



Results from Malaysia on the Dark Tetrad's and Impulsivity's Roles in Social Media Addiction

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Abstract

This study investigates the roles of the Dark Tetrad personality traits (Machiavellianism, Narcissism, Psychopathy, and Sadism) and impulsivity in social media addiction within the Malaysian context. Utilizing a sample of 500 participants across various demographic backgrounds, this research explores the relationships between these personality traits, impulsivity, and social media addiction. Our findings suggest that higher levels of Machiavellianism, Narcissism, and impulsivity are significantly associated with greater social media addiction, while Psychopathy and Sadism show less consistent effects. This study contributes to understanding the psychological underpinnings of social media addiction and provides implications for targeted interventions in Malaysia.

Keywords: Dark tetrad; Impulsivity; Social Media Addiction; Malaysia; Personality traits

Introduction

Social media platforms have become ubiquitous in contemporary society, offering numerous benefits but also raising concerns about potential addictive behaviors. Social media addiction has been increasingly recognized as a significant issue, with detrimental effects on mental health and daily functioning. Understanding the psychological factors contributing to social media addiction is crucial for developing effective intervention strategies. This study focuses on the role of the Dark Tetrad personality traits and impulsivity in social media addiction, using a Malaysian sample to provide insights into regional differences [1-3].

The pervasive use of social media has transformed how individuals interact, communicate, and share information. While these platforms offer numerous benefits, such as enhanced connectivity and access to information, there is growing concern about the potential for excessive use to lead to social media addiction. Social media addiction is characterized by compulsive engagement with social media platforms to the extent that it interferes with daily functioning, relationships, and overall well-being. As social media continues to play a central role in modern life, understanding the psychological factors contributing to addiction becomes increasingly important. Social media addiction is marked by excessive and uncontrollable use of social media platforms, resulting in negative impacts on personal, academic, or professional life. Symptoms often include preoccupation with social media, withdrawal symptoms when access is restricted, and a persistent desire to use social media despite adverse consequences. The rise in social media usage has prompted researchers to explore various psychological factors that may contribute to this addiction, including personality traits and impulsivity. The Dark Tetrad refers to a cluster of four distinct yet interrelated personality traits: Machiavellianism, Narcissism, Psychopathy, and Sadism. These traits are characterized by manipulative, self-centered, and callous behaviors, which have been linked to various maladaptive outcomes, including addiction-related behaviors. Machiavellianism involves a manipulative approach to interpersonal relationships, where individuals prioritize personal gain and exhibit a lack of morality. This trait may contribute to social media addiction by driving individuals to use social media as a tool for manipulation and self-promotion [4].

Narcissism is characterized by grandiosity, a need for admiration, and a lack of empathy. Narcissistic individuals may be particularly prone to social media addiction due to their desire for constant validation and

attention from others. Psychopathy involves impulsivity, callousness, and a lack of empathy. While psychopathy's role in social media addiction may be less direct, its associated impulsivity and disregard for consequences could contribute to compulsive social media use. Impulsivity is a personality trait characterized by a tendency to act without forethought and seek immediate gratification. It has been consistently linked to various forms of addiction, including substance abuse and gambling. In the context of social media, impulsivity may manifest as a compulsive need to check updates, post frequently, and engage in online interactions without regard for the potential negative consequences. High levels of impulsivity can exacerbate social media addiction by making it difficult for individuals to control their online behaviors. The context of Malaysia provides a unique setting for studying social media addiction due to its diverse cultural, social, and economic landscape. With a high rate of social media usage among Malaysians, understanding how personality traits and impulsivity influence addiction within this population is crucial. Malaysia's multicultural society, with its varying levels of exposure to digital technology and social media, offers an opportunity to explore how these psychological factors interact in different demographic groups. This study aims to investigate the roles of the Dark Tetrad personality traits and impulsivity in social media addiction within a Malaysian sample [5].

Significance of the study: Understanding the psychological underpinnings of social media addiction is essential for developing targeted interventions and prevention strategies. By examining the Dark Tetrad traits and impulsivity in the Malaysian context, this study contributes to the broader field of addiction research and offers practical implications for mental health professionals, educators, and policymakers in addressing social media addiction.

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Social media addiction: Social media addiction refers to excessive use of social media platforms that interfere with daily life and well-being. It is characterized by compulsive engagement, withdrawal symptoms when not online, and negative impacts on personal and professional life [6-8].

The dark tetrad

- Machiavellianism: Manipulative behavior and a focus on personal gain.
- Narcissism: Grandiosity, self-focus, and a need for admiration.
- Psychopathy: Impulsivity, callousness, and lack of empathy.
- Sadism: Pleasure derived from inflicting harm on others.

Impulsivity

Impulsivity is characterized by a tendency to act without forethought and a propensity for immediate gratification. It is often linked to various addictive behaviors.

Methodology

Participants

A total of 500 participants from Malaysia were recruited through online surveys and university networks. The sample included diverse age groups, educational levels, and socioeconomic backgrounds [9].

Participants completed the following questionnaires: The Dark Tetrad Short Scale to assess Machiavellianism, Narcissism, Psychopathy, and Sadism.

The Barratt Impulsiveness Scale to measure impulsivity.

The Social Media Addiction Scale to evaluate social media addiction.

Procedure

Participants completed the surveys online, and data were collected over a period of three months. Anonymity and confidentiality were ensured.

Results

The mean age of participants was 23.5 years, with a gender distribution of 50% male and 50% female. The average scores for the Dark Tetrad traits, impulsivity, and social media addiction were calculated (Table 1 and Table 2).

Correlation analysis: Pearson correlation coefficients revealed significant positive correlations between Machiavellianism ($r = 0.42, p < 0.01$), Narcissism ($r = 0.38, p < 0.01$), and impulsivity ($r = 0.45, p < 0.01$) with social media addiction. Psychopathy ($r = 0.15, p = 0.05$)

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables.

Variable	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)
Age	23.5	5.2
Machiavellianism	3.45	0.85
Narcissism	3.60	0.90
Psychopathy	2.80	0.75
Sadism	2.55	0.70
Impulsivity	4.10	0.95
Social Media Addiction	3.75	0.85

Table 2. Comparison of Dark Tetrad Traits and Impulsivity by Social Media Addiction Levels.

Variable	Low (M ± SD)	Moderate (M ± SD)	High (M ± SD)	F	p
Machiavellianism	3.10 ± 0.70	3.50 ± 0.85	3.80 ± 0.90	6.35	< 0.01
Narcissism	3.20 ± 0.75	3.55 ± 0.85	4.00 ± 0.95	7.25	< 0.01
Psychopathy	2.60 ± 0.65	2.75 ± 0.70	3.10 ± 0.80	4.10	< 0.05
Sadism	2.30 ± 0.60	2.50 ± 0.70	2.70 ± 0.75	2.50	0.08
Impulsivity	3.70 ± 0.85	4.00 ± 0.90	4.50 ± 1.00	8.50	< 0.01

and Sadism ($r = 0.12, p = 0.08$) showed weaker and less consistent relationships with social media addiction.

Regression analysis: Multiple regression analysis indicated that Machiavellianism ($\beta = 0.30, p < 0.01$), Narcissism ($\beta = 0.25, p < 0.01$), and impulsivity ($\beta = 0.35, p < 0.01$) were significant predictors of social media addiction. Psychopathy and Sadism did not contribute significantly to the model.

Discussion

The results suggest that Machiavellianism, Narcissism, and impulsivity are significant predictors of social media addiction in Malaysia. These findings are consistent with previous research indicating that manipulative and self-centered traits, along with impulsive tendencies, contribute to addictive behaviors the weaker associations of Psychopathy and Sadism may reflect cultural differences or the specific nature of social media addiction in this context. The significant positive correlations between Machiavellianism, Narcissism, and social media addiction suggest that individuals with these traits are more prone to developing addictive behaviors related to social media use. Machiavellianism, characterized by manipulative and strategic behavior, may lead individuals to engage in social media excessively to gain social influence and manipulate others for personal gain. Narcissists, driven by their need for admiration and validation, might find social media platforms particularly appealing, as these platforms provide opportunities for self-promotion and receiving immediate feedback from others [10].

Impulsivity emerged as a strong predictor of social media addiction, aligning with previous research linking impulsivity to various addictive behaviors. The tendency to act without forethought and seek immediate gratification can drive individuals to compulsively check and engage with social media, leading to addiction. This finding underscores the role of impulsivity as a key factor in the development and maintenance of social media addiction. Psychopathy and Sadism showed weaker associations with social media addiction. While psychopathy is characterized by impulsivity and a lack of empathy, its relationship with social media addiction may be less direct than that of Machiavellianism and Narcissism. The weaker correlation between Sadism and social media addiction suggests that deriving pleasure from causing harm to others is not a significant driver of compulsive social media use. These traits may manifest in other forms of online behavior, such as cyberbullying, rather than addiction per se. The Malaysian context provides a unique cultural backdrop for understanding these relationships. Malaysia's multicultural society, which includes significant influences from Malay, Chinese, Indian, and indigenous cultures, may shape how personality traits interact with social media use. The high rate of social media penetration in Malaysia and its role in daily communication and social interaction likely amplify the effects of personality traits and impulsivity on social media addiction. The collectivist nature of Malaysian culture, which emphasizes group harmony and social relationships, may influence the expression of Dark

Tetrad traits and their impact on social media addiction. For instance, narcissistic individuals in Malaysia might use social media to maintain and enhance their social status within their communities, while Machiavellian individuals may leverage social media to strategically navigate social networks. Understanding these cultural nuances is essential for developing culturally sensitive interventions.

Implications

Understanding the personality traits associated with social media addiction can help in designing targeted interventions. For instance, individuals with high levels of Machiavellianism and Narcissism may benefit from therapies that address self-esteem and interpersonal relationships. Interventions aimed at reducing social media addiction could benefit from focusing on individuals with high levels of Machiavellianism and Narcissism by addressing their underlying needs for manipulation and validation. Cognitive-behavioral strategies that promote healthy self-esteem and teach alternative ways to achieve social goals without relying on social media could be effective. For individuals with high impulsivity, interventions could include training in self-regulation and delay of gratification. Techniques such as mindfulness, impulse control strategies, and structured routines can help individuals manage their impulsive tendencies and reduce compulsive social media use. Additionally, educational programs that raise awareness about the risks of social media addiction and promote balanced media consumption can be beneficial.

Limitations and future research

This study's cross-sectional design limits causal conclusions. Future research could explore longitudinal relationships and the impact of cultural factors on these associations. Longitudinal studies are needed to establish causal links and understand the temporal dynamics of these relationships. The self-report nature of the measures used in this study may introduce biases related to social desirability and self-perception. Future research could incorporate multi-method approaches, including behavioral assessments and longitudinal tracking, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of social media addiction. Additionally, the sample in this study, while diverse, may not fully represent the entire Malaysian population. Future studies should aim to include larger and more representative samples to enhance the generalizability of the findings.

Conclusion

This research highlights the significant roles of Machiavellianism, Narcissism, and impulsivity in social media addiction among Malaysians. By identifying these key factors, we can better address social media addiction and develop effective preventive and therapeutic strategies. The significant associations between Machiavellianism, Narcissism, and impulsivity with social media addiction underscore the importance of considering personality traits in understanding and addressing this contemporary issue. By identifying key psychological factors, this research provides a foundation for developing targeted and culturally sensitive interventions to mitigate social media addiction in Malaysia and potentially other similar contexts.

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Conflict of Interest

None

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