Are Spectacles the Female Equivalent of Beards for Men? How Wearing Spectacles in a LinkedIn Profile Picture Influences Impressions of Perceived Credibility and Job Interview Likelihood

Sarah F. van der Land[1(✉)], Lotte M. Willemsen[2], and Suzanne A.J. Unkel[3]

[1] Erasmus University Rotterdam, Rotterdam, The Netherlands
vanderland@eshcc.eur.nl
[2] University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam, The Netherlands
[3] Google, Dublin, Ireland

Abstract. This study builds on our previous work on beardedness [1] and explores whether wearing spectacles in a LinkedIn profile picture affects a female candidate's prospects of being invited for a job interview and whether this is contingent on the type of job vacancy. Results of a 2 (spectacle use: spectacles versus no spectacles) × 3 (job type: expertise, trustworthiness, attractiveness) experiment conducted among 139 participants show that bespectacled candidates are perceived as having more expertise and –to our surprise- also being more attractive than candidates not wearing spectacles. Moreover, a candidate's perceived credibility is a significant predictor of the intention to invite the candidate for a job interview. Theoretical and practical implications of these findings are discussed.

Keywords: Personal branding · Strategic social media · Impression management · Recruitment · Spectacles · Credibility · Job interview success · LinkedIn

1 Introduction

Today's employers are increasingly using Social Network Sites (SNSs; e.g., Facebook and LinkedIn) to screen potential job applicants before inviting them to a job interview [2]. Because most employers have limited time and information processing capabilities to search among the large online pool of potential job candidates on LinkedIN [2], they often resort to heuristic inferential strategies, as elicited in the Elaboration Likelihood Model, to economize their judgments [3]. Therefore, judgments about a candidate's *credibility* are likely to be guided by very minimal visual cues displayed in a profile picture such as gender, ethnicity, spectacles and facial hair [4, 5]. Credibility refers in this study to perceived positive characteristics of a potential candidate that affect the receiver's (e.g. employer) acceptance of a message, and is viewed as a multifaceted construct [6, p. 48]. Thus, the cues a potential job candidate displays on their online profile may determine first interpersonal impression formation [7], credibility and, evidently, job interview success.

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This study explores whether one specifically salient visual cue in a LinkedIn profile picture, namely wearing spectacles, affects a candidate's prospects of being invited for a job interview. The research design of this study builds on, and partially replicates, our prior work on the effects of bearded candidates on job interview success [1]. Moreover, it extends Guido, Peluso, and Moffa's study [8] on the effects of bearded endorsers in advertising, to the context of job recruitment. Spectacles were chosen as a visual manipulation in this study because prior research indicated that the stereotype of spectacles is to decrease a persons' level of attractiveness [9], but increase intelligence ratings [10]. In other words, spectacles in your LinkedIN profile picture may make you less attractive, but you look more intelligent. Moreover, based on our earlier work [1] we were curious to investigate whether spectacles are the female equivalent of beards in terms of expertise and intelligence perceptions. As there is a lack of empirical knowledge on effective online personal branding [11] we've formulated the following research question: "*Does wearing spectacles in a LinkedIN profile picture affect a female job candidates' likelihood of obtaining a job interview, and to what extent is this contingent on the type of job vacancy?*"

2 Theoretical Framework

In everyday life, when we get acquainted with previously unfamiliar people, we base our first impressions of others on very minimal visual cues of information such as race, height and attractiveness [7, 12, 13]. Particularly in the context of applying for a job, a strong first impression is vital because the minimal cues displayed in a job candidates' self-presentation, may impact employers' hiring decision [14]. In an ideal world, when searching for a suitable candidate, recruiters and employers would engage in a rational cost-benefit analysis of all available information on potential candidates, and not be tempted to be guided by first impressions and stereotypes. However, fact is that most recruiters have limited time and information processing capabilities and therefore must resort to heuristic inferential strategies to economize their judgments, as elicited in the Elaboration Likelihood Model [3] and the Heuristic-Systematic Model [4]. More important: once a first impression is made of the candidate, recruiters are reluctant to change them, as they are inclined to be consistent in their decisions [15].

In an online setting, research has shown that a profile picture is one of the first things people notice when they view someone's Social Network Site (SNSs) [16]. Therefore, it receives the most attention from those to whom the profile picture belongs [16], as well as those who observe the SNS profile [17]. SNS users carefully select their profile pictures to present and "brand" themselves in the best possible way [18]. Observers attend to the profile picture to draw inferences of the profile picture's owner [19]. Profile pictures are especially relevant when information is exchanged between unknown contacts, as people are not able to rely on other social cues (e.g., voice intonation, non-verbal communication, facial expressions etc.). Indeed, according to Social Information Processing theory, the few available cues present in this profile picture (e.g. spectacles, hair color) are prone to be magnified and stereotyped by those who form judgments of the profile picture [5]. Thus, the cues a potential job candidate displays on their LinkedIN

profile picture may determine interpersonal impressions, including credibility perceptions, and, evidently, job interview success. In this study, perceived credibility is a multifaceted construct, which is generally believed to consist of expertise, trustworthiness and attractiveness perceptions [see 6 for a review].

In our previous research on impression formation [1], we found that wearing a beard in a LinkedIn profile pictures was a salient cue for men that enhanced perceptions of expertise and affected and job interview likelihood for *expertise-jobs*. In this study, we perceive spectacles as the female equivalent of the male beard and expect that spectacles arouse the same associations of intelligence, trust and wisdom for women as beards do for men. An additional reason to focus on spectacles as a cue is that putting on a pair of spectacles is a simple act that may have a major impact on a person's face and how the person is perceived [20], and therefore is a suitable cue to study 'personal branding'.

Traditionally, spectacles are first and foremost functional objects, helping people with impaired sight to improve their vision [21]. However, nowadays spectacles are increasingly turning into fashion accessories [20], which has been sparked by popular culture as celebrities and famous models are more frequently seen wearing spectacles with noticeable frames [22, 23]. The stereotypical association of bespectacled people is that they are considered to be more intelligent [24], often associated with the "nerd stereotype". In an experiment by [20], it was found that individuals wearing spectacles (both rimless and full-rim) were rated as more successful and more intelligent than individuals not wearing spectacles. Therefore, we hypothesize that spectacles may serve as a cue to enhance expertise perceptions for women, in a similar vein as beards do for men.

An important indicator of trust is the ability to look someone in the eye [25]. The eye region is very informative part of the human face, which gives important information about people's current focus of attention and intentions [26]. Spectacles were found to significantly enhance perceptions of trustworthiness in an experiment in comparison to faces without spectacles [20].

Many studies have demonstrated that most people tend to be rated as less attractive with spectacles on [9, 27]. Yet for women's ratings of attractiveness, this effect seems to be particularly negative [28, 29]. Therefore, we hypothesize the following:

H1: Wearing spectacles in a LinkedIn profile picture interacts with job type, such that wearing spectacles (vs. not wearing spectacles) in a LinkedIn profile picture (a) positively affects credibility perceptions for the expertise-job, (b) positively affects credibility perceptions for the trustworthiness-job, but (c) negatively affects credibility perceptions for the attractiveness-job

In the context of persuasive communication, higher levels of perceived credibility have been linked to various positive outcomes [6, 30]. For instance, the rich body of credibility research demonstrates that more credible sources produce more attitude change than less credible sources [see 31, for a review]. Moreover, [30] found that salesmen who were perceived more credibly are able to gain a significantly higher number of customer purchases for their product than salesmen who were not perceived as such. Therefore, we argue that the perceived credibility of a job candidate will affect the intentions to invite him for a job interview and offer the following hypothesis:

H2: Candidates with a higher perceived credibility are more likely to get a job interview invitation than candidates with a lower perceived credibility.

3 Method

To test these hypotheses graphically displayed in Fig. 1 a 2 (spectacle use: spectacles versus no spectacles) × 3 (job type: attractiveness, trustworthiness, expertise) between subject factorial design was conducted.

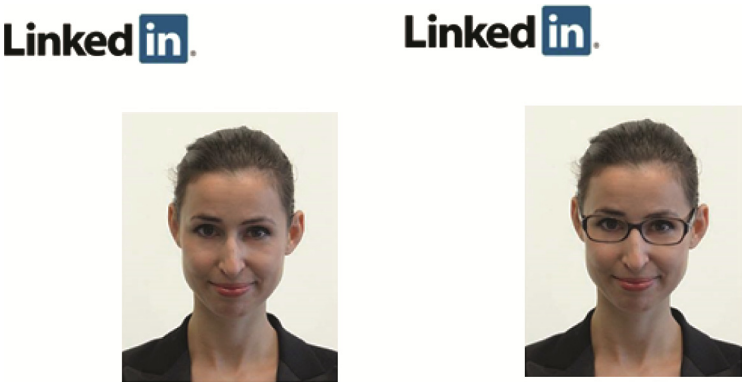

Fig. 1. Facial stimuli used as job candidates

3.1 Sample

In total, 139 participants, between 18 and 55 years old (52.2 % female, $M_{age} = 25.53$, $SD = 7.27$) participated in this online experiment. Participants were selected based on a convenience sample of the social networks of the students who participated in a Master's level Media and Communication course at a high-ranked University in the Netherlands. Thus, the sample consisted of some recruiters, but also friends, colleagues and acquaintances were invited to fill out the online survey.

3.2 Research Design

To manipulate job type, three job vacancies were created to represent Ohanian's [6] three sub-dimensions of credibility—i.e., attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise. In line with previous research [cf. 1], the expertise-job comprised a position as an architect at an architectural firm, and the trustworthiness-job comprised a position as a back office cashier at a bank. The attractiveness-job comprised a vacancy for a promotion model at a promotion agency. Participants (n = 38, of which most in the age category between 19 and 30 years of age, 65.8 % female) were randomly shown one of three job

vacancies. Participants were asked to imagine they were a recruiter and to indicate on 15-items of Ohanian's perceived credibility what kind of candidate would be most suitable for this job vacancy (1 = strongly disagree; 7 strongly agree). An example item corresponding with the attractiveness vacancy was "the candidate should be elegant", for the expertise vacancy "the candidate must be knowledgeable", and for the trust vacancy "the candidate must be reliable". Perceptions about required qualities matched with the intended sub dimensions of credibility. Respondents perceived attractiveness an important quality for the promotion model vacancy ($M_{attractiveness} = 5.45$, $SD = 1.19$), trustworthiness an important quality for the cashier vacancy ($M_{trustworthinesss} = 5.20$, $SD = .40$), and expertise an important quality for the architect vacancy ($M_{expertise} = 5.20$, $SD = .57$). This was also confirmed by one-sample t-tests; each quality scored significantly higher than the mid category of the scale (all $ps < .01$). Therefore, the analyses verified that the selected job vacancies were valid representations of the intended sub-dimension.

To manipulate the facial stimuli, *spectacle use,* respondents were exposed to a Linkedin profile picture, showing a female candidate who did or did not wear spectacles. The design of the spectacles was a modern style consisting of a thick full-rim and a black frame, as this corresponds to current fashion for eye spectacles [20]. The thick rim was chosen in order to make sure that participants would notice them. The hairstyle of the model was put up in a bun, in order to avoid unwanted effects of increasing female attractiveness due to long and medium hairstyles [19]. The model was a relatively young female (31 years of age), because candidates in this age category are rewarded more positive replies to their job application by recruiters than older candidates [12]. To control for unwanted effects of familiarity with the model [35], we asked: "Are you familiar with the model?" Only (n = 3) participants indicated being familiar with the model, which were then eliminated from the dataset.

The model wore a black blazer because employers prefer candidates to wear dark, conservative clothing during job interviews [36, 37]. The model expressed a neutral but pleasant face (by holding her lips together and directing the corners of her mouth upwards), in order to avoid unwanted interpersonal effects of smiling [38]. To ensure that the spectacles were the only manipulation cue, the picture of the model was photo shopped by a graphical designer, creating two identical pictures in terms of facial expression. Thus, apart from this manipulation, these two LinkedIn profile pictures were identical. Finally, the LinkedIN logo was added to increase the photo's likeness to a real LinkedIN profile picture (see Fig. 2).

3.3 Procedure

The procedure was similar to our prior study [1]. Participants were led to a Qualtrics survey website after having clicked on the online link they received via email, Facebook or LinkedIN. The first page of the survey presented a welcome message and stated that the general purpose of this study, provided background information on the researchers and offered instructions. Subsequently, participants were randomly assigned to one of the six experimental conditions (e.g. with spectacles versus without spectacles in combination with one of the three designed jobs). Respondents were forced to look at the job

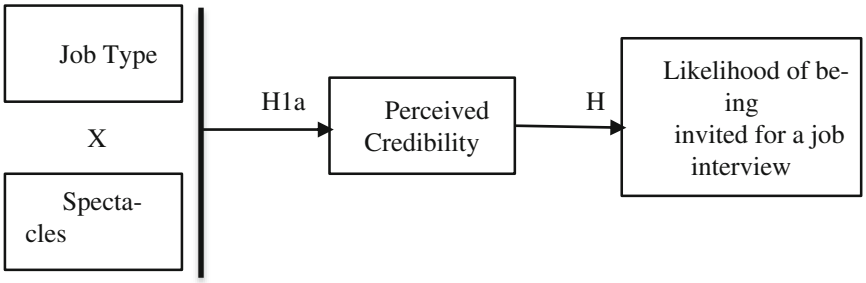

Fig. 2. Conceptual model of this study

description for at least 20 s first (a timer only activated the "next" button after 20 s) and at least twelve seconds at the LinkedIn profile picture, after which the post experiment questionnaire was activated.

3.4 Measures

Ohanian's [6] 15-item semantic differential scale was used to measure the *perceived credibility of the candidate,* with five items representing each of the three sub–dimensions. The scales for the three sub dimensions proved sufficiently reliable as *attractiveness* formed a one-dimensional scale (Cronbach's $\alpha = .84$), and so did *expertise* (Cronbach's $\alpha = .90$), and *trustworthiness* (Cronbach's $\alpha = .89$). *Perceived invitation intention* (Cronbach's $\alpha = .81$) of the female job candidate, was measured via a two-item rating scale based on Fishbein and Ajzen [39]. One item measured the strength of the likeliness to invite the job candidate, and the other item measured the subjective probability that the inviting behavior will be effectively performed within the next three months. All of the items discussed above were measured on a seven-point semantic differential scale ranging from 1 (strong negative evaluation) to 7 (strong positive evaluation).

4 Results

A check for gender effects was carried out and the results from a difference analysis showed that participants' gender has no significant effect on female candidates' perceived credibility, its sub dimensions, and the intention to invite applicants to a job interview $p = .17$.[1] This finding supports that gender has no role in the model; relationships among independent and dependent variables are not affected by gender.

To test the research hypotheses, a factorial ANOVA analysis was performed with spectacle use and job type as independent variables and perceived credibility as dependent variable. The results reveal a main effect of spectacle use, $F(1,133) = 5{,}657$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .04$). A candidate who wears spectacles in a LinkedIN profile picture is

[1] All our results are presented one-tailed, due to predicted directional effects of our hypotheses [45].

perceived to be more credible ($M = 4.80$, $SD = .58$) than a candidate who wears no spectacles ($M = 4.55$, $SD = .70$). Importantly, and more germane to the hypotheses, the results revealed a spectacle use by job type interaction, $F(1,133) = 5{,}657$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .04$). Planned comparisons demonstrate that for expertise jobs, wearing spectacles ($M = 4.80$, $SD = .50$) versus no spectacles ($M = 4.32$, $SD = .74$) significantly increases a candidate's perceived credibility, $F(1,41) = 6.163$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .13$. Hence, the analyses provide support for 1a, stating that spectacle use positively affects credibility perceptions for the expertise-job.

Hypotheses 1b posed that wearing spectacles in a LinkedIN profile picture would positively affect credibility perceptions for the trustworthiness jobs as well. However, results showed that wearing spectacles ($M = 4.62$, $SD = .58$) or not wearing spectacles ($M = 4.73$, $SD = .44$) didn't seem to help or hinder the perceived credibility levels elicited by candidates' physiognomies, $F(1,46) = .529$, $p = .41$, $\eta^2 = .13$ for the trustworthiness job. Hence, hypothesis 1b is not confirmed. Hypothesis 1c stated that wearing spectacles would negatively affect credibility perceptions for the attractiveness-job. To our surprise, we found that the picture of our female job candidate was perceived as more credible for the attractiveness job *with* spectacles ($M = 4.96$, $SD = .63$) than *without* spectacles ($M = 4.56$, $SD = .84$), $F(1,46) = 3.539$, $p = .06$, $\eta^2 = .07$, thus hypothesis 1c was rejected.

To test our second hypothesis, a regression analysis was carried out. Results show that candidates' *perceived credibility* is a significant predictor of *invitation intention* for a job interview, $F(1, 137) = 21.59$, $p < .001$, which explained 14 % on the ($R2 = 0.14$). In line with our expectations, perceived credibility was positively related to invitation intention, $b^* = 0.37$, $t = 4.65$, $p < .001$. Therefore, hypothesis H2 was confirmed.

5 Discussion

Our study contributes to research and practice in the following ways. As indicated in [1], first, although prior research shows that SNSs are increasingly popular recruitment tools, there has been very little empirical research into effective *personal branding* of job candidates on SNSs [11].

Second, in contrast to the attention that Facebook has received from marketing and computer-mediated communication scholars, very little research has been dedicated to *professional* SNSs such as LinkedIn [cf. 41]. Third, from a practical perspective, for jobs seekers today, it is important to know which visual cues in an online profile picture can help create positive impressions on employers, and how these self presentation mechanisms work in relation to different job categories. For instance, depending on the type of job one aims for, it may be wise or unwise to wear a colourful shirt, put on a bow tie – or wear spectacles.

The present study shows that LinkedIn profile pictures of bespectacled candidates are perceived as more *credible* than candidates without spectacles only when the job vacancies was an *expertise-job* (H1a). For the *trustworthiness-job*, there was no significant difference in wearing spectacles or not (H1b). Moreover, our results indicated that bespectacled candidates are perceived as *more credible* for the *attractiveness-job*, than

non-bespectacled candidates (H1c). This finding is in contrast to our expectations and inconsistent with the existing body of literature that supports that spectacle wearers are perceived as unattractive [9, 28]. Regarding our final hypothesis (H2), as expected, a higher degree of *perceived credibility* indeed resulted in a greater likelihood to obtain *a job interview* than candidates with a lower perceived credibility. This implies that candidates' *perceived credibility* can be considered an explanatory variable of their *invitation intention*. In other words, the more credible candidates are perceived to be, the more likely they will be invited for a job interview.

An explanation for our findings regarding spectacles and attractiveness may be that this type of spectacles with a thick rim induced symmetry, and therefore attractiveness [9]. Second, this specific pair of spectacles may have magnified the model's eyes, and big 'puppy' eyes have always been a biological indicator of attractiveness [40]. Lastly, this finding might be related to the current trend of wearing spectacles-without-lenses, which entails that people wear spectacles as a fashion accessory. This turnaround has been initiated by popular culture as celebrities and famous models are increasingly wearing spectacles with noticeable frames [22, 23]. An explanation for our finding regarding trust could be that for trustworthiness-jobs people want to look job applicants in the eyes. It has been shown that narrow eyes raise suspicion whilst round eyes are perceived as a sign of trust [41], moreover, adults make attributions about competence based on eye gaze patterns [42].

As for practical implications, people managing their personal brand [43] should carefully choose a profile picture when they are applying for a specific job category. Applicants incorrectly upload profile pictures that are inconsistent with the offered job vacancy (for example, a woman without spectacles who applies for an expertise-job) as it is so much harder to get the approval of recruiters and persuade them to invite the applicants to a job interview. Another field of interest is advertising, where the presence of spectacles on the face of product endorsers could boost their credibility as perceived by consumers, with positive effects on purchase intention. Moreover, politics is yet another domain where wearing spectacles could boost candidates perceived credibility; this will positively affect the voting intention [44].

A limitation of this study with respect to its external validity relates to the type of spectacles and the model as manipulation material. Further research should verify whether different styles of spectacles (flamboyant with noticeable colors, modest with a slim frame, etc.), paired with different models (e.g. ethnicity, age, degrees of attractiveness) have similar results when it comes to *perceived credibility*. Ohanian's [6] construct of credibility could be used for this purpose to test the ability of the selected photos to elicit the three credibility sub dimensions in participants' minds. Second, the role of culture and fashion trends in self-presentation needs to be considered in regard to wearing spectacles. Third, future research could investigate the combination of men wearing a beard and spectacles on perceived credibility.

In conclusion, based on this research's findings, an optimist would state that it seems women can have it all: spectacles may enhance perceptions of credibility for jobs related to 'beauty' and 'brains'. However, further research is necessary to investigate whether these effects hold for all types of spectacles, all "types" of women and in all types of cultures.

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