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The impact of stating employers' benefits and compensation in
job advertisements on an applicants' decision making

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Abstract

This thesis examines how compensation and benefit information and its specificity in job advertisements influence applicants' decision-making in the pre-application stage. The study is motivated by the ongoing "war of talent" and evolving workforce expectations. These factors require organisations to redesign job advertisements to clearly signal their offers and align with applicants' preferences. The theoretical framework builds on recruiting, signalling theory and job pursuit intention as predictors of application behaviour.

The research is a quantitative online survey processed via Sawtooth. It combines an experimental design with a choice-based conjoint analysis. Within the first part of the survey, participants were randomly assigned to either a specific job advertisement with detailed compensation and benefits information or a generic vague job advertisement. Participants then completed a questionnaire on their job pursuit intention, rated on a 5-point Likert scale and analysed in a self-coded R script. In the choice-based conjoint part, respondents evaluated eight "What we have to offer" sections. Each presented hypothetical job advertisements with five attributes. The attributes varied in base salary, variable pay, work location/flexibility, vacation days, and working hours per week. Based on this, part-worth utilities and attribute importance scores were estimated using a hierarchical Bayesian model in Sawtooth Software.

The dataset consists of 83 valid participants predominantly younger, highly educated professionals based in Europe, mainly in Austria and Germany. The main finding indicates that, contrary to expectations, the generic job advertisement generated higher job pursuit intention than the specific one. However, the specific advertisement was perceived as more informative. The choice-based conjoint analysis shows that work location/flexibility was the most important attribute, followed by base salary, vacation days, variable pay and working hours. Thus, while competitive pay remains important to applicants, non-monetary benefits related to work-life balance carry substantial weight in applicant decision-making. A gender analysis suggests that women place relatively greater emphasis on flexibility and vacation days, whereas men place greater importance on compensation. Yet, these findings are limited by a small, demographically skewed sample.

Nevertheless, this study contributes to recruitment and employer-branding research. It offers guidance for employers on balancing specificity in job advertisements and highlighting important compensation and benefits, such as work location and flexibility.

Kurzfassung

Der anhaltende Fachkräftemangel und die veränderten Erwartungen von Bewerbenden stellen Unternehmen zunehmend vor Herausforderungen in ihrer wettbewerbsfähigen Positionierung. Eine klare Kommunikation attraktiver Arbeitgeberattribute und die Anpassung an spezifische Bewerberpräferenzen gewinnen dabei zunehmend an Bedeutung.

Diese Studie untersucht, wie die gezielte Darstellung von Informationen zu Gehalt und Zusatzleistungen in Stellenanzeigen die Entscheidungsfindung potenzieller Arbeitnehmer während der Bewerbungsphase beeinflusst. Grundlage bilden Erkenntnisse der Rekrutierungsforschung, der Signaling Theory sowie das Konzept der Job-Pursuit-Intention als Indikator für Bewerbungsverhalten.

Für die empirische Untersuchung wurde eine experimentelle Studie mit einer quantitativen Online-Befragung und einer Choice-Based-Conjoint-Analyse kombiniert. Teilnehmende erhielten entweder eine detaillierte Stellenanzeige mit konkreten Angaben zu Vergütung und Zusatzleistungen oder eine generische Stellenausschreibungen mit vagen Formulierungen. Anschließend bewerteten sie ihre Bewerbungsabsicht auf einer fünfstufigen Likert-Skala. In der Conjoint-Analyse trafen sie wiederholt Entscheidungen zwischen hypothetischen Ausschreibungen, die sich hinsichtlich Grundgehalt, variabler Vergütung, Arbeitsort/Flexibilität, Urlaubstagen und Wochenarbeitszeit unterschieden. Die Auswertung erfolgte mithilfe einer hierarchischen Bayes-Schätzung in „Sawtooth“ sowie einem ergänzenden R-Skript.

Die Ergebnisse zeigen überraschend, dass die generische Ausschreibung eine höhere Bewerbungsabsicht auslöste, obwohl die spezifische Ausschreibung als informativer wahrgenommen wurde. In der Attributbewertung erwiesen sich Arbeitsort und Flexibilität als wichtigste Kriterien, gefolgt von Grundgehalt, Urlaubstagen, variabler Vergütung und Wochenarbeitszeit. Frauen legten dabei tendenziell mehr Wert auf Flexibilität und Urlaubstage, Männer dagegen verstärkt auf Vergütung. Aufgrund der kleinen, demografisch eingeschränkten Stichprobe sind die Ergebnisse jedoch nur begrenzt generalisierbar. Insgesamt leistet die Studie einen Beitrag zur Forschung im Bereich Rekrutierung und Employer Branding und verdeutlicht, dass Arbeitgeber insbesondere Flexibilität und Arbeitsort sowie auch den Detaillierungsgrad ihrer Stellenanzeigen strategisch hervorheben sollten.

Abbreviation List

Abbreviation	Definition/Full Form
APAC	Asia-Pacific
CA	Conjoint Analysis (mentioned in context of methodology)
CBC	Choice-Based Conjoint
CI	Confidence Interval
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
df F to O	Difference female to overall importance score
df M to O	Difference male to overall importance score
EUR	Euro (currency)
HB	Hierarchical Bayes
HR	Human Resources (inferred from context, e.g., HRM)
HRM	Human Resource Management
JPI	Job Pursuit Intentions
MSc	Master of Science
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
PTO	Paid Time Off
R	Refers to the programming language used for analysis
RJP	Realistic Job Preview
SD	Standard Deviation
UK	United Kingdom
USA	United States of America

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background and Context

In today's competitive job market, attracting and retaining talent is a challenge for organisations across industries. Recruitment is no longer limited to filling vacant positions, but rather a strategic process focused on securing the best candidates in a market characterized by labour shortages and increased competition for qualified professionals (Elving et al., 2013).

As a result, job advertisements serve as the first point of interaction between employers and potential employees (Backhaus, 2004). Beyond announcing job openings, job advertisements shape an applicants' perceptions of the organisation and affects their attraction to the job, which can influence their decision-making (Breagh, 2013).

Among the many factors that influence candidates' evaluations of job opportunities, what a company offers in terms of compensation and benefits can be particularly important. Research indicates that job and organisational attributes related to compensation and other rewards are among the strongest predictors of applicant attraction and job choice (Chapman et al., 2005). Transparent and attractive compensation packages not only clarify the value of a role but also reduce uncertainty for applicants when comparing alternative offers. They can signal fairness and the employer's commitment to an employee's well-being, which may contribute to positive perceptions of the organisation (Rynes et al., 2004). This is especially relevant for organisations to differentiate themselves to stand out among the many options available to applicants.

1.2 Problem Statement

Despite the apparent importance of compensation- and benefit-related information, organisations are often uncertain about how to communicate these elements in job advertisements. This uncertainty creates a practical dilemma many employers face. When does transparency in stating compensation and benefits boost applicant attraction, and when might it backfire? Many employers remain hesitant to disclose detailed compensation and benefits information, fearing issues such as internal dissatisfaction, reduced negotiation flexibility, or competitive disadvantages.

Beyond whether compensation and benefits are stated, the way this information is presented in job advertisements is key in shaping applicant perceptions. Research indicates that specific job

advertisements, with detailed descriptions of employment conditions and their role, lead to higher applicant attraction than vague messages (Roberson et al., 2005; Verwaeren et al., 2017).

1.3 Research Gap and Theoretical Relevance

Compensation typically refers to monetary rewards, such as salaries, bonuses, and performance incentives, while benefits refer to non-monetary rewards, including flexible working arrangements, vacation policies, health insurance, and opportunities for professional growth (Kadir et al., 2019). While compensation factors have traditionally been seen as the primary motivator for job seekers, recent research suggests that benefits such as work-life balance, career development opportunities, and flexibility are becoming equally important, particularly as workforce expectations evolve (Chapman et al., 2005).

Prior research has examined the general importance of compensation and benefits in shaping job preferences and employer attractiveness. However, there is limited understanding of how the inclusion and specificity of compensation and benefits information in job advertisements affect applicants' actual decision-making.

In particular, the following specific gaps can be identified in the existing literature:

Gap 1: Compensation and benefits are frequently treated as background or control variables rather than as core aspects, meaning that little is known about how their explicit communication in job advertisements influences applicants' intentions to apply and perceptions of employer attractiveness.

Gap 2: The way in which compensation and benefits attributes are presented, for example, through specific role-based details versus more generic information and how this framing affects applicants' trade-offs between different components of compensation and benefits, remains underexplored.

To strengthen the research logic and the direction of this study, each of these gaps directly informs the forthcoming research hypotheses. Gap 1 underpins hypotheses that investigate the impact of explicitly stating compensation and benefits on applicant attraction and intentions to apply. Gap 2 maps onto hypotheses examining how the specificity or generality of

communication in job advertisements shapes applicant decision-making and their trade-offs among different compensation and benefits attributes. This clear linkage ensures that every hypothesis is grounded in a defined area of limited understanding identified in the literature, making the pathway from literature gap to empirical test fully transparent.

Additionally, while advanced quantitative methods such as choice-based conjoint (CBC) analysis are widely used in marketing research to understand consumer preferences, their application in recruitment research remains relatively rare (Orme, 2010). This limits the understanding of how job seekers make complex trade-offs among multiple job attributes in realistic choice situations.

Addressing these gaps is theoretically relevant for research on recruitment, employer branding, and job choice. It contributes to a better understanding of how applicants process the information signalled through job advertisements.

1.4 Research Objectives and Research Question

This research aims to explore how applicants' decision-making is influenced by the inclusion of compensation and benefits information in job advertisements. Specifically, it examines whether stating such information shapes candidates' perceptions of the role and employer and whether it directly affects applicants' decision to apply. Furthermore, it investigates how different levels of specificity, thus specific versus generic job advertisements, influence the candidates' preferences.

The central research question guiding this study is:

“How does stating compensation and benefits in job advertisements affect applicants’ decision-making?”

To answer the central question, the study examines the impact of presenting compensation and benefits information in either specific or generic job advertisements. As well as varying levels of compensation and benefits and examines how these factors influence applicants' choices.

1.5 Scope, Key Concepts and Definitions

In this thesis, compensation refers to the monetary rewards an employer offers, including base salary, bonuses, and performance-related incentives. Benefits refer to non-monetary rewards,

such as flexible working arrangements, vacation policies, health insurance, and opportunities for professional and career development (Kadir et al., 2019).

Job advertisements are defined as publicly accessible announcements of job openings, typically distributed via online job boards, company websites, or professional networks.

Applicants' decision-making is understood as the evaluation of job advertisements and the resulting preferences and choices, particularly with a focus on the intention to apply. The study focuses on the pre-application stage of the recruitment process, in which applicants evaluate job ads and form initial preferences.

1.6 Methodological Overview

To answer the research question, the study uses a choice-based conjoint analysis, a quantitative method commonly used to examine how individuals prioritise attributes when making decisions (Orme, 2010). Unlike simple rating or ranking scales, CBC analysis compels participants to make realistic trade-offs between competing job features, revealing the relative importance of each attribute in actual choice situations. This study leverages CBC analysis to simulate real-world decision-making scenarios, providing a robust and quantifiable framework for analysing how job seekers prioritise attributes when evaluating job advertisements. Participants are presented with hypothetical "What we have to offer" sections with a basic job advertisement that systematically vary in key attributes of compensation and benefits information.

In this study, the CBC analysis is used to elicit how participants trade-off different job attributes, including compensation and benefits, when choosing between job advertisements. In a subsequent part of the survey, participants additionally rated their likelihood of applying to generic versus specific job advertisements using an application intention scale. This combined approach allows for examining both the relative importance of compensation and benefits in applicants' choices and the influence of presentation format on their stated intention to apply.

1.7 Practical Relevance

By analysing the participants' choices, this research aims to provide actionable insights into how organisations can design job advertisements to better align with the preferences of modern job seekers. The findings are expected to reveal not only which components of compensation and benefits are most important to candidates, but also how the framing and specificity of this information influence their perceptions of job attractiveness.

The results of this study are intended to inform best practices for job advertisement design, helping employers optimise their recruitment strategies to attract candidates in an increasingly competitive labour market. As organisations face growing pressure to attract and retain top talent, especially in industries with skill shortages, understanding how compensation and benefits influence candidates' decision-making is crucial for success.

1.8 Structure of Thesis

The remainder of this thesis is structured as follows. Chapter 2 reviews the relevant literature on recruitment, job advertisements, compensation and benefits, and applicants' decision-making and outlines the theoretical framework underpinning the study. Chapter 3 develops the conceptual model and where applicable, derives hypotheses from the literature. Chapter 4 describes the research design, including the choice-based conjoint setup, the survey structure, the sample, and the data analysis methods. Chapter 5 presents the study's empirical results. Chapter 6 discusses these findings in light of the existing literature and the theoretical framework. Finally, Chapter 7 concludes the thesis by summarising the main contributions, outlining practical implications for organisations, and highlighting limitations and avenues for future research.

2 Theoretical Background

This chapter provides the theoretical framework that supports this study. It first introduces recruitment as a multi-stage process and highlights the central role of job advertisements in the application generation stage. It then discusses job advertisements as a communication instrument applying signalling theory to understand how information in job postings shapes applicants' perceptions. Followed by job pursuit intentions (JPI) and the willingness of applicants to pursue a vacancy. Building on this, the chapter examines the role of compensation and benefits in recruitment, distinguishing between different components of compensation and benefits that are used primarily in labour markets. Finally, it discusses the importance of specificity in communicating compensation and benefits, reviews research on trade-offs between different job attributes and identifies gaps in the existing literature that motivate the present study.

2.1 Recruitment and the Role of Job Advertisements

Recruitment can be defined as the set of activities undertaken by organisations to attract applications for job openings and identify individuals, who are willing and able to fill vacant positions (Breaugh, 2008). It enables organisations to expand their workforce or replace employees due to turnover. In today's labour market, however, recruitment has become increasingly complex and strategic due to skilled shortages (Boselie, 2014 p.164). The growing gap between the supply of skilled workers and the demand for talent has created significant challenges for organisations, emphasizing the need for effective and targeted recruitment strategies to maintain competitiveness and ensure organisational success (Boselie, 2014 p.164; Elving et al., 2013).

Barber (1998) conceptualises recruitment as a multi-stage process comprising three main stages: application generation, maintenance of applicant interest and job choice/closure. In the application generation stage, organisations aim to attract a pool of qualified candidates, who are motivated to apply for a given position. During the maintenance stage, they seek to keep these candidates engaged and prevent drop-out in the process. Finally, in the closure stage, organisations aim to secure a candidate by extending an offer and negotiating terms acceptable to both.

For the purposes of this research, the emphasis is placed on the application generation stage, as it represents the initial interaction between an organisation and potential candidates. This stage

is especially important because it determines both the size and quality of the applicant pool and lays the foundation for further recruitment efforts. If this stage is ineffective, later stages of the process have fewer opportunities to operate successfully (Breaugh, 2013).

It is important to distinguish between the quantity and quality of applicants (Breaugh and Starke, 2000). Organisations must attract an adequate number of applicants to ensure choice, while simultaneously attracting individuals with the right qualification requirements, in terms of skills and fit for organisation (Crowley and Jeske, 2021). These objectives are not easy to achieve. Strategies that maximise the number of applicants, for examples, very broad or unspecific ads, may not yield high-quality candidates. In contrast, highly selective or very detailed messages may discourage some applicants who would in fact be suitable, as they perceive themselves to be unsuitable for the role. Therefore, job advertisements are one of the few instruments that can be adjusted relatively quickly and cost-effective to influence both the volume and the composition of applicants.

A further distinction is often made between internal and external recruitment. Where internal recruitment draws on existing employees, for example via internal postings, external recruitment targets candidates outside the organisation. Job advertisements are used in both cases, but are especially essential in external recruitment. In this context, potential applicants have limited prior knowledge of the employer and rely on the information presented in the advertisement (Breaugh, 2013). This dependence on limited information means that the design and content of job advertisements strongly shape applicants' initial evaluations and decisions (Breaugh and Starke, 2000).

2.2 Job Advertisements as Strategic Communication

As previously mentioned, job advertisements are an important tool in the recruitment process, serving as a primary means for organisations to communicate with potential applicants. More than simple announcements of vacancies, they are strategic communication instruments for information about the role, the organisation and the employment offer. Research by Backhaus (2004) shows that online job advertisements are not only used for job content and requirements yet also for an organisation's identity, and thus serve as an instrument for strategic communication. Overall, they shape applicants' initial perceptions and influence whether individuals decide to pursue a position (Breaugh, 2013).

Beyond providing factual information, job advertisements also contribute to how applicants form an overall impression of the organisation as an employer. Prior research shows that recruitment messages can simultaneously fulfil an informational function, by describing tasks, requirements, and pay, a symbolic function, signalling what the organisation stands for and what kind of employment relationship it offers (Lievens and Highhouse, 2003; Collins and Stevens, 2002). In this context, information about what the employer offers in terms of rewards and conditions is particularly important.

Prior research on recruitment messages shows that job advertisements typically convey three main types of information: descriptions of job tasks and responsibilities, requirements (e.g. qualifications, experience) and job rewards (e.g. pay, benefits, development opportunities) (Roberson et al., 2005). The rewards component is what the employer offers to potential applicants, playing a central role in applicant attraction. Petry et al. (2021) emphasise this part of the job advertisement by treating attributes such as salary and opportunities for advancement as a distinct group of offer-related elements linked to the employer image dimension.

Drawing on this literature, reviewing job advertisements on LinkedIn and using insights from recruitment practice, shows that offer-related content is frequently presented in a distinct section, commonly titled “Our offer” or “What we offer”. Given that previous research links offer-related attributes as key drivers of job pursuit intentions, this thesis refers to that part of the job advertisement as the “What we have to offer” section (Petry et al., 2021). Generally, this section comprises information on compensation, benefits and other core employment conditions, which are used in the empirical study as attributes in the conjoint analysis to examine applicants’ preferences and trade-offs.

2.2.1 The Evolution of Job Advertisements

The spread of job advertisements has changed substantially with the rise of digital technologies. Whereas organisations traditionally relied on newspapers and physical job boards, they now use online job portals, company websites, professional networks such as LinkedIn and social media platforms to reach potential applicants (Allen et al., 2007). Backhaus (2004) shows that online job boards have become an important tool to communicate with potential applicants. These digital channels allow for greater reach in a faster time and often provide targeting options, enabling organisations to address specific groups of candidates based on location, industry, career stage or skills.

Generally, digitalisation has also led to an information surplus. Applicants are frequently confronted with a high volume of job advertisements across multiple platforms, which can result in attention fatigue and make it harder for individual postings to stand out (Allen et al., 2007). Yet also for employers, digitalisation has changed something, as platforms like LinkedIn make it a minimal effort for applicants with the “Easy apply” button. In such an environment, the contents quality and clarity of the job advertisements are essential. Messages that are too generic or vague may be overlooked or quickly dismissed, whereas clear, specific and relevant information is more likely to get attention and stimulate further interest (Roberson et al., 2005).

The shift to digital recruitment has further changed the way applicants interact with job advertisements. Many candidates now engage in active search (browsing job boards, setting alerts) and passive scanning (encountering advertisements via social media or networks), often comparing multiple offers in parallel (Allen et al., 2007). This comparative context amplifies the importance of how compensation and benefits are communicated. As applicants can compare salary ranges, flexibility options or vacation policies across several advertisements and may favour employers who provide more transparent and concrete information (Verwaeren et al., 2017).

2.2.2 Signalling Theory in Job Advertisements

Signalling theory offers a theoretical lens to understand how job advertisements influence applicant perceptions and behaviour (Spence, 1973). In situations of information asymmetry, one party (the signaller) conveys information to another party (the receiver) through observable signals. In recruitment, organisations possess more information about the job and the employment relationship than potential applicants do (Connelly et al., 2011). Job advertisements are therefore signals through which organisations convey information, sometimes intentions, about the job and the organisation (Cable and Judge, 1994; Connelly et al., 2011).

Applicants interpret both the content and the form of these signals. Content refers to what is communicated, for example, salary, benefits, tasks or organisational culture. Form refers to how this information is presented, including its specificity, level of detail, consistency and tone. Signals can differ in three main respects: their strength, their cost to the organisation and their credibility. Signal strength refers to how clearly a signal conveys information to applicants. Signal cost captures the resources an organisation must invest to provide the signal. Signal credibility concerns the extent to which applicants perceive the signal as believable and reliable

(Connelly et al., 2011). For example, providing a precise salary range or clearly defined benefits may be perceived as a strong and credible signal of transparency and fairness, whereas ambiguous phrases such as “competitive package” may be interpreted as weak or even questionable signals.

Compensation and benefits are particularly important signals because they are relatively concrete and easily comparable across employers. Specific details about compensation and benefits, such as salary ranges, number of vacation days or degree of work location or flexibility, indicate how the organisation values employees and what kind of employment relationship it offers (Cable and Judge, 1994; Gerhart and Rynes, 2003). These signals can influence both instrumental perceptions (e.g. financial security, work-life balance) and symbolic perceptions (e.g. fairness, organisational support), which together shape overall employer attractiveness (Lievens and Highhouse, 2003; Rynes et al., 2004).

In contrast, generic or vague compensation and benefits information may be perceived as non-informative or even as an attempt to conceal less favourable conditions. Research on recruitment message shows that transparent and detailed information in job advertisements increases perceived organisational trustworthiness and job clarity (Roberson et al., 2005; Verwaeren et al., 2017). In the context of this study, signalling theory therefore suggests that the way compensation and benefits are presented will shape how applicants evaluate a job and whether they are inclined to pursue it.

2.3 Job Pursuit Intentions and Applicant Decision-Making

Job pursuit intentions describe an individual’s motivation or willingness to pursue a job opportunity after being exposed to a recruitment message, such as a job advertisement (Highhouse et al., 2003). JPI form a vital link between initial perceptions and behaviour in the recruitment process. They indicate how likely it is that an individual will take concrete steps, such as submitting an application, requesting more information or accepting an interview invitation (Chapman et al., 2005). The recruitment literature differentiates between related but distinct constructs, including job attractiveness, organisational attractiveness and intention to pursue. Job attractiveness refers to the perceived desirability of a specific position; organisational attractiveness refers to the perceived desirability of the organisation as a potential employer; and job pursuit intentions reflect the individual’s behavioural intention to further engage with a specific opportunity (Highhouse et al., 2003; Lievens and Highhouse, 2003). Although these constructs are strongly correlated, they capture slightly different aspects of

applicant reactions. For recruitment practice, job pursuit intentions are particularly relevant because they are the most proximal predictor of actual application behaviour (Chapman et al., 2005).

2.3.1 Determinants of Job Pursuit Intentions

Job pursuit intentions can be based on an instrumental-symbolic framework, which applicants are generally both interested in (Nguyen Ngoc et al., 2022).

Instrumental attributes are mainly job related, such as compensation, responsibilities, work location, etc., which are a focus of applicant (Nguyen Ngoc et al., 2022). This is supported by the meta-analytic research of Chapman et al. (2005), which states that job and organisational attributes related to pay and other rewards rank are among the strongest predictors of applicant attraction and job choice. Transparent and specific information about these attributes reduces uncertainty and enhances perceptions of job attractiveness (Rynes et al., 1983).

Symbolic intangible attributes can be the perceived image and reputation of an organisation, thus its culture and values, influence JPI (Nguyen Ngoc et al., 2022). Applicants are more likely to pursue jobs with organisations they perceive as reputable, ethical or aligned with their personal values (Lievens and Highhouse, 2003; Collins and Stevens, 2002). Here, job advertisements can contribute forming this image through highlighting these.

The combination of both instrumental and symbolic attributes is important as each applicant differs in preferences and values (Nguyen Ngoc et al., 2022). Personal factors such as career stage or family situation influence how job attributes are evaluated (Ng et al., 2010). For example, younger applicants may find development opportunities and flexibility more important, while older applicants may prioritise job security and retirement benefits. These differences mean that the same job advertisement can elicit different levels of JPI across individuals.

2.3.2 The Role of Specificity in Job Pursuit Intentions

The specificity of information in job advertisements has been shown to significantly affect JPI. Cable and Judge (1994) find that advertisements with clear and detailed information about key attributes, including compensation and benefits, generate more positive reactions and stronger intentions to apply than advertisements with vague or generic statements. Specificity allows

applicants to better assess whether a job matches their expectations and needs, thereby increasing perceived fit and the likelihood of pursuit.

Generic advertisements that use unspecific language such as “competitive salary”, “excellent benefits” or “exciting development opportunities” provide limited guidance for applicants. In competitive and information-rich labour markets, such generic statements may fail to differentiate the job from other opportunities and make it difficult for applicants to compare offers (Roberson et al., 2005). Verwaeren et al. (2017) researched that higher levels of detail in job advertisements increase perceived job attractiveness and organisational transparency, which in turn enhance applicants’ likelihood of applying.

Specificity regarding compensation and benefits is essential, as these attributes are central to applicants’ evaluations and often serve as key decision criteria. Clear information about pay ranges, working hours or flexibility options enables applicants to make more informed comparisons across job offers and to decide whether a position fits within their acceptable range or into their aspirations.

2.3.3 Theoretical Perspectives on Job Pursuit Intentions

Several theoretical perspectives help explain why the content and specificity of job advertisements influence JPI:

- Signalling theory suggests that applicants interpret information in job advertisements as signals about underlying job and organisational characteristics (Spence, 1973; Cable and Judge, 1994). Thus, as previously described specific information about compensation and benefits reduces information asymmetry and increases perceptions of fairness, transparency and trustworthiness, which are positively related to job pursuit intentions.
- Person-environment fit perspective posits that individuals are more likely to pursue jobs when they perceive a good fit between their own needs, values and abilities and the characteristics of the job and organisation (Kristof, 1996). Person-job fit refers to the match between an individual’s skills and the job’s requirements, while person-organisation fit refers to congruence between individual and organisational values (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Specific information about compensation, benefits, working hours and flexibility helps applicants judge whether these aspects of the

employment offer align with their preferences and constraints, thereby influencing perceived fit and JPI.

Together, these perspectives suggest that job advertisements that provide clear and detailed information about critical attributes, especially compensation and benefits, are likely to produce stronger job pursuit intentions than advertisements that rely on generic or ambiguous descriptions.

2.4 Compensation and Benefits in Recruitment

Compensation and benefits play a central role in recruitment, influencing applicants' perceptions of job attractiveness and their ultimate decision to pursue or reject a job opportunity. These attributes serve as both tangible rewards for work performed and symbolic indicators of an organisation's values, priorities and fairness (Cable and Judge, 1994; Rynes et al., 2004). In competitive labour markets, where organisations compete for scarce talent, effectively communicating compensation and benefits in job advertisements has become a critical component of recruitment strategies.

Many organisations present their employment offer through the rewards component of the job advertisement, "What we have to offer" section, which is used to outline compensation and benefits for candidates (Gerhart and Rynes, 2003). In this part of the advertisement, employers describe concrete reward attributes, such as salary and leave entitlements. At the same time, they signal the broader philosophy of their reward system, for example, an emphasis on performance, security or flexibility. Backhaus (2004) states that the section of an employer's offering is often generic compared to the requirements asked in a job advertisement. Moreover, the suggestion that overall employers are underutilising job advertisements due to generic communication in the "What we have to offer" section (Backhaus, 2004).

2.4.1 Compensation

Compensation refers to the financial remuneration employees receive in exchange for their work. It includes fixed pay, such as base salaries, and variable pay, like bonuses, profit sharing, and performance-based incentives (Boselie, 2014 p.196). Among all job attributes, compensation is often considered the most influential factor in job choice, serving as a benchmark for comparing job offers and assessing organisational competitiveness (Rynes et al., 1983).

2.4.1.1 Fixed Pay (Base Salary)

Fixed pay, also commonly referred to as base salary, is the guaranteed monetary compensation employees receive in exchange for their work (Kadir et al., 2019). It represents the predictable, stable component of an employee's earnings, which is paid on a regular basis (e.g. weekly or monthly) and is independent of performance-based rewards (Kadir et al., 2019).

Base salary is often the primary determinant of job attractiveness. Research by Schlechter et al. (2014) demonstrates that base salary has a stronger influence on applicants' perceptions of job attractiveness than other forms of compensation. Fixed pay serves as the foundation of an employee's financial remuneration, ensuring stability and security in meeting their immediate financial needs (Kadir et al., 2019). Furthermore, in the context of job advertisements, the specificity of salary information is critical. For instance, advertisements that explicitly state a salary range (e.g., "€60,000-€70,000") allow applicants to assess whether the position aligns with their financial expectations and apply (Verwaeren et al. , 2017).

Conversely, vague or generic terms such as "competitive salary" or "market-competitive pay" often fail to resonate with applicants, as they provide insufficient information to differentiate the job from others in the market, which, according to Backhaus (2004), are often underestimated. Recruiting and signalling research suggest that transparent communication on compensation enhances job attractiveness and is perceived as more trustworthy (Rynes and Cable, 2003). Yet, according to Boselie (2014 p.197), it is also questionable whether the right candidates are attracted if only financial aspects are important to the applicants.

2.4.1.2 Variable Pay

Variable pay refers to any monetary compensation paid only when specific criteria are met (Boselie, 2014 p.197). Unlike fixed pay, which is guaranteed, variable pay is often tied to individual, team, or organisational performance metrics, making it an important tool for aligning employee behaviour with business goals. Common forms of variable pay include bonuses, profit-sharing, commission-based earnings, and performance-based incentives (Armstrong and Taylor, 2014).

Variable pay is used primarily as a motivational tool, encouraging employees to exceed performance expectations. Armstrong and Taylor (2014) assert that variable pay enhances organisational productivity by directly connecting rewards to measurable achievements. However, its impact on job attractiveness is often secondary to base salary, as applicants

typically prioritise guaranteed income over such additional payments (Chapman et al., 2005). Despite its secondary role, the transparent communication of variable pay details in job advertisements can enhance perceptions of fit (Verwaeren et al., 2017). For example, stating that employees are eligible for "annual performance-based bonuses of xx%" signals that the organisation recognises and rewards high performance, which can appeal to applicants who value merit-based compensation systems (Rynes et al., 2004).

While variable pay is generally seen as a positive addition to job attractiveness, its impact may vary depending on the type of incentive offered (Schlechter et al., 2014). For instance, individual performance-based bonuses are typically perceived as more equitable and motivating than team-based incentives, which may be subject to free-riding concerns (Kerr, 1975). Types of variable pay also reflects how the employers' culture is perceived (Verwaeren et al., 2017). Therefore, organisations must carefully design their variable pay schemes and communicate them effectively in job advertisements to maximize their appeal and alignment with candidate expectations.

2.4.2 Benefits

Benefits refer to non-monetary rewards that enhance employees' overall satisfaction and well-being. These include flexible working arrangements, health insurance, vacation policies, and professional development opportunities (Kadir et al., 2019). In recent years, benefits have become increasingly important in attracting and retaining talent as workforce expectations evolve. Research suggests that non-monetary benefits are particularly valued by younger generations, who prioritise work-life balance and career growth over financial incentives (Ng et al., 2010). Moreover, these benefits can serve as cost-effective differentiation tools in competitive labour markets. They increase the perceived value of the employment offer for applicants, while often being less costly or more flexible for employers than permanent increases in base pay, and can also generate savings through reduced turnover and better person-job fit (Gerhart and Rynes, 2003).

2.4.2.1 Flexible Working Arrangements

Flexible working arrangements, including remote work options, flexible schedules, and compressed workweeks, are among the most sought-after benefits in today's job market. A survey by PwC (2017) found that nearly 80% of job seekers prioritise flexibility when evaluating job opportunities. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the trend by normalizing remote work and increasing demand for flexible arrangements.

Including specific details about flexibility in job advertisements can significantly enhance job attractiveness (Schlechter et al., 2014). Signals as such indicate that the organisation values work-life balance, which is particularly appealing to candidates with caregiving responsibilities or those seeking greater autonomy in managing their time (Hakim, 2006; Ng et al., 2010).

2.4.2.2 Vacation Days

Vacation days are a universally valued benefit that contributes to work-life balance and employee well-being. Research by Altmann and Suess (2015), distributed via German social media, indicates that paid time off is a key determinant of employer attractiveness.

Including vacation days as an attribute in this study reflects its relevance to employees' quality of life. Longer vacation periods signal an organisation's commitment to employee well-being and often serve as a differentiating factor in competitive labour markets (Ng et al., 2010). The levels selected for this study are 20, 25, and 30 days, which align with standard vacation policies in Europe and allow for a realistic evaluation of how this benefit is prioritised relative to other job attributes.

2.4.2.3 Working Hours

Working hours are a fundamental component of work-life balance, directly impacting employees' daily routines and overall job satisfaction. Chapman et al.'s (2005) research suggests work-life related attributes, like work hours, are predictors of applicant attraction.

This study includes working hours as an attribute with three levels: 35, 38.5, and 40 hours per week, which reflect typical working arrangements in European labour markets. Research by Petry et al. (2021) found that unattractive working conditions, like working hours, reduce applicants' attraction, suggesting long working hours can be perceived as a signal of poor work-life balance, which may deter applicants. Including working hours as an attribute allows for an exploration of how candidates value time-related benefits compared to financial and other non-monetary rewards.

2.4.2.4 Other Benefits

While this research focuses on work location flexibility, vacation days, and working hours, other benefits commonly included in job advertisements that significantly impact job attractiveness and employee decision-making. There is also health and wellness benefits, such as comprehensive health insurance, gym memberships, wellness programs. and mental health support (Backhaus, 2004). These benefits could signal an organisation's commitment to

employee well-being and are often associated with increased loyalty and productivity (Chapman and Webster, 2006). Similarly, professional development opportunities, including training budgets, mentorship programs, certifications, and career advancement initiatives, are highly attractive to younger professionals (Ng et al., 2010). According to Elving et al. (2013), these opportunities are critical for individuals who prioritise career growth and skill development over immediate financial rewards.

Retirement and pension plans are another category of benefits that hold appeal for mid- and late-career professionals. Employer-funded pension contributions, retirement savings plans, and early retirement options address long-term financial security, which becomes increasingly important as individuals advance in their careers. Ng et al. (2010) found that older professionals tend to prioritise retirement benefits more than younger workers, whose focus often shifts to flexibility and professional development. Finally, parental leave and childcare support, such as paid parental leave, on-site childcare facilities, and flexible work arrangements for parents, are benefits that resonate strongly with working parents, especially women (Chapman et al., 2005). These benefits are associated with family responsibilities and work-life integration, as highlighted by Hakim (2006).

2.4.2.5 Selected Benefits for Study

While the aforementioned benefits are undoubtedly important to candidates, they were excluded from this study to maintain a focus on the selected attributes, which were chosen for their universal relevance across industries and countries. Many of these additional benefits, such as health insurance and retirement plans, are subject to regional variation based on national policies, making them less consistent across international labour markets.

Therefore, the decision to focus on work location flexibility, vacation days, and working hours was driven by their universal relevance and alignment with modern workforce expectations. Work location flexibility, for example, has become one of the most sought-after benefits globally, particularly in the post-pandemic era, where hybrid and remote work arrangements have become normalized (McKinsey & Company, 2022). Vacation days are valued by employers for its well-being signals and therefore have a direct link to the employer's attractiveness (Altmann and Suess, 2015). Similarly, working hours are a tangible measure of work-life balance and have become more important as candidates increasingly prioritise shorter workweeks and flexibility in their professional lives (Schlechter et al., 2014).

These benefits also align with broader workforce trends. Research highlights that younger generations, such as Millennials and Gen Z, value work-life balance and flexibility over traditional financial rewards (Ng et al., 2010; Deloitte, 2022; Nguyen Ngoc et al., 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic further shifted workplace priorities, with employees across generations placing greater emphasis on non-monetary rewards that enhance their quality of life. Furthermore, these benefits are practical to communicate in job advertisements, as they are easily quantified and clearly presented, ideal for studying their impact on applicant decision-making.

These attributes provide employers with clear insights into how to design job advertisements that resonate with diverse talent pools while addressing workforce priorities.

2.5 The Role of Specificity in Communicating Compensation and Benefits

The following section examines how the wording used to communicate compensation and benefits in job advertisements significantly influences applicants' perceptions.

2.5.1 Specific vs. Generic Job Advertisements

Specific job advertisements, which include detailed descriptions of compensation and benefits, provide applicants with concrete information that reduces uncertainty and enables them to make informed decisions. For example, stating a salary range, outlining specific benefits (e.g., "20 vacation days, flexible working hours"), or describing career development opportunities can enhance perceptions of transparency and fairness (Cable and Judge, 1994; Verwaeren et al., 2017).

Generic job advertisements, on the other hand, may leave applicants uncertain about the value of the offer. For instance, vague phrases like "excellent benefits" or "growth opportunities" fail to provide applicants with actionable information, potentially deterring them from applying (Elving et al., 2013). Research by Verwaeren et al. (2017) highlights that the level of detail in job advertisements significantly influences applicants' perceptions of job attractiveness. Specific compensation and benefits information, such as exact salary ranges and clearly defined benefits, was found to enhance perceived organisational transparency and trustworthiness, thereby increasing applicants' likelihood of applying for the job. This study builds on Verwaeren et al.'s (2017) findings by further examining how the framing of compensation and benefits affects candidate preferences. Also, as previously mentioned, Backhaus (2004) highlighted that generic phrasing limits the information of an advertisement to an applicant.

2.5.2 Trade-offs Between Compensation and Benefits

Applicants often evaluate job opportunities by weighing multiple attributes, including salary, benefits, and job responsibilities. Research using choice-based conjoint analysis has been particularly useful in understanding these trade-offs. For example, Petry et al. (2021) conducted a CBC study in Austria to explore how applicants prioritised salary, benefits, and flexibility. Their findings revealed that while salary was a key determinant of job attractiveness, non-monetary benefits often compensated for lower salary offers, particularly among younger applicants.

Similarly, Ng et al. (2010) found that applicants valued attributes such as team climate, work environment and career development opportunities alongside salaries, highlighting the importance of tailoring job advertisements to reflect applicant preferences.

2.6 Gaps in the Literature

While significant progress has been made in understanding the role of compensation and benefits in recruitment, several gaps remain. First, there is limited research on how the specificity of compensation and benefits information in job advertisements affects applicant decision-making. While studies by Elving et al. (2013) and Backhaus (2004) provide valuable insights, more empirical research is needed to explore the interaction between specificity and applicants' decision-making and job pursuit intentions.

Secondly, few studies have examined the relative importance of monetary and non-monetary benefits in different cultural contexts. For example, while Austrian applicants may prioritise flexibility and career development, applicants in other regions may place greater emphasis on salary or job security.

Finally, while CBC analysis has been widely used to study applicant preferences, there is a need for more research that combines CBC with experimental designs to explore how applicants respond to specific vs. generic job advertisements.

This study aims to address these gaps by examining how the presentation of compensation and benefits influences applicant decision-making.

3 Research Question and Hypotheses

The communication of compensation and benefits in job advertisements significantly affects applicants' perceptions of job attractiveness and their willingness to pursue a role. Although prior research highlighted the importance of job attributes such as salary, flexibility, and benefits for an applicants' attraction for a job (Cable and Judge, 1994; Chapman et al., 2005), there remains a limited understanding of how applicants prioritise these attributes and how demographic differences, such as gender, influence their preferences (Konrad et al., 2000).

This study addresses this gap by exploring the relative importance of compensation and benefits attributes and understanding how applicants evaluate and compare job advertisements with different attribute levels. By using a choice-based conjoint analysis alongside an experimental design, the study aims to identify, which specific job attributes and attribute levels drive job seekers' decision-making.

The central research question guiding this study is as follows:

"How does the specificity of compensation and benefits information in job advertisements influence applicants' decision-making and job pursuit intentions?"

Detailed information in job advertisements reduces uncertainty (Spence, 1973) and can increase applicants' perceptions of organisational transparency and fairness of the recruiting process (Chapman and Webster, 2006). Specific compensation and benefits information, such as a starting salary and bonus details, allows applicants to assess the job offer more accurately, leading to higher levels of interest and intent to apply (Verwaeren et al., 2017).

H1: Participants exposed to job advertisements with specific compensation and benefits information will report significantly higher job pursuit intentions (JPI) compared to those exposed to general information.

Highhouse et al. (2003) found that applicants' perceptions of job and organisation attractiveness impact their job pursuit intentions. Providing specific and detailed information in job advertisements enhances clarity, which increases the trust in the employer and reduces the need for further clarification (Rynes and Cable, 2003). By asking participants to rate statements like "I feel well-informed about what the company is offering.", it can be tested if the information level has this effect. With this said, the following hypothesis will be tested:

H2: Participants who feel well-informed about what the company is offering will report higher trust in the company and greater interest in applying.

Research by Rynes et al. (1983) highlights that monetary rewards, including base pay and bonuses, often serve as an important attribute for job seekers. Moreover, studies argue that compensation is more important for employee motivation and job-related decisions than is generally acknowledged. While benefits, such as vacation days or flexibility, contribute to long-term job satisfaction, they are often secondary considerations when compared to financial compensation (Rynes et al., 2004). Therefore, the third hypothesis is:

H3: Compensation attributes, such as base pay and variable pay, will be perceived as more important by applicants than benefit attributes, such as vacation days and working hours.

Among compensation attributes, base pay has consistently been identified as the most critical factor in job seekers' decision-making processes. Studies by Schlechter et al. (2014) argue that base salary not only provides financial stability but also has highest value for applicant attractiveness. For applicants, base pay is a guaranteed reward, unlike bonuses or benefits, which may be conditional or long-term (Schlechter et al. 2014). Given its direct impact on an applicant's financial well-being, base pay is expected to hold the highest importance relative to other job attributes. This leads to the sub-hypothesis that:

H3a: Base pay will be the most important attribute influencing applicants' preferences compared to other attributes such as variable pay, work location flexibility, vacation days, or working hours

While base pay is the foundation of compensation, variable pay, such as bonuses, adds an additional layer of value for applicants. Research by Armstrong and Taylor (2014) highlights that individual performance-based bonuses are particularly attractive, as they directly connect effort with reward. This reflects a perception of fairness and recognition. In contrast to team-based bonuses, which may suffer from free-riding concerns (Kerr, 1975; Lazear and Gibbs, 2018). Therefore, individual bonuses are seen as a more motivating form of compensation.

H3b: Among variable pay levels, individual performance-based bonuses will be assigned the highest value by applicants compared to team-based bonuses or no bonuses.

Moreover, gender differences in job attribute preferences have been consistently documented in recruitment literature, suggesting that male and female applicants evaluate and prioritise job attributes differently based on their individual needs, values, and societal expectations (Ng et al., 2010). For example, male applicants tend to prioritise compensation-related attributes such as base pay and bonuses (Ng et al., 2010). This aligns with traditional career advancement goals and financial security of men (Konrad et al., 2000). On the other hand, female applicants are often more inclined to value work-life balance attributes, such as work location flexibility and vacation days, as these are perceived as supportive of caregiving responsibilities and personal well-being (Ng et al., 2010; Hakim, 2006).

A meta-analysis by Konrad et al. (2000) shows gender-based distinctions in job preferences with male applicants placing greater importance on financial compensation attributes, like compensation or promotion opportunity, to signal organisational competitiveness and role prestige. Female applicants tend to respond more positively to job advertisements that place emphasis on well-being and supportive aspects of the role and are discouraged by masculine competitiveness wording (Gaucher et al., 2011). These findings align with a shifting workplace dynamic, where organisations are increasingly expected to offer benefits, which cater to diverse applicant priorities.

Therefore, understanding the differences in gender preferences is critical for implementing an inclusive recruitment strategy. Organisations that fail to consider these differences risk unintentionally influencing their applicant pool. In current times of gender equality in the workplace, this can have unintended side effects. Particularly as research suggests that female job seekers are more likely to be drawn to employers who explicitly highlight flexibility and family-friendly policies in job advertisements (Gaucher et al., 2011; Ng et al., 2010). Based on this context, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: The relative importance of job attributes and their levels will differ between male and female applicants.

4 Methodology

Recruitment is a dynamic process that requires an in-depth understanding of how potential applicants evaluate job opportunities. Among the many factors that influence job seekers' decisions, the way compensation and benefits are presented in job advertisements is critical. Despite existing research on job attributes and applicant preferences, there is limited evidence on how the specificity of compensation and benefits information shapes perceptions of job attractiveness and influences decision-making.

This study adopts a quantitative research approach to explore the relationship between compensation and benefits specificity and applicants' job pursuit intentions. By employing a structured and systematic methodology, this research aims to address the central research question and test the developed hypotheses. The following sections outline the research design, data collection process, and analytical techniques used to generate actionable insights into how job seekers prioritise job attributes and respond to variations in job advertisement content.

4.1 Research Design

A quantitative approach was undertaken for this study as it provides systematic, objective, and measurable insights into the relationship between compensation specificity and job pursuit intentions. Quantitative research allows to identify patterns, relationships, and causal effects, which makes it ideal for testing the set hypotheses and addressing the research question (Queirós et al., 2017).

The study had an experimental design to examine how variations in the level of detail in job advertisements affects applicants' evaluations. This involved exposing participants to either a specific or generic job advertisements and measuring their responses through standardised scales. By isolating the variable of specificity, this experimental framework ensures the internal validity of the findings and allows for causal inferences regarding the impact of detailed versus vague compensation information on JPI (Campbell and Stanley, 1963).

In addition to the experimental component, the study incorporates a choice-based conjoint analysis, which is a widely used methodology for understanding decision-making in multi-attribute contexts. CBC experiments simulate real-world scenarios by presenting participants with hypothetical job advertisements that vary systematically across multiple attributes, such as salary, benefits, and working conditions. This approach enables the quantification of attribute

importance and provides insights into how applicants prioritise job features when making trade-offs (Orme, 2010).

The data collection was conducted online, leveraging digital tools to reach a diverse pool of participants. Online surveys are particularly advantageous in recruitment research, as they allow for broad geographical reach, cost efficiency, and ease of participation (Couper, 2000). The survey was open for six weeks, during which 201 participants accessed the survey link, and 83 completed all components. All responses were retained for analysis, as participants successfully met the eligibility criteria.

This dual-method design, combining experimental and conjoint approaches, ensures that the study captures both direct behavioural responses and relative preferences. The integration of these methods allows for a comprehensive exploration of the research question and hypotheses.

Prior to showing the survey design, it is important that the survey incorporates a fictional job advertisement for both the job pursuit intentions and choice-based conjoint sections. A generic sales position was chosen for this recruitment research due to its general relevance for participants. Unlike roles that require technical expertise or specific qualifications in their industry, such as engineering, sales positions typically require transferable skills and basic qualifications. This makes the role easily understandable and relatable for most individuals, which can help response quality. By using a widely relatable job advertisement, this focus of the study is to research participant preferences and minimize bias related to specific professional backgrounds, as supported by previous research (Roberson et al., 2005; Highhouse et al., 2003).

From a methodological standpoint, using a sales position also aligns with Realistic Job Preview (RJP) theory. RJP aims to provide candidates with a balanced understanding of a job, including its positive and challenging aspects, to help them make informed decisions (Earnest et al., 2011). A generic sales position, with its limited complexity and universal appeal, provides a straightforward and realistic framework for presenting job attributes such as salary, bonuses, and benefits. This ensures that participants can focus on evaluating the attributes themselves rather than being distracted by highly technical or unfamiliar job descriptions.

Finally, prior research supports the use of fictional job advertisements in recruitment studies to ensure experimental control and isolate the variables of interest. For example, Verwaeren et al. (2017) used fictional job advertisements in their experimental study to examine the impact of

specificity in compensation and benefits information. The study demonstrated that fictional advertisements and employers reduce the risk that participants' evaluations are influenced by pre-existing biases towards an organization. Similarly, Cable and Judge (1994) argue that the use of fictional job scenarios allows researchers to test hypotheses in a controlled environment, ensuring that participants focus on the attributes presented rather than external factors such as organisational reputation or personal associations with specific industries.

In conclusion, the decision to use a fictional sales position in this study was driven by its universal relevance, accessibility, and neutrality, as supported by prior research. By selecting a role that participants could easily imagine themselves in, the study ensured high levels of engagement and minimized biases related to professional or demographic factors.

4.2 Survey Design

The survey was designed and implemented using Sawtooth Software, which is widely used for designing and conducting CBC studies. Sawtooth Software is a specialised tool for creating surveys that incorporate conjoint analysis and advanced choice modelling techniques. It enables researchers to design customized choice tasks, randomised attribute levels, and collect data efficiently from participants. The software's capabilities ensure high-quality data collection and robust analysis, making it a preferred tool in both marketing and recruitment research (Sawtooth Software, 2023). Overall, it was structured to be a short survey and take approximately 20-25 minutes to complete.

The procedure consisted of the following steps, also seen in Appendix A:

1. Informed Consent:
 - Participants were provided with an information sheet explaining the study's purpose, procedures, and ethical considerations. They gave informed consent before proceeding.
2. Random Assignment for JPI Experiment:
 - Participants were randomly assigned to either the specific condition or the general condition.

3. Job Pursuit Intentions task:

Table 1: Questionnaire Text for JPI

Specific Conditional Text	General Conditional Text:
What we have to offer: We offer a starting salary of €42,000 per year, plus annual performance bonuses of up to 10%. Our hybrid work model allows you to work remotely up to three days per week. You'll enjoy 25 days of paid vacation, subsidized health insurance, and professional development opportunities, all designed to support your career growth.	What we have to offer: We offer a competitive salary, hybrid work flexibility, and a culture focused on your growth. You'll enjoy paid vacation, training opportunities, health and wellness initiatives, and a collaborative environment where your success truly matters.

- Participants viewed one job advertisement (specific or general) and rated their JPI using the 5-point Likert scale. JPI was tested by the following statement to rate:
 1. I would consider applying for this job.
 2. The compensation and benefits are important factors in my decision to apply for a job.
 3. Transparent salary information makes me more likely to apply.
 4. I feel well-informed about what the company is offering.
 5. The information in the advertisement increased my trust in the company.
 6. I need to ask more questions at an interview to clarify the offer.

4. Choice-based conjoint tasks:

- All participants, regardless of their assigned JPI condition, completed 8 CBC choice tasks. For each task, they selected their preferred job advertisement from three options. Table 2 shows the following attributes, which were randomly put together for each participant.

Table 2: CBC Attributes and Levels

Attribute	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Base Salary	€60,000	€65,000	€70,000
Variable Pay / Bonus	No incentive	Individual performance-based	Company/Team performance-based
Work Location	Fully On-Site	Hybrid (2-3 days home office)	Fully Remote
Vacation Days / PTO	20 days	25 days	30 days
Working Hours	35 hours per week	38.5 hours per week	40 hours per week
None Option	Participants could select "None" if none of the job offers were acceptable.		

5. Demographic Questionnaire:

- Participants answered questions about their age, gender, education, and employment status.

6. Eligibility question:

- A mathematical question of $2+3=$ was asked to identify any outliers not fully participating in the study.

7. Debriefing:

- Participants were thanked for their participation and provided with a brief explanation of the study's purpose.

4.3 Choice-based Conjoint Analysis

4.3.1 Theoretical Foundation of CBC

As previously mentioned, this study uses a choice-based conjoint analysis, which is commonly used in marketing research. Its application in recruitment research is particularly valuable, as job seekers typically face complex decisions that require them weighing and trading off different job attributes, such as salary, benefits, and working conditions (Petry et al., 2021). This methodology enables researchers to simulate real-world scenarios and assess how candidates prioritise various job features when presented with competing options. The theoretical foundation of CBC analysis is based on the utility theory, which assumes that

individuals make choices by selecting the option that provides the greatest perceived benefit or utility (Orme, 2010). In recruitment, candidates often evaluate job opportunities by considering multiple factors, such as compensation, benefits, and work-life balance. A CBC analysis captures how candidates value these attributes by presenting them with a job advertisements that vary systematically in their attribute levels. This allows researchers to measure the relative importance of each attribute and quantify how participants make trade-offs when selecting among different job offers.

Previous recruitment research has demonstrated CBC as useful to study job preferences. For example, Petry et al. (2021) undertook a choice experiment at an Austrian university to investigate how job attributes such as salary, benefits, and flexibility influenced applicant preferences. Their findings revealed that salary was the most important factor of job attractiveness, non-monetary benefits, such as work location flexibility, could compensate for lower salaries demonstrating the importance of these attributes in attracting talent. Similarly, Verwaeren et al. (2017) applied CBC analysis to examine how the specificity of compensation and benefits information in job advertisements impacted applicants' perceptions of job attractiveness. Their study concluded that detailed and transparent information about compensation and benefits significantly increased applicants' likelihood of applying for a job.

The application of CBC analysis in this study builds on the work of Petry et al. (2021) and Verwaeren et al. (2017), who demonstrated its effectiveness in recruitment research. By integrating CBC analysis with an experimental design, this study expands on previous research by examining how specific versus generic job advertisements influence candidate preferences and decision-making. This combined approach ensures that the findings are both rigorous and relevant, offering valuable insights into how organisations can design job advertisements that resonate with diverse talent pools.

4.3.2 Conjoint Design and Implementation

The implementation of a choice-based conjoint experiment using five job-related attributes: base salary, variable pay/bonus, work location/flexibility, vacation days/PTO, and weekly working hours (see Table 2). Each attribute was specified with three realistic levels that reflect common offerings in European labour markets. The attribute set and levels were derived from prior literature on job preferences (Petry et al., 2021; Verwaeren et al., 2017) and a review of job advertisement on LinkedIn in current labour markets, which were refined based on expert judgement to ensure both realism and sufficient variation to elicit meaningful trade-offs.

Each respondent completed 8 choice tasks. In every task, they were presented with three hypothetical job offers, each consisting of a unique combination of attribute levels, plus a “None” option. The inclusion of a “None” option allows respondents to reject all presented job offers if none meet their minimum expectations, making the choice situation more realistic and avoiding forcing preferences that may not exist (Orme, 2010). The order of the choice tasks, as well as the positions of the three job offers within each task, were randomised for each respondent. This randomization helps to reduce potential order and position effects, such as systematically favouring the first or last option.

The experimental design for the CBC tasks was generated using Sawtooth Software’s built-in design generator. The software constructs an efficient design that balances attribute levels across tasks and respondents while minimising correlations between attributes. This ensures that each attribute and level is shown sufficiently often and in diverse combinations, allowing the estimation of stable part-worth utilities. No prohibitions or constraints were imposed on attribute combinations allowing all level combinations and therefore respondents could evaluate a broad range of realistic job configurations.

4.3.3 Estimation Procedure and Calculation of Utilities

The CBC data were analysed using Sawtooth Software’s standard estimation procedures for discrete choice experiments. Part-worth utilities for each attribute level were estimated at the individual level using a hierarchical Bayes (HB) model, which is widely recommended for CBC studies, particularly when sample sizes are moderate and individual-level estimates are of interest (Orme, 2010). HB models assume that each respondent has a distinct preference structure, while individual-level parameters are treated as draws from a common population-level distribution (Rossi et al., 2005). This hierarchical structure stabilises individual estimates by borrowing strength from the overall sample, while still allowing for substantial heterogeneity in preferences.

Attributes were coded using effects coding, which is the default approach in Sawtooth for CBC estimation (Orme, 2010). The inclusion of a “None” alternative fulfils an important methodological function in CBC designs. It allows respondents to express that none of the presented job offers meet their minimum requirements, rather than being forced to choose an option that they would not realistically consider (Miller and Ziegler, 2024; Orme, 2010).

Within each HB algorithm, the probability of choosing a particular job offer in a choice task increases in line with its total utility, defined as the sum of its part-worth utilities across all included attribute levels (Orme, 2010).

To facilitate comparison across attributes measured on different conceptual scales, relative importance scores are calculated for each attribute (Orme, 2010). For a given attribute, the importance score is derived by computing the range of its part-worth utilities (maximum minus minimum utility) and dividing this range by the sum of the ranges of all attributes.

As reported in Table 9, each level is presented with its rescaled utility, standard deviation, and 95% confidence interval, thereby providing information not only on the central tendency of preferences but also on their dispersion and estimation uncertainty across respondents.

4.4 Sample

Shown in Table 3, of the 201 individuals who accessed the link, 83 have completed the survey. Thereof, 61 females, 21 males, and one individual who did not want to state their gender.

Table 3: Gender Distribution

Gender	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
Female	61	73.5%	73.5%
Male	21	25.3%	98.8%
Non-binary	0	0.0%	98.8%
Prefer not to say	1	1.2%	100.0%
Total	83	100.0%	

Furthermore, Table 4 shows the age distribution of the survey participants, which is predominantly in the 25-34 age group accounting for 80.7% (67 participants) of the total sample. This significant majority indicates that most respondents are in their late twenties to early thirties. Additionally, 13.3% (11 participants) of respondents fall into the 18-25 age group, indicating a younger demographic. Participants in older age groups are underrepresented, with only 2.4% (2 participants) in the 35-44 age range and 3.6% (3 participants) in the 55-64 age range. Notably, no respondents were recorded in the 45-54, 65-74, or above 74 years categories. This lack of representation in older age groups creates a distribution heavily concentrated in younger age groups, with few outliers extending into older demographics

The concentration in younger age groups, with a few outliers within the 55-64 years age range, can be explained by the author's personal network, where the survey was shared. Yet, this does not need to be considered a limitation, as younger professionals represent a key demographic actively participating in career development and jobseeking activities. This distribution aligns with findings from Ng et al. (2010), which indicate that individuals in early and mid-career stages are more likely to engage in employment-related decision-making and respond to surveys regarding job attributes and opportunities.

Table 4: Age Distribution

Age Group	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
18-25 yrs	11	13.3%	13.3%
25-34 yrs	67	80.7%	94.0%
35-44 yrs	2	2.4%	96.4%
45-54 yrs	0	0.0%	96.4%
55-64 yrs	3	3.6%	100.0%
65-74	0	0.0%	
above 74 yrs	0	0.0%	
Total	83	100.0%	

Also, the highest level of education and employment status has been questioned in the survey. The educational distribution, seen in Table 5, reveals that the majority of participants have attained a master's degree or equivalent, accounting for 57.8% (48 participants) of the total sample. While a smaller proportion, 9.6% (8 participants), reported having a high school diploma, one participant indicated "None of the above" and no participants reported having a PhD. The cumulative percentage highlights that nearly all respondents (98.8%) have at least a bachelor's degree, reflecting a highly educated sample. The strong representation of participants with advanced education aligns with the expected demographics of professionals likely to participate in a career-focused survey, particularly one shared through professional networks.

Table 5: Education Distribution

Educational Status	Fre	Percent	Cum
High School Diploma	8	9.6%	9.6%
Bachelor or equivalent	26	31.3%	41.0%
Master or equivalent	48	57.8%	98.8%
PhD	0	0.0%	98.8%
None of the above	1	1.2%	100.0%
Total	83	100.00%	

Similarly, the employment status distribution (Table 6) indicates that most participants are employed. Thereof, 78.3% (65 participants) were full-time and 6.0% (5 participants) were employed part-time. A smaller proportion of respondents identified as students (10.8%, 9 participants), which aligns with the younger age groups in the sample. Additionally, 3.6% (3 participants) reported being unemployed, and 1.2% (1 participant) identified as freelance. Notably, no participants reported being retired or on a pension, consistent with the limited representation of older age groups in the dataset.

Table 6: Employment Status

Employment Status	Fre	Percent	Cum
Full-Time	65	78.3%	78.3%
Part-Time	5	6.0%	84.3%
Unemployed	3	3.6%	87.9%
Student	9	10.8%	98.7%
Freelance	1	1.2%	99.9%
Pension	0	0.0%	
None of the above	0	0.0%	
Total	83	100.0%	

The combined findings from these tables suggest that the sample primarily comprises highly educated, full-time professionals, which aligns with the survey's focus on job preferences and compensation-related decision-making. The overrepresentation of individuals with master's and bachelor's degrees, as well as full-time employment, reflects the career-oriented nature of the participants and the recruitment methods used, which likely targeted individuals actively engaged in professional development and workplace decision-making. The small proportion of students and part-time employees further emphasises the sample's focus on established

professionals rather than those in transitional or pre-career stages. Similar studies, such as those by Ng et al. (2010), Chapman et al. (2005), and Highhouse et al. (2003), also relied on samples with overrepresentation of educated early professionals or students, as these individuals are most likely to engage with the research topic due to their current career stage.

The geographical distribution of participants shows a strong European focus, with 82.9% of respondents residing in Europe. The largest groups within Europe come from Austria and Germany, representing a significant portion of the sample. Outside of Europe, 17.1% of respondents are from the Asia-Pacific (APAC) region.

This grouping reflects the likely influence of the survey's distribution, which leveraged the author's professional and social networks. The high representation of European participants is consistent with studies in the field of organisational behaviour and job preferences that often draw heavily from specific regions due to the professional networks of the researcher and the relevance of the sample to the study's objectives (Ng et al., 2010; Chapman et al., 2005).

In the following chapter, the analysis of the described dataset will be presented and tested against the previously set hypothesis.

5 Analysis

After the demographic characteristics of the sample were explained in the previous chapter, a thorough analysis of the remaining data points from the survey will be carried out to test the hypotheses. This analysis has been done through an R script. Prior to the analysis, one possible explanation for the relatively low completion rate of 41.3% is how the Sawtooth tool records participation. Specifically, the tool appears to count every instance in which the link has been clicked, including cases where individuals may have opened the survey briefly after receiving, without the intention of completing it at that time. Consequently, some individuals who ultimately completed the survey may have accessed it multiple times, thereby inflating the number of recorded link accesses and reducing the apparent completion rate.

As already mentioned, the first part of the survey tested how differences in the specificity of a job advertisement were perceived compared to a generic job advertisement. For this, a 5-point Likert scale was used, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). A 5-point Likert scale, similar to the 7-point Likert scale, assumes equal intervals between points, allowing it to be treated as a quasi-metric scale.

Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with six statements, as previously mentioned and shown in Appendix A, reflecting different aspects of their job application decision-making process. These included their likelihood of applying for the job, the importance of compensation and benefits, the impact of transparent salary information, their perceived level of information about the company's offerings, whether the advertisement increased their trust in the company, and the extent to which they would need to ask further questions during an interview to clarify the offer.

Table 7 shows the mean, median, and standard deviation values, providing insights into participants' responses to generic and specific job ads. Overall, for most questions, the mean and median are closely aligned or identical, suggesting a symmetrical distribution of responses and no significant skew (Appendix B; Figure 1 and Figure 2). However, there are a few cases where the mean is slightly lower or higher than the median. For example, the mean is lower for the specific job advertisement for job application and the generic job advertisement for offer awareness. Also, it is higher for the specific job advertisements of C&B importance. In these cases, the data may be slightly skewed, indicating that some participants provided either ratings lower or higher than the majority. If the mean is lower than the median, the distribution is slightly left-skewed, and if the mean is higher, the distribution is slightly right-skewed.

The data also reveals that the standard deviation is generally higher for the generic job ads, indicating greater variability in participants' opinions. This pattern supports the idea that generic job ads, being less targeted, are more likely to let participants have broader interpretations and opinions, reflecting a wider range of responses.

However, there are two notable exceptions to this trend, first for consideration when applying. The standard deviation for the specific job ad ($SD = 1.28$) is higher than for the generic job ad ($SD = 0.84$). This suggests that participants were more divided in their opinions about applying for the specific job ad. Secondly, when asking for clarification about the job offer, the standard deviation for the specific job ad ($SD = 0.73$) is slightly higher than for the generic job ad ($SD = 0.69$). This indicates greater variability in participants' responses to the specific job ad regarding the need for clarifying the job offer.

In conclusion, while generic job ads tend to generate more varied responses overall due to their general nature, specific job ads lead to greater consistency in participant opinions. Yet, exceptions in certain questions highlight areas where specific job ads can also lead to greater variability, particularly in participants' consideration of applying and seeking clarification about the job offer.

Table 7: Mean, Median & SD of JPI

Condition	Statement	Mean	Median	SD
Specific	Job Application	3.50	4.00	1.28
Specific	C&B Importance	4.40	4.00	0.50
Specific	Salary Transparency	4.47	5.00	0.68
Specific	Offer Awareness	3.90	4.00	0.88
Specific	Advertisement Trust	3.47	4.00	0.86
Specific	Offer Clarification	4.23	4.00	0.73
Generic	Job Application	4.21	4.00	0.84
Generic	C&B Importance	4.47	5.00	0.67
Generic	Salary Transparency	4.28	4.00	0.84
Generic	Offer Awareness	3.13	3.00	1.02
Generic	Advertisement Trust	3.25	3.00	0.92
Generic	Offer Clarification	4.28	4.00	0.69

To test the first hypothesis, a comparison of the two job advertisements is needed. Because the dataset did not follow a normal distribution, the Mann-Whitney U-test was used to compare the

specific job advertisement with the generic one. Like a T-test for significance, Mann-Whitney U-testing works similarly for ordinal data that is not paired. It also has the advantage of working well with small sample sizes, which this study had, with a total of 83 responses. One main difference between a T-Test and a Mann-Whitney U-Test is that a U-Test compares medians, whereas a T-Test compares means.

Table 8 represents the results of the Mann-Whitney U-test conducted. The test evaluates whether the type of statement significantly impacts perceptions or responses within each category. There were only two categories where statistically significant differences were observed, which were Job Application ($p = 0.0123$; $p < 0.05$) and Offer Awareness ($p = 0.0014$; $p < 0.05$). To identify which of the two job ads was preferred, the median and mean seen in Table 7 were used. As for the Job Application, the medians were identical at 4.0, the mean was used to identify which advertisement was showing a significance.

The mean for the generic job advertisement was 4.2, whereas the mean for the specific job advertisement was 3.5. This indicates that respondents were more likely to apply for the generic job advertisement than for the specific one. Contrary to expectations, the anticipated significant difference in favour of the specific job advertisement was not observed; instead, the results showed the opposite pattern.

Looking at the other results from Table 8, the remaining categories, namely C&B Importance, Salary Transparency, Advertisement Trust, and Offer Clarification, did not yield statistically significant results ($p > 0.05$). This lack of significance suggests that the type of statement does not considerably influence perceptions of participants.

Table 8: Mann-Whitney U-testing

Statement (generic vs. specific)	W_statistic	p_value
Job Application	1045.5	0.012
C&B Importance	885.0	0.335
Salary Transparency	709.5	0.371
Offer Awareness	471.5	0.001
Advertisement Trust	682.5	0.259
Offer Clarification	820.0	0.796

After testing the JPI selection of candidates when seeing job ads, the participants were shown eight randomised CBC selections. In the methodology section, it was explained that a CBC

study will reflect utility part-worth's and relative importance scores. Using the Sawtooth Software, the part-worths are directly calculated in the tool and represented in Table 9. By examining the rescaled utility values, standard deviations (SD), and confidence intervals (CI), it is possible to identify participants' preferences and priorities, as well as the variability in their opinions for each attribute and its levels

Table 9: Average Part - Worth Utilities

Attribute	Level	Rescaled Utility	SD	Lower 95% CI	Upper 95% CI
Base Salary	60.000 EUR	-50.1	19.8	-54.4	-45.8
	65.000 EUR	-9.4	17.1	-13.1	-5.6
	70.000 EUR	59.4	20.8	54.9	63.9
Variable Pay / Bonus:	No incentive	-44.3	23.1	-49.3	-39.3
	Individual performance based	35.6	32.2	28.6	42.5
	Company/Team performance based	8.7	25.6	3.1	14.3
Work Location/Flex ibility:	Fully On-Site	-44.8	47.0	-55.0	-34.6
	Hybrid (2-3 days home office allowed)	51.5	23.9	46.3	56.7
	Fully Remote	-6.7	53.4	-18.3	4.9
Vacation days/PTO:	20 days	-53.5	31.9	-60.4	-46.6
	25 days	6.5	18.1	2.6	10.5
	30 days	47.0	28.2	40.8	53.1
Working hours:	35 hrs	20.6	21.6	15.9	25.3
	38.5 hrs	8.3	18.9	4.16	12.4
	40 hrs	-28.9	24.3	-34.2	-23.6
None	None Option	-24.9	83.2	-42.9	-6.8

Interpreting Table 9, the base salary emerged as one of the most critical factors influencing participant preferences. Unsurprisingly, higher salaries received higher rescaled utility values, with a salary of 70,000 EUR being the most preferred level, scoring a high positive utility of 59.4. This indicates a strong positive preference for the highest salary level. In contrast, the lowest salary level, 60,000 EUR, had the lowest utility value, at -50.1, indicating a strong negative preference, as expected. The intermediate salary of 65,000 EUR was viewed slightly

negatively, with a utility score of -9.4. The standard deviation values for all salary levels were moderate, ranging from 17 to 21, suggesting some variability in responses but overall agreement on the desirability of higher salaries. The confidence intervals for all salary levels were relatively narrow, underlining a high confidence in the results.

Looking at variable pay/bonus data, it reveals that participants place a high value on the incentive. As expected, individual performance-based bonuses emerged as the most preferred option, with a utility score of 35.6, reflecting a strong positive preference among participants. However, the high standard deviation of 32.2 highlights significant variability in opinions, suggesting that while many participants favour individual-based incentives, there is a notable split in preferences, with some participants likely showing less enthusiasm for this option. In contrast, company/team performance-based bonuses received a utility score of 8.7, indicating a slight positive preference. However, also here there is a relatively high standard deviation (25.6) for this level, which also points to mixed opinions, suggesting that while some participants appreciate team-based incentives, a portion of them may not view these as positively as individual-based bonuses. These findings highlight a clear preference for performance-based incentives but also underline the diverse perspectives participants hold regarding the structure of these incentives. Overall, the absence of a bonus was strongly disliked, with a utility score of -44.3, confirming that participants expect some form of additional compensation. Thus, the findings suggest that offering incentives, particularly individual performance-based bonuses, can significantly enhance the attractiveness of job offers. However, companies should also consider the variability in preferences and may need to offer flexibility in how bonuses are structured.

Like salary, flexibility in work location is another key driver of job satisfaction, as reflected later in the importance scores. Overall, participants expressed a strong preference for hybrid work options, with a rescaled utility of 51.5 and moderate variability ($SD = 23.9$). Suggesting that hybrid work, allowing two to three days of home office per week, is highly favourable to most individuals. On the other hand, fully on-site work was strongly disliked (Utility score of -44.8), reflecting a significant aversion to this option. The high standard deviation of 47.0, however, also highlights that there are diverse opinions. Surprisingly, fully remote work had a slight negative utility score of -6.7 with an extremely high standard deviation of 53.4, which indicates that opinions on fully remote work are highly polarized. These findings highlight the importance of offering flexibility in work location, with hybrid options being the most preferred.

Another finding was that participants strongly value generous vacation days, with 30 days being the most preferred option, as indicated by its high utility score of 47.0. This reflects a clear preference for a longer period off. Conversely, 20 days were the least favoured, with a utility score of -53.5, demonstrating significant dissatisfaction with this option. Offering 25 days was somewhat positively viewed, with a utility score of 6.54, though it was far less preferred than 30 days. While the standard deviations for vacation days ranged from moderate to high, the consistently strong preference for 30 days suggests broad agreement among participants. These findings highlight the importance of offering a competitive number of vacation days, as a smaller allocation could notably reduce the overall appeal of a job offer.

Although working hours play a role in job preferences, their relative importance appears lower than that of vacation days. Shorter working hours remain preferred, with 35 hours per week receiving a utility score of 20.6, indicating a clear positive preference. Responses showed moderate variability, as reflected by the standard deviation of 21.6, though the confidence intervals confirm that 35 hours is positively perceived. Working 38.5 hours per week was also viewed favourably, but with a lower utility score of 8.30, demonstrating that participants value the shorter 35 hour workweek more. On the other hand, 40 hours per week was strongly disliked, with a negative utility score of -28.9, signifying a strong preference for reduced working hours. These results suggest that while working hours remain an important consideration for participants, they are less critical compared to other attributes such as vacation days. Shorter working hours are still valued, as they contribute to a desirable work-life balance, but the data indicates that vacation days hold greater importance for participants overall.

In addition to the job attributes themselves, the estimated utility of the "None" alternative, as previously mentioned, provides information about respondents' baseline tendency to reject all presented job offers rather than choose any of them. In the present study, the "None" option exhibits a negative mean utility (see Table 9), suggesting that the majority of constructed job profiles were perceived as at least somewhat acceptable. At the same time, the relatively large standard deviation associated with the "None" utility indicates substantial heterogeneity in respondents' minimum requirements and reservation thresholds. This heterogeneity is consistent with the variation observed in the utilities of attributes such as work location and variable pay, and underlines the value of modelling both individual-level preferences and opt-out behaviour within the CBC framework.

Overall, the findings emphasise the importance of tailoring job offers to align with employee preferences. Higher salaries, hybrid work flexibility, generous vacation days, and shorter

working hours are features that can significantly enhance the attractiveness of job offers. While generic job ads may appeal to a broader audience, they are associated with greater variability in preferences, whereas specific job ads tend to generate more consistent responses. Employers should aim to strike a balance between offering competitive compensation and tailoring job attributes to meet diverse individual preferences, particularly in areas where opinions are highly variable, such as variable pay and work flexibility. By addressing these preferences, organisations can design more appealing job offers that align with the expectations of potential employees, ultimately contributing to higher levels of job satisfaction and retention.

Table 10: Attribute Ranking

Attribute	Importance Score	Rank
Work Location/Flexibility	26.0%	1
Base Salary	22.3%	2
Vacation days/PTO	20.8%	3
Variable Pay / Bonus	18.1%	4
Working hours	12.8%	5

The results in Table 10, ranking of job attributes based on their importance, provide insights into candidates' priorities when evaluating job offers. Thus, we are looking at the trade-offs applicants would be making when having to choose between different attributes. Work location/flexibility is emerging as the most critical factor, ranking first with the highest importance score (26.0%). This finding aligns with earlier analyses that revealed a strong preference for hybrid work arrangements, which received the highest utility score. The standard deviation (SD) for work location levels, however, showed substantial variability, particularly for fully remote and fully on-site options. Thus, while hybrid work was broadly preferred, the high standard deviation values suggest that opinions on work flexibility are diverse, likely due to differences in individual preferences, lifestyles, or job roles. Base salary, which ranked second in importance (22.3%), showed a strong preference for higher salary levels in the utility analysis, with 70,000 EUR receiving the highest utility score among all salary options. Though SD values for salary levels were moderate, indicating some variability in individual preferences, the high utility scores for higher salaries reflect a consensus on their importance. This reinforces the idea that competitive compensation is a crucial component of an attractive job ad.

Surprisingly, vacation days (PTO) ranked third in importance (20.8%). The utility analysis showed a strong preference for the highest vacation days, there was an overall consensus among the participants about the importance of generous vacation policies. Working hours were the

least important attribute in attracting candidates. Although there is a clear preference for shorter working hours, as seen with the positive utility of a 35-hour workweek, this factor is less critical in driving application decisions compared to vacation days and salary. However, the consistent preference for reduced hours highlights the importance of work-life balance in candidates' overall preferences.

While bonuses and working hours can contribute to an organisation's appeal, attributes like work location, salary, and vacation policies are more significant drivers in attracting candidates to apply. Offering flexibility, competitive salaries, and sufficient time off is essential to align with candidate priorities.

In conclusion, while compensation, particularly base salary, remains a critical factor in attracting candidates to apply for a job, benefits such as work flexibility and vacation days have been shown to carry more weight in influencing application decisions. The findings from this analysis align with studies by McKinsey & Company conducted after COVID-19, which have highlighted a significant shift in candidate priorities toward non-monetary benefits that enhance work-life balance and overall quality of life (McKinsey & Company, 2022). Employers aiming to attract top talent should focus on creating job offers that emphasise flexibility, generous vacation policies, and competitive compensation. Although bonuses and working hours contribute to the overall appeal of a job, they are secondary to the more influential factors of benefits and salary in driving candidates' decisions to apply.

The analysis of job attribute preferences reveals several key observations regarding the overall importance rankings, gender differences, and general trends in how males and females evaluate various job attributes, as seen in Table 11. These findings are critical for understanding gender-based priorities in job preferences and for tailoring recruitment strategies accordingly. However, it is important to note that the sample sizes of male and female participants in this study are unequal, with 21 male participants and 63 female participants, resulting in a 3:1 ratio. This unequal distribution must be considered when interpreting the results, as it may introduce bias and limit the generalizability of the findings, particularly for male participants.

When comparing gender differences (displayed in Table 11), several trends emerge. Females ranked base salary as the third most important attribute, while males ranked it at second place. The gender difference in overall importance shows that males value salary more than females, with a difference of 2.68% in overall importance. When examining the part-worth utilities for base salary, females showed a slightly less negative perception of the lowest salary level

(60,000 EUR) compared to males, with a utility of -47.4 for females and -57.2 for males. At the mid-level salary, both genders showed a relatively neutral perception. However, at the highest salary level of 70,000 EUR, males assigned a significantly higher utility (67.6) compared to females (56.6), indicating that males place greater emphasis on higher salaries than females. This reflects a stronger motivation for financial rewards among male participants. Interestingly, the standard deviation (SD) for the highest salary level (70,000 EUR) is noticeably higher for males (25.4) compared to females (18.7). This suggests that while males, on average, value higher salaries more than females, their preferences are more varied, with some male participants placing exceptionally high or low emphasis on this level. Females, on the other hand, exhibit more consistent preferences for salary across all levels, reflecting a more uniform prioritization of compensation.

Both genders ranked variable pay/bonus as the fourth most important attribute, but females assigned slightly higher importance to it at 18.4%, compared to 17.2% for males, with a -0.85% difference in overall importance for males. This indicates that although both genders view bonuses as relatively less important compared to other factors, females tend to prioritise them slightly more. The part-worth utilities, however, showed that females place more value on individual recognition and rewards, as a higher utility (37.5) compared to males (29.1) was assigned for individual performance-based bonus. Conversely, males assigned a higher utility to the company/team performance-based bonus (14.0) compared to females (7.19). This suggests that females are more motivated by personal achievements, while males may value a shared sense of success. The standard deviation for the no incentive level was slightly higher for males (18.61) compared to females (16.99), indicating greater variability with males. This suggests that while males overall are slightly more tolerant of the absence of bonuses, their individual preferences regarding bonuses are more diverse.

The highest-ranked attribute overall, work location/flexibility, was also the top priority for both genders, with negligible differences in overall importance (26.04% for females and 25.95% for males). This highlights the universal value of flexible work arrangements, particularly hybrid models, regardless of gender. The part-worth utilities reinforce this finding, with both genders showing strong preferences for hybrid work models. For the fully on-site level, both expressed strong negative preferences, with females assigning a utility of -47.6 and males assigning a less negative utility of -35.1. Notably, the standard deviations for fully on-site work were markedly higher for males (28.9) compared to females (23.2), suggesting that male preferences for on-site work were more variable. For the fully remote level, both genders exhibited slightly

negative perceptions, with females assigning a utility of -6.22 and males assigning -9.43. While neither group is strongly favourable toward fully remote or fully on-site work, the hybrid (two to three days home office per week) option received the highest utility from both genders, with females assigning a utility of 53.8 and males assigning a slightly lower but still high utility of 44.5. This variability among males reflects a wider range of attitudes toward on-site work, with some males being more accepting of this arrangement than others, whereas females consistently showed stronger negative attitudes. The slight differences in part-worth utilities for fully on-site and fully remote work suggest that females may prioritise flexibility in work location slightly more than males, further emphasizing the importance of offering flexible policies to cater to gender-specific needs. This aligns with existing research that shows women often prioritise flexibility to manage work-life responsibilities more effectively.

Supporting this trend is the fact that the second most important attribute for females is vacation days/PTO, which was ranked third by males. The gender difference in overall importance suggests that females value vacation days more strongly than males with a 4.31% higher importance. Like work flexibility, this aligns with existing research indicating that women often prioritise work-life balance benefits, such as additional time off, over monetary compensation. The part-worth utilities reveal clear gender differences in how males and females perceive different levels of vacation days. For the 20 days level, both genders expressed strong negative preferences, with females assigning a utility of -57.1 and males a less negative utility of -42.7. This indicates that females are significantly more dissatisfied with the lowest level of vacation days compared to males. For the mid-level of 25 days, females were assigned a slightly positive utility of 7.33, whereas males were assigned a near-neutral utility of 2.87. This reflects a noticeable difference, with females perceiving 25 days as more desirable than males, further highlighting their stronger preference for increased vacation benefits. At the highest level of 30 days, both genders showed a strong positive preference, with females assigning a utility of 49.78 and males a slightly lower utility of 39.8. The standard deviations also reveal that males exhibited more variability in their preferences for vacation days, particularly at the 30 days level, where the standard deviation for males was 22.1 compared to 18.7 for females. This suggests that while males as a group value additional vacation days, individual preferences for this attribute are more diverse among them, whereas female preferences for vacation days are more consistent. Lastly, analysis of working hours highlights that both genders prefer shorter workweeks, with 35 hours receiving positive part-worth utilities from both females (19.7) and males (22.7). Males demonstrated a slightly stronger preference for a 35-hour workweek compared to females, suggesting that they may place a higher value on reduced working hours.

For a 38.5-hour workweek both genders expressed neutral to slightly positive attitudes, with males assigning a higher utility (11.1) than females (7.55). At the 40-hour level, both genders expressed strong negative preference. Males exhibit greater variability in their aversion to working hours compared to females, whose preferences are more consistent.

The unequal distribution of male and female participants in this study, with 21 males and 63 females, must be acknowledged as a limitation. The smaller male sample size increases the likelihood of variability, as reflected by the higher standard deviations in their preferences across multiple attributes. This variability reduces statistical power, making it more challenging to identify robust gender-based differences. Additionally, the larger proportion of female participants may disproportionately influence the overall results, potentially skewing the interpretation of gender differences. While the study provides valuable insights, these findings should be interpreted as preliminary and require further validation. Future research with a larger and more balanced sample is essential to confirm these findings and ensure their generalizability. Increasing the male sample sizes would improve statistical power and provide a more comprehensive understanding of male preferences, while a more representative sample across genders, industries, and demographics would strengthen the validity of these conclusions.

In conclusion, this study highlights several gender-based differences and similarities in job attribute preferences. Both genders prioritise work location/flexibility as the most important attribute, with females demonstrating a stronger preference for work-life balance benefits such as vacation days and flexible work arrangements, and males emphasizing compensation, particularly higher base salaries and team-oriented bonuses. Despite the strong overall agreement on the importance of hybrid work models, females consistently exhibit stronger preferences for benefits, primarily those related to work-life balance attributes, as evidenced by their higher utilities for hybrid work and additional vacation days. Males, on the other hand, show a greater emphasis on compensation. Employers can leverage these insights to better align job advertisement with the differing priorities of male and female candidates. To attract candidates across all groups, incorporating hybrid work arrangements, offering more vacation days, and providing shorter working hours are likely to enhance the attractiveness of jobs to applicants.

Table 11: Gender Importance Scores

	F	Ranking F	df F to O	df M	M	Ranking M	df M to O
Base Salary	21.3%	3	-0.97%	-3.65%	25.0%	2	2.68%
Variable Pay /Bonus	18.4%	4	0.31%	1.16%	17.2%	4	-0.85%
Work Location /Flexibility	26.0%	1	0.02%	0.08%	26.0%	1	-0.06%
Vacation days /PTO	21.9%	2	1.10%	4.31%	17.6%	3	-3.17%
Working hours	12.3%	5	-0.50%	-1.91%	14.2%	5	1.40%

6 Discussion

The primary research question guiding this study is: "How does stating compensation and benefits in job advertisements affect applicants' decision-making?" To address this question, a thorough review of the literature on recruitment, Signalling Theory and job pursuit intentions was conducted. The theoretical framework derived from this review enabled the formulation of hypotheses that explore the influence of compensation and benefits on job seekers' decision-making processes.

The first two hypotheses focus on JPI. First, job advertisements with specific compensation and benefits should lead to higher job pursuit intentions than generic advertisements. The second hypothesis suggests that candidates who feel well-informed about a company's offerings are more likely to trust the organisation and show interest in applying.

The next two hypotheses explore compensation and benefit attributes. The third hypothesis, with two sub-hypotheses, states that compensation attributes like base pay and variable pay are more important than benefits such as vacation days and working hours. The sub-hypotheses examine the importance of base pay and preference for individual performance-based bonuses over team-based or no bonuses. The fourth hypothesis expects men to prioritise financial rewards, while women emphasise work-life balance benefits.

As previously described, the dataset was collected through an online survey. This survey included two job advertisements and a choice-based conjoint analysis of a "What we have to offer" section. Participants viewed either specific or generic job advertisements and evaluated their job-pursuit intentions using six key statements. Participants also completed a CBC task, choosing between hypothetical job offers that varied across multiple attributes. To test the first hypothesis about job pursuit intentions for specific or generic advertisements, a Mann-Whitney U-test was conducted. This non-parametric test, suitable for small sample sizes and non-normal data, assessed whether advertisement specificity influenced intentions to apply. For the third (including sub-hypotheses) and fourth hypotheses, the study also evaluated the relative importance scores of job attributes and part-worths. The CBC analysis showed how participants prioritised and made trade-offs between job attributes by calculating part-worth utilities for each level.

The results from both analyses were used to test the proposed hypotheses and are summarised and interpreted in the following subchapters, aligned with the hypotheses.

6.1 Summary of Results

Based on the data analysis presented in the previous chapters, the findings do not support the first hypothesis, which is rejected. The Mann-Whitney U-test revealed a statistically significant difference ($W = 1045.5$, $p = 0.012$) in job pursuit intentions between specific and generic job advertisements. Contrary to the hypothesis, participants reported higher JPI for generic job advertisements (mean = 4.21) compared to specific job advertisements (mean = 3.50). These results suggest that generic job advertisements are more effective at generating initial interest among applicants, despite the greater detail in specific job advertisements. The analysis of the data presented in the previous chapters provides partial support for the second hypothesis. The Mann-Whitney U-test for Offer Awareness revealed a statistically significant difference ($W = 471.5$, $p = 0.001$) between specific and generic job advertisements, with participants exposed to specific advertisement reporting feeling more well-informed about the company's offerings. However, no statistically significant differences were observed for Advertisement Trust ($W = 682.5$, $p = 0.259$) or Compensation and Benefits (C&B) Importance ($W = 885.0$, $p = 0.335$). These findings suggest that specific job advertisements enhance perceived information clarity but do not significantly impact applicants' trust in the company or the perceived importance of compensation and benefits.

6.2 Interpretation of Results

Hypothesis 1 proposed that specific job advertisements, which include detailed information about compensation and benefits, would result in higher job pursuit intentions compared to generic advertisements. However, this hypothesis must be rejected for two key reasons.

First, the data revealed that participants reported higher JPI for generic job advertisements (mean = 4.21) compared to specific job advertisements (mean = 3.50). The Mann-Whitney U-test confirmed a statistically significant difference between the two conditions ($W = 1045.5$, $p = 0.012$), indicating that generic job advertisements were more effective in generating initial interest among applicants.

Second, the results suggest that, contrary to the hypothesis, generic job advertisements may allow candidates to project their own expectations onto the role. This flexibility likely makes the position seem more appealing. In contrast, specific job advertisements, while providing detailed information, may limit candidates' perceived autonomy or flexibility in the role.

These findings are not fully aligned with previous research emphasising the importance of transparency and clarity in advertisements as key to increasing job attractiveness (Cable and Judge, 1994; Rynes and Cable, 2003). According to the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), specific job advertisements should reduce uncertainty by providing clear details, which should increase applicants' intentions to apply. However, this outcome suggests that the way advertisements are framed and the level of detail also influence how flexible and appealing candidates find the job.

The results may also reflect the signalling effect of generic advertisements, as outlined by Spence (1973). Generic advertisements may signal flexibility and openness to individual interpretation, allowing applicants to imagine a role tailored to their preferences, thereby increasing its attractiveness (Roberson et al., 2005).

Allen et al. (2007) argue that web-based recruitment shapes perceptions of organisational attractiveness. Generic advertisements may seem more appealing as they convey broader brand values instead of just job details. Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) also highlight the role of employer branding in recruitment, thus advertisements can signal the company's identity and values. Generic may align better with the employer brand, which could lead to higher JPI.

Finally, Verwaeren et al. (2017) studied message framing in recruitment. They found that overly specific job descriptions can reduce a candidate's perceived fit, as rigid definitions make it harder for applicants to identify with the role. This supports the view that generic advertisement, by allowing room for interpretation, helps candidates see themselves in the role and thus increases attractiveness.

In conclusion, hypothesis 1 is rejected. The findings show employers must balance specificity and flexibility when designing job advertisements. While transparency matters, overly specific descriptions may limit perceived role flexibility and reduce JPI, especially early in recruitment. Future research needs to explore whether specific advertisements become more influential in later stages of recruitment, such as interviews or offer negotiations, and investigate whether cultural and demographic factors additionally impact job preferences.

Hypothesis 2 proposed that participants who feel well-informed about what the company is offering would indicate greater trust in the company and greater interest in applying for the job. This hypothesis is partially supported for two reasons.

First, the Mann-Whitney U-test revealed a statistically significant difference ($W = 471.5$, $p = 0.001$) in perceived information levels between participants exposed to specific and generic job advertisements. Participants exposed to specific advertisements reported feeling significantly better informed about what the company was offering than those exposed to generic advertisements. This finding indicates that specific job advertisements are more effective in enhancing applicants' understanding of the role and the organisation's offerings.

Second, while specific advertisements improved perceptions of being well-informed, the hypothesis was only partially supported, as no significant differences were observed in trust in the company ($W = 682.5$, $p = 0.259$) or interest in applying ($W = 820.0$, $p = 0.796$) between the two groups. This suggests that while detailed job advertisements can reduce ambiguity and provide clarity, they do not necessarily result in higher trust in the employer or stronger job pursuit intentions.

These findings are consistent with Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behaviour, which highlights the importance of perceived behavioural control and the role of accessible, clear information in shaping intentions. Specific job advertisements likely reduce uncertainty and give applicants a sense of control over their decision-making, as they feel better informed about what the company is offering. This aligns with Breaugh's (2013) argument that recruitment communication should minimise ambiguity to increase applicants' engagement and confidence in their decision-making.

However, the lack of significant differences in trust and interest in applying contrasts with prior studies, such as Cable and Judge (1994) and Rynes and Cable (2003), which suggested that clear and specific information in job advertisements enhances trust in the employer and positively influences job pursuit intentions. One possible explanation is that organisational trust and interest in applying may be influenced by other factors beyond the content of job advertisements, such as employer reputation, employee reviews, or personal experiences during the application process. As the job advertisement was fictional, there was no "real" employer with a reputation or reviews to be researched.

This limitation is supported by Elving et al. (2013), who emphasised that the broader employer brand plays a crucial role in shaping applicants' trust and attraction to organisations. Candidates often seek supplementary information about employers from external sources, such as online reviews or word-of-mouth recommendations, which may outweigh the impact of specific job advertisements on trust. Additionally, Allen et al. (2007) found that organisational websites and

digital platforms significantly influence applicants' perceptions of employer trustworthiness, suggesting that trust is shaped by a combination of factors rather than solely by the level of detail in job advertisements.

The findings also align with Earnest, Allen, and Landis (2011), who emphasised the importance of Realistic Job Previews (RJP) in recruitment. Providing clear and accurate information about the job helps candidates form realistic expectations, reducing uncertainty and increasing engagement. However, the lack of significant differences in trust suggests that while specific advertisements act as a form of RJP, they may not fully address all factors that influence trust, which requires additional signals of organisational reliability and fairness.

Thus, Hypothesis 2 is partially supported. Specific job advertisements significantly improve participants' perception of being well-informed about what the company is offering, consistent with research emphasising the importance of transparency in reducing uncertainty (Ajzen, 1991; Cable and Judge, 1994). However, this increased clarity does not necessarily translate into greater trust in the employer or a stronger interest in applying, as trust may be influenced by other factors, such as employer reputation, employee reviews, and personal interactions during the recruitment process. Employers should continue to prioritise transparency in job advertisements to provide candidates with the information they need to make informed decisions, while also focusing on broader employer branding and creating positive candidate experiences throughout the recruitment process. Future research should investigate how job advertisement content, organisational reputation, and recruitment-stage dynamics influence trust and job-pursuit intentions.

The second part of the study used a CBC analysis to answer the hypotheses. The third hypothesis, which states that compensation attributes, such as base pay and variable pay, would be perceived as more important by applicants than benefit attributes, such as vacation days and working hours, is partially rejected for two key reasons.

First, while base salary ranked second in importance (importance score: 22.30%) and received high utility scores (e.g., €70,000 = 59.43), work location flexibility, a benefit, emerged as the most important attribute with the highest importance score (26.01%). Vacation days, another benefit, ranked third in importance (20.78%). These results suggest that while compensation, particularly base salary, remains an important factor for job preferences, benefits carry more weight in driving application decisions.

Second, the findings reflect a shift in candidate preferences toward non-monetary rewards that improve work-life balance. Work location flexibility was particularly valued, with hybrid work arrangements receiving the highest utility score among all work location levels (51.46). This indicates that candidates place significant importance on the ability to work in a hybrid model, which has become increasingly relevant in the post-pandemic workplace.

These results are consistent with studies conducted in European contexts, such as Petry et al. (2021), who used choice-based conjoint analysis on students in Austria and found that benefits such as flexibility and work-life balance were important drivers of job preferences among younger professionals. Similarly, Verwaeren et al. (2017) conducted a CBC study in the Netherlands and found that attributes related to flexible working arrangements and vacation days were among the most important factors for job attractiveness.

These findings align with the demographic profile of this thesis sample, which had a strong European focus, with 81.9% of respondents residing in Europe. The largest groups within Europe were from Austria and Germany, which culturally are similar to the Netherlands and share high Uncertainty Avoidance scores, as previously mentioned. The age distribution of participants further supports the relevance of benefits such as flexibility and work-life balance. The sample was primarily composed of younger professionals, with 80.7% of participants falling into the 25-34 age group and another 13.3% aged 18-25, overall, 94.0% being under 34. These age groups are typically at the early stages of their careers and tend to value non-monetary benefits that support a healthy work-life balance over purely financial compensation, as evidenced by studies such as Ng et al. (2010) and Deloitte (2022).

The high representation of European participants and younger professionals in this study aligns with the findings of Petry et al. (2021) and Verwaeren et al. (2017), who showed in their studies that flexible work arrangements, vacation policies, and other work-life balance benefits were important to job attractiveness and could, in some cases, compensate for lower compensation. These studies highlight a broader European trend where candidates increasingly prioritise quality-of-life benefits, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has reshaped workplace expectations.

In conclusion, the findings from this study support the notion that non-monetary benefits, such as work location flexibility and vacation days, are critically important to younger European professionals. Employers should leverage these insights by emphasising benefits that align with candidates' priorities for work-life balance in job advertisements.

As hypothesis three is partially rejected, the sub-hypothesis H3a proposed that base pay would be the most important attribute influencing applicants' preferences compared to other attributes. This hypothesis is also rejected, as work location flexibility was ranked as the most important attribute (importance score: 26.01%) over base salary (22.30%). The second sub-hypothesis, which focused on bonus pay, stated that individual performance-based bonuses would be assigned the highest value by applicants, followed by team-based bonuses and no bonuses. This hypothesis is supported, as individual performance-based bonuses received the highest utility score among variable pay options (35.6), compared to team-based bonuses (8.7) and no incentive was strongly disliked (-44.3).

The preference for individual performance-based bonuses aligns with Schlechter et al. (2014), who found that linking rewards to individual performance enhances job attractiveness by signalling fairness and recognition for personal contributions. This preference also aligns with Lazear and Gibbs (2018), who emphasised that performance-based rewards are perceived as more equitable and motivating than group-based incentives, as they eliminate concerns about free-riding in team settings.

However, gender differences were observed in preferences for individual performance-based bonuses and team-based incentives. Female participants assigned higher utility scores to individual performance-based bonuses (37.5) than male participants (29.1), suggesting that women may be more motivated by rewards tied to personal achievement. Conversely, team-based bonuses were assigned a higher utility score by male participants (14.0) than by females (7.2), suggesting that men may place greater value on collaborative and shared success. This finding aligns with research by Konrad et al. (2000), which highlights gender differences in job attribute preferences, with men typically prioritising team-oriented incentives and women favouring individual recognition and rewards. The observed gender differences may reflect broader societal and cultural norms in which women are often more focused on recognition for their personal contributions, while men may place greater emphasis on group outcomes and collective success. Additionally, analysis showed a high standard deviation for individual performance-based bonuses ($SD = 32.20$), indicating significant variability in preferences across genders and suggesting that not all individuals share the same level of enthusiasm for this type of incentive. This variability may reflect cultural and gender-specific differences in attitudes toward rewards, as preferences for individual versus group-based incentives can vary across national and gender contexts. For instance, countries with higher individualism scores, such as the Netherlands (80) and Germany (67), may exhibit a stronger preference for

individually tied bonuses, particularly among male participants. In contrast, women's stronger preference for individual bonuses may reflect their desire to highlight individual contributions in work environments that have historically been male-dominated (Hakim, 2006).

These findings underscore the importance of offering flexible incentive structures that cater to diverse candidate needs, regardless of gender. As suggested by Verwaeren et al. (2017), recruitment strategies tailored to specific candidate groups, such as offering a choice between individual and team-based bonuses, may increase the overall appeal of job advertisements. Employers should consider these gender differences when designing compensation packages to ensure they resonate with the preferences of both male and female applicants.

The final hypothesis, proposed that the relative importance of job attributes and their levels would differ between male and female applicants. This hypothesis is supported based on observed gender differences in the relative importance assigned to various job attributes.

First, female participants placed greater importance on benefits, such as work flexibility (26.0%) and vacation days (21.9%), compared to males (work flexibility: 26.0%, vacation days: 17.6%). These findings are consistent with research by Ng et al. (2010) and Hakim (2006), which highlight that women tend to prioritise work-life balance and family-friendly policies due to societal expectations and caregiving responsibilities. This is further supported by the higher utility scores assigned by females to hybrid work models (53.8) and 30 vacation days (49.8) compared to males (44.5 and 39.8, respectively).

Second, male participants demonstrated a stronger preference for compensation attributes, particularly base pay, which was ranked second most important by men (importance score: 25.0%) compared to women (21.3%). Men assigned a higher utility score to the highest salary level of €70,000 (67.6) than women (56.6), indicating that men may place greater emphasis on monetary rewards and career advancement opportunities. This distinction aligns with findings by Konrad et al. (2000), which emphasise that male job seekers often prioritise monetary incentives as a key motivator, while women focus more on work-life integration and personal well-being.

Third, gender differences were also observed in preferences for variable pay/bonuses, where female participants favoured individual performance-based bonuses (utility score: 37.5) over team-based bonuses (7.2). Male participants, on the other hand, preferred team-based bonuses (utility score: 14.0) compared to individual performance-based bonuses (29.1). This aligns with

research suggesting that women often value recognition for their individual contributions, while men may prioritise shared success and collaboration (Hakim, 2006; Konrad et al., 2000).

The observed gender differences are consistent with broader patterns in job preferences reported by previous research. Konrad et al. (2000) revealed that women consistently placed greater importance on work-family attributes, like flexible working hours and vacation days, while men emphasised monetary compensation and career advancement opportunities. Ng et al. (2010) report that especially younger female professionals emphasis on work life balance and flexibility. Verwaeren et al. (2017) found that Dutch candidates exhibited gendered preferences in their evaluation of job attributes, with women placing higher value on flexibility and personal well-being, while men focused on monetary rewards.

These gender differences may also be influenced by cultural factors. Countries such as Germany (67) and the Netherlands (80) score high on individualism (Hofstede Insights, 2024), which may amplify preferences for attributes that align with personal goals and values. Women's greater emphasis on work-life balance may reflect societal expectations for caregiving roles, while men's focus on monetary rewards may align with traditional views of career progression and financial stability. Thus, Hypothesis 4 is supported, as clear gender differences were observed in the relative importance of job attributes. These findings are consistent with prior research, such as Konrad et al. (2000), which demonstrates that men and women evaluate job attributes differently based on their individual goals and societal expectations.

6.3 Limitations of the Study

This research offers valuable insights into the importance of compensation and benefits in job advertisements and gender differences in job attribute preferences, but several limitations must be acknowledged. These limitations affect how broadly the findings can be applied and suggest areas for further investigation.

6.3.1 Small Sample Size

A key limitation is the relatively small sample size of 83 participants. While sufficient for statistical analysis, this limits the ability to generalise findings to the broader population of job seekers. Small samples increase variability and reduce statistical power, making it harder to detect subtle subgroup differences. Bias may also be amplified if certain groups are over- or underrepresented. For instance, the small number of male participants (21 males vs. 61 females) creates a gender imbalance, which restricts the ability to generalise about male preferences.

Unequal gender samples may also skew results, as the larger female sample could disproportionately influence outcomes.

6.3.2 Sample Distribution

6.3.2.1 Gender Distribution

The unequal gender distribution is another significant limitation. Female participants made up 73.5% of the sample, males 25.3%, and one participant did not disclose gender. This imbalance reduces reliability in findings about male preferences, as the smaller male sample increases variability. Future studies should strive for balanced gender representation to enhance generalizability and statistical power.

6.3.2.2 Age Distribution

The sample was also heavily skewed toward younger professionals: 80.7% were aged 25-34 and 13.3% aged 18-25. This limits applicability to older age groups, who may prioritise different job features such as stability or retirement packages. The absence of older participants (none in the 45-54 or 65-74 categories) means the findings may not reflect mid- or late-career preferences. Future research should include a broader age range to capture preferences at different career stages.

6.3.2.3 Geographic Distribution

Most participants (81.9%) were from Europe, primarily Germany, Austria, and the Netherlands. While this offers insight into European job seekers, the findings may not apply to regions such as North America, Asia-Pacific, or Africa, where cultural and economic contexts vary. Cultural factors, such as uncertainty avoidance and individualism (Hofstede Insights, 2024), shape preferences for job attributes. Future studies should seek more geographically diverse samples to understand regional and cultural differences.

6.3.3 Methodology and Duration

The study used choice-based conjoint analysis, a robust method for evaluating trade-offs in decision-making. However, CBC relies on hypothetical scenarios, which may not fully capture real-world choices. While CBC offers valuable insight into relative preferences, it does not account for the full complexity of actual job selection, such as employer reputation or interview experiences. Data collection occurred over six weeks, limiting the ability to identify longer-

term trends. Longer or repeated data collection, as seen in studies like Roach and Sauermann (2024), would provide a more comprehensive view of shifting labour market preferences.

6.3.4 Recruitment Stages Assessed

This study focused only on the initial recruitment stage, when candidates evaluate job advertisements. However, different job-choice factors become important at later stages (Boswell et al., 2003). For example, work-life balance may matter most early on, while compensation or career advancement may become more important during interviews or negotiations. The initial focus may also explain why some attributes, such as autonomy, did not emerge as significant. Previous research (Rynes and Cable, 2003) highlights that these can become more important in later stages. Future research should explore how preferences evolve throughout the recruitment process.

6.3.5 External Validity

Finally, the study does not account for external factors (e.g., economic conditions, industry norms) that may have shaped responses. Employer branding, reputation, and candidate experiences can strongly influence job preferences and decisions (Chapman et al., 2005). While this study focused on job advertisement content, future research should examine how external factors interact with compensation and benefits to shape job choices.

6.4 Recommendations for further research

Building on the limitations discussed in the study, several directions for future research can be suggested to address the gaps and enhance the understanding of how compensation and benefits in job advertisements influence applicants' decision-making.

Firstly, increasing the sample size to be able to have a analysis by the demographic factors such as gender or age. As this will enable researchers to investigate how compensation and benefits preferences vary from different stages of career, gender, as well as cultural differences (Hofstede Insights, 2024; Ng et al., 2010).

Secondly, a recommendation would be to conduct a study over a longer span of time or to make each respondent to retake the survey to capture preferences with evolving labour market (Roach and Sauermann, 2024).

Lastly, as this study focused on the initial attraction phase of a recruiting process, future studies should examine the shift throughout the entire recruitment process. Moreover, including not only the “What we have to offer” section but also identifying broader signals which could come from employer branding or the organization reputation (Allen et al., 2007).

In conclusion, future studies should address these limitations by incorporating larger and more diverse samples, adopting longitudinal designs, exploring multi-stage recruitment processes, and examining external factors that influence job preferences. By tackling these gaps, researchers can provide more robust and generalizable insights into how candidates evaluate job advertisements and make employment decisions. As the labour market evolves, these studies will be crucial in helping organisations adapt to changing candidate priorities and design recruitment strategies that effectively attract and retain top talent.

7 Conclusion

This study aimed to explore how the inclusion and specificity of compensation and benefits in job advertisements influence applicants' decision-making. Using a combination of an experimental design and choice-based conjoint analysis, the research provided insights into how job seekers prioritise different job attributes and respond to variations in the presentation of job advertisements.

The findings reveal following takeaways. First, contrary to expectations, generic job advertisements were found to generate higher job pursuit intentions compared to specific advertisements. This suggests that while specific advertisements give clarity and reduce ambiguity, they may unintentionally limit candidates' perceived flexibility and autonomy in a role. Generic advertisements, by contrast, allow candidates to project their expectations and preferences onto the job, making it appear more appealing during the initial stages of recruitment.

Second, specific advertisements did result in participants feeling more well-informed about the company's offerings, this did not translate into significantly higher levels of trust in the employer or greater interest in applying. This suggests that other factors, such as employer branding, organisational reputation, and candidate experiences during the recruitment process, play a critical role in building trust and influencing application decisions.

Third, the CBC analysis found that non-monetary benefits, such as work location flexibility and vacation days, were ranked higher in importance than compensation attributes such as base salary and variable pay. This finding highlights a shift in preferences among younger professionals, who increasingly prioritise work-life balance over purely monetary incentives. Work location flexibility emerged as the most important job attribute overall, with hybrid work models being particularly valued. Vacation days were also highly prioritised, with participants expressing a strong preference for 30 days of paid vacation.

Fourth, while base salary remains a critical factor in job preferences, the findings underscore the importance of offering competitive compensation alongside non-monetary benefits. Similarly, while individual performance-based bonuses were preferred over team-based bonuses, gender differences were evident. Female participants favoured individual performance-based bonuses, while male participants showed a stronger preference for team-based bonuses, reflecting traditional gender-based differences in workplace priorities.

Conclusion

Finally, the study confirmed gender differences in job attribute preferences, with women placing greater emphasis on work-life balance attributes, such as flexibility and vacation days, while men prioritised financial rewards, particularly base pay. These findings align with existing research and reflect broader societal expectations and cultural norms.

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Appendix

Appendix A - Questionnaire

Welcome and thank you for participating in this study!

This study is being conducted by the University of Vienna. Participation is voluntary and you may exit the survey at any time.

This survey is part of a research project on exploring how people evaluate job opportunities.

The survey includes general questions about your preferences, followed by a series of choice-based questions where you are asked to compare segments of job advertisements. The survey ends with demographic questions.

There are no right or wrong answers - please respond based on your personal views and preferences.

Your responses will remain anonymous and confidential. The survey should take approximately **10 minutes** to complete.

Please take your time and answer each question as thoughtfully. Thank you!

Below you will see a "**What we have to Offer**" section which belongs to a job advertisement for a Customer Service Representative role.

Please read it as if you were exploring job opportunities in this field. Please answer the questions based on your impressions of the ad.

What we have to offer:

We offer a competitive salary, hybrid work flexibility, and a culture focused on your growth. You'll enjoy paid vacation, training opportunities, health and wellness initiatives, and a collaborative environment where your success truly matters.

Likert Scale (1-5: Strongly Disagree - Strongly agree)

- I would consider applying for this job.
- The compensation and benefits are important factors in my decision to apply for a job.
- Transparent salary information makes me more likely to apply.

- I feel well-informed about what the company is offering.
- The information in the advertisement increased my trust in the company.
- I need to ask more questions at an interview to clarify the offer.

Below you will see a **"What we have to Offer"** section which belongs to a job advertisement for a Customer Service Representative role.

Please read it as if you were exploring job opportunities in this field. Please answer the questions based on your impressions of the ad.

What we have to offer:

We offer a starting salary of **€42,000 per year**, plus annual performance bonuses of up to **10%**.

Our hybrid work model allows you to work remotely up to **three days per week**.

You'll enjoy **25 days of paid vacation, subsidized health insurance, and professional development opportunities**, all designed to support your career growth.

Likert Scale (1-5: Strongly Disagree - Strongly agree)

- I would consider applying for this job.
- The compensation and benefits are important factors in my decision to apply for a job.
- Transparent salary information makes me more likely to apply.
- I feel well-informed about what the company is offering.
- The information in the advertisement increased my trust in the company.
- I need to ask more questions at an interview to clarify the offer.

In the next section, you will be shown a series of **"What we offer"** sections. Each section includes a different combination of attributes such as salary, bonus type, work location, vacation days, and working hours.

Please review each set carefully and choose the job you would be **most likely to apply for**, based on the combination of features.

There are no right or wrong answers - we're interested in understanding which job characteristics matter most to you.

Appendix

Please consider the three offers below and make your selection for each one as if you were considering a real job opportunities.

(On Mobile, please swipe to horizontally to be able to see the three options)

What we offer: 1/8

Base Salary	60.000 EUR	70.000 EUR	65.000 EUR
Variable Pay / Bonus	Individual performance based	No incentive	Company/Team performance based
Work Location/Flexibility	Fully Remote	Hybrid (2-3 days home office allowed)	Fully On-Site
Vacation days/PTO	30 days	25 days	20 days
Working hours	35 hrs	40 hrs	38.5 hrs
	Select	Select	Select

None, I wouldn't choose any of these.

Select

Figure 1: Survey choice-based conjoint example

Please select your age group:

- 18-25 yrs
- 25-34 yrs
- 35-44 yrs
- 45-54 yrs
- 55-64 yrs
- 65-74
- above 74 yrs

Please select your gender that you identify with:

- Male
- Female
- Non-binary
- Prefer not to say

Please select your completed educational level

- High School Diploma
- Bachelor or equivalent
- Master or equivalent
- PhD/Master
- None of the above

Please select your current employment status:

- Employed Full-Time
- Employed Part-Time
- Unemployed
- Student
- Freelance
- Pension
- None of the above

Please state the country in which you are currently living in:

Please select the answer for the mathematical equation:

$2+3=$

- 4
- 5
- 6

Thank you for taking our survey!

Your responses have been submitted successfully.

Appendix B - Additional Statistics**Table 12:** Country Distribution

Country	Fre	Percent	Cum
Austria	32	38.55%	38.55%
Germany	18	21.69%	60.24%
Australia	14	16.87%	77.11%
Netherlands	6	7.23%	84.34%
Spain	5	6.02%	90.36%
United Kingdom	2	2.41%	92.77%
Portugal	1	1.20%	93.98%
Greece	1	1.20%	95.18%
Belgium	1	1.20%	96.39%
Ukraine	1	1.20%	97.59%
Switzerland	1	1.20%	98.80%
Sweden	1	1.20%	100.00%
Total	83	100.00%	

Table 13: Region Split

Country	Region
Austria	EUROPE
Germany	EUROPE
Netherlands	EUROPE
Spain	EUROPE
Portugal	EUROPE
Greece	EUROPE
Belgium	EUROPE
Ukraine	EUROPE
Switzerland	EUROPE
Sweden	EUROPE
United Kingdom	EUROPE
Australia	APAC

Table 14: Regional Distribution

Region	Fre	Percent	Cum
EUROPE	68	82.9%	82.9%
APAC	14	17.1%	100.0%
Total	83	100.0%	

Table 15: Question Statement Mapping

Question	Statement
R1	Job Application
R2	C&B Importance
R3	Salary Transparency
R4	Offer Awareness
R5	Advertisement Trust
R6	Offer Clarification

Table 16: Part-worth utilities by gender

Attribute	Level	Female	Male	Overall
Base Salary	60,000EUR	-47.44	-57.24	-49.95
	65,000EUR	-9.16	-10.35	-9.46
	70,000EUR	56.60	67.59	59.42
Variable Pay / Bonus	No incentive	-44.73	-43.08	-44.31
	Individual performance-based	37.54	29.11	35.38
	Company / Team performance-based	7.19	13.98	8.93
Work Location / Flexibility	Fully on-site	-47.61	-35.08	-44.40
	Hybrid (2-3 days home office)	53.83	44.51	51.44
	Fully remote	-6.22	-9.43	-7.04
Vacation Days / PTO	20 days	-57.11	-42.65	-53.41

	25 days	7.33	2.87	6.19
	30 days	49.78	39.77	47.22
Working Hours per Week	35 hours	19.66	22.67	20.43
	38.5 hours	7.55	11.04	8.44
	40 hours	-27.21	-33.70	-28.87
None option	“None”	-19.62	-38.38	-24.43

Table 17: T-Testing

Statement (generic vs. specific)	t_statistic	p_value
Job Application	-2.71491	0.009474
C&B Importance	-0.55487	0.580636
Salary Transparency	1.08187	0.282967
Offer Awareness	3.59169	0.000618
Advertisement Trust	1.099101	0.275863
Offer Clarification	-0.30438	0.761931

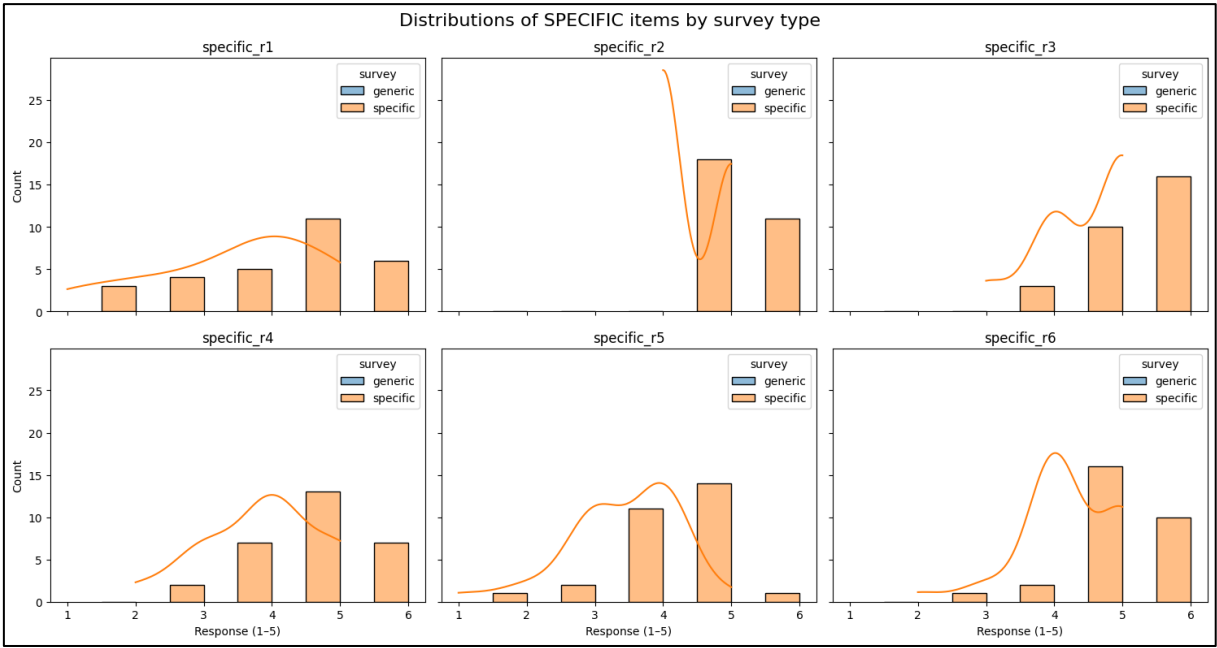


Figure 2: Distribution of specific advertisement

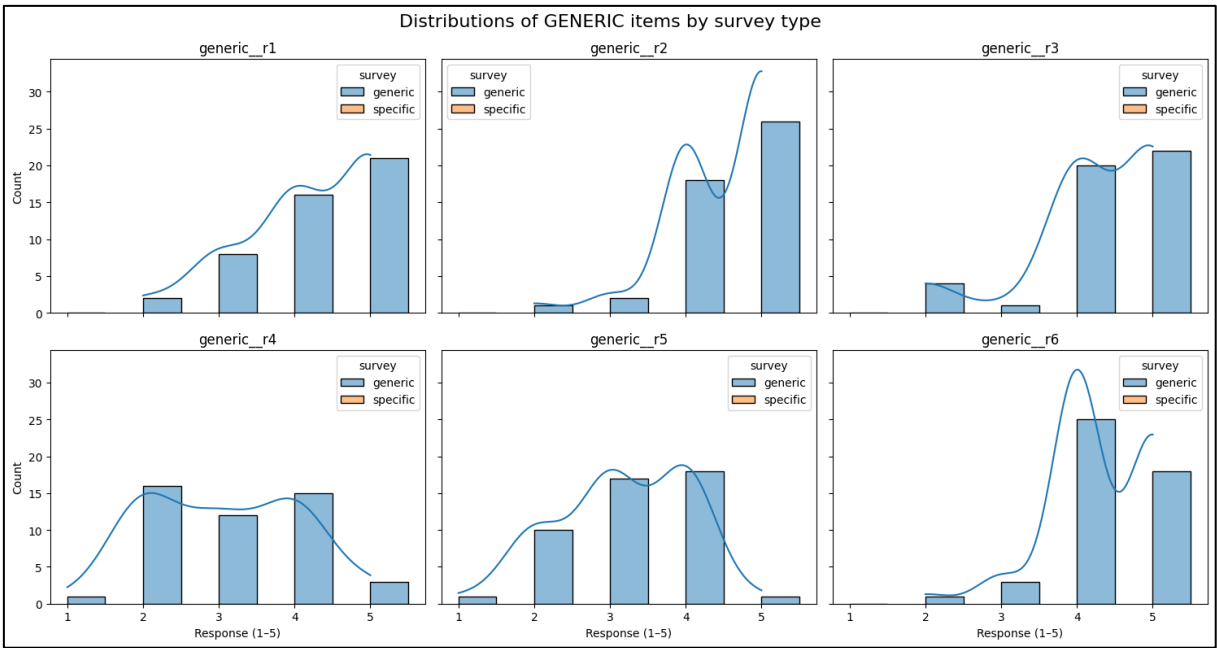


Figure 3: Distribution of generic advertisement