



# Professional personal branding:

An Investigation of the Process How Recruiters Judge the Perceived Credibility of Job Applicants Based on Their LinkedIn Profile Picture

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Master's Thesis

20 June 2015

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## ABSTRACT

Formally, in the process of hiring, employers should only take into consideration objective information and the requirements which are necessary for the vacant position that could be of influence on future performance of an individual. However, in practice there are several other subjective influencing factors (e.g. ethnicity, physical appearance and gender). This research aims to assess how and why recruitment professionals perceive a job candidate as credible when screening LinkedIn profiles for future candidates. This study is conducted by qualitatively exploring the three components of Ohanian's (1990) perceived credibility: attractiveness, trust and expertise. By means of the *think-aloud method* in interviews and photo elicitation, that is showing visualisations of seven different visual cues (e.g. smiling, formal attire) eleven recruitment professionals are questioned about their underlying motives and thoughts while judging the job applicants. A nuance in business sector is applied as this study focuses on a marketing consultant. The findings of this study suggest that recruitments professionals make an effort to systematically and rationally judge job applicants, however unconsciously, their online information processing is led by simple judgmental heuristics such as visual cues in a profile picture. Especially the cues of smiling and eye-contact appear to have a positive influence on the perception of perceived credibility. In addition, the findings indicate that the visual cue of attire can be used by job applicants to express the perceived fit with a type of organisation, formal (e.g. corporate organisation) or informal (e.g. start-up). With this knowledge, the likelihood to obtain a job interview for starters or graduates is just a few visual cues away.

**KEYWORDS:** *Online Personal branding, LinkedIn, E-recruitment, Social Information Processing, Self-presentation*

## Acknowledgements

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*“It always seems impossible, until it’s done” – Nelson Mandela*

Less than a year ago, it felt like a mission impossible to find an interesting topic, conduct a successful research and to complete it between the set time limit. At this moment, that seems to be in the distant past. I enjoyed the couple months of research and I hope to be able to contribute, although small, to existing studies on professional personal branding online.

First of all, I wish to express my sincere gratitude to the respondents that were willingly to cooperate in the interviews. They provided me with in-depth insights, and without their effort, time and experience, I would not have been able to complete this research. In addition, I would like to thank my parents for their unwavering support and encouragement when sometimes things felt out of reach. Additionally, I want to express my gratitude in particular to my siblings, whom both have shown nothing but support and occasionally turned my frown upside down. Edgar, thank you for your endless wisdom, your constructive criticism, your scarce time but most of all, the suggestion that brought me to the eventual topic of this research. Yorick, I would like to thank you for being the subject of this study. Hopefully, my findings will benefit your LinkedIn profile someday (or otherwise will stimulate a profession in modelling). Moreover, I would also like to express my gratitude to Hans Wijker, who was so kind to offer me his scarce time and professional photograph services for free.

Lastly, but certainly not least, I want to express my profound gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Sarah van der Land for her excellent guidance, insightful feedback and enduring patience. Were it not for her help, the end of this thesis would still not have been in sight.

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# 1 Introduction

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Several studies have discussed and tried to answer the question what influences the hiring decisions of recruiters (Caers & Castelyns, 2010; Bagues & Perez-Villadoniga, 2012; Vrooman, Gijssberts and Boelhouwer, 2014). Formally, in the process of hiring, employers should only take into consideration the objective information and requirements which are necessary for the vacant position and that could be of influence on future performance of an individual. However, in practice, research has indicated there are several other subjective influencing factors such as gender (Olian, Schwab & Haberfield, 1988; Isaac, Lee & Carnes, 2009), age (Richardson, Webb, Webber & Smith, 2013), ethnicity (Gerdes & Garber, 1983; Heilman, 2012; Blommaert, Coenders & van Tubergen, 2014) and physical appearance (Hartfield, 1986, Wiegman, 2014).

When people communicate, they gather information about the other in order to know how to respond or what to expect (Siibak, 2009). The Social Information Processing theory by Walther (1993) describes how people form and manage impressions and relationships online. He states that in face-to-face communication perception is based on non-verbal characteristics. In online communication, verbal characteristics are missing. Therefore, impressions are formed based on the information available online, such as visual cues by looking at pictures. Examples of visual cues can be age, ethnicity, obesity and facial attractiveness (Caers & Castelyns, 2010).

Profile pictures receive the most attention, considering that they are the first thing people look at on Social Network Sites (SNSs) (Hum, Chamberlin, Hambright, Portwood, Schat and Bevan, 2011). Furthermore, facial attractiveness seems to be an important factor and can increase your chance of being recruited (Hartfield, 1986). This is supported by a recent study of the Dutch ‘Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau’ where they explored in what ways attractiveness, physical and mental health are related to success in life by means of judging profile pictures (Vrooman et al, 2014). The findings emphasize that physically attractive individuals who have a high self-esteem have more success in life, regardless of their education, work experience, ethnicity, age or gender (Wiegman, 2014; Vrooman et al, 2014). Findings indicate that investing in visual cues such as personal care and clothing have a positive response on perception. Especially on the job market this can be particularly useful.

The rise of Social Network Sites (SNSs) enables recruitment professionals to access online profiles with personal information and pictures of job applicants (Kluemper & Rosen, 2009). Not only did it increase the size of their pool of potential candidates, but it also resulted in a growing amount of recruiters conducting online checks on job applicants since online profiles provide a good source for non-verbal characteristics (Clark & Roberts, 2010). Personal



information uploaded by Social Network users serves as a reference check, a source for background information and may even contribute to whether an applicant is selected for an interview or not (Roberts & Roach, 2009; Clark & Roberts, 2010).

In 2012, Forbes Magazine declared LinkedIn to be the best career-website (Adams, 2010). However, its popularity had already been increasing among recruitment professionals as early as 2006 (King, 2006; Roberts & Roach, 2009; Archambault & Grudin, 2012; Chiang & Suen, 2015). LinkedIn allows an individual to plan future career steps by building a network of professionals, sharing experiences and market skills (LinkedIn, n.d.). Globally, LinkedIn currently has over 300 million members and it strives to connect professionals worldwide to increase their success and productivity (LinkedIn, n.d.).

The success and increasing use of LinkedIn by job applicants as well as recruitment professionals indicates that SNSs influences recruiters in such a way, during the recruitment process, that a bias may already arise in the first selection procedure (Caers & Castelyns, 2010; Clark & Roberts, 2010). When taking into account the findings of Hum et al. (2011); that on SNSs the profile picture is the first thing people look at and is also the most important aspect for image construction and relational success, the importance of visual cues becomes apparent. In addition, Van't Wout & Sanfey (2008) illustrate that a human face is vital in forming a reliable and strong impression of someone.

Job applicants have also become more aware of the opportunities accompanying the increasing popularity of the online assessment of personal profiles by future employers (Kluemper & Rosen, 2009). Since the online profile of people serves as the first impression one receives of you as an individual and communicates your personality, individuals actively engage in impression management, also known as self-presentation (Gosling, Gaddis and Vazire, 2007). According to (Leary & Kowalski, 1990) this can be defined as “the process by which individuals attempt to control the impressions others form of them” (p. 34). Since people have more control over their self-presentation online than in face-to-face communication, impressions that other people receive of you can therefore be strategically planned (Krämer & Winter, 2008). Ohanian (1990) states that the perceived credibility of an individual consists of three factors: attractiveness, expertise and trust. By looking at these three factors, it is possible to assess an individual's credibility.

This research helps to assess how and why recruitment professionals perceive a job candidate as credible when screening LinkedIn profiles for future candidates, and how this could provide advantages. In this research, one is considered to be a recruitment professional if he or she spends at least 20 hours a week in recruiting potential job candidates, over a period

of at least 1 year. The research gap this study addresses is that it will be the first study that uses a qualitative method to examine the decision making process of recruitment professionals in relation to how a profile photo contributes to a higher perceived credibility of job applicants. Studies that have approached this phenomenon, all used a quantitative approach (i.e. experiments) and only focused on outcome variables such as job interview success (Van der Land & Muntinga, 2014) or recruitment and self-presentation on SNSs (King, 2006; Joos, 2008; Roberts & Roach, 2009; Papacharissi, 2009; Hunt, 2010; Caers & Castelyns, 2010; Clark, 2010; Zide et al, 2014).

The aim of this study is to explore how visual cues (*attractiveness, expertise and trust*) are represented in the decision-making process of recruiters on whether to select an individual as a possible future employee. Therefore, the following research question is formulated: “*How does a LinkedIn profile picture contribute to the perceived credibility of a job applicant on the likelihood to obtain a job interview?*”

By approaching this phenomenon in a qualitative manner, using photo elicitation within interviews, this study hopes to provide new detailed insights in successful online self-presentation via LinkedIn. It is hereby important that particularly recruitment professionals are approached. When interviewing someone from the general public, the findings are less likely to reveal the insights used by recruitment professionals, but rather those insights the general public assumes professionals use to assess. Prior studies were mostly quantitative in nature, and conducted experiments among students (Caers & Castelyns, 2010; Van der Land & Muntinga, 2014; Van der Land, Willemsen & Unkel, 2015). This study however, focuses on recruiters and seeks to obtain highly detailed data and an in-depth understanding on the decision-making *process* they undergo when selecting a job applicant for a job-interview. The indicated cannot be explored by conducting a quantitative study.

The scientific relevance of this research is that it provides an in-depth investigation on how self-presentation on business-oriented social network platform affects the perspective of recruiters. This study contributes to research since – to the best of our knowledge – no attempts have been made to operationalize the perspective of recruitment professionals. It will be designed to provide in-depth data and insights into the cognitive process of perception during the selection procedure. In addition, the underlying motivations of behaviour of recruitment professionals can be addressed. The societal and practical relevance of this research is the gain of valuable knowledge on professional personal branding which could provide recruitment advantages for graduates and starters, with little work-experience, in successfully obtaining a job interview, evidently increasing the chance of getting hired. Conforming to research that

demonstrates graduates and starters have a disadvantage in obtaining a job interview in comparison to older “more experienced” job applicants (Richardson et al., 2013).

The remainder of this thesis is structured as follows. In the next section, an outline of the theoretical framework is provided. Here, an analysis of previous research on the subject will be given and the main concepts will be introduced. Hereafter, the methodology will be discussed followed by the results, a discussion of the results and subsequently the conclusion of this research.

## 2 Theoretical framework

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In this section we review the literature on key concepts such as online information processing, perceived credibility, visual cues and likelihood to obtain a job for a job applicant. The purpose of this framework is to create a theoretical foundation for positioning the responses of the recruitment professionals to our selection of visual cues which is discussed in the method section. Hereby a special focus is upon an individual's cognitive process and information processing, as this study aims to gain insight in the decision-making *process* of recruitment professionals. Moreover, it is important to note that this research wants to apply an inductive approach concerning existing theory about visual cues as the researcher does not solely want to be guided (e.g. limited) by prior studies.

### 2.1 *Online information processing*

There are several theories on how people process information (Walther, 1993; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Chen & Chaiken, 1999). The fundamentals of the information processing theory lie within the cognitive psychology (Anderson, 1990). Simplified, the premise of the information is as follows: our surroundings provide input of data, which is also known as the stimulus (Anderson, 1990). What follows is a series of stages of processing in which the stimulus is coded or shaped. Subsequently, an output is produced in which an appropriate response is formed (Anderson, 1990). As this study especially focuses on a decision-making *process*, the theories on the social perspective (Walther, 1993; Fulk, Steinfeld, Schmitz & Power, 1987) and cognitive perspective (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Chen & Chaiken, 1999) of information processing are of interest.

### *Social information processing*

The Social Information Process theory (SIP) (Walther, 1993) assumes that, when communicating, individuals always form impressions regardless of the medium being used. Nevertheless, as non-verbal cues are missing in online communication, individuals tend to look for other cues that may be used to shape impressions than when communicating face-to-face (Walther, 1993). Therefore, even the simplest cues could have a major impact on impression formation, which indicates that interpersonal communication is just as important as face-to-face communication. In addition, Walther (1993) emphasizes that the online development of relations requires more time since online impression formation takes longer.

The main principle of the SIP is that meaning is socially constructed (Fulk et al.,

1987). That is, perception and behaviour are influenced by numerous objective characteristics in the direct surroundings of an individual. The influence of the social environment must therefore not be underestimated, as every perceived rationally taken decision may be considered as subjective (Fulk et al., 1987). The study of Fulk et al. (1987) demonstrates that work-related SIP consists of three presumptions. First and foremost, the perception of work-related tasks and decisions is subjective. Work-performance varies per individual and depends on social context. The second presumption is that the eye for certain details is different in every work-environment and mainly depends on social cues received from co-workers (Fulk et al., 1987). Thirdly, decisions are made with constraints due to past behaviour and social cues such as norms in a work-environment (Fulk et al., 1987).

### *Cognitive information processing*

The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) proposed by Petty & Cacioppo (1986) focusses on a cognitive approach of information processing rather than on a social one. In summary, this model distinguishes two routes that may result in persuasion; the central route (direct) and the peripheral route (indirect). The difference is that the central route requires a great deal of attention considering that information is processed rationally, something that is not necessary for processing via the indirect route. Rather, the indirect route is a decision process that is dependent on simple judgmental heuristics (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Simple characteristics such as whether one likes a person or not could already be of great influence. When reflecting this on the decision process of recruiters, or how they process information, it may be assumed that selecting job candidates is such an automated task that the recruitment professionals do not take these decisions rationally. In comparison to the social information processing perspective, recruiters may be led by judgmental heuristics in their decisions, such as visual cues in a profile picture and not by their social environment.

A dual processing model quite similar to the ELM is the Heuristics-Systematic Model (HSM) by Chen & Chaiken (1999). This model aims to explain how individuals receive and process messages. Although the original intent of the HSM is to examine persuasive messaging, it could also provide some helpful insights in the field of e-recruitment, considering that self-presentation can be seen as a form of persuasive messaging as the underlying motivation is to influence the perception of recruitment professionals (Leary & Kowalski, 1990). The HSM is based on the principle of sufficiency (Chaiken & Trope, 1999). This means that in terms of information processing, individuals seek the most convenient way to gather information with the least amount of effort. Therefore, the belief is that while processing a persuasive message,

one only uses a limited amount of his cognitive resources (Chaiken & Trope, 1999; Chen & Chaiken, 1999).

According to the model, individuals can process information in two modes, systematically or based on heuristics. As the model assumes that people are instinctively choosing for the least amount of effort, the first mode of processing is when perception is led by simple heuristics. By doing so, individuals apply a short-cut in the decision-making process (Chen & Chaiken, 1999). On the other hand, some messages require more effort to process, which results in a systematic way of information processing. Examples of situations in which this occurs can be when it concerns more detailed information, for e.g. when looking at advantages or disadvantages of a given argument or when one does not agree with a message, fears the message or is personally affected by a message (Chen & Chaiken, 1999).

Thus, when comparing the HSM with the ELM, one major difference between the two models can be identified. The ELM assumes there are two ways of information processing. Perception is based on heuristics or on a rational approach (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), however it is the choice of the perceiver which mode of processing is followed. Yet, the HSM assumes that a person is most likely to process information based on heuristics as this way of information processing requires the least cognitive effort. When the message is more complicated, a person is required to put in more effort. In this case, an individual cannot rely on the heuristic approach, which results in the systematic approach of processing information (Chaiken & Trope, 1999; Chen & Chaiken, 1999). In terms of recruitment this could indicate that when a recruitment professional is searching for job applicants and has found one consistently matching to the job criteria, the perception of the recruitment professional would be influenced by simple heuristics present on an online profile, as the instinct of the recruitment professional chooses to process with limited cognitive resources. This could both positively or negatively influence the chances of the job applicant, dependant on the available heuristics (e.g. representative profile or decent photo) (Caers & Castelyns, 2010).

In addition to aforementioned findings, Bilal & Kirby (2002) argue that the amount in which individuals are being led by judgmental heuristics, depends on the amount of web experience these users have. Users that have more experience on the web are more likely to vary between decision-making routines. This could imply that an user sometimes prefers the direct route of information processing, though in other cases prefers the indirect route of information processing. Thus, the user would not per definition choose for the most convenient way of information processing, but alternates between the two modes (Bilal & Kirby, 2002).

### *Visual impression management*

Although it can be assumed that when Walther (1993), Petty & Cacioppo (1986) and Chen & Chaiken (1999) published their theories, social media were not as popular as they are nowadays, whereas the first SNS was launched in 1997 (Ellison, 2007), their findings are fundamental in understanding contemporary impression management online. From these findings, it can be concluded that impression formation is based on certain cues available online and that it is tempting to process information in the most convenient way by making decisions based on simple cues. LinkedIn can be considered to provide these visual cues.

In addition, Chiang & Suen (2015), who in their study applied the ELM to recruitment in online community context, argue that recruitment professionals use visual cues (heuristics) from the online profiles of job applicants and that these cues can evoke positive responses amongst the recruitment professionals. This happens solely if they are under the impression that the source is credible. Additionally Chiang & Suen (2015) suggest that these cues are sometimes even more important than job related information, such as prior work experience or education.

Research has indicated that a profile picture is one of the most important tools that people use for visual impression management nowadays (Ellison, Heino and Gibbs, 2006; Sabiik, 2009; Hum et al, 2011). According to a study conducted by Sabiik (2009) amongst adolescents in Estonia, users of SNS are trying to create an online ‘ideal self’ through photos. This ideal self is gender-related (Sabiik, 2009). The results of the research of Sabiik (2009) indicated that girls, above all, attach great value to beauty and looks. In addition, displaying the feminine side was found very important as well. This coincides with existing beauty norms associated with the traditional role of gender (Strano, 2008; Sabiik, 2009). Boys on the other hand were more lax in their choice for a profile photo (Sabiik, 2009). However, it must be said that these findings do not completely fall in line those of Hum et al. (2011). Hum et al. (2011) argues that, in an online context, there are no differences in gender roles. Both males as females aim for similar perceptions when choosing their profile picture (Hum et al., 2014).

As a profile picture offers the first important clue of an individual’s online identity, it is evident that a profile picture is not only used as a display of physical appearance, but also displays and support the qualities and textual claims an individual makes at his/her profile (Hum et al., 2011; Ellison et al, 2006). Consequently, a profile picture can be a great tool to show one’s qualities, especially considering that a job applicant intends to ‘sell’ his or her qualities to a future employer in order to successfully obtain a job interview. Therefore, the message a profile picture conveys should be considered as one of the most important factor when

constructing one's professional online image.

There are also factors of impact on impression formation, out of control of an individual. In practice, these are factors such as race, age and gender that appear to have a crucial role in the recruitment process (Blommaert et al., 2014; Gerdes & Garber, 1983; Heilman, 2012; Richardson et al., 2013). Blommaert et al. (2014) conducted a research in the Netherlands towards ethnic discrimination in the hiring procedure. She created identical résumés that only differed in applicants name (e.g. a Dutch or Arabic name). Her findings indicated that job applicants with a Dutch name were more likely to be viewed by recruitment professionals and besides had a higher chance of being invited for job interviews. This in contrary to the job applicants with an Arabic name, whom, regardless of education or qualifications, received less views. These findings demonstrate that recruitment professionals are sensitive to certain influences, in this case ethnicity, and that bias already occurs in the very first phase of the selection process.

Moreover, Heilman (2012) argues that in a work setting there is a tendency amongst recruitment professionals to evaluate and judge job applicants based on gender stereotypes. This has most often negative consequences for women, especially in job functions that are associated with male-gender typed (Heilman, 2012). Furthermore also age appears to have an direct effect on the hiring decisions of recruitment professionals (Richardson et al., 2013). The findings of Richardson et al. (2013) imply that age discrimination especially occurs amongst older job applicants (e.g. above the age of 48) and that this age-group has a disadvantage in comparison to job applicants younger in age (e.g. between the age of 33-48 years old). In addition, older job applicants were perceived to perform less good in the areas of sociability and trainability (Richardson et al., 2013). However, age discrimination does not occur solely amongst older aged applicants. Job applicants too young in age (e.g. below the age of 33) appeared to have a disadvantage as well and where less likely to be hired (Richardson et al., 2013).

## 2.2 *Perceived credibility*

If one sets aside characteristics such as race, age and gender and instead focusses on characteristics that can be controlled, one can change a person's appearance by means of clothing, personal care and selecting the most advantageous camera angle. In other words, it can be argued that – to a certain extent - it is possible to control one's perceived credibility. Here, one must first define what is meant by perceived credibility. According to Ohanian's Credibility Model (Ohanian, 1990), the credibility of an endorser depends on perceived



attractiveness, trustworthiness and level of expertise. Taking into account that some recruiters select online, a recruiter's first impression, may be acquired from one's LinkedIn profile. In the following sections an attempt will be made to operationalise the various components attributing to Ohanian's Credibility Model (Ohanian, 1990).

The first component that may increase perceived credibility is perceived attractiveness (Wiegman, 2014; Lau, 1982; Otta, Delevati, Cesar and Pires, 1994). Wiegman (2014) implies that good looks result in an increased chance of being invited for a job interview, regardless of the job description. According to prior research, a possible explanation could be that physical attractiveness stimulates the initial impression one has of someone and, consequently, positively influences the (future) academic potential (Feingold, 1992; Hosoda, Stone-Romero & Coats, 2003). This implies that good looks provides advantages for one. Strikingly, the physical attractiveness of one could be the crucial factor for decision makers when interviewing job applicants with a comparable level of expertise (Hosoda et al., 2003). However, even without good looks it is still possible to control physical appearance in a positive manner (Wiegman, 2014).

The second component that may increase perceived credibility is perceived trustworthiness (Todorov & Duchaine, 2008; Frith & Frith, 1999; Todorov, Pakrashi & Oosterhof, 2009). According to Erikson (1953), basic trust is the main ingredient for a healthy personality. Moreover, Darby and Jeffers (1988) suggest that perceived attractiveness also has an influence on the perception of trust. After being exposed at least 33 ms to a face, people are already deciding whether a face is trustworthy or not (Todorov & Duchaine, 2008). This does not change if one is exposed longer to a face.

The third component that may increase the perceived credibility is perceived expertise (Ohanian, 1990). Expertise can be defined as the skill or knowledge one has in a particular field (Oxford Dictionary, n.d.). Knowledge and skills are evaluated by looking at the prior learning of a job applicant (Berglund & Andersson, 2012). For e.g. by looking at certificates and prior work experience. The aforementioned factors combined are of influence on the evaluation of recruitment professional during the selection and interview procedure of a job applicant (Dipboye, 1992; Stevens & Kristof, 1995). Thus, when taking into consideration that according to Ohanian (1990) a high level of perceived attractiveness, trustworthiness and expertise results into a high perceived credibility, which characteristics can be altered in order to influence the aforementioned components of Ohanian's perceived credibility (Ohanian, 1990)?

### 2.3 *Visual cues of influence on perceived credibility*

Prior studies demonstrate that there are several visual cues that tend to evoke a certain perception (Lau, 1982; Otta et al., 1994; Sundaram & Webster, 2000; Burgoon, 1985; Fodness, 1994; Forsythe, 1990; Noyima, 2003)

#### *Smiling*

Early research performed by Lau (1982) and Otta et al. (1994) mentions that an individual may increase his or her likability and attractiveness by smiling. In the study of Lau (1982), average-looking subjects were chosen to avoid the effects of physical attractiveness. The results show that smiling subjects were considered to be intelligent, nice, pleasant and bright (Lau, 1982). This is mostly due to the fact that overall, a smile is associated with happiness (Ekman & Friesen, 1975). In addition, happy people are acknowledged to be more sincere and sociable in comparison to non-smiling people as this is thought to be the underlying motivation for their happiness (Reis, Wilson, Monestere, Bernstein, Clark, Seidl, Franco, Gioioso, Freeman & Radoane, 1990). However, some findings indicated that there is a difference in gender in smiling (Otta et al, 1994). With women, a broad smile (teeth and gums showing) was rated the same as a neutral face, while a smile with mouth closed and a moderately laughing smile were rated as positive. With men it was the other way around, mostly being rated as handsome when displaying a broad smile.

#### *Attire*

Not only smiling appears to have an effect on someone's perception, also clothing triggers a response. In general, clothing may be used to accentuate certain parts of the body in order to create a positive image and can also impact your presentation, credibility and appearance. In addition, professional clothing conveys a professional attitude (Hartmans, Heremans, Lagrain, Asch and Schoenmakers, 2014). Hartmans et al. (2014) conducted research among Belgium citizens on which clothing they preferred for their doctor and felt more at ease with. Findings suggest that the majority of the citizens had more confidence in a doctor in a white coat. Indeed, the doctor's clothing was of direct influence on the expertise rating received from patients. In other words, it can be argued that a relation exists between professional clothing and perceived expertise.

Creekmore (1980) found that wearing appealing clothing resulted in a higher rating of personal attractiveness and concluded that this should be taken into account in studies addressing impression formation, as people that are considered as attractive were more likely

to be selected for prestigious roles and to be accepted by others. Also when looking at gender, effects of clothing can be found. The study of Forsythe (1990) indicates that both men and women increase their chances of being hired when wearing a more masculine outfit, such as a business suit, regardless of occupation. Interestingly, Forsythe (1990) also notes that clothing is only one cue of many that may influence the outcome of a job interview. The researcher indicates that attractiveness, age and personal grooming also play a role (Forsythe, 1990).

Furthermore, one should also take into account the occupation when choosing appropriate clothing. For instance, it is important for women executives to wear conservative or more masculine clothing in organisations that can be considered as being more conservative such as the financial industry (Forsythe, 1990). Forsythe (1990) assumes this will be less important when one is employed in a less conservative field, such as marketing or public relations. However it remains unclear what exactly is defined as appropriate clothing and what is not. Considering the focus of this study, it may be interesting to explore the judgment of business clothing on an individual's perceived credibility. In sum, choice in clothing not only influences physical appearance, but also may affect the perceived expertise by creating a professional look that imparts trustworthiness and confidence.

#### *Black and white photography*

Another visual cue that can be alternated in photographs is the use of black-and-white photography. According to Noyima (2003), black-and-white photography is often used due to its aesthetic and simple expression and. Colour represents emotions, while black-and-white has a sense of abstraction and formality to it. The absence of colours in a photograph gives it an intellectual, scientific tone and authority (Noyima, 2003). In art, black-and-white photography is used to emphasize aspects as shape, texture and subject matter (Noyima, 2003). When used in advertisements, it is often leads the products to be associated with high-class brands or stylish fashion magazines. In a picture it could differentiate an individual since colour pictures are used by the masses because they relate to popular tastes. These finding are contradicted by Sassen (2011), who states that black-and-white photography creates a distance, between the depicted subject and the perceiver and unsettles meaning from the setting that is created. However, since black-and-white photography is often connected to art and high class, it may trigger a feeling of expertise.

#### *Informal setting*

SNSs enhanced the sharing of daily life moments and experiences (Labrecque, Markos and

Milne, 2011), such as pictures made in an informal setting. When travelling, people want to expand their horizon and are willing to explore and search for new experiences (Blichfeldt, 2007). This could emphasize the social character of one, and the effort to seek for more diversity. According to Fodness (1994), a holiday photo represents the enjoyment of life and the possibility that one can escape from the daily routine. Strauss-Blasche (2000) in his findings stresses that travelling enhances the well-being of people. When people feel comfortable and relaxed, they are more open for positive emotions and therefore may also show a higher self-esteem (Crouch & Straub, 1983). Moreover, higher self-esteem typically increases an individual's attractiveness (Wiegman, 2014). However, Fodness (1994) also underlines that holidays could be referred to as ego-enhancement for individuals who want to show off in order to satisfy their need for recognition.

#### *Averting gaze*

New types of communication, provide new traditions in social behaviour. Another visual cue that can be explored is eye contact. According to Gabbott & Hogg (2001), frequent eye contact enhances perceived credibility and results in being perceived as friendly. This is supported by the findings of Sundaram & Webster (2000) who examined the role of non-verbal communication in service encounters. The findings imply that with non-verbal channels of communication eye contact is essential. Eye contact was found to convey modesty and intimacy and was associated with a higher likability and credibility (Sundaram & Webster, 2000; Burgoon, 1985). In contrast, avoiding eye-contact was found to have a negative judgement on trustworthiness (Sundaram & Webster, 2000). Applying these findings to an online profile, where obviously at least some non-verbal communication is going on, it could be the case that when an individual's profile photo is not front-facing, a negative response on perceived credibility might occur.

#### *Neutral face expression*

Finally, Lee, Kam, Park, Kim and An (2008) examined whether a neutral face is evaluated as showing no emotions and is therefore perceived as neutral. The findings imply that in some circumstances the neutral faces may sometimes be negatively evaluated. This could be due to that people consider a neutral face to be the same as a 'sad' face, resulting in a slightly cold and threatening perception (Lee et al, 2008). This happens for instance when a neutral expression is shown preceding or after a happy expression (Lee et al., 2008). Earlier research conducted by Reis et al. (1990) suggests that, overall, people perceive a non-smiling person (neutral face

expression) as someone who is in possession of less positive traits in comparison to one smiling, whom they perceive to have more positive traits. However, it is important to note here that only two visual cues have been used in this study (e.g. smiling and non-smiling). In addition, this study did not elaborate on why the respondents perceived the smiling face more positive and ascribed more positive traits to this person.

The findings of the study conducted by Jones, DeBruine, Little, Conway & Feinberg (2006) are not entirely consistent with the aforementioned. Jones et al. (2006) argue that only faces with a direct gaze and smiling are perceived more positive in comparison to a face with direct gaze and a neutral expression. This positive perception occurs especially in the perception of attractiveness. However, when one averts the gaze, this perception changed. A face with an averted gaze and a neutral expression was perceived as more attractive in comparison to a face with averted gaze and a smiling expression (Jones et al., 2006). These findings could therefore indicate that if one visual cue is overall perceived as more attractive in comparison to another one, this does not automatically mean it is also perceived this way.

#### *2.4 Perceived credibility and the likelihood to obtain a job interview*

First impressions of the personality of people are shaped by the visual appearance of their faces. Perception of appearance is shaped very quickly and was found to be based on information and cues within the first 39 ms (Bar, Neta and Linz, 2011). This is supported by the study conducted by Van't Wout & Sanfey (2008) who found that the human face is used as a source of information. Something which is not entirely strange as there is a specific area of the brain involved in the processing of visual information, in particular faces (Kanwisher, McDermott & Chun, 1997). In this light, it can be assumed that facial signals play a crucial role in how people evaluate others. Moreover, it also suggests how people infer meaning to personality traits as a result of a face (Frith & Frith, 1999). Subsequently it can be concluded that if recruiters receive their first impression from your LinkedIn profile this may form the basis for selecting someone for a job interview as it introduces a bias (Bar et al, 2011; Caers and Castelyns, 2010).

Additionally, Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman & Johnson (2000) argue that during selection or job-interviews recruitment professionals make a distinction between the person-job fit and the person-organisation fit, or as they name it: the person-environment fit theory (Kristof-Brown et al., 2000). According to their findings, the perceived fit between a person and job is determined by the skills, prior work experience and education of an applicant (Kristof-Brown et al., 2000). The perceived fit between person and organisation is determined by focusing at personality characteristics of the job applicant, such as traits and values (Kristof-Brown et al.,

2000). The overall findings of this study demonstrate that a recruitment professional first looks at the perceived fit between person and job. In a later stage, the recruitment professional assesses whether there also is a fit between person and organisation (Kristof-Brown et al., 2000). This suggests that the initial concern of recruitment professionals is to see whether job applicants are qualified for the function.

Follow-up research conducted by Chiang & Suen (2015) demonstrates consistency with the findings of Kristof-Brown et al. (2000). In addition, they present a model that combines the person-environment theory of Kristof-Brown et al. (2000) with the ELM (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) in which they argue that if recruitment professionals make a distinction between person-job fit and person-organisation fit, they are processing rationally, which results in the activation of the central route. However, a person to person fit can also occur. In this case, a job applicant receives a more favourable evaluation due to subjective motives. That is, a job applicant could share an equivalent background or shows a common interests which could evoke a “similar-to-me” response, influencing the decision for an interview or even increase hiring motives as the job applicant is evaluated as more ideal (Chiang & Suen, 2015; Rynes, Barber & Varma, 2000). As this happens, the recruitment professional is engaging in the peripheral route of processing information. Evaluation in this case is not dependant on job-related information but is influenced by simple unrelated cues (Chiang & Suen, 2015).

In conclusion, it appears to be evident that recruiters respond to visual cues and these cues can be used to explore how recruiters judge the perceived credibility of a job applicant. In correspondence with the findings of Ohanian (1990), the perceived credibility of the subject depends on the amount of perceived trust, expertise and attractiveness. It should be noted that the implicit assumption being made here is that credible subjects are more persuasive than non-credible subjects. In the context of recruitment selection it will therefore be assumed that a positive perceived credibility results in a higher likelihood of obtaining a job interview. However, interestingly, the prior research discussed in this section did not take into account the influence the visual cues have on recruitment professionals, mostly on people from the general public. This is especially fascinating as recruitment professionals are ought to look beyond simple heuristics. Therefore, it is interesting to examine whether the discussed visual cues have any influence on the decision-making *process* of recruitment professionals and to examine the underlying motives. A more detailed discussion will follow in the methodology section.

### 3 Methodology

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This study was conducted by means of interviews and the use of photo-elicitation to analyse and explore the cognitive processes of recruitment professionals when conducting e-recruitment on LinkedIn. To gain insight in this process, the respondents were questioned on how they assess LinkedIn profile pictures manipulated on various visual cues.

#### 3.1 *Sample*

The respondent group used in this study consisted of recruitment professionals. This decision to solely select recruitment professionals was made because recruitment professionals are confronted with this task of ‘online job candidate selection’ within limited timeframes on a daily basis. For the sake of internal consistency, it was imperative that the respondents worked at organisations comparable in size.

The daily exposure requirement is more likely to be met when a recruiter works at a larger organisation on account of that larger organisations have a higher employee throughput and typically attract more potential candidates than smaller organisations. In this study, organisations that have a 1000 employees or more will be considered to be large. In addition, it was essential that respondents were familiar with using LinkedIn as a recruitment tool.

In total, 11 respondents were interviewed. Taking into account the qualitative approach of the study, it was likely that this amount of respondents would provide sufficient data to achieve information saturation (Baarda, 2013). Considering the limited amount of time and the intention to go in-depth and to explore the cognitive process of the recruiters in the decision-making process, the focus was upon obtaining detailed data. To this end, the questions posed were structured to stimulate detailed knowledge extraction and to trigger the respondents to dig deep in the why and how of their cognitive processes.

#### 3.2 *Research design*

As LinkedIn can be considered as the world’s largest professional network online (Chiang & Suen, 2015; Adams, 2013) it is evident that this SNS plays a key role in online recruitment and therefore has a central role in this study. Most of the research conducted on LinkedIn and recruitment relies on a quantitative approaches gathered from experiments and self-report data from samples of the general public (Caers & Castelyns, 2010; Van der Land & Muntinga, 2014; Van der Land et al., 2015). To date, very little research has been done on uncovering the decision making *process* by which recruiters select candidates to invite for an interview, in addition to their thoughts on the matter and how their cognitive processes are organised.



In order to collect this valuable information, it is necessary to approach this study qualitatively. Interviews may be particularly helpful in this case. The advantage of conducting interviews over an experiment, is that interviews provide specific and detailed background data. During the interviews it is possible to collect more accurate and detailed data as the researcher is able to ask follow-up questions to specify certain motivations (Monette, Sullivan & de Jong, 2013). This does not only allow the researcher to gather more in-depth knowledge, but also prevents literacy issues that might have occurred when choosing a different data collection method (Monette et al., 2013). Especially in this research this is very important as the exploration of decision-processes is complex.

In addition, photo-elicitation is used during the interviews. This is a technique that allows the researcher to evoke the deeper elements of the conscious process of recruitment professionals regarding every manipulated visual cue (Harper, 2002). As the use of images in combination with words triggers a higher utilisation of the brain's capacity a deeper and more accurate understanding can be achieved (Harper, 2002).

An additional method to explore the cognitive process of the recruitment professionals is the think-aloud method. When using the think-aloud method the respondent is asked to vocalize thoughts and reactions while evaluating information in real-time (Kucan & Beck, 1997). In this way a new source of information can be accessed, as it provides the researcher with a chance to explore an untouched domain of cognitive processing of recruitment professionals (Van Someren et al, 1994; Kucan & Beck, 1997). This method has previously been used to great effect, for example as a fast and inexpensive way to test usability of web designs and to gather honest and direct recommendations (Nielsen, 2012). Especially when taking into account the possibility of socially desirable answers, the think-aloud method provides an advantage. That is, the formalisation of answers is minimized by asking the respondent to make a direct association with a picture (Young, 2009). Since the respondent is requested to express all thoughts verbally, an immediate response is required.

### 3.3 *Manipulation material*

As discussed in the theoretical framework it can be assumed that different visual cues elicit responses and can be used to gain insight in the decision-making process of recruitment professionals (Bar et al, 2011; Caers and Castelyns, 2010; Hum et al, 2011), namely laughing (Lau, 1982; Otta et al, 1994), business clothing (Creekmore, 1980; Forsythe, 1990), black and white (Noyima, 2003; Sassen, 2011), casual holiday shots (Blichfeldt, 2007; Fodness 1994; Strauss-Blasche, 2000; Crouch & Straub, 1983), avoiding eye-contact (Gabbott & Hogg, 2001;



Sundaram and Webster, 2000; Burgoon, 1985) and a neutral face (Steinbrück, Schaumburg, Duda and Krüger, 2002; Lee et al, 2008). The created manipulation material is displayed below (in Figure 3.1 - Figure 3.6).

In addition to the aforementioned six visual cues that were used to gain insight in the decision-making process, a seventh visualisation was added in this study. In order to examine the specific influence of the visual cue smiling and the visual cue of avoiding eye-contact in one photo, a profile picture of a job applicant combining a smile and avoiding eye-contact was added. The choice to add this seventh visualisation is based upon the findings of previous research. According to the theoretical framework, a smile had a positive influence on a perception (Lau, 1982; Otta et al, 1994). This in comparison to avoiding eye-contact which evoked negative feelings (Gabbott & Hogg, 2001; Sundaram and Webster, 2000; Burgoon, 1985). It therefore was interesting to examine the influence that a combination of both visual cues had on the perception of recruitment professionals. In addition, as the findings in the research of Jones et al. (2006) indicated that there was a difference in perception when one smiles or not when averting the gaze, it was interesting to examine whether similar responses would be evoked by the respondents. Therefore, this profile picture was used to see if anything changed in the process of decision-making of the recruitment professionals if these visual cues were combined in one photo, or that it did not differ from the perception recruitment professionals have from the job applicant that only contained one of these visual cues.

Together, all of these visual cues can be used to explore perceived credibility by looking at the elements of attractiveness, trustworthiness and expertise. By exploring which visual cue establish a positive response, it can be determined why and based on what grounds the respondent perceives the subject as credible or not.

In order to create a realistic setting, the manipulated photos will be presented to the recruitment professionals as a profile picture placed in a real screenshot of a LinkedIn profile page. Any additional information is blurred. Moreover, the same model and background, will be used in every profile picture, aside from the holiday picture, to avoid unwanted interaction effects and to establish a pattern. The subject will be a male, 27 years old. This age indicates that the job candidate is a recent graduate or starter with little to no working experience (Bendick, Brown and Wall, 1999). As a result of the subject's limited experience, his perceived credibility increases in relative importance and can be argued to be crucial for this job candidate to obtain a job interview.

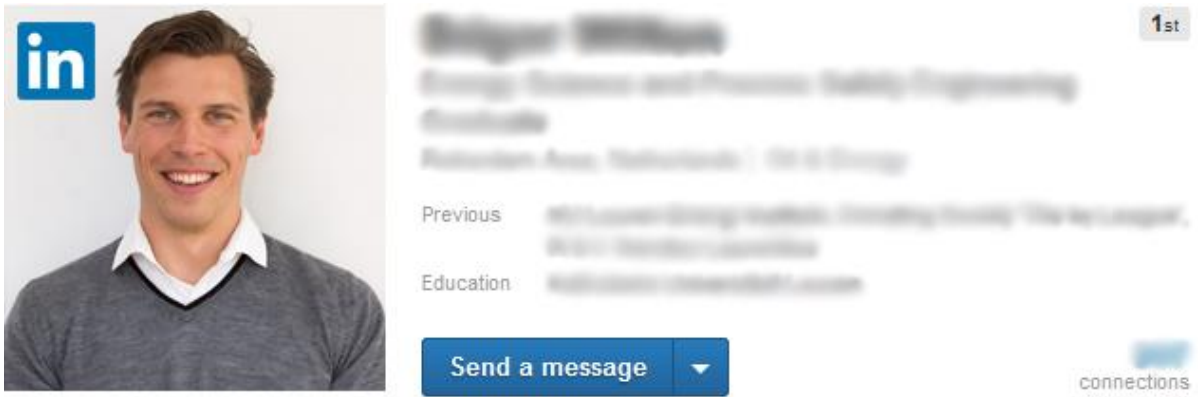


Figure 3.1: Manipulation smiling

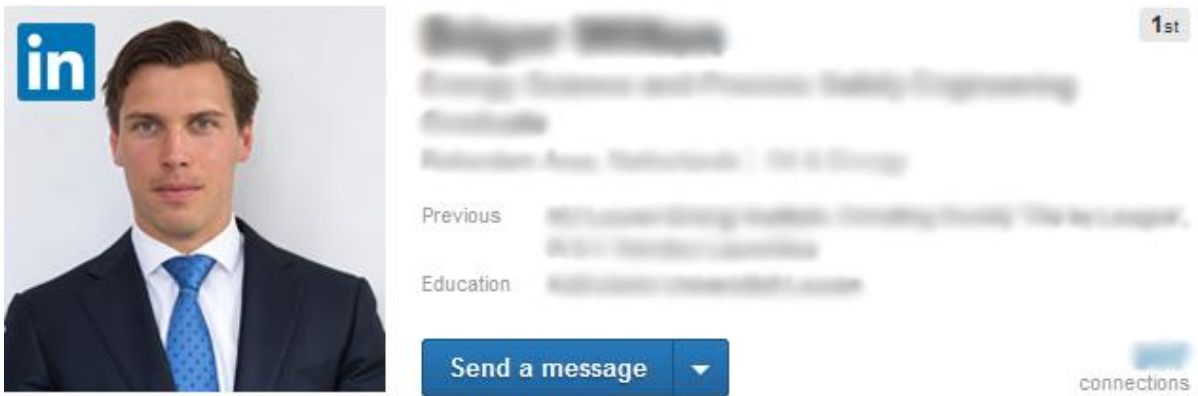


Figure 3.2: Manipulation business clothing

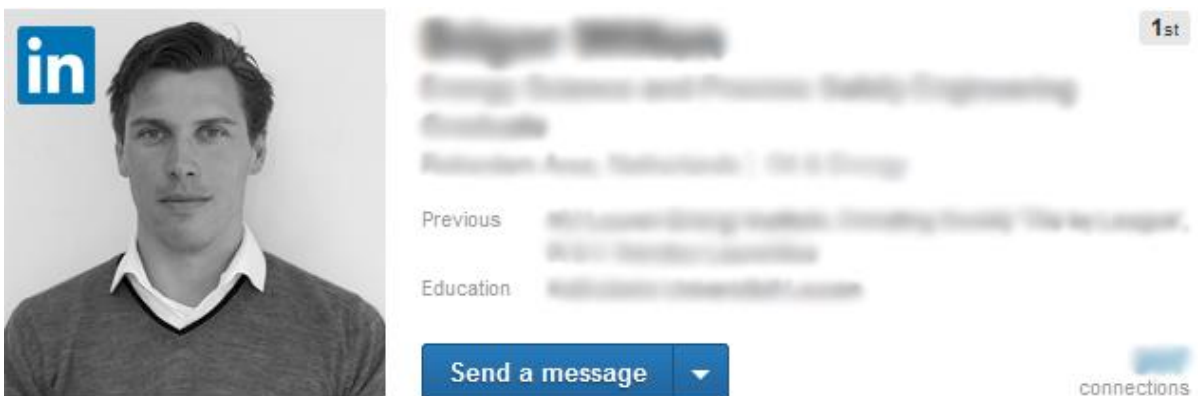


Figure 3.3: Manipulation black & white

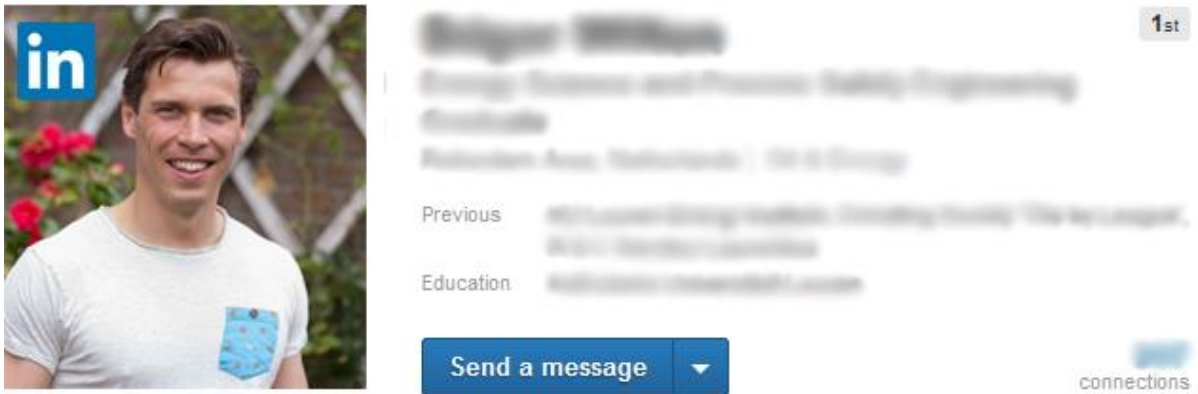


Figure 3.4: Manipulation holiday picture

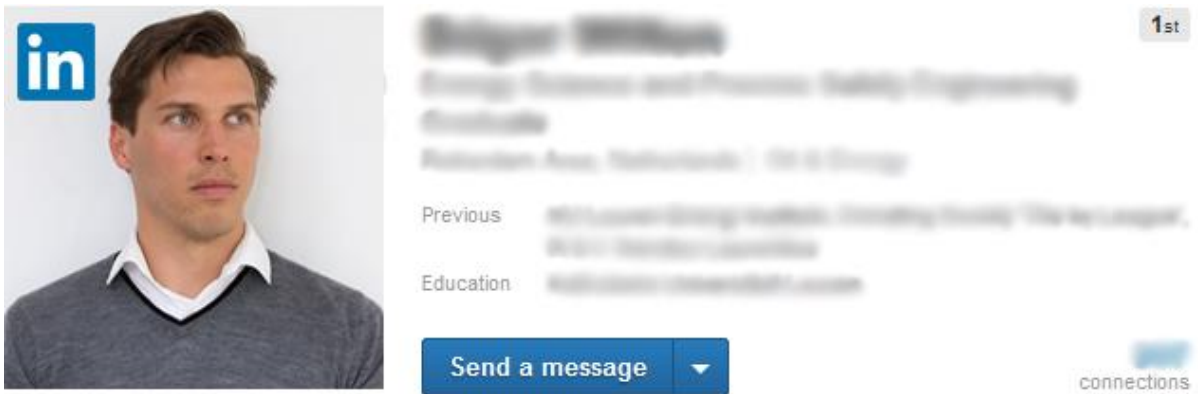


Figure 3.5a: Manipulation avoiding eye-contact

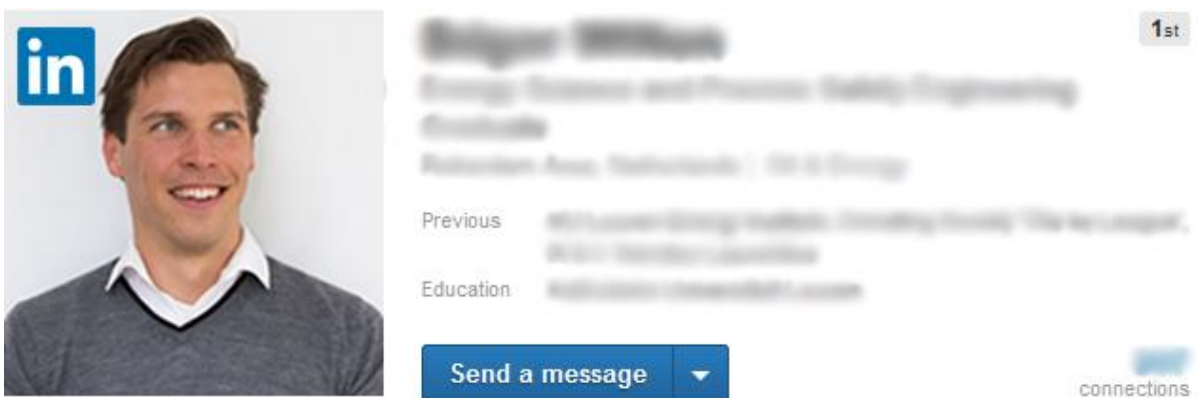


Figure 3.5b: Manipulation avoiding eye-contact smiling

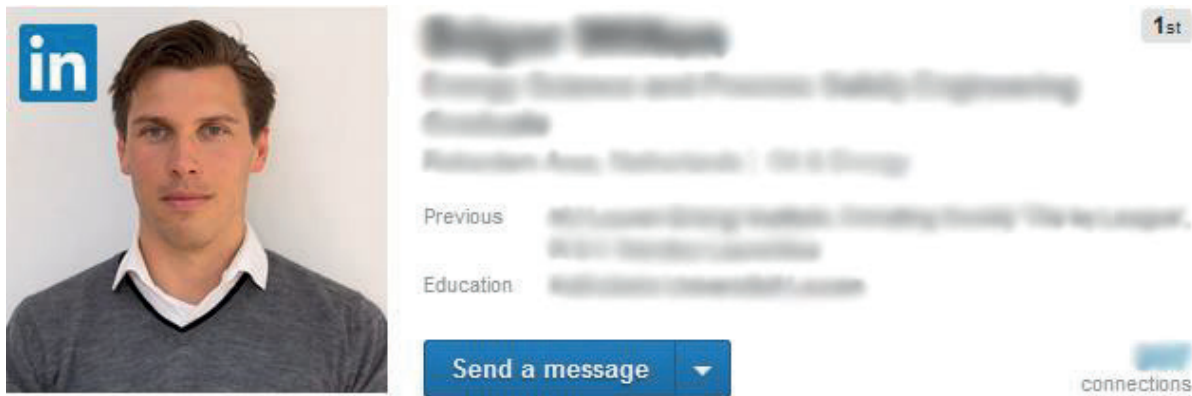


Figure 3.6: Manipulation neutral face

In this study the subject is applying for a position as a junior marketing consultant. The complete job-description can be found in Appendix A. The position in the job description was selected for its generality; it may be encountered in all fields of business and industry. Furthermore, although this position does require a certain level of grooming, it is not fully dependant on physical appearance.

The job vacancy was based on several existing descriptions of starter positions for marketing consultant. Here, the necessity for the various aspects outlined in Ohanian (1990) can be found in the description of the ideal candidate. First, the attractiveness aspect is conveyed by mentioning that the ideal candidate is a team player that possesses excellent communication skills and dynamic, strong presentation skills. Second, expertise aspect corresponds to the requirement for a Master's degree, excellent project management, presentation and analytical skills. Third, although trust is not explicitly stated in the job description, it is implicitly required in order to form mutually beneficial relationships, such as those encountered in a typical working environment.

### 3.4 Procedure

The interview started by stressing confidentiality and that information was only to be used for research purposes. Subsequently, the recruiter was offered the fictitious job vacancy and was asked to 'think-aloud' on his/her cognitive process when judging the candidates. Before showing any of the visualisations, it was determined by the researcher if the job vacancy was clearly understood to ensure full understanding and to prevent any language barriers. Hereafter, an introduction was given stating that the recruitment professional was looking to hire a new marketing consultant and had the access to online profiles of job applicants. This was followed by showing the first visualisation. To prevent any bias, the visualisations were shown in a set

order. The order of the visual cues is presented in Figure 3.1 - Figure 3.6 and was as follows: smiling, business clothing, black & white, holiday, avoiding eye-contact neutral face, avoiding eye-contact in combination with a smile and finally the neutral face. While they were viewing the visualisation, the respondents were asked to express their thoughts verbally. It was important to let the respondent do most of the talking in order to prevent disturbing the cognitive processing. After the last visualisation had been shown the respondent was asked to turn around all the visualisations and rank them from high (1) to low (7) in respectively attractiveness, trust, expertise and likelihood to invite the job applicant. This was to explore whether if and why the respondents had a specific preference for one visualisation over the other.

To make sure all important aspects were covered and to prevent biases, a specific set of questions was followed for each visualisations. By combining the visualisations with interview questions the informal atmosphere was diminished whereas the respondent was engaged in his/her 'professional' activity. In addition, this engaging setting provided a realistic selection process. During the interview, follow-up questions were asked in order to create a better understanding and to evoke as many thoughts as possible from the recruitment professional.

### 3.5 *Operationalization*

Questions for the interview on perceived credibility were adapted to a qualitative open approach based on the theory of Ohanian (1990). If, how and why the subject was perceived as credible was examined by questioning the respondent on three areas: attractiveness, trustworthiness and expertise. Example questions were:

- What is your first impression of this person?
- What are the qualities of this person?
- Does this person fit the job description?

After these questions, follow up questions were used to probe responses on the aspects of trust, attractiveness and expertise. These questions were specifically about certain qualities of the job applicant, such as verbal skills, work experience and level of confidence. Furthermore, the intention of inviting the subject to a job interview was observed by asking how likely it was, that this person would be invited for a job interview at the company the respondent works for and why this was the case. This process was repeated for every picture.

After showing the seven visualisations, the respondents were asked to make four rankings. The first ranking had to be made on attractiveness, the second ranking was on

trustworthiness, the third ranking was on expertise and the fourth and final ranking was on the likelihood to invite a job applicant for a job interview. These rankings showed insights in the specific preferences for visualisations and helped to determine why respondents have these preferences. For instance, was the perception of the respondent based on a specific visual cue or were there other underlying motivations present. In addition, the ranking process could be used to determine which visual cues were experienced as positive and which were not. Furthermore, the respondents were asked what thoughts certain visual cues specifically evoked in comparison to the other visual cues. When an underlying motivation was not expressed clearly enough, the researcher was able to ask follow-up questions to evoke a more in-depth response.

By questioning the respondent with an open approach on these three different areas per visualisation and eventually with all the visualisations, it could be explored during the interview how a recruiter judges the subject's perceived credibility. In addition the respondent's decision-making process was explored thoroughly and, if necessary, follow-up questions were asked. Furthermore it could be investigated whether certain visual cues were deemed to be positive or negative by the recruitment professionals. The results of the perception on the individual profile photos could eventually be compared with the results when the visualisations were shown altogether. An overview of the structure and questions per concept can be found in appendix B.

### 3.6 *Data analysis*

In order to analyse the data thoroughly, all of the interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed. A thematic analysis was applied in order to identify, examine and report any repeated patterns of meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Simultaneously, it also provided a framework for systematic analysis and enabled the researcher to segment and reassemble data in order to gather findings (Boeije, 2010). Furthermore, as a thematic analysis is most commonly used to focus on identifiable patterns of behaviour (Aronson, 1995), it provided a good approach to gain in-depth knowledge in the decision-making *process* of recruitment professionals.

To enable this systematic approach, the five phases of Braun & Clarke (2006) have been applied to the analysis. After the interviews were transcribed and familiarized, interesting passages or quotes were highlighted to identify data segments. However it is important to note here that during this process there was no selection yet of importance or relevance, as this does not correspond with an open approach (Boeije, 2010). In phase 3 and 4 (Braun & Clarke, 2006), the data segments were organized in thematic maps and sorted per visual cue. Each visual cue



was analysed thoroughly on how the respondents perceived the job applicant, conforming to the three components of Ohanian's (1990) perceived credibility: attractiveness, trustworthiness and expertise. Additionally, the results of the rankings of the visualisations altogether, on the three components of Ohanian (1990), were taken into account and analysed. Eventually in phase 5 and phase 6, a final analysis of the visual cues was conducted and repeated patterns of meaning were uncovered.

### 3.7 *Reliability and validity*

Taken into consideration that in this study the researcher is the tool of measurement, the credibility in this research was fully dependant on the qualities and effort of the researcher (Boeije, het Hart & Hox, 2009). Therefore, with regard to internal consistency, a set order of steps has been followed to preserve the reliability of this study.

Within qualitative research, there is the intention that when interviews are repeated by someone else, similar findings must be observed (Boeije et al., 2009). Therefore, to ensure consistency during the interviews, a set script of interview questions was followed. This positively benefits the reliability of this research, whereas accidental mistakes in the collection of data are less likely to occur when the method of data collection is standardized (Boeije et al., 2009). The standardized list of questions was brought to every interview to assure no question was forgotten. To elicit as many thoughts as possible from the respondents, possible follow-up questions were probed. The potential follow-up questions were also included in the interview script. In addition to the consistency in interview questions, the consistency between the different interviews was ensured by showing the same order of visualisations, which enhances the overall inter rater reliability of the interviews (Armstrong, Gosling, Weinman & Marteau, 1997).

Reliability and transparency in the process of data analysis was assured by recording and transcribing every interview. After transcribing, the thematic analysis of the data was conducted. To guarantee a systematic analysis of the data, the six steps of data analysis from Braun & Clarke (2006) were used as a guidance.

The internal validity of this study was maintained by sensitizing the concepts used in this research. By questioning the respondents about the individual visualisations, as well as all the visualisations at one in the rankings, it was ensured that respondents expressed their thoughts about all of the concepts and all the visualisations.

Above all, the researcher aspired to enter the interviews as open-minded as possible. To ensure this open attitude and to limit the level of subjectivity of the researcher, an inductive

approach was used while researching prior studies. By doing so, the researcher limited guidance from existing theory about visual cues. Furthermore, the researcher tried to be as informative as possible by being transparent about the research method, the process of collecting data and the analysis. To ensure the relevance of the results, only respondents where addressed who were working at organisations comparable in size and whom had at least one year of work experience in the field of e-recruitment. In addition, a realistic setting of recruitment was created by showing the respondents visualizations and by applying a nuance in a job description. This enhances the validity, due to the creation of this realistic setting the attention of the recruitment professionals was distracted from the official interview setting as they had a visualisation to focus on.



## 4 Results

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This section provides an overview of the results of the interviews. First and foremost, the findings of the visualisations will be discussed and organised per visual cue. As the three components of Ohanian's (1990) perceived credibility: attractiveness, trustworthiness and expertise, have a central role in this study, these components will be used to identify the perceived credibility of the different visual cues. After the results of the visual cues separately, the results of the overall rankings on attractiveness, trustworthiness, expertise and the likelihood to invite a job applicant will be provided, followed by the additional results. This section will end with the presentation of a conceptual model based on the empirical obtained insights that can be used as a point of departure for further research (see Figure 5.1). Moreover, a fully detailed description of respondents and an overview of the demographics can be found in Appendix C.

### 4.1 *Smiling*

Overall, the results tend to demonstrate that a profile picture with a smile has a positive influence on the perception of the majority of respondents. The job applicant was perceived as a junior with some relevant work experience, such as an internship, though most definitely at the start of his career. The respondents perceived the applicant as someone with an open and positively appealing appearance. In their opinion, the smile was the trigger for this perception.

Moreover, every respondent acknowledged a positive match between the job description and the applicant as in their perception the job candidate had a sufficient background and met all of the criteria. The cues that elicited this perception were representative attire (e.g. decent clothing), and a smile. Respondent 8 (female, 27) mentions: *“He looks as if he went to a university, I think because of the blouse and sweaters and his clothing. I also think he has the education level that is required for the job description. So which background he further has will not matter that much because he has the ability to succeed. He looks open, very positive and has a smile. I also think his communication skills are very good and those are the most important requirements for this function”*. Or as respondent 9 (female, 28) evaluates this person: *“Someone with an open appearance, relatively young and someone eager to learn. He looks as if he is a sympathetic, representative person with a welcoming appearance.”*

Merely two respondents noticed that the job candidate could also be interested in sales. The major cue for this perception was the enthusiastic appearance in combination with the representative look of the candidate due to the smile and casual clothing. For respondents, this

was a clear indicator that this particular applicant likes to set targets and achieve goals. For respondent 5 (male, 37), this goal-minded perception was so strong that he eventually mentioned he would not invite this candidate for a job interview, as he was under the impression this candidate was more a numerical or financial type, instead of a marketing type. He mentions: *“This is a person that likes to set targets, so as he looks very representative he would be definitely more a sales guy. He could also be an accountant because I think he is good with numbers or at least a very ambitious person”*. This could indicate that there is an inverted U-curve present as the respondents are influenced by the representative appearance of the job applicant.

The aforementioned perception of an open and welcoming appearance was of influence on the perception of verbal skills, trust and confidence. Respondent 1 (female, 26) has the following response to the question how she perceives the verbal skills of the job candidate: *“Oh, that’s difficult to judge. I expect them to be good because he has a broad smile and an open posture, open appearance. So based on the photo I think his communication is good. I think he can communicate well because he has an open personality that he can use to easily connect to people surrounding him”*. Furthermore, as seen in table 4.1, the smiling photo was by every respondent perceived as trustworthy. The respondents indicated this is mainly due to his happy appearance and positive vibe. Respondent 8 (female, 27) mentions: *“He looks confident due to his posture and open appearance”*.

In general, the data on the smiling picture demonstrate that there is a tendency to be perceived as a socially skilled, ambitious, trustworthy and professional candidate. The findings demonstrate that a smile positively influences verbal skills and triggers the feeling of an open character. Moreover, the majority of the respondents were of opinion that smiling was an indication of a more extravert person. Overall, the perception of this job applicant was very positive which shows consistency when looking at the three components of Ohanian (1990). That is, this was the only job applicant that was perceived as attractive, trustworthy, high in expertise and was likely to be invited by all of the respondents. Every respondent was convinced of the sincere motives of this job applicant and perceived a potential match between the organisation, the job description and the job applicant.

#### 4.2 Formal attire

From the interviews it seems clear that the job candidate wearing formal attire is initially perceived by the respondents as a professional and as more serious. The majority (6 out of 10) respondents mention that their initial impression of the job applicant is very serious. As a result

of this 'serious' perception, eight respondents perceive the job applicant as someone with relevant work experience. When asked why respondents perceived this job applicant as someone with more experience, the respondents expressed that this was due to his professional appearance, which was in their opinion stimulated by the cues of the suit and the neutral face. Respondent 9 (F, 28) mentions: *"The fact that he looks so serious is mostly due to his clothes, combination of suit and tie"*.

It is evident that there are several motivations for the perception of a higher work experience amongst the respondents. Aside from the perception of serious, some respondents mentioned that the job candidate looks very confident, which implies for them that the job candidate is more experienced and therefore is older in age. Respondent 2 (female, 26): *"I think that when someone presents himself in this way that that person has a underlying motive so definitely has to offer a lot"* and Respondent 4 (female, 26): *"He looks like someone who is already a bit more experienced and already has started a career. He doesn't look like the average type of student anymore"*. Interestingly, these respondents perceive the neutral face expression not as serious or as ambition but as confidence and as an indicator for age.

The aforementioned perception is also noticeable in the results of the rankings in the second part of the interviews. More than half of the respondents rank this job candidate as the candidate with the highest expertise in comparison to the other visualisations. When explaining their underlying motivation for this choice, the majority of the respondents indicates that the suit in combination with the neutral face expression stimulates the perception of expertise. Respondent 11 (F, 22) immediately says when being asked to rank the candidates from high to low expertise: *I don't know why but I immediately think that the suit should be moved upwards in the ranking"* and *"I think I see the suit in connection to a higher education"*.

Nevertheless, not every respondent was convinced by the suit. Three respondents expressed that the formal attire could also be used by the applicant as a tool for a more fortunate presentation in order to hide his insecurity or lack of work experience. Respondent 1 (female, 26): *"He looks very serious and arrogant and that gives me the feeling that he is maybe trying too hard, so he is pretending he is someone he's not and is actually very insecure."*

Furthermore, the respondents are distributed in the belief whether there is a match between job applicant and job description. Some do see conformity between the function and the applicant. However, six out of ten respondents mention that this candidate is more suitable for a more formal function in finance or analytics. Respondent 9 (female, 28) explains: *"If you look at this person, this is a stereotypical business administration student, could also easily do marketing I won't hesitate at that, but as I read the job description it should be a young person"*

*who is eager to learn and can easily communicate with people, so this would be more a person who would become a consultant*". This is something that respondent 7 (female, 36) also notices: *"As I see the job description I would go for a more smooth candidate. It is not a job in which you have to be in suit every day so I would see him more in a financial setting for instance"*. Other respondents indicated that their willingness to invite the candidate to a job interview depends on the type of corporate culture of a company, formal or informal. The willingness of inviting this job applicant to a job interview would increase with a more formal culture.

To conclude, there are various responses to a candidate in a suit. The formal attire seems to have an influence on the perception of work experience, confidence and age. Overall, the interviews indicate that a candidate with a profile photo wearing a suit is not necessary for someone in a junior function and would make more sense for a candidate that has more work experience. More than half of the respondents mention that they, due to the cue of the suit, perceive the candidate in general as professional, serious and representative which indicates for them that the candidate has ambition. Respondent 11 (F, 22): *"He shows integrity. I think he finds it important that he delivers quality at his work."* Thus, when reflecting on the three components of Ohanian (1990), the job applicant is perceived as attractive by every respondent, 10 out of 11 respondents perceive the candidate as an expert and 8 out of 11 respondents perceive the applicant as trustworthy.

#### 4.3 *Black & White*

Overall, the data demonstrates that a black and white picture does not hinder, nor help a person's appearance on LinkedIn. Although all respondents do evaluate this job applicant as attractive and the far majority as trustworthy and as an expert, in comparison to the other job applicants this candidate is seen as "average". The job applicant in this photograph is not evaluated as negative, but also not as very positive.

Initial responses of respondents are a decent, representative and secure candidate that looks very serious. The majority of the respondents mention that a picture with colour attracts more attention than a black & white photo does. Respondent 4 (female, 26) illustrates: *"Well my preference would go to a photo with colour because that looks more natural and attracts more attention than a black & white photo. However overall, I think this is a good profile shot and it looks professional"*. The large majority of the respondents indicated that this person looks confident and trustworthy. Respondent 9 (female, 28) *"I think he looks confident because he looks straight into the camera. You have a lot of people who are photographed sideways or with a look avoiding eye-contact and that is not the case with this person."* Interestingly, the

visual cue of eye-contact stimulates the perception of confidence for this respondent.

Nevertheless, some respondents indicated that they perceive this applicant as less confident in comparison to the job applicant that is smiling, solely due to the smile. Respondent 4 (female, 26) illustrates: *“I think that the first picture, the one smiling looked more confident than this one, just because this person is not smiling”*. This demonstrates that the absence of a smile has an influence on the perception of confidence. However, the findings do not indicate if this perception was consistent amongst other respondents, as most of them perceived this applicant still as confident. It is however noticeable that the respondents have a less distinct and outspoken perception of this candidate in comparison to the other candidates. During attempts to evoke more responses the following responses were given, for example by respondent 5 (M, 37): *“I think his verbal skills are average because he has such a neutral face. He is not an introvert person but also not an extravert person. I think he is in between the both.”* And as a response if respondent 5 (M, 37) was likely to invite this candidate: *“I am not sure of this applicant likes to arrange things and do things. I am hesitating actually because I don't really get an impression of this candidate by means of the photo, difficult to gauge so it's hard for me to say yes or no”*.

Moreover, more than half of the respondents indicate that a colour photo appeals more to them because it looks more natural. Respondent 10 (M, 41) mentions the following: *“I think it's also because he looks less approachable due to the black & white, seems as if his appearance is more closed in comparison to a colour photo”*. This would indicate that the cue of black & white does not only feels more natural, but due to the unnatural (dark) colours also triggers a more distant feeling.

In sum, the overall perception of this job applicant is good. Aside from the fact that that the majority of the respondents mention that a colour photo looks more natural and appealing in comparison to a black & white photo, as the candidate looks more distant due to the colour difference. This, job applicant does not evoke any striking negative responses and is perceived as an average, serious, ambitious and representative candidate. In terms of the perceived credibility of Ohanian (1990), all of the respondents perceived this applicant as attractive, 10 out of 11 respondents perceived this applicant as trustworthy and 10 applicants also perceived this applicant as an expert. As a result 10 out of 11 respondents would invite this job applicant to a job interview. However, important to note here is that some respondents indicated, that in comparison to the other job applicants, for instance the smiling one, this perception of this job applicant would be less positive. This demonstrates that overall, the visual cue of black & white

evokes a positive perception amongst the respondents, but if it would be the choice between the smiling applicant and this applicant, the smiling applicant would have a preference.

#### 4.4 *Holiday setting*

On LinkedIn, quite some people have a more casual, holiday picture on their profile. Does this negatively affect the impressions of the respondents? The data obtained from the interviews demonstrates that a slight majority of the respondents was still likely to invite the candidate, although they would have preferred a more representative photo.

The perception of the casual holiday look of the job applicant was more distributed amongst the respondents. Overall, the respondents perceived this candidate as less professional due to the cues of informal clothing and the setting the photo was taken. In addition some respondents questioned why someone would choose a profile picture like this on LinkedIn as they see the SNS as a professional network to present yourself. Respondent 9 (female, 28) mentions: *“I think this is less professional due to the clothing. Although we are looking for someone who is young, eager to learn and ambitious, If I was a professional international company and looking for the person in the job description I would evaluate this candidate negatively.”* This demonstrates that respondents perceive LinkedIn as a professional SNS and expect respondents to behave and present themselves conform these standards.

The above findings are supported by respondent 11 (F, 22) as she remarks: *“The impression I have from this person is that he is dissolute. He is clearly a student. I was under the impression that the candidate displayed on the other photo’s had already started his professional career but if I look at this picture I only think that he could have worn a blouse or he should have taken only a photo of his face. He should have paid more attention to this. I think this is also why I perceive him as younger.”* Her conclusion about the photo is therefore as follows: *“I think this photo is less professional. If you have a certain function or ambition you should express this ambition at all time, idem when you’re not at work”*. However, respondent 6 (M, 24) shows a different perspective as he mentions the following: *“Your social media account is your own small piece of internet and I always advice people to do with it what they want in such a way that they feel comfortable with it. If you don’t feel comfortable with a too neat and decent photo, than don’t do it if that’s not who you are. This is my perception of course. It could also be that he doesn’t want to work for a big corporate where you have to be in a suit and a tie all day. There are also enough lean start-ups where it is possible to go to the office in a t-shirt. So his presentation depends on what kind of company he is looking for.”*

Respondent six demonstrates an interesting perspective here, whereas he underlines the



importance of professional presentation on LinkedIn but also encourages job applicants to look beyond this professional aspect and portray themselves as who they are. That is, not choosing a certain photo just because that conforms to LinkedIn standards and expectations, for instance wearing a suit because that looks professional. Interestingly, this perception of self-presentation is also noticed by respondent 5 (M, 37) who mentions the following: *“I think that this person does not like a formal environment.”*

Moreover, for some respondents it was hard to gauge the background, characteristics and work experience of the job candidate. Respondent 4 (F, 26) answered the following to the question if this candidate matches the job description: *“He looks as if he is still a student but based on only the picture and without any knowledge of his work experience it could go both ways. It could also be someone who has a totally different function, someone who is more technically educated. I wouldn’t say directly that this is a typical WO-student”*. So this implies that the informal attire does not conform to the expectations of how a WO-student should dress. However, interestingly, this does not immediately indicate for respondent 4 that this job applicant is not suitable for the job description. However, it does elicit hesitation. This hesitation is also noticeable amongst respondent 8 (F, 27) as she mentions: *“I think this person looks less as a professional to be honest. It will be the type that if I invite him or if he eventually will get hired it would come more as a surprise than in comparison to the other photos I have seen”*, she also adds the following: *“I think he likes a party and I also think that he did not take his study that seriously. But I also think that he is realizing now that he should take more serious steps for his career. However he did not think of this before”*.

The interviews also show that the majority of the respondents perceived this job applicant as lower educated. The main indicator that triggers this perception was the perceived casual look (e.g. informal attire) of the job applicant. This could suggest that in the perception of the respondents, a less professional appearance, triggered by the casual outfit, is linked to level of education. For instance, respondent 5 (male, 37) gave the following response to the question how likely it was that he would invite this candidate to a job interview: *“I am not sure, it depends on the education of this person. I think he has an HBO-education and if you need a Masters diploma this wouldn’t suit, however I might give him a chance”*. This also conforms to the perception of respondent 2 (female, 26): *“He looks more tanned than in the other pictures. I think he is a sunbed type. Ok I know this doesn’t make any sense because I also sometimes use a sunbed but I think he is a more a car sales person type”* and *“I also have the feeling he misses a gold necklace.”* However, two respondents did not entirely agree with the majority of the respondents as they were under the impression that this person finished his

studies early and has a lot of work experience, or is currently working.

Thus, overall these findings suggests that the initial perception of this applicant was described by the respondents as less professional and less representative. Therefore, it seems that in comparison to the other applicants, this candidate was perceived more negatively. On the other hand, the majority of the respondents eventually mentioned that they would still invite the candidate as the casual, smooth and open appearance of the job candidate also triggered the perception of a potential marketing person.

When the question was posed how likely it was to invite this job applicant, some respondents indicated that an invitation for a job-interview depended entirely on the motivation of the job applicant and if he met the criteria of the job description. Respondent 11 (F, 22) was hesitating as she stated: *“If I had seen all of the previous candidates I would not invite this candidate for a job interview, however my opinion might have been different if I had seen the candidates in a different order and for instance this candidate first”*.

In sum, the informal setting elicits a less professional perception amongst the respondents. As a result, for this job description the applicant is perceived as either positive or negative dependant on the presence of an formal or informal corporate culture within a company. In addition, the respondents indicate that a job applicant may use his attire to express a preference for a formal or informal corporate culture. Though, in general this job applicant could prevent this distinction in perception and can increase his positive perception by choosing a more representative and professional photo. Nonetheless, even though this picture is not perceived as highly professional due to the informal setting of the photo, a large majority of the respondents still perceives this candidate as confident, attractive and trustworthy due to the smile and eye-contact. Mainly as a result of the open, relaxed appearance of the job applicant.

#### 4.5 *Avoiding eye-contact*

The results demonstrate that the visual cue of eye-contact has a noticeable influence on the perception of respondents. Respondent 8 (F, 27) illustrates the following: *“For me, eye-contact is very important and with this person it’s not possible to make eye-contact. As a result it’s hard to estimate a person so in that sense he limits himself by not looking into the camera”*. She continues with: *“I always want to look someone in the eye. For me that’s an important indicator if someone is trustworthy or not”*. Not only respondent 8 noticed the importance of eye-contact, the majority of the respondents underlined the importance of eye-contact.

Amongst the recruiters, this job applicant evokes initial impressions such as: un-



accessible, a thinker, rebellious, determined, un-personal but most of all as more than half of the respondents stated: *“Why does he look away? I don’t understand it”*. As a result of the averted gaze, the majority (8 out of 11) respondents say that they either can’t gauge this person because they don’t feel a connection, or that he is less trustworthy due to the avoidance of eye-contact. Either way, this is not favourable for the perception of the job applicant.

Interestingly, four respondents illustrate that this applicant still has a fifty/fifty percent chance to receive an invitation for a job-interview. However, this invitation would depend on how many other candidates would apply or can be found for the function. In addition, these respondents indicate that they would enter the job interview with a bias whereas they would extra carefully examine the candidate in an interview. As respondent 4 (female, 26) says: *“I think his verbal skills are still ok, but I would test it in a phone call. With the other job candidates I have more the feeling that they are better suitable than with this one”* and respondent 9 (female, 28): *“This would be someone I would invite, however in a job interview I would test him extra carefully at all fronts”*.

Moreover, respondent 9 (female, 28): questions the motives of the job applicant as she expresses the following: *“I think it is conscious choice if you choose such a profile picture for LinkedIn”*. Hereby she demonstrates that people are fully aware which profile picture they choose and that when someone chooses a picture averting the gaze this person might have an underlying motive for it.

Additionally, there is a tendency amongst the respondents to perceive this person as untrustworthy. The absence of eye-contact was the visual cue that triggered this perception for them. Strikingly, a smile in combination with no eye-contact did restore this trust as all of the respondents perceived the combination of smile and no eye-contact as more trustworthy. In addition the combination of a smile and avoiding eye-contact also decreased the distant and un-personal perception respondents received of the job applicant on the picture. Some respondents even mention that they would perceive the applicant avoiding-eye contact while smiling more as a people’s person and socially skilled due to a more open attitude as a result of the smile.

However, although overall a smile was considered to have a positive influence on perception, the avoidance of eye-contact remained a disturbing factor. Respondent 1 mentions (F, 26): *“The smile enhances a more open appearance of the applicant to that is positive however if you want to show more guts and present yourself in a positive manner, where you want to show that you are confident of yourself you will choose a photo where you look straight into the camera and although the smile, he is still looking away. As selling yourself and sales in general is important in marketing, I think he is more a softie instead of a sales, strategic*

*marketing person”*

Altogether, the visual cue of avoiding eye-contact has a negative influence on the perceived trustworthiness of a job applicant. Only four respondents perceived this job applicant as trustworthy. The visual cue of eye-contact did not only have negative consequences for the evaluation of trustworthiness, but also for the evaluation of social skills and presentation skills, which were both perceived as less. Respondents perceived this job applicant as more distant and to himself. The perception of attractiveness remains. As for expertise, all the respondents perceived this applicant as an expert as they perceived the “staring in infinity”-expression as someone who is an intellectual thinker that clearly sets his goals. This positively influenced the perceived ambition of the applicant. However, important to note is that although some components of Ohanian (1990) were perceived as positive, the respondents would still be biased as a result of the avoidance of eye-contact which seems to have consequences for the job-interview of the applicant.

#### 4.6 *Neutral face*

The majority of the respondents describes this job applicant as confident, friendly and serious. Noticeable, is that during the interview many respondents struggled with the fact that they could not gauge this candidate because he looked so neutral which evoked a perception of an average applicant. It sometimes took some additional follow-up questions to trigger a response. Some respondents were therefore asked why it was so difficult to gauge this job applicant. Respondent 1 (female, 26) answered the following to this question: *“I am not sure, I would need more information with him because he is difficult to read. Could work positive because than I am looking for more information, so it’s advantageous for him because my opinion is than based on not solely a picture. But on the other hand it’s also not very positive because his picture doesn’t invite someone to continue to examine the profile and look further. A smile would invite more for instance because that would evoke a happy feeling. It’s a meaningless photo to me.”* So as this respondent implies, a smile would work more appealing in perception than just a neutral face does. This respondent demonstrates that such a neutral photo, would evoke a corresponding response. That is, the respondent is not highly positive, but still would be interested.

Just as with the neutral black & white photo, respondents do not have an outspoken or distinct opinion with this candidate. Overall they evaluate him as serious, decent, a junior. Furthermore, the respondents indicate that they perceive a match between job applicant and the job description. Interestingly this has a positive influence on how the respondents evaluate this

person. Respondent 7 (F, 36) mentions: *“I think on this photo he looks less confident than the other photo’s but that’s maybe what appeals to me the most. People can also look to overconfident on their photo when they have no work experience yet, so that’s what I like about this photo”*.

Additionally, respondent 4 (F, 26) evaluates says when she was asked how she perceived the trustworthiness of this person: *“I don’t have any reason to believe that he is not. He looks very decent and representative.”* In addition, respondent 8 (F, 27) says: *He looks a bit like a young professional due to the clothing he is wearing, not too formal but still representative. So no suit, because a suit does not really fit with marketing. He looks as if he has studied at a university or as if he is in the process of graduating at a university. I also think it is important that I can see his eyes. That indicates for me that he is a trustworthy, good and smart man.”* So according to the respondents this job applicant meets the criteria of the job description and also fits within the junior role. However, not every respondent is as positive in perception as the others. The serious appearance and neutral photo indicates something else for respondent 5 (M, 37) as he mentions the following: *“He looks a bit boring, He looks very average. I don’t think he is someone with an outspoken opinion. He is definitely not an extravert, but also not an introvert. I think he is a person that is a bit the middle of the road. So really average.”*

Respondent 4 (F, 26) illustrates something interesting as she was answering the question how she perceived the verbal skills of this job applicant: *“I think his verbal skills are fine. I think it would have been different though if it was a women displayed on the photo. When a women does not smile on a photo people are more obliged to think that she is a bitch while with men it is more accepted and it is not a problem. And of course this is really stupid that this thought occurs only with women and not with men but I think that there is not a woman on LinkedIn that does not smile at her photo.”* With other words, this respondent indicates that a neutral face is more accepted with male job applicants than it would be with female job applicants. This is very interesting as this was the only respondent who mentioned a difference in perception between male and female job applicants.

In sum, the perception of this job applicant corresponds with the evaluation of the visual cue of black & white. Respondents are not very positive, but also certainly not negative. Interestingly, all of the recruiters perceived the job applicant as attractive and trustworthy. In addition, the far majority of the respondents perceived the job applicant as high in expertise. By the look of this, one would assume that the visual cue of neutral face expression evokes very positive responses. Nonetheless, as the far majority of respondents also indicated, the job applicant looks representative, decent and welcoming, however due to the neutrality of the

expression and the photo evokes a bit boring perception. With other words, the respondents do not perceive this job applicant as an outspoken positive job applicant. Overall, the far majority of the respondents would invite this candidate to a job interview though.

#### 4.7 *Results of the rankings*

During the final questions of the interview, the respondents were asked to rank all of the visualisations from high (positive perception) to low (negative perception) on respectively: attractiveness, trustworthiness, expertise and likelihood to invite the job applicant.

##### *Results ranking on attractiveness*

Overall, the results of the ranking on attractiveness indicate that a smile evokes a strong perception of attractiveness. The far majority of the respondents ranked the profile picture with a smile as the most attractive. Only respondent 7 (36, F) does not support this perception and ranked the profile photo where the job applicant has a neutral expression as most attractive. The underlying motivation of her choice was as follows: *“I am hesitating, however I would not put the smiling picture in front, I would prefer this person as he looks more serious in comparison to the smiling applicant, however it is a close call”*. Nonetheless, it is important to note here is that the respondent did perceive the smiling profile picture as second-most attractive.

In addition to a smile, the visual cue of averting eye-contact seems to have a negative impact. Half of the respondents ranked this job applicant as the least attractive. The other respondents did not rank this profile photo higher than the fourth rank. Therefore, it can be assumed that the photo avoiding eye-contact has the least positive influence on the perception of attractiveness amongst the respondents. Furthermore, no clear pattern in perception of attractiveness is identified amongst the remaining profile photos as the respondents were very divided in their perception of attractiveness. However, it is interesting to note that especially the holiday photo and the photo in formal attire are ranked either very good, or very bad. For instance, less than half of the respondents ranked the holiday profile photo as the least attractive. This in contrary to four respondents who did perceive this photo as attractive.

##### *Results ranking on trustworthiness*

Aside from evoking a perception of attractiveness, a smile also stimulates the perception of trustworthiness. The far majority of the respondents perceived the profile picture with a smile as most trustworthy. Merely three respondents did not share this perception and perceived the photo with the neutral face expression, the holiday photo and the photo with the formal attire

as most trustworthy. Furthermore, avoiding eye-contact negatively influenced the perception of trustworthiness as 7 out of 11 respondents perceived this visualization as the least trustworthy. However, what is truly interesting though is that the profile picture of the job applicant avoiding eye-contact while smiling, scores is perceived as more trustworthy. Respondents explained that they perceived this respondent as more open due to the smile which consequently improved the perception of trustworthiness of this particular candidate.

Remarkably, the holiday photo and the photo in suit are both ranked as most trustworthy, as well as the least trustworthy. These results suggest once again that the respondents were very distributed in their perception of these visual cues as no consistency can be noticed.

#### *Results ranking on expertise*

Slightly more than half of the respondents perceived the job applicant with the suit as having the most expertise. These respondents overall indicated that in their perception the suit represented work experience and ambition. The respondents connected this to high expertise. Interestingly it can be seen that the ranking on expertise evoked a more distributed perception of job applicants amongst the respondents. Especially taking into consideration that a smile had a strong influence on attractiveness and trustworthiness but in the area of expertise seems to have a less strong influence. Only 3 out of 11 respondents perceive the job applicant with the smile as the one with the highest expertise.

Merely three respondents differentiate in their perception and perceive the neutral face expression or the holiday photo as the job applicant with the highest expertise. Furthermore, the convincing majority of the respondents perceives the holiday photo as the job applicant with the least expertise. The respondents motivate this perception by stating that this is mostly due to the informal attire of this job applicant as they perceive this as less professional. Taking in to consideration that the respondents perceive LinkedIn as a professional SNS, this profile photo lacks in expertise in their perception.

#### *Results ranking on likelihood to invite*

Aside from one respondent, there is conformity amongst the rest of the respondents to invite the smiling job applicant to a job interview as 10 out of 11 respondents perceived this job applicant as the most likely candidate to invite. Only respondent 5 (M, 37) differentiates in his perception and choose the holiday photo as the candidate most likely to invite as he mentions the following reason: *“I think he has a modern and hip appearance due to the informal look and I think this is suitable to a function in marketing, this makes him look sporty and as if he*

*interested in events and I think this also contributes to his expertise.”*

This is interesting as half of the respondents perceives the same job applicant as the one least likely to invite for a job interview. According to Respondent 5 (M, 24) this is because of the following reason: *“I think this is more a Facebook photo than a LinkedIn photo. This would definitely not match with this company.”* This is supported by how respondent 9 (F, 28) perceives the job applicant as she elaborates on why she would be least likely to invite the job applicant with the holiday photo: *“On LinkedIn some people can take themselves too seriously by dressing al up on their photo, but this job applicant doesn’t takes himself serious enough.”*

Moreover, it seems that the job applicant who is avoiding eye-contact has been overall perceived as the job applicant least likely to invite for an interview. The avoidance of eye-contact seems to evoke a negative perception amongst the respondents as this profile picture was perceived as the most negative.

In sum, the rankings on attractiveness, expertise and trust indicate that there is an overall strong reaction to a smile and to eye-contact. In general, the profile picture of the job applicant smiling was perceived most positive on the three components. This in contrary to the job applicant avoiding eye-contact, who was perceived mostly negative on the three components. The results of the rankings on the three components are in line with the results of the ranking who most likely to invite, as the job applicant with the smile is most likely to invite and the job applicant avoiding-eye contact least likely to invite. Furthermore, it is remarkable that the visual cues of formal attire (e.g. the suit) and non-formal attire (e.g. the holiday photo) evoke very different perceptions amongst the respondents. The respondents are very divided in their perception of these job applicants as half of the respondents perceives the candidate in the holiday photo as a non-professional who does not meet the requirements for the function while the other half of the respondents perceives this candidate as a smooth marketing type with good qualities. Finally, it appears evident from the rankings that the visual cues of neutral face and black & white smiling do not evoke a clear perception. These job applicants are not perceived as the worst candidates, however also not as the best job applicants, as both visual cues are consistently ranked somewhere in between rank two and rank six.

#### 4.8 *Additional results*

In addition to the influence of visual cues present in a profile photo, there were some other striking results that are worth mentioning. More than half of the respondents mentioned that the corporate culture of a company is an important and crucial indicator for what type of candidate they are looking for. The majority of the respondents stress that especially the job history and



experience of a candidate are taken into account and not solely a picture.

More than half of the respondents (6 out of 11) also illustrate that LinkedIn is a professional network and that it does matter how people present themselves on a profile picture at this professional SNS. The respondents indicate that they consider LinkedIn as an online business card and the self-presentation on a profile picture on LinkedIn does not only influence the possibility of obtaining a job interview, it also influences the job-interview itself.

Therefore, the majority of the respondents agreed that job applicants should choose a representative photo. This was especially nicely put by respondent 9 (female, 28) who says: *“I am aware that people are prejudiced by photos. At my previous function I was an IT recruiter and in IT a lot of people have really awful photographs. However, a few times I was positively surprised by inviting people to a job interview so I learned from that, that I should not solely look at the photograph. However, from my own experience, if someone has an appealing appearance and looks professional, people are more willingly to click for more information than otherwise. So overall it has a very positive influence if you have a representative photo”*.

Furthermore, when a job applicant was perceived by the respondents as representative, open and decent there was a tendency amongst the respondents to perceive the social and presentation skills of the job applicant as positive. Interestingly, some recruiters indicated that they were surprised that unconsciously they caught themselves of having a certain preference. Respondent 10 (M, 41) says: *“Hm he is less approachable in this picture. I would advise him to choose his first picture as profile picture, he looks better there. It’s funny because I am aware that a smile is important but now you see that it actually works”*. Later in the interview he mentions: *“I now notice that joviality is important to me. If the next photo contains a cranky person, I would interpret that person differently. So now I am thinking what it is that has such an influence on me, because actually you don’t want the pictures to influence you in that kind of way but in the end you see that they do”*.

Respondent 5 (M, 24) also added something about the measures that his organisation takes: *“I am admin of our LinkedIn recruiter sheet and from the global office they disable the pictures. In the United States that’s a bigger issue. However I enabled it again and not to see if someone is attractive or is smiling or looking serious, but just to make sure someone does not have a picture hanging over a bar”*. Although respondent 5 stresses that enabling pictures is not done to judge the appearance of a candidate and is mainly done to see if a candidate has a representative photo. He hereby does indicate and underline the importance of a good photo and that a profile photo can have a crucial influence. Furthermore, this also indicates that

organisations take into account the influence of a profile picture and even record this in special policies.

#### 4.9 *Conceptual Framework*

As a result of the analysis from the interviews and to visually illustrate the main findings, a conceptual model is created. The conceptual framework is displayed in Figure 5.1 and gives an overview of which visual cues positively and negatively influence the different components of attractiveness, trustworthiness and expertise, the three components of the perceived credibility of a job applicant which eventually contribute (or not) to the likelihood of obtaining a job interview.

In the conceptual framework, four signals are used to indicate an influence on perception: ++, +, +/- and a -. First of all, the ++ sign indicates a highly positive influence on the perception of the respondent. The + sign indicates a positive influence on the perception of the respondents. The +/- sign indicates that the visual cue does not positively or negatively influence the perception of the respondents. This means that the visual cue does not hinder, nor help the perception of the job applicant. Lastly, the – sign indicates a negative influence on the perception of the respondents.

As displayed in the conceptual model, the overall results of the interviews indicate that attractiveness is highly influenced by the perception of an open, representative and professional appearance which is evidently stimulated by the visual cues smiling (++), as respondents indicated that smiling triggered their main perception of open and representative. Furthermore, the visual cues eye-contact (+) and formal attire (+) were also of positive influence. However, it is important to note here that although formal attire was perceived as a positive contribution to attractiveness respondents were divided in their perception of what can be defined as representative clothing as this differed per corporate culture. The visual cues neutral face expression, black & white and the holiday photo did not seem to have a positive nor negative influence on the perception of attractiveness and therefore have an indication of +/-.

According to the respondents, the perception of trustworthiness is mainly influenced by an open, representative and professional appearance. The visual cues that influenced the perception of trustworthiness were smiling (++) and eye-contact (+). Especially smiling seemed to have a strong influence on the respondents. Furthermore, some of the respondents indicated that a suit influenced their perception of representative positively. Nevertheless, this perception differed amongst the respondents, as it depended again on the corporate culture of a company. Therefore the visual cue of formal attire could hinder or help the perception of



trustworthiness, dependent on the organisation of application. Therefore, this influence is also indicated by a +/- . The visual cues of a neutral face expression, black & white photo and the holiday photo did not seem to influence the perception of trustworthiness and are also indicated by a +/- .

The visual cues of formal attire (e.g. the suit) and a smile did both positively influence the perception of expertise and are therefore assigned a + . Respondents perceived the suit to be an indicator for work experience and a serious attitude. The smile highlighted the open appearance of the job applicant. Remarkably, the holiday photo seemed to have a negative influence (-) on perception due to the 'unprofessional' setting of the photo. Finally, the visual cues of neutral face expression, black & white and eye-contact did not have any influence, positive or negative, on the perceived expertise of the job applicant.

In sum, especially smiling seems to have the most important influence on the positive perception of the job applicant. Hereafter, the visual cue of eye-contact also has a positive influence on perception. The visual cues of the formal attire and the holiday photo seem to influence in some cases the perception of the respondent. Furthermore, overall, the visual cues of neutral face and black & white seem to evoke no positive, nor negative influences on perception.

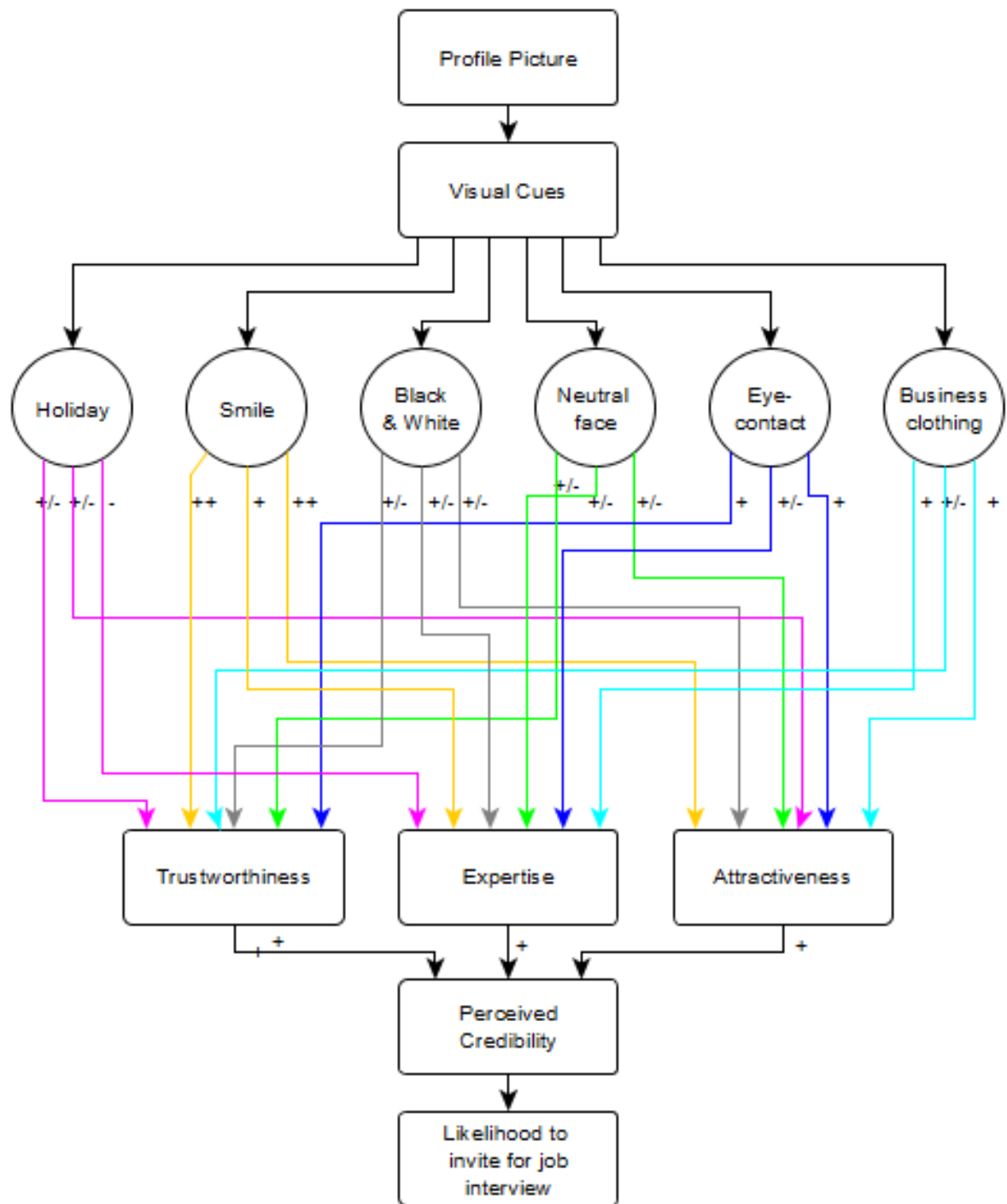


Figure 5.1 – Conceptual Framework of the influence of visual cues on the perceived credibility

## 5 Discussion

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This study aimed to answer the following research question: “*How does a LinkedIn profile picture contribute to the perceived credibility of a job applicant on the likelihood to obtain a job interview?*”

Results obtained from the interviews indicate that there are visual cues that are important determinants for the perceived credibility of a job applicant and that these visual cues can be used to the advantage of job applicants when applying for a position. Furthermore, it was assumed that for each visual cue the corresponding attribute scores of attractiveness, trustworthiness and expertise influence the perceived credibility and that a positive perception of these components results in a positive perception of perceived credibility.

In particular, it was uncovered that a profile picture with the ‘right’ visual cues may steer the perception of a recruitment professional in a positive direction as some profile pictures are clearly perceived as more positive than others. Especially smiling and making eye-contact were found to have a positive influence on the perception of a recruitment professional. This was consistent with the findings of prior studies (Lau, 1982; Otta et al., 1994; Ekman & Friesen, 1975; Reis et al., 1990; Gabbott & Hogg, 2001; Sundaram & Webster, 2000; Burgoon, 1985).

Moreover, the findings also demonstrate consistency with the study of Ohanian (1990). The job applicant with the visual cues of smiling and eye-contact was not only perceived very positive on the three components of perceived credibility: attractiveness, trustworthiness and expertise, the candidate also appeared to be amongst the job applicants most likely to invite. This was not only the case in the individual analysis of the visualisations, but also in the overall rankings made in the finalising stage of the interviews. This was especially noticeable with the visual cue of smiling, whereas this cue was perceived highly positive on the three separate components, and was eventually the job applicant that recruitment professionals selected as most likely to invite for a job interview.

However, it should be noted here, that this study was specifically tailored for a marketing consultant position. Therefore, the validity of these finding may be limited when applied outside the scope of this thesis. These results indicate that recruitment professionals are influenced by simple heuristics in which the recruitment professionals do not follow the rational systematic approach but instead base their perception on influencing visual cues. In terms of online information processing, this indicates that recruitment professionals do not always follow the central route but are being led by simple judgemental heuristics and choose the indirect route of decision-making (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) .

Some respondents indicated that a bias can occur as a result of one's profile picture. This might not have a large influence on the likelihood to invite a candidate, however it could influence the initial impression of a candidate and the questions posed in the job interview. For example, some respondents expressed that based on the profile picture where the job applicant was avoiding eye-contact, the applicant would either not be invited or otherwise be questioned about the choice for averting their gaze and on trustworthiness in particular. Moreover, the respondents indicated they would pay more attention to the behaviour of job applicants. This line of questioning was left unmentioned when the respondents were shown a profile picture where the job applicant was making eye-contact and was smiling. Thus it can be assumed that avoiding eye-contact creates a bias amongst the recruitment professional, which has its consequences in the job-interview.

Speaking in broad terms, this could correspond with the HSM of Chen & Chaiken (1999). According to them, when a persuasive message is more complicated, more effort is required in which a more rational approach is chosen. Connecting this to the perception of the profile picture, the recruitment professionals did not immediately feel appealed to job applicant as no eye-contact was made. Therefore, it was harder to gauge this person which resulted in a more rational approach of the cues. If the job applicant qualifies for the description the recruitment professional has no reason not to invite the job applicant, however, due to the initial response on the visual cues, the job applicant needs to prove himself more to the recruitment professional than he would have with a smiling picture.

Another remarkable observation from the interviews was the influence of clothing. That is, respondents' opinions with regard to representative clothing varied considerably. In some way, this showed some consistency with the person-environment fit theory of Chiang & Suen (2015). The respondents who indicated that a suit was crucial for the professional perception of the job applicant, were working in organisations that operate in a more formal setting. This could have evoked a similar-to-me response amongst the respondents (Rynes, Barber & Varma, 2000). Additionally, hereby the recruitment professionals recognised a fit between person and job (e.g. job description) and between person and organisation (e.g. suitable attire) (Kristof-Brown et al., 2000; Chiang & Suen, 2015).

On the other hand, others did not support this perception as they perceived a suit to be too serious for a recently graduate or starter. These respondents viewed this job applicant as someone who was trying too hard or pretending to conform to some imagined business ideal. Nevertheless, too informal attire was also perceived as negative by some respondents. The holiday photo, for instance, was not considered professional and not appropriate for a business-

related SNS. However, some respondents did perceive the holiday photo as positive as they connected the informal clothing to the smooth and relaxed personality requirements described in the junior marketing consultant job description. The relaxed perception was conform findings of the theoretical framework, as prior studies indicated that informal and relaxed setting such as a holiday evokes an open, relaxed appearance (Fodness, 1994; Crouch & Straub, 1983). Though, no noticeable influence on the perception was observed on the area of self-esteem which shows some inconsistency with the theory (Crouch & Straub, 1983)

Overall, the response to the clothing cues may indicate that when it comes to formal or informal attire, the perception of the respondents is based on the corporate environment they operate in. In general, formal attire did have a positive influence on the perception of expertise while the t-shirt on the holiday photo has a negative influence on the perception of expertise. However, the final decision on whether to invite a job applicant for an interview depended on the type of the organisation that the job applicant was applying, i.e. a matter of personal preference and the perceived match with the company's culture. It can therefore be assumed that for instance in a start-up organisation, a recruitment professional would be more positively influenced by the holiday photo and less by the business attire photo as start-ups are more likely to have a more casual company culture. A recruitment professional working in a major corporate with a more professional atmosphere would be more likely to have an opposite reaction. It can therefore be argued that in addition to smiling and eye-contact, the visual cue of formal or informal attire may be considered relevant when the job applicant has a preference for a specific type of organisation; corporate or informal.

Thus, to summarize the findings of this study, if a person on a profile picture smiles this positively influences the perceived attractiveness, expertise and trust. Moreover, when a job applicant is wearing business attire on a profile picture this has a positive influence on the perceived expertise of the job applicant. In addition, formal attire does not hinder, nor help the perception of attractiveness or trustworthiness. However, as the respondents mentioned, the perception in this case is influenced by the corporate culture of an organisation. Is it formal or informal? Depending on this factor, the visual cue of clothing can have a steering influence on the decisions of recruitment professional. Furthermore, a black and white photograph does not noticeably influence the perceived attractiveness, expertise and trust. That is, the perceived credibility is neither hindered or helped as a result of this visual cue. A profile picture in a holiday setting could have a positive influence on the perception of attractiveness and trust of recruitment professional from a company with a more relaxed culture. However, it may also

negatively influence the attractiveness and expertise with a company with a more strict corporate culture.

Disabling eye-contact on a profile photo has a negative influence on the perception of trust. However, it has no negative influence on the perception of expertise and attractiveness. Finally, a neutral face on a profile photo has a slight positive influence on the perceived attractiveness, trust and expertise. Here the job applicant is being perceived as an average candidate.

### 5.1 *Unexpected findings*

As a result of the theoretical framework, the assumption was made that a positive perceived credibility results in a higher likelihood of obtaining a job interview. Overall, this assumption was consistent with the results. However, there were a few unexpected findings. First of all, the big difference in perception of the job applicant avoiding eye-contact in comparison to the job applicant avoiding eye-contact while smiling was not consistent with prior findings (Burgoon, 1985; Sundaram & Webster, 2000; Gabbott & Hogg 2001). This finding is especially interesting as the study of Jones et al. (2006) argued that attractiveness decreased in the case of an averting gaze while smiling. This might indicate that the visual cue of smiling elicits the positive influence on the components expertise and trustworthiness of Ohanian's (1990) perceive credibility.

The indicated might be the explanation for the more positive perception of this job applicant. This assumption is supported by the findings as there was a noticeable tendency amongst the respondents to perceive the job applicant averting the gaze while smiling as more trustworthy in comparison to the job applicant averting the gaze with a neutral face expression. This indicates that a smile in this light could weigh stronger in perception as a visual cue and indicator for trust and therefore slightly restores the negative perception of trustworthiness that avoiding eye-contact evokes (Sundaram & Webster, 2000).

Secondly, another unexpected finding is that according to Lee et al. (2008) the neutral photo should evoke a feeling of slightly cold and threatening. However, the absence of emotions triggered somehow the perception that this person is representative and a professional. Subsequently, this job applicant was perceived as a good candidate and did well in the rankings of attractiveness, trustworthiness and expertise.

A third unexpected finding is that as a result of solely the findings of part one of the interviews, it appears recruitment professionals are more likely to invite the job applicant with the black & white photo in comparison to the job applicant with the neutral face expression

photo. This in comparison to the second part of the interview, during the rankings, where a majority of the respondents mention that a photo with colour appeals more to them than a black and white photo. If the findings had been consistent with prior studies, all of the respondents had to evaluate the neutral face expression photo as more positive than the black & white photo. The indicated was also consistently seen in the results of the rankings where aside from one ranking, in every ranking the colour photo is ranked higher than the black and white photo (Noyima, 2003; Sassen 2011). This could either be a result of the single visualisation or it indicates that at first sight a black & white has a different influence than when the photo is shown accompanied by other visual cues.

## 5.2 *Theoretical implications*

First of all, this study contributes to the overall knowledge about LinkedIn as not many studies concerning recruitment focused on this SNS (Caers & Castelyns, 2010; Van der Land & Muntinga, 2014; Van der Land, Willemsen & Unkel, 2015). As this SNS is increasingly used by recruitment professionals and job applicants (Caers & Castelyns, 2010), it shows more insights in successful personal branding online and in addition shows the developments in how individuals can brand themselves.

A second contribution is made in terms of the methodological approach, as this study is the first to examine the phenomenon of online professional personal branding from a qualitative perspective. That is, the knowledge retrieved from this study shows valuable insights seen from a professional level, and not seen the perspective of the general level. The findings show that even from a professional perspective, people are not unprejudiced, despite the fact that people assume they should be unprejudiced. Although recruitment professionals are trained not to look solely at a photograph, – unconsciously – visual cues are taken into account and are used in *process* of decision making. Still, in contrary to people of the general public, recruitment professionals can, mostly due to their experience and education, put some prior judgments aside. However, there is no such thing as full immunity to visual cues present in a profile photo.

The findings of this study demonstrate an existing consistency between online social information processing on a professional level and the studies of Walther (1993), Petty & Cacioppo (1986) and Chen & Chaiken (1999). Although recruitment professionals are experienced and approach the decision-making *process* of inviting a job applicant systematically by looking at prior work experience and qualifications, recruitment professionals cannot prevent an, although unconscious, influence from visual cues. Overall, an attempt is made to form a rational decision, however the influences of some visual cues are

sometimes stronger which results in a decision led by simple heuristics and therefore a biased perception of job applicant. Thus there seems to be a fit between the ELM and HSM and the way in which recruitment professionals process online information.

### 5.3 *Practical implications*

Based on the findings of this research, this study could provide helpful practical implications for starters or recently graduated job applicants when entering the job market. As some of the respondents indicated, job applicants with approximately the same level of experience and qualifications could give themselves an advantage by choosing a representative photo in which they at least smile and make eye-contact with the camera, as these two visual cues have in general the most positive influence on recruitment professionals. In addition, if a job applicants aims to apply for a job at a certain type of organisation (start-up, or corporate company) it could be wise for this applicant to accommodate his attire to the corporate culture of the organisation in order to express a perceived fit.

Moreover, the practical implications of this study do not only affect job applicants, but also have consequences for recruitment professionals. The findings of this study provide a better insight in the decision making process of recruitment professionals during selection of candidates. Most importantly, the findings indicate that, and, how visual cues can be used to influence the perception of recruitment professional. The results of this study therefore provide the professionals with the knowledge that some visual cues apparently appeal to them more than others, such as a smile and eye-contact. This knowledge could be used as personal as well as work-related training to stay in the loop with the current developments in their field of expertise.

Finally, on a meta-level, one could argue that organisations also benefit from the findings of this study. Whereas not only job applicants apply personal branding online, but organisations have seen the advantages of online branding as well (Labrecque et al, 2011). On LinkedIn, every employee could be considered as a brand ambassador for the organisation (Arruda, 2014). Therefore, when taking into consideration the findings of this study, organisations could use the visual cues of smiling and eye-contact in their strategy or requirements for the profile photos of employees on LinkedIn, subsequently improving the overall perception of their employees (e.g. brand). Additionally, the website and social media accounts of organisations most often also includes photographs of employees. Therefore, by applying the findings of this study to all of the photographs used in external communication, organisations could positively influence their effective branding online.



#### 5.4 *Limitations and future research*

As with every study, the chosen method of this study has certain limitations. Due to the restricted time frame of this study and financial aspects, this study only focussed on recruitment professionals within the Netherlands. One of the limitations regarding the external validity of this study is that different findings might occur when respondents are from different cultural backgrounds. Recruitment policies, attitudes and perceived credibility ideals may vary. Therefore, a recommendation for future research is to examine the decision-making process of recruitment professionals in a cross-cultural context.

A second limitation is in terms of validity. The findings of this study may be limited when applied outside the scope of this thesis as a job nuance of a marketing consultant was applied. Therefore, findings only apply to the branch of marketing. An alternate job description could possibly evoke a different perception of job applicants and visual cues. Therefore, a recommendation for future research is to explore the decision-making *process* of recruitment professionals in different sectors. With this study as a basis, future research could focus on larger sample groups by conducting online experiments or surveys. This will increase the statistical power of findings and may lead to interesting outcomes.

A third limitation of this study is gender related, as the chosen subject of this study is a male. The female gender is not taken into consideration. Prior studies have shown that perception of men is different than the perception of females (Heilman, 2012; Curran, 1988). This was also supported by one of our respondents during the interviews. Additional research is therefore necessary to examine the influence of visual cues is on the perception of recruitment professionals with a female subject. Only then findings can show if visual cues can provide advantages as well for women. Future studies should focus on the perception of visual cues gender-specifically to see if visual cues of female subjects are perceived similarly.

## 6 Conclusion

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It appears to be evident that recruitment professionals respond to certain visual cues present in a profile picture, which in turn, influences the likelihood of being invited for a job interview. By means of applying the think-aloud method and photo elicitation to interviews, this study explored the cognitive decision-making *process* of eleven recruitment professionals in their decision to invite a job applicant to a job-interview. Seven visualisations were used to examine if respondents would be influenced by the following visual cues: smiling, formal attire, black & white, a holiday photo, avoiding eye-contact and a neutral face expression. Especially the visual cues of smiling and eye-contact appear to have a positive influence on Ohanian's (1990) components of perceived credibility: attractiveness, trustworthiness and expertise.

Overall, the recruitment professionals expressed their preference that job applicants should use a LinkedIn profile picture that corresponds to professional network standards, representative and professional. However, as long as the job applicant looks somewhat representative, the likelihood of being invited for a job interview is substantial. When the job applicant is not considered as representative the chance for an invitation still remains as recruitment professionals are trained to look beyond appearance and predominantly select the job applicants on work experience and skills.

The findings of this study also imply that the decision-making *process* of recruitment professionals is not entirely conducted rational and that, in addition to prior work experience and qualifications, recruitment professionals are led by simple judgemental heuristics such as visual cues while processing information online. Although, this mostly happens unconsciously, there seems to be an striking influence on perception which could have consequences for the job applicant in the eventual job interview. For instance that a recruitment professional pays more attention to the behaviour of job applicants.

With the current knowledge in mind, starters or graduates in the industry of marketing could use these findings as an advantage in the application for a job. It would be wise for them to smile and make eye-contact on a profile picture, as these are the universal cues that positively influence perception. Additionally, it can be argued that aside from smiling and eye-contact, the visual cue of formal or informal attire may be considered relevant when the job applicant has a preference for a specific type of organisation; corporate or informal. Therefore, as one is the CEO of his own brand, the likelihood to successfully obtain a job interview is just a few visual cues away.

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## 8 Appendices

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### 8.1 *Appendix A: Job description Junior Marketing Consultant*

#### **Role description**

Junior Marketing Consultants have an understanding of marketing techniques and are able to combine analytic with communication skills. We are looking for someone who is eager to learn, has excellent presentation skills and is capable of delivering their findings and recommendations to the client. As part of our Marketing team you will have the opportunity to build your expertise with a mix of strategy and operations projects.

#### **Functional Requirements**

- A Master's degree in Business Administration, Marketing or equivalent
- Maximum of 2 years of experience in marketing and brand strategy
- A successful candidate is both a team player with strong communication skills but also able to work independently for extended time frames
- Excellent project and people management
- Dynamic and strong presentation skills
- Establishing and maintaining relationships with each client
- Fluent in English and Dutch. Additional languages are a plus

## 8.2 Appendix B: Interview Questions

So as can be concluded from the job vacancy you are looking for a marketing consultant to hire. To select suitable applicants you have access to online profiles.

- With the job description in mind, could you please describe for me what kind of person you are looking for?
  - ➔ Do you have any particular characteristics in mind that you would pay attention to when looking online? (Think of necessary skills, traits, appearance)

### Part 1: Questions repeated for every photo

- When looking at the photo, what do you see?
- What is your first impression of this person?
  - ➔ *In your opinion, does this person look attractive? Why?*
  - ➔ *What are the characteristics of this person that you find attractive (not attractive)?*
- Do you think this person fits the job description? Why?
- How likely is it that you will invite this person for a job interview? Why?
- Which qualities do you think this person possesses? why?
  - ➔ *Does this person look as a people's person? (attractiveness)*
  - ➔ *Does this person look as if he has good verbal skills? (social attractiveness)*
  - ➔ *Does this person look confident? Why? (attractiveness/expertise)*
  - ➔ *Does this person look as a professional? Why? (expertise/attractiveness/trust)*
  - ➔ *Does this person look as if he has work experience? (expertise)*
  - ➔ *Does this person look as if he has good presentation skills? (attractiveness/expertise)*
  - ➔ *Does this person look trustworthy? (trust)*

### Part 2: General questions

- If you had to rank these profile pictures from 7 (Attractiveness) to 1 (high perceived attractiveness), what would that order be? Please explain per number why you place that image at that particular number. Why?
- If you had to rank these profile pictures from 7 (low perceived Trust) to 1 (high perceived trust), what would that order be? Please explain per number why you place that image at that particular number. Why?

- If you had to rank these profile pictures from 7 (low perceived Expertise) to 1 (high perceived Expertise), what would that order be? Please explain per number why you place that image at that particular number. Why?
- If you had to rank these profile pictures from 7 (less likely to invite) to 1 (most likely to invite), what would that order be? Please explain per number why you place that image at that particular number. Why?
- This was the final question, do you have anything you would like to add in comments or questions? Thank you for participating!

### 8.3 Appendix C: Overview of respondents

<b>Nr.</b>	<b>Respondent</b>	<b>Company</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Nationality</b>	<b>Function</b>	<b>Experience</b>	<b>Hrs/Wk</b>
1	Evelien Bijl	Anonymous	F	26	Dutch	Recruiter	2 years	30
2	Tessa Knijnenburg	ISM E-company	F	26	Dutch	Corporate Recruiter	1 year	40
3	Anonymous	Anonymous	F	28	Dutch	Recruiter	1 year	40
4	Anonymous	Anonymous	F	26	Dutch	Recruiter	1 year	40
5	Job Willems	Brunel	M	37	Dutch	Recruiter	9 years	40
6	Dave van Kuijk	Accenture	M	24	Dutch	Sourcing specialist	2 years	40
7	Anonymous	Anonymous	F	36	Dutch	Senior intercedent	9 years	25
8	Lizanne Köhler	T-Mobile	F	27	Dutch	Corporate recruiter	2,5 years	50
9	Anonymous	Anonymous	F	28	Dutch	Recruiter	5 years	25
10	Anonymous	Anonymous	M	41	Dutch	Corporate Recruiter	10 years	36
11	Anonymous	Anonymous	F	22	Dutch	Talent Acquisition Business Partner - Sales	3 years	32

