
**INTENTION TO EXAGGERATE IN ONLINE REVIEWS AMONG SOCIAL
MEDIA USERS IN INDONESIA**

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Abstract

This study examines the influence of Dark Personality Traits on the intention to exaggerate online reviews among Indonesian social media users. The study focuses on narcissism, machiavellianism, psychopathy, and moral disengagement in the context of organic social media reviews. Data were collected through an online questionnaire, resulting in 244 valid responses, and analyzed using PLS-SEM with SmartPLS 4. The results show that machiavellianism positively influences exaggeration intention, whereas narcissism and psychopathy do not have significant direct effects. However, all three Dark Personality Traits positively influence moral disengagement, which significantly increases the intention to exaggerate online reviews. Moral disengagement emerged as the strongest predictor, highlighting its role in facilitating information distortion. This study contributes to the literature on consumer ethics, digital marketing, and the Dark Triad in a collectivist, non-Western context. The findings also provide practical implications for businesses and social media platforms in improving review monitoring systems, strengthening digital ethics awareness, and maintaining the credibility of online review ecosystems.

Keywords: Dark Personality Traits; Moral Disengagement; Exaggeration In Online Reviews; Narcissism; Machiavellianism; Psychopathy; Social Media

INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of digital technology has transformed global consumer communication and information-sharing patterns. With approximately 5.24 billion active social media users worldwide and average daily usage reaching 2 hours and 25 minutes, social media has become an integral part of modern life (Chaffey, 2025; DataReportal, 2025). Platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok now function not only as communication tools but also as digital ecosystems where ordinary consumers actively share consumption experiences without commercial motives. This shift has changed communication from passive media consumption to participatory interaction, allowing consumers to act as both creators and disseminators of information. Organic reviews shared by non-influencer users increasingly shape purchasing decisions and are often perceived as more persuasive than sponsored content (Chatterjee et al., 2024; Ruby, 2025). However, prior studies have mainly focused on influencer marketing, sponsored endorsements, and fake reviews, while limited attention has been given to exaggeration behavior in organic online reviews shared on personal social media accounts.

Indonesia ranks among the countries with the highest social media usage globally, with over 191 million active users, representing approximately 68% of the population (DataReportal, 2025). Indonesian consumers actively share organic consumption experiences on platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook, influenced by collectivist values including social proof and group conformity (Djumrianti & Osseo-Asare, 2024; Triandis, 2001). However, the credibility of organic reviews is increasingly challenged by exaggeration behavior, where users overstate experiences or emotional reactions beyond reality (Camilleri et al., 2025; Kapoor et al., 2021). Prior studies estimate that 16–36% of online reviews contain exaggeration elements, particularly among millennials, potentially creating reputational and financial risks for businesses.

Unlike fake reviews, which are entirely fabricated, exaggeration involves genuine consumers amplifying positive or negative experiences for psychological or social purposes (Camilleri et al., 2025; MacIntyre et al., 2020). This behavior may distort information quality, create unrealistic expectations, increase post purchase dissatisfaction, and reduce trust in brands and digital platforms (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Filieri et al., 2020). To explain this phenomenon, this study adopts the Dark Triad framework consisting of narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy, which are associated with self-interest, manipulation, and low ethical concern (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). The study also incorporates moral disengagement, a cognitive mechanism that enables individuals to justify unethical behavior without experiencing guilt (Bandura, 1991, 2002).

Prior studies have produced inconsistent findings, particularly regarding psychopathy's direct effect on exaggeration intent (Borghi & Ratcharak, 2025; Kapoor et al., 2021; Yousaf & Kim, 2023). Furthermore, limited research has specifically examined exaggeration behavior in organic consumer reviews within collectivist social media environments such as Indonesia. Therefore, this study aims to: (1) examine the direct effects of each Dark Personality Trait on the intention to exaggerate online reviews; (2) investigate the mediating role of moral disengagement; and (3) provide empirical evidence from the Indonesian social media context. This study contributes to the online review literature by extending understanding of the

psychological mechanisms underlying exaggeration behavior among ordinary non-influencer consumers in organic digital communication environments.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Moral Disengagement Theory

This study is grounded in Moral Disengagement Theory (MDT) by Albert Bandura, which explains how individuals cognitively disengage from internal moral standards, allowing unethical behavior without feelings of guilt or psychological distress. Moral disengagement occurs through mechanisms such as moral justification, diffusion of responsibility, distortion of consequences, and attribution of blame (Bandura, 1991, 2002; Moore et al., 2012). Prior studies have applied MDT in consumer ethics and unethical decision-making, showing that moral disengagement often links personality traits with unethical behavior (He & Harris, 2014; B. D. Jones et al., 2017; Moore et al., 2012). In online review contexts, moral disengagement may reduce psychological resistance toward deceptive or exaggerated review behavior, increasing individuals' intention to exaggerate online reviews.

Dark Triad Theory

The Dark Triad refers to a cluster of socially aversive personality traits consisting of narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). These traits are commonly associated with manipulative tendencies, self-interest orientation, low empathy, and unethical behavior (Carroll, 1991; Furnham et al., 2013). Within digital environments, individuals with elevated Dark Triad traits may be more likely to distort consumption experiences or manipulate online information to achieve psychological or social goals. Consequently, the Dark Triad provides a relevant theoretical framework for explaining exaggeration behavior in online reviews.

Narcissism is characterized by grandiosity, superiority, entitlement, and a strong desire for admiration and social validation (Grijalva & Zhang, 2016; Millon et al., 2012). Narcissistic individuals are highly motivated to maintain a favorable self-image and frequently use social media as a platform for self-enhancement and impression management (Dumas et al., 2017). In the context of online reviews, exaggerating consumption experiences may serve as a relatively low-risk strategy for attracting attention, projecting expertise, and enhancing social recognition. Unlike fake reviews, exaggerated reviews are typically grounded in real experiences, making them psychologically easier to justify while still supporting self-presentation goals (Kapoor et al., 2021). Although prior findings regarding narcissism and deceptive online behavior remain inconsistent (Borghi & Ratcharak, 2025; Cohen, 2025), the self-enhancement orientation of narcissistic individuals suggests a greater tendency to exaggerate online reviews.

H1: Narcissism has a positive effect on the intention to exaggerate online reviews.

Machiavellianism reflects a manipulative and strategic interpersonal orientation characterized by cynicism toward morality and a strong focus on personal gain (Muris et al., 2017). Individuals high in Machiavellianism tend to view communication as a tool for influencing others and achieving desired outcomes (Jones & Paulhus, 2014). In online review contexts, exaggeration may function as an effective yet relatively low-risk mechanism for shaping public perception, influencing purchasing decisions, or advancing personal interests. Prior studies consistently associate Machiavellianism with deceptive and manipulative online

behavior, including dishonest consumer practices and fake review activities (Borghi & Ratcharak, 2025; Cohen, 2025). Kapoor et al. (2021) further identified Machiavellianism as one of the strongest predictors of exaggeration intention in online reviews.

H2: Machiavellianism has a positive effect on the intention to exaggerate online reviews.

Psychopathy is characterized by impulsivity, low empathy, callousness, and limited feelings of guilt or remorse (Patrick et al., 2009). Individuals with psychopathic tendencies are generally less concerned about the potential negative consequences of their actions on others, which may reduce moral inhibition toward misleading or exaggerated communication. However, empirical findings regarding psychopathy and online review behavior remain inconsistent. Some studies report positive associations with dishonest online behavior (Cohen, 2025), while others find weak or non-significant direct effects on review-related behaviors (Borghi & Ratcharak, 2025; Kapoor et al., 2021). Despite these inconsistencies, the lack of empathy and reduced moral sensitivity associated with psychopathy provide theoretical support for expecting a positive relationship with exaggeration intention.

H3: Psychopathy has a positive effect on the intention to exaggerate online reviews.

Although Dark Triad traits may directly influence exaggeration intention, prior studies suggest that unethical behavioral tendencies are often facilitated through cognitive justification mechanisms rather than personality alone (Jones et al., 2017; Moore et al., 2012). In this regard, Moral Disengagement Theory provides an important explanatory framework for understanding how individuals cognitively rationalize ethically questionable behavior. Narcissistic person may use moral justification to protect their positive self-image, whereas machiavellian tend to rationalize manipulation as an acceptable strategy for achieving personal goals. Psychopathic individuals, characterized by low empathy and reduced guilt, are more likely to disengage from moral self-sanctions with minimal psychological resistance (Kapoor et al., 2021). Prior studies consistently demonstrate that Dark Triad traits positively predict moral disengagement across various unethical behavioral contexts (Alganami & El Keshky, 2022; Koay & Lok, 2024; Wu et al., 2020).

H4: Narcissism has a positive effect on moral disengagement.

H5: Machiavellianism has a positive effect on moral disengagement.

H6: Psychopathy has a positive effect on moral disengagement.

Moral disengagement is further expected to increase individuals' intention to exaggerate online reviews by weakening internal moral restraints against deceptive communication. When individuals cognitively rationalize exaggeration as harmless, socially acceptable, or morally justifiable, the psychological inhibition against engaging in such behavior becomes substantially reduced (Bandura, 1991, 2002; Moore et al., 2012). Previous studies found that moral disengagement positively predicts exaggeration intention in online reviews and contributes to information distortion in digital environments (Kapoor et al., 2021; Vasil et al., 2025). Moral disengagement therefore functions as a key psychological mechanism that transforms dark personality tendencies into exaggeration intentions.

H7: Moral disengagement has a positive effect on the intention to exaggerate online reviews.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a quantitative research design using a cross-sectional online survey through a self-administered questionnaire distributed via Google Forms. The survey link was disseminated through several social media platforms, including WhatsApp, LINE, Twitter/X, and Instagram. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were assured of anonymity and confidentiality. All constructs were measured using a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree). The target population consisted of Indonesian social media users who had previously posted organic (non-sponsored) reviews regarding products or services on their personal social media accounts. To ensure the relevance of respondents to the research context, this study applied a non-probability sampling approach combining purposive and convenience sampling techniques (Hair et al., 2019). Respondents were required to meet the following criteria: (1) Indonesian citizen, (2) active user of social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and/or Facebook, (3) having previously shared organic product or service reviews online, and (4) at least 18 years old.

The minimum sample size was determined following the recommendation of Hair et al. (2014), which suggests a sample range of 5 to 10 times the total number of indicators and latent variables ($5a \leq x \leq 10a$). The proposed research model consisted of 25 indicators and 5 latent constructs ($a = 30$), resulting in a recommended sample size ranging from 150 to 300 respondents. A total of 244 valid responses were collected and retained for analysis, thereby satisfying the recommended minimum sample requirement for PLS-SEM analysis.

All measurement items were adapted from Kapoor et al. (2021). Narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy were each measured using four items. Moral disengagement was measured using eight items representing Bandura (1991) moral disengagement mechanisms. Intention to exaggerate online reviews was initially measured using five items. Intention to exaggerate online reviews was initially measured with 5 items; however, item EXT5 (reverse-coded) was excluded following pilot testing and outer loading analysis (loading = 0.658, below the recommended threshold of 0.708; Hair et al., 2019), resulting in 4 final items. A pilot test involving 30 respondents was conducted to evaluate the validity and reliability of the measurement instrument. The pilot test results indicated that all retained items achieved Pearson correlation values exceeding the minimum threshold ($r > 0.361$). In addition, Cronbach's Alpha values for all constructs ranged from 0.874 to 0.973, indicating satisfactory internal consistency reliability (Hair et al., 2019).

Data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 4. PLS-SEM was chosen due to its suitability for prediction-oriented research and mediation analysis involving latent constructs (Hair et al., 2019). The measurement model was evaluated using convergent validity (outer loadings and AVE), discriminant validity (Fornell–Larcker criterion and cross-loadings), and reliability tests (Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability). The structural model was assessed through Variance Inflation Factor (VIF), coefficient of determination (R^2), predictive relevance (Q^2), and bootstrapping procedures. Hypotheses were considered significant at t -statistic > 1.96 and p -value < 0.05 (Hair et al., 2019).

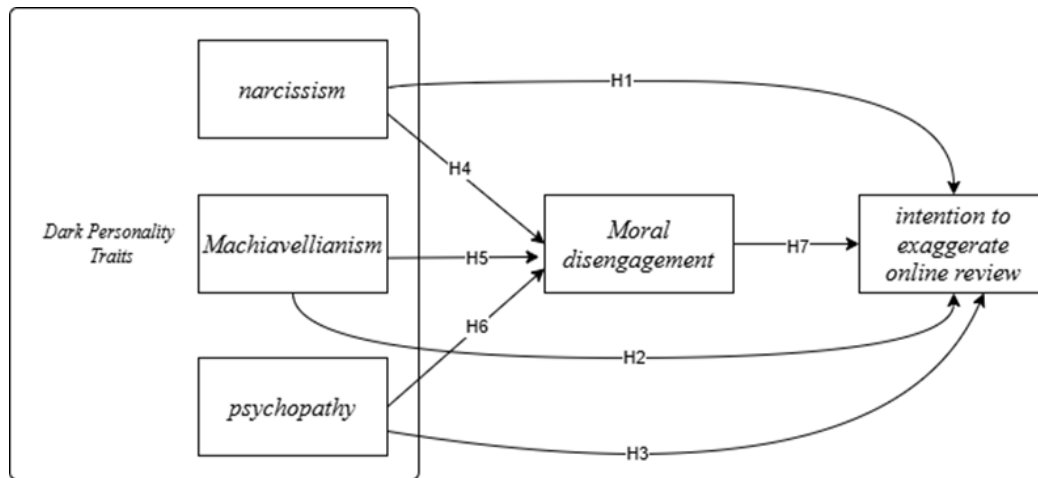


Figure 1.
Framework Model

Source: Adapted from (Kapoor et al., 2021)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Respondents Profile

Table 1.
Respondent Profile

Characteristics	Frequency	%
Gender		
Male	49	20,1
Female	195	79,9
Age		
<18 years	6	2,5
18-22 years	80	32,8
23-27 years	58	23,8
28-32 years	63	25,8
33-37 years	26	10,7
38-42 years	9	3,7
43-47 years	1	0,4
>48 years	1	0,4
Occupation		
Student	94	38,5
Entrepreneur	25	10,5
Private-sector employee	86	35,2

State-owned enterprise (SOE) employee	30	12,3
Civil servant (ASN)	9	3,7
Education		
Elementary School	-	-
Junior High School / Equivalent	-	-
Senior High School / Vocational High School / Equivalent	49	20,1
Diploma Degree (D1/D2/D3)	24	9,8
Bachelor's Degree (S1)	165	67,6
Master's Degree (S2)	6	2,5
Doctoral Degree (S3)	-	-
Monthly Income		
≤ IDR 2,500,000	71	29,1
IDR 2,500,001–5,000,000	41	16,8
IDR 5,000,001–7,500,000	92	37,7
IDR 7,500,001–10,000,000	35	14,3
IDR 10,000,001–12,500,000	1	0,4
> IDR 12,500,000	4	1,6
Frequency of Social Media Usage		
≤ 1 hour	2	0,8
1–2 hours	77	31,6
3–4 hours	132	54,1
5–6 hours	27	11,1
≥ 6 hours	6	2,5

Source: Data processed (2026)

Table 1 shows a total of 244 respondents participated in the study. The majority were female (79.9%), aged 18–22 years (32.8%), students (38.5%), and held a bachelor's degree (67.6%). Most respondents reported monthly incomes between IDR 5,000,001–7,500,000 (37.7%), and 54.1% spent 3–4 hours per day on social media.

Measurement Model Evaluation

The measurement model was evaluated to assess the validity and reliability of the constructs used in this study. Convergent validity was examined using outer loadings and Average Variance Extracted (AVE), while internal consistency reliability was assessed through Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values. Table 2 presents the results of the convergent validity and reliability assessment for all constructs and measurement items.

Table 2.
Convergent Validity and Reliability

Item	Mean	Convergent Validity		Reliability	
		Outer Loading	AVE	Cronbach Alpha	Composite Reliability
Exaggeration	4,695		0,731	0,877	0,916
EXT1	4,72	0,872			
EXT2	4,76	0,840			
EXT3	4,69	0,856			
EXT4	4,69	0,851			
Machiavellianism	4,912		0,690	0,850	0,899
MACHV1	4,76	0,844			
MACHV2	5,04	0,782			
MACHV3	4,95	0,847			
MACHV4	4,89	0,849			
Moral Disengagement	4,707		0,629	0,915	0,931
MOR1	4,81	0,756			
MOR2	4,79	0,792			
MOR3	4,66	0,835			
MOR4	4,59	0,767			
MOR5	4,56	0,775			
MOR6	4,84	0,803			
MOR7	4,73	0,826			
MOR8	4,68	0,787			
Narcissism	4,938		0,706	0,861	0,906
NAR1	4.96	0,849			
NAR2	5.02	0,840			
NAR3	4.95	0,856			
NAR4	4.82	0,815			
Psychopathy	4,912		0,697	0,855	0,902
PSY1	5,09	0,815			
PSY2	4,79	0,831			
PSY3	4,93	0,849			
PSY4	4,84	0,844			

Source: Data processed (2026)

Table 2 shows that the mean values of all constructs ranged from 4.695 to 4.938, indicating that respondents generally agreed with the statements measured in this study. Based on the assessment criteria, all construct means fall within the “Agree” category (4.44–5.29), suggesting relatively high tendencies toward the measured psychological traits and behavioral

intentions. In terms of convergent validity, all indicator outer loadings exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.708, ranging from 0.756 to 0.872, while all AVE values were above 0.50 (Hair et al., 2019), indicating satisfactory convergent validity. Furthermore, the reliability results demonstrated strong internal consistency, as all Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2019).

Next, discriminant validity was assessed using the Fornell–Larcker criterion and cross-loading analysis. Table 3 presents the Fornell–Larcker results, while Table 4 reports the cross-loadings. The findings confirm that each construct is empirically distinct, with indicators loading more strongly on their respective constructs than on others (Hair et al., 2019).

Table 3.
Fornell-Larcker

	EXT	MACH	MOR	NAR	PSY
EXT	0,855				
MACH	0,691	0,831			
MOR	0,727	0,647	0,793		
NAR	0,662	0,785	0,659	0,840	
PSY	0,675	0,822	0,659	0,834	0,835

Source: Data Processed (2026)

Table 4.
Cross-Loading

	EXT	MACH	MOR	NAR	PSY
EXT1	0,872	0,667	0,665	0,625	0,659
EXT2	0,840	0,554	0,613	0,549	0,564
EXT3	0,856	0,560	0,608	0,548	0,548
EXT4	0,851	0,572	0,596	0,534	0,526
MACHV1	0,603	0,844	0,573	0,598	0,650
MACHV2	0,554	0,782	0,517	0,644	0,697
MACHV3	0,568	0,847	0,507	0,649	0,650
MACHV4	0,567	0,849	0,551	0,720	0,735
MOR1	0,528	0,562	0,756	0,505	0,500
MOR2	0,558	0,470	0,792	0,525	0,491
MOR3	0,649	0,581	0,835	0,597	0,563
MOR4	0,542	0,504	0,767	0,469	0,508
MOR5	0,555	0,474	0,775	0,498	0,497
MOR6	0,585	0,494	0,803	0,521	0,558
MOR7	0,595	0,451	0,826	0,511	0,501
MOR8	0,588	0,561	0,787	0,546	

					0,553
NAR1	0,539	0,611	0,567	0,849	0,705
NAR2	0,563	0,682	0,549	0,840	0,680
NAR3	0,556	0,686	0,538	0,856	0,718
NAR4	0,565	0,658	0,560	0,815	0,700
PSY1	0,551	0,666	0,538	0,701	0,815
PSY2	0,558	0,654	0,573	0,686	0,831
PSY3	0,554	0,722	0,556	0,704	0,849
PSY4	0,589	0,701	0,532	0,694	0,844

Source: Data Processed (2026)

Table 3 shows that the square root of the AVE for each construct exceeded its correlations with other constructs, confirming that the Fornell–Larcker criterion was met. Furthermore, Table 4 indicates that all indicators loaded more strongly on their respective constructs than on other constructs in the model. These findings indicate that the cross-loading criterion was fulfilled, confirming adequate discriminant validity and demonstrating that each indicator appropriately represented its intended latent construct (Hair et al., 2019).

Structural Model Evaluation

The structural model evaluation was conducted through collinearity assessment, path coefficient analysis, coefficient of determination (R^2), and predictive relevance (Q^2). The bootstrapping results used to assess the structural relationships among constructs are presented in Figure 2.

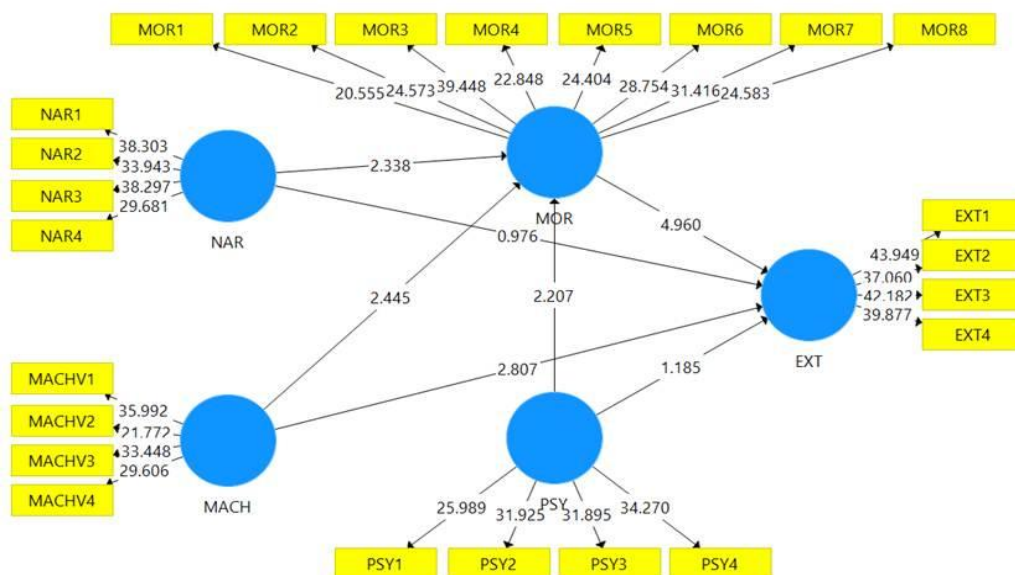


Figure 2.

Bootstrapping

Source: Data Processed (2026)

Table 5.
Collinearity Test

	EXT	MACH	MOR	NAR	PSY
EXT					
MACH	3,528		3,415		
MOR	1,962				
NAR	3,812		3,656		
PSY	4,421		4,321		

Source: Data Processed (2026)

Table 5 shows that all Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values ranged from 1.962 to 4.421, remaining below the recommended threshold of 5.0. These results suggest that multicollinearity was not a serious issue in the structural model, as the predictor constructs did not exhibit excessive correlations. Therefore, the model satisfied the collinearity assumptions required for further structural analysis and hypothesis testing (Hair et al., 2019).

Next, the structural model was evaluated using the coefficient of determination (R^2) and predictive relevance (Q^2). These assessments were conducted to examine the model's explanatory and predictive capabilities for the endogenous constructs. Table 6 presents the results of the R^2 and Q^2 evaluations for each dependent variable in the study model.

Table 6.
The R^2 and Q^2 Evaluations

Variables	The Coefficient of Determination		Predictive Relevance (Q^2).		
	R Square	R Square Adjusted	RMSE	MAE	Q^2_{predict}
EXT	0,621	0,615	0,718	0,524	0,499
MOR	0,490	0,484	0,742	0,536	0,465

Source: Data Processed (2026)

Table 6 shows that the adjusted R^2 values for exaggeration intention (0.615) and moral disengagement (0.484) were moderate, indicating satisfactory explanatory power. The Q^2 values for intention to exaggerate (0.499) and moral disengagement (0.465) were also greater than zero, confirming adequate predictive relevance and capability (Hair et al., 2019). Furthermore, the hypothesis testing and path coefficient results are shown in Table 7.

Table 7.
Path Coefficient

Hypotheses	β (Original Sample)	T-Statistic	P-Value	Decision
NAR $\rightarrow$ EXT	0.086	0.976	0.330	H1 Rejected
MACH $\rightarrow$ EXT	0.251	2.807	0.005	H2 Accepted
PSY $\rightarrow$ EXT	0.110	1.185	0.237	H3 Rejected
NAR $\rightarrow$ MOR	0.283	2.338	0.020	H4 Accepted
MACH $\rightarrow$ MOR	0.240	2.445	0.015	H5 Accepted
PSY $\rightarrow$ MOR	0.226	2.207	0.028	H6 Accepted
MOR $\rightarrow$ EXT	0.435	4.960	0.000	H7 Accepted

Source: Data Processed (2026)

Note: Intention to Exaggerate (EXT); Machiavellianism (MACH); Moral Disengagement (MOR); Narcissism (NAR); Psychopathy (PSY).

Effect of Narcissism on Intention to Exaggerate

Hypothesis H1 was rejected ($\beta = 0.086$, $T = 0.976$, $p = 0.330$), indicating that narcissism does not significantly influence the intention to exaggerate online reviews. This finding aligns with Borghi & Ratcharak (2025), who found a negative relationship between narcissism and fake review posting, as well as Yousaf & Kim (2023), who showed narcissism correlates with lower review ratings. Although narcissistic individuals are characterized by a strong desire for admiration, recognition, and positive self-presentation, they may avoid behaviors that could threaten their public image or credibility if perceived as dishonest (Dumas et al., 2017). This finding suggests that narcissistic individuals tend to engage in strategic self-presentation rather than overt information distortion. Unlike fake reviews or explicit deception, exaggeration still carries reputational risk in digital environments where online audiences can critically evaluate authenticity. Consequently, concerns about maintaining a favorable self-image may suppress the tendency to exaggerate reviews, despite the self-enhancement motives commonly associated with narcissism.

Effect of Machiavellianism on Intention to Exaggerate Online Reviews

The findings demonstrate that Machiavellianism significantly increases individuals' intention to exaggerate online reviews ($\beta = 0.251$, $T = 2.807$, $p = 0.005$), supporting Hypothesis H2. This result is consistent with (Borghi & Ratcharak, 2025; Cohen, 2025), who linked Machiavellianism with dishonest online behaviors and fake review activities. Individuals high in Machiavellianism tend to perceive online reviews as strategic tools for influencing others and advancing personal interests. Their manipulative orientation, cynical morality, and willingness to exploit others make them more tolerant of information distortion when it provides personal advantage (Muris et al., 2017). Compared with explicit fabrication,

exaggeration offers a lower-risk yet credible strategy for shaping consumer perceptions. The descriptive findings further support this interpretation, as respondents acknowledged tendencies toward manipulation, deception, and flattery to achieve desired outcomes. These findings suggest that exaggeration functions not merely as emotional expression, but as a deliberate impression-management strategy used to influence others in digital environments.

Effect of Psychopathy on Intention to Exaggerate Online Reviews

The results indicate that psychopathy does not significantly influence the intention to exaggerate online reviews ($\beta = 0.110$, $T = 1.185$, $p = 0.237$), leading to the rejection of Hypothesis H3. This finding aligns with (Borghi & Ratcharak, 2025; Yousaf & Kim, 2023), who also reported weak or inconsistent relationships between psychopathy and deceptive online review behavior. Although psychopathy is associated with low empathy, impulsivity, lack of remorse, and cynical attitudes toward others (Patrick et al., 2009), these characteristics may not support the deliberate and strategic behavior required to construct exaggerated review narratives. Unlike Machiavellian individuals, psychopathic individuals tend to act impulsively and pursue immediate self-gratification rather than calculated impression management. The descriptive findings support this interpretation, as respondents reported tendencies related to moral indifference and cynicism, yet these traits did not consistently translate into intentions to exaggerate online reviews. This finding suggests that psychopathy may be more closely associated with reactive or opportunistic deviant behavior than with strategically managed forms of online information distortion.

Effect of Narcissism on Moral Disengagement

The findings support Hypothesis H4 ($\beta = 0.283$, $T = 2.338$, $p = 0.020$), indicating that narcissism positively influences moral disengagement. This result suggests that individuals with stronger narcissistic tendencies are more likely to rationalize ethically questionable behavior before acting. The finding aligns with Alganami & El Keshky (2022), who reported a positive relationship between Dark Triad traits and moral disengagement. Although Koay & Lok (2024) found no mediating role of moral disengagement between narcissism and behavioral intention, the present study demonstrates that narcissism still contributes directly to moral disengagement processes. Narcissistic individuals are strongly oriented toward self-image, admiration, and social recognition, which may encourage cognitive justifications that minimize moral concerns while preserving a positive self-concept. Respondents also tended to agree that exaggerating reviews is not a serious issue, suggesting that moral disengagement supports self-enhancement and social approval motives in online environments.

Effect of Machiavellianism on Moral Disengagement

The findings support Hypothesis H5 ($\beta = 0.240$, $T = 2.445$, $p = 0.015$), confirming that Machiavellianism positively influences moral disengagement. This result indicates that individuals with manipulative, strategic, and self-serving tendencies are more likely to rationalize unethical behavior and weaken their moral self-regulation. The finding aligns with (Alganami & El Keshky, 2022; Koay & Lok, 2024; Wu et al., 2020), all of which reported positive associations between Machiavellian traits and moral disengagement. Individuals high in Machiavellianism tend to view ethical principles as flexible and instrumental, allowing them to justify deceptive or exaggerated online reviews when such behavior serves personal interests. The findings further support this interpretation, as respondents tended to agree that exaggerating reviews is not a serious issue and may be acceptable under certain conditions.

These results suggest that Machiavellian individuals engage in cognitive rationalization that reframes unethical behavior as reasonable or harmless, thereby increasing the likelihood of moral disengagement in online review contexts.

Effect of Psychopathy on Moral Disengagement

Hypothesis H6 was supported ($\beta = 0.226$, $T = 2.207$, $p = 0.028$), indicating that psychopathy positively influences moral disengagement, suggesting that individuals with low empathy and limited remorse are more likely to rationalize unethical behavior. This finding is consistent with prior studies by (Alganami & El Keshky, 2022; Koay & Lok, 2024; Wu et al., 2020), which reported a positive association between psychopathy and moral disengagement. Individuals high in psychopathy tend to disregard moral considerations, display emotional detachment, and view others cynically, making them more likely to perceive exaggerated online reviews as acceptable or harmless. The descriptive findings further showed agreement with statements reflecting low remorse and limited concern for moral consequences. Such characteristics facilitate spontaneous moral justification without extensive internal conflict, as these individuals prioritize self-interest and immediate gratification over ethical considerations. Consequently, psychopathy appears to be an important predictor of moral disengagement in the context of online review behavior.

Effect of Moral Disengagement on Intention to Exaggerate

Hypothesis H7 was supported ($\beta = 0.435$, $T = 4.960$, $p = 0.000$), confirming the strongest path in the model, that moral disengagement positively influences the intention to exaggerate online reviews. The finding is consistent with Kapoor et al. (2021) and extends the evidence of Vasil et al. (2025) within the context of social media review behavior. Individuals with higher levels of moral disengagement tend to rationalize exaggeration as acceptable, harmless, or socially justifiable, thereby reducing internal moral restraint and increasing tolerance toward information distortion. Respondents also demonstrated agreement with statements suggesting that exaggerating reviews is “not a serious issue” or can be justified under certain circumstances. These findings suggest that moral disengagement plays a central role in facilitating exaggeration intentions by weakening self-regulatory moral processes. Moreover, the results indicate that dark personality traits may not directly lead to exaggeration behavior unless accompanied by cognitive moral justification mechanisms.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the influence of Dark Personality Traits on the intention to exaggerate online reviews among Indonesian social media users, with moral disengagement positioned as a mediating mechanism. The findings reveal that Machiavellianism directly increases exaggeration intention, whereas narcissism and psychopathy do not exert significant direct effects. However, all three Dark Personality Traits positively influence moral disengagement, which in turn strongly predicts the intention to exaggerate online reviews. These results suggest that unethical review behavior is driven less by personality traits alone and more by the cognitive moral justification processes that enable individuals to rationalize information distortion. The study contributes to the literature on consumer behavior, digital ethics, and the Dark Triad by extending the framework of Kapoor et al. (2021) into the context of organic social media reviews within a collectivist, non-Western setting. In

particular, the findings clarify the indirect role of psychopathy and highlight moral disengagement as a central psychological mechanism linking dark personality traits to deceptive online behavior.

From a practical perspective, the findings emphasize the importance of strengthening review monitoring systems, enhancing transparency mechanisms, and promoting digital ethics awareness among users. Social media platforms and businesses are encouraged to develop more effective moderation strategies and algorithmic detection systems to reduce exaggerated or misleading reviews and maintain the credibility of online review ecosystems.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations, including a sample dominated by young respondents and the focus on only three Dark Personality dimensions. Future studies are encouraged to incorporate additional psychological and platform-related variables, apply longitudinal approaches, and compare different social media platforms to obtain broader insights into online review behavior.

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