

# THE EFFECT OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND EMPLOYER BRANDING ON GENERATION Z'S INTENTION TO APPLY FOR JOBS

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## Abstract

This study examines the influence of social media and employer branding on Generation Z's intention to apply to start-up companies in Cirebon. Using a quantitative approach, data were collected through a survey of 155 Generation Z respondents. The research instrument was tested for validity and reliability, and the data were analyzed using multiple linear regression. The findings reveal that social media has a positive and significant effect on intention to apply, although its impact is smaller compared to employer branding. Employer branding is found to be more dominant in shaping Generation Z's job application interest. Simultaneously, both variables have a significant effect and explain 52.6% of the variance in intention to apply. These findings highlight that the combination of social media and employer branding serves as a crucial strategy for start-ups, especially in developing regions, to attract young talents.

**Keywords:** social media, employer branding, intention to apply, Generation Z, start-up

## A. INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of information and communication technology has fundamentally transformed various aspects of life, including the employment sector. One of the most visible changes can be observed in how organizations interact with potential job seekers. In this digital era, social media no longer functions merely as a communication platform; instead, it has become a strategic tool for shaping corporate image and attracting prospective employees.

As a generation that grew up alongside digital technology, Generation Z demonstrates intensive use of social media, not only for social interaction but also for gathering information related to career opportunities. This behavioral pattern encourages companies, particularly start-ups, to optimize social media-based communication in their recruitment strategies. At the same time, employer branding has emerged as a critical factor influencing job seekers' perceptions. A strong employer brand enables organizations to signal appealing attributes, such as supportive work culture, career development opportunities, and organizational values.

In recent years, employer branding has attracted increasing attention in human resource management research. It is closely associated with organizational efforts to build a positive image as an employer, particularly in attracting younger generations such as Generation Z. Previous studies have confirmed that employer branding has a significant influence on employer attractiveness and intention to apply (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004); (Lievens, F. & Slaughter, 2016). Similarly, social media has been widely recognized as an effective communication channel that allows organizations to present their culture, values, and reputation in a more transparent and interactive manner (Kaplan, A. M., & Haenlein, 2010); (Pitaloka, R. T.; Moko, 2023).

Nevertheless, existing studies examining the relationship between employer branding, social media, and job application intentions have generally focused on large companies located in metropolitan areas or developed countries (Berthon et al., 2005); (Theurer et al., 2018b). Empirical evidence from start-up companies operating in developing cities remains relatively limited. Cities such as Cirebon are currently experiencing growth in digital and entrepreneurial ecosystems, making their labor market dynamics particularly relevant for further investigation. In this context, Generation Z in these regions faces a unique situation: while access to digital information is increasingly expansive, formal employment opportunities, especially in start-ups, are still relatively constrained.

Therefore, this study aims to address this research gap by examining the effect of social media and employer branding on Generation Z's intention to apply for jobs in start-up companies in Cirebon. The contribution of this research is both theoretical and practical: it extends the application of Signaling Theory and Uses and Gratifications theory within the context of developing cities. From a practical perspective, it provides insights for start-up companies in designing more effective employer branding and recruitment strategies to attract Generation Z talent.

## **B. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Social Media**

Social media refers to digital platforms that enable users to create, share, or exchange information, ideas, and expressions virtually through online communities and networks. It can also be defined as digital platforms that allow individuals and organizations to share information, interact, and build relationships online.

(Kaplan, A. M., & Haenlein, 2010) define social media as "*a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content.*" According to Manning (2014, as cited in (Kaplan, A. M., & Haenlein, 2010), social media is "*the term often used to refer to new forms of media that involve interactive participation,*" characterized by digital platforms that enable active user engagement. (American Psychological Association, 2019) that "*Social media are forms of digital communication through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content.*" Based on these explanations, social media can be defined as an internet-based digital platform that enables users to create, share, and interact with content within virtual communities, playing a crucial role in shaping a company's public image.

The literature shows that the effectiveness of social media in employer branding is determined not only by a brand's presence on digital platforms but also by the quality of communication and interaction it offers. First, informativeness-the completeness, relevance, and contextuality of information-plays an important role in shaping job seekers' perceptions (Raacke, John; Bonds-Raacke, 2008); (Theurer et al., 2018b). Second, social presence, or a personal and humanized communication style, enhances the effect of informativeness when combined effectively (Raacke, John; Bonds-Raacke, 2008). Third, communication through social media often involves three key activities: advertising (official messages with high credibility), interactive marketing (interactive activities that strengthen engagement), and user-generated content (word-of-mouth), such as employee testimonials (Chi, 2011).

Accordingly, the dimensions of social media used in this study refer to:

- 1) Visual and Creative Content: appealing, relevant, and high-quality information (*informativeness*).
- 2) Interaction and Engagement: interactive activities between the company and its audience (*social presence, interactive marketing*).
- 3) Message Consistency: coherence, credibility, and uniformity in company communications (*advertising*).
- 4) Employee Testimonials and Stories: reviews, experiences, or employee narratives shared on social media (*user-generated content / word-of-mouth*).

### **Employer Branding**

Employer branding refers to a company's image and reputation as a workplace, shaped through both employees' direct experiences and job applicants' perceptions. It is also defined as an organization's effort to create a positive image as an ideal place to work, both for current employees and potential candidates.

(Ambler & Barrow, 1996) define employer branding as "*the package of functional, economic, and psychological benefits provided by employment and identified with the employing company.*" (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004) describe employer branding as the process of developing an organization's identity as an employer. (Kaur et al., 2015) emphasize that employer branding is an effort to increase a company's attractiveness to potential employees.

Based on these definitions, employer branding can be concluded as an organizational strategy to build a positive image as an employer with the aim of attracting, recruiting, and retaining quality talent.

In this study, employer branding is measured through five dimensions: work culture, corporate social responsibility (CSR), diversity and inclusion, career development, and employee well-being. These dimensions are adapted from previous studies emphasizing the role of organizational culture (Moroko,

L. & Uncles, 2008); CSR (Szegedi, 2023), diversity and inclusion (Confetto, 2023), career development (Lievens & Slaughter, 2016), and employee well-being (Thang, 2024).

### **Generation Z's Intention to Apply**

Generation Z refers to individuals born between 1997 and 2012. They have grown up in the digital era, possess high expectations toward technology, value work flexibility, and appreciate companies' social values. They are also more inclined to work in dynamic environments such as start-ups.

(Gupta & Saini, 2020) and (Zaki & Pusparini, 2020), as cited in studies on start-ups in Indonesia, define *intention to apply* as "the expressed motivation by an active and qualified jobseeker to pursue employment in a firm." (Highhouse et al., 2003) describe it as an individual's explicit intention to apply to a particular organization based on perception and preference. (Yuspita et al., 2025) further explain that job application intention among Generation Z is influenced by employer branding, reputation, and social media—although not defined literally, the context emphasizes that such intention represents a motivational drive to pursue employment.

From these explanations, Generation Z's *intention to apply* can be defined as the motivation and tendency of potential applicants, especially those from Generation Z, to apply for a job, reflected in their willingness to take concrete steps such as submitting applications or expressing interest in a particular company.

Empirical studies identify several key factors influencing Generation Z's interest in working at start-ups. First, value alignment between personal and organizational culture is essential, as Gen Z tends to avoid companies that do not reflect integrity and inclusiveness (Barhate & Dirani, 2022). Second, self-development opportunities; including training, mentoring, and clear career paths, significantly attract their interest (Schroth, 2019); (Lievens, F. & Slaughter, 2016); (Jiang, T., & Iles, 2011). Third, work-life balance and well-being are highly valued, including flexible working hours and attention to mental health (Hendriana, E., Christopher, A., Zain, H. O. A., & Pricilia, 2023); (Barhate & Dirani, 2022). Fourth, company reputation, encompassing person-organization fit and positive image, strengthens job application intentions among Gen Z (Jordan, M. H.; Desiana, 2024).

Accordingly, the dimensions of Generation Z's intention to apply in this study include:

- 1) Value Alignment between Personal and Organizational Values: alignment in integrity, diversity, and inclusion.
- 2) Self-Development Opportunities: training, skill development, and career progression.
- 3) Work-Life Balance: flexibility, mental and physical well-being.
- 4) Company Reputation: positive image, employee reviews, and testimonials.

## **Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses**

### **1. The Effect of Social Media (X1) on Generation Z's Intention to Apply (Y)**

Social media serves as a primary channel for Generation Z to obtain information about companies, including their reputation, work culture, and values. Visual content, interaction, message consistency, and employee testimonials shared on social media shape perceptions among potential applicants. This aligns with the Uses and Gratifications Theory, which explains that individuals use media to satisfy specific needs, including informational needs about job opportunities. Previous studies support the role of social media in recruitment contexts, as shown by (Kaplan, A. M., & Haenlein, 2010); (Annisa et al., 2022), and (Pitaloka, R. T.; Moko, 2023), who found that social media significantly affects young generations' intention to apply for jobs.

**Hypothesis 1 (H1):** Social Media (X1) influences Generation Z's Intention to Apply (Y).

### **2. The Effect of Employer Branding (X2) on Generation Z's Intention to Apply (Y)**

Employer branding reflects a company's image as an attractive workplace for potential employees. Aspects such as work culture, social responsibility, diversity and inclusion, career development, and employee well-being are crucial factors for Generation Z when choosing a company. This concept aligns with Signaling Theory (Spence, 1973) as cited in (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004), which suggests that companies send quality signals through employer branding to attract potential candidates. Previous research, such as Indra and (Indra & Widodoatmodjo, 2021), confirms that employer branding strongly influences young generations' perceptions and job application intentions.

**Hypothesis 2 (H2):** Employer Branding (X2) influences Generation Z's Intention to Apply (Y).

### 3. The Simultaneous Effect of Social Media (X1) and Employer Branding (X2) on Generation Z's Intention to Apply (Y)

Social media and employer branding have a mutually reinforcing relationship. Social media acts as an effective communication channel to expand employer branding reach, while employer branding provides valuable content to be disseminated through social media. Message consistency built through these two elements can form a positive corporate image and enhance Generation Z's intention to apply. This framework is supported by the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), which posits that intention is influenced by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control, both social media and employer branding contribute to shaping these factors.

Empirical evidence further supports the importance of employer branding in shaping Generation Z's job application intentions. (Indra & Widoatmodjo, 2021) found that employer attractiveness and social media use significantly enhance corporate reputation and job application interest. Similarly, (Geofanny & Faraz, 2023) confirmed that employer branding and e-recruitment significantly affect Generation Z's job application intentions. Moreover, (Annisa et al., 2022) showed that employer attractiveness, social media, and corporate reputation jointly influence intention to apply among Indonesian Gen Z. These findings strengthen the argument that social media and employer branding are key strategies for start-ups to attract young talents.

**Hypothesis 3 (H3):** Social Media (X1) and Employer Branding (X2) simultaneously influence Generation Z's Intention to Apply (Y).

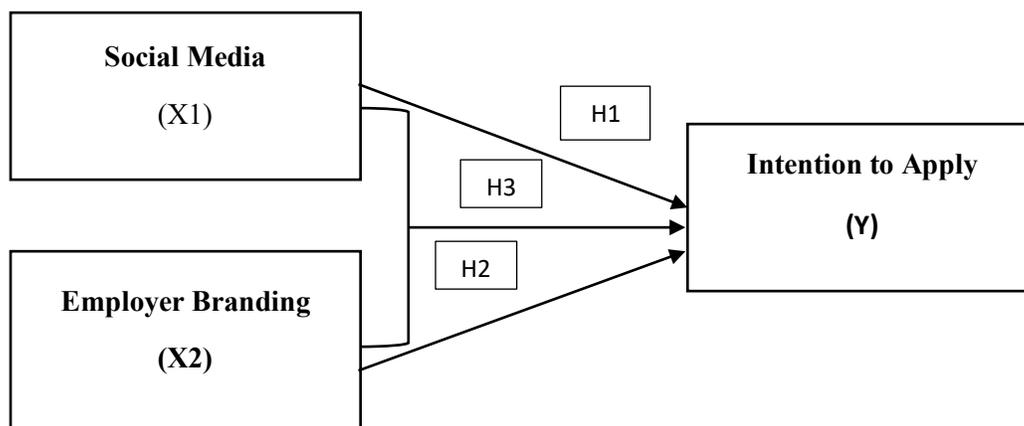


Figure 2.1 Conceptual Framework

### C. METHODOLOGY OF RESEARCH

This study employed a quantitative approach using a survey method. This approach was chosen because the research focuses on testing causal relationships between the independent variables (social media and employer branding) and the dependent variable (Generation Z's intention to apply).

The population of this study consists of Generation Z (born between 1997 and 2012) residing in Cirebon City and Regency who have the potential to apply for jobs at start-up companies. The minimum sample size was set at 155 respondents, following the recommendation of Hair et al. (2010) in (Taber, 2018), which suggests a minimum of five times the number of indicators (31 × 5). Data were collected using an online questionnaire with a 5-point Likert scale (1= strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). Data analysis was conducted using multiple linear regression with the aid of statistical software (SPSS). The analytical procedures included: Validity and reliability testing of the instrument, Classical assumption tests (normality and multicollinearity), Partial regression test (t-test) to examine the effect of each independent variable on the dependent variable, Simultaneous regression test (F-test) to assess the combined effect of social media and employer branding on Generation Z's intention to apply, and Coefficient of determination (R<sup>2</sup>) to measure how much variation in the dependent variable is explained by the independent variables.

**D. RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

**Results**

**Table 1. Instrument Validity Test Results**

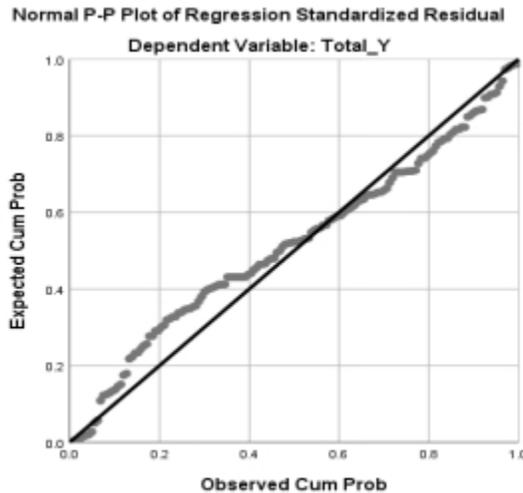
Variable	Items	r-count	r-table (0.159)	Description
Social Media	1–8	0.579 – 0.769	>0.159	Valid
Employer Branding	1–15	0.473 – 0.785	>0.159	Valid
Intention to Apply	1–8	0.646 – 0.828	>0.159	Valid

**Interpretation:** All items have r-count values greater than r-table and are significant ( $p < 0.05$ ). Thus, the research instrument is valid for all variables.

**Table 2. Instrument Reliability Test Results**

Variable	Cronbach’s Alpha	Number of Items	Description
Social Media	0.831	8	Reliable
Employer Branding	0.914	15	Reliable
Intention to Apply	0.891	8	Reliable

**Interpretation:** Alpha values greater than 0.70 indicate high reliability. All instruments are consistent and suitable for use.



**Figure 1. Normality Test (P-P Plot)**

**Interpretation:** The distribution of points follows the diagonal line in the P-P Plot, indicating that the residuals are normally distributed and the assumption of normality is met.

**Table 3. Multicollinearity Test**

Variable	Tolerance	VIF	Description
Social Media	0.623	1.605	No multicollinearity
Employer Branding	0.623	1.605	No multicollinearity

**Interpretation:** Tolerance values greater than 0.10 and VIF values below 10 indicate no multicollinearity problems.

**Table 4. Multiple Regression Analysis Results**

Variable	B	T	Sig.	Description
Constant	3.792	1.618	0.108	Not significant
Social Media (X1)	0.159	1.997	0.048	Significant
Employer Branding (X2)	0.395	8.904	0.000	Significant

**Interpretation:** Social media and employer branding both have positive and significant effects on intention to apply. Employer branding has the stronger influence ( $\beta = 0.395$ ).

**Table 5. F-Test (Simultaneous Test)**

F-count	Sig.	Description
84.325	0.000	Significant

**Interpretation:** Social media and employer branding jointly have a significant effect on intention to apply.

**Table 6. Coefficient of Determination (R<sup>2</sup>)**

R	R <sup>2</sup>	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	Std. Error
0.725	0.526	0.520	3.399

**Interpretation:** The model explains 52.6% of the variance in intention to apply, while 47.4% is explained by factors outside the model.

## Discussion

### 1. The Effect of Social Media on Generation Z's Intention to Apply

The results show that social media has a positive and significant effect on Generation Z's intention to apply for jobs in start-up companies. This suggests that social media functions not merely as a communication channel, but also as an important source of information through which young job seekers evaluate potential employers. From the perspective of Uses and Gratifications Theory, Generation Z actively utilizes social media to fulfill informational and social needs, such as gaining insights into organizational culture, work environment, and employee experiences portrayed through digital content. These informational gratifications help reduce uncertainty during the early stages of the job search process.

This finding is in line with previous studies that have reported a significant influence of social media on job application intentions among younger generations (Pitaloka, R. T.; Moko, 2023), (Habasarón & Rachmawati, 2023), (Sivertzen et al., 2013). Social media enables organizations to present authentic narratives through visual content, employee testimonials, and interactive communication, thereby shaping positive organizational perceptions. However, the relatively smaller regression coefficient indicates that while social media plays an important role in influencing intention to apply, it may function more as a supporting medium rather than a primary determinant of job application decisions. This suggests that Generation Z tends to use social media as an initial screening tool before considering deeper organizational attributes.

Importantly, this study extends existing literature by confirming the relevance of social media in influencing job application intentions within the context of start-up companies in developing cities. In regions such as Cirebon, where access to digital information is expanding but formal employment opportunities remain limited, social media serves as a strategic platform for start-ups to communicate employer value propositions effectively to digitally active Generation Z job seekers.

## **2. The Effect of Employer Branding on Generation Z's Intention to Apply**

The results demonstrate that employer branding has a positive and significant effect on Generation Z's intention to apply for jobs, with a stronger influence compared to social media. This finding highlights the importance of organizational attributes, such as work culture, career development opportunities, employee well-being, and corporate values, in shaping job seekers' decisions. This result is consistent with prior studies which found that employer branding significantly influences job application intentions (Ramadhan, 2023), (Lestari & Manggiasih, 2023), (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004), and (Tanwar, K., & Prasad, 2016).

From the perspective of Signaling Theory, employer branding acts as a credible signal that helps reduce information asymmetry between organizations and potential applicants. Generation Z, in particular, relies on employer branding cues to infer the quality and authenticity of a workplace, especially in start-up environments where formal information may be limited. A well-communicated employer brand signals organizational legitimacy, stability, and alignment with personal values, which are critical considerations for young job seekers when deciding whether to apply.

The dominance of employer branding in this study underscores its strategic role for start-up companies operating in developing cities. Despite having more limited resources than large corporations, start-ups can build competitive advantage by clearly communicating their unique organizational identity and value proposition. This finding reinforces the theoretical argument that employer branding is a key mechanism through which organizations influence job pursuit behavior, particularly among Generation Z.

## **3. The Simultaneous Effect of Social Media and Employer Branding on Generation Z's Intention to Apply**

The simultaneous analysis reveals that social media and employer branding jointly exert a significant influence on Generation Z's intention to apply for jobs, explaining 52.6% of the variance in the dependent variable. This indicates that job application decisions among Generation Z are shaped by a combination of digital communication channels and perceived organizational signals. Rather than relying on a single factor, Generation Z evaluates employment opportunities through an integrated assessment of online information and employer brand attributes, rather than relying on a single source of cues.

These results further support the integration of Uses and Gratifications Theory and Signaling Theory, which together explain how digital communication and corporate image influence applicant behavior. Social media provides the platform through which information is accessed and gratified, while employer branding supplies the substantive signals that shape trust and organizational attractiveness. These results are consistent with previous studies showing that employer branding communicated through digital channels significantly affects job application intentions (Pitaloka, R. T.; Moko, 2023), (Ramadhan, 2023), and (Theurer et al., 2018a).

Overall, this study reinforces the evidence that the synergy between social media and employer branding creates a stronger influence on Generation Z's intention to apply than either factor alone. For start-up companies targeting young talent, the findings emphasize the importance of aligning digital communication strategies with a coherent and authentic employer brand in order to attract Generation Z job seekers effectively.

## **E. CONCLUSION**

This study demonstrates that Social Media has a positive and significant effect on Generation Z's *Intention to Apply*, although its influence is relatively smaller. Employer Branding has a positive and significant effect and is more dominant than Social Media in influencing Generation Z's *Intention to Apply*. Simultaneously, Social Media and Employer Branding have a significant effect and jointly explain 52.6% of the variation in Generation Z's *Intention to Apply*.

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