

Relationship between Dark-Triad and Internet Addiction: Mediating Effect of Motives of Cyber-Dating

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Dark triad traits (psychopathy, narcissism, and Machiavellianism) may predispose individuals to engage in online dating to fulfil their needs for attention and affirmation, and motives behind cyber dating (romance, escape into a virtual realm, and adventure) may partially explain the strong correlation between these traits and internet addiction. This study investigates the relationships between dark triad traits, cyber dating motives and internet addiction among 360 young adults aged 18-24. Utilising self-report measures such as the Cyber Relationships Motive Scale, Short Dark Triad, and Six-item Version of the Internet Addiction Test, and employing correlation, mediation, and t-test analyses. The findings highlight significant correlations between variables and the mediating role of cyber dating motives in the relationship between dark triad traits and internet addiction, with observed gender differences. These results provide crucial implications for relationship counselling, understanding digital-age behaviour, and developing strategies for healthier online interactions and policies.

Keywords: cyber-dating motives, dark triad traits, internet addiction, mediation

The last 20 years have seen a remarkable change in how people engage in interpersonal interactions (Ackland 2009; Lewis and West 2009; Wysocki 1998). For young adults, romantic relationships are a significant theme (Claxton & Van Dulmen, 2013). Location-based, user-friendly, and with game-like aspects like swiping to connect with potential mates, mobile dating apps are becoming increasingly popular (David & Cambre, 2016; Miles, 2017; Sumter et al., 2017; Timmermans & De Caluwé, 2017). Therefore, it is not unexpected that young adults make up the majority of dating app users (Heino et al., 2010; Ramirez et al., 2015).

According to research (Ranzini & Lutz, 2017; Sumter et al., 2017; Timmermans & De Caluwé, 2017), there are a variety of motives, i.e., the reasons behind the emergence of behaviour for using dating apps. Personality factors that influence reasons for cyber-dating can also result in

adverse facets of internet use, like addiction, according to Hardie and Tee (2007). Internet addiction is a maladaptive pattern of problematic or excessive internet use for non-essential, private internet activities that extends online time and results in significant life changes (Ali et al., 2021; Tudorel et al., 2019).

The Dark Triad qualities were created to overcome the constraints of conventional personality studies. The three separate and dysfunctional personality qualities that make up The Dark Triad are psychopathy, narcissism, and Machiavellianism (Malesza & Ostaszewski, 2016). The Dark Triad's core values include callousness and a lack of empathy (Book et al., 2016). Additionally, there are distinguishing features, such as narcissism is characterised by a sense of entitlement (Raskin & Terry, 1988), long-term manipulative strategising is a hallmark of Machiavellianism, according to Jones and Paulhus (2014), while psychopathy is

characterised by coldness and antisocial behaviour (Hare, 1996).

Previous studies have linked Dark Triad traits to online dating decisions (Jonason et al., 2012; Lyons et al., 2020; Smith et al., 2019). With a lower capacity to wait for gratification and less self-control, they are more inclined to adopt a quick or opportunistic life strategy. Thus, people scoring higher on the Dark Triad qualities are more likely to be interested in online relationships since they may satisfy their immediate and short-term demands

According to Wang and Chang (2010), the three primary motivations for cyber relationships are romance, escape into a virtual realm and adventure. Researchers have found that these motives correlate with an individual's personality traits.

Dark triad features may make people more prone to engage in online dating to satisfy their needs for attention and affirmation (Freyth & Batinic, 2021; Lyons et al., 2020) by acting impulsively and dangerously online. Moreover, those drawn to online dating for particular reasons may be more susceptible to developing internet addiction if their conduct becomes excessive and starts interfering with their regular lives (Majorsy, 2017).

In a study by Bonilla-Zorita et al. (2020), some of the reasons for use might serve as an escape from suffering, reinforcing the behaviour negatively and increasing the likelihood of misuse behaviours emerging. According to Chung et al. (2019), dark triad personality may be a significant unique difference factor contributing to the emergence and maintenance of addictive behaviours. High social compensation, social engagement, and relationship formation are important indicators of internet addiction (Caplan, 2010; Joinson, 2008; Morahan-Martin & Schumacher, 2003).

According to uses and gratification approach (UGA), a person uses media goal-directedly to satisfy reasons expressed as distinct needs (Ryan et al., 2014; Tang et al., 2022). Investigating personality and motives as dating app usage predictors in a single study was initiated by Timmermans and De Caluwé (2017). Caplan's model of Problematic Internet use (2010) found a preference for online social interactions which is defined as a "cognitive individual-difference construct characterised by beliefs that one is safer, more efficacious, more confident, and more comfortable with online interpersonal interactions and relationships than with traditional face-to-face social activities".

Internet addiction strongly correlates with the dark triad personality traits of narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy (Jauk & Dieterich, 2019; Sindermann et al., 2018). Yet, the motives behind relationship development in cyber interactions may help to partially explain the relationship between dark triad qualities and online addiction (Jonason & Webster, 2010). Few studies have examined the dark triad in the context of online dating, even though it has been discussed in earlier studies on romantic relationships. Relationship development goals in online connections may partially mediate the relationship between dark triad features and internet addiction.

Understanding the motives for online dating services is crucial in light of socially damaging tendencies like the Dark Triad, which transcend the Big Five paradigm and fundamental individual uniqueness (Lyons, 2019). This study aims to add to the growing body of knowledge regarding the relationships between socially malignant personality traits and internet use to further mating goals. Since previous studies have found little to no gender disparities in the use of dating apps (Smith & Duggan, 2013),

probably because the sample was skewed towards women, the purpose of this study is also to understand these differences (Mayshak et al., 2020). The consensus is based on the evolutionary theory that men engage in more sexual interactions and socialisation than women but that women are more passive (Sumter & Vandenbosch, 2018).

Given the significant lack of Indian research, this study aims to address this gap and provide valuable insights into these phenomena within the Indian context. This research is important to understand how these traits and behaviours manifest in young Indian adults, ultimately contributing to more culturally relevant psychological interventions and policies.

Objective

To understand the mediating role of motives for cyber-dating in the relationship between dark triad traits and internet addiction.

Hypotheses

There will be a significant relationship between the dark triad, the motives towards mobile dating apps and internet addiction among young adults.

There will be a significant difference in the motives of males and females using mobile dating apps.

The motives for cyber dating will mediate the relationship between dark triad traits and internet addiction.

Method

Sample

The sample size for the study was 360 young adults aged 18-24 years out of which there were 186 females, 169 males and 5 preferred to not reveal their gender. The present study focused on young adults

because one-third of young adults, or those aged 18 to 24, have used mobile dating at least once, according to Smith (2016). Young adulthood is a crucial development period in a person's life, especially with the allure of dating applications (Sumter & Vandenbosch, 2018). To be included in the study, the participants were required to have regular access to the Internet and experience with online dating or be interested in pursuing online dating. Participants in a committed relationship were excluded to avoid potential interference or bias in their responses.

Measures

The Cyber Relationships Motivation Scale (CRMS) is a self-report questionnaire that evaluates why people interact online. The 23-item scale was created by Wang and Chang (2010) to evaluate nine different reasons for entering into online relationships. The computed reliability of standardised Cronbach's alpha was .90, and all factor loadings fell between .68 and .96. By association among the nine components, the discriminant validity of the Cyber-Relationship Motives Scale was investigated (motives). The findings revealed that the nine parameters had a correlation that varied from -.01 to .47. The scale's Cronbach's alpha value was found to be adequate ($\alpha = .69$). It has been used in various studies to assess the motives for engaging in cyber relationships in different populations (Majorsy, 2017).

The Short Dark Triad (SD3) is a widely used psychological measure of the Dark Triad traits - narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy (Jones and Paulhus, 2014). The SD3 comprises 27 items, nine of which represent each of the three qualities of the Dark Triad. Responses range from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" on a 5-point scale for each question. The short dark triad scale was found to be good ($\alpha = .71$).

The SD3 can be helpful in various research and therapeutic settings and has been demonstrated to have strong reliability and validity in numerous investigations. The intercorrelations ranged from .22 to .40, and the alphas ranged from .68 to .74. According to Jones and Paulhus (2014), the SD3 validities for narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy were .42, .34 and .57, respectively.

The Six-item Version of the Internet Addiction Test (s-IAT) is a shortened version of the original Internet Addiction Test (IAT) developed by Widyanto & McMurrin (2004). The s-IAT consists of six statements the respondent rates on a five-point scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (always). The s-IAT has been found to have good psychometric properties, including excellent reliability (coefficient alpha = 0.97), good predictive validity, adequate item coverage, and good criterion validity, as indicated by a strong positive correlation with the original measure ($r = 0.878$). The value of Cronbach's alpha of the s-IAT scale was found to be moderate ($\alpha = .61$).

Procedure

Participants were asked to sign the informed consent form and thereafter, complete self-report measures of the dark triad, motives for cyber dating, and internet addiction. The data collection was done using Google Forms. The google forms were sent to the possible participants from different categories. The participants were informed of the informed consent, to ensure their

confidentiality and only after the informed consent was filled and the inclusion criteria was met, they were given access to the further questionnaire. The form was closed after ensuring the responses and organising the data in the excel sheet, the data was ready for further analysis.

To evaluate the relationship between the variables, the study computed bivariate correlations between dark triad, motives for cyber dating, and internet addiction (Jin et al., 2019; Jonason et al., 2012; Lee & Lim, 2021). A regression analysis examined how cyber-dating motives mediated the relationship between dark triad traits and internet addiction (Majorsy, 2017). Amongst male and female participants, the means of dark triad features, motives for cyber dating, and internet addiction were compared using the T-test. This test is frequently employed when there are two groups and a continuous variable of interest (Kim, 2015).

Results

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Normality	
				W	p
Adventure	360	47.4	6.71	0.98	<.001
Escape	360	17.0	4.35	0.99	.006
Romance	360	16.5	3.61	0.99	.004
InternetAddiction	360	16.7	3.38	0.98	<.001
Machiavellianism	360	27.6	4.17	0.98	<.001
Narcissism	360	27.5	4.77	0.99	.149
Psychopathy	360	23.6	5.22	0.97	<.001

Table 2. Correlation Matrix

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
1 Adventure	1															
2 Escape	.223**	1														
3 Romance	-0.084	0.003	1													

4	Internet Addiction	.123*	.270**	.144**	1														
5	Machiavellianism	.106*	.161**	.134*	.256**	1													
6	Narcissism	0.012	-.115*	-0.048	-0.022	.112*	1												
7	Psychopathy	0.011	0.041	.255**	.476**	.422**	-0.002	1											
8	Anonymity	.654**	-0.02	-0.095	0.057	0.058	0.004	0.049	1										
9	Meet New People	.447**	0.048	0.008	-0.004	-.204**	0.052	-.148**	.131*	1									
10	Easy to Communicate	.564**	.268**	0.028	.234**	.295**	-.137**	.223**	.231**	0.041	1								
11	Curiosity	.574**	.225**	0.034	0.077	-0.019	0.032	-.121*	.221**	.183**	.181**	1							
12	Emotional Support	.639**	.193**	-.117*	.107*	.194**	0.024	0.076	.296**	0.066	.266**	.203**	1						
13	Social Compensation	.206**	.771**	-0.007	0.028	-0.025	-.142**	-.173**	-0.045	-0.002	.181**	.286**	.184**	1					
14	Away from the Real World	.180**	.737**	0.004	.405**	.299**	-0.035	.231**	0.032	0.082	.264**	0.067	.167**	.180**	1				
15	Love	0.055	-0.036	.608**	-.253**	-.212**	-0.003	-.219**	-0.046	.203**	-0.012	0.089	-0.089	.123*	-.163**	1			
16	Sexual Partners	-.162**	0.049	.642**	.444**	.387**	-0.025	.526**	-0.091	-.168**	0.043	-0.055	-0.052	-.119*	.167**	-.176**	1		

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 3. Path Coefficients and Indirect Effects of the Dark-Triad (X) on Internet Addiction (Y) as Mediated through Motives of Cyber-Dating (M)

Variables	Path coefficients				Indirect effect	
	Internet Addiction (IA)	Adventure (ADV)	Escape (ESC)	Romance (ROM)	estimate	bias-corrected bootstrap 95% confidence interval
Machiavellianism (MCN)	.17 (.04)	.30 (.08)	.25 (.05)	.17 (.04)		
Adventure (ADV)	.06 (.04)					
Escape (ESC)	.16 (.04)					
Romance (ROM)	.10 (.04)					
Total effect					.07 (.02)	.04, .12
MCN → ADV → IA					.02 (.01)	.001, .04
MCN → ESC → IA					.04 (.01)	.02, .07

MCN → ROM → IA					.02 (.009)	.001, .04
Psychopathy (PSY)	.29 (.02)	.07 (.07)	.06 (.04)	.20 (.03)		
Adventure (ADV)	.06 (.02)					
Escape (ESC)	.17 (.03)					
Romance (ROM)	.02 (.04)					
Total effect					.02 (.01)	-.009, .05
PSY → ADV → IA					.004 (.005)	-.006, .02
PSY → ESC → IA					.01 (.008)	-.005, .03
PSY → ROM → IA					.004 (.009)	-.01, .02
Narcissism (NCS)	.03 (.04)	.05 (.07)	-.11 (.05)	.00 (.04)		
Adventure (ADV)	.07 (.03)					
Escape (ESC)	.19 (.04)					
Romance (ROM)	.14 (.05)					
Total effect					-.02 (.02)	-.05, .21
NCS → ADV → IA					.003 (.006)	-.009, .02
NCS → ESC → IA					-.02 (.01)	-.05, .000
NCS → ROM → IA					.000 (.007)	-.02, .17

Table 4. t-statistics

	Male		Female		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>S.D.</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>S.D.</i>		
Adventure	47.32	6.85	47.47	6.54	-0.22	0.83
Escape	16.80	4.37	17.19	4.31	-0.86	0.39
Romance	17.47	3.44	15.55	3.50	5.19	0.00
Addiction	17.67	3.37	15.70	3.11	5.74	0.00
Machiavellianism	28.72	4.14	26.50	3.90	5.21	0.00
Narcissism	27.41	4.46	27.54	5.00	-0.24	0.81
Psychopathy	25.37	4.87	22.01	5.04	6.38	0.00

Discussion

The study aimed to investigate the interplay between the dark triad traits, motives for using mobile dating apps, and internet addiction among young adults. According to the Whole Trait Theory (Fleeson & Jayawickreme, 2015), personality

traits are divided into an explanatory and a descriptive component. Dark Triad qualities can be used to explain the many motives behind cyber dating and internet addiction. Results indicated significant correlations between internet addiction and motives for cyber relationships. Machiavellianism and

psychopathy showed positive correlations with internet addiction, while narcissism did not. Machiavellianism positively correlated with adventure, escape, and romance motives, whereas narcissism negatively correlated only with the escape motive. Psychopathy exhibited a significant positive correlation with the romance motive. Mediation analyses revealed significant indirect paths from Machiavellianism to internet addiction via adventure, escape, and romance motives. However, similar mediation effects were not found for psychopathy or narcissism. Additionally, gender differences were observed, with males scoring higher on Machiavellianism, psychopathy, romance motive, and internet addiction compared to females.

The life history theory and the complex interactions of Dark Triad qualities in the digital sphere shed light on the strong positive correlation between escape and adventure, and Machiavellianism. As to the life history hypothesis (Jonason et al., 2010), those who possess the dark triad personality traits prioritise reproduction over subsistence regarding resource allocation. Individuals with Dark Triad features are more likely to utilise the Internet to satisfy their short-term interests and urgent demands (Jin et al., 2019). The significant positive correlation between the adventure motive and high Machiavellian persons can be explained by their impulsive impulses towards instant pleasure and thrills in the digital realm. Furthermore, Machiavellian personalities are recognised for their ability to manipulate and exploit others; these characteristics frequently result in unfavourable adaption practices in interpersonal interactions (Carpenter, 2012). People with a high degree of Machiavellianism may turn to the internet to avoid the difficulties of real emotional connections and the fallout from their deceptive actions. This aligns with the finding that the escape motive and Machiavellianism

have a positive relationship. For narcissism and psychopathy, the escape motives did not correlate (Carpenter, 2012).

There was no discernible correlation between narcissism and romance motive among the three Dark Triad qualities. One explanation would be that, rather than actively pursuing a strategy, narcissists are more appealing because they are conveniently passively selected for short-term mating (Burchette, 2017). Machiavellianism and psychopathy significantly correlate with sexual partners, a subset of the romance motive. These findings are consistent with the research findings that Freyth and Batinic (2021) carried out. It may be simpler for those who possess these qualities to draw in and interact with possible sexual partners. According to research, people who score highly on sensation-seeking behaviours opt for romantic dates and casual companions via online dating apps (Bonilla-Zorita et al., 2020; Chan, 2017).

There is a positive correlation between psychopathy and Machiavellianism, and Internet addiction. Brand et al.'s (2016) Interaction of the Person-Affect-Cognition-Execution model (I-PACE) which holds that internet addiction is the result of the interaction of a person's characteristics, motivations, the situation, cognitive and affective components, and gratifications, could explain the emergence and maintenance of addictive behaviours. According to Chung et al. (2019), the Dark Triad personality type may be regarded as a significant unique characteristic contributing to developing and maintaining addictive behaviours. It is easier for Machiavellian individuals to cheat or trick people online because disciplinary actions are less likely than in real life (Demirciođlu & Köse, 2018; Siah et al., 2021). Their internet use increases due to this never-ending loop of

reinforcement, which eventually becomes addictive.

The Expectation and Confirmation model (Bhattacharjee, 2001) and the Use and Gratification approach (Katz et al., 1973) provide insight into the predictive elements of media use in cyber-dating. The three motives for people date online: romance, adventure, and escape have a positive correlation with internet addiction. The loop of internet use was sustained by social comparison and affirmation on dating platforms, which heightened addictive behaviours (Jin et al., 2019).

Narcissism and internet addiction do not significantly correlate. The present findings corroborate earlier studies' findings that narcissism and Facebook addiction levels are unrelated (Casale & Fioravanti, 2018). However, the findings refute the social skill explanation of problematic Internet use (Caplan, 2005) and the social compensation theory (Valkenburg & Peter, 2009). A plausible rationale for the disparate outcome could be that the present investigation, in contrast to earlier studies, has concentrated on a particular social media site. Furthermore, narcissism is a complex characteristic with various expressions in different people. Analysing online addiction without considering the differences across platforms fails to identify the risks and preferences of narcissists. According to the personality-coping-outcome theory, the relationships between personality and outcomes may have a bearing on coping mechanisms (Gallagher, 1996; Siah et al., 2021).

Machiavellian tendencies influence internet addiction through these motives, as seen by the significant indirect routes from Machiavellianism to adventure, escape, and romance in the first parallel mediation analysis. Machiavellianism-inclined people may use the internet for romance, escape,

and adventure, which can exacerbate their internet addiction (Jauk & Dieterich, 2019). Furthermore, they frequently use charm and cunning to pursue several love relationships online (Jones and Paulhus, 2014). The romantic motivation behind this increased internet usage amplifies addiction habits. The significant coefficients and the non-overlapping confidence intervals suggest a strong mediation effect.

There were no significant indirect relationships between psychopathy, narcissism, and internet addiction through romantic, adventure, or escape motives in the second or third parallel mediation analyses. Contrary to popular belief, psychopathy's impulsive character explains why it does not exhibit mediation effects through escape, adventure, or romantic impulses. When mediating the relationship between internet addiction and psychopathic persons, the motives are futile because of their impulsive and emotionally detached nature, they do not require specific objectives for their indiscriminate online connections. Their characteristics are directly linked to compulsive internet use, negating the importance of the intermediary pathways (Hare, 1996). Regarding narcissism, the fact that narcissistic qualities are complex may be the reason for the absence of mediation effects. Narcissistic people participate in various online activities because a need for attention and adoration drives them. It is difficult to identify clear channels of direct mediation because of the wide range of behaviours that dilute the distinctiveness of intentions (Lyons et al., 2020, Raskin & Terry, 1988).

According to the gender socialisation theory (Tolman et al., 2003) and other studies (Sumter & Vandenbosch, 2018), men were more likely than women to report wanting casual sex. Women are supposed to appreciate a more passive sexual role and invest in committed relationships. In contrast,

men are typically socialised towards valuing, participating in various sexual relationships, and taking an active role in sexual encounters (Tolman et al., 2003). According to theories of sexual selection, women desire a high social position in their male partners because it indicates their capacity to guard and give resources (Shulman et al., 2014). As a result, males' high levels of sensation-seeking and low levels of impulse control evolved due to the reproductive success of men who are psychologically prone to taking risks and earning high status.

Future Implications

Based on well-established theories such as life history theory, the results not only aid in understanding internet addiction but also have practical implications for digital platform designs and interventions. Investigating gender disparities in the study adds to our understanding of how society shapes online activity. As the digital landscape continues to evolve, these insights serve as a foundation for future research endeavours, enabling a deeper understanding of human behaviour in the digital age and guiding the development of strategies to promote healthier online interactions. These results also have relationship counselling implications, enabling therapists to comprehend better and treat the link between personalities and online interactions. Ethical considerations and policy-making in the digital sphere will also be influenced to ensure user safety and well-being online.

Limitations

Initially, the study's dependence on self-reported data collected using Google Forms raises the possibility of biases related to social desirability and response. The findings of this study may be limited in their generalisability, given the focus on young Indian adults, and caution should be exercised when applying them to other age

groups or cultural contexts. Further research with diverse populations is needed to validate and extend these findings.

Conclusion

By examining the Dark Triad traits—Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy—and their associations with particular motives like romance, adventure, and escape, the study clarifies the complex relationship between personality traits and digital interactions. The findings align with theories suggesting that individuals with dark triad traits use the internet to fulfil short-term interests, leading to addictive behaviours. The distinct pathways for each trait underscore the importance of considering personality-specific motives when addressing internet addiction.

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