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Maximising the credibility of realistic job preview messages: The effect of jobseekers' decision-making style on recruitment information credibility

ABSTRACT

Recruiting the right talent is crucial, particularly in sectors, such as the retail industry, with a high turnover and low commitment levels. In today's job marketplace, jobseekers receive recruitment messages from various sources. Recruiters are increasingly concerned about the effectiveness of their job recruitment messages. Previous research has indicated that recruitment information credibility is critical to mediating a jobseeker's willingness to join an organisation. However, research on how to maximise the credibility of job recruitment messages has not led to conclusive results. Taking an individual-differences perspective, this research presents two scenario-based experiments to explore how retail-trade jobseekers respond differently to experience-based information that is provided by a company-controlled source depending on their decision-making style. Study 1 (746 participants) shows that when the message is presented in the employee's tone (staff word-of-mouth, SWOM-formed) and contains employee descriptions and opinions, satisficers perceive the message to be more credible. Maximisers, on the other hand, are less likely to be affected by how the message is formed. Study 2 (351 participants) reveals that the joint effect of job-type and the provider's background information moderated satisficer-style but not maximiser-style jobseekers' perceptions of credibility. While satisficers are more likely to perceive an employee's tone (SWOM-formed) message as credible when the message presents a match between the background of the employee and the job type under consideration, maximisers are not affected by this joint effect. The study has theoretical implications that explain the divergent results in the existing recruitment-message studies, and has practical implications for recruiters who are seeking to maximise their candidate pool and increase the credibility of their recruitment messages.

Keywords: recruitment information, decision-making style, maximiser, satisficer, information credibility, source credibility

Introduction

Recruitment is a mission-critical process for human resources management (McKenna & Beech, 1995; Van Hoya, 2013), as the results influence organisational capabilities, strategic execution and competitive advantage (Phillips & Gully, 2015). Recruiting a relatively large number of new employees in a limited period is especially important for companies in the retail industry. In their 2014 annual report, the Society for Human Resource Management described the retail industry as one of the most labour-intensive industries in the US. Similarly, the US Bureau of Labor Statistics (2014) reported that despite the 550,000 job openings in the retail sector in July 2014, many vacancies were waiting to be filled. Due to the high turnover rate and lack of any specific skill requirements, the retail sector has an acute need to hire stable and fast-learning new employees to fill vacancies (Keeling, McGoldrick & Henna, 2013).

To this end, Breaugh (2013) proposes that increasing the number of applicants in the application pool is one of the most useful strategies to improve the number of qualified and suitable candidates. This proposal may seem self-evident, but for the past six decades the theory and practice of how to attract qualified candidates and to maximise the candidate pool by elaborating job recruitment messages has become a challenge. It is no less so at present, with many practitioners and researchers devoted to finding the best solutions (e.g., Rynes & Barber, 1986) before and during the ‘application generation phase’ (Hinojosa, Walker & Payne, 2015).

The literature on recruitment has often focused on analysing job-selection processes and practices from an organisational perspective (Hausknecht, Day & Thomas, 2004) in settings ranging from multinational corporations to particular

geographic regions (e.g. Mohamed, Singh, Irani & Darwish, 2013). There is also a stream of literature over three decades (e.g., Schwab, Rynes & Aldag, 1987) examining job searching from the point of view of the jobseekers. Recruitment emerges as a two-way decision-making process. Companies and HR managers make recruitment decisions, but candidates form perceptions of organisational attractiveness and decide which companies to target and which job offers to accept. Rynes (1991) indicates that individual differences appear to differ widely in job information search. However, only limited research has examined whether differences in search strategies are associated with differences in search outcomes. Therefore, there has been an increasing interest in research that examines recruitment from an individual differences perspective (Hausknecht *et al.*, 2004; Phillips & Gully, 2015). Candidates are exposed to ‘employer brand behaviour incidents’ by receiving information such as salary levels and career progress opportunities from a range of sources, including recruitment postings, advertisements, media coverage and word-of-mouth (WOM) testimonials, which may or may not be controlled by an organisation (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003). Several factors ranging from comparable measures (e.g., benefits, location and training programmes) to subjective perceptions of an organisation’s image and personality affect the way that applicants make decisions (Slaughter, Zickar, Highhouse & Mohr, 2004). At the individual level, information content, sources, and characteristics affect candidates’ perceptions of organisational attractiveness and job-application intentions (Phillips & Gully, 2015). What information applicants receive and in what manner are elements of informational justice (Chambers, 2002). Therefore, the aim of the present research is to investigate jobseekers’ perceptions (from an individual differences perspective) towards job recruitment content that is provided and controlled by employers.

We conducted two complementary studies that explore how individual jobseekers with different decision making styles (maximisers vs. satisficers) perceive job recruitment messages. Study 1 focuses on credibility perceptions of different message formats (recruitment messages directly provided by the employer [employer's tone] vs. recruitment messages containing employee descriptions and opinions [employee's tone]). Even though the positive link between information and source credibility is well established in the literature (Gupta & Wilemon, 1988; Castillo, Mendoza & Poblete, 2012; Gao, Tian & Tu, 2015), there is a small number of studies that integrate source and content considerations (Xu, Benbasat & Cenfetelli, 2012). Therefore, study 2 shifts the focus from information content to information source by exploring source credibility perceptions of maximisers and satisficers who seek different job positions (management-level jobs vs. grassroots-level jobs) and receive recruitment messages that may or may not match information providers' (recruitment messages in employee's tone) background information (professional-background information that illustrates an information provider's expertise (a good match with recruitment messages about management-level jobs) vs. personal-background information that illustrates an information provider's personality, personal habits and interpersonal relationships (a good match with recruitment messages about grass-level jobs)).

Study 1 provides evidence that individual differences in the form of decision-making style influence response outcomes to recruitment messages in terms of credibility; satisficers are affected by recruitment messages in an employee's (rather than employer's) tone. This finding is further explored in study 2, which focuses on those recruitment messages that are presented in an employee's tone only and contain employee descriptions and opinions. In order to deepen our understanding, we took a

more holistic approach and extended the work to combine individual differences, job type and source (provider) characteristics in one integrated framework. The findings suggest that whilst satisficers are affected by job positions and the background information offered by the information provider, maximisers remain unaffected. We conclude with an analysis of the main findings and a discussion of the theoretical and practical implications.

Literature review

The communication of job and company information during the recruitment process can be through various sources and channels. The source through which jobseeker receive job information is one of the key factors that influence their initial attraction to an organisation (Van Hoye & Lievens, 2009). Walker, Field, Giles and Bernerth (2008) indicate that jobseekers often use job advertisements presented during the early stages of recruitment to gather information about employers. Early recruitment-related information provided by employers significantly affects a potential candidate's application decision (Collins & Stevens, 2002). Previous studies (e.g., Cable & Yu, 2006; Van Hoye & Lievens, 2007) propose the credibility of a communication is one of the most crucial elements that mediate the effectiveness of recruitment information and jobseekers' willingness to join an organisation. In another study, jobseekers were significantly more attracted to organisations when the information source/communication is perceived to be credible (Walker *et al.*, 2008). Employers need to carefully consider how to convince and persuade jobseekers to believe the employer is being honest to them; increasing jobseeker perceptions of credibility of company-controlled recruitment messages is therefore an important issue to employers (Van Hoye & Lievens, 2009).

Credibility is defined as ‘believability’ (Fogg & Tseng, 1999). It is the extent of the trustworthiness of the communicator as perceived by the individual receiving the communication (Freedman, Richmond, Ashley & Kelly, 1981). Hovland and Weiss (1951) propose that people tend to discount information that they subjectively consider to be less trustworthy. Research in the area of recruitment supports this supposition in that the credibility of the information provider is a mediator affecting a jobseeker’s decision to adopt the advice from a source (e.g., Van Hoyer, 2012; Luo, Luo, Schatzberg & Sia, 2013), and influences job application decisions (e.g., Fisher, Ilgen & Hoyer, 1979). In other words, even though the content is true, receivers will still not consider a suggestion if they deem the information provider to be untrustworthy (e.g., Hass, 1981). In contrast, when the information provider (communicator) is considered to be trustworthy, information receivers are more likely to consider the content and potentially change their attitudes towards the object (e.g., a product, a job vacancy) (Hovland & Weiss, 1951). Some researchers (e.g., Flanagin & Metzger, 2013) concentrate on ‘information credibility’ to indicate more specifically the credibility of the information content. Nevertheless, information credibility is highly related to source credibility (credibility of the provider). Indeed, there is a positive link between information and source credibility (Gupta & Wilemon, 1988; Castillo, Mendoza & Poblete, 2012; Gao, Tian & Tu, 2015).

Existing studies reveal that experience-based information (more subjective information, such as office climate and work environment), even if it contains some negative aspects, can significantly increase the credibility of the information (e.g., Fisher *et al.*, 1979; Cable & Turban, 2001). Premack and Wanous (1985) propose the idea of realistic job previews (RJPs) and claim that employers should provide genuine, experience-based job information with both positive information content and possible

negative aspects (if any) that prospective employees may face at work. This realistic information gives jobseekers a better understanding of the company and the work environment (e.g., Van Hove, Weijters, Lievens & Stockman, 2016).

However, although numerous researchers have applied the concept of RJP messages, and have attempted to investigate how to increase perceived credibility and acceptance of information, somewhat ambiguous results have been found. For instance, Rieh (2002) indicates that different message formats (framing) and presentations (for instance, how a message is written or presented in an employer's tone, which is relatively official, or in an employee's tone, which is presented in a more personal experience sharing based format) affect information recipients' perception of information credibility. In contrast, Kuhn (2000) shows that message formats did not have a direct effect on the recipients' perceived credibility and trust and perceived risk regarding the information provider. Furthermore, Wright (2000) posits that jobseekers consider and evaluate the background and similarity of the information provider to themselves, and the experience, and thus, presumed expertise, of this source (provider) in a specific job area. Wathen and Burkell (2002) suggest background information should imply personality and interpersonal relationships (amongst others) and that total work experience in years, special knowledge or ability relevant to the work, and level of education are important factors indicating an information provider's expertise in a job position. That is to say, when the messages are personal experience based (or an advertisement message that is presented in a personal experience sharing/employee's tone), jobseekers perceive a *correspondence* of the message provider specific job experience with the job type they are applying for as a signal of credibility of the information, e.g., a message from a member of customer care about conditions for customer contact staff is likely considered more

credible than the same message from someone working at management level. Nevertheless, Cable and Turban (2001) propose that the information source has a relatively weak effect on credibility; instead, the content, such as message valence, is the key factor that leads jobseekers to perceive the credibility of the information differently.

Such uncertainties are not only theoretically unsatisfactory; they also give little help or guidance to practitioners seeking to design job recruitment advertisement information content and maximise recruitment outcomes. Some researchers indicate that jobseekers' individual characteristics may be a possible underlying theoretical factor that explains these divergent results. Driver and Mock (1975) explain that people possess different values, motives and risk attitudes. Individuals have different preferences, decision styles and considerations with regard to information content. Judge and Cable (1997) suggest that researchers need to look at individual characteristics to understand how people use information to make decisions. This in turn leads to the assertion that individual differences are a source of potential moderators that should be considered.

Individual differences in the type of information preference indicate a link to decision-making styles. Decision-making style is defined as a habitual attitude of making choices that affects an individual's decision-making process (Scott & Bruce, 1995). A well-known classification of decision-making styles is that of maximiser and satisficer. This was initially proposed by Herbert Simon in 1956 and involves an individual's information search depth, evaluation and application choices. Simon (1956) proposes the notion of maximisers and satisficers based on bounded rationality. Maximisers prefer extensive comparisons and searches for information about an

object, such as a product or a job, evaluating and analysing information carefully so as to make the best choice; this corresponds with the analytic processing system (system 2) in the traditional dual-process theory (Evans, 2008). However, Simon indicates that individuals seldom make a fully unconscious or irrational decision in reaction to an event. Some people do not ‘maximise (perfect rational)’; instead, they ‘satisfice (bounded rational)’ because they value the time and resources, and compromise with a good-enough solution (Campitelli & Gobet, 2010). Therefore, satisficers have the characteristic of preferring to seize chances and possibilities, and they will make a ‘good enough’ decision rather than necessarily the ‘best decision’. Hence, the notion of maximisers and satisficers represents a stable individual-difference classification, but also refines the traditional dual-process theory. It is considered appropriate to represent jobseekers’ information-evaluation processes.

Applying the differences of maximisers and satisficers to retail-trade recruitment content, Liu, Keeling and Papamichail (2015) have found that maximiser-style jobseekers and satisficer-style jobseekers have different preferences and considerations about job-related information. Maximisers show a high tendency towards risk avoidance; they spend more effort searching for job-related information, using information from more diverse sources to gain a deeper understanding of the organisation. Although Sparks, Ehrlinger, and Eibach’s (2012) study indicates that sometimes maximisers can delay decision-making because they always believe there is a better choice than the present one, they also acquire more knowledge about a job position. After they have accepted the offer and gone to work, they show higher met expectations than satisficers (Liu *et al.*, 2015). Satisficers, on the other hand, prefer to take a chance on a job as long as the position fits their needs and passes their thresholds. As they generally do not spend that much time collecting and comparing

information, they are also more likely to make decisions by relying on their personal perceptions of the source, the content and by using heuristic cues.

The concept of maximising tendency is verified by a variety of studies in a range of research areas (e.g., Sparks *et al.*, 2012). However, comparatively few researchers have applied the concept in the recruitment and human resource management research field (but see Iyengar, Wells & Schwartz, 2006; Liu *et al.*, 2015). Consequently, a full understanding of the consequences of individual differences in decision-making in job-application settings is still limited. A more detailed study of individuals' (jobseekers') job-information-seeking behaviours from this perspective will not only enhance understanding of how different outcomes arise from the same stimulus, but also present opportunities to help companies to design their recruitment information content to encourage more jobseekers to join the candidate pool.

This research presents two scenario-based factorial design experiments to examine whether an individual's decision-making style (maximiser vs. satisficer) results in differing perceptions of the information credibility of experience-based recruitment information from a company-controlled source. Study 1 aims to explore whether a formal, company-controlled source (a job advertisement) may invoke different levels of credibility from maximiser-style and satisficer-style jobseekers, if delivered in distinctive forms of RJP message (a message that contains more genuine, experience-based information). These forms are that the message is framed and formatted either as being directly provided by the employer (employer-sourced format, presented in the employer's tone) or as providing present employee descriptions and

opinions (staff word-of-mouth (SWOM) form: SWOM-sourced format message presented in the employee's tone).

The results of Study 1 indicate that SWOM-formed (the advertisement message that is presented in an employee's tone) RJP messages receive the overall highest credibility rating from jobseekers. Based on this finding, we propose a possible moderation effect that comes from the correspondence of an information provider (i.e., the employee, the SWOM-formed advertisement message provider) background (professional background vs. personal background), and the job position that the jobseeker aims to apply for (grassroots-level vs. management-level retail-trade job). Study 2 examines the influence of the interaction between these two variables and jobseekers' decision-making style on the credibility of the SWOM-formed RJP messages in a company-controlled advertisement.

Study 1

Conceptual development

RJP message format and credibility

Premack and Wanous (1985) identify RJP as devices used in the early stages of personnel selection to provide potential applicants with accurate information. An RJP message is monitored by the recruiting organisation and emanated from a company-controlled source, such as a recruiting advertisement, it provides potential applicants with information content on positive, or a mixture of positive and negative, aspects of a job - such as more experience-based aspects.

Compared to concrete, confirmable, more objective information (e.g., salary, hours and location), the more subjective, experience-based information is considered intangible (Keeling *et al.*, 2013). This experience-based information helps jobseekers to be aware of what the organisation offers if they accept the role (e.g., organisational culture, office climate and manager leadership style) and what the organisation may expect from them (e.g., late hours, customer interaction, urgency, degree of physical risk) (Shore & Tetrick, 1994).

RJP messages (emanating from a company-controlled source such as recruiting advertisements) have different formats, including: the description (of the RPJ message) is displayed as employer sourced, which is presented in the employer's tone (e.g., 'Working hours in Company A are very flexible') and in the form of employee testimonials; and the message is presented as staff (current employee) sourced, where the content is in an employee's tone and is, therefore, more personal (e.g., 'Based on my experience, I think the working hours in Company A are very flexible') (Shore & Tetrick, 1994). Even though employee testimonials and SWOM represent different sources, because SWOM is not completely controlled by employers whereas employee testimonials are technically monitored by employers (Keeling *et al.*, 2013), in RJP form employee testimonials can be considered similar to SWOM, especially in terms of the information content.

Buda and Charnov (2003) indicate that the way a message is presented and framed may influence how message credibility is perceived. Recruitment messages delivered via different forms significantly influence jobseekers' perceptions of employer features (Rieh, 2002; Allen, Scotter & Otondo, 2004). Based on the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) (Petty & Cacioppo, 1984), the format of an RJP

message is considered to be a peripheral cue. The nature of the content (e.g., valence, job attributes) of a message in an employer's tone and a message in a current employee's tone can be the same. The main difference is how the message is worded and framed. Cober, Brown, Blumental, Doverspike, and Levy (2000) indicate that displaying employees' testimonials encourages jobseekers to identify with organisations and increase their trust towards the employer, because jobseekers *feel* that they see 'the more human side of the organisation'. Van Hoya and Lievens (2007) also found that employees' testimonials received higher credibility than information provided directly by the employer, because jobseekers think that the information provider (the employee) has a closer experience of the work environment, even though their experimental scenarios provided the same information content.

The moderation effect of decision-making style

As highlighted before, decision-making is a possible moderator leading to different perceptions of a message. The concept of maximisers and satisficers illustrates two well-known theories extant in the social psychology literature. Heider (1958) proposes the 'naive scientist' theory. This theory assumes that people naturally act like scientists who rationally search for information, weigh costs, evaluate benefits, and match and update their expectations. On the other hand, based on the idea of heuristics, Fiske and Taylor (1984) propose that people act as 'cognitive misers', utilising mental shortcuts to make assessments and decisions. Acting as cognitive misers does not mean humans are being irrational; rather, they are protecting their mental-processing resources by finding different ways to save time and effort when negotiating the numerous choices they face in daily living. While these two cognitive approaches will likely both come into play for an individual across different

circumstances and contexts (e.g., consequence of decision), people will vary in their experiences and learning of the efficacy of applying each approach. Thus, people are likely to come to rely on and chronically apply one approach more consistently than the other.

When making decisions, ‘naive scientist’-oriented, maximiser-style decision-makers are more likely to adopt a central route that involves careful scrutiny of a persuasive communication to determine the merits of the arguments (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), which leads these information recipients to cautiously weigh the information (Cacioppo, Petty & Morris, 1983). Even though SWOM-formed RJP are considered to be a more human information source, ultimately the information is controlled and monitored by employers, and the nature of the information content is the same. Therefore, whether the information is in SWOM form or in the employer’s tone, maximisers are more likely to consider the ‘root source’ and the ‘content’ rather than the ‘message form/format’. Maximisers are thus less likely to perceive differences in information credibility between RJP messages in different formats.

In comparison, satisficers are orientated as ‘cognitive misers’. They tend to use instinct and feelings and adopt peripheral routes when making decisions. When the peripheral route is used, message recipients tend to be affected by peripheral cues, which involve the evaluation of the early parts of the message rather than subsequent parts (e.g., Tversky & Kahneman, 1974). They are inclined to evaluate a piece of information as trusted or less trusted by relying on their first and general impressions. This initial response will then affect their perception of the message content. Their attitudes tend to change according to subjective consciousness (Coon & Mitterer, 2014). The message recipients will also maintain their previous attitude towards the

subject of the message, and this will affect their perception of the rest of the message (e.g., Cacioppo *et al.*, 1983). Thus, it can be expected that the SWOM-formed RJP message with the current employee's tone will be evaluated as having a higher level of information credibility by satisficers, compared to RJP messages provided directly by the employer that have an organisational tone.

A two-way interaction between RJP message format and a jobseeker's decision-making style is therefore expected:

Hypothesis 1: *Satisficers will perceive higher information credibility when receiving an RJP message in SWOM format, compared to an RJP message in the employer format, whereas maximisers will show no significant difference in credibility ratings across the conditions.*

Scenario design

The content of the scenario (see Appendix 1) was based on a pre-study conducted with 346 participants with work experience in the retail trade invited via Amazon Mechanical Turk (AMT, <https://www.mturk.com/mturk/>). AMT is considered to be a reliable data collection panel; data quality is demonstrated to be as good as data collected via traditional sources (e.g., Buhrmester, Kwang & Gosling, 2011). Amazon runs a strict censoring system to manage its members to ensure the quality of its participant database. It has an additional advantage that it is possible to monitor (anonymously) repeat responses and whether people have taken part in previous studies, thus enhancing data quality. Participants were instructed to read a piece of job recruitment message that contained mainly concrete job attribute information (e.g., salary, location). This job recruitment information was constructed

from typical advertisements observed in newspapers (the National Ad Search and the National Business Employment Weekly) and on job-matching websites for retail jobs (craigslist.com, monster.com and indeed.com; these were listed in a qualitative study by participants who have work experience in the retail trade as the most widely used job-searching sources in the US). After reading the message, participants answered whether they required further information or not and what that further information would be. The top seven attributes mentioned were: 1) general fairness of treatment of employees by the company, 2) physical working environment, 3) social working environment, e.g., friendly colleagues, helpful supervisors, 4) family-friendly or flexible working hours, 5) general reputation of the company, 6) remuneration and 7) chance of promotion. The initial job advert was then enhanced to include further/initial information relevant to these attributes and then designed to be provided through each of the scenarios.

Parts of the structure of the scenario design were adapted from the experiments of Judge and Bretz (1992) and Thorsteinson, Palmer, Wulff, and Anderson, (2004). The nature of RJP messages is that they can contain positive-only information or a mixture of positive and some weakly negative aspects. Thus, both positive-only information and a mixed-valence information scenario were applied. For the mixed-valence scenarios, some more negative features, such as risks and possible negative circumstances, were emphasised. Following Fisher *et al.*'s (1979) experiment design, the positive messages were pre-tested and selected with a mean rating of between 4.5 and 5.5 (from '1 – very unfavourable' to '7 – very favourable'). Weakly negative messages were chosen with a mean rating of between 2.5 and 3.5. Extreme positive and negative messages were not used in order to avoid overshadowing the effect of other independent variables. Mackintosh (1971) indicates

that a strong stimulus may overshadow a weaker one, and one component may block an individual's perception of another component. In experimental design, the shadowing effect should therefore be considered (Fisher *et al.*, 1979).

For the SWOM form, the scenarios were presented as 'see what our current employee says about what it is like working here', and a more individual/personal tone was used to introduce the attribute information (e.g., I think, I would say). For the scenarios featuring information provided directly by the employer, the instruction pointed out that 'the advertisement also includes the following information', and an organisational tone was used (e.g., the company considers/supports, Company A provides).

Measures

Three items, adopted from the personal-involvement inventory (Zaichkowsk, 1994) (item 1) and the credibility scale (McCroskey & Teven, 1999) (items 2 and 3), were employed to evaluate the credibility of the information. The items were as follows: 1) 'I feel this information provider is dishonest/honest', 2) 'The information from this provider is unreliable/trustworthy', and 3) 'I think this information in Company A's advertisement is realistic' (strongly disagree/strongly agree). Nunnally (1978) suggests that a seven-point design is the ideal scale design, based on evidence that scale reliability increased dramatically from two-point to seven-point designs. However, the reliability increase became slight and less obvious when the design had more than seven points. Therefore, Nunnally (1978) indicates that adopting a nine-point scale design is relatively conservative. Although some researchers (e.g., Brown, Widing & Coulter, 1991) found evidence that analysis results and research findings are not likely to be greatly affected across five-point, seven-point and nine-point scale

designs, taking into account the mix of a five-point scale for item 1 (Zaichkowsk, 1994) and seven-point scales for items 2 and 3 (McCroskey & Teven, 1999), a relatively conservative scale design was used in the present study. Thus, all three items were evaluated on a nine-point scale (anchored at 1 as ‘dishonest/unreliable /strongly disagree’ and 9 as ‘honest/ trustworthy/strongly agree’).

The short (six-item) version of the 13-item maximisation scale (MS) (Schwartz, Ward, Monterosso, Lyubomirsky, White & Lehman, 2002) provided the measure of decision-making style. Nenkov, Morrin, Schwartz, Ward and Hull, (2008) report that this outperforms the 13-item version in reliability and validity tests, concluding it should be used in future research. The components were: alternative search questions (e.g., ‘when I am in the car listening to the radio, I often check other stations to see if something better is playing, even if I am relatively satisfied with what I am listening to’), decision difficulty (e.g., ‘I often find it difficult to shop for a gift for a friend’) and high standards (e.g., ‘I never settle for second best’). The original scale used a seven-point scale anchored at 1 as ‘disagree’ and 7 as ‘agree’.

Conduct of Study 1

After the participants had read the participant information and agreed the ethical terms of the study, they were directed to read a short instruction. Participants were then randomly assigned to one of the four treatment groups (see Table 1), and were asked to imagine that they were seeking a new job in the retail trade and that an advertisement had caught their attention; each treatment group was given advertisement content containing information about the job with a different combination of valence and message formats/forms. The four groups then completed

the credibility scale and the manipulation check items. All respondents provided demographic information and completed the MS before the submission.

Insert Table 1 about here

Results

A total of 389 male (52%) and 357 female (48%) participants were recruited via AMT. Comparing user IDs ensured no participant had taken part in the pre-study. All participants were requested to be aged over 19 and to have work experience in the retail trade in the US. Each participant was rewarded with a \$1 incentive. A total of 59% of the participants had a college or university degree, and 86% had more than one year of retail work experience. In addition, 78% received a wage of below \$3,000 per month, which corresponds with the salary level in the retailing industry and also reflects the lower average income in this sector. There were no significant differences among the four randomly assigned groups in terms of demographic variables, showing a successful random assignment of the sample.

A CFA (AMOS 20) using all items of both constructs indicated a good fit for the two-construct measurement model [CMIN 88.92, DF 26, GFI .98, RFI .96, CFI .98, RMSEA .057, standardised RMR .036 (and an improvement on a one-factor model CMIN 1586.25, DF 27; Chi-square value of nested comparison = 1497.33, $p < .01$]. Calculated construct reliabilities were satisfactory [credibility = 0.89; MS = 0.87]. It was thus acceptable to go forward using these scales. For the MS, in line with other research using this scale, a median split differentiated maximisers and satisficers. The median of 4.50 is similar to that in previous studies (e.g., 4.23 in the research by

Schwartz *et al.*, 2002). The three credibility construct items were combined into a single new construct.

All seven job-attribute means were rated above the median point (5.00 on the nine-point scale), suggesting that no selected job attribute was non-essential/useless for jobseekers when making a retail-trade job-application decision. This supported the selection of the job attributes and confirmed the successful and appropriate scenario design.

Testing the hypothesis 1

A two (message in the employer's tone/in the employee's tone) by two (maximisers/satisficers) two-way ANCOVA test was conducted for Hypothesis 1. Message valence was set as a covariate to control the effects on credibility. Supporting H1, the results revealed a significant two-way interaction between decision-making style and RJP message format [$F(1, 741) = 7.48, p < .01$] (see Table 2, Figure 1). A follow-up independent-samples t-test showed that satisficers were significantly affected by the format of the RJP message [$t(358) = 5.23, p < .01$, Cohen's $d = .55$]. When the message was in the tone of the employee (SWOM format), satisficers reported a significantly higher perception of information credibility [$M_{\text{satisficer, SWOM formed}} = 6.96, SD = 1.55$], compared to when the message was formed in the employer's tone [$M_{\text{satisficer, employer tone}} = 6.15, SD = 1.37$].

A further follow-up independent-samples t-test showed that for maximisers, no significant difference in credibility ratings was found between the message in the SWOM format and the message in the employer's-tone format [$M_{\text{maximiser, SWOM formed}} = 6.64, SD = 1.38$; $M_{\text{maximiser, employer tone}} = 6.38, SD = 1.37, t(384) = 1.84, p = .07$,

Cohen's $d = .18$]. Therefore, H1 was fully supported.

Furthermore, although message valence was controlled as a secondary variable, it is worth noting that, overall, the more balanced information content (a mixture of positive and some weakly negative aspects) received higher credibility [$M = 7.01$, $SD = 1.38$] than positive-only content [$M = 6.08$, $SD = 1.37$] [$F(1, 741) = 8.57$, $p < .01$]. This result corresponds with existing research that found that information with negative-aspect content can increase perceived credibility; providing (at least some) possible drawbacks of a job probably makes jobseekers feel that employers are being more honest with them (Walker, Feild, Giles, Armenakis & Bernerth, 2009).

Insert Table 2 about here

Insert Figure 1 about here

Study 1 demonstrates that maximisers and satisficers can show different perceived credibility outcomes depending on message format. For satisficers, when the message is presented in the employee's tone (SWOM formed), the results suggest they are more willing to trust the information. Maximisers, on the other hand, are less likely to be affected by how the message is formed.

Thus, for satisficers, addressing and forming the RJP *in the employee's tone* can bring efficient results. Consequently, even though this strategy may have little effect on maximiser assessments, the results suggest that employers should design (at

least part of) their recruitment messages in SWOM form if the goal is to maximise the candidate pool.

Nonetheless, the finding raises a question over whether the provider's (the employee's) background of this *RJP message in the employee's tone* (aka SWOM-formed RJP message), such as their work experience, and the type of job position being considered by the jobseekers are factors influencing jobseekers' perceived source credibility (e.g., Wright, 2000). The jobseeker is looking for information relevant to their current personal goals, that is, whether to make an application for a specific job or not. In the retail trade, different job types have different job requirements (Ryan, Horvath & Kriska, 2005). It is fairly well established that personally relevant information not only is more attention getting, it is also more involving and increases motivation to process information with subsequent effects on its weight in decision making (Johnson & Eagly, 1989; Petty, Cacioppo & Goldman, 1981). Thus, the type of job position is one of the important determinants of the mind-set that is adopted when someone looks for a job and information on that job position is more likely to be noticed.

The literature is also clear that perceived information source expertise adds to persuasive effects (McGinnies & Ward, 1980). In advertising, perceived expertise is related to congruence for the spokesperson/product combination, resulting in higher credibility and positive changes in attitude (Kamins & Gupta, 1994; Till & Busler, 2000). In our case, we might therefore expect that a fit between the RJP message provider's (the employee's) job experience and the job they are giving information about should increase perceptions of expertise, and therefore, credibility.

It is not only cognitive effects that may be at work. Smith (2000) explains that affective consequences of an information provider depend on the information receivers feeling a contrastive effect (e.g., ‘that person could not be me’) or an assimilative effect (e.g., ‘that person could be me’). The affect that results in an assimilative effect or a contrastive effect can be influenced by the message provider’s background (e.g., Wathen & Burkell, 2002). The message provider’s background is therefore one of the most noticeable elements of a recruitment message when it is encountered. When jobseekers aim to apply for a certain job type, different types of provider background information may trigger and boost the mid-set of a contrastive effect or an assimilative effect.

In other words, we need to refine our understanding of maximiser/satisfier reactions to SWOM-formed RJP message (RJP message in the employee’s tone) offering differing employee background information and fit/non-fit of experience with the job type that the jobseeker aims to pursue. The findings may strengthen the credibility of SWOM-formed RJP job advertisement messages. A second study examines the possible joint effect between the information provider’s background and the job type under consideration together with the moderation effect of the jobseeker’s decision-making style.

Study 2

Conceptual development

The influence of the joint effect of message-provider background and job type that the jobseeker aims to pursue on perceived credibility

Fiske and Taylor (1991) indicate that the characteristics and background of the information provider heavily influence the process and outcomes of persuasion. Information-provider background information – such as qualifications, details about the provider's experience, recognition and reputation – are among the most important criteria that Internet users utilise to evaluate online information providers' trustworthiness (e.g., electronic word of mouth) (Pattanaphanchai, O'Hara & Hall, 2013). (Wathen & Burkell 2002) conclude that the key factors influencing credibility perceptions are the information provider's expertise/knowledge, credentials, likeability/goodwill/dynamism and attractiveness. These factors can be classified into two main categories: professional and personal. The professional category includes an information provider's special knowledge, experience and training/education in the area. The personal aspect covers the provider's personality, characteristics, attractiveness and habits. These two aspects of the information provider are both important. When information recipients evaluate the information provider as having high professional expertise and perceive the provider's personal background as likeable, they will then perceive higher provider credibility (Wathen & Burkell, 2002).

Moreover, information receivers' perceptions of higher information-provider similarity with themselves are positively related to perceptions of higher provider credibility (Wathen & Burkell, 2002). Different job positions have different skill requirements. In the retail trade, management-level jobs, such as marketing managers, usually require the individual to have professional knowledge and experience. Grassroots-level employees (e.g., shop assistants) have fewer specific knowledge requirements (Ryan *et al.*, 2005). Consequently, it is likely that when a jobseeker aims to find a management-level job in the retail trade, the information provider's professional background will be considered to have more weight. Providing

professional-background information may better convince a management-level jobseeker to trust the information that they receive from the provider compared to providing personal-background information about the provider. On the other hand, when jobseekers plan to get a grassroots-level job, which usually does not require a higher-education qualification or professional knowledge, receiving personal-background information about the information provider is more likely to enhance jobseekers' judgments about the information provider's similarity to themselves, based on such indications as sharing the same interests and seeming friendly to them. Therefore, for these jobseekers, personal-background information will lead to a higher perception of credibility (the assimilative effect; Smith, 2000).

The moderation effect of jobseekers' decision-making style

Maximisers have been shown to be a group of people who are more cautious, who always try to avoid the risk of making wrong decisions, and who generally have a higher need for cognition (NFC) and a higher level of uncertainty avoidance (Liu *et al.*, 2015). Moreover, as discussed before, maximisers generally adopt the central route and consider every possible chance of making a reasonable decision. When maximisers only receive limited information in the RJP message – that is, information either on the provider's professional or personal background from one source (e.g., an advertisement) – it is likely this will be insufficient for them to decide if the information provider is trustworthy, because both aspects are important to them (Wathen & Burkell, 2002). Thus, lack of sufficient information to make a decision should lead to little difference in perceived credibility between these two conditions. Their perceptions of credibility are likely to change only when both professional- and

personal-background information is provided. This should be the case whether the maximiser aims to find a management-level job or a grassroots-level job.

On the other hand, satisficers show relatively low NFC, and tend to follow their first impression about the source and adopt peripheral routes when making decisions. Thus, when satisficers are looking for a management-level job, the information provider's professional-background information will lead to increased credibility perceptions, because it shows the professional aspect of the provider. On the other hand, when satisficers aim for a grassroots-level job in the retail trade, personal-background information will draw their attention because basic-level jobs usually do not require many professional skills. Personal-background information will provide cues on RJP message providers' self-similarity and likeability, which are positively related to perceived credibility. Hence, it is anticipated that jobseekers who adopt a satisficer decision-making style will report perceived-credibility differences according to the type of background information given and the job being considered.

Consequently, we expect that an interaction between the type of background information and the job position will influence the perceived source credibility for satisficers, but not for maximisers. Thus:

Hypothesis 2: *Upon receiving a SWOM-formed RJP message, there is a three-way interaction between decision-making style, the provider's background information and job position, such that: for satisficers, when aiming for a management-level job, higher perceived source credibility results from receiving professional- rather than personal-background information, while, conversely, when aiming for a grassroots-level job, higher perceived source credibility results from receiving personal rather than professional*

(expertise) information; whereas, for maximisers, perceived credibility is not affected by background information type and job position.

Scenario design

For the management-level job scenario, an instruction asked participants to imagine that they were seeking a new job as a ‘sales manager’ in the retail trade and that a job advertisement had caught their attention; for the grassroots-level job scenario, the instruction asked participants to imagine that they were seeking a new job as a ‘shop assistant’ in the retail trade. A brief introduction about the job position was provided, which was emphasised as coming from a current employee (see Appendix 2).

Wathen and Burkell’s (2002) research suggested that the total work experience in years, special knowledge or ability relevant to the work, and level of education are important factors that show an information provider’s expertise in a job position; these factors were therefore adopted for the professional-background scenario design. For the personal-background information, the advertisement included descriptions of the individual’s personality, personal habits and interpersonal relationships (Wathen & Burkell, 2002). Each scenario contained five sentences that covered these characteristics of the information provider (Employee A).

Measures

Nine items that evaluated the credibility of the information provider were adapted from research by Fisher *et al.* (1979). Fisher *et al.* (1979) developed this scale to evaluate a jobseeker’s perception towards an information provider (a person). Study 2 aims to investigate further the effects on jobseeker’s attitude towards the

SWOM-formed RJP message of varying the background of the SWOM-formed RJP message provider (an employee/a person. That is, to examine differences in source credibility effects on the message – application decision link. Fisher *et al.* (1979) developed a scale that evaluates three facets of jobseeker perceptions of the credibility of an information provider (a person). This scale was considered a conceptual fit to this study. Therefore, nine items that evaluate the credibility of the information provider were adapted from research by Fisher *et al.* (1979). The nine items were divided into three aspects: trust, expertise and liking for the provider. The original items for the Fisher *et al.* (1979) measure were evaluated on a seven-point scale (anchored at 1 as ‘disagree’ and 7 as ‘agree’). As there were no concerns about mixing previous scale points, the seven-point scale was adopted for this study. The six-item MS was adopted, as in Study 1.

For the manipulation check, one item was used to assess if the participants perceived the provider’s background information accurately (*‘I think the provided background information about Employee A is ...’*, on a two-sided nine-point scale anchored at (-4) +4 ‘(not) profession-oriented’, ‘(not) personal-oriented’, 0 as ‘neutral’).

Conduct of Study 2

After the participants had read the study information and agreed to the ethical terms, they were randomly assigned to one of the six treatment groups (S1–S6). S1 and S2 were the control groups; no provider background information was given. The difference was the job position (management level job (S1) or grassroots level job (S2)). Conditions S3 (management level job, professional background), S4 (management level job, personal background), S5 (grassroots level job, professional

background) and S6 (grassroots level job, personal background) were given information with different combinations of job-position and provider-background information (see Table 3). S3, S4, S5 and S6 were additionally asked to evaluate the manipulation check item afterwards. After reading the scenario, all respondents were then guided to complete the credibility scale. All participants provided demographic information and completed the MS before submission.

Insert Table 3 about here

Results

A total of 187 male (53%) and 164 female (47%) participants were recruited via AMT. All participants were aged over 19 and had work experience in the retail trade in the US. Compensation of \$1.50 was given to each participant via AMT as an incentive. The population was distributed similarly to the sample in Study 1. A total of 67% of the participants had a college/university degree, 91% had more than one year of retail work experience, and 72% received a wage of below \$3,000 monthly. There were no significant differences among the eight randomly assigned groups in terms of demographic variables, confirming that the random assignment was successful.

A CFA (AMOS 20) using all items of both constructs indicated a good fit for the two-construct measurement model [CMIN 320.25, df 89 GFI .83 RFI .96 CFI .86 RMSEA .08 standardised RMR .092 (and an improvement on the one-factor model CMIN 937.92, df 90, Chi-square value of nested comparison = 617.67, $p < .01$)]. Calculated construct reliabilities were satisfactory [credibility = .85; MS = .91]. For

the MS, a median split differentiated maximisers and satisficers. The median split point of 4.24 was close to the median in Study 1.

For source credibility, Mumford (2012) argues that the three dimensions proposed by Fisher *et al.* (1979) are all essential components that an information receiver uses to evaluate the credibility of an information provider. From this point of view, to gain information on overall credibility, the dimensions could be combined to create a single mean rating. This proposition fits the purpose of the present study, which is to compare the jobseekers' overall perceptions of information provider credibility. However, a question remains about whether this is an appropriate action. An initial EFA (Direct Oblimin, eigenvalues greater than 1) extracted three factors (cumulative 71.13% of variance) with all loadings over .60, and the items completely matched the original constructs. Moreover, a CFA model with the original three components (*trust of source* [AVE = .75; CR = .90], *expertise of source* [AVE = .66; CR = .85] and *liking for source* [AVE = .56; CR = .79] also suggested a fair fit of the data [CMIN 109.90 DF 24 GFI .951 RMSEA .086 (an improvement on the one-factor model, CMIN 207.25 DF 27 GFI .810 RMSEA .172: Chi-square for nested comparison: 90.35, $p < .01$)]. These results suggest a relatively better fit if the model contains three components (compared to all nine items load in one factor).

However, the CFA results also show that these original three credibility components are significantly ($p < .01$) and strongly correlated with each other [.813, .720, .788], suggesting these are not entirely separate constructs. This view is supported by the comparison of the squared intra-construct correlations (SIC) to the AVEs (see Table 4) where source expertise and liking for the source fail or come close to failing the Discriminant Validity test, that is, that AVE estimates should be larger than the all corresponding SIC estimates (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson and

Tatham 2006, p 778).

Insert Table 4 about here

These outcomes support Mumford's (2012) propositions that the three components are related and all validly contribute to the *overall* source credibility perceptions but are also worthy of individual examination (see also Fisher *et al.*, 1979). Therefore, we first view the three factors as 'determinants of credibility' (Fisher *et al.*, 1979, pg. 95) calculating a composite variable as a measure of *overall* source credibility, then also separately explore the three determinants of trust, expertise and liking in subsequent analyses.

A one-way ANOVA with a Bonferroni post-hoc test (95% confidence level) showed the manipulation for the provider's background information was successful [$M_{\text{management level, professional}} = 2.81$, $M_{\text{grassroots level, professional}} = 2.91$ vs. $M_{\text{management level, personal}} = 7.25$, $M_{\text{grassroots level, personal}} = 7.36$, $F(3, 223) = 245.86$, $p < .01$] (the two-sided scale was coded with the anchor 4 of professional oriented coded as 9, the 0 of neutral as 5, and the 4 of personal oriented (the -4 of not professional-oriented) as 1).

Testing the hypothesis 2

Overall source credibility

The data concerning scenarios S3, S4, S5 and S6 were selected from the dataset to test the hypothesis 2 (S1, S2 were designed as control groups, see Table 3). A two (management level/grassroots level) by two (professional/personal background) by two (maximiser/satisficer) three-way ANOVA test was conducted. The results

show support for H2 in that a significant three-way interaction was observed [$F(1, 219) = 11.39, p < .01$] (see Table 5). A significant three-way interaction means that there is a two-way interaction that varies across levels of a third variable (Kirk, 2013). In the present study, the information provider background and job type are considered as having a joint effect on jobseekers' perceived credibility towards the information provider. Therefore, after splitting the dataset by the variable decision-making style, two two-way ANOVA tests and independent-samples t-tests were employed to test the simple main effects of the two-way interaction (between job position and the provider's background information) at the two decision-making styles (maximiser/satisficer).

 Insert Table 5 about here

Supporting H2, the first two-way ANOVA conducted to test the position*background interaction effect on maximisers indicated that maximisers' perceived source credibility did not show an interaction between position and background [$F(1, 108) = .32, p = .58$]. Furthermore, no evidence was found in a one-way ANOVA that perceived credibility was different among the four conditions. This indicated that the perceived source credibility reported by maximisers who aimed for different job positions was *not* affected by the information provider's background [$M_{S3, Maximiser} = 4.85, M_{S5, Maximiser} = 4.95, M_{S4, Maximiser} = 4.78, M_{S6, Maximiser} = 5.00, F(3, 108) = .32, p = .56$]. The results (see Figure 2, Table 3) suggest that no matter what job type maximisers were aiming for, getting information on either just the professional background or just the personal background of the information provider was insufficient to affect perceived credibility between conditions. A slopes

difference test also supported the findings; no slope difference was found between grassroots/management job type at professional/personal background information (comparing (1) and (2) in Figure 2) [$t = .76, p = .45$].

On the other hand, for satisficers, another two-way ANOVA examining the position by background interaction effect did illustrate a significant two-way interaction effect between job position and the provider's background information [$F(1, 111) = 25.99, p < .01$]. Independent-samples t-tests revealed that when satisficers were seeking a management-level job, receiving RJP messages in the provider's professional-background information condition resulted in higher reported perceived credibility of the provider compared to the condition of receiving the provider's personal-background information [$M_{S3, Satisficer} = 5.24, M_{S4, Satisficer} = 4.73, t(55) = 3.19, p < .01$]. When satisficers wanted to find a grassroots-level job, the provider's personal-background information condition showed significantly higher perceived source credibility compared to the provider's professional-background information condition [$M_{S6, Satisficer} = 5.44, M_{S5, Satisficer} = 4.81, t(56) = 4.03, p < .01$] (see Figure 2). A slopes difference showed a significant difference between grassroots/management job type at professional/personal background information (comparing (3) and (4) in Figure 2) [$t = 3.15, p < .01$]. Therefore, H2 was fully supported.

 Insert Figure 2 about here

Trust of source/provider, expertise of source/provider, and liking for source

As discussed above (see measures), the overall credibility was composed of three determinants: the sub-scales for these three components were further analysed.

After splitting the dataset by decision-making style, three pairs of two-way ANOVA tests and independent-samples t-tests were used to test the provider's background information*job position effect for the two decision-making styles (maximiser/satisficer).

For maximisers, respectively, the three two-way ANOVA tests all revealed non-significant results [$F(1, 108)$ *trust of source/provider* = 1.94, $p = .17$; $F(1, 108)$ *expertise of source/provider* = .65, $p = .42$; $F(1, 108)$ *liking for source* = .30, $p = .42$], supporting that maximisers were not reacting differently by job type*provider background in the aspects of trust, expertise and liking for the source. On the other hand, for satisficers, the three two-way ANOVA tests all showed significant results [$F(1, 111)$ *trust of source/provider* = 26.68, $p < .01$; $F(1, 111)$ *expertise of source/provider* = 6.46, $p < .05$; $F(1, 111)$ *liking for source* = 23.34, $p < .01$]. Independent-samples t-tests also revealed consistent results with satisficers' overall perceived credibility towards the provider (results are presented in Table 6). The findings demonstrated that satisficers reacted to the effect of provider background*job type significantly on overall credibility and the three sub components.

Insert Table 6 about here

Discussion and conclusion

Theoretical implications

Jackson, Brett, Sessa, Cooper, Julin and Peyronnin (1991) indicate that individual dissimilarity is an important element that affects recruitment outcomes. Applying individual decision-making style in the recruitment field enhances our understanding of how individuals may perceive and evaluate the same information differently and how these differences may affect the effectiveness of recruitment information design elements. The present study extends previous recruitment research and applied psychology research, and provides evidence and an explanation to begin to clarify inconsistent findings among the existing studies of recruitment-message design.

Study 1 and Study 2 reveal that the divergent findings in the recruitment-message literature may be due to neglect of participant individual differences. Study 1 reveals the moderation effect of an individual's decision-making style on the credibility of (experience-based) RJP messages in two different forms. The results indicate that maximisers are generally unaffected by message forms, while satisficers report significantly higher perceived credibility for the SWOM form. This explains the divergent findings in the recruitment studies regarding the effect of message format on jobseeker perceptions of credibility. In other words, RJP messages in the SWOM form receive higher credibility overall from jobseekers compared to RJP messages in the employer's-tone form, mainly because of the effects within the satisficer group. Therefore, variations in sample composition that do not take account of these differences in decision-making style can show inconsistent results.

Study 2 illustrates the influence of the interaction between decision-making style, job position/type and the information provider background information on perceived credibility. The results show pronounced differences between decision-

making styles in terms of the effects of the type of provider background information given and the job type on credibility. Maximisers are less likely to be influenced by receiving incomplete provider background information. Furthermore, their perceptions of credibility do not differ across job positions either, showing that maximisers always try to pursue the best option, and the principle does not change because of different decision objects (job types). The results are in line with the definition of maximisers in that they tend to evaluate information carefully and are less easily satisfied when they receive insufficient information. On the other hand, satisficers in the management-level/professional-background information condition and in the grassroots-level job/personal-background information condition attached higher credibility to information providers (i.e., the current employees) than in the other conditions. This result demonstrates that satisficers are likely to be influenced by peripheral cues when making decisions. Compared to maximisers, satisficer preferences are evidently affected by job types/positions and the background of the information provider.

Practical implications

In today's job marketplace, applicants receive recruitment messages from various sources. Recruiters are increasingly concerned with the effectiveness of their job recruitment messages (Buda & Charnov, 2003). For instance, in the Internet age, company websites provide a relatively inexpensive and versatile platform for employers to advertise job vacancies and an easy/free-to-access source of information for jobseekers (Hinojosa *et al.*, 2015; Simón & José Esteves, 2015). However, the main concern is how to make information recipients (jobseekers) believe the posted

information is trustworthy and that the employers are being honest with them before they make the decision to apply (Walker *et al.*, 2009).

Zottoli and Wanous (2001) emphasise that researchers must consider the differences that exist within a recruitment source, and not just across different source categories. Understanding maximisers and satisficers empowers employers to produce recruitment information that can attract more candidates by taking into account the differences between maximisers and satisficers so as to increase their perceived credibility and therefore, convincing (increase perceived credibility) them with appropriate types and forms of information. There are situations where, within a battery of questions about the candidate, it would be appropriate to identify whether they are inclined to be a maximiser or satisficer and so customise the recruitment information (e.g., on a job website that requires registration or at a recruitment fair when job seekers register an interest with a company).

In situations where individual dispositions are not identifiable, employers could still apply the practical implications of this paper as there are implementations that can be made at a general level that will improve the job information for all information seekers (jobseekers). That is, the results of the present study provide suggestions for employers about how they could generally increase the credibility of job-related messages when they are designing recruitment information. The mean scores of all treatments (scenarios) in Study 1 are above the middle option (5.00), providing evidence that experience-based information in a company-controlled source (i.e., an advertisement) receives high overall credibility. Jobseekers cannot usually gain this type of knowledge before they have accepted an offer and started work (Breugh, 2008) without extending their information search to current or past

employees. Experience-based information provided by official recruitment channels can still improve a jobseeker's perceived credibility of the information provided and may give them insight into working for an organisation. The results also indicate that employers do not need to deliberately hide the shortcomings of the position. Providing an accurate depiction of the job significantly increases jobseekers' belief that employers are being honest with them.

Moreover, even though the message form does not change maximisers' perceived credibility of the information source (that is, does not increase or decrease it), the SWOM form significantly increases perceived credibility for satisficers. Therefore, adopting the SWOM form by including current employees' experiences of work in recruitment messages should help maximise the candidate pool, which is a crucial aim for labour-intensive industries. On the other hand, when providing these current employees' experiences, the provider's (i.e., current employee's) background information should not be ignored. Employers should choose appropriate employees to represent the company and should provide information on both their professional *and* their personal background in the message. This is particularly the case for those jobseekers who are satisficers.

Study limitations and future study suggestions

Although the sample shows representativeness on features of the retail trade and the existing studies have demonstrated that AMT is a panel that gathers trustworthy participants and generates high-quality data, it was an online sample in a trade in which there may be groups with less or no Internet experience or exposure. Furthermore, incentives and compensation might alter AMT members' preference towards survey participation. Future research might focus on a sample that includes

less-Internet-savvy groups, and might also broaden the sample to include volunteers without providing incentives. Moreover, even though the scenario-based experimental method is identified as one of the most useful methods that allows researchers to control potential biases and establish the effects of and relationships between variables (Howitt & Cramer, 2014), it is acknowledged that the artificiality of the setting could produce results that do not reflect real life. Future studies are encouraged not only to replicate the present study and to retest or further test the relationships between the variables in the same or different sectors, but also to adopt other research methods, such as using qualitative data to frame the effects of individual differences on the perceptions of recruitment information content.

Furthermore, as highlighted in the literature review, information credibility and source credibility (credibility of the provider) are highly related and connected (e.g., Castillo *et al.*, 2012; Gupta & Wilemon, 1988; Gao, Tian & Tu, 2015). When receivers consider a source/information provider is reliable, the receivers are more likely to accept and adopt the information content from the source/information provider, which means the credibility of the information (the content) also increases; when the information contains more realistic/truthful information, the source credibility also strengthens. Nevertheless, it is acknowledged that the credibility scales that are adopted in the two studies represent slightly different concepts, though the scales are considered fitting better with the studies (Study 1 for information credibility; Study 2 for provider/source credibility). By shifting the focus from information content to source, we designed two complimentary studies that investigate individual differences in perceiving information and provider credibility. Rather than focusing on information aspects only, we adopted a more comprehensive credibility measure in study 2. Our review of the literature has shown that these two

forms of credibility (information and provider) are positively linked anyway. Therefore, it can be argued that we have adopted a more holistic approach to studying credibility aspects in one piece of work. Future studies however, could adopt both scales, test the correlation and verify that the results of the two scales are consistent.

Another issue that is worth noting is the use of Fisher *et al.*'s (1979) credibility scale. The discriminant validity check and CFA results not only fully support the results in H2 (for overall source credibility), but are also consistent with Mumford's (2012) proposition that the Fisher *et al.*'s three credibility components were all essential elements when an information receiver evaluates the credibility of an information provider. The inter-relatedness of the three components indicates the overall rating of the three components could be considered to represent the overall perception of source credibility. Therefore, our findings suggested that the Fisher *et al.*'s (1979) credibility scale can be used both as an overall measure of perceptions of source credibility, but is also useful for future studies to show possible differences in determinant strength in diverse situations when decomposed into the three determinants.

The present research provides a fundamental basis for further individual-differences and recruitment studies. Future research could investigate differences in the criteria that satisficers and maximisers take into account when choosing jobs. In terms of credibility, further research should investigate any differences between online (Internet) and offline job-related information sources. Within online sources, for example, as suggested by Dineen and Allen (2014), future research could explore whether popular social-media websites like Facebook and Pinterest and online job-

discussion forums such as LinkedIn are suitable recruitment information sources and whether maximisers and satisficers perceive and evaluate these sources differently.

The study results shed light on corporate practices for the information that the employers can control. An interesting topic that is suggested by one of the reviewers is that future studies may investigate if maximiser-style and satisficer-style jobseekers/employees may have different perceptions towards the company policy/event/environment, and rate/comment on a(n) company/employer on job websites, such as Glassdoor, with different viewpoints. In this case, the information cannot be controlled by the companies. Future studies are encouraged to explore the characteristics and differences of maximisers and satisficers from a variety of aspects that may benefit and improve the effectiveness of HRM activities.

Recruiting staff is an integral task of any organisation. Despite extensive research on recruitment over the last six decades, there has been limited testing, and thus there is limited understanding, of individual differences in job-application decision-making styles. In contrast to traditional recruitment, Phillips and Gully (2015) propose that strategic human resource management should consider the individual level. The individual-level outcomes feed back into the recruitment system to shape organisation strategies. It is intended that this study of decision-making style in recruitment will attract further attention to this area from researchers and practitioners.

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DECISION-MAKING STYLE AND PERCEIVED CREDIBILITY

Table 1. Study 1 scenarios, means and SD for perceived credibility

Scenarios/ Groups	Information Form	Message Valence	D-M style	N	Mean	SD
Scenario 1	Directly from employer (Employer-sourced)	Positive content only	Maximiser	96	6.25	1.32
			Satisficer	88	6.44	1.44
Scenario 2	Directly from employer (Employer-sourced)	Positive & weakly negative content	Maximiser	90	7.05	1.32
			Satisficer	102	7.41	1.51
Scenario 3	SWOM-formed (SWOM-sourced)	Positive content only	Maximiser	110	6.01	1.37
			Satisficer	84	5.60	1.29
Scenario 4	SWOM-formed (SWOM-sourced)	Positive & weakly negative content	Maximiser	90	6.83	1.26
			Satisficer	86	6.68	1.24

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Table 2. Tests of between-subjects effects (Study 1)

Dependent Variable: Credibility					
Source	Type III SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	81.58	4	20.40	10.16	.000
Message Valence [Covariate]	15.20	1	15.20	8.57	.006
Decision-Making Style (D-M Style)	.61	1	.61	.30	.582
RJP format (RF)	53.41	1	53.41	26.61	.000
D-M Style * RF	15.02	1	15.02	7.48	.006
Error	1487.51	741	2.01		
Total	1569.09	745			

DECISION-MAKING STYLE AND PERCEIVED CREDIBILITY

Table 3. Study 2 scenarios, means and SD for perceived credibility

Scenarios/ Groups	Job Type	Provider (current employee) background information	D-M style	Overall Credibility			Components of Overall Credibility	Mean	SD
				N	Mean	SD			
Scenario 1	Management level	No background (control group 1)	Maximiser	27	4.30	.68	Trust	4.27	.63
							Expertise	4.31	.92
							Liking	4.30	.85
			Satisficer	36	4.36	.56	Trust	4.35	.62
Scenario 2	Grassroots level	No background (control group 2)					Expertise	4.51	.65
							Liking	4.21	.71
			Maximiser	33	4.39	.70	Trust	4.27	.80
							Expertise	4.33	.64
Scenario 3	Management level	Professional background					Liking	4.63	.85
			Satisficer	28	4.41	.57	Trust	4.27	.80
							Expertise	4.33	.64
							Liking	4.63	.84
Scenario 4	Management level	Personal background	Maximiser	30	4.85	.55	Trust	4.76	.62
							Expertise	4.96	.69
							Liking	4.83	.61
			Satisficer	27	5.24	.60	Trust	5.28	.58
Scenario 5	Grassroots level	Professional background					Expertise	5.27	.80
							Liking	5.16	.66
			Maximiser	29	4.78	.56	Trust	4.54	.73
							Expertise	5.01	.61
Scenario 6	Grassroots level	Personal background					Liking	4.79	.79
			Satisficer	30	4.73	.61	Trust	4.84	.89
							Expertise	4.92	.62
							Liking	4.41	.59
Scenario 7	Management level	Professional background	Maximiser	27	4.95	.43	Trust	4.94	.48
							Expertise	4.92	.71
							Liking	5.00	.51
			Satisficer	28	4.81	.59	Trust	4.75	.88
Scenario 8	Grassroots level	Personal background					Expertise	5.01	.72
							Liking	4.67	.64
			Maximiser	26	5.00	.62	Trust	5.04	.52
							Expertise	5.18	.73
Scenario 9	Management level	Professional background					Liking	4.78	.62
			Satisficer	30	5.44	.60	Trust	5.79	.65
							Expertise	5.46	.79
							Liking	5.08	.68

DECISION-MAKING STYLE AND PERCEIVED CREDIBILITY

Table 4. Discriminant Validity: AVE bold numbers on the diagonal, off diagonal numbers are SIC

	Trust	Expertise	Liking
Trust	.75		
Expertise	.66	.66	
Liking	.52	.62	.56

DECISION-MAKING STYLE AND PERCEIVED CREDIBILITY

Table 5. Tests of between-subjects effects (Study 2)

Dependent Variable: Credibility					
Source	Type III SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	12.58	7	1.80	5.47	.000
Job Type	1.30	1	1.30	3.97	.048
Background Info.	.03	1	.03	.09	.759
D-M Style	1.39	1	1.39	4.23	.041
Job Type * Background Info.	5.61	1	5.61	17.08	.000
Job Type * D-M Style	.01	1	.01	.01	.907
Background Info. * D-M Style	.07	1	.07	.22	.638
Job Type * Background Info. * D-M Style	3.74	1	3.74	11.39	.001
Error	71.95	219	.33		
Corrected Total	84.53	226			

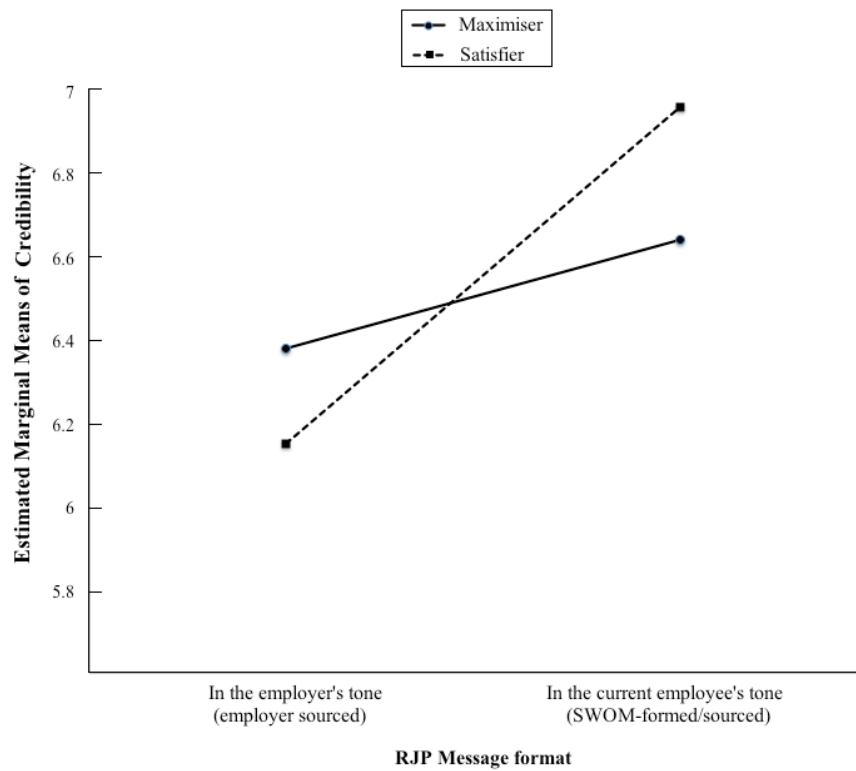
DECISION-MAKING STYLE AND PERCEIVED CREDIBILITY

Table 6. Results of independent-samples t-tests (satisficers)

Components of Overall Credibility	Scenarios/Groups	Mean	SD	df	t-statistic
Trust (satisficers)	Scenario 3	5.28	.58	55	2.18*
	Scenario 4	4.84	.89		
	Scenario 5	4.75	.88	56	5.12**
	Scenario 6	5.79	.65		
Expertise (satisficers)	Scenario 3	5.27	.80	55	4.92*
	Scenario 4	4.92	.62		
	Scenario 5	5.01	.72	56	5.10*
	Scenario 6	5.46	.79		
Liking (satisficers)	Scenario 3	5.16	.66	55	4.48**
	Scenario 4	4.41	.59		
	Scenario 5	4.67	.64	56	2.37**
	Scenario 6	5.08	.68		

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

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Covariates appearing in the model are evaluated at the following values: valence = .49

Figure 1. The interaction effect between decision-making style and RJP message format

DECISION-MAKING STYLE AND PERCEIVED CREDIBILITY

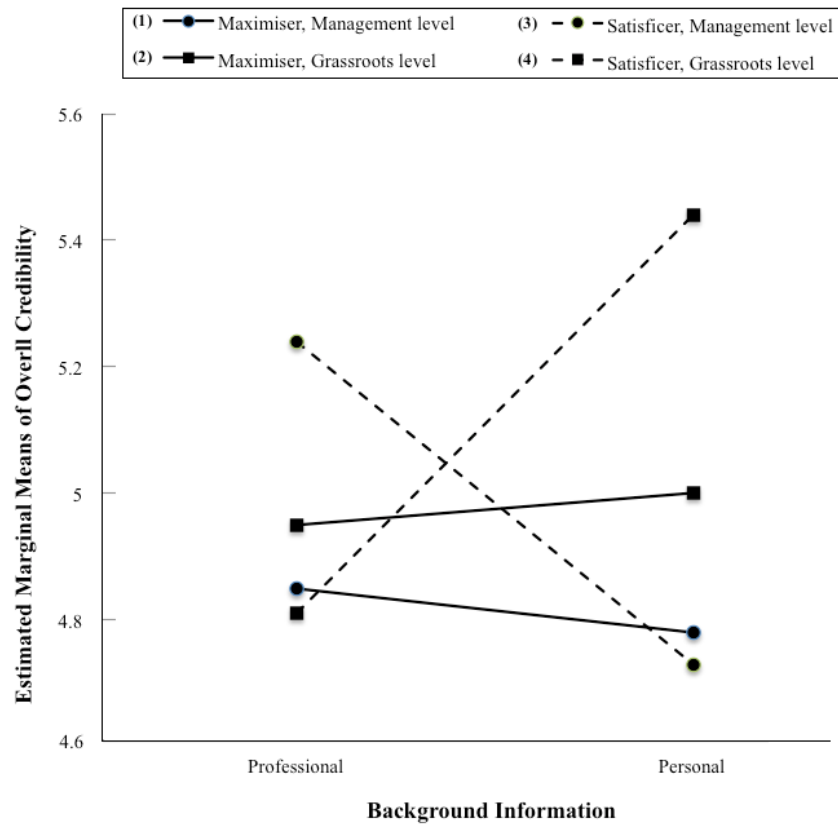


Figure 2. Moderation effect of job type and information provider background on decision-making style: overall credibility relationship

Appendix 1: Scenarios for Study 1

Please imagine that you are seeking a new job in the retail trade, when an advertisement draws your attention.

The advertisement is provided by Company A and mentions key job attributes, including salary information, a chance of promotion, work location, training opportunities, job skill requirements and so on.

The advertisement also includes the following message:

SWOM-formed messages: See what our current employee says about what is it like working here

The messages are provided by our currently employee:

Employee A:

I am an employee for Company A and work in the same department as this vacancy. I would say...

Messages directly from company: the instruction pointed out that ‘the advertisement also includes the following information’]

(Attributes)	SWOM-formed messages (in recruitment advertisement)	Messages directly from company (in recruitment advertisement)
1. General fairness of treatment of employees by company	<p>[Positive] The company considers employees’ wellbeing and provides support. For example, I find there is ample time to complete tasks before they are due. You will have the opportunity to work on a variety of tasks and develop your skills in many areas. Expectations are high but feedback is constructive and you will be recognized when these expectations are met.</p> <p>[Less Positive - Weakly negative] The company considers employees’ wellbeing and tries to provide support. However, many tasks you will be asked to perform have time deadlines that are difficult but necessary to meet. Though most of the work is fairly routine, you will sometimes have the opportunity to work on a variety of tasks and develop your skills in other areas. Expectations are high, you are expected to meet these and there are consequences.</p>	<p>[Positive] The company considers employees’ wellbeing and provides support. For example, we believe in giving ample time to complete tasks before they are due. You will have the opportunity to work on a variety of tasks and develop your skills in many areas. Expectations are high but we aim for constructive feedback and you will be recognized when these expectations are met.</p> <p>[Less Positive - Weakly negative] The company considers employees’ wellbeing and tries to provide support. However, many tasks you will be asked to perform have time deadlines that are difficult but necessary to meet. Though most of the work is fairly routine, you will sometimes have the opportunity to work on a variety of tasks and develop your skills in other areas. Expectations are high, you are expected to meet these and there are consequences.</p>
2. Physical working environment	<p>[Positive] Moreover, I have to say, the working environment is pleasant, clean and tidy, and the facilities are all like new. The company has</p>	<p>[Positive] The working environment is pleasant, clean and tidy, and the facilities are all like new. The company has investment plans to improve the</p>

	<p>investment plans to improve the working facilities in the near future.</p> <p>[Less Positive – Weakly negative] Moreover, I have to say, although kept clean, the working environment is sometimes messy due to the work and not all facilities are new but the company has plans to invest in a cleanup and to improve the working facilities in the near future.</p>	<p>working facilities in the near future.</p> <p>[Less Positive – Weakly negative] Although kept clean, the working environment sometimes can be messy due to the work and not all facilities are new but the company has plans to invest in a cleanup and to improve the working facilities in the near future.</p>
3. <i>Social working environment, e.g., friendly colleagues, helpful supervisors</i>	<p>[Positive] This company supports co-operative teams; we always work together and help each other. You will enjoy meeting with friendly and courteous people and you can make good friends here. We all work together to make this place a success. Our supervisor monitors with a 'light touch' and lets you do your job.</p> <p>[Less Positive – Weakly negative] Although as with any retail job, you might occasionally encounter difficult coworkers and customers, this company supports co-operative teams. Most of the time we work together and help each other. Despite our differences, we all work together to make this place a success. Your supervisor monitors you closely to make sure you are on top of things.</p>	<p>[Positive] Company A supports co-operative teams. Employees always work together and help each other. You will enjoy meeting with friendly and courteous people and you can make good friends here. Our employees all work together to make this place a success. Supervisors monitor with a 'light touch' and let you do your job.</p> <p>[Less Positive – Weakly negative] Although as with any retail job, you might occasionally encounter difficult coworkers and customers, this company supports co-operative teams. Most of the time our employees work together and help each other. Despite their differences, our employees all work together to make this place a success. Your supervisor will monitor you closely to make sure you are on top of things.</p>
4. <i>Family friendly or flexible working hours</i>	<p>[Positive] I would say the working hours in Company A are very flexible. The company tries to be family-friendly and give you the shifts you choose or the vacation times you ask for, so planning is done well in advance.</p> <p>[Less Positive – Weakly negative] I would say the working hours in Company A are generally flexible. The company tries to be family-friendly and give you the shifts you choose or the vacation times you ask for, but you may need to compromise and you will need to take your turn working on holidays.</p>	<p>[Positive] Working hours in Company A are very flexible. The company tries to be family-friendly and give you the shifts you choose or the vacation times you ask for, so planning is done well in advance.</p> <p>[Less Positive – Weakly negative] Working hours in Company A are flexible. The company tries to be family-friendly and give you the shifts you choose or the vacation times you ask for, but you may need to compromise and you will need to take your turn working on holidays.</p>

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5. <i>General reputation of the company</i>	[Positive] Company A is highly regarded for corporate responsibility and does much good work in the community. It is the leading company in the sector with an excellent reputation for looking after staff and with rising profits. I am very proud to work for this company.	[Positive] Company A is highly regarded for corporate responsibility and does much good work in the community. It is also the leading company in the sector with an excellent reputation for looking after staff and with rising profits. Staff are proud to work for us.
	[Less Positive – Weakly negative] Company A includes corporate responsibility and community in its mission statement but still has a way to go. But it is a rising company in the sector and I am pleased to work for them.	[Less Positive – Weakly negative] Our corporate mission for the future aims to progress corporate responsibility and involvement in the community. Company A is a rising company in the sector and staff are pleased to work for us.
6. <i>Basic Remuneration</i>	[Positive] I think the pay is good. Company A offers the best salary in the retail trade. I think I earn what I deserve.	[Positive] Pay levels are good. Company A offers the best salary in the retail trade. Employees will earn what they deserve.
	[Less Positive – Weakly negative] I think the pay is fair. Company A offers the average salary level in the retail trade.	[Less Positive – Weakly negative] Pay levels are fair. Company A offers the average salary level in the retail trade.
7. <i>Chance to get promotion</i>	[Positive] We are given many opportunities for advancement within the organization. It will not take long to get promotion in Company A, if you work hard - you will have a high chance to get promoted (up to twice in four years I think).	[Positive] Employees are given many opportunities for advancement within the organization. It will not take long to get promotion in Company A, if you work hard - you will have a high chance to get promoted (up to twice in four years).
	[Less Positive – Weakly negative]. We are given some opportunities for advancement within the organization but you have to earn it. If you work hard, I believe you will have a chance to get promoted after a few years	[Less Positive – Weakly negative]. Employees are given some opportunities for advancement within the organization but you have to earn it. If you work hard, you will have a chance to get promoted after a few years.

Appendix 2: Scenarios for Study 2

No background information	Expertise background	Personal background	Expertise background + Personal background
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DECISION-MAKING STYLE AND PERCEIVED CREDIBILITY

Imagine that you are seeking a new job as a sales manager in the retail trade, when an advertisement draws your attention.

The advertisement is provided by Company A and mentions key job attributes, including salary information, a chance of promotion, work location, training opportunities, job skill requirements and so on.

Imagine that you are seeking a new job as a shop assistant in the retail trade, when an advertisement draws your attention.

The advertisement is provided by Company A and mentions key job attributes, including salary information, a chance of promotion, work location, training opportunities, job skill requirements and so on.

The advertisement also includes the following message:

Employee A:

I am an employee for Company A and work in the same department as this vacancy.

I personally believe that Company A provides a good work environment, the salary is fair, the office climate is generally friendly and colleagues here work together to help each other. My current position fits I wanted to do and Company A sometimes offers training courses to help me to learn new skills. Welcome to Company A, I look forward to you joining the team!

X	Background of Employee A: Employee A has worked in the retail trade for over 5 years; this is his 3rd year of working in our organization. Employee A has rich experience and knowledge in logistics and retail management. He has a MBA degree in business management. Employee A was elected as the 'most knowledgeable' employee of the department in 2013. He also took the training as an associate trainee in 2013 and demonstrated good crisis management and leading abilities.	X	Background of Employee A: Employee A has worked in the retail trade for over 5 years; this is his 3rd year of working in our organization. Employee A has rich experience and knowledge in logistics and retail management. He has a MBA degree in business management. Employee A was elected as the 'most knowledgeable' employee of the department in 2013. He also took the training as an associate trainee in 2013 and demonstrated good crisis management and leading abilities.
X	X	Background of Employee A: Employee A is outgoing and approachable. He loves interacting and communicating with other people. His colleges like him and he was elected as the 'most friendly' employee of the department in 2013. He likes animals, watching movies, listening to music, and writing. He also loves sharing	Moreover, employee A is outgoing and approachable. He loves interacting and communicating with other people. His colleges like him and he was elected as the 'most friendly' employee of the department in 2013. He likes animals, watching movies, listening to music, and writing. He also loves sharing experience and ideas with his

experience and ideas with his friends. friends.
