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The influence of the dark triad on the relationship between entrepreneurial attitude orientation and entrepreneurial intention: A study among students in Taiwan University

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ABSTRACT

Entrepreneurial attitude orientation refers to an individual's attitude to start a new venture, such as innovativeness, risk-taking, need for achievement, self-confidence, and locus of control. These elements are known to predict entrepreneurial intention. While prior research about the influence of personality primary focus on the positive aspects, recently, the dark triad, a set of personality characteristics that includes Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy, has been found to predict personal and organizational achievement. Considering the new generation of entrepreneurs are more likely to be self-reliant and loyal toward themselves, it is proposed that the dark triad can mediate the relationship between entrepreneurial attitude orientation and entrepreneurial intention. Structural equation modeling is used to examine the hypotheses based on a sample of 295 college students in Taiwan. In addition to a significant positive relationship between entrepreneurial attitude orientation and entrepreneurial intention, the influence of the dark triad as a mediator was also found. Results suggest individuals high on the dark triad are more intended to engage in entrepreneurial activity, which advance our knowledge of the entrepreneurial decision-making process. Theoretical and applied implications are discussed.

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1. Introduction

Starting up a new business is an individual decision, and an individual's attitude is at the central in defining entrepreneurial activities (Begley & Boyd, 1988; Koh, 1996). Entrepreneurial attitude orientation consists of personal characteristics such as innovativeness, risk-taking, need for achievement, self-confidence, and locus of control (Robinson, Stimpson, Huefner, & Hunt, 1991). These elements have been found to predict entrepreneurial inclinations (Kollmann, Christofor, & Kuckertz, 2007), which is a reliable predictor of entrepreneurial action (Covin & Wales, 2012; Krueger, Reilly, & Carsrud, 2000; Rauch & Frese, 2007). Based on Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behavior, Krueger and Carsrud (1993)

developed the entrepreneurial intention model, where entrepreneurial attitude can affect entrepreneurial behavior through entrepreneurial intention. In their model, entrepreneurial attitude and entrepreneurial intention have been influenced by personal and situational variables indirectly (Krueger & Carsrud, 1993). As entrepreneurial intention is considered the most important variable for the future of new venture formation (Krueger et al., 2000), the objective of the present study is to explore whether seemingly negative aspect of personality, the dark triad, may influence the relationship between entrepreneurial attitude orientation and entrepreneurial intention.

While emerging evidence has suggested that certain personality characteristics may play a somewhat larger role in the origins of entrepreneurial success (Gürol & Atsan, 2006), understanding factors affecting individual's attitude to become an entrepreneur has remained unclear (Zhao, Seibert, & Hills, 2005). Existing literature mostly focused on positive, well-known personality factors, such as the five-factor model of personality (Antoncic, Bratkovic Kregar, Singh, & DeNoble, 2015), self-efficacy (Wang, Chang, Yao, & Liang, 2016); self-esteem (Chen, Ding, & Li, 2016); and

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creativity, locus of control, and need for achievement (Popescu, Bostan, Robu, Maxim, & Diaconu, 2016). The negative aspect of personality has been substantially ignored. In fact, it was not until recently that scholars began to explore the negative side of entrepreneurship (Baron, Zhao, & Miao, 2015; Klotz & Neubaum, 2016; Shepherd, Patzelt, & Baron, 2013).

Despite the old psychological origins of the dark triad (Furnham, Richards, & Paulhus, 2013; Hmieleski & Lerner, 2013), the relationship between the dark triad and entrepreneurial intention is rarely explored. In fact, a Web of Science search conducted on June 1, 2017, shows only one study (Hmieleski & Lerner, 2016) explored such relationship. Even though there has been theoretical argument about the influence of the dark triad within the context of entrepreneurship studies (Klotz & Neubaum, 2016; Miller, 2015), the present study is the first to empirically examine the mediation of the dark triad on entrepreneurial attitude and entrepreneurial intention.

The principal rationale to consider the dark triad is based on the notion that during the start-up phase, due to the nature of challenges facing entrepreneurs, certain capabilities such as narcissism or aggressiveness are required to overcome the situation (Miller, 2015; Paulhus & Williams, 2002). In other words, in addition to major characteristics of an entrepreneur such as innovativeness, risk-taking, and strong will to act (Littunen, 2000), specific personality may be beneficial. In this respect, some psychological research has focused on the potential benefits of the dark triad (Brunell et al., 2008), a set of personality characteristics that includes Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy (Jonason & Webster, 2010). The dark triad plays a positive convincing role on entrepreneur innovation and intention for achievement (Kramer, Cesinger, Schwarzing, & Gelléri, 2011), as well as personal success (O'Boyle, Forsyth, Banks, & McDaniel, 2012) and organizational achievement (Wisse, Barelds, & Rietzschel, 2015). In contrast, only a few studies found the dark triad to be dysfunctionality in work and individual behavior (Goldman, Van Fleet, & Griffin, 2006). There seems to be no clear source of evidence on the potential role of the dark triad (Akhtar, Ahmetoglu, & Chamorro-Premuzic, 2013). Given that personality traits have effective consequences on individual's entrepreneurial intentions (Mathieu & St-Jean, 2013), to advance theory building and practical implication, it is important to study whether the dark triad can influence the relationship between entrepreneurial attitude orientation and entrepreneurial intention.

In addition to theory building to explore the relationship among the constructs, the present study also filled a research gap on entrepreneurial intention in Taiwan. While entrepreneurial intention has been studied in countries such as USA and Spain (Uslay, Teach, & Schwartz, 2002), it was rarely studied in Taiwan. A Web of Science search conducted on June 1, 2017 using entrepreneurial intention and Taiwan as keywords found only 4 studies. In Liñán and Chen (2009) paper, they developed the entrepreneurial intention questionnaire using Spain and Taiwan participants, and concluded that entrepreneurial intentions are formed the same way. In the Liu, Chen, and Hsu (2014) paper, the focus was on entrepreneurial franchisees and their intention to continue. In the Chang, Tsai, and Peng (2014) paper, they explored the influence of motivation, opportunity, and ability to affect entrepreneurial intentions through personal attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. Finally, in the Tsai, Chang, and Peng (2016) paper, they studied perceived capability and entrepreneurial intention by considering the mediating roles of perceived opportunity and fear of failure and the moderating role of gender. As none of the studies consider to include personality as a possible predictor of entrepreneurial intention, the Taiwan context may contribute to the field's research and development.

This study offers several contributions to the existing literature

on entrepreneurial studies. To begin with, the relationship between entrepreneurial attitude orientation and entrepreneurial intention will be examined to confirm entrepreneurial attitude orientation as an antecedent of entrepreneurial intention (Robinson et al., 1991; Shariff & Saud, 2009). Findings can be helpful not only to predict highly inclined future entrepreneurs but also to provide practical applications for training and management education to motivate or in some cases demotivate intentions. Second, as responding to a recent call for research on the dark triad personality related to entrepreneurship (Klotz & Neubaum, 2016), the present study goes above and beyond the only one study conducted on the dark triad and entrepreneurial intention (Hmieleski & Lerner, 2016), and becomes the first study to empirically examine the mediation of the dark triad on entrepreneurial attitude and entrepreneurial intention. In this respect, the results will contribute to the understanding of the dark triad as an effective personality trait that influences the entrepreneurial decision process, and offer deeper insights to future entrepreneurs into their strengths and weaknesses before facing challenges. Finally, the outcome of this study could support the potential of the dark triad for constructive purposes, such as to recruit talent for new venture, or retain "the dark force" for strategic development and opportunities in the organization.

2. Theoretical background

Entrepreneurial intention is defined as an attentive state of mind that directs personal attention and experience toward planned entrepreneurial behavior. As the decision to become an entrepreneur is considered voluntary and conscious (Krueger et al., 2000), it is sensible to analyze how that decision is taken. A growing body of literature exists that suggests entrepreneurial action follows the formation of entrepreneurial intention (Douglas, 2013; Zhang, Duysters, & Cloodt, 2014). In this sense, entrepreneurial intention would be a determinant element towards performing entrepreneurial actions (Liñán, Rodríguez-Cohard, & Rueda-Cantuche, 2011). In other words, entrepreneurial intention is the potent predictor of entrepreneurial activity in individuals who intend to set up a new business in the future (Obschonka, Silbereisen, & Schmitt-Rodermund, 2010).

Personal characteristic is often considered to be a significant predictor of entrepreneurial intention (Crant, 1996). According to the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991), as intention predicts action, certain specific attitude predicts and affects intention. Such behavioral intention results from attitude, and becomes a determinant of behavior (Vesalainen & Pihkala, 1999). We proposed that entrepreneurial attitude orientation is a possible predictor of entrepreneurial intention. An entrepreneurial attitude is considered a better approach to describe entrepreneurs than other characteristic or demographic variable, as attitude would measure the extent to which individual positively or negatively inclined to do something (Chen, Jing, & Sung, 2012; Liñán, 2004).

Prior research has proposed to consider entrepreneurial attitude orientation in several aspects that are highlighted in entrepreneurs (Rauch, Wiklund, Lumpkin, & Frese, 2009; Robinson et al., 1991). Innovativeness refers to an individual's intention towards innovation through perceiving and acting upon business activities in a new and unique way (Rauch et al., 2009). In this regard, evidence shows that entrepreneurs are significantly more innovative than non-entrepreneurs (Robinson et al., 1991). Innovativeness was found as the focal point of entrepreneurial activities, which traditionally has been identified as one of the essential characteristics of entrepreneurs. Risk taking refers to an individual's propensity to take risk, which is about the individual orientation toward taking charges in an uncertain decision-making context.

The need for achievement refers to an individual's interest in

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