

Moderating Role of Trust within the Relationship between Machiavellianism and Marital Satisfaction

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Marital satisfaction is one of the most important factors in a married life. Previous studies have concluded that trust and Machiavellianism affect marital satisfaction (Atta, Adil, Shujja, & Shakir, 2013; Hyla, 2011). Present study aimed at exploring the moderating role of Trust for the relationship of Machiavellianism with marital satisfaction. Urdu versions of Machiavellianism sub-scale of the Dark triad scale (Gul-e-Sehar & Fatima, 2016), ENRICH Marital Satisfaction scale (Shakir, 2012) and Trust scale (Shakir, 2012) were used in present study. 193 married individuals were taken up to age 60. Trust acted as a moderator for the relationship of Machiavellianism and marital satisfaction in such a way that the relationship between the Machiavellianism and marital satisfaction became significantly negative when the level of trust was low.

Keywords: trust, machiavellianism, marital satisfaction, married individuals.

Marriage is the basic unit of a society, particularly in a collectivistic one. Especially, in the Muslim culture of Pakistan, marriage has a prime importance. Here, marriage is a universal phenomenon, and unlike the Western culture, family formation and childbearing is contingent to the marriage here. It is even more important for girls as they are felt as secure after marriage. In this culture, most of the time it is arranged by the parents, otherwise, the couple doesn't get prestige in the family. Moreover, it is the bond between two families and not only two individuals (Shahzad, 2017). These traditions bring some complexities to the marital life of the couple, where being successful in one's marriage is even more important and even more challenging to the couple. There are many factors that influence marital satisfaction of the married couple. Within these factors, personality factors are particularly significant. One such factor is Machiavellianism, i.e., a deceitful interpersonal style with a prime focus on self-interests and with disregard for ethical principles (Jones & Paulhus, 2009). Apart from this, trust is very important contributor to marital satisfaction. By trusting each other, spouses can live together happily; without trust, a marital relationship is unlikely to be successful.

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Contribution of Authors:

1. Conceived the idea, planned the study, data collection and drafted the manuscript.
2. Helped in data collection & data analysis, helped in literature review and referencing
3. Critically revised the manuscript and helped in literature review and referencing

Marital satisfaction is defined as an inner mental state of happiness and gratification received from one's own marital life. Rusbult and Buunk, (1993) defined marital satisfaction as an internal state of gratification and cheerfulness with one's own marriage. The person who is highly contented and happy with his/her marital life is perceived to have increased marital satisfaction. It can be said that the marital satisfaction of a married individual depends, to some degree, on how well his or her marriage is in accordance with the expectations and norms set by the culture and society (Rebello, Silva, & Brito, 2014). There are different kinds of physical and mental health hazards for those individuals who are having an unstable marital life. Therefore, it is very important to identify the factors that lead to decrease the marital satisfaction (Murray, 2011).

Multiple factors can be considered important in determining a perfect intimate relationship especially, a married relation. These factors include religious, cultural, legal, societal, personal, educational and some other factors as well (Lalonde, Hynie, Pannu, & Tatla, 2004). The present study has focused on the relationship of Machiavellianism with marital satisfaction. Machiavellianism, as defined by Miller, Hyatt, Maples-Keller, Carter, and Lynam (2017), is a readiness for manipulation of others in a skillful and strategic way in order to gain personal success. This manipulation of others and personal success is characterized by more, at least above average impulse control. Empirical evidences revealed that Machiavellianism affects close relationships including sexual as well as romantic relationships (Brewer & Abell, 2015). In a study, individuals with high scores of Machiavellianism were found to be more emotionally detached in their relationships and were often hesitant to remain loyal in their relationships (Ali & Chamorro-Premuzic, 2010). This tendency might affect their relationship satisfaction. Previous research however, has mainly focused on Machiavellianism with respect to short-term intimate rather than long-term committed relationships (such as marriage). However, individuals who are high at Machiavellianism do form long-term relationships with important opportunities of using others in exploitive manner, for the benefit of own self (Brewer & Abell, 2015).

Hyla (2011) found that Machiavellianism has significant positive relationship with relationship satisfaction through appropriate influence tactics. Hence, the spouses of Machiavellianistic individuals are influenced easily by them and their marital/relationship satisfaction increases. Contrarily, as discussed earlier, Brewer and Abell (2017) found that Machiavellianism and relationship satisfaction are negatively correlated. It also seems that the relationship between the two variables is not as clear as it seems to be and the inconsistent findings of previous studies suggest the possibility of some third variable in the relationship. The present study considers trust as a moderating variable.

Turning towards trust, it is the psychological internal state marked by expectation one has about positive reward from a relationship and belief in partner's responsiveness and thus produces strong effects on relationship quality (Givertz, Woszidlo, Segrin, & Knutson, 2013; Simpson, 2007). According to Makhdoom and Malik (2019), when an individual trusts his/her partner, the relationship becomes a satisfying relationship to both of the partners with an enhanced autonomy and independence. The stronger the trust that spouses have on each other, the happier and more satisfied relationship they will have. But if trust is weakened, the marital or any intimate relationship will not be much happy and satisfied. Hence, in order to have a satisfied and happy relationship, trust is necessary as found by previous studies. Atta, et al., (2013) found that trust is significantly positively associated with marital satisfaction in single-career couples as well as dual-career couples.

In Pakistan, however, little empirical research has focused on Machiavellianism in relationship context. The studies conducted here mostly focused its organizational correlates and its role in relationships is not yet clear in Pakistan. For instance, a research was done on preference of leadership style in people with high or low level of Machiavellianism in Pakistan. The result concluded that people with high and low Machiavellianism level prefer selection of different leadership styles; high Machs use manipulative tactics to influence people while low Machs tend to use supporting and coaching strategies (Amir & Malik, 2017). However, effects on relationship satisfaction and moderator effects like trust, etc. are less explored in this culture. Therefore, keeping in view the marital relationship quality importance in the collectivistic Pakistani culture, present study focused on the relationship of Machiavellianism with marital satisfaction; and trust was taken as a moderator.

The main objective is to explore how high or low level of trust moderates the relationship between Machiavellianism and marital satisfaction.

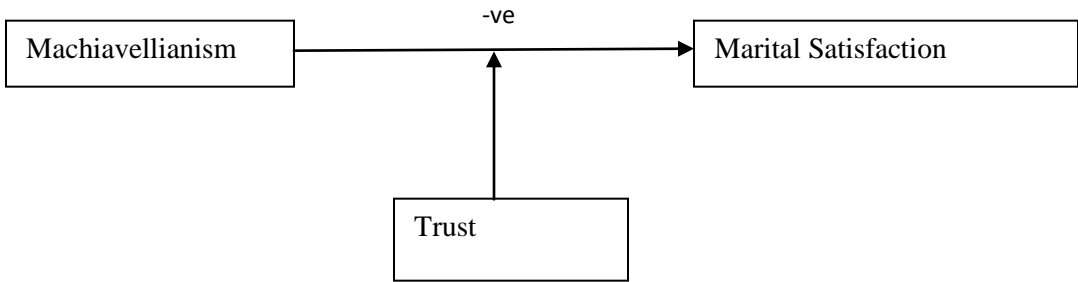


Figure 1. Conceptual framework of present study

Method

To test the conceptual framework of the study, it was hypothesized that

1. Machiavellianism will likely to predict marital satisfaction negatively.
2. Trust will likely to predict marital satisfaction positively.
3. Trust will moderate the relationship of Machiavellianism and marital satisfaction such that the relationship of Machiavellianism with marital satisfaction will be strengthened when level of trust is low.

Sample. Sample comprised 193 married individuals (both men $n = 80$, and women $n = 113$), up to 60 years of age ($M = 38.83$, $SD = 11.00$) who had spent at least one year of married life. Sample was purposively approached. The sample included only those individuals who were living an intact married life, had spent at least one year of married life and were below the age of 60. The sample excluded those individuals that were above 60 years of age, divorced or widowed, spent below one year of married life or living apart due to job/overseas deployment.

Instruments. According to the nature of the study, following scales were used to measure the variables.

Machiavellianism sub-scale of Dark Triad scale (D3-Short). Urdu version of Machiavellianism subscale of the Short Dark Triad scale (Gul-e-Sehar, & Fatima, 2016) was used to measure Machiavellianism on 5-point Likert type scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

It has 9 items. High scores on this scale yield high Machiavellianism and vice versa. Reliability for this subscale was reported in literature to be $\alpha = .77$.

Trust Scale. Urdu translated version of Trust scale (Shakir, 2012) consisted of 17 items was used to assess level of trust. The response format of the scale is 7-point Likert-type ranging from 1 to 7. The scale is internally consistent as it shows good alpha reliability i.e., $\alpha = .91$.

ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale. Urdu version of ENRICH marital satisfaction scale (Shakir, 2012) consisted of 15 items was used to measure marital satisfaction of married individuals. Its response format was 5-point Likert-type ranging from 1 (completely disagree) to 5 (completely agree). Item number 2, 5, 8, 9, 12 and 14 were reverse scored. The scale is internally consistent as the reported Cronbach alpha for the scale is 0.86.

Procedure. The study was conducted as per ethical standards of APA. The study followed a correlational survey research design and the sample was approached personally through purposive sampling. Informed consent was obtained and confidentiality assurance was given. Instruction to properly fill the questionnaire was also given to respondents and they were requested for genuine responses. Total 200 questionnaires were distributed, however, only 193 were included in the study as 7 were found to be incomplete during data screening. Average time for completion of questionnaire was recorded to be 20 minutes. After data collection and screening, final data of 193 respondents was entered in SPSS-20 and analyzed for hypotheses testing by computing descriptive, correlation, and regression analyses; whereas moderation analysis was run by using Model 1 of Process Macro 2018.

Results

Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, Cronbach Alpha and Correlation Matrix for all the Variables Used in the Study (N = 193)

Variables	M	SD	Mach	MS	Trust	α
Machiavellianism	25.32	4.76	--	-.03	.01	.64
Marital Satisfaction	59.59	8.29	--	--	.67**	.85
Trust	81.00	12.60	--	--	--	.80

** $p < .01$

The Table 1 demonstrates that Machiavellianism is not significantly correlated with any of the variables; however, marital satisfaction has significant positive relationship with trust. The reliability analysis indicate that the reliability coefficient of Machiavellianism, marital satisfaction and trust is .64, .85 and .80 respectively which contributes to moderate to good internal consistencies of the scales (McCrae, Kurtz, & Terracciano, 2015).

Table 2

Multiple Regression Analysis for Machiavellianism, trust and Machiavellianism x trust predicting marital satisfaction (N = 193)

Predictor	Model B	Outcome: Marital Satisfaction	
		95%CI LL,UL	
Constant	25.20	17.79, 32.61	
Mach	-.05	-.23, .13	
Trust	.44***	.36, .50	
R ²		.45	
F		76.48***	
Mach	-1.37***	-2.58, -.16	
Trust	.02	-.34, .40	
Mach x Trust	.02***	.001, .03	
R ²		.46	
ΔR ²		.01	
F		53.62***	
ΔF		4.82*	

* $p < .05$, *** $p < .001$

Table 2 portrays the results of multiple regression analysis of independent variables Machiavellianism and trust. Findings indicate that overall model significantly and positively predicts marital satisfaction $F(3, 189) = 76.48, p < .001$ and explains 45% variance in dependent variable. Trust positively predicts marital satisfaction ($\beta = .67, t = 12.36, p < .001$); whereas Machiavellianism is not a predictor of marital satisfaction.

Moderation analysis by Process Macro concludes that the overall model is found to be significant with $F(3, 189) = 53.62, p < .001$ with $R^2 = .46$, which suggests that all the three variables including Machiavellianism, trust and interaction of Machiavellianism and trust account for 46% variance in dependent variable. Further the value of ΔR^2 suggests that although 1% variance is caused in the dependent variable due to interaction ($\Delta R^2 = .01$), however, the effect is significant with $\Delta F = 4.82, p < .05$.

Figure 2

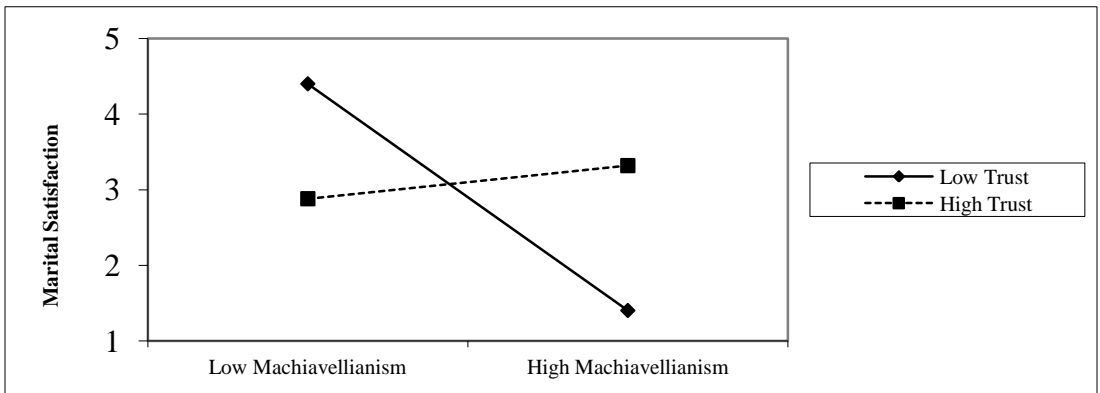


Figure 2. Moderating Role of Trust for the relationship of Machiavellianism and Marital Satisfaction.

The figure shows that when level of trust is high, the relationship between Machiavellianism and marital satisfaction is very weak. Contrarily when the level of trust is low, then the relationship between Machiavellianism and marital satisfaction becomes strongly negative.

Discussion

The present study focused on the moderating role of trust between the relationship of Machiavellianism and marital satisfaction. Alpha analysis of study revealed all the scales had satisfactory reliabilities except the reliability of Machiavellianism scale i.e., .64; the reason for this moderate level reliability of this scale is that Machiavellianism is a personality trait, as personality of everyone differs a lot from each other, so reliability is somewhat low to moderate (McCrae, Kurtz, & Terracciano, 2015).

It was hypothesized that Machiavellianism will likely to be a significant negative predictor of marital satisfaction. The results of the study failed to accept this hypothesis (see Table 1 & 2). The logical reason for unexpected results may be that, in our culture, marital satisfaction is determined by a number of different factors including relationship of the married individual with his/her parents and in-laws, the socioeconomic status of the husband, having children and other factors. Marital roles specified by our society discourage the conflicts based on personality differences. So, in these circumstances, an individual's level of Machiavellianism does not significantly predict marital satisfaction.

Secondly, it was hypothesized that trust will likely to be significant positive predictor of marital satisfaction. The hypothesis was supported. Study found that trust positively predicted marital satisfaction (see Table 2) and the logical reason of this may be that having more trust in one's spouse tends to perceive positive about the spouse. Spouses with high trust level are much more confident about the presence and support of partner in high and low times of life and the marital quality is far better than those who lack trust in their marriage. Ross (2009) also found that relationships were more successful in which the spouses have trust on each other. In collectivist culture like Pakistan where marriage is considered the basic unit of family life, a research conducted by Atta, et al. (2013) found that trust and its sub-scales were significant positive predictors of marital satisfaction both in single and dual-career couples.

Third and major hypothesis of the study was that the low level of trust will moderate the relationship of Machiavellianism and marital satisfaction in such that it would strengthen the negative relationship of Machiavellianism and marital satisfaction. The findings of the study supported the hypothesis. Findings revealed that when level of trust is high, the relationship of the independent and the criterion variable becomes very weak and when the level of trust is low, the relationship between Machiavellianism and marital satisfaction becomes strongly negative (see Table 2 & Figure 2).

Machiavellianism is a personality trait which is often been associated with negative relationship outcomes; therefore, relationship satisfaction among couples is always at stake. However, as present study concludes, the negative consequences only persist when they lack trust upon their partners. Although no direct evidence from the literature can be found to support these results; however, the results can be better understood when the structure of relationships is being studied. Brett (n.d) for instance, stated that when trust is low, the individuals begin to reduce communication with their spouses and show a reluctance to improve their relationships.

Furthermore, Machiavellianistic individual who already gives less importance to relationships and is ready to manipulate these for personal gains, has less trust on the spouse, can even has more negative feelings from this relationship. Brewer and Abell(2017) found that the women who score high on Machiavellianism perceive that their spouses are less dependable; less trustworthy; and they show less willingness to pursue their relationship than their counterparts. Moreover, Machiavellianistic individuals perceive relationship partners as a tool to reach their desired goals (Wastell & Booth, 2003; Pilch, 2008) and less likely to feel empathy towards partners (Jakobwitz & Egan, 2006; Paál & Bereczkei, 2007). Therefore, such individuals begin to experience low level of satisfaction from their marital relationship when trust is low. Such detrimental effects of Machiavellianism can also be found in literature. For example, Trussell (2015) reported that burnout contributes to intention to quit only when the level of trust is low. Therefore, the results of the present study seem justified.

Conclusions

The study concludes that trust is the factor which contributes to marital satisfaction. Not only its individual but interactive effects are also important as when it is high, no matter the individual is Machiavellianistic or not, marital satisfaction is not disturbed. Whereas, when trust is low, Machiavellianism results in lower marital satisfaction.

Limitations and Suggestions

The present study was not void of certain limitations. The sample of the present study was taken from married individuals. In order to have a clearer look at the relationships further studies should consider dyadic couples including while comparing the scores of one partner to that of other partner and see the effects of spouse's level of Machiavellianism on marital satisfaction and like variables. Moreover, the undocumented custom in the Pakistani society restricts the married couple particularly women to discuss their marital issues with others. Here, the wife who says that everything is alright and fakes good about her marital life is considered as a good wife. This role demand puts the results of the study at stake of demand characteristics. Therefore, the next researchers should use other methods along with self-report measures.

Certain demographics like occupation of the spouse, influence of family system, number of children, marriage type (love/arrange marriage and cousin/non-cousin marriage), years of marriage, couldn't also be controlled but could have affected the results of the study. Next researches should consider these factors when studying such a relationship.

Practical Implications

The study has implications in the practical field as follows.

In the practical field, the study can help family counsellors, particularly those dealing with couples problems. For example, if marital satisfaction is low, family counsellors can develop trust in order to increase marital satisfaction. The study can also help in connecting personality traits, particularly Machiavellianism, with the marital problems of a couple. Moreover, marriage is considered as an institution, which pave the foundation for family setup and the high marital quality also ensure good family setup for individuals as well as their offspring. The study also has advantages for layman person. A common person can learn, through this study, that in order to be a successful in marriage, it is important to build trust between the spouses and manage problems together in a cooperative way.

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