



Employer Branding, Use of Social Media, and CSR as Determinants of Gen Z's Intention to Apply: Corporate Reputation as Mediator

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the influence of employer branding, use of social media, and corporate social responsibility (CSR) on Gen Z's intention to apply for a job, with corporate reputation as a mediator. This research adopts a quantitative approach and data were collected from 275 respondents consisting of final-year undergraduate students and fresh graduates from the Faculty of Economics and Business (FEB) at public and private universities in the Jabodetabek area. Data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to test the hypotheses. The findings indicate that employer branding and CSR have significant positive effects on corporate reputation. Furthermore, corporate reputation had a positive and significant effect on intention to apply and served as a mediating variable between employer branding and CSR toward intention to apply. However, corporate reputation did not mediate the relationship between use of social media and intention to apply. These findings highlight that Gen Z's decision to apply was strongly influenced by their perception of a company's positive reputation. Also the results contributed to signaling theory and provided practical implications for organizations to develop employer branding and CSR strategies to attract potential young talents.

INTRODUCTION

The increasing intensity of competition in the labor market has urged organizations to enhance their strategies of attracting and retaining qualified talent. As companies strive to achieve sustainable competitive advantage, human capital has become one of the most critical resources that determine organizational success. In this digital era, technological advancements have significantly transformed recruitment practices, pushing companies to adopt digital platforms to engage applicants more effectively. This condition has made the labor more

competitive, compelling organizations to differentiate themselves through strategies that highlight their attractiveness as employers.

Employer branding has emerged as a key strategy for organizations to position themselves as employers of choice. Companies can communicate their unique values, culture, and work environment through their employer branding, which influence job seekers' perceptions and decisions to apply. As explained by signaling theory (Spence, 1973), employer branding acts as an external signal that reduces information asymmetry between employers and job seekers. BPS (2020), Gen Z university students, who represent 27.94% of Indonesia's population are beginning to dominate the productive workforce. According to the MarkPlus QuickSurvey (2022), Gen Z in Indonesia comprising university students, fresh graduates, and early-career workers, identified employer reputation, work-life balance, and company culture as the most important criteria to choose where to work. The top employers preferred by Gen Z included both state-owned enterprises (BUMN) and multinational companies such as Astra International and Unilever.

At the same time, corporate social responsibility (CSR) has emerged as another determinant of another employer's attractiveness for Gen Z. Based on a survey from Deloitte (2024), 75% of Gen Z and Millennials valued companies' social engagement and viewed CSR as a major factor when they choose a place to work. The Iconomics (2025) also highlighted companies such as Bank Mandiri for their strong CSR programs that illustrate the growing importance of CSR in shaping positive corporate reputation. Previous studies have emphasized that employer branding and CSR contribute positively to job seekers' intention to apply, both directly and indirectly through corporate reputation (Silva & Dias, 2023; Bharadwaj, 2024; Thanh et al., 2024).

Furthermore, the use of social media has been identified as an essential communication tool that strengthens these effects by enhancing employer visibility and credibility in the eyes of potential applicants. Studies indicate that approximately 73% of Indonesian Gen Z individuals obtain most of their information through social media platforms (IDN Research Institute, 2024). Social media has become a primary information source for Gen Z, influencing how they evaluate job opportunities, corporate culture, and organizational credibility. Thus, use of social media functions as a powerful organizational signal that shapes job seekers' perceptions. Spence (1973), signaling theory, organizations must convey credible signals to reduce information asymmetry and influence applicants' interpretations of organizational attractiveness.

Despite many studies examining employer branding, CSR, and intention to apply, significant research gaps remain. First, the integration of use of social media alongside employer branding and CSR within a unified model mediated by corporate reputation has been rarely explored. Second, existing research is predominantly conducted in Western contexts, leaving limited understanding of how these relationships manifest in Indonesia, especially among Gen Z. Addressing these gaps, this study proposes a comprehensive model examining how employer branding, use of social media, and CSR influence intention to apply both directly and indirectly through corporate reputation.

This study aims to (1) examine the effects of employer branding, use of social media, and CSR on corporate reputation, (2) examine the influence of corporate reputation on intention to apply, and (3) explore the role of corporate reputation as mediator. To meet these objectives, there are research questions raised, how the influence of employer branding, use of social media, and CSR can affect intention to apply through corporate reputation as mediator in the context of final-year undergraduate students and fresh graduates from the Faculty of Economics and Business (FEB) at public and private universities in the Jabodetabek area. Also by applying signaling theory and using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) for analysis, this research offered new insights into how companies can build a strong reputation and effectively attract Gen Z in a highly competitive labor market. The findings are expected to enrich human resource management literature and offer practical insights for companies seeking to attract and retain Gen Z, talented candidates in this digital era and competitive labor market.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Signaling Theory

Signaling theory was introduced by Michael Spence (1973), this theory focuses on labor market context that explains the existence of information asymmetry between employers and job seekers. This theory is widely applied in human resource management research, especially in recruitment studies that signaling theory used to explain how organizations influence potential applicants perceptions (Chapman et al., 2005). Spence (1973) explains that organizations can use their characteristics, structures, and organizational attributes as signals that reflect what is like to work within the organization. Through these signals, job seekers often rely on corporate reputation to assess organizational working conditions. These signals may be positive or negative, and positive signals are likely to enhance organizational attractiveness among job seekers (Connelly et al., 2011).

Employer Branding, Corporate Reputation, and Intention to Apply

Employer branding refers to an organization's strategy as an employer to communicate their values, culture, and employment related benefits. Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) define employer branding as a combination of functional, economic, and psychological benefits that shape job seekers' perceptions of a company as a potential workplace. In recruitment context, employer branding plays a strategic role in influencing job seekers decisions during the early stages of the application process.

Spence (1973) defines employer branding as a signal that helps reduce information asymmetry between organizations and job seekers. To reduce that asymmetry, job seekers usually rely on observable signals to infer unobservable organizational attributes. Therefore, employer branding functions as a signal by conveying information regarding workplace culture, career opportunities, and organization values. And positive employer branding signals are expected to reduce uncertainty and can enhance organizational attractiveness.

Previous studies found that strong employer branding positively influences job seekers' intention to apply (Chapman et al., 2005; Sivertzen et al., 2013). Chapman et al. (2005) explain that employer related information can significantly affect job seekers intention to apply. Also Sivertzen et al. (2013) explain that employer branding positively influences job seekers' intention to apply. This relationship is relevant for Gen Z who tend to value meaningful work, personal development, and organizational value congruence. Based on this research, the following H1: Employer branding has positive effect on intention to apply

Corporate reputation reflects how potential applicants perceive an organization's attractiveness as an employer (Sivertzen et al., 2013). Cable and Turban (2003) explain that corporate reputation refers to job seekers' overall evaluation of an organization that is formed under conditions of limited information. This evaluation is based on accumulated organizational signals that communicate organizational characteristics and credibility (Spence, 1973).

Employer branding contributes to the development of corporate reputation by consistently communicating employment related values and practices (Sivertzen et al., 2013). In line with signaling theory, employer branding functions as a signal that shapes job seekers interpretations of organizational quality and when these signals are perceived as credible, organizations strengthen positive reputational perceptions over time (Spence, 1973). Previous studies suggest that employer branding is a significant antecedent of corporate reputation. Sivertzen et al. (2013) find that employer branding can enhance corporate reputation, which subsequently influences job seekers' intention to apply. Based on this research, the following H2: Employer branding has positive effect on corporate reputation

Use of Social Media

The use of social media refers to organizational activities on digital platforms that aim to communicate employer related information to potential applicants such as job opportunities, organizational values, and work culture (Sivertzen et al., 2013). With social media, organizations can reach a broader audience and also facilitate two way communication such as making recruitment messages more interactive.

From signaling theory perspective, Spence (1973) explains that social media content serves as a signal that provides job seekers with information under conditions of limited information. Social media also allows organizations to transmit signals that influence corporate reputation and application intentions. For Gen Z, social media is a primary source of career related information due to their high digital literacy and frequent online engagement. Based on previous research conducted by Silva and Dias (2023), it was stated that the use of social media is a contributing factor in shaping a company's reputation, which in turn can influence the intention to apply. Furthermore, research conducted by Bharadwaj (2024) found that social media plays an important role in shaping job applicants' perceptions of a company, which can significantly influence their intention to apply. Based on this research, the following hypothesis is developed:

H3: Use of social media has positive effect on intention to apply

The use of social media in employer branding can enhance corporate reputation, which in turn influences intention to apply (Kissel & Buttgen, 2015). This is supported by the fact that high-quality information and interactive content on social media can improve job applicants' perceptions of corporate reputation. In addition, companies can use social media by creating informative and positive content to strengthen their corporate image and enhance their reputation (Bharadwaj, 2024). Furthermore, research findings from Silva and Dias (2023) indicate that the use of social media in employer branding can help build and enhance corporate reputation. Social media can also serve as an effective tool in improving company reputation, as a positive reputation can attract potential applicants. Based on this research, the following hypothesis is developed:

H4: Use of social media has positive effect on corporate reputation

Corporate Social Responsibility

Duarte et al. (2014) defines corporate social responsibility (CSR) as organizational initiatives that demonstrate responsibility toward social, environmental, and ethical issues beyond economic objectives and reflect a company's commitment to stakeholder welfare. From a Signaling Theory perspective, CSR functions as an observable signal of organizational ethics and moral standards, which may enhance organizational attractiveness and increase intention to apply. When a company is active in implementing CSR, this shows that the company is well managed and ultimately the company can attract more candidates to join (Bai, 2022). Also, CSR can create the impression that a company has good values and work culture, making it more attractive to job seekers (Thanh et al., 2024). Based on this research, the following hypothesis is developed:

H5: CSR has positive effect on intention to apply

Referring to research conducted by Thanh et al. (2024), it was found that companies that are active in CSR activities tend to have a better reputation or image among job seekers. Companies can use CSR as a strategic resource to maintain or enhance their corporate reputation (Wang et al., 2021). This finding aligns with previous research, which indicates that CSR can be a key factor in building corporate reputation, which in turn has a positive impact on employees and other stakeholders (Prakash et al., 2016). Additionally, Li et al. (2021) argue that the relationship between CSR and corporate reputation can be seen in how companies use CSR as a strategy to build their reputation by considering various social and environmental issues. Based on this research, the following hypothesis is developed:

H6: CSR has positive effect on corporate reputation

Corporate Reputation and Intention to Apply

Corporate reputation plays an important role in attracting intention to apply and can help companies retain their best employees (Sivertzen et al., 2013). Additionally, Thang and Trang (2024) also found that job applicants tend to be more interested in applying to companies with strong and positive reputations. In other words, job applicants are likely to consider a company's reputation when applying for a job (Silva & Dias, 2023). Job applicants will tend to consider several companies when applying for jobs, and they often use corporate reputation as one of the pieces of information about the working conditions at a company (Cable & Turban, 2003). Elbendary et al. (2024) state that when a company has a positive reputation, job applicants will tend to want to join that company. Based on this research, the following hypothesis is developed:

H7: Corporate reputation has positive effect on intention to apply

Mediation Effect of Corporate Reputation

Ambler and Barrow (1996) stated that employer branding can enhance the attractiveness of job seekers in terms of intention to apply, with a focus on building corporate reputation. When employer branding is strong, it influences corporate reputation and drives intention to apply. Silva and Dias (2023), that all dimensions of employer branding have a positive influence on intention to apply, mediated by corporate reputation. Based on this research, the following hypothesis is developed:

H8: Corporate reputation positively mediates the effect of employer branding on intention to apply.

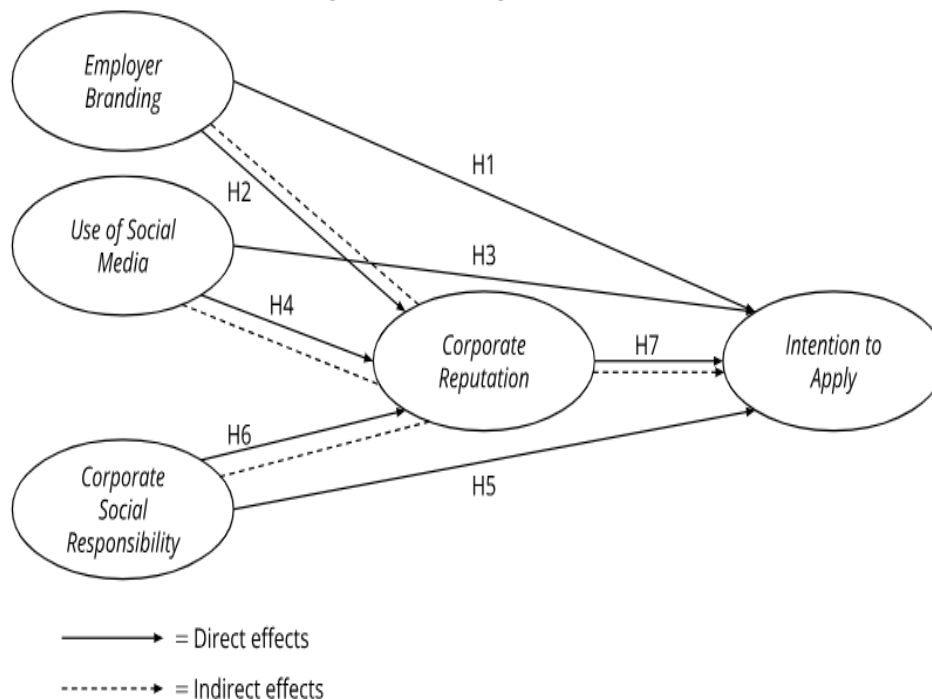
Sivertzen et al. (2013) found in their research that social media can play a role in shaping corporate reputation, which in turn can influence intention to apply. In other words, social media may be used to build corporate reputation, but its impact on intention to apply will be felt only if the company's reputation is perceived as strong and positive by potential applicants (Sivertzen et al., 2013). Additionally, Bharadwaj, S. (2024) states that a company's use of social media can be used as a tool to disseminate brand image and messages, which are expected to enhance the organization's appeal to potential job applicants. Based on this research, the following hypothesis is developed:

H9: Corporate reputation positively mediates the effect of use of social media on intention to apply.

Thanh et al. (2024) found that companies with higher levels of engagement in corporate social responsibility (CSR) practices are more likely to enhance their corporate reputation. This, in turn, can influence candidates' decisions regarding their intention to apply, attend interviews, and work for the company. Previous studies have also found that positive CSR can enhance employees' perceptions of the company as a good workplace and increase their intention to apply, either directly or indirectly through the mediation of corporate reputation (Story et al., 2016; Thanh et al., 2024). Based on this research, the following hypothesis is developed:

H10: Corporate reputation positively mediates the effect of CSR on intention to apply.

Based on the hypothesized relationships formulated above, the conceptual model to be investigated in this study is depicted in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1 Conceptual Model

METHODS

Context

This study was conducted within the context of understanding factors that influence job application intentions among Gen Z in Indonesia. The research specifically targeted final-year undergraduate students and fresh graduates from Faculties of Economics and Business at public and private universities in the Greater Jakarta area. This population was chosen because Gen Z represents a significant proportion of the upcoming workforce, and their job-seeking behavior is increasingly shaped by digital communication channels. The study focuses on how employer branding, use of social media, corporate social social responsibility influence intention to apply, both directly and indirectly through corporate reputation as mediator.

Research Method and Sample

This research used a quantitative research method with a cross-sectional survey design to empirically test the hypothesized relationships among variables. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire that was distributed through social media platforms and university student groups to reach the target population efficiently. The sampling method used is purposive sampling with inclusion criteria respondents were final-year undergraduate students or fresh graduates from Faculty of Economics and Business in the Greater Jakarta area. A total of 275 valid responses were obtained and used for data analysis. Data analysis was conducted using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS software, which is appropriate for testing complex models with mediating relationships.

Measurements

All constructs were measured using adapted and validated scales from prior studies. Employer branding was measured based on items adapted from Berthon et al. (2005). To measure the use of social media variables, a questionnaire developed by Collins and Stevens (2002) and later adapted by Sivertzen et al. (2013). Corporate social responsibility was measured

using indicators adapted from Turker (2009) and subsequently modified by Thanh et al. (2024). Corporate reputation was measured by Thanh et al. (2024) and intention to apply was measured using items adapted from Highhouse et al. (2003). All measurement items employed a 7 point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

RESULTS

Measurement Model

Data analysis was conducted using SmartPLS software. The data analysis procedure consists of several stages, beginning with validity and reliability tests to ensure that the measurement instrument was both accurate and appropriate for capturing the research constructs. Indicators with outer loading values > 0.70 are considered very good and should be retained. However, Hair et al. (2017) explain that indicators with outer loading values between 0.40 and 0.70 can be considered by looking at their effect on Composite Reliability (CR) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values.

Table 1 Validity and Reliability Test Result

Variable	Indicator	Outer Loading	α	CR	AVE
Employer Branding					
Interest Value	EB1	0.741	0,639	0,805	0.580
	EB2	0.785			
	EB4	0.757			
Social Value	EB7	0.768	0,720	0,842	0.639
	EB9	0.789			
	EB10	0.841			
Economic Value	EB11	0.786	0,736	0,849	0.651
	EB12	0.827			
	EB13	0.808			
Development Value	EB16	0.742	0,637	0,805	0.580
	EB17	0.803			
	EB20	0.738			
Application Value	EB22	0.673	0,555	0,771	0.530
	EB24	0.792			
	EB25	0.713			
Use of Social Media	USM1	0.696	0,704	0,811	0.521
	USM2	0.746			
	USM3	0.810			
	USM4	0.621			
Corporate Social Responsibility	CSR1	0.885	0,781	0,872	0.695
	CSR3	0.842			
	CSR5	0.770			
Corporate Reputation	CR1	0.838	0,723	0,844	0.645
	CR3	0.759			
	CR4	0.809			
Intention to Apply	IA1	0.754	0,791	0,864	0.616
	IA2	0.852			
	IA3	0.675			
	IA4	0.846			

Based on the results in Table 1, several indicators were removed by the researcher because they had outer loading values < 0.40 to improve the AVE value. Fornell and Larcker (1981) explain that, if the AVE value is > 0.50 , the construct is considered to explain its indicators. Table 1 shows the the dimension of the employer branding variable has a Cronbach's alpha value < 0.60 , namely the application value dimension. Despite having a low Cronbach's alpha value, application value has a composite reliability value > 0.70 and is still considered reliable. This aligns with the explanation by Hair et al. (2014) that in the PLS-SEM approach, composite reliability is given more consideration than Cronbach's alpha.

Discriminant validity was assessed using the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) criterion. Henseler et al. (2015), HTMT values < 0.90 indicate sufficient discriminant validity, while values > 0.95 may still be acceptable in social and business research when the constructs are conceptually related (Franke & Sarstedt, 2019). Based on Table 2, the results show that most HTMT values between constructs are below the recommended threshold.

Table 2 HTMT Results

Variable	HTMT
Corporate Reputation <-> CSR	0,918
Corporate Reputation <-> Employer Branding	0,895
Corporate Reputation <-> Intention to Apply	0,994
Corporate Reputation <-> Use of Social Media	0,742
CSR <-> Employer Branding	0,883
CSR <-> Intention to Apply	0,835
CSR <-> Use of Social Media	0,885
Employer Branding <-> Intention to Apply	0,846
Employer Branding <-> Use of Social Media	0,760
Intention to Apply <-> Use of Social Media	0,730

However, HTMT values between corporate reputation and intention to apply exceeds the conservative cut-off, with a value 0.994. This result can be theoretically justified due the strong conceptual relationship between corporate reputation and intention to apply. Hair et al. (2022) describe that HTMT evaluation should consider theoretical foundations in addition to statistical thresholds. Therefore, the overall results indicate that discriminant validity is generally acceptable.

Table 3 Results of R-Square

Variable	R-Square
Corporate Reputation	0,615
Intention to Apply	0,674

In assessing the structural mode, R Square is used to evaluate the extent to which exogenous variables account for the variance in endogenous variables. According to Table 3, the results of the R Square for the Intention to Apply variable at 0.674 and Corporate Reputation at 0.615, indicating that their influence on the variables is significant. This aligns with the findings of Hair et al. (2017), who categorize an R Square value of 0.75 as strong, 0.50 as moderate, and 0.25 as weak in terms of their influence on the variables.

Structural Model

Hypothesis analysis was conducted by evaluating t-statistics values to determine the significance of the relationship between research variables through path coefficients. In this testing process, researchers used SmartPLS through bootstrapping analysis with a significance level of 5%. The research hypothesis was formulated as one-tailed, so Hair et al. (2017) explained that the relationship between variables can be said to be significant if the t-statistics value is ≥ 1.645 and the p-values are ≤ 0.05 .

Table 5 Results of Direct Effect

	Hypothesis	Path Coefficient	T Statistics	P Values	Results
H1	EB -> IA	0.335	4.634	0.000	Significant
H2	EB -> CR	0.531	7.660	0.000	Significant
H3	USM -> IA	0.134	2.603	0.005	Significant
H4	USM -> CR	0.065	1.333	0.092	Insignificant
H5	CSR -> IA	0.055	0.838	0.201	Insignificant
H6	CSR -> CR	0.247	3.275	0.001	Significant
H7	CR -> IA	0.394	6.922	0.000	Significant

Based on Table 5, it shows that there are two hypotheses that are declared insignificant, namely H4 with a t-statistic value (0.838) and p-values (0.201). Then H5 is also declared insignificant because it has a t-statistic value (1.333) and p-values (0.092). Meanwhile, H1, H2, H3, H6, and H7 are significant because each hypothesis shows a t-statistic value > 1.645 and p-values < 0.05 .

Table 6 Results of Indirect Effect

	Hypothesis	Path Coefficient	T Statistics	P Values	Results
H8	EB -> CR -> IA	0.209	5.296	0.000	Significant
H9	USM -> CR -> IA	0.026	1.274	0.102	Insignificant
H10	CSR -> CR -> IA	0.097	2.920	0.002	Significant

In addition, in indirect effects, there is one insignificant hypothesis, namely H9, because it has a t-statistics value of less than 1.645 and p-values of more than 0.05. Meanwhile, H8 and H10 are declared significant with t-statistics values > 1.645 and p-values < 0.05 .

DISCUSSION

This study provides empirical evidence on the determinants of Gen Z's intention to apply for jobs by examining employer branding, use of social media, and corporate social responsibility with corporate reputation as a mediation. The findings indicate that employer branding has a positive effect on intention to apply. This result supports Signaling Theory, Spence (1973) explains that organizations send signals to reduce information asymmetry in the job market. Employer branding functions as a strong signal of organizational values and working

conditions that enable job seekers to form favorable perceptions before direct organizational interaction. Also this findings is consistent with previous studies, that strong employer branding increases organizational attractiveness and intention to apply (Amble & Barrow, 1996; Berthon et al., 2005; Gomes & Neves, 2011).

The results also show that the use of social media has a positive effect on intention to apply. This finding suggests that social media platforms serve as effective recruitment channels that allow organizations to communicate job-related information quickly and directly to potential applicants. For Gen Z, social media acts as an immediate signal that captures attention and stimulates interest in applying for a job. The results of Bharadwaj (2024) research are in line with this research, which found that social media recruitment positively influences job seekers' intention to apply, particularly among Gen Z who are digitally native.

In contrast with corporate social responsibility that does not have a positive effect on intention to apply. This finding indicates that CSR may not be perceived as a decisive factor in the early stages of job application decisions. Spence (1973) explains from a signaling perspective, CSR may be considered a weaker or indirect signal that requires further interpretation by job seekers. Previous studies suggest that although CSR enhances organizational attractiveness, its effect on intention to apply often depends on mediating factors such as corporate reputation (Story et al., 2016; Tarigan et al., 2020).

Furthermore, the findings reveal that employer branding and CSR have positive effects on corporate reputation, while the use of social media does not positively influence corporate reputation. This finding contrasts with previous studies that have demonstrated a positive relationship between social media use and the strengthening of corporate reputation (Sivertzen et al., 2013; Pham & Vo, 2022). As digital natives, Generation Z tend to be more critical and selective regarding the content they encounter on social media. Sabrina et al. (2024) found that Gen Z is more likely to engage with content that is perceived as authentic, credible, and relevant, rather than being influenced merely by the frequency or exposure of corporate social media activity.

Finally, corporate reputation is found to have a positive effect on intention to apply and to mediate the relationship between employer branding and CSR with intention to apply. From the Signaling Theory perspective, this finding confirms that corporate reputation acts as a key interpretive mechanism that translates organizational signal into behavioral intention (Spence, 1973). A favorable corporate reputation reduces uncertainty and increases trust, thereby encouraging Gen Z job seekers with intention to apply (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003; Silva & Dias, 2023). However, corporate reputation does not mediate the relationship between the use of social media and intention to apply

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of this study, several important conclusions can be drawn regarding the determinants of Gen Z's intention to apply for jobs. The research aimed to examine the effects of employer branding, use of social media, and corporate social responsibility on intention to apply through corporate reputation. Using data from 275 final-year undergraduate students and fresh graduates from Faculties of Economics and Business in the Greater Jakarta area, the findings provide empirical evidence on how companies can strategically attract Gen Z job seekers in an increasingly competitive labor market.

The results indicate that employer branding has a positive effect on intention to apply. This finding confirms that employer branding plays a crucial role in shaping job seekers perceptions and increasing their willingness to apply to a company. For Gen Z, aspects such as a supportive work environment, positive organizational culture, and opportunities for personal and professional growth are key considerations when evaluating potential employers. In addition, use of social media also found to have a positive direct effect on intention to apply. This suggests

that interactive, informative, and engaging social media content can directly influence job seekers' interest in applying for jobs, particularly among Gen Z who are highly familiar with and reliant on digital platforms for information seeking.

However, CSR does not show a positive direct effect on intention to apply. This finding indicates that, within the context of this study, CSR activities alone are not sufficient to directly motivate Gen Z to submit job applications. It is possible that CSR initiatives are perceived as less relevant in influencing immediate application decisions or job seekers prioritize other factors such as organizational culture and career development opportunities.

Furthermore, the results demonstrate that employer branding and CSR have a positive effect on corporate reputation, while use of social media does not positively influence corporate reputation. This implies that a company's reputation is more strongly shaped by substantive organizational attributes. Corporate reputation itself is found to have a positive effect on intention to apply, that indicates corporate reputation is the central role in shaping job seekers evaluation and decisions for intention to apply.

Also corporate reputation is proven to mediate the relationship between employer branding and intention to apply, as well as between CSR and intention to apply. This indicates that although CSR does not directly influence intention to apply, it can enhance corporate reputation which in turn increases job seekers' intention to apply. In contrast, corporate reputation does not mediate the relationship between use of social media and intention to apply. This suggests, although social media can attract attention, it does not necessarily build a storing reputational signal that job application decisions indirectly.

Overall, these findings support the application of signaling theory in the recruitment context, where employer branding and CSR function as strategic signals that shape corporate reputation and influence Gen Z's intention to apply. Corporate reputation emerges as a key mechanism through which companies can translate their internal values and social initiatives into tangible recruitment outcomes..

LIMITATION

Based on the findings of this study, several practical and theoretical suggestions can be proposed for companies and future researchers.

From a managerial perspective, companies are advised to prioritize the development of a strong and authentic employer branding strategy. Since employer branding has both a direct and indirect effect on intention to apply through corporate reputation, organizations should consistently communicate their values, work environment, and employee value proposition. Emphasizing social value, such as a supportive and inclusive workplace, can be particularly effective in attracting Gen Z jobseekers, who tend to value organizational culture and psychological well-being.

In addition, although use of social media has a positive direct effect on intention to apply, companies should not rely solely on social media as a tool to build corporate reputation. Instead, social media should be used strategically as a communication channel to reinforce employer branding and CSR messages in a credible and transparent manner. Companies are encouraged to create content that not only promotes job vacancies but also provides meaningful insights into organizational culture, employee experiences, and long-term corporate values.

Companies also should view CSR initiatives as a long-term reputational investment rather than a short-term recruitment tool. Even though CSR does not directly influence intention to apply, its positive impact on corporate reputation suggests that consistent and well-communicated CSR programs can strengthen a company's image as a responsible and trustworthy employer. Therefore, companies should ensure that their CSR programs are aligned with social and environmental issues that are relevant to Gen Z and are communicated clearly and authentically.

Future research is encouraged to explore additional variables that may influence intention to apply, such as perceived person-organization fit, organizational attractiveness, or job market conditions. Further studies could also examine different generational or industry sectors to provide a more comprehensive understanding of recruitment dynamics. In addition, qualitative approaches or mixed-method designs could be employed to gain deeper insights into how job seekers interpret employer branding, CSR, and social media signals during the recruitment process.

Also, future research may consider expanding the geographical scope of the study or conducting longitudinal research to observe changes in job seekers perceptions over time. Such approaches would help strengthen the generalizability of findings and provide a richer understanding of how corporate reputation evolves and influences intention to apply in the long term.

RESEARCH TRANSPARENCY AND ETHICS STATEMENTS

1. Author Contributions:

HWH: Conceptualization, Methodology, Data Collection, Data Analysis,

FM: Writing – Original Draft, Visualization, Review and Editing

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3. Conflict of Interest:

No conflict of interest: The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest related to the research and publication of this article.

4. Research Ethics:

The study did not involve any intervention, biological specimens, vulnerable groups, or sensitive personal data. Participation was voluntary, and the confidentiality of the respondents was maintained.

5. Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI):

No Use of AI. The authors declare that generative AI was not used in the preparation of this article.

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