

Manipulators less convincing online than in person, research shows

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UBC Okanagan Professor Michael Woolworth finds manipulators less convincing online. Credit: UBC Okanagan

If you have to negotiate business with a narcissist or psychopath, you're better off doing it on Facebook, research from UBC's Okanagan campus

shows.

In one of the first studies of its kind, UBC researchers found that traditionally successful manipulators who are classified as being part of the Dark Triad (DT)—[people](#) with narcissistic, psychopathic or Machiavellian tendencies—don't send very compelling online messages.

"The results of this study are pretty clear—once you remove non-verbal cues such as body language from the equation, the ability to smoke out narcissists and psychopaths becomes easier," says UBC's Michael Woodworth, a professor of psychology. "We can also conclude that it is very likely that the qualities that allow these people to successfully charm, manipulate, intimidate or exploit others appear to require a live, in-person audience."

The study, titled "The Dark Side of Negotiation", was conducted between October 2013 and February 2014 and included more than 200 Canadian university students, a proportion of who were identified as having various qualities on the DT spectrum.

After being randomly assigned to either a face-to-face or computer-mediated contact group, the students were asked to negotiate for concert tickets, either as a buyer or a seller, with the ultimate goal of achieving maximum financial benefit for themselves.

Consistent with other studies, Woodworth's research concluded that those who ranked higher on the DT spectrum were more successful in face-to-face negotiations than they were online. Surprisingly, the research also concluded that higher-ranking DT participants were 12.5 percent less successful in online negotiations than those ranking lower on the spectrum.

Students' placement on the spectrum varied depending on individual

characteristics and attributes.

Each of the three parts of the DT has distinct traits. Psychopaths tend to lack empathy and be anti-social. Narcissists lean toward grandiosity and self-adoration. People with Machiavellian qualities are goal-oriented, calculated manipulators.

"While there has long been a fascination with DT personalities and how they can impact 'ordinary' people, little has been studied as to how these people behave online," says Woodworth.

"What this research tells us is that if you want to be confident in your ability not be taken in by these types of known manipulators, you're probably better off dealing with them online."

Working with Woodworth on the project were honours student Lisa Crossley, graduate student Pamela Black and UBC Professor Emeritus Bob Hare. The study was published this month in the journal of *Personality and Individual Differences*.

Woodworth and Crossley are now conducting similar DT research involving deception.

Provided by University of British Columbia

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