

# iscte

INSTITUTO  
UNIVERSITÁRIO  
DE LISBOA

---

## **Generational Influences on Employer Branding in Multinational Tech Companies**

Polina Novichenko

Master in Human Resource Management and Organizational  
Consulting

Supervisor:

PhD, Nelson Jorge Campos Ramalho, Associate Professor,  
Iscte-IUL

September, 2025



BUSINESS  
SCHOOL

---

Department of Human Resources and Organizational  
Behaviour

**Generational Influences on Employer Branding in  
Multinational Tech Companies**

Polina Novichenko

Master in Human Resource Management and Organizational  
Consulting

Supervisor:

PhD, Nelson Jorge Campos Ramalho, Associate Professor,  
Iscte-IUL

September, 2025

Generational Influences on Employer Branding in Multinational Tech Companies

Polina Novichenko

ii

**iscte**

INSTITUTO  
UNIVERSITÁRIO  
DE LISBOA

## **Resumo**

Num mercado global de trabalho de TI cada vez mais competitivo, atrair talentos externos tornou-se um desafio crítico para as empresas multinacionais de TI, uma vez que as mensagens transmitidas para atingir esse objetivo não são igualmente eficazes. Elas devem ter em consideração as diferenças geracionais. Embora haja indícios na literatura sobre algumas dimensões específicas dessas mensagens, há uma falta de compreensão sobre como elas funcionam em configuração. Este estudo baseia-se na Teoria da Sinalização (Spence, 1973) para investigar como cinco dimensões dentro das mensagens de marca do empregador (remuneração, carreira, ambiente de trabalho, global vs. local, responsabilidade social) servem configuracionalmente como sinais para diversos candidatos. Com base numa amostra de 153 profissionais de TI de 31 nacionalidades e sete centros europeus (França, Países Baixos, Polónia, Portugal, Espanha, Reino Unido e Ucrânia), uma análise de conjoint mostra que, em geral, as descrições de empregadores que oferecem um forte desenvolvimento de carreira, mas têm pouca preocupação com a RSE, são as mais atraentes. Os perfis preferidos variam de acordo com as gerações, sendo a geração X a mais sensível a um ambiente de trabalho positivo, e a geração Y a mais sensível a baixas preocupações com a RSE, altas oportunidades de desenvolvimento de carreira e alcance global das operações. Por último, a geração Z é mais sensível apenas a baixas preocupações com a RSE. Estas conclusões são discutidas à luz da teoria.

*Palavras-Chave:* Atratividade do empregador, Gerações, Sinais, IT.

*Códigos JEL:* M12; M51.

## **Abstract**

In an increasingly competitive global IT labor market, attracting external talent has become a critical challenge for multinational IT firms, as the messages conveyed to achieve that goal are not equally effective. They may need to take into consideration generational differences. Although there is an indication in the literature about some specific dimensions of such messages, there is a lack of understanding about how they operate in configurations. This study draws on Signaling Theory (Spence, 1973) to investigate how five dimensions within employer-branding messages (compensation, career, work climate, global vs local, social responsibility) configurationally serve as signals to diverse candidates. Based on a sample of 153 IT professionals across 31 nationalities and seven European hubs (France, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Spain, the UK, and Ukraine), a conjoint analysis shows that generally depictions of employers that offer strong career development but have low CSR concerns are the most attractive. The preferred profiles vary according to generations, but Generation X is more sensitive to a positive work environment, Millennials are more sensitive to low CSR concerns, high career development opportunities, and global operations reach. Lastly, Generation Z is more sensitive to low CSR concerns only. These findings are discussed in the light of the theory.

*Keywords:* Employer attractiveness, Generations, Signaling, IT.

*JEL Codes:* M12; M51.

## Contents

Resumo .....	i
Abstract .....	ii
1. Literature review .....	3
1.1. Employer branding .....	3
1.2. HRM as an employer attractiveness driver .....	5
1.2.1. Compensation and benefits .....	6
1.2.2. Career development opportunities .....	7
1.2.3. Collaborative Work Environment .....	8
1.2.4. CSR/ESG .....	9
1.3. Boundary Conditions: Generational Moderators.....	11
1.3.1. Generational Influences .....	11
1.3.2. Global Branding Signals and Generational Cohorts .....	12
1.3.3. Compensation and Benefits and Generational Cohorts .....	12
1.3.4. Career Development Opportunities and Generational Cohorts .....	14
1.3.5. Teamwork-oriented Environment and Generational Cohorts.....	15
1.3.6. CSR and Generational Cohorts .....	15
1.4. Conceptual model .....	16
2. Method .....	17
2.1. Research design.....	17
2.2. Data collection .....	17
2.3. Sample .....	18
2.4. Vignette Design.....	18
2.4.1. Factors and Levels .....	18
2.4.2. Orthogonal Design.....	19
2.5. Data analysis strategy .....	20
2.5.1. Conjoint Plan File (Orthoplan) .....	21
2.5.2. Data File (Survey Responses).....	21
2.5.3. Subgroup Analysis.....	21

3. Results.....	22
3.1. General Preferences .....	22
3.2. Cohort Preferences.....	23
4. Discussion.....	27
4.1. Support for Main Effects (H1a–H1e).....	28
4.2. Support for Interaction Effects (H2a–H2e).....	30
4.2.1. H2a: Global versus Local.....	30
4.2.2. H2b: Compensation and Benefits .....	31
4.2.3. H2c: Career Development.....	31
4.2.4. H2d: Collaborative Work Environment.....	32
4.2.5. H2e: CSR/ESG and Employer Attractiveness .....	33
4.3. Theoretical Implications .....	34
4.4. Practical Implications.....	35
4.5. Limitations and Future Research.....	36
5. Conclusion .....	38
6. References.....	40
Annex A. Vignette cards used in the conjoint design.....	47

## **Introduction**

Global competition for skilled professionals in multinational IT companies has intensified: according to forecasts, by 2030 there will be a shortage of 85.2 million workers, which could lead to a loss of US\$8.452 trillion in unrealized annual revenue (Korn Ferry, 2018). The growing talent shortage is putting significant pressure on organizations to position themselves as attractive employers, with employer branding becoming an important strategy for achieving this goal (Ambler & Barrow, 1996).

Over the past two decades, employer branding has evolved from a conceptual approach to a practical tool for addressing labor market challenges. Early studies presented the fundamental principles of employer branding with an emphasis on its role in attracting and retaining talent (Ambler & Barrow, 1996). More recently, researchers have explored its application in diverse and competitive global labor markets, particularly the need to balance global and local branding signals. Reis et al. (2017) emphasize that effective employer branding requires this balance in order to resonate with a diverse pool of potential candidates, as overly global branding may lack cultural relevance, while overly localized strategies may blur the company's global identity.

An important aspect of employer branding is generational differences. It has been found that generations, including baby boomers, Generation X, millennials, and Generation Z, also differ in their workplace preferences (Lyons & Kuron, 2014). These generational differences pose a serious challenge for multinational IT companies seeking to develop universal branding strategies. Lievens and Slaughter (2016) emphasize the importance of addressing these complex issues, but most of the existing literature focuses on the perceptions of internal employees rather than external candidates. Mokina (2014) notes the importance of aligning internal branding with organizational identity, but does not consider the external strategies necessary to attract talent in different cultural contexts. Nevertheless, these generational differences point to the need to develop tailored employer branding strategies that resonate with different audiences (Lyons & Kuron, 2014; Twenge, 2010).

Digital platforms, particularly LinkedIn and other professional networks, have changed employer branding by increasing transparency and expanding the visibility of organizational practices. Dabirian et al. (2017) argue that this transparency requires greater alignment between external branding messages and internal realities. Potential candidates are now better informed

about organizational culture and values, increasing the need for authenticity in employer branding strategies. This evolution highlights the importance of understanding how external candidates perceive branding signals in a digital context, especially in industries such as IT, where competition for talent is particularly fierce.

Employer branding also intersects with related areas such as corporate social responsibility (CSR) and environmental, social, and governance (ESG) initiatives. These factors are becoming increasingly influential in shaping employer attractiveness, especially among younger generations. Turker (2009) and Elkington (1997) suggest that CSR and ESG initiatives signal ethical and socially responsible practices, increasing the attractiveness of organizations to candidates who care about environmental and social issues.

Despite significant progress in understanding employer branding, several critical questions remain. First, few studies have examined how generations interpret employer branding signals, especially in the context of digital channels. Second, striking a balance between global branding consistency and local adaptation remains a serious challenge, and few studies offer practical solutions. Finally, when considering the relevant aspects for assessing employer attractiveness, studies often treat each aspect separately, as if they did not interact with each other and ultimately did not require trade-offs. This can only be done with a configurational approach to design, which is lacking. This study is driven by the following main research question: To what extent do generational differences moderate the effectiveness of employer branding strategies in multinational IT companies?

The objectives of this dissertation are:

1. To identify which employer branding signals most strongly influence employer attractiveness in multinational IT companies.
2. To examine how the importance of these signals differs across generations (Generation X, Millennials, Generation Z).

This study aims to test the relative importance of certain aspects of employer attractiveness as a whole and for three generations: X, Y, and Z. To this end, the literature review will begin by examining key concepts, namely employer branding, human resource management practices as factors influencing employer branding, including compensation, career, work environment, global and local practices, and CSR. The hypotheses are motivated by the literature review with the aim of developing a conceptual model in which these practices are predictors, employer attractiveness

is the outcome variable, and generation is the moderator. The rest of the dissertation will present detailed methods and results for discussion in light of the theory. In conclusion, contributions to both theory and practice will be highlighted, as well as recognized limitations and suggestions for future research.

This dissertation is structured as follows. Chapter 1 reviews the relevant literature and develops the hypotheses. Chapter 2 describes the methodology, including the conjoint vignette design and sampling. Chapter 3 presents the results. Chapter 4 discusses theoretical and practical implications, as well as limitations and suggestions for future research. Chapter 5 concludes.

## **1. Literature review**

Building on the theoretical framework and literature review, this section presents the hypotheses that guide the current study. The aim is to explore how different employer branding signals influence employer attractiveness and how these relationships may vary depending on generational differences. The hypotheses are grounded in well-established theoretical perspectives, including signaling theory, self-determination theory, and generational cohort theory, to provide a coherent and researchable foundation.

### **1.1. Employer branding**

Employer branding refers to the strategies that organizations use to position themselves as attractive employers to potential candidates (Ambler & Barrow, 1996). In multinational IT companies, this includes balancing global branding signals (e.g., innovation, sustainability) with local branding signals (e.g., cultural relevance, regional flexibility) in order to attract diverse talent (Lievens & Slaughter, 2016; Reis et al., 2017). This concept is central to the study because it acts as a signaling mechanism for communicating the organization's values and opportunities to external candidates.

In practice, employer branding encompasses the strategies that organizations use to position themselves as attractive employers (Ambler & Barrow, 1996). These strategies are particularly important in multinational contexts, where companies must balance standardized global messages with adapted local ones. Global branding signals, such as sustainability, innovation, and career growth, create a cohesive organizational identity (Lievens & Slaughter, 2016). Meanwhile, local

branding signals, such as regional flexibility or community involvement, provide cultural relevance and appeal to local talent (Reis et al., 2017).

Signaling theory (Spence, 1973) provides a framework for understanding how these branding strategies work. According to this theory, organizations send signals through branding messages, job advertisements, and public communications, which candidates interpret to assess the attractiveness of the organization. The effectiveness of these signals depends on their clarity, consistency, and alignment with the candidate's values and expectations. For example, corporate social responsibility (CSR) and environmental, social, and governance (ESG) initiatives serve as strong signals about an organization's ethical and sustainable practices, which particularly resonate with the younger generation (Elkington, 1997; Turker, 2009).

This theoretical framework positions employer branding as a dynamic signaling mechanism shaped by cultural and generational diversity. Drawing on signaling theory (Spence, 1973), it links branding strategies to candidate perceptions, emphasizing the need for a balance between global consistency and local relevance. The study fills critical gaps in understanding how multinational IT companies can effectively attract external talent by integrating ideas from employer branding, cultural theory, and generational research.

While global signals help build a unified corporate identity, they don't always resonate with local job seekers. Research shows that overly standardized global branding can weaken candidates' emotional connection, as it often lacks local relevance and personalization (Al Ariss et al., 2014). At the same time, global and local branding signals remain central to the strategies that transnational IT companies use to attract diverse talent. Standardized global messages, such as those emphasizing innovation and sustainability, help shape a cohesive identity and provide a competitive advantage in attracting highly skilled employees (App, Merk, & Büttgen, 2012). Conversely, local signals, such as community involvement and regional flexibility, promote cultural alignment and enhance employer attractiveness in specific markets (Kucherov & Zavyalova, 2012).

Historically, globalization models assumed that replicating standardized structures and processes across borders would align employee values with corporate design (Doz et al., 2001). However, this assumption has proven problematic, as employees and candidates require a stronger sense of identity rooted in local relevance. This tension between global uniformity and local adaptation leads to the following hypothesis:

**H1a. Global branding signals are less positively associated with employer attractiveness than local employer branding signals.**

**1.2. HRM as an employer attractiveness driver**

Human resource management (HRM) practices are widely recognized as strategic levers that determine how external candidates evaluate employers. Within strategic HRM, research on high-performance practices/systems shows that coordinated sets of practices can improve organizational outcomes and enhance the organization's perception among potential applicants (Combs et al., 2006; Lepak, Liao, Chung, & Harden, 2006). From a signaling perspective, these practices contribute to employer value by demonstrating reliability, investment in personnel, and long-term viability (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Lievens & Slaughter, 2016).

Compensation and benefits signal the strength and fairness of the organization and satisfy basic economic and motivational needs (Gerhart & Fang, 2014). Generous and transparent compensation practices are often included in HPWP/HPWS “best practice” configurations, linking them not only to productivity but also to attractiveness in competitive labor markets (Combs et al., 2006; Lepak et al., 2006). Career development opportunities, such as training, mentoring, and clear paths for internal mobility, signal investment in employment and are consistently associated with positive responses from job seekers and their intention to stay with the company (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Jiang, Lepak, Hu, & Baer, 2012). These opportunities are consistent with self-determination theory, supporting the need for competence and growth, which helps explain their broad appeal to all groups (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

The social climate at work is another important factor. A collaborative, team-based environment creates a sense of psychological safety and support that job seekers associate with learning and meaningful interpersonal exchange (Edmondson, 1999; Kahn, 1990). At the same time, data links collaboration and team climate to service quality and innovation, reinforcing their importance as external signals of a healthy work environment (De Jong, De Ruyter, & Lemmink, 2005; Salas, Sims, & Burke, 2005). Corporate social responsibility (CSR) and broader ESG-type activities also function as employer signals, communicating values and social orientation (Aguinis & Glavas, 2019; Turban & Greening, 1997). Previous research shows that CSR can enhance an organization's attractiveness, especially when candidates perceive these initiatives as credible and

relevant to the everyday experiences of employees (Albinger & Freeman, 2000; Jones, Willness, & Madey, 2014; Waples & Brachle, 2020).

Together, compensation and benefits, career growth, team atmosphere, and CSR/sustainability form a holistic set of human resource management-based signals that reflect candidates' diverse priorities. Compensation provides security and fairness (Gerhart & Fang, 2014). Career growth satisfies motives for growth and long-term fit (Jiang et al., 2012; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Teamwork reflects a culture of support and opportunities to learn with others (Edmondson, 1999; Kahn, 1990; Salas et al., 2005). CSR expresses value alignment and legitimacy when perceived as authentic (Aguinis & Glavas, 2019; Turban & Greening, 1997; Jones et al., 2014). In the remainder of this chapter, each dimension is examined in turn to clarify its specific contribution to employer attractiveness and the conditions under which its effect may be stronger or weaker.

### **1.2.1. Compensation and benefits**

Compensation and benefits refer to a package of monetary and non-monetary rewards provided by organizations to their employees in exchange for their work (Milkovich, Newman, & Gerhart, 2016). These rewards serve several purposes, including attracting, retaining, and motivating talent, aligning individual goals with organizational goals, and increasing employee productivity and satisfaction (Gerhart & Fang, 2014). Compensation typically includes two broad categories: tangible (external) and intangible (internal) rewards.

Tangible rewards include direct financial rewards such as wages, bonuses, incentives, profit sharing, stock-based compensation, as well as indirect financial benefits such as pensions, health insurance, allowances, company cars, and other fringe benefits (Gerhart & Rynes, 2003). Material rewards correspond to what Herzberg (1966) classified as hygiene factors, i.e., they primarily prevent dissatisfaction rather than directly increasing intrinsic motivation or engagement. However, these factors still play an important role in the modern economy, as a person's quality of life depends largely on their purchasing power (Gerhart & Fang, 2014; Pfeffer, 1998).

On the other hand, intangible rewards and benefits include non-monetary rewards such as recognition programs, flexible work schedules, meaningful work, and a positive organizational climate (Noe et al., 2019). Herzberg's motivation-hygiene theory (Herzberg, Mausner, & Snyderman, 1959) defines intangible rewards as intrinsic motivators that increase employee

satisfaction, commitment, and motivation by satisfying deeper psychological needs such as growth, achievement, and self-actualization (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Despite the strong motivational role of non-monetary rewards, research emphasizes that monetary rewards remain an important factor. Indeed, a fair and generous reward structure is recognized as one of the key factors of HPWP in the strategic human resource management literature (Lepak, Liao, Chung, & Harden, 2006; Pfeffer, 1998). HPWP, including comprehensive reward systems, consistently demonstrate improvements in outcomes such as productivity, employee retention, engagement, and satisfaction (Combs, Liu, Hall, & Ketchen, 2006; Lepak & Snell, 2002).

Compensation and benefits are also key features of the employer value proposition (EVP) – a strategic representation of what an organization offers employees in exchange for their skills and experience (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). According to signaling theory, compensation and benefits packages serve as indicators of an organization's quality, financial stability, and long-term viability (Peters, Treisch, & Petry, 2022). Especially in uncertain labor markets, candidates interpret generous compensation packages as signals of an organization's strength and reliability, which significantly influences employer attractiveness and candidate decision-making (Cable & Judge, 1994; Peters et al., 2022; Spence, 1973).

Given the above arguments, compensation and benefits function not only as fundamental hiring practices but also as strategic tools for employer branding. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

### **H1b. Stronger compensation and benefits increase employer attractiveness.**

#### **1.2.2. Career development opportunities**

Career growth opportunities are widely recognized as a key factor in employer attractiveness, especially among highly skilled candidates seeking long-term growth. Career growth refers to the systems, resources, and pathways that organizations provide to support employees in expanding their skills, taking on new responsibilities, and advancing professionally (Baruch, 2004). These paths are often classified as vertical (e.g., promotion), horizontal (e.g., job transfer), or boundless, which involve moving across organizational or geographic boundaries (Baruch, 2006; Arthur & Rousseau, 1996).

From a psychological perspective, career growth is consistent with self-determination theory, which posits that people experience intrinsic motivation when their needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness are satisfied (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Structured development opportunities satisfy these needs by allowing employees to achieve mastery, make autonomous career decisions, and build meaningful connections in the workplace (Deci, Olafsen, & Ryan, 2017).

Empirical data further confirms the strategic importance of career growth. A large-scale meta-analysis of human resource management practices found that development-oriented initiatives such as training, mentoring, and internal mobility have a significant positive impact on employee attitudes, productivity, and retention – key components of employer attractiveness (Jiang et al., 2012). More recent studies focusing on European job seekers have shown that mentioning career growth in job advertisements significantly increases the perceived attractiveness of an organization, especially among young candidates (Hauff & Witte, 2023). Similarly, a study of Scandinavian job advertisements showed that non-financial attributes, including training opportunities and career growth potential, have as much influence on job seekers' preferences as salary information (Østergaard & Ramsdal, 2022).

Taken together, these findings suggest that career growth serves not only as an internal motivator but also as an external signal of an organization's investment in its employees. By offering visible and reliable paths for growth, organizations increase their attractiveness in competitive labor markets. Accordingly, we propose the following hypothesis:

**H1c. Career growth opportunities are positively related to employer attractiveness.**

### **1.2.3. Collaborative Work Environment**

Another important factor contributing to employer attractiveness is the presence of an environment conducive to collaboration. In the context of an organization, collaboration refers to coordinated efforts and interactive processes among team members who pursue common goals and share common responsibilities (Salas, Sims, & Burke, 2005). Effective collaboration typically involves clear communication, mutual trust, shared leadership, interdependence, and a supportive organizational atmosphere that promotes high collective performance (Mathieu, Maynard, Rapp, & Gilson, 2008).

Research consistently shows that a culture of collaboration within an organization positively influences employee well-being by fostering a sense of belonging and interconnectedness among team members (Mathieu et al., 2008; Salas, Cooke, & Rosen, 2008). According to self-determination theory (SDT), cooperation in the workplace directly satisfies the internal psychological need for relatedness, defined as the fundamental desire to feel socially connected, valued, and integrated into a group (Deci & Ryan, 2008; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

When employees feel that their organization encourages interpersonal support and mutual respect, they experience stronger intrinsic motivation, increased job satisfaction, and enhanced emotional commitment to their organization (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Gagné & Deci, 2005). Furthermore, empirical evidence consistently links collaborative work environments with increased productivity, reduced turnover, and enhanced innovation (Mathieu et al., 2008; Salas et al., 2008).

Moreover, organizations that encourage collaboration and teamwork are typically perceived as more people-oriented, inclusive, and supportive, which is highly valued by job seekers who place a high value on meaningful interpersonal interactions at work (Berthon, Ewing, & Hah, 2005). A culture of collaboration within an organization effectively demonstrates the organization's commitment to supporting the social and emotional well-being of its employees, thereby creating a high-quality social environment that enhances its overall attractiveness as an employer (Collins & Stevens, 2002; Cable & Turban, 2003). Based on these theoretical arguments and empirical data, the following hypothesis is proposed:

**H1d. A collaborative environment is positively related to employer attractiveness.**

#### **1.2.4. CSR/ESG**

Alongside global and local positioning and human resource management practices, organizations are increasingly adopting responsible management approaches and long-term sustainability initiatives. This shift reflects broader social trends that emphasize corporate responsibility beyond traditional economic goals to include social and environmental considerations (Doz et al., 2001). As a result, CSR and ESG practices have become integral components of organizational strategy, influencing both commercial reputation and employer attractiveness.

CSR refers to voluntary practices and initiatives by organizations aimed at making a positive contribution to the well-being of society and environmental sustainability, going beyond legal compliance and profit maximization (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012; Carroll, 1999). Typical CSR initiatives include environmental protection measures, ethical labor practices, community engagement, philanthropy, diversity and inclusion policies, and sustainability reporting (Carroll, 1999; Crane, Matten, & Spence, 2019).

In addition, ESG criteria are a standardized framework used by investors, consumers, and employees to evaluate corporate practices in terms of environmental sustainability, relationships with employees, suppliers, and communities, and organizational transparency, accountability, and ethical governance (Eccles & Klimenko, 2019).

Organizations that follow these practices reap significant benefits, as CSR and ESG have become important signals that influence perceptions of an organization's legitimacy, reliability, and long-term stability (Aguinis & Glavas, 2019; Crane et al., 2019). Society's attention to CSR and ESG signifies a shift whereby ignoring or inadequately participating in sustainable practices can damage an organization's reputation—not only in its commercial activities but also in its attractiveness as an employer (Catano & Hines, 2016; Eccles & Klimenko, 2019).

Finally, the growing emphasis on CSR and ESG practices has turned them into important employer branding signals. Research shows that candidates, especially young ones, are more likely to be attracted to organizations that align with their values and demonstrate a commitment to ethical and sustainable business practices (Catano & Hines, 2016; Waples & Brachle, 2020).

The reason for the appeal of sustainability lies in its broad integration into contemporary societal values and expectations. Organizations that actively embrace and communicate their CSR and ESG initiatives benefit from employer brand enhancement, positive reputation, and increased attractiveness to socially conscious job seekers (Greening & Turban, 2000; Eccles & Klimenko, 2019).

Given these arguments, the following hypothesis is formulated:

**H1e. CSR and ESG initiatives are positively associated with employer attractiveness.**

### **1.3. Boundary Conditions: Generational Moderators**

While key HRM practices such as compensation, career development, teamwork, and CSR initiatives are central drivers of employer attractiveness, their effectiveness may vary based on individual contexts. Two macro-level contextual factors – culture and generation are particularly relevant in understanding how employer branding messages are received. These factors serve as boundary conditions, moderating the relationships between HRM practices and perceived employer attractiveness.

#### **1.3.1. Generational Influences**

Generational cohorts, such as Millennials and Generation Z, differ in their expectations of employers. Millennials often value purpose-driven work and career growth opportunities (Twenge, 2010), while Generation Z emphasizes sustainability, inclusivity, and digital engagement (Lyons & Kuron, 2014). These shared experiences influence how employer branding signals are interpreted.

Generational cohort theory (Mannheim, 1952) argues that shared historical experiences shape values and expectations. In employer branding, these cohort-specific values alter how signals are received. Baby Boomers (born 1946-1964) prioritize job security, loyalty, and structured progression (Smola & Sutton, 2002), making stability and benefits cues especially salient. Generation X (1965-1980), shaped by economic volatility and early digitalization, values autonomy and work–life balance, and thus responds strongly to flexibility signals (Jurkiewicz & Brown, 1998). Millennials (1981-1996) seek purpose-driven work, rapid development, and social responsibility (Twenge, 2010), so messaging around meaningful projects and CSR resonates with them. Generation Z (1997-2012), true digital natives demand authenticity, inclusivity and sustainability, discounting any signal perceived as insincere (Lyons & Kuron, 2014).

**H2. Generation moderates the impact of the five employer-branding signals on attractiveness in such a way that the weight of each dimension varies across generations.**

This hypothesis is purposively drafted in a general way to allow for a clarification of the exact moderations expected across each dimension which will be done by stating sub-hypotheses as follows.

### **1.3.2. Global Branding Signals and Generational Cohorts**

Generational background influences how individuals respond to employer branding signals. Millennials and Generation Z, who have grown up in an increasingly digital and globalized environment, are more familiar with international brands and cross-cultural communication. As digital natives, they are therefore more receptive to global messages that highlight innovation, diversity, and international opportunities (Prensky, 2001; Jonsen, Point, & Kelan, 2021).

Studies also show that younger cohorts often see themselves as part of a global community and are more comfortable with flexible, hybrid identities that transcend national boundaries (Ng, Lyons, & Schweitzer, 2018). In contrast, older generations, whose professional experience was largely formed in more localized labor markets, tend to value stability and local relevance, which makes them more responsive to employer signals rooted in national or cultural context (Parry & Urwin, 2011).

At the same time, younger generations do not only expect global orientation but also authenticity. Generation Z in particular expects organizations to demonstrate real commitments to diversity, sustainability, and social impact, and reacts critically when branding is not matched by practice (Schroth, 2019; Williams, 2021). This suggests that global branding signals are most effective when combined with credibility and transparency.

Based on these insights, the following hypothesis is proposed:

**H2a. The positive association between global branding signals and employer attractiveness is stronger for younger generations and weaker for older generations.**

### **1.3.3. Compensation and Benefits and Generational Cohorts**

Compensation and benefits have long been recognized as central components of the employment relationship and remain among the strongest predictors of employer attractiveness across industries (Rynes, Gerhart, & Minette, 2004). Within the employer branding literature, financial rewards and benefit packages are often conceptualized as *hygiene factors* in Herzberg's

motivation-hygiene theory (Herzberg, Mausner, & Snyderman, 1959), meaning they may not guarantee long-term motivation, but their absence is likely to cause dissatisfaction and disengagement. From a signaling perspective, competitive pay and benefits communicate an organization's stability, its valuation of employees, and its willingness to invest in its workforce.

Generational cohorts, however, differ in how they interpret and prioritize such signals. Older cohorts, including Baby Boomers and Generation X, entered the labor market during periods when long-term employment, defined benefit pensions, and health coverage were strong markers of employer quality. For these groups, financial compensation and tangible benefits remain closely tied to perceptions of organizational reliability and career security (Lyons & Kuron, 2014). Baby Boomers in particular, nearing or already in retirement, view robust benefit packages as essential to maintaining financial well-being, while Generation X often balances career responsibilities with family obligations, making healthcare and retirement contributions especially salient (Cennamo & Gardner, 2008).

Younger cohorts, such as Millennials and Generation Z, while not indifferent to salary, often approach compensation with a different logic. They tend to view financial rewards as necessary baseline expectations rather than as differentiators in employer choice (Ng et al., 2010). Instead, these generations frequently place stronger emphasis on intrinsic or developmental rewards, such as flexible work arrangements, purpose-driven roles, or opportunities for rapid career advancement (Twenge & Campbell, 2012; Deloitte, 2020). For many in Generation Z, organizational culture and alignment with personal values may outweigh marginal differences in salary.

Taken together, these insights suggest that although competitive compensation is universally relevant, its relative weight in determining employer attractiveness is generationally contingent. Older generations interpret financial rewards as primary signals of security and commitment, whereas younger generations contextualize them within a broader bundle of employer offerings.

Therefore, we propose:

**H2b. The positive association between compensation and benefits and employer attractiveness is stronger for older generations.**

This hypothesis aligns with findings suggesting older employees emphasize financial stability and job security as essential elements for job satisfaction (Lyons & Kuron, 2014).

### **1.3.4. Career Development Opportunities and Generational Cohorts**

Beyond compensation, opportunities for career development and advancement play a decisive role in shaping employer attractiveness. Within employer branding research, training, mentoring, and career progression are frequently categorized as developmental signals, indicating that an organization invests in the long-term employability and growth of its workforce (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). Such opportunities are strongly associated with engagement, retention, and perceptions of organizational support (De Vos & Meganck, 2009).

Generational differences are especially pronounced in this domain. Millennials and Generation Z are often described as “career-oriented explorers,” motivated by continuous learning and the acquisition of transferable skills (Ng, Lyons, & Schweitzer, 2018). These cohorts, having entered labor markets marked by rapid technological change and less job security, tend to prioritize employers that provide structured career paths, skill development, and visible opportunities for progression. Lack of such opportunities is frequently interpreted as a signal of stagnation and can become a decisive factor in turnover intentions (De Hauw & De Vos, 2010).

Older cohorts, by contrast, often place less emphasis on formal career development opportunities, particularly those in later career stages who may already occupy senior positions or prioritize stability over advancement (Kooij et al., 2011). While continuous learning remains relevant for maintaining employability, Baby Boomers and Generation X generally weight these opportunities lower compared to financial security or work-life balance. For them, the absence of career development opportunities is less likely to detract from employer attractiveness than it is for younger cohorts.

In this sense, career development signals serve as a generational differentiator: they represent an attractive pull factor for younger employees while carrying comparatively less weight for older ones.

Thus, we hypothesize:

**H2c. The positive association between career development opportunities and employer attractiveness is stronger for younger generations.**

### **1.3.5. Teamwork-oriented Environment and Generational Cohorts**

The social environment of the workplace is another crucial determinant of employer attractiveness. A teamwork-oriented culture signals inclusivity, collaboration, and shared purpose, which are increasingly valued in knowledge-based industries (Berthon, Ewing, & Hah, 2005). Research on organizational culture highlights that collaborative environments not only enhance innovation and problem-solving but also serve as important retention factors by fostering belonging and trust (Deloitte, 2020).

Generational cohorts vary in their preference for such relational environments. Millennials and Generation Z, raised in an era of digital connectivity and cooperative learning, tend to emphasize teamwork as a key condition for professional fulfillment. For these generations, collaboration is associated with creativity, inclusivity, and alignment with broader societal values such as diversity and openness (Schroth, 2019). A teamwork-oriented environment thus functions as a strong positive signal of employer attractiveness by resonating with their expectations of supportive and dynamic organizational cultures.

Older cohorts, while certainly capable of functioning effectively in collaborative environments, may be more accustomed to hierarchical structures and individualized recognition, reflecting the organizational norms dominant during the earlier stages of their careers (Parry & Urwin, 2011). Baby Boomers often equate professional success with individual achievement and autonomy, making collaborative cultures somewhat less central in their evaluation of employers. Generation X occupies an intermediate position, valuing teamwork but also emphasizing independence.

This suggests that teamwork-oriented signals resonate disproportionately with younger generations, for whom collaboration is both a professional preference and a cultural norm. Hence, we hypothesize:

**H2d. The positive association between a teamwork-oriented environment and employer attractiveness is stronger for younger generations.**

### **1.3.6. CSR and Generational Cohorts**

Sustainability and its expressions, such as corporate social responsibility or the concern with ESG ratings, are relatively recent in management and business literature and practice. The centrality that sustainability and CSR gained in public policies across the world, mostly in

developed countries, made it a “must have” instead of a “nice to have” (Pohl & Tolhurst, 2010), and younger generations seemingly more assimilate this sustainability zeitgeist (Endenich et al., 2023).

As an ethically-based construct, CSR is judged based on either a deontological (Kantian) or teleological (Utilitarian) ethical view of the world. Individuals who adopt a Kantian view of ethics, i.e., a principled-based judgment of right versus wrong, will intrinsically see it as positive. Conversely, those who adopt a utilitarian view of ethics, i.e., good or bad is judged by its consequences, may consider it positive or negative depending on the outcome they value. If, e.g., utilitarian individuals stress social cohesion as a positive outcome of CSR, they will favor it, but conversely, if they stress diminished financial returns due to the costs of CSR, then they may reject it.

Chatzopoulou and de Kiewiet (2021) conducted a study on Millennials’ ethical views on CSR, which acknowledged their utilitarian view, but mostly, that they have a fundamental Kantian view on CSR. Hence, we hypothesize:

**H2e. The positive association between CSR and employer attractiveness is stronger for younger generations.**

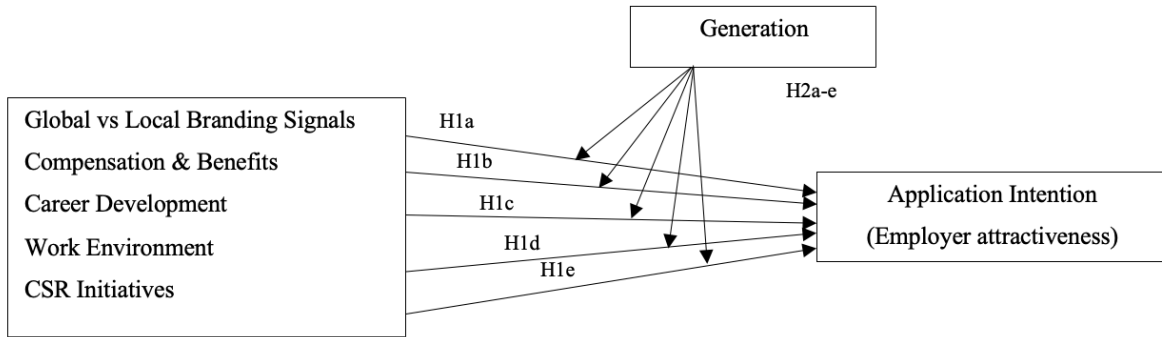
From a configurational viewpoint, these hypotheses could be summarized by generational cohorts. To sum up, Generation X are expected to be more sensitive to compensation and to local operations. At the same time, the remaining dimensions may not play a key role in deciding about employer attractiveness. Conversely, both Millennials and Generation Z will be more sensitive to offers that highlight Global operations, career development opportunities, a positive collaborative work environment, and strong CSR concerns. Millennials and Generation Z may differ in the weight given to dimensions, but literature does not yet offer enough clarity to differentiate them, especially as Generation Z’s work experience is not yet consolidated.

**1.4. Conceptual model**

The graphical depiction of the conceptual model that integrates all the hypothesized relationship is shown below with employer attractiveness as a dependent variable, employer-branding signals as independent under the boundary condition of the generational cohort.

**Figure 2.1**

Conceptual model..



## 2. Method

### 2.1. Research design

This research has been designed as an experimental study, with a 5x2 factorial design where the five dimensions of employer attractiveness are presented in two options (e.g. high vs low) as a set of vignettes. These vignettes have been generated under an orthoplan that is suitable for a conjoint analysis as explained in detail below.

### 2.2. Data collection

Data for this study was collected using an online survey distributed via LinkedIn between May and early July 2025. Participants were contacted directly through LinkedIn messages, informed about the purpose of the research, and invited to complete an anonymous questionnaire hosted on Qualtrics. The message outlined the academic nature of the study, its focus on job offer decision-making in the tech industry and emphasized voluntary participation.

Before starting the survey, participants were presented with an informed consent form detailing the study's objectives, estimated completion time, and their rights, including the option to withdraw at any time. They were assured that all responses would remain anonymous, and that no personally identifiable information would be collected. Consent was required to proceed.

To ensure relevance, purposive sampling was used. Participants were selected using LinkedIn filters, targeting individuals currently or recently employed in IT services and IT consulting, with roles such as Software Engineer, Web Developer, Product Owner, Project Manager, QA Specialist, and Engineering Manager.

Approximately 500 individuals were contacted, resulting in 153 valid responses, all securely stored and managed via Qualtrics, ensuring data integrity and confidentiality.

### **2.3. Sample**

The sample comprises 153 individuals with 31 different nationalities namely American (USA), Andorran, Belarusian, Belgian, Brazilian, British, Bulgarian, Canadian, Colombian, Costarrican, Cypriot, Dutch, Ecuadorian, Egyptian, French, Greek, Indian, Irish, Italian, Nigerian, Pakistani, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, Serbian, Spanish, Sri Lankan, Taiwanese, Turkish, and Ukrainian. The most frequent nationality is British (15.7%), followed by Ukrainian (11.8%), Spanish (10.5%), Portuguese (9.8%), Polish (8.5%), French (6.5%), and Dutch (4.6%). Participants reported to be living mostly in the United Kingdom (18.3%), Poland (15%), Spain (13.7%), Portugal (12.4), The Netherlands (10.5%), and France (5.2%). Most participants are male (82%), female (14.7%) and the remaining are either non-binary (0.7%) or preferred not to disclose (2.7%). As regards age, the range goes from 19 to 67 years-old, averaging 38.5 years-old (sd=13.1). Participants are mostly educated holding a master's degree (45.7%) or a Bachelor's degree (41.7%) or a doctorate degree (3.3%). From the sample 36.4% fall in the Generation X (aged over 45); 35.7% in the millennials (aged 29 to 44), and 27.9% in the Generation Z" (aged below 29).

### **2.4. Vignette Design**

To assess how different factors influence job offer preferences among tech professionals, we employed a conjoint experimental design using vignettes. Each vignette represents a hypothetical job opportunity described in the form of a fake job advertisement. The goal was to simulate realistic decision-making scenarios, where respondents would evaluate offers based on different combinations of attributes.

#### **2.4.1. Factors and Levels**

Based on prior literature and exploratory interviews, we identified five key job attributes (factors) that commonly influence job-related decisions. Each factor had two levels: one

representing a more attractive or favorable condition (high), and the other a less favorable or standard condition (low).

Table 2.1  
*Factors and levels used in the conjoint design*

Factor	Level 1 (Low)	Level 2 (High)
Global vs. Local	Global, centralized practices	Localized, decentralized practices
Compensation	In line with market	Above market
Career Opportunities	Reasonable growth path	Outstanding career development
Work Environment	Focus on individual performance	Supportive team environment
CSR (Social Responsibility)	Low CSR investment	High CSR investment

#### 2.4.2. Orthogonal Design

To systematically vary combinations of these five factors while minimizing redundancy, we used SPSS’s Orthoplan function to generate an orthogonal design. This resulted in eight unique cards (vignettes), allowing for the independent assessment of each factor’s effect.

Each vignette presented participants with a short scenario styled as a job advertisement, followed by a question assessing how likely they would be to apply for the position (assuming they are currently open to a job change). An example is shown below.

*Card 1 – Factor Level Codes*

Global	Compensation	Career	Work Environment	CSR
2	2	1	1	2

Our client has a global reach and operates in a highly decentralized fashion that tailors products and practices according to your own market. You have figured out who this company is and, talking to a friend, you learned that the company has a compensation package above the market, reasonable career development opportunities, but success depends on individual effort, with less focus on teamwork and more on personal responsibility. The company is also known for its great investment in social responsibility. The participant was then invited to answer: “Considering this invitation, how likely is it that you would apply? (Assuming that you want to change jobs now).” The answer was registered on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Extremely unlikely) to 6 (Extremely likely).

*Card 2 – Factor Level Codes*

Global	Compensation	Career	Work Environment	CSR
1	2	2	1	2

Our client has a global reach and operates in a highly centralized fashion with standard products and management practices.

You have figured out who this company is and, talking to a friend, you learned that the company has a compensation package above the market, outstanding career development opportunities, but success depends on individual effort, with less focus on teamwork and more on personal. The company is also known for its great investment in social responsibility. At the end, the participant was requested to answer the same question. The full text of all eight vignettes is provided in Annex A.

**2.5. Data analysis strategy**

Following Green and Srinivasan (1990) a conjoint analysis was performed to obtain the relative importance of criteria concerning employer attractiveness both for the whole sample as well as for subgroups, namely the cohorts in line with Leeper et al. (2020). Accordingly, two

datasets were required to perform the conjoint analysis in SPSS: (1) a conjoint plan file, and (2) a response data file.

### **2.5.1. Conjoint Plan File (Orthoplan)**

Using SPSS's ORTHOPLAN procedure, an orthogonal experimental design was generated. As stated, this file included eight unique vignettes (cards), each representing a different combination of levels from the five factors. The orthogonal design ensured that the effects of each attribute could be estimated independently. The resulting plan was saved as a .sav file, which served as the PLAN file for the conjoint procedure.

### **2.5.2. Data File (Survey Responses)**

The second file contained participant responses exported from Qualtrics and saved in SPSS format. Each row represented an individual respondent, while columns contained the ratings for each of the 8 vignettes (Card1, Card2, ... Card8). As stated, ratings were provided on a 6-point Likert-type scale, indicating how likely the respondent would be to apply for the presented job opportunity, assuming they were open to a change.

This file also included a unique respondent ID (used to identify each participant in the analysis) and additional demographic variables (e.g., age, gender, nationality), which allowed for subgroup description and analysis based on generational cohorts or other characteristics.

The conjoint procedure in SPSS linked the orthogonal design (plan file) to the response dataset and estimated part-worth utilities for each attribute level. SPSS provided the utility scores for each factor level as well as their relative importance to explain the likelihood of applying.

### **2.5.3. Subgroup Analysis**

To explore whether preferences varied across different respondent groups, the sample was segmented based on cohort variables (Generation X, Millennials, Generation Z), following the subgroup analysis technique introduced by Leeper et al. (2020). This allowed for a comparison of factor importance between demographic categories, helping to identify patterns in job preferences across populations.

### 3. Results

This section starts with showing findings concerning the whole sample, disregarding generations, stating the relative preferences participants have for compensation, career development, work environment, corporate social responsibility, and global versus local presence in judging the attractiveness of a job advertisement. It will then segment these findings into cohort-specific groups.

#### 3.1. General Preferences

The conjoint analysis showed corporate social responsibility was given the highest importance (54.286), followed by career development (20.0), global versus local presence (11.429), work environment (8.571), and compensation (5.714). Namely, participants show a strong preference for low corporate social responsibility (0.396) as against high (-0.396); high career development was also favored (0.146), global instead of local presence is slightly more favored (0.083), good work environment is also slightly more favored (0.063), and compensation has also a minimal impact favoring high compensation over low (0.042). Table 3.1 shows the utilities for the global sample.

Table 3.1

*Utilities and standard errors for the full sample*

Factor	Level	Utility estimate	Standard error	Notes
Global vs. Local	Local	-.083	.136	H1a rejected
	Global	.083	.136	
Compensation	Low	-.042	.136	H1b supported
	High	.042	.136	
Career Development	Low	-.146	.136	H1c supported
	High	.146	.136	
Work Environment	Low	-.063	.136	

	High	.063	.136	H1d supported
CSR	Low	.396	.136	
	High	-.396	.136	H1e rejected

---

Overall, the model has strong predictive ability ( $r = .915, p < .001$ ) and the main factors that explain the job attractiveness are corporate social responsibility and career development. An employer that is globally intending to attract more technical IT professionals with a similar profile of this sample is perceived as one that does not put emphasis on corporate social responsibility, that offers a positive outlook as regards career development and, to a lesser extent, that has global operations and a positive work environment and high compensation, albeit these two latter factors play a minimum role. Statistically, the factors that make a difference are corporate social responsibility and career development as the utilities surpass the standard error.

Findings support hypotheses H1b, H1c, and H1d as the preferred factor level converges with the ones stated in the hypotheses. However, findings do not support hypotheses H1a and H1e as the preferred factor level emphasizing stronger attractiveness of companies fall in those that are described as having a global focus and also a low investment in CSR.

H1a: Global branding signals are less positively associated with employer attractiveness than local employer branding signals.

H1b: Compensation and benefits are positively associated with employer attractiveness.

H1c: Career development opportunities are positively associated with employer attractiveness.

H1d: A collaborative work environment is positively associated with employer attractiveness.

H1e: CSR and ESG initiatives are positively associated with employer attractiveness.

### 3.2. Cohort Preferences

As stated, the sample comprises three cohorts, which are expected to behave differently regarding preferences for the factors in play. As the vignettes are randomly shown to the participants, and the sampling was not cohort-stratified, not all cards have the exact same frequencies. This is not an issue as the statistics will operate based on sufficient information per cohort/card, but it should be acknowledged. The precise frequencies per card and cohort are shown below in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2

*Frequencies per vignette card by generation.*

Card	Generation Z	Millennials	Generation X	Total
1	2	6	5	13
2	4	8	4	16
3	8	10	7	25
4	3	5	6	14
5	3	5	7	15
6	5	4	7	16
7	7	6	4	17
8	7	6	11	24
Total	39	50	51	140

Table 3.2 shows findings per cohort. For Generation X, the model has good predictive ability ( $r = .823, p = .006$ ) and the most important factor is work environment (40.741), followed ex-aequo by compensation (18.519) and career development (18.519), and lastly by corporate social responsibility and global versus local, also tied with 11.111 estimate. Namely, Generation X shows a strong preference for a good work environment (.344), which is the factor at play because it is the only estimate with a magnitude higher than the standard error ( $se=.210$ ). All the others show a tendency that is not sufficiently strong to indicate they played a role.

For Millennials, the model has strong predictive ability ( $r = .918, p < .001$ ), and the most important factor is corporate social responsibility (44.681), followed ex-aequo by career development (23.404) and global versus local (23.404), and at a greater distance with minimum effects by work environment (6.383) and compensation (2.128). Namely, millennials show a strong preference for low corporate social responsibility (.656), followed ex-aequo by high career development and global presence, both with an estimate of .344. These are the only ones that reach statistical significance as the estimates surpass the standard error. Work environment and compensation were irrelevant for this cohort.

For Generation Z, the model has good predictive ability ( $r = .798$ ,  $p = .009$ ) and the most important factor is corporate social responsibility (40.0), followed ex-aequo by career development, work environment, and global versus local all with an estimate of 20.0, and compensation is found to have null role in the decision. Namely, Generation Z show a strong preference for low corporate social responsibility (.250) which is the only one to have an estimate higher than the standard error (.177). All the others show a tendency that is not sufficiently strong to indicate they played a role.

Table 3.3  
*Utilities and standard errors by generation.*

Factor	Level	Generatio n X Utility	Generatio n X Standard error	Millennia ls Utility	Millennia ls Standard error	Generatio n Z Utility	Generatio n Z Standard error
Compensati on	Low	-.156	.210	.031	.252	.000	.177
	High	.156	.210	-.031	.252	.000	.177
Career Developmen t	Low	.156	.210	-.344	.252	-.125	.177
	High	-.156	.210	.344	.252	.125	.177
Work Environmen t	Low	-.344	.210	.094	.252	.125	.177
	High	.344	.210	-.094	.252	-.125	.177
CSR	Low	.094	.210	.656	.252	.250	.177
	High	-.094	.210	-.656	.252	-.250	.177
Global vs. Local	Local	-.094	.210	-.344	.252	-.125	.177
	Globa l	.094	.210	.344	.252	.125	.177

(Constant)	5.281	.210	4.969	.252	5.625	.177
------------	-------	------	-------	------	-------	------

---

Hypothesis 2a stated that younger generations would show a stronger preference for global branding signals given by potential employer as compared to the older generation (which in this case is represented by Generation X). Findings do show that global is preferred by Millennials although Generation X and Generation Z effects do not have enough magnitude to decide whether they prefer local or global. Therefore, H2a is partially supported.

Hypothesis 2b posited a stronger preference for compensation and benefits in the Generation X compared to both Millennials and Generation Z and although the positive utility estimate for Generation X is found for Compensation, its magnitude is not enough (as the standard error surpasses the effect) to identify it as a definite preference. Therefore, H2b is not supported.

Hypothesis 2c stated a stronger preference by younger generations for employers that signal strong career development opportunities. Findings support this contention for Millennials only, which renders partial support for H2c.

Hypothesis 2d proposed that younger generations prefer teamwork-oriented environments compared with Generation X. Findings show the opposite: Generation X prefer such environments, while neither Millennials nor Generation Z show clear preferences. Thus, H2d is not supported.

Hypothesis 2e previewed younger generations would have a preference for employers that signal their involvement with CSR. Findings show the reverse is correct, i.e. that younger generations (and in this case both Millennials and Generation Z have significant utility estimates) do prefer employers that signal low involvement with CSR. Hence, H2e is supported in reverse direction.

## 4. Discussion

This study was set out to examine how five core employer-branding signals (global vs. local practices; compensation; career development; work environment; CSR investment) influence perceived attractiveness among IT professionals and how these effects vary by generational cohort. Drawing on Signaling Theory (Spence, 1973) and generational cohort theory (Mannheim, 1952), we hypothesized that each signal would positively predict attractiveness (H1a-e) and that Millennials/ Generation Z would weight global- team- career- and CSR-oriented signals more heavily, while Generation X would favor and benefits-focused cues (H2).

Table 4.1  
*Support for main effects (H1a–H1e)*

Factor	Utility	SE	Hypothesis Result
Global vs. Local Practices	0.136	0.136	H1a Rejected
Compensation & Benefits	0.136	0.136	H1b Supported
Career Development	0.136	0.136	H1c Supported
Work Environment	0.136	0.136	H1d Supported
CSR	0.136	0.136	H1e Rejected

The results of this study show a mixed picture when it comes to how different aspects of employer branding affect job attractiveness. Out of the five hypotheses tested, three were supported (compensation and benefits, career development, and collaborative work environment), one was partly supported (global vs local branding), and one was clearly rejected (CSR). Among all the factors, career development opportunities stood out as the most consistently valued element, especially by Millennials, confirming that growth remains a key motivator for younger professionals. Compensation and a good work environment were more important for Generation X, which aligns with their career stage and focus on job security. Meanwhile, the idea that global companies would be seen as more attractive (H1a) was not fully supported, with findings showing a slight preference for global presence among Millennials, but also a general appreciation for localized practices, especially among older participants.

The most surprising result was the rejection of H1e, which predicted that CSR initiatives would increase employer attractiveness. In fact, across all generations - particularly Millennials and Gen Z - participants preferred companies with lower emphasis on CSR in the job descriptions. One possible explanation is that younger workers, especially Millennials, have become more skeptical about CSR over time (Chatzopoulou & de Kiewiet, 2021). Although CSR has grown in importance over the past decade, especially in recruitment and branding (Waples & Brachle, 2020), its real impact may not always be visible or convincing. This generation has seen CSR become almost standard, and some may now see it as superficial or mostly used for marketing. Research supports this idea, suggesting that when CSR feels disconnected from real employee experiences, it can be viewed as inauthentic or even off-putting (Aguinis & Glavas, 2019; Crane et al., 2019).

In this study, CSR may have felt too general or unrelated to the participants' personal values or daily work. Other research also shows that people tend to prioritize CSR only when it connects directly to their own identity or values, which may not have been the case here (Bauman & Skitka, 2012). Since most participants likely work in digital or technical fields, it is also possible they simply gave more weight to practical benefits like growth, flexibility, or international exposure, as Chatzopoulou and de Kiewiet (2021) also reported a consequentialist ethical stance in their qualitative study conducted on Millennials' consumer choices.

Another point to consider is that this study used conjoint analysis, which asks participants to make direct trade-offs between different job attributes. This method simulates real-world decision-making more realistically than rating each factor separately, but it also means that some values, like CSR, might drop in priority when placed next to more concrete or personally relevant options. While participants may still *care* about CSR in principle, their actual choices suggest they are more focused on factors that directly impact their career paths or daily work experience.

This section will now detail below the discussion per hypothesis.

#### **4.1. Support for Main Effects (H1a–H1e)**

Our conjoint results do not support H1a as the localized practices outperformed the global ones. Globalization has become a standard associated with mobility, open frontiers, and multicultural work environments (Richardson & Mallon, 2005), but it has also been criticized for overshadowing local players and contributing to the unrooting of some idiosyncratic features (Robertson, 2020).

These global versus local options have been addressed in literature (Doz, Santos, & Williamson, 2001) and they are not incompatible. However, when opting to go international in work choices and embracing some nomadic work life, it is quite natural that one is not merely looking to find a place that offers more material or tax advantages but also to expose oneself to a cultural experience to broaden one's own thinking and understanding of the world (Richardson & Mallon, 2005; Inkson & Myers, 2003).

This would be nowadays more in line with companies that opt to give local primacy over global by decentralizing and accepting local standards (Bartlett & Ghoshal, 1989; Robertson, 1995). In line with H1b, a generous compensation and benefits scenario was given preference, which is not surprising at all as generous compensation has been proposed as a key best HR practice (e.g. HPWS Lepak et al., 2006) without differentiating between tangible and intangible rewards although both play a role in one's ability to comply with financial and other monetary responsibilities and to foster motivation (Gerhart & Fang, 2014).

Additionally, being known as an employer that has a generous compensation policy provides a signal that the company is financially robust (Peters et al., 2022) which is an obvious attractor for those that are looking for a stable position that provides enough resources and time to develop and consolidate one's own professional capital.

The results of the research support the H1c hypothesis, indicating that career development is a key factor influencing employer attractiveness. This is consistent with previous research demonstrating that opportunities for learning, skill-building, and advancement are central to individuals' evaluations of prospective employers (Berthon, Ewing, & Hah, 2005). According to Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), the need for competence and personal growth is fundamental, and environments that support this drive enhance intrinsic motivation. Moreover, studies on employer branding highlight that signaling developmental opportunities can strengthen the employer's image among potential applicants, especially in competitive talent markets (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Lievens & Slaughter, 2016). Organizations that emphasize internal mobility, mentorship, and training are therefore more likely to be perceived as desirable employers.

The H1d hypothesis is also supported. Although the effect appears more subtle compared to other factors, participants indicated a preference for workplaces characterized by teamwork and collaboration. This aligns with existing literature on organizational culture and psychological safety, which finds that collaborative environments contribute to job satisfaction, innovation, and

performance (Edmondson, 1999; Kahn, 1990). Moreover, a team-oriented culture is associated with stronger organizational commitment and lower turnover intentions (De Jong et al., 2005). From an employer branding perspective, promoting a collaborative atmosphere may signal not only functional work dynamics but also emotional and social rewards that enhance the overall employment experience (Lievens & Slaughter, 2016).

Contrary to expectations, the H1e hypothesis is not supported. Participants showed a preference for employers with lower levels of corporate social responsibility. This result diverges from previous studies that typically frame CSR as a positive signal in employer branding (Turban & Greening, 1997; Albinger & Freeman, 2000). However, more recent research has noted that CSR messaging can sometimes backfire, especially if perceived as inauthentic or irrelevant to the employee experience (Jones et al., 2014). In technical domains, employees may prioritize factors such as innovation, autonomy, or tangible benefits over broad social initiatives. Additionally, younger professionals may display skepticism toward CSR initiatives that are not directly linked to internal practices or employee well-being (Glavas, 2016). Thus, while CSR can enhance employer attractiveness under certain conditions, its effect may be contingent on perceived authenticity and alignment with employee values.

## **4.2. Support for Interaction Effects (H2a–H2e)**

### **4.2.1. H2a: Global versus Local**

The results provide partial support for H2a, as Millennials demonstrated a clear preference for global branding signals, whereas the effects for Generation Z and Generation X were not statistically strong enough to draw firm conclusions. The preference among Millennials may reflect generational values shaped by increased globalization, digital connectivity, and international mobility. Unlike previous generations, younger cohorts have grown up in a borderless digital world, where remote work, international education, and global cultural exchange are normalized. For these individuals, global employer branding may signal greater career mobility, exposure to diverse teams, and access to multinational projects, all of which align with a desire for dynamic and flexible work environments (Ng, Schweitzer, & Lyons, 2010; Luscombe, Lewis, & Biggs, 2013).

Moreover, global branding often signals innovation, progressiveness, and cultural openness - attributes frequently valued by younger generations (Twenge, Campbell, & Freeman, 2012). In

contrast, older cohorts such as Generation X may be more rooted in local contexts due to family, community ties, or established professional networks. Younger professionals, by contrast, may see global employers as enabling a "nonlinear" life trajectory - one that includes living in various cities or countries, building diverse social capital, and advancing through a non-traditional career path. This aligns with research suggesting that Millennials and Generation Z are more inclined to prioritize experiential and growth-oriented elements in employment choices over geographic or organizational stability (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010).

#### **4.2.2. H2b: Compensation and Benefits**

The findings provide partial support for H2b, with notable generational differences. For Generation X, judging on the magnitude of utility estimates, compensation and benefits emerged as one of the most influential factors, tied with career development, and second only to work environment. Although the utility estimate for high compensation did not exceed the standard error, its relative importance is consistent with theoretical expectations. Also, the fact that Generation X may have a high cost of living (e.g., mortgage, offspring expenses, with e.g., college tuition) may explain why compensation is more central.

In contrast, Millennials and Generation Z placed significantly less emphasis on compensation. Millennials ranked compensation as the least important factor, while for Generation Z it had no detectable role in decision-making. This supports findings by Ng, Schweitzer, and Lyons (2010), who note that Millennials and younger workers often prioritize non-monetary rewards such as meaningful work, flexibility, and purpose. Therefore, while compensation remains a foundational requirement (Gerhart & Fang, 2014), its value as a strategic differentiator in employer branding appears generationally contingent.

#### **4.2.3. H2c: Career Development**

The results provide strong support for H1c, particularly among Millennials, for whom career development was a highly valued attribute where the utility estimate for high career development exceeded the standard error, indicating statistical significance. This is consistent with prior research showing that development opportunities are central to Millennials' job preferences, driven by a desire for learning, progression, and autonomy (Baruch, 2004; Hauff & Witte, 2023; Ng et al., 2010).

These findings align with Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which posits that individuals are intrinsically motivated when their needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness are met (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Deci, Olafsen, & Ryan, 2017). Structured development opportunities fulfill the psychological need for competence and facilitate a sense of career ownership.

Generation Z showed a moderate utility estimate for career development, though not statistically significant. Generation X similarly rated this factor as necessary, yet again, the estimate did not exceed the error threshold. This can be interpreted as the generations comprehending a diversified set of individuals that have specific preferences that are more individual-based than generation-based. Overall, the data suggests that career development plays a cross-generational role, with particular strength among younger cohorts, confirming the hypothesis and reinforcing its strategic value for employer branding (Jiang, Lepak, Hu, & Baer, 2012). Eventually, Generation Z has not experienced sufficiently an occupational role within companies to have a full grasp of the career development opportunities, and therefore, the trend is there but not yet strong enough to be significant.

#### **4.2.4. H2d: Collaborative Work Environment**

H1d receives strong support among Generation X, for whom a collaborative work environment was the most important attribute and the utility estimate for a positive work environment exceeded the standard error, indicating statistical significance. These results are consistent with existing literature that underscores the value of teamwork, communication, and interdependence in enhancing job satisfaction and engagement (Mathieu, Maynard, Rapp, & Gilson, 2008; Salas, Sims, & Burke, 2005).

From a psychological perspective, this preference reflects the relatedness need identified in Self-Determination Theory - namely, the desire to feel connected and valued within a team (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Deci & Ryan, 2008). A collaborative workplace thus signals organizational support, inclusion, and mutual respect, fostering intrinsic motivation and stronger emotional commitment (Gagné & Deci, 2005).

Conversely, Millennials and Generation Z did not prioritize the work environment to the same extent. Millennials assigned it a low importance score, and while Generation Z showed a moderate estimate, being not statistically significant in both cases. Generally, this can indicate a diverse array of preferences within each generation. These generational contrasts mirror broader shifts in

workplace expectations, where younger cohorts increasingly emphasize impact, flexibility, and authenticity over interpersonal dynamics alone (Berthon, Ewing, & Hah, 2005; Gursoy, Maier, & Chi, 2008). In sum, while a collaborative work environment significantly contributes to employer attractiveness for older candidates, it may be less central for younger cohorts, offering important implications for targeted employer branding strategies.

#### **4.2.5. H2e: CSR/ESG and Employer Attractiveness**

Hypothesis H2e proposed that CSR would be positively associated with employer attractiveness for the younger generations. This assumption was grounded in a growing body of literature emphasizing the increasing importance of organizational responsibility and sustainability in shaping employer brand perceptions - particularly among younger generations (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012; Carroll, 1999; Greening & Turban, 2000; Waples & Brachle, 2020).

However, the results of the conjoint analysis contradict this hypothesis, revealing a consistent preference across the full sample and all cohorts for low levels of CSR. Among all five evaluated job factors, CSR had the highest overall importance score, yet participants exhibited a clear preference for low CSR, with the estimate exceeding the standard error. This finding suggests that CSR, rather than enhancing employer attractiveness, actively detracted from it in the eyes of respondents.

These results directly contradict existing assumptions in the literature, which argue that CSR function as a powerful signaling mechanism, conveying organizational trustworthiness, ethical alignment, and long-term stability (Aguinis & Glavas, 2019; Eccles & Klimenko, 2019). The rejection of H1e also challenges findings from Greening and Turban (2000), who concluded that firms engaging in socially responsible behavior tend to be viewed more positively by prospective employees. Similarly, Waples and Brachle (2020) reported that job seekers, especially Millennials and Generation Z, show a marked preference for employers perceived as socially and environmentally responsible.

A closer look at the generational breakdown reinforces this counterintuitive trend. For Millennials, CSR had the highest importance score, and they exhibited a statistically significant preference for low CSR. A similar pattern emerged among Generation Z, where CSR was also the most influential factor, and low CSR was significantly preferred. Even Generation X, while

assigning CSR the lowest relative importance, showed the same directional preference, though without statistical significance.

These findings suggest a surprising fundamental divergence between theoretical expectations and actual decision-making behavior among job seekers in the sampled population. Several potential explanations may account for this discrepancy. One interpretation is that CSR may be perceived by candidates not as authentic commitments but as superficial or performative messaging - a phenomenon often described as “greenwashing” (Crane et al., 2019). If job seekers are skeptical of CSR claims or view them as irrelevant to their personal and professional goals, these practices may fail to contribute positively to employer attractiveness or may even generate distrust.

Another explanation may relate to domain-specific expectations. Given the sample’s likely composition of technical professionals (ex: IT and digital talent), it is plausible that respondents prioritize instrumental attributes - such as growth, compensation, and international exposure - over ethical or societal considerations. In line with signaling theory (Spence, 1973), candidates may instead rely on tangible role-related indicators rather than reputational features like CSR when evaluating prospective employers.

Moreover, the preference for low CSR may reflect cognitive dissonance between professed values and actual decision-making behavior. While many individuals express support for sustainable and ethical practices, they may not prioritize these dimensions when making concrete job choices - particularly if CSR signals are perceived as non-substantive or disconnected from daily work experiences (Catano & Hines, 2016).

In sum, hypothesis H1e must be rejected. The data strongly suggest that CSR signaling is counterproductive to build employer attractiveness among younger candidates. This finding introduces a critical perspective into the employer branding literature: CSR is not universally appreciated, and its impact is likely contingent on candidate background, perceived authenticity, and context. Employer branding strategies should therefore be carefully tailored and avoid overreliance on CSR signals without credible, transparent, and role-relevant communication.

### **4.3. Theoretical Implications**

This study extends employer-branding theory by showing that the effects of core signals are configurational and audience-dependent. Using a conjoint design, we demonstrate that candidates

evaluate signals through explicit trade-offs rather than in isolation, extending prior work that treats attributes separately (Green & Srinivasan, 1990; Lievens & Slaughter, 2016).

We also show which audiences these signals resonate with, as generational cohorts act as moderators that move Signaling Theory beyond a generic view of job seekers and toward a receiver-sensitive account of employer attractiveness (Spence, 1973). While most prior work assumes signals are interpreted uniformly, our results demonstrate that their meaning and weight differ across cohorts. This adds nuance to Signaling Theory by shifting attention from the characteristics of the signals alone to the characteristics of the receivers, underscoring that employer branding is not only about what is communicated but also to whom it is communicated.

To explain why career development and teamwork show robust positive effects, we connect signaling with Self-Determination Theory. These cues speak to the needs for competence and relatedness, which accounts for their broad attractiveness and the stronger influence found in some generational groups (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Our results further position employer branding as a context-sensitive system. The mixed pattern for global versus local cues aligns with the integration-responsiveness and glocalization literatures, suggesting that global identity can be helpful, but traction depends on credible local adaptation (Bartlett & Ghoshal, 1989; Robertson, 1995).

Finally, the negative utility of high CSR observed in this IT sample challenges the common assumption that CSR uniformly increases employer attractiveness. Consistent with research on authenticity skepticism, this points to boundary conditions for CSR-as-signal - namely, credibility, role relevance, and alignment with internal practices - and indicates that Signaling Theory benefits from moderators that capture receiver characteristics and perceived authenticity (Aguinis & Glavas, 2019; Jones, Willness, & Madey, 2014; Waples & Brachle, 2020).

#### **4.4. Practical Implications**

These findings highlight the need for tailored and evidence-based strategies for HR managers and professionals responsible for employer branding. While signals such as career development enjoy wide appeal across generations, others, most notably CSR, prove effective only when perceived as credible and contextually meaningful. A portfolio approach is therefore recommended, combining a consistent global identity with localized practices - such as visible

local leadership, country-specific flexibility norms, and appropriate language use to increase relevance in host markets (Bartlett & Ghoshal, 1989; Robertson, 1995).

At the same time, emphasis should be adapted by cohort. For Generation X, this means foregrounding team climate, dependable managers, and clear, competitive compensation and benefits. For Millennials, structured career paths, mentoring, learning budgets, and credible opportunities for global exposure are likely to be more persuasive. For Generation Z, concise, evidence-based messaging is essential, and CSR should be tied to tangible, role-proximal activities (e.g., product sustainability tasks, volunteering hours) rather than generic claims (Aguinis & Glavas, 2019; Waples & Brachle, 2020). To ensure credibility and effectiveness, organizations should institutionalize message testing through conjoint or A/B experiments and track conversion analytics by cohort and geography, adjusting campaigns accordingly (Green & Srinivasan, 1990).

Finally, priority should be given to consistently high-yield signals, particularly career development and teamwork climate, across all communication channels. These should be made visible in job adverts, recruiter scripts, employee stories, and synchronized with external platforms such as social media and review sites, to deliver consistent and credible signals (Caligiuri, Colakoglu, Cerdin, & Kim, 2010).

Importantly, external signals must align with the actual employee experience, as misalignment risks skepticism and reputational damage, especially around CSR claims (Jones et al., 2014). Moreover, employer-branding strategies should be seen as dynamic: they require ongoing monitoring and recalibration as generational expectations and market contexts evolve.

#### **4.5. Limitations and Future Research**

The findings of this research provide valuable insights into generational differences in employer branding preferences. Nevertheless, certain limitations may influence the validity and scope of these results.

First, the study sample consisted largely of individuals with backgrounds in digital or technical professions, which must have influenced the results. Participants in these fields may prioritize career development, flexibility, or international exposure more than CSR or workplace culture. As such, the findings may not fully represent preferences in other sectors such as healthcare, education, or manufacturing.

Second, while generational differences were examined, the sample size per cohort was uneven (with relatively smaller sample in Generation X) which may have slightly impacted the robustness of comparisons, especially for Generation X. Future studies should aim for larger cohort samples and potentially control for other variables like years of experience, seniority, or job type.

Third, the use of conjoint analysis, while effective in capturing trade-offs and simulating real-world decisions, comes with its own constraints. Participants are forced to prioritize one attribute over another, which may understate the importance of values like CSR when placed next to more immediate, self-relevant factors. While this method improves external validity compared to simple ratings, it may not capture the emotional or symbolic weight some factors carry in real-world job decisions. There are other factors that have not been controlled in this study. If one considers the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980) the social norms and its subjective perception by the individual, namely group norms, will play a role in the individual behavioral intention, i.e. in judging the employer attractiveness, and this dimension is not considered in this study. Future research may complement this design by bringing to the analysis also the social influence of group belongingness and how much the individual is able to actually change work in a certain stage of life.

Additionally, cultural influences were not the central focus of this study, despite the known role culture plays in shaping employer attractiveness (Caligiuri et al., 2010). Most participants were from European contexts, which may have specific expectations about what is an ideal job, and an ideal employer. Future studies could apply the same model in non-Western regions to explore how local norms shape responses to global branding signals.

For future research, a few promising directions emerge. First, qualitative studies such as interviews or focus groups could explore why certain employer attributes are prioritized over others and how perceptions of authenticity affect responses to CSR messaging. Second, it would be valuable to test how different framings of CSR - for example, role-specific sustainability initiatives or personal employee stories - might increase its relevance and attractiveness and if an extended social responsibility description (e.g. comprehending ecological impact) may alter findings. Third, expanding the demographic range of participants, including more industries, age groups, and cultural backgrounds, would allow for broader generalization.

Lastly, there is potential for longitudinal or behavioral studies that track actual application or job-switching behavior in relation to employer brand perceptions. This could offer stronger

evidence of how stated preferences align with real-world decisions over time and will align with stronger theoretical models such as the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980).

In sum, while this study provides a clear snapshot of current employer branding preferences across generations, further research is needed to better understand how evolving expectations, context, and communication strategies shape talent attraction in a globalized labor market.

## **5. Conclusion**

This study analyzed how employer brand signals influence perceptions of employer attractiveness and application intentions, as well as how these effects differ across generations. Guided by signaling theory, self-determination theory, and the integration-reactivity perspective, five signals were analyzed: global and local practices, compensation and benefits, career opportunities, teamwork atmosphere, and corporate social responsibility (CSR) using a joint experiment with IT professionals.

Candidates did not respond to individual attributes in isolation; they weighed signals configurationally and made trade-offs. In the sample, the strongest and most consistent factors of attractiveness were career growth and a favorable team atmosphere, which correspond to the needs for competence and relatedness. Global identity and CSR yielded mixed results, with CSR reducing attractiveness when it appeared generic, poorly substantiated, or unrelated to the job. Some signals have broad appeal, while others are effective only when they are credible and clearly linked to day-to-day work.

The study's contribution is threefold. First, the results promote a signaling perspective, showing that the impact of a signal depends on who receives it and how it is interpreted. Second, they link the appeal of career growth and teamwork to core motivational mechanisms, explaining why these signals are important to all groups. Third, results challenge the assumption that CSR and global identity are universally positive because their value depends on credibility and relevance to the role and local context. Taken together, these findings contribute to a configuration- and audience-oriented approach to employer branding.

In practice, findings suggest employer branding strategies should combine a consistent global identity with local adaptations that reflect the norms and expectations of each generation. Signals that have a broad impact, such as career growth and teamwork atmosphere, should be visible in job postings, interactions with recruiters, and employee stories. CSR and global positioning should

be communicated cautiously and only when real practices are in place but the overall message is that until there is a general perception of authenticity related to CSR/ESG, even real-based signals may be misinterpreted by receivers. External messaging must align with internal reality to maintain credibility. Organizations should also view employer branding as an ongoing process: testing messages, tracking response by cohort and geography, and adjusting campaigns as conditions and preferences change.

Overall, employer attractiveness is determined by a small set of salient signals, the importance of which depends on both psychological needs and generational perspective. Organizations that prioritize credible development opportunities and a genuine teamwork atmosphere, while tailoring other messages to the audience and context, are more likely to attract and retain talent in an increasingly competitive global market. Recalling the research question that motivated this study the conclusion is that findings made it very clear that generational differences do moderate the effectiveness of employer branding in promoting employer attractiveness, and thus should be considered together with the signals conveyed by the employer organizations.

## 6. References

- Ajzen, I., & Fishbein, M. (1980). *Understanding attitudes and predicting social behavior*. Prentice-Hall.
- Albinger, H. S., & Freeman, S. J. (2000). Corporate social performance and attractiveness as an employer to different job seeking populations. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *28*(3), 243–253. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1006289817941>
- Aguinis, H., & Glavas, A. (2012). What we know and don't know about corporate social responsibility: A review and research agenda. *Journal of Management*, *38*(4), 932–968. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206311436079>
- Aguinis, H., & Glavas, A. (2019). On corporate social responsibility, sensemaking, and the search for meaningfulness through work. *Journal of Management*, *45*(3), 1057–1086. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206317691575>
- Backhaus, K., & Tikoo, S. (2004). Conceptualizing and researching employer branding. *Career Development International*, *9*(5), 501–517. <https://doi.org/10.1108/13620430410550754>
- Baumeister, R. F., & Leary, M. R. (1995). The need to belong: Desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation. *Psychological Bulletin*, *117*(3), 497–529. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.117.3.497>
- Bartlett, C. A., & Ghoshal, S. (1989). *Managing across borders: The transnational solution*. Harvard Business School Press.
- Berthon, P., Ewing, M., & Hah, L. L. (2005). Captivating company: Dimensions of attractiveness in employer branding. *International Journal of Advertising*, *24*(2), 151–172. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2005.11072912>
- Caligiuri, P., Colakoglu, S., Cerdin, J. L., & Kim, M. S. (2010). Examining cross-cultural and individual differences in predicting employer reputation as a driver of employer attraction. *International Journal of Cross Cultural Management*, *10*(2), 137–151. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1470595810370913>
- Cable, D. M., & Judge, T. A. (1994). Pay preferences and job search decisions: A person–organization fit perspective. *Personnel Psychology*, *47*(2), 317–348. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1744-6570.1994.tb01727.x>

- Cable, D. M., & Turban, D. B. (2003). The value of organizational reputation in the recruitment context: A brand-equity perspective. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 33*(11), 2244–2266. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1559-1816.2003.tb01883.x>
- Carroll, A. B. (1999). Corporate social responsibility: Evolution of a definitional construct. *Business & Society, 38*(3), 268–295. <https://doi.org/10.1177/000765039903800303>
- Catano, V. M., & Hines, S. (2016). The influence of corporate social responsibility on employee attraction and retention. *Canadian Journal of Administrative Sciences, 33*(2), 122–135. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cjas.1389>
- Cennamo, L., & Gardner, D. (2008). Generational differences in work values, outcomes and person–organisation values fit. *Journal of Managerial Psychology, 23*(8), 891–906. <https://doi.org/10.1108/02683940810904385>
- Chatzopoulou, E., & de Kiewiet, A. (2021). Millennials’ evaluation of corporate social responsibility: The wants and needs of the largest and most ethical generation. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour, 20*(3), 521–534. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cb.1876>
- Collins, C. J., & Stevens, C. K. (2002). The relationship between early recruitment-related activities and the application decisions of new labor-market entrants: A brand equity approach to recruitment. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 87*(6), 1121–1133. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.87.6.1121>
- Combs, J., Liu, Y., Hall, A., & Ketchen, D. (2006). How much do high-performance work practices matter? A meta-analysis of their effects on organizational performance. *Personnel Psychology, 59*(3), 501–528. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1744-6570.2006.00045.x>
- Crane, A., Matten, D., & Spence, L. J. (Eds.). (2019). *Corporate social responsibility: Readings and cases in a global context* (3rd ed.). Routledge.
- Deci, E. L., Olafsen, A. H., & Ryan, R. M. (2017). Self-Determination Theory in work organizations: The state of a science. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior, 4*, 19–43. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-032516-113108>
- Deloitte. (2020). *Global Millennial Survey 2020*. Deloitte.
- De Hauw, S., & De Vos, A. (2010). Millennials’ career perspective and psychological contract expectations: Does the recession lead to lowered expectations? *Journal of Business and Psychology, 25*(2), 293–302. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10869-010-9162-6>

- De Jong, J. P. J., De Ruyter, K., & Lemmink, J. (2005). Service climate in self-managing teams: Mapping the linkage of team member perceptions and service performance outcomes in a business-to-business setting. *Journal of Management Studies*, 42(8), 1593–1620. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6486.2005.00556.x>
- De Vos, A., & Meganck, A. (2009). What HR managers do versus what employees value: Exploring both parties' views on retention management from a psychological contract perspective. *Personnel Review*, 38(1), 45–60. <https://doi.org/10.1108/00483480910920705>
- Doz, Y. L., Santos, J., & Williamson, P. J. (2001). *From global to metanational: How companies win in the knowledge economy*. Harvard Business School Press.
- Eccles, R. G., & Klimenko, S. (2019). The investor revolution. *Harvard Business Review*, 97(3), 106–116.
- Edmondson, A. (1999). Psychological safety and learning behavior in work teams. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 44(2), 350–383. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2666999>
- Endenich, C., Hahn, R., Reimsbach, D., & Wickert, C. (2023). Wait-and-see-ism as partial adoption of management practices: The rise and stall of integrated reporting. *Strategic Organization*, 21(3), 566–595. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14761270231152889>
- Gagné, M., & Deci, E. L. (2005). Self-determination theory and work motivation. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 26(4), 331–362. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.322>
- Gerhart, B., & Fang, M. (2014). Pay for (individual) performance: Issues, claims, evidence and the role of sorting effects. *Human Resource Management Review*, 24(1), 41–52. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hrmr.2013.08.010>
- Gerhart, B., & Rynes, S. L. (2003). *Compensation: Theory, evidence, and strategic implications*. SAGE.
- Glavas, A. (2016). Corporate social responsibility and organizational psychology: An integrative review. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 7, 144. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2016.00144>
- Green, P. E., & Srinivasan, V. (1990). Conjoint analysis in marketing: New developments with implications for research and practice. *Journal of Marketing*, 54(4), 3–19. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002224299005400402>

- Greening, D. W., & Turban, D. B. (2000). Corporate social performance as a competitive advantage in attracting a quality workforce. *Business & Society*, 39(3), 254–280. <https://doi.org/10.1177/000765030003900302>
- Gursoy, D., Maier, T. A., & Chi, C. G. (2008). Generational differences: An examination of work values and generational gaps in the hospitality workforce. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 27(3), 448–458. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2007.11.002>
- Hauff, S., & Witte, K. (2023). Job seekers' preferences for employer signals: Evidence from a discrete choice experiment. *European Management Journal*, 41(3), 470–483. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emj.2022.09.006>
- Herzberg, F., Mausner, B., & Snyderman, B. B. (1959). *The motivation to work* (2nd ed.). Wiley.
- Inkson, K., & Myers, B. A. (2003). “The Big OE”: Self-directed travel and career development. *Career Development International*, 8(4), 170–181. <https://doi.org/10.1108/13620430310482553>
- Jiang, K., Lepak, D. P., Hu, J., & Baer, J. C. (2012). How does human resource management influence organizational outcomes? A meta-analytic investigation of mediating mechanisms. *Academy of Management Journal*, 55(6), 1264–1294. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2011.0088>
- Jones, D. A., Willness, C. R., & Madey, S. (2014). Why are job seekers attracted by corporate social performance? Experimental and field tests of three signal-based mechanisms. *Academy of Management Journal*, 57(2), 383–404. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2011.0848>
- Jonsen, K., Point, S., & Kelan, E. K. (2021). Diversity and inclusion branding: A new employer branding perspective. *European Journal of International Management*, 15(1), 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1504/EJIM.2021.111292>
- Jurkiewicz, C. L., & Brown, R. G. (1998). GenXers vs. Boomers vs. Matures: Generational comparisons of public employee motivation. *Review of Public Personnel Administration*, 18(4), 18–37. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0734371X9801800403>
- Kahn, W. A. (1990). Psychological conditions of personal engagement and disengagement at work. *Academy of Management Journal*, 33(4), 692–724. <https://doi.org/10.5465/256287>
- Kooij, D. T. A. M., de Lange, A. H., Jansen, P. G. W., & Dijkers, J. S. E. (2011). Older workers' motivation to continue to work: Five meanings of age. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 26(3), 267–281. <https://doi.org/10.1108/02683941111112602>

- Leeper, T. J., Hobolt, S. B., & Tilley, J. (2020). Measuring subgroup preferences in conjoint experiments. *Political Analysis*, 28(2), 207–221. <https://doi.org/10.1017/pan.2019.31>
- Lepak, D. P., & Snell, S. A. (2002). Examining the human resource architecture: The relationships among human capital, employment, and human resource configurations. *Journal of Management*, 28(4), 517–543. <https://doi.org/10.1177/014920630202800403>
- Lepak, D. P., Liao, H., Chung, Y., & Harden, E. E. (2006). A conceptual review of human resource management systems in strategic human resource management research. *Research in Personnel and Human Resources Management*, 25, 217–271. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0742-7301\(06\)25006-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0742-7301(06)25006-0)
- Lievens, F., & Slaughter, J. E. (2016). Employer image and employer branding: What we know and what we need to know. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior*, 3, 407–440. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-041015-062501>
- Lyons, S. T., & Kuron, L. K. J. (2014). Generational differences in the workplace: A review of the evidence and directions for future research. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 35(S1), S139–S157. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.1913>
- Luscombe, J., Lewis, I., & Biggs, H. (2013). Essential elements for recruitment and retention: Generation Y. *Education + Training*, 55(3), 272–290. <https://doi.org/10.1108/00400911311309323>
- Mathieu, J. E., Maynard, M. T., Rapp, T., & Gilson, L. (2008). Team effectiveness 1997–2007: A review of recent advancements and a glimpse into the future. *Journal of Management*, 34(3), 410–476. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206308316061>
- Myers, K. K., & Sadaghiani, K. (2010). Millennials in the workplace: A communication perspective on Millennials' organizational relationships and performance. *Journal of Business and Psychology*, 25(2), 225–238. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10869-010-9172-7>
- Noe, R. A., Hollenbeck, J. R., Gerhart, B., & Wright, P. M. (2019). *Fundamentals of human resource management* (8th ed.). McGraw-Hill.
- Ng, E. S., Schweitzer, L., & Lyons, S. T. (2010). New generation, great expectations: A field study of the Millennial generation. *Journal of Business and Psychology*, 25(2), 281–292. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10869-010-9159-4>

- Østergaard, S., & Ramsdal, H. (2022). What matters in job ads? The relative importance of salary, job security and development opportunities. *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, 38(2), 101184. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scaman.2022.101184>
- Parry, E., & Urwin, P. (2011). Generational differences in work values: A review of theory and evidence. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 13(1), 79–96. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2370.2010.00285.x>
- Petry, T., Treisch, C., & Peters, M. (2022). Designing job ads to stimulate the decision to apply: A discrete choice experiment with business students. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 33(15), 3019–3055. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2021.1891112>
- Pfeffer, J. (1998). *The human equation: Building profits by putting people first*. Harvard Business School Press.
- Pohl, M., & Tolhurst, N. (2010). *Responsible business: How to manage a CSR strategy successfully*. Wiley.
- Prensky, M. (2001). Digital natives, digital immigrants. *On the Horizon*, 9(5), 1–6. <https://doi.org/10.1108/10748120110424816>
- Richardson, J., & Mallon, M. (2005). Career interrupted? The case of the self-initiated expatriate. *Career Development International*, 10(5), 361–375. <https://doi.org/10.1108/13620430510615302>
- Robertson, R. (1995). Glocalization: Time–space and homogeneity–heterogeneity. In M. Featherstone, S. Lash, & R. Robertson (Eds.), *Global modernities* (pp. 25–44). SAGE.
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist*, 55(1), 68–78. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.55.1.68>
- Salas, E., Cooke, N. J., & Rosen, M. A. (2008). On teams, teamwork, and team performance: Discoveries and developments. *Human Factors*, 50(3), 540–547. <https://doi.org/10.1518/001872008X288457>
- Salas, E., Sims, D. E., & Burke, C. S. (2005). Is there a “big five” in teamwork? *Small Group Research*, 36(5), 555–599. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1046496405277134>
- Spence, M. (1973). Job market signaling. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 87(3), 355–374. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1882010>

- Turban, D. B., & Greening, D. W. (1997). Corporate social performance and organizational attractiveness to prospective employees. *Academy of Management Journal*, 40(3), 658–672. <https://doi.org/10.5465/257057>
- Twenge, J. M. (2010). A review of the empirical evidence on generational differences in work attitudes. *Journal of Business and Psychology*, 25(2), 201–210. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10869-010-9165-6>
- Twenge, J. M., Campbell, S. M., & Freeman, E. C. (2012). Generational differences in young adults' life goals, concern for others, and civic orientation, 1966–2009. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 102(5), 1045–1062. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0027408>
- Waples, C. J., & Brachle, B. J. (2020). Recruiting Millennials and Gen Z via corporate social responsibility: Aligning employer brand and candidate values. *Business Horizons*, 63(6), 843–856. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2020.07.004>
- Williams, K. (2021). The new rules of authenticity: Gen Z and corporate purpose. *Journal of Brand Strategy*, 10(3), 215–223.

## Annex A. Vignette cards used in the conjoint design

### Job Advertisement (Stimulus Material)

We are a talent search company specialized in IT talent and our client is looking for someone with your exact professional experience. Our client has operations across the world, is headquartered in Zurich and is looking to fill in a position in new facilities in your home town.

(global) Our client has a global reach and operates in a highly centralized fashion with standard/products and management practices. (local) Our client has a global reach and operates in a highly decentralized fashion that tailors products and practices according to your own market.

You have figured out who this company is and, talking to a friend, you learned that the company has an in-line with the market/compensation package above the market, reasonable/outstanding career development opportunities, but success depends on individual effort, with less focus on teamwork and more on personal / and a supportive team with a positive. The company has been lagging behind in social responsibility investment / The company is also known for its great investment in social responsibility.

#### Card 1

Global	Compensation	Career	Work Environment	CSR
2	2	1	1	2

Note. Our client has a global reach and operates in a highly decentralized fashion... compensation package above the market, reasonable career development opportunities, but success depends on individual effort, with less focus on teamwork and more on personal responsibility. The company is also known for its great investment in social responsibility.

Card 2

Global	Compensation	Career	Work Environment	CSR
1	2	2	1	2

Note. Our client has a global reach and operates in a highly centralized fashion... compensation package above the market, outstanding career development opportunities, but success depends on individual effort. The company is also known for its great investment in social responsibility.

Card 3

Global	Compensation	Career	Work Environment	CSR
1	1	1	1	1

Note. Our client has a global reach and operates in a highly centralized fashion... in line with the market compensation package, reasonable career development opportunities, but success depends on individual effort. The company has been lagging behind in social responsibility investment.

Card 4

Global	Compensation	Career	Work Environment	CSR
1	1	2	2	2

Note. Our client has a global reach and operates in a highly centralized fashion... in line with the market compensation package, outstanding career development opportunities, and a supportive team with a positive work environment. The company is also known for its great investment in social responsibility.

Card 5

Global	Compensation	Career	Work Environment	CSR
1	2	1	2	1

Note. Our client has a global reach and operates in a highly centralized fashion... compensation package above the market, reasonable career development opportunities, and a supportive team with a positive work environment. The company has been lagging behind in social responsibility investment.

Card 6

Global	Compensation	Career	Work Environment	CSR
2	1	2	1	1

Note. Our client has a global reach and operates in a highly decentralized fashion... in line with the market compensation package, outstanding career development opportunities, but success depends on individual effort. The company has been lagging behind in social responsibility investment.

Card 7

Global	Compensation	Career	Work Environment	CSR
2	1	2	2	1

Note. Our client has a global reach and operates in a highly decentralized fashion... compensation package above the market, outstanding career development opportunities, and a supportive team with a positive work environment. The company has been lagging behind in social responsibility investment.

Card 8

Global	Compensation	Career	Work Environment	CSR
2	1	1	2	2

Note. Our client has a global reach and operates in a highly decentralized fashion... in line with the market compensation package, reasonable career development opportunities, and a supportive team with a positive work environment. The company is also known for its great investment in social responsibility.