutral, objective analysis. By recognising this theme, the reader will be better prepared to make sustainable, emotionally coherent financial decisions.

The final theme explores on the author’s idea that true financial success is not simply the accumulation of assets, but the attainment of contentment and alignment with personal values. Housel advises that continuously modifying the standards of wealth diminishes contentment and results in endless pursuit. Housel writes, “The hardest financial skill is getting the goalpost to stop moving.” (2020, p. 30) By highlighting the notion of "enough," the author encourages readers to establish their own definitions of success instead of adhering to external criteria. This recontextualization fosters a resilient attitude that prioritises personal independence, self-governance, and sustained well-being over flashy consumerism.

CRITICAL EVALUATION

Morgan Housel's *The Psychology of Money* excels due to its clarity, narrative skill, and the assertion that money is as much about mentality as it is about technique. The book's greatest strength is in its simplicity. Housel utilises concise, relevant examples to clarify complex ideas about risk, compounding, and behavioural bias for a wide audience. The book can translate behavioural finance topics into accessible language, rendering it beneficial for both general audiences and experts desiring a behavioural viewpoint on money. The format of concise, independent chapters promotes targeted reading and contemplation, which many consider educationally beneficial. A significant strength is the focus on humility, caution, and a long-term perspective.

Housel contends that survival and consistency are more significant than genius, promoting a pragmatic ethic that challenges the cultural adoration of risk-taking and flashy consumerism.

Even so, the book contains several limitations. A prominent limitation is its dependence on anecdotal evidence rather than empirical validation. Housel prioritises storytelling and insightful case studies, which improve readability but sometimes substitute narrative with complex proof. Readers in pursuit of comprehensive data-driven analysis or formal models may find the book inadequate. The book may also have the writing frequently devolves into phrases, providing memorable phrases while delivering minimal practical assistance. The book proficiently identifies behavioural issues but offers limited guidance on specific solutions for institutional transformation or portfolio construction in response to those issues.



An additional area of limitation pertains to the cultural and contextual perspective. Numerous examples are derived from U.S. financial history and the experiences of individual investors in prosperous nations, thereby constraining cross-cultural applicability. Readers in varying economic circumstances may discover that specific assumptions regarding market access, social safety nets, or consumer conventions are not universally relevant. Moreover, the recurrence throughout the chapters, the book's primary themes are constantly restated, which some may interpret it as reinforcement while others may consider it as redundant.

Ethical and philosophical limitations also occur in this book. Housel's endorsement of moderation and the concept of "enough" subconsciously supports a conservative viewpoint on consumption. Those who advocate structural or policy-oriented solutions to inequality may consider the emphasis on individual temperament inappropriate in addressing systemic financial issues. Ultimately, despite the refined style of the writing, the lightness of tone may cause some readers to undervalue the intricacy of macroeconomic or regulatory influences on outcomes.

The *Psychology of Money* is a significant and beneficial addition to public financial education. Its qualities include clarity, psychological understanding, and a sympathetic viewpoint on finance. Its shortcomings include an overall lack of empirical depth, occasional redundancy, and restricted application across various socio-economic circumstances.

APPLICATION TO THE MALAYSIAN CONTEXT

Housel's primary observations on the psychology of money are directly applicable to the Malaysian socioeconomic context, where communal responsibilities, status anxieties, and intergenerational customs influence financial conduct. In Malaysia, saving and spending behaviours are often influenced by household responsibilities and cultural expectations. Expenditure on weddings, real estate, and household assistance frequently serves as both a social indicator and an economic choice. This inclination clearly reflects Housel's differentiation between observable consumption and concealed wealth. Housel cautions that visible affluence may conceal vulnerability whereas Malaysian households that emphasise extravagant spending to maintain honour or social status endanger long-term wealth and hinder the advantages of compounded savings (Sabri et al., 2023). Wedding and marriage expenditures in Malaysian communities reinforces the notion that cultural norms compel households to engage in substantial one-time expenditures, financed via savings or loans, which impacts financial stability.

Generational disparities in perceptions of risk and success are prominent. In Malaysia, younger generations, particularly Gen Z, exhibit increased involvement in digital finance and heightened responsiveness to financial education conveyed by parents and online platforms. Family financial interaction continues to significantly shape young adults' opinions, although the methods of transmission vary between generations. Housel's focus on long-term thought and humility in financial choices contrasts with the younger generation's exposure to immediate, high-frequency success narratives on social media platforms. Several studies indicate that parental interaction continues to influence Gen Z's financial objectives and behaviours, despite technological advancements modifying access to financial goods (Abdul Ghaffoor & Akhtar, 2024; Sabri et al., 2023).



Cultural taboos surrounding discussions of money, debt, and failure hinder the implementation of Housel's behavioural guidelines. Housel advocates for openness regarding errors, reasonable humility, and a redefinition of success as liberation instead than material gain. In Malaysia, the unwillingness to address debt and the stigma associated with financial failure hinder open financial discourse and the pursuit of support. Research on low-income and vulnerable populations indicates that stigma, inadequate financial literacy, and restricted agency hinder the effectiveness of behavioural interventions unless they are culturally attuned and family centred (Jaffar, 2024). Research on financial well-being among single moms indicates the necessity for context-specific tools and treatments that include caring responsibilities and restricted bargaining power within families (Ramli, Abdol Ghapar, & Abu Seman, 2024).

CONCLUSION

The Psychology of Money is a deep yet comprehensible exploration of how human behaviour, emotions, and cultural values influence financial choices. Housel's views on wealth, risk, and fulfilment beyond economic theory, prompting readers to develop self-awareness and sustained discipline. In the Malaysian context, his conclusions are particularly relevant, demonstrating how social duties, intergenerational norms, and cultural taboos affect financial well-being. Although the book's anecdotal approach may restrict its empirical accuracy, its universal message that genuine financial success is rooted in humility, patience, and the understanding of what constitutes "enough" renders it a timeless resource for financial literacy and mindful existence.

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