

HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT | RESEARCH ARTICLE

From Branding to Applying: The Role of Corporate Reputation as a Mediating Variable among Gen Z

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ABSTRACT

Intention to apply is the process by which individuals begin to show interest in joining a company, particularly among Gen Z students. Gen Z has different preferences when choosing a workplace compared to previous generations. Therefore, companies must not only compete in terms of products and services but also in the recruitment process. The purpose of this study is to examine how employer branding influences Gen Z students' intention to apply in Padang City, using corporate reputation as a mediating factor. A total of 140 respondents were selected using purposive random sampling for quantitative research employing Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) as the analytical tool. The findings of this study conclude that (1) employer branding has a significant positive effect on intention to apply, (2) employer branding has a significant positive effect on corporate reputation, (3) corporate reputation has a significant positive effect on intention to apply, and (4) corporate reputation significantly mediates the effect of employer branding on intention to apply. The results of this study are expected to provide strategic recommendations for companies in Padang City to compete in attracting high-quality young talent in this digital era.

Keywords: Employer Branding, Intention to Apply, Corporate Reputation.

JEL Code: E44, F31, F37, G15

I. Introduction

In today's era of globalization and digitalization, competition in the workplace is becoming increasingly fierce. Companies are not only competing in terms of products and services but also in attracting the best talent. (Silva & Dias, 2022). At present, the workforce is increasingly dominated by Generation Z, Lim & Lianto (2024) Stating that Generation Z is the youngest generation to enter the workforce. On average, Gen Z is currently pursuing higher education, while some have already entered the workforce in 2020 (Sekar Arum et al., 2023).



Table 1. Classification of Indonesia's population based on the table

Number	Data Name	Value (million people)
	Gen Z	74.
2	Millennials	69.3
3	Gen X	58.65
4	Baby Boomers	31.01
5	Post Gen Z	29.1
6	Pre-Boomers	5.03

Based on Table 1 published by the Central Statistics Agency, the number of Indonesians classified as Gen Z reaches 74.93 million, making them the largest generation. This makes Gen Z the dominant and influential group in the current workforce. Additionally, Gen Z is known for their speed and skill in utilizing the internet and social media without limits, particularly in seeking information about an organization or company's image. (Purnawan et al., 2024) . When it comes to choosing a workplace, Gen Z has different preferences compared to previous generations, as they prioritize flexibility, company values, sustainability, and an inclusive work environment (Schroth, 2019) . Additionally, Nurqamar et al. (2022) State that Gen Z highly values work-life balance. They prefer companies that offer flexible work arrangements and understand the importance of such a balance. Meanwhile, according to Anggraini & Ellyawati (2025) Work flexibility provides Gen Z with the opportunity to manage their time wisely, spend time with family, pursue hobbies, and remain productive at work. Therefore, companies need to implement the right strategies to attract Gen Z's interest in applying to the company.

One strategy companies can implement to attract Gen Z's interest in applying is through employer branding. Employer branding is a method used to create a unique brand identity for a company, which will distinguish it from its competitors (Kusuma & Prasetya, 2017) . In a study by It was found that 42% of Gen Z prefer to work for companies that align with their values. This suggests that companies with strong employer branding can attract Gen Z, who prefer companies that share their values and culture. According to Wijaya et al (2023) The intention to apply is a process of interest in obtaining a job that begins with efforts to search for information about job vacancies. Based on this information, prospective employees then determine their choices and decide to select the desired company. In line with this, Ek Styvén et al. (2022) State that the intention to apply is the process when someone has an interest in obtaining a job, where the process begins with efforts to gather information related to job vacancies. After obtaining this information, the prospective employee will make a choice and decide to submit a job application to the company they are targeting.

When considering their intention to apply, Gen Z tends to be more selective in choosing a workplace by considering reviews from previous employees and media exposure regarding the company. (Theurer et al. 2018) . As a result, even if a company has an attractive employer branding as an employer, if its corporate reputation is poor, the intention to apply may decrease significantly. Corporate reputation can act as a mediator between employer branding and intention to apply. According to Anggoro & Harsono (2023) Companies can use corporate reputation as a parameter to understand job applicants' perceptions of their interest in applying for a job. In the study Soeling et al (2022) It is stated that reputation is a valuable strategic asset for every business. Businesses with a good reputation in society due to their products, services, and social contributions tend to attract the interest of Gen Z. Additionally, Gen Z tends to prioritize factors such as corporate reputation, opportunities for personal development, and alignment with their values. (Kumar et al., 2021). Research focusing on the relationship between employer branding, corporate reputation, and intention to apply is still concentrated in major cities. As shown in the study conducted by Vondrea & Riza (2024), which analyzed the career choices of Gen Z residing in Jakarta, found that the attractiveness of an employer's brand and corporate reputation significantly influence Gen Z's decision to apply for a job, with corporate reputation acting as a mediating factor that strengthens the relationship between employer brand and the intention to apply for the job.

This suggests that corporate reputation plays a significant role in mediating the relationship between employer branding and the intention to apply for a position. In line with the importance of corporate

reputation in attracting Gen Z, several companies in Padang have established a positive reputation in the eyes of the public, including the younger generation. Some companies known for their good reputation as places to work and sought after by Gen Z in Padang include PT Semen Padang, widely recognized for its contributions to regional development and commitment to sustainability; Bank Nagari, as a regional bank with excellent service and strong local values; PT PLN (Persero) West Sumatra Region, with its vital role in energy supply and job stability; and PT Telkom Indonesia Tbk - Witel West Sumatra, known for its innovation in telecommunications and technology-based work environment.

The presence of these companies reflects the potential for employer branding and corporate reputation that can attract Gen Z to apply for jobs in Padang City. Although some companies in Padang City have a good reputation, there have been few studies that explore whether employer branding and corporate reputation can compete with those of companies in major cities in attracting local Gen Z. This phenomenon is also a concern, especially for companies seeking to attract high-quality young talent. According to the "by Strong employer branding, such as modern work facilities, clear career opportunities, and an inclusive work culture, is more commonly found in large or multinational companies based in major cities. This study aims to provide strategic recommendations for companies in Padang City to enhance their appeal to Gen Z job seekers by examining how employer branding influences intention to apply through the mediation of corporate reputation. Additionally, the findings are expected to provide strategic recommendations for companies in Padang City to effectively compete in attracting high-quality young talent in the digital age.

II. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

2.1. Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) was developed by Ajzen (1991). TPB explains that a person's intention to act is influenced by three main factors: attitude toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. Attitude toward behavior refers to the extent to which individuals have positive or negative evaluations of an action. Subjective norms reflect the social influence an individual perceives in making decisions, while perceived behavioral control describes the extent to which an individual feels they have control over the behavior. This theory is also used in similar research, such as the study conducted by Jordan & Desiana (2024), which also employs the TPB concept. Additionally, research by Wardani & Ikram (2023) examined the influence of employer branding, corporate reputation, and corporate responsibility on the intention to apply among Gen Z at Brawijaya University. The results indicated that employer branding and corporate reputation have a significant influence on the intention to apply, supporting the TPB framework, where positive perceptions of the company affect applicants' attitudes and subjective norms. In this context, TPB can be used to understand how employer branding and corporate reputation influence intention to apply.

2.2. Intention to apply

Intention to apply is the process by which individuals begin to show interest in joining a company, according to (2003), intention to apply is the result of individuals' perceptions of an organization's image (employer branding), which influences their interest in joining. Intention to apply is an individual's tendency to apply for a job at a specific organization based on their perceptions of the organization's attractiveness (Highhouse et al., 2003). According to Wulansari (2023), the intention to apply is a process or interest in a job position that begins with the intention and effort to seek information about job vacancies. In recruitment practice, a high intention to apply indicates the success of employer branding strategies and company reputation.

2.3. Employer branding

Employer branding was first developed by (Ambler & Barrow, 1996) , where this theory combines branding concepts in marketing with human resource practices and thinking, providing functional, psychological, and economic benefits packages. According to Nafuiddin et al. (2023) Employer branding is what distinguishes one organization from another. It is a two-sided approach used by marketing management and human resource management to create brand equity for customers and employees. This involves highlighting the unique elements of an organization's culture and values, as well as implementing strategies and initiatives that align with its strategic objectives. Meanwhile, Tumasjan et al. (2020) State that employer branding is a series of tangible and intangible benefits provided by an organization through human resource policies to attract potential employees and retain current employees. In line with this, Erlinda & Safitri (2020) Define employer branding as an extraordinary effort undertaken by a company to manage its identity by creating a positive reputation or image that is communicated and developed both internally and externally to various stakeholders. Employer branding can take the form of a good image, positive company values, a comfortable and professional work culture, the work environment, and so on. (Ekhsan et al., 2022) . In recruitment practices, the implementation of employer branding encourages companies to highlight values, work culture, and development opportunities that align with the preferences of the target generation, thereby increasing the number and quality of applicants. Although employer branding offers numerous benefits, its implementation also faces challenges. One of these is the risk of a mismatch between the promoted image and the reality at the workplace, which can reduce candidates' trust. (Theurer et al., 2018) .

2.4. Corporate reputation

According to Wardani & Ikham (2023) Reputation is a person's perception of an individual, organization, or even a country that reflects admiration, positive feelings, and trust in that object. Corporate reputation is the image or public perception of a company. Corporate reputation is a valuable asset that attracts consumers, employees, and investors. (Julythiawati & Ardiana, 2023) . Meanwhile, according to Oktavianus et al. (2022) Corporate reputation is a fundamental aspect in creating and building appropriate relationships between a company and its stakeholders. Companies can use corporate reputation as a parameter to understand job applicants' perceptions regarding their interest in applying for a position (Anggoro & Harsono,2023) . In line with this, Syah (2013) States that corporate reputation is the overall perception of outsiders regarding a company's characteristics. In recruitment practices, a positive reputation can reduce recruitment barriers because potential applicants are more likely to trust the company before interacting directly with the selection process. Although a positive company reputation is often seen as a competitive advantage, it also has the potential to bring risks. A high reputation can create excessive expectations, and failure to meet public expectations can lead to disappointment that damages trust. Therefore, corporate reputation needs to be managed realistically and sustainably, not just as an image, but also as a reflection of actual organizational practices.

2.5. The influence of employer branding on intention to apply

In the context of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), this explains how employer branding can influence intention to apply. Strong employer branding creates positive attitudes toward the company as a workplace, which ultimately encourages individuals to form the intention to apply for a job. As stated in the research conducted by Highhouse et al., (2003 Strong employer branding can increase positive attitudes toward the company and enhance the intention to apply for a job. Therefore, strong employer branding increases the intention to apply by creating positive perceptions about the company (Sivertzen et al., 2013) .

H1: Employer Branding has a significant positive effect on Intention to Apply.

2.6. The influence of employer branding on corporate reputation

Employer branding influences corporate reputation by shaping positive perceptions of the company in the minds of potential employees and the public. A strong employer branding strategy creates positive perceptions of the company, both in the eyes of potential employees and the broader public. Companies with a good work environment, adequate welfare, and clear career development opportunities are more respected and have a good reputation in the labor market. (Rampl & Kenning, 2014) . Based on TPB, the reputation formed by employer branding can influence subjective norms, which are perceptions of what is considered appropriate or good by the social environment. If employer branding establishes a positive reputation, the social norms formed within the surrounding environment will also encourage individuals to consider the company seriously. Effective employer branding enhances the company's image and reputation, both among employees and potential applicants. Thus, employer branding can directly contribute to the formation of a positive corporate reputation.

H2: Employer Branding has a significant positive impact on Corporate Reputation.

2.7. The influence of corporate reputation on intention to apply

A positive company reputation plays an important role in shaping prospective applicants' perceptions of the work environment, career development opportunities, and organizational stability. Based on TPB, company reputation can influence two main components, namely subjective norms and perceived behavioral control. Subjective norms reflect the influence of the social environment in encouraging someone to act, while perceived behavioral control concerns an individual's belief in their ability to act. If a company has a good reputation, individuals will feel supported by the social environment and will be more confident in applying for the position. Research by Shows that corporate reputation can enhance a company's attractiveness to potential applicants through social norms and behavioral control mechanisms. Additionally, Stevens (2010) Found that corporate reputation can increase potential applicants' trust in a company, thereby motivating them to apply for jobs.

H3: Corporate reputation has a significant positive effect on intention to apply.

2.8. The influence of corporate reputation as a mediating variable on the influence of employer branding on intention to apply

Employer branding has a greater impact on intention to apply when corporate reputation acts as an intermediary factor between employer branding and intention to apply (Jiang & Iles 2011). Based on the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), corporate reputation strengthens the influence of employer branding on application intention by fostering positive attitudes, increasing social support (subjective norms), and reinforcing perceived behavioral control. These findings indicate that corporate reputation plays a crucial role in enhancing the influence of employer branding on intention to apply. Practically, this suggests that companies should focus not only on their image as a workplace but also on maintaining a positive reputation in the public eye through consistent performance, social responsibility, and transparent communication. With a good reputation, employer branding messages become more credible and have the potential to encourage more candidates, especially Gen Z, to apply. Therefore, corporate reputation influences the relationship between employer branding and intention to apply.

H4: Corporate reputation significantly mediates the influence of employer branding on intention to apply.

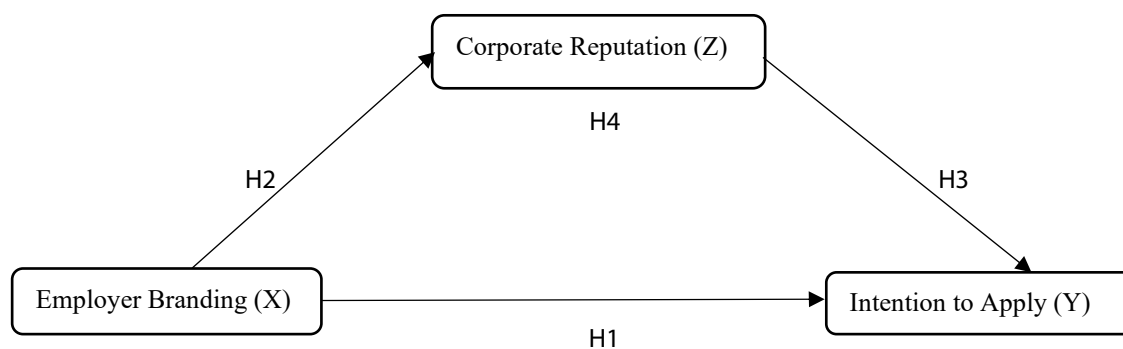


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

III. Research Method

This study is quantitative research conducted in Padang City, West Sumatra, in July 2025. The research design used is causal research, which is conducted to explain cause-and-effect relationships. The population in this study consisted of Gen Z students in Padang City (unemployed/about to enter the workforce), with an unknown number. The sampling method used in this study was purposive sampling, where the researcher determined the sample by setting specific characteristics in accordance with the research objectives. This was done because the population size was unknown, with the following specific criteria: (1) Gen Z students aged 20-25 years, (2) have never worked/are about to apply for a job, (3) are located in Padang City. In determining the sample size, this study employed the requirements proposed by Hair et al. (2010), with the general rule that the minimum sample size is 5 to 10 times the number of indicators. The number of indicators in this study is 14 indicators per variable, multiplied by 10, resulting in a sample size of 140 samples representing the population. Data collection for this study was obtained from primary data in the form of questionnaires, while secondary data was obtained from books, journals, and other scientific articles.

In this study, employer branding indicators were adapted from Berthon et. al (2005) , which includes five dimensions: interest value, social value, economic value, development value, and application value. These indicators were selected because they have been empirically used extensively in measuring candidates' perceptions of a company's attractiveness. Therefore, these indicators are considered relevant for uncovering the perceptions of Gen Z students in Padang City. The corporate reputation indicator refers to the " , which emphasizes six dimensions: emotional appeal, product and service, vision and leadership, workplace environment, financial performance, and social responsibility. Corporate reputation is crucial in the context of Gen Z, as this generation tends to support companies with clear moral values, a commitment to sustainability, and a positive social media presence. This is relevant considering that the recruitment process in the current digital era is greatly influenced by the company's image on online platforms. (Silva & Dias, 2022) . Meanwhile, the intention to apply the indicator was taken from Highhouse et al (2003) Which includes three dimensions: organizational attractiveness, intention toward the organization, and organizational prestige. The research instrument used for data collection was a Google Forms-based questionnaire, which presented respondents with a series of written questions or statements. The responses were then organized on a Likert scale, with answer options ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree."

Data analysis in this study used descriptive statistics and inferential statistics. In the descriptive analysis, the respondents' answers to the questionnaire items were processed, grouped, tabulated, and explained. The purpose was to verify the data or recheck the questionnaires filled out by the respondents to ensure that all questions had been answered completely. At this stage, the researcher analyzed the percentage, average, and total achievement of respondents (TRA). Meanwhile, for inferential statistical data analysis, the researcher used SmartPLS 4 software with the PLS-SEM (Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling) technique, which involves conducting outer model, inner model, and hypothesis tests. Hypothesis

testing in this study was conducted by operating bootstrapping to see if there was a relationship between variables and whether the formulated hypotheses could be accepted.

IV. Results and Discussion

4.1. Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistical analysis is a data collection technique used to provide an empirical description of the data collected in a study. It analyzes data by describing the data collected without the aim of making general explanations and conclusions. The data came from the respondents' answers to the items in the questionnaire, which were then processed by grouping and tabulating the data. Descriptive statistical analysis was conducted in this study for data verification, which involved rechecking the questionnaires filled out by respondents and ensuring that all questions were answered completely. The number of respondents was 165, after a screening process was conducted by asking several questions with specific criteria in line with the objectives of this study. Through this process, the number of respondents who met the criteria was 140.

4.2. Description of research variables

The total respondent achievement (TRA) was used to determine each category of answers from the descriptive variables. TRA in this study was tested using descriptive statistical analysis, where the employer branding variable produced a TRA of 86%, meaning that the average respondent response to employer branding was in the high category. The intention to apply variable produced a TRA of 85%, meaning that the average respondent's response to intention to apply was in the high category. The corporate reputation variable had a TRA of 84%, meaning that the average respondent's response to corporate reputation was in the high category.

4.3. Outer Model

The SmartPLS outer model was used to assess the extent to which the indicators were able to represent the latent constructs accurately. This model aims to ensure the validity and reliability of each indicator in measuring the intended variables. There are three main stages in testing the outer model, namely convergent validity testing, discriminant validity testing, and reliability testing. Validity refers to the ability of indicators to reflect the construct being measured. At the same time, reliability indicates the extent to which the indicators are consistent and stable in measuring the construct repeatedly. If all validity and reliability criteria are met, the measurement model can be considered suitable for further analysis. In SmartPLS, outer model evaluation is conducted iteratively, where indicators with low loading factors can be eliminated or modified to produce a strong and accurate model.

a. Validity test

Validity testing uses convergent validity and discriminant validity. Convergent validity is one of the criteria in SmartPLS analysis testing. In this study, convergent validity follows the practical rules commonly used, where the ideal loading factor value is above 0.7 and the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) is at least 0.5 to indicate that the latent variables can explain most of the variance in the indicators (Ghozali, 2015). Meanwhile, discriminant validity is conducted to determine whether the construct has adequate discriminant validity, which can be tested using cross-loading, by comparing the correlation of each indicator with the construct being measured and its correlation with other constructs. Discriminant validity is considered adequate if the correlation of the indicator is higher with its own construct compared to other constructs.

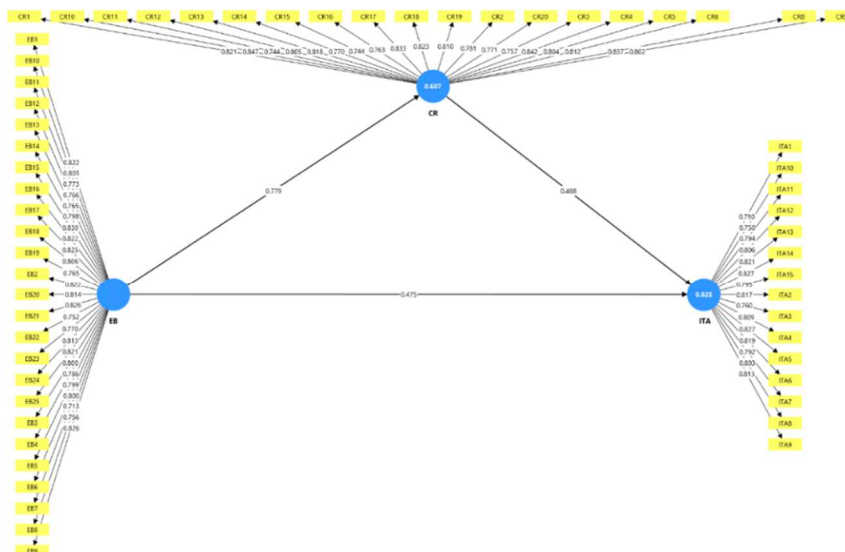


Figure 2. Inner model

Based on the model diagram, all items in each variable in this study have outer loading values greater than 0.7. However, there is one indicator, CR7, that does not meet the criteria because its value is below 0.7. According to Hair et al. (2014), indicators with outer loading values below 0.7 can be considered for removal. Therefore, that indicator was removed, thereby fulfilling the outer loading requirement for convergent validity. Additionally, convergent validity can be assessed using the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value. The AVE value in this study is presented in the table below:

Table 2. Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

	Average variance extracted (AVE)
CR	0
EB	0.633
ITA	0.643

Based on Table 2, it can be seen that each variable has an AVE value above 0.5. Therefore, it can be concluded that each variable in this study has good convergent validity and is acceptable, because the factor loading value is > 0.7 and the AVE value is > 0.5 . To assess the acceptance of each variable in the discriminant validity test, the cross-loading values can be examined, where the cross-loading results must show that the indicators of each construct have higher values than the indicators in other constructs. The cross-loading values in this study are as follows:

Table 3. Cross-Loading Values

	CR	EB	ITA
CR1	0.821	0.649	0.763
CR10	0.847	0.681	0.731
CR11	0.744	0.58	0.661
CR12	0.805	0.626	0.669
CR13	0.818	0.580	0.671
CR14	0.770	0.653	0.663
CR15	0.744	0.569	0.606
CR16	0.763	0.587	0.653
CR17	0.833	0.659	0.723
CR18	0.823	0.651	0.706
CR19	0.810	0.620	0.694

CR2	0.781	0.596	0.659
CR20	0.771	0.578	0.623
CR3	0.757	0.568	0.653
CR4	0.842	0.652	0.711
CR5	0.804	0.652	0.705
CR6	0.812	0.638	0.723
CR8	0.837	0.647	0.717
CR9	0.802	0.636	0.687
EB1	0.661	0.822	0.722
EB10	0.610	0.803	0.660
EB11	0.576	0.773	0.636
EB12	0.593	0.766	0.677
EB13	0.556	0.765	0.632
EB14	0.632	0.798	0.673
EB15	0.645	0.830	0.723
EB16	0.635	0.822	0.751
EB17	0.670	0.825	0.711
EB18	0.625	0.806	0.702
EB19	0.559	0.765	0.668
EB2	0.691	0.822	0.725
EB20	0.584	0.814	0.658
EB21	0.622	0.826	0.699
EB22	0.557	0.752	0.643
EB23	0.624	0.77	0.682
EB24	0.700	0.813	0.689
EB25	0.707	0.821	0.768
EB3	0.592	0.800	0.648
EB4	0.655	0.786	0.647
EB5	0.600	0.799	0.615
EB6	0.605	0.800	0.677
EB7	0.501	0.713	0.586
EB8	0.616	0.756	0.649
EB9	0.631	0.826	0.728
ITA1	0.694	0.697	0.790
ITA10	0.699	0.632	0.750
ITA11	0.715	0.644	0.794
ITA12	0.739	0.663	0.806
ITA13	0.737	0.679	0.821
ITA14	0.676	0.689	0.827
ITA15	0.728	0.699	0.795
ITA2	0.660	0.677	0.817
ITA3	0.655	0.694	0.760
ITA4	0.638	0.705	0.809
ITA5	0.670	0.737	0.827
ITA6	0.661	0.689	0.819
ITA7	0.657	0.692	0.792
ITA8	0.672	0.683	0.803
ITA9	0.713	0.702	0.813

Based on Table 3 above, it can be seen that the correlation values of the indicators with their constructs are always greater than the correlations of those indicators with other variables or constructs. Thus, based on the cross-loading values, all indicators have met the discriminant validity criteria.

b. Reliability test

The reliability of the questionnaire was measured by examining the Cronbach's Alpha (CA) and Composite Reliability (CR) values. Indicators within a single variable demonstrate strong internal consistency, with an ideal Cronbach's alpha value exceeding 0.7; the closer the value is to 1, the more reliable the data. The following are the Cronbach's alpha and Composite Reliability values in this study:

Table 4. Cronbach's Alpha & Composite Reliability

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)
CR	0.969	0.969	0.971
EB	0.976	0.976	0.977
ITA	0.960	0.960	0.964

Based on Table 4 above, the composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha values for all variables are above 0.7, indicating that all variables in this study are reliable or meet the criteria.

4.4. Inner model

The structural relationship between latent variables in the research model was examined using the SmartPLS inner model. The R-squared value indicates how much of the variance in the dependent variable can be explained by the independent variables; the more independent variables that can explain the dependent variable, the higher the R-squared value. According to Hair et al. (2014), an R-square value of 0.75 is considered high, 0.50 is moderate, and 0.25 is weak. The R-Square test serves as a basis for assessing the predictive ability of the model used and helps determine how well the structural model explains the relationships between variables. The following are the estimated R-square values in this study using SmartPLS:

Table 5. R-Square Values

	R-square	Adjusted R-square
CR	0.607	0.605
ITA	0.825	0.823

Based on Table 5 above, the R-square value of the corporate reputation variable (CR) is 0.607, which means that the employer branding variable can explain 60.7% of the variance in corporate reputation. At the same time, the rest is influenced by other factors outside the model. The adjusted R-square value of 0.605 indicates a correlation with the number of predictors in the model that remains close to the R-square value, indicating that the model is relatively stable. Meanwhile, the ITA (Intention to Apply) variable has an R-square value of 0.825, which means that the employer branding variable can explain 82.5% of the variance in intention to apply. Factors outside the model influence the remaining 17.7%. The adjusted R-square value of 0.823 indicates that 82.3% of the employer branding variable influences intention to apply. Variables outside the scope of this study influence the remaining 17.7%.

4.5. Hypothesis development

Hypothesis testing in SmartPLS was conducted to evaluate the relationship between latent variables in the research model using the bootstrapping method. This process produced path coefficients, t-statistics, and p-values used to determine the significance of the relationship. A hypothesis is considered significant if the t-statistic is > 1.96 and the p-value is < 0.05 at a 95% confidence level. However, if these criteria are not met, the relationship is considered insignificant. Additionally, the path coefficient value indicates the direction and strength of the influence between variables, where a higher value indicates a stronger relationship.

a. Direct Effect Hypothesis Testing

Direct hypothesis testing aims to determine the extent to which independent variables directly influence dependent variables without going through mediating variables. The results of this test can be seen from the path coefficient in the SmartPLS output, where a larger value indicates a more substantial influence. If the t-statistic is > 1.96 and the p-value is < 0.05 , the relationship is considered significant.

Table 6. Results of Direct Effect Hypothesis Testing

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values	Interpretation	Results
CR→ITA	0.475	0.480	0.067	7.102	0.000	Positive, Significant	Supported
EB → CR	0.779	0.783	0.040	19.598	0.000	Positive, Significant	Supported
EB → ITA	0.488	0.484	0.071	6.872	0.000	Positive, Significant	Supported

Based on Table 6 above, the results for the direct effect hypothesis on hypothesis 1, hypothesis 2, and hypothesis 3 are as follows: The results of the first hypothesis test show that the employer branding variable with the intention to apply variable has an original sample (O) value of 0.475, which means that employer branding has a positive effect on the intention to apply. Additionally, the t-statistic value is 7.102, which is significantly larger than the t-table value (1.96) and has a value of 0.000 (< 0.05), indicating that this influence is significant. The results of this study indicate that employer branding has a positive and significant effect on intention to apply. Therefore, it can be concluded that the first hypothesis of this study is accepted. The results of this study are similar to those conducted by Putri & Abdurrahman (2023), which prove that employer branding has a positive and significant effect on intention to apply. This study states that employer branding simultaneously influences intention to apply; the higher the employer branding, the higher the intention to apply. Additionally, the research conducted by Ekhsan & Fitri (2021) is consistent with this study, showing that employer branding has a positive and significant influence on intention to apply. This study indicates that the higher the employer branding, the higher the intention to apply.

The results of the second hypothesis test indicate that the employer branding variable has a value of 0.779 in the original sample (O), meaning that employer branding has a positive influence on corporate reputation. Additionally, the t-statistic value of 19.598 is significantly larger than the t-table value (1.96) and has a value of 0.000 (< 0.05), indicating that this influence is significant. The results of this study indicate that employer branding has a positive and significant influence on corporate reputation. Therefore, it can be concluded that the second hypothesis of this study is accepted. This finding aligns with previous research indicating that employer branding plays a crucial role in enhancing corporate reputation. For instance, the study by Purnawan et al. (2024) Found that employer branding has a significant impact on corporate reputation. The study demonstrated that strong employer branding can significantly enhance a corporation's reputation. Additionally, research conducted by Silva & Dias (2022) Additionally, it was demonstrated that employer branding has a positive impact on corporate reputation.

The results of the third hypothesis test indicate that the corporate reputation variable with the intention to apply variable has an original sample (O) value of 0.488, meaning that corporate reputation has a positive influence on intention to apply. Additionally, the t-statistic value is 6.872, which is significantly higher than the t-table value (1.96) and has a value of 0.000 (< 0.05), indicating that this influence is significant. The results of this study indicate that corporate reputation has a positive and significant influence on intention to apply. Therefore, it can be concluded that the third hypothesis of this study is accepted. Based on the study by Vondrea & Riza (2024) Corporate reputation has a significant positive influence on the intention to apply. This study shows that the better and higher the corporate reputation, the higher the intention to apply to the company. In this study, corporate reputation also acts as a partial mediator.

b. Hypothesis Testing for Indirect Effects

In addition to testing the direct effect, this study also examines the indirect effect through a mediating variable. This test was conducted by examining the indirect effect in the bootstrapping output in SmartPLS. If the t-statistic value is > 1.96 and the p-value is < 0.05 , then the mediating effect can be considered significant. This test is crucial for determining whether the mediating variable plays a role in strengthening or bridging the relationship between the independent and dependent variables. The following table shows the calculation of the mediating variable coefficients:

Table 7. Results of the Hypothesis Test for Indirect Effects

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values	Interpretation	Results
EB → CR → ITA	0.381	0.378	0.054	7.015	0.000	Positive, Significant	Supported

Based on the table of mediation coefficient calculation results, the original sample (O) value is 0.381, indicating that the indirect effect of employer branding on intention to apply through corporate reputation is positive. Additionally, the t-statistic value is 7.015, which is significantly larger than the t-table value (1.96) and has a p-value of 0.000 (< 0.05), indicating that this influence is significant. Therefore, it can be concluded that corporate reputation plays a significant mediating role in the relationship between employer branding and intention to apply. This means that effective employer branding can enhance a corporate reputation, which ultimately has a positive impact on the intention to apply. Based on this, the fourth hypothesis of this study can be accepted. This study demonstrates that employer branding has a positive and significant impact on increasing the intention to apply among Gen Z students, particularly through the mediating role of corporate reputation. This aligns with the findings of Purnawan et al., (2024), who stated that the influence of employer branding on the intention to apply for a job becomes stronger when corporate reputation acts as a mediator. Overall, corporate reputation serves as a mediating variable in bridging the relationship between employer branding and intention to apply. Employer branding is capable of creating corporate reputation in the public eye, which in turn drives intention to apply for the company.

V. Conclusion

Based on the data analysis and interpretation of the research conducted on the influence of employer branding on intention to apply with corporate reputation as a mediating variable, it shows that employer branding has a significant positive influence on intention to apply, employer branding has a significant positive influence on corporate reputation, corporate reputation has a significant positive influence on intention to apply, corporate reputation has been proven to significantly mediate the influence of employer branding on intention to apply, indicating that employer branding can increase Gen Z students' intention to apply through corporate reputation. Companies are advised to continue improving their employer branding through various strategies, such as maintaining a positive and inclusive work environment. Companies need to maintain and improve their corporate reputation, as a good reputation can strengthen the influence of employer branding on the intention to apply of young people, especially Gen Z. This study is limited to one object, namely the city of Padang, thus limiting the generalization of the findings and results, which may not apply to other regions with different social, cultural, and economic characteristics. Additionally, this study focuses solely on the variables of employer branding, corporate reputation, and intention to apply for the position. Factors that may also influence intention to apply, such as compensation, work environment, and career development opportunities, were not analyzed in this study. Therefore, future research is encouraged to include these additional factors to obtain more comprehensive results, ensuring that the findings are accurate and applicable.

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