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Are they accurate? Recruiters' personality judgments in paper versus video resumes

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ABSTRACT

Whether recruiters accurately infer personality from resumes is currently a topic of great interest in the light of technological advancements and new types of resume formats (like video resumes) that are increasingly being used. Based on predictions from the realistic accuracy model and the media richness theory, we investigated whether real recruiters ($N = 296$) are able to infer applicants' Big Five personality characteristics more accurately from video and audio resumes than from less information-rich resume formats (like paper resumes) and whether applicants' perceived attractiveness (physical/vocal) affects accuracy judgments. As expected and with the exception of extraversion, personality was not accurately judged from paper resumes. Interestingly, information-rich resume formats and applicants' perceived attractiveness did not affect accuracy judgments. Despite recruiters' stubborn reliance on their capacity to infer personality from resume information, study findings clearly showed that different types of resumes –also the new, more information-rich ones– are no valid tools to infer candidates' personality from.

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1. Introduction

Worldwide, resumes are one of the most frequently used selection tools by both applicants and recruiters and are even used more frequently than any other assessment tool (Piotrowski & Armstrong, 2006; Steiner, 2012). Due to technological developments, new types of resumes, such as the so-called video resumes, emerged and became increasingly popular (Hiemstra, Derous, & Born, 2015; Oostrom, van der Linden, Born, & van der Molen, 2013). Video resumes are short video-taped messages (less or about 2–3 min) in which applicants present themselves to recruiters or potential employers and elaborate on their competencies, qualifications and previous work experiences (Gissel, Thompson, & Pond, 2013; Hiemstra, Derous, Serlie, & Born, 2012). By using video resumes, applicants can distinguish themselves more from the applicant pool and are more able to show off their personality, talents or motivation towards a job.

Paper and video resumes do share similarities. Much like paper resumes, video resumes present candidate information in an

asynchronous way, meaning that the recruiter/employer can view the resume information at any place and point in time. Video resumes also differ from paper resumes, in that they provide more and different cues to recruiters, like visual and auditive information about the applicant. However, these more differentiated cues in video resumes also consist of non-job relevant information, like for example applicants' attractiveness.

This paper investigates the impact of different resume formats on recruiters' judgments about applicants' personality. Although not intended to be a psychological test, recruiters still infer other types of information than biographic information from resumes, such as applicants' personality, to base hiring decisions upon (Burns, Christiansen, Morris, Periard, & Coaster, 2014; Cole, Feild, Giles, & Harris, 2009). For recruiters, personality is an important construct to infer from applicants, because personality has strong predictive validity in predicting overall job performance and job-related behaviors (Sackett, Lievens, Van Iddekinge, & Kuncel, 2017). Personality measurements also possess incremental validity up and beyond intelligence measures (Schmidt & Hunter, 1998). Assessing personality of an applicant can therefore provide additional information to recruiters, which can help them make the best choice in recruiting and selecting an applicant.

However, whether recruiters are able to accurately infer

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personality from resumes, is still an open question and much debatable (Cole, Rubin, Feild, & Giles, 2007). Research into this topic is rather scarce and has mostly focused on paper resumes. Yet, due to recent technological developments –such as the emergence of video resumes–, this research theme has received more attention (Hiemstra et al., 2015).

Because accurate judgments are quintessential in recruitment and personnel selection, this paper aims to advance insights on recruiters' accuracy of personality inferences from resume information. Based on the realistic accuracy model (Funder, 1995; 2001), this paper first discusses the way recruiters process resume information and whether accurate personality inferences from resumes are possible. Second, inspired by media richness theory (Daft & Lengel, 1986), we examine whether information richness affects accuracy of personality inferences. It has been shown that raters infer targets' personality in a different way from paper resumes than from video-based resumes (Waung, Hymes, & Beatty, 2014), which are considered to be higher in information richness. However, it is unclear whether resume format also affects accuracy of personality inferences, which touches upon the essence of screening. Last, we explore the influence of non-job relevant resume information –like perceived applicants' attractiveness– on accuracy judgments. Because applicants' attractiveness (both physical and vocal) becomes more salient in information-rich resumes than in paper resumes, it is still much debated whether this (perceived) attractiveness can impact recruiters' personality judgments, and especially the accuracy of such judgments.

Below, we discuss the theoretical background of the study. First, we discuss different resume formats, followed by a discussion of the realistic accuracy model, which is applied to the context of resume screening. Then, we touch upon the effects of information richness of resume formats on accuracy of personality judgments. We end the literature review by discussing the relation between (perceived) attractiveness and accuracy judgments.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Resume format and accuracy

2.1.1. Resume formats

Many recruiters select applicants by the 'classic trio' of resumes, letter of reference, and the interview. Of this 'trio', resumes are the first tool to get to know applicants. Typically, resumes are paper credentials that consist of biographic information, which also seems to be used by recruiters to make attributions about applicants' soft skills (like interpersonal skills, leadership abilities or motivation) and even their personality (Brown & Campion, 1994; Burns et al., 2014; Cole, Feild, & Giles, 2003). For instance, Cole et al. (2003) showed that resume items referring to applicants' work experiences correlated negatively with applicants' agreeableness, and items on academic achievements correlated positively with applicants' presumed conscientiousness. More recently, Burns et al. (2014) also showed that people connect certain cues in resumes (like experience, type of education, and resume format) to applicants' personality and even hirability. However, whether recruiters can also accurately infer personality characteristics from items on paper resumes, is not investigated (for an exception: Cole et al., 2009).

Indeed, most studies on resume evaluations only consider 'paper credentials'. Yet, recent developments in technology and multimedia present new opportunities and implications for personality inferences based on resume screening. New formats such as video resumes have emerged and are increasingly popular in both Europe and the United States (Hiemstra & Derous, 2015; Silverman, 2012), urging for more research. More specifically, a

literature search in Web of Science and conference proceedings (February, 2017) showed that since 2010, there have only been 12 studies written on the subject of video resumes. Of these 12 studies, six were written in the last four years, indicating that there is growth in researchers' attention to video resumes. However, this growth in research is still limited and rather disproportionate when one compares this to the growth of use of video resumes in practice. For example, according to a survey in June 2011, 174.000 hits were found on the popular website YouTube for the keyword video resume (Gissel et al., 2013). By February 2017, this number increased to 5.53 million hits. Indeed, studies have already mentioned that the technique is popular among practitioners (Hiemstra & Derous, 2015; Hiemstra et al., 2015; Nguyen & Gatica-Perez, 2016; Waung, Hymes, Beatty, & McAuslan, 2015). Yet the subject of video resumes is little explored in research (Ryan & Derous, 2016), and therefore considered here.

Video-based resumes, may vary in format. In a more narrow sense, the video resume is a verbal report of the candidate's biographical information (previous education, relevant work experience and extra-curricular activities), which is comparable to the written biographical information in paper resumes (Cole et al., 2007). In a more broad sense, video resumes may allow job applicants to demonstrate their knowledge, skills, abilities and other characteristics, such as motivation and career objectives, hence resembling more a videotaped job interview and work sample test than a paper resume (Hiemstra & Derous, 2015).¹ Video resumes differ from paper resumes in that they consist of more varied and richer cues, and hence, can grant applicants the opportunity to present themselves more naturally. Compared to paper resumes, recruiters can base their personality assessment on more cues as well as different kinds of cues (e.g. verbal, non-verbal behavior). Whether this leads to more accurate judgments of personality is a point of interest in the realistic accuracy model (Funder, 1995; 2001) and the information richness theory (Daft & Lengel, 1986), which are discussed next.

2.1.2. The realistic accuracy model

A model that describes when and how it is possible to form accurate judgments about a target individual is the 'realistic accuracy model' (RAM; Funder, 1995, 2001). According to the realistic accuracy model, a target's personality can be judged accurately if (1) relevant information (e.g. personality traits) can be detected from (2) a clearly available context (e.g. questionnaire with sufficient personality items), (3) this information is detected by a rater (e.g. the rater is able to work with personality questionnaires) and (4) if this information is interpreted correctly (e.g. the rater has adequate knowledge and capabilities to interpret results of a personality questionnaire) (Funder, 2001). The first two elements, relevance and availability, are environmentally-based cues and can be influenced by the ratee, while the other two elements, detection and interpretation, are more person (rater) based.

2.1.2.1. Relevance: personality traits. When applied to the context of resume screening, the first element of the model, *relevance*, handles the question whether personality traits can be assessed from resume information. Waung et al. (2014) give an overview of resume cues (both in paper and video resumes) linked to Big Five personality traits. For example type and number of extracurricular activities are a cue for assessing extraversion, while volunteerism

¹ In this study we consider video resumes in a narrow sense. Such video resumes (also referred to as 'talking resumes') differ considerably from paper resumes in that they use a multimedia format that also presents vocal/verbal and visual/non-verbal information of the applicant.

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