



The Influence Of Employer Branding And Corporate Reputation On Intention To Apply In The Tobacco Industry: Social Media As Moderating Variable

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ABSTRACT

Human resources are critical for business success, making competition for top talent increasingly intense. This study examines the influence of employer branding and corporate reputation on job seekers' intention to apply in the tobacco industry, using PT Hanjaya Mandala Sampoerna (HMSP) as the research context, and evaluates the moderating role of social media, specifically Instagram. A quantitative approach was used with purposive and snowball sampling, involving 160 job seekers aged 22–30 years in Jakarta and Surabaya. Data were collected through online questionnaires and analyzed using PLS-SEM. Results show that social media is the most influential factor in increasing intention to apply, followed by corporate reputation and employer branding. Active communication on social media strengthens corporate reputation, even in industries with negative stigma such as tobacco, while its interaction with employer branding is not significant. These findings highlight the strategic role of social media and reputation in attracting talent in challenging sectors. The study provides insights for companies to integrate authentic employer branding, reputation management, and digital engagement to optimize recruitment.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid development and increasing complexity of the business environment have elevated the strategic importance of human resources as one of the most valuable assets for organizations. The success of a company depends on the quality of its human resources (Hayomi & Suharnomo, 2024). Employing highly competent personnel who can adapt to business dynamics is a key factor in achieving long-term organizational goals. Consequently, organizations must exert optimal efforts to attract and retain top talent.

This awareness has intensified competition in talent acquisition, often referred to as the “war for talent” (Tenakwah, 2024). Companies face challenges in identifying candidates who meet both technical and soft skill requirements (Ayu & Maulana, 2025), making it essential to understand factors influencing job seekers’ intention to apply (Wijaya et al., 2023). Organizations that succeed in attracting applications from high-quality candidates gain a competitive advantage.

To enhance intention to apply, organizations implement strategies such as employer branding and corporate reputation. Employer branding promotes the company as an attractive workplace, encompassing functional, economic, and psychological benefits (Amelia & Nasution, 2016; Berthon et al., 2005), while corporate reputation builds trust and credibility (Fombrun, 1996; Silva & Dias, 2022). In the digital era, social media has become a key channel for shaping perceptions. According to We Are Social (2025), Indonesia has 143 million social media users, representing about 50.2% of the population, making platforms like Instagram strategic for recruitment (Annisa et al., 2022; Sivertzen et al., 2013).

Previous studies consistently show that employer branding, corporate reputation, and social media positively influence intention to apply (Yuspita et al., 2025; Rai et al., 2024; Evrina & Wulansari, 2023; Putri & Abdurrahman, 2023; Thang & Trang, 2024). However, some findings remain inconsistent, particularly regarding compensation and benefits, which do not always significantly affect intention to apply (Purusottama & Ardianto, 2019). Moreover, research focusing on industries with negative stigma, such as tobacco, is still limited. Given the possibility that industry characteristics may affect job seekers’ perceptions, it is important to determine whether the relationships among these variables remain significant in industries with negative stigma such as tobacco. This gap highlights the urgency of exploring how these factors interact in such contexts. Therefore, this study aims to examine the influence of employer branding and corporate reputation on job seekers’ intention to apply in the tobacco industry and assess the moderating role of social media, particularly Instagram.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Employer Branding

Employer branding is a corporate strategy to position a company as an attractive workplace by offering functional, economic, and psychological benefits (Ambler & Barrow, 1996). Berthon et al. (2005) expanded this concept into five dimensions: interest, social, economic, development, and application value. It serves as a communication tool to convey work environment and organizational identity, helping prospective employees understand what it is like to work in the company (Bharadwaj & Yameen, 2020; Santos et al., 2023). Employer branding is considered an important investment for attracting top talent.

Corporate Reputation

Corporate reputation, an intangible asset that provides competitive advantage, reflects stakeholders’ perceptions of company performance and credibility (Fombrun, 1996). The Reputation Quotient (RQ) evaluates six dimensions: emotional appeal, products and services, leadership, workplace environment, financial performance, and social responsibility (Fombrun et al., 2000). A strong reputation fosters trust and enhance organizational attractiveness.

Intention to Apply

According to the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), intention is the best predictor of actual behavior and is influenced by attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. Intention to apply refers to a person’s willingness to submit a job application (Wijaya et al., 2023), typically starting with seeking company information and ending with application submission (Sukresno & Fadli, 2022).

Social Media

Social media has evolved into a strategic recruitment tool, enabling rapid and cost-effective communication, broader reach, and interaction with potential applicants (Sivertzen et al., 2013; Pham & Vo, 2022). Platforms like Instagram allow companies to share content about work culture, achievements, and values, shaping perceptions and motivating applications (Kissel & Büttgen, 2015).

Employer Branding and Intention to Apply

Employer branding significantly influences intention to apply. Studies show that strong employer branding attracts qualified applicants and enhances organizational appeal (Jordan & Desiana, 2024; Evrina & Wulansari, 2023; Putri & Abdurrahman, 2023; Rai et al., 2024; Silva & Dias, 2022).

H1: Employer branding has a positive effect on intention to apply in the tobacco industry.

Corporate Reputation and Intention to Apply

Corporate reputation also positively affects intention to apply. Job seekers prefer companies with good image and credibility (Kartika & Riandi, 2023; Thang & Trang, 2024; Hayomi & Suharnomo, 2024).

H2: Corporate reputation has a positive effect on intention to apply in the tobacco industry.

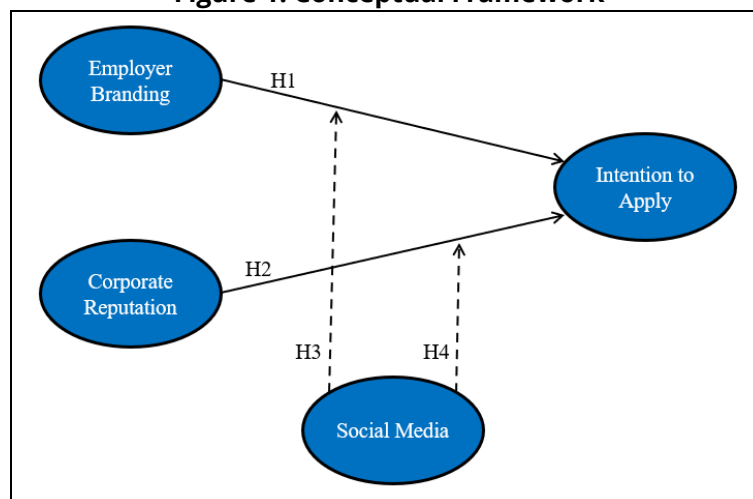
The Moderating Role of Social Media

Social media strengthens organizational attractiveness by providing accessible and appealing information. Previous research indicates that social media positively influences intention to apply and can moderate the effect of reputation (Annisa et al., 2022; Bharadwaj, 2023; Kusdiyanto & Ishbah, 2024; Yuspita et al., 2025).

H3: Social media strengthens the relationship between employer branding and intention to apply.

H4: Social media strengthens the relationship between corporate reputation and intention to apply.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework



Source: Author, 2025

Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual framework, where employer branding and corporate reputation act as independent variables, intention to apply as the dependent variable, and social media as a moderating variable that reinforces these relationships.

METHODS

Research Design

This study uses a quantitative explanatory approach, aiming to explain causal relationships between variables using numerical data and statistical analysis to test hypotheses and determine the influence of one variable on another.

Sampling

The population consists of job seekers in Jakarta and Surabaya, selected because PT Hanjaya Mandala Sampoerna (HMSP) headquarters is located in these regions, making the context relevant to the tobacco industry. Since the population size is unknown, the sample size was determined based on Hair et al. (2014), which recommends at least five times the number of indicators. With 18 indicators across four variables, the minimum requirement was 110 respondents.

A non-probability sampling method combining purposive and snowball sampling was applied. Purposive sampling targeted job seekers familiar with HMSP's company profile and Instagram account (@insidesampoerna), aged 22–30 years, and holding at least a bachelor's degree. Respondents represented diverse work experience backgrounds, including fresh graduates and experienced professionals. Snowball sampling was used to expand coverage by asking initial participants to refer others meeting the same criteria.

Data Collection

This study used both primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained through an online questionnaire with a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree), distributed via Google Forms and shared through WhatsApp over a three-week period (July 14–August 1, 2025). Secondary data from credible sources, including scientific publications and academic references, were used to strengthen the theoretical framework and support the analysis.

Measures

This study examines two independent variables employer branding and corporate reputation with social media as a moderating variable and intention to apply as the dependent variable. Employer branding was measured using five dimensions adopted from Berthon et al. (2005), namely interest value, social value, economic value, development value, and application value. Corporate reputation was assessed through six dimensions adopted from Fombrun et al. (2000), including emotional appeal, product and service quality, vision and leadership, workplace environment, financial performance, and social responsibility. Intention to apply was measured using three indicators adopted from Sivertzen et al. (2013): job acceptance, employer preference, and effort commitment. Social media was evaluated using four indicators adapted from Pham and Vo (2022), which cover social media use, career information, attractive information and achievements, and social media reviews.

Data Analysis Technique

Data was analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS version 4. The analysis included evaluation of the outer model (indicator reliability, internal consistency, convergent and discriminant validity) and inner model (multicollinearity, coefficient of determination R^2 , effect size f^2 , predictive relevance Q^2 , and hypothesis testing through path coefficients). Prior to full-scale data collection, instrument validity and reliability were pre-tested on 32 respondents using SPSS version 27.

RESULTS

Respondent Characteristic

A total of 160 respondents participated in this study. Most were aged 22–24 years (79%), followed by 25–27 years (15%) and 28–30 years (6%). In terms of education, 96% held a bachelor's degree and 4% a master's degree. Regarding work experience, 46% had less than one year, 13% had none, 31% had 1–3 years, and the remainder had more than three years. Job seekers were primarily located in Jakarta (57%) and Surabaya (34%), with 9% searching in both cities. This profile reflects a diverse group of young, educated job seekers.

Descriptive Analysis

The mean scores for all variables were above 4 on a 1–5 Likert scale, indicating positive perceptions of employer branding, corporate reputation, social media, and intention to apply. Standard deviations were relatively small, suggesting homogeneous responses among participants.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Research Variables

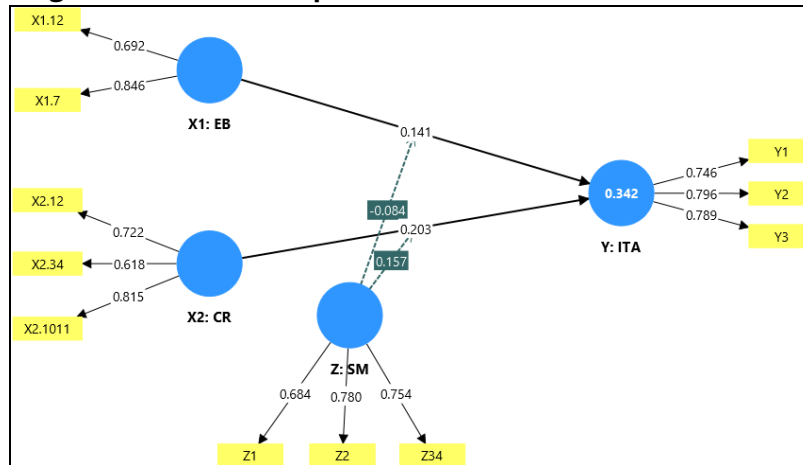
Variable	Indicator	Mean	Standard Deviation
Employer Branding (X1)	Interest value	4.27	0.28
	Application value	4.41	0.68
Corporate Reputation (X2)	Emotional appeal	4.42	0.49
	Product and service	4.37	0.54
	Social responsibility	4.29	0.62
Intention to Apply (Y)	Job acceptance	4.41	0.68
	Employer preference	4.23	0.80
	Effort commitment	4.27	0.66
Social Media (Z)	Social media use	4.33	0.66
	Career information	4.28	0.69
	Attractive information & achievements	4.28	0.61

Source: SPSS 27.0 Output, 2025

PLS-SEM Analysis: Outer Model Evaluation

During the outer model testing phase, several indicators were excluded from the model for not meeting statistical criteria, specifically those with outer loading values below 0.6 or AVE below 0.5 (Hair Jr et al., 2014). This elimination process ensures that only valid and reliable indicators are used in subsequent analyses.

The social value and economic value indicators in the employer branding construct; the vision and leadership, workplace environment, and financial performance indicators in the corporate reputation construct; as well as the social media reviews indicator in the social media construct were eliminated due to having outer loading values below 0.6. In addition, the development value indicator in the employer branding construct was also eliminated because its AVE value was below 0.5

Figure 2. Structural Equation Model with Path Coefficients

Source: PLS-SEM Output, 2025

Indicator Reliability

Most indicators in Table 2 show outer loading values above 0.7, although some are in the range of 0.6 to 0.7. These indicators are retained as the AVE and reliability criteria were met (Hair Jr et al., 2014) making all indicators suitable for further analysis.

Table 2. Outer Loading Analysis Results

Variable	Indicators	Outer Loading	Remark
Employer Branding (X1)	Interest value	0.692	Valid (sufficient)
	Application value	0.846	Valid
Corporate Reputation (X2)	Emotional appeal	0.722	Valid
	Product and service	0.618	Valid (sufficient)
	Social responsibility	0.815	Valid
Intention to Apply (Y)	Job acceptance	0.746	Valid
	Employer preference	0.796	Valid
	Effort commitment	0.789	Valid
Social Media (Z)	Social media use	0.684	Valid (sufficient)
	Career information	0.780	Valid
	Attractive information & achievements	0.754	Valid

Source: PLS-SEM Output, 2025

Internal Consistency Reliability

Composite Reliability (CR) was used to assess internal consistency, with values above 0.7 indicating reliability (Hair Jr et al., 2014). All constructs met this criterion, confirming good reliability. CR is preferred over Cronbach's alpha in PLS-SEM as it provides a more accurate estimate (Hair et al., 2019).

Table 3. Composite Reliability Analysis Results

Variable	Composite Reliability	Remark
Employer Branding (X1)	0.746	Reliable
Corporate Reputation (X2)	0.764	Reliable
Intention to Apply (Y)	0.821	Reliable
Social Media (Z)	0.784	Reliable

Source: PLS-SEM Output, 2025

Convergent Validity

Convergent validity was assessed using Average Variance Extracted (AVE), with values above 0.5 indicating validity (Hair Jr et al., 2014). All constructs met this criterion, confirming convergent validity.

Table 4. Average Variance Extracted (AVE) Analysis Results

Variable	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	Remark
Employer Branding (X1)	0.597	Valid
Corporate Reputation (X2)	0.522	Valid
Intention to Apply (Y)	0.604	Valid
Social Media (Z)	0.548	Valid

Source: PLS-SEM Output, 2025

Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity was assessed using the Fornell-Larcker criterion and cross-loading analysis. According to Fornell-Larcker, validity is confirmed when the square root of AVE for each construct exceeds its correlations with other constructs. All constructs met this criterion, and cross-loading results further supported discriminant validity.

Table 5. Discriminant Validity (Fornell-Larcker Criterion) Analysis Results

Variable	Employer Branding	Corporate Reputation	Intention to Apply	Social Media
Employer Branding (X1)	0.773*			
Corporate Reputation (X2)	0.495	0.723*		
Intention to Apply (Y)	0.359	0.407	0.777*	
Social Media (Z)	0.347	0.446	0.517	0.740*

* Square Root of AVE

Source: PLS-SEM Output, 2025

PLS-SEM Analysis: Inner Model Evaluation

The structural model was assessed through multicollinearity, explanatory power, effect size, predictive relevance, and hypothesis testing. VIF values were below 5, indicating no multicollinearity issues. The model explained 34.2% of the variance in intention to apply ($R^2 = 0.342$), with social media showing the largest effect size ($f^2 = 0.181$, medium). Predictive relevance was adequate ($Q^2 = 0.269$).

Bootstrapping results confirmed that employer branding ($p = 0.047$) and corporate reputation ($p = 0.021$) significantly influence intention to apply, while social media has the strongest effect ($p < 0.001$). Social media moderated the effect of corporate reputation ($p = 0.047$) but not employer branding ($p = 0.279$).

Table 6. Path Coefficient Analysis Results

Relationship	Path Coefficient (O)	t-statistic	p-value	Effect
X1: EB → Y: ITA	0.141	1.983	0.047	Significant
X2: CR → Y: ITA	0.203	2.313	0.021	Significant
Z: SM → Y: ITA	0.392	4.456	0.000	Significant
Z: SM x X1: EB → Y: ITA	(0.084)	1.082	0.279	Not significant
Z: SM x X2: CR → Y: ITA	0.157	1.987	0.047	Significant

Source: PLS-SEM Output, 2025

Based on the analysis, three of the four hypotheses were confirmed. Employer branding (H1) and corporate reputation (H2) have a significant positive effect on intention to apply, while social media (H4) strengthens the relationship between corporate reputation and intention to apply. In contrast, the moderating effect of social media on employer branding (H3) was not significant. Overall, employer branding, corporate reputation, and social media show significant direct influences on job seekers' intention to apply, with social media emerging as the most dominant factor and an effective moderator for corporate reputation.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study reveal that employer branding, corporate reputation, and social media have a direct and significant influence on individuals' intention to apply for jobs in the tobacco industry. Through the PLS-SEM approach, it was found that social media is the most influential variable, followed by corporate reputation and employer branding. Additionally, the interaction between social media and corporate reputation was found to be significant, whereas the interaction between social media and employer branding did not show a meaningful effect.

Employer branding was proven to have a positive and significant effect on the intention to apply, as it shapes positive perceptions regarding the work environment, values, and development opportunities offered by the company. When job seekers perceive a company as an attractive workplace that aligns with their aspirations, their intention to apply increases. This finding supports the research of Berthon et al. (2005), which emphasizes the importance of a company's image as an attractive workplace. Such a positive image enhances job seekers' interest in joining, in line with the findings of Evrina & Wulansari (2023), Silva & Dias (2022), and Yuspita et al. (2025).

Two indicators of employer branding that met the statistical criteria were interest value and application value, with application value being the main contributor. This indicates that job seekers highly value opportunities to apply their skills and make tangible contributions in the workplace. A work environment that supports the application of abilities becomes a distinct attraction for individuals seeking employment.

It is noteworthy that the economic value indicator, which includes compensation and benefits, did not meet the statistical criteria as a representation of employer branding. Therefore, this indicator cannot be used to measure the effect of employer branding on the intention to apply. This finding is consistent with the study by Purusottama and Ardianto (2019), which states that the dimension of compensation and benefits is not the main factor in shaping a company's image as an attractive workplace. This shows that today's job seekers tend to prioritize other aspects of employer branding, such as a challenging work environment, motivation, support for personal development, and opportunities for meaningful contribution, rather than merely financial rewards. These preference differences may be influenced by industry characteristics, respondent backgrounds, or changing values among younger generations who increasingly emphasize meaning and personal growth in the workplace.

Corporate reputation was also proven to have a positive and significant impact on individuals' intention to apply. A good reputation creates a sense of trust and pride, encouraging job seekers to join the company. This finding supports the views of Fombrun et al. (2020), as well as the studies by Hayomi & Suharnomo (2024) and Kartika & Riandi (2023), which highlight corporate reputation as one of the main factors in job application decisions.

Among the three indicators of corporate reputation that passed the statistical test (emotional appeal, product and service, and social responsibility), it was found that social responsibility was the largest contributor. This shows that a company's commitment to social responsibility is an important consideration for job seekers, who now pay more attention to social values and the company's contribution to society.

Although employer branding and corporate reputation were proven to have positive and significant effects on the intention to apply, it should be recognized that not all job seekers respond enthusiastically to these strategies. Some job seekers are critical or even less interested in the company's efforts to build a positive image and reputation. This attitude may arise from personal experience, individual values, or perceptions of certain industries, such as the tobacco industry, which often faces negative stigma. However, the presence of critical groups presents both a challenge and an opportunity for companies to continuously improve authenticity, transparency, and consistency in employer branding and reputation strategies. With an honest and open approach, companies can build trust and broaden their appeal, not only to those who already have positive perceptions but also to potential applicants who are initially skeptical.

The dominant influence of social media in this study indicates that platforms such as Instagram are highly effective in shaping positive perceptions and attracting job seekers, especially young generations who are the main target of recruitment and tend to seek company information through social media. Companies that are active and consistent in managing digital content are more likely to attract the attention of potential applicants. This result is consistent with previous studies by Sivertzen et al. (2013), Annisa et al. (2022), and Bharadwaj (2023), which emphasize the strategic role of social media in recruitment. The social media indicators that met the statistical criteria are social media use, career information, and attractive information and achievements. Among these, career information and attractive information and achievements were the main contributors. Information about career opportunities, company culture, work environment, as well as company activities and achievements published on HMSP's Instagram account was proven effective in increasing the intention to apply. This highlights the importance of transparency and the quality of information shared through social media, so companies need to continuously optimize informative and inspiring content on their digital channels. The significant interaction between social media and corporate reputation indicates that the impact of corporate reputation on individuals' intention to apply will be stronger if supported by active and positive communication on social media. In other words, a good reputation alone is not enough, companies need to communicate their reputation effectively through digital platforms to reach and convince potential applicants.

Conversely, the non-significant interaction between social media and employer branding shows that employer branding is important and can directly increase the intention to apply, regardless of how the company communicates employer branding through social media. In other words, job seekers assess employer branding from various sources and experiences, not just from content displayed on social media. Strong employer branding can be formed through company reputation, employee experiences, work culture, and company values, so its influence remains significant even without reinforcement from social media interactions. Meanwhile, promoting employer branding solely on social media is not sufficient to significantly increase the intention to apply. Job seekers tend to be more critical and require real evidence from the work environment and employee experiences, not just the image or messages built on digital platforms. This may also occur because social media is more effective in strengthening corporate reputation, but less optimal in building authentic employer branding without support from real experiences within the company.

This study successfully addresses the research gap related to the tobacco industry context, which faces negative stigma, showing that companies can still attract applicants through reputation and effective communication on social media. These findings expand the understanding from previous studies, which were mostly conducted in general industries or startups. Furthermore, this study reinforces the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), which states that the intention to apply is influenced by individuals' perceptions of the company, reputation, and information received through social media. This research also adds empirical evidence that social media can serve as a moderating variable that strengthens the effect of corporate reputation on the intention to apply.

CONCLUSION

The study aimed to examine the influence of employer branding and corporate reputation on job seekers' intention to apply in the tobacco industry and evaluate the moderating role of social media, particularly Instagram. Results show that all three variables significantly affect intention to apply, with social media having the strongest impact, followed by corporate reputation and employer branding. Employer branding contributes through factors such as work environment and development opportunities, while compensation and benefits were not significant, indicating job seekers prioritize intrinsic factors over financial rewards. Corporate reputation influences intention mainly through social responsibility, reflecting the growing importance of ethical values. Social media enhances the effect of corporate reputation but does not moderate employer branding, confirming its role as a strategic communication channel in overcoming negative stigma.

This research expands understanding of recruitment strategies in industries facing reputation challenges and reinforces the need for integrated approaches combining reputation, authentic employer branding, and effective digital communication. Limitations include the focus on the tobacco industry, moderate explanatory power, and reliance on Instagram as the primary platform. Future studies should explore other sectors, additional variables such as person-organization fit and work-life balance, differentiate respondents' employment status, and include other digital channels like LinkedIn or company websites for broader insights.

SUGGESTION

The practical implication of this study is that companies, especially in the tobacco industry, need to prioritize strengthening authentic reputation and employer branding, as well as optimizing the use of social media as a strategic communication channel. Companies are advised not only to present a positive image on social media but also to ensure that the values, culture, and work experiences offered are genuinely felt by employees. In addition, informative, inspiring, and transparent social media content about career opportunities, work culture, and the company's social contributions will further enhance the company's attractiveness to job seekers. With an integrated strategy between reputation, authentic employer branding, and effective digital communication, companies can be more optimal in attracting and retaining high-quality talent, even in sectors facing public perception challenges such as the tobacco industry.

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