EMPLOYER BRANDING AND DIGITAL EXPOSURE IN SHAPING COMPANY ATTRACTIVENESS AMONG GENERATION Z IN CIREBON RETAIL

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Abstract

This study examines the influence of employer branding and digital exposure on company attractiveness among Generation Z talent in retail stores in Cirebon City, Indonesia. As Generation Z increasingly evaluates prospective employers through both organizational reputation and digital signals, understanding the factors that shape their perception of organizational attractiveness has become strategically important for local businesses. A quantitative, cross-sectional survey design was employed, with data collected from 120 Generation Z respondents using purposive sampling. Partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) was used to test the hypothesized relationships. The findings reveal that employer branding exerts a positive and significant influence on company attractiveness ($\beta = 0.612$, $p < 0.001$), while digital exposure demonstrates a statistically significant yet negative association ($\beta = -0.137$, $p = 0.042$). Together, the two variables explain 60.2% of the variance in company attractiveness. These findings suggest that a strong and authentic employer brand is the primary driver of positive organizational perception among Generation Z, whereas digital exposure may reduce attractiveness when it lacks consistency and alignment with the actual organizational reality. The study contributes contextual evidence from the retail sector in a mid-sized Indonesian city, and findings should be interpreted within this specific scope before being generalized to other sectors or regions.

Keywords: Employer Branding, Digital Exposure, Company Attractiveness, Generation Z, Retail Sector

INTRODUCTION

Increasingly dynamic business competition positions human resources as a strategic asset that determines a company's sustainability and competitive advantage. In this context, competition for quality talent is no longer just an issue for large corporations but also a real challenge for organizations operating locally, including retail businesses. This situation is increasingly critical as Generation Z begins to dominate the influx of new workers. This generation grew up in an environment heavily influenced by digital technology, has extensive access to information, and exhibits different organizational evaluation patterns than previous generations. The literature shows that Generation Z tends to pay attention to company reputation, self-development opportunities, the work environment, and organizational values when considering attractive workplaces (Lukić-Nikolić and Lazarević 2022; Vieira, Gomes da Costa, and Santos 2024).

Consequently, Generation Z is more selective in organizational choice, actively compares employment alternatives, and is more sensitive to the social and psychological factors offered by companies. Research confirms that younger workers are drawn to organizations with supportive interpersonal relationships, learning opportunities, and a positive work-life balance (Hendriana et al. 2023; Lassleben and Hofmann 2023). Therefore, companies need to build a convincing perception that the organization not only provides jobs but also offers valuable work experiences.

In this context, employer branding understood as the strategic process by which an organization builds, communicates, and sustains an attractive identity as a place to work has emerged as a key instrument for shaping prospective applicants' perceptions. It is important to distinguish employer branding from adjacent but related concepts: unlike general corporate reputation or company image, which refer to broader public perceptions of the organization, employer branding focuses specifically on the organization's identity and value proposition as an employer, encompassing its work environment, internal culture, career development offerings, and employee experience. Literature confirms that employer branding helps companies strengthen differentiation in the labor market, clarify their employee value proposition, and increase the likelihood of being perceived as an employer of choice (Dabirian, Kietzmann, and Diba 2017; Theurer et al. 2018). However, effective employer branding cannot be built solely through communication messages; it must be based on the actual internal conditions of the organization. Findings by Aulia et al. (2025) indicate that the workplace and company culture have a significant impact on employee relationships. These results confirm that a strong company image as a workplace must be supported by a truly positive organizational experience, as candidates' perceptions of a company are fundamentally inseparable from the quality of its internal environment.

On the other hand, digital transformation has made digital exposure an increasingly decisive factor in shaping prospective applicants' perceptions. For Generation Z, social media, official company websites, recruitment platforms, and various organizational digital footprints are often the initial sources of information before they decide to apply for a job. This digital information serves not only as a promotional tool but also as a signal regarding the organization's credibility, reputation, and character. Research by Nguyen Ngoc Thang and Trang (2024) demonstrates the usefulness of company information via social media and the relationship between Employer branding, company image, and application intention. These findings are supported by El-Menawy and Saleh (2023), who demonstrated that the use of social media platforms has a crucial role in the relationship between Generation Z's desire for employment and their attractiveness. This indicates that social media is no longer simply an additional communication channel but has become a crucial part of the process of establishing an organization's attractiveness in the eyes of young talent.

However, digital exposure does not always automatically have a positive impact. The quality, consistency, and authenticity of information conveyed through digital media significantly determine how a company is perceived by potential applicants. If a company overly emphasizes an idealized image that is inconsistent with internal reality, digital media can actually trigger skepticism and undermine candidate trust. In this context, Schaarschmidt, Walsh, and Ivens (2021) showed that the reputation of a company's profile on a company rating platform significantly influences job seekers' application intentions. This means that the digital reputation formed online can either strengthen or weaken a company's attractiveness. Similar findings are also evident in the Indonesian context, where employer branding and social media both influence Generation Z's application intentions, but employer branding tends to be more dominant (Salma and Erlin 2025; Sunimah 2025; Yuspita et al. 2024).

The urgency of this study becomes stronger when viewed from the local context of Cirebon City. Data from the Badan Pusat Statistik Kota Cirebon show that the city's economy in 2023 was still dominated in the manufacturing and retail industries, such as the repair of motor vehicles and engines, which contributed 28.28% to gross regional domestic product. At the same time, the number of employed residents reached 167,037 people, and 53.18% of them worked in formal activities. These figures indicate that trade and services occupy an important position in the economic structure of Cirebon City, making the ability of retail businesses to attract young workers a strategic issue for business sustainability and service quality (Badan Pusat Statistik Kota Cirebon, 2024; Badan Pusat Statistik Kota Cirebon, 2023).

Although research on employer branding, e-recruitment, organizational reputation, and intention to apply has continued to develop, important gaps remain. First, many previous studies emphasize job application intention as the dependent variable, whereas company attractiveness as an initial perception of the organization as a place to work is still relatively underexplored, especially in local retail contexts. Second, prior findings generally highlight positive relationships between employer branding and digital media, but they have not sufficiently addressed the possibility that digital exposure may produce different effects when communication quality is not consistent with organizational reality. Third, the conceptual boundaries between employer branding, digital exposure, organizational reputation, and social media use have not been sufficiently operationalized in the context of local retail businesses, making it difficult to isolate the unique contribution of each construct to company attractiveness. Fourth, retail stores in Cirebon City have not been examined specifically, even though this sector operates in a labor market increasingly shaped by digital image and the expectations of Generation Z. Based on these considerations, this study aims to analyze the influence of employer branding and digital exposure on company attractiveness among Generation Z talent in retail stores in Cirebon City.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Employer branding refers to a strategic organizational effort to build and communicate an attractive identity as a place to work for both prospective and existing employees. In contemporary human resource literature, employer branding is no longer understood merely as external recruitment promotion, but as the integration of organizational values, employer identity, employee value proposition, and work-related experiences that shape how the company is perceived in the labor market. A literature review by Theurer et al. (2018) explains that employer branding develops through employer knowledge, branding activities, and value creation processes that ultimately influence organizational attractiveness. In the context of Generation Z, employer branding becomes increasingly important because this generation tends to evaluate employers not only based on economic rewards, but also on meaningful work, career growth, learning opportunities, and alignment between personal and organizational values (Lukić-Nikolić and Lazarević 2022; Vieira et al. 2024).

For Generation Z, employer branding is closely related to the organization's ability to present a credible and desirable work environment. This generation is generally more responsive to organizational signals concerning work atmosphere, social interaction, flexibility, and opportunities for self-development. Empirical evidence shows that younger workers tend to prefer organizations that offer positive interpersonal relationships, supportive environments, and work-life balance, because these aspects influence how they interpret the quality of the employer. Hendriana et al. (2023) found that employer branding is associated with positive work-related perceptions among Generation Z, while Lassleben and Hofmann (2023) show that expectations toward employers among Gen Z are strongly linked to organizational climate and developmental prospects. This implies that employer branding functions not only as an image-building mechanism, but also as a strategic signal of the actual quality of the workplace.

A strong employer brand must also be supported by internal organizational reality. An attractive employer image cannot be sustained if it is disconnected from the actual work environment and company culture experienced by employees. In this regard, Aulia et al. (2025) demonstrate that The workplace and corporate culture have a significant impact on employee relationships at PT. PG Rajawali II. Although the study focuses on retention rather than applicant attraction, its findings are highly relevant for employer branding because they show that organizational culture and work conditions constitute the internal foundation of how a company is perceived as an employer. In other words, a credible employer brand is more likely to emerge when organizational values, internal culture, and employee experiences are genuinely aligned.

The studies reviewed above converge on the view that employer branding is a multidimensional construct whose effectiveness depends on the alignment between external communication and actual organizational conditions. However, the existing literature reveals divergent emphases on the mechanisms through which employer branding operates. Theurer et al. (2018) position employer branding primarily as a brand equity mechanism that converts employer knowledge into organizational attractiveness, while Hendriana et al. (2023) and Lassleben and Hofmann (2023) emphasize the relational and developmental dimensions that particularly resonate with Generation Z candidates. Aulia et al. (2025)

further demonstrate that internal workplace conditions are not merely a backdrop but an active determinant of how an organization is perceived as an employer. These divergences suggest that among Generation Z, the persuasive power of employer branding lies less in brand awareness per se and more in the perceived authenticity of what the employer brand promises a distinction that is especially relevant in the retail context, where candidates may already have experiential knowledge of the work environment as customers.

Digital exposure in this study refers to the visibility and communicative presence of a company across digital channels such as social media, corporate websites, online recruitment platforms, and other forms of digital traces available to prospective applicants. For Generation Z, digital exposure has become a major source of early organizational information. Before engaging directly with employers, many young job seekers first encounter organizations through social media content, online reviews, employer rating platforms, and recruitment-related digital messaging. Accordingly, digital exposure functions as a signaling mechanism that helps applicants evaluate the credibility, reputation, and attractiveness of an employer. Nguyen Ngoc Thang and Trang (2024) According to the study, the availability of company information in social media moderates the relationship between employer branding, image, and employment advertisements. This suggests that digital visibility enhances the acceptance and interpretation of employer-sponsored messages.

The role of social media becomes even more significant when viewed from the behavioral tendencies of Generation Z. El-Menawy and Saleh (2023) show that the use of social media platforms mediates the relationship between employer attractiveness and Generation Z's intention to apply for a job. This finding indicates that digital platforms do not merely transmit information; they also shape how organizational attractiveness is processed by young job seekers. Similarly, Yuspita et al. (2024) report that employer branding and e-recruitment influence job application intention among Generation Z, with social media use and corporate reputation strengthening this relationship. Therefore, digital exposure can be understood as an extension of employer communication that broadens organizational reach and amplifies its employer brand in the digital labor market.

Nevertheless, digital exposure does not automatically generate positive outcomes. The effect of digital communication depends on the quality, consistency, and authenticity of the information conveyed. If the company projects an idealized image that is not supported by real organizational conditions, digital exposure may instead create distrust and weaken organizational appeal. Schaarschmidt et al. (2021) demonstrate that profile reputation on employer rating platforms significantly affects job seekers' application intentions, meaning that online evaluations and digital reputational cues can either strengthen or damage employer attractiveness. In a similar vein, Salma and Erlin (2025) show that employer branding influences person-organization fit among Generation Z job seekers through social media, implying that poorly aligned or unconvincing digital content may undermine perceived fit. Sunimah's study in Cirebon also indicates that both social media and employer branding significantly influence Generation Z's intention to apply, although employer branding remains the more dominant factor. These findings suggest that digital exposure must be managed strategically and should remain consistent with the actual employer identity of the organization.

A critical reading of the digital exposure literature reveals an important tension that prior studies have not fully resolved. Several researchers document the positive role of digital channels in amplifying employer branding messages and facilitating information access for Generation Z job seekers (Nguyen Ngoc Thang and Trang 2024; El-Menawy and Saleh 2023; Yuspita et al. 2024). However, Schaarschmidt et al. (2021) demonstrate that digital reputation on third-party rating platforms can significantly undermine application intentions when it reflects negative organizational evaluations, while Salma and Erlin (2025) show that poorly aligned digital content may weaken perceived person-organization fit. These divergent findings suggest that the relationship between digital exposure and organizational attractiveness is not linear and may depend on the quality, consistency, and authenticity of the digital content encountered. Crucially, none of the existing studies have directly tested this conditional dynamic in the context of local retail businesses in Indonesia, where Generation Z candidates may interact with a more limited and less professionally managed digital organizational presence than those examined in prior research.

Company attractiveness refers to the extent to which prospective applicants perceive an organization as a desirable and worthy place to work. It is shaped by both instrumental and symbolic attributes, including reputation, organizational values, work climate, career prospects, and the overall meaning attached to the employer. In the Indonesian context, Soeling, Arsanti, and Indriati (2022) show that organizational reputation mediates the relationship between employer brand attractiveness and intention to apply, which confirms that attractiveness is built not only from formal employer messages but also from broader perceptions of the organization. Safitri and Novianti (2024) likewise find that company reputation and employer branding contribute to organizational attractiveness in attracting talented employees. Taken together, these studies indicate that company attractiveness is the result of how internal quality, external reputation, and employer communication are interpreted by prospective job seekers.

The studies on company attractiveness collectively indicate that it is not a fixed organizational attribute but a relational construct shaped by the interplay between organizational quality, strategic communication, and candidates' interpretive frameworks. Soeling et al. (2022) point to organizational reputation as a mediating force, suggesting that attractiveness is not determined solely by what the organization communicates but by how those communications are filtered through existing reputational perceptions. Safitri and Novianti (2024) further confirm that both reputation and employer branding independently contribute to organizational attractiveness, implying that these constructs, while related, operate through distinct pathways. Taken together, these findings underscore the importance of examining employer branding and digital exposure simultaneously rather than in isolation, as their combined effect on company attractiveness may differ substantially from their individual contributions a model specification this study is designed to address in the retail context of Cirebon City.

Based on the above discussion, employer branding is theoretically expected to influence company attractiveness because it clarifies organizational identity, strengthens reputation, and communicates the value of working within the company. At the same time, digital exposure is also expected to influence company attractiveness because it functions as an important medium through which Generation Z receives, evaluates, and verifies employer-related information. Accordingly, this study positions employer branding and digital exposure as antecedents of company attractiveness among Generation Z talent in retail stores in Cirebon City. The conceptual relationship among these variables is presented in Figure 1.

In line with the conceptual framework, the hypotheses of this study are formulated as follows:

H1: Employer branding affects company attractiveness.
H2: Digital exposure affects company attractiveness.

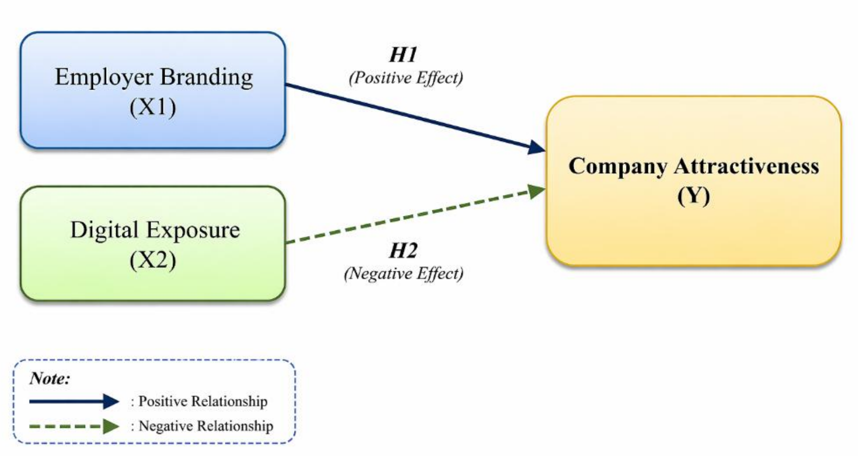

Figure 1.
Research Framework

RESEARCH METHOD

This research employed a cross-sectional survey design and a quantitative methodology to analyze the influence of employer branding and digital exposure on company attractiveness among Generation Z talent in retail stores in Cirebon City. The quantitative approach was chosen because this study focuses on examining the relationships between latent constructs operationalized through a number of measurable indicators. The research model consists of two exogenous variables, employer branding and digital exposure, and one endogenous variable, company attractiveness. The relationship between the variables was utilising PLS-SEM, or partial least squares structural equation modelling, as this approach works well for predictive models, is capable of estimating relationships between latent constructs simultaneously, and remains adequate for a moderate sample size (Hair Jr. et al. 2021; Sarstedt and Liu 2024).

The population of this study consisted of Generation Z individuals in Cirebon City defined as those born between 1997 and 2012 who were currently seeking employment or expressing interest in working in the retail sector. The sample size of 120 respondents was determined based on two considerations. First, following the minimum sample size guideline for PLS-SEM commonly referred to as the "10-times rule" which stipulates that the minimum adequate sample equals ten times the largest number of structural paths directed at any single construct (Hair Jr. et al. 2021) the minimum required sample for this study was 90, derived from the nine indicators of the Employer Branding construct. The final sample of 120 respondents exceeds this threshold, providing a sufficient buffer to support stable path coefficient estimation and adequate statistical power. Second, this sample size is consistent with the range commonly reported in PLS-SEM studies employing similarly sized measurement models in the management literature (Sarstedt and Liu 2024). Respondents were selected through purposive sampling based on predefined eligibility criteria aligned with the research objectives, namely Generation Z individuals familiar with or interested in the retail workplace in Cirebon City. While purposive sampling strengthens the conceptual relevance of the sample, it inherently limits random representativeness; this constraint is acknowledged as a study limitation in the concluding section. Primary data was collected through a closed-ended questionnaire distributed to respondents. The research instrument was structured as reflective indicators representing each construct: 9 indicators for employer branding, 9 indicators for digital exposure, and 8 indicators for company attractiveness. A five-point Likert scale, with 1 denoting strongly disagree and 5 denoting strongly agree, was used to rate each statement.

Measurement model (outer model) and structural model (inner model) are the two main stages of data analysis. The validity and reliability of the reflective construct are evaluated using Cronbach's alpha, rho_A, composite reliability, average variance extracted (AVE), and heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT). A construct is deemed to have convergent validity if its AVE is greater than 0.50, and internal reliability if its Cronbach's alpha, rho_A, and composite reliability are greater than 0.70. In contrast, the reflexive indicator's value is 0.708 or greater if the HTMT value is less than 0.90. (Hair Jr. et al. 2021).

During the inner model stage, tests were performed to determine the significance and strength of the relationships between constructs using the path coefficient, t-statistic, p-value, coefficient of determination (R2), and effect size. Path significance was tested using a bootstrapping procedure, and the hypothesis was declared supported if the p-value was less than 0.05. The R2 value indicated the ability of employer branding and digital exposure to explain variations in company attractiveness, whereas the f2 value evaluated the contribution of each exogenous variable to the endogenous variable. Thus, the PLS-SEM analysis in this study was used not only to test the significance of the direct effect but also to assess the quality of the measurement model and the explanatory power of the structural model as a whole (Hair Jr. et al. 2021; Hult et al. 2018).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The respondent profile is presented to provide an overview of the characteristics of the sample used in this study. All respondents met the inclusion criteria of belonging to Generation Z and having familiarity with, or interest in, employment opportunities in the retail sector in Cirebon City. The demographic description focuses on age, gender, and educational level because these aspects help explain the profile of labor-market entrants targeted by this study.

Table 1.
Profile of Respondents

Variable	Category	F	%
Age	17–20 years	8	6.7

	21–23 years	65	54.2
	24–26 years	47	39.2
Gender	Male	43	35.8
	Female	77	64.2
Education	Senior High School/Vocational School	24	20.0
	Diploma (D3)	32	26.7
	Bachelor (S1)	64	53.3

Source: Research data processed by the author, 2026.

Table 1 shows that the respondents were dominated by the 21–23 year age group, accounting for 54.2% of the sample, indicating that the majority of participants represent Generation Z individuals in the early stages of their working lives who are actively evaluating career opportunities. Female respondents comprised 64.2% of the sample, while male respondents accounted for 35.8%. In terms of educational attainment, most respondents held a bachelor's degree (53.3%), followed by diploma-level education (26.7%) and senior high school or vocational education (20.0%). While this demographic profile is broadly consistent with the target population of Generation Z talent in urban retail contexts, two characteristics of the sample warrant acknowledgment. First, the educational composition is skewed toward higher attainment levels, with over half of respondents holding a bachelor's degree, whereas the retail sector in practice attracts a more educationally diverse workforce. This concentration may mean that the perceptions captured in this study more accurately reflect the expectations of more highly educated Generation Z individuals, which could differ from those of candidates with vocational or secondary education backgrounds. Second, the gender imbalance with females comprising nearly two-thirds of the sample may reflect participation patterns in the Cirebon retail labor market but also introduces the possibility that findings are more representative of female Generation Z perceptions of employer attractiveness. These sampling characteristics should be considered when interpreting the findings and are discussed further as study limitations in the concluding section.

Measurement Model Evaluation

The measurement model was assessed to ensure that the indicators used in this study accurately reflected their respective latent constructs. During this phase, the internal consistency, convergent validity, and discriminant validity of the constructs were evaluated. Given that the constructs were specified as reflective, indicators were expected to exhibit high outer loadings and adequate construct reliability prior to the interpretation of structural relationships.

Table 2.
Outer Loadings

Indicator	Company Attractiveness (Y)	Digital Exposure (X2)	Employer Branding (X1)
X1.1			0.832
X1.2			0.725
X1.3			0.801
X1.4			0.746
X1.5			0.736
X1.6			0.827
X1.7			0.703
X1.8			0.749
X1.9			0.819
X2.1		0.830	
X2.2		0.802	
X2.3		0.804	
X2.4		0.822	
X2.5		0.773	
X2.6		0.781	
X2.7		0.827	
X2.8		0.786	
X2.9		0.842	
Y1	0.838		
Y2	0.767		
Y3	0.803		
Y4	0.789		
Y5	0.735		
Y6	0.756		
Y7	0.785		
Y8	0.812		

Source: Research data processed by the author, 2026.

Vol. 9. No. 2 (2026)
Page: 17833-17849

Table 2 indicates that all indicators met the minimum loading threshold commonly used for reflective constructs. The outer loadings for Employer Branding ranged from 0.703 to 0.832, for Digital Exposure from 0.773 to 0.842, and for Company Attractiveness from 0.735 to 0.838. These results demonstrate that each indicator contributes adequately to its latent variable. The absence of low or problematic loadings also indicates that none of the items needed to be eliminated at this stage of the analysis.

Table 3.
Reliability and Convergent Validity

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Digital Exposure (X2)	0.933	0.933	0.944	0.651
Company Attractiveness (Y)	0.911	0.912	0.928	0.618
Employer Branding (X1)	0.915	0.916	0.930	0.596

Source: Research data processed by the author, 2026.

Table 3 confirms that all constructs demonstrated strong internal consistency. The combined reliability values are between 0.928 and 0.944, the Rho-A values are between 0.912 and 0.933, and the Cronbach-Alpha values are between 0.911 and 0.933. The fact that all of these numbers are higher than the suggested cutoff point of 0.70 suggests that the measurement items were internally consistent. Furthermore, the AVE values for Employer Branding (0.596), Company Attractiveness (0.618), and Digital Exposure (0.651) all exceeded 0.50, indicating satisfactory convergent validity. As a result, It was possible to determine more than the half of the variance of each construct's indicators.

Table 4.
Discriminant Validity (HTMT)

Variable	Company Attractiveness (Y)	Digital Exposure (X2)	Employer Branding (X1)
Company Attractiveness (Y)	-	-	-
Digital Exposure (X2)	0.711	-	-
Employer Branding (X1)	0.844	0.847	-

Source: Research data processed by the author, 2026.

The HTMT values presented in Table 4 are all below the conservative threshold of 0.90, confirming that the three constructs in the model are empirically distinct from one another. The absence of any HTMT value exceeding this threshold indicates minimal overlap between the indicators measuring each construct. Accordingly, employer branding, digital exposure, and company attractiveness can be treated as distinct and separable constructs within the structural model.

Structural Model Evaluation

After the adequacy of the measurement model had been established, The structural model was evaluated in order to assess the models' effectiveness and the strength of each direct effect. The evaluation focuses on the coefficient of determination (R^2), the Effects (f^2), and the Significance of structural paths. In line with the revised article structure, the model was interpreted as consisting of two direct paths: Employer Branding to Company Attractiveness and Digital Exposure to Company Attractiveness.

Table 5.
Structural Model Summary

Statistic	Relationship / Construct	Value	Interpretation
R^2	Company Attractiveness (Y)	0.602	Moderate explanatory power
Adjusted R^2	Company Attractiveness (Y)	0.595	Stable model fit
f^2	Employer Branding to Company Attractiveness	0.423	Large effect
f^2	Digital Exposure to Company Attractiveness	0.091	Small effect

Source: Research data processed by the author, 2026.

Table 5 shows that Employer Branding and Digital Exposure jointly explained 60.2% of the variance in Company Attractiveness, indicating that the model had moderate explanatory power. The explanatory capacity may have remained constant after adjustment, as indicated by the adjusted R2 value of 0.595. Digital exposure had a small effect ($f^2 = 0.091$), while employer branding had a large effect ($f^2 = 0.423$). This finding suggests that, in the current model, employer branding was far more important in determining a company's attractiveness than digital exposure.

Table 6.
Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Path	Path Coefficient	t-statistic	p-value	Decision
H1	Employer Branding to Company Attractiveness	0.612	6.874	0.000	Supported
H2	Digital Exposure to Company Attractiveness	-0.137	2.041	0.042	Supported

Source: Research data processed by the author, 2026.

Discussion

Employer Branding and Company Attractiveness

The hypothesis test in Table 6 demonstrates that Employer had a statistically significant and positive impact on the company's attractiveness ($\beta = 0{,}612$; $t = 6{,}874$; $p < 0{,}001$). This result indicates that the more attractive the organization is to Generation Z talent, the stronger the employer's image is. The benefits of the path coefficient and the large f^2 value further suggest that Employer Branding was the dominant explanatory factor in the model. These results are theoretically consistent with the view that employer branding operates as a strategic mechanism for communicating organizational value, employer identity, and expected work experience to prospective applicants. When the brand of the employer is credible and meaningful, job seekers are more likely to view the company as a desirable workplace.

The result is in line with Theurer et al. (2018), who argue that employer branding strengthens organizational attractiveness by developing employer knowledge and perceived value. It is also consistent with Safitri and Novianti (2024), who found that company reputation and Employer branding increases an organization's appeal. In the context of Generation Z, this relationship is particularly important because younger candidates tend to evaluate employers not only from compensation considerations, but also from work climate, growth opportunities, and value congruence. The internal dimension of employer branding is also reinforced by Aulia et al. (2025), whose findings show that The workplace and corporate culture have an impact on employee relationships. Although retention and attraction are distinct outcomes, both are rooted in how the organization is experienced and perceived. Therefore, the present finding suggests that retail firms in Cirebon cannot rely on external promotion alone; they must support their employer brand with real organizational conditions that are capable of sustaining positive perceptions among prospective employees.

Digital Exposure and Company Attractiveness

The second hypothesis indicates that Digital Exposure had a statistically significant effect on Company Attractiveness, but the direction of this effect was negative ($\beta = -0.137$; $t = 2.041$; $p = 0.042$). Although the size of the effect was small, the negative sign is theoretically meaningful. It suggests that increasing digital visibility does not automatically lead to higher company attractiveness. Instead, digital exposure may reduce attractiveness when the organization's online presence is perceived as excessive, inconsistent, overly promotional, or disconnected from the actual organizational reality. For Generation Z, who are accustomed to evaluating digital information critically, the quality and credibility of digital content matter more than mere frequency or visibility.

This finding offers an important nuance to prior studies that emphasize the positive role of social media and digital communication in attracting young applicants. (Nguyen Ngoc Thang and Trang 2024) demonstrate the relationship between employer branding, image, and intention to apply by using information from social media, while El-Menawy and Saleh (2023) show that Social media use reveals the relationship between an employee's attractiveness and Generation Z's willingness to apply for jobs. However, the present study indicates that in the retail context of Cirebon, digital exposure may become counterproductive when it is not supported by authenticity and organizational substance. The result is also consistent with Schaarschmidt et al. (2021), who found that digital profile reputation shapes application intentions, and with Salma and Erlin (2025), who show that social media can either strengthen or weaken person-organization fit depending on how employer branding is conveyed. Thus, digital exposure should be managed as a strategic extension of the employer brand rather than as an isolated promotional activity.

Integrated Interpretation and Managerial Implications

Taken together, the findings show that company attractiveness among Generation Z in retail stores is primarily driven by a strong and credible employer brand, while digital exposure plays a supporting role that can either reinforce or undermine that attractiveness.

The model explains 60.2% of the variance in Company Attractiveness, which means that the two focal variables already capture a substantial part of how young talent evaluates a retail company as a potential employer. Yet, the contrast between the strong positive contribution of Employer Branding and the weaker negative contribution of Digital Exposure highlights an important managerial lesson: visibility without authenticity is insufficient. Companies need to communicate who they are as employers in a way that is both persuasive and consistent with the real employee experience.

For retail businesses in Cirebon City, the implication is clear. Building company attractiveness requires strengthening internal elements first, such as work environment, organizational culture, developmental opportunities, and a coherent employee value proposition. Only after these elements are well established should firms intensify their digital communication. Social media, recruitment platforms, and other online channels should be used to translate the employer brand faithfully rather than to exaggerate it. This interpretation is also consistent with Sunimah (2025) and Yuspita et al. (2024), who underline the importance of aligning employer branding, media use, and candidate perception among Generation Z. In short, retail firms will be more successful in attracting young talent when digital communication is built upon a genuinely attractive organizational identity.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that employer branding is positively and significantly associated with company attractiveness among Generation Z talent in retail stores in Cirebon City. The findings indicate that a stronger employer image reflected in a positive organizational reputation, supportive work environment, clear organizational values, and promising career development opportunities is associated with a higher likelihood that Generation Z will perceive a company as an attractive place to work. In contrast, digital exposure demonstrated a statistically significant yet negative association with company attractiveness. This result suggests that digital visibility alone does not automatically strengthen employer appeal; when digital communication is excessive, inconsistent, or misaligned with actual organizational conditions, it may generate skepticism and undermine candidate trust. At the model level, employer branding and digital exposure together account for 60.2% of the variance in company attractiveness, indicating that both variables contribute meaningfully to how Generation Z evaluates retail companies as potential employers.

From a theoretical perspective, this study reinforces the view that company attractiveness is determined not only by organizational attributes themselves but also by how well attributes are communicated and interpreted by prospective applicants in a digital environment. The findings confirm that employer branding remains the dominant factor in shaping positive perceptions among Generation Z, while digital exposure acts as a contextual factor whose effect depends heavily on the quality, authenticity, and consistency of the information delivered. Accordingly, this study contributes to the growing body of literature on talent attraction bydemonstrating that digital presence should not be treated merely as a promotional instrument, but as an extension of the employer brand itself. In this sense, the research adds a contextual contribution by illuminating the relationship between digital exposure, employer branding, and company attractiveness in the retail sector at the local-city level in Indonesia.

From a practical perspective, the findings imply that retail companies in Cirebon City should prioritize the development of a credible and value-based employer branding strategy before intensifying digital promotion. Companies need to ensure that the image communicated through social media, recruitment platforms, and other digital channels accurately reflects the real work environment, organizational culture, and employee experience. A strong and authentic employer brand is associated with greater trust and attractiveness among Generation Z, whereas poorly managed digital exposure may undermine that effect. Therefore, retail firms should integrate internal organizational strengthening with consistent external communication in order to improve their competitiveness in attracting young talent.

There are a number of limitations to this study. First, because the study only looks at retail businesses in Cirebon City, its conclusions can't be applied to other industries or geographical areas. Second, the study only looks at two antecedent variables of company attractiveness; the model did not account for other potentially important factors like candidate experience, organisational reputation, person-organization fit, and compensation expectations. Additionally, the sample composition with a higher proportion of bachelor's degree holders and a female majority may limit the representativeness of findings for the broader Generation Z retail workforce. Future studies are therefore encouraged to broaden the research scope by employing longitudinal or experimental designs to establish causality, involving larger and more diverse samples, comparing multiple business sectors across different regional contexts, and incorporating additional explanatory variables or mediating mechanisms to capture a more complete picture of how Generation Z evaluates potential employers.

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