



From branding to behavior: investigating the impact of employer branding and organizational reputation on application intentions through person-organizational fit (POF)

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Abstract. This study examines the effects of employer branding and perceived employer reputation on intention to apply for a job among Generation Z, with person-organization fit acting as a mediating variable. Using a quantitative research design, data were collected through a survey of 320 final-year university students and recent graduates in Indonesia. The data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The findings reveal that both employer branding and employer reputation have a significant positive influence on person-organization fit. Employer branding also demonstrates a direct and significant effect on intention to apply. In contrast, employer reputation does not directly influence intention to apply but exerts an indirect effect through person-organization fit, which itself significantly predicts intention to apply. These results highlight that Generation Z places strong emphasis on value congruence between themselves and prospective employers when making job application decisions. The study contributes to the theoretical development of job-seeking behavior by clarifying the mediating role of person-organization fit and offers practical insights for organizations in designing authentic employer branding and reputation management strategies aligned with the values of Generation Z to enhance their attractiveness in the labor market.

Keywords: employer branding; perceived employer reputation; person organization fit; intention to apply; generation z

Introduction

Modern organizations face significant challenges in attracting and retaining top talent amid an increasingly competitive labor market. In today's complex era of digitalization and globalization, companies are not only competing in terms of products or services but also in their attractiveness as employers (Collins & Stevens, 2002). Labor market dynamics indicate that job seekers' expectations are rising, particularly among younger generations who are more value conscious and prioritize factors such as flexibility, diversity, and organizational sustainability (Lievens & Slaughter, 2016). According to Theurer et al. (2018), in the context of the "war for talent," companies must establish a strong value proposition to compete effectively in attracting high quality candidates. Additionally, the ease of access to information through digital media enables job applicants to compare numerous organizations quickly, making competitiveness in recruitment strategies increasingly vital. Consequently, organizations must develop holistic strategies that not only reflect a positive work culture but also shape strong perceptions of the organization's attractiveness and advantages as a place to work.

Employer branding has emerged as a key strategy in building the image of an organization as an attractive and valuable workplace for potential applicants. Within the strategic management and human resource literature, employer branding is defined as a set of activities undertaken by an organization to develop an internal brand identity aimed at attracting, motivating, and retaining both prospective and current employees (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). Employer branding involves not only promoting the benefits of working within the organization but also creating and communicating work values that differentiate the company from its competitors in the labor market (Berthon, Ewing, & Hah, 2005). Research by Lievens and Slaughter (2016) emphasizes that strong employer branding is directly

associated with the perception of the organization as an attractive workplace, especially when the branding narrative highlights employee development, innovation, and work–life balance. The relevance of employer branding has grown in the digital era, where job seekers actively seek information about corporate culture, leadership styles, and employee experiences through various platforms such as social media and job review sites (Theurer et al., 2018). Therefore, employer branding serves not only as a communication tool but also as a means of shaping applicants' initial experiences and perceptions of the organization as a whole.

In addition to employer branding, an organization's reputation shaped by public opinion also plays a significant role in influencing job application decisions. Organizational reputation refers to the collective perception held by the public regarding a company's character, integrity, and performance, which is formed through the interplay of stakeholder experiences, communications, and expectations (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990; Cable & Turban, 2003). In the recruitment context, reputation serves as an external signal used by potential applicants to evaluate the reliability, security, and longterm value of working for a particular organization (Highhouse, Zickar, Thorsteinson, Stierwalt, & Slaughter, 2007). Unlike employer branding, which is internally managed, reputation develops organically through the opinions of employees, customers, investors, and increasingly, through social media, which accelerates the dissemination of both positive and negative information (Ke, Sheng, & Xie, 2023). A study by Sivertzen, Nilsen, and Olafsen (2013) published in the *Journal of Product & Brand Management* found that perceived corporate reputation directly influences employer attractiveness and intention to apply, particularly when aligned with the applicants' personal expectations. Therefore, organizational reputation is an integral aspect of shaping job seekers' cognitive decisions, which weigh both rational and emotional elements when considering a potential employer.

Person Organization Fit (POF) bridges external and internal organizational perceptions in shaping applicants' intentions to apply. POF describes the extent to which applicants perceive alignment between their personal values, goals, and the culture of the organization (Kristof, 1996). During the recruitment process, applicants are not solely concerned with financial incentives or job titles; they also evaluate the compatibility between themselves and the organizational environment, which directly affects their willingness to join (Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005). A meta analysis by Uggerslev et al. (2012) revealed that POF is a strong predictor of intention to apply, job satisfaction, and employee commitment. POF is also influenced by signals sent through employer branding and organizational reputation, through which applicants form initial expectations regarding work climate, leadership styles, and development opportunities (Slaughter, Cable, & Turban, 2014). Thus, POF functions as a cognitive and affective bridge that connects the organizational image constructed through branding and reputation with the actual decision to apply for a job.

Previous studies have examined the effects of employer branding or organizational reputation separately; however, only a limited number have integrated both constructs into a single conceptual model with POF as a mediating variable. Most existing research has focused on the direct relationship between employer branding and intention to apply, without considering the psychological mechanisms that mediate this relationship. For instance, in studies by Berthon et al. (2005) and Sivertzen et al. (2013), employer attractiveness was treated as the ultimate outcome of branding strategies. A study by Junça Silva and Dias (2022) attempted to combine employer branding and reputation into a single model, yet tested reputation only as a mediator and did not account for POF as an internal psychological construct formed from applicants' perceptions of the organization. Meanwhile, Theurer et al. (2018), in their literature review, emphasized the need for conceptual models that can explain how organizational signals (branding and reputation) are cognitively interpreted by job applicants through evaluative processes such as POF. Even in the comprehensive review by Lievens and Slaughter (2016), which highlighted the

importance of employer image, there was no thorough integration of organizational signals with the applicants' internal cognitive mediation mechanisms. Therefore, despite the confirmation of the significance of each individual construct, a theoretical model that holistically integrates employer branding, reputation, and POF remains a notable research gap in the global academic literature.

In the Indonesian context, Generation Z has high expectations regarding organizational reputation and values, yet local companies have not fully optimized the integrated use of employer branding and reputation. Generation Z in Indonesia currently the largest demographic in the productive age group is highly digitally literate, active on social media, and tends to be more selective in choosing workplaces based on values such as sustainability, diversity, and the quality of organizational leadership (Utami & Suharto, 2022). However, empirical research in Indonesia that investigates Generation Z's perceptions of employer branding and organizational reputation remains limited, particularly in relation to their intention to apply. Many companies, especially SMEs and local startups, have begun using social media to strengthen their image as attractive employers, but the communication of organizational values is often inconsistent, lacking in strategic direction, and fails to address psychological aspects of potential applicants, such as POF (Yuliana & Rahayu, 2023). Furthermore, the LinkedIn Talent Trends Indonesia (2023) report found that corporate reputation and sustainability values have become key factors in job application decisions among young people, yet few Indonesian companies actively manage their reputation as an integral part of their employer branding strategy. This phenomenon underscores the urgent need for research that systematically examines the influence of employer branding and reputation on intention to apply through the mediating mechanism of POF in the context of Generation Z in Indonesia.

Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses

Employer Branding and Intention to Apply

Employer branding is a crucial strategy for shaping a positive image of a company in the eyes of prospective applicants, particularly among younger generations who tend to be more selective in choosing workplaces. This branding goes beyond visual identity or slogans; it encompasses the communication of core values, organizational culture, and the promise of the employee experience offered by the company (Theurer et al., 2018). A study by Reis and Braga (2022), conducted in the context of the European labor market, demonstrated that consistently designed employer branding enhances perceptions of organizational attractiveness and shapes applicants' intention to apply. Furthermore, in the digital context, employer branding content shared through social media significantly impacts applicants' cognitive engagement, which in turn reinforces their intention to apply (Benraiss-Noailles & Viot, 2021). Companies that effectively highlight an employee value proposition aligned with applicants' personal values tend to achieve higher applicant conversion rates.

Within the framework of the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), employer branding influences attitude toward the behavior by shaping a positive organizational image and creating expectations that align with social norms and perceived behavioral control. Empirically, Moser et al. (2017) found that employer branding directly contributes to intention to apply among job seekers aged 20–35 years. Similar findings were confirmed by Eger, Micik, and Král (2019), who stated that employer branding emphasizing personal development and work–life balance dimensions is more effective in attracting Generation Z applicants. Meanwhile, research by Silva et al. (2020) revealed that factors such as corporate reputation and brand value exert a stronger influence on intention to apply than financial compensation. Therefore, it can be concluded that employer branding plays a strategic role in shaping

applicants' initial perceptions and decisions, particularly in the current digital and highly competitive environment.

H1: Employer branding has a positive effect on intention to apply.

Perceived Employer Reputation dan Intention to Apply

Perceived employer reputation refers to an individual's perception of a company's external image, encompassing aspects such as credibility, ethics, social responsibility, and overall performance (Sivertzen, Nilsen, & Olafsen, 2017). This reputation is shaped by external sources such as media coverage, online reviews, customer experiences, and public opinion, and thus tends to be beyond the organization's direct control (Ke, Sheng, & Xie, 2023). According to Signaling Theory (Spence, 1973), reputation serves as an indirect signal of quality for job seekers to evaluate whether an organization is a desirable place to work. In the context of recruitment competition, a positive reputation can provide a competitive advantage by fostering positive associations with organizational stability, job security, and social value (Eger, Micik, & Král, 2019). Research conducted by Shirin and Kleyn (2017) demonstrates that reputation perception significantly contributes to employer attractiveness and shapes applicants' positive attitudes, which in turn enhances their intention to apply.

Further studies have shown that the influence of organizational reputation on intention to apply becomes more salient when information regarding compensation, job titles, or job descriptions is limited or ambiguous. This is supported by recent findings from Benraiss-Noailles and Viot (2021), who revealed that reputation built through digital reviews and social media significantly affects applicants' initial decisions. Generation Z, in particular, exhibits a stronger tendency to rely on online reputation as a benchmark when making early career decisions (Reis & Braga, 2022). Therefore, organizations must recognize that reputation is not merely an outcome of employer branding, but rather a distinct construct that exerts a strong influence on intention to apply. This implication highlights the importance of actively managing corporate reputation as a critical component of a successful recruitment strategy.

H2: Perceived employer reputation has a positive effect on intention to apply.

Employer Branding and Person Organization Fit (POF)

Employer branding is not solely intended to attract general applicant interest, but also to shape perceptions of compatibility between the applicant and the organizational culture being promoted commonly referred to as POF. POF refers to the degree to which an individual's values, preferences, and expectations align with the norms, culture, and value system of an organization (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). In the context of employer branding, signals communicated through brand messaging such as flexible work arrangements, development opportunities, or participative leadership styles can help applicants form initial perceptions of value congruence (Slaughter et al., 2014). A study by Baum and Kabst (2017) confirms that employer branding content emphasizing authentic organizational values is more effective in fostering positive POF perceptions. This is consistent with the findings of Ullah et al. (2022), who showed that applicants are more likely to perceive value congruence with organizations that consistently communicate their character and workplace image.

Furthermore, employer branding disseminated through digital media can enhance applicants' perceptions of their personal fit with the organization. A study by Kang and Shin (2020) found that transparency in employer branding content significantly influences perceptions of shared values, which serve as the foundation for POF, particularly in online recruitment contexts. Meanwhile, Ghosh (2021) demonstrated that value based employer branding is positively associated with applicants' evaluation of POF, especially among younger generations, including Generation Z, who are more responsive to social signals and sustainability values. In this regard, POF functions as an essential psychological component that bridges the gap between initial perception (branding) and behavioral intention (intention to apply).

Therefore, organizations must design employer branding messages that are not only attractive but also accurately reflect the organizational culture and values, in order to foster stronger POF perceptions among applicants.

H3: Employer branding has a positive effect on person organization fit (POF)

Perceived Employer Reputation and Person Organization Fit (POF)

Perceived employer reputation plays a crucial role in shaping applicants' perceptions of value alignment between themselves and an organization, commonly referred to as POF. A company's reputation that reflects ethical values, sustainability, and social justice can enhance applicants' perceptions of cultural alignment with the organization (Duarte et al., 2022). According to signaling theory, organizational reputation serves as an indirect signal that allows applicants to assess a company's internal norms and practices (Ke et al., 2023). In a study conducted by Ghosh (2021), positive organizational reputation was found to improve applicants' perceptions of the company's work culture, fairness, and social responsibility, thereby strengthening their evaluation of value congruence. This finding is supported by Kang and Shin (2020), who showed that a consistent and transparent public reputation enhances perceived congruence, particularly among value driven applicants such as those from Generation Z.

Furthermore, reputation formed through media coverage, online reviews, and an organization's success in corporate social responsibility initiatives has been shown to contribute significantly to perceptions of alignment between individual and organizational values. In the digital era, applicants increasingly rely on publicly available reputation information from online platforms and social media to assess whether an organization aligns with their personal identity and aspirations (Benraiss-Noailles & Viot, 2021). This is consistent with recent findings by Reis and Braga (2022), which revealed that corporate reputation is significantly related to POF, particularly when organizations are able to authentically communicate their commitment to social issues. Hence, reputation serves not only as an external differentiator but also as a key instrument in fostering value resonance, which underpins applicants' evaluations of POF. The strategic implication is that organizations must manage their reputation holistically and ensure alignment with internal values to strengthen perceptions of value congruence among high quality applicants.

H4: Perceived employer reputation has a positive effect on person organization fit (POF)

Person Organization Fit (POF) and Intention to Apply

POF plays a crucial role in shaping applicants' intention to apply, as it reflects the alignment between individual values and organizational values. According to Person Environment Fit theory, individuals are more inclined to be attracted to organizations that demonstrate similarity in values, norms, and workplace culture (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Research by Silva et al. (2020) shows that applicants who perceive a strong fit with an organization are more likely to proceed with job applications. In the context of digital recruitment, Ghosh (2021) emphasizes that POF acts as a psychological bridge between the organizational image being communicated and the applicant's decision to apply. Furthermore, Ullah et al. (2022) found that POF not only increases the intention to apply but also enhances perceptions of organizational attractiveness and fosters long term loyalty after recruitment.

The relationship between POF and intention to apply is especially relevant in the context of younger generations, such as Generation Z, who are highly influenced by the alignment between personal values and organizational ethos. Kang and Shin (2020) stated that a high perception of POF strengthens applicants' belief that the organization can provide psychological comfort, opportunities for growth, and emotional stability in the long term. This aligns with the findings of Reis and Braga (2022), who confirmed that POF is one of the strongest predictors of intention to apply often more influential than

material incentives. In online recruitment systems, POF frequently serves as an initial determinant before applicants access detailed information about a specific job. Therefore, organizations should actively integrate narratives about organizational culture and values into all recruitment communication channels in order to shape POF perceptions from the earliest stages of interaction with prospective applicants.

H5: Person organization fit (POF) has a positive effect on intention to apply.

The Mediating Role Person Organization Fit (POF)

POF has been widely recognized as a key mediating variable in explaining how applicants' perceptions of employer branding and organizational reputation influence their intention to apply. According to the integrative recruitment model, applicants' perceptions of organizational values conveyed through branding and reputation are cognitively translated into value congruence evaluations, which subsequently shape behavioral intentions (Reis & Braga, 2022). Research by Silva et al. (2020) demonstrated that POF functions as a psychological mechanism bridging employer branding and intention to apply, where perceived value alignment fosters a desire to become part of the organization. Similarly, Duarte et al. (2022) asserted that organizational reputation enhances POF, which in turn indirectly influences applicants' intention to apply. In this sense, POF is not merely an independent variable, but a pivotal explanatory mechanism that elucidates the causal relationship between applicants' initial perceptions and their decision to apply.

In the context of Generation Z, who place significant emphasis on social values and personal alignment when choosing employers, the mediating role of POF becomes even more prominent. A study by Ullah et al. (2022) found that the influence of employer branding on intention to apply increases significantly when applicants perceive a strong value congruence with the organization. Additionally, recent findings by Kim and Lee (2023) indicate that a favorable organizational reputation does not necessarily enhance application intention unless it results in a positive POF evaluation. Therefore, examining the mediating role of POF within this model is both theoretically and practically important, particularly in an era where applicants' career decisions are influenced not only by material incentives but also by value resonance between the individual and the organization. The managerial implication is that companies must manage employer branding and reputation consistently in order to reinforce perceptions of POF, which ultimately contributes to more effective recruitment outcomes.

H6a: Person organization fit (POF) mediates the relationship between employer branding and intention to apply.

H6b: Person organization fit (POF) mediates the relationship between perceived employer reputation and intention to apply.

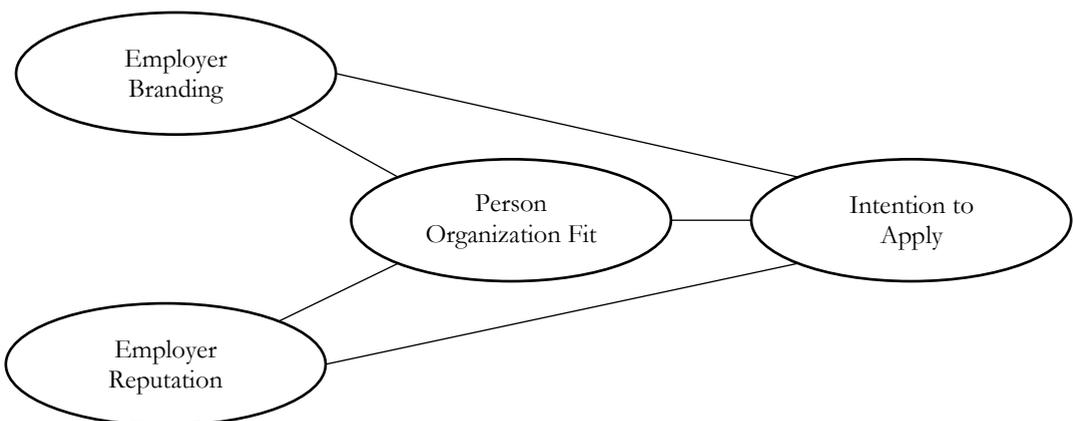


Figure 1. Research Model

Methods

This study adopts a quantitative approach with a causal research design to examine the effects of employer branding and perceived employer reputation on intention to apply, with POF as a mediating variable. This method was chosen as it is suitable for explaining the relationships among variables within a theoretically constructed conceptual framework. Data were collected through the distribution of an online questionnaire to respondents who met the inclusion criteria. The research instrument employed a closed-ended questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree), designed to measure the four main variables: employer branding, perceived employer reputation, POF, and intention to apply.

The employer branding variable was measured using five items adapted from Berthon et al. (2005) and updated by Theurer et al. (2018), covering dimensions such as work values, personal development opportunities, and social attractiveness of the organization. Perceived employer reputation was measured using four items derived from Silva et al. (2020) and Duarte et al. (2022), focusing on applicants' perceptions of the company's credibility, ethics, and public image as understood through digital media and indirect experiences. POF was assessed using five items adapted from the classic scale by Cable and Judge (1996), with contextual modifications to align with Generation Z characteristics, in order to evaluate the degree of value congruence between individuals and organizations. Intention to apply was measured using six items developed based on Allen et al. (2007) and expanded by Reis and Braga (2022), evaluating applicants' actual intention to apply for jobs at organizations with specific reputations and employer branding efforts. All indicators underwent content validation by three experts in the fields of human resource management and organizational behavior to ensure clarity, contextual relevance, and empirical measurability of the constructs.

The population of this study consists of Generation Z university students and fresh graduates (aged 18-27) in Indonesia who are currently job hunting or planning to apply for jobs in the near future. This group was selected due to its status as the most productive age segment, which is highly active in career exploration and places strong emphasis on organizational values and image. The sampling technique employed was purposive sampling with the following inclusion criteria: (1) aged between 18 and 27 years, (2) currently in their final year of university or recently graduated, and (3) have previously seen or read employer branding or corporate reputation information on social media. The minimum sample size was determined based on the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) guideline, requiring a minimum of 5-10 times the number of indicators. With 20 indicators, the minimum required sample size was 200. This study successfully collected data from 320 eligible respondents. The respondents came from various universities and regions across Indonesia. Of the total sample, 62% were female and 38% male. Regarding educational status, 55% were final-year students and 45% were recent graduates. A majority (68%) had participated in internships or held work experience, providing them with relevant organizational preferences. All respondents accessed employer-related information through digital platforms such as LinkedIn, Instagram, and career websites.

The data analysis technique used in this study was Structural Equation Modeling based on Partial Least Squares (PLS-SEM), conducted using SmartPLS version 4. This software was selected for its capability to handle complex models with latent variables and its suitability for data that are not normally distributed and for moderate to large sample sizes (Hair et al., 2019). The analysis was carried out in two stages: evaluation of the measurement model (outer model) and evaluation of the structural model (inner model). The outer model assessment examined indicator validity and reliability using criteria such as loading factor (> 0.70), Average Variance Extracted (AVE) (> 0.50), and composite reliability (CR) (> 0.70), along with discriminant validity using the Fornell–Larcker criterion and HTMT ratio (Sarstedt et al., 2022). In the inner model analysis, the relationships among variables were evaluated through path

coefficients, R-square, f-square, and significance testing using bootstrapping with 5,000 subsamples at a 5% significance level ($p < 0.05$). Mediation analysis was conducted based on the approach by Zhao, Lynch, and Chen (2010), which distinguishes between full mediation, partial mediation, and no mediation based on the presence of significant direct and indirect effects. These procedures were designed to validate the conceptual model and support statistically and theoretically sound conclusions.

Results

Descriptive Statistics of Respondents

This study involved 320 respondents consisting of final-year university students and fresh graduates from Generation Z (aged 18-27 years). The majority of respondents were female (62%), while male respondents accounted for 38%. A total of 55% of the participants were currently in their final year of study, while 45% had already graduated (see Table 1). Most respondents (68%) had experience participating in internship programs or organizational activities, and nearly all accessed information about companies through social media platforms such as Instagram, LinkedIn, and digital career portals. This indicates that the respondents had relevant exposure to employer branding and corporate reputation, making them well-suited for the objectives of this study.

Table 1. Respondent Profile

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	122	38.1%
	Female	198	61.9%
Status	Final-Year Student	176	55%
	Fresh Graduate	144	45%
Internship Experience	Yes	218	68.1%
	No	102	31.9%

Evaluation of the Measurement Model (Outer Model)

The evaluation of the outer model was conducted to assess the validity and reliability of the constructs. The loading factor results presented in Table 2 indicate that all indicators had values above 0.70, thereby meeting the criteria for indicator reliability. The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for all variables were above the threshold of 0.50 (mean AVE = 0.642), confirming the presence of convergent validity. In addition, the Composite Reliability (CR) values for each construct exceeded the minimum threshold of 0.70 (mean CR = 0.881), indicating a high level of internal consistency across constructs. Discriminant validity was assessed using both the Fornell–Larcker criterion and the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT). The results show that each construct is empirically distinct from the others, as indicated by HTMT values below 0.90. Therefore, it can be concluded that discriminant validity has been satisfactorily established.

Table 2. Outer Model Test Results

Construct	Indicator	Loading Factor	AVE	Composite Reliability
Employer Branding	EB1	0.721	0.645	0.881
	EB2	0.803		
	EB3	0.895		
	EB4	0.812		
	EB5	0.779		
Perceived Employer Reputation	REP1	0.734	0.612	0.864
	REP2	0.882		
	REP3	0.764		
	REP4	0.79		
Person Organization Fit	POF1	0.748	0.688	0.902
	POF2	0.86		
	POF3	0.903		
	POF4	0.812		
	POF5	0.799		
Intention to Apply	IA1	0.73	0.659	0.911
	IA2	0.841		
	IA3	0.888		
	IA4	0.914		
	IA5	0.792		
	IA6	0.765		

Evaluation of the Structural Model (Inner Model)

The evaluation of the inner model was conducted to assess the relationships between constructs within the conceptual model. As shown in table 3, the R-square value for the variable Intention to Apply is 0.652, indicating that 65.2% of the variance in intention to apply can be explained by employer branding, perceived employer reputation, and POF. The R-square value for POF is 0.546, suggesting that 54.6% of the variance in POF is accounted for by employer branding and perceived employer reputation. The results of the bootstrapping analysis reveal that employer branding has a significant effect on POF ($\beta = 0.421$; $p < 0.001$) and on intention to apply ($\beta = 0.298$; $p < 0.01$), indicating that H1 and H3 are accepted. Perceived employer reputation also has a significant effect on POF ($\beta = 0.386$; $p < 0.001$), supporting H2, but it does not have a significant direct effect on intention to apply ($\beta = 0.074$; $p = 0.178$), thus H4 is rejected. Meanwhile, POF has a significant positive effect on intention to apply ($\beta = 0.422$; $p < 0.001$), confirming H5. These findings indicate that POF mediates the relationship between employer branding and intention to apply, as well as between perceived employer reputation and intention to apply, supporting the acceptance of H6 and H7.

Table 3. Outer Model Test Results

Hypothesis	Path Coefficient	T-Statistic	P-Value	Significance
Employer Branding → Person-Organization Fit	0.421	6.134	0.0010	Significance
Perceived Employer Reputation → Person-Organization Fit	0.386	5.872	0.01	Significance
Employer Branding → Intention to Apply	0.298	3.453	0.001	Significance
Perceived Employer Reputation → Intention to Apply	0.074	1.357	0.178	Not Significant
Person-Organization Fit → Intention to Apply	0.422	7.11	0.000	Significance

Mediation Analysis

Mediation analysis was conducted based on the approach proposed by Zhao et al. (2010). The results indicate that POF partially mediates the relationship between employer branding and intention to apply (indirect effect $\beta = 0.177$; $p < 0.01$), as both the direct and indirect effects are statistically significant. In contrast, POF fully mediates the relationship between perceived employer reputation and intention to apply (indirect effect $\beta = 0.163$; $p < 0.001$), given that the direct effect is not statistically significant. Thus, the role of POF is confirmed to be critical as a psychological mechanism that bridges applicants' initial perceptions of employer image and reputation to their intention to apply for a job.

Table 4. Mediated Relationship

Mediated Relationship	Indirect Effect	T-Statistic	P-Value	Type of Media
Employer Branding → Person Organization Fit → Intention to Apply	0.177	4.122	0.01	Partial Mediation
Perceived Employer Reputation → Person Organization Fit → Intention to Apply	0.163	4.835	0.001	Full Mediation

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that employer branding has a positive and significant effect POF, suggesting that the organization's image as an attractive employer can shape applicants' perceptions of value congruence between themselves and the company. This finding aligns with the study by Theurer et al. (2018), which emphasized that employer branding not only builds external reputation but also serves as a catalyst for shaping cognitive perceptions of fit between candidates and organizations. Generation Z the focus population of this research is particularly sensitive to the values conveyed by companies through digital platforms, making strong and consistent branding highly influential in shaping

psychological orientations toward value congruence. This alignment is critical, as it directly relates to individual preferences and initial decision making in the job search process.

In addition, perceived employer reputation was also found to have a significant influence on POF. This suggests that a positive perception of the organization's reputation encompassing ethical standards, business performance, and social responsibility fosters a stronger sense of value congruence between potential applicants and the organization. These findings reinforce those of Duarte et al. (2022), who highlighted the critical role of organizational reputation in creating perceived value alignment. In the Indonesian context, Generation Z regards corporate reputation as a central consideration, as this demographic tends to associate their employment choices with broader identity and social values. Therefore, organizations that maintain a positive public reputation are more likely to attract applicants with compatible values.

Furthermore, employer branding was found to have a positive and significant direct effect on intention to apply. This result reinforces the strategic role of employer branding in attracting job interest among younger job seekers, as previously emphasized by Berthon et al. (2005) and supported by more recent findings from Reis and Braga (2022). Strong branding generates positive associations, enhances organizational attractiveness, and encourages application intentions even among individuals who have no prior direct experience with the company. In an increasingly competitive digital era, employer branding strategies have become even more critical, as younger applicants tend to evaluate organizational quality based on external communications and content circulated online.

Conversely, the direct effect of perceived employer reputation on intention to apply was found to be non significant. This is an intriguing finding, as it suggests that while reputation plays a role in shaping POF, it does not automatically trigger an applicant's intention to apply on its own. This can be explained by referring to the study by Lievens and Slaughter (2016), which posits that reputation only directly influences job-seeking behavior when accompanied by strong exposure to or experience with the organization's internal values. In the context of Generation Z, it is likely that reputation functions primarily as an initial screening tool in organizational evaluation but is not sufficiently powerful to serve as a primary determinant in decision making without the mediation of POF.

POF was found to have a significant positive effect on intention to apply, confirming that value congruence between individuals and organizations is a key factor in application decisions. This finding supports the fit theory developed by Cable and Judge (1996) and is reinforced by contemporary research such as Silva et al. (2020), which states that the stronger the perceived fit, the higher the likelihood of exhibiting behavioral intentions including job application behavior. For Generation Z, POF likely serves as the cognitive bridge between what they observe (branding and reputation) and how they perceive compatibility with the organization. This congruence functions as a personal evaluative tool for determining how relevant the organization is to their career expectations and life values.

Mediation analysis revealed that POF partially mediates the relationship between employer branding and intention to apply and fully mediates the relationship between perceived employer reputation and intention to apply. These findings underscore the importance of a value-based approach in employer branding and corporate reputation strategies. Employer branding exerts both direct and indirect effects of similar magnitude, whereas reputation is more effective when consistently communicated to foster perceptions of value alignment. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of the psychological mechanisms underlying job application decisions among Generation Z in Indonesia and demonstrates that building emotional and value-based connections with prospective applicants is more effective than merely emphasizing organizational image or prestige.

From a service management perspective, the results of this study underscore that employer branding and perceived employer reputation function as critical service signals in labor markets

dominated by service-oriented industries such as hospitality, banking, education, and healthcare. In service contexts, prospective employees interpret employer branding not merely as an image-building mechanism, but as a pre-employment promise of internal service quality, organizational values, and service culture. This finding aligns with the principles of Service-Dominant Logic, which emphasize that value is co-created through human interaction and employee engagement (Vargo & Lusch, 2008). For Generation Z in Indonesia and broader Southeast Asia, employer branding that highlights service ethics, social responsibility, and employee well-being is particularly salient, as this cohort tends to associate employment choices with identity, purpose, and societal contribution. Consistent with internal marketing theory, such branding helps shape perceived person–organization fit (POF) by signaling how the organization treats its employees as internal customers, which is essential for sustaining service excellence (Ahmed & Rafiq, 2003; Chiang & Hsieh, 2012).

Furthermore, the mediation role of POF provides important implications for service recruitment strategy. While perceived employer reputation contributes to POF, its non-significant direct effect on intention to apply suggests that reputation in service industries primarily serves as a baseline credibility factor, rather than a direct motivator. This supports prior service management research indicating that reputation influences behavioral outcomes only when translated into meaningful internal values and service climate perceptions (Lievens & Slaugther, 2016; Schneider et al., 2013). The strong effect of POF on intention to apply confirms that value congruence acts as a cognitive bridge linking external service cues (branding and reputation) with behavioral intention. In Southeast Asian service settings where relational norms, collectivism, and social harmony remain influential organizations that effectively communicate how their service values are enacted internally are more likely to attract applicants who are predisposed to deliver high-quality service. Thus, this study contributes to service management literature by demonstrating that talent attraction among Generation Z depends less on organizational prestige and more on perceived alignment between individual service orientation and organizational service culture (Cable & Judge, 1996; Silva et al., 2020).

Limitations and Future Research Directions

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged and serve as a foundation for future research. First, the cross-sectional research design limits the ability to draw causal inferences over time; thus, future studies are encouraged to adopt longitudinal approaches to better understand the dynamics of job application intention over extended periods. Second, the focus on Generation Z respondents in Indonesia restricts the generalizability of the findings to other generations or cultural contexts; therefore, cross-generational and cross-cultural studies are highly recommended. Third, this study did not account for moderating variables such as job involvement or familiarity with the company, which may influence the strength of relationships between variables; future research should incorporate these factors to provide a more comprehensive understanding. Fourth, all data were collected through self-reported surveys, which are subject to common method bias and social desirability bias; future research should consider data triangulation or experimental designs to improve methodological rigor. Fifth, POF was measured as a unidimensional construct, whereas the literature suggests that dimensions such as value congruence, goal congruence, and personality culture fit may offer a deeper understanding of applicant organization alignment. Lastly, the quantitative approach employed in this study may not fully capture the subjective meanings behind Generation Z perceptions of employer branding and reputation; hence, qualitative or mixed-method approaches are essential in future research to uncover richer, personal narratives in the job application decision making process.

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