Study finds your profile picture plays a significant role in whether you get hired

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A study has found that your online profile picture may play a key role in whether you get hired. The study also found that if your profile photo suggests you "look the part," those hiring you as an employee or

freelancer may be more likely to give that more weight than lower ratings, lack of certifications and a fewer number of reviews than your close competitors.

[The study](link), which is published in *Marketing Science*, is called "Look the Part? The Role of Profile Pictures in Online Labor Markets." The authors of the study are from Harvard Business School and the Marshall School of Business at University of Southern California.

"We analyzed six months of data from Freelancer.com and found that, above and beyond demographics and beauty, there is a strong correlation between simply looking the part and perceived [job performance](link)," said the researchers. "As part of our research, we analyzed 63,014 'completed' jobs that were posted online, which collectively received just over 2 million applications from 160,014 freelancers. The data was collected between January and June 2018."

The researchers found that the effect of perceived job fit is stronger when the reputation system on the platform is highly inflated. In other words, less diagnostic data on a candidate forces the hirer to rely more on instincts tied to analysis of the profile photo. At the same time, the power and influence of a good profile photo are not easily overcome when platforms recommend one or multiple freelancers for the focal job based on reputation and/or certifications.

"Interestingly, the more candidates an online platform presents to someone in a hiring position, the greater the likelihood that the profile picture will influence the hiring decision," said the researchers. "These results suggest that [profile](link) photos might have an unintended consequence beyond establishing trust between participants, as many online freelancer marketplaces claim, and that they can put those who 'don't look the part' at a disadvantage."

"Our research was inspired by anecdotal evidence that suggested people often rely on appearances to judge whether an individual is suitable for a certain kind of job," added the researchers.

"One example was the social media backlash to OneLogin's recruiting ads in 2015. According to some users, the ad failed to represent what a female engineer should look like, partly because the woman portrayed in one of the ads was perceived as too attractive to be a real software engineer. Online job employers and candidates must put forth credible imagery that defies biased stereotypes."

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