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Emotional Salary: What Impact does it Have when Evaluating Job Offers? Contribution from the Stereotype Content Model

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A B S T R A C T

This study investigated the impact of emotional salary cues in job advertisements on perceptions of organizational warmth and competence, as well as intentions to respond to the advertisement. Two groups of participants (n =132) were randomly assigned to evaluate either a traditional job advertisement or one with emotional salary components. Participants rated the advertisements on warmth and competence dimensions and indicated their intention to respond. A univariate analysis of variance was conducted to examine the interaction between warmth and competence across conditions. A significant interaction between warmth and competence in influencing the intention to respond to job advertisements was found (F(2, 128) = 10.434, p < .001, η_p^2 = .143). Advertisements featuring emotional salary components were associated with a narrower range of responses between competence and warmth measures. The inclusion of emotional salary elements led to a slight increase in the intention to respond to the advertisement, though the effect was modest. The findings support the applicability of the Stereotype Content Model to organizational contexts in job advertisements. Emotional salary cues may contribute to a more balanced perception of organizations, addressing both warmth and competence dimensions simultaneously. While these cues can positively influence job seekers' perceptions, they may not be sufficient alone to dramatically alter application behaviors. Future research should explore specific emotional salary components and their long-term effects on job satisfaction and retention.

Salario emocional: ¿qué impacto tiene al evaluar ofertas de trabajo? Contribución del modelo de contenido estereotípico

R E S U M E N

Este estudio investigó el impacto de las señales emocionales relacionadas con el salario en las ofertas de empleo sobre la percepción de calidez y competencia organizacional, así como la intención de responder al anuncio. Dos grupos de participantes (n = 132) fueron asignados aleatoriamente a evaluar un anuncio de empleo tradicional o uno con componentes emocionales relacionados con el salario. Los participantes calificaron las ofertas según las dimensiones de calidez y competencia e indicaron su intención de responder. Se realizó un análisis de varianza univariante para examinar la interacción entre calidez y competencia en ambas condiciones. Se encontró una interacción significativa entre calidez y competencia en la influencia sobre la intención de responder a las ofertas de empleo (F(2, 128) = 10.434, p < .001, η_p^2 = .143). Las ofertas de empleo con componentes emocionales relacionados con el salario se asociaron con un rango de respuestas más estrecho entre las medidas de competencia y calidez. La inclusión de elementos emocionales relacionados con el salario produjo un ligero aumento en la intención de responder al anuncio, aunque el efecto fue modesto. Los hallazgos respaldan la aplicabilidad del Modelo de Contenido de Estereotipos a los contextos organizacionales en las ofertas de empleo. Los indicadores emocionales relacionados con el salario pueden contribuir a una percepción más equilibrada de las organizaciones, abordando simultáneamente la calidez y la competencia. Si bien estos indicadores pueden influir positivamente en la percepción de quienes buscan empleo, es posible que no sean suficientes por sí solos para modificar drásticamente sus comportamientos de solicitud. Las investigaciones futuras deberían explorar los componentes emocionales específicos del salario y sus efectos a largo plazo en la satisfacción laboral y la retención del personal.

Palabras clave:
Salario emocional
Modelo de contenido estereotípico
Selección de empleo

Organizations in contemporary labour markets face increasing challenges in attracting and retaining qualified professionals amid economic volatility and rapid technological change. These dynamics continuously reshape employment conditions and employee expectations. Companies face the arduous task of not only attracting capable professionals but also retaining them in an

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environment that is more dynamic and unpredictable than ever before.

These market challenges have a direct impact on the wages paid to employees. In response to economic pressures and competitiveness, many organizations are reevaluating their compensation structures. Adjustments in wages, whether increases or decreases, are often made to align with budget constraints and market standards. However, these adjustments influence not only the financial well-being of employees but also their motivation and job satisfaction.

The relationship between pay and job satisfaction has long been examined. Monetary rewards alone appear insufficient to mitigate the inherent conflicts of interest within organizations (Sorauren, 2000). Although higher salaries are typically associated with greater satisfaction and retention (Lee & Sabharwal, 2016), the relationship is modest and indirect (Judge et al., 2010). People may work for money, but they do not solely work for that purpose and research has consistently shown that adequate compensation is a critical factor in ensuring that employees feel valued and motivated in the workplace, making clear that financial compensation alone is no longer sufficient in addressing the complex needs of today's workforce.

Non-monetary incentives have been described as positively correlating with employees' job satisfaction (Qader, 2021), productivity (Mokhniuk & Yushchyshyna, 2018), performance (Paul, 2024) and retention (Harunavamwe & Kanengoni, 2013). Such incentives may be intangible—stemming from the work itself, such as achievement, challenge, autonomy, or personal growth—or tangible, such as symbolic rewards or recognition. These are usually informal strategies, that are not contract bonded or clearly defined on organizational policies. On the other hand, we have tangible incentives. These can include a variety of items that have value, per se, as gift cards, travels, parking spaces and other small gifts (Brightenburg et al., 2016). These may be associated with the position, and well defined in contract terms.

Emotional salary-non-monetary compensation addressing individual needs for balance, growth, and well-being (Vera et al., 2019) has gained attention as a potential factor in shaping job seekers' perceptions of organizations. It could include flexible working hours, working hours dedicated to personal projects, social projects, among other policies or benefit that significantly contribute to an employee's overall satisfaction and well-being. By addressing these aspects, organizations can fulfill the psychological and emotional needs of their workforce, thereby boosting morale and happiness (Ravina-Ripoll et al., 2024).

Despite its growing prominence in managerial discourse and human resource practices, emotional salary remains a relatively underdeveloped construct in organizational research. Definitions often refer broadly to "intangible rewards" or "non-monetary benefits" (Bapuji et al., 2020), but few attempts have been made to conceptualize and operationalize the construct with theoretical precision.

Building on existing work by Aviles-Peralta (2024), emotional salary is defined as a multidimensional set of intentional, non-financial organizational practices designed to fulfil employees' socio-emotional and self-developmental needs. Recent research further clarifies this construct, emphasizing that emotional salary is not a diffuse collection of benefits but a structured system of practices with distinct yet interrelated dimensions (Díaz-García et al., 2023; Junça-Silva et al., 2024). These dimensions can be grouped into four broad categories: human, motivational, strategic, and value creation (Rubio Ávila et al., 2020). The human and motivational dimensions capture the relational aspects of organizational care—recognition, fairness, and social support—primarily communicating warmth and benevolent intent. In contrast, the strategic and value-creation dimensions reflect competence-enhancing practices such as autonomy, career development, and mastery, demonstrating the organization's capability and efficiency. This taxonomy refines the conceptual scope of emotional salary by showing that its elements operate along two functional poles: one relational, oriented toward affective connection, and another instrumental, oriented toward employee growth and performance. It also aligns with Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), as emotional salary satisfies fundamental needs for relatedness, autonomy, and competence, thereby enhancing intrinsic motivation and engagement.

Beyond its practical implications in motivation, emotional salary can also be understood as a system of symbolic signals that shape how observers perceive organizations. According to the Stereotype Content Model (SCM; Cuddy et al., 2008; Fiske et al., 2002), social targets — including organizations — are judged along two fundamental dimensions: warmth, reflecting perceived benevolent intentions, and competence, reflecting perceived ability and effectiveness. Emotional salary cues map naturally onto these dimensions. Practices that emphasise care, well-being, inclusion, or flexibility primarily convey benevolent intentions and therefore enhance perceptions of warmth. At the same time, elements such as structured development, mentoring, or opportunities for mastery can also imply that the organisation has the competence and resources necessary to fulfil its promises. Thus, emotional salary is not merely a set of benefits; it is a communicative mechanism through which organisations project their intentions and capabilities to potential applicants. By integrating these perspectives, the present study refines the conceptualization of emotional salary and clarifies its dual role as both a relational (warmth-related) and instrumental (competence-related) organizational signal within the recruitment context.

In the race to attract and retain top talent, emotional salary may play a pivotal role. Modern employees are not solely motivated by financial gain; they seek workplaces that offer a holistic approach to their well-being, that provide growth opportunities and flexible conditions (Zaharee et al., 2018). Companies that excel in providing these working conditions may stand at a better chance of securing and keeping the best talent. This implies reframing how we attract and retain talent, translating this into higher productivity, reduced turnover rates, and a more engaged workforce (Abraham et al., 2023). Consequently, understanding and implementing emotional salary strategies may be crucial for businesses aiming to maintain a competitive edge.

Despite the recognized importance of emotional salary, there is a noticeable gap in empirical studies examining its impact, particularly in the realm of talent attraction and retention. Current literature is abundant with discussions on financial compensation, yet there is a scarcity of research dedicated to understanding how non-monetary benefits influence employee perceptions and behaviors. This gap highlights the need for further investigation into the mechanisms through which emotional salary affects organizational perception, especially for those who seek a job.

Due to the importance of an organization in the identity of a future employee, we may pay attention to our general impression of an organization when deciding to apply to a job offer. Lievens and Highhouse (2003) observed individuals were able to make trait inferences about a bank, which mildly influenced the organization attractiveness as an employer. It is suggested that an individual admiration of organizations is composed both of respectability – including honor and integrity— and impressiveness— combining prominence and prestige in attaining a certain product or goal (Highhouse et al., 2009), usually extracted from symbolic inferences that help the seeker to evaluate if the organization serves the needs for self-expression (Highhouse et al., 2007).

The Stereotype Content Model (SCM), developed by Susan Fiske and her colleagues (Fiske et al., 2002), is a psychological theory that posits that people universally categorize others based on two primary dimensions: warmth and competence. These dimensions are then used to form stereotypes about individuals and groups (Cuddy et al., 2008). This framework is particularly relevant for understanding how subtle signals embedded in recruitment communication —such as those conveyed by emotional salary cues— can shape applicant perceptions. Recent studies have shown that the Stereotype Content Model can be effectively applied to organizational contexts, with warmth and competence dimensions influencing stakeholders' perceptions of companies (Aaker et al., 2012; Kervyn et al., 2012).

When applied to the evaluation of organizations, the SCM may provide a valuable framework for understanding how future employees perceive companies and institutions. Observing the previous studies, respectability and impressiveness resemble the warmth and competence. However, the perception of organizations through the lens of these two meta-traits is a complex and evolving area of study. While the evolutionary origins of warmth and competence perceptions in humans may not directly apply to organizations, there is evidence to suggest that we do attribute human-like traits to companies (Aaker et al., 2010).

We suggest that in the context of organizations, warmth refers to the perceived intentions of the organization—whether it is seen as friendly, trustworthy, and well-meaning. Competence, on the other hand, pertains to the perceived ability of the organization to achieve its goals effectively and efficiently. Stakeholders, including customers, employees, investors, and the public, may use these dimensions to form impressions and judgments about organizations.

The primary importance of the warmth dimension lies in its perceived connection to others' intentions, leading to the prediction of active behaviors (Fiske et al., 2007). For instance, groups perceived as warm tend to elicit active facilitation, such as offering help, while those perceived as lacking warmth are more likely to elicit active harm, such as being attacked (Cuddy et al., 2008). On the other hand, the secondary nature of the competence dimension, which evaluates others' capability to carry out intentions, predicts passive behaviors. In this case, groups judged as competent are more likely to elicit passive facilitation, such as obligatory association and convenient cooperation, whereas those judged as lacking competence are more likely to elicit passive harm, such as neglect and being ignored (Cuddy et al., 2008).

In this logic, organizations perceived as high in warmth are those that are seen as having good intentions towards their employees. This can be reflected in their corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives, ethical business practices, and positive interactions with the community. For instance, a company that actively engages in environmental sustainability, supports charitable causes, and treats its employees well is likely to be seen as warm. Such perceptions can lead to increased customer loyalty, employee satisfaction, and overall goodwill. On the other hand, perceived competent organizations are seen as capable, efficient, and successful. For example, a tech company that consistently launches cutting-edge products and demonstrates strong financial performance would be perceived as highly competent. High competence can attract investors, boost market confidence, and enhance the organization's reputation.

These evaluations are known to have a behavioral consequence, in terms of discrimination of groups (Fiske et al., 2007). People tend to establish positive as well negative relations with other individuals or groups according to the interplay of these two dimensions. It is likely that this perception may define behavior when seeking a new job. When individuals search for a new job or review a job advertisement, they are probably to categorize the organization based on these two dimensions—warmth and competence—and use this evaluation to determine their intention to respond to the ad.

Emotional salary cues thus function as social signals that activate warmth and, to a lesser extent, competence perceptions. Benefits such as work–life balance, recognition, or a supportive climate explicitly communicate the organisation's benevolent intentions towards its employees, strengthening perceptions of warmth. Simultaneously, development-related practices or mentoring opportunities may also signal organisational competence, indicating the capacity to deliver on those intentions. By shaping these fundamental dimensions of perception, emotional salary has the potential to directly influence job seekers' evaluations and their behavioural intentions to apply. Organizations that effectively communicate their commitment to emotional salary may influence job seekers' perceptions of warmth and competence.

This study extends previous work by experimentally testing how emotional salary cues influence organizational impressions through the lens of the Stereotype Content Model. By integrating social perception theory with recruitment research, it contributes new empirical evidence on how non-monetary benefits shape employer attractiveness via warmth and competence perceptions.

Based on previous studies showing that non-monetary incentives positively correlate with job satisfaction (Qader, 2021) and that warmth perceptions lead to active facilitation (Cuddy et al., 2008), we hypothesize that job advertisements including emotional salary cues will be perceived as higher in warmth and will elicit greater intention to apply compared to regular advertisements.

Method

Participants

The study focused on the adult populations, aged 18 to 64 and currently active in the labor market. The sampling technique used was non-probabilistic, based on convenience and snowball methods.

Two independent groups were formed: one responded to a "real" job offer without emotional salary characteristics, while the other evaluated a similar offer with emotional salary components. The "real" ad group comprised 68 people, including 32 women and 36 men, with an average age of 31.35 (*SD* = 8.72). Marital status indicated 24 in a de facto union, 2 divorced, and 42 were single. In terms of dependents, 49 had none, 10 had 1, 4 had 2, 3 had 3, and 2 1ad more than 3 dependents. Education levels ranged from 3rd cycle (4), secondary education (25), to higher education (39). Employment status showed 15 unemployed and varying income levels among the employed.

The "modified" job offer group comprises 64 individuals: 36 women, 27 men, and 1 non-binary person, ages 20 to 64 (*M* = 32.13; *SD* = 8.42). Maritally, 15 are in a de facto union, 2 are divorced, and 47 are single. In terms of dependents, 46 have none, 9 have 1, 6 have 2, 1 has 3, and 2 have more than 3. Educationally, 14 have secondary education, and 50 have higher education. Employment-wise, 17 are unemployed, 8 earn less than 1 minimum wage, and 47 are employed, with varied income levels.

Measures

A self-response questionnaire captured socio-demographic details including age, gender, educational background, nationality, number of children, and employment status, thereby enabling the comprehensive characterization of the study sample.

Warmth and Competence

The warmth and competence evaluations were carried out utilizing a measurement tool developed by Fiske et al. (2007) as an element of the Stereotype Content Model. This tool comprises 14 attributes, with items 1 to 7 directed toward the competence aspect and items 8 to 14 toward the warmth aspect. Respondents rated these items on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from "1 = *Not at all*" to "7 = *Completely,*" based on their perception of the advertisement they were exposed to, whether "real" or "altered". The final scores were computed by averaging the items for each aspect, with higher scores denoting a stronger perceived warmth and competence. This approach offers a comprehensive measure of impression formation and permits the examination of how warmth and competence are perceived in varying contexts, including recruitment advertising.

Intention to Respond

The study assessed the intention to respond to the advertisement using a single query: "To what extent would you respond to this ad." A Likert scale was employed with a range from 1 to 7, where 1 signified no response and 7 denoted a complete intention to respond, indicating a high level of interest.

Manipulation

We asked permission to a recruitment website to select and use an undifferentiated ad for a position for a Store Manager position at a company named Fantasia Company, located in Lisbon, Portugal. The advertisement outlines the following job responsibilities, offers, candidate profile and "why should I apply for this job" section.

Manipulation was conducted on "what we offer" section. On the regular ad group, participants read as follows:

- Real opportunities for career progression;
- Competitive salary and performance bonuses above average;
- Private health insurance and access to a pension fund;
- Interaction with one of the most comprehensive sales software on the market;
- Opportunity to work on various projects;
- Good working environment;
- Rotative working hours.

On the emotional salary ad, the section presents as this:

- Genuine opportunities for career progression and continuous training.
- Competitive salary and performance bonuses above average.
- Private health insurance and access to a pension fund.
- Interaction with one of the most comprehensive sales software on the market.
- Opportunity to work on various social solidarity projects.
- Good working environment and leisure spaces.
- Flexible hours with time allocated for personal investment.

Manipulation Check

In the main experiment, we also included an additional procedure to assess whether participants were aware of the experimental manipulation. Immediately before the debriefing, participants were asked, in a final open-ended question, what they believed the study investigated. This question aimed to identify any potential demand characteristics or explicit recognition of the non-monetary cues embedded in the job advertisement. None of the participants spontaneously mentioned the concept of emotional salary, referred to the non-monetary elements of the advertisement, or indicated that these cues were the primary focus of the research. This absence of hypothesis awareness suggests that the manipulation was not explicitly detected and that participants processed the stimuli naturally, thereby reducing the likelihood of biased responses and strengthening the internal validity of the study.

Procedures

As previously mentioned, this study consists of two distinct questionnaires. The first questionnaire presents a genuine job listing from a job website, intentionally excluding any emotional salary factors. In contrast, the second questionnaire displays a similar job listing but includes additional components emphasizing emotional salary.

Both questionnaires were distributed online through Google Forms, employing convenience and snowball sampling techniques for participant recruitment. Participation was completely voluntary, with assurances of anonymity and confidentiality, and no incentives or rewards were offered. Each participant was randomly assigned to complete one of the two questionnaires.

Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 29). Preliminary analyses included descriptive statistics and assumption testing. Prior to running the main model, data was screened for missing values and outliers. No missing data was detected, and all variables were normally distributed.

The main analysis employed a univariate general linear model to examine the effect of advertisement condition (traditional vs. emotional) and the interaction between perceived warmth and competence on the intention to respond to the job advertisement. The dependent variable was the self-reported intention to apply for the advertised job, while the independent variable was the type of advertisement viewed. Warmth and competence ratings were included as covariates, and their interaction term (warmth*competence) was modeled within each condition. This design allowed the simultaneous assessment of the unique and joint effects of the two social-perception dimensions proposed by the Stereotype Content Model (Fiske et al., 2002).

Homogeneity of variances was verified using Levene's test. To ensure robustness against unequal variances and to improve the stability of parameter estimates, bootstrapping procedures were implemented with 5,000 resamples and percentile-based 95% confidence intervals (Efron & Tibshirani, 1993; Hayes, 2013). Effect sizes were expressed as partial eta squared (η_p^2). Confidence intervals for η_p^2 were estimated using the approximation method proposed by Smithson (2003) and Smithson and Verkuilen (2006), providing a more informative interpretation of effect magnitude and precision. Effect size interpretation followed Cohen's (1988) guidelines, where values of .01, .06, and .14 indicate small, medium, and large effects, respectively. All analyses used a significance level of α = .05. Graphical representations of the mean scores for warmth and competence across conditions were generated to facilitate interpretation of the observed interactions.

Results

The presented findings correspond to the assessment of competence and warmth in an advertisement. Each group was exposed to a different advertisement: one group saw a traditional ad without emotional elements, while the other group viewed the same ad but with added emotional elements. It is anticipated that the assessment of warmth and competence would differ based on these conditions, ultimately impacting the intention to engage with the advertisement.

Consequently, a unidimensional variance model was employed, with the intention to respond to the ad as the dependent variable and the type of ad viewed (traditional or emotional) as the independent variable. Within this assessment, the interaction of warmth and competence was considered, acknowledging that they are conceptually independent measures and can present distinct joint configurations (Fiske et al., 2002).

The specific model investigated the impact of warmth*competence interaction under different viewing conditions on the intention to respond to the ad. The average response in the traditional condition was 4.15 (*SD* = 2.253), indicating a slightly positive intention to respond to the ad. In the emotional condition, the average response was 4.55 (*SD* = 1.931), also slightly positive and higher than that of

Table 1. Tests of Between-subjects Effects of Univariate Analysis

Origin	Type III Sum of Squares	gl	Mean Square	*F*	Sig.	Partial eta squared
Corrected model	79.713[1]	2	39.857	10.434	<.001	.143
Intercept	383.171	1	383.171	100.314	<.001	.445
Competence* Warmth (condition)	79.713	2	39.857	10.434	<.001	.143
Standard	477.466	125	3.820			
Total	2981.000	128				
Corrected total	557.180	127				

Note. Dependent variable: To what extent would you respond to this advertisement regardless of your current conditions/qualifications?
[1]R Square = .143 (Adjusted *R* Square = .129).

the traditional group. Levene's equality of variances test revealed significant differences in error variance between groups (F(1, 128) = 7.181, p = .008), cautioning the interpretation of the data obtained. To address this issue, bootstrapped estimates (5,000 resamples, 95% percentile confidence intervals) were conducted to ensure robustness of the results. The bootstrapped ANOVA confirmed the same pattern of significant effects, supporting the reliability of the findings despite unequal variances across conditions. The squared partial eta measurement was used to assess the size of the effect observed.

The bewteen-subject effects analysis indicated a significant impact of competence-warm interaction on the intention to respond to the advertisement within the observed conditions (F(2, 128) = 10.434, p < .001, η_p^2 = .143, IC [0.07;0.22]). These findings suggest that 14.3% of the variance in ad response can be attributed to the independent variables considered in the model, which include the viewed advertisement and the interaction of evaluations within each ad. The graph (Figure 1) illustrates the distribution of response averages by warm and competence across advertisement conditions.

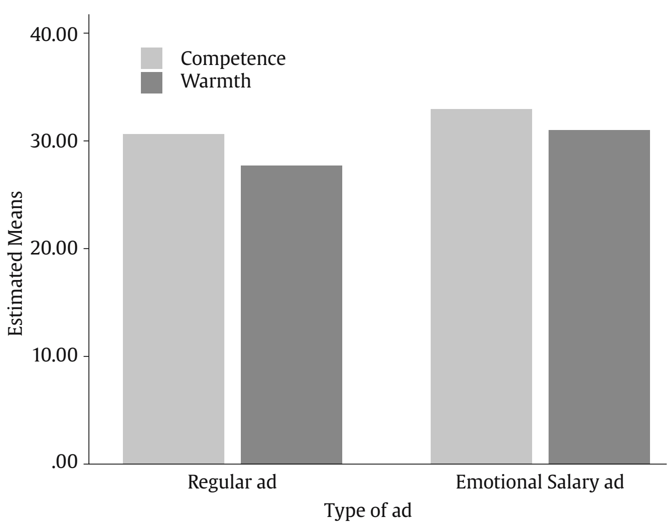

Figure 1. Interaction between Warmth and Competence Ratings across Advertisement Conditions.

The previous analysis revealed an improvement in competence assessment but emphasized the evaluation of warmth, resulting in a slight increase in the intention to respond to the ad. To better illustrate these differences, Figure 2 presents a bar chart showing the mean warmth and competence ratings for each advertisement condition.

This visualization clarifies how the variation between warmth and competence evaluations differs across the two ad types. Specifically, the traditional advertisement displays a wider difference between warmth and competence evaluations, whereas in the emotional salary condition, both dimensions converge more closely, suggesting that the inclusion of emotional elements promotes a more balanced perception of the organization.

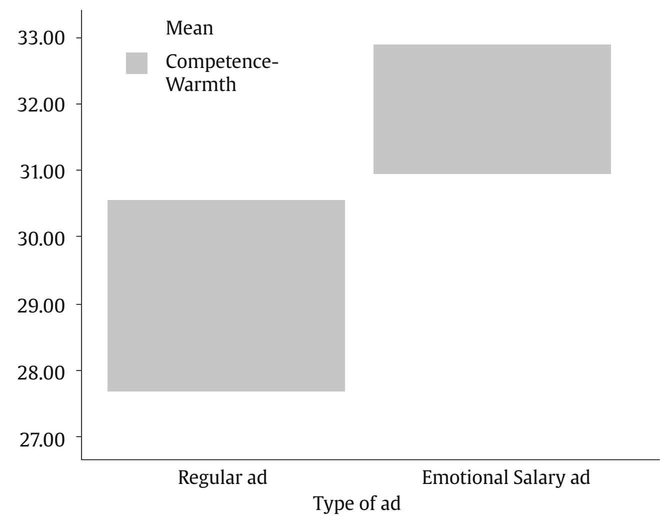

Figure 2. Mean Warmth and Competence Evaluations across Traditional and Emotional Advertisement Conditions.

The earlier model underwent testing with the incorporation of categorical variables in interaction with the condition (2x2). The assessment of warmth and competence by the condition remained unaffected by the nationality of the participants (F(2,128) = 2.796, p = .065), the intention to change jobs (F(2,128) = .743, p = .478), and the level of schooling (F(2,128) = .130, p = .879). Schooling was grouped into two levels: up to secondary/secondary education and university education for this analysis.

Discussion

This study aimed to investigate the impact of emotional salary cues in job advertisements on perceptions of organizational warmth and competence, as well as intentions to respond to the advertisement. The results provide valuable insights into the role of non-monetary benefits in shaping job seekers' perceptions and behaviors.

Results revealed a significant interaction between warmth and competence in predicting participants' intention to respond to the job advertisement. This finding supports the applicability of the Stereotype Content Model (SCM) to organizational contexts, extending previous research by Aaker et al. (2012) and Kervyn et al. (2012).

Notably, the advertisement including emotional-salary cues was associated with a smaller difference between warmth and competence ratings. This suggests that emotional salary cues may contribute to a more balanced perception of organizations, potentially addressing both warmth and competence dimensions simultaneously. This finding is particularly novel, as it demonstrates how non-monetary benefits can shape multidimensional impressions of potential employers.

These results align with previous research showing that fairness in recruitment processes enhances warmth perceptions by signalling trust and care, while emotional salary cues reinforce competence by demonstrating a strategic commitment to employee well-being (Nikolaou & Georgiou, 2018). This balance suggests that job seekers evaluate offers beyond tangible rewards, valuing organizations that integrate relational and instrumental attributes. Thus, effectively communicating emotional salary elements can strengthen an employer's image as both caring and capable, increasing talent attraction and retention.

While the inclusion of emotional salary elements led to a slight increase in the intention to respond to the advertisement, the effect was modest. This result indicates that while emotional salary cues can positively influence job seekers' perceptions, they may not be sufficient on their own to dramatically alter application behaviors.

Several limitations of the present study point to directions for future research. Our relatively small sample size and focus on a specific cultural context limit the generalizability of our findings. Furthermore, individuals who are currently employed might evaluate recruitment materials differently from those who are unemployed or actively seeking work. Employed participants may perceive emotional salary cues as more peripheral or aspirational, whereas job seekers could attribute greater importance to such cues when assessing potential employers. These differences in employment status, combined with the convenience and snowball sampling procedure, further constrains the generalizability of our findings. Future research should therefore aim to recruit samples that vary in employment status and labour market involvement, as these factors may moderate the relationship between emotional salary cues, warmth and competence perceptions, and behavioural intentions.

Future studies should employ larger, more diverse samples across different cultures and industries to validate and extend our results. Also, this study measured immediate reactions to job advertisements. Longitudinal research could explore how perceptions of emotional salary influence long-term job satisfaction, performance, and retention.

In relation to specific emotional salary components, while we examined emotional salary as a broad concept, future research could investigate which specific elements (e.g. work-life balance, personal growth opportunities) have the strongest impact on job seekers' perceptions and intentions. Future research should examine how emotional salary interacts with traditional monetary compensation in shaping job seekers' decisions and perceptions.

Despite its limitations, this study contributes to the recruitment literature by empirically demonstrating how emotional-salary cues influence warmth and competence perceptions –key dimensions of organizational impression formation. This dual contribution bridges social cognition theory with applied HR practices. The finding that emotional salary cues lead to more balanced perceptions of warmth and competence is novel and suggests that non-monetary benefits may play a more complex role in shaping organizational impressions than previously thought. By demonstrating a modest positive effect of emotional salary cues on response intentions, this study highlights the potential value of incorporating such elements into job advertisements, while also cautioning against overreliance on these factors.

From a practical standpoint, our findings have several implications for organizations and HR professionals. The inclusion of emotional salary components in job advertisements may help create more balanced perceptions of organizations, potentially appealing to a wider range of job seekers. Also, while emotional salary cues can positively influence intentions to respond, they should be considered as part of a comprehensive recruitment strategy rather than a standalone solution.

We believe that this study shows how organizations may benefit from carefully crafting job advertisements that address both warmth and competence dimensions, using emotional salary cues as one tool to achieve this balance.

In conclusion, this study advances understanding of how non-monetary benefits influence applicants' perceptions and intentions. By linking emotional salary with the Stereotype Content Model, it provides a theoretical and practical framework for designing recruitment strategies that humanize organizational communication and strengthen employer attractiveness. As the job market continues to evolve, understanding the nuanced effects of emotional salary may become increasingly crucial for organizations seeking to attract and retain top talent.

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