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THE INFLUENCE OF EMPLOYER BRANDING AND ORGANIZATIONAL REPUTATION ON THE INTEREST IN APPLYING FOR JOBS OF GENERATION Z (A STUDY ON GENERATION Z IN THE WESTERN CILACAP REGION)

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Abstract. The dominance of Generation Z in the labor market has shifted job seekers' orientation, who no longer focus solely on financial compensation but also consider company image, organizational reputation, and workplace values. This study aims to analyze the influence of employer branding and organizational reputation on job application intention among Generation Z in the western region of Cilacap, Indonesia. A quantitative approach was employed using a survey method through an online questionnaire distributed to respondents aged 18–27 years who are active or potential job seekers. Data were analyzed using the Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) technique with SmartPLS 4.0 software. The results show that employer branding and organizational reputation have a positive and significant effect on job application intention, both partially and simultaneously. These findings confirm that a strong employer image and a positive organizational reputation are key factors in shaping Generation Z's perceptions and decisions to apply for jobs. Practically, this study provides recommendations for companies to strengthen communication strategies and build a credible digital reputation to continuously attract young talents.

Keywords: Employer branding; Organizational reputation; Job application intention; Generation Z; PLS-SEM.

1. Introduction

Changes in the global labor structure indicate a shift in the values and preferences of young generations toward the world of work. Generation Z, born between 1997 and 2012, is now beginning to dominate the labor market. They are known as digital natives who are critical thinkers, value-oriented, and more selective in choosing their workplaces. Unlike previous generations, Generation Z not only considers financial aspects but also pays attention to work-life balance, flexibility, organizational reputation, and the alignment of company values with their own identities. This condition is pushing companies to adapt to new communication strategies by strengthening employer branding with the organization's image as an attractive and valuable workplace. In this context, employer branding plays an important role as a means of shaping positive perceptions and building emotional loyalty among potential employes. Additionally, an organization's reputation also has a significant influence on job applicants' decisions, as it reflects the company's credibility, trustworthiness, and integrity in the public eye.

In Indonesia, this phenomenon is becoming increasingly clear. According to the Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS, 2023), over 27% of the workforce in Indonesia comes from Generation Z. Although the number of job opportunities continues to increase, not all vacancies successfully attract their interest. Generation Z tends to choose companies with a positive image and a strong reputation, which aligns with their identity and expectations. This condition creates an attraction gap, which is the disparity between the availability of job openings and the interest of applicants in applying to a specific company. Employer branding is becoming one of the important factors in bridging this gap.

However, despite most previous studies showing that employer branding and organizational reputation positively influence application interest (Kaur & Sharma, 2023; Vieira et al., 2024), there are inconsistent results. Astuti's (2024) research found that organizational reputation did not significantly influence job application interest. The inconsistency in the research results indicates that the influence of organizational reputation on job application interest is contextual and has not been widely studied among Generation Z in local areas like West Cilacap. Therefore, this study was conducted to analyze the extent to which employer branding and organizational reputation influence job application interest among Generation Z in this region.

Given these contextual dynamics and the mixed findings reported in prior studies, a deeper theoretical understanding of the key constructs examined in this research is necessary. To provide a solid conceptual foundation for analyzing the influence of employer branding and organizational reputation on Generation Z’s intention to apply for jobs in the West Cilacap region, the following section outlines the theoretical framework underpinning each variable.

Employer branding is a strategic process undertaken by companies to build and manage their image as an attractive workplace that aligns with the values sought by potential employes (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). The dimensions of employer branding are: (1) Organizational Values (2) Career Development (3) Work environment Employer branding encompasses a company's strategies for building an image as an attractive workplace thru organizational values, career development opportunities, and work flexibility (Vieira et al., 2024). Additionally, employes' social behavior that supports the organizational ecosystem further strengthens this image authentically and sustainably (Eriksson et al., 2022).

Organizational reputation is the collective perception held by the public and potential applicants regarding the quality, credibility, and characteristics of a company as a place to work (Helm, 2021). A good reputation is a strategic asset that can increase potential applicants' trust and interest in a company (Jiang & Iles, 2022). Dimensions of Organizational Reputation (1) Credibility (2) Performance (3) Digital Reputation. Another important factor is organizational reputation. Reputation reflects public perception of a company's credibility and quality. Thang dan Trang (2024) emphasize that a positive reputation significantly contributes to increased application interest, especially when supported by easily accessible information transparency thru social media. For Generation Z, who grew up in a digital ecosystem, a company's reputation in the online public sphere is a key indicator in their decision to apply for a job.

Interest in applying for a job refers to a prospective applicant’s intention or willingness to submit a job application to a specific organization. Conceptually, intention represents an individual’s conscious readiness to perform a behavior, as explained in the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991). In job-seeking contexts, this intention is influenced by perceptions of organizational attributes, attractiveness, and credibility. Recent studies further conceptualize job-application intention as an evaluative and motivational response that reflects how appealing an organization is perceived and how strongly an individual plans to pursue employment opportunities within it. This construct is commonly measured through three dimensions (1) attraction, (2) willingness, and (3) intention, which together represent the cognitive and affective readiness of potential applicants. Contemporary research shows that employer branding, corporate reputation, and digital organizational signals significantly shape Generation Z's intention to apply by reinforcing organizational attractiveness and perceived alignment with personal values (Hapsara & Nugrahaningsih, 2024; Zahira et al., 2024; Abanan et al., 2024).

2. Research Method

This study employs a quantitative approach with descriptive and causal survey methods. A quantitative design is considered appropriate because the research aims to test causal relationships among latent variables and generate empirical explanations based on numerical data. The constructs examined in this study, employer branding, organizational reputation, and job application intention, are abstract concepts that require a structural modelling approach, making the quantitative method suitable for producing measurable and generalizable findings.

The population in this study consists of Generation Z individuals residing in the western sub-districts of Cilacap, including Gandrungmangu, Sidareja, Karangpucung, Cipari, Cimanggu, Majenang, and Wanareja in the West Cilacap area. Respondents were selected based on the following criteria: (1) individuals aged 18–27, (2) currently seeking employment or planning to apply within the next year, (3) having access to company information online, and (4) being willing to participate in the study.

Sampling was conducted using non-probability sampling with the accidental sampling technique. This was due to the lack of accurate data on the population size in the field, making it impossible to determine the probability of selecting samples from each member of the population, as well as the relatively limited research time. In addition, this study also used the Accidental Sampling method, which means that sample selection occurred by chance and if the person was considered to meet the criteria determined by the researcher. Data was collected through an online questionnaire (Google Form) during the period of September-November 2025, and 54 respondents were obtained as the final sample in this study.

Recent studies show that PLS-SEM remains robust and can produce reliable parameter estimates even when using small samples, as long as robustness checks such as multicollinearity evaluation, bootstrapping, and effect size reporting are performed (Vaithilingam et al., 2024). Considering the characteristics of the model, the number of constructs, the complexity of the relationships, and the supporting literature, a sample size of 54 is considered adequate for PLS-SEM analysis in the context of exploratory-predictive studies such as this one.

The research instrument employed a five-point Likert scale to measure three main variables: employer branding, encompassing organizational values, career development, and the work environment; organizational reputation, comprising credibility, achievements, and digital reputation; and job application interest, including attractiveness, willingness, and intention to apply.

Data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 4.0. This method was selected because of its suitability for complex models, predictive orientation, relatively small sample sizes, and ability to accommodate reflective measurement models. The analysis comprised four stages: conducting descriptive analysis, evaluating the measurement model (outer model) to assess construct validity and reliability, evaluating the structural model (inner model) to examine the relationships among variables and the model's explanatory power, and testing the hypotheses through bootstrapping at a 5% significance level, using the criteria of a t-statistic greater than 1.96 and a p-value below 0.05.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Descriptive Analysis

Based on the respondents' demographic information, the majority were female (74.1%), aged 20–25 years (70.3%), and originating from Karangpucung (44.4%), reflecting value-driven youth aspirations in the semi-urban context of West Cilacap. The respondent characteristics are presented in the following table:

Table 1. Respondent Characteristics

Characteristics	Frequency	Precentage
Jenis Kelamin:		
Male	14	25,9 %
Female	40	74,1 %
Age:		
< 20 years	7	13 %
20-25 years	38	70,3 %
>25 years	9	16,7 %
Region:		
Gandrungmangu	5	9,3 %
Sidareja	4	7,4 %
Karangpucung	24	44,4 %
Cipari	3	5,6 %
Cimanggu	4	7,4 %
Majenang	7	13 %
Wanareja	4	7,4 %
Lainnya	3	5,6 %
Total	**54**	**100 %**

Based on the data obtained from the distributed questionnaires, the data were analyzed to describe each research variable related to employer branding, organizational reputation, and intention to apply among Generation Z in the West Cilacap region.

3.2 SmartPLS Analysis

This study uses PLS analysis, which consists of evaluating the measurement model (outer model) and the structural model (inner model). Here is an explanation of the model evaluation analysis results:

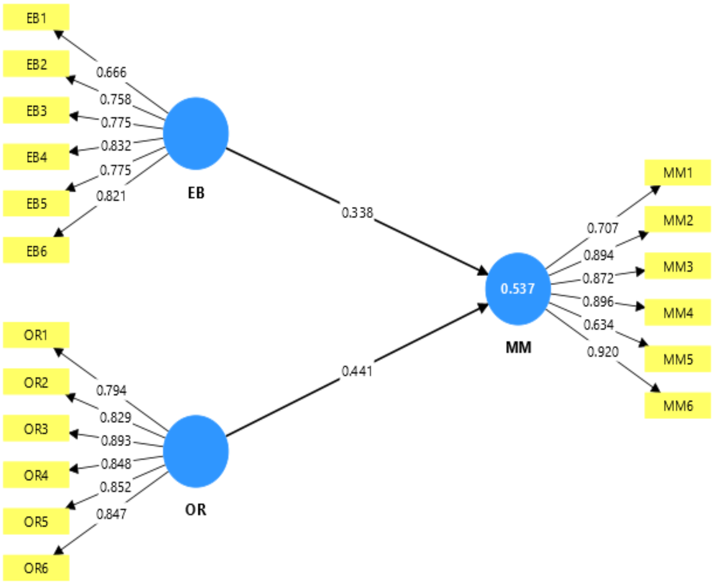

Fig. 1. SmartPLS Analysis Result

3.3 Measurement Model Analysis (Outer Model)

The measurement model was evaluated through convergent validity, discriminant validity, and construct reliability. This stage ensures that each indicator accurately measures the intended latent variable.

Convergent Validity

Convergent validity was assessed through outer loading values and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). All indicators had outer loading values above 0.70, with a tolerance of several indicators between 0.60–0.70, which is still acceptable in social research. The AVE values for all constructs were also above the threshold of 0.50, indicating that each construct was able to explain more than half of the variance of its indicators.

Table 2. Outer Loading

Code	EB	MM	OR	Note
EB1	0.666			Valid
EB2	0.758			Valid
EB3	0.775			Valid
EB4	0.832			Valid
EB5	0.775			Valid
EB6	0.821			Valid
MM1		0.707		Valid
MM2		0.894		Valid
MM3		0.872		Valid
MM4		0.896		Valid
MM5		0.634		Valid

MM6	0.920		Valid
OR1		0.794	Valid
OR2		0.829	Valid
OR3		0.893	Valid
OR4		0.848	Valid
OR5		0.852	Valid
OR6		0.847	Valid

Table 3. Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

Construct	AVE	Note
EB	0.598	Valid
MM	0.685	Valid
OR	0.713	Valid

Notes:
EB : indicator *Employer Branding*
MM : indicator minat melamar (*Interest in Applying for Jobs)*
OR : indicator (*organizational reputation)*

Discriminant Validity

The results of the discriminant validity test using the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) show that all HTMT values are below the threshold of 0.90, indicating that each construct can be empirically distinguished and does not overlap. The Fornell-Larcker Criterion test also confirms that the square root of the AVE for each construct is greater than the correlations with other constructs, which confirms the clarity of differentiation between variables.

Construct Reliability

Reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability (CR). All constructs meet the reliability standard with values exceeding 0.70, which indicates strong internal consistency.

Table 4. Construct Reliability

Construct	Cronbanch's alpha	Composite reability	Note
EB	0.864	0.899	Realible
MM	0.905	0.928	Realible
OR	0.919	0.937	Realible

3.4 Structural Model Analysis (Inner Model)

The structural model was evaluated using multicollinearity assessment, coefficient of determination (R^2), model fit, effect size (f^2), and hypothesis testing.

a. Multicollinearity (VIF)
   All VIF values equal 2.382, well below the threshold of 5, indicating no multicollinearity issues among predictor variables.
b. Coefficient of Determination (R^2)
   The job application interest construct (MM) obtained:
   - $R^2 = 0.537$ (strong)
   - Adjusted $R^2 = 0.519$

   This means employer branding and organizational reputation collectively explain 53.7% of the variance in job application interest, while the remaining 46.3% is influenced by factors outside the model.
c. Model Fit (SRMR)
   The SRMR value for both the saturated model and estimated model is 0.10, which satisfies the model fit criterion (< 0.10). This demonstrates an acceptable level of discrepancy between the empirical data and the proposed model.
d. Effect Size (f^2)
   Effect size analysis shows differing strengths:
   - Employer Branding → MM = 0.104 (small effect)
   - Organizational Reputation → MM = 0.177 (medium effect)

   This indicates organizational reputation contributes more strongly to job application interest compared with employer branding.

3.5 Hypothesis Testing (Bootsrapping)

Hypothesis testing in PLS-SEM uses bootstrapping to evaluate the significance of structural paths, based on t-statistics rho 1.96 for $p < 0.05$) and the direction of influence (Original Sample/O positive for positive influence).

Table 5. Path Coefficients

Konstruk	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	t-statistic (|O/STDEV|)	P values
OR→ MM	0.338	0.339	0.126	2.685	0.007
EB→MM	0.441	0.455	0.112	3.929	0.000

The table is used to explain the direction and significance of the direct relationship hypothesis by referring to the t-statistics value (> 1.96) and Original Sample (0 > 0 for positive). For H_3, the simultaneous effect is assessed through the significant R^2 MM (0.537, strong). The explanation is as follows

1. The effect of employer branding on application interest has an original sample value of 0.441 (positive) and a t-statistics value of 3.929 > 1.96 Therefore, it can be concluded that H_1 is accepted.
2. The effect of organizational reputation on application interest has an original sample value of 0.338 (positive) and a t-statistics value of 685 > 1.96 Therefore, it can be concluded that H_2 is accepted.
3. The simultaneous effect of employer branding and organizational reputation on application interest has an R^2 value of 0.537 (strong) with both paths being positive

and significant (t-statistics > 1.96, $p < 0.05$) Therefore, it can be concluded that H_3 is accepted.

Overall, all three hypotheses were accepted, confirming that employer branding and organizational reputation, individually and simultaneously, have a positive and significant effect on application interest. This supports the research structural model, with employer branding as the strongest predictor (coefficient 0.441) and a total variance explanation of 53.7% among Generation Z in West Cilacap.

The results of this study reinforce the finding that employer branding and organizational reputation are two key factors that influence Generation Z's decision to apply for a job. Strong employer branding can create a positive perception of the values, work environment, and career opportunities offered by the company. Generation Z, who tend to look for workplaces that match their personal values and work-life balance, will be more attracted to companies with authentic and progressive brand identities.

On the other hand, a good organizational reputation strengthens public trust and serves as an important signal to potential applicants. A reputation built through social responsibility, transparent communication, and a positive track record can enhance a company's credibility. These findings are in line with research by Fombrun (1996) and Jiang & Iles (2022), which confirms that a positive company reputation contributes significantly to attracting job applicants

The strong R value (0.537) confirms that the combination of employer branding and organizational reputation can explain more than half of the variation in job application interest. This means that companies that successfully combine attractive branding strategies and a solid reputation have great potential to attract high-quality young talent.

4. Conclusion and Recommendation

This study concludes that employer branding and organizational reputation have a positive and significant impact on Generation Z's interest in applying for jobs in the West Cilacap region, both partially and simultaneously. These results emphasize the importance of image and reputation as key signals in attracting the attention of potential talent in a competitive labor market. An authentic company image, consistent organizational values, and a credible reputation have been proven to shape positive perceptions of the company and encourage job application intentions

Theoretically, this study enriches human resource management literature by strengthening the understanding of the role of employer branding and organizational reputation in the context of Generation Z in Indonesia. Practically, companies need to optimize digital communication strategies to build a transparent, value-oriented image that is relevant to the aspirations of the younger generation. The government and HR practitioners can also utilize these findings to design programs to increase the attractiveness of local employment. This study is limited by its restricted geographical focus on the West Cilacap region and the use of a relatively small sample size. Further research is recommended to expand the scope of observation, add mediating variables such as organizational attractiveness or job satisfaction, and consider moderating factors such as digital engagement to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the determinants of job application interest in the digital era.

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