Job Application Interests of Generation Z: The Role of Employer Branding, E-Recruitment and Work Expectation

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Abstract

This study examines how employer branding, e-recruitment, and work expectations influence Generation Z's intention to apply for jobs in West Java, Indonesia. It addresses limited comparative evidence on the relative importance of these factors within local labor markets. A quantitative, cross-sectional survey collected data from 199 Generation Z respondents aged 13–29 using purposive sampling. The relationships among variables were assessed through Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) using SmartPLS software. Work expectations had the strongest significant association with job application intention (β = 0.452, p < 0.001), followed by e-recruitment (β = 0.280, p = 0.001). Employer branding showed no statistically significant relationship (β = 0.002, p = 0.983). Together, the predictors explained 45.2% of the variance in application intention. Respondents placed greater importance on anticipated working conditions and accessible online recruitment processes than on employer branding. Clear information about employment opportunities may therefore matter more than organizational image alone. Purposive sampling, the regional focus, and the cross-sectional design restrict generalizability and causal interpretation. Moreover, stated application intentions cannot establish whether respondents subsequently submitted job applications. This study compares three recruitment-related factors in a Generation Z sample and provides contextual insights relevant to the Theory of Planned Behavior without directly testing its core constructs. The findings suggest that employers should communicate job expectations and improve the clarity and accessibility of digital recruitment platforms.

Keywords: *Employer Branding, E-Recruitment, Generation Z, Intention to Apply, Work Expectation*

1. INTRODUCTION

Along with the dynamics of globalization and digitalization, changes are not only occurring in various industrial sectors but also affecting the patterns and intensity of competition in the increasingly competitive labor market (Sudrajat & Surbakti, 2024). In this context, organizational image and Human Resource Management (HRM) become important factors in building sustainable competitive advantage (Safitri & Novianti, 2024). Organizations in this era are no longer solely focused on product and service competition but are also required to attract and retain quality workforce through appropriate strategies in recruitment and human resource management (Febrina & Erlin, 2025). This condition becomes even more relevant when linked to the entry of Generation Z into the workforce, which brings its own characteristics and preferences in assessing the attractiveness and image of an organization.

One of the human resources that is currently beginning to dominate the workforce and is considered to have a high level of adaptation to globalization and technological development is Generation Z. Generation Z is the first generation to grow up in a period of globalization and cultural diversity; thus, they have individual interactions from different backgrounds, nationalities, and social media (Cerasi & Balcioglu, 2024). This generation born between 1997 and 2013 is known as the digital native generation as they have been used to the development of information technology, the use of social media, and extensive connectivity from an early age (Pricope, Băltescu, Brătucu, Tecău, Chițu, & Duguleană, 2023; Setiawan, Suriani, Yunus, & Sukmawaty, 2025). In addition to their ability to adapt to the digital world, Pricope et al. (2023) also add that Generation Z is often described as ambitious individuals with strong determination, showing a good level of readiness and caution, as well as having realistic, open-minded views and a high level of tolerance.

Based on the results of the 2025 Inter-Census Population Survey (*Survei Penduduk Antar Sensus*/SUPAS), Generation Z remains the largest demographic group in Indonesia, accounting for 24.93 percent of the total population of 284.67 million people, or approximately 71 million people.

This proportion is slightly higher than that of the millennial generation, which stands at 24.34 percent. The central statistics agency classifies Generation Z as residents born between 1997 and 2012, therefore, by 2025, this group will be aged 13–28 years, and most will have entered the workforce. The range slightly differs from the definition used in this study, which refers to Cerasi and Balcioglu (2024), stating that Generation Z consists of individuals born between 1997 and 2013. Referring to the age of Generation Z, which is now entering the workforce, the participation of Generation Z in the labor market shows a significant increase, marked by the growing number of graduates from vocational secondary education to higher education (Setiawan et al., 2025). In addition to their ability to adapt to technology, this generation is also known for having different work preferences compared to previous generations. Generation Z tends to prioritize work flexibility, alignment with organizational values, sustainability aspects, and an inclusive work environment as the main considerations when choosing a job (Febrina & Erlin, 2025). The difference in work preferences between Generation Z and previous generations certainly presents unique challenges for organizations (Vieira & Santos, 2024).

Organizations must adapt to the growing number of new workers; thus, it is increasingly vital to understand the expectations and demands of new workers, especially Generation Z, who have their own features and originality (Nguyen, Rowley, & Pejić, 2022). This is because of the job expectations discrepancies among Generation Z and earlier generations, which demand organizations to adapt their human resource management methods to stay relevant and competitive (Rani, Jalih, & Widyowati, 2022). According to Iorgulescu (2016), Generation Z tends to demand continual development possibilities from a work environment, direction from experienced leaders, positive working relationships, and a high level of predictability. Hence, these work expectations should be a main concern for organizations while establishing and characterizing tasks that are aligned with Generation Z preferences (Rani et al., 2022). Nguyen et al. (2022) state that the job aspirations of Generation Z job seekers can differ based on the country and culture.

Another aspect that organizations need to pay attention to in attracting the workforce from Generation Z is the organization's reputation or image. In the context of the current labor market, an organization's appeal to top talent heavily depends on its reputation or image (Thang & Trang, 2024). Organizations need to develop distinctive values and build a positive image to retain their employees and attract the best talent (Thang & Trang, 2024). Research found that 42% of Generation Z prefer to work at companies that align with their values. Therefore, organizations can demonstrate their values to external parties, in this context, job seekers from Generation Z, one way to do this is through employer branding (Febrina & Erlin, 2025).

The importance of employer branding is significant in Generation Z, given the features that make this generation more adaptable to change, critical to organizational values, and a strong inclination for a match between individual and company values (Febrina & Erlin, 2025). Therefore, employer branding is one of the strategic instruments for organizations to attract the workforce from Generation Z and to boost the company's attractiveness in the increasingly competitive labor market (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). Backhaus and Tikoo also argued that organizational attractiveness is vital in drawing Generation Z workforce's interest, especially in terms of forming the first impression of the organization as an attractive employer. This good perception can stimulate the intention to apply to the organization to arise (Wibowo, Winarno, & Fakhri, 2025). The research of Santiago (2019) discovered that there is a relationship between employer branding and the intention to seek for a job. Then Lesmono and Widhianto (2024) claimed that the more attractive the employer branding presented by a firm, the higher the desire of workers to apply to that organization.

Referring to an individual's desire to apply for a job, this interest is influenced by the job applicant's assessment of the organizational information presented through job advertisements, from an individual and social perspective. The more positive the information received, the greater the desire of an individual to apply to the organization (Wibowo et al., 2025). The recruitment process is carried out to attract potential workers, if the organization can attract as many job candidates as possible, it can be more selective and choose the most potential human resources. Therefore, with the current

utilization of digital technology, organizations are starting to use e-recruitment systems (Jasmine, Utomo, & Kurniasari, 2025). E-recruitment is an effective strategy for organizations to attract workers, especially Generation Z, because this process is conducted online, both in delivering job vacancy information and in the application mechanism. This digital-based recruitment system is considered capable of accommodating the needs and work preferences of Generation Z, which tend to prioritize ease, practicality, and flexibility in accessing information (Lestari & Manggiasih, 2023).

Previous research has shown that employer branding positively influences Generation Z's intention to apply for jobs (Junça, & Dias, 2023; Muarip, & Sujoko, 2025), while findings regarding e-recruitment remain inconsistent (Lestari and Manggiasih, 2023; Wibowo et al., 2025). Although these factors have been widely examined, their simultaneous relationships with work expectations have received limited attention. Consequently, their relative contributions to Generation Z's job application intention remain insufficiently understood, highlighting an important research gap.

Work expectations might explain these differences, because Generation Z looks at career growth, good leadership, positive work connections, and job stability when choosing a job (Iorgulescu, 2016). Employment expectations can be different in various countries and cultures, as noted by Nguyen et al. (2022). These differences show that how appealing an organization is and how easy it is to find job openings online might not be equally important when the job opportunities do not match what job seekers are looking for. The unique part of this study is combining employer branding, online recruitment, and employee expectations into one model to see how each one affects the desire to apply for a job. This adds more understanding to the different results found in earlier research.

West Java was chosen because it has the largest group of Generation Z in Indonesia, around 12.85 million people, which makes up 25.22% of the province's total population, according to the West Java Provincial Statistics Bureau in 2026. This group of people being concentrated in the province makes it a good place to look at what younger job seekers want in a job. Even though the results mainly show what people in Bogor think, since 79.4% of the people surveyed are from there, the findings mostly represent the people who took part in the survey, not all Generation Z people in West Java.

This study examined how employer branding, online hiring processes, and job expectations affect the likelihood of Gen Z applying for jobs in West Java. This study helps the field of recruitment behavior by showing how important factors, such as the attractiveness of an organization and ease of applying through digital methods, affect Gen Z job applications. It also provides helpful information that connects to the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) without actually checking the main ideas of the theory. In real life, the results can help create job-hiring plans that match what Gen Z wants in their work.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Employer Branding

Employer branding involves creating and promoting an organization's unique identity and core values to differentiate it from other employers, as defined by Backhaus and Tikoo (2004). Wijaya et al.(2023) differentiated between internal and external employer branding. Internal employer branding aims to enhance employees' feeling of belonging and their dedication to the organization. Meanwhile, external employer branding involves sharing information about the company's identity, the nature of the work environment, and the features of employment opportunities with potential candidates. Ambler and Barrow (1996) outline five dimensions of employer branding, such as interest value, social value, economic value, development value, and application value. These dimensions reflect how attractive an organization is by highlighting aspects such as innovation, workplace relationships, compensation, career opportunities, and professional development.

From the viewpoint of signaling theory, employer branding conveys the traits of an organization that potential job candidates cannot fully understand before they start working. These signals assist applicants in forming their first impressions of how attractive an organization is and in assessing

possible job opportunities. Lievens and Slaughter (2016), highlight that employer branding enhances how applicants remember and recognize information about an organization. Lievens and Slaughter (2016) also mention that first impressions of an organization can affect job preferences, the desire to apply, and later hiring choices. Therefore, employer branding shows how attractive an organization is, as seen by others, through information related to employment, rather than based on personal expectations of individuals.

2.2 E-recruitment

E-recruitment involves utilizing digital technologies and social media to identify and engage potential employees whose qualifications meet the organizational needs. This recruitment approach facilitates access to a wider talent pool while minimizing operational costs and improving recruitment effectiveness (Jasmine et al., 2025). Koman et al. (2024) highlighted the contribution of digital technologies to more transparent and efficient recruitment practices. AbdulKareem et al. (2024) in Wibowo et al. (2025) classified e-recruitment into six dimensions: transparency, cost reduction, ease of use, participation, efficiency, and platform trust.

Through digital recruitment channels, prospective applicants can explore employment opportunities, obtain information from company websites and social media, and complete application procedures electronically (Wijaya et al., 2023). The availability of transparent recruitment information may also contribute to a more favorable organizational image (Wołodźko and Woźniak, 2017). From a signaling theory perspective, digital recruitment serves as a communication mechanism through which organizations convey information about employment opportunities and recruitment practices. The theory of planned behavior (TPB) further suggests that accessible online application procedures may relate to perceived behavioral control by making the application process easier to complete. Conceptually, e-recruitment differs from employer branding because it focuses on the convenience, openness, and effectiveness of recruitment procedures rather than the perceived attractiveness of an organization as an employer.

2.3 Work Expectation

Work expectations refer to the conditions, career prospects, and workplace experiences that individuals seek when considering employment. Generation Z tends to place considerable importance on work-life balance, flexible employment arrangements, professional growth, supportive relationships, and opportunities to contribute meaningfully to organizations (Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021). This generation also demonstrates a preference for autonomy and collaborative learning environments in which supervisors provide constructive guidance and encourage open communication (Rani, Jalih, & Widyowati, 2022).

From the perspective of Person–Organization Fit (P–O Fit), individuals assess prospective employers by considering the compatibility between their employment preferences and perceived organizational attributes. Despite sharing certain characteristics, employer branding and work expectations represent distinct concepts. Employer branding concerns how attractive an organization appears to prospective employees, whereas work expectations emphasize the conditions and opportunities individuals seek in their future employment. Accordingly, both variables are incorporated as independent predictors of job application intention in the proposed research model. Discriminant validity testing was employed to evaluate whether these constructs can be empirically distinguished.

2.4 Intention to Apply

Job application intention refers to an individual's inclination to submit an application for a particular employment opportunity. According to Wibowo et al. (2025), favorable information presented through job advertisements and online recruitment channels can encourage prospective applicants to consider applying for available positions in an organization. The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) explains that behavioral intention is shaped by three principal components: attitudes

toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, 1991). These components pertain to individuals' assessments of expected outcomes, perceived social influences, and beliefs about their ability to perform a particular action.

Within the recruitment process, employer branding and work expectations may shape how individuals assess prospective employment opportunities, whereas the accessibility of e-recruitment platforms may influence perceptions of how easily applications can be submitted. Signaling theory offers an additional explanation by describing how organizational information contributes to applicants' initial impressions. The Person–Organization Fit (P–O Fit) perspective further emphasizes the perceived alignment between individual employment preferences and organizational characteristics. Together, these theoretical perspectives provide a conceptual basis for the proposed relationships, although their underlying mechanisms are not directly examined in this study. Job application intention must also be distinguished from the willingness to continue pursuing a position or to accept a subsequent job offer (Cable and Judge, 1994; Silva and Dias, 2022). This study therefore concentrates on individuals' intentions to submit job applications rather than their actual application behavior or decisions made during later recruitment stages.

2.5 Employer Branding and Intention to Apply

Employer branding serves as a means of presenting an organization's distinctive characteristics to attract potential job applicants (Junça & Dias, 2023). From a Signaling Theory perspective, positive information about an organization can shape applicants' perceptions of its attractiveness as a prospective employer. The Person–Organization Fit (P–O Fit) perspective suggests that individuals consider the compatibility between organizational characteristics and their personal employment preferences.

Research by Junça and Dias (2023) in Portugal demonstrated a relationship between employer branding and individuals' intention to apply for jobs. Consistent findings were reported by Muarip, & Sujoko, 2025, who identified a positive association among Generation Z fresh graduates in Yogyakarta. These studies highlight the relevance of organizational attractiveness in shaping employment-related intentions. Nevertheless, the importance of employer branding may vary among individuals because attractive organizational attributes do not always correspond to their specific employment expectations. Therefore, considering employer branding and work expectations simultaneously provides a more comprehensive understanding of their respective relationships with job application intention.

H_1: Employer branding has an influence on the intention to apply

2.6 E-Recruitment and Intention to Apply

Digital recruitment has become increasingly important for Generation Z, as it offers convenient and flexible access to employment opportunities (Lestari and Manggiasih, 2025). Through online recruitment platforms, organizations can distribute vacancy information more effectively while improving transparency throughout the recruitment process (Koman et al., 2024; Jasmine et al., 2025). From the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) perspective, the convenience of digital recruitment may relate to perceived behavioral control, as simpler application procedures can minimize the difficulties experienced by prospective applicants.

However, existing studies have produced differing results regarding the relationship between e-recruitment and job application intention. Lestari and Manggiasih (2025) identified a significant association, highlighting the value of accessible and regularly updated recruitment information. In contrast, Wibowo et al. (2025) reported an insignificant relationship, indicating that convenient digital recruitment does not necessarily translate into stronger application intentions. These contrasting findings suggest that accessibility may not be the only factor influencing applicants' decisions. Organizational attractiveness and personal employment expectations may also play important roles. Accordingly, this study incorporates e-recruitment, employer branding, and work expectations within a single research model to examine their respective contributions to job application intention.

H_2: E-recruitment affects the intention to apply

2.7 Work Expectation and Intention To Apply

Generation Z places considerable emphasis on employment conditions that support work-life balance, career advancement, positive relationships with colleagues, and constructive communication with supervisors (Gabrielova and Bocko, 2021). Rani et al. (2022) demonstrated that employment expectations are related to Generation Z's intention to pursue job opportunities, suggesting that personal career preferences deserve greater consideration in recruitment practices. The Person–Organization Fit (P–O Fit) perspective provides a theoretical explanation for this relationship, as prospective applicants may be more inclined to apply when organizational characteristics correspond to their desired working conditions. The Theory Of Planned Behavior (TPB) also indicates that positive assessments of expected employment outcomes may strengthen behavioral intentions (Ajzen, 1991). Conceptually, work expectations differ from employer branding because they emphasize the employment conditions individuals seek rather than their perceptions of an organization's attractiveness. Examining work expectations together with employer branding and e-recruitment allows the study to distinguish the roles of personal career preferences, organizational information, and digital recruitment accessibility in shaping job application intentions.

H_3: Work expectation affects intention to apply

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative cross-sectional survey to examine the relationships between employer branding, e-recruitment, work expectations, and job application intention among Gen Z. This approach enables systematic hypothesis testing through statistical analyses (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Given its cross-sectional design, the findings indicate statistical associations rather than definitive causal relationships between variables. The questionnaire comprised 37 indicators adapted from previous studies. Employer branding was measured using Berthon, Ewing, and Hah (2005), while e-recruitment adopted indicators from AbdulKareem, Oladimeji, Ishola, Bello, Umar, and Adejumo (2024), as cited in Wibowo, Winarno, and Fakhri (2025). Work expectations were measured using Iorgulescu (2016) as in Rani, Jalih, and Widyowati (2022), and job application intention was measured using Gomes and Neves as in Wibowo et al. (2025). All variables were assessed using a Likert scale. Employer branding reflects perceived organizational attractiveness, and work expectations represent individual employment preferences. Their conceptual distinction was further assessed using convergent and discriminant validity.

Purposive sampling was employed to recruit Generation Z individuals aged 13–29 years, including employed and unemployed respondents (Sekaran & Bougie, 2017). Data were collected through Google Forms, distributed online, and with direct assistance. Of 214 responses, 199 met the screening criteria and were retained for analysis. Most respondents originated from West Java (94.5%), particularly Bogor (79.4%), while 5.5% came from outside the province. The sample represents Generation Z individuals broadly rather than exclusively active job seekers, limiting the generalizability of the findings. Data were analyzed using PLS-SEM with SmartPLS, which is suitable for predictive models involving multiple latent constructs and does not require strict multivariate normality (Hair, Risher, Sarstedt, & Ringle, 2019). Measurement model evaluation included reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity, followed by structural model assessment to examine the proposed relationships.

Table 1. Respondent characteristics

Characteristics	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Job Status	Not working	184	92.5
	Working	15	7.5
	Total	199	100
Age	13–15	2	1.0

Characteristics	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Age	16–20	139	69.8
	21–25	44	22.1
	26–29	14	7.0
	Total	199	100
Highest Level of Education	Junior High School	18	9.0
	Senior High School/equivalent	156	78.4
	Diploma	6	3.0
	Bachelor Degree	18	9.0
	Postgraduate	1	0.5
	Total	199	100
City/Regency of Origin	Bogor City	126	63.3
	Bogor Regency	26	13.1
	Bogor (unspecified)	6	3.0
	Bandung Raya	17	8.5
	Rest of West Java	13	6.5
	Outside West Java	11	5.5
Total		199	100

Table 1 presents the characteristics of 199 Generation Z respondents who met the research criteria and whose data were suitable for further processing. The number exceeded the minimum sample size based on the power analysis recommended by Memon, Ting, Cheah, Thurasamy, Chuah, and Cham (2020) for PLS-SEM-based survey research. With three independent variables leading to the intention to apply, a medium effect size ($f^2 = 0.15$), a significance level of 5%, and a statistical power of 80%, the minimum sample size required was 77 respondents, while for a statistical power of 95%, 119 respondents were needed. Thus, the sample size in this study was adequate for model estimation.

Based on employment status, the majority of respondents were not yet employed, totaling 184 people (92.5%), while 15 people (7.5%) were currently working. This composition aligns with the research focus on Generation Z, who are in the job-seeking stage. Respondents who were already employed were included in the analysis because they were still within the age range of Generation Z and remained potential candidates for other job applications. The dominance of respondents who did not have work experience needs to be considered when interpreting the research results, as the attractiveness of the organization tends to be perceived more by job seekers who have work experience compared to those who are inexperienced (Nguyen, Rowley, & Pejić, 2022).

In terms of age, the respondents were predominantly from the 16–20 age group, with 139 individuals (69.8%), followed by the 21–25 age group with 44 individuals (22.1%), the 26–29 age group with 14 individuals (7.0%), and the 13–15 age group with two individuals (1.0%). All respondents fell within the birth range of Generation Z, which is from 1997 to 2013 Cerasi and Balcioglu (2024), and more than 90% of them were aged 16–25 years. The young age group is the most vulnerable in the labor market. The central statistics agency recorded that the open unemployment rate (*Tingkat Pengangguran Terbuka*/TPT) for the population aged 15–24 years in August 2025 reached 16.89%, which is much higher than that of the 25–59 age group (2.93%) and the national TPT (4.85%). This age profile, concentrated in early adulthood, is similar to previous research on the intention to apply among Generation Z, which involved novice job seekers such as final-year students in Vietnam Thang and Trang (2024), and recent graduates in Indonesia (Wibowo et al., 2025).

Based on the highest level of education, the majority of respondents had a high school/equivalent education (156 people, 78.4%). Respondents with a junior high school and

bachelor's degree each numbered 18 people (9.0%), followed by 6 people (3.0%) with a diploma and 1 person (0.5%) with a postgraduate degree. Overall, respondents with higher education (diploma, bachelor's, and postgraduate) numbered 25 people (12.6%). This composition is consistent with the age distribution of the respondents, most of whom are at the age of graduating from high school to the beginning of college. This group is relevant to the research context, considering that high school graduates have the highest unemployment rate in Indonesia. In August 2025, the unemployment rate for vocational high school graduates was recorded at 8.63% and for senior high school graduates at 6.88%, higher than that for Diploma I/II/III graduates (4.31%) and Diploma IV/S1/S2/S3 graduates (5.39%).

Based on the respondents' city/district of origin, they were concentrated in the Bogor area, which included Bogor City (126 people, 63.3%), Bogor Regency (26 people, 13.1%), and Bogor without city/district details (6 people, 3.0%), totaling 158 people (79.4%). Other respondents came from the Bandung Raya area (17 people, 8.5%), other cities/districts in West Java (13 people, 6.5%), and outside West Java (11 people, 5.5%). Thus, 188 respondents (94.5%) were from West Java Province. The concentration of respondents in the Bogor area reflects the reach of the questionnaire distribution using the purposive sampling technique, which is non-probabilistic; therefore, the generalization of the research results to the entire Generation Z population in West Java needs to be done with caution (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). Nevertheless, this region remains relevant to the research background, as the unemployment rate in Bogor Regency in August 2025 reached 7.69%, higher than the unemployment rate in West Java Province at 6.77%, and the national unemployment rate at 4.85%. In general, the characteristics of the respondents depict Generation Z as young, with a secondary education, and not yet employed, thus being in the early stage of entering the job market. This profile aligns with the research objective of understanding the determinants of Generation Z's interest in applying for jobs, while also providing an important context for interpreting the results of the hypothesis testing in the subsequent section.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Results

4.1.1 Validity and Reliability Test

Measurement model testing began with an assessment of the reliability and convergent validity of the four study constructs. Table 2 shows the values of Cronbach alpha, rho_A, Composite Reliability (CR), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct. According to Hair et al. (2019), a construct is reliable when the value of Cronbach alpha and CR is above 0.70, whereas convergent validity is fulfilled when the value of AVE is above 0.50. The four constructs in this study, employer branding, e-recruitment, work expectation, and intention to apply, fulfill all these criteria. The CR values ranged from 0.937 to 0.961, while the AVE values ranged from 0.609 to 0.831. Based on these results, all four constructions are certified credible and valid in terms of convergence.

Table 2. Test of data validity and reliability

Construct	Cronbach Alpha	rho_A	CR	AVE
E-Recruitment	0.950	0.954	0.956	0.627
Employer Branding	0.925	0.927	0.937	0.624
Intention to Apply	0.949	0.950	0.961	0.831
Work Expectation	0.929	0.930	0.940	0.609

Discriminant validity was tested using the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT), following Henseler et al. (2015), who assessed this approach as more sensitive in detecting discriminant validity issues compared to the Fornell-Larcker criterion. The HTMT value was considered to meet the criteria if it did not exceed 0.90. Table 3 shows that all construct pairs were below this threshold. The highest HTMT value was found in the pair Work Expectation and Employer Branding at 0.868. This value still meets the 0.90 criterion; thus, the discriminant validity between the constructs in this model was fulfilled.

Table 3. Discriminant validity (HTMT)

Construct	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
(1) E-Recruitment				
(2) Employer Branding	0.663			
(3) Intention to Apply	0.603	0.573		
(4) Work Expectation	0,700	0.868	0.678	

Table 3 shows that all HTMT values met the threshold of 0.90, and the relatively high value between employer branding and work expectation (0.868) indicates substantial conceptual similarity. This finding suggests that both constructs share certain employment-related attributes, potentially influencing their individual contributions to job application intention. Therefore, their relationships in the structural model should be interpreted cautiously, despite meeting the established discriminant validity criterion (Henseler et al., 2015).

4.1.2 Evaluation of the Measurement Model (Outer Model)

The measurement model was evaluated using the outer loadings of 37 reflective indicators across four constructs. The reported loading values ranged from 0.711 to 0.941, exceeding the recommended minimum of 0.708 (Hair et al., 2019). Bootstrapping with 5,000 subsamples indicated that all indicator loadings were statistically significant ($p < 0.001$). These findings support indicator reliability and convergent validity. Table 4 summarizes the loading ranges for each construct; however, complete indicator-level loadings, including their standard errors, t-statistics, *p*-values, and confidence intervals, should be reported in an expanded table or supplementary appendix to ensure transparency and reproducibility.

Table 4. Outer loadings (reflective constructs)

Construct	Loading Range	Highest Loading	Lowest Loading
Employer Branding (9 item)	0.729 – 0.843	EB8 (0.843)	EB1 (0.729)
E-Recruitment (13 item)	0.711 – 0.844	ER6 (0.844)	ER9 (0.711)
Work Expectation (10 item)	0.747 – 0.841	WE3 (0.841)	WE2 (0.747)
Intention to Apply (5 item)	0.864 – 0.941	IA5 (0.941)	IA4 (0.864)

4.1.3 Evaluation of the Structural Model (Inner Model)

The structural model was checked using the coefficient of determination (R^2), effect size (f^2), collinearity statistics (VIF), and the model fit index. The model accounted for 45.2% of the variation in the intention to apply ($R^2 = 0.452$, adjusted $R^2 = 0.444$), indicating that it had a moderate ability to explain the data. Using the usual f^2 values of 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 to show small, medium, and large effects, respectively, work expectation ($f^2 = 0.117$) and e-recruitment ($f^2 = 0.077$) had small effects, while employer branding ($f^2 = 0.000$) had almost no effect. These results show that statistical significance differs from real-world significance. Table 5 presents the R-squared and *f*-squared values of the structural model.

Table 5. Coefficient of determination (R^2) and effect size (f^2)

Dependent Variable	R^2	Independent Variable	f^2
Intention to Apply	0.452	Employer Branding	0.000
		E-Recruitment	0.077
		Work Expectation	0.117

Table 6. Collinearity statistics (inner VIF)

Track	VIF
Employer Branding → Intention to Apply	2.947
E-Recruitment → Intention to Apply	1.859
Work Expectation → Intention to Apply	3.192

Collinearity was checked using the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF). As shown in Table 6, the VIF values are between 1.859 and 3.192, which are all below the usual limit of 5, showing that there is no serious multicollinearity. Even though the VIF values for work expectation (3.192) and employer branding (2.947) are higher, along with their HTMT value of 0.868, this shows that there might be some overlap in the ideas they represent. This overlap might lower how much Employer Branding explains something on its own, so it's important to take this into account when looking at why its coefficient isn't significant.

The model fit was checked using the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR), Chi-Square, and Normed Fit Index (NFI), as shown in Table 7. The SRMR value of 0.058 is lower than the usual suggested limit of 0.08, which means that the model fits the data well enough. Although the NFI value of 0.782 is lower than the commonly used standard of 0.90, this indicates that the model does not meet all the usual standards for how well it fits. The Chi-Square value of 1480.143 is mentioned as a description and should not be used alone to show that the model is good or accurate. Therefore, when evaluating a model, it is important to look at how accurate the measurements are, how well the model explains the data, and how well it can predict future outcomes, along with the fit indices that are reported (Hair et al., 2019).

Table 7. Model fit

Index	Saturated Model	Estimated Model
SRMR	0.058	0.058
Chi-Square	1480.143	1480.143
NFI	0.782	0.782

4.1.4 Hypothesis Testing

The PLS program model examined in this study is shown in Figure 1. The bootstrapping results (5,000 subsamples) show that H_2 and H_3 meet the significance criteria ($p < 0.05$), whereas H_1 does not meet these criteria and is therefore deemed unsupported, as shown in Table 8.

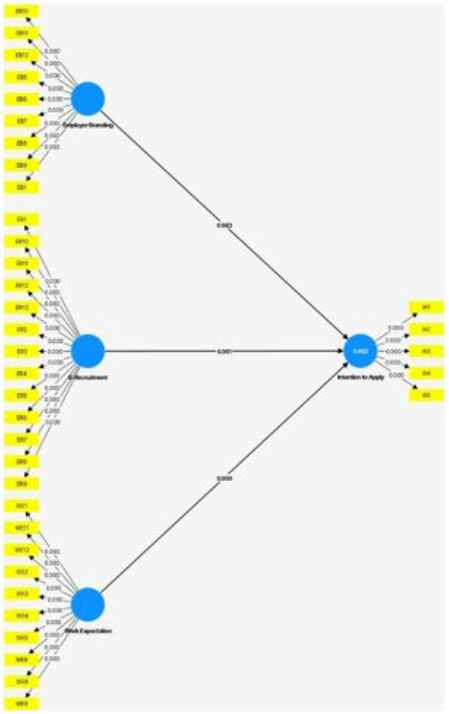

Figure 1. Hypothesis testing

Table 8. Summary of hypothesis testing results

Hypothesis	Track	*β*	t-value	p-value	Decision
H_1	Employer Branding → Intention to Apply	0.002	0.02	0.983	Not Supported
H_2	E-Recruitment → Intention to Apply	0.280	3.37	0.001	Supported
H_3	Work Expectation → Intention to Apply	0.452	3.85	<0.001	Supported

Table 8 shows that H_1 is not supported because employer branding does not have a significant direct link to intention to apply ($\beta = 0.002$, $t = 0.02$, $p = 0.983$). On the other hand, e-recruitment and work expectation both show strong positive links. E-recruitment has a β of 0.280, with a t-value of 3.37 and p-value of 0.001, and work expectation has a β of 0.452, with a t-value of 3.85 and p-value less than 0. 001.These results support both H_2 and H_3. Work expectation has the strongest link and biggest impact, with an effect size of $f^2 = 0.117$, while e-recruitment comes next with an effect size of $f^2 = 0.077$. The small employer branding coefficient doesn't mean it's not important overall, because this model did not look at possible indirect connections or shared explanations with other factors.

4.2 Discussion

Employer branding does not have a significant effect on intention to apply ($\beta = 0.002$, $t = 0.021$, $p = 0.983$), thus, H_1 is not supported. Its contribution to R^2 can also be ignored ($f^2 \approx 0.000$). These findings differ from those of Verma, Kaur, and Bhasin (2024), who found that employer branding significantly influences the intention to apply among MBA graduates in India, with components such as job role, compensation, organizational culture, job security, and international assignments being the main drivers. Regarding the research conducted by Thang and Trang (2024), which studied Generation Z in the logistics sector of Vietnam and found that employer branding indeed has a significant impact on the image and reputation of the organization, the path to intention to apply is actually determined by that image and reputation, not by employer branding directly. This pattern is consistent with the insignificance of the direct path H1 in this study. In line with Soeling, Arsanti, and Indriati (2022), who found that the influence of employer brand attractiveness on intention to apply is fully mediated by organizational reputation, rather than having a direct effect. This finding provides a possible explanation that the effect of employer branding in this research model is channeled through intermediary variables that are not explicitly modeled here, such as organizational reputation or image.

The insignificance of the influence of employer branding on the intention to apply in this study differs from the findings of most previous studies, which reported a significant direct influence (Verma et al., 2024). This difference can be explained because the effects of employer branding in previous studies tended to depend on certain conditions, rather than a direct effect that applies uniformly to all applicants. From the perspective of person-organization fit, Wei, Chang, Lin, and Liang (2016) showed that the influence of corporate image on intention to apply depends on the perceived fit of the applicant with the organization. In a sample diverse in values and career preferences, the average effect of employer branding can weaken to the point of being statistically undetectable. Iyer, Aryan, and Saadouli (2025) also found that the appeal of employer branding among Generation Z varies according to industry sector and labor market context. From the perspective of signaling theory (Spence, 1973), employer branding serves as a signal about the quality of the organization, and such signals are more effective when applicants have the space to select their options. This pattern is evident in the research model, where two significant predictors, namely, work expectation and e-recruitment, are instrumental and practical, while employer branding, which is symbolic, does not show any influence. This indicates that when the space for selecting options is limited, applicants tend to consider attributes that directly impact their decision to apply rather than the organization's image. Thus, the insignificance of H_1 does not automatically mean that employer branding is unimportant; rather, its role depends on the context in which applicants make decisions, in this case, the local labor market conditions. The condition of the labor market in West Java can provide an additional explanation for this result. BPS data show that West Java is among the provinces with the highest open unemployment rates in Indonesia (6.77% in August 2025). In a labor market with such a high level of competition, applicants are likely to prioritize the opportunity to get a job in general rather than selectively considering the image of specific employers. This research does not

directly measure the level of economic urgency or the number of applications submitted by respondents, so this explanation is speculative and needs to be explicitly tested in future research, for example, by including indicators of labor market pressure or job search urgency as control or moderator variables.

The weak link between employer branding and the decision to apply for a job goes against what Verma et al. (2024) found, which showed a strong connection among MBA graduates in India. This difference could be because the group studied is mainly made up of people who are unemployed (92.5%) and those who are between 16 and 20 years old (69.8%). Limited work experience might affect how people judge how appealing an organization is, even though this idea wasn't checked directly. The high HTMT value between employer branding and work expectation (0.868) shows that they are quite similar in concept, which might make it hard to tell them apart when explaining things. From a signaling theory perspective, employer branding can affect how people see a company without always making them want to apply right away. Earlier research by Soeling and their team in 2022 shows that a company's reputation might play a role in how this connection works. Therefore, future studies should look into other ways that employer branding might affect things, such as through how well a company is seen and how well a person fits with the organization. Instead of thinking that a small or no direct effect means that employer branding is not important.

Furthermore, e-recruitment has a positive and significant effect on the intention to apply (β = 0.280, t = 3.366, p = 0.001), thus supporting H_2. In line with Wijaya, Mustika, Bulut, and Bukhori (2023), who found that e-recruitment and employer branding both play significant roles in shaping the job application intentions of Indonesia's millennial generation, it is emphasized that the ease of access and the quality of job vacancy information electronically become important determinants in the decision to apply among digital-native job seekers. Consistent with the results of the PLS path modeling study by Moghaddam, Rezaei, and Amin (2015), which showed that the quality of information content, interactivity, and ease of navigation of the e-recruitment platform are positively related to the behavioral intention of job seekers, it strengthens the argument that the quality of the digital experience in the electronic recruitment process is a significant pathway to the intention to apply, consistent with the substantial contribution of e-recruitment (f^2 = 0.077) in this research model.

An interesting finding was also discovered by Thompson, Braddy, and Wuensch (2008) in an experimental study involving 182 job seekers, which showed that the attractiveness of the format and usability of recruitment websites influenced the intention to apply. However, this effect was mediated by job seekers' impression of the employer rather than the direct effect of the website's quality itself. These findings open the possibility that the e-recruitment pathway to intention to apply in this study is also supported by perceptions of organizational credibility formed through the experience of using electronic recruitment channels, even though this was not explicitly tested in the model. The e-recruitment coefficient in this study (β = 0.280) is relatively lower compared to work expectation, indicating that for Generation Z in the context of this study, the ease of the electronic recruitment process is important but not the main consideration compared to the alignment of job expectations themselves. These findings are consistent with previous research that has not yet reached a consensus regarding the direct role of e-recruitment on the intention to apply, where studies by Lestari and Manggiasih (2023) showed a significant positive influence, while Wijaya et al. (2023) and Wibowo, Winarno, and Fakhri (2025) did not find a significant direct influence. The diversity of these findings suggests that the role of e-recruitment may depend on the context, thus requiring further investigation.

In a competitive job market like West Java, applicants often apply to many job openings simultaneously in a short period to increase their chances of being accepted. The ease and efficiency of the e-recruitment process are relevant precisely because they support this broad application strategy, not because applicants feel emotionally attached to a specific organization. E-recruitment serves as a facilitator that streamlines the application process, rather than as the main motivator for choosing a specific organization. The findings on this hypothesis are also in line with the behavioral control component in the TPB, which is a person's perception of how easy or difficult it is to perform a behavior. E-recruitment directly reduces the perceived difficulty in the job application process;

therefore, it is reasonable that its path is significant toward the intention to apply, even if it is not the strongest.

Work expectation had the strongest positive influence on intention to apply (β = 0.452, t = 3.854, $p < 0.001$), making it the path with the highest coefficient and effect size in the model (f^2 = 0.117), thus, H_3 is supported. These findings are in line with Rani, Jalih, and Widyowati (2022), who found that the work expectations of Indonesia's Generation Z, including health guaranties, the quality of supervising bosses, and job security, have a substantial impact on their willingness to apply for jobs. Nguyen, Rowley, and Pejić (2022) also found that Generation Z in transitional economies like Vietnam place more importance on intangible job attributes, such as work atmosphere and workplace ethics, compared to purely physical attributes in shaping their job pursuit intentions.

In line with the systematic review by Pózner and Kozák (2025) of 250 publications in Web of Science and Scopus, which concluded that for Generation Z, financial compensation is not the main factor in choosing a job, career development, as well as the availability of autonomy, flexibility, and work-life balance are more determining factors. These findings reinforce the notion that Generation Z's work expectations are multidimensional and oriented toward psychological values rather than merely material compensation.

Choudhary and Pandita (2025) also found that Generation Z's expectations regarding the digitalization of training and development, work-life balance, and employee engagement significantly influence their intent to join an organization, emphasizing that the alignment between what the organization offers and what Generation Z expects is an important consideration before deciding to apply. The dominance of work expectation over employer branding and e-recruitment in this study implies that for Generation Z, the alignment between personal job expectations and what the organization offers becomes a more decisive factor in their intention to apply, compared to the employer's image or the sophistication of electronic recruitment channels alone.

The strong link between work expectations and the decision to apply (β = 0.452, f^2 = 0.117) shows that job preferences are important to Generation Z respondents. This finding matches the results of Rani et al. (2022), Nguyen et al. (2022), and Pózner and Kozák (2025), highlighting how career growth, a good work environment, and balancing work with personal life are important factors for younger workers when choosing a job. From the perspective of how well a person matches with an organization, job seekers might consider whether a potential job opportunity fits their personal goals and expectations. The theory of planned behavior also states that if people think that the results of getting a job will be good, it might make them more likely to take action (Ajzen, 1991). Although the idea of fit and the factors from the theory of planned behavior were not tested, these explanations are still just theories and not proven facts based on real research. The results show that work expectations and ease of online job applications have a greater direct impact on whether someone decides to apply than the employer's brand image, according to the current model. This adds useful context to studies on hiring and managing people in the workplace.

5. CONCLUSIONS

5.1 Conclusion

This study explored how employer branding, electronic recruitment methods, work-related expectations, and the intention to apply for jobs are connected among young adults from Generation Z in West Java. The results show that work expectation has a significant positive link with intention to apply (β = 0.452, $p < 0.001$), which supports H_3. Similarly, e-recruitment also has a significant positive relationship with intention to apply (β = 0.280, p = 0.001), supporting H_2. On the other hand, employer branding does not demonstrate a significant direct connection (β = 0.002, p = 0.983), which means the first hypothesis is not supported. Together, these variables account for 45.2% of the variation in the intention to apply.

The results emphasize the importance of employment expectations and the availability of digital recruitment tools when considering what influences Generation Z's choices when applying for jobs.

The low employer branding coefficient does not mean that it is entirely unimportant, since potential indirect connections were not investigated. This study theoretically adds to the body of knowledge on recruitment and human resource management by clearly explaining how individual employment preferences, digital recruitment methods, and the appeal of an organization compare in their roles. Nevertheless, the findings relate to the intention to apply rather than actual behavior in applying, and they should not be taken as causal due to the cross-sectional design and the limited representativeness of the sample.

5.2 Research Limitations

This study has several limitations. The initial use of purposive sampling, along with the geographical focus on respondents from the Bogor area (79.4%), restricts the ability to generalize the study's results to Generation Z throughout West Java. Second, the majority of respondents were between the ages of 16 and 20 years (69.8%), had completed secondary education (78.4%), and were currently unemployed (92.5%), which may have restricted their ability to assess potential employers effectively. Third, the cross-sectional, self-reported survey measured the intention to apply for a position rather than the actual behavior of applying for a job, which limits the ability to draw causal conclusions. Finally, the relatively high HTMT value between employer branding and work expectation (0.868) suggests that there might be some overlap in their concepts, and there could be unconsidered mediating or moderating factors that affect how we understand the relationships that have been estimated.

5.3 Suggestions and Directions for Future Research

Organizations should focus on providing clear information regarding career growth opportunities, maintaining a good balance between work and personal life, having supportive leadership, and ensuring favorable working conditions. At the same time, they should keep their online recruitment platforms easy to access and open to everyone. Employer branding strategies must align with current employment conditions rather than being overlooked due to the insignificant direct connection. Future studies should explore organizational reputation as a possible mediator and consider person–organization fit or job-search urgency as potential moderators. To enhance the generalizability and explanatory power of future research findings, it is recommended to use broader and more representative samples, implement longitudinal study designs, and measure actual application behaviors.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

NK developed the research concept and performed the analyses of the data. NK and DNM drafted the manuscript and prepared the figures. NK and DNM contributed to software support, data validation, and critical review of the manuscript. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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