

From Sports Fields to Storefronts: The Dark Triad's Impact on Luxury Consumption

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Abstract

The present study examines the effect of the Dark Triad personality traits (i.e. Machiavellianism, narcissism and psychopathy) on athletes' luxury consumption intentions, focusing particularly on the mediating role of the desire to be liked. The research draws on conspicuous consumption theory to explore how socially undesirable personality traits drive individuals to seek prestige and social approval through luxury consumption. A total of 358 active athletes in Turkey were the subjects of the study, which was conducted using purposive sampling. The data were analysed using the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) approach. The findings indicate that narcissism and psychopathy exert a substantial influence on luxury consumption, operating through the desire to be liked. In contrast, Machiavellianism does not demonstrate a significant indirect effect. The results of this study demonstrate the unique psychological mechanisms through which each trait of the Dark Triad influences consumer behaviour. The present study contributes to the existing literature by offering a novel perspective on the intersection of personality psychology, sports, and luxury consumption. Furthermore, it provides practical implications for marketers, brand managers, and sports psychologists. This study reveals that athletes' luxury consumption is driven not only by personal gratification but also by the pursuit of social approval and visibility. These findings offer practical insights for marketing professionals, sports managers, and psychologists to develop more psychologically attuned branding, sponsorship, and athlete support strategies.

Keywords: Narcissism, Psychopathy, Machiavellianism, Luxury consumption, Desire

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INTRODUCTION

In today's consumer societies, individuals' purchasing behaviours are shaped not only by basic needs but also by psychological, social, and personality-based motives (Li & Yu, 2022; Odekerken-Schröder et al., 2003). In this context, consumers prefer luxury consumption to satisfy these underlying motives (Cho et al., 2022; Heine et al., 2018; Kaur & Anand, 2018). Luxury consumption is a significant phenomenon that reflects individuals' symbolic motivations such as status (Balabanis & Stathopoulou, 2021), social approval (Wang, 2022), and admiration-seeking (Joo & Kim, 2021). Luxury products not only add material value to consumers' appearance but also provide prestige, recognition, and social visibility (Philippe et al., 2022). In this respect, luxury consumption is closely related to psychological needs such as self-presentation and the desire to be liked (Bulut et al., 2023; Wang & Chen, 2021).

Over the last two decades, the role of dark personality traits (Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy) in consumers' decision-making processes has been a central focus in the marketing and consumer behaviour literature (Blair et al., 2022; Konuk & Otterbring, 2024). These traits are characterised as socially aversive aspects of an individual's personality (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). This tripartite structure represents tendencies toward self-interest, manipulation, lack of empathy, and dominance (Furnham et al., 2013). The fact that individuals with dark personality traits often exhibit attention-seeking, superiority-establishing, and socially influential behaviours brings the desire for visibility and impact to the forefront of their consumption preferences (Blair et al., 2022; Grapsas et al., 2020).

In particular, the desire to be liked can be considered a mediating psychological mechanism underlying individuals' preference for luxury products (Cengiz et al., 2024). This desire stems from a person's need for approval and recognition from their social group (Ashton-James & Levordashka, 2013). This need becomes even more pronounced in high-visibility settings such as social media and especially among individuals in the public eye, such as athletes (Akoğlu et al., 2024). Athletes may be more inclined to spend money on luxury items to reinforce their social status and enhance their public image (Eastman et al., 2020).

However, previous studies have mostly examined the relationship between individuals' dark triad traits and consumption behaviours directly (Kapoor et al., 2021; Shivani & Godwin, 2018). Although the mediating role of various factors (e.g., moral disengagement, virtue signalling, status) has been explored (Koay & Lok, 2024; Konuk & Otterbring, 2024), the role of the desire to be liked has been discussed only to a limited extent. This represents an important gap in the literature. In particular, the question of how athletes with dark personality traits exhibit consumption tendencies driven by motives of social approval and attention-seeking remains insufficiently answered.

This study aims to address this gap by examining the impact of dark triad personality traits on athletes' desire to be liked and their luxury purchasing intentions. Moreover, the mediating role of the desire for admiration in the relationship between these three personality traits and luxury consumption intention is empirically tested. Consequently, this study makes a significant

contribution to the field by offering a novel perspective on the relationship between dark personality traits and consumption psychology, while also enhancing our understanding of the consumer behaviour of athletes.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Dark Triad

The Dark Triad is a psychological construct comprising three socially aversive personality traits: narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy. These traits reflect tendencies toward callousness, manipulation, and socially detrimental behaviours driven by self-interest and a disregard for others (Jones & Paulhus, 2014; Paulhus & Williams, 2002). Introduced by Paulhus and Williams (2002), this framework unified three previously distinct personality constructs into a single conceptual model (Blair et al., 2022). Although individuals high in Dark Triad traits may initially appear charismatic or impressive in short-term interactions, they are often perceived as manipulative and self-serving over time (Konuk & Otterbring, 2024). Each of these traits uniquely contributes to interpersonal dynamics and consumer behaviour.

Machiavellianism is characterised by strategic manipulation, emotional detachment, and a utilitarian view of relationships. Individuals with high levels of Machiavellianism tend to exploit others for personal gain and often disregard established moral norms (Den Hartog & Belschak, 2012; Paulhus & Williams, 2002). They can use symbolic resources such as luxury goods not only for personal enjoyment, but also as a means of gaining admiration and reinforcing their social dominance. Narcissism, on the other hand, is closely linked to status-seeking, self-enhancement, and exaggerated self-importance (Zeigler-Hill et al., 2019). Narcissistic individuals tend to idealise their own uniqueness and superiority and are highly motivated by admiration and validation from others (Djeriouat & Trémolière, 2014). They frequently engage in conspicuous consumption of rare and prestigious items to signal distinction and superiority (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). Psychopathy is associated with emotional coldness, lack of empathy, impulsivity, and antisocial behaviour. Individuals high in psychopathy tend to disregard rules, exploit others without remorse, and show low emotional responsiveness (Fowles & Dindo, 2009; Koay & Lok, 2024; Paulhus & Williams, 2002). They often value dominance and power over altruistic concerns and are inclined toward material success as a marker of superiority (Glenn et al., 2017).

When these three characteristics come together, they influence how individuals create, direct, and present their image of themselves, especially in social contexts where approval, admiration, or status are valued (Górník-Durose & Pilch, 2016; Grapsas et al., 2020). Individuals high in these traits have been shown to acquire luxury goods as status symbols to demonstrate purchasing power or emulate those they admire (Guido et al., 2020; Razmus et al., 2023; Zhu et al., 2023).

The Theory of Conspicuous Consumption

This theory, first introduced by Veblen (1899), suggests that individuals who aim to reach a higher social class engage in conspicuous consumption not for utilitarian purposes but to display their social status and prestige. Leibenstein (1950) defined two dimensions of conspicuous consumption: the bandwagon effect, referring to the preference for luxury brands to be part of prestigious social groups, and the snob effect, defined as the consumption of exclusive, high-priced products inaccessible to lower-income consumers.

Veblen's theory has been widely applied in modern consumer research to explore the psychological motivations behind luxury consumption (Barrera & Ponce, 2021; Sedikides & Hart, 2022; Shukla, 2008; Wang et al., 2022). These studies show that luxury consumption functions as a form of social differentiation, identity expression, and affirmation of group membership (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012). At the basis of this consumption style lies the individual's desire to be noticed, admired, and approved by others. These are the fundamental elements of the concept of social approval or the desire to be liked.

Recent developments in consumer psychology have revealed personality traits, particularly the Dark Triad, as important drivers of conspicuous consumption (Grapsas et al., 2020; Jonason et al., 2010). These traits are linked to self-serving strategies, emotional detachment, and an increased need for power, control, and social dominance (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). Therefore, this theory serves as the foundational framework for this study. Furthermore, this theoretical approach is complemented by Self-Presentation Theory (Goffman, 2023), which posits that individuals actively manage their public image during social interactions. From this perspective, luxury consumption may serve as a strategic tool to craft favourable impressions and obtain social approval. Similarly, Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 2004) suggests that individuals derive self-worth from their group memberships; thus, consuming luxury brands may reinforce a sense of belonging to high-status or admired social groups. Both theories provide robust psychological grounding for understanding the mechanisms linking personality traits to prestige-oriented consumption behaviours.

Literature review and hypotheses development

Dark Triad and The Desire to Be Liked

Individuals exhibiting Dark Triad traits frequently adopt manipulative interpersonal styles and strive to attract admiration and differentiate themselves through strategies such as enhancing physical appearance and displaying luxury possessions (Grapsas et al., 2020; Pilch & Górnik-Durose, 2016). While these traits have been extensively examined in the fields of clinical psychology and athletic performance (Bryan et al., 2023; Nicholls et al., 2017; Nicholls et al., 2020), their implications for athletes' consumer behaviour remain under-researched.

Research has demonstrated that athletes often engage in luxury consumption to increase their visibility, acquire social status, and gain social approval (Akoğlu et al., 2024). This is consistent with broader psychological theories such as basic social motivation, which links luxury consumption with the desire to be liked, arising from the need for belonging, acceptance, and admiration (Su-Topbaş et al., 2024).

The desire to be liked drives individuals to project a favourable image to others, often through the strategic presentation of an idealised self (Demir et al., 2024). Although it is considered a basic psychological need in the third stage of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, it can also reflect internalized or unrealistic social expectations (Su-Topbaş et al., 2024). Although closely related to concepts such as social approval and admiration, the desire to be liked constitutes a fundamental interpersonal motivation focused on gaining acceptance and minimising rejection anxiety (Ashton-James & Levordashka, 2013; Leary, 1995). While this desire is universal, the way it is expressed and the strategies employed to fulfil it may vary substantially depending on one's personality profile. In individuals with elevated Dark Triad traits, this desire may manifest in more strategic, image-oriented, or manipulative forms.

Machiavellian individuals seek to establish instrumental relationships with others in order to achieve personal gain and gain popularity, driven by a calculated, goal-oriented desire. Their perception of others as unpredictable and untrustworthy leads to emotionally distant yet strategically controlled interactions (Ináncsi et al., 2015). They often use social manipulation to achieve recognition, viewing luxury brands as tools to gain admiration and enhance their social standing (Bereczkei, 2017). Based on these insights, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Machiavellianism positively influences the desire to be liked.

Narcissists are often perceived as more charismatic, competent, and likeable in initial interactions than non-narcissists (Ashton-James & Levordashka, 2013). Their strong affinity for symbolic and status-laden products has been consistently linked to narcissistic tendencies (Kang & Park, 2016). In their quest for superiority and social validation, narcissists frequently engage in luxury consumption as a means to attract admiration (Fastoso et al., 2018). Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Narcissism positively influences the desire to be liked.

Psychopathic individuals, while emotionally detached, prioritise social dominance and relative superiority over altruistic values. They attribute high importance to power and material success (Glenn et al., 2017). As such, they may also seek admiration and likability—not through emotional connection, but through dominance and status displays. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Psychopathy positively influences the desire to be liked.

The Desire to Be Liked and Luxury Purchase Intention

The desire to be liked, otherwise referred to as the need for social approval or admiration, is rooted in Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 2004) and Impression Management Theory (Goffman, 2023). It is a powerful socio-psychological motivation that influences individuals' acceptance within society and, consequently, their consumption behaviours (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

Luxury consumption involves the purchase of products that convey prestige, privilege, and superior quality within society (Akoğlu et al., 2024). Many individuals who consume luxury goods are driven by the desire to be admired (Han et al., 2010). This is especially true for athletes, who are more visible in society than the average person and often prefer luxury consumption as a means of admiration-seeking. These individuals aim to acquire luxury products not only to reflect how they look or aspire to look, but also to publicly display that image (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2014). Previous studies have shown that consumers who feel a strong need for social approval are more likely to prefer luxury brands (Cheung et al., 2025; Kim & Jang, 2014). Akoğlu et al. (2024) also found that athletes' luxury consumption preferences are shaped not only by personal taste but also by their desire for social status and acceptance. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: The desire to be liked positively influences luxury consumption.

Mediating Effect: The Desire to Be Liked

The Dark Triad traits—Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy—are associated with behaviours aimed at self-validation, social dominance, and manipulation (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). Narcissistic individuals, for example, tend to see themselves as superior and unique (Back et al., 2013), while those with psychopathic tendencies, due to their lack of empathy, may seek social admiration in more superficial or instrumental ways (Paulhus & Williams, 2002).

In this context, the desire to be liked acts as a key mediating psychological mechanism between dark personality traits and luxury consumption. Luxury products can serve as tools for affirming social identity and achieving social acceptance (Veblen, 1899). While previous studies have examined the direct effects of the Dark Triad on luxury consumption, little empirical attention has been paid to the mediating role of a central social motivation such as the desire to be liked. Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H5: The desire to be liked mediates the effect of Machiavellianism on athletes' luxury purchase intention.

H6: The desire to be liked mediates the effect of narcissism on athletes' luxury purchase intention.

H7: The desire to be liked mediates the effect of psychopathy on athletes' luxury purchase intention.

METHOD

Research Model

In order to test the research model, firstly the validity and reliability of the measurement model were tested.

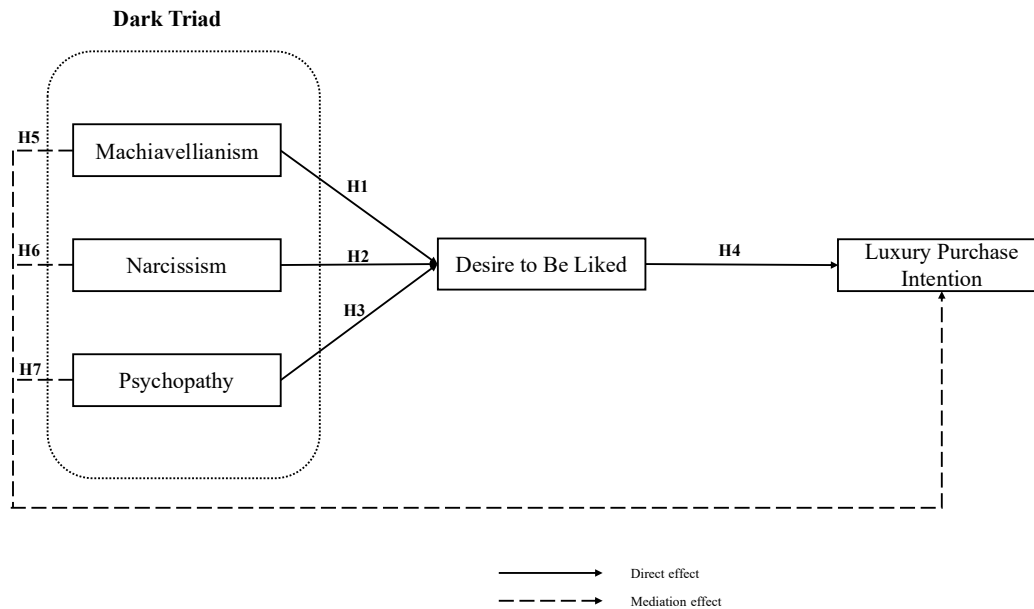


Figure 1. Research model

Data Collection and Sampling

In this study, the participants consisted of athletes who were actively engaged in sports in Turkey. A purposive sampling method was used to select the participants. The inclusion criteria required participants to be over the age of 18 and to have purchased a product from a brand they considered to be a luxury brand at least once. The questionnaires were created using Google Forms and distributed via various social media platforms (e.g., WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, X, and email). A total of 500 individuals were invited to participate, and 412 responses were received. Among these, 54 participants who did not meet the inclusion criteria were excluded, resulting in a final sample of 358 participants. According to Hair Jr et al. (2021), this sample size is appropriate for structural equation modelling (SEM). In addition, the minimum required sample size was calculated using power analysis with G*Power 3.1.9.7 for PLS-SEM. The calculation was based on the targeted effect size (f^2), a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$, and a power level of $1-\beta = 0.95$. The analysis indicated that a minimum of 119 participants would be sufficient, confirming that the sample size of 358 was adequate for the purposes of this study.

161 (45%) of the participants were male and 197 (55%) were female athletes. In addition, 70.1% (N=251) were interested in individual sports branches, while 29.9% (N=107) were involved in team sports. The average age of the participants was 21.97 ± 4.35 years and their average monthly income was $32.650\text{TL} \pm 17.453$.

Ethics Approval

This research has been approved by the Ethics Committee of Niğde Ömer Halisdemir University in its decision numbered 2025/09-14 at its meeting dated 27.05.2025 and numbered 09.

Data Collection Instruments

The study utilised an online questionnaire as the primary data collection instrument. The questionnaire was divided into two sections. The first section included demographic information about the participants, such as gender, age, and active athlete status. The second section comprised three validated and reliable measurement scales: the Dark Triad Scale, the Desire to Be Liked Scale, and the Luxury Purchase Intention Scale. The Dark Triad Scale, originally developed by Jonason and Webster (2010) and adapted into Turkish by Toplu Yaşlıoğlu and Atılgan (2018), consists of three subscales—Machiavellianism, Narcissism, and Psychopathy—each containing 4 items. The Desire to Be Liked Scale was developed by Kaşıkara and Doğan (2017) and includes 9 items. The Luxury Purchase Intention Scale, developed by Hung et al. (2011) and adapted into Turkish by Uz (2022), consists of 3 items. All items across the scales were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree).

Data Analysis

The research data were analysed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM). For this purpose, SmartPLS 4.0 software was employed. The PLS-SEM method is recommended when the primary objective is theory development, the model is complex, and the sample size is relatively small (Hair et al., 2021). Prior to data analysis, missing data, outliers, and normality assumptions were examined. Additionally, to address potential multicollinearity and common method bias, various diagnostic techniques were applied.

Common Method Bias

In this study, several procedural and analytical approaches were employed to minimise common method bias (CMB). As part of the procedural approach, participants were assured of their anonymity through the informed consent form provided prior to the study. For the analytical approach, Harman's single-factor test was conducted, and the results showed that a single factor accounted for only 34.196% of the total variance. Since this value is below the 50% threshold, it suggests that common method bias is not a major concern (Podsakoff et al., 2003). In addition, variance inflation factor (VIF) values were examined to assess multicollinearity and further reduce the potential for CMB. According to Kock (2015), VIF values below 3.3 indicate that common method bias is unlikely. In this study, all VIF values were below 3.3. Taken together, these findings suggest that common method bias is not a significant issue in this study.

FINDINGS

Table 1. Factor loading, validity, and reliability

Construct	Items	Outer loading (>0.6)	Cronbach's alpha (>0.7)	CR (> 0.7)	AVE (> 0.5)
Machiavellianism	M1	0.718	0.834	0.888	0.665
	M2	0.837			
	M3	0.850			
	M4	0.849			
Narcissism	N1	0.655	0.813	0.878	0.644
	N2	0.846			
	N3	0.841			
	N4	0.853			
Psychopathy	P1	0.853	0.799	0.862	0.612
	P2	0.758			
	P3	0.660			
	P4	0.842			
Desire for Being Liked	DBL1	0.799	0.898	0.917	0.552
	DBL2	0.821			
	DBL3	0.778			
	DBL4	0.701			
	DBL5	0.662			
	DBL6	0.680			
	DBL7	0.743			
	DBL8	0.741			
	DBL9	0.745			
Luxury Purchase Intention	LPI1	0.908	0.897	0.934	0.826
	LPI2	0.931			
	LP33	0.886			

Note (s): Factor loading, α = Cronbach's alpha, CR=Composite reliability and AVE=Average variance explained

The factor loadings of all items in Table 1 are above 0.60 and construct validity is ensured. Cronbach's Alpha values of the sub-dimensions ranged between 0.799 and 0.997 and showed high internal consistency. In addition, all composite reliability (CR) values are above 0.70 and average variance explained (AVE) values are above 0.50. These findings reveal that the scales are both reliable and valid and are in accordance with the structural model test.

Table 2. Discriminant validity

Construct	M	N	P	DBL	LPI
Machiavellianism	0.816				
Narcissism	0.638	0.803			
Psychopathy	0.535	0.440	0.782		
Desire for Being Liked	0.441	0.432	0.496	0.743	
Luxury Purchase Intention	0.285	0.247	0.333	0.205	0.909
Heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT)					
Constructs	M	N	P	DBL	LPI
Machiavellianism					
Narcissism	0.766				
Psychopathy	0.623	0.485			
Desire for Being Liked	0.485	0.493	0.533		
Luxury Purchase Intention	0.329	0.283	0.390	0.214	

In Table 2, discriminant validity was evaluated using the Fornell-Larcker criterion and HTMT ratios. According to the Fornell-Larcker criterion, the square root AVE value of each construct

(values on the diagonal of the table) is higher than the correlations of that construct with other constructs. This indicates that the constructs are distinguishable from each other. All of the HTMT ratios are below the threshold of 0.85 (Henseler et al., 2015), which confirms that there is a strong discriminant validity in the model. In particular, concepts such as ‘Desire for Being Liked’ and ‘Luxury Purchase Intention’ are highly differentiated from other constructs. As a result, it can be said that all constructs are significantly differentiated from each other and the model is acceptable in terms of discriminant validity.

Table 3. Hypothesis testing

Hypothesis	Paths	(β)	S.D	t-value	p	LLCI	ULCI	Result
Direct effect								
H1	M→ DBL	0.133	0.066	2.003	0.046	0.004	0.260	Supported
H2	N→ DBL	0.195	0.069	2.817	0.005	0.046	0.326	Supported
H3	P→ DBL	0.342	0.051	6.763	0.000	0.246	0.442	Supported
H4	DBL→LPI	0.206	0.058	3.540	0.000	0.101	0.322	Supported
Indirect effect								
H5	M→ DBL→LPI	0.027	0.018	1.559	0.120	0.001	0.063	Not supported
H6	N→ DBL→LPI	0.040	0.020	2.047	0.041	0.007	0.081	Supported
H7	P→ DBL→LPI	0.070	0.023	3.006	0.003	0.033	0.119	Supported
Variance accounted for (VAF) of the mediator variables								
Independent variable		Dependent variable		Mediating variable		Indirect effect	Total effect	VAF %
M		LPI		DBL		0.027	0.180	15%
N		LPI		DBL		0.040	0.400	10.0%
P		LPI		DBL		0.070	0.658	10.6%

M= Machiavellianism; N= Narcissism; P= Psychopathy; DBL= Desire for Being Liked; LPI= Luxury Purchase Intention

According to Table 3, most of the hypotheses tested in the structural model were supported. The effects of Machiavellianism ($\beta = 0.133$, $t = 2.003$, $p = 0.046$), Narcissism ($\beta = 0.195$, $t = 2.817$, $p = 0.005$) and Psychopathy ($\beta = 0.342$, $t = 6.763$, $p < 0.001$) variables on ‘Desire to be liked’ (DBL) are statistically significant. These findings indicate that hypotheses H1, H2 and H3 are supported. The effect of ‘Desire to be liked’ on Luxury Purchase Intention (LPI) was also found to be significant ($\beta = 0.206$, $t = 3.540$, $p = 0.000$), which supports hypothesis H4.

In terms of indirect effects, the effect of Machiavellianism on LPI through DBL was not significant ($\beta = 0.027$, $t = 1.559$, $p = .120$); therefore, hypothesis H5 was not supported. On the other hand, the indirect effect of Narcissism on LPI through DBL was significant ($\beta = 0.040$, $t = 2.047$, $p = .041$) and hypothesis H6 was supported. Moreover, the indirect effect of Psychopathy on LPI was also significant ($\beta = 0.070$, $t = 3.006$, $p = .003$), indicating that hypothesis H7 was supported. The mediation level of indirect effects was evaluated by calculating the Variance Accounted For (VAF) value. The VAF value in the Machiavellianism → DBL → LPI path was found to be 15.0% (0.027/0.180), 10.0% (0.040/0.400) in the Narcissism → DBL → LPI path, and 10.6% (0.070/0.658) in the Psychopathy → DBL → LPI path. The ratios, which are below 20% as per the criteria proposed by Hair et al. (2019), demonstrate a weak mediation effect of DBL for all three variables.

Table 4. Predictive accuracy and relevance of the model

	Endogenous latent constructs	VIF	R-Square	R-Square Adjusted	Q ²
M		1.949			
N	DBL	1.725	0.313	0.307	0.164
P		1.435			
DBL	LPI	1.000	0.042	0.040	0.034

M= Machiavellianism; N= Narcissism; P= Psychopathy; DBL= Desire for Being Liked; LPI= Luxury Purchase Intention

R² shows how much of the variance in an endogenous (dependent) variable is explained by the exogenous (independent) variables in the model. According to Table 4, dark triad personality traits account for 31.3% the desire to be liked. This indicates a moderate level of explanatory power (Hair et al., 2021). Desire to be liked explains only 4.2% of luxury purchase intention. This is a very low level of explanatory power. Q² measures the ability of the model to predict a particular construct. Q² values above 0 indicate that the construct has predictive validity (Hair et al., 2021). The model's predictive power for the desire to be liked is acceptable. However, the predictive relevance for luxury purchase intention is quite low.

DISCUSSION and CONCLUSION

This study was conducted to examine the effects of Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy (collectively known as the Dark Triad) on athletes' intentions to purchase luxury products, with a particular focus on the mediating role of the desire to be liked. The hypotheses investigated were developed based on moral disengagement theory and conspicuous consumption theory.

The results confirmed Hypotheses 1, 2, and 3 by revealing that the three Dark Triad traits (Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy) have a significant direct effect on the desire to be liked. To the best of the authors' knowledge, no previous study has directly investigated the effect of Machiavellianism on the desire to be liked. However, research by Grams and Rogers (1990) suggests that Machiavellian individuals may use manipulative strategies to gain others' approval. Similarly, Houston et al. (2015) noted that Machiavellian tendencies often drive manipulative behaviours in the pursuit of success. In the context of athletes, Machiavellian traits may be indirectly linked to social approval motives such as the desire to be liked and recognised.

The narcissistic tendencies of athletes were also found to increase their desire to be liked, a finding supported by several prior studies. Although some literature suggests that narcissists are generally less concerned with others' approval or disapproval (Leder et al., 2020), other studies highlight a more complex picture. For example, Neave et al. (2020) found that vulnerable narcissists turn to luxury consumption to gain approval and admiration. The broader literature supports the notion that narcissists have a high and persistent need for validation and admiration from their social group (Campbell & Foster, 2011; Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001). Buffardi and Campbell (2008) also argue that narcissists' tendency to show off, emphasize their physical appearance, and pursue social status, especially on social media, stems from their

desire to be liked. Ashton-James and Levordashka (2013) added that narcissists are especially motivated to be liked by those they perceive as superior or higher in status.

Psychopathy, another component of the Dark Triad, was also found to influence athletes' desire to be liked. Glenn et al. (2017) showed that individuals with psychopathic traits are motivated by both pleasure-seeking and relative social positioning. These individuals place greater importance on their relative standing in society than on objective metrics like income or education. Thus, the desire to be liked may serve as a means of exerting influence and reinforcing dominance.

The study also confirmed that the desire to be liked significantly affects athletes' luxury purchase intentions. This finding is consistent with previous research (Akoğlu et al., 2024; Gil et al., 2012). For example, Cengiz et al. (2024) found that young consumers are often driven by the desire to be liked and appreciated when purchasing goods or services. Vigneron and Johnson (1999) similarly stated that consumers are drawn to luxury products to obtain prestige, social recognition, and approval. Han et al. (2010) further noted that individuals perceive themselves as more socially acceptable based on their appearance and the products they consume, which in turn drives luxury consumption.

With regard to mediation, narcissism and psychopathy were found to influence luxury purchase intentions through the desire to be liked, supporting Hypotheses 6 and 7. However, Hypothesis 5, which predicted a mediating effect for Machiavellianism, was not supported. These findings are consistent with previous literature. Narcissistic individuals are known to seek attention, approval, and admiration (Campbell et al., 2002). In this context, it is expected that the desire to be liked mediates the relationship between narcissism and luxury consumption, as it reflects a psychological mechanism through which narcissists fulfil their ego needs. As noted by Akoğlu et al. (2024) and Veblen (1899), individuals often engage in luxury consumption to gain social status and acceptance. Koay and Lok (2024) also confirmed that narcissistic individuals tend to show a strong inclination towards purchasing luxury products. This may explain why individuals with high social approval needs—such as athletes—are more likely to consume luxury products when they exhibit narcissistic traits.

Similarly, although psychopathic individuals lack empathy and emotional connection with others, the desire to be liked remains a key motivator for them due to their strong need to exert power and influence (Furnham et al., 2013; Paulhus & Williams, 2002). In other words, psychopathic athletes may use luxury consumption as a strategic means of establishing dominance and enhancing their social influence via the desire to be liked.

Conversely, the findings indicate that Machiavellianism exerts a negligible effect on athletes' luxury consumption intentions via the desire to be liked. This suggests that Machiavellian individuals are more likely to pursue manipulation and strategic advantage rather than social approval (Razmus et al., 2024). The desire to be liked is fundamentally rooted in the need for social acceptance, attention, and validation (Leary, 1995). While this need is dominant in narcissistic and psychopathic individuals and contributes to their luxury consumption behaviours, it remains secondary or even irrelevant for Machiavellian individuals. This

distinction highlights the fact that each trait within the Dark Triad influences consumer behaviour through distinct psychological mechanisms (Jonason & Webster, 2010).

Theoretical Implications

This study makes important theoretical contributions to the literature by examining the effects of dark personality traits (Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy) on athletes' luxury consumption intentions, with the desire to be liked as a mediating variable. Firstly, this study is among the few that investigate the desire to be liked as a mediating construct in the relationship between the Dark Triad and luxury consumption. In this respect, it offers a more nuanced understanding of the psychological foundations of conspicuous consumption theory and addresses a significant gap in the literature by integrating this theory with dark personality traits. Moreover, by focusing on a highly visible population such as athletes, the present study introduces novel insights into consumer behaviour literature that are specific to the athlete profile. This unique context enriches our understanding of how personality traits influence consumption behaviours in status-driven environments.

Practical Implications

The findings of this study demonstrate that athletes' luxury consumption behaviours are driven not only by personal pleasure or the display of material power, but also by the need for social approval and recognition. These findings offer a range of practical implications for professionals in marketing, brand management, and sports psychology.

Firstly, due to their visibility and social influence, athletes serve as important tools for luxury brand managers and marketing professionals (Toffoletti & Thorpe, 2018). Therefore, in markets targeting athletes, marketing strategies should go beyond emphasizing the physical quality or high price of products and instead highlight their potential to provide social approval, recognition, and prestige (Akoğlu et al., 2024). Athletes with narcissistic and psychopathic tendencies often engage in luxury consumption to be admired, increase visibility, and gain appreciation (Glenn et al., 2017; Neave et al., 2020). Marketers can enhance brand loyalty and purchase intentions by tailoring advertisements and sponsorship messages to these psychological motivations. Secondly, sports clubs, managers, and sponsorship providers should seek to understand athletes' underlying psychological drives and design more effective communication and sponsorship strategies accordingly. For example, sponsoring an athlete with high levels of narcissistic traits may be particularly effective for brand visibility, as such individuals frequently promote themselves and luxury products on social media platforms (Buffardi & Campbell, 2008; Neave et al., 2020). Thirdly, this study provides valuable information for sports psychologists. In particular, the consumption behaviors of young athletes who act out of a desire for social approval, as seen on social media, can have long-term negative effects on self-confidence, social comparison, and mental health (Demir et al., 2024; Su-Topbaş et al., 2024). As such, the tendency to satisfy the desire for approval through luxury consumption should be addressed in psychological counselling, and athletes should be supported in developing a healthier and more stable self-image. Finally, understanding the core psychological processes underlying athletes' pursuit of social status and visibility can be leveraged in social awareness campaigns. Such campaigns could highlight that luxury

consumption should not be based solely on external appearance but also reflect internal values—thus promoting more sustainable and conscious consumer practices.

Conclusion, limitations, and future recommendations

The present study examined the impact of athletes' Dark Triad traits on their luxury consumption intentions, with a particular focus on the mediating role of the desire to be liked. This research makes a significant contribution to the existing literature on consumer behaviour and personality psychology by investigating how Dark Triad personality traits (i.e., Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy) influence athletes' intentions to engage in luxury consumption, and how the desire to be liked mediates this relationship.

The findings reveal that narcissism and psychopathy significantly affect luxury consumption intentions through the desire to be liked. However, this mediating effect was not supported for Machiavellianism. This suggests that while Dark Triad traits are related to consumer behaviour, the underlying psychological mechanisms may vary depending on the specific trait. Nevertheless, the study has several limitations. First, the sample consisted exclusively of Turkish athletes, which limits the generalisability of the findings. Future studies should consider including athletes from different countries and cultural backgrounds. Second, the study employed a cross-sectional design, which restricts the ability to draw causal inferences. Longitudinal research would be valuable in establishing cause-and-effect relationships. Finally, the study utilised a quantitative research design based on participants' self-reported evaluations. Future research could benefit from adopting qualitative or mixed-methods approaches to gain deeper insight into the underlying processes.

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