Digital opportunities or additional barriers?

Exploring the experiences of higher educated refugees using social media in their search for adequate employment

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ABSTRACT

One of the main barriers highly educated refugees face in the Netherlands is obtaining adequate employment. Social media is becoming an increasingly important tool during the job search process. Social network sites such as LinkedIn present opportunities for refugees to obtain host country social capital. Therefore, great emphasis is often placed on using social media for professional purposes by organizations and policy makers, as this would enhance refugee resilience. Refugee resilience is embedded in neoliberalism, favouring entrepreneurial mind-sets and focused on personal agency. However, caution must be taken when presenting social media as a solution for refugees to overcome contextual barriers they face during the job search process, as social media might not present equal opportunities for everyone. This study therefore examined the experiences of highly educated refugees in the Netherlands who used social media for professional purposes, generating insights in these experiences from the participants' point of view. Eight semi-structured interviews have been conducted, embedded in theories of social capital, employment, social media and the digital order, and neoliberalism and personal agency. Findings indicate that refugees have embraced this neoliberal mind-set and the use of social media for employment purposes. Over the past years, there has been a rise of digital professional refugee networks. In these social media networks, employment information is shared, vacancies are posted and resources are being exchanged. However, many participants seem to focus their digital practices mainly on such refugee networks, limiting opportunities for obtaining bridging social capital containing native contacts. This focus is a result of negative experiences many participants have had on social media, such as online bullying and discrimination. These experiences, as well as cultural differences, often lead to reluctance amongst refugees to profile themselves on social media. In conclusion, higher levels of trust are necessary on social media platforms in order for everyone to express themselves freely and engage with each other openly.

Keywords: *Refugees, employment, social media, neoliberalism, highly educated*

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Introduction

According to the UN Refugee Organization UNHCR, there are over 100.000 refugees in the Netherlands at the end of 2018 (Vluchtelingenwerk, 2019). One of the main challenges refugees face in their host country is employment. Compared to natives as well as other migrants, levels of unemployment are significantly higher amongst refugees (Ruiz, 2018; Bloch, 1999, 2008). If they do manage to acquire a job, it often does not match their professional skills, educational qualifications or previous work experience (Psoinos, 2007; Bloch 1999, 2008). This unemployment or underemployment is problematic as for many refugees obtaining (meaningful) employment is an important factor in completing their integration process (Alencar, 2020; Ager & Strang, 2008). In addition, the Netherlands is experiencing a labour market shortage, one third of which is due to a scarcity of higher educated professionals (UWV, 2019). The deprivation of valuable human capital makes refugees' unemployment and underemployment problematic not only for themselves, but also for their host country (Eggenhofer-Rehart, 2018).

Over the past decade, social media have become an important tool during the job search process, especially for professionals and academics. Social platforms such as LinkedIn can provide access to information and help obtain and maintain a professional network. However, former research amongst refugees showed that less than half of the participants used social media for employment purposes (Alencar, 2017). Gaining insight in the experiences of professionally qualified refugees using social media for professional purposes, can contribute to the understanding of why the usage of social media for professional purposes is still done so little by refugees. In addition, it can examine whether refugees perceive social media as a useful tool to promote themselves professionally, or if they feel like the transparency these platforms produce could also work negatively for them. This transparency could potentially lead to discrimination, or transfer existing inequalities in the labour market to the digital environment. This study explores the experiences of professionally qualified refugees in the Netherlands regarding the use of social media in their search for adequate employment. The study will be based on the theory of social capital. Former research on refugees in the labour market based on the theory of social capital has been conducted, but very few is known about their online job search experiences. Social capital is increasingly being transferred to the digital environment and simultaneously social media have become a professional tool as well as a social tool.

1.1 Refugees in the Netherlands

In 2019, 22.533 people apply for asylum in the Netherlands (Vluchtelingenwerk, 2019). Sixteen percent of first time applicants are Syrians, making Syria the country of origin with the most asylum seekers for the sixth consecutive year. Syria has been in war since 2011, forcing millions of Syrians to leave their country. Most of them are displaced in neighbouring countries Turkey, Lebanon or Jordan. As the war proceeded, Syrians started to seek refuge in the Netherlands between 2013 and 2015. This led to a labelled 'crisis' in 2015, when 58.880 refugees applied for asylum in the Netherlands, 27.710 of them originating from Syria. Those who arrived in the Netherlands were generally the ones who had a middle-class lifestyle and enough money to travel further than their neighbouring countries (Van Heelsum, 2017). Syrian refugees therefore possess relatively high human capital. Therefore, a large amount of participants in this study consist of Syrians because they are more often highly educated, and are overall the largest group of refugees in this decade. Other relatively large groups of refugees in the Netherlands are Eritreans, Afghans, Iraqi, Iranian and Somali.

When refugees apply for asylum in the Netherlands, they reside in an asylum accommodation. During this period, asylum seekers are not allowed to work or study until refugee status is acquired. Former research shows the length of stay in asylum accommodations can negatively affect socio-economic integration in the Netherlands (Bakker, Dagevos, & Engbersen, 2014). In addition, Dutch bureaucracy is extensive, and can form a serious challenge. In all of Europe, legislative and administrative procedures are identified as employment-barriers for refugees (Pajic et al., 2018; UNHCR, 2017). These factors can lead to the so called 'refugee-gap' in the labour market. This gap implies the difference in work rates between refugees and other migrants (Bakker, Dagevos, & Engbersen, 2016). This gap mainly exists at the beginning of refugees' career in the Netherlands. Therefore, it is most relevant to include participants who have arrived to the Netherlands from 2010 onwards in this study, as they are or have recently been in this critical phase and will most likely have recent experiences in searching for employment.

1.2 Employment and social media

The reasons for unemployment or underemployment amongst refugees are often attributed to the refugees themselves, as they are often portrayed as incompetent and lazy by the media (Psoinos, 2007). While there has been a lot of attention paid to refugees in the media, they rarely get to narrate their experiences themselves. Emphasis is often placed on their

powerlessness, vulnerability and passivity (Georgiou, 2018). In contrast to traditional media, social media could serve as a digital space where refugees can represent themselves, and highlight different aspects of their persona such as their professional skills or educational background. However, social media might not be such an open and equal space as it appears to be. Georgiou (2019) argues social media are subject to a digital order that grants prominence and visibility to individuals that comply with host country neoliberal visions of resilient individuals, while it silences others who do not meet those standards. Additionally, Alhayek (2014) argues social media claim to 'empower' refugees whose voices are not often heard in traditional media, while actually reflecting its homogenous stereotypical discourses.

There has been strong evidence of the use of social media by refugees in the area of obtaining social networks, place-making decisions and obtaining general or governmental information (Dekker, Engbersen, Klaver, & Vonk, 2018). However, research on the interactions between refugee professional networks and social media technologies is underrepresented. The importance of this is evident, considering the number of professional refugees that perform under their potential. Social platforms such as LinkedIn have become increasingly important for academics and professionals to access information, obtain and maintain a professional network, foster one's career and for self-promoting (Donelan, 2016; Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Trimble & Kmec, 2011). In spite of social media becoming an important factor in the labour market, refugees perceive offline and interpersonal connections as well as offline local community initiatives as more important in this area (Alencar, 2017). This study aims to examine where this perception comes from and what the barriers are for using social media as a professional tool.

Refugees in particular experience ethnic discrimination in the labour market, which could potentially transfer to the digital environment. Blommaert, Coenders, and Van Tubergen (2014) demonstrated ethnic discrimination in online recruitment procedures in the Dutch labour market by posting fictional resumes on online databases providing short descriptions of the fictive applicants, using Dutch names as well as Arabic names. They made equal profiles regarding educational level, professional skills and demographic characteristics and applied for jobs in various sectors, in different regions of the country. Regardless, full resumes were requested considerably less often for applicants with an Arabic name. On top of that, applicants with a Dutch name were 60 percent more likely to receive positive feedback and reactions after providing their full resumes. This discrimination might even be worse for refugees, as a propensity to discriminate against ethnic groups that are put further down the 'hierarchy' is demonstrated (Andriessen, Nievers, Dagevos, & Faulk, 2012). This hierarchy is

constructed in societies by ranking ethnic groups, based on the time spent in the host country and the perceived cultural distance of this group relative to the indigenous population (Hagendoorn & Hraba, 1989). In response to this often experienced discrimination, members of ethnic minorities in the Netherlands have been found to develop coping strategies, one of which is not to mention their country of birth (Andriessen, Dagevos, Nievers, & Boog, 2007; Kraal, Roosblad, & Wrench, 2009). Since social media profiles often make peoples backgrounds transparently observable, the use of social media could potentially conflict with such coping strategies. Moreover, fear of discrimination could be a reason to be reluctant regarding the use of social media as a professional tool in itself.

Social media platforms could potentially be a useful tool for refugees in their search for adequate employment, as they can function as professional spaces that can be utilized for accessing information, networking, self-promoting and career enhancement. Considering professionally skilled refugees are often unemployed or underemployed, the importance of this seems evident. Besides, social media can provide a space where refugees can represent themselves, according to their own narratives, considering traditional media often portray a stereotype image. Emphasis is often placed on these benefits. However, professional opportunities provided by social media platforms might not present equal (professional) opportunities for everyone, especially refugees. By gaining in-depth insights in the experiences of professionally qualified refugees using social media for professional purposes, a more complete picture can be constructed. This can contribute to the understanding of why the usage of social media for professional purposes is still done so little by refugees, and perhaps what can be done to improve this. Therefore, this study will be conducted by the following research question; *How do professionally qualified refugees in the Netherlands experience the use of social media in their search for adequate employment?*

Professionally qualified will be defined as someone who holds a Bachelor degree or higher, whether this degree is obtained in the Netherlands or elsewhere. In this study, adequate employment refers to employment appropriate to the professional skills and educational level of the refugees participating in the study. Employment is considered adequate if it matches previous work experience and can provide contentment to a certain extend (Gericke et al, 2018). For example, when someone worked as a doctor in Syria and now works in a bar in the Netherlands, this is considered as inadequate employment, as this does not match the person's professional skills, educational level or previous work experience and will most likely not be fulfilling. The following sub-questions have been formulated:

1. What are the potentially perceived or experienced barriers regarding the use of social media in the search for adequate employment?
2. What are the potentially perceived or experienced benefits regarding the use of social media in the search for adequate employment?

These questions were explored in 8 semi-structured interviews with high educated refugees in the Netherlands. This study is socially relevant as employment opportunities and information are increasingly mediated by digital social media platforms. On top of that, the COVID-19 pandemic that arose during this study has increasingly forced us to rely on digital networks and social media practices. Gaining insight into how social media practices aimed at obtaining adequate employment are experienced is therefore crucial. Gaining insight in the experiences of higher educated refugees is particularly important, due to their disadvantaged position and career potential in the Dutch labour market.

The second chapter of this study will provide a theoretical framework, discussing theories of social capital, employment, neoliberalism, personal agency and their relation to social media spaces and tools, enabling the research questions to be examined in a contextually embedded manner. Emerged concepts from the theoretical framework will be used as a tool to analyse the collected data. Chapter three will discuss the methodology, clarifying how data was collected, the participants were recruited, the concepts were operationalized, and data was analysed. The results will be presented in chapter five, which is structured according to five selective codes that emerged from the data-analysis. Finally, chapter six will discuss the conclusion. This final chapter will reflect on the research question, and discuss the limitations and implications of this study.

Theoretical Framework

2.1 Social Capital

The theoretical framework of this paper will be based on the theory of social capital. Bourdieu, amongst other scientists, developed his social capital theory in the 1970's and 1980's, when he distinguished two elements of social capital; social relationships that can be used as recourses, and the quality thereof. Granovetter (1973) earlier recognised the importance of social networks in obtaining employment. He made a distinction between 'strong ties' and 'weak ties'. Strong ties refer to friends and family, whereas weak ties refer to acquaintances. In his 'strength of weak ties' theory, Granovetter argues that weak ties are more useful and important in obtaining employment. These ideas were reflected by Putnam (1993, 2000) who introduced the concepts of 'bonding social capital' and 'bridging social capital'. Bonding social capital consists of strong ties with friends and family. This is often a homogenous group, with the same ethnic background and a similar social identity. This form of capital is described as a dense network with high trust levels (Lancee, 2010). Because of these high trust levels, resources are more likely to be exchanged within this group and there will be more mutual support. Refugees often use ties from their bonding social capital as recourses when searching for employment (Lamba, 2008). However, these strong ties often have limited value, particularly for professionally skilled refugees. Friends and family function as survival strategies, or for 'getting by', whereas bridging social capital is needed for 'getting ahead' (Torezani, Colic-Peisker & Fozdar, 2008). Ethnic-group ties often have scarcer knowledge about career opportunities and development. Obtaining employment through strong ties can lead to underemployment, as it often leads to lower occupations within an ethnic niche (Lamba, 2008; Campion, 2018). Campion (2018) argues that refugees primarily focus on generating networks for social safety. This results in bonding social capital with high levels of trust amongst people similar to themselves. Campion (2018) states that refugees prioritize generating this type of 'safety network' over acquiring adequate employment, resulting in lower jobs with less pay. Ryan (2011) criticises scholars often take access to social networks for granted in migration studies, as they fail to recognize refugees do not always have access to bridging social contacts, even when they desire this access. For example, refugees have mentioned frustrations about not having (access to) any native contacts in their host country (Gericke et al., 2018).

Bridging social capital consists of weak ties with acquaintances, colleagues, and social workers. This group contains a wide variety of people, with different nationalities and

backgrounds. Bridging social capital often contains high levels of native contacts, and thin trust (Lancee, 2010). Putnam considered this group of contacts as the most important for social advancement and achieving success. Host country networks are perceived as crucial in job acquisition (Campion, 2018). This importance is reinforced by the fact that most employers are natives (Lancee, 2010). Research conducted in Australia amongst skilled refugees, showed that only 18 percent used their weak ties as a resource in their search for a job, with a successful outcome of only 11 percent. Bridging social capital and the use thereof seemed to be underdeveloped (Torezani et al., 2008).

Research conducted in the Netherlands on the relationship between immigrants' social capital and labour market outcomes, showed a positive association between bridging networks and the chance of employment as well as higher income (Lancee, 2010). This association was only found for structural bridging social capital, which was conceptualized as networks that 'build a bridge' to the native population. This network contains inter-ethnic contacts and contacts within organizations with a high number of native members. Bonding networks did not affect employment chances or income. This supports the notion that bridging social capital is necessary for 'getting ahead' in the labour market. Participants with a high level of bridging social capital were more than two times more likely to be employed, as opposed to participants who did not obtain this form of capital. Similar results were found by De Vroome and Van Tubergen (2010), who found that bridging social capital had a positive effect on refugees' economic integration in the Netherlands. In this study, bridging social capital was operationalized as having native Dutch social contacts and being a member of a mainstream organization. Having native contacts was positively related to both employment odds and occupational status. Being a member of a mainstream organization was positively related to occupational status (De Vroome & Van Tubergen, 2010). Thus, for higher educated refugees seeking employment of relatively high occupational status, having native contacts seems to be useful.

However, the simplistic distinction between bonding and bridging capital in migration studies has been criticised (Ryan, 2011; Gericke et al., 2018). Researchers often distinguish these forms of capital based on ethnicity, which undermines the complex nature of the different forms of social capital available to refugees or migrants. Ryan (2011) found that recently arrived migrants in the UK can generate a bonding network of friends based on similar interests, educational backgrounds, and ambitions instead of ethnicity. Additionally, bridging networks were formed with professionals or colleagues from the same ethnicity. Ryan argues that instead of focussing on ethnicity, the complex nature of these social ties can

be better understood when focussing on relative social locations. This reflects Woolcock's idea of 'linking social capital' (2001). Linking social capital refers to 'vertical' connections between people with unequal power relations. Ryan (2011) introduced the concepts of vertical and horizontal social capital. Vertical social capital refers to contacts with a different 'social location'. They belong to a different social level and have access to different valuable knowledge and resources. These people can be natives, have a migrant background, or the same ethnicity as the refugees themselves (Gericke et al., 2018). They can bond over this similar ethnic background, while gaining extensive knowledge and benefitting from different educational backgrounds, careers or interests. Horizontal social capital contains people who belong to a similar social level, and have similar knowledge and resources. They can be native contacts, and therefore host country social capital, but not be valuable to enhance refugees' careers. Distinguishing vertical and horizontal social capital nuances the dichotomous focus of ethnicity in bonding and bridging social capital. Ryan (2011) argues it is important to realise migrant- and refugee social networks change and evolve as they are not static. They can therefore evolve over relative social locations, and increase in value over time (Ryan, 2011; Gericke et al., 2018).

Research conducted amongst Syrian refugees in Germany showed four available types of social capital, each with different benefits regarding labour market integration; horizontal bonding contacts, horizontal bridging contacts, vertical bonding contacts, and vertical bridging contacts (Gericke et al., 2018). Many participants who obtained employment on their own were underemployed, underlining the importance of social networks. However, horizontal social capital also often lead to unemployment. Vertical bonding social capital often lead to adequate employment for refugees who worked in lower skilled jobs in their home country, or those without formal qualifications. For professionally skilled refugees, vertical bridging social capital was found to be valuable in obtaining adequate employment. Vertical bridging contacts provided access to a broader range of employment, job types and positions. Career opportunities provided by vertical bridging contacts more often matched the refugees own skills and ambitions, whereas horizontal bridging contacts mainly provided access to their own jobs. However, horizontal bridging contacts were valuable in an indirect manner as they provided useful cultural knowledge and were helpful in learning the native language. The results therefore support findings of Ryan (2011), as characteristics other than ethnicity were identified as factors influencing the value of different types of social capital available to refugees. It also supports earlier findings that bonding social capital can potentially have a negative impact, as it can lead to underemployment. Bridging social capital

holds the potential to connect an individual with the broader social structure, while bonding social capital is often perceived as capital that binds an individual to their sometimes narrow social group (Nannestad & Svendsen, 2008). However, bonding social capital can be useful in its own way, for instance by providing emotional support (Ryan, 2011). Besides, research conducted amongst immigrants in Denmark showed a positive relationship between bonding and bridging social capital. This implies that bonding social capital does not hinder the establishment of bridging social capital, which is most useful for economic integration (Nannestad & Svendsen, 2008). Gericke et al. (2018) argue that vertical bridging social capital could help refugees overcome the obstacles they encounter when entering their host country labour market. However, the researchers point out that trust-levels towards different types of social capital may explain the ways in which refugees develop their social capital, and why they rely on certain types of contacts.

In light of these social theories, the potential benefits of professional participation on social media seem to be evident. Engaging in social network sites such as LinkedIn could be a way for refugees to expand their bridging or vertical network, and lead to successful contributions towards ones career (Donelan, 2016; Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Social media provides the opportunity to connect with contacts that may not be found in one's personal, offline network, and gain knowledge and access to resources beyond one's own bonding network. The increasing importance of digital platforms are embedded in what Castells (2000) describes as the network society, stimulated by the rise of the internet. Key features of this modern society are the demise of the nation state and large public institutions, a digital culture, and emerging ICT's. In this network society, individual communication through digitized media allows individuals to communicate openly and freely.

The increasing relevance of these platforms has led to different forms of purposeful social media use amongst refugees worldwide, such as using social media to improve English language skills, learn more about the host country's culture and society, or obtain psychosocial support from peers (Wollersheim, Koh, Walker, & Liamputtong, 2013; Veronis, Tabler, & Ahmed, 2018; Tudsri & Hebbani, 2015). In spite of the increasing relevance of these digital platforms and social media use amongst refugees in various domains, the use of social media for employment purposes amongst refugees seems to be underdeveloped. Research on refugees' social media use in connection with integration in the Netherlands showed less than half of the participants used social media for employment purposes (Alencar, 2017). Some of the participants only trusted online platforms or networks suggested by their interpersonal contacts, limiting a versatile social media use. One of the main reasons

for not using social media for employment purposes was the perception of their offline interpersonal connections being more useful in acquiring employment. As Gericke et al. (2018) pointed out, this could be due to a higher level of trust amongst these contacts.

2.2 Employment

One of the main challenges refugees face in their host country is obtaining employment. Employment plays a crucial role in refugee resettlement as many refugees identify obtaining employment as an important factor in completing their integration process and feeling included in their host country society (Alencar, 2020; Ager & Strang, 2008). Known barriers towards obtaining employment include host country language deficiency, discrimination, and pre-flight trauma (Esses, Medianu, & Lawson, 2013). Compounding these barriers is the lack of social capital refugees often face, as they leave most of their social networks behind (Yakushko, Backhaus, Watson, Ngaruiya, & Gonzalez, 2008). Despite their high level of human capital in terms of education or professional skills, higher educated refugees therefore often have difficulties with obtaining adequate employment in their host country. For refugees to be able to utilize any form of capital, it has to be socially and institutionally recognized in their new environment (Eggenhofer-Rehart et al., 2018). Social capital as well as human capital is relational, not universal. When refugees enter a new social field, that is a new social environment with its own structures and powers, this reveals their individual relationship to this social field or order. In the face of different labor market rules and practices, social norms, and (occupational) identity threats, it can be extremely difficult to relocate career capital. Research conducted in Austria shows that for these reasons, refugees' career capital is devaluated when moved to a new environment, as are all other forms of capital (Eggenhofer-Rehart et al., 2018). The extent to which social fields differ, plays a crucial role in the relocation of capital. The fact that refugees are forced to relocate and therefore often arrive unfamiliar or unprepared for the new social field they are entering and its rules and regulations, strongly hinders the utilization of their existing capital. Professionally skilled refugees get stuck in a difficult position because their capital is devalued and qualifications are assigned to lower educational levels. On top of that, they have a stronger occupational identity than lower skilled refugees, making it harder to find a job that fits their particular set of skills and knowledge. Eggenhofer-Rehart et al. (2018) therefore argue that high levels of capital become more of a burden to this group when transitioning between social fields, instead of a positive recourse. Because capital has to be recognized, mutual efforts must be made by the refugees and their host society to enable capital utilization for labor market

integration (Eggenhofer-Rehart et al., 2018).

The importance of capital recognition is supported by Morrice (2013), who researched the experiences of higher educated refugees in the UK as they entered university to gain a host country qualification and re-establish their professional identity. She found that as this group moved across social fields, various forms of earlier gained capital were not acknowledged. For capital to have value, the social field in which it is placed has to recognize it. Only with this recognition it can be converted to symbolic capital that holds power. The researcher conceptualized refugees in higher education "not as being in deficit, but as being located in a field which fails to recognize or legitimate existing capital" (Morice, 2013, p. 667).

Refugees have difficulties in obtaining employment due to structural forces hindering them from utilizing their capital. Challenges they face include their qualifications not being acknowledged and labor market discrimination. These structural forces hinder refugees' individual agency when they try to obtain adequate employment (Lamba, 2008). Refugees often face marginalization as they are perceived as competitors to unemployed natives and are discriminated based on ethnicity (Campion, 2018). Such marginalization keeps refugees from gaining work experience on a level adequate to their professional skills and forces them to settle for lower skilled jobs. This discrimination threat could be a reason why refugees are reluctant to search for jobs on social media, and why they choose to depend on their bonding networks with high levels of trust. Dietz et al. (2015) showed that employment discrimination towards refugees can actually increase when they are more skilled. They observed that the more qualifications and skills immigrants had, the lower their employment rates were relative to comparable natives. They investigated this skill paradox, building on social identity theory. This theory implies that people partly define their identity through the social group they belong to. For recruiters, a refugee status can become a social identity, perceiving refugees as the outgroup and natives as the in-group. As individuals often want to maintain a positive social self-concept, they have a tendency to promote the image of their in-group. This can lead to a positively biased treatment of this group over members of the outgroup (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2010). When situations occur where groups compete for resources, such as employment, the image-enhancing aspect of positive bias towards the in-group becomes more relevant (Abrams & Hogg, 2010). Therefore, this bias depends on whether members of the in-group are capable to represent the common in-group in a positive way. The members who have this capability are preferred over comparable members of the outgroup. Building on this theory, Dietz et al. (2015) hypothesized that recruiters prefer highly skilled native applicants

over highly skilled immigrant applicants, more so than preferring low-skilled native applicants over low-skilled immigrant applicants. This prediction proved to be true in their research, and an additional threat-based skill paradox and skill discounting phenomenon was observed. Skill discounting entailed a lower evaluation of immigrants' skills and qualifications than those of natives, even if they were in fact of the same quality. This phenomenon affects highly skilled immigrants more as they have more skills and qualifications. This skill discounting is an institutional problem as well as a problem at individual-level because of recruiters' biases towards immigrant applicants (Esses, Dietz & Bhardwaj, 2006). Dietz et al. (2015) showed that despite of Western countries often being considered to provide a lot of opportunities for highly skilled immigrants, they in particular also have to face discrimination from recruiters. As recruiters often operate online now, their internal bias operates in this environment as well, and discrimination threat towards higher skilled refugees is transferred to social media.

While online discrimination threat could be a reason for refugees to be reluctant towards using social media for professional purposes, some researchers argue the lack of social media usage for professional purposes amongst refugees may be due to a difference in work culture. Willot and Stevenson (2013) interviewed professionally qualified refugees in the United Kingdom regarding their attitudes towards employment. They found the majority of the participants did not comprehend the notion of 'marketing themselves' and assumed their qualifications and work ethic spoke for themselves and were enough. A female doctor perceived questions about communication skills or teamwork to be out of context during job interviews. Only one participant perceived joining professional networks as important. These findings can possibly be embedded in the proven influence cross-cultural differences have on communication styles and perceptions, as well as the fact that Western societies are perceived as more individualistic, meaning the needs and goals of the individual are most important (Allik & Realo, 2004; Gudykunst, 1997). This was reflected by the female doctor in Willot and Stevenson's research, who stated that 'a doctor is a doctor' and 'if you are to do a job good you are to work hard', when asked what she would personally be giving to the job (Willot & Stevenson, 2013, p. 128). Besides having difficulties with application processes that required participants to promote themselves, Willot and Stevenson also identified an overall lack of awareness regarding the job application process and of the work culture in the host country. For example, none of the refugees requested feedback from employers on their applications, or on why they had not been hired or short-listed. However, the researchers point

out this may be due to a difference in cultural norms as this might be perceived as rude, or to lack of (professional) confidence (Willot & Stevenson, 2013).

2.3 Neoliberalism and personal agency

The world of work has developed towards more uncertainty, renewed and expanded possibilities for self-development and an accelerated pace of change. To take advantage of these developments in the work environment, a strong emphasis has been placed on personal agency (Obschonka, Hahn & Bajwa, 2018). Research conducted amongst recently arrived Syrian refugees in Germany identified self-efficacy and resilience as important personal traits for entrepreneurial alertness and career adaptability. This study therefore pleads for a more agentic perspective when studying the early integration of refugees in new job markets, often characterized by mentioned uncertainty and opportunities. Obschonka et al., (2018) argue that successful integration in the labour market does not only depend on contextual factors, but on agentic personality traits such as self-initiative and career adaptability as well. The researchers argue that in order for refugees to cope with their uncertain situations and embrace the new opportunities the host society has to offer, a proactive and entrepreneurial mind-set is required. However, in-depth interviews with Syrian refugees in Germany regarding career adaptation revealed more complex and nuanced results. Wehrle, Kira and Klehe (2019) found that context greatly influenced refugees' career adaptability and argue that career-construction barriers are contextually conditioned. Identified barriers included lost time, fundamental uncertainties and a lack of resources such as social connections. Refugees developed adaptive coping responses characterized by a positive mind-set, self-regulation, taking control and perseverance despite of these obstacles. These coping responses were partly shaped by contextual factors. This study therefore highlights the complex relationship between context and individual competences. In summary, findings showed that career difficulties could be contextually conditioned instead of attitudinal. However, individual coping competences and a positive mind-set can strengthen career adaptability (Wehrle et al., 2019).

Skilled refugees' professional identities are often threatened during their career transition in the host country. Wehrle, Kehle, Kira and Zikic (2018) found that as an identity threat coping mechanism, refugees often used 'Identity threat jujitsu' (Kreiner & Sheep, 2009). This jujitsu entails behaviours that are aimed towards turning negative threats, such as stigmatizing identities being imposed, into positive personal action. Such actions include reframing threats as opportunities, or trying to build improved relationships with the actors imposing the threats. With these actions, refugees try to maintain their threatened identity as a

professional, or as someone who is contributing to society. Identities that are important not only for financial reasons, but for self-definition as well. Through these identity threat jujitsu actions, refugees responded to and altered their context. In spite of barriers and threats that refugees face, this study again highlights the interactions between context and refugees' personal agency (Wehrle et al., 2018).

The notion of refugee personal agency has been widespread, and has been implemented in global refugee policy (Crisp, 2020). In December 2019 the first Global Refugee Forum took place, attended by international organisations and governments. The forum emphasized an increasing focus on market-oriented approaches to refugee self-reliance in developing countries. This focus was presented as a promise of benefits towards refugees, but they suit the demands of the UN's Refugee Agency UNHCR's stakeholders as well. The notion of refugee personal agency allows for a reduction in humanitarian assistance and donor states' aid budgets. Self-reliance has become a central concept in UNHCR's ideology, communications strategy and fundraising exercises. The idea behind this self-reliance is that refugees should be able to sustain themselves instead of depending on the state welfare or humanitarian aid. This refugee self-reliance promotion and approach is strongly influenced by neoliberalism. Neoliberalism is a dominant political movement, emerging since the 1970's (Bockman, 2013). It assumes that governments attempting to help refugees will actually make their conditions worse. Instead, it perceives private markets, individuals and companies as the best solutions to generating social welfare and economic prosperity. A further key principle of neoliberalism is individual independence and responsibility, believing individuals have the duty to provide their own growth and support, which can be enabled by hard work. It assumes anyone can develop characteristics as an entrepreneurial spirit, in accordance with the belief in intrinsic equality of all members of society, stigmatizing people who do not develop these. Placing this responsibility on the refugees themselves can potentially be harmful for their well-being and protection, as it ignores constrains refugees face. These can include work-restrictions, lack of starting capital, or discrimination. The notion of self-reliance is there for blind to refugees' rights of vulnerability or personal circumstances (Easton-Calabria & Omata, 2018, Georgiou, 2020). Especially if the external support of refugees and them becoming self-resilient are seen as two opposites, this can lead to negative outcomes. Acknowledging responsibility to create (online) environments where refugees can actually access and benefit from recourses and opportunities equally is a crucial first step.

The way refugee self-reliance is currently conceptualised and implemented, holds refugees almost exclusively responsible for achieving their own economic autonomy (Easton-

Calabria & Omata, 2018). This one-sided form of refugee 'empowerment' can actually constrain refugee agency. Dykstra-DeVette (2018) examined empowerment discourses at international refugee resettlement agencies. She found that Western resettlement rhetoric participates in global power systems that proliferate neoliberal values. Values that are based on consumerism, independence and self-determination. Values that were found to be both enabling and limiting in the context of resettlement. Refugee resettlement organizations promoting empowerment aimed at self-sufficiency and individual responsibility, may exclude important factors of what empowerment should mean from various social locations (Dykstra-DeVette, 2018; Sharma, 2008). Empowerment programs that focus entirely on economic integration articulate with neoliberal values and principles as they prioritize individualism, equality and work ethic (Sharma, 2008). Such homogenizing representations of empowerment may actually undermine personal agency and choice when it comes to individuals' self-representations. Governmental neoliberalism conceptualizes humans as individualized and autonomous agents that become entrepreneurs of themselves (Türken, Nafstad, Blakar, & Roen, 2016). Under neoliberal governance, empowerment can be used as a tool to produce self-governing entrepreneurial actors that are oriented towards a free market. Hierarchical organisations leave little space for dialogue when developing and implementing top-down empowerment programs. This is particularly harmful when such programs are designed for underrepresented groups (Dykstra-Devette, 2018). Refugee empowerment programs often revolve around employment, data and outcomes that articulate with neoliberal views of a 'good worker'. Refugees have to be presented as entrepreneurial and participating economically in order to qualify as good citizens or ethical figures (Nayar, 2010). Such views leave out those who do not succeed in obtaining immediate employment due to external factors or trauma in the representation of successful refugees. They also undermine the many aspects beside economic ones that are of importance when it comes to humanitarian development. Besides, institutional top-down expectations of refugee resilience and actual lived experiences of refugee resilience can differ from each other. A relational, more context-aware understanding of refugee resilience is therefore needed (Udwan, Leurs, & Alencar, 2020).

Neoliberalism favours normative identities and does not acknowledge circumstantial difficulties that refugees face in their new (work)culture or the trauma they carry with them. Empowerment programs based on neoliberal values engage with the idea that everyone is exclusively responsible for their own well-being. Current empowerment programs are encouraging refugees to sell themselves within a neoliberal frame. Dykstra-DeVette (2018)

perceived this during a job training, where the trainer told the refugees that he knows other cultures may be modest, but in their host country what matters is selling themselves and being the best. The trainer also told refugees that were facing difficulties not to disclose this information because it would make them seem less reliable or willing to work hard. Dykstra-DeVette (2018) pleads for a less colour-blind, neoliberal conceptualization of empowerment that recognizes institutionalized discrimination and does not exclude differences. The current notion of neoliberal empowerment labels refugees as personally responsible or profiteers if they fail to fight their way up in the economic order that is designed to their disadvantage. Therefore, this form of empowerment can have negative consequences for refugees as instead of functioning a positive force, it entails an extra barrier. The rise social media platforms such as LinkedIn is strongly connected to the political movement of neoliberalism, as it promotes individualized, market-orientated and entrepreneurial actors. Social media represent a space where you can 'work your way up' by selling yourself within a certain frame. When networking and the use of social media for professional purposes are viewed as neoliberal-practices, it becomes evident that caution must be provided in the perception of these as being the ultimate solutions for refugees. Putting the responsibility of finding adequate employment exclusively on the refugee themselves, stating the use of social media as a way to acquire this through networking, obtaining information and self-promoting is too short-sided. When refugees fail to obtain employment due to contextual factors, and this is then attributed to the lack of refugees' online efforts, professional social media practices can result in another resource of stigmatization.

Resilience has become a central aspect of neoliberal humanitarianism. While it holds potential for sustainable forms of humanitarian development and refugee assistance, the way it is conceptualized now undermines the lived experiences and needs of refugees in offline contexts (Easton-Calabria & Omata, 2018; Udwan et al., 2020). A great emphasis has been placed on digital resilience programmes or employment opportunities, but little research exist on the way these digital resilience strategies are being facilitated digitally (Udwan et al, 2020). Professional networking for refugees is characterized by increased digitalization and unequal opportunities (Alencar & Tsagkroni, 2019).

2.4 Social media and digital order

The use of social media for professional purposes presents great opportunities for refugees as this can link them to wider, linking, bridging or vertical forms of capital. As illustrated in section 2.1, this vertical bridging social capital could be particularly helpful whilst searching

for adequate employment. Emphasis is often placed on these potential benefits that refugees could obtain from using social media for professional purposes. The importance of using social media, such as Linkedin, in refugees' job search is highlighted by organizations and start-ups, providing trainings or promoting workshops to assist refugees in using these platforms (Alencar & Tsagkroni, 2019). One of the refugee participants in Alencar's research described that he felt like having a network through LinkedIn is essential in the Netherlands, and the first thing employers do when they receive your application is search your name on the platform to see who you are. This forms an extra requirement for newcomers as adapting and integrating into Dutch society is now also about responding to the host country expectations regarding digital practices (Alencar & Tsagkroni, 2019). While social media is an open space presenting various opportunities, that does not necessarily mean refugees will equally be able to benefit from the (professional) opportunities social media provides. While social media increases opportunities for recognition, it simultaneously conditions and frames this recognition according to market-rules and racial hierarchies (Georgiou, 2019). Georgiou (2019) describes how the online world is subjected to a digital order. This digital order requires what she describes as a 'performative refugeeness' in order for human recognition. Recognition that is conditionally granted when refugees perform as resilient individuals instead of showcasing vulnerability. This concept of performative refugeeness is consistent with the current widespread promotion of refugee 'self-reliance' on an economic level (Easton-Calabria & Omata, 2018). The conditionality of this recognition is normalized by digital infrastructures. Social media, subjected to this digital order, can serve as a space where 'others' have to prove their 'rights to have rights' (Georgiou, 2019). Citizenship and civic agency are increasingly enacted and shaped digitally (Hintz et al., 2019). This digital citizenship contains a performative dimension, where technology is used to represent yourself as a citizen. These digital practices, whether they are social, economic or communicative, have to be conducted in 'the same way' as other platform- or community members. That means refugees have to be assimilated from 'the other' into 'the same' - a resilient individual - an idea that is also reflected in neoliberalism. In the digital space, refugees can therefore still be hindered from contributing as equal community members when they are being themselves.

Countless digital initiatives have emerged on social media, aiming to give voice and grant digital presence to refugees. Some of these initiatives are focused on economic integration or employment, often promoting coding-classes or other market-orientated opportunities. These online initiatives showcase refugees as talented, resilient, productive, hard-working and innovative people who are contributing to the host society. These

initiatives, knowingly or unknowingly, operate within the digital order and neoliberal society that has been described. Within this space, 'successful' refugees are visible. A visibility that comes with an invisible silencing of others who do not comply with the set conditions for (online) recognition. Such social media initiatives may create space for agency, but only for those who overcame contextual barriers or difficulties and fought their way up towards an identity that articulates the notion of 'performative refugeeness', of a resilient individual. These are the people that can prove their entrepreneurial abilities and who have adapted to the neoliberal economy. They have learned how to speak the digital language of the countries and markets wherein refugees have to prove themselves towards the natives. "However, the determined resilience of certain voices digitally gaining prominence comes with the silencing of other voices, experiences, and complexities" (Georgiou, 2019, p. 608). This silencing is illustrated with the examples that none of the social media initiatives showcased fully veiled women in their representations of successful refugees, neither was any visibility created for voices who questioned the ideals associated with the host country or market (Georgiou, 2019).

 Not only silenced voices experience the digital order on social media in a negative way. Even voices that are heard express anxiety regarding the new requirements of performative refugeeness they feel they now have to operate under online, as the conditions for recognition remain strict for refugees nonetheless. The frustration that comes from this is demonstrated in Georgiou's study, where one of the refugees interviewed explained she felt like she constantly had to prove something online. While this woman whose voice is often heard and celebrated on social media, she explains that she feels the need to hide difficulties she faces and put on a poker face while meeting all the (digital) requirements that are imposed on her. Social media can become a space where refugees have to 'prove' they are not what the mainstream media portray them to be, by portraying themselves according to certain standards, even when these standards are not within their reach due to circumstances outside of their power. With that, social media for some can become another obstacle or unattainable responsibility in their search for adequate employment, because of the existing inequalities and discrimination existing in the offline world it can reflect and reproduce. While social media proves to be useful as it connects refugees to networks, places and information they can autonomously seek and establish, it does not free them from marketization or other mechanisms demanding compliance into 'the same' (Georgiou, 2019). Old mechanisms are now being managed in a digital way, and inequalities become invisible within hegemonic digital narratives of entrepreneurial agency. A problem that is invisible due to its positive frame. A narrow frame that fails to recognize differences, history, or personal journeys. One

that sets new requirements for performing, and places certain experiences or needs over others. Mainly that of personal resilience over vulnerability, individual aspiration over collective dissent, and determination over consolidation (Georgiou, 2019).

Social media seems to celebrate diversity, yet fails to recognize it. Social media holds great potential for positive social change, and social networking sites can become key tools used to change dominant representations in mainstream media. However, Alhayek (2014) analysed Facebook campaigns aimed to encourage female Syrian refugees, and identified a 'media online privilege' of representation, that actually excluded most Syrian refugee women. She found that social networking websites actually served as spaces promoting stereotypes, similar to mainstream media discourses. Campaigns claiming to represent female Syrian voices that are not usually heard in online spaces, actually portray self-orientalizing representations disconnected from these women's offline realities. Representations that are similar to Western stereotype discourse about the Arabian culture. These representations marginalize voices of refugee women who do not fit these dominant representations or place emphasis on the diversity or complexity that characterize their experiences (Alhayek, 2014).

In summary, social media holds potential for personal agency, representing yourself and making voices heard that are normally overlooked. However, social media operates under its own digital order that reproduces existing inequalities, sets strict boundaries for ways of representation and grants prominence to certain voices over others.

2.5 Contextual embedding

Due to the current pandemic of COVID-19 the world is facing a severe crisis. Like with most crises, it hits people with a disadvantaged social or economic position hardest. There has been no time to measure the exact consequences of this pandemic for refugees, the application process, obtaining certificates or the economy and job market yet, but there is no doubt that all these domains will experience negative effects. Moreover, the effects of the uncertainty and anxiety this pandemic produces for misplaced people who have already suffered from crisis's like war or carry other forms of trauma are still unknown. De Vroome and Tunbergen (2010) found significant negative associations between mental health issues such as depression, and odds of employment and occupation status amongst refugees. They also found general health problems to be negatively related to both employment odds and occupational status. Dropping out of integration courses significantly decreased refugees' employment odds and occupational status, as did the amount of time spent at refugee

reception centres (De Vroome & Van Tunbergen, 2010). As in the current situation courses and exams are paused and the amount of time spent in refugee centres will increase, this will most likely have negative consequences for the (future) economic integration of refugees. One consequence of this pandemic that is yet visible, is the enormously increased relevance of technology, digital practices and social media in all aspects of life, education, employment and integration. More than ever, people have to depend on online networks and facilities. This pressure, combined with the continuously communicated message from policymakers and organisations towards refugees stressing the importance of using social media for professional purposes, pushes them towards this digital environment without there being extensive knowledge on how they are experiencing it. It is therefore crucial to gain insight into how these social media practices aimed at obtaining adequate employment are experienced by higher educated refugees.

2.6 Conclusion

Refugees are naturally more disadvantaged when it comes to social capital, because they leave behind most of their social network when they leave their country of origin (Torezani et al., 2008). On top of that, they face structural barriers making it difficult to integrate into the labour market. Within their new country of residence, lies the challenge of rebuilding a new bridging social network and obtaining adequate employment. An increasingly important tool in the Netherlands and beyond for building a social network for professional purposes, is social media. Despite of the increasing global relevance of using social media for professional purposes, and specific relevance it potentially has for higher educated refugees, this practice is underrepresented within this group (Alencar, 2017). Some scholars argue this may be due to lack of awareness of work culture (Willot & Stevenson, 2013). While social media present great opportunities for refugees as it can link them to wider, linking, bridging or vertical forms of capital, caution must be taken when presenting social media practices as a 'solution' for higher educated refugees looking for adequate employment. Social media use for professional purposes has risen in neoliberal states, placing emphasis on personal agency and autonomous digital practices (Easton-Calabria & Omata, 2018). While social media is an open space, it seems to be subject to a digital order creating space for certain voices while silencing others (Georgiou, 2019; Alhayek, 2014). Offline inequalities or discrimination can be transferred to the digital environment, and social media can function as yet another requirement refugees have to fulfil in their quest for recognition or employment.

Insights derived from these theories reflect the possible benefits of using social media for professional purposes, but also show the potential constrains professionally qualified refugees might face in doing so. It is therefore necessary to remain critical of these practices during the execution of this study, and crucial to examine the experiences of higher educated refugees using social media for professional purposes from their point of view. Especially in the current pandemic we are facing, where refugees face more difficulties and have to depend on digital practices more than ever before.

Method

3.1 Operationalization

For clarity purposes, the research questions will be repeated before describing the research design. The main research question is as follows: How do professionally qualified refugees in the Netherlands experience the use of social media in their search for adequate employment? Sub-questions are;

1. What are the potentially perceived or experienced barriers regarding the use of social media in the search for adequate employment?
2. What are the potentially perceived or experienced benefits regarding the use of social media in the search for adequate employment?

These questions have been researched through a qualitative research design, in the form of in-depth interviews. A qualitative research design is needed to understand each participants' personal story and journey, and to encourage them to share and elaborate on their experiences. In-depth interviews can provide deeper insight in the participants views and experiences as it allows for an in-depth analysis of underlying opinions and behaviours (Legard, Keegan & Ward, 2003). Because this study aims to get a deeper insight in the participants' perceptions and experiences, and the way they give meaning to these experiences, this design was most suitable for this study. This is an inductive study, meaning its main purpose is providing new theories and insights regarding the experiences of higher educated refugees using social media for professional purposes. Patton (as cited in Bowen, 2006, p. 2) stated: "Inductive analysis means that the patterns, themes, and categories of analysis come from the data; they emerge out of the data rather than being imposed on them prior to data collection and analysis". However, it draws on theories mentioned in the theoretical framework, and the data will be continuously compared to these existing theories to identify similarities or contradictions. Sensitizing concepts emerged from the theoretical framework will be used as an interpretive tool during data analysis. These concepts provide a starting point and general sense of guidance, without being definitive (Bowen, 2006). The sensitizing concepts are visualized below.

Concept	Dimensions/indicators
Social capital	Social relationships that can be used as (employment) resources

	Bonding social contacts such as friends and family
	Bridging social contacts such as (native) connections from organisations
Social media practices	Using social media to establish or maintain (professional) networks
	Using social media to seek (employment) information or vacancies
	Using social media to apply for job openings
	Using social media for (professional) self-profiling
Employment	Underemployment, not matching the participants' skills or educational background
	Adequate employment, matching the participants' skills or educational background

The flexibility semi-structured interviews provide is a crucial component, as all participants will have unique experiences and the interviewer must be able to respond to these, so they can be fully elaborated. This means topics may not be discussed in the same order during all interviews, as participants are encouraged to share their stories freely according to their preferences. Sensitive topics might be discussed during the interviews, therefore, one-on-one interviews are preferred over focus groups or surveys as they may discourage participants from disclosing sensitive stories or information as these settings may feel less comfortable or safe (Harrel & Bradley, 2009). The non-media centric approach of this study offers the opportunity to analyse how refugees' (professional) media practices interact with their offline work-related experiences. Scholars have recently advocated this approach, because of the urgency to focus on media-engagement across a various range of contexts and situations. "In this respect, a focus on the practices, activities and interactions of refugees may provide an innovative starting point for gaining deeper understanding of the situatedness of digital media

technologies in their daily lives, and consequently in practices related to integration into their new society" (Alencar, 2020, p.505). A research approach that is essential as the importance of mobile devices and the internet continues to increase in the lives of displaced people, especially since the outbreak of COVID-19.

The interviewer's own expectations or perceptions should not be introduced as they can influence the participants responses, decreasing the validity of the study. Closed questions for example were therefore avoided as much as possible, as open questions provide opportunity for the respondents to fill in the question themselves and think out loud (Hammer & Wildavsky, 2018). Closed questions were only asked during the interview to clarify contradictions or for confirmation. Prior to the interviews, a semi-structured questionnaire was made based on the theories discussed in the theoretical framework and the sensitizing concepts. The questionnaire addresses the following themes:

(1) Personal information and background: The questions included in this theme are centred around understanding where the participants are from, and encourage them to share information about their journey to the Netherlands. Questions are also centred around their educational- and career background, to gain a deeper understanding into who the participants are as professionals. Questions about relevant demographic information such as age and social status are also included.

(2) Social and professional networks: The questions included in this theme centre around the participants' networks. Questions include whether they had any social network when arriving in the Netherlands, how they tried to expand their network, and what type of contacts their current network consists of. A focus will be on gaining insights into whether participants have bonding social contacts as well as bridging social contacts. For example, whether they mostly interact with other people who also have refugee backgrounds, if they have any native friends, or if they have any contacts at institutes or organisations. Participants will also be asked whether there were any contacts they perceived as particularly useful in their search for adequate employment, and what type of contacts.

(3) Employment: The questions included in this theme centre around how participants usually obtain information about employment or vacancies, whether they perceive digital and/or personal networks as useful in their search for adequate employment, and if they feel like their educational- or career backgrounds helped with searching for and/or finding a job. Participants will also be asked whether they have experienced any (online) discrimination in their search for employment, and if so, to further elaborate on these experiences. Finally, a question will be asked about the participants' perception of successful economic integration,

and whether they think they are integrated economically in the Netherlands. Insights in these perceptions are valuable as they reveal underlying feelings and perceptions towards their labour market participation in the Netherlands.

(4) Social media and digital practices: Questions regarding this theme include whether participants were aware of/familiar with social network sites or groups aimed at employment before coming to the Netherlands, how participants use social media in their job search and how they experience this, and if they have experienced any opportunities or barriers whilst using social media for professional purposes. As the main research question in this study is aimed at the experiences of higher educated refugees using social media in their search for adequate employment, these questions are evidentially important.

(5) Digital identity: The questions included in this theme centre around how the participants profile themselves online and how they experience this. Questions include what kind of information they post to describe their professional experience and how often they post information about themselves on social media. These questions provide insight into whether participants feel comfortable in expressing themselves online, how they wish to be perceived and what they feel is required from them by fellow social media users or potential recruiters or employers in the digital world.

(6) Media portrayal of refugees: Additional questions will be asked about how participants perceive refugees to be portrayed in the mainstream media in the Netherlands, and whether they perceive social media as a space where they can represent themselves (in contrast to mainstream media).

It is important to realise that this study is shaped by hierarchical power relations. The researcher is white and born in the Netherlands, operating from a position of privilege. When considering the pressure there is currently being put on refugees to perform online and engage in neoliberal digital practices for professional purposes, as well as the notions of control, discrimination, racism, islamophobia and anti-refugee discourses existing in the Netherlands, this hierarchy is particularly evident. The bottom-up perspective of this research was therefore elaborated to the participants, stressing the importance of there being no right or wrong answers. The goal of this research is to gain insight in *their* lived experiences, participants were therefore explicitly encouraged to be as open and honest as they were comfortable with.

3.2 Respondents

A total of 8 interviews were conducted, with refugees from Syria (N=6), Iran (N=1) and Burundi (N=1), currently residing in the Netherlands. Participants were aged between 23 and 56, with an average age of 36. All participants came to the Netherlands between 2013 and 2017, ensuring recent experiences with searching for adequate employment. A table containing the key demographics of the participants is provided on the next page. Because of the specific nature and background of the participants, most participants were recruited via *purposeful sampling*. This means they were selected purposefully, based on their characteristics. These characteristics included having a refugee background, a high educational level, work experience, and having active social media accounts. All participants were in the possession of a university Bachelor degree diploma or higher, or were in an advanced stage in the process of obtaining one. Every participant was working at the time of the interview, either full-time, part-time or as a volunteer. They all had active social media accounts that they had used or were using for professional purposes. Some participants were personally approached on LinkedIn, and others responded to a detailed call in refugee Facebook-groups such as Refugee Start Force. Additionally participants were acquired through *snowball sampling*, that is through the networks of earlier participants. One participant was obtained via personal connections. Eisenhardt (1989) states that given the small number of participants that can often be researched when conducting in-depth interviews, purposeful selection of participants where the research interests are clearly observable is preferred. In order to reflect the sample population as best as possible, maximum variation sampling within this group was applied. This means refugees from different genders, ages and backgrounds were included. 3 female and 5 male participants were interviewed. Participants were working in the banking sector, as counsellors, legal advisors, volunteers, researchers, in sales or as interns. A precise overview of participant characteristics is showed in table 1. This study consists of 8 interviews of approximately one hour, varying from 45 minutes to 2 hours, with an average of 68 minutes. Interviews were conducted in May 2020. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, participants could only be interviewed via Skype-video calls. Interviews took place digitally, with the interviewer as well as the participants both being inside their own homes. Despite the fact that personal meetings were not possible, there has been an attempt to create a safe environment, enabling respondents to elaborate their experiences as freely and comfortably as possible. For instance, one-on-one settings were guaranteed, meaning that the interviewer would be alone in a closed room when interviews were being conducted. Participants were also stimulated to ask any questions they may have had prior to the interview, and anonymity was guaranteed for all participants. All

participants gave their informed consent and permission to be audio-taped during the interviews. To respect their privacy, all names have been replaced by pseudonyms.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had an effect on this study. It was particularly difficult to obtain and maintain the attention of (potential) participants in the midst of all the worries and (digital) information overload about the virus. Six respondents that were recruited prior to the outbreak of the pandemic did not respond anymore afterwards, or expressed only feeling comfortable doing the interview in person due to the sensitive nature of their stories. Therefore, only eight participants have eventually been obtained. The limited number of participants somewhat effects the validity of the findings in this study. However, since saturation was reached within the eight interviews that were conducted, this study can be considered valid despite its small sample size (Fusch & Ness, 2015).

Table 3.2: demographic information about the participants

Name (pseudonym)	Gender	Age	Country of origin	Description
Rabia	Female	36	Syria	Rabia has been living in the Netherlands since 2015. In Syria, she studied Business administration – finance and investment. In 2017 she started her traineeship for status holders at the 'Gemeente Amsterdam' where she is now a regular counsellor.
Dunia	Female	23	Syria	Dunia has been living in the Netherlands since 2017. She studied English literature at Cairo University, and is now studying international Law at Tilburg University. Next to her studies, she works as a legal advisor at the Syrian professional network.
Jawad	Male	37	Syria	Jawad has been living in the Netherlands since 2016. He studied English literature in Syria, and is now studying Arts, Culture and Society at Erasmus University

				Rotterdam. Next to his studies, he works as a volunteer at the National Holocaust Memorial.
Bashar	Male	33	Syria	Bashar has been living in the Netherlands since 2013. He studied Informatica – software engineering in Syria, and Business Information Systems at the university of Amsterdam. He is currently working as an information manager at a Dutch bank.
Wazir	Male	54	Syria	Wazir has been living in the Netherlands since 2015. He studied Electrical Engineering in Syria. He is currently working as a sales engineer.
Abdul	Male	31	Iran	Abdul has been living in the Netherlands since 2014. He studied European Studies in Iran.
Majid	Male	46	Syria	Majid has been living in the Netherlands since 2016. He studied medicine in Syria and Biomedical science at Utrecht University. He is currently working as a PhD-researcher.
Lydia	Female	30	Burundi	Lydia has been living in the Netherlands since 2016. She studied political science and international relations in Burundi and conflict studies and human rights at Utrecht University and is now doing her internship.

3.3 Data analysis

The interviews will be recorded in order to be transcribed verbatim. The following transcripts have manually been systematically analysed by a qualitative thematic content analysis, using what Boeije (2002) describes as the *constant comparative method.* By constant comparison within and between interviews, theory can be formed by coding and categorising. By comparing and linking these categories, main themes can be distinguished. The first step in systematically analysing the transcripts have been open coding. During this step, every textual fragment of the interview was analysed. When the fragments were deemed relevant they were given a suiting code. Codes were then compared within a single interview to detect potential contradictions that had to be explained. This lead to 304 open codes that had emerged from the data. Secondly, comparison between interviews have been shaped by axial coding. Open codes were compared, and the same or highly similar open codes were grouped together in these axial codes, leading to 21 initial axial codes. After careful revision, these were further grouped together, resulting in 14 final axial codes. Thirdly, emerging themes were extracted from these axial codes, which form the main components of the theory. This final step in the coding process requires extensive sorting, reassembling and reorganizing of the axial codes to reveal the connections between them. The selective codes that are created through this assembling are the most important codes, as they are the foundation of the results and discovered concepts and theories. These selective represent the main themes identified in the data; (1) The transition of (digital) networks, (2) Social media practices and experiences, (3) Refugee identity stigmas, (4) Cultural differences in employment (acquisition), (5) Refugee resilience implementation. These selective codes each confirm or contradict ideas and theories discussed in the theoretical framework. The selective and axial codes will form a code-tree, as visualized on the next page. The systematic nature of the analysis and the constant comparing increase the reliability and validity of the results (Boeije, 2002; Clarke & Braun, 2017). The result section will be organised by presenting each main theme/selective code and its sub-themes.

The aim of this study is to provide new insights in the experiences of professionally qualified refugees. The study therefor has an inductive nature, meaning the main themes have emerged from the data. However, it does draw upon earlier conducted research described in the theoretical framework. Reflecting upon these theories is important, as results from this study can for example confirm or contradict these theories and be a valuable addition to existing literature, or provide critical notions in need of further research. Additionally, similarities in findings in this research and findings in existing research, can contribute to the validation of the findings (Eisenhardt, 1989).

4. Results

The result section will be structured according to the themes that emerged from the data and their accompanying axial codes, as visualised below.

The transition of (digital) networks	Lack of network upon arrival
	The initial importance of vertical bridging capital
	The rise of digital refugee networks
Social media practices and experiences	Digital practices
	Negative experiences on social media
	The experienced pressure to participate on social media
Refugee identity stigmas	Negative stereotypes and discrimination
	Hiding the refugee identity
	Wanting to be rated as a person
Cultural differences in employment (acquisition)	The difference in work culture
	The difference in profiling oneself (online)
Refugee resilience implementation	Internalisation of neoliberal mind-set
	Municipalities pushing underemployment
	Reciprocity for successful economic integration

4.1 The transition of (digital) networks

This section will describe the transition of (digital) networks found amongst the participants in this study. Most of the participants in this study arrived in the Netherlands around 2015, the peak of the labelled refugee crisis. None of the participants had a strong social network when they first arrived. Most of them described how vertical bridging contacts, such as native contacts obtained via volunteer work or organisations, were most helpful in their first period after arriving in the Netherlands. It was often unclear to participants where to find information

or employment opportunities, and these vertical bridging contacts could help them in this regard. Therefore participants often described their offline personal connections as more important during this stage.

An interesting observation is that because of the lack of social network and information on how to navigate in the Dutch labour market the participants experienced themselves, many of them now want to help other refugees in this regard. Social media platforms are often used to facilitate this help, by creating digital professional refugee networks on LinkedIn, or joining Facebook groups where newcomers can now obtain information from refugees that have been residing in the Netherlands for multiple years. These digital networks contain the high levels of trust that can often be found in bonding networks, while providing access to information and resources that can often be found in bridging networks. This reflects the evolvement of refugee social networks over time as described by Ryan (2011). As refugees evolve over relative social locations, the value of these networks can increase over time (Ryan, 2011; Gericke et al., 2018). In this study, this transition is paired with an increased digitalisation of these refugee networks. These findings will be structurally described in the following sub-sections.

4.1.1 Lack of network upon arrival

All of the participants described they had almost no network in the Netherlands when they arrived. The only contacts most of them had were direct family members that had either made the journey to the Netherlands before them and they were now joining, or that would arrive later to join them. Only Lydia, a 30-year old political reporter from Burundi, arrived with a colleague as they both had to flee because their work put them in danger due to the government. The lack of social networks often posed difficulties for participants wanting to enter the labour market as they did not know who or where they could ask for information. As stated by Portes (1998), social networks are used to share information, and social capital can contribute to economic development and outcomes. Bashar, a 33-year old manager from Syria, illustrates the relationship between the lack of a social network and the lack of knowledge on how to find information:

> Once I came to be honest I had totally no network at all, so I had to find all the
> information myself. And I was kind of like alone because I came earlier, In 2013, so at
> that time still not a lot of refugees came, Syrian refugees to the Netherlands and it was

not really clear what place or what apps you should go in order to finally get a job. So I had to do the whole work myself and ask here and there.

These experiences reflect statements by Fisher (2018), who argues that refugees struggle with an overall lack of knowledge on how to find information in their host countries, and often do not know which technologies there are to support them. Jawad, a 37-year old Master's student from Syria, said that the main problem for refugees trying to find employment in the Netherlands is the difficulty to obtain the information they need. He elaborated that all the provided information, including that on social media, is in English or Dutch. This poses an extra barrier for refugees trying to obtain information who do not have a sufficient English- or Dutch language proficiency yet. The fragmented and digitalised manner in which information is often provided in Western-European countries, requires refugees to adequately use the support of social networks that can help them navigate this information (Fisher, 2018). The lack of social support networks can therefore form a huge barrier in obtaining the right information to acquire employment information in the host country labour market.

4.1.2 The initial importance of vertical bridging capital

All of the participants' networks initially started to expand through native or vertical bridging contacts after arriving in the Netherlands. These contacts included volunteers from refugee centres, people from organizations, fellow students from university and colleagues from volunteer-positions. These contacts were useful for the participants in various ways, such as providing information on how to write motivation letters, help participants move to their new home, get acquainted with more places and organisations, and obtain employment. Six out of eight participants found a job or internship through these contacts. This reinforces earlier findings highlighting the importance of vertical bridging contacts in acquiring employment (Gericke et al., 2018). Rabia, a 36-year old counsellor from Syria, found a job at the municipality through an organisation. She believes that refugees who are successful in finding a job in the Netherlands, are the ones who have had help from native contacts. She elaborates on this in the following section, where she talks about how her husband found his job:

> Through my friend that I told you about in Huizen. She is in HR and she knows so many people. I met her for the first time at an 'in gesprek met elkaar' event that was organized by VWN. I was lucky and she is now still in Huizen and trying to help the refugees as much as possible. There is like a small community of Dutch people trying to do as much as possible to help people through their network, and what I saw from

all the experience around me, the people who have succeed in the Netherlands, they are the one who were lucky to have these kind of people.

Majid, a 46-year old medical researcher from Syria, describes how he obtained his current PhD-position through extensive networking with university professors when he was studying for his Master's at Utrecht University. He also talks about how his wife obtained her previous job through a connection she made during her time volunteering at the Dutch food bank. Wazir, a 54-year old engineer from Syria, explains how he told as many colleagues from volunteer work as possible that he was searching for a job. These colleagues helped him get paid jobs three times, all by tagging him online when they encountered employment opportunities on social media. However, these were relatively low-skilled jobs, for example installing solar panels. This is inconsistent with the notion of bridging contacts often providing more adequate employment of a higher occupational status (De Vroome & Van Tubergen, 2010). Wazir illustrates that he has experienced offline social contacts to be more important to initially build a network, but finds social media useful in maintaining and utilizing this network. These ideas are also reflected in the way in which he eventually obtained employment as an engineer. When seeing the vacancy for this job on LinkedIn, Wazir noticed he had a LinkedIn-connection currently working at the company in question. He reached out to this connection, someone he personally knew from the past, who then requested the HR-team to read Wazir's application with special attention. This shows how personal connections obtained in the offline world can later be utilized on social media.

4.1.3 The rise of digital refugee networks

The previous sub-sections describe a general lack of social capital amongst refugees that have arrived in the Netherlands between 2013 and 2016, and the importance of native social contacts helping them as they start to navigate in their new host country. This sub-section however, will illustrate the various ways these participants have over time established strong social networks with fellow refugees. Partly due to their own experienced barriers, such as language deficiencies, not knowing how to obtain (employment) information, and lack of social support, almost all participants expressed the desire to now assist newcomers with these barriers.

> If I can push the others, if I can help them, if I can do something for them to start at some point and to do something, then I will not hesitate to do it or to help them. Because they need it. (Jawad, 37)

This assistance is largely shaped on social media, by creating and joining refugee networks and groups. Seven out of eight respondents in this study mentioned being members of such online groups. Within these groups, various information and resources are shared, for example job opportunities. Wazir explains how he shares employment- and education opportunities in private Facebook groups for Syrians in the Netherlands, and has received multiple messages from people thanking him because they have acquired jobs through the information he shared:

> If I look at myself four, five years ago, if someone guided me a little bit. Like okay you're going to make this kind of application, go get a certificate in this field, it would make my life much easier. But I lacked guidance, there was no one to tell me your background is this, it's good if you do this for you. (…) So when I see an opportunity, I post it [in refugee groups on social media] like guys this opportunity is telling they will provide training, they will provide experience and they will give you let's say, six months of training and then the job. Or this institute is giving education for one day per week, you should press on the link. So at least three people I know, they already got certificates and jobs because of this. (…) You see people always helping and answering these questions. So there are many groups and there are many people helping. If you know something help because he's new and you've done this before.

Wazir also addresses the large number of refugees that arrived in the Netherlands in 2015, and talks about how some of them started their own businesses and are now providing jobs to newcomers. He additionally mentions that the language barrier is now partly gone, as there are many refugees willing to assist online by translating information, or posting information or vacancies in Arabic. Apart from joining online refugee networks, one participant in this study established one himself. Bashar started an online network to gather Syrian professionals in the Netherlands. This Syrian Professional Network has attracted over 600 members on LinkedIn within five months. Bashar aims to empower newcomers (re)starting their career in the Netherlands. He describes how this community of professional Syrians help each other, support each other and learn from each other. A digital community that did not exist when he first arrived in the Netherlands himself in 2013.

> It's totally different, it is enlarged by time and also I see now for the newcomers, for the people who came later, they have fewer challenges to find the information I would say about what should you do, which organisation you can reach out to. Because there are already people who have had this experience and share it with them. And now with

the Syrian professional network it is great because now we connect everyone, and it's really easy now to access the information. That was also one of my motivations, because I had to do everything by myself that I now want to help other people. But not the only motivation, I found a lot of value of this as a network. It's not only about the job, it also about somehow a community of professionals. You have this support, assistance, it is not only about individuals. (…) We have the same culture, the same challenges.

While the Syrian professional network is a digital network, they also organise offline events. Such events include career-related workshops, courses and information sessions to help refugees that wish to start their own business but lack knowledge on how to do so. This illustrates how social connections acquired online can later be transformed to offline, personal connections. Rabia, who has joined the Syrian Professional Network, describes that she views digital support amongst Syrians as a new phenomenon:

I met those people online and those are Syrian people who speak the same language and we are trying to take small steps to help each other with jobs. For me, because now when I have something in the gemeente [municipality] I can help them and I can pass it to other people. And now they are doing small stuff, small things to help refugees which is pretty great actually. Like the experience in this field in Syria is little compared to here. So our people now here, they are working in ING, one of them in Deloitte, other one in EY, so they have already learned there, they trying to pass it to other people. This culture, we didn't have it in Syria. In Syria, when you have something, you learned something, you keep it for yourself, to keep you shining compared to other people. (…) So this thing is great actually. This is a new thing.

Dunia, a 23-year old law student, is the most recently arrived newcomer included in this study as she has been living in the Netherlands since 2017. By that time, multiple Syrian Facebook groups and digital networks had already emerged online. Dunia therefore describes how she feels that there is always help available to her in these Facebook groups:

It is for the newcomers in Utrecht. And it is really helpful, because you can ask someone to help you with the language, to teach you for instance. Or if you ask for stuff like, if you want to do something and you don't have enough knowledge about it, you can ask how to do it. There are always people to, to give you information. (…)

> They understand that you come from different place and they will understand you. And they will give you useful information.

She also describes how she was contacted on LinkedIn by a member of the Syrian Professional Network, where she is now gaining experience as a legal advisor. She expresses how this digital network is not only useful to her in finding employment, but also provides her with people she can relate to or look up to, as they are all high educated Syrians navigating through the Dutch labour market:

> Because you go to LinkedIn you find like okay, there are Syrians in the Netherlands who work, who are professionals and stuff. (…) I met around like 50 Syrians who already work here and have a lot of experience and they can also share. Like one of the workshop was how to find a job in the Netherlands and the person who presented was Syrian who worked here already for two or three years and was talking about the work environment and all these kind of things in Arabic. Which is also like really nice. And he is Syrian like me, he had kind of the same experience. It's really cool that I can relate to what he is saying.

Dunia's experiences reflect Wazir's earlier statements about the language barrier being lower for recently arrived newcomers as there is translation help available to them, as well as information in Arabic. These findings show the potential for social media to function as a space where refugees can overcome obstacles they face when trying to obtain adequate employment. Information and resources are being exchanged within these digital networks by refugees between themselves. These findings reinforce Ryan's (2011) arguments, as they show the value of social networks are not dependent on the ethnicity of the contacts in them, but on these the relative social locations of these contacts. That entails, the access to different and valuable knowledge and resources these contacts contain.

4.2 Social media practices and experiences

Almost all participants stated they realised the importance of (digital) networks for professional purposes. They stated that networking is the most important practice in the Netherlands to acquire employment, and being active on network sites such as Linkedin is crucial here. Despite of this awareness, many participants showed reluctance towards profiling themselves on digital media platforms. Some expressed worries about sharing personal information on social media, as they felt it could be used against them. Many of

them explained how they have had negative experiences on social media, or how their participation on social media felt useless as their digital practices continuously failed to lead to results. Trust seems to be an important condition for digital participation, as participants mentioned they would only participate within certain social media groups that felt like safe spaces. While participants were mostly reluctant to participate on social media in terms of posting information or extensively profiling themselves, they did use social media to seek out information and search for opportunities. These findings will be further elaborated in the following sub-sections.

4.2.1 Digital practices

Almost none of the participants were actively using social media for professional purposes in their country of origin. After coming to the Netherlands, all of them have either started to do so or have expanded their practices. Such practices include creating an account on professional network sites such as LinkedIn, joining Facebook groups to find information about vacancies, or generally seeking employment information on different social media platforms. After coming to the Netherlands, many of them expressed realisations of the important role digital practices play in the Dutch labour market. Dunia, a 23-year old law student from Syria, explains how she had never heard of LinkedIn prior to coming to the Netherlands. When she was in the refugee reception centre, the importance of LinkedIn was highlighted during a workshop on how to find employment in the Netherlands. Bashar, a 33-year old manager from Syria, also elaborates on realising this importance:

> I think it's very important. At the beginning I didn't focus a lot on that. But I had a feeling that it is very important here to put a very good profile on LinkedIn. And I know that almost 90 percent of the companies look on LinkedIn profiles for the candidates.

However, after arguing the importance of LinkedIn, Bashar shares that he is not a very active user of the platform and he tries to keep the information on his profile short and basic. A seeming contradiction of perceptions and behaviours that is observable amongst multiple participants in this study. For example, Lydia, a 30-year old reporter from Burundi, states: "I think digital network is very important, but I'm not very active online." She elaborates that she also tries to keep the information on her social media profiles as limited as possible; "You don't know what happens with the information on your profile. Some people can use it against you." Wazir, a 54 year old engineer from Syria, explains he only publicly places

comments or posts in private social media groups. He avoids to do so on public pages, because he might receive comments about him being a refugee.

> I don't write anything on social media, because I don't want to hear a sentence or something like ah you are a refugee. So I don't write at all in groups. (…) Let's say I send you a DM, but I don't write in the comments.

The threat of online criticism from natives or other non-refugees also hinders Rabia, a 36-year old counsellor from Syria, from expressing her opinions online:

> Sometimes when I want to express my opinion about things that happen in the Netherlands or measures that they can, or the government make here. I do not feel so free to do that, because they may say like okay you are like, you are not Dutch. So you are not allowed to criticise.

Overall, the majority of the participants in this study were reluctant towards profiling themselves or sharing their opinions and personal information on social media. While participants were reluctant towards sharing information on social media themselves, most of them did find social media useful for seeking out existing information or searching for employment opportunities. Abdul, a 31-year old refugee from Iran, explains how LinkedIn provides him detailed employment information and how he can effectively search for vacancies there using certain filters. Moreover, he has found an online programming course through Facebook which he is currently following. Wazir, a 54-year old engineer from Syria, also describes how he uses LinkedIn in his job-search process:

> I made a premium account to have extra insights. When I apply for a job I look carefully for the number of applicants. So if I see ten people applying from university of Rotterdam and Amsterdam, I don't apply. It's for sure I'm not going to take it. Because they are local, they know the language, they know the culture, the certificates are local. (…) So each job I apply for I have to read carefully what is needed, who are my competitors or other applicants, all possible information. The background of the hiring manager, at which company he worked, I see him on LinkedIn. What company he worked so during the interview I may say something suitable to consider his background, so I get more of his attention.

Wazir describes he just uses LinkedIn "to target opportunities", but does not expresses himself on the platform in any way. The majority of the participants in this study used social

media to find employment information or vacancies, but were reluctant towards contributing to online platforms themselves as that could potentially make them vulnerable, especially as refugees. Participants expressed worries of online criticism, and information being used against them. These threats could form barriers for refugees towards contributing on social media, in forms of engaging in discussions or profiling oneself online. Worries of such threats could emerge from fear of offline experienced discrimination transferring to the online environment, or from negative experiences they have had on social media. Unfortunately, the majority of the participants in this study have encountered such experiences. Those will be further elaborated in chapter 4.3, and in the following sub-section.

4.2.2 Negative experiences on social media

The majority of the participants in this study described that they either felt unheard or ignored on social media, or they had encountered negative experiences such as being bullied or being scammed. Majid, a 46-year old medical researcher from Syria, explains he has therefore stopped using social media for professional purposes:

> To be honest with you, I tried this LinkedIn, Facebook, all of them. And I receive nothing. I don't find them good for me as a refugee. Maybe for Dutch people. (…) For me as refugee, even with my big expertise, no chance. It is just because it's protocol, we have to do LinkedIn. (…) I don't post a lot actually, I'm not focussed a lot on this actually. Because I found if you present yourself and others are not interested about you, you waste time. So you have to be effective about it.

Rabia, a 36-year old counsellor from Syria, also mentioned she has tried as much as possible through LinkedIn and applied at several companies, without any result. Wazir, a 54-year old engineer from Syria, said he was continuously applying via LinkedIn for jobs when he entered the Dutch labour market. He kept track of all his applications, adding up to a total of 259. He describes this extensive applying through LinkedIn without any success as a "very defeating process." He had additionally been scammed on social media, when he replied to a vacancy on Facebook regarding manual labour for a two-week job. Wazir was 'hired' and worked for two weeks, without ever getting paid after. This has resulted in him not trusting employment information on Facebook, as he states: "anyone can write anything". Two participants shared they have experienced a form of online bulling on social media:

It is really hard to find a place where you can express yourself or ask questions without feeling like people are making fun of you. Or find it weird what you are asking or something like that. Because like, I tried once to ask questions about if I want to find a job, without having to speak Dutch. And they were like, laughing some people, they were like you are in the Netherlands, you need to speak the language and stuff. And it's totally understandable, but you feel like attacked a bit like this. So, it is really sometimes hard to find a good place to ask the good, like the suitable question for it. (Dunia, 23-year old law student from Syria)

You have to look exactly at social media as we are looking at the whole world here offline. And then we can talk about the discrimination that people experience sometimes. When you post something, and you will find someone from the UK that is bullying you because you don't understand how I think. You have to say this and you're not allowed to say that. And they intervene in a rude way then they try to judge you. (Jawad, 37-year old master student from Syria)

As shown in the previous experiences, participants in this study faced difficulties in finding the right social media spaces where they felt like they could trust the provided information and express themselves freely without feeling criticised or neglected. Negative experiences on social media combined with the potential threat of online criticism as described in the previous sub-section, 5.1.1, have as a consequence that refugees in this study mainly participate on social media within refugee groups or networks. These groups provide safety, as participants trust they will not be laughed at, criticised or taken advantage of by fellow group members. Trust is mainly found in bonding networks, containing social contacts with similar ethnic backgrounds. In the offline world, refugees often use ties from their bonding social capital as recourses when searching for employment (Lamba, 2008). This has often been criticised, as bridging social networks are believed to be more useful in this regard (Campion, 2018). As Gericke et al. (2018) argue, the reason why refugees rely on their bonding network could be due to a higher level of trust amongst these contacts. It is interesting to see similar patterns emerge in the online world, as participants in this study primarily, or some even exclusively, focus on and engage in bonding social network groups on social media when searching for employment. Moreover, the notion of trust partly explains why similar patterns of network developing are unfolding in the digital environment.

4.2.3 The experienced pressure to participate on social media

Half of the participants indicated that they felt pressure to use social media for professional purposes because of the emphasis that is placed on doing so in the Netherlands. Participants mentioned feeling like they would not be perceived as professionals if they did not use social media for professional purposes, and disagree with this perception themselves. Bashar, a 33-year old manager from Syria, shares that he perceives platforms such as LinkedIn as useful for sharing information, but thinks these platforms are now used in a wrong way as they have become leading in the job market. He thinks this is unfair, as a lot of people who do not know how to profile themselves well on social media are now being 'underestimated', as they in fact are skilful, suitable employees. He therefore states he does not support the idea of portraying oneself online in order to find employment. He expresses that this generates pressure because not having a perfect profile leads to less employment chances. He describes this pressure in the following quote:

> If you are not really active on social media that does not mean that you are not a good worker. So you don't have a lot of connections on LinkedIn, that does not mean that in real life you are not really active or also in the work atmosphere. So I think it is too much a little bit, and it is also pushing people and put a lot of pressure like you have to do this or you won't get a job. And this is what I don't like actually about it. There should be other ways that people can present themselves than just knowing how to make a good profile. (…) I know that it is this way now, that the people who are more active and showing and sharing they are more like, they are in better position than people who are not really active on social media sites. So it is now this sort of pressure that this person now he doesn't have a LinkedIn he is not professional.

Rabia, a 36-year old counsellor from Syria, explains how her forced migration and time spent in the refugee reception centre has left her with a 'gap' in work experience. The pressure to have a perfect profile on LinkedIn made her feel in deficit as a professional due to this gap. She also explains how she thinks information on her profile might be interpreted according to certain stereotypes about refugees. Eventually, she expresses how she feels a pressure to "keep up with everything" on social media, stating that language barriers make this especially difficult for her:

> And the first time I was like afraid to speak about my experience, because I found like it was little comparing to my age, because I am 36 years old, I should have a better

experience. I have like three or four years and my career stopped there. So I kind of felt like it was not good to put that on, like people could see the gap but not why. So they can think I was being lazy or can be misinterpreted. And then yeah, it became little by little, in three years I could build my LinkedIn. But I found it pretty difficult to connect there, too many people, too many stuff. Dutch people are very active on LinkedIn or Facebook or Instagram. So you have to also try to keep up with these things now. (…) You have to keep with everything. It is pretty difficult, especially with my language.

These experiences illustrate how professional participation on social media can instead of being a positive or empowering tool to help refugees obtain adequate employment, form an extra barrier and generate more pressure. Lydia, a 30-year old reporter from Burundi, states she experiences the pressure to professionally participates on social media as well. She describes that this generates an internal conflict, because she is reluctant towards sharing personal information on social media. This reluctance has been expressed by multiple participants in this stud, as shown in chapter 5.2.1. Lydia therefore describes difficulties she experiences in balancing her personal preference of providing limited personal information on social media, and the experienced external pressure to profile yourself on social media:

I think it's difficult. On one hand I prefer not to tell much about me, but on the other hand it's the only way they know about you. Your skills and your expertise and who you are, personality. Sometimes I am sure it can be used in your advantage but a lot of times it can be used against you. (…) Vacancy online they don't ask a lot of information about you, just request cv and motivation letter. They don't question are you a refugee or no, they just need to know like your qualified for the position. But social media is different. It almost always works against me. (…) But I still have to do it and have to get there. It is how it works in Holland. I have to do something, also on the social media, otherwise I will discriminate myself.

Lydia describes how the transparency of social media can work against her. She also mentions that more traditional ways to apply for jobs, don't "question" whether she is a refugee or not, while social media's transparency limit choices of disclosing such information. Ethnic minorities in the Netherlands have developed several coping strategies in facing discrimination in the labour market, such as not mentioning their country of origin (Andriessen et al., 2007; Kraal et al, 2009). As social media profiles can make peoples backgrounds transparently observable, the use of social media for professional purposes could

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potentially conflict with such coping strategies. Multiple participants in this study have adopted such coping strategies, for example by changing their name on job applications. These findings will be further elaborated in the next chapter.

4.3 Refuge identity stigmas

Seven out of eight participants in this study expressed they have experienced (labour market) discrimination in the Netherlands due to negative stereotypes about refugees. Such experiences include receiving negative comments from employers, feeling underestimated by professors or fellow students at universities, or an overall feeling of being judged because of their refugee backgrounds. Participants spoke about stereotypes including refugees being lazy, refugees not being hard workers, refugees being victims or criminals, or refugees being incompetent, unintelligent or low-skilled. These stereotypes articulate with common stereotypes about refugees that are often being portrayed in the mainstream media (Psoinos, 2007; Georgiou, 2018). Seven out of eight participants also perceived media partly responsible for these stereotypes, stating that media contribute to these stereotypes because of the way they report about refugees. Two out of three female participants in this study mentioned (fear of) an additional form of discrimination, as they expressed worries about (future) employers perceiving them as submissive or unwilling to interact with male colleagues. As a consequence of this discrimination threat, half of the participants in this study indicated they prefer not to mention they have refugee backgrounds towards people they have recently met, or to potential future employers. Half of the participants in this study expressed desires to more often be rated as 'people', based on their skills or personality, instead of on their refugee identity. These experiences and perceptions will be further elaborated in the next sub-sections.

4.3.1 Negative stereotypes and discrimination

Almost all participants in this study expressed they had experienced decimation, or suffered from negative stereotypes about refugees. They felt like these stereotypes made it particularly difficult for them to enter the Dutch labour market or obtain employment, as employers or recruiters would not negatively judge them by their refugee backgrounds. This has resulted in multiple high experienced and educated participants in this study applying for jobs over a 100 times before obtaining adequate employment. Jawad, a 37-year old master student from Syria

with a background in English literature, explains how he experiences his attempts to enter the Dutch labour market:

> It's not accessible for me as a refugee, so it was very hard. I applied for many jobs, but I have not received any response from any company. And sometimes actually I receive a response after ten minutes that they haven't accepted. After ten minutes, so it was also shameful, how come you judged my CV or how did you have the time to read my CV at least, read all my application in ten minutes. So I don't think that the recruiter had read my CV or has read my cover letter. And so you rejected just for the name I think. Or just because I am from Syria.

Jawad also described how he was approached by a recruiter on LinkedIn offering him an internship. When Jawad responded and provided more information about himself by sending his resume, the recruiter told him that he had offered the internship by mistake. Jawad describes how he experiences two types of discrimination in the Netherlands, as he is both a refugee and from the Middle-East. He argues that Western media often portray people from the Middle-East as primitive, underdeveloped people that have less professional skills than people from Europe. He describes how facing this discrimination has had negative effects on his self-image in the following quote:

> It's very hard to me, and so when you think that when you get rejected by the companies than you lose your self-esteem and your self-confidence. Because you think you are not good enough to join this company or to be one of the members.

Jawad additionally mentions how social media has played an essential role in stereotyping refugees, as they often associate people from war zones, like Syrians, or followers of Islam with terrorism. He therefore argues that being a Muslim forms an extra discrimination threat, and the accumulating stigmas attached to being a refugee, being from the Middle-East and being a Muslim, make it very hard to find a job. Rabia, a 36 year old counsellor from Syria, explains she experiences the same stigmas being placed on Arabian or Muslim people, and how she feels they are being perceived as criminals or terrorists. She therefore thinks companies might also be scared to hire refugees as they do not trust them. She additionally elaborates on how being an Arab woman forms another source of stigmatization in the corporate environment:

I am Arab, but also they have stigma. An Arab woman, they are being scared that my culture is being conservative, or being like not really social with other man. That make them also scared you know. (…) You can feel it, from the very first beginning. It is not shown on the table, but it is on there.

Dunia, a 23-year old law student from Syria, expresses concerns about similar worries future employers might have about her interacting with male colleagues. She shares that she often feels underestimated at university, as people tend to react shocked when she tells them she is studying there or are surprised when she has passed an exam. Dunia states that people perceive refugees as uneducated people, and it is hard for her to change those perceptions. Two other participants have had similar experiences at universities. Majid, a 54-year old medical researcher from Syria, explains how professors would ask if "he understood anything" after lectures, while he was easily following. Lydia, a 30-year old reporter from Burundi, talks about how her capability of obtaining a master degree is often underestimated in the following quote:

When they see you as a bad person or a victim they have to help you, they don't think you are capable to do anything. It's really unbelievable, so many people when I tell them like last year I was doing my masters, they are like wow, very shocked. They can't believe that a refugee can go through university and get a master degree, like come on. And people they forget that before we came here we had our lives (…). I think some people would love to see us start from primary school. (…) I think the media play a key role with these stereotypes and this kind of exclusion about refugees.

Some participants have received blatant, discriminating comments from former employers or fellow students. Wazir, a 54-year old engineer from Syria, shares that his former boss told him: "It's better to sell your house and go back to your own country". Majid, a 46-year old medical researcher from Syria, received questions as "what are you doing here" and comments as "you are taking the place of another student" when he was studying for his Master's degree at Utrecht University. It can be concluded from these experiences, that participants in this study suffer from various stereotypes and forms of discrimination as they navigate through the Dutch labour market and higher education. These experiences have led to participants feeling excluded, lower self-esteem and difficulties in obtaining employment.

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As a consequence, half of the participants indicated they often prefer not to disclose their refugee identity, as will be further elaborated in the following sub-chapter.

4.3.2 Hiding the refugee identity

> Not mentioning that I am a refugee, not because I am ashamed but because of how people perceive refugees. It's insane, believe me it's really insane. I guess it's part of human being, they will judge a lot. (Lydia, a 30-year old reporter from Burundi)

The quote above illustrates how refugees sometimes choose not to share their refugee backgrounds to avoid facing discrimination. Lydia continues by saying that when she applies for a job, she prefers to exclusively provide information about her personal interests, her educational background, and work-experience. She elaborates further on why she prefers not to share she has a refugee background:

> Sometime it can be used in my favour and sometime it can be used against me you know what I mean so, because I don't know what is inside the people. I like to try not to do, no. (…) This is something I learned from I don't know, since I lived in Holland. (…) Cause the media are like portraying really bad refugees. When people know you, and they know you are a good person they don't mind you are a refugee, but you have to gain the trust first.

Half of the participants in this study indicated they sometimes chose not to disclose their refugee backgrounds when applying for jobs or meeting new people. Dunia, a 23-year old law student from Syria, explains she does not want recruiters to "Get the impression of a refugee, from the beginning". Some participants even changed their names on job applications to a more typical Dutch name such as Jaap, as they believed this would increase their chances to be invited for an interview. Majid, a 46-year old medical researcher from Syria, explains how he applied for a certain job through LinkedIn and never received a response. A month after, he decided to apply again with the same CV, but not through LinkedIn this time and using a fake, Dutch name. Majid said he received a positive response from the company the same day, inviting him for an interview. Majid went to the interview and revealed he had replied to the vacancy before, as he describes in the following quote:

I said sir, I sent this application before. (…) But I didn't get any response back. Neither did I from any company, so I thought I am not qualified to be in Netherlands. I thought you come from the moon or from other planet. For that reason I just wanted to restore my trust in myself, for that reason I changed my name to Christiaan. (…) I told them okay, I understand, you don't want me. I am just here to prove for myself that I am enough, I'm still okay. My education and expertise is still valuable in this society.

After Majid revealed his real name and explained he had replied to the vacancy before, the company declined him. After elaborating on this experience, Majid states: "I'm not going to use social media or whatever anymore, because this is what happens". This statement illustrates how refugees might avoid using social media for professional purposes, as the transparency on these platforms can lead to discrimination. Blommaert et al. (2014) found that Dutch online recruiters were 60 percent more likely to give positive feedback and reactions towards applicants with a Dutch name, in comparison to applicants with Arabic names. Therefore, refugees can become reluctant towards using social media for professional purposes as this poses discrimination threats and conflicts with potential preferences to hide their refugee backgrounds.

4.3.3 Wanting to be rated as a person

One of the reasons participants in this study had for omitting their refugee backgrounds, was the desire to be rated as a person, based on their (professional) skills. Lydia, a 30-year old reporter from Burundi, explains: "Some people they just reacted like with so much pity when they know you are a refugee, that's something I don't like. I want to be treated like everybody." Dunia, a 23-year old law student, expressed experiencing the same type of sympathy when she had her Skype interview to apply for university in the Netherlands:

I was still in the AZC, refugee camp. And I mentioned that. And I felt the tone even was different, because she was like aw, that is really like sad and I hope you can get through these things and eh, we should accept you to make you like move from this place. You know, this kind of things. So I mean like, the interview was like 30 minutes and I think 15 minutes what it was my experience and how I found the Netherlands now and all this kind of things. Which is not really related to the study or to how they

choose students. And yeah so, at the beginning I was feeling like, that kind of thing, that I am not valued for my knowledge.

Dunia expresses that she wants to be dealt with as someone who has qualifications and is good at their job, not as someone who came from a different background. She says that she feels like people evaluate her being a refugee before they evaluate her work. When she was working, she sensed a form of sympathy, while she perceives herself to be successful because of her skills. While the desire to be rated based on their professional skills can form a barrier for refugees in using social media for professional purposes as this would make their refugee backgrounds more transparently observable, social media can also be used as a tool to present themselves as professionals. Bashar, a 33-year old manager from Syria, also expresses the desire to be rated as a professional based on his skills instead of based on his refugee background. He has therefore created the Syrian Professional Network, to position himself and other refugees as professionals on social media. He elaborates on this in the following quote:

> We are professionals so we do also like not want to be seen as refugees only. This is what we're trying to do, to be like shown as professionals. So this is the whole idea behind it.

Bashar argues that there are many stereotypes about refugees not being hard workers or good employees. While he believes media play a role in shaping these stereotypes, he also mentions these stereotypes could come from differences in work culture. He states that the way of "dealing and acting in the work environment" is different in Syria. For example, he explains that in Syria he was used to primarily listen to his boss and not contribute during meetings by speaking himself. He therefore received comments from colleagues about being too quiet during meetings during his first period working at a Dutch bank. Because of these differences, he experienced initial difficulties in adapting to the Dutch work atmosphere. However, he explains he has overcome these challenges and believes other refugees are capable of doing so as well. These findings and experienced differences in work culture will be further elaborated in the next chapter.

4.4 Cultural differences in employment (acquisition)

All participants in this study indicated that there are significant differences in work culture between the Netherlands and in their country of origin. Such differences include different

ways of obtaining employment or behaving in the work environment. The participants in this study were found to have difficulties with application processes that required them to promote themselves, and they seemed to have a lack of overall awareness regarding job application processes and the work culture in the Netherlands. These findings are similar to Willot and Stevenson's (2013) findings from research amongst higher educated refugees entering the UK labour market. However, participants in this study adapted to their new work environments quickly and could now clearly identify the cultural differences in employment (acquisition) between the Netherlands and their country of origin.

4.4.1 Difference in work culture

Almost all participants mentioned differences in work culture between the Netherlands and their country of origin. They said employees in the Netherlands are expected to be proactive and take initiative, whereas in their country of origin employees are expected to mainly take orders. Rabia, a 36-year old counsellor from Syria, states that in Syria "the boss is the boss" and you have to take his orders. In the Netherlands she experiences more freedom in her work environment, her thoughts and opinions are taken into account, and she has to contribute to shaping her own tasks at work. In Syria, when Rabia proposed ideas at work her boss would decline them. She quotes: "Here is like you can just, you can be yourself and you can create something and you can be proud of it". She also states she was scared of her boss in Syria, whereas here she has a boss she can rely on. Dunia, a 23-year old law student from Syria, shares similar opinions:

> We have a totally different work environment in Syria than here and it is really important for us to understand this, so we would be able to feel more comfortable here. And to be able to be more I think like productive. If you know the rules and if you know all of these things. (…) Here is people kind of equal or like at least, everyone has the right to express your opinion or if you agree or don't agree, you still have the space where you can say no, or to express what you think. In Syria it is more like hierarchy. And if someone is like higher than you, you cannot say like you are wrong or something. So I think this is like, it is really important, because in the beginning I was not able, I didn't know like if I could say I don't like this or eh, I need to change this. It was for me like I'm not sure.

In the quote above, Dunia explains how she felt uncertain whether she could speak out and share her opinion in her new work environment. Other participants in this study expressed

similar struggles in adjusting to their new work environment and learning its rules and regulations. Bashar, a 33-year old manager from Syria, further elaborates on how he feels this adaptation forms one of the biggest challenges refugees face in the Netherlands:

> I think the biggest challenge is or the biggest difference is more speak out yourself and to find your own way within your work environment. And be more proactive. So we are used more to have orders or instructions what to do or how you do stuff, and then get the functions and get your job and then you go and do it. But here you have to find yourself, your own ways and build your own network. Also within your company or the place where you work, and be more proactive and be more like speaking out yourself and sharing information, form your ideas and opinion. And this one of the biggest challenges that the refugee or a Syrian will like find here in the Netherlands. I had it also.

Participants in this study described various differences in work culture between the Netherlands and their country of origin. In the Netherlands, a more personal professional identity needs to be formed, and personal ideas and perceptions have to be formed and expressed in the work environment. This more personally shaped professional identity is often what individuals express on professional social networking platforms such as LinkedIn. These cultural differences could therefore make it difficult for refugees to profile themselves professionally. These difficulties will be further illustrated in the following sub-chapter.

4.4.2 Difference in profiling oneself (online)

All participants explained that connections are crucial to obtain employment in their country of origin, and jobs are given through these connections. Therefore, formally applying for jobs by sending a CV or motivation letter is often unnecessary. Many participants said they were unfamiliar with profiling oneself in order to find a job, whether this was online on social media or in a CV and motivation letter. Bashar, a 33-year old manager, explains: "It was challenging to learn how to present yourself, how to position yourself and how to put your strong points. And try to be more like catchy and attractive, and have a good attitude." Wazir, a 54-year old engineer from Syria, expressed facing similar challenges:

> To write the correct cover letter, I learned it here. To show the best in you in ten lines. And to get attention from the HR and the hiring manager by knowing how to use

yourself, not in an arrogant way, but in a good way that attract the attention of the HR which know nothing about the technical jobs.

Wazir explains he was unaware of the 'two-step process' when applying for jobs. By that, he means applications being assessed by HR departments or external agency's in the first round of application. Jawad, a 37-year old master student, argues that refugees "miss these HR-techniques" of knowing how to present oneself and this makes finding employment particularly difficult for them. Dunia, a 23-year old law student from Syria, argues that cultural differences play a big role in how people present themselves:

> I think that you need, in Syria you need to be more humble, like you should not talk about what you can do or cannot do. While here you almost need to, you should be able to know what you can do and how to express that to others, and how to present yourself in a good way. And it's something, I think it need time from us to learn. Like I found it really difficult when I want to find a job and to write like I am a very hard worker and I have a good communication skills. I found it really difficult, because I don't want people to feel like I'm arrogant, you know that I think a lot about myself.

Dunia adds that creating her LinkedIn-profile felt weird, and sending connections felt uncomfortable when she started using the platform. She mentions having a Dutch friend helping her describe her strengths, underlining the importance of social capital. She additionally expressed concerns about wearing a headscarf on her profile picture, because recruiters might make assumptions about her based on her appearance or religion. She further elaborates on these concerns in the following quote:

> I feel like sometimes I have to make it so clear that I am an open person and that I can be like very nice and friendly. I feel that you wear a headscarf, that you have certain behaviour or something. Like in my last job we had someone in the crew, he was gay. And for some people they saw that Islam would not accept them. And it was like all the time, he was like not really talking to me and I was always feeling like maybe this because I am wearing my headscarf. So I was all the time making it so clear that, no, I'm friendly, I accept every people. So I feel like I need to make an extra effort to make people convinced that I am open, or nice. I cannot be just normal. It is not only because of personality, but of how I present as a person.

These experiences illustrate the challenges refugees face when professionally profiling themselves online. These (online) techniques to obtain employment are mostly unfamiliar to them upon arriving in the Netherlands, as in their country of origin employment is mostly obtained through connections. Earlier findings of Willot and Stevenson (2013) showed that refugees often did not comprehend the notion of 'marketing themselves' while trying to obtain adequate employment, and often overlooked the importance of joining professional networks in this process. This study shows that such perceptions most likely come from differences in work culture, as cultural differences can influence the way people choose to profile themselves. For example, Dunia, a 23-year old law student, believes portraying your own strengths on social media could be perceived as arrogant in Syria. Refugees have to navigate through this new and unfamiliar digital environment, while making careful considerations on how to disclose (or non-disclose) their refugee identity. These challenges need to be taken into consideration when researching refugees' professional social media practices.

4.5 Refuge resilience implementation

As described in the theoretical framework, global refugee policy is increasingly focused on refugee resilience and personal agency (Crips, 2020). Emphasis is placed on neoliberal principles of self-reliance, entrepreneurial mind-sets and proactive agentic personality traits, rather than contextual factors (Obschonka et al., 2018). The majority of the participants in this study seem to have partly internalised such views and have adopted this neoliberal mind-set. However, participants' experiences with governments illustrate that current implementations of such policies are quite self-contradictory. For example, refugees in this study have tried to start their own businesses, but governments were not supportive of these initiatives and tried to push underemployment by offering contracts to work at Dutch discount stores. While high levels of personal agency were found amongst the participants in this study, the majority simultaneously placed emphasis on contextual factors and necessary mutual efforts from host countries for successful economic integration.

4.5.1 Internalisation of neoliberal mind-set

Seven out of eight participants in this study seemed to have adopted neoliberal views on successful integration in the Dutch labour market, and showed entrepreneurial spirits. They emphasized the important of personal agency, perseverance despite contextual barriers,

working hard, being proactive and becoming financially independent. The internalisation of this neoliberal mind-set is illustrated in the quotes below:

> I think a success story is a people who like came here with nothing, and started to build their career or their own business. And they are integrated, they are independent financially, they are not like getting the subsidy from the government. I would say, and they are paying taxes and they are just acting as any normal citizen. I think this is the success story. (Bashar, a 33-year old manager from Syria)

"And you have you can do something here if you are a, maybe if you have enough ability to challenge the circumstances. (…) You got to try, you will not stop at some point and you will not let the society stop you." (Jawad, a 37-year old master student from Syria)

"Have the courage you know to introduce myself to other people, to initiative, to try to, to people see me, you know. That is what you have to do here." (Rabia, a 36-year old counsellor from Syria)

"You have to fight to prove yourself. I am here, I will continue, I will not give up, when I face a storm I will circle around and go ahead. (…) Don't let yourself be put in a corner" (Majid, a 46-year old medical researcher from Syria)

"Economically integrated means like self-sufficient, and eh independent". (Wazir, a 54-year old engineer from Syria)

Abdul, a 31-year old man from Iran with a background in European Studies, even explains how he has started an online programming course. He states he is not interested in programming personally, but he knows programmers are in high demand in the Netherlands. His market-orientated approach is further reflected in his expressed desire to obtain the programming certificate so he can add it to his CV and LinkedIn. He describes how he wakes up at five in the morning every day, so he can work from six in the morning to two in the afternoon, and study for his programming course from three to ten. This notion of 'pushing yourself' to work hard is found amongst multiple participants in this study. Wazir, a 54-year old engineer from Syria, states: "I was catching or chasing every single possible opportunity I can find". He describes how being a productive as possible works in his favour during job interviews:

That this guy is new in the country and he is trying, doing his best, meaning when I hire him he will be very productive. He will take the extra mile to achieve the job, and this is what they want to see.

4.5.2 Municipalities pushing underemployment

As illustrated in the previous sub-chapter, refugees in this study seemed to have partly adopted the neoliberal principles that are currently being emphasized in global refugee policies. Governments argue the importance of market-orientated and agentic refugees, and states we should support them in becoming self-resilient entrepreneurs. However, participants in this study elaborated on experiences with governments reflecting very little of this support or the overall views governments seem to emphasize. Lydia, a 30 year old reporter from Burundi, expresses that she feels governments actually hinder refugees from being independent:

Some refugee organisation or the government municipality, they always want people to call them to ask for help. I think they love it, it gives them kind of higher position. I am here, you are there. You are asking, you beg me to give you more information, something they can find by themselves, it is not that complicated. Yeah, that's something I really hate. They really want to pull like refugee ignorance. They don't want them to emancipate, it almost seems like the government policy or I don't know. They want refugees or immigrants to do this kind of job that Dutch people don't really want to do. Maybe it's about the policy. If people are smart they will take their job or they will do a job that the Dutch students want to do, and be challenging for them.

It is particularly interesting that Lydia mentions how she feels government policies are aimed against refugee emancipation, while the actual policies state the opposite. She also mentions that Dutch governments want to push refugees towards underemployment. These ideas were expressed by multiple participants in this study. Majid, a 46-year old medical researcher from Syria, describes how the municipality offered him a contract to work at the Dutch discount store Action, and told him they would stop his welfare payment if he declined the contract and continued studying for his master. A master he was only obtaining because his two masters from Syria were not acknowledged in the Netherlands. He elaborates on his experience with the municipality in the following quote:

If you don't respect me, I will work as schoonmaker [cleaner] with master degree. And then you give bad message for my children, that if you study or not, you will work in schoonmaken [cleaning]. Do you understand the idea? Then nothing with this kind of people. Can do nothing. (…) So I said if you want to give me uitkering [welfare payment] give me, if you don't, don't. I will manage it on my own. How? Is not your problem. Because if you're thinking about me you wouldn't put me in this situation. Just wait and let me graduate and I will pay higher taxes. So I worked at night, I found a job taking care of elderly people. The situation pushed me to have that job. Why you put me in the corner, I don't understand it, but fine. I made it to the other side, I'm doing my PhD now. As I said, just be patient.

Wazir, a 54 year old engineer from Syria, experienced a similar lack of support by the government when he wanted to start his own training centre for refugees, but the municipality refused to cooperate. He argues that municipalities fail to recognize refugees as (potential) entrepreneurs in the following quote:

In the gemeente [municipality] they see the refugees for refugees. (…) So they don't rely on them to do anything, they can't trust them that they can do good jobs. That they can be pioneers, that they can take initiative, they can move. (…) They say no you don't have the knowledge, you can't do it. Why you can't do it? It's simple.

Wazir additionally expresses concerns about municipalities pushing underemployment: "The gemeentes [municipalities] are pushing the refugees to work anything. Just to show that refugees are volunteering all the time, and they are working. Regardless if the job is good for them or not". Jawad, a 37-year old master student from Syria, believes governments and organisations working with them, want to limit jobs available to refugees to certain sectors:

Only for example catering or for restaurants as chefs and or something to work as in the elderly houses. And positions as logistics. So they they presumed that they don't have the skill to join the Dutch labour market on a high level or on a second level. And they have to be limited to these fields.

According to the experiences and perceptions in this study, governments push underemployment and fail to support refugee entrepreneurship. While refugees seem to have

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internalised the widespread notions of neoliberalism by the government, municipalities themselves fail to implement them in practice.

4.5.3 Reciprocity for successful economic integration

Six out of eight participants in this study said that successful economic integration cannot be established through refugee personal agency only, and requires mutual effort and acknowledgement from the host society. They expressed successful economic integration does not only contains a financial aspect, but it also about feeling included in the work environment. Bashar, a 33-year old manager from Syria, states that contextual factors need to be taken into account regarding successful economic refugee integration:

> For refugees, you have to put a lot of energy in to this. It is seen as a normal thing, and yeah it is a normal thing indeed but this person had to put a lot of energy in to all of this still. So this is a success story to not only focus on the result, but also on the effort and the energy that is put to reach this, yeah. (…) Then you feel more part of the society and like you are more accepted indirectly I mean. And you can perform better than.

Dunia, a 23-year old law student from Syria, also places emphasis on the contextual barriers that need to be overcome in order to feel successful. She additionally highlights the importance of feeling included in the work environment in order to be successfully economically integrated:

> To be successful is like, yeah. I think the first thing is, for me, to overcome the maybe overwhelming emotion of like eh, different country and a different atmosphere. So even in the work I mean, to, overcome this feeling and eh, to do what I really, to be able to do your best and I don't know like, to get to this feeling that you are equal. And you like, you are appreciated from the people you work with.

5. Conclusion

This study aimed to answer the question of how professionally qualified refugees in the Netherlands experience the use of social media in their search for adequate employment. A question that has become particularly relevant over the last couple of months due to the outbreak of COVID-19, as well as the continues emphasis placed on using social media for professional purposes by various organisations and policymakers (Crisp, 2020). First of all, as 'refugees' are not a homogenous group, their experiences are not identical either. However, clear patterns regarding these experiences have emerged from the data collected during the eight semi-structured interviews conducted for this study. The theoretical framework of this study was based on the theory of social capital. As expected, all participants indicated they had very little social capital in the Netherlands upon arrival, as they left their social networks behind in their country of origin. Based on the theoretical framework, bonding social networks were expected to be of importance during the initial first stage of arriving in a new country, as they are useful for 'getting by' (Torezani et al., 2008; Lamba, 2008)). However, for 'getting ahead' refugees would need to obtain bridging social capital (Campion, 2018); Putnam, 1993, 2000). Social media was expected to provide great opportunities that could link refugees to a wider range of bridging social contacts. The participants in this study, in a way, illustrated experiences opposite to these expectations. They elaborated on how bridging contacts, for instance connections from organisations, were important during their first phase in the Netherlands, when they were searching for employment and trying to expand their network. However, once the refugee participants in this study obtained employment and had familiarized themselves with the Dutch labour market, they expressed strong desires to share their knowledge with other refugees. Social media was often used to facilitate this help, by creating and joining (professional) refugee networks online, and exchanging (employment) information and vacancies amongst these contacts. These digital refugee networks proved to be of great value to the participants in this study, as they helped them obtain employment, gain self-esteem and establish resourceful networks with high levels of trust. These findings call for a reconsideration of the distinction of 'bridging social capital' and 'bonding social capital' based on ethnicity, as suggested by research of Ryan (2011).

However, the rise of these digital refugee networks are not exclusively embedded in refugees' desires to help each other professionally. Many participants expressed that these digital refugee groups functioned as safe spaces for them on social media. Outside of these safe spaces, many of them encountered negative experiences such as online bullying or

discrimination. Trust therefore seems to impose an important prerequisite for professional participation on social media by refugees. Refugees were often reluctant towards (professionally) profiling themselves online as they worried any information they provided could be used against them. These findings stress the importance of creating safe online environments, which allow everyone to express themselves freely and engage on open social media platforms. Only then will social media be able to build bridges between natives and refugees ,that everyone feels safe to cross.

While most of the participants in this study expressed not to contribute much themselves on social platforms, almost all of them have extensively used them to seek out employment information and opportunities. While none of them used social media for professional purposes in their host country due to cultural differences in employment acquisitions, the participants in this study had quickly adopted these digital strategies. Many of them highlighted the importance of social media in obtaining adequate employment and the potential it holds for refugees to overcome barriers such as not having access to information. Embracing these new online techniques and viewing them as opportunities, fits in an overall observed internalisation of neoliberal principles amongst participants in this study. Many of them demonstrated high levels of personal agency and perseverance despite contextual barriers, in order to obtain adequate employment and financial independence. Some participants even tried to start their own businesses, further reflecting the internalisation of entrepreneurial ideas. Unfortunately, those participants and ideas were not supported by the governments. This is paradoxical, as in theory, governments place great emphasis on these notions of entrepreneurship and refugee resilience (Crisp, 2020). This paradox illustrates that even if refugees put in maximum effort, economic integration can only be established through mutual efforts from refugees and the host society. These mutual efforts are crucial in online environments as well, as even if refugees fully embrace the use of social media for online purposes, this digital environment must allow them to do so in a safe way.

5.1 Discussion

Due to its small sample size, this study naturally has its limitations. Claims about how governments operate cannot be made based on these findings. It would however be beneficial to gain deeper insight in the 'refugee resilience' implementation by Dutch governments, as participants in this study elaborate on experiences in this regard that do not comply with the ideas imposed by such policies. The paradoxes found in this study illustrate the importance of a non-media centric approach for future research, as this approach allows for analysis of how

media practices interact with offline experiences (Alencar, 2020). Another recommendation for future research based on the findings of this study, would be to compare the (professional) social media experiences of refugees who arrived before 2015 with those from refugees who arrived, let's say, after 2017. As many participants expressed they felt like the rise of digital refugee networks eliminate barriers of language, lack of information and (online) available networks. This comparison could lead to relevant insights regarding the value of the professional refugee networks that are now emerging online for newcomers, and the value of the social capital that is obtained through these social networks (on a professional level). Additionally, both Arabic women concluded in this study elaborated on concerns about employers perceiving them as submissive or unwilling to work with men, effecting on how they felt they needed to profile themselves online. These findings present an interesting starting point for further research as these perceptions could lead to double marginalization of refugee women with Arabic backgrounds in the online world.

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