



## Research Report

## Machiavellianism, self-monitoring, self-promotion and relational aggression on Facebook



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## ABSTRACT

Machiavellianism is a personality trait characterized by cynicism, emotional detachment and a willingness to manipulate others. Research investigating the behavior of Machiavellian men and women has focused on its influence in offline relationships. The popularity of social networking sites suggests that it is also important to consider the interactions of Machiavellian men and women in this context as well. Men ( $N = 54$ ) and women ( $N = 189$ ) completed questionnaires assessing Machiavellianism, self-monitoring, self-promotion and relational aggression. Analyses revealed that women who were high in Machiavellianism engaged in more dishonest self-promotion and relational aggression towards a close friend on Facebook whilst males with high levels of Machiavellianism engaged in more self-promoting behavior. In addition, both men and women high in Machiavellianism engaged in more self-monitoring. The findings demonstrate the importance of considering the influence of personality on online behavior and associated gender differences.

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## 1. Introduction

Machiavellianism is a personality trait characterized by emotional detachment, low empathy and a willingness to exploit others (Christie & Geis, 1970; Vecchio & Sussman, 1991; Wastell & Booth, 2003; Wilson, Near, & Miller, 1998). Those with high levels of Machiavellianism demonstrate strategic planning, suspicion of others and protective self-monitoring and employ a range of strategies to influence their offline relationships (Christie & Geis, 1970; Rauthmann, 2011; Jonason & Webster, 2012). These strategies include projecting intimacy, making the other person feel ashamed, embarrassed or guilty, selecting friends that may be easier to manipulate and regulating the amount or depth of personal information revealed (Austin, Farrelly, Black, & Moore, 2007; Blumstein, 1973; Brewer, Abell, & Lyons, in press; Jonason & Schmitt, 2010). However, whilst research has demonstrated the influence of Machiavellianism in offline interactions (e.g. Chen, 2010; Jonason & Kavanah, 2010; Lyons & Aitken, 2010), little is known about Machiavellianism in the context of online relationships. Therefore, the current study investigates the influence of Machiavellianism on online behavior and interactions that take place on social networking sites.

Social networking sites allow the user to create a profile, regulate connections with others, interact and monitor interactions between other users (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). The use of these sites is widespread. Over 50% of Internet users report using at least one social networking site and over 90% of these use Facebook, often as part of their daily routine (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Hampton, Sessions Goulet, Rainie, & Purcell, 2011). Although social networking sites support both the formation and maintenance of personal relationships (Murray & Weller, 2007), they also provide opportunities to artificially enhance individual reputation or manipulate relationships.

The majority of Facebook users report that their profiles provide an accurate representation of the self (Stern & Taylor, 2007). However, research indicates that Facebook identities are socially desirable and difficult to obtain offline (Zhao, Grasmuck, & Martin, 2008), suggesting that the manipulation of information (e.g. self-monitoring and self-promotion) is a well-established strategy amongst Facebook users (Kramer & Winter, 2008; Nadkarni & Hofmann, 2012; Pempek, Yermolayeva, & Calvert, 2009). In particular, controlling the amount and type of information posted (e.g. emphasising positive qualities) enables the user to create and enhance a particular image (Chen & Marcus, 2012; Kim & Lee, 2011; Schlenker & Pontari, 2000; Utz, 2010; Zhang, 2010), which may encourage the trust or cooperation of other users. Indeed, though explicitly false information may be identified by familiar online and offline friends, online interactions provide

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more opportunities than offline interactions for the strategic impression management conducive to manipulation (Bibby, 2008; Buffardi & Campbell, 2008; Kramer & Winter, 2008).

Previous research indicates that a number of personality factors (e.g. neuroticism, narcissism, shyness, self-esteem and self-worth) influence the manner in which people engage in online interactions (Nadkarni & Hofmann, 2012). For example, extraversion is associated with use of social networks (Correa, Hinsley, & de Zuniga, 2010; Wehrli, 2008; Wilson, Fornasier, & White, 2010), Facebook use (Gosling, Augustine, Vazire, Holtzman, & Gaddis, 2011), number of Facebook friends (Amichai-Hamburger & Vinitzky, 2010; Ong et al., 2011), membership of Facebook groups (Ross et al., 2009), disclosure of information on Facebook (Bibby, 2008; Chen & Marcus, 2012) and the use of Facebook to broadcast activities (Correa et al., 2010). Neuroticism is positively related to use of social media (Wehrli, 2008), conscientiousness is negatively related to time spent on social networking sites (Wilson et al., 2010) and openness is positively related to amount of time spent on Facebook and number of Facebook friends (Skues, Williams, & Wise, 2012). In addition, those using Facebook are more narcissistic i.e. self-absorbed, sensitive to slights from others and likely to bolster self-esteem through admiration from others (Luchner, Mirsalimi, Moser, & Jones, 2008; Wink, 1991) than non-Facebook users (Ryan & Xenos, 2011).

Whilst a range of studies have demonstrated the relationship between personality and online behavior, there is a paucity of research investigating the importance of Machiavellianism in this context. Initial findings are consistent with the notion that Machiavellianism influences online behavior and that motivations for Facebook activity are self-centred rather than cooperative. In particular, Machiavellian Facebook users are more concerned with themselves than the 'friend' they are interacting with on Facebook and aggressive interactions provide Machiavellian men and women with opportunities to dominate and exploit other users (Li, 2007; Rosenberg & Egbert, 2011). However, further research is required to investigate the influence of Machiavellianism on computer mediated interaction.

The present study investigates whether Machiavellian men and women employ self-presentation tactics (i.e. self-monitoring and self-promotion) and how honest they are in their interactions on Facebook. Machiavellianism is more strongly related to behavior for men than women (McHoskey, 2001) and gender differences exist in Facebook behavior (e.g. McAndrew & Jeong, 2012; Stefanone, Lackaff, & Rosen, 2011). Therefore the current study investigated the potential relationship between Machiavellianism and self-promotion, self-monitoring, dishonest self-promotion and relational aggression via Facebook separately for male and female participants.

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Participants

Men ( $N=54$ ) and women ( $N=189$ ) were recruited via a research website ( $N=210$ ) and opportunity sampled from the campus of a British university ( $N=33$ ). Men ( $M_{\text{age}}=24.65$ ,  $SD=6.50$ ) and women ( $M_{\text{age}}=23.81$ ,  $SD=8.38$ ) were aged 18–44 and 18–69 years respectively. Participants completing questionnaires online and offline did not differ with regards to Machiavellianism ( $t(54.53)=-.23$ ,  $p>.05$ ), self-promotion ( $t(241)=1.26$ ,  $p>.05$ ), self-monitoring ( $t(51)=1.27$ ,  $p>.05$ ), honest-dishonest self-promotion ( $t(240)=.31$ ,  $p>.05$ ) and relational aggression ( $t(55.76)=1.73$ ,  $p>.05$ ), therefore these samples were analysed together.

### 2.2. Measures

Participants first provided preliminary demographic information (age, gender) and then completed a series of items (devised by the researchers) assessing Facebook activity (e.g. frequency of viewing friend's activity). Participants responded based on their frequency of behavior on a typical day (once or less per day to more than 10 times per day). To measure less frequent behavior (e.g. viewing friend's 'friends' list), questions were also devised that asked participants to respond based on their behavior in a typical week (once or less per week to more than 10 times per week). In addition, participants were asked to report the amount of time engaged in the behavior on a typical day or week (up to 15 min to over 4 h).

The Mach IV (Christie & Geis, 1970) measures the cynicism, morality and manipulative behavior which constitute Machiavellianism. Items include '*The best way to handle people is to tell them what they want to hear*' and '*It is wise to flatter important people*'. Participants responded on a 7-point Likert scale from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree. Facebook self-promotion was measured using five statements derived from Carpenter (2012). Items included '*How often do you post status updates to Facebook*' and '*How often do you tag pictures of yourself on Facebook?*' Participants responded on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 = never to 5 = all the time.

The original self-monitoring scale (Snyder, 1974) contains 25 statements and measures self-monitoring behavior in (offline) social interactions. In the present study, 16 statements were selected and adapted to measure participants self-monitoring of behavior on Facebook. Adapted statements included '*When I am uncertain of what to put as a status update, I look at the updates of my Facebook friends*' and '*Even if I am not enjoying myself, I often pretend on Facebook that I am*'. Participants responded by answering true or false to each statement. The honesty of self-promotion behaviors were measured using 14 statements. These items (devised by the researchers) included: '*I often update my status saying I am doing something exciting even though this is not true*' and '*I often send friend requests to people I don't know in order to increase my number of Facebook friends*'. Participants responded on a 5-point Likert Scale from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree and seven items were reverse coded to create a total dishonesty self-promotion score.

Finally, relational aggression specific to Facebook activity was measured using 19 statements developed by the researchers. Participants were asked to respond to this with reference to a close friend whom they interact with both offline and via Facebook. These statements include: '*I often ignore my friend when they try to speak to me on Facebook chat*' and '*I often write something embarrassing about my friend in my Facebook status*'. Participants responded on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). In the present study, all scales demonstrated acceptable reliability: Machiavellianism:  $\alpha=.75$ ; Facebook self-promotion:  $\alpha=.80$ ; dishonest self-promotion:  $\alpha=.74$  and relational aggression:  $\alpha=.94$ , with the exception of self-monitoring:  $\alpha=.56$ . Higher scores represent higher levels of Machiavellianism, self-promotion, self-monitoring, relational aggression and self-promotion which contains a greater amount of dishonesty. Items developed by the researchers are available on request.

## 3. Results

Posting status updates was the most frequent Facebook activity reported by participants, followed by posting photographs, changing the profile picture, tagging pictures and updating profile information. Participants typically accessed Facebook, viewed the news

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