



## The Effect of Employer Branding and Social Media on job Application Intentions: Corporate Reputation as a Mediating Variable Among Generation Z University Students in Yogyakarta

Zaidania Salma Salsabila<sup>1\*</sup>, Andriyastuti Suratman<sup>2</sup>  
Islamic University

**Corresponding Author:** Zaidania Salma Salsabila [salmazaidania@gmail.com](mailto:salmazaidania@gmail.com)

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### ABSTRACT

This study examines the influence of employer branding and social media on job application intentions among Generation Z university students in Yogyakarta, with corporate reputation as a mediating factor. Using a quantitative approach, data were collected from 200 participants via questionnaires and analyzed with PLS-SEM in SmartPLS. Key findings include employer branding positively and significantly affects both job application intentions and corporate reputation. Social media positively influences corporate reputation but does not have a significant direct effect on job application intentions. Corporate reputation positively impacts job application intentions and mediates the effects of employer branding and social media on these intentions. The results emphasize the importance for organizations to strengthen employer branding and manage their corporate reputation to attract Generation Z job seekers effectively.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The competition for highly qualified employees has intensified in recent years, making talent attraction a critical challenge for organizations. Human resources are widely recognized as a strategic asset that contributes to organizational performance and long-term competitiveness. Consequently, organizations must develop effective recruitment strategies to attract individuals whose skills and values align with organizational objectives. Alongside these developments, digital transformation has significantly altered the recruitment landscape, enabling organizations to communicate with potential applicants through various online platforms and digital channels. As a result, understanding the determinants of job application intentions has become increasingly important in contemporary human resource management research.

The growing participation of Generation Z in the labor market has further transformed recruitment practices. In Indonesia, Generation Z represents one of the largest demographic groups and is expected to dominate the workforce in the coming years. As digital natives, members of this generation frequently rely on internet-based information when evaluating potential employers and making career decisions. Previous studies suggest that Generation Z tends to assess organizations not only on economic considerations but also on organizational reputation, workplace culture, social values, and opportunities for professional growth. Consequently, organizations are increasingly required to establish a positive employer image and maintain effective communication with prospective employees through digital media.

One of the most prominent approaches for attracting talented applicants is employer branding. Employer branding refers to the process through which organizations develop and communicate a distinctive employer identity that differentiates them from competing employers (Ambler & Barrow, 1996). Through effective employer branding, organizations can highlight their unique values, work environment, and employee benefits, thereby enhancing their attractiveness among job seekers. Prior studies have consistently demonstrated that employer branding positively influences organizational attractiveness and applicants' intentions to pursue employment opportunities within a company (Laila & Khan, 2024; Kurniawati & Larasati, 2025). These findings indicate that a favorable employer image plays a crucial role in shaping prospective applicants' perceptions and behavioral intentions.

In addition to employer branding, social media has become an essential recruitment tool for organizations seeking to engage with younger generations. Social media platforms enable companies to disseminate information rapidly, interact with stakeholders, and communicate organizational values in a more transparent manner. For Generation Z, social media serves as a primary source of information regarding potential employers because it provides access to organizational content, employee experiences, and public evaluations of companies. Previous research suggests that organizational communication through social media can enhance applicants' perceptions of organizational attractiveness and increase their willingness to apply for available positions (Ha

& Luan, 2018; Rani et al., 2022). Therefore, social media is increasingly viewed as a strategic mechanism for influencing recruitment outcomes.

Another factor that may explain applicants' behavioral intentions is corporate reputation. Corporate reputation reflects stakeholders' collective evaluation of an organization's credibility, reliability, and overall quality. A favorable reputation reduces uncertainty and serves as an important signal of organizational quality for prospective employees (Cable & Turban, 2003). From the perspective of job seekers, organizations with strong reputations are generally perceived as more trustworthy, stable, and desirable workplaces. This consideration is particularly relevant for Generation Z, whose career decisions are often influenced by perceptions of organizational authenticity, social responsibility, and ethical conduct. Consequently, corporate reputation may significantly influence an individual's intention to apply for employment opportunities.

The relationships among employer branding, social media, corporate reputation, and intention to apply can be explained through signaling theory. Organizations continuously transmit signals regarding their values, culture, and employment conditions through branding activities and digital communication channels. These signals shape external stakeholders' perceptions and contribute to the development of corporate reputation. When job seekers perceive an organization as reputable and attractive, they are more likely to develop positive attitudes and stronger intentions to pursue employment opportunities within that organization. Therefore, corporate reputation may function as an important mediating mechanism linking employer branding and social media to job application intentions.

Despite the increasing scholarly attention devoted to recruitment-related factors, several research gaps remain. First, previous studies have primarily examined employer branding and social media independently, while limited research has investigated their simultaneous effects on intention to apply. Second, the mediating role of corporate reputation has not been extensively examined within an integrated research framework. Third, empirical evidence focusing specifically on Generation Z university students in Yogyakarta remains scarce. Considering that Yogyakarta is one of Indonesia's largest educational centers and hosts a substantial population of prospective job seekers, understanding recruitment-related perceptions within this context represents an important contribution to the literature.

Accordingly, this study investigates the effects of employer branding and social media on intention to apply among Generation Z university students in Yogyakarta. Furthermore, this study examines the mediating role of corporate reputation in explaining how employer branding and social media influence' intentions to pursue employment opportunities. The findings are expected to contribute to the literature on recruitment and employer attractiveness while providing practical insights for organizations seeking to attract Generation Z talent in an increasingly digital environment.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Signaling Theory*

Spence (1973) originally proposed Signaling Theory to elucidate how parties possessing superior information convey signals to other parties to mitigate information asymmetry. Within recruitment contexts, employer branding and social media function as signaling mechanisms through which organizations communicate their attributes and values to prospective applicants. Connelly et al. (2011) emphasized that the quality of signals transmitted by organizations influences individuals' perceptions and subsequent decision-making processes.

### *Theory of Planned Behavior*

According to Azen's (1985) Theory of Planned Behavior, an individual's intention to perform a specific behavior is influenced by three factors: their attitude toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. In this study, positive perceptions of employer branding and corporate reputation can enhance a person's intention to seek employment with an organization.

### *Employer Branding*

Employer branding constitutes an organizational strategy directed at establishing a positive image as an appealing workplace for prospective employees (Ambler & Barrow, 1996). This concept encompasses various organizational benefits, including economic value, social value, career development opportunities, and a supportive working environment. According to Barrow and Mosley (2005), employer branding facilitates the attraction of high-quality talent and enhances employee loyalty.

### *job Application Intention*

job application intention refers to the early stage of an individual's job search behavior, reflecting the extent to which a person is prepared and motivated to take concrete steps toward jobtaining employment opportunities. According to Highhouse et al. (2003), this intention emerges when job seekers evaluate an organization positively, which encourages them to submit applications. Likewise, Nawakitphaitoon and Sooraksa (2023) described job application intention as an individual's inclination to engage in various job-search activities, such as gathering information about organizations, communicating with potential employers, and actively pursuing available vacancies.

In the recruitment process, employer branding functions as an important signal that reflects the attractiveness and quality of an organization as a workplace. Organizations that possess a strong and favorable employer image tend to attract greater interest from potential candidates. Previous studies conducted by Ekhsan and Fitri (2021), Purborini and Basid (2022), and Hapsara and Nugrahaningsih (2024) found that effective employer branding can

enhance individuals' willingness and intention to apply for jobs within an organization.

H1: Employer branding exerts a positive influence on job application intention.

Furthermore, employer branding contributes significantly to the formation and enhancement of corporate reputation. Companies that successfully establish a positive image as employers are more likely to gain public trust, credibility, and favorable perceptions from prospective employees (Potgieter & Doubell, 2020). Empirical evidence provided by Setiawan and Marginningsih (2021), Soeling et al. (2022), as well as Hapsara and Nugrahaningsih (2024) suggests that effective employer branding plays a substantial role in strengthening corporate reputation.

H2: Employer branding has a positive effect on corporate reputation.

### *Social Media*

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) described social media as a collection of internet-based platforms that facilitate user-generated content and enable individuals to communicate, share, and exchange information interactively. In organizational settings, social media has become an essential communication channel through which companies promote their organizational culture, employment opportunities, corporate activities, and other information relevant to potential applicants. According to Carpentier et al. (2019), social media can improve an organization's attractiveness by increasing the availability of accurate, relevant, and transparent information. Given their familiarity with digital technologies, members of Generation Z frequently depend on social networking platforms as one of the main sources of information when exploring employment opportunities (Lever, 2022).

Empirical studies conducted by Laila and Khan (2024), Maulana and Wahyudi (2025), as well as Salamah et al. (2023) suggest that social media contributes to higher job application intention by enabling job seekers to access broader and more detailed information regarding prospective employers.

H3: social media positively influences job application intention.

In addition, social media serves as an important medium through which organizations can shape and strengthen public perceptions. Dikmans et al. (2015) argued that active and consistent communication through social media platforms can enhance corporate reputation by fostering stakeholder engagement and facilitating effective information sharing. Supporting this view, Ruslim et al. (2021), Pitaloka and Moko (2023), and Hasyatamma et al. (2025) reported that social media utilization contributes positively to the development of corporate reputation.

H4: social media positively influences corporate reputation.

### *Corporate Reputation*

Corporate reputation can be understood as the overall assessment formed by stakeholders regarding an organization based on their accumulated experiences, available information, and perceptions of the company (Fombrun et al., 1999). It represents how stakeholders perceive the organization's trustworthiness, performance quality, reliability, and long-term success (Walsh & Beatty, 2007). Cable and Turban (2003) emphasized the importance of corporate reputation in recruitment processes, noting that job seekers generally prefer organizations that are viewed positively by the public. A favorable reputation provides reassurance regarding workplace conditions, career advancement opportunities, and organizational stability. Consistent with this argument, findings from Ekhsan and Fitri (2021), Soeling et al. (2022), Yunanti et al. (2025), and Destiani and Rachmawati (2025) indicate that a positive corporate reputation encourages stronger job application intention among prospective applicants.

H5: Corporate reputation positively influences job application intention.

A well-developed employer brand can strengthen corporate reputation by projecting a favorable image of the organization as a desirable place to work. As stakeholders develop a more positive perception of the company, potential applicants are more likely to trust the organization and become interested in pursuing employment opportunities within it (Soeling et al., 2022). Furthermore, research by Purborini and Basid (2022), Hapsara and Nugrahaningsih (2024), and Nisa et al. (2025) suggests that corporate reputation functions as an intermediary mechanism through which employer branding affects job application intention.

H6: Corporate reputation mediates the relationship between employer branding and job application intention.

Social media also contributes to the development of corporate reputation by enabling organizations to distribute information quickly and reach a broad audience. Through continuous communication and active engagement on social networking platforms, companies can cultivate favorable perceptions among stakeholders. An enhanced corporate reputation subsequently encourages potential applicants to view the organization more positively and increases their willingness to pursue employment opportunities. Findings reported by Ruslim et al. (2021), Laila and Khan (2024), and Hapsari (2025) indicate that corporate reputation acts as an intervening mechanism linking social media activities to job application intention.

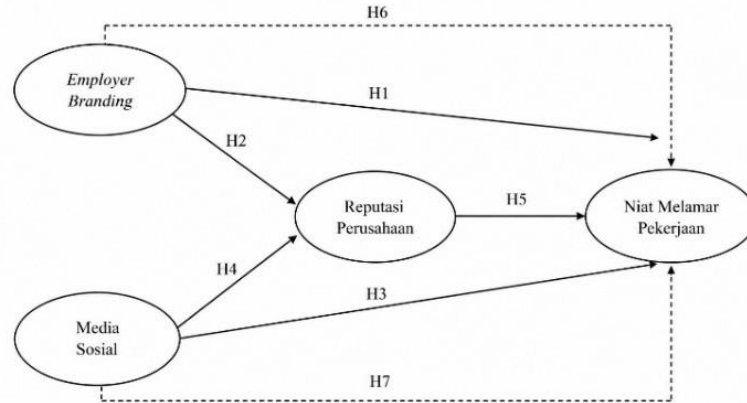
H7: Corporate reputation mediates the relationship between social media and job application intention.

### *Conceptual framework*

This research investigates the relationships among employer branding, social media, corporate reputation, and job application intention. Specifically, corporate reputation is proposed as a mediating variable that

explains how employer branding and social media influence individuals' intentions to apply for employment opportunities.

Figure 1. Research Conceptual Framework



## METHODOLOGY

This investigation adopted a quantitative approach employing survey methods to examine the effects of employer branding and social media on job application intention, with corporate reputation serving as a mediating variable among Generation Z students in Yogyakarta. The quantitative approach was selected because it enables objective and systematic testing of relationships among variables (Creswell, 2014).

The study population comprised Generation Z students enrolled in higher education institutions in Yogyakarta. Respondents were selected through purposive sampling based on criteria requiring that they be active university students, belong to the Generation Z cohort, and be preparing to enter the workforce. A total of 200 respondents participated in this research. This sample size satisfies the recommended requirements for SEM-PLS analysis as specified by Hair et al. (2017).

Table 1. Research Variables and Measurement Sources

Variable	Number of Indicators	Source
Employer Branding	11	Setiawan & Marginningsih (2021)
Social Media	6	Collins & Stevens (2002)
Corporate Reputation	11	Fombrun et al. (1999)
job Application Intention	7	Permadi & Netra (2015)

All indicators were assessed using a six-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree), following Chomeya's (2010)

recommendation. Data analysis was conducted using Structural Equation Modeling-Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) with SmartPLS software. The analytical procedure comprised two primary stages: outer model to assess construct validity and reliability, and inner model evaluation to examine relationships among variables and test the proposed hypotheses (Hair et al., 2017).

**RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

This research involved 200 Generation Z university students in Yogyakarta. Respondents were selected based on criteria requiring active student status, membership in the Generation Z cohort, and interest in employment opportunities and career development. Respondent characteristics encompassed gender, age, field of study, and experience seeking job-related information through social media. The majority of respondents were final-year students preparing to enter the workforce, rendering them highly relevant to the research objectives.

*Measurement Model Evaluation*

The measurement model was assessed to ensure that all constructs met the required standards of validity and reliability. The evaluation covered convergent validity, discriminant validity, Composite Reliability, and Cronbach's Alpha. Convergent validity was examined using outer loading and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values. Based on the criteria proposed by Hair et al. (2017), indicators are considered valid when their outer loading values exceed 0.70, while construct-level convergent validity is established when AVE values are greater than 0.50.

The initial assessment indicated that two indicators of the Social Media construct, namely MS2 and MS4, did not satisfy the recommended outer loading threshold. As a result, these indicators were excluded from further analysis. After their removal, the measurement model was re-estimated to improve the overall quality and accuracy of the construct measurement.

The re-evaluation results showed that all remaining indicators achieved outer loading values above 0.70, indicating satisfactory convergent validity. Moreover, each construct jobtained an AVE value greater than 0.50, demonstrating that the latent variables were able to explain a substantial proportion of the variance in their respective indicators. These findings confirm that the constructs fulfilled the requirements for convergent validity.

Table 2. Average Variance Extracted (AVE) Values

Variabel	Nilai AVE
EB	0.819
MS	0.788
CR	0.871
AI	0.803

Reliability testing was subsequently conducted using Composite Reliability and Cronbach's Alpha. Hair et al. (2017) suggested that both

measures should exceed the minimum threshold of 0.70 to indicate acceptable internal consistency. The results revealed that all constructs surpassed the recommended benchmark for both reliability measures. Therefore, the constructs can be considered reliable and suitable for further analysis.

Table 3. Reliability Test Results

Variabel	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability ( $\rho_A$ )	Composite Reliability ( $\rho_C$ )	Status
EB	0.978	0.978	0.980	Reliable
MS	0.910	0.911	0.937	Reliable
CR	0.975	0.975	0.979	Reliable
AI	0.975	0.977	0.978	Reliable

#### Structural Model Evaluation

The inner model evaluation assessed the model's capacity to explain relationships among variables through R-square ( $R^2$ ) values and hypothesis testing. The  $R^2$  value for Corporate Reputation is 0.851, indicating that employer branding and social media collectively explain 85.1% of the variance in corporate reputation. Meanwhile, the  $R^2$  value for job Application Intention is 0.900, indicating that employer branding, social media, and corporate reputation together explain 90.0% of the variance in job application intention. According to Hair et al. (2017), these values demonstrate the proposed model's substantial predictive capability.

Table 4. R-Square Test Results

Variabel	R-Square	R-Square Adjusted
AI	0.900	0.899
CR	0.851	0.849

Hypothesis testing employed the bootstrapping procedure in SmartPLS. A hypothesis was considered supported when the t-statistic exceeded 1.96 and the p-value was less than 0.05. Mediation analysis examined whether corporate reputation serves as an intervening variable in the relationships between employer branding, social media, and job application intention.

The path coefficient analysis results indicate that six of the seven proposed hypotheses were supported and statistically significant. The accepted hypotheses were H1, H2, H4, H5, H6, and H7, while H3 was not supported.

Table 5. Path Coefficient Test Results

Hubungan Variabel	Original Sample (O)	T Statistics	P Values	Status
EB → AI	0.340	3.044	0.002	Accepted
EB → CR	0.635	4.844	0.000	Accepted
MS → AI	0.149	1.925	0.054	Rejected

MS → CR	0.302	2.234	0.026	Accepted
CR → AI	0.486	4.408	0.000	Accepted
EB → CR → AI	0.309	3.350	0.001	Accepted
MS → CR → AI	0.147	1.963	0.050	Accepted

Employer Branding (EB) demonstrated positive and significant direct effects on both job Application Intention (AI) and Corporate Reputation (CR). Corporate Reputation (CR) likewise exhibited a significant positive effect on job Application Intention (AI). In contrast, social media (SM) did not show a significant direct effect on job Application Intention (AI), although it significantly influenced Corporate Reputation (CR).

Furthermore, Corporate Reputation (CR) was identified as a significant mediating variable in the relationship between Employer Branding (EB) and job Application Intention (AI), as well as in the relationship between social media (SM) and job Application Intention (AI). Overall, six hypotheses were supported, while only the direct effect of social media on job Application Intention (H3) was not supported.

H1: Employer Branding → job Application Intention

The findings indicate that employer branding exerts a positive and significant influence on job application intention. This result implies that stronger organizational images as attractive workplaces correspond to greater willingness among Generation Z individuals to pursue employment with those organizations. Drawing upon Signaling Theory (Spence, 1973), employer branding functions as a signal conveying information about organizational culture, career opportunities, work environment, and corporate values to prospective applicants. These outcomes align with previous research by Ekhsan and Fitri (2021), Lestari and Manggiasih (2023), and Hapsara and Nugrahaningsih (2024), all of which identified employer branding as an important factor in enhancing applicants' intentions to join organizations.

H2: Employer Branding → Corporate Reputation

The results demonstrate that employer branding positively and significantly affects corporate reputation. This finding suggests that organizations successfully cultivating positive images as attractive workplaces are more likely to secure favorable perceptions from both the public and prospective applicants. Employer branding functions not merely as a recruitment instrument but also as a strategic mechanism for building and sustaining strong corporate reputation over extended periods. These findings corroborate previous research by Potgieter and Doubell (2020), Setiawan and Marginningsih (2021), and Soeling et al. (2022), which concluded that employer branding substantially contributes to corporate reputation enhancement.

H3: social media → job Application Intention

The findings reveal that social media does not significantly influence job application intention. This outcome suggests that despite Generation Z's high social media activity, information obtained through these platforms does not sufficiently directly affect their employment decisions. Prospective applicants tend to consider other factors, including corporate reputation, job security,

career development opportunities, and work environment, before making employment-related choices. This result diverges from findings by Laila and Khan (2024) and Pitaloka and Moko (2023) but aligns with Ruslim et al. (2021), who concluded that social media primarily serves as an information source rather than a key determinant of ob application intention.

H4: social media → Corporate Reputation

The results indicate that social media positively and significantly affects corporate reputation. This finding suggests that organizational activities on social media can shape positive public perceptions through rapid, transparent, and interactive information dissemination. Social media enables organizations to showcase corporate culture, business activities, and achievements, thereby enhancing public trust and confidence. These outcomes are consistent with previous research by Dikmans et al. (2015), Ruslim et al. (2021), and Hasyatamma et al. (2025), which concluded that social media serves as an important tool for building and strengthening corporate reputation.

H5: Corporate Reputation → ob Application Intention

The study finds that corporate reputation has a positive and significant effect on ob application intention. Prospective applicants are more attracted to companies with strong reputations because such organizations are seen as credible, trustworthy, and able to provide better career opportunities. This supports the Theory of Planned Behavior (Azen, 1985), which states that positive attitudes increase behavioral intentions. These results align with prior studies by Cable and Turban (2003), Soeling et al. (2022), and Yunanti et al. (2025).

H6: Employer Branding → Corporate Reputation → ob Application Intention

Corporate reputation significantly mediates the relationship between employer branding and ob application intention. Strong employer branding enhances corporate reputation, which in turn motivates ob seekers to apply. This shows that employer branding impacts ob application intention both directly and indirectly through corporate reputation. These findings are consistent with research by Purborini and Basid (2022), Hapsara and Nugrahaningsih (2024), and Nisa et al. (2025).

H7: social media → Corporate Reputation → ob Application Intention

Corporate reputation also mediates the relationship between social media and ob application intention. Although social media does not directly influence ob application intention, it strengthens corporate reputation, which then boosts individuals' intention to apply. This suggests social media acts as a tool to build corporate reputation, ultimately influencing ob seekers' behavior. These findings align with studies by Ruslim et al. (2021), Laila and Khan (2024), and Hapsari (2025).

#### *Theoretical Implications:*

This study advances Signaling Theory and the Theory of Planned Behavior in recruitment contexts by showing that employer branding and social

media act as signals shaping prospective applicants' perceptions of corporate reputation. It also confirms the critical mediating role of corporate reputation in connecting employer branding and social media with ob application intention. Additionally, the study enriches the understanding of Generation Z ob-seeking behavior, especially within the Indonesian context.

*Practical Implications:*

Organizations should enhance their employer branding strategies to boost their appeal as employers. Social media should be leveraged not just for sharing ob openings but as a strategic tool to build and maintain corporate reputation. Maintaining a positive reputation is vital, as it significantly influences Generation Z's ob application intentions. Companies are encouraged to focus on transparency, active communication, and fostering a positive workplace culture to develop and sustain favorable organizational images.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This study examined the effects of employer branding and social media on ob application intention, with corporate reputation serving as a mediating variable among Generation Z students in Yogyakarta. The findings revealed that employer branding plays a significant role in enhancing both ob application intention and corporate reputation. Meanwhile, social media was found to positively influence corporate reputation but did not exhibit a direct effect on ob application intention.

Furthermore, corporate reputation demonstrated a positive effect on ob application intention and served as a mediating variable in the relationships between employer branding and ob application intention, as well as between social media and ob application intention. These findings indicate that corporate reputation represents a crucial factor bridging the effects of employer branding and social media in shaping Generation Z's interest in applying for positions. Accordingly, strengthen their employer branding efforts, manage social media effectively, and maintain positive corporate reputations to successfully attract Generation Z talent.

## **FURTHER STUDY**

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the research was confined to Generation Z university students in Yogyakarta; consequently, the findings may not be generalizable to broader populations. Second, the study examined only the effects of employer branding, social media, and corporate reputation on ob application intention, leaving other potentially influential factors unexplored. Additionally, the measurement of social media in this study was relatively general and did not distinguish the effects of individual social media platforms.

Future research is encouraged to expand the scope of respondents and geographical coverage, as well as incorporate additional variables such as organizational attractiveness, e-recruitment, compensation, work-life balance, and ob security. Subsequent studies may also investigate the effects of specific

social media platforms, including LinkedIn, Instagram, and TikTok, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of Generation Z job-seeking behavior.

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