

Preference Analysis of Employer Attractiveness: What Do Final Year Students Consider Important?

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Abstract. *Employer attractiveness is one of the factors considered when choosing a place to work. However, previous studies did not explain in detail which attributes of employer attractiveness were considered most important when applying to a company. This study aimed to determine the preferences of final-year students as prospective employees regarding the attributes of employer attractiveness. Five attributes were used in this study: interest, social, economic, development, and application. This study employed a descriptive quantitative method involving 150 respondents, who were final-year students from the Bachelor of Management and Bachelor of Accounting programs, selected using purposive sampling. Data were collected using a questionnaire and analyzed using SPSS 26 software. Of the 150 respondents, only 148 respondents' data could be processed. The results of this study indicated that the attribute most considered important and aligned with respondents' preferences was the economic attribute, with an importance value of 38.684. The level of the economic attribute most preferred by respondents was a company that provided salaries commensurate with employee performance, with a utility estimate value of 0.322. The combination or stimuli that were of interest and considered important by respondents included companies that supported employee creativity, had a healthy and enjoyable work environment, provided salaries commensurate with employee performance, offered training and development programs, and maintained high-quality customer service and hospitality.*

Keywords: *Employer Attractiveness, Conjoint Analysis, Final-Year Student Preferences*

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INTRODUCTION

Higher education institutions are one of the main sources of quality human resources in Indonesia (Abdillah, 2024). In West Sumatra, there are many higher education institutions, both state-sponsored and independently funded, that contribute to producing the best graduates who have the potential to become quality human resources. One of these institutions is Universitas Negeri Padang. With its national and international reputation, Universitas Negeri Padang has successfully produced thousands of graduates across various fields of study, one of which is the Faculty of Economics and Business. Every year, it graduates hundreds of students from various study programs.

These graduates have great potential to support local companies in West Sumatra in meeting their needs for skilled and professional workers. However, preliminary survey results conducted on 62 final-year students from the Bachelor of Management and Bachelor of Accounting programs at Faculty of Economics and Business, Universitas Negeri Padang revealed that most of them prefer to work for companies outside West Sumatra rather than for local companies in West Sumatra.

Based on the initial survey, 48 out of 62 respondents stated that the reason they chose to work in companies outside West Sumatra was due to better job opportunities and higher salaries. This suggests that, from the respondents' perspective as prospective employees, companies in West Sumatra are less aware of aspects related to job opportunities, career development, and financial benefits, leading most of them to prefer working outside West Sumatra. This phenomenon is important to note because university graduates are a potential resource for supporting the sustainability of local companies.

If this trend continues, local companies in West Sumatra risk facing a gap between labor demand and labor supply. This not only affects the process of recruiting potential employees but also impacts the overall performance, innovation, and competitiveness of companies. As a result, this situation could have a negative impact on the long-term economic growth and development of the region. Therefore, it is important for local companies to understand the factors that influence the interest of potential employees, especially final-year students, in applying to a company.

Employer attractiveness is one of the important factors considered by prospective employees. This concept was proposed by Berthon et al., (2005). This concept is a continuation of employer branding. Employer branding is the process of creating and communicating a company's brand (Soeling et al., 2022). Meanwhile, employer attractiveness is the individual perception that arises from the employer branding that the company has established. This employer branding will eventually attract potential employees to apply for jobs at the company (Santiago, 2019).

Employer attractiveness describes the extent to which a company is able to attract prospective employees based on five values, also known as employer attractiveness attributes, namely interest value (related to an attractive work environment), social value (related to the work environment atmosphere), economic value (related to finances), development value (related to career development), and application value (related to opportunities to apply skills).

This concept aligns with the person-organization fit theory, which states that potential employees are more likely to be attracted to companies that align with the values they hold (Kristof, 1996). This alignment of values becomes a unique attraction for potential employees to apply to the company. The more attractive the company is and the closer it is to the preferences of prospective employees, the greater the likelihood that they will apply for a job at that company (Syarifah, 2022).

Previous researchers have proven that employer attractiveness influences intention to apply (Soeling et al., 2022; Soleha & Satriya, 2024; Ardiansyah & Sary, 2024). However, research specifically examining the attributes of employer attractiveness that are most important to prospective employees, especially final-year students, is still limited.

Understanding these preferences is crucial for local companies to adjust their recruitment strategies and human resource management to attract potential job seekers. To identify these preferences, this study employs conjoint analysis, a specialized technique for understanding respondents' preferences toward products, services, or ideas (Agarwal et al., 2015; Al-Omari et al., 2022). Additionally, the use of the conjoint analysis method represents an innovation in human resource research, particularly in the concept of employer attractiveness, which is still rarely used.

Therefore, this study aims to fill the existing gap by focusing on analyzing the preferences of final-year economics and business students at the Universitas Negeri Padang regarding employer attractiveness attributes using the conjoint analysis method. Thus, through this study, the attributes and combinations of attribute levels that are most considered important by final-year students when applying for jobs can be identified. The results of this study are expected to serve as a guideline for local companies in West Sumatra in evaluating and enhancing their

attractiveness as workplaces, thereby reducing the desire of final-year students to work outside West Sumatra.

Based on the background description presented above, the problems in this study can be formulated as follows: (1) What are the employer attractiveness attributes considered important by final year students of the Faculty of Economics and Business, Universitas Negeri Padang in choosing a place of work? (2) What combination of levels for each employer attractiveness attribute is most preferred by final-year students of the Faculty of Economics and Business, Universitas Negeri Padang, when choosing a place of work?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Person Organization Fit Theory

The theory used in this study is the person-organization fit theory. This theory explains that a person will be more attracted to an organization whose values, culture, and goals match or fit with that person's personal values or preferences (Kristof, 1996). In the context of this study, employer attractiveness is a representation of the values and characteristics of a company as seen by prospective employees. Therefore, by identifying which employer attractiveness attributes are considered most important by final-year students as prospective employees, we can understand how this fit is formed between job seekers and organizations (Lievens, F., & Highhouse, 2003; Leekha & Sharma, 2014; Lin et al., 2018).

Employer Attractiveness

Employer attractiveness refers to an individual's perception of a company (Berthon et al., 2005). This perception relates to the company's image. Initially, a company will build its image in the eyes of external parties, known as employer branding. Once this image has been established, people outside the company will form their own perceptions of the company's image, including potential employees.

Employer attractiveness has five dimensions or values, namely interest value (emotional appeal, e.g., challenging projects), social value (pleasant working atmosphere, e.g., supportive), economic value (financial benefits), development value (opportunities for self-development and career advancement), and application value (applying knowledge and skills).

Conjoint Analysis

Conjoint analysis is a technique used to determine preferences. As stated by Hair et al., (2019) using conjoint analysis, it is possible to determine how the attributes of a product influence individual preferences and the resulting impact on purchasing decisions. Although conjoint analysis is generally used in the field of marketing, with the passage of time, it has also been applied in the field of human resources (Guevarra et al., 2023).

Preferences

Preferences can be understood as a person's personal tendency to choose certain goods or services, depending on the extent to which they like or dislike them (Hadinata & Yudiantoro, 2023).

METHODS

This study employs a descriptive quantitative method, which describes and explains a phenomenon based on collected data without comparing or seeking causal relationships between variables (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016; Nurhabiba & Misdalina, 2023). Therefore, no hypotheses were formulated in this study. This study also employed a survey research design, which aimed to collect information by formulating questions to be administered to respondents. The study was conducted in June 2025 at the Faculty of Economics and Business, Universitas Negeri Padang. The population of this study consisted of final-year students in the Bachelor of Management and Bachelor of Accounting programs. Sampling was conducted using purposive sampling with the

following criteria: (1) final-year students of the Bachelor of Management and Bachelor of Accounting programs at the Faculty of Economics and Business, Universitas Negeri Padang, who have completed all courses and are currently working on their thesis or final project; (2) have awareness of employer attractiveness; (3) had never worked full-time or part-time. The sample size was set at 150 respondents. Based on statement by Orme (2010) that the number of respondents in conjoint analysis research ranges from 150 to 1.200 respondents, depending on the complexity of the research design. Additionally, this study also considered the total number of stimuli that needed to be analyzed and the respondents' tolerance limits for fatigue in evaluating each stimulus. The attributes and levels used in this study were sourced from the research by Berthon et al., (2005). In the research by Berthon et al., (2005) there were five attributes, each with five levels, resulting in a total of 25 levels. However, in this study, the use of 25 levels in conjoint analysis was deemed ineffective as it would result in too many stimuli, potentially causing respondent fatigue when evaluating each stimulus. Therefore, this study referred to another study that also used the attributes and levels from Berthon et al., (2005), but in a more concise version. Thus, this study adopted the version by Hapsara & Nugrahaningsih (2024), which was more suitable for conjoint analysis. In addition, this study had been applied to a sample of Generation Z students in Indonesia, and the instruments used had undergone validity and reliability testing. The test results show that the instruments were valid and reliable, making them suitable for use in research contexts with samples in Indonesia.

Table 1. Attributes and Levels

Atribut	Level
Interest Value	Companies that support employee creativity.
	Companies that always creates new product innovations regularly.
Social Value	Companies that have a healthy and enjoyable work environment
	Companies where there is no gap between employees and superiors.
Economic Value	Companies that provide salaries commensurate with employee performance.
	Companies that always provides salaries and compensation regularly and on time.
	Companies that have programs for employee career development.
Development Value	Companies that have regular training and development program.
	Companies that have public speaking skills development program.
Application Value	Companies that excel in quality of service to customers and hospitality.
	Companies that provide opportunities for employees to share knowledge with customers.

Source: Hapsara & Nugrahaningsih, (2024)

This study uses two types of data, namely primary data obtained through questionnaires and secondary data obtained through articles, books, reports, and websites. The research instrument used is a stimulus-based questionnaire designed using the traditional full profile conjoint analysis method. The questionnaire contains stimuli that respondents must evaluate using a rating scale from 1 to 10, where 1 indicates the lowest or least preferred value and 10 indicates the highest value. The higher the value given, the more favorable the stimulus is perceived by the respondents, and vice versa. The use of a 1-10 scale allows respondents to give more varied and detailed ratings to each stimulus. For example, a stimulus that is fairly liked can be given a value of 7, while one that is highly preferred can be given a value of 10. This helps to distinguish preference levels more accurately than a scale of 1-5 or 1-7. In addition, Saftari & Fajriah (2019) mentions that one example of a scale that can be used in rating techniques is a scale of 1-10. Previous studies have also used a scale of 1-10.

The stimuli used in this study were created using SPSS 26 with a fractional factorial design method to simplify the number of stimuli that respondents must evaluate. If a fractional factorial

design were not used, the resulting stimuli or combinations would total 48 (the number of levels for each attribute calculated by $2 \times 2 \times 3 \times 2 \times 2 = 48$). Because 48 stimuli were too many for respondents to rate, the number was reduced using a fractional factorial design. As a result, the total number of stimuli that respondents had to rate was 8. To minimize potential bias, data collection was conducted by distributing questionnaires directly to respondents, rather than using online questionnaires. The questionnaire started with an introduction from the researcher explaining the purpose of the study, assuring respondents that all answers and personal data would be kept confidential, and emphasizing that the data would only be used for research purposes (Azfaruddin, 2024). Then, because this study used purposive sampling, there were screening questions that had to be answered before filling out the main questionnaire.

These questions ensured that respondents met the predetermined criteria. This was done in an effort to minimize bias due to respondents who did not meet the research sample criteria. Next, respondents were asked to complete their personal data (demographic information) before proceeding to fill out the main questionnaire. The researcher explained the procedure for filling out the questionnaire in advance to ensure that respondents understood the instructions well. The questionnaire was completed independently so that respondents do not feel pressured or influenced by the researcher. The potential for social desirability bias was minimized by emphasizing that there are no right or wrong answers, but rather that all answers purely reflect the preferences of the respondents. In this study, the collected data were processed and analyzed using the conjoint analysis method. The type of conjoint analysis method used is traditional full profile conjoint analysis. This type was chosen based on the number of attributes, which in this study were five. Orme (2010) states that if there are fewer than six attributes being tested, the traditional full profile conjoint analysis method should be used.

Meanwhile, the design of stimuli was carried out using the full profile method, which presents stimuli or combinations of attribute levels. In conjoint analysis, there are two outputs, namely part-worth coefficients and relative importance values. Part-worth coefficients indicate respondents' preference levels for each attribute. The method for obtaining part-worth coefficients was similar to that used to determine regression coefficients for dummy variables (Supranto, 2004). Meanwhile, relative importance values indicate respondents' preferences for the attributes presented. Relative importance values were obtained from the dummy variable values at a certain attribute level that was entered into the conjoint analysis model, while the dummy variable values for other attributes remain constant or were set to zero (Rozy, 2017). According to Supranto (2004), the level of importance of each attribute was calculated as the difference between the maximum utility value and the minimum utility value, which was also referred to as the attribute importance value.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Respondents Description

The questionnaire was distributed to 150 respondents, and all were returned. However, in the conjoint analysis process, two respondents gave the same value to each stimulus, so their data could not be analyzed and were automatically excluded from the data processing. Thus, the number of respondents whose data were used in this study was 148 people. The following table shows the characteristics of the respondents

Table 2. Characteristics of Respondents

Category	Sub-Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	32	21%
	Female	118	79%
Age	21 years	22	15%
	22 years	101	67%
	23 years	21	14%

Study Program	24 years	5	3%
	25 years	1	1%
	Bachelor of Management study program	98	65%
	Bachelor of Accounting study program	52	35%

Source: Processed Primary Data (2025)

Of the 150 respondents, based on gender, the majority were female, with 118 respondents (79%). Based on age, the majority of respondents in this study were 22 years old, with 101 respondents (67%). Based on study program, the majority of respondents were from the Bachelor of Management study program, with 98 respondents (65%).

Relative Important Values

The relative importance values indicate respondents' preferences for the attributes considered most important and taken into consideration. In the SPSS output, this relative importance value can be seen in the importance value table.

Table 3. Importance Values

Importance Values	
Interest	13.562
Social	18.140
Economic	38.684
Development	14.457
Application	15.157

Source: Processed Results of SPSS 26 (2025)

The attribute with the highest value was considered the most important. From the table above, it can be seen that the attribute with the highest value is the economic attribute with a value of 38.684. This meant that the economic attribute was regarded as the most important by respondents as prospective employees. Then, the attribute in second place was the social attribute with a value of 18.140. The attribute ranked third was the application attribute with a value of 15.157. The fourth attribute was the development attribute with a value of 14.457. And the attribute ranked last was the interest attribute with a value of 13.562. This meant that the interest attribute was not considered important by the respondents.

Part-Worth Coefficients

The part worth coefficients indicate respondents' preferences for levels of attributes that are considered important. In the SPSS output, the part worth coefficients can be seen in the utilities table. What determines whether a level is considered important or not is by looking at its utility estimate. The utility estimate is also referred to as the utility value. The highest value indicates that the level is considered important.

Table 4. Part-Worth Coefficient

Utilities				
Level			Utility Estimate	Std. Error
Interest	1	Supporting employee creativity	-.035	.014
	2	Always create product innovations	.035	.014
Social	1	Healthy work environment	.154	.014
	2	No gap between employees and superiors	-.154	.014
Economic	1	Provide salaries commensurate with employee performance	.322	.019
	2	Salaries and compensation are paid regularly.	-.009	.022
	3	Have a career development program	-.313	.022

Development	1	Have a training development program	.012	.014
	2	Have a public speaking program	-.012	0.14
Application	1	Excelling in customer service and hospitality	.015	.014
	2	Providing opportunities to share knowledge	-.015	.014
(Constant)			7.100	.015

Source: Processed results of SPSS 26 (2025)

From the interest attribute, the level considered most important and preferred by respondents was companies that always created product innovations, with a value of 0.035. From the social attribute, the level that respondents considered most important and prefer was companies that had a healthy and enjoyable work environment, with a value of 0.154. From the economic attribute, the level that respondents consider most important and preferred was companies that provided salaries commensurate with employee performance, with a value of 0.322. From the development attribute, the level that respondents consider most important and preferred was a company that had regular training and development programs, with a value of 0.012. From the application attribute, the level that respondents considered most important and preferred was a company that excelled in customer service and hospitality, with a value of 0.015.

Combination of Attribute Levels

According to Timmermans (1984), to determine which stimuli or combinations are most preferred by respondents, the method is to calculate the total utility estimates by summing the values of each level that constitutes the stimuli. The stimuli or combination with the highest total utility estimate value was the stimuli or combination most preferred and considered important by respondents. The following table shows the total utility estimate values for each stimuli.

Table 5. Total Utility Estimate for Stimuli

Stimuli	Interest	Social	Economic	Development	Application	Total
1	-0.035	0.154	0.322	0.012	0.015	0.468
2	0.035	-0.154	0.322	-0.012	-0.015	0.176
3	0.035	-0.154	0.322	0.012	0.015	0.23
4	-0.035	-0.154	-0.313	-0.012	0.015	-0.499
5	-0.035	-0.154	-0.009	0.012	-0.015	-0.201
6	0.035	0.154	-0.009	-0.012	0.015	0.183
7	-0.035	0.154	0.322	-0.012	-0.015	0.414
8	0.035	0.154	-0.313	0.012	-0.015	-0.127

Source: Processed results of SPSS 26 (2025)

Each stimulus consists of five attribute levels that describe the characteristics of the company. Based on the table above, the result showed that the stimulus that was considered most important and preferred by respondents is stimuli 1 with a total utility estimate value of 0.468. Stimulus 1 included the following: the company supports employee creativity (interest), the company has a healthy and enjoyable work environment (social), the company provides salaries commensurate with employee performance (economic), the company has regular training and development programs (development), and the company excels in customer service and quality (application). Meanwhile, the stimulus that respondents the least important and least preferred was stimulus 4, with a total utility estimate value of -0.499. Stimulus 4 consists of companies that consistently create new product innovations on a regular basis (interest), companies with a healthy and enjoyable work environment (social), companies with programs for employee career development (economic), companies with regular public speaking skill development programs (development), and companies that excel in customer service quality and hospitality (application).

Validity Test and Accuracy Predictions

A validity test was conducted on the model used in this study. According to Ihwah et al., (2020), a validity test was conducted in conjoint analysis to examine the relationship between the actual values given by respondents and the values estimated by the model.

Table 6. Validity Test Result

Correlations ^a		
	Value	Sig.
Pearson's R	.999	.000
Kendall's tau	.929	.001

Source: Processed results of SPSS 26 (2025)

Based on the table above, it can be seen that the significance values of Pearson's R and Kendall's tau were less than 0.05, which meant that the results of the conjoint analysis in this study had significant predictive accuracy between the actual assessments by respondents and the model estimation results.

Through conjoint analysis, it can be seen that respondents' preferences as prospective employees regarding employer attractiveness attributes are determined by the relative importance values and part-worth coefficients results. The results of this study indicate that respondents who were final-year students considered economic attributes to be very important when choosing and applying for a job at a company. This shows that financial aspects, specifically regarding the provision of salaries commensurate with employee performance, are considered important and crucial factors in viewing and assessing employer attractiveness. Furthermore, this also shows that financial attributes or aspects are not only viewed as important factors in viewing and assessing employer attractiveness, but are also values they strongly uphold. In their daily lives and in their thoughts and plans for future employment, final-year students strongly emphasize financial well-being as a primary need. Thus, economic aspects become a dominant factor that shapes how they view and assess a company's employer attractiveness.

This is closely related to and in line with the theory of person-organization fit by Kristof (1996), whereby the selection of a company as a place of employment is based on value alignment. Final year students preferred companies that offer attractive economic aspects, particularly in terms of salary, which is a value that they strongly adhere to as prospective employees. These results are also inseparable from the socio-economic reality in West Sumatra. Many local companies offer relatively low salaries, limited career choices, and narrow career opportunities. Respondents are aware of this, as they stated in the preliminary survey conducted before the research questionnaire was distributed. Most of them stated that salaries at companies outside West Sumatra were perceived to be higher than those at companies in West Sumatra itself. Thus, economic value is not only a personal preference but also a rational response to the local labor market in West Sumatra. Meanwhile, the social attribute ranked second, the application attribute third, and the development attribute fourth.

This indicates that aspects such as workplace environment, opportunities to apply employees' skills, and career development are also considered important by final-year students, although not as strongly or as importantly as the economic attribute. The attribute ranked last is the interest attribute with the lowest value of 13.562. This indicates that emotional interest was not considered important for final-year students. These research results differ from research by Roy et al., (2022) on Generation Z students in India, which showed that Gen Z students tended to prefer and considered development attributes such as growth and career opportunities to be more important. The economic attribute is also a consideration but not the main one. This difference may be due to differences in lifestyle, way of thinking, and priorities at work. However, this difference can be a strength of the study because it can contribute to enriching the discussion both locally and globally. Regarding the stimuli combinations, the results showed that of the eight

stimuli evaluated, only Stimulus 1 was considered the most attractive and ideal by respondents. Stimulus 1 described a company that supported employee creativity, has a healthy and enjoyable work environment, provides salaries commensurate with employee performance, offers training development programs, and maintains high-quality customer service and hospitality.

Although Stimulus 1 was considered the ideal stimulus for companies, especially in West Sumatra, in reality, it was very difficult for companies to provide all aspects of Stimulus 1 at the same time, given their limited resources. Therefore, a practical approach that can be taken is for companies to focus first on salary competitiveness, which is an important aspect for final-year students. Then, gradually improve the work environment, creativity development, training programs, and company services. This gradual approach made the research recommendations more realistic and applicable to the business world. The researchers acknowledged that this study also had limitations. The sample was dominated by female respondents (79%), the majority of respondents came from management study programs (65%), and the study was only conducted in one faculty at Padang State University. This means that the results of this study could not be generalized to all final-year students from other universities and study programs in West Sumatra. It is hoped that future studies will expand the scope of their research in terms of both sample size and research location in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of final-year students' preferences regarding employer attractiveness.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research and analysis results, the following conclusions can be drawn: (1) The attribute most considered important by respondents as prospective employees in selecting and applying for jobs at a company was economic attributes, with a strong tendency toward companies that provided salaries commensurate with employee performance. (2) The combination of levels and attributes or stimuli most favored by respondents was stimulus 1, which included companies that supported employee creativity, companies that had a healthy and enjoyable work environment, companies that provided salaries commensurate with performance, offered regular training and development programs, and companies that excelled in customer service and hospitality.

SUGGESTION

For further research, it is recommended to use other attributes related to employer attractiveness such as company reputation, leadership. In addition, further research can expand the scope of respondents to improve the generalizability of the findings. For companies, the result of this study can serve as a guideline in evaluating and enhancing their employer attractiveness to avoid losing potential job candidates, particularly final-year students.

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