



# Self-presentation on Facebook: How do recruiters evaluate the different self- disclosure behaviors of male and female candidates on Facebook?

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Master Thesis

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### Abstract

The current study aimed to understand whether the type of content that people post on Facebook can have an influence on recruiter's assessment of a job applicant, and on the decision whether or not that applicant is suitable to pass through the selection process. The main research question which was examined was: To what extent do self-enhancing and self-verifying online behaviors influence recruiters' selection results and does this influence differ for candidates' or recruiters' gender? Literature analysis showed that not only behavior type, but also the gender of the candidate who performs this behavior may be influential on the opinion of the recruiter. Gender discrimination is a widely discussed topic in the Human Resources field and it was interesting to understand whether it exists in an online environment as well. The different combinations of self-presentation styles online and gender of the candidate were examined against the qualification assessment rates of the recruiters.

Male and female job applicants and two different types of self-presentation behavior online were compared: self-verifying and self-enhancing. A 2x2 between-subjects experimental scenario study was conducted for which 201 responses were collected. The results showed that, as hypothesized, self-enhancing behavior leads to more positive candidate assessment rather than self-verifying behavior. Candidates' gender did not show significant results' differences, but was of high importance when candidates of female gender were combined with the two different self-disclosure types. The interaction effects showed that for females, it is more important to use self-enhancing behavior than for males, because this leads to higher results on two out of the five qualification assessment scales (hiring recommendation and source credibility), and to a bigger chance that they get invited to an interview. The study results showed that gender of the recruiter (participant) does not significantly influence the relationship between gender of the candidate and qualification assessment rates. Additional analyses showed that the relationship between the self-disclosure type and decision whether to invite the applicant to an interview was mediated by three out of the five assessment scales: argument quality, person-job fit, and hiring recommendation.

The current study gives gender-specific recommendation to job applicants regarding what type of behavior they should use in order to be evaluated more favorably by recruiters. Limitations and future research ideas are discussed at the end of this research paper.

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## Introduction

Social media platforms are developing more and more in the era of digitalization, changing peoples' private and work lives (Caers, & Castelyns, 2011). Social Networking Sites (SNS's) were initially created to ease communication between friends and family, as well as to allow people to share content such as photos, videos, and text updates with their online networks (Aral, Dellarocas, & Godes, 2013). As SNS's continue to develop, various professionals have found ways to incorporate them into their businesses (Aral, Dellarocas, & Godes, 2013). For example, companies use platforms such as Facebook and LinkedIn for marketing and employer branding purposes (de Vries, Gensler, & Leeflang, 2012). Another aspect in which social media has gained an important role is the job search (Caers, & Castelyns, 2011). The personal data people voluntarily share online has further allowed employers to get additional information about their (potential) employees. This has enabled companies to not only track their employees' personal lives, but also to run online background checks on people who wish to join these organizations (McDonald, & Thompson, 2016). Some employers do ask for access to the personal social media profiles of candidates which is in accordance with the legal requirements regarding private information usage (Jeske, & Schultz, 2016), but it is also possible that job applicants become subject of online checks even without them suspecting (Chauhan, Buckley, & Harvey, 2013; McDonald, & Thompson, 2016).

According to a recent CareerBuilder study (2018), seventy per cent of employers use social media to research candidates. Of those, fifty-seven per cent have reported to have found content on applicants' profiles which caused them not to proceed with them in the recruitment process. Another forty-three per cent of the recruiters in these companies report having been so impressed with a candidates' content that they decided to make a job offer. Some of the positive content recruiters find online include: signs of professionalism, creativity, good communication skills, and references from others (CareerBuilder, 2012).

Recruiters can thus use social media to assess candidates' profiles which may consequently ease the selection process (choosing which candidates to invite for an interview). They can quickly and effortlessly examine what kind of content their candidates tend to post online (Chauhan et al., 2013). Bohnert and Roos (2010) found that online behaviors can have an impact on recruiters' decisions during a selection process. A possible reason for this may be that potential employees would also represent the organization online if they were hired.

There are different types of online behavior that recruiters can come across on job applicants' profiles (Fieseler, Meckel, & Ranzini, 2014). Research on online boundary management has defined two specific types of self-presentation – self-enhancing and self-verifying (Ollier-Malaterre, Rothbard, & Berg, 2013). Self-enhancing online behavior relates to posting only positive and self-flattering content, while self-verifying behavior is used when one wants to show his/her true identity to the public, regardless of the negative sides of his/her personality or actions (Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2013). A recent study by Batenburg and Bartels (2017) showed how these online boundary management behaviors influence the perceived “likeability” and “respect” of an employee by his/her colleagues. Even though it has been found that online behaviors can impact the perceptions of colleagues and recruiters regarding a (potential) employee, academics have not yet extensively analyzed which type of behavior leads to more positive or negative selection process results. The current study aimed at filling this knowledge gap.

In an offline context, a vast amount of academics have examined how a recruitment process can be influenced by candidates' personal characteristics (e.g. Kinicki, & Lockwood, 1985; Young, Rinehart, & Heneman III, 1993). One of those characteristics, which is frequently discussed in the Human Resources studies is gender of the recruiters and the candidates (e.g. Steinpreis, Anders, & Ritzke, 1999; van den Brink, Brouns, & Waslander, 2006). Heilman (2001) argues that people have varying work-related expectations of others, based on gender stereotypes. Usually, females are expected to possess more feminine qualities such as kindness, empathy, and proneness to obedience, while males are expected to be strong, decisive, and more ego-centric (Heilman, 2001). Such stereotyping can likewise have an influence on the selection process due to recruiters' differing expectations of the online profiles they have to assess (Cole, Field, & Giles, 2004). The gender of the recruiters has also been found to influence their expectations towards male or female candidates (Steinpreis et al., 1999; Cole et al., 2004). A study by Crowder-Meyer (2013) confirmed that women positioned in the recruiters' seats would hire more female candidates than would male recruiters, when they were asked to analyze the same candidates' profiles. Impact of gender differences on the recruitment process has not yet been examined in an online environment and, therefore, this study aims at providing insight into this topic.

As can be noted from the literature discussed above, a job applicant's employment success can be influenced by three factors: the recruiter's gender, the candidate's gender and his/her

online behavior. It is interesting to combine and examine those factors and their influence on the recruitment process – more specifically, would a recruiter's assessment of an application change according to the candidate's gender and the type of self-presentation he/she uses.

Until now, only one study has examined the two types of self-presentation behaviors (self-enhancing and self-verifying) in a work context – that of Batenburg and Bartels (2017). They showed that the content published online can indeed impact the opinions of one's colleagues towards him/her. The results of the current study would extend the academic knowledge regarding social media behaviors in a recruitment context, showing whether these behavior types can also impact the attitudes of HR professionals. Moreover, it has already been found that gender plays an important role in the recruitment process but no research has been conducted on this topic in an online setting. Therefore, this study will give insight into whether the candidates' and recruiters' gender define the latter's attitude when evaluating candidates online. Finally, the relationship between the gender of the candidate and his/her online behavior type would be examined to understand which gender is likely to be evaluated more favorably when conducting self-verifying or self-enhancing behavior. The experiment on which those results are based was conducted as a scenario study with students and working adults in all fields of expertise who had to position themselves in the role of a recruiter. The current study ends with a discussion of the results in relation to the literature review and recommendations regarding in what ways applicants can represent themselves in order to maximize job application success.

As a starting point for this research, the following research question was formulated:

**RQ:** To what extent do self-enhancing and self-verifying online behaviors influence recruiters' selection results and does this influence differ for candidates' or recruiters' gender?

## **Literature Review**

The following section provides an overview of previous research regarding the topics which are discussed in the current study. The findings from previous research resulted in the formulation of hypotheses which were then tested with an experimental method.

### **Advantages and Disadvantages of Using SNS's in the Recruitment Process**

The advantages and disadvantages of using social media for recruitment purposes have already been examined in previous research (Jeske, & Shultz, 2016). Apart from the personal information employers obtain, online screening can provide many other benefits to them. It has been found that companies can save time, effort, and finances by just reviewing the profiles of candidates online, while at the same time recruiters form their first impression of the potential employees (Girard, Fallery, & Rodhain, 2013; Yokoyama, 2016). Some of the other advantages HR practitioners mention regarding this screening practice are: ability to fast and easily retrieve information; obtaining information that is not available in the candidates' resumes; ensuring the information in the Curriculum Vitae's is correct; and assessing the person-organization fit (Broughton, Foley, Ledermaier, & Cox, 2013).

Screening applicants online has got a number of drawbacks which should also be taken into account. Some academics (Girard, Fallery, & Rodhain, 2013; Yokoyama, 2016) describe this HR practice to be unfair to candidates, and in some cases even unethical and illegal. Broughton et al. (2013) report that candidates who do not use social media may be disadvantaged, while at the same time the privacy of those who do use it, is endangered. Moreover, the information retrieved from social networks may not always be reliable. Old profiles that are no longer in use, identity theft, and non-work related information are other issues job applicants can become victims of. In fact, knowing that an employer has examined their personal social media account in order to assess their job application may lead to lower motivation rates for working in the organization in question (Madera, 2012).

Noon (as cited in Wilton, 2013) has identified several processes which could represent evidence of discrimination and which hinder an organizational culture from offering workplace equality. One of those processes is the informal assessment of candidates rather than formal appraisals. For the current study, taking into account one's social media content

may be categorized as an informal assessment which in turn means that recruiters using social media for selection purposes may well be qualified as using a discriminative recruitment method. Other aspects which may lead to possible discrimination during recruitment are the personal characteristics of the job applicant. If the applicants' age, nationality, race or gender is obtained from a social media profile and is taken into account during the assessment, this may also result in an act of discrimination (Broughton et al., 2013). Specifically, gender discrimination is a widely-discussed topic in the HR field (e.g. Broughton et al., 2013; Brown, & Vaughn, 2011; Heilman, 2001) and will be further examined in the current literature review.

More specific literature on how social media may disadvantage a job applicant's qualification assessment is presented in the following section.

### **Online Self-Presentation of Job Applicants**

According to McDonald and Thompson (2016), online users have the right of voice, private identity, and autonomy online. Embracing a behavior, completely freed from limitations and work-life boundaries, however, may have an impact on recruitment decisions for job seekers. To get a better understanding of the ways in which people can present themselves to others, we will analyze the identity negotiation theory which is based on self-evaluation motives (Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2013) and by which people determine "who is who" (Swann Jr., Johnson, & Bosson, 2009). According to Ollier-Malaterre et al. (2013), the identity negotiation theory is based on the idea that employees can present themselves to others in different ways in order to suit the target audience. The idea of presenting different identities to different groups of people is called Boundary Management – often, this boundary is most visible between the professional and personal environment of an employee (Fieseler et al., 2014). Brown and Vaughn (2011) argue that one of the main reasons for which people try to keep their personal and professional domains separated is because there are certain expectations in the work-related networks that have to be lived up to. Not all types of content people would share with family and friends are suitable for sharing with colleagues or recruiters on who their employment is dependent (Brown, & Vaughn, 2011). Managing the boundaries between the professional and personal realms may be much harder in an online

rather than offline setting (Fieseler et al., 2014). The reason for this is the nature of the SNS's – except for strictly professional platforms (e.g. LinkedIn), people usually tend to “befriend” their family members and close friends online in the first place. But accepting a friend invitation from a colleague may significantly change the way one decides what to post online (Van Eck Peluchette, Karl, & Fertig, 2013).

Ollier-Malaterre et al. (2013) claim that there are two types of online self-disclosure which employees can embrace: self-verification and self-enhancement. On the one hand, self-enhancing behavior in the online world is conducted by people who post only positive information about their identities and personal/professional lives. All of their online publications seem to only enhance their personal qualities. For these employees, posting photos or statuses, for example, that would question their professional qualities or would present them as weak and emotionally-unstable, is unthinkable. On the other hand, employees with self-verifying behavior tend to post information that they believe represents them in the most accurate way and verifies their self-view. These employees may not invest so much time and effort into creating the perfect online content, as long as it reflects their true qualities.

But how are these different self-presentation behavior types perceived by others? Chiang and Suen (2015) found that a candidate may be perceived as a positive fit for a job by recruiters if he/she offers good and authentic arguments for the qualifications he/she has listed online. Perceived person-job fit consequently may predict if the candidate will be recommended for hiring. Van Zoonen, van der Meer, and Verhoeven (2014) examined the work-related content employees post online. They found that employees can act as ambassadors for their organizations as long as they post professional and positive content about their jobs. This may be one more reason why recruiters want to see what kind of content the potential employees publish on social media – if they are prone to posting negative information, they may not turn out to be the best brand ambassadors.

Other reasons that are able to make a recruiter screen out a candidate include provocative photographs, use of inappropriate language, alcohol- or drug-related content, revealing information that falsifies qualifications listed in the resume, posting negative or confidential data about former employers or work associates (McDonald, Thompson, & O'Connor, 2016). These actions may be seen by the employer as predictions of low work performance or negative company image creation (Kluemper, 2013).

Batenburg and Bartels (2017) conducted a study in which they analyzed to what extent the two types of online boundary management behavior (self-verifying and self-enhancing) would influence the rates of “respect” and “likeability” among a person’s colleagues. The main results showed that the levels of respect were significantly higher when a person presented self-enhancing behavior, while the likeability rates were not influenced by the type of online behavior.

In conclusion, the self-enhancing content a job applicant posts online has been found to positively influence the perceived person-job fit and to increase the levels of respect among colleagues. It also makes recruiters more confident that the candidate would be able to act as brand ambassador online if hired for the organization. Based on these arguments, we can expect that self-enhancing behavior could have similar positive effect on recruiters and their decisions. This is why we hypothesize the following:

*H1: Job applicants who embrace self-enhancing online behavior are more likely to be invited to an interview than applicants who embrace self-verifying behavior.*

### **Gender of Job Applicants and Recruiters**

Gender discrimination is a topic, widely discussed in the areas of psychology, human resources and employment law (e.g. Altonji, & Blank, 1999; Darity Jr., & Mason, 1998; Williams, 2003). Suarez and Suarez (2002), for example, conducted a research whose main aim was to understand what kind of issues women in Europe face when looking for job opportunities or when already hired for an organization. Most of the participants in the research who were working or had worked in paid employment reported that they had experienced some kind of gender discrimination in employment assessment, or in the workplace. German students reported that most of the decision-making positions in their companies were occupied by men who prevented women from getting promoted. Students from the United Kingdom complained about males progressing in their careers much easier and faster than their female colleagues.

Gino, Wilmoth and Brooks (2015) claimed that women are underrepresented in the majority of senior-level positions – for example, less than 15% of executive officers, less than

20% of full professors in the natural sciences, 6% of partners in venture capital firms, and only 5% of Fortune 500 CEO's are women. Lindsey (2016) claims that even if it is illegal for employers to overtly use the domestic role of women during hiring decisions, this can always be done covertly. Based on these studies one could argue that women in many professional fields are judged differently from men in terms of work performance, given the same characteristics, except for their gender. And, unintentionally or not, many management boards hire and promote according to a stereotypical masculine model which describes men as more competent, capable, and as better leaders than women (Lindsey, 2016). Maas and Torres-Gonzalez (2011) already found that increase in the organizational attractiveness and perceived likelihood of the female candidates is more probable to happen if women are evaluated by other women, and if the evaluation is made subjectively rather than objectively. However, Gino, Wilmuth and Brooks (2015) found that women are less attracted by the idea of power than men and are also less likely to accept a promotion at work.

Heilman (2001) argued that men are usually associated with professional roles that are higher in the organizational hierarchy such as management or executive positions due to the expected qualities they ought to possess. A study by van den Brink et al. (2006) revealed that there are significant differences in the success rates of male and female applicants for roles in academic institutions. The results showed that men are more likely than women to be assigned to positions they have applied for. Another study by Newman (2014) analyzed the recruitment trends in Uganda and Kenya. The main results showed that in the medical cadre, 40% of the recruited generalists and only 20% of the recruited specialists were women.

To summarize the findings discussed until this point, it can be stated that men are thought to possess more executive qualities and to be more successful in their applications. That being said, it can be assumed that gender of a person could be detrimental to others' opinion regarding his/her professional and personal qualifications. This statement leads us to the expectation that in the current study, male candidates would again be assessed as more competent than female candidates, and would therefore be more likely to be successful in the selection process.

*H2: Male job applicants who post messages on SNS's are more likely to be invited to a job interview than female job applicants who post messages on SNS's.*

## Gender and Types of Behavior

El Ouiridi, Segers, El Ouiridi, and Pais (2015) investigated whether candidates would increase the levels of career-oriented content sharing on social media if they had high professional online image concerns. They found that women are usually more concerned than men about how professional their profiles look, but unexpectedly, they did not score higher on behaving in a more appropriate way online than men or than people who were not concerned about their image. Hatmaker (2013) found that women working in roles which are considered to be executed primarily by men, had the sense that others always perceive them first as women, and then as professionals. This led them to think of ways to differentiate themselves from “ordinary” women and present their image as highly professional. One way in which they could differentiate themselves was by showing themselves as aggressive, competitive, and competent individuals in front of their colleagues. Taking those findings into account, one could suggest that even if females are more concerned about their professional identity, stereotypes are able to make others perceive female job applicants as not so competent and skillful as male applicants. These arguments, combined with the expected outcomes of self-enhancing and self- verifying results, lead to the following hypotheses:

*H3a: Male job applicants who engage in self-enhancing behavior would be more successful in the selection process than female job applicants who engage in self-enhancing behavior.*

*H3b: Male job applicants who engage in self-verifying behavior would be more successful in the selection process than female job applicants who engage in self-verifying behavior.*

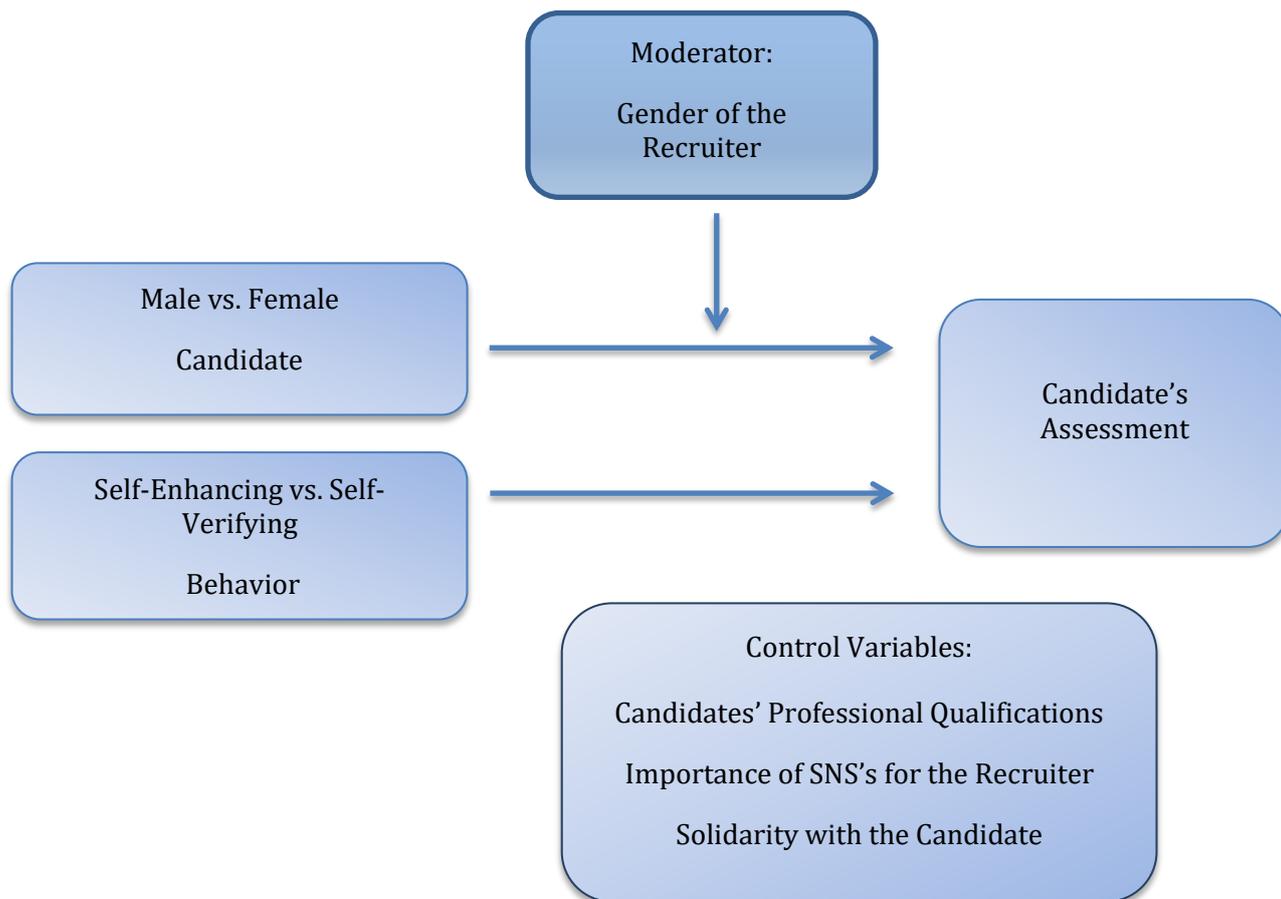
In the current study, gender of the recruiter (participant) is presented as a moderator of the relationship between gender of the job applicant and qualification assessment rates. The reason for this is that it may not only be important who the subject of evaluation is, but also what different views the assessors may have. For example, Eagly and Mladinic (1989) already found that women have much more positive stereotypes towards other women than towards men, while men's stereotypes were marginally more favorable towards women than towards men. Other academics have focused specifically on the way male and female candidates are evaluated by recruiters of different gender. A study by Steinpreis et al. (1999) showed that both male and female recruiters would rate the qualifications and experiences of the male

applicants as much higher than that of the female applicants, and consequently, would prefer to hire the male candidate over the female one, even when all applicants have the same work experience listed in their resumes. Cole et al. (2004) conducted a study in which candidates' resumes had to be evaluated by recruiters of different genders. In general, they found that gender of the recruiter and the applicant interacted to influence the recruiter's perceptions of the candidate's qualifications. The findings showed that male applicants were perceived by female recruiters as having more work experience than female applicants (given that all candidates had similar qualifications and work experience), whereas no such differences were found for assessments of male recruiters. Further, female rather than male job seekers were more likely to be rated by male recruiters as having done more extracurricular activities. Because contradicting evidence was found regarding each gender's preferences, we cannot confidently give a direction to our hypothesis. The findings of the examined studies let us conclude the following:

*H4: The relationship between the job applicant's gender and his/her success in the selection process is moderated by the gender of the recruiter.*

### **Conceptual Model**

Based on the literature review and the formulated hypotheses, the following Conceptual Model was created to visualize the relationships between the different factors which were examined in the current study (see Figure 1).



*Figure 1. Conceptual Model.*

## Method

### Design

For the purpose of the current research, a 2x2 between-subjects scenario study was designed. Scenario studies are usually used as a way to gain insight into the way societal processes influence one another. They aim to answer the question: What will happen if we act in a certain way? The goal of this method is to explore situations that are possible to happen in a variety of perspectives (Borjeson, Hojer, Dreborg, Ekvall, & Finnveden, 2006). In the current study, the different conditions represent different possible situations which the target group may experience in real life.

For the current study design, two independent variables were used and each one had two levels: gender of the candidate (male vs. female) and type of online self-presentation (self-verifying vs. self-enhancing), which resulted in a total of four experimental conditions. The main and interaction effects between these independent variables were measured against the dependent variable – the candidate's qualification assessment, which was measured by five ordinal scales and one nominal question. The conceptual model further took into account the moderating variable gender of the recruiter (participant). The researcher controlled for the impact of three variables: importance of social media for the recruiter (participant), professional qualification skills of the candidate, and participant's solidarity with the candidate.

### **Stimuli**

The materials that were shown to participants in the four conditions were manipulated by the researcher so that each one of them reflected one of the levels of the two independent variables. All conditions depicted Facebook profiles of the candidate whom the participants had to evaluate. Facebook was purposefully chosen for the social media profile illustration in the stimuli because it is a platform on which people connect with friends and family before extending their network to colleagues (if at all). Unlike LinkedIn which is a completely professional SNS, Facebook is used by people to share personal information and the content may not always be completely suitable for work relations (van Dijck, 2013). What can be concluded is that Facebook is considered a more personal networking site than LinkedIn. This could be beneficial for the experiment because checking a candidates' profile on LinkedIn may seem like a reasonable action due to the nature of the platform, but looking at a Facebook profile to evaluate someone's professional qualities is not something everyone would do.

The manipulated Facebook profiles were of male or female candidates with identical education and work experiences. In all four conditions, the candidate was presented as a Financial Management graduate from University of Amsterdam, having worked as Finance Assistant at Nestea, and currently occupied as an Accounting Officer at Unilever. One of the two posts in every condition was an identical self-enhancing post, showing a picture of a work desk with a blank notebook, the description of which read: "I love starting new projects. So

glad my company gives me the chance to express and realize my ideas – of course, the main ingredient is hard work but it is so much more motivating when you keep the main goal in sight.”

The differences between the self-enhancing and self-verifying conditions were two: the cover photos and the second post. For the self-enhancing condition, the cover photo illustrated the quote “Work hard, dream big.” and the second post showed a hand holding a beer up to the sky. The description of the photo was “Hard work pays off – I have been awarded employee of the month for third time in a row! Time to celebrate with my lovely colleagues.” In contrast, for the self-verifying condition, the cover photo of the profile showed “It’s party time!” and the second post showed the same photo of a beer bottle as in the self-enhancing condition but this time the text accompanying it read: “Damn... This week has no end... All I need right now is some booze and getting my head off work.” The other main difference between the conditions was the gender of the profile holder – in two of the conditions the candidate was depicted as a woman, and in the other two – as a man. This difference was made visible by the profile photo of the account holder which depicted either a young professional woman, or a young professional man.

In order to keep all other details constant in all manipulated stimuli, the name of the candidate was also the same (Julian Johnes). All of the stimuli can be found in Appendix 2.

## Measures

There were several variables that had to be measured for the purposes of this research and the items for each one of them were either created for this study or adapted from existing research papers with verified scales. The dependent variable – candidate’s qualification assessment – was measured with three items for each of the five scales: argument quality (Chiang, & Suen, 2015), source credibility (Chiang, & Suen, 2015), perceived person-job fit (Kristof-Brown, 2000), perceived person-person fit (Chiang, & Suen, 2015), hiring recommendation (Chiang, & Suen, 2015), and a final question regarding whether the participant would invite the candidate to a first job interview (for all items used in the questionnaire, see Appendix 1). The moderating variable in the conceptual model was the gender of the recruiter (participant) which was measured at the beginning of the survey.

Regarding the manipulation checks, after seeing the Facebook profile, the participant had to answer four questions - whether he/she had seen a male or female profile, to what extent he/she thinks that the educational and professional experience of the candidate matches the job requirements, to what extent he/she thinks that the candidate conducted self-verifying and self-enhancing behavior (formulated as two statements), and how easy it was for the participant to imagine that he/she was a recruiter (Wiesenfeld, Swann, Brockner, & Bartel, 2007).

One of the control variables – importance of social media for the recruiter, was measured by a one-item Likert scale, and the other control variable – solidarity with the candidate (referring to similarities and a bond between the recruiter and the candidate) was measured with two items, adapted from a scale from Leach et al. (2008). The demographic questions were situated at the end of the questionnaire. The researcher controlled for the professional qualifications of the candidate by making these characteristics identical in all four conditions. The full questionnaire and all scale items can be seen in Appendix 1.

## **Pretest**

Before conducting the experiment, a pretest was performed ( $N = 22$ ). It consisted of an informed consent agreement, the questions used to identify the suitable candidates for the study (age and Facebook usage), the demographic questions, and all the manipulation check questions used in the actual experiment. Aiming to get more feedback on the way participants perceived the stimuli, an additional question was added right before the section with demographic questions: “What did you see on the Facebook page of the candidate? Please write some brief notes.” The pretest was distributed via the personal network of the researcher.

Firstly, all of the participants indicated correctly the gender according to the condition they were in. Secondly, we had to ensure that the qualifications listed on the Facebook profile match with the ones in the job ad and this is why the second manipulation check question asked the respondents to what extent they believed there was a fit between those. The results showed that indeed the qualifications and the requirements for the job were well-suited ( $M=5.73$ ,  $SD=1.24$ ).

To test whether the scores for the perceived self-enhancing behavior were more explicitly shown in the self-enhancing conditions and not in the self-verifying conditions, an independent t-test was performed. On average, the self-enhancing behavior rates were higher ( $M=5.36$ ,  $SD=1.78$ ) in the self-enhancing condition than the rates in the self-verifying condition ( $M=3.13$ ,  $SD=.99$ ). This difference was significant ( $Mdif=2.23$ ,  $t(20)=3.78$ ,  $p=.03$ ). Thus, the manipulation check was successful.

The same test was repeated for the self-verifying behavior in both conditions. On average, the perceived self-verifying behavior rates were higher ( $M=5.38$ ,  $SD=3.43$ ) in the self-verifying condition than the self-enhancing condition ( $M=3.43$ ,  $SD=2.503$ ). The difference was, however, not significant ( $Mdif=-1.95$ ,  $t(20)=-1.97$ ,  $p=.09$ ). We can explain this, firstly, by the small number of people who participated in the pretest ( $N=22$ ), and secondly, by the fact that there were almost twice as many participants in the self-enhancing conditions ( $N=14$ ) as in the self-verifying ones ( $N=8$ ) which could have skewed the data more favorably towards the self-enhancing behavior scores.

One question measured how easy it was for the participant to imagine that he/she was a recruiter. The descriptive statistics for this variable showed that, overall, it was very easy for the participants to imagine themselves as recruitment officers ( $M=5.64$ ,  $SD=1.40$ ).

Lastly, respondents had the chance to note some brief observations they made while examining the Facebook profile stimuli. This was done in order to understand where exactly they focus their attention and to spot details that might need to be changed. The majority of the answers indicated that the Facebook profile contained mainly work-related information, and that the candidate's skills were suitable for the job.

To conclude, the results of the pretest showed that the manipulations were performed successfully and lead to the desired results. No changes were made to the stimuli or the questionnaire as they both seemed easy to understand and analyze for the participants. The self-verifying stimuli only did not show significant results but due to the reasons stated, it was expected that with a much bigger sample, the outcomes would turn out to be satisfying, which indeed was the case with the final sample used for the statistical analyses and results of the study.

### **Sampling of the Main Study**

The target group for this study consists of people over the age of 18 who have used Facebook at some point in their life. There were no limitations regarding the nationality, occupation or marital status of the participants because the study did not demand any specific knowledge or skills. This is why random snowball sampling was used to gather the data. Snowball sampling refers to distributing the questionnaire to a number of people within one's network, who after that share it with people from their own network. This way one can reach more participants, most of whom would probably have similar personal characteristics because of the communities they share. Regarding the distribution of the questionnaire, the researcher sent it directly to participants by asking them to also do the same and promote the questionnaire, and also published the link to the online experiment in several survey exchange groups. Moreover, the questionnaire was distributed among employees of a medium-sized recruitment agency, which ensured the involvement of at least a few real recruiters.

In total, 236 people took part in the experiment. Of those, 35 people were removed from the data set because they were under age, did not agree to the informed consent, dropped out from the survey, had never had a Facebook profile or did not correctly identify the gender of the candidate (manipulation check). The final number of responses which were analyzed was 201.

### **Descriptive Statistics of the Participants**

From all the 201 participants, the majority had obtained a Bachelor Degree (45.3%), followed by a Master Degree (38.8%). The third largest group consisted of secondary education graduates (11.4%) and the rest of the participants had another educational diploma obtained or preferred not to disclose this information (4.5%). Working was the most frequent occupation among the respondents (42.8%), followed by studying (29.9%), studying and working simultaneously (26.4%) and a small number of participants were engaged with another type of occupation (1%). The average age of the respondents was 26 years, with the youngest being 18 years old, and the oldest – 53 years old. In total, people from 43

nationalities took part in the experiment. The biggest nationality group was that of Bulgarians (27.4%), followed by Dutch (18.9%), British (7.5%) and others (46.2%).

## **Procedure**

The procedure for this scenario study was similar to that of Batenburg and Bartels (2017). Firstly, participants were asked to confirm that they were at least 18 years old and that they agree with the informed consent form presented to them. Secondly, participants had to answer whether at some time of their life they had used the social media platform Facebook. People who answered “No” to this question were not eligible to participate because they would not have known how exactly Facebook works and whether or not it is suitable for recruitment purposes. Respondents who had agreed to participate and had used Facebook were then shown a short text which clearly described the role they had to play and their task. They had to imagine that they worked as recruiters for a company that had an open vacancy for a Financial Manager. Participants were then given a short job description which they had to read carefully (see Appendix 1). The job requirements shown to respondents were closely related to the qualifications listed on the candidates' profiles.

Participants were then told that they would see the Facebook profile of a potential candidate which they had to examine carefully. After that, one of the manipulated stimuli (randomly distributed) was shown to the participants, followed by the manipulation check questions. Respondents were then asked to evaluate the profile and answer all of the questions (for the dependent variable scales) which were discussed in the Measures section. Finally, participants were thanked for participating and were debriefed.

## **Manipulation Check**

To understand whether the manipulations in the final questionnaire were successful several analyses were conducted.

Firstly, the overall score of the qualification fit between the job requirements and the qualities of the candidate was above midpoint of the scale ( $M=5.44$ ,  $SD=1.45$ ,  $N=200$ ).

Similarly the score which showed how easy it was for the participant to image that he/she was a recruiter ( $M=5.39$ ,  $SD=1.55$ ,  $N=201$ ) was also very high. Both average scores indicate that the qualification fit and the ease of scenario imagination rates were positive. These scores were calculated for all four conditions together because the qualification skills and job requirements did not change per condition, and the procedure and stimuli all participants were exposed to were identical except for the self-disclosure type and gender of participant which are not able to influence how easy/hard it is for the participant to imagine the scenario.

Secondly, two t-tests were performed regarding the statements that had to check whether the self-disclosure condition was evident enough in the stimuli. The results showed that participants scored higher on the statement which reported that the candidate posted only positive information in the self-enhancing condition ( $M=5.81$ ,  $SD=1.48$ ) than in the self-verifying condition ( $M=3.74$ ,  $SD=1.76$ ). The t-test was significant and showed that the manipulation was successful ( $t=9.01$ ,  $df=199$ ,  $p=.00$ ,  $M\ diff = 2.07$ ,  $SE\ diff = .23$ , 95% CI (1.619; 2.526)). The statement claiming that the candidate shows both positive and negative information about himself was rated higher in the self-verifying condition ( $M=5.18$ ,  $SD=1.71$ ) than in the self-enhancing condition ( $M=2.7$ ,  $SD=1.76$ ). These findings were also significant ( $t=-10.12$ ,  $df=199$ ,  $p=.00$ ,  $M\ diff = -2.48$ ,  $SE\ Diff = .25$ , 95% CI(-2.962; -1.997)), and therefore, the second manipulation was also successful.

### **Internal Reliability**

The dependent variables in the study – Argument Quality, Source Credibility, Person-Job Fit, Person-Person Fit, and Hiring Recommendation, were measured with Likert scales, each one of which consisted of three items (see Appendix 1). The internal reliability of the scales was sufficient in order to proceed with the main tests (See Table 1).

*Table 1 Internal Reliability Scores of the Dependent Variables*

Scale	Cronbach's $\alpha$
Argument Quality <sup>1</sup>	.77
Source Credibility <sup>1</sup>	.81
Person-Job Fit <sup>2</sup>	.81
Person-Person Fit <sup>1</sup>	.85
Hiring Recommendation <sup>1</sup>	.89

*Note.* <sup>1</sup> Chiang, & Suen, 2015; <sup>2</sup> Kristof-Brown, 2000.

## Results

### Main Effects

The first aim of the current study was to understand whether there is a significant main effect between the conditions participants were exposed to and the perceived candidate qualifications.

Five independent t-tests were performed regarding the self-presentation behavior type and its relationship to the five candidate assessment scales. The results showed that for source credibility and person-person fit, there was no significant difference in the mean scores in accordance to the two conditions ( $Mdif=.37$ ,  $t(199)=1.89$ ,  $p=.06$  and  $Mdif=-.07$ ,  $t(199)=-.32$ ,  $p=.75$  respectively). However, three main effects were found for the other scales. Firstly, the findings showed that argument quality was rated significantly higher ( $Mdif=.53$ ,  $t(199)=3.02$ ,  $p=.00$ ) when the candidate conducted self-enhancing ( $M=5.02$ ,  $SD=1.24$ ) rather than self-verifying behavior online ( $M=4.5$ ,  $SD=1.4$ ). Moreover, the influence of the control variable importance of social media on this relationship was found to be marginally significant ( $F(1,197)=7.99$ ,  $p=.05$ ), and the influence of solidarity towards the candidate was also statistically significant ( $F(1,197)=9.94$ ,  $p=.02$ ). This means that depending on the level of

importance of social media for the participant and his/her solidarity towards the candidate, the results on argument quality can vary. Secondly, person-job fit was also significantly higher ( $Mdif=.69$ ,  $t(199)=3.74$ ,  $p=.00$ ) in the self-enhancing ( $M=5.39$ ,  $SD=1.32$ ) than in the self-verifying condition ( $M=4.70$ ,  $SD=1.29$ ). Solidarity towards the candidate also influenced this relationship significantly ( $F(1, 197)= 8.81$ ,  $p=.03$ ). Finally, the hiring recommendation rates were significantly higher ( $Mdif=.54$ ,  $t(199)=3.08$ ,  $p=.00$ ) in the self-enhancing ( $M=5.08$ ,  $SD=1.36$ ) than in the self-verifying condition ( $M=4.54$ ,  $SD=1.10$ ). In this case, again the solidarity rates had influence over the hiring recommendation scores ( $F(1,197)= 31.42$ ,  $p=.00$ ). For all mean scores, please refer to Table 2.

The findings of these t-tests partly support Hypothesis 1 which stated that candidates who use self-enhancing behavior online would be perceived as more suitable for the job than candidates who use self-verifying behavior. This means that our prediction was formulated in the right direction and was confirmed by the results.

*Table 2 Main Effects of Type of Self-Presentation & Candidate Assessment Rates*

Dependent Variable	Condition	M	SD	Mdif	t(199)	p
Argument Quality	Self-Enhancing	5.02	1.24			
	Self-Verifying	4.5	1.24	.53	3.02	.00
Source Credibility	Self-Enhancing	4.65	1.47			
	Self-Verifying	4.28	1.26	.37	1.89	.06
Person-Job Fit	Self-Enhancing	5.39	1.32			
	Self-Verifying	4.70	1.29	.69	3.74	.00
Person-Person Fit	Self-Enhancing	4.47	1.54			
	Self-Verifying	4.53	1.33	-.07	-.32	.75
Hiring Recommendation	Self-Enhancing	5.08	1.36			
	Self-Verifying	4.54	1.10	.54	3.08	.00

Five independent t-tests were performed in regards to the gender of the candidate and the five qualification assessment scales. None of the tests yielded significant results. The mean scores and the significance rates can be seen in Table 3. Hypothesis 2 predicted that male job

applicants would be more successful in the selection process than female job applicants. The results of the t-tests showed that this hypothesis was not supported in regards to the different qualification assessment scales which respondents had to rate.

*Table 3 Main Effects of Gender of the Candidate & Candidate Assessment Rates*

Dependent Variable	Condition	M	SD	Mdif	t(199)	p
Argument Quality	Male	4.60	1.24			
	Female	4.92	1.27	-.31	-1.78	.08
Source Credibility	Male	4.35	1.41			
	Female	4.58	1.34	-.23	-1.18	.24
Person-Job Fit	Male	5.03	1.30			
	Female	5.05	1.40	-.02	-.10	.92
Person-Person Fit	Male	4.43	1.47			
	Female	4.57	1.40	-.14	-.68	.50
Hiring Recommendation	Male	4.76	1.24			
	Female	4.85	1.30	-.09	-.50	.62

### **Interaction Effects of Gender of the Candidate and Self-Disclosure Behavior Types**

Two-way ANOVA tests were conducted to examine the interaction effects of gender of the candidate and type of self-disclosure online on the five candidate assessment scores, controlling for the Importance of social media for the participant and solidarity with the candidate. There was no statistically significant interaction with regards to the argument quality rates ( $F(1, 195) = 1.53, p = .22$ ), person-job fit rates ( $F(1,195)=3.58, p=.06$ ), and person-person fit rates ( $F(1,195)=2.89, p=.09$ ).

However, a significant interaction effect was found between the two conditional levels and the scores of source credibility ( $F(1,195)=8.63, p=.00$ ). As can be seen in Figure 2, the self-presentation behavior type interacted specifically with the female candidate condition ( $F(1,197)=10.80, p=.00$ ). This means that when the female candidate was combined with self-

enhancing behavior, the perceived source credibility scores were higher than when the female candidate was combined with the self-verifying behavior. Further, female candidates with self-enhancing behavior showed significantly higher results than male candidates engaged in the same self-disclosure type. Moreover, the relationship was influenced by both the importance of social media for the participant ( $F(1,195)=4.33, p=.04$ ) and solidarity towards the candidate ( $F(1,195)=26.57, p=.00$ ). Furthermore, a significant interaction effect was found between the conditions regarding the hiring recommendation scores ( $F(1,195)=4.77, p=.03$ ). The follow-up test showed that the interaction effect was present again when the self-presentation type was combined with the female candidate condition ( $F(1,197)=12.85, p=.00$ ). The interpretation of these results tell us that when the female candidate profile was combined with self-enhancing behavior, this led to significantly higher hiring recommendation rates than when it was combined with self-verifying behavior (see Figure 3). Moreover, when female job applicants used self-enhancing behavior, their hiring recommendation rates were higher than those of male applicants, in contrast to the results in the self-verifying condition where male applicants scored higher than females. This relationship was also influenced by the importance of social media ( $F(1,195)=5.11, p=.03$ ) and solidarity with the candidate ( $F(1,195)=31.39, p=.00$ ).

Hypotheses 3a and 3b stated that regardless of the type of self-presentation behavior which male job applicants use, they will always be assessed more favorably by the participants than female job applicants. These hypotheses were partially supported: in the self-verifying condition, male job applicants did receive higher assessment rates than female applicants. However, when females engaged with self-enhancing behavior, the results changed significantly, making them the most successful group (compared to all other conditions' groups).

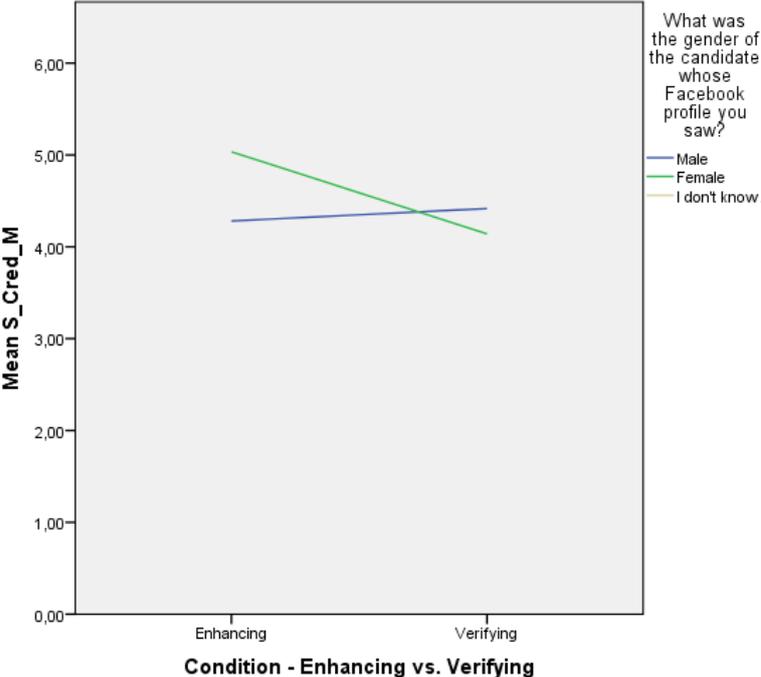


Figure 2. Visualization of the Interaction Effect between the Two Conditions and Source Credibility Scores.

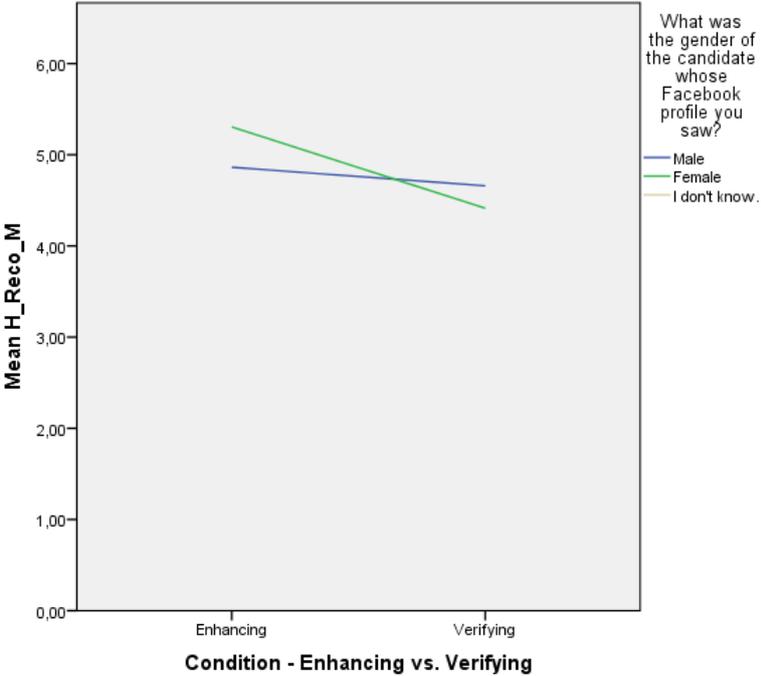


Figure 3. Visualization of the Interaction Effect between the Two Conditions and Hiring Recommendation Scores.

### Moderation Effects

To analyze the moderation effect of gender of the participant on the relationship between the gender of the candidate and the five different evaluation scales, Hayes PROCESS Model 1 tests were performed. None of the tests yielded significant results. The outcome of the tests can be seen in Table 4. This means that Hypothesis 4, which predicted that gender of the participant would moderate the relationship between gender of the candidate and the candidate assessment rates, was not supported.

*Table 4 Moderation Effect of Gender of the Participant on the Relationship between Gender of the Candidate and Type of Self-Presentation, and Candidate Assessment Rates*

Candidate Assessment Scale	R	R <sup>2</sup>	F	df1	df2
Argument Quality	.13	.02	1.07	3	197
Source Credibility	.09	.01	.53	3	197
Person-Job Fit	.03	.00	.05	3	197
Person-Person Fit	.10	.01	.65	3	197
Hiring Recommendation	.10	.01	.68	3	197

### Main Effects for Final Decision of the Participants

Apart from the five variables on the success of the candidate in the selection process that participants had to respond to, they were asked to answer a final question regarding whether or not they would invite the candidate for an interview. A multinomial regression test was performed in order to understand whether there was a relationship between the condition the participant was exposed to and his/her willingness to interview the candidate. The results showed that the gender of the candidate did not influence the final decision of the respondent significantly ( $F(1)=.90$ ,  $p=.34$ ) but the self-disclosure type did ( $F(1)=7.14$ ,  $p=.01$ ). Specifically, when participants were exposed to the self-enhancing condition, they were more likely to be positive about inviting the candidate to an interview ( $b=.92$ ,  $SE=.35$ ,  $p=.01$ ,  $Exp(B)= 2.5$ ) than when participants were exposed to the self-verifying condition. The Cox

and Snell test results showed that approximately 4% of the variance in the final decision responses was predicted by the type of online behavior the job applicant uses.

### **Additional Analyses**

Besides testing the hypotheses formulated in the Literature Review section, additional analyses were performed to provide further insight into the relationship between the conditions and the different dependent variable scales.

To understand whether the five scales, which were used to describe the candidate assessment as rated by the participants, acted as mediators in the relationship between gender of the candidate and self-presentation behavior type on the one hand, and the final decision of the participant on the other hand, Hayes PROCESS Model 4 tests were performed.

The results showed that for the source credibility and person-person fit scales there was no mediation effect. However, for the other three scales, the results were positive.

Firstly, the argument quality rate did significantly mediate the relationship ( $F(2,198)=6.29$ ,  $R^2=.06$ ,  $p=.00$ ), and, more specifically, it mediated the link between the self-presentation type and the final decision. This means that there is an indirect effect in the relationship,  $b=-.53$ ,  $t(198)=-3.04$ ,  $p=.00$ ,  $LLCI=-.87$ ,  $ULCI=-.19$ . Consequently, regarding the type of self-disclosure used, the higher the argument quality perceptions are, the more probable it is that the participants will be willing to invite the candidate for an interview.

Secondly, perceived person-job fit was shown to also significantly mediate the relationship between the conditions and the final decision ( $F(2,198)=6.98$ ,  $R^2=.07$ ,  $p=.00$ ). This mediation was significant again only in regards to the self-disclosure type the candidate used ( $b=-.69$ ,  $t(198)=-3.73$ ,  $p=.00$ ,  $LLCI=-1.05$ ,  $ULCI=-.32$ ).

Finally, a significant mediation effect was found for the hiring recommendation scale ( $F(2,198)=4.87$ ,  $R^2=.05$ ,  $p=.01$ ) on the relationship between the different conditions and decision to invite the applicant for an interview. The hiring recommendation rates particularly mediated the effect of the self-presentation type on the willingness to invite the candidate for an interview ( $b=-.54$ ,  $t(198)=-3.08$ ,  $p=.00$ ,  $LLCI=-.88$ ,  $ULCI=-.19$ ).

To summarize, argument quality, perceived person-job fit, and hiring recommendation rates were found to significantly mediate the relationship between the two self-disclosure behavior types and willingness of the participant to invite the candidate for an interview. This means that the higher a candidate scores on one of those three scales, the higher his/her chance is to pass through the selection process.

## **Discussion**

The results of the current study will now be interpreted in regards to the literature which was discussed above and the practical relevance the research may have in real-life situations. Further, the limitations of the current research are discussed, together with ideas for future research.

### **Interpretation & Theoretical Implications**

Comparing the results of the experiment to the literature review findings, an important thing to mention is the confirmation of the statement that self-presentation behavior online does matter in regards to recruitment decisions. The literature, and more specifically, Ollier-Malaterre et al. (2013) suggested that self-enhancing and self-verifying behavior do have an impact on the way an employee is perceived by his/her colleagues. In their research paper, Batenburg and Bartels (2017) confirmed this suggestion by proving that online behavior types do have an influence on one's colleagues in regards to the levels of respect and liking. Similarly, the results of the current study showed that candidates who conduct self-enhancing behavior are more likely to be perceived as better person-job fits, representing more qualitative arguments on their profiles and are more likely to be recommended for hiring than candidates who conduct self-verifying behavior, given that they have applied for the same role and have the same work and educational experience (H1). An interesting observation we can make here is that the three variables, which were found to be influenced the most by self-presentation behavior, were all linked more to the work-related qualities of the candidate (to what extent he/she fits with the job, how good his/her arguments are and if he/she is suitable for hiring). The variables which were not particularly influenced by the type of behavior (person-person fit and source credibility) were more concerned with the way participants

perceived the candidate as a person. Ollier-Malaterre et al. (2013) and Batenburg and Bartels (2017) already examined the boundary management behaviors online and how they can influence the relationship between a person and his/her colleagues, but this study is the first to review the topic in regards to a recruitment process with recruiters and job applicants involved.

The self-presentation style a candidate chooses to use also influences the final decision of the participant whether or not to invite the job applicant for an interview (behavioral intention). In this case, the self-enhancing behavior was again confirmed as the behavior which more successful candidates would use because it led to more positive final decision responses than did the self-verifying behavior (H1). The finding that self-enhancing behavior leads to more favorable results among job applicants is in line with Brown & Vaughn's (2011) argument that not all content employees want to share online is suitable for work-related audiences, and more particularly, for recruiters. Chiang and Suen (2015) further supported this argument by suggesting that recruiters are more likely to perceive a positive person-job fit if the applicant offers authentic and trustworthy arguments for the qualifications shown on their profile. To conclude the findings of the main effect results regarding self-presentation, for the majority of statements regarding the candidate's assessment, the self-enhancing condition led to higher rates compared to the self-verifying condition.

Although various academics suggest that women are more often discriminated than men during recruitment processes due to the stereotypes and differing professional expectations of them (e.g. Heilman, 2001; Suarez, & Suarez, 2002), the current study showed that participants did not seem to make decisions in the selection process based on the candidates' (H2) or based on their own gender (H4). However, the fact that the results from the current study sample did not show any notable results regarding gender of the candidates and the recruiters, does not mean that gender discrimination is absent in HR practices. For example, according to Lindsay (2016), employers were able to discriminate female applicants overtly, which means that during the recruitment process (which often includes screening, interviews, and sometimes professional assessment tests) recruiters get the chance to filter out candidates based on different arguments, not necessarily stating the real reason for the rejection which could also be the gender of the candidate. Van den Brink, Benschop, and Jansen (2010) argued that gender bias is more likely to occur when the recruitment process is based on

ambiguous criteria and the evaluation is kept confidential. In the current study, participants were asked to openly assess the qualifications of the candidate which could have led to more transparency and accountability. However, if the evaluation did not have to be so detailed and outspoken (e.g. participants rating the five different qualification assessment scales), it is possible that the results may have been different. For example, participants might have indicated their intentions to invite the candidate to an interview to be lower for female than for male candidates. Further, Van den Brink et al. (2006) who showed that women are less likely than men to be offered a job in academic institutions, only examined reports regarding the recruitment processes in these entities which contained the gender of the applicants and some generic comments regarding the vacancies in question. Van den Brink et al. (2006) did not analyze skills and abilities of each candidate and the job requirements which means that they did not have information regarding why the final decision (not) to hire someone was made. In contrast, the current study tried to gather information on the complete evaluation process by making the participant think more deeply regarding the applicant's profile and skills, and the reasons why participants were unwilling to invite a candidate for a job interview can be explained by simply looking into their evaluation of the different skills of the candidate.

Another possible explanation for the results regarding the candidates' gender is the fact that participants were only comparing the job description requirements to the candidate's background and skills, without thinking about the organization for which they are hiring – the cultural fit, possibilities to grow within it, the type of personality needed in the team, etc. If participants had information about the company and the task to think about the overall career path of the job applicant, it is possible that the results regarding gender showed significant differences. For instance, providing participants with a masculine or a feminine organizational culture could have influence on the perceived person-organization fit depending on the gender of the participant. For example, Maier (1999) examined organizational cultures from the masculine-feminine prism and suggested that masculine cultures consist of hidden assumptions and organizational practices which promote forms of communication, images of leadership, value and definition of success which are stereotypically masculine. Due to the fact that the majority of senior managers and directors are men, and because they are expected to adhere more to the masculine rather than feminine values, it has often been argued that management (sub)cultures are likely to be dominated by masculine norms (Maier, 1999). The

masculine culture is also one of the main elements of the “glass ceiling” (a phrase used to describe the inability of women to climb up the professional ladder due to invisible or even non-existent barriers others set for them) (van Vianen, & Fischer, 2002). Taking this into account, we can expect that participants may consider candidates of different gender to be high or low fit with a masculine or feminine organizational culture – for example, seeing a female candidate may make participants think that she will not be able to fit into the team and the management style of a masculine organization, and consequently, she will not be that suitable for hiring for the vacancy in question.

Other interesting results that should be noted are the interaction effects that were found – those between the gender of the candidate and the self-presentation behavior type, and source credibility and hiring recommendation rates (H3a, H3b). More specifically, it was found that when female candidates engage in self-enhancing behavior, this leads to higher perceived source credibility and hiring recommendation rates from the participant than when male candidates engage in self-enhancing behavior. For female candidates, there was a big difference in the source credibility and hiring recommendation scores, depending on the type of behavior used, while for male candidates the type of self-disclosure online seemed not to impact the same assessment items. These results can be linked to Hatmaker’s (2013) theory that women often expose themselves firstly as professionals, and only after that – as women, in order to be perceived as more skillful and competent. Indeed, the results of the current study showed that when women post only positive work-related information about themselves, the chance to be invited to an interview grew significantly compared to when they post both positive and negative information. A possible explanation could be that when women use self-verifying behavior, they are perceived more as “women” and less as “professionals”. Ruble, Cohen, and Ruble (1984) suggest that since aggressiveness is perceived as a male characteristic, and positivity - as a female characteristic, this can be interpreted in the sense that when participants see a slightly more aggressive or negative post on the social media profile of a woman, this is something which is not aligned with their stereotypes of women always being related to positivity. This could lead to decrease in the female candidates’ assessment rates because it is not something participants expect to see.

Additional analyses of the data were performed to understand whether two additional factors: importance of social media for the participant and solidarity towards the job applicant

had influence over the results. The findings showed that the main effects between self-presentation and argument quality, person-job fit and hiring recommendation scores were significantly influenced by the solidarity of the participant towards the job applicant. Argument quality rates were also influenced by the level of importance of social media for the participant. The interaction effect of gender of the candidate and self-disclosure type on the hiring recommendation and source credibility were also influenced by importance of social media for the participant and the perceived solidarity. Therefore, depending on the way the participant feels about using social media in recruitment and his/her feelings towards the candidate, the extents to which he/she trusts the source (candidate) and is willing to recommend him/her for hiring will vary.

### **Practical Relevance**

The findings of the current study provide us with useful insights regarding recruiters' perceptions of a job applicant and the decision-making process during the selection phase. The results showed that, firstly, it is advisable for candidates, regardless of the gender, to use self-enhancing behavior because this would lead to more favorable selection process results for them since it positively influences the perceived argument quality, hiring recommendation rates, and person-job fit.

Secondly, apart from using only self-enhancing behavior, job applicants should carefully evaluate the posts they upload on their social media profiles. For example, they should always think in advance about the target audience but also about the "invisible audience": are the posts work-related or more personal, what kind of words they use, and what kind of emotion they transmit to the reader. In conclusion, one can state that using self-enhancing content only is useful for the positive opinion of strictly professional work connections online.

Thirdly, the results showed that, overall, it is more important for female job applicants to engage in self-enhancing behavior than it is for male job applicants. The reason for this is the interaction effect result which demonstrated that the type of behavior chosen by a candidate makes much more difference for women than for men. Therefore, female candidates are advised to post only positive content about themselves online, and male candidates can

sometimes allow themselves to be more open and honest by posting self-verification statuses and photos.

### **Limitations & Future Research**

The current study examined online boundary management behaviors and differences among job applicants' and recruiters' gender in regards to recruiters' qualification assessment and perceived hiring intentions. The scenario study was created to represent four online profiles on Facebook who had the same educational background and work experience. As hypothesized, the findings showed that self-verifying content led to lower scores on the qualification assessment rates and lower intention of the participant to invite someone for an interview than self-enhancing content. Further studies could examine more closely the factors which lead to participants evaluating candidates with self-verifying behavior as more unsuitable for a job. For instance, research could focus on which parts of the social media profile participants pay most attention to: the visuals, the wording of the posts, the overall emotion which the profile transmits, etc., and how exactly these parts influence the recruiter's opinion. One way to analyze this is by using eye tracking. Eye tracking allows researchers to follow the eye movement of participants and to gain insight in what ways they observe the stimuli and how much time they spend processing the different parts of the stimuli (Jacob, & Karn, 2003). Following this study, we can say that self-verifying behavior leads to lower intentions of the participants to invite a candidate for a job interview, but it is still not clear whether there are certain parts of the Facebook profile which influence this intention more than the others. It is important to understand that in order to give more specific advice to job applicants who want to get represented in front of recruiters in a better way.

Linking back to Ollier-Malaterre et al.'s framework (2013) on online boundary management behavior, the current study only focused on the type of self-disclosure candidates can use. However, Ollier-Malaterre et al. (2013) also discussed another way in which employees can adjust their social media behavior so that it suits different audiences – via segmentation or integration of online audiences. Segmentation refers to employees showing certain information online only to a particular audience, and integration – to employees combining their personal and professional audiences and posting the same content for all of their social media friends. Future research could use the segmentation and integration

behaviors to understand which one leads to more favorable results in the selection process. Further, it would be useful to know what would happen if those are combined with the different self-disclosure types and what results that would lead to. Until now, only Batenburg and Bartels (2017) have conducted a study focusing on the combination of those behaviors which was aimed at employees working in an organization. They found that when employees use self-enhancing behavior, this leads to more “respect” among their colleagues rather than when they use self-verifying behavior. Further, when employees use integration rather than segmentation regarding their online audiences, this leads to more “liking” towards them. Overall, Batenburg and Bartels (2017) found that posting self-enhancing content to an integrated public on social media would lead to employees preserving their respect and liking. However, no research until now has focused on these boundary management behaviors regarding job applicants and recruiters. Such research would extend the academic knowledge regarding whether candidates hiding certain parts of their profiles that are not suitable for recruiters, or making their profiles visible but only posting self-enhancing content there, would lead to more positive evaluation results by recruiters.

The results of the current study also showed that solidarity with the candidate plays an important role in the relationship between gender of the candidate and self-presentation type, and the qualification assessment scores. In other words, the assessment of the candidate is influenced by the subjective opinion of the participant and his/her personal attitude towards the profile. The stimuli in this study were created to represent almost identical candidate profiles with the exception of the gender of the person shown on the profile photo. However, the photos of both the male and female candidates showed a young and attractive person which might also make the participants have a more positive or negative attitude towards them. Previous research has found that candidates who are very attractive are more positively evaluated during screening process compared to candidates who are considered “average”, taken into account that their resumes are identical (Watkins, & Johnston, 2002). It is possible that in the current study participants did not focus on the gender of the candidate, but rather on his/her attractiveness, which might have impacted the results. For example, it is possible that if participants were not that attractive, female applicants could have been evaluated more negatively than male applicants. Therefore, future studies could focus on the attractiveness of the candidate by either manipulating the profile photos, or by gathering data regarding the participants' opinion on the job applicant's appearance.

Finally, in the current study it was hypothesized that gender of the candidate and the recruiter would have an impact on the qualification assessment rates during the evaluation of the Facebook profiles. These hypotheses were not supported by the data and, therefore, future studies could combine these factors (gender of the candidate and participant) with the above-mentioned manipulation and/or assessment of job applicants' attractiveness. This would show, firstly, if male or female applicants who are (not) more attractive get more favorable results on their qualification evaluations, and secondly, if these results differ depending on the gender of the participant.

## **Conclusion**

The current study aimed at understanding whether the type of self-presentation behavior and gender of a job applicant would have influence on the recruiter's decision whether or not to invite the candidate for an interview. The results showed that, overall, self-enhancing behavior leads to more favorable results than self-verifying behavior, and this is especially true for women who want to be successful in the selection process. The relationship between self-presentation type and final decision whether or not to invite the candidate for a job interview was mediated by three particular factors: argument quality, person-job fit, and hiring recommendation. Differences in the results for the different genders were not that contrasting and possible reasons for that were exposed in the Discussion section, together with recommendations towards candidates on what type of content to post on their social media profiles which would be suitable for their work networks.

To summarize, even though some candidates may use social media only for personal, and not for work-related reasons, this does not guarantee that others will not take their online profiles into account for different purposes such as recruitment. Consequently, even before the potential candidate is hired, recruiters may use social media as a screening tool in order to gain better knowledge about the applicant. Based on the results, we can suggest that if recruiters use social media platforms to evaluate job applicants, their assessment of the candidates may be influenced by the type of content they see online.

Therefore, one should always be mindful and very critical towards the information he/she decides to disclose online.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1

#### Questionnaire

1. Are you 18+ years old?
  - a) Yes
  - b) No

2. Informed Consent

Dear participant,

This questionnaire is part of a Master thesis project for the program Business Communication & Digital Media at Tilburg University. Your participation is completely anonymous, and your responses will be kept confidential. If you have any questions related to the study, please contact the researcher.

Please indicate whether you agree to participate in this experiment by clicking one of the options below.

Thank you for your time!  
Silviya Hristova (s.g.hristova@tilburguniversity.edu)

- a) "Yes, I agree"
  - b) "No, I do not agree"
3. Have you ever had a Facebook profile?
  - a) Yes
  - b) No
4. What is your gender?
  - a) Male
  - b) Female

## Scenario description

**Please read the following text carefully.**

**Imagine** that you are working as a **recruiter** for a big **fast-moving-consumer-goods company**. Recently, you received a new vacancy. The description for which is the following:

*We are looking for a motivated **Finance Officer** to work in the Regional Finance Team in Amsterdam (M/ F).*

### Responsibilities of the candidate:

- *Performs budgeting and forecasting of cash flows*
- *Provides financial analyses for the commercial team and influences the decision-making of the team*
- *Manages that suppliers are paid on time with appropriate authorizations*
- *Transfers pricing documentation*

### Requirements of the candidate:

- *At least a Master's degree in Accounting, Controlling or equivalent*
- *Relevant working experience*
- *Lives in Amsterdam or willing to relocate*

**On the next page you will find a Facebook profile of a possible candidate for the job.**

**Please examine the Facebook profile carefully. You will then be asked a few questions.**

*Show Stimuli 1, 2, 3, or 4*

## Manipulation check

1. What was the gender of the candidate whose Facebook profile you saw?
  - A) Male
  - B) Female
  - C) I don't know.
  
2. Based on the job description you have just read and the candidates' Facebook profile, to what extent do you think the professional and educational background of the candidate match the job requirements?

Likert Scale: 1 – Absolutely No Match; 7 – Complete Match

Based on the candidates' Facebook profile, please indicate to what extent you agree/disagree with the following statements (Wiesenfeld, Swann, Brockner, & Bartel, 2007):

3. The candidate only shares positive information about himself on Facebook.

Likert Scale: 1 – Completely Disagree; 7 – Completely Agree

4. The candidate posts both positive and negative information about himself on Facebook.

Likert Scale: 1- Completely Disagree; 7 – Completely Agree

### **Scenario imagination**

Please indicate to what extent you agree/disagree with the following statement.

1. It is easy for me to imagine that I am a recruiter.

Likert Scale: 1 – Completely Disagree; 7 – Completely Agree

### **Argument quality** (Chiang, & Suen, 2015)

Please indicate to what extent you agree/disagree with the statements. Please answer honestly – there are no right or wrong answers.

1. The information presented by the candidate on Facebook was informative.

Likert Scale – 1- Completely Disagree; 7- Completely Agree

2. The information presented by the candidate on Facebook was valuable.

Likert Scale – 1- Completely Disagree; 7- Completely Agree

3. The information presented by the candidate on Facebook was persuasive.

Likert Scale – 1- Completely Disagree; 7- Completely Agree

### **Source credibility** (Chiang, & Suen, 2015)

Please indicate to what extent you agree/disagree with the statements. Please answer honestly – there are no right or wrong answers.

1. The candidate presenting the information on Facebook was trustworthy.

Likert Scale – 1- Completely Disagree; 7- Completely Agree

2. The candidate presenting the information on Facebook was credible.

Likert Scale – 1- Completely Disagree; 7- Completely Agree

3. The candidate presenting the information on Facebook appeared to be experienced and professional.

Likert Scale – 1- Completely Disagree; 7- Completely Agree

### **Perceived P-J fit** (Kristof-Brown, 2000)

Please indicate to what extent you agree/disagree with the statements. Please answer honestly – there are no right or wrong answers.

1. The candidate fits the demands of the job.

Likert Scale – 1- Completely Disagree; 7- Completely Agree

2. Other employees will think this candidate is qualified to do this job.

Likert Scale – 1- Completely Disagree; 7- Completely Agree

3. I am confident that this candidate is qualified for this job.

Likert Scale – 1- Completely Disagree; 7- Completely Agree

### **Perceived P-P fit** (Chiang, & Suen, 2015)

Please indicate to what extent you agree/disagree with the statements. Please answer honestly – there are no right or wrong answers.

1. The candidate has qualities that I like.

Likert Scale – 1- Completely Disagree; 7- Completely Agree

2. I would enjoy doing something out of work with the candidate.

Likert Scale – 1- Completely Disagree; 7- Completely Agree

3. I would like to spend free time with the candidate.

Likert Scale – 1- Completely Disagree; 7- Completely Agree

### **Hiring recommendation** (Chiang, & Suen, 2015)

Please indicate to what extent you agree/disagree with the statements. Please answer honestly – there are no right or wrong answers.

1. I consider the candidate to be suitable for hiring into the hiring organization.

Likert Scale – 1- Completely Disagree; 7- Completely Agree

2. The candidate would have a good future in the hiring organization.  
Likert Scale – 1- Completely Disagree; 7- Completely Agree
3. The candidate would perform well for the hiring organization.  
Likert Scale – 1- Completely Disagree; 7- Completely Agree

### **Final Decision**

1. Would you now invite this candidate to an interview with you for the position of Finance Officer?
  - a) Yes
  - b) No

### **Control variables**

Please state your opinion.

1. To what extent would a candidate's social media posts be important for you when you would make a decision in a recruitment process (e.g. whether to invite someone to an interview or not)?

Likert Scale - 1 – Not important at all; 7 – Very important

Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements (Leach et al., 2008):

2. I feel a bond with the candidate whose profile I saw.

Likert Scale - 1- Completely Disagree; 7 – Completely Agree

3. I feel I have a lot in common with the candidate.

Likert Scale - 1 – Completely Disagree; 7 – Completely Agree

### **Demographic Questions**

1. How old are you?

Open box answer

2. What is your nationality?  
Open box answer
  
3. What is the highest educational diploma you have obtained?
  - a) Secondary education
  - b) Bachelor
  - c) Master
  - d) Other
  - e) Would rather not say
  
4. What is your current occupation?
  - a) Studying
  - b) Working
  - c) Studying and working
  - d) Other
  - e) Would rather not say

**End of Survey:**

Thank you for the time! Your response has been recorded.

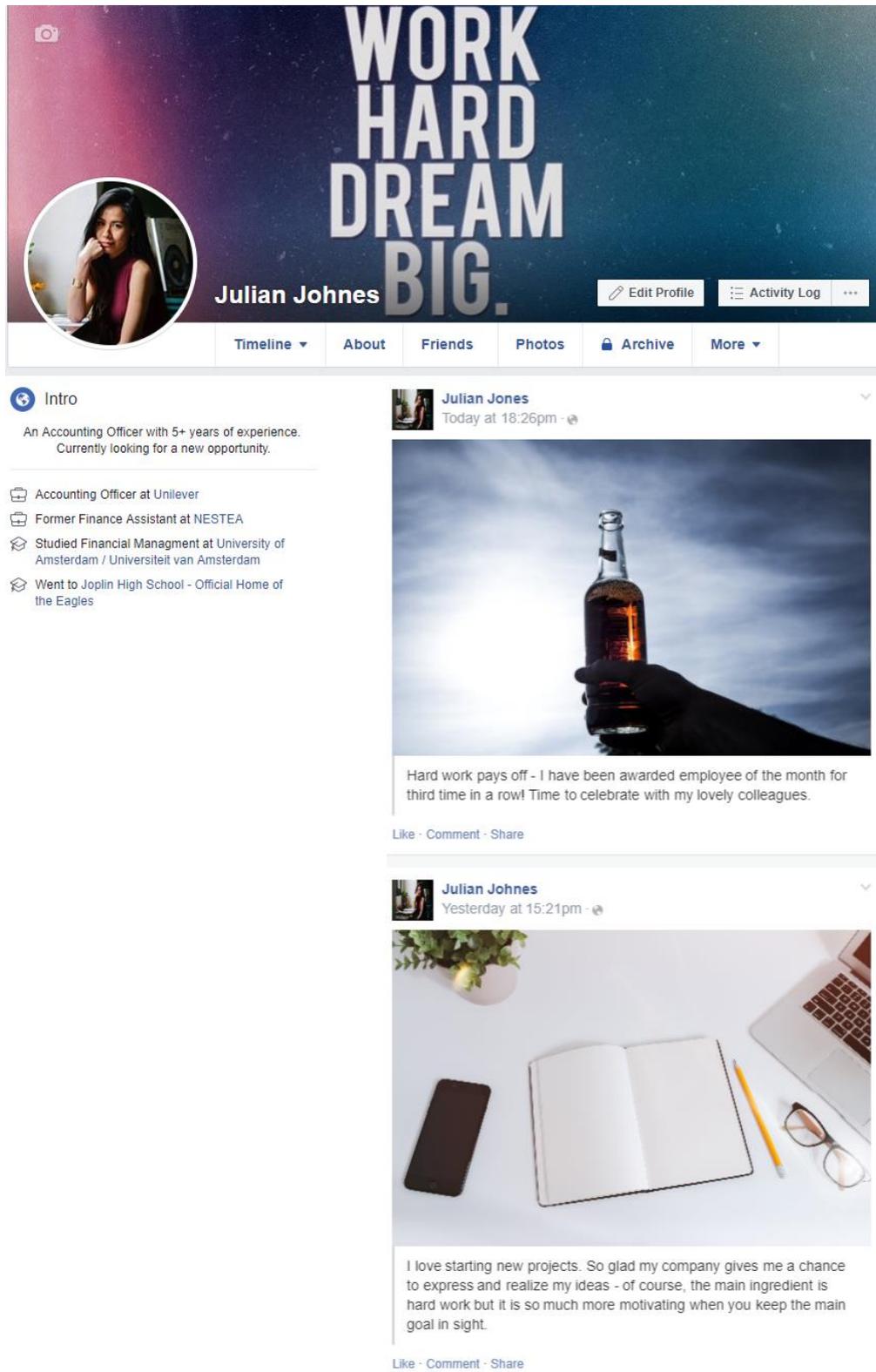
**Debriefing**

The aim of this experiment was to understand whether different social media behaviors (self-enhancing and self-verifying) would influence the qualifications assessment of recruiters. The Facebook profile you saw was manipulated to represent one of the two behaviors by showing only positive, or both positive and negative posts. The gender of the candidate and of the recruiter (your gender) will also be taken into account when analyzing the results in order to understand whether this factor also influences the qualifications assessment and the decision to invite someone to an interview.

If you have any questions or feedback regarding the study, please contact the researcher  
Silviya Hristova

**Appendix 2**  
Stimuli

Condition 1 – Female; Self-Enhancing



**Julian Jones**

**WORK HARD DREAM BIG.**

[Edit Profile](#) [Activity Log](#) [...](#)

[Timeline](#) [About](#) [Friends](#) [Photos](#) [Archive](#) [More](#)

**Intro**

An Accounting Officer with 5+ years of experience. Currently looking for a new opportunity.

- Accounting Officer at Unilever
- Former Finance Assistant at NESTEA
- Studied Financial Management at University of Amsterdam / Universiteit van Amsterdam
- Went to Joplin High School - Official Home of the Eagles

**Julian Jones**  
Today at 18:26pm

Hard work pays off - I have been awarded employee of the month for third time in a row! Time to celebrate with my lovely colleagues.

Like - Comment - Share

**Julian Jones**  
Yesterday at 15:21pm

I love starting new projects. So glad my company gives me a chance to express and realize my ideas - of course, the main ingredient is hard work but it is so much more motivating when you keep the main goal in sight.

Like - Comment - Share

Condition 2 – Female; Self-verifying

**Julian Johnes**

Timeline About Friends Photos Archive More

**Intro**  
An Accounting Officer with 5+ years of experience. Currently looking for a new opportunity.

- Accounting Officer at Unilever
- Former Finance Assistant at NESTEA
- Studied Financial Management at University of Amsterdam / Universiteit van Amsterdam
- Went to Joplin High School - Official Home of the Eagles

**Julian Johnes**  
Today at 18:26pm



Damn... This week has no end... All I need right now is some booze and getting my head off work.

Like - Comment - Share

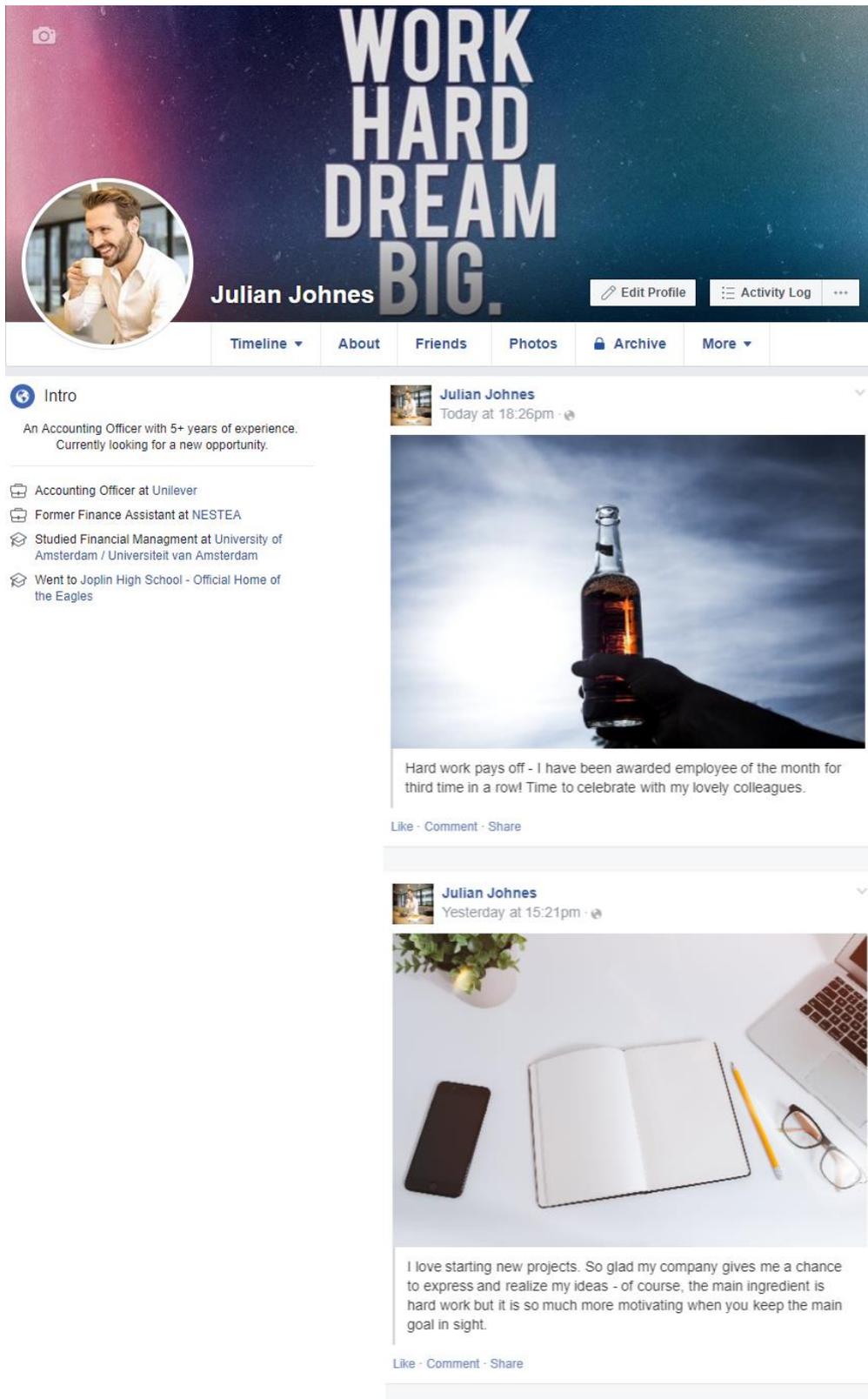
**Julian Johnes**  
Yesterday at 15:21pm



I love starting new projects. So glad my company gives me a chance to express and realize my ideas - of course, the main ingredient is hard work but it is so much more motivating when you keep the main goal in sight.

Like - Comment - Share

Condition 3 – Male; Self-enhancing



The image shows a Facebook profile for Julian Johnes. The profile picture is a circular image of a man in a white shirt holding a coffee cup. The cover photo features the text "WORK HARD DREAM BIG." in large white letters on a dark blue background. Below the cover photo, there are navigation tabs: Timeline, About, Friends, Photos, Archive, and More. The profile bio states: "An Accounting Officer with 5+ years of experience. Currently looking for a new opportunity." The education section lists: "Accounting Officer at Unilever", "Former Finance Assistant at NESTEA", "Studied Financial Management at University of Amsterdam / Universiteit van Amsterdam", and "Went to Joplin High School - Official Home of the Eagles".

**Julian Johnes**  
Today at 18:26pm · 🌐



Hard work pays off - I have been awarded employee of the month for third time in a row! Time to celebrate with my lovely colleagues.

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**Julian Johnes**  
Yesterday at 15:21pm · 🌐



I love starting new projects. So glad my company gives me a chance to express and realize my ideas - of course, the main ingredient is hard work but it is so much more motivating when you keep the main goal in sight.

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Condition 4 – Male; Self-verifying

**Julian Johnes**

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**Intro**

An Accounting Officer with 5+ years of experience. Currently looking for a new opportunity.

- Accounting Officer at Unilever
- Former Finance Assistant at NESTEA
- Studied Financial Management at University of Amsterdam / Universiteit van Amsterdam
- Went to Joplin High School - Official Home of the Eagles

**Julian Johnes**  
Today at 18:26pm

Damn... This week has no end... All I need right now is some booze and getting my head off work.

[Like](#) [Comment](#) [Share](#)

**Julian Johnes**  
Yesterday at 15:21pm

I love starting new projects. So glad my company gives me a chance to express and realize my ideas - of course, the main ingredient is hard work but it is so much more motivating when you keep the main goal in sight.

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