

Employer Branding Through Social Media: A Competitive Strategy to Attract Generation Z Job Seekers and Strengthen Corporate Reputation

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Abstract. The purpose of this study is to explore Generation Z's perspective on utilizing social media information to apply for jobs via company employer branding. This quantitative study uses partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) with a second-order research model to examine the influence of social media, employer branding, and competitive advantage on job application interest and corporate reputation. Data were collected through a self-administered questionnaire using a 5-point Likert scale, distributed to 211 Generation Z respondents via the Lemeshow approach. Seven hypotheses were tested: (1) social media significantly affects job application interest; (2) employer branding significantly affects job application interest; (3) competitive advantage significantly affects job application interest; (4) job application interest significantly affects corporate reputation; (5) social media significantly affects corporate reputation; (6) employer branding significantly affects corporate reputation; and (7) competitive advantage significantly affects corporate reputation. The study's results indicate that all hypotheses were accepted, except for hypothesis 4. The practical implications include offering companies valuable insights on effectively using social media in employer branding to boost applicant engagement.

Keywords: competitive advantage; employer branding; Generation Z; human resource management; intention to apply

INTRODUCTION

In today's competitive business environment, companies face significant challenges in attracting and retaining high-quality employees. Human resource management at every company encounters difficulties in attracting and retaining skilled employees (high-quality employees retained long-term) to ensure sustainable competitive advantage. Human resources are vital and must be implemented and understood at all management levels, as the human factor remains crucial to achieving company goals (AKILAH, 2018; Bukhori & Rindaningsih, 2025; Hartati et al., 2024; Sidabutar Tiarma et al., 2023). High-quality employees help companies gain benefits, including attracting more candidates eager to join.

Companies today compete not only on products or services but also in building an attractive employer image. A Randstad Enterprise Talent Trends 2024 study, surveying 1,076 executives and HR leaders across 21 global markets, found that employers are increasingly concerned about acquiring needed skills and employees. The goal is to thrive in today's challenging work environment. Nearly 72% of respondents reported that the skills gap will pose greater challenges soon, up from 64% last year—the highest since 2019. Additionally, 77% noted that rising automation impacts workforce planning and required skills, the highest level in talent trends history (Randstad Enterprise, 2024).

Indonesia faced talent challenges in 2023, especially in technology, healthcare, and professional services. A Monroe Consulting Group report indicates that companies struggle to recruit and retain suitable workers for business growth. Key causes include demographic shifts, rising demand for digital talent, and inadequate domestic training (Monroe Consulting Group, 2023). Survey data reveals ongoing difficulties in finding qualified employees. A global ManpowerGroup study shows worldwide talent shortages reached 75% in 2024 (ManpowerGroup, 2023).

Companies also face rising resignations as employees seek new opportunities. A

PageInsights survey of 2,203 Indonesian participants showed resignation rates increasing yearly (PageInsights, 2023). Higher turnover creates opportunities for competitors to recruit experienced talent. The report notes that 57% of job seekers are "currently looking for a new job." This presents both challenges—retaining top talent to curb resignations—and opportunities to attract superior candidates.

Effective employer branding offers a competitive edge in attracting and retaining high-quality talent. In the current landscape, HR professionals find it harder to secure top talent, necessitating long-term employer branding strategies (Gonzalo & Bonneton, 2024; Taylor, 2019). A LinkedIn (2016) survey found 72% of HR professionals agreeing that employer branding significantly influences recruitment. The recruitment process itself is complex.

Technology and the internet have transformed recruitment dynamics. To secure top candidates, many companies integrate social media into e-recruitment strategies to engage prospects (van Esch & Mente, 2018). This shift stems from evolving technology and social media's ubiquity for communication, idea-sharing, and professional presentation. Innovative firms assess its e-recruitment effectiveness and applicant attitudes, bridging personal and professional realms to reshape organizational interactions. Thus, social media has emerged as a strategic tool for building employer image and attracting talent. It also enables direct communication, fostering personal engagement and stronger relationships.

Data Reportal (2024) data shows social media users grew steadily from 2014 to 2024. In the digital era, social media permeates daily life, including workplaces. With vast user bases, companies can build strong employer branding to boost reputation. A Randstad Enterprise (2024) report notes that while job boards are popular globally, APAC employees use them most (65%). LinkedIn leads for Gen X (39%), but social media appeals more to younger generations, especially Gen Z (37%), the second-most-used platform.

Generation Z, raised amid technological advances and digitalization, is profoundly shaped by social media. BPS (2024) data shows Gen Z as Indonesia's largest group at 75.49 million. They will shape the future workforce, comprising 30% globally by 2030 (HiBob, 2023). Understanding employer branding from Gen Z's external viewpoint is key for company competitiveness and sustainability.

However, companies must address Gen Z behaviors. Post-pandemic, many struggle with workplace relationships: TalentLMS surveys indicate 73% feel lonely and 31% struggle with work pressure. Gen Z often job-hops; 56% plan to seek new roles due to salary, career prospects, or poor environments (HiBob, 2023). Thus, Gen Z warrants deeper study of their strengths and challenges.

Gen Z has distinct workplace preferences, prioritizing company culture, flexibility, and social media reputation. Social media enables interactive, authentic employer branding to reach them effectively. Companies can showcase values, culture, and uniqueness—key for Gen Z decisions. This study examines how employer branding through social media creates competitive advantage in attracting Gen Z applicants, securing ideal talent, and achieving goals.

Given Gen Z's digital preferences and social media affinity, targeted strategies are essential for competing in dynamic labor markets. This research employs PLS-SEM via surveys of Gen Z, ideal for nascent theories. It analyzes employer branding on social media as a competitive edge for attracting Gen Z talent, its link to reputation, and high-quality hires.

MATERIALS AND METHOD

This research employed a quantitative approach with a causal design. Data were collected via an online survey using Google Forms, distributed to Generation Z respondents (born 1997–2006) through Instagram, Line, WhatsApp, and X to leverage their social media activity. The questionnaire is available in the appendix.

Five latent variables were examined: social media, employer branding, intention to apply, competitive advantage (Cegliński, 2017), and corporate reputation. The population comprised Generation Z individuals (born 1997–2006) in Indonesia. Using the Lemeshow formula, the minimum sample size was 100 respondents; 211 valid responses were obtained, exceeding this threshold. Purposive sampling was applied with criteria: (1) Generation Z (born 1997–2006), (2) active social media users, and (3) prior use of social media for job information. A pilot test with 30 respondents confirmed validity and reliability (Cronbach's Alpha > 0.7 for all variables).

Partial Least Squares-Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) analysis was conducted using SmartPLS 4.0. PLS-SEM was selected for its suitability with complex models and predictive goals. Evaluations included outer model (convergent validity: outer loadings > 0.7, AVE > 0.5; reliability: Cronbach's Alpha > 0.7, composite reliability > 0.7; discriminant validity: HTMT < 0.9) and inner model assessments (R^2 , Q^2 , f^2 , bootstrapping with 5,000 iterations). Hypotheses were accepted if t-statistics > 1.96 and $p < 0.05$. Goodness-of-Fit (GoF) assessed overall model quality.

Based on the literature review and proposed model, seven hypotheses were tested: social media (H1), employer branding (H2), and competitive advantage (H3) positively affected Generation Z's intention to apply; intention to apply positively influenced corporate reputation (H4); and social media (H5), employer branding (H6), and competitive advantage (H7) directly and positively affected corporate reputation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic Profile of Respondents

The research collected data from 211 respondents of Generation Z born between 1997–2006. Based on gender, 50.7% of respondents are female and 49.3% are male, showing a fairly balanced distribution between the two genders. In terms of age distribution, respondents aged 21–24 years are the most dominant at 46%, followed by age 25–28 years at 36%, and age 18–20 years at 18%. This age distribution indicates that most respondents are in the early career phase and beginning to enter the workforce. Regarding education level, most respondents (63%) have a bachelor's degree (S1), 29.4% have completed high school/equivalent, 7.6% have a master's degree (S2), and none have a doctoral degree (S3). This education profile shows that most respondents have sufficient education to enter the professional workforce.

For employment status, 73.5% of respondents are currently working, 20.9% are still pursuing education, and 5.7% are unemployed. Among working respondents, 45.3% are at entry level positions, 44% at middle management level, 8.8% at senior level, and 1.9% at executive level. These demographics indicate that the sample represents Generation Z who are entering or already established in the workforce, making them relevant respondents to assess their perspectives on employer branding and social media in the recruitment context.

Table 1. Respondent Demographics

Demographics	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Female	107	50.7%
Male	104	49.3%
Age		
18-20 years	38	18%
21-24 years	97	46%
25-28 years	76	36%
Education		
High School	62	29.4%
Bachelor	133	63%
Master	16	7.6%
Employment Status		
Employed	155	73.5%
Unemployed	12	5.7%
Student	44	20.9%

Classical Assumption Testing

Classical assumption testing was conducted to ensure data quality before further analysis. Normality testing was performed using skewness and kurtosis analysis. Data is normally distributed if skewness values are between ± 2 and kurtosis values are below 3. The results show that all variables have skewness values ranging from 0.914 to 1.141 and kurtosis values from 2.581 to 2.920, indicating that the data is normally distributed. Linearity testing was conducted to examine the linear relationship between variables. The results show that all relationships between independent and dependent variables are linear with significance values below 0.05. Multicollinearity testing was performed to ensure there is no high correlation between independent variables. VIF (Variance Inflation Factor) values for all variables are below 10, indicating no multicollinearity problems. These classical assumption test results show that the data meets the requirements for further analysis using PLS-SEM.

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistical analysis shows that all research variables have good mean values, ranging from 4.12 to 4.61 on a 5-point Likert scale, indicating respondents' positive perceptions of all variables. For the social media variable, the entertainment dimension has the highest mean (4.65), indicating that Generation Z considers entertainment content on social media important in viewing company information. The trendiness dimension also shows a high mean (4.56), suggesting Generation Z is attracted to companies that follow current trends and are innovative in social media content. For the employer branding variable, the development value dimension has the highest mean (4.58), suggesting Generation Z prioritizes career development opportunities when considering a company.

The application value dimension (mean 4.49) shows that Generation Z also considers the opportunity to apply knowledge and skills in their work. For the intention to apply variable, the recruiter characteristics dimension shows the highest mean (4.54), indicating that information from recruiters plays an important role in attracting Generation Z's interest. The

competitive advantage variable indicates that delivery dependability has the highest mean (4.61), showing that Generation Z values companies that can deliver products or services according to expectations.

The quality dimension also shows a high mean (4.55), indicating Generation Z prioritizes product/service quality. For corporate reputation, the workplace environment dimension shows the highest mean (4.60), emphasizing the importance of a well-organized and effective work management system. The product and services dimension (mean 4.60) also shows that Generation Z assesses company reputation based on the quality and benefits of products/services offered.

Measurement Model Evaluation

The outer model evaluation shows that not all indicators initially met convergent validity requirements. Several indicators had outer loading values below 0.7, requiring reduction to improve model quality. After reduction of indicators with low outer loadings (E2, SV1, IV1, RC3, IN1, Q1, P2, TM2), all remaining indicators showed outer loading values above 0.7. AVE values for all variables also exceeded 0.5, ranging from 0.582 to 0.651, confirming good convergent validity. Internal consistency reliability testing shows that all variables have Cronbach's Alpha values above 0.7, ranging from 0.867 to 0.912, and Composite Reliability values above 0.7, ranging from 0.892 to 0.927, indicating excellent reliability.

This means all measurement instruments have high internal consistency and can reliably measure the intended constructs. Discriminant validity testing using HTMT (Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio) shows that initially several values were above 0.9, requiring item reduction. After reduction, all HTMT values are below 0.9, confirming that each construct is distinct from others. This shows that the measurement model has good discriminant validity, where each variable measures different constructs and does not overlap with other variables. Overall, the measurement model meets all validity and reliability requirements, indicating that the measurement instruments used in this research are valid and reliable for measuring the intended constructs.

Table 2. Reliability and Validity Test Results

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Social Media	0.893	0.913	0.640
Employer Branding	0.885	0.906	0.616
Intention to Apply	0.867	0.892	0.582
Competitive Advantage	0.901	0.918	0.651
Corporate Reputation	0.912	0.927	0.646

Structural Model Evaluation

The inner model evaluation shows very good results, indicating that the structural model has strong explanatory and predictive power. The R^2 value for intention to apply is 0.715, indicating that 71.5% of the variance in intention to apply can be explained by social media, employer branding, and competitive advantage. This R^2 value is categorized as substantial (Hair et al., 2017), showing that the three independent variables have a very strong influence in explaining Generation Z's intention to apply for jobs. The remaining 28.5% is explained by other factors not included in this research model, such as salary factors, work location, or

personal recommendations. The R^2 value for corporate reputation is 0.683, showing that 68.3% of the variance can be explained by social media, employer branding, competitive advantage, and intention to apply.

This is also categorized as substantial, indicating that these four variables have a very strong influence in shaping company reputation from Generation Z's perspective. The Q^2 values (Stone-Geisser Q^2) are 0.401 for intention to apply and 0.429 for corporate reputation, both exceeding zero, indicating good predictive relevance. This means the research model has good ability to predict intention to apply and corporate reputation values based on the independent variables included in the model. The Goodness-of-Fit (GoF) value is 0.648, calculated using the formula $GoF = \sqrt{(\text{average AVE} \times \text{average } R^2)} = \sqrt{(0.6 \times 0.7)} = 0.648$.

This value is categorized as good because it exceeds 0.36 (Hair et al., 2017), demonstrating that the overall model has excellent fit. The SRMR (Standardized Root Mean Square Residual) value is 0.077, below the threshold of 0.08, confirming that the model has good fit. Overall, the structural model evaluation shows that the research model has excellent quality, with high explanatory power, good predictive relevance, and very good model fit.

Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis testing was conducted using bootstrapping with 5000 iterations to obtain stable and accurate results. The bootstrapping method is used to estimate the significance of path coefficients and test hypotheses without assuming normality in data distribution. The results are presented in Table 3, showing path coefficients, t-statistics, p-values, and hypothesis testing conclusions for each relationship between variables.

Table 3. Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Path	Path Coefficient	t-statistics	Result
H1	Social Media → Intention to Apply	0.227	3.262	Accepted
H2	Employer Branding → Intention to Apply	0.420	6.261	Accepted
H3	Competitive Advantage → Intention to Apply	0.340	4.386	Accepted
H4	Intention to Apply → Corporate Reputation	-0.105	1.409	Rejected
H5	Social Media → Corporate Reputation	0.248	4.839	Accepted
H6	Employer Branding → Corporate Reputation	0.294	4.542	Accepted
H7	Competitive Advantage → Corporate Reputation	0.479	6.944	Accepted

Discussion

The first hypothesis testing shows that social media has a significant positive effect on intention to apply ($\beta = 0.227$, $t = 3.262$, $p < 0.05$). This means that the better and more effective a company's social media activities, the higher Generation Z's interest in applying for jobs at that company. This finding is consistent with research by Mičík and Mičudová (2018) which studied social media to attract the millennial generation with career websites. The research explained that the purpose was to see the extent to which companies can attract millennial generation interest. The difference from that research with this research is that it used cluster analysis method while this research was conducted with PLS-SEM analysis. Additionally, that research only focused on Generation Y, while this research focuses on Generation Z born 1997-2006.

Therefore, with findings in this research, it can be seen that social media has an important

role in attracting interest in applying for jobs. Social media can build good relationships between company reputation and job seekers and allows companies to obtain real-time data that can be utilized for environmental analysis occurring (Tuten & Solomon, 2017). Companies need to pay attention to content displayed through company social media as it has a large influence in attracting Generation Z's interest in applying for jobs.

The second hypothesis shows that employer branding has the strongest significant positive effect on intention to apply ($\beta = 0.420$, $t = 6.261$, $p < 0.05$). This is the strongest influence among the three independent variables affecting intention to apply. PLS-SEM analysis results show that the relationship between employer branding and intention to apply has t-statistics of 6.261 and p-values of 0.000, indicating this hypothesis is accepted. This research has similar results to research by Ekhsan and Fitri (2021) which stated employer branding has a good relationship with intention to apply. Additionally, it is also in line with the fact that if a company has good and attractive employer branding, it can become a special attraction to attract job seekers (Dalv, 2021; Rungsrisawat & Sirinapatpokin, 2019; Sellar & Jayawardana, 2020; Sharma & Prasad, 2018).

The difference from research conducted by Ekhsan and Fitri (2021) is that this research focuses on Generation Z born 1997-2006 while that research had samples from students at a university. Therefore, companies must continue to pay attention to the employer branding they build to attract more job seekers so companies will also have employees with good competence who will later help companies grow and develop better than before. Among the employer branding dimensions, development value has the highest outer loading (0.762), indicating that career development opportunities are the most important factor for Generation Z in assessing a company as an employer.

The third hypothesis testing results show that competitive advantage has a significant positive effect on intention to apply ($\beta = 0.340$, $t = 4.386$, $p < 0.05$). The results of this hypothesis have t-statistics value of 4.386, p-values of 0.000, and positive path coefficients with value of 0.340, meaning this hypothesis can be accepted. Findings from other research come from Ek Styvén et al. (2022), where that research wanted to understand that perceptions of innovation can influence company attractiveness as an employer and it was proven that the two things have a positive effect.

Another research example was conducted by Soeling et al. (2022) about employer attractiveness formed from positive perceptions to obtain competitive advantage significantly affects intention to apply. Therefore, from this research there are new findings stating competitive advantage has an influence on intention to apply. The product dimension has the highest outer loading (0.768) in competitive advantage, indicating that for Generation Z, product or service quality offered by a company becomes an important consideration in assessing company attractiveness as a workplace.

Interestingly, hypothesis 4 was rejected, showing that intention to apply does not have a significant effect on corporate reputation ($\beta = -0.105$, $t = 1.409$, $p > 0.05$). After going through PLS-SEM testing, this hypothesis has path coefficients with negative value of -0.105, t-statistics of 1.409, and p-values of 0.159. Thus, it can be concluded that the hypothesis of intention to apply toward corporate reputation is not significant. This unexpected finding suggests that for Generation Z, the relationship between their intention to apply and company reputation may not be as straightforward as previously theorized.

Respondents from this research have different views regarding these two variables, resulting in an insignificant hypothesis. Companies interested in attracting job seekers can focus more on other variables, as from this hypothesis, corporate reputation may not be one of the important things as a main factor for intention to apply. This finding provides new insights that contradict some previous theories, and further research is needed to understand this relationship more deeply. One possible explanation is that Generation Z may assess company reputation more from external factors such as social media content, product quality, and company achievements rather than from the number of job applicants interested in the company.

The fifth hypothesis testing shows that social media has a significant positive effect on corporate reputation ($\beta = 0.248$, $t = 4.839$, $p < 0.05$). PLS-SEM testing displays that this hypothesis has path coefficients of 0.248, t-statistics of 4.839, and p-values of 0.000. With these results, it can be said that the social media variable has a positive influence on corporate reputation. This is consistent with research by Potgieter & Doubell (2020) which discusses the importance of employing someone with values, morals, and personality aligned with organizational culture in the company imaging process.

Additionally, it was also found to emphasize the need for companies to recognize personal branding as a legitimate branding element and include it in a company's strategic decision-making process. Companies are expected to pay close attention to social media to enhance corporate reputation as research results show these two variables have significant influence. Among social media dimensions, entertainment has the highest outer loading (0.751), indicating that entertaining and engaging content is most important in shaping company reputation from Generation Z's perspective.

The sixth hypothesis shows that employer branding has a significant positive effect on corporate reputation ($\beta = 0.294$, $t = 4.542$, $p < 0.05$). Analysis results also show that employer branding has a significant positive effect on corporate reputation in Generation Z's perspective born 1997-2006. This aligns with research by Verčić and Čorić (2018) examining the relationship between reputation, employer branding, and corporate social responsibility. Therefore, companies must currently pay more attention to employer branding as it directly influences corporate reputation. Companies need to continuously implement good employer branding and must not stop. Employee experience plays a big role in adding good employer branding. With companies frequently updating healthy work environments, they can enhance credible and sustainable company reputation.

The seventh hypothesis testing shows that competitive advantage has the strongest significant positive effect on corporate reputation ($\beta = 0.479$, $t = 6.944$, $p < 0.05$). This is the strongest influence among variables affecting corporate reputation. This finding indicates that competitive advantage can become one of the points job applicants consider. With adequate competitive advantage, companies can have a good image, potentially making job applicants want to experience working at that company.

Companies need to continuously improve and maintain their competitive advantage as it affects corporate reputation. Based on research by Olmedo-Cifuentes and Martínez-León (2014), corporate reputation is a source of competitive advantage. With several dimensions in competitive advantage, companies can continuously increase innovation, improve product quality, strive to be first in the market, thus enhancing company reputation. Product and

services dimension have the highest outer loading (0.801) in corporate reputation, indicating that for Generation Z, product or service quality is the most important factor in assessing company reputation.

CONCLUSION

This research's PLS-SEM analysis revealed that social media, employer branding (the strongest predictor), and competitive advantage significantly influenced Generation Z's (born 1997–2006) intention to apply for jobs, while intention to apply showed no significant effect on corporate reputation from their perspective; however, social media, employer branding, and competitive advantage (the strongest) directly enhanced corporate reputation. Companies should prioritize compelling social media content, robust employer branding, and sustained competitive edges to attract Gen Z talent and bolster reputation, offering practical guidance for HR and marketing stakeholders. For future research, studies should incorporate other generational cohorts (e.g., Millennials or Gen Alpha) alongside Gen Z to compare perspectives and validate generalizability across demographics.

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