

Beyond the big five: the effect of machiavellian, narcissistic, and psychopathic personality traits on stakeholder engagement

Article

Accepted Version

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To link to this article DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/mar.21647>

Publisher: Wiley

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Beyond the Big Five: The Effect of Machiavellian, Narcissistic, and Psychopathic Personality Traits on Stakeholder Engagement

Abstract

Prior research has established the key impact of customers' Big Five personality traits (e.g., agreeableness, conscientiousness) on their brand/firm engagement, suggesting that individuals with differing personality traits engage differently with brands. In parallel, extending influential customer engagement research, *stakeholder engagement*, which covers *any* stakeholder's (e.g., a customer's, supplier's, employee's, competitor's) engagement in his/her role-related interactions, activities, and relationships, is rapidly gaining momentum. However, despite existing acumen in both areas, little remains known regarding the effect of stakeholders' anti-social or maladaptive *dark triad*-based personality traits, including machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy, on the focal anti-social stakeholder's and his/her interactee's engagement, as therefore explored in this paper. To address these issues, we develop a conceptual model and an associated set of propositions that outline the nature of a stakeholder's machiavellian, narcissistic, or psychopathic role-related engagement and its effect on his/her interactee's engagement. We conclude by outlining pertinent theoretical and managerial implications that arise from our analyses.

Keywords: Stakeholder engagement; Customer engagement; Machiavellianism; Narcissism; Psychopathy; Dark triad of personality traits.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the last decade, customer engagement (CE), defined as “a customer’s motivationally driven, volitional investment of ... operant resources (including cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and social knowledge/skills), and operand resources (e.g., equipment) in brand interactions” (Kumar et al., 2019, p. 141), has evolved into a prominent firm performance metric (Hollebeek et al., 2019; Brodie et al., 2011). In particular, CE has been demonstrated to generate enhanced firm performance, including by stimulating sales, revenue, share-of-wallet, and stock price growth, to name a few (Beckers et al., 2018; Giakoumaki et al., 2020). For example, The Gallup Group (2021) suggests that “consumer electronics shoppers who are fully engaged spend 29% more per shopping trip than actively disengaged customers,” corroborating CE’s practical significance.

CE is shaped by a range of factors, including customers’ age, culture, and personality (e.g., Rather and Hollebeek, 2021; Itani et al., 2020), among others. The latter, *personality*, has been defined as “the dynamic organization within the individual of those psycho-physical systems that determine his [her] unique adjustments to [the] environment” (Allport, 1937: p. 48). Existing studies have explored the effect of the Big Five personality traits of extraversion, agreeableness, openness, conscientiousness, and neuroticism on CE (e.g., Marbach et al., 2016; Chen et al., 2017). For example, Islam et al. (2017) establish a significant positive association of customer extraversion, agreeableness, openness, and neuroticism on CE, and a negative effect of conscientiousness on CE in a Facebook-based brand community. In addition, Hollebeek, Islam et al. (2019, p. 224) conceptualize the notion of *personality-based CE styles*, defined as a customer’s “personality trait-driven disposition to think, feel, act, and relate to others in a certain characteristic manner in their brand interactions,” revealing customers’ *typical* personality-based brand engagement.

However, despite its contribution, the extant literature reveals the following gaps. First, prior studies have examined the role of customers' Big Five personality traits, which are observed to varying degrees in well-adjusted, well-functioning, or adaptive individuals (John and Srivastava, 1999; Peng et al., 2012), on their CE, as outlined. Yet, individuals' personalities may also exhibit structural *maladaptive* or *anti-social* traits that disregard or violate the rights or well-being of others (Sanjeev et al., 2019; Berger, 2003), which remain more tenuous vis-à-vis CE to date. Specifically, the effect of individuals' anti-social, *dark triad*-based personality traits of machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy on their own and their interactee's engagement remains nebulous, as therefore explored in this paper. These analyses are important, because not only are these maladaptive personality traits prevalent in 10-13% of the global population (Hull, 2021), they are also on the rise (Montes, 2013), leading us to identify a critical and growing need to understand the effect of these anti-social traits on engagement.

Second and relatedly, though several authors have explored the interface of CE and adaptive personality traits, as noted, little remains known regarding the effect of different firm *stakeholders'* anti-social personality traits on their own *and* their interactee's role-related engagement (Clark et al., 2020; Giacalone and Greenberg, 1998), as therefore investigated in this paper. That is, not only customers may engage in anti-social ways in their brand/firm-related interactions, but *any* firm stakeholder may do so (Jackson, 2014). Here, a *stakeholder* denotes any "group or individual who can affect or is affected by [the firm]" (e.g., suppliers, employees, managers, investors, etc.; Freeman 1984, p. 46). For example, managers commonly display machiavellian or narcissistic tendencies (Harmstra et al., 2021), thus affecting stakeholder- and firm-based interactions, relationships, and effectiveness. Moreover, like the anti-social, aggressing stakeholder, his/her interactee can *also* assume any stakeholder role (e.g., customer/employee, etc.), thus yielding broader, more generalizable insight (vs. *single* stakeholder-based analyses).

These anti-social traits, which may result from stressful or traumatic events in the aggressing stakeholder's life (e.g., abuse/illness; Benzi et al., 2019), are undesirable given their tendency to challenge the stakeholder's own *and* his/her interactee's role engagement, -satisfaction, -performance, and well-being (Perugini and Solano, 2021). The outlined maladaptive personality traits are, therefore, particularly prevalent in stakeholder *interactions*, including in staff meetings, customer-to-customer interactions (e.g., in educational/fitness classes), firm-based supplier dealings, investor relations, brand communities, shared servicescapes (e.g., in public transport, libraries, hospitals, airports, train stations, hotel lobbies, restaurants, rest homes, or cinemas), and so on (Clark et al., 2020), revealing their key theoretical link to the interactive SE concept and warranting the substantial practical relevance of our analyses.

Addressing these gaps, this article makes the following contribution to the SE- (e.g., Hollebeek et al., 2021) and firm-based anti-social personality traits literature (e.g., Fastoso et al., 2018). By exploring the maladaptive traits of machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy, collectively known as the *dark triad* of personality traits (e.g., Jakobwitz and Egan, 2006), and their effect on the focal (i.e., anti-social) stakeholder's engagement *and* that of his/her interactee(s), our analyses offer pioneering new insight. For example, how does a machiavellian salesperson's attempt to unduly manipulate his/her prospect (e.g., to purchase a redundant item) affect the latter's brand engagement? Or, how may an employee's *stalking* (e.g., of a co-worker), which has been viewed as psychopathic behavior (Ogloff et al., 2020), impact the latter's engagement? Given the lack of literature-based insight into these and related issues, we explore the theoretical interface of stakeholders' machiavellian, narcissistic, and psychopathic role-related engagement and its effect on their interactee's engagement in this paper. Our analyses, therefore, extend the work of authors, including Furnham and Treglown (2021), Filipkowski and Derbis (2020), and Purwati et al. (2019), who address the dark triad's

impact on a particular stakeholder's (e.g., employee's, customer's) engagement, which we expand to incorporate *any* stakeholder's role-related engagement (Viglia et al., 2018), thus unlocking more generalizable, *omni*-stakeholder-based insight.

The article's remainder unfolds as follows. In Section 2, we review pertinent maladaptive personality traits- and SE literature, followed by the development of a conceptual model and an associated set of propositions that address the effect of relevant firm stakeholders' maladaptive personality traits on their own *and* their interactee's role-related engagement in Section 3. In Section 4, we outline key implications that emerge from our analyses and derive avenues for further research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In Section 2.1, we review key literature on the dark triad of personality traits, which comprises the malevolent personality traits of machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy (e.g., James et al., 2014), followed by an outline of the stakeholder engagement (SE) literature in Section 2.2.

2.1 The Dark triad of personality traits

The dark triad of personality traits is discussed in a rich body of applied psychology research, including in clinical psychology, law enforcement, and management, among others (O'Boyle et al., 2012; McHoskey et al., 1998). Stakeholders who score high on these traits are less compassionate, -agreeable, and -empathetic (Lee and Gibbons, 2017), and are more likely than others to create interpersonal tension, social stress, or to violate rules/regulations, thus raising significant organizational issues (Parker-Ellen et al., 2019). In the next sub-sections, we review the dark triad of personality traits, including machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy. Though a level of overlap may exist across these traits, they have been identified as psychometrically distinct constructs (Paulhus and Williams, 2002).

2.1.1 Machiavellianism

While consensus regarding the conceptualization of *machiavellianism* is lacking, scholars agree that it is characterized by an individual's cunning or unscrupulous manipulation and exploitation of others and unemotional callousness toward others (Den Hartog and Belschak, 2012; Jakobwitz and Egan, 2006). For example, Christie and Geis (1970, p. 106) define machiavellianism as "a process by which the manipulator gets more of some kind of reward than [s]he would have gotten without manipulating, while someone else gets less." Here, *manipulation* refers to a type of social influence that intends to change another's perception or behavior through the manipulator's indirect, deceptive, or underhanded tactics (Nathan, 2017). Moreover, the manipulator typically tries to advance his/her interests at the expense of another or others (Kislik, 2017). For example, managers may coerce an employee to undertake an unsafe task at work, with a view to taking the credit for its successful completion. Or, an academic supervisor may manipulate a doctoral student to list the former's name as lead author on the latter's research work.

This tendency to manipulate others may see varying levels of aggressive behavior, ranging from flattery and/or deception, to bribery and/or intimidation (Szabó and Jones, 2019). Individuals that score high on this trait therefore expose an absence of, disregard for, or indifference toward moral standards or beliefs (Sen et al., 2016). Machiavellian individuals also view interpersonal manipulation as the key to achieving their objectives (Furnham et al., 2013). While authoritative firm stakeholders (e.g., managers) tend to display higher machiavellianism (Dahling et al., 2009), as noted, *any* firm stakeholder can, theoretically, exhibit machiavellian behavior. For example, customers may try manipulate frontline service employees to *get their way* (e.g., by receiving additional service benefits or an unfair refund). We next review important narcissism literature.

2.1.2 Narcissism

Named after the Greek mythological figure Narcissus, who fell in love with his own reflection, *narcissism* is defined as an inordinate fascination with or admiration of one's own physical and/or mental attributes, or an excessive self-love (e.g., Pincus, 2013). In other words, narcissism involves the narcissist's idealized self-image based on an embellished view of his/her own characteristics or performance, which is also known as pathological self-absorption (Barnett and Sharp, 2017; Emmons, 1987). Though these traits are common at the infantile level of personality development, narcissists typically retain them into adulthood, including by displaying a tendency toward grandiosity, egotism, pride, and lacking empathy (Miller et al., 2011; Pincus et al., 2009). For example, narcissists may boast about their own self-perceived abilities and expect others to glorify or worship them accordingly.

In 1898, Havelock Ellis first identified narcissism as a disorder (Millon et al., 2004), after which *narcissistic personality disorder* was later listed in the American Psychological Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM) from 1968. Individuals scoring high on this trait tend to display grandiose or pretentious, entitled, dominant, and/or superior behavior and potential unethical behavior (Kashmiri et al., 2017). For example, firms led by narcissistic CEOs are more likely to engage in corporate tax sheltering (Olsen and Stekelberg, 2016). Narcissism comprises four facets that distinguish it from healthy self-care or -responsibility (Sanjeev et al., 2019; Weiser, 2015; Horton et al., 2006): (i) *authority*: the belief that one has the right to give orders, make decisions, and expect or enforce obedience; (ii) *superiority*: the belief that one is superior to others; (iii) *self-absorption*: self-admiration; and (iv) *entitlement*: the belief that one is inherently deserving of privileges or special treatment. Moreover, narcissism often creates relational tensions between the self and others, thus challenging the maintenance of a conducive organizational culture (Duchon and Burns, 2008). We next review literature addressing the dark triad's third and final personality trait, psychopathy.

2.1.3 Psychopathy

As for machiavellianism and narcissism, no universally agreed-upon definition exists for psychopathy (Paulhus and Williams, 2002; Skeem et al., 2011). Known as the most malevolent dark triad trait (Rauthmann, 2012), *psychopathy* is characterized by an individual's (i.e., the psychopath's) persistent anti-social behavior, impaired empathy and remorse for one's actions, and impulsive, disinhibited, thrill-seeking behavior (Campbell and Miller, 2011; Blair, 2003). Consequently, psychopathic individuals typically struggle to establish deeper, meaningful relationships, including in the workplace or servicescape (Karampournioti et al., 2018; Schütte et al., 2018).

After the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM) and the *International Classification of Diseases* (ICD) recognized anti-social- and dissocial personality disorder (which exhibit significant overlap with psychopathy) as a mental condition, Canadian psychologist Robert Hare revitalized attention to the concept with his *Psychopathy Checklist* in criminology (e.g., Hare, 2021). That is, though psychiatric- and psychological organizations or associations have tended to refrain from a formal *psychopathy* diagnosis, assessments of individuals' psychopathic characteristics are commonly used in the criminal justice context. Moreover, while the popular press tends to refer to psychopathy as “insanity” or “mental illness,” psychopathy remains conceptually distinct from psychosis (Hare, 1999).

Psychopathy is subject to a rich research tradition (Landay et al., 2019; Boddy et al., 2010). In this multi-disciplinary discourse, several psychopathy conceptions exist, including *Cleckleyan psychopathy* (i.e., the psychopath's bold, disinhibited behavior and feckless disregard) and *criminal psychopathy* (i.e., meaner, more aggressive behavior; Skeem et al., 2011). Despite these differing conceptions, psychopathy is most commonly measured by Hare's (1991) *Psychopathy Checklist, Revised* (PCL-R; e.g., Cooke and Michie, 1997), where

those scoring high on this trait tend to display the following attributes (Marcus et al., 2013): (i) *Boldness*: Low fear, including through an elevated tolerance to stress, unfamiliar situations, and danger, coupled with high self-confidence and social assertiveness; (ii) *Disinhibition*: Poor impulse control, including through a limited ability to plan or assess the consequences of their actions, an urge to control situations, a demand for immediate gratification, and impaired behavioral restraints, and (iii) *Meanness*: Lacking empathy, remorse, and attachment to others, leading them to adopt cruelty for self-empowerment, defiance of authority, and destructive thrill-seeking (Besta et al., 2021). We next review management/marketing-based stakeholder engagement research.

2.2 Stakeholder engagement

Extending the widespread interest in *customer engagement* in the last decade (e.g., Moriuchi, 2021; Siuki et al., 2021), the marketing literature's growing ecosystem-, network-, or *multi-stakeholder* focus (e.g., Vargo and Lusch, 2016) has spawned a growing recognition of the need to consider *any* stakeholder's (vs. merely the customer's) role-related engagement (e.g., Brodie et al., 2016), as encapsulated in the *stakeholder engagement* (SE) concept (Viglia et al., 2018; Jonas et al., 2018). For example, while customer engagement examines the customer's purchase/brand usage dynamics (e.g., Labrecque et al., 2020), employee engagement assesses a worker's engagement with his/her job (e.g., Breevaart et al., 2014), etc., as outlined. With its roots in the rich stakeholder theory discourse since the 1980s, SE is traditionally viewed from a firm perspective (e.g., Driessen et al., 2013). However, following Hollebeek et al. (2020), we take an *omni-stakeholder* view of SE that incorporates *any* stakeholder's role-related interactions, activities, and relationships, thus revealing a substantially expanded theoretical breadth and broader applicability.

SE's conceptualization is debated in the literature. For example, though Viglia et al. (2018, p. 405) define the concept as a stakeholder's "emotional and cognitive ... engagement

[to] trigger... behavioral activation,” Hollebeek et al. (2020, p. 1) define SE as “a stakeholder’s state-based, boundedly volitional resource endowment in his/her role-related interactions, activities, and/or relationships.” Notwithstanding this debate, most authors agree on a number of SE hallmarks, as discussed further below.

First, SE is an interactive concept (e.g., Giakoumaki and Krepapa, 2020), where *interaction* has been viewed as “mutual or reciprocal action or influence” (Vargo and Lusch, 2016, p. 9). In these interactions, aspects of stakeholders’ personality tend to surface, including through their observed level of agreeableness or conscientiousness (McCrae and Costa, 2008) *and/or* their potential maladaptive (i.e., machiavellian, narcissistic, and/or psychopathic) traits (Wright et al., 2017). For example, while machiavellian stakeholders have been found to display greater levels of self-monitoring and more dishonest self-promotion in their Facebook-based interactivity (Abell and Brewer, 2014), narcissistic stakeholders tend to respond aggressively to interactional ego-threat provocation (e.g., through perceived personal insults; Jones and Paulhus, 2010a). Therefore, these maladaptive personality traits tend to not only impact the focal (i.e., anti-social) stakeholder’s engagement, but also, that of his/her interactee (e.g., Clark et al., 2020). Consequently, SE-based interactivity is crucial for machiavellian, narcissistic, or psychopathic stakeholders in communicating their social influence to others (Poorrezaei and Heinze, 2014; Hollebeek et al., 2021).

Second, SE is widely viewed as a stakeholder’s role-related tangible (e.g., equipment-based/monetary) and intangible (e.g., cognitive, emotional, or behavioral) resource investment in their role-related interactions (e.g., Jonas et al., 2018), revealing its multidimensional nature (Bissola and Imperatori, 2016). Though *cognitive SE* refers to a stakeholder’s level of role-related cognitive processing and mental elaboration, *emotional SE* denotes the extent of a stakeholder’s role-related affect (e.g., passion; Hollebeek et al., 2014). Moreover, *behavioral SE* reflects a stakeholder’s role-related actions (Hollebeek et al., 2021). For example, while

employees will spend time, thought, and effort in engaging with their job (Zeng and Murali, 2021), suppliers' engagement will see them purchasing, moving, and (re)distributing stock, while also liaising with their staff and clients. Overall, stakeholders' greater (in)tangible resource investments reflect their higher engagement (Viglia et al., 2018).

Third, though some of these resource investments occur out of a stakeholder's own free will (i.e., volitionally), others may be less voluntary, exposing SE's *bounded* volitionality (Hollebeek et al., 2020, 2018). In the context of the dark triad of personality traits, this bounded volitionality has high relevance, as the recipient of the focal stakeholder's anti-social behavior (i.e., interactee), in particular, will often be an *involuntary* party to these interactions. For example, given psychopathic stakeholders' tendency toward vengeance behavior, low forgiveness, low empathy, and schadenfreude (Giammarco and Vernon, 2014; James et al., 2014), the interactee will tend to be involved on a less or *non*-volitional basis.

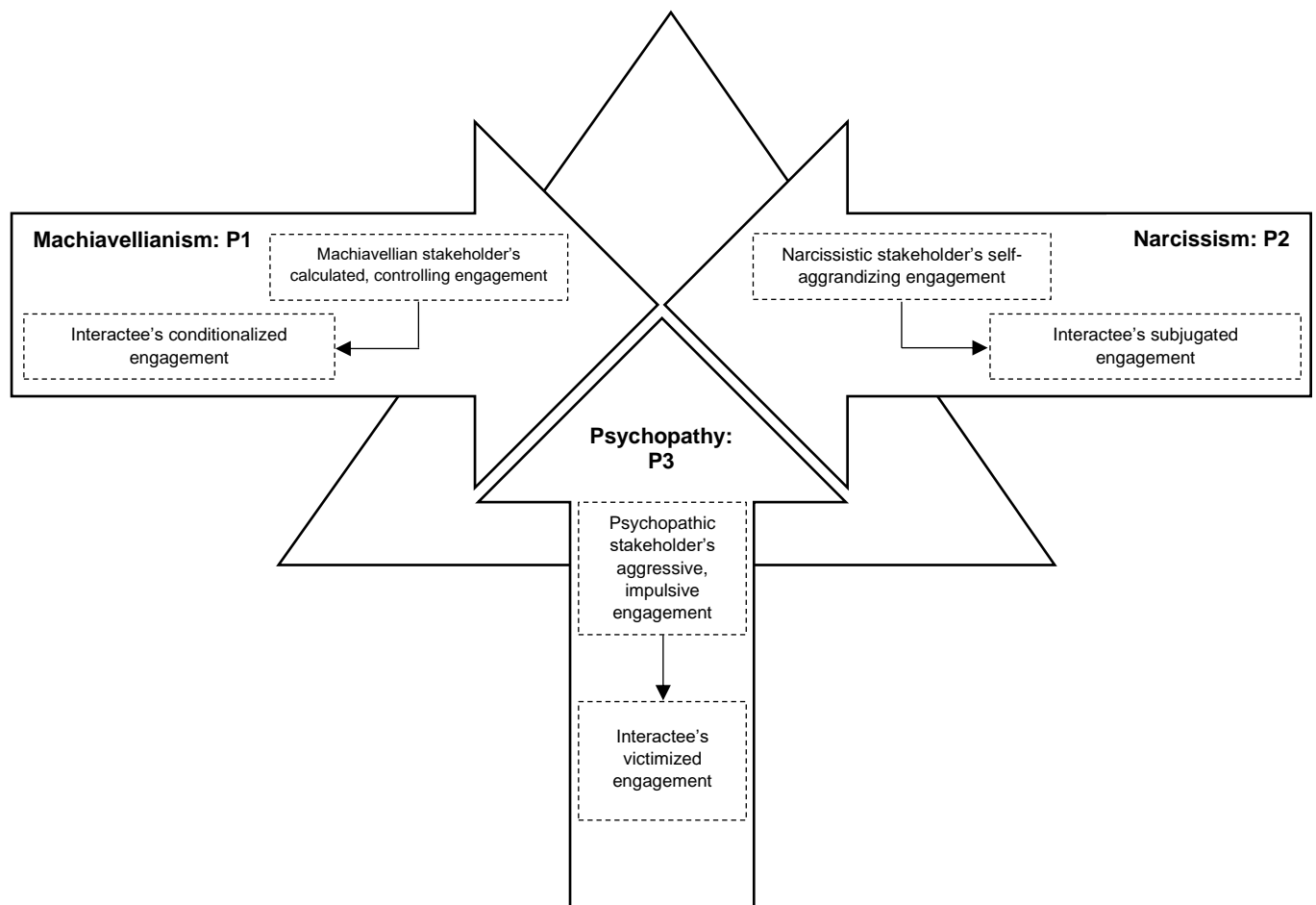
Fourth and relatedly, the above examples also imply SE's broad valence, ranging from positive-, to neutral-, to negative SE (e.g., Lievonen et al., 2018). Here, stakeholders' favorable, constructive, or supportive role-related engagement reveals their *positive SE* (e.g., customers' or employees' firm-related advocacy), while *negative SE* reflects a stakeholder's unfavorable, unsupportive, or injurious engagement that is intended to hinder, harm, or damage particular others (e.g., by setting up a vendor to fail; by sabotaging a customer relationship, or by limiting a co-worker's resource access; Bowden et al., 2017). This negative SE, which can transpire out of the aggressing stakeholder's jealousy or spitefulness (Tortoriello et al., 2017), is particularly prevalent in stakeholders displaying the maladaptive personality traits of machiavellianism, narcissism, and/or psychopathy (Marcus et al., 2014). For example, a narcissistic stakeholder's (e.g., manager's) envy of another's (e.g., employee's) role-related performance or success may lead the former to defame the latter in an attempt to curb his/her future performance or opportunities. Therefore, though an aggressing machiavellian, narcissistic, or psychopathic

stakeholder's engagement may create value for him/herself, it will tend to hinder, oppress, or limit that of its recipient or interactee, thus likely reducing the latter's perceived role value (Clark et al., 2020). We next present the proposed conceptual model, which integrates and extends the reviewed areas of literature.

3. CONCEPTUAL MODEL

In this section, we develop a conceptual model and an associated set of propositions that outline the role of the dark triad's personality traits of machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy on the anti-social or aggressing stakeholder's, and his/her interactee's, role-related engagement, as discussed further and shown in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Conceptual model.



3.1 Effect of machiavellian stakeholder's engagement on interactee's engagement

As noted in Section 2.1.1, machiavellianism is characterized by stakeholders' cunning, self-serving manipulation and exploitation of others, an absence of morality, and unemotional callousness (Den Hartog and Belschak, 2012). To achieve their objective, machiavellian stakeholders are inclined to use indirect, deceptive, or underhanded tactics, often at the expense of others (Nathan, 2017; Kislik, 2017). For example, a machiavellian director may fraudulently use corporate funds or lie to or deceive his/her staff for his/her own personal (e.g., financial) gain. Consequently, machiavellian stakeholders' engagement typically features a high degree of goal-directed, manipulative cognitions, emotions, and behavior (Lyons et al., 2010; Hunt and Chonko, 1984). To manipulate their micro- (e.g., customer), meso- (e.g., supplier firm), or macro-level interactee (e.g., the general public), machiavellian stakeholders may rely on or use incomplete information to their advantage or spread misinformation in an attempt to gain control or influence (Simon et al., 2015). For example, some commentators argue that governments are manipulating their citizens to take a COVID-19 vaccine that has received little testing, thus using *cross-stakeholder* information asymmetry to their advantage (Bergh et al., 2019).

Given a machiavellian stakeholder's tendency to display *calculated, controlling* engagement, his/her interactee is likely to experience a limiting or *obliging* effect on his/her own role-related engagement. That is, because of machiavellian stakeholders' aim to influence and control their interactee for their own benefit (Delbaere et al., 2021; Dahling et al., 2009), the latter's SE will tend to be more conditional (i.e., on the manipulator's requirement) and less volitional. For example, a team leader may try impose certain terms or conditions on the team's members, yielding their qualified, strings-attached engagement. Consequently, the interactee's (e.g., a team member's) engagement is likely to focus on adhering to, managing, or suitably

circumnavigating (where possible), the machiavellian stakeholder's control (e.g., Hollebeek, Das, and Shukla, 2021). Based on this rationale, we posit:

P1: *A machiavellian stakeholder's calculated, controlling engagement will tend to conditionalize the interactee's engagement.*

3.2 Effect of narcissistic stakeholder's engagement on interactee's engagement

As outlined in Section 2.1.2, narcissism reflects a stakeholder's innate fascination with or admiration of him/herself (e.g., Fastoso et al., 2018), as outlined. Narcissists display a tendency toward grandiosity, including by offering or promising the interactee an extraordinary experience, which however commonly represents an inflated or exaggerated pretense (Sanjeev et al., 2019; De Zavala et al., 2013). For example, narcissistic managers may promise their employees a rapid career progression if they play along with their self-promoting agenda. Narcissistic stakeholders' engagement is therefore characterized by egotism, self-praise, self-promotion, and self-glorification (De Bellis et al., 2016; Gerstner et al., 2013). Moreover, if the interactee won't cooperate with a narcissistic stakeholder's request, (s)he can erupt in narcissistic rage, an outburst of intense anger with, or silence toward, the other (Krizan and Johar, 2015) and/or vengeance-seeking behavior (Giammarco et al., 2014).

Owing to a narcissistic stakeholder's *self-aggrandizing* engagement, the interactee's engagement is expected to be domineered or undermined by that of the former. That is, for narcissistic stakeholders, it is *all about them*, thus tending to overpower their interactee's engagement. In other words, like for machiavellian stakeholders (P1), narcissistic stakeholders wish to exert a level of control over their interactee, revealing a widely acknowledged level of overlap between the two traits (e.g., Hansen-Brown, 2018). However, while machiavellian stakeholders primarily set out to manipulate their interactee, narcissistic stakeholders focus on their own self-embellishment toward the other (Tomkins and Ulus, 2015). We postulate:

P2: *A narcissistic stakeholder's self-aggrandizing engagement will tend to subjugate his/her interactee's engagement.*

3.3 Effect of psychopathic stakeholder's engagement on interactee's engagement

Psychopathy is characterized by a stakeholder's persistent anti-social behavior, impaired empathy and remorse, unpredictable, impulsive, disinhibited behavior, and meanness (e.g., Lynam and Derefinko, 2006), as outlined. Though psychopathy may exist to varying degrees in individuals, psychopathic stakeholders will display a tendency toward aggressive or hostile behavior with poor behavioral control (e.g., by trying to irately/violently persuade their interactee of their cause or objective; Boddy et al., 2010). For example, psychopathic employees may threaten or intimidate their co-workers through overt physical harassment, "*or else*" (Brewer et al., 2021), which they typically get a thrill out of (Anderson et al., 2021). In line with moral disengagement theory (Bandura et al., 1996), stakeholders scoring high on this trait are also likely to externalize blame, or blame others for (while rationalizing their own) behavior (DeLisi et al., 2014).

Moreover, psychopathic stakeholders tend to exhibit atypical responses to social distress cues due to their low empathy and impaired ability to recognize or respond appropriately to others' facial expressions, body language, and/or vocal tones (e.g., of happiness/fear; Blair et al., 2018). Therefore, when psychopathic stakeholders are pressuring, straining, or coercing another individual, they are less likely to moderate or cease their behavior based on the interactee's response (e.g., by pleading them to stop). In other words, psychopathic stakeholders are less able to appreciate the emotional aspect of their interactee's injurious experience (Young et al., 2012).

We therefore expect psychopathic stakeholders' aggressive behavior to *persecute* or *oppress* their interactee's engagement. For example, by making unfair demands on a supplier (e.g., by pressuring them to accept *for them* unfavorable terms and conditions), a psychopathic director of a leading firm may attack the former (e.g., by threatening to take away their business

and ruin the supplier's reputation, *unless* it conforms to the aggressor's demands). In other words, psychopathic stakeholders tend to ill-treat and abuse their interactees for their own pleasure or gain (Blair et al., 2018), in turn *victimizing* their interactee's role-related engagement (Yang et al., 2018). If the interactee refuses to cooperate with the psychopathic stakeholder's request, the former is likely to pressure or bully him/her (e.g., by outlining adverse looming consequences for him/her, if (s)he fails to cooperate; Boddy, 2017). We posit:

P3: *A psychopathic stakeholder's aggressive, impulsive engagement will tend to victimize his/her interactee's engagement.*

4. DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND LIMITATIONS

4.1 Theoretical implications

This article contributes to the SE- and marketing/management-based dark triad of personality traits literature by exploring the effect of a stakeholder's machiavellian, narcissistic, or psychopathic engagement on that of his/her interactee. Though these dark personality traits are observed in a significant and growing percentage of the global population (Hull, 2021; Montes, 2013), as outlined, little remains known regarding their respective effect on the aggressing stakeholder's and his/her interactee's engagement, as therefore explored in this paper.

While these maladaptive traits are observed to different degrees across stakeholders, machiavellian individuals primarily attempt to manipulate others (e.g., Dahling et al., 2009), while narcissistic individuals focus on gratuitous self-praise and self-promotion (e.g., Campbell and Miller, 2011). Moreover, psychopathic stakeholders tend to display bold, disinhibited, and mean behavior, along with impaired empathy and remorse (e.g., Blair, 2003). Based on these characteristics, we theorize regarding the respective effect of a machiavellian, narcissistic, and psychopathic stakeholder's engagement on that of his/her interactee, thus adding novel literature-based insight. In particular, our analyses extend the work of authors,

including Filipkowski and Derbis (2020) and Purwati et al. (2019), who have previously studied the effect of a *particular* stakeholder's (e.g., a manager's, employee's, consumer's) maladaptive personality trait-driven engagement on that of his/her interactee (e.g., staff, customers, the firm). In other words, by taking an *omni*-stakeholder perspective, we broaden these prior authors' analyses to incorporate *any* firm stakeholder (Freeman, 2010), thus making a broader, more generalizable contribution to the literature.

A plethora of further research opportunities spawn from the reported analyses, including the following: Given the existence of a level of theoretical overlap between the dark triad-based personality traits of machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy (Jones and Paulhus, 2010b), how would the aggressing stakeholder's and his/her interactee's engagement be likely to pan out under differing relative levels and combinations of these maladaptive traits? How do the theorized associations transpire for particular aggressing stakeholders and their interactees across different stakeholder roles (e.g., manager/employee; customer/firm)? To what extent and how are the aggressing stakeholder's and his/her interactee's cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement likely to converge (vs. diverge) under particular contextual conditions (Clark et al., 2020)? In what ways should ethical management deal with or regulate their potential machiavellian, narcissistic, or psychopathic stakeholders' engagement (e.g., through suitable corporate governance policies; Dahling et al., 2012)? How can technology be leveraged to minimize machiavellian, narcissistic, or psychopathic stakeholders' role-related engagement (e.g., through regular surveillance), and how does this impact stakeholder privacy (Sun et al., 2018)?

We also offer additional avenues for further research, as structured by our propositions, in Table 1. For example, P1 reads: "*A machiavellian stakeholder's calculated, controlling engagement will tend to conditionalize the interactee's engagement.*" A suggested research opportunity for this proposition addresses the expected timespan of a machiavellian

stakeholder's manipulative influence (if successful) on his/her interactee (see Table 1, P1: fifth bullet-point). To investigate this issue, we recommend the undertaking of longitudinal research that explores the evolution of a machiavellian stakeholder's and his/her interactee's engagement, their interface, and the extent to which they covary over time (Viswanathan et al., 2017). As another example, P3 states: "*A psychopathic stakeholder's aggressive, impulsive engagement will tend to victimize his/her interactee's engagement.*" Under this proposition, the fourth bullet-point in Table 1 refers to the impact of psychopathic stakeholders' engagement on *vulnerable* stakeholders (e.g., bottom-of-the-pyramid customers, digitally disadvantaged suppliers, etc.; Fletcher-Brown et al., 2021), whose engagement is expected to be *particularly* persecuted by that of the aggressor. That is, further understanding of the ways to protect vulnerable stakeholders' engagement is required (e.g., by suggesting practices, tactics, or strategies to help avoid, manage, or circumnavigate psychopathic stakeholders' engagement).

Table 1: Research questions structured by our propositions of dark triad-based personality traits and SE.

Proposition	Sample Research Questions
P1: <i>A machiavellian stakeholder's calculated, controlling engagement will tend to conditionalize the interactee's engagement.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What effect are particular machiavellian tactics (e.g., flattery, deception, lying) likely to have on the interactee's role engagement under particular stakeholder- and contextual characteristics (Monaghan et al., 2016)? ○ To what degree will particular interactees accept (vs. reject) a machiavellian stakeholder's manipulative attempt (e.g., will those exhibiting a high need for control be less likely to accept it; Sechrist et al., 2004; Geng et al., 2019)? ○ To what extent are stakeholders who hold high (vs. low) perceived levels of control more likely to successfully victimize their interactee's engagement? ○ What role does the interactee's personality (e.g., agreeableness) or culture (e.g., power distance) play in his/her acceptance of the machiavellian stakeholder's engagement? ○ If a machiavellian stakeholder's calculated, controlling engagement successfully conditionalizes his/her interactee's engagement, what is the expected timespan of the former's manipulation of the latter, and what are its long-term effects on both stakeholders, as well as on their respective ecosystems?
P2: <i>A narcissistic stakeholder's self-aggrandizing engagement will tend to subjugate his/her interactee's engagement.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What effect are particular narcissistic tactics (e.g., grandiosity, self-praise, narcissistic rage) expected to have on the interactee's role engagement under particular stakeholder- and contextual characteristics (Iivonen & Moisander, 2015)? ○ To what extent and why will particular interactees accept (vs. reject) a stakeholder's narcissistic engagement? ○ Under what conditions are interactees most likely to disengage from (e.g., by exiting their relationship with) a narcissistic stakeholder (Campbell & Campbell, 2009)? ○ How and why do some interactees tend to attract narcissistic stakeholders' engagement, and what can they do to either avoid or make the best of these? ○ To what extent is narcissistic stakeholders' engagement limited to a stakeholder's (e.g., manager) role (vs. a pervasive personality trait)? How can firms minimize their engagement with narcissistic stakeholders?
P3: <i>A psychopathic stakeholder's aggressive, impulsive engagement will tend to victimize his/her interactee's engagement.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ How can firms recognize, measure, or ascertain psychopathic stakeholders' role-related engagement <i>prior to</i> developing a relationship with them? ○ Once a firm's relationship with a psychopathic stakeholder is in place, what governance practices should it use to monitor or minimize the impact of the psychopathic stakeholder's engagement on that of focal others (Boddy et al., 2010)? ○ What is the dimensionality of psychopathic firm stakeholders' engagement under particular contextual conditions (e.g., Bissola & Imperatori, 2016)? ○ Which stakeholders are particularly vulnerable to psychopathic firm stakeholders' engagement, and how are they best protected against their potentially harmful engagement (Fletcher-Brown et al., 2021; Clark et al., 2020)? ○ What can firms do to manage their psychopathic stakeholders' aggressive or violent engagement?

4.2 Practical implications

Our analyses also raise important managerial implications. First, as noted, P1 reads: “A *machiavellian stakeholder’s* calculated, controlling engagement will tend to conditionalize the *interactee’s* engagement.” This proposition not only raises or reinforces managerial awareness of the risk of involving machiavellian stakeholders in their (e.g., operational) interactions and relationships, but also pinpoints the potentially adverse impact of machiavellian stakeholders’ engagement on that of their interactees, in turn generating further, potentially adverse consequences (e.g., on these interactees’ *other* stakeholders). Firms are therefore first advised to limit their interactions with machiavellian stakeholders, and second, to manage these stakeholders’ engagement as much as possible (Dahling et al., 2012). For example, the development of stakeholder codes-of-conduct can help guide appropriate (vs. inappropriate) stakeholder actions and behavior. Firms should not only establish these policies and guidelines at the senior (e.g., Board) level, but also employ an independent panel of watchdogs in this regard, because senior firm stakeholders (e.g., managers) may be relatively prone to displaying anti-social behavior (Den Hartog and Belschak, 2012).

P2 states: “A *narcissistic stakeholder’s* self-aggrandizing engagement will tend to subjugate his/her *interactee’s* engagement.” This proposition signals the inherent challenge of narcissistic stakeholders’ engagement on that of others. To manage narcissistic stakeholders’ engagement, we recommend organizations to develop a collaborative, supportive organizational culture not only to counteract narcissistic engagement, but also to discourage narcissists from displaying their grandiose behavior and/or from entering or interacting with the firm (Giacomin and Jordan, 2018). Moreover, lower-status stakeholders (e.g., employees), in particular, should be given the opportunity to report fellow stakeholders’ unacceptable narcissistic behavior, while also being offered support to help address any issues in this regard (Cragun et al., 2020). Finally, P3 posits: “A *psychopathic stakeholder’s* aggressive, impulsive

engagement will tend to victimize his/her interactee's engagement.” As psychopathy is commonly identified as the most malevolent dark triad trait, firms’ careful management of this trait is of particular importance. Given psychopathic stakeholders’ tendency toward aggressive, disinhibited behavior (Skeem et al., 2011), a zero-tolerance policy is pivotal to curtail and ideally, eradicate, stakeholders’ psychopathic engagement. For example, firms may use the PCL-R test to gauge their stakeholders’ psychopathy level (Hare, 1991), and offer therapy where necessary (e.g., on an opt-in basis; Harris and Rice, 2006). However, as a caveat, psychopathy is notoriously difficult to treat (e.g., because psychopathic stakeholders tend to be unmotivated to change; Kiehl and Hoffman, 2011). Therefore, if/when possible, we primarily advise firms to eliminate psychopathic stakeholders from their organization.

4.3 Limitations and further research

Notwithstanding its contribution, this study is also subject to limitations that offer additional avenues for further research. First, the purely theoretical nature of our analyses implies a need for their future empirical testing and validation (Hair et al., 2013). For example, the propositions may be further explored or tested in subsequent qualitative (e.g., in-depth interview-based) or quantitative (e.g., structural equation modeling/field study-based) research. Moreover, particular variables may moderate the proposed associations (e.g., stakeholder need-for-control, culture), which also merit further scrutiny.

Second, though we assessed the effect of the dark triad’s personality traits on the aggressing stakeholder’s engagement and that of his/her interactee, other or related theories or perspectives may be used, including social influence- (Delbaere et al., 2021), regulatory focus- (Higgins, 2012), regulatory engagement- (Higgins and Scholer, 2009), or moral disengagement theory (Bandura et al., 1996), to name a few. Moreover, though the dark triad of personality traits has received extensive theoretical and empirical support, some authors advocate its extension to include a fourth dimension, *sadism*. These four anti-social traits, collectively, are known as the

dark tetrad (Chabrol et al., 2015). Further researchers may therefore wish to explore the role of aggressing stakeholders' sadism and its effect on their interactee's engagement. Furthermore, while we investigated the effect of the dark triad's anti-social personality traits, we recommend future scholars to study other types of dysfunctional or deviant stakeholder (e.g., abusive/revenge-based) behavior (Wilson et al., 2021), particular sub-types of the identified dark triad traits (e.g., overt/covert narcissism; Fastoso et al., 2018), or the role of individual/collective stakeholders' role-related machiavellian, narcissistic, or psychopathic engagement on that of others (e.g., employees/managers vs. competitors/the government; Wilson, 2019).

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