

# NARCISSISM VERSUS MACHIAVELLIANISM AND THE ROLE OF SELF CONTROL TOWARDS SOCIAL DESIRABILITY

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*Due to increasing attention given to negative personality traits and their impact on various marketing outcomes, we aim to focus on two constructs: Narcissism and Machiavellianism. A presentation of key works in both narcissism and Machiavellianism are shown, alongside analyses of their effects with regard to social desirability with the moderating impact of self-control. We found that although both, narcissism and Machiavellianism, positively impact social desirability, the presence of self-control in these personalities weakens their social desirability to a significant extent. Through better understanding the behaviors of consumers with the two similar, but knowingly different, personality traits in the presence of self-control, marketers are able to target consumers more effectively. Further theoretical and managerial contributions are discussed.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Among the multiple socially aversive personalities mentioned by Kowalski (2001), Machiavellianism and narcissism personality constructs have received substantial research-based attention across a variety of academic areas, including clinical and social psychology (e.g., Christie & Geis, 1970; 2013; Lee & Ashton, 2005), as well as marketing (e.g., Hunt & Chonko, 1984; Sinha & Mandel, 2008). While these traits have been examined from various research perspectives, one topic of interest for researchers has always been the similarity and the differences between the two constructs (McHoskey, 1995; Paulhus & Williams, 2002).

Machiavellianism and narcissism are similar in multiple aspects. McHoskey (1995) found a high correlation between the two personalities, defining peculiar similarities between them, such as interpersonal manipulation – both being more task-oriented compared to person-oriented; and interpersonal circumflex – a two-dimensional love dominance axis space, both falling in the same location. McHoskey (1995) also found a positive correlation between Machiavellianism and the entitlement and exploitative aspects of narcissism, although

there was a negative correlation between Machiavellianism and the adjustment aspect of narcissism. While each of these aspects share some degree of similarity with regard to exploitation, manipulateness and self-inflated sense of self, key differences do exist (Lee & Ashton, 2017).

There has also been an ongoing debate as to whether there is a positive or negative association between the two constructs (Jonason, Li, & Teicher, 2010; McHoskey, Worzel, & Szyarto, 1998; Paulhus & Williams, 2002; Rauthman & Kolar, 2013.) Although multiple studies have looked at the similarities between the constructs, differences between them have been rarely addressed. It is for this reason that this study seeks to further detail the *contextual specific* differences of these two robust personality characteristics. The importance of this study stems from its clarifying nature on the consistently mixed outcomes of both the Machiavellian and narcissism literature, and sheds further light on the implications for marketing, such as consumer behavior as well as upper echelon behavior (i.e., behavior of top management teams in the firm). It is our hope that by contributing towards a deeper understanding the nature and behaviors of individuals that exhibit one or both of these personality traits can aid marketing, as well as business professionals, to better target these types of individuals, exponentially increasing in numbers due to the use of social media

applications (e.g., Vander Molen, Kaplan, Choi, & Montoya, 2018; Preotiu-Pietro, Carpenter, Giorgi, & Ungar, 2016). Some researchers have even gone to the extent of calling it *narcissism epidemic* (e.g., Twenge & Foster, 2008).

This study further seeks to examine the theoretical differences that exist in the extant literature between Machiavellianism and narcissism, and seeks to understand their empirical relationship with other constructs. Specifically, we also examined the unique relationship that exists between Machiavellianism and narcissism, as they pertain to the frequently associated construct of social desirability (Kajzer, D'Arcy, Striegel, & Van Bruggen, 2014; Triki, Cook, & Bay, 2017) along with the role of self-control. This relationship is known to have very important managerial implications from different perspectives of marketing, as discussed in the managerial implication section. The remainder of the article is organized as follows: starting with introduction to both Machiavellianism and narcissism, followed by the major differences between them, and finally their relation to social desirability and self-control, explained through methodology and results. The contribution and limitations of the paper are discussed at the end.

### MACHIAVELLIANISM

Machiavellianism is defined as “a strategy of social conduct that involves manipulating others for personal gain, often against the other's self-interest” (Wilson, Near, & Miller, 1996; p.285). Simply stated, this definition largely describes a manipulative individual. The term “Machiavellianism” was dubbed by Richard Christie, which comes from the name of the writer “Machiavelli,” who is well known for his political outlook in the book named *The Prince* (Christie & Geis, 1970). After R. Christie's book, multiple researchers showed interest in this term and the statistical aspect of this personality trait. In one study conducted by Preziosi and Gooden (2003), 41.4% of responders scored above the neutral point on the Machiavellianism scale, suggesting that they were “high Machiavellians” and 58.6% scored below the neutral point suggesting that they were “low Machiavellians.” The most popular scale that has been used to measure

Machiavellianism is the Mach IV scale by Christie and Geis (1970), which is based on the dominant traits demonstrated by a Machiavellian personality and widely accepted in the marketing literature (Al-Khatib et al., 2005; Hunt & Chonko, 1984).

Further describing this personality, an individual known for their immorality and for manipulating others, both for selfish gains, is high in Machiavellianism (Christie & Geis, 1970). He/she is usually characterized as being cynical, unprincipled, and manipulating others for self-gain and life success (Jones & Palhaus, 2009). They are known to be engaged in aggressive, manipulative, exploitative, and devious behavior for achieving personal, as well as business objectives (Calhoun, 1969, p. 211). For them, the needs, feelings, or rights of others are secondary.

To understand Machiavellians, it becomes important to study the characteristics, which further enhance the traits of Machiavellianism. Looking at their manipulative and amoral behavior, Machiavellians score low in ‘Honesty’ - being truthful, as well as ‘Humility’ - people who have moderate or accurate view of themselves (Baumeister & Exline, 2002; Emmons, 1999; Lee & Ashton, 2005). They deceive and disregard others, thus maximizing their own interests (Hodson, Hogg, & MacInnis, 2009). According to Christie and Geis (1970), individuals high in Machiavellianism are known for the following four characteristics: (a) lack of interpersonal affect in interpersonal relationships, (b) lack of concern with conventional morality, (c) lack of gross psychopathology, and (d) low ideological commitment.

Machiavellians are well known for their anti-social behavior, as well. Two of the main behaviors they show are (a) lying and cheating (Lewicki, 1983) and (b) betrayal (Elangovan & Shapiro, 1998). Machiavellians have been reported to be telling more lies (Kashy & DePaulo, 1996) to dishonor deals they have made (Forgas, 1998), and to withhold important information which is beneficial to them (Sakalaki, Richardson, & Thepaut, 2007). They are also known to cheat more in their term exams (Shafer & Wang, 2010) compared to others. Machiavellians have also been known to

express pleasure at same-sex friends' misfortunes in a romantic relationship (Abell & Brewer, 2018). Known for their betrayal behavior, Machiavellians are known to engage in more unethical behavior like kickbacks or bribes (Hegarty, 1995). Jones and Paulhus (2009) suspect that Machiavellians portray their betrayal characteristic only when that can lead to success; otherwise they will not.

These characteristics of Machiavellianism have further been studied to explore other aspects of life and their relationship with the personality. Gemmill and Heisler (1972) studied the relationship between Machiavellian-oriented individuals and several job-related variables. They found positive relationships between high Machiavellians and more job strain, less job satisfaction, and less perceived opportunity for formal control. Hegarty and Sims (1978) found that individuals high in Machiavellianism behave less ethically compared to individuals low in Machiavellianism (Singhapakdi & Vitell, 1993; Singhapakdi & Vitell, 1990; 1991). In terms of gender, Rayburn and Rayburn (1996) hypothesized that males are more Machiavellian-oriented than females. They also found intelligence is negatively related to Machiavellianism (Rayburn & Rayburn, 1996).

Machiavellian consumers have been consistently studied in various forms in the field of marketing. Hunt and Chonko (1984) had once mentioned, "Marketing has its own share of Machiavellianism" (p.40). They further went on to conclude that younger marketers are more Machiavellian compared to older marketers. Singhapakdi et al. (1993) mentioned that the ethical perceptions of marketers are based on their Machiavellian characteristic. Dugan et al. (2019) stressed on importance of Internet marketing and its positive effect on sales performance, but Machiavellian characteristic weakening this relation. Further, Chaudari et al. (2017) found that Machiavellian consumers' characteristics affects their willingness to pay in store. Albeit many more, one can conclude from these studies that Machiavellianism has been prevalent in the marketing field since ages, and it needs to be studied further.

Table 1 highlights the brief literature review of research done on Machiavellianism.

## NARCISSISM

Narcissism can be defined as the gratification from egotistic admiration of an individual's own attributes, characterized by the self-enhancement of multiple characteristics, including physical attractiveness, intelligence, leadership ability, and other characteristics that would be socially favorable to possess (Bleske-Rechek, Remiker, & Baker, 2008; Grijalva, Harms, Newman, Gaddis, & Fraley, 2015; Grijalva & Zhang, 2016; Muris et al., 2017). Narcissists have also demonstrated extreme aggressive behaviors, such as defense mechanism to threats against their own sense of self-esteem (Byrne & O'Brien, 2014; Bushman & Baumeister, 1998). Narcissistic individuals are also characterized by poor coping ability when threats to their inflated sense of ego are present, and as such, are unlikely to self-select themselves into scenarios that would foster such threats (Bushman & Baumesiter, 1998).

While myriad research posits narcissism as a detrimental character trait, positive attributes have also been identified (Errasti, Amigo, & Villadangos, 2017; Nevicka, Baas, & Ten Velden, 2016). Threats to narcissists' egos has shown to increase their creative ability, as well as increased motivation towards competing tasks that allow them to demonstrate their competence. In addition to creative performance, narcissism has also been positively linked to the outgoing and socially vibrant personality that is common among extraverted individuals (Muris, Merchelbach, Otgaar, & Meijer, 2017). While increased leadership capability has also been linked to narcissism, these results were based on self-reports of narcissists, and as such, have limited credibility (Grijalva et al., 2015).

In a moral context, narcissism tends to have a negative relationship with ethical decision making (Antes et al., 2007) and positive relationship with counterproductive work behaviors (CWBs) (O'Boyle, Forsyth, Banks, & McDaniel, 2012), with certain moderators such as materialism (Grijalva & Newman, 2016; Antes et al., 2007; Bergman,

**TABLE 1:**  
**Major Findings from Previous Machiavellianism Research**

Article	IV	Moderator/ Mediator	DV	Finding
Abell Lyons and Brewer (2014)	Maternal and Over Paternal Care and Over- protection	Machiavellianism (Mediator)	Friendship Quality	Low maternal care and high paternal overprotection are positively related to Machiavellianism which negatively impacts adult friendship quality
Andrew et al. (2008)	Machiavellianism		Agreeableness and Empathy	Low Machiavellians portray high Agreeableness and empathy levels compared to low Machiavellians
Bodey and Grace (2007)	Self-efficacy, Machiavellianism, perceived control, and risk-taking	Consumer attitude toward complain- ing (Moderator)	Consumer propen- sity to complain	Two groups have different relation- ships with the outcome variables
Czibor and Bereczkei (2012)	Machiavellianism			High Machiavellians were more sensi- tive to social context signals and con- sidered their partner behavior more than low Machiavellians
Dussault Hojjat and Boone (2013)	Machiavellianism	History of inti- mate behaviors (Moderator)	Mate attraction strategies, and intimacy	High Machiavellians had greater like- lihood of using deceptive tactics and faced lower levels of relationship intimacy compared to low Machiavel- lians
Giammarco et al. (2013)	Dark Triad per- sonality traits		Perceived ability to deceive	Machiavellianism, Psychopathy and Narcissism were highly correlated with the perceived ability to deceive, in that order
Jones and Paulhus (2010)	Dark triad - Machiavellianism, narcissism, psy- chopathy		(a) Short vs. long- term relationship focus, (b) Use of mate retention tactics, and (c) Rates of infidelity	Psychopathy was associated with short-term relationship focus and us- ing mate retention tactics. Machiavel- lians reported different tactics for short versus long term relationship
Lang (2014)	Fear of fusion, diffuse identity, and use of primi- tive defenses		Machiavellianism	Fear of fusion and primitive defense usage successfully predicted Machia- vellian interpersonal tactics
Liu (2008)	Machiavellianism	Demographic Variables (Moderator)	Knowledge shar- ing willingness	Machiavellianism is negatively corre- lated with Knowledge sharing willing- ness. Demographic variables did not moderate the relation
O.Boyle and McDaniel (2012)	Dark Triad Meta-analysis	Authority In group collectiv- ism (Moderator)	Job performance and counterpro- ductive work be- havior (CWB)	High Machiavellians portrayed re- duced quality of job performance compared to low Machiavellians. Dark triad was positively associated with CWB and this association was moderated by authority and culture
Rauthmann (2011)	Dark Triad		Self-Monitoring (acquisitive: per- ceptiveness, im- pression manage- ment; protective: protective variabil- ity, protective social referencing)	Narcissism was related to acquisitive, Machiavellianism to protective, and psychopathy to both forms of self- monitoring
Wilson et al. (1996)	Machiavellianism		Long term versus short term gains	Machiavellians are more interested in short term gains compared to long term gains

Westerman, Bergman, Westerman, & Daly, 2014).

With regard to counterproductive work behaviors (CWBs), or detrimental voluntary behaviors that risk the health of an organization and its members, narcissism was the dominant predictor of CWBs compared to Machiavellianism (Forsyth et al., 2012). This effect appears to be moderated by in-group collectivist culture, which is less likely to tolerate violations of social exchange and places a substantial emphasis on reciprocity norms (Van Dyne, Vandewalle, Kostova, Latham, & Cummings, 2000). Specifically, the presence of this collectivist culture element appears to weaken the relationship between narcissism and CWBs (Grijalva & Newman, 2016).

In a social media context, studies have shown that narcissists have consistently demonstrated an overt engagement in social media platforms (Errasti et al., 2017; Gnambs & Appel, 2018). Although the relationship between intelligence and narcissism has shown no consistent or significant positive/negative results, this relationship appears to be moderated by a variety of factors, including age, sex, and the type of intelligence measure utilized (O'Boyle, Forsyth, Banks, & Story, 2013). A moderating effect of culture was also found; specifically, a stronger effect of narcissistic behavior is present in power-distant cultures. From a gender perspective, research has shown that women are less likely to be narcissistic than men and demonstrate fewer of the socially undesirable characteristics of this personality trait, though the literature is mixed with regard to the salience of such gender differences (Gnambs & Appel, 2018; Grijalva et al., 2015).

In the consumption context, narcissistic consumers are known to consume more luxurious brands (Fastoso et al., 2018; Kang & Park, 2016) and give more importance to store image, as compared to product price (Naderi & Paswan, 2016). Belk, Mayer, and Bahn (1982) mentioned that one way of disclosing the consumer self-concept is based on their purchase decisions. Explaining this further, Sedikides et al. (2007) mentioned that the narcissistic personality overshadows the decision making process due to one's

conspicuous nature. Another research promotes the importance of selfie-marketing, due to the ever-increasing number of narcissistic consumers towards social media (Fox et al., 2017). These research studies show how narcissism has become an important criterion in marketing research to further understand the consumption behavior due to the growing number of narcissistic consumers. Table 2 briefly highlights some of the relevant literature review of narcissism.

### KEY DIFFERENCES BETWEEN NARCISSISM AND MACHIAVELLIANISM

In contrast to Machiavellianism, which may be indicative of more malicious interpersonal behavior, narcissists often demonstrate a sense of vulnerability, which is often reflected in their inadequacy, insecurity, and defensive tendencies against threats to their fragile grandiosity (Miller, Dir, Gentile, Wilson, Pryor, & Campbell, 2010). Despite these relatively undesirable characteristics, a meta-analysis conducted by Muris et al. (2017) found that narcissists demonstrate a greater capability for engaging in amiable and tactful interactions and relationships when compared to Machiavellians. These results were not necessarily original, as a similar examination of this phenomenon was conducted by Rauthmann and Denissen (2014), which yielded the same outcome. Along with the difference past research found in their engaging behavior, these two personalities also differ in some other aspects, which have been summarized in Table 3 and are described in detail here.

#### Emotional Intelligence

Narcissistic and Machiavellian individuals differ in the trait of emotional intelligence, or the way they perceive themselves on emotional ability. Petrides et al. (2011) compared how these two personalities score on this trait. They found that narcissists are positively correlated with this trait versus Machiavellians who are negatively correlated. This finding was supported by recent research conducted by Nagler et al. (2014), whereby narcissists demonstrated a positive relationship with socio-emotional intelligence, and Machiavellians once again demonstrated a negative relationship

**TABLE 2:**  
**Major Findings from Previous Narcissism Research**

Article	IV	Moderator	DV	Finding
Antes et al. (2007)	Narcissism Cynicism Big 5 Personality	Metacognitive reasoning strategies Social behavioral patterns	Ethical Decision Making (EDM)	Narcissism consistently negatively related to EDM
Gnambs & Appel (2018)	Meta-analysis	Power distance	Narcissistic behavior in social media	Positive relationship of narcissistic personality and social media use
Grijalva et al. (2015)	Meta-Analysis	Extraversion	Relationship between narcissism and leadership	Narcissism displayed positive relationship with leadership emergence, self-reported leadership effectiveness, suggests midrange level of leadership narcissism optimal
Grijalva & Zhang (2016)	Meta-analysis	Big 5 Personality Task performance Intelligence Leadership Attractiveness Likability	Relationship between narcissism and self-enhancement	Narcissists self-enhance particularly for agentic characteristics more so than communal characteristics
Lee & Ashton (2005)	Big 5 Personality HEXACO Personality		Dark Triad (Psychopathy, Machiavellianism, Narcissism)	Dark Triad strongly negatively linked to HEXACO's Honesty-Humility factor; Narcissism positively linked to Extraversion
Muris et al. (2017)	Meta-analysis		Inter-correlations among Dark Triad Gender differences Linkage to Personality Psychosocial Correlates	Dark Triad highly inter-correlated; High narcissism linked with social difficulties, lesser greed-avoidance and modesty
Nevicka, Baas, & Ten Velden (2016)	Ego Threat	Negative Feedback Threat to Uniqueness	Intentions to complete challenging task Creative performance Anagram task performance	Narcissism associated with increased desire to perform tasks that demonstrate abilities and creative performance
O'Boyle et al. (2013)	Meta-Analysis	Sex Age Sample type Measure of GMA	Relationship between Dark Triad & GMA	No relationship demonstrated
Rauthmann & Denissen (2014)	Dark Triad Behavior	Physical attractiveness	Mate attraction	Narcissists more effective at attracting mates due to their approach-oriented behaviors (e.g., self-assuredness, charm).
Rhodewalt & Morf (1995)	NPI	Positivity Complexity Vulnerability	Self-images Antagonism Hostility	NPI linked with positive self-images and low self-complexity; high NPI scorers linked with self-aggrandizing, hostility, and perceptions of support during periods of stress
Twenge et al. (2008)	Meta-analysis	Assertiveness Agency Self-esteem Extraversion	Cross-Temporal NPI Scores	Narcissism has increased by 30% among American college students from 1979-2006

**TABLE 3:**  
**Comparison of Narcissistic and Machiavellian Personalities**

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Narcissism</b>	<b>Machiavellianism</b>
Emotional Intelligence	Positive Association	Negative Association
Self-Leadership	Positive Association	No Association
Perception	Underrate other to enhance self	Do not Underrate others to enhance self
Perceived as	Less Favorable and antisocial	Either liked or Socially Unaccepted
Aggression	Positive Association	No association
Limited Empathy	No relation	Negatively Related
Dimensions	Measure is multi-dimensional	Measure is One-Dimensional
Relationship	Variety of relationships	No association
Job Performance	No change	Reduction in quality
Impulsivity	Positive Association	No Association

with this construct. These findings corroborate much of what is known about both narcissists and Machiavellians, such that Machiavellians and their externally oriented mindset has a lesser focus on feelings, whereas narcissists can leverage emotional intelligence to maintain their inflated sense of self by behaving accordingly when interacting with others.

### **Self-Leadership**

Self – Leadership can be described as developing a sense for one’s own capabilities, forecasting, and utilizing both the awareness and control over one’s emotions to their benefit (Bryant & Kazan, 2012). When it comes to this trait, narcissists were found to be positively correlated with this scale, particularly with regard to constructs, such as goal setting, self-observation, constructive thought patterns, and natural reward strategies, visualizing successful performance, and evaluating beliefs. This is likely due to narcissists being intrinsically motivated for goal-achievement via a high need for achievement as a means of receiving positive attention from others to support their inflated self-view (Furtner, Rauthmann, & Sachse, 2011). However, Machiavellians were negatively associated with self-leadership, since they are more prone to utilize others to achieve their goals for them, as opposed to being overly self-leading in achieving certain goals (Furtner et al., 2011). In their respective managerial roles, Machiavellians have shown a strong, negative association with corporate social and environmental reporting (Shafer & Lucianetti, 2016), and are negatively related to corporate

ethics and social responsibility (Ang & Leong, 2000). Narcissism in CEOs is positively related to CSR activities (Al-Shammari et al., 2019), thus further supporting the marketing activities in the firm.

### **Enhancing Self**

To enhance one self, narcissists are known to engage in applauding themselves while derogating others (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001; Rauthmann, 2011). This stems from the sense of entitlement that narcissists feel; to the extent that they are willing to sacrifice others and their relationships as a means of maintain a positive self-image (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001). Comparatively, although Machiavellians also view others unfavorably, they have not been known for underrating others to enhance themselves (Paulhus & Williams, 2002; Rauthmann, 2011). Rather, Machiavellians often utilize others to accomplish their goals, and as such, diminishing others will act to reduce the effectiveness of this strategy (Furtner et al., 2011).

### **Perceived by Others**

Narcissists are usually liked in initial interactions (Back, Schmukle & Egloff, 2010; Oltmanns, Friedman, Fiedler, & Turkheimer, 2004), but with time they are perceived to be less favorable and antisocial, as their ultimate focus is their own self-focus (Campbell, Reeder, Sedikides, & Elliott, 2000; Rauthmann, 2011). When Machiavellians were studied, there were mixed perceptions about them

(Jones & Paulhus, 2009). On the one hand they are liked (Deluga, 2001; Wilson et al., 1996; Rauthmann, 2011), while on the other hand they are socially unaccepted (Falbo, 1977) and were judged negatively (Wilson et al., 1996; Rauthmann, 2011). This dualistic view of Machiavellians aligns with the notion that Machiavellians have negative views of people in general, which may feed into hostility (Christie & Geis, 1970). However, given that Machiavellians are willing to achieve their goals at the expense of others, they may also exhibit communal and agentic qualities to get ahead and support their long-term strategies (Rauthmann & Kolar, 2013).

### **Aggression**

Narcissistic individuals may show aggression when insulted (Jones & Paulhus, 2010). This aligns with their hypersensitivity towards potential threats to their ego, which prompt narcissists to respond in a manner that is oftentimes overly defensive and aggressive (Bushman & Baumesiter, 1998). Conversely, Machiavellianism has been found to have little relation with direct aggression (Jones & Paulhus, 2009; 2010). Rather, they are careful in portraying their aggressiveness, specifically when they think that aggressive behavior can impact long term outcomes. Given that Machiavellians often leverage others to achieve their desired goals, unlike narcissists utilizing aggression as a potential immediate response, will likely reduce this long-term manipulative strategy.

### **Affective Empathy**

Among the most salient forms of empathy studied with regard to Machiavellians and narcissist includes affective empathy. This form of empathy refers to the ability to understand and experience the emotions of others (Jolliffe & Farrington, 2006). It was found that Machiavellianism was related with a low level of affective empathy, whereas narcissists were not found to have any noteworthy relationship with affective empathy (Jonason & Krause, 2013). The exploitativeness and entitlement aspects of narcissism in particular tend to coincide with less affective empathy and social desirability (Watson, Grisham, Trotter, & Biderman, 1984; Watson & Morris, 1991).

Machiavellians are often found to have a negative relationship with empathy, likely due to empathy being potentially detrimental to achieving their goals, since Machiavellians prefer to achieve their goals at the expense of others (Andrew, Cooke, & Muncer, 2007; Rauthmann & Kolar, 2013).

### **Relationship**

When it comes to engaging in relationships, many researchers have found that both narcissists and Machiavellians demonstrate a preference for short-term relationships (Jonason, Li, Webster, & Schmitt, 2009; Jonason, Valentine, Li, & Harbeson, 2011). However, more recent literature suggests that there are differences with regard to how narcissists and Machiavellians treat both short-term and long-term relationships (Forster, Ozelsel, & Epstude, 2010). Jonason, Luévano, and Adams (2012) found evidence that narcissists are linked to short-term relationships, whereas Machiavellians are not strongly associated with a particular relationship style (Jonason, Luévano & Adams, 2012). This supports the findings associated with how narcissists are perceived by others, such that they are liked by others during initial interactions, but due to their inevitable antisocial behaviors, these relationships are generally short-term (Back et al., 2010; Oltmanns et al., 2004; Rauthmann, 2011). Also in line with the literature pertaining to Machiavellianism and perceptions of others, relationships can be long-term but generally only when such an extended relationship benefits a long-term strategy for the Machiavellian (Rauthmann & Kolar, 2013). In the circumstance in which a Machiavellian determines a relationship provides little value to their goals, it is reasonable to assume that the Machiavellian would then place little effort into maintaining such relationships.

### **Job Performance**

O'Boyle et al. (2012) conducted a meta-analysis comparing the personalities of narcissism and Machiavellianism in terms of which personality is associated with reduction in quality of job performance via the lens of Social Exchange Theory. They found that Machiavellianism personality demonstrated an

inconsistent decline in job performance with an increase in counterproductive work behaviors. This finding likely stems from Machiavellian focus on achieving success via political manipulation, as opposed to direct attention to their work, something organizations are eventually prone to identify (Molm, 2010). In the case of narcissism, there was no significant relationship identified for narcissism and workplace performance, though they were linked with substantially higher levels of counterproductive work behaviors. These performance findings are likely due to the mixed nature of narcissism, as these individuals self-promote which could lead to short-term success, but their actual performance has been mixed in previous literature due to the context-specific nature of this relationship (Hogan and Kaiser, 2005; Campbell, Hoffman, Campbell, & Marchisio, 2011; Penney & Spector, 2002). In regards to salesperson's performance, Machiavellian salespeople are more productive, but at the same time, receive lower managerial ratings (Ricks & Fraedrich, 1999) whereas narcissistic salespeople are not as concerned with performance, but showed positive associations with sales satisfaction and level of comfort with ethically questionable sales behaviors (Soyer et al. 1999).

### **Impulsivity**

Relevant literature portrays the role of impulsivity as being mixed with regard to its desirability. Specifically, impulsivity has been linked with having positive aspects, such as fast information processing and spontaneity (Dickman & Meyer, 1988; Vigil-Colet & Morales-Vives, 2005), as well as negative outcomes, such as personality disorders and drug use (Barratt, Stanford, Kent, & Felthous, 1997; DeWit, 2009). When narcissists and Machiavellians were compared on impulsive behavior, it was found that narcissists were associated with impulsivity whereas Machiavellians were not (Jones & Paulhus, 2011).

Other than the criteria mentioned above on which Machiavellians and narcissists differ, there are many other behavioral differences which have been studied between these personalities. So much so that Paulhus and Williams (2002) mentioned in their article that

these two personalities are overlapping but distinct constructs. Although many such aspects wherein Machiavellians differ from narcissists have been studied, there are certain aspects on which research is yet to be done, including social desirability.

### **Social Desirability**

Social desirability in the literature has been defined as a "need for social approval and acceptance and the belief that this can be attained by means of culturally acceptable and appropriate behavior" (Crowne & Marlowe, 1964, p. 109). Social desirability is known for showing traits of two components – impression management ("purposeful presentation of self to fit into a situation or please an audience") and self-deception ("motivation to maintain a positive self-concept") (Latkin et al., 2017, p. 134). The impression management component is a stable characteristic of social desirability, which constantly needs social approval resulting in socially desirable misreporting (DeMaio 1984). This is due to their motivation to have a positive image and a need for strong approval. The self-deception component is known to be an item characteristic of social desirability, wherein the subject is aware of certain activities or attitudes being socially undesirable, but they view it to be positively biased. In other words, this component of social desirability is strongly influenced by characteristics of a specific item (Groves 1989). Thus, the authors posit that those high on the social desirability scale would be seen as engaging in defensive or self-protecting behaviors (Crowne & Marlow, 1964). This nature of socially desirable personality is viewed as troublesome in multiple situations to themselves and to the community, due to their intrinsic characteristic of underreporting socially undesirable behavior and over-reporting socially desirable behavior (Krumpal, 2013). Thus, it becomes crucial to identify the personalities that show the traits of social desirability. Table 4 provides a brief literature review on relevant past research performed on social desirability.

In the extant literature, there have been mixed results with regard to social desirability's ties to Machiavellianism and narcissism. Triki et al. (2017) found that Machiavellians were more

**TABLE 4:**  
**Major Findings from Previous Social Desirability Research**

Article	IV	Moderator/ Mediator	DV	Finding
Adams et al. (2005)	Social Desirability Social Approval		Self-reported Physical Activity	Social desirability and social approval influence self-reported physical activity selectively
Burton (1999)	Gender Machiavellian orientation, Social desirability		respondent's orientation toward corporate social responsibility	Social desirability does not have a significant impact on the CSR orientation of respondents
Davis, Thake and Vilhena (2010)	social desirability bias		self-reported consumption, hazardous use, and harms	Social Desirability bias under-estimates the use of harmful or hazardous self-consumption
Dalton and Ortegren (2011)	Gender	Social Desirability	Ethical Decision Making	Social desirability attenuates the effect of gender on ethical decision making
Chung and Moroe (2003)	Social Desirability bias	Religiousness Gender	ethical decision-making	High ethical decision-making results in high social bias. Religious women had the highest bias compared to any other interaction
Dunn and Shome (2009)	cross-cultural differences between Chinese and Canadian business students	social desirability bias	assessment of the ethicality of various business behaviors	Canadians have higher social desirability bias compared to Chinese.
Hult, Keillor and Lafferty (1999)	Validating CETSCALE	Gender and Culture	Social Desirability Bias	Higher social desirability bias was exhibited by U.S. subjects compared to those in Japan and Sweden
Kluemper (2008)	Trait Emotional Intelligence	social desirability and core-self evaluations	coping, stress, and life satisfaction	the incremental validity coefficients between trait EI and the three criteria is reduced in the presence of core-self evaluations and social desirability
Herbert et al. (1995)	Self-report of dietary intake	social desirability or social approval	risk Estimates in epidemiological studies.	Self-report of dietary intake reduced in the presence of social desirability bias
Joinson (1999)	self-consciousness, social anxiety, self-esteem, and social desirability	Anonymity Media	Reported Score by Survey Takers	Participants reported low survey scores when they were asked to take anonymous surveys and when Internet was used as medium compared to paper

likely to present themselves in the best possible way, leading to a positive correlation between social desirability and Machiavellianism. In Kajzer et al. (2014) and Mudrack (1993), the opposite result, a negative correlation, was found in their research.

The same scenario occurs when observing social desirability and narcissism. Raskin, Novacek, and Hogan (1991) found no association between narcissism and social desirability, while Sedikides et al. (2004) found that narcissism was independent of social

desirability, and Campbell et al. (2000) found that narcissists tend to self-enhance and have socially desirable responses. Adding to the mixed findings, previous literature has suggested that narcissists are sensitive to threats to their inflated sense of self (which engaging in socially desirable behaviors may mitigate), but also prone to impulsive behaviors which may result in them lashing out to such threats in manner that is less socially desirable (Byrne & O'Brien, 2014; Bushman & Baumeister, 1998; Jones & Paulhus, 2011).

Depending on their independent depositions, it is possible that a narcissist would be prone to a “Group Think” (Janis, 1972) phenomena within a focus group context if their views were not in alignment with those of others in a manner that could invite criticism and corresponding challenges to their ego (in the case of the narcissist) or mitigate goal achievement via group buy-in (in the case of Machiavellians). While due to differing reasons, such circumstances could ultimately prevent either a narcissist or Machiavellian from expressing their genuine thoughts (Albrecht, Johnson, & Walther, 1993; Carey, 1995; Hollander, 2004).

Social desirability has been studied from different perspectives of marketing, as well. For example, consumers with higher social desirability chose apples labeled as “local” more than apples labeled as “organic” (Costanigro et al., 2011). Further, another research found that women are more loyal towards companies compared to men, due to social desirability bias (Melnik et al., 2009). In a special issue on social desirability, Fisher (2000) mentions its importance and calls for discipline’s collective ability to work on this variable. Further, when it comes to more familiar brands, the question why they are sold more than unfamiliar brands, boiled down to social desirability being the most powerful mechanism, which explained the familiarity-like phenomenon (Rindfleisch & Inman, 1998). Thus, social desirability takes a front seat when it comes to certain purchase decisions made by consumers, increasing the importance for further research.

While the aforementioned studies have observed narcissism, Machiavellianism, and social desirability in different forms, they have never been utilized in the same study. With that, we are proposing that the explanation could lie in the combination of these constructs, and as such, we address the following hypotheses based on the narcissistic and Machiavellian nature:

- H<sub>1a</sub>:** There is a positive relationship between Machiavellianism and social desirability.
- H<sub>1b</sub>:** There is a positive relationship between narcissism and social desirability.

## Self-Control

Self-control is the ability to thwart impetuous feelings that can inhibit an individual’s resolve (Metcalfe & Mischel, 1999). Extant literature would also note that self-control “is a stable personality trait associated with the capacity to resist temptation, maintain self-discipline, and break harmful habits” (Limerick and Peltier, 2014, pg. 149). Through this monitoring and resistance of feelings and inhibition of actions, those with higher levels of self-control will be better able to regulate emotions and resist behaviors (Baumeister, 2002; Baumeister et al., 2012). The concept of self-control has been examined in the context of narcissism, and to a lesser extent, Machiavellianism as well. Self-control appears to facilitate the delayed gratification that is associated with long-term goals and projects, whereas a lack or limited self-control facilitates shorter-term and opportunistic gratification (Jonason & Tost, 2010).

Many marketing studies have kept self-control as the central piece of their research. For example, Haws et al. (2016) explained how consumer research has frequently connected spending decisions to self-control. Self-control has also been observed in the consumer eating behaviors frequently (e.g., May & Irmak, 2014). More so, one study concluded that self-controlling consumers pay for video rentals on a per unit basis compared to packages, intending to make it costlier and thus, in a way, controlling for their intentions to watch such videos (Wertenbroch, 1998). Past self-control research has always emphasized on how “purchase of vices generates regret” and that it is beneficial to consumers to choose virtue over vice (Keinan & Kivetz, 2008). Haws et al. (2016) concluded that self-control is one of the most influential variables in consumer decision-making and suggest that this variable should be further intervened for marketing related research.

Most of the marketing research related to these constructs has been summarized in Table 5.

Similar to social desirability, there have been mixed results in the extant literature pertaining to self-control and the concepts of narcissism and Machiavellianism. For example, in a two-

**TABLE 5:**  
**Major Findings of Variables in the Field of Marketing**

Article	IV	Moderator/ Mediator	DV	Finding
Dugan et al. (2019)	Internet Marketing	Machiavellianism	Sales performance	Internet marketing has positive effect on sales performance but Machiavellian characteristic weakens this relation.
Chaudari et al. (2017)	Machiavellian consumers	Rational and emotional Response	Willingness to buy	Person and store characteristics impact the willingness to pay at stores mediated by rational and emotional responses
Kang and Park (2016)	Luxurious brand	Narcissistic consumer	Buying behavior	Narcissistic consumers purchase more luxurious brands which enhance their self-image
Fastoso et al. (2018)	Narcissism	Self-congruity	Counterfeit proneness	Narcissists prone to consuming high-prestige products and are thus attractive targets for luxury brands
Naderi and Paswan (2016)	Narcissism		Store image Product price	“narcissistic consumers ascribe more importance to store image than to product price, whereas price is more critical in non-narcissists' decision making”
Costanigro et al. (2011)	Local versus Organic apples	Social Desirability	Willingness to pay	Local apples were sold more than organic apples due to the presence of social desirability bias
Melynk et al. (2012)	Gender	Visibility of status and social desirability	Loyalty towards brands	men respond more positively than women to loyalty programs that emphasize status, but only when their higher status is highly visible to others
Haws et al. (2016)	Healthy eating	Self-control	Responsible spending	“self-control is an important and influential individual difference that affects a wide variety of consumer decisions and behaviors”
Bossuyt et al. (2017)	Impulse purchases		Trait of Machiavellianism	There is a dark side to impulse buying for retailers.
Janssen et al. (2016)	Brand disclosure effect	Self-control	persuasion	Self-control plays a crucial role in the effects of brand placement disclosures

part study Jonason and Tost (2010) found Machiavellianism to be negatively linked to self-control in one of their two studies, and found no evidence for a significant relationship with narcissism in either study. It is noted by the authors that this discrepancy is something that deserves attention in future research. In contrast, studies have demonstrated a clear negative link between narcissism and self-control (Harrison, 2010; Vaughn, DeLisi, Beaver, Wright, & Howard, 2007). Due to the mixed literature and call for further exploration of this issue, based on the nature of narcissistic and Machiavellian personalities discussed, we propose the following hypotheses:

**H<sub>2a</sub>:** Self-control will weaken the relationship between Machiavellianism and social-desirability.

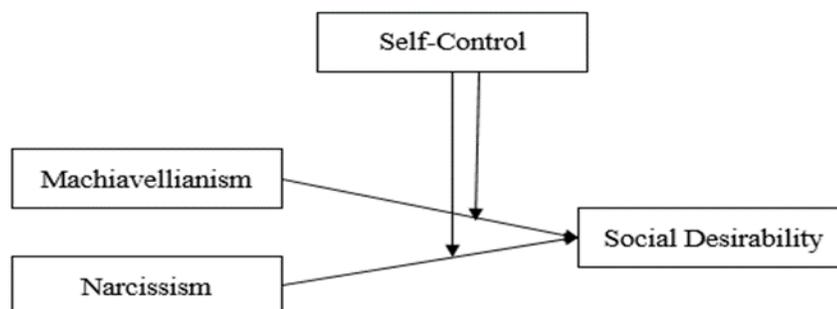
**H<sub>2b</sub>:** Self-control will weaken the relationship between narcissism and social-desirability.

Figure 1 explains the conceptual framework for the article.

## METHODOLOGY

A sample of 741 respondents was recruited using Amazon's Mechanical Turk. Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk) was used as a

**FIGURE 1:  
Conceptual Framework**



platform for our study because MTurkers are considered more heedful to the stipulations, as compared to the student population. A study by Hauser and Schwarz (2016) showed that MTurk participants perform better with attention checks than a pool of college students. Based on this, the survey presented to the respondents was adequate after careful considerations of the strengths and weaknesses of the platform (Hulland & Miller, 2018). The concepts that were presented in the manuscript are not specific to a particular subset of the population, and therefore, warranted greater participant diversity (Goodman & Paolacci, 2017). In addition, when the data were collected, there were several attention checks that allowed for the prior removal of inattentive MTurk workers (Kees et al., 2017; Pass et al., 2018). As Buhrmester, Kwang, and Gosling (2011) suggest, compared to student sample, MTurk samples are far more varied, and the data obtained from MTurk participants can be compared to reliability of data obtained using other collection methods in certain tasks amenable to online data collection (Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011).

The average age of the respondents was 31 years, wherein individuals ranged from 18 to 72 years old. About half (50.7%) of the respondents were male.

The Trimmed Machiavellianism (Rauthmann, 2013) scale was used in this study, which is comprised of five items, including “Anyone

who completely trusts anyone is asking for trouble” and “Most people are basically good and kind” (Reverse Coded). The Trimmed Mach scale was chosen due to it not being as broad as the MACH-IV and is “indicative of a cynical view of people in general” (Rauthmann, 2013. p. 395). In the investigation of the Trimmed Mach scale, the scale was found to have comparable construct and criterion validity to that of the more common MACH-IV scale (Rauthmann, 2013).

The most dominant measure of narcissism by far is the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI) developed by Raskin and Terry (1998). The full 40-item scale of this measure assesses aspects such as superiority, self-sufficiency, authority, vanity, exploitativeness, entitlement and exhibitionism (Muris et al., 2017). Several variations of this measure have subsequently been introduced, with the most notable feature among them being a reduced number of items that assess the several aspects of the measure. Among these measures is the NPI-16, which has demonstrated notable validity evidence, including predictive, internal, discriminant, and face (Ames, Rose, & Anderson, 2006). Narcissism is comprised of 16 dichotomous questions, such as “I am an extraordinary person” or “I am much like everybody else.”

Social desirability was measured using the Fischer and Fick (1993) Form XI -10item scale that includes items, such as “I am always courteous, even to people who are

disagreeable” and “I can remember ‘playing sick’ to get out of something” (reverse coded).

Self-control was measured using 13-item Self-Control Scale by Tangney, Baumeister, and Boone (2004). They indicated how much they agreed (1 = not at all, 5 = very much) with statements like, “I refuse things that are bad for me,” “I am good at resisting temptation,” and “I do certain things that are bad for me, if they are fun.” (reverse-coded). The items were then averaged to create the value of self-control. In their meta-analysis of self-control, de Ridder et al. (2012) noted that the scale has been shown to have “reliability (Cronbach’s  $\alpha = 0.89$ ) and good test-retest reliability ( $r = 0.89$  over 3 weeks)” (pg. 80).

Table 6 shows all the correlations between the variables, along with descriptive statistics.

**ANALYSES AND RESULTS**

**Machiavellianism**

Results from PROCESS Model 1 (Hayes, 2013) indicate a significant main effect of Machiavellianism on Social Desirability ( $t=2.75$ ,  $SE=0.11$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), suggesting that those higher on the Machiavellian scale had higher social desirability scores in support of Hypothesis H1a. There was also a significant main effect of self-control on social-desirability ( $t=7.30$ ,  $SE=0.13$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), suggesting that as self-control increased, so did social desirability. These results are demonstrated in detail in Table 7.

Results also revealed a significant and negative Machiavellianism and self-control interaction ( $t=-4.36$ ,  $SE=0.31$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) on social desirability in support of Hypothesis H2a, or in

**TABLE 6:**  
**Correlations (Reliabilities Presented on the Diagonal)**

	Mean	SD	Machiavellian	Narcissism	Social Desirability	Self-Control
Machiavellian	3.82	1.16	<b>0.72</b>			
Narcissism	0.37	0.27	0.42**	<b>0.86</b>		
Social Desirability	4.21	0.82	-0.31**	-0.19**	<b>0.67</b>	
Self-Control	3.28	0.69	-0.25**	-0.25**	0.39**	<b>0.85</b>

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

**TABLE 7:**  
**Direct and Moderation Effects of Self-control on Social Desirability and Machiavellianism/narcissism Relationship**

	$\beta$	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
<b>Intercept</b>	1.77	0.44	4.01	0.00	0.90	2.64
<b>Self-Control</b>	0.91	0.13	7.30	0.00	0.67	1.16
<b>Machiavellianism – H<sub>1a</sub></b>	0.30	0.11	2.75	0.01	0.08	0.51
<b>Interaction – H<sub>2a</sub></b>	-0.14	0.03	-4.36	0.00	-0.20	-0.08
	$\beta$	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
<b>Intercept</b>	2.39	0.24	10.16	0.00	1.93	2.86
<b>Self-Control</b>	0.58	0.07	8.73	0.00	0.45	0.72
<b>Narcissism – H<sub>1b</sub></b>	1.17	0.53	2.22	0.03	0.14	2.20
<b>Interaction – H<sub>2b</sub></b>	-0.45	0.16	-2.87	0.00	-0.76	-0.14

other words, self-control weakening the Machiavellianism to social desirability relationship. We conducted a follow-up Johnson-Neyman floodlight analysis, which indicated that this effect was positive and significant for self-control at  $\leq 1.10$ , as well as negative and significant at  $\geq 2.65$ . The graph of the interaction is presented in Figure 2.

**Narcissism**

Results from PROCESS Model 1 (Hayes, 2013) indicate a significant main effect of narcissism on Social Desirability ( $t=2.22$ ,  $SE=0.53$ ,  $p<0.05$ ), suggesting that those higher on the narcissism scale had higher social desirability scores, supporting Hypothesis H1b. In this model, there was also a significant main effect of self-control ( $t=8.73$ ,  $SE=0.07$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), suggesting that as self-control increased, so too did social desirability.

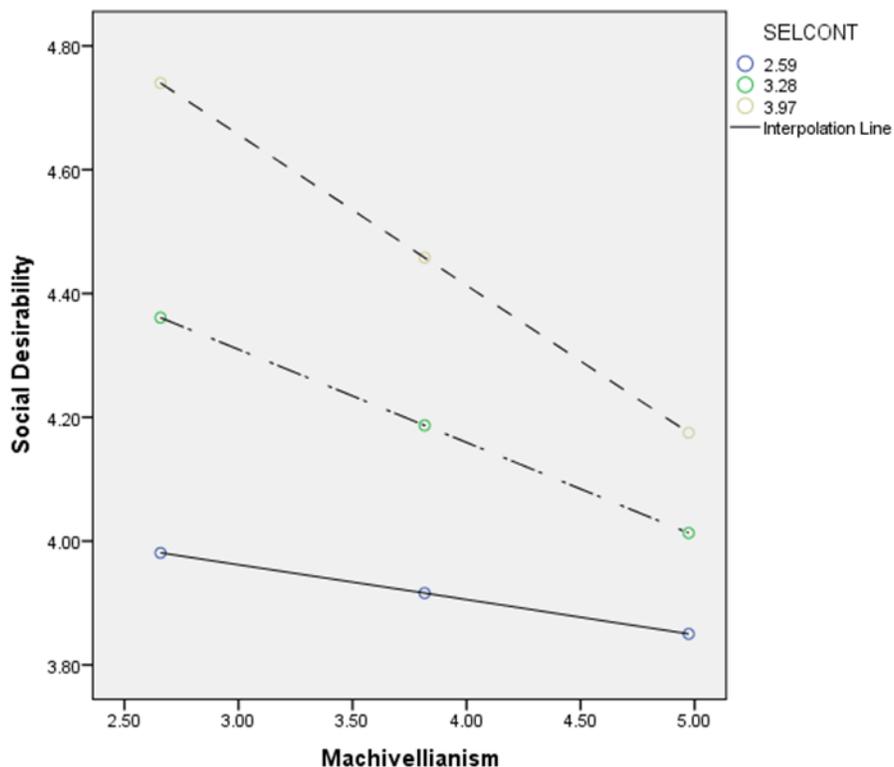
Results also revealed a significant and negative narcissism and self-control interaction ( $t=-2.87$ ,

$SE=0.16$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) on social desirability supporting Hypothesis H2b, which suggests that self-control weakens the narcissism to social desirability relationship. We conducted a follow-up Johnson-Neyman floodlight analysis, which indicated that this effect was negative and significant for self-control at  $\geq 3.01$ . Figure 3 displays the visual interaction of self-control and narcissism on social-desirability.

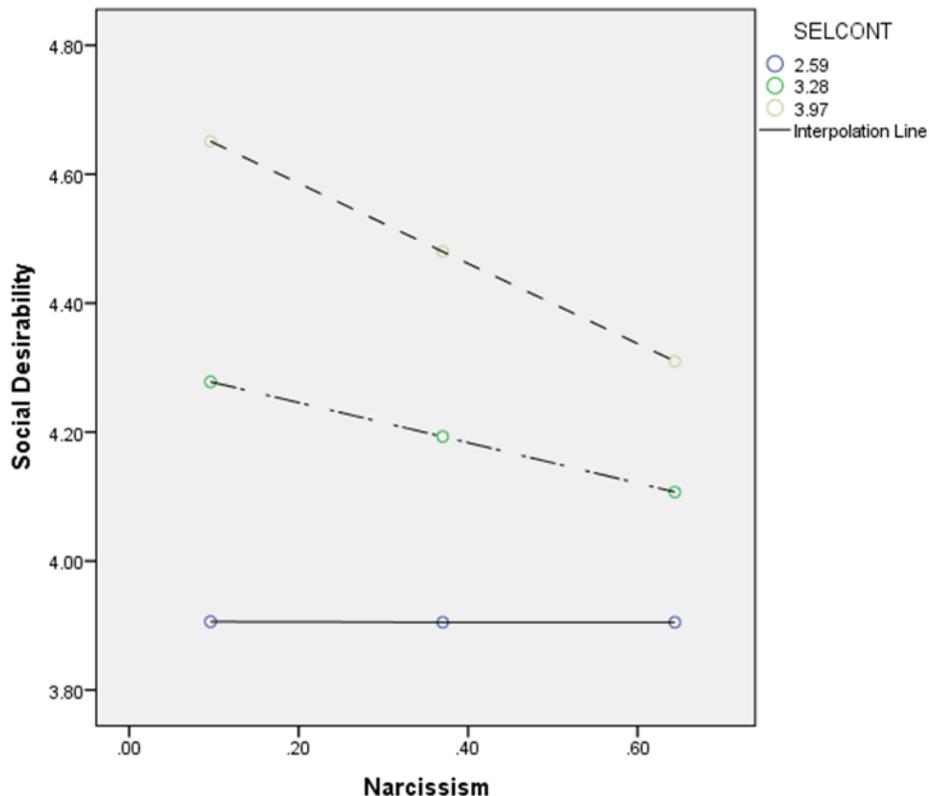
**DISCUSSION**

As much of the literature concerning the linkage between narcissism and Machiavellianism as it pertains to social desirability remains mixed, this study’s results provide dedicated, additional, and valuable empirical information in this domain in favor of the literature that suggests both Machiavellians and narcissists can engage in social desirability, if it can be strategically valuable to each personality trait (for differing reasons). Specifically, the results of this study support some previous literature, yet contrast with others (Campbell et al., 2000; Kajzer et al.,

**FIGURE 2:**  
Interaction of Self-control and Machiavellianism and Impact on Social Desirability



**FIGURE 3:**  
**Interaction of Self-control and Narcissism and impact on Social Desirability**



2014; Mudrack, 1993; Raskin et al., 1991; Triki et al., 2017).

With regard to Machiavellianism, our study found that there is indeed a positive and significant relationship between Machiavellianism and the relevant construct of social desirability. These results are in agreement with Triki et al. (2017), who found that Machiavellianism is positively linked to behaviors that are often linked with social desirability (e.g., engaging in culturally acceptable behaviors).

We posit that these results are intuitive and justified not only by previous literature, but also based on the definition of Machiavellianism. Machiavellians are primarily focused with positioning themselves to reach an optimal outcome that benefits them (Calhoun, 1969; Christie & Geis, 1970; Jones & Palhaus, 2009; Wilson et al., 1996). The results of this study coincide with this definition, such that it may very well be in a Machiavellian individual’s

best interest to concern themselves with social desirability, as this introduces a potential advantage for their objectives. This positive linkage between social desirability and narcissism was also found to be particularly salient among individuals that are especially high in Machiavellianism.

We posit that this result also is in line with previous literature and the definitions of both Machiavellianism and narcissism, such that an individual that is primarily concerned with their own objectives while simultaneously having an inflated sense of ego is even more likely to pay regard to others’ social perceptions (Grijalva et al., 2015; Wilson et al., 1996). This is because these individuals that are stacking both high narcissism and Machiavellianism not only have a very high regard for themselves, but also will engage in self-benefitting behaviors without much care given towards the impact it may have on others (Jones & Paulhus, 2009; Muris et al., 2017).

In similar fashion to individuals high in Machiavellianism, the results of this study found that narcissistic individuals also seem to demonstrate a significant and positive relationship with social desirability. These results are not surprising, as the limited relevant literature also found similar linkages between narcissism and behaviors that are often linked to social desirability (Campbell et al., 2000; Fukunishi, Hattori, Nakamura, & Nakagawa, 1995; Watson & Morris, 1991).

Much of the literature available on both narcissism and Machiavellianism seems to suggest a common theme, such that both traits are comprised of characteristics that are not socially desirable and questionable with regard to their ethics (Christie & Geis, 1970, Bushman & Baumesiter, 1998; Calhoun, 1969; Jones & Palhaus, 2009; Muris et al., 2017, O'Boyle, Forsyth, Banks, & McDaniel, 2012). While such a theme may in fact be true, our findings suggest that both narcissists and Machiavellians might very well engage in actions that are counter to their stereotypical behaviors. By demonstrating behavior that is socially desirable, individuals that exhibit these traits may very well leverage this façade to their benefit. For example, narcissists who are sensitive to threats to their ego (Bushman & Baumesiter, 1998), may demonstrate socially desirable behavior in a focus group context to avoid any negative feelings associated with disagreement by others in the case where their suggestions do not align with others. Machiavellians may also engage in socially desirable behaviors if they believe that this manipulation will benefit them with regard to ultimately achieving their goals (Wilson et al., 1996). For example, in the same marketing focus group context, Machiavellians may exhibit socially desirable behaviors, such as agreeableness, as a means of increasing their charisma with the group, with an ultimate goal of leveraging this charisma as a means to get the group to buy into their preferred response to the questions asked during a focus group.

As it pertains to self-control, our studies coincide with previous literature, such that both Machiavellians and narcissists demonstrate a negative relationship with this construct (Bushman & Baumesiter, 1998; Jonason & Tost, 2010). However, we posit that a lack of

self-control may not necessarily be detrimental to either personality trait, albeit for varying reasons. Referring back to the focus group context, if a narcissist's ego is beginning to feel threatened by others in the group, they could actually purposely display a loss of self-control as a strategic means to exhibit power via its association with the concepts of autonomy and freedom (Hart, Richardson, Tortoriello, & Tullett, 2017).

### MANAGERIAL MARKETING IMPLICATIONS

The results of this study have very important managerial implications, specifically from a marketing point of view. As mentioned in previous research, understanding consumer personality traits helps advance customer relationship management practices (Liu et al., 2015). Every consumer has a personality and every personality consumes differently. It is important to know how they possibly intend to behave, and in the marketing world it is important to predict such behaviors, as advertising is exponentially becoming target-based. This paper shows us how both Machiavellians and narcissists crave for social desirability; thus, designing the advertisements and promotions to these personalities in a socially desirable manner may attract their attention more to such ads, as mentioned in the literature how target-specific ads can be strategically formulated (Lu et al., 2015).

Secondly, sales literature has mentioned the dilemma of selling to friends and how social desirability bias there can harm their performance due to the two roles they have to take while selling to friends (Beeler et al., 2019). Since direct selling is the new trend and salespeople are being encouraged to sell to friends, their social desirability bias puts them to test. As the study demonstrates, self-control does weaken the bond between certain personalities and social desirability. Since narcissistic and Machiavellian salespeople are known to have detrimental effects on customer relationships (Smith, 2017), training them on improving their appetite for self-control will also improve their social desirability bias, further reducing the stress and thus improving sales performance.

Third, the upper echelon leaders are also considered to have various personality traits that eventually trickle down to the overall firm performance, as well as various marketing outcomes (Kashmiri et al., 2019). Another study reports that narcissistic CEOs are usually a huge problem for their firms (O'Reilly et al., 2018). To reduce the overall negative impact of narcissistic CEOs on the firm performance, the board of directors can take the route of understanding their social desirability bias and how that can be put to use towards the betterment of the firm, thus benefiting the firm and the marketing outcomes.

Fourth, we learn that social desirability is highly found among the Machiavellian and narcissistic consumers. This can be of great advantage to the local communities struggling in the nation to market their products. For example, a great way of marketing would include portraying how buying their products would make the consumers socially desirable, thus making them a part of their community. This strategic marketing would not only help consumers want to buy more of local products, but at the same time help the local communities to thrive and profit from their socially desirable message. Although narcissists and Machiavellians are biased towards such messages based on our results, future research should also look into various other personalities, and if this holds true on other grounds as well, social desirability could possibly be the central message of such promotions, where the local communities can benefit from the best possible outcomes.

Lastly, one important criterion where the firms are turning their marketing focus to giving back to the society. All the firms have adopted socially responsible marketing and CSR has become more vital than ever for firms to be a part of. However, how to make that message reachable and acceptable is an important question. One way of doing that is utilizing social desirability to their benefit and creating the environment of social importance, thus increasing the impact and reach.

### CONCLUSION

There has been an ongoing debate in the literature whether there is a significant

difference between narcissists and Machiavellians, or whether they are interrelated concepts (e.g., Kerig & Stellwagen, 2010). Some have even argued them to be distinct, yet intertwining concepts (Stellwagen, 2011). We try to contribute towards this debate by showing that these two traits do not necessarily always differ, and that there are some ways in which they are similar, such as in the case of social desirability. Further, we also provide evidence that these two traits try to manage themselves in a similar pattern (i.e., by having more self-control) in this study. Keeping these findings in mind, we encourage future research to consider the similarity between narcissism and Machiavellianism as a robustness check and to highlight any salient differences, if applicable.

This study helps to advance two bodies of research. First, we examine and compare the two seemingly overlapping personalities. This assessment of comparison should prove useful not only for psychologists studying these constructs, but also for marketers, economists, and other relevant fields that engage in human interactions in which narcissistic and Machiavellian behaviors are usually present. We found significance in multiple categories which involve narcissistic and Machiavellian personalities. First, social desirability and its relationship with narcissists and Machiavellians has been highly debated in literature (Triki et al., 2017; Kajzer et al., 2014; Mudrack, 1993; Raskin et al., 1991). While some believe it to be positive, others suggest that the behavior is negative, and a third party suggests that there is no significant relationship, in general. We found social desirability to be positively related to Machiavellianism, as well as narcissism, thus providing further guidance to researchers and practitioners that may be seeking an objective solution. The present results are also notable, given the importance and debate on agreeableness/antagonism to understanding the Machiavellian and narcissistic behaviors (Muris et al., 2017; Miller et al., 2010). Specifically, our results suggest that it would be beneficial for both researchers and practitioners to assess these traits, while acknowledging the impact of social desirability as one of the possible predictors of these personality traits.

### LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Previous work has debated about narcissism, Machiavellianism, and their behaviors that are linked with social desirability (Campbell et al., 2000; Kajzer et al., 2014; Mudrack, 1993; Raskin et al., 1991; Triki et al., 2017). The current study has delved into this debate and found the relation these constructs share with each other, in a relatively straightforward and efficient manner. By comparing these relationships, the study has provided some insight into the historically intriguing yet mixed results. We hope that these results will further help the psychologists and marketers, researchers and practitioners alike to explain these traits and their idiosyncratic differences. One variation that would be worthwhile for future research to explore would be to examine whether there is an amplifying effect of narcissism on Machiavellianism and vice versa; as in the present studies, these two constructs were treated as independent.

According to Patsiaouras, Fitchet, and Davies (2016), in the past decade, there has been an increase in tying up marketing with psychology, with many researchers looking at the impact of psychology on consumer behavior, along with marketing (Fullerton, 2007; Schwarzkopf & Gries, 2010; Tadjewski, 2006). This study further enhances the path of connecting marketing with psychology, specifically personalities – Machiavellian and narcissistic, thus helping marketers to differentiate between the two overlapping but not so similar personalities.

One limitation of this study is the self-reporting nature of the survey, as its accuracy has been questioned due to the criterion problem (John & Robins, 1994). Due to this limitation, there is always a possibility of the results being biased. Thus, future research should investigate these differences of Machiavellians and narcissists further to confirm the outcomes by performing lab-based studies or gathering real world data. Future research should also consider replicating this study by collecting data in alternate ways, like pen and paper or surveys shared in community, to further generalize the results confidently.

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