The Dark Triad and Entrepreneurial Intentions among Nigerian University Students

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Abstract
The primary objective of this study was to examine the relationship between the Dark Triad (DT) and Entrepreneurial Intentions (EI) among undergraduate students of a government-owned university in Nigeria. To achieve this objective, 154 undergraduate students were randomly selected from different departments, within the faculty of management sciences and the questionnaire administered on them. The DT were measured using The Short Dark Triad (SD3) and EI was measured with questions from the Entrepreneurial Intention Questionnaire (EIQ). Data was analysed using descriptive statistics and regression analysis. Our results indicated while there was a high level of EI and moderate levels of Machiavellianism and narcissism among the students, there was however no correlation between the DT and EI. The implications of the findings for entrepreneurship in Nigeria and similar environments were discussed. We conclude that most individuals engage in entrepreneurship out of necessity rather than selfish interests and recommend that budding entrepreneurs prepare themselves adequately before starting any venture.

Keywords: dark triad, entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial intentions, Machiavellianism, narcissism, Nigeria, psychopathy

Introduction
Entrepreneurship has emerged as a major area of interest in different countries around the world, largely due to its ability to propel national economic development (United Nations, 1993). Definitions of entrepreneurship (Hisrich & Peters, 2002) suggest that rather than being a short-term or one-step process, it is a long process involving various steps. According to Inegbenebor and Ogunrin (2010), entrepreneurship begins with an idea or a dream and culminates with the individual acting on his/her ideas and performing definite entrepreneurial actions such as, registration of business name, securing premises, employing staff and marketing of goods or services. However, not all ideas/dreams end up as actual businesses and one factor which has been identified capable of determining whether ideas are translated into enterprises is entrepreneurial intent. According to Venter, Urban & Rwigema (2010), entrepreneurial intent is the single best predictor of entrepreneurial action. Based on Ajzen’s (1991) theory of planned behaviour, Krueger and Carsrud (1993) in their entrepreneurial intention model, classified variables capable of influencing entrepreneurial intention into situational and personal factors. Personality has emerged as one of a number of personal factors influencing entrepreneurial intention and the primary objective of this study is to examine whether seemingly certain negative personality traits, the dark triad, influence entrepreneurial intentions among Nigerian undergraduate students.

A lot of work examining the relationship between personality traits and entrepreneurial intentions have focused on and indeed identified several positive traits linked to entrepreneurial intent. Studies such as...
Karabulut, 2016; Wang, Chang, Yao, & Liang, 2016) have found that traits such as: proactiveness, willingness to take risks, locus of control, agreeableness, the need for achievement, self-efficacy and self-esteem linked to entrepreneurial intent. Recently however, authors have started to examine not only the negative aspects of entrepreneurship (Baron, Zhao, & Miao, 2015; Klotz & Neubaum, 2016) but also how certain negative personality traits, the Dark Triad (DT) in particular, influence individuals decisions to start business (Cesinger, Kramer, Schwarzinger & Gelleri, 2011; Hmieleski & Lerner, 2013; Hmieleski & Lerner, 2016; Miller, 2015; Do & Dadvari, 2017).

The primary argument in favour of considering the dark triad and other negative personality traits is based on the notion that, in addition to possessing characteristics of such as innovativeness, risk-taking, and a strong will to act (Littunen, 2000), entrepreneurs might benefit from possessing negative traits, which can help them overcome the challenges faced during the normally turbulent start-up phase of entrepreneurship (Miller, 2015). Further supporting this argument are studies which have shown the dark triad to be positively linked to entrepreneur innovation and intention for achievement (Cesinger, et al, 2011), as well as personal success (O’Boyle, Forsyth, Banks, & McDaniel, 2012) and organizational achievement (Wisse, Barelds, & Rietzschel, 2015).

Previous studies on the relationship between personality traits / mental attributes and EI within the Nigerian context, have tended to focus on traits / abilities considered to be positive. This study is one of the few to examine the relationship between the DT and EI in the Nigerian context. Findings from the study will thus add to the growing literature on the relationship between the DT and entrepreneurship by providing an African and Nigerian perspective to the debate.

Entrepreneurial Intention

Intention has been identified as a cognitive construct representing a state of mind, which directs attention, experience, and action toward a specific goal or a pathway to its achievement (Bird & Jelinek, 1988). Psychologists have proven that intentions are the best predictors of any planned behaviour, particularly when the behaviour is rare, hard to observe, or involves unpredictable time lags (Krueger, 2000). Entrepreneurship is one process that requires such planned behaviour and intention has been identified as a very important part of it (Krueger, 2007). Entrepreneurial intent (EI) represents an individual’s objective to pursue an entrepreneurial career without a definite temporal point of occurrence (Prueett, Shinnar, Toney, Llopis & Fox, 2009). EI is thus future oriented and according to Thompson (2009), the point of occurrence might be imminent, unknown, and indeed may never be reached. EI is not simply a yes or no question, but a matter of extent ranging from a very low, effectively zero, to a very high degree of personal, conscious conviction and planning to start a new business. That EI may not result in the actual establishment of business, may be due to a mix of various personal and environmental factors. According to MacMillan and Katz (1992), these personal and environmental variables typically have an indirect influence on entrepreneurship by influencing key attitudes and general motivation to act. Some of these personal factors include needs, wants, and habits, while environmental factors include time constraints, task difficulty and the influence of other people (Lee & Wong, 2004).

The Dark Triad

The dark triad describes a cluster of three undesirable and interpersonally problematic behaviour styles: Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy (Paulhus & Williams, 2002).

Machiavellianism has come to be identified as a personality trait involving a manipulative, deceptive interpersonal style connected with a pessimistic, cynical vision of human nature and coolness in social contacts. Machiavellians are
inclined to use manipulation to exploit others, striving to gain profits and personal advantage in all possible ways (Christie & Geis, 1970). In addition Machiavellians plan ahead, build alliances, and do their best to maintain a positive reputation (Jones & Paulhus, 2009).

**Narcissism** as a personality trait is characterised by dominance, exhibitionism, and exploitation as well as feelings of superiority and entitlement (Lee & Ashton, 2005). Clinical characteristics include a grandiose sense of self-importance, exaggerated self-esteem, a general lack of empathy, interpersonal exploitative & arrogant behaviour and desires for excessive admiration (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Narcissists tend to be objectively intelligent but at the same time, they overrate their intelligence (Paulhus & Williams, 2002).

**Psychopathy** is described as a specific combination of problematic affective, interpersonal and behavioural features (Cooke, Michie & Hart, 2006). These features include a grandiose sense of self-worth (Hare, 1999); thrill-seeking behaviour (Paulhus & Williams, 2002); attraction to power (Hercz, 2001), prestige and control (Deutschman, 2005).

The DT share a socially malevolent character, behaviour tendencies towards duplicity, exploitation, manipulativeness and a grandiose sense of self-importance (Lee & Ashton, 2005).

**The Dark Triad & Entrepreneurial Intentions**
Studies on the relationship between the DT and EI, have generally shown a positive relationship between the DT and EI. For example in a study involving undergraduate and postgraduate students, Hmieleski and Lerner (2016) found only narcissism to be positively related to entrepreneurial intention among the students. Similarly, Mathieu and St. Jean (2013) also found narcissism to be positively related with entrepreneurial intentions, however in that study rather than examine all members of the DT, they focused on only narcissism. In another study conducted on college students Do and Dadvari (2017) and Hmieleski and Lerner (2013) found that individuals high on the dark triad were more likely to engage in entrepreneurial activity. In another study, Cesinger et al (2011), found only psychopathy and narcissism to be positively related to EI among a group of entrepreneurship students.

**Theoretical Framework**
According to the Career Choice Theory (CCT) (Holland, 1997) and Person-Environment Fit Theory (PEFT) (Judge & Kristof-Brown, 2004) suggest that individuals orient themselves towards careers in whatever profession and work environments in which they think, their individual needs will be fulfilled and best fits their personality. Individuals possessing the dark triad, will thus seek out careers in which desires, attitudes and actions related to the dark triad can best be acted out. In support of this association, Jonason, Webster, Schmitt, Li and Crysel (2012) hypothesizes that narcissists tend to seek professions where they may be appreciated and create social bonds and where they may attain social dominance. Psychopaths prefer isolated positions and avoid pro-social working places. They also seem to prefer positions where they can avoid being monitored (Jonason et al., 2012). Machiavellians, on the other hand, strive for positions where they can reach a high social status. Entrepreneurship offers a path through which such desires can be met and work environments created since, such individuals themselves, will create and manage such companies. In further support of this association, Hmieleski and Lerner (2013) found that the dark triad was overrepresented among entrepreneurs. Therefore it is hypothesised that:

**H1: The DT traits and EI are positively correlated.**

**Sample**
The target population for the study consisted of all 300 and 400 level students, within the Faculty of Management Sciences, University of
Benin, Edo State, Nigeria. The focus on only students in 300 and 400 level was rooted in our belief that since, such students were close to graduating, they may harbour more entrepreneurial intentions than students in lower levels, who typically have more years of study before graduation. 4 departments (Accounting, Banking & Finance, Business Administration and Entrepreneurship) were identified within the Faculty of Management Sciences and a total of 240 copies of questionnaire were administered on randomly selected students who met our criteria and were willing to participate. From the total number given out, 154, were returned and found useable. This represented a return rate of 64%. From the valid responses analysed, 93 (60%) were female and 61 (40%) were male. Majority of the participants 54 (35%) were from the Department of Business Administration, while the smallest number 24 (16%) were those studying, Entrepreneurship. The majority of the participants 103 (70%) were aged 21-26.

Measures
The dark triad (DT) were measured using The Short Dark Triad (SD3) (Jones & Paulhus, 2014). The SD3 consists of twenty seven questions that measure, each trait of the dark triad. Each trait is measured with nine questions and respondents are expected to answer the questions on a five point Likert scale (Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree). Sample items include: “it’s not wise to tell people your secrets”, “I hate being the centre of attention” and “I’ll say anything to get what I want”. Cronbach’s alpha was conducted on the SD3, resulting in an overall reliability value of 0.78.

Entrepreneurial Intention (EI) was measured using six questions from the Entrepreneurial Intention Questionnaire (Linan & Chen, 2009). The questions, utilized a seven point Likert scale (Total Agreement to Total Disagreement) and assessed respondent’s intentions to become entrepreneurs. Sample items include: “I am ready to do anything to be an entrepreneur” and “I will make every effort to start and run my own business”. The Cronbach's alpha obtained for this study was 0.88.

The Data
Descriptive statistics, correlations and ANOVA from the analysis of the data are presented in Table 1 below. The table shows that the mean for EI from our sample was 5.60 and 3.35, 3.72 and 2.29 of the DT traits of Machiavellianism narcissism and psychopathy respectively.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Descriptive</th>
<th>Correlations</th>
<th>ANOVA</th>
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<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Entrepreneurial Intentions</td>
<td>5.60</td>
<td>1.43</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Machiavellianism</td>
<td>3.70</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Narcissism</td>
<td>3.42</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Psychopathy</td>
<td>2.29</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>0.04</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Note. N = 154**

The table also shows significant correlations between all three members of the DT, with \( r = 0.31 \) for Machiavellianism and narcissism, \( r = 0.33 \) for Machiavellianism and psychopathy and \( r = 0.25 \) for psychopathy and narcissism.

With respect to the relationship between the DT and EI, the table shows that the correlation between EI and the DT was insignificant, with \( r = 0.06 \) for Machiavellianism and EI, \( r = 0.05 \) for narcissism and EI and \( r = 0.04 \) for psychopathy and EI. Based on these we have to reject our stated hypothesis regarding the existence of a positive correlation between the DT and EI within our sample.

The final section of our table shows results from our ANOVA analysis. The results indicate that Machiavellianism (\( p = 0.02 \)), has a more significant effect on EI, when compared
to narcissism (p = 0.06) and psychopathy (p = 0.06).

Discussion of Findings
The objectives of this study included measuring EI and the influence of the DT on EI among undergraduate students in a government owned university in Nigeria. Our findings indicate high levels of EI among the undergraduate students examined. This was consistent with findings from other studies (Folaye & Olatunji, 2018; Inegbenebor & Ogunrin, 2010; Okoye, 2016) which also examined EI in the Nigerian context. Two reasons may be responsible for the high levels of EI among Nigerians. The first being the poor prospects of paid work in the country and general factors associated with developing countries like Nigeria (Adekiya & Ibrahim, 2016). EI has indeed been found to be higher in developing countries, than in developed countries (Iakovleva, Kolvereid, & Stephen, 2011). The second reason, which is connected to the first are efforts, such as reality TV shows, altering of school curriculums, offering of internships and start-up capital by both the Nigerian government and private organizations to promote entrepreneurship among citizens (Muhammed, & Haruna, 2011; Akanbi, 2013).

Our study found no correlation between the DT and EI among our sample, contradicting findings from studies reviewed earlier, which have generally found correlation between at least one of the DT and EI. The lack of correlation between the DT and EI from our study, suggests that the motivation for entrepreneurship is for reasons other than those normally associated with the DT. Studies that have examined the push and pull factors associated with entrepreneurship in Nigeria (Akinzemi & Adejumo, 2017; Akanbi & Ofoegbu, 2011; Okafor & Amalu, 2010) have identified factors such as: family influence / commitments, financial issues, unemployment, passion, migration & raising money for future education. These factors differ from the self-serving motives such as the need for dominance and status associated to the DT and when the business environment in Nigeria is taken into consideration, it would appear that survival or necessity motives, rather than self-serving motives influence entrepreneurship in Nigeria. Despite the country being ranked 145 out 190 countries in terms of ease of doing business (World Bank Group, 2017) and economic, economical, security & cultural challenges facing entrepreneurs (Enah, 2010; Abimbola & Agboola, 2011; Idam, 2014), it has been found that the growth of new businesses has not dampened (Dutse & Aliyu, 2017).

Our study also found that among the DT, Machiavellianism had the highest score was the only trait with a significant relationship to EI. This indicates that this particular trait might play a more significant role in influencing EI, than narcissism and psychopathy. Given the current dynamics of class and status in Nigeria and the predominance of what, Ochulor and Metuonu (2013) describe as “The Machiavellian philosophy of wealth acquisition” within the country it is not all that surprising to find that the trait is present among Nigerians more than narcissism and psychopathy.

Conclusion
This study sought to examine the relationship between the DT and EI among Nigerian undergraduate students. We found, high levels of EI and that the DT did not significantly affect EI within our sample. While the traits were present, they just did not play a significant role in EI, indicating that they may serve some other purpose for individuals. Individuals will thus engage in entrepreneurship not due to having required skills but rather out of necessity. This may explain the poor success rate of businesses in the country.

Recommendation
This study's limitation is its focus on, not only students of one higher institution of learning, but also from only one faculty, which thus makes it difficult to generalize for all other students. To obtain better results, more institutions need to be included in DT and EI
studies. The DT among actual entrepreneurs can also be examined. Entrepreneurs also need to ensure they have the adequate skills, before business venture can be undertaken. Rushing into a business might provide short term gain but the business may not survive the test of time.

References


brief measure of dark personality traits. *Assessment*, 21(1), 28-41.


