

Is Narcissism Really the Secret to Sales Success? Unraveling The Role of Effort in Salesperson Outcomes

Apakah Narsisme Benar-Benar Rahasia Kesuksesan Tenaga Penjual? Mengungkap Peran Effort dalam Hasil Kerja Tenaga Penjual

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Abstract

Salesperson outcomes are influenced by various individual factors, including personality traits. Drawing on the Narcissistic Admiration and Rivalry Concept (NARC), this study examined the relationships between narcissistic admiration, narcissistic rivalry, effort, and salesperson outcomes, with effort proposed as a mediator. This study used a quantitative cross-sectional design involving 231 motorcycle salespersons in Indonesia recruited through purposive sampling and analyzed using General Linear Model. The results indicated that narcissistic admiration positively predicted both effort ($\beta = 0.608$) and salesperson outcomes ($\beta = 0.160$ and $\beta = 0.226$), whereas narcissistic rivalry negatively predicted effort ($\beta = -0.282$), but did not significantly predict salesperson outcomes. The mediation analysis indicated that the indirect effects of narcissistic admiration and narcissistic rivalry on salesperson performance through effort were not significant. This was indicated by the confidence intervals for the indirect effects crossing zero, suggesting that effort did not mediate the relationships between narcissistic admiration or narcissistic rivalry and salesperson performance. These findings provide a more nuanced understanding of how different dimensions of grandiose narcissism relate to salesperson outcomes and offer insights for organizations in identifying personality characteristics associated with sales performance.

Keywords : Narcissistic Admiration, Narcissistic Rivalry, Effort, Salesperson Outcomes, Salespersons

Abstrak

Hasil kerja tenaga penjual dipengaruhi oleh berbagai faktor individual, termasuk trait kepribadian. Dengan merujuk pada *Narcissistic Admiration and Rivalry Concept* (NARC), penelitian ini mengkaji hubungan antara *narcissistic admiration*, *narcissistic rivalry*, *effort*, dan *hasil kerja tenaga penjual*, dengan *effort* sebagai mediator. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain kuantitatif *cross-sectional* yang melibatkan 231 tenaga penjual sepeda motor di Indonesia, yang direkrut melalui teknik *purposive sampling* dan dianalisis menggunakan *General Linear Model*. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa *narcissistic admiration* secara positif memprediksi *effort* ($\beta = 0,608$) dan hasil kerja tenaga penjual ($\beta = 0,160$ dan $\beta = 0,226$), sedangkan *narcissistic rivalry* secara negatif memprediksi *effort* ($\beta = -0,282$), tetapi tidak secara signifikan memprediksi hasil kerja tenaga penjual. Hasil analisis mediasi menunjukkan bahwa *indirect effects narcissistic admiration* dan *narcissistic rivalry* terhadap hasil kerja tenaga penjual melalui *effort* tidak signifikan. Hal ini ditunjukkan oleh *confidence interval* dari *indirect effects* yang melintasi nol, sehingga *effort* tidak terbukti memediasi hubungan antara *narcissistic admiration* maupun *narcissistic rivalry* dengan hasil kerja tenaga penjual. Temuan ini memberikan pemahaman yang lebih bernuansa mengenai bagaimana dimensi-dimensi berbeda dari *grandiose narcissism* berkaitan dengan hasil kerja tenaga penjual, serta memberikan wawasan bagi organisasi dalam mengidentifikasi karakteristik kepribadian yang berhubungan dengan kinerja penjualan.

Kata Kunci : Narcissistic Admiration, Narcissistic Rivalry, Effort, Hasil Kerja Tenaga Penjual, Tenaga Penjual

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Received 10/06/2026

Revised 10/08/2026

Accepted 06/09/2026



INTTRODUCTION

According to the Indonesian Motorcycle Industry Association (AIS, 2026), domestic motorcycle sales increased by 1.3%, from 6,333,310 units in 2024 to 6,412,769 units in 2025. This growth reflects sustained market demand and intensifying competition within the Indonesian motorcycle industry. As competition continues to increase, companies rely heavily on salespersons to achieve sales targets and maintain their competitive advantage.

In the industrial and organizational context, sales is a profession that requires individuals to achieve sales targets. Working in a highly competitive environment also demands salespersons to demonstrate strong performance, such as maintaining good relationships with customers (Palmatier et al., 2007). Financial outcomes are commonly used as the primary standard for measuring salesperson performance and success (Kerr & Cuevas, 2022). Nevertheless, not all salespersons are able to achieve the same outcomes. This difference may be influenced by various factors affecting salesperson performance, one of which is personal factors (Churchill et al., 1985).

Personality is one of the personal factors that frequently receives attention in studies examining salesperson performance. Herjanto and Franklin (2018) categorized personality as part of social intelligence, which refers to the ability of salespersons to recognize social cues and engage effectively in interpersonal interactions. Because of its important role in shaping interpersonal behavior, companies often emphasize positive personality traits during the recruitment process for salespeople. Previous studies have also demonstrated that salespeople with positive personality traits and interpersonal skills tend to achieve better work outcomes (Canales-Ronda, 2023; Homburg et al., 2024). However, most existing research has primarily focused on positive personality characteristics, while negative personality traits remain relatively overlooked in the context of salesperson outcomes, such as narcissism.

Satornino et al. (2022) proposed that salesperson performance is not only affected by positive personality. In fact, narcissism creates strong first impressions for salesperson performance. Several previous studies have also shown that narcissism is associated with sales performance. A study conducted by Ibragimov et al. (2025) found a significant positive correlation between adaptive narcissistic traits and sales performance. In addition, research by Soyer et al. (1999) revealed that individuals working as salespersons tend to have higher levels of narcissism and achievement motivation compared to individuals who have never worked in sales-related occupations. These findings indicate that narcissistic characteristics may play a role in supporting salesperson performance and success.

Narcissistic personality traits may influence salesperson outcomes in both positive and negative ways. At the broadest level, narcissism is divided into two major forms: grandiose narcissism and vulnerable narcissism (Miller et al., 2011). Newest study by Miller et al. (2021) stated that grandiose narcissism is generally characterized by

confidence, dominance, and social assertiveness, whereas vulnerable narcissism is more associated with insecurity, emotional instability, distrust, and social withdrawal. Salespersons work in highly competitive environments that require high confidence and strong motivation to achieve recognition and performance targets. They are required to achieve often high and competitive sales targets by dealing with complex sales situations, building trust, and convincing buyers in an increasingly competitive market, making salespeople the main link between customers and the company (Ahearne & Rapp, 2010; Zhang & Glynn, 2015; Franklin & Marshall, 2018). Therefore, this study specifically focuses on grandiose narcissism because its characteristics are considered more relevant to the sales profession.

Back et al. (2013) introduced the Narcissistic Admiration and Rivalry Concept (NARC), which conceptualizes grandiose narcissism into two dimensions: admiration and rivalry. Both dimensions share the same overarching goal of maintaining a grandiose self, but they differ in the strategies used to achieve it. Specifically, both dimensions are driven by the core motivation to create and maintain a grandiose self-image, although admiration is generally associated with stable self-esteem, whereas rivalry is more often linked to fragile self-esteem and interpersonal conflict (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001; Cichocka et al., 2019). Previous studies have shown that these two dimensions are associated with distinct psychological and social outcomes, including optimism, social belonging, and mental toughness (Manley et al., 2019; Ma et al., 2026; Zheng et al., 2026). Likewise, in the context of social interactions, narcissistic admiration contributes to initial popularity through charismatic and self-enhancing behaviors, whereas narcissistic rivalry tends to reduce popularity because of aggressive, antagonistic, and arrogant behaviors (Back et al., 2013). In the context of competitive behavior, individuals high in narcissistic admiration are more likely to pursue success by attempting to appear impressive and gain admiration from others, whereas individuals high in narcissistic rivalry tend to protect their status through aggressive competition, devaluing others, and attempting to dominate rivals (Szűcs et al., 2023). These contrasting behavioral tendencies indicate that narcissistic admiration and rivalry may produce different behavioral outcomes, particularly in how they motivate individuals to exert effort in pursuing their goals.

Although previous studies have consistently demonstrated that narcissism is associated with salesperson performance (Ibragimov et al., 2025; Soyer et al., 1999), considerably less is known about the psychological mechanisms through which narcissistic tendencies translate into salesperson outcomes. Existing studies have primarily focused on the direct relationship between narcissism and performance, providing limited insight into the motivational and behavioral processes that explain why some narcissistic salespersons achieve better outcomes than others. This limitation is particularly important because the two dimensions of grandiose narcissism—admiration and rivalry—represent distinct self-regulatory strategies rather

than merely different personality characteristics (Back et al., 2013). Consequently, understanding the behavioral mechanisms through which these dimensions influence salesperson outcomes may provide a more comprehensive explanation of narcissism in sales contexts.

Effort may provide one such mechanism. Effort refers to the amount of cognitive and behavioral energy individuals invest in pursuing work-related goals and sustaining task performance (Kurzban et al., 2013; Van Iddekinge et al., 2022). Rather than simply working hard, effort reflects how individuals allocate, exert, and maintain their energy toward goal-directed activities. In sales settings, effort is particularly important because salesperson performance largely depends on the extent to which salespeople engage in selling-related activities, such as prospecting customers, maintaining customer relationships, and pursuing sales opportunities. Accordingly, greater effort has consistently been associated with higher sales performance and better salesperson outcomes (Brown & Peterson, 1994; Van Iddekinge et al., 2022), suggesting that effort may represent an important mechanism through which individual characteristics influence performance.

From a self-regulation perspective, effort is theoretically well positioned to explain the relationship between narcissism and salesperson outcomes. Grandiose narcissism is fundamentally characterized by the pursuit of admiration, status, and superiority (Back et al., 2013; Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001). To maintain this desired self-image, narcissistic individuals continuously regulate their behavior by allocating cognitive and behavioral resources toward activities that maximize opportunities for success and social recognition. Consequently, effort represents one of the earliest behavioral manifestations of narcissistic self-regulation because it reflects how much energy, persistence, and attention individuals invest in pursuing valued goals. Unlike constructs such as self-efficacy, achievement motivation, or adaptive selling behavior, which primarily reflect cognitive evaluations or domain-specific competencies, effort captures the behavioral investment that precedes the execution of these strategies. Before salespersons can effectively persuade customers, adapt their selling approach, or demonstrate competence, they must first decide how much effort they are willing to invest in achieving sales goals. Therefore, effort may represent a more proximal mechanism linking narcissistic tendencies with salesperson outcomes.

Consistent with this reasoning, several studies have shown that narcissism influences the amount of effort individuals exert in achievement-oriented settings (Roberts et al., 2015; Roberts et al., 2019; Falco et al., 2020; Prundeanu & Popusoi, 2022). Roberts et al. (2019) for example, reported that narcissism exerted a significant indirect effect on performance through effort under conditions of high self-enhancement. These findings suggest that narcissistic tendencies may motivate individuals to invest greater effort in competitive environments where success provides opportunities for recognition and status enhancement.

Nevertheless, evidence regarding the mediating role of effort remains scarce, particularly when narcissism is conceptualized using the Narcissistic Admiration and Rivalry Concept (NARC). Although admiration and rivalry pursue the same overarching goal of maintaining a grandiose self-image, they rely on fundamentally different self-regulatory strategies (Back et al., 2013), suggesting that they may influence effort and ultimately salesperson outcomes in different ways. To date, however, empirical evidence explaining the behavioral mechanism through which narcissistic admiration and rivalry influence salesperson outcomes remains limited, particularly in sales contexts. Addressing this gap requires a theoretical framework that not only distinguishes the two dimensions of grandiose narcissism but also explains how these dimensions are translated into goal-directed behavior and performance outcomes.

Accordingly, this study adopts the Narcissistic Admiration and Rivalry Concept (NARC; Back et al., 2013) as the overarching theoretical foundation. NARC conceptualizes grandiose narcissism as comprising two distinct self-regulatory strategies—narcissistic admiration and narcissistic rivalry—through which individuals pursue and protect a grandiose self-image. This framework was selected because it directly underpins the conceptualization and measurement of grandiose narcissism employed in this study (NARQ; Muttaqin et al., 2023) and explicitly distinguishes the assertive, approach-oriented strategy of admiration from the antagonistic, avoidance-oriented strategy of rivalry, which constitutes the central theoretical distinction examined in this research. Building on this foundation, the present study further integrates Trait Activation Theory (Tett et al., 2021) and Self-Regulation Theory (Lord et al., 2010; Inzlicht et al., 2021) to explain the behavioral mechanism linking narcissism to salesperson outcomes. Trait Activation Theory explains why the competitive and evaluative nature of sales work activates narcissistic admiration and rivalry, whereas Self-Regulation Theory explains how these activated traits are translated into effort as a proximal, goal-directed behavioral response. Accordingly, effort is conceptualized as the self-regulatory mechanism through which the two dimensions of narcissism may differentially influence salesperson outcomes.

Therefore, this study examines the relationships between narcissistic admiration, narcissistic rivalry, effort, and salesperson outcomes among motorcycle salespersons. More specifically, this study investigates whether effort functions as a proximal self-regulatory mechanism through which admiration and rivalry differentially influence salesperson outcomes. By integrating the Narcissistic Admiration and Rivalry Concept with Trait Activation Theory and Self-Regulation Theory, this study extends previous research that has primarily focused on the direct relationship between narcissism and performance. The findings are expected to contribute to the industrial and organizational psychology literature by providing a more nuanced understanding of how distinct dimensions of grandiose

narcissism shape salesperson outcomes through behavioral self-regulation.

Research Model

The conceptual research model tested in this study is presented in Figure 1. The model proposes that narcissistic admiration and narcissistic rivalry, as the two dimensions of grandiose narcissism, function as predictors of salesperson outcomes, with effort proposed as the mediating mechanism that links these two dimensions to salesperson outcomes. Age and sales experience were included as control variables because both were significantly correlated with the outcome variables (Table 2).

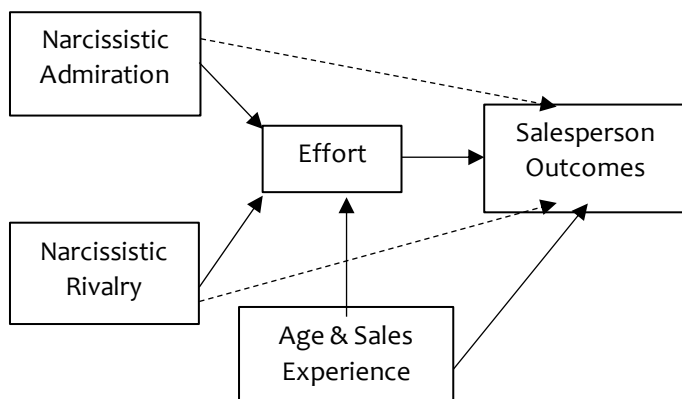


Figure 1. Conceptual Research Model

Based on the proposed conceptual framework and the theoretical arguments presented above, the hypotheses of this study are as follows: (1) narcissistic admiration positively predicts salesperson effort and salesperson outcomes; (2) narcissistic rivalry negatively predicts salesperson effort and salesperson outcomes; and (3) salesperson effort mediates the relationships between narcissistic admiration and salesperson outcomes as well as between narcissistic rivalry and salesperson outcomes.

RESEARCH METHODS

Research Design

This study used a quantitative approach with a cross-sectional design (Azwar, 2018). Data were collected at a single point in time by using a self-administered questionnaire that was distributed to all respondents. The variables were measured simultaneously within the same survey.

Participants

A total of 257 respondents participated in this study, and there is a total of 231 respondents who are eligible. The participants were salespersons working in the motorcycle sales sector. A non-probability sampling technique, specifically purposive sampling, was used to recruit respondents who met the criteria (i.e., individuals currently working as salespersons). The number of participants for this study was taken by using G*Power software version 3.1.9.4.

(Faul et. al, 2009). Based on this calculation, the effect size was set at $f^2 = 0.15$, $\alpha = 0.05$, and power $(1-\beta) = 0.80$. The minimum sample size required was 77 participants.

Measurement

Narcissism. To measure the dimensions of narcissism; admiration and rivalry, we used the Indonesian-adapted version of the Narcissistic Admiration and Rivalry Questionnaire (NARQ) by Muttaqin et al. (2023) that was originally conducted by Back et al. (2013). This questionnaire consists of 18 items, which are divided into two main dimensions; admiration consists of 9 items, and rivalry consists of 9 items. This questionnaire response used six options ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree).

Effort. Work Effort Scale (WESC) by Cooman et al. (2009) was used in order to measure the work effort made by salespeople. WESC consists of 10 items divided into three main dimensions; Intensity (4 items), Persistence (3 items), and Direction (3 items). This questionnaire response used seven options ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

Salesperson Outcomes. We measured this aspect by using a self-reported performance indicator. Participants were asked to report the number of motorcycles they sold for the last month, and the average number of motorcycles they sold per month, which served as an objective proxy for their sales performance.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using Jamovi version 2.4.14. Preliminary analyses included descriptive statistics and Pearson correlations among study variables. Scale quality was examined using corrected item-total correlations, Cronbach's alpha, and McDonald's omega.

Construct validity was examined using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) in lavaan through jamovi. The hypothesized measurement model consisted of three factors: admiration, rivalry, and effort. Model fit was evaluated using the comparative fit index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis index (TLI), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), and standardized factor loadings, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE), whereas discriminant validity was assessed using the Fornell-Larcker criterion (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Potential common method bias was examined using full-collinearity variance inflation factor (VIF) approach. Multicollinearity, autocorrelation, and residual normality were also evaluated prior to hypothesis testing. Because the residuals deviated from normality, robust Huber-White standard errors were used in the subsequent mediation analyses.

Two mediation models were estimated separately for sales performance during the previous month and average monthly sales performance. Narcissistic admiration and rivalry were entered as predictors, work effort as the mediator, and age and sales experience as covariates.

Indirect, direct, and total effects were examined using standardized estimates (β), standard errors, z statistics, p-values, and 95% confidence intervals. Statistical significance was set at $p < .05$.

RESEARCH RESULTS

The final sample comprised 231 salespersons. As shown in Table 1, 55.0% of the participants were female, nearly half were aged 25–29 years, and the majority had previous sales

experience. Field salespersons constituted the largest occupational group.

Table 1. Participant Characteristics (N = 231)

Characteristic	Category	N	%
Gender	Male	104	45.0
	Female	127	55.0
Age	19-24	91	39.4
	25-29	109	47.2
	≥ 30	31	13.4
Previous Sales Experience	Yes	196	84.8
	No	35	15.2
Sales Position	Field Sales	155	67.1
	Counter/Dealer Sales	26	11.3
	Digital/Online Sales	18	7.8
	Sales Executive/Consultant	14	6.1
	Other Sales Positions	18	7.8

Note. Percentages may not total exactly 100% because of rounding.

Participants had a mean age of 25.8 years ($SD = 3.50$) and an average of 40.3 months of sales experience ($SD =$

27.5). Descriptive statistics and correlations among the study variables are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Among Study Variables

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1 Admiration	43.3	7.80	—						
2 Rivalry	29.4	12.4	.052	—					
3 Effort	58.1	10.1	.594***	-.249***	—				
4 Outcomes (Last Month)	6.17	3.10	.196**	.022	.143*	—			
5 Outcomes (Average)	6.20	2.75	.222***	-.081	.156*	.707***	—		
6 Age	25.8	3.50	.013	.035	.023	.407***	.393***	—	
7 Sales Experience	40.3	27.5	.019	-.031	.030	.496***	.494***	.757***	—

Note. $p < .05$. $p < .01$. $p < .001$.

Admiration was positively associated with effort ($r = .594$, $p < .001$), previous-month sales ($r = .196$, $p = .003$), and average monthly sales ($r = .222$, $p < .001$). Rivalry was negatively associated with effort ($r = -.249$, $p < .001$) but was unrelated to either sales outcome. Effort showed small

positive associations with previous-month sales ($r = .143$, $p = .029$) and average monthly sales ($r = .156$, $p = .018$). Age and sales experience were positively related to both indicators of sales performance and were strongly correlated with each other ($r = .757$, $p < .001$).

Table 3. Reliability and Convergent Validity of the Study Measures

Variables	Items	Item-Total Correlation	α	ω	CR	AVE	$\sqrt{\text{AVE}}$
Admiration	9	.589 – .733	0.903	0.904	.904	.829	.522
Rivalry	9	.671 – .829	0.935	0.935	.935	.617	.785
Effort	10	.620 – .771	0.925	0.926	.926	.555	.745

All corrected item–total correlations for each measurement exceeded the recommended threshold of .30, indicating satisfactory item functioning. Reliability coefficients were also high across all three constructs.

Confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs) were conducted separately for narcissistic admiration, narcissistic rivalry, and work effort to evaluate the factorial validity of

each construct. For each measurement model, model fit was evaluated using the chi-square statistic (χ^2), comparative fit index (CFI), Tucker–Lewis index (TLI), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) with its 90% confidence interval, and standardized root mean square residual (SRMR). The goodness-of-fit indices for the three measurement models are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Goodness-of-Fit Indices for the Measurement Models

Variables	χ^2	df	p	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	RMSEA 90% CI	SRMR
Narcissistic Admiration	45.9	27	.013	.981	.974	.0551	.0254 – .0818	.0290
Narcissistic Rivalry	215	27	< .001	.881	.841	.173	.152 – .195	.0568
Work Effort	101	35	< .001	.951	.937	.0902	.0699 – .111	.0340

The one-factor model for narcissistic admiration demonstrated good fit to the data, $\chi^2 (27) = 45.9$, $p = .013$, CFI = .981, TLI = .974, RMSEA = .0551, 90% CI [.0254, .0818], and SRMR = .0290. Standardized factor loadings ranged from .617 to .777, indicating that the nine items adequately represented the narcissistic admiration construct.

Similarly, the one-factor model for narcissistic rivalry showed less satisfactory fit to the data, $\chi^2 (27) = 215$, $p < .001$, CFI = .881, TLI = .841, RMSEA = .173, 90% CI [.152, .195], and SRMR = .0568. Nevertheless, all nine rivalry items loaded significantly on the latent construct, with standardized factor loadings ranging from .700 to .869.

The measurement model for work effort also demonstrated acceptable fit to the data, $\chi^2 (35) = 101$, $p < .001$, CFI = .951, TLI = .937, RMSEA = .0902, 90% CI [.0699, .111], and SRMR = .0340. Standardized factor loadings for the 10 effort items ranged

from .650 to .807, supporting the factorial validity of the work effort measure.

Overall, the CFA results provided support for the factorial validity of the three measures, although the one-factor model for narcissistic rivalry showed comparatively weaker overall fit. All indicators demonstrated statistically significant and adequate standardized factor loadings, supporting their representation of the respective latent constructs.

Full-collinearity VIF values ranged from 1.00 to 2.36 and were below the conservative threshold of 3.3 (Kock, 2015), suggesting that common method bias was unlikely to substantially affect the results. There was also no evidence of problematic multicollinearity or autocorrelation (maximum VIF = 2.36; Durbin–Watson = 1.76, $p = .056$). The Shapiro–Wilk test indicated that the residuals deviated from normality ($W = .810$, $p < .001$). Accordingly, robust Huber–White standard errors were used in the mediation analyses.

Table 5. Indirect, Direct, and Total Effects on Outcomes Last Month

Predictor	Effect Type	Estimate	SE	95% C.I. (a)		β	z	p
				Lower	Upper			
Admiration	Indirect	0.010	0.018	-0.025	0.045	0.026	0.578	0.563
Rivalry	Indirect	-0.003	0.005	-0.013	0.007	-0.012	-0.576	0.565
Age	Indirect	0.002	0.004	-0.006	0.009	0.002	0.390	0.697
Sales Experience	Indirect	-0.000	0.000	-0.001	0.001	-0.001	-0.242	0.809
Admiration	Direct	0.063	0.028	0.008	0.119	0.160	2.230	0.026*
Rivalry	Direct	0.009	0.015	-0.020	0.038	0.036	0.599	0.549
Age	Direct	0.060	0.076	-0.088	0.209	0.068	0.794	0.427
Sales Experience	Direct	0.050	0.010	0.031	0.069	0.442	5.165	< 0.001***
Admiration	Total	0.074	0.022	0.030	0.117	0.186	3.319	< 0.001***
Rivalry	Total	0.006	0.014	-0.022	0.034	0.024	0.422	0.673
Age	Total	0.062	0.076	-0.087	0.210	0.070	0.812	0.417
Sales Experience	Total	0.050	0.010	0.031	0.069	0.441	5.141	< 0.001***

Table 6. Path Coefficients of Mediation Model (Outcomes Last Month)

Path	Estimate	SE	β	z	p
Admiration → Effort	0.784	0.064	0.608	12.236	< 0.001***
Rivalry → Effort	-0.229	0.041	-0.282	-5.655	< 0.001***
Effort → Outcomes	0.013	0.023	0.043	0.579	0.563
Age → Effort	0.115	0.219	0.040	0.528	0.598
Sales Experience → Effort	-0.007	0.028	-0.020	-0.266	0.790

For sales outcomes in the last month, the indirect effects of admiration ($\beta = 0.026$, $p = 0.563$), rivalry ($\beta = -0.012$, $p = 0.565$), age ($\beta = 0.002$, $p = 0.697$), and sales experience ($\beta = -0.001$, $p = 0.809$) through effort were not significant, indicating that effort did not mediate these relationships.

The path coefficients showed that admiration had a significant positive effect on effort ($\beta = 0.608$, $p < 0.001$), whereas rivalry had a significant negative effect ($\beta = -0.282$, $p < 0.001$). However, effort did not significantly predict sales outcomes ($\beta = 0.043$, $p = 0.563$). In addition, age and sales experience did not significantly predict effort.

Regarding direct effects, admiration had a significant positive effect on sales outcomes ($\beta = 0.160$, $p = 0.026$), while rivalry and age were not significant predictors. In contrast, sales experience showed a strong positive effect on outcomes ($\beta = 0.442$, $p < 0.001$).

For total effects, admiration ($\beta = 0.186$, $p < 0.001$) and sales experience ($\beta = 0.441$, $p < 0.001$) were significant predictors of sales outcomes, whereas rivalry and age remained non-significant.

Table 7. Indirect, Direct, and Total Effects on Outcomes Monthly Average

Predictor	Effect Type	Estimate	SE	95% C.I. (a)		β	z	p
				Lower	Upper			
Admiration	Indirect	-0.003	0.016	-0.034	0.028	-0.008	-0.188	0.850
Rivalry	Indirect	0.001	0.005	-0.008	0.010	0.004	0.188	0.851
Age	Indirect	-0.000	0.002	-0.005	0.004	-0.001	-0.178	0.859
Sales Experience	Indirect	0.000	0.000	-0.000	0.000	0.000	0.154	0.878
Admiration	Direct	0.080	0.025	0.031	0.129	0.226	3.179	0.001**
Rivalry	Direct	-0.019	0.013	-0.045	0.007	-0.084	-1.427	0.154
Age	Direct	0.045	0.067	-0.086	0.175	0.057	0.670	0.503
Sales Experience	Direct	0.045	0.008	0.028	0.061	0.445	5.244	< 0.001***
Admiration	Total	0.077	0.020	0.038	0.115	0.217	3.921	< 0.001***
Rivalry	Total	-0.018	0.012	-0.042	0.006	-0.081	-1.449	0.147
Age	Total	0.044	0.067	-0.087	0.175	0.056	0.662	0.508
Sales Experience	Total	0.045	0.009	0.028	0.061	0.445	5.236	< 0.001***

Table 8. Path Coefficients of Mediation Model (Outcomes Monthly Average)

Path	Estimate	SE	β	z	p
Admiration → Effort	0.784	0.064	0.608	12.236	< 0.001***
Rivalry → Effort	-0.229	0.041	-0.282	-5.655	< 0.001***
Effort → Outcomes	-0.004	0.020	-0.014	-0.189	0.850
Age → Effort	0.115	0.219	0.040	0.528	0.598
Sales Experience → Effort	-0.007	0.028	-0.020	-0.266	0.790

For average monthly sales outcomes, the indirect effects of admiration ($\beta = -0.008$, $p = 0.850$), rivalry ($\beta = 0.004$, $p = 0.851$), age ($\beta = -0.001$, $p = 0.859$), and sales experience ($\beta = 0.000$, $p = 0.878$) through effort were not significant.

Consistent with the previous model, admiration positively predicted effort ($\beta = 0.608$, $p < 0.001$), and rivalry negatively predicted effort ($\beta = -0.282$, $p < 0.001$). However, effort did not significantly predict average monthly outcomes ($\beta = -0.014$, $p = 0.850$). Age and sales experience also did not significantly predict effort.

In terms of direct effects, admiration had a significant positive effect on average monthly outcomes ($\beta = 0.226$, $p = 0.001$), while rivalry and age were not significant predictors. Sales experience again showed a strong positive effect ($\beta = 0.445$, $p < 0.001$).

The total effects indicated that admiration ($\beta = 0.217$, $p < 0.001$) and sales experience ($\beta = 0.445$, $p < 0.001$) were significant predictors, whereas rivalry and age remained non-significant.

The analysis results showed that there was no mediating effect of effort in either outcome model, both for outcomes in the last month and average monthly outcomes (all $p > 0.05$). Although admiration and rivalry significantly influenced effort, effort did not significantly influence outcomes, thus failing to meet the criteria for a mediator. Directly, admiration and sales experience consistently showed a significant positive effect on both types of outcomes, whereas rivalry and age did not show significant effects.

DISCUSSION

The present study examined the relationships between narcissistic admiration, narcissistic rivalry, effort, and salesperson outcomes among salespersons. Overall, the findings suggest that admiration represents a more adaptive dimension of narcissism in sales contexts, whereas rivalry appears to be associated with reduced effort without directly affecting salesperson outcomes. Contrary to expectations, effort did not mediate the relationships between narcissistic admiration, narcissistic rivalry, and salesperson outcomes. Among the control variables, sales experience consistently demonstrated a positive effect on salesperson outcomes, while age was not a significant predictor.

One of the main findings of this study is that narcissistic admiration positively predicted salesperson outcomes, both in terms of outcomes achieved in the last month and average monthly outcomes. This finding is consistent with the Narcissistic Admiration and Rivalry Concept (NARC), which conceptualizes admiration as an assertive self-enhancement strategy characterized by grandiosity, charm, self-confidence, and a strong motivation to obtain social admiration (Back et al., 2013). Individuals high in admiration are motivated to maintain a positive self-image and gain recognition from others by demonstrating competence and success. In sales environments, where success is often visible and closely tied to rewards, status, and recognition, such motivations may encourage salespersons to engage in behaviors that facilitate higher performance. This finding is also consistent with Trait Activation Theory (Tett et al., 2021), which suggests that personality traits are expressed when relevant situational cues are present. Because sales positions require persuasion, self-presentation, and achievement striving, characteristics associated with admiration may be particularly beneficial for achieving favorable sales outcomes.

The findings further revealed that narcissistic admiration positively predicted effort. This result is

consistent with self-regulation theory, which conceptualizes behavior as a goal-directed process in which individuals allocate resources to attain desired outcomes (Lord et al., 2010; Inzlicht et al., 2021). According to Back et al. (2013), individuals high in admiration strive to obtain social admiration and maintain a positive self-view. Because successful performance can serve as evidence of competence and superiority, individuals with higher levels of admiration may be more willing to invest effort in work-related activities. This interpretation is supported by previous studies showing that admiration is positively associated with optimism (Ma et al., 2026) and mental toughness (Manley et al., 2019). These characteristics may strengthen individuals' confidence in their ability to achieve desired outcomes and sustain their persistence when pursuing achievement-related goals. Consequently, individuals high in admiration are likely to perceive effort investment as an effective means of attaining recognition and reinforcing their grandiose self-image. This finding is also in line with prior research suggesting that effort serves as an important mechanism linking individual characteristics to performance outcomes (Halperin & Vigotsky, 2024). Similarly, Roberts et al. (2019) found that narcissism exerted a positive indirect effect on performance through effort when self-enhancement motives were high, suggesting that the desire to maintain a favorable self-image can motivate greater effort expenditure.

In contrast, narcissistic rivalry negatively predicted effort but did not significantly predict salesperson outcomes. This finding is partially consistent with the NARC model, which characterizes rivalry as an antagonistic self-protection strategy aimed at avoiding failure and protecting the self from threats through hostility, devaluation of others, and defensive behaviors (Back et al., 2013). Individuals high in rivalry may devote substantial psychological resources to managing perceived threats and maintaining superiority over others rather than investing effort in productive work activities. This interpretation is consistent with evidence suggesting that rivalry is negatively associated with optimism (Ma et al., 2026) and social belonging (Zheng et al., 2026). However, the absence of a direct effect on salesperson outcomes suggests that reduced effort alone may not be sufficient to impair objective sales performance. Sales outcomes are influenced by numerous factors beyond personality, including selling skills, customer relationships, market opportunities, and accumulated experience (Churchill et al., 1985; Herjanto & Franklin, 2018). Therefore, although rivalry may reduce effort, its impact may not necessarily translate into lower sales outcomes.

Contrary to our hypothesis, effort did not mediate the relationships between narcissistic admiration, narcissistic rivalry, and salesperson outcomes. This finding contrasts with previous research demonstrating that greater work effort generally contributes to higher job performance (Brown & Peterson, 1994; Posada et al., 2017). A meta-analysis by Van Iddekinge et al. (2022) likewise concluded that work effort is among the strongest predictors of both behavioral and outcome aspects of job performance.

However, the present findings suggest that the role of effort may be more nuanced in sales contexts than previously assumed. One possible explanation is that salesperson outcomes depend not only on the quantity of effort invested, but also on the effectiveness with which that effort is translated into customer-facing behaviors. Although effort reflects individuals' behavioral investment in goal pursuit, successful sales performance requires salespersons to channel this investment into activities such as building customer trust, identifying customer needs, adapting selling strategies, negotiating effectively, and maintaining long-term customer relationships (Churchill et al., 1985; Herjanto & Franklin, 2018). Consequently, salespersons who invest comparable levels of effort may nevertheless achieve substantially different outcomes because they differ in the quality rather than the quantity of their work behaviors. In this sense, effort may represent a necessary but insufficient condition for salesperson success. This interpretation is also consistent with Halperin and Vigotsky's (2024) mediation framework, which emphasizes that effective effort—not merely greater effort—is responsible for enhancing performance. Their framework suggests that effort contributes to performance only when it is strategically directed toward goal-relevant activities. Therefore, the absence of a significant mediating effect in the present study does not necessarily challenge the importance of effort; rather, it indicates that effort alone may not constitute the primary mechanism through which narcissistic admiration and rivalry influence salesperson outcomes. Instead, the effectiveness of effort allocation appears to be more critical than its absolute magnitude in determining sales success.

From a self-regulation perspective, effort functions as a mechanism through which individuals attempt to reduce discrepancies between current performance and desired goals (Lord et al., 2010). From the perspective of Trait Activation Theory, the findings further suggest that activating a personality trait does not necessarily guarantee improved job performance. Rather, the consequences of trait activation depend on whether the activated behaviors are adaptive within a particular work context. In sales environments, admiration may activate behaviors such as confidence, assertiveness, and persuasive self-presentation, which are highly valued in customer interactions. Conversely, rivalry may activate defensive competitiveness and interpersonal antagonism, which may consume self-regulatory resources without contributing directly to successful sales performance. Thus, Trait Activation Theory and Self-Regulation Theory together suggest that activated personality traits influence performance only when they produce adaptive goal-directed behaviors. However, self-regulation theory does not assume that effort automatically leads to successful outcomes. Instead, successful goal attainment depends on how effectively regulatory resources are directed toward goal-relevant behaviors (Inzlicht et al., 2021). Therefore, effort may represent only one component of the self-regulation process, whereas other mechanisms such as goal commitment, self-efficacy, adaptive selling

behavior, or interpersonal influence may play a more proximal role in determining salesperson outcomes. This explanation may be particularly relevant in the context of narcissism. Morf (2006) argued that narcissists often engage in self-regulatory processes aimed at maintaining a grandiose self-image; however, these efforts can paradoxically create conditions that undermine future success. Consequently, the effort invested by narcissistic individuals may not always be directed toward behaviors that maximize objective performance outcomes. Instead, some effort may be allocated toward self-enhancement, impression management, or ego-protective strategies, which help maintain a favorable self-view but do not necessarily improve sales outcomes.

The findings also raise the possibility that narcissistic admiration influences salesperson outcomes through mechanisms other than effort. Individuals high in admiration are characterized by interpersonal confidence, social boldness, charisma, and assertive self-presentation (Back et al., 2013). These characteristics may directly facilitate customer interactions by enhancing persuasive communication, increasing customer confidence, and creating favorable first impressions. Consequently, admiration may contribute to salesperson outcomes primarily through interpersonal effectiveness rather than greater behavioral effort. Future studies should therefore examine alternative mechanisms such as adaptive selling behavior, customer orientation, interpersonal influence, persuasion, or impression management.

In terms of the control variables, sales experience consistently emerged as a significant predictor of salesperson outcomes across both outcome measures. This finding is consistent with previous sales literature suggesting that accumulated experience enables salespersons to develop more effective selling strategies, improve customer understanding, and refine relationship-building skills over time (Churchill et al., 1985; Herjanto & Franklin, 2018). In addition, Chawla et al. (2020), building on the framework of Ford et al. (1987), identified work experience as one of the biographical factors that have long been examined as determinants of salesperson performance. Therefore, salespersons with greater experience may possess more developed selling knowledge, stronger customer management capabilities, and a better understanding of market dynamics, which contribute to superior sales outcomes. Interestingly, sales experience did not significantly predict effort, suggesting that experienced salespersons may achieve superior outcomes not necessarily by working harder, but by working more effectively. This finding further supports the notion that the quality and effectiveness of effort may be more important than the quantity of effort in determining salesperson outcomes. In contrast, age did not significantly predict salesperson outcomes. Although age has frequently been included among biographical factors associated with sales performance (Chawla et al., 2020), the present findings suggest that chronological age may be less relevant than job

related experience in explaining performance differences among salespersons. This may be because sales-specific knowledge and skills are acquired primarily through work experience rather than age itself.

IMPLICATIONS

The present findings contribute to the Narcissistic Admiration and Rivalry Concept by demonstrating that admiration and rivalry differ not only in their motivational orientation but also in the behavioral pathways through which they influence work outcomes. More importantly, the findings suggest that effort may not represent the principal mechanism linking narcissistic traits with salesperson outcomes in competitive sales environments. Instead, narcissistic admiration appears to influence objective salesperson outcomes more directly, whereas rivalry primarily affects motivational investment without producing measurable performance consequences. This distinction extends Trait Activation Theory by suggesting that activated personality traits influence performance through multiple behavioral pathways rather than through effort alone. Likewise, the findings refine Self-Regulation Theory by indicating that successful performance depends not only on the amount of effort invested but also on how effectively self-regulatory resources are translated into adaptive interpersonal behaviors.

Future studies should investigate alternative mediating mechanisms that may more directly connect narcissistic admiration with salesperson outcomes. Constructs such as adaptive selling behavior, interpersonal influence, customer orientation, persuasive communication, impression management, and social intelligence may represent more proximal behavioral mechanisms than effort. Examining these mechanisms would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of how grandiose narcissism facilitates success in highly competitive sales environments.

CONCLUSION

These findings suggest that narcissistic admiration positively predicted both effort and salesperson outcomes, whereas narcissistic rivalry negatively predicted effort but showed no significant relationship with salesperson outcomes. Furthermore, effort did not mediate the relationships between narcissistic admiration, narcissistic rivalry, and salesperson outcomes, indicating that effort alone may not explain how narcissistic traits influence sales performance. These findings highlight the importance of distinguishing between the two dimensions of grandiose narcissism and suggest that the effectiveness of effort, rather than the amount of effort invested, may play a more important role in shaping salesperson outcomes.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The authors sincerely express their gratitude to all salespersons working in the motorcycle sales sector who participated in this study and generously shared their

valuable time and experiences. Their contributions and willingness to participate were important to the completion of this research.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles applicable to research involving human participants. Prior to participation, all respondents were informed about the purpose and procedures of the study, and their participation was voluntary. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection. Participants were also informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time and that their responses would be treated confidentially and used solely for research purposes.

DECLARATION OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest.

TRANSPARENCY OF DATA

The data underlying the findings of this study can be obtained from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

FUNDING

This research was not funded by any external institutions or organizations.

AUTHOR'S CONTRIBUTIONS

The author was responsible for the study's conceptualization and design, data collection, data analysis, interpretation of results, manuscript drafting, and manuscript revision. The supervisor provided academic supervision throughout the research process, contributed to the development of the methodology, monitored the study's progress, critically evaluated the manuscript, and approved the final version of the manuscript.

STATEMENT ON THE USE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

The authors used artificial intelligence (AI)-assisted tools solely to support language refinement, grammar checking, and improvement of manuscript readability during the writing process. All intellectual contributions, including the study design, data collection, analysis, interpretation of findings, and conclusions, were conducted entirely by the authors. The authors carefully reviewed, verified, and edited all AI-assisted outputs and assume full responsibility for the accuracy, integrity, and originality of the content presented in this manuscript.

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