



RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Effect of Employer Branding and Digital Recruitment on Generation Z's Job Application Intention: The Mediating Role of Candidate Experience

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Abstract

The rapid development of digital technology has encouraged companies to adopt employer branding and digital recruitment strategies to attract Generation Z job applicants. This study aims to analyze the influence of employer branding and digital recruitment on job application intention through candidate experience as a mediating variable. This research employed a quantitative approach using Structural Equation Modeling-Partial Least Square (SEM-PLS). Data were collected through online questionnaires distributed to 115 Generation Z respondents in East Java and Bali who had experience applying for jobs. The results indicate that employer branding and digital recruitment have a positive and significant effect on candidate experience and job application intention. However, candidate experience does not significantly affect job application intention and is unable to mediate the relationship between employer branding and digital recruitment on job application intention. The findings indicate that employer branding and digital recruitment directly influence Generation Z's job application intention, whereas candidate experience does not function as a significant mediator. Therefore, organizations should prioritize strengthening employer branding and optimizing digital recruitment systems to attract Generation Z applicants.

Keywords

Employer Branding; Digital Recruitment; Candidate Experience; Job Application Intention; Generation Z.

1 | INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of technology has compelled organizations to adapt to the dynamic changes in the business environment, particularly in the field of human resource management. Digital transformation has significantly changed recruitment practices, encouraging organizations to adopt technology-based strategies such as employer branding and digital recruitment to enhance their attractiveness to job seekers. This issue has become increasingly important as Generation Z is widely recognized as a digital-native generation that is highly adaptive to technology and tends to rely on digital information when making career decisions (Schroth, 2019). Furthermore, the emergence of digital platforms such as LinkedIn and JobStreet has transformed the interaction between organizations and job seekers. Recruitment processes have become faster, broader in reach, and supported by more effective data utilization, thereby improving efficiency and effectiveness in identifying suitable candidates (Nikolaou, 2021). This study focuses on Generation Z in East Java and Bali. These regions were selected because they represent rapidly growing labor markets with increasing adoption of digital recruitment practices and a substantial proportion of Generation Z individuals entering the workforce. As a result, East Java and Bali provide a relevant context for examining how employer branding, digital recruitment, and candidate experience influence job application intention among Generation Z.

Employer branding has emerged as a crucial strategy for attracting talented individuals by establishing a positive image of the organization as an ideal workplace. Sivertzen *et al.* (2013), as cited in Noviriani (2023), argue that strong employer branding can significantly enhance organizational attractiveness and increase applicants' intention to apply for jobs. However, its effectiveness largely depends on the consistency between the image projected by the organization and the actual experiences encountered by candidates during the recruitment process. In addition, Holm (2012), as cited in Mandic (2022), explains that digital recruitment offers several advantages, including cost efficiency, faster selection processes, and broader candidate reach. Nevertheless, the adoption of technology in recruitment also presents challenges, such as reduced personal interaction, lack of transparency, and the possibility of creating unfavorable candidate experiences when recruitment systems are not properly designed (Nikolaou, 2021). Organizations are required not only to optimize technology in recruitment but also to ensure a positive candidate experience throughout the recruitment process. This is particularly important because Generation Z has high expectations regarding transparency, responsiveness, and quality of interaction, making candidate experience a key factor influencing job application intention (Suryana & Rosnani, 2026). However, empirical evidence suggests that the implementation of recruitment technology is not always effective. Suhardi (2025) found that e-recruitment had a significant negative effect on Generation Z's job application intention, indicating that poorly designed recruitment systems may reduce candidates' interest in applying for jobs. Similarly, other studies have reported that e-recruitment does not significantly influence job application intention, although it may affect other variables such as corporate reputation (Diningrum & Suratman, 2026).

These findings indicate that technological convenience alone is insufficient to increase job application intention, as candidate experience remains an essential determinant. Previous studies have also produced inconsistent findings regarding the relationship between employer branding and job application intention. Fatah (2026) found that employer branding did not significantly influence Generation Z's intention to apply for jobs, despite being perceived positively by potential applicants. This finding suggests the existence of a gap between the image projected by organizations and candidates' actual intentions to apply. Moreover, Generation Z evaluates organizations not only based on their reputation and image but also on the experiences gained throughout the recruitment process. Negative experiences, such as a lack of transparency, delayed responses, and ineffective communication, may decrease candidates' willingness to apply. Suryana and Rosnani (2026) emphasized that candidate experience is a critical factor, indicating that the success of digital recruitment depends not only on technological sophistication but also on the quality of interactions and experiences perceived by candidates during the selection process. Although previous studies have extensively examined the direct effects of employer branding and digital recruitment on job application intention, empirical findings remain inconsistent. Furthermore, limited studies have investigated candidate experience as a mediating variable, particularly among Generation Z in Indonesia. Therefore, further investigation is needed to clarify the relationships among these variables and explain the inconsistencies reported in prior studies. Based on the phenomena and previous findings, several research gaps can be identified, including inconsistent results regarding the influence of employer branding on job application intention, mixed findings on the effectiveness of e-recruitment, and the limited use of candidate experience as a mediating variable, particularly within the context of Generation Z. Therefore, this study offers novelty by integrating candidate experience as a mediating variable in examining the relationship between employer branding, digital recruitment, and job application intention among Generation Z. This approach is expected to provide a more comprehensive explanation of the inconsistencies found in previous studies, clarify the mechanisms underlying the relationships among variables, and contribute both theoretically and practically to the development of more effective and candidate-oriented recruitment strategies.

2 | BACKGROUND THEORY

The relationships among employer branding, digital recruitment, candidate experience, and job application intention can be explained through several theoretical perspectives. In this study, Signaling Theory and the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) serve as the primary theoretical foundations. Signaling Theory explains how organizations communicate information and organizational attributes to potential applicants through various signals that influence perceptions and decision-making. Meanwhile, TAM explains how individuals evaluate and accept technology based on its perceived usefulness and ease of use. These theories provide a comprehensive framework for understanding how employer branding and digital recruitment shape candidate experience and influence Generation Z's intention to apply for jobs.

2.1 Signaling Theory

Signaling Theory is a theory that explains how individuals make decisions under conditions of information uncertainty or information asymmetry between two interacting parties. The theory suggests that individuals use available information as a basis for evaluating the quality of an object or organization when complete information is not accessible. In the recruitment context, candidates often have limited knowledge about a company and therefore rely on various signals provided by the organization to form perceptions regarding its attractiveness as a workplace (Choudhury, 2024). Signaling Theory was first introduced by Spence, who argued that parties possessing more information (signalers) send signals to less-informed parties (receivers) to reduce uncertainty. Within organizations, these signals may include corporate reputation, recruitment activities, organizational communication, career opportunities, and other forms of information that reflect organizational quality. Candidates use such signals to evaluate organizational characteristics that cannot be directly observed before joining the company (Jones *et al.*, 2016). Employer branding provides signals regarding an organization's reputation, values, and work environment, while digital recruitment reflects the organization's professionalism, transparency, and capability in utilizing recruitment technologies. Positive signals are expected to create favorable perceptions, enhance candidate experience, and increase job application intention. Therefore, Signaling Theory serves as a relevant theoretical foundation for explaining the relationships among employer branding, digital recruitment, candidate experience, and job application intention (Vinayak *et al.*, 2017).

2.2 Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)

Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) is a theoretical model developed to explain how individuals accept and use technology in various information system contexts. TAM suggests that technology acceptance is influenced by users' perceptions of a particular system and their behavioral intentions toward its use (Nugroho & Apidana, 2023). The model has been widely applied in information systems research because of its ability to explain technology adoption behavior in a simple yet robust manner across different settings, including e-learning, social media, and e-recruitment (Wicaksono, 2022). Therefore, TAM provides a useful framework for understanding how individuals evaluate and adopt technological systems. According to Davis, TAM was developed from the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) and proposes that technology acceptance is primarily determined by two key constructs: perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use. Perceived usefulness refers to the extent to which an individual believes that using a technology will improve performance or effectiveness. Meanwhile, perceived ease of use refers to the degree to which an individual believes that a technology can be used with minimal effort (Banjarnahor, 2021). These perceptions shape users' attitudes toward technology and subsequently influence their intention to use it (Wicaksono, 2022). Furthermore, perceived ease of use can enhance perceived usefulness, indicating a close relationship between the two constructs (Sathyanarayana *et al.*, 2024). In the context of digital recruitment, TAM explains that candidates are more likely to use recruitment platforms when they perceive them as useful and easy to navigate. Recruitment websites that provide accessible information, efficient application processes, and user-friendly interfaces are expected to encourage positive candidate perceptions and increase job application intention (Azzatillah *et al.*, 2024). Therefore, TAM serves as a relevant theoretical foundation for explaining how digital recruitment influences candidate experience and job application intention among Generation Z (Nugroho & Apidana, 2023).

2.3 Employer Branding

Employer branding is one of the primary strategies employed by organizations to establish a positive perception as an attractive workplace. It refers to an organization's efforts to build and maintain a favorable image among both prospective and existing employees (Putra & Agussalim, 2025). According to Ambler and Barrow (1996), as cited in Rokhmah and Wijayanto (2025), employer branding is a strategic approach that differentiates organizations through the functional, economic, and psychological benefits offered to employees. Similarly, Ariyanto and Kustini (2021), as cited in Pitaloka and Moko (2024), argue that employer branding is designed to highlight organizational advantages

in order to attract potential applicants. Therefore, employer branding can be defined as a strategy aimed at enhancing organizational attractiveness and employee retention through the development of a positive corporate image and value proposition. The concept of employer branding extends beyond organizational reputation and encompasses organizational values, culture, and identity. In the context of Generation Z, value congruence plays a significant role in shaping job application intention. Based on Signaling Theory, employer branding functions as a signal communicated by organizations to prospective applicants. Since job seekers often possess limited information about an organization, they rely on signals such as organizational reputation, career opportunities, work environment, and organizational values to evaluate the attractiveness of a potential employer (Spence, 1973). Positive employer branding signals can reduce uncertainty and help candidates develop favorable perceptions toward the organization before engaging in the recruitment process. Employer branding is commonly reflected through several dimensions, including corporate reputation, organizational attractiveness, career development opportunities, work environment, and organizational values and culture (Tarigan *et al.*, 2022). Corporate reputation reflects candidates' perceptions of the organization as a desirable workplace. Organizational attractiveness represents the extent to which the organization appeals to prospective applicants. Career development opportunities indicate the potential for professional growth within the organization. Work environment refers to the physical and psychological conditions offered to employees, while organizational values and culture represent the principles and norms that guide organizational behavior. Collectively, these dimensions shape candidates' perceptions of organizations and influence their willingness to pursue employment opportunities. Previous studies suggest that employer branding contributes to organizational attractiveness and strengthens candidates' intentions to apply for jobs. Ekhsan and Fitri (2021) found that employer branding positively influences job application intention by creating favorable perceptions of the organization. Therefore, employer branding is considered an important organizational factor that influences candidate experience and job application intention among Generation Z.

2.4 Digital Recruitment

Digital recruitment, often referred to as e-recruitment, is a technology-based recruitment method that has become increasingly popular among organizations in attracting and selecting potential candidates. Digital recruitment refers to the process of attracting, screening, and selecting candidates through online platforms, including corporate websites, job portals, and other digital channels. Likewise, Suhardi (2025) defines e-recruitment as an online recruitment process designed to facilitate employee hiring activities. Pramudya *et al.* (2024) further emphasize that digital recruitment improves efficiency and expands the reach of candidate searches. Consequently, digital recruitment can be understood as a technology-driven recruitment approach aimed at simplifying, accelerating, and broadening the recruitment process. In this study, digital recruitment is explained through the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), which suggests that individuals are more likely to adopt and use technology when it is perceived as useful (perceived usefulness) and easy to use (perceived ease of use) (Davis, 1989). In the recruitment context, candidates are more willing to engage with digital recruitment platforms when the systems provide convenient access to job information, simplify the application process, and offer a positive user experience. Therefore, the effectiveness of digital recruitment depends not only on the availability of technology but also on candidates' perceptions of the quality of the recruitment system. Positive perceptions of digital recruitment platforms are expected to enhance candidates' experiences throughout the recruitment process and encourage stronger intentions to apply for available positions. Although digital recruitment offers convenience and efficiency, its effectiveness largely depends on the quality of the recruitment system. Unresponsive systems or processes lacking transparency may reduce applicants' willingness to apply for jobs. Diningrum and Suratman (2026) found that e-recruitment did not significantly influence job application intention, suggesting that the use of technology alone does not automatically increase candidate interest. According to Rahmawati and Putra (2022), the effectiveness of digital recruitment can be assessed through several indicators, including ease of access to information, clarity and completeness of information, system usability (user-friendly), system responsiveness and speed, and recruitment process transparency. Ease of access to information refers to how easily candidates can obtain job vacancy information through the organization's digital platforms. Clarity and completeness of information reflect the quality of information provided regarding job positions, requirements, and recruitment stages. System usability describes the extent to which candidates can easily understand and operate the recruitment platform. System responsiveness and speed refer to the ability of the system to provide timely responses throughout the recruitment process. Meanwhile, recruitment process transparency reflects the extent to which organizations provide clear information regarding recruitment stages, procedures, and selection progress. Based on TAM, digital recruitment systems that are perceived as useful, easy to use, and transparent are likely to generate positive evaluations among candidates. These positive perceptions can improve candidate experience by creating a smoother and more satisfying recruitment process. Furthermore, candidates who perceive digital recruitment systems positively are more likely to develop stronger intentions to apply for jobs because the recruitment process is

considered accessible, efficient, and reliable. Therefore, digital recruitment is expected to play an important role in shaping candidate experience and increasing job application intention among Generation Z. Based on this reasoning, it can be proposed that digital recruitment positively influences candidate experience and job application intention.

2.5 Candidate Experience

Candidate experience is an important factor that bridges employer branding and digital recruitment with job application intention. Candidate experience refers to the perceptions and experiences gained by candidates throughout the recruitment process (Zahrudini & Afrianty, 2020). It plays a significant role in influencing candidates' decisions and shaping the long-term image of an organization (Sipahutar, 2025). Candidate experience encompasses the entire recruitment journey, from information searching to the final stages of selection, including transparency, responsiveness, communication quality, and perceptions of fairness. In this study, candidate experience is explained through Signaling Theory, which suggests that candidates interpret organizational signals received during the recruitment process and use them to evaluate the attractiveness and credibility of an organization. Employer branding and digital recruitment serve as organizational signals that shape candidates' expectations before entering the recruitment process. The experiences encountered by candidates during recruitment then become a basis for evaluating whether the signals communicated by the organization are consistent with reality. Positive experiences indicate that the organization delivers positive and credible signals, whereas negative experiences may create perceptions that the organization has failed to meet candidates' expectations. Suryana and Rosnani (2026) argue that candidate experience significantly influences candidates' perceptions of organizations. Positive experiences can enhance organizational attractiveness, whereas negative experiences may reduce candidates' interest in pursuing employment opportunities. According to Evrina and Wulansari (2023), candidate experience is reflected through several indicators, namely clarity of recruitment information, ease of participating in the selection process, respectful treatment of candidates, transparency throughout the selection process, and overall positive impressions of recruitment activities. Clarity of recruitment information refers to the extent to which candidates clearly understand recruitment procedures and requirements. Ease of participating in the selection process reflects candidates' perceptions regarding the convenience of completing recruitment stages. Respectful treatment of candidates refers to how organizations communicate and interact professionally with applicants. Transparency throughout the selection process indicates the extent to which organizations provide clear and timely information regarding recruitment progress and outcomes. Meanwhile, overall positive impressions reflect candidates' general evaluations of their recruitment experiences. These indicators demonstrate that candidate experience is influenced not only by recruitment outcomes but also by the quality of interactions and processes experienced by candidates. Positive candidate experiences are expected to strengthen candidates' perceptions of organizational attractiveness and increase their willingness to apply for jobs. Furthermore, candidate experience may act as an important mechanism through which employer branding and digital recruitment influence job application intention. Therefore, candidate experience is expected to positively influence job application intention and mediate the relationships between employer branding, digital recruitment, and job application intention.

2.6 Job Application Intention

Job application intention refers to an individual's tendency and willingness to respond to employment opportunities offered by an organization. It reflects an internal motivation that arises from positive perceptions of an organization and influences an individual's decision to apply for a job (Ekhsan & Fitri, 2021). According to Slameto (2015), as cited in Rahmawati (2022), intention represents an individual's inclination to pay attention to and develop interest in an object voluntarily, while Hidayati and Wulansari (2023) define it as a behavioral intention preceding actual job-search actions. Therefore, job application intention can be understood as an individual's interest, desire, and readiness to apply for a position based on perceptions of an organization. In this study, job application intention is explained through Signaling Theory, which suggests that individuals use available organizational signals to reduce uncertainty and support decision-making. In the recruitment context, prospective applicants often possess limited information about an organization and therefore rely on signals conveyed through employer branding, organizational reputation, and recruitment practices. Positive signals received by candidates are expected to create favorable perceptions of the organization and increase their willingness to pursue employment opportunities. Furthermore, the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) also supports the notion that positive perceptions regarding the usefulness and ease of digital recruitment systems can encourage candidates to engage in recruitment activities and strengthen their intention to apply for jobs. For Generation Z, job application intention is influenced not only by the availability of job-related information but also by experiences encountered during the recruitment process. Perceptions regarding organizational attractiveness and candidate experiences are important determinants of application decisions (Suryana & Rosnani, 2026). According to Geofanny and Faraz (2023), job application intention is reflected through several indicators, including attraction toward the organization, willingness to apply for a job, motivation to seek further job-related information, and intention to submit job applications.

Attraction toward the organization refers to the level of interest candidates have in working for a particular company. Willingness to apply reflects candidates' desire to pursue available employment opportunities. Motivation to seek further information indicates candidates' readiness to explore additional information regarding job vacancies and organizational characteristics. Meanwhile, intention to submit job applications reflects candidates' readiness to take concrete action by sending applications to the organization. These indicators suggest that job application intention is formed through candidates' evaluations of organizational attributes, recruitment systems, and recruitment experiences. Employer branding and digital recruitment create initial perceptions regarding the attractiveness of an organization, while candidate experience may strengthen or weaken candidates' intentions to apply for employment opportunities. Therefore, job application intention serves as the ultimate behavioral outcome influenced by employer branding, digital recruitment, and candidate experience.

3 | METHOD

This study employed a quantitative approach with a causal research design to examine the influence of employer branding and digital recruitment on job application intention, with candidate experience serving as a mediating variable. Primary data were collected through an online questionnaire survey. The research population consisted of Generation Z individuals residing in East Java and Bali, Indonesia, specifically those born between 2001 and 2005 who are entering or have entered the labor market. A purposive sampling technique was employed to ensure that respondents possessed characteristics relevant to the research objectives. The respondents were required to meet the following criteria: (1) reside in East Java or Bali, (2) be between 20 and 24 years old, (3) be final-year university students or graduates, and (4) have applied for a job at least once. Following the recommendation of Hair *et al.* for Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), the minimum sample size was determined using the ten-times rule, which suggests that the sample size should be at least ten times the largest number of structural paths directed at an endogenous construct. Based on this guideline, a minimum sample size of 114 respondents was established. A total of 115 valid responses were obtained and included in the analysis, indicating that the sample size was adequate for PLS-SEM analysis. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire consisting of four constructs: digital recruitment, employer branding, candidate experience, and job application intention. The operationalization of the variables is presented in Table 1. The questionnaire comprised five indicators for digital recruitment, five indicators for employer branding, five indicators for candidate experience, and four indicators for job application intention. All measurement items were assessed using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Data analysis was conducted using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) based on the Partial Least Squares (PLS) approach with the assistance of SmartPLS software. PLS-SEM was selected because it is suitable for predictive research models involving multiple latent constructs and mediation relationships, accommodates relatively small sample sizes, and does not require strict multivariate normality assumptions. The analysis consisted of two stages. First, the measurement model (outer model) was evaluated through convergent validity, discriminant validity, Average Variance Extracted (AVE), Composite Reliability (CR), and Cronbach's Alpha to ensure the validity and reliability of the measurement instruments. Second, the structural model (inner model) was assessed using the coefficient of determination (R^2), predictive relevance (Q^2), path coefficients, and hypothesis testing through the bootstrapping procedure. The Q^2 value was obtained using the blindfolding procedure to evaluate the predictive capability of the structural model, where a Q^2 value greater than zero indicates that the model has predictive relevance for the endogenous constructs. Mediation analysis was subsequently performed to examine the role of candidate experience in mediating the relationships between employer branding, digital recruitment, and job application intention.

Table 1. Operational Definition

Variable	Operational Definition	Indicators	Source	Measurement Scale
Digital Recruitment (X1)	Digital recruitment is the process of attracting, screening, and selecting job candidates through internet-based technologies such as job portals, social media, and Applicant Tracking Systems (ATS).	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ease of access to recruitment information 2. Clarity and completeness of recruitment information 3. User-friendliness of the recruitment system 	Rahmawati & Putra (2022)	Skala Likert (1-5)

Employer Branding (X2)	Employer branding refers to prospective applicants' perceptions of a company's image, reputation, and attractiveness as a workplace, influencing their interest in joining the organization.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. System speed and responsiveness 5. Transparency of the recruitment process 1. Company reputation as a workplace 2. Company attractiveness to job applicants 3. Career development opportunities 4. Working environment offered by the company 5. Organizational values and culture 	Tarigan <i>et al.</i> (2022)	Five-point Likert Scale (1 = Strongly Disagree; 5 = Strongly Agree)
Candidate Experience (Z)	Candidate experience refers to the perceptions and experiences gained by applicants throughout the recruitment process conducted by an organization.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Clarity of recruitment process information 2. Ease of participating in the selection process 3. Respectful and courteous treatment of candidates 4. Transparency of the selection process 5. Positive impression of the recruitment process 	Evrina & Wulansari (2023)	Five-point Likert Scale (1 = Strongly Disagree; 5 = Strongly Agree)
Job Application Intention (Y)	Job application intention is an individual's willingness or intention to submit a job application based on their perceptions and interest in a particular company.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Interest in working for the company 2. Intention to apply for a job 3. Willingness to seek job vacancy information 4. Intention to submit a job application 	Geofanny & Faraz (2023)	Five-point Likert Scale (1 = Strongly Disagree; 5 = Strongly Agree)

The conceptual framework proposes that employer branding and digital recruitment directly influence candidate experience and job application intention. Furthermore, candidate experience is hypothesized to mediate the relationship between employer branding and job application intention, as well as the relationship between digital recruitment and job application intention. The framework was developed based on previous theoretical and empirical studies concerning recruitment strategies and candidate behavior in the digital era.

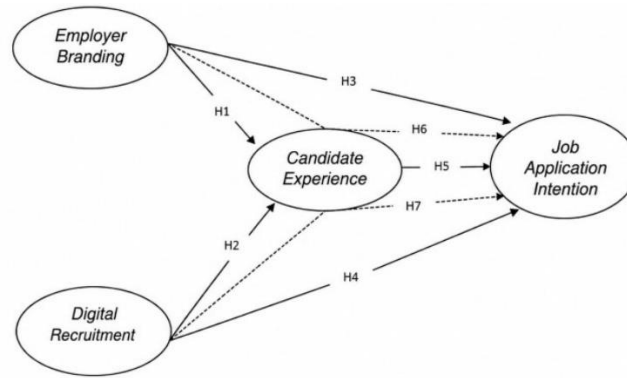


Figure 1. Research Framework

- > : Indirect effect between variables through the mediating variable (Z).
- > : Direct effect between variables.

4 | RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Results

4.1.1 Respondent Profile

This analysis was conducted to provide a general overview of the characteristics of respondents involved in this study. The respondent profile is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Respondent Characteristics

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Year of Birth	2001	49	42,5
	2002	42	36,3
	2003	16	13,8
	2004	3	2,5
	2005	5	5
Domicile	East Java	30	26,2
	Bali	85	73,8
Educational Status	Final-Year Student (Currently Preparing an Undergraduate Thesis)	24	21,3
	Graduate/Alumni	91	78,8
Current Activity	Active Student	26	22,5
	Fresh Graduate	7	6,2
	Employed	65	56,3
	Job Seeker	17	15
Job Application Experience	1-2 times	30	26,3
	3-5 times	29	25
	More Than 5 Times	56	48,8
Job Application Platforms Used	LinkedIn	50	43,8
	Jobstreet	63	55
	Glints	49	42,5
	Company Website	62	53,8
	Company Email	56	48,8
	Instagram	45	38,8
	TikTok	12	10
	Friend or Family Referrals	66	57,5

Based on the descriptive analysis of 115 respondents, the majority were born in 2001 (42.5%), followed by respondents born in 2002 (36.3%). Most respondents were domiciled in East Java (73.8%), while the remaining 26.2% resided in Bali. In terms of educational background, the majority were university graduates or alumni (78.8%), whereas

21.3% were final-year students. Regarding current activities, most respondents were employed (56.3%), followed by active students (22.5%), job seekers (15.0%), and fresh graduates (6.2%). Furthermore, nearly half of the respondents (48.8%) had applied for jobs more than five times, indicating substantial job application experience among the sample. Concerning job application channels, friend or family referrals were the most frequently used source (57.5%), followed by JobStreet (55.0%), company websites (53.8%), and company email (48.8%). These findings suggest that Generation Z job seekers utilize both digital recruitment platforms and personal networks when searching for employment opportunities.

4.1.2 Measurement Model Evaluation (Outer Model)

The measurement model (outer model) was assessed to examine the validity and reliability of the research instruments. In the PLS-SEM approach, the evaluation of the measurement model involved testing convergent validity and discriminant validity to determine the adequacy of the measurement indicators, as well as composite reliability to assess the internal consistency of the constructs. The results indicate that the measurement instruments demonstrate acceptable levels of validity and reliability. The PLS measurement model results are presented in Figure 2.

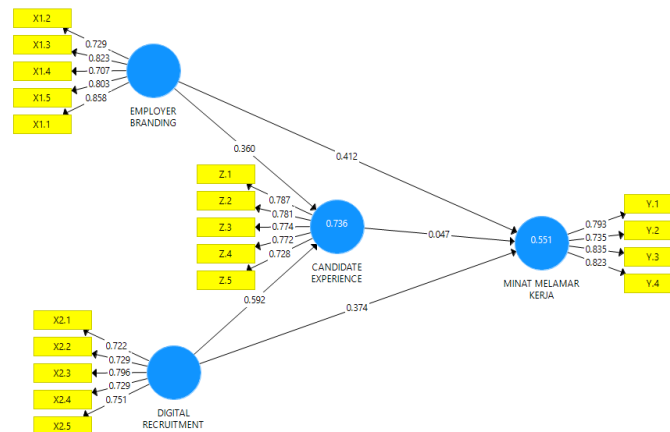


Figure 2. Measurement Model (Outer Model) Results

4.1.3 Convergent Validity

Convergent validity was used to assess the relationship between indicator scores and the latent constructs being measured. This test aims to ensure that the questionnaire items adequately represent the research indicators. Convergent validity was evaluated by examining the loading factor values, where values ranging from 0.60 to 0.70 or higher are considered acceptable. The results of the convergent validity assessment are presented below.

Table 3. Loading Factors

	Employer Branding	Digital Recruitment	Job Application Intention	Candidate Experience
X1.1	0.858			
X1.2	0.729			
X1.3	0.823			
X1.4	0.707			
X1.5	0.803			
X2.1		0.722		
X2.2		0.729		
X2.3		0.796		
X2.4		0.729		
X2.5		0.751		
Y1.1			0.793	
Y1.2			0.735	
Y1.3			0.835	
Y1.4			0.823	
Z1.1				0.787
Z1.2				0.781
Z1.3				0.774
Z1.4				0.772
Z1.5				0.728

Based on the results of the convergent validity assessment, all indicators of the Employer Branding, Digital Recruitment, Job Application Intention, and Candidate Experience constructs obtained loading factor values above 0.70, thereby meeting the required criteria for convergent validity. These findings indicate that all indicators adequately represent their respective constructs and are therefore suitable for further analysis.

4.1.4 Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity was employed to assess the extent to which a construct is distinct from other constructs in the research model. This assessment examines the relationship between indicators and their respective latent constructs to ensure that each indicator is more strongly associated with its own construct than with other constructs. A construct is considered to possess adequate discriminant validity when the obtained value exceeds 0.70. The results of the discriminant validity assessment are presented below.

Table 4. Discriminant Validity

	Employer Branding	Digital Recruitment	Job Application Intention	Candidate Experience
X1.1	0,858			
X1.2	0,729			
X1.3	0,823			
X1.4	0,707			
X1.5	0,803			
X2.1		0,722		
X2.2		0,729		
X2.3		0,796		
X2.4		0,729		
X2.5		0,751		
Y1.1			0,793	
Y1.2			0,735	
Y1.3			0,835	
Y1.4			0,823	
Z1.1				0,787
Z1.2				0,781
Z1.3				0,774
Z1.4				0,772
Z1.5				0,728

Based on the results of the discriminant validity assessment, all indicators associated with the Employer Branding, Digital Recruitment, Job Application Intention, and Candidate Experience constructs obtained values above 0.70, thereby satisfying the recommended criteria for discriminant validity. These findings indicate that each indicator adequately represents its respective construct and can be clearly distinguished from other constructs within the research model.

4.1.5 Fornell-Larcker

The Fornell-Larcker Criterion used to assess the discriminant validity of the measurement model. According to Hair *et al.* (2022), discriminant validity is established when the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct is greater than its correlations with other constructs.

Table 5. Fornell-Larcker

	Candidate Experience	Digital Recruitment	Employer Branding	Job Applicant Intention
Candidate Experience	0,769			
Digital Recruitment	0,808	0,746		
Employer Branding	0,714	0,598	0,786	
Job Applicant Intention	0,643	0,658	0,669	0,797

Presents the Fornell-Larcker Criterion for assessing discriminant validity. The results show that most constructs satisfy the criterion, as the square root of the AVE is greater than the correlations with other constructs. However, the correlation between Candidate Experience and Digital Recruitment (0.808) exceeds the square root of the AVE for both Candidate Experience (0.769) and Digital Recruitment (0.746), indicating that discriminant validity between these two constructs has not been fully established according to the Fornell-Larcker Criterion. Therefore, additional assessment using the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) is recommended to provide further evidence of discriminant validity.

4.1.6 HTMT (Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio)

Table 6 presents the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) values used to assess the discriminant validity of the measurement model. According to Hair *et al.* (2022), discriminant validity is established when the HTMT value between two constructs is below the recommended threshold of 0.90. HTMT is considered a more robust criterion for evaluating whether each latent construct is empirically distinct from the others.

Table 6. HTMT (Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio)

	Candidate Experience	Digital Recruitment	Employer Branding	Job Applicant Intention
Candidate Experience				
Digital Recruitment	0,978			
Employer Branding	0,844	0,720		
Job Applicant Intention	0,783	0,791	0,797	

As shown in Table 6 most HTMT values are below the recommended threshold of 0.90, indicating satisfactory discriminant validity among the constructs. Specifically, the HTMT values for Employer Branding–Candidate Experience (0.844), Employer Branding–Job Application Intention (0.797), Digital Recruitment–Employer Branding (0.720), Digital Recruitment–Job Application Intention (0.791), and Candidate Experience–Job Application Intention (0.783) meet the recommended criterion. However, the HTMT value between Candidate Experience and Digital Recruitment is 0.978, which exceeds the recommended threshold of 0.90. This result indicates a high degree of similarity between the two constructs and suggests that discriminant validity is not fully established for this construct pair.

4.1.7 Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) was used to assess the convergent validity of each construct by measuring the amount of variance captured by a construct relative to the variance attributable to measurement error. A construct is considered to demonstrate adequate convergent validity when its AVE value exceeds 0.50. In addition, the square root of the AVE should be greater than the correlations between the construct and other constructs in the model, indicating satisfactory discriminant validity. The results of the AVE assessment are presented below.

Table 7. Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

Variable	Value AVE
<i>Employer Branding</i>	0,618
<i>Digital Recruitment</i>	0,557
Job Application Intention	0,636
<i>Candidate Experience</i>	0,591

Based on the results of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) assessment, all constructs obtained values above the recommended threshold of 0.50, indicating satisfactory convergent validity. The AVE value for Employer Branding was 0.618, Digital Recruitment was 0.557, Job Application Intention was 0.636, and Candidate Experience was 0.591. These findings demonstrate that all indicators adequately represent their respective constructs and are therefore suitable for further analysis.

4.1.8 Composite Reliability

Composite reliability was used to assess the internal consistency of the indicators in measuring their respective latent constructs. This test evaluates the extent to which the indicators forming a construct are consistent and capable of measuring the variable reliably. A construct is considered reliable when it achieves a composite reliability value greater than 0.60, although this threshold is not considered absolute. The results of the composite reliability assessment are presented below.

Table 8. Composite Reliability

Variabel	Composite Reliability
<i>Employer Branding</i>	0,889
<i>Digital Recruitment</i>	0,862
Job Application Intention	0,874
<i>Candidate Experience</i>	0,878

Based on the results of the composite reliability assessment, all constructs obtained values above the recommended threshold of 0.60 and were therefore considered reliable. Employer Branding achieved a composite reliability value of 0.889, Digital Recruitment 0.862, Job Application Intention 0.874, and Candidate Experience 0.878. These findings indicate that all indicators demonstrate a high level of internal consistency and reliability, confirming their suitability for subsequent analysis.

4.1.9 Cronbach's Alpha

Reliability was further assessed using Cronbach's Alpha to evaluate the internal consistency of the measurement items within each construct. A construct is generally considered reliable when its Cronbach's Alpha value exceeds 0.70, although values above 0.60 are still considered acceptable in exploratory research. The results of the Cronbach's Alpha assessment are presented below.

Table 9. Cronbach's Alpha

Variabel	Cronbach's Alpha
<i>Employer Branding</i>	0,844
<i>Digital Recruitment</i>	0,802
<i>Job Application Intention</i>	0,808
<i>Candidate Experience</i>	0,827

Based on the results of the reliability assessment using Cronbach's Alpha, all constructs obtained values above 0.70 and were therefore considered reliable. Employer Branding achieved a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.844, Digital Recruitment 0.802, Job Application Intention 0.808, and Candidate Experience 0.827. These findings indicate that all constructs demonstrate a satisfactory level of internal consistency, confirming that the measurement instruments are reliable and suitable for use in this study.

4.1.10 Structural Model Assessment (Inner Model)

The structural model (inner model) represents the evaluation stage used to assess the adequacy of the research model by examining the relationships among the latent variables and their indicators. In this study, the structural model was evaluated using the R-Square (R^2) and Q-Square (Predictive Relevance) approaches. These measures were employed to determine the explanatory and predictive capabilities of the proposed research model. The results of the structural model assessment are presented below.

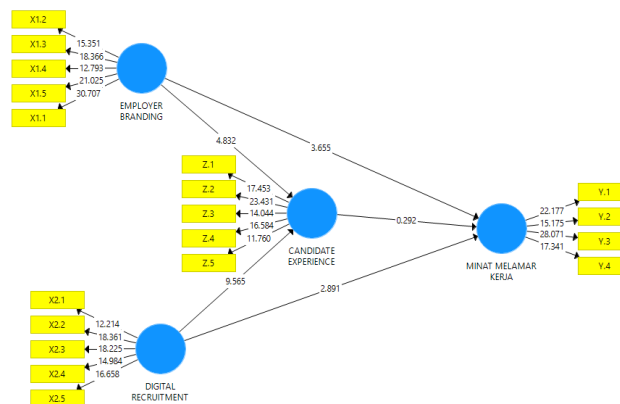


Figure 3. Structural Model Results (Inner Model)

4.1.11 Structural Model Evaluation Using R-Square (R^2)

The coefficient of determination (R-Square) was used to assess the explanatory power of the independent variables on the dependent variables. According to Ghazali (2018), an R^2 value of 0.75 indicates substantial explanatory power, 0.50 indicates moderate explanatory power, and 0.25 indicates weak explanatory power within the structural model.

Table 10. R-Square Results of the Structural Model

Variable	R-Square	R-Square Adjusted
<i>Job Application Intention</i>	0,551	0,539
<i>Candidate Experience</i>	0,736	0,731

Based on the R-Square assessment, Job Application Intention obtained an R-Square value of 0.551 and an Adjusted R-Square value of 0.539. These results indicate that the independent variables included in the model explain 55.1% of the variance in Job Application Intention, while the remaining 44.9% is explained by other factors not included in this study. Meanwhile, Candidate Experience achieved an R-Square value of 0.736 and an Adjusted R-Square value of 0.731. This indicates that the independent variables explain 73.6% of the variance in Candidate Experience, whereas the remaining 26.4% is attributable to factors outside the proposed research model. Overall, these findings suggest that the structural model possesses moderate to substantial explanatory power.

4.1.12 Q-Square (Q^2)

Predictive relevance (Q^2) was assessed to evaluate the predictive capability of the structural model. According to Hair *et al.* (2022), a Q^2 value greater than zero indicates that the model has predictive relevance for the endogenous constructs. The Q^2 value was calculated based on the R-square values of the endogenous variables using the Stone-Geisser formula. The results are presented in Table 11.

$$Q^2 = 1 - [(1 - R_1^2) \times (1 - R_2^2)]$$

$$Q^2 = 1 - [(1 - 0,736) \times (1 - 0,551)]$$

$$Q^2 = 1 - (0,264 \times 0,449)$$

$$Q^2 = 1 - 0,118536$$

$$Q^2 = 0,881$$

Table 11. Q-Square (Q^2)

Variable	Q-Square (Q^2)
Structur Model	0,881
Candidate Experience	0,736

As presented in Table 11, the structural model produced a Q^2 value of 0.881, which is greater than zero. This result indicates that the model has strong predictive relevance and is capable of explaining and predicting the endogenous constructs effectively. In other words, the combination of Employer Branding and Digital Recruitment, together with the mediating role of Candidate Experience, provides substantial predictive power for explaining Job Application Intention. Therefore, the proposed structural model demonstrates satisfactory predictive capability and is considered appropriate for hypothesis testing.

4.1.13 Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis testing was conducted to determine whether the proposed hypotheses were supported or rejected based on the results of the data analysis. A hypothesis was considered supported when the relationship between variables was consistent with the proposed hypothesis, the t-statistic exceeded 1.96, and the p-value was less than 0.05. The results of the hypothesis testing are presented below.

Table 12. Direct Effects Hypothesis Testing Results (Path Coefficients)

Hypothesis	Relationship Between Variables	Original Sample	t-Statistic	P-Value	Decision
H ₁	Employer Branding -> Candidate Experience	0,360	4,832	0,000	Accepted
H ₂	Digital Recruitment -> Candidate Experience	0,592	9,565	0,000	Accepted
H ₃	Employer Branding -> Job Applicant Intention	0,412	3,655	0,000	Accepted
H ₄	Digital Recruitment -> Job Applicant Intention	0,374	2,891	0,004	Accepted
H ₅	Candidate Experience-> Job Applicant Intention	0,047	0,292	0,770	Rejected

Table 13. Indirect Effects Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Relationship Between Variables	Original Sample	t-Statistic	P-Value	Decision
H ₆	Employer Branding -> Candidate Experience -> Job Applicant Intention	0,017	0,289	0,773	Rejected
H ₇	Digital Recruitment -> Candidate Experience -> Job Applicant Intention	0,028	0,287	0,774	Rejected

Based on the hypothesis testing results, Employer Branding and Digital Recruitment were found to have positive and significant effects on both Candidate Experience and Job Application Intention. Therefore, hypotheses H1, H2, H3, and H4 were supported. In contrast, Candidate Experience did not have a significant effect on Job Application Intention, resulting in the rejection of H5. Furthermore, Candidate Experience was not found to mediate the relationship between Employer Branding and Job Application Intention, nor the relationship between Digital Recruitment and Job Application Intention. Consequently, hypotheses H6 and H7 were rejected.

4.2 Discussion

This section discusses the findings of the study by interpreting the results of the hypothesis testing regarding the effects of employer branding and digital recruitment on Generation Z's job application intention through candidate experience as a mediating variable. The findings are interpreted by relating the empirical evidence to relevant theories and previous studies, aiming to provide a deeper understanding of the relationships among the research variables and explain the phenomena occurring in the digital recruitment process among Generation Z. The results indicate that employer branding has a positive and significant effect on candidate experience, evidenced by an original sample value of 0.360, a t-statistic of 4.832, and a p-value of 0.000, thereby supporting the first hypothesis. This suggests that the stronger the employer branding of a company, the more positive the experience perceived by candidates during the recruitment process. For Generation Z, company image serves as one of the primary considerations when deciding whether to apply for a job. When organizations present a positive and professional identity, candidates develop favorable expectations regarding the recruitment process, leading to a more positive experience. These findings align with Sivertzen *et al.* (2013), who argued that employer branding enhances organizational attractiveness and creates positive perceptions among candidates, and Zahrudini and Afrianty (2020), who found that employer branding positively influences candidate experience. Furthermore, Schroth (2019) emphasized that Generation Z tends to prefer organizations with strong reputations and values that align with their personal preferences. Theoretically, these findings support the employer branding concept proposed by Ambler and Barrow, highlighting the importance of functional, economic, and psychological values in attracting potential candidates. Therefore, employer branding functions not only as a marketing strategy but also as a determinant of candidate experience throughout the recruitment process.

The findings also demonstrate that digital recruitment has a positive and significant effect on candidate experience, supported by an original sample value of 0.592, a t-statistic of 9.565, and a p-value of 0.000, indicating support for the second hypothesis. This suggests that a well-designed digital recruitment system enhances candidates' experiences throughout the selection process. Digital recruitment enables candidates to access job information, submit applications, and participate in recruitment stages more efficiently and flexibly. As digital natives, Generation Z relies heavily on technology in various aspects of life, including job searching. Consequently, user-friendly, responsive, transparent, and informative recruitment systems contribute significantly to candidate satisfaction. These findings support Nikolaou (2021), who argued that technology can improve communication effectiveness and candidate experience when appropriately implemented, and Suryana and Rosnani (2026), who found that digital recruitment positively affects candidate experience. Mandic (2022) further emphasized that e-recruitment creates a more modern and flexible recruitment experience, improving candidates' perceptions of organizations. Therefore, organizations should ensure that digital recruitment systems not only facilitate administrative processes but also provide a professional and positive experience for candidates.

Moreover, the results reveal that employer branding has a positive and significant effect on job application intention, supported by an original sample value of 0.412, a t-statistic of 3.655, and a p-value of 0.000, confirming the third hypothesis. This indicates that stronger employer branding increases Generation Z's intention to apply for jobs within an organization. A strong employer brand creates perceptions of a positive work environment, supportive organizational culture, and attractive career development opportunities, encouraging candidates to become part of the organization. Generation Z respondents showed greater interest in organizations with strong reputations and positive workplace images. These findings are consistent with Ekhsan and Fitri (2021), who reported that employer branding significantly influences job application intention by increasing organizational attractiveness, and Pitaloka and Moko (2024), who identified employer branding as a key factor influencing Generation Z's intention to apply for jobs. Rokhmah and Wijayanto (2025) also highlighted that Generation Z tends to prefer organizations with positive work cultures and strong reputations. Therefore, employer branding remains an essential strategy for attracting talented individuals in the digital era. Additionally, the findings indicate that digital recruitment positively and significantly affects job application intention, evidenced by an original sample value of 0.374, a t-statistic of 2.891, and a p-value of 0.004, supporting the fourth hypothesis. Effective digital recruitment systems can increase Generation Z's willingness to apply for jobs by providing easier access to job-related information and simplifying the application process. Transparent and user-friendly recruitment systems enhance convenience and encourage job application behavior. Since Generation Z is accustomed to digital technology, fast, flexible, and technology-driven recruitment processes are particularly appealing. These findings are consistent with Pramudya *et al.* (2024), who found that e-recruitment positively affects job application intention by improving accessibility and efficiency, and Permatasari and Ahsani (2026), who reported that digital recruitment

significantly enhances Generation Z's interest in applying for jobs. Furthermore, Suhardi (2025) argued that technology-based recruitment strengthens perceptions of organizational modernity and professionalism. Consequently, organizations should optimize digital recruitment practices to attract potential applicants more effectively. However, the results indicate that candidate experience does not have a significant effect on job application intention, based on an original sample value of 0.047, a t-statistic of 0.292, and a p-value of 0.770, leading to the rejection of the fifth hypothesis. This suggests that the recruitment experience alone is insufficient to significantly increase Generation Z's intention to apply for jobs. A possible explanation lies in the characteristics of the respondents, most of whom had applied for jobs more than five times, indicating familiarity with digital recruitment processes. Their intention to apply may be influenced more by factors evaluated before entering the recruitment process, such as employer reputation, career opportunities, job information, and the accessibility of recruitment platforms, rather than by the experience gained during the recruitment process itself. Thus, Generation Z tends to make job application decisions based on the attractiveness and credibility of an organization instead of their recruitment experience. This finding differs from Suryana and Rosnani (2026), who found that candidate experience positively influences job application intention, but aligns with Diningrum and Suratman (2026), who reported that recruitment experiences do not always serve as the primary determinant of job application intention. Therefore, candidate experience cannot be considered a significant predictor of job application intention within the context of this study. Furthermore, the findings reveal that candidate experience does not mediate the relationship between employer branding and job application intention, evidenced by an original sample value of 0.017, a t-statistic of 0.289, and a p-value of 0.773, resulting in the rejection of the sixth hypothesis. This indicates that employer branding influences job application intention directly rather than indirectly through candidate experience. A strong organizational reputation, attractive employer image, positive organizational culture, and perceived career opportunities appear sufficient to encourage Generation Z to apply for jobs without requiring positive recruitment experiences as an intervening mechanism. The absence of a mediating effect may also be explained by the respondents' characteristics, as most had participated in multiple recruitment processes, focusing more on evaluating the company's reputation and long-term career prospects than on their recruitment experiences. Consequently, the direct influence of employer branding on job application intention is stronger than the indirect influence through candidate experience, suggesting that candidate experience does not play a substantial mediating role in translating employer branding into job application intention within the context of this study.

Lastly, the results demonstrate that candidate experience does not mediate the relationship between digital recruitment and job application intention, supported by an original sample value of 0.028, a t-statistic of 0.287, and a p-value of 0.774, leading to the rejection of the seventh hypothesis. This indicates that digital recruitment directly influences job application intention without requiring candidate experience as an intervening mechanism. Recruitment systems that provide easy access to information, user-friendly interfaces, efficient processes, and transparent procedures are sufficient to encourage Generation Z to submit job applications. This result can also be attributed to the respondents' familiarity with online recruitment platforms. Having experienced multiple job applications, respondents are more likely to prioritize the convenience, efficiency, and accessibility of digital recruitment systems rather than their overall recruitment experience. Therefore, the direct effect of digital recruitment on job application intention is stronger than the indirect effect through candidate experience. From a practical perspective, these findings emphasize that strengthening employer branding and optimizing digital recruitment systems are more effective strategies for increasing Generation Z's job application intention than relying on candidate experience as a mediating mechanism. Although candidate experience remains valuable for maintaining positive interactions with applicants and supporting long-term organizational reputation, the statistical results of this study indicate that it does not significantly influence job application intention nor mediate the effects of employer branding and digital recruitment.

5 | CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE WORK

This study concludes that employer branding and digital recruitment have positive and significant effects on candidate experience and Generation Z's job application intention. However, candidate experience does not significantly influence job application intention and does not mediate the relationships between employer branding, digital recruitment, and job application intention. These findings indicate that Generation Z's intention to apply for jobs is driven more by organizational reputation and the quality of digital recruitment systems than by recruitment experiences. Therefore, organizations should strengthen their employer branding by enhancing corporate image and career opportunities while improving digital recruitment through clear job information, user-friendly platforms, transparent processes, and timely responses to applicants. Future research is encouraged to incorporate additional variables, such as corporate reputation, compensation, perceived organizational attractiveness, person organization fit, or social media recruitment, and to involve a larger sample size to improve the generalizability of the findings.

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