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**DEVELOPING EMPLOYER BRANDING STRATEGY BASED ON DESIGN  
SCIENCE RESEARCH TO ATTRACT GENERATION Z'S INTENTION TO  
APPLY AT COMPANY A**



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**Abstract**

Generation Z is increasingly dominating the workforce with unique preferences for work-life balance, sustainability, and personal development. Companies face challenges in designing employer branding strategies that attract this generation's intention to apply. This study employs the Design Science Research (DSR) approach to develop an evidence-based employer branding strategy for Company A. The literature review covers employer branding, intention to apply, and Generation Z characteristics. This research is expected to provide academic contributions and strategic guidelines for companies in attracting and retaining young talent.

**Keywords:** Employer Branding, Generation Z, Intention to Apply, Design Science Research

## INTRODUCTION

Generation Z (Gen Z), defined as individuals born between 1997 and 2012, has become a dominant force in the global workforce. As digital natives who grew up amidst rapid technological advancements, Gen Z brings unique work perspectives that differ significantly from previous generations (Statista, 2024). In Indonesia, Gen Z is projected to dominate the labor market within the next decade, making them not only a critical component of future human capital but also key drivers in redefining workplace values (Statista, 2024).

According to recent demographic data, the age group of 10–29 years constitutes a significant portion of Indonesia's population, further reinforcing the growing influence of Gen Z in the country's workforce (Statista, 2024). This generational shift necessitates companies to adapt their human resource management strategies, particularly employer branding, to attract and retain young talent effectively.

Gen Z is known for being highly adaptable to change and having high expectations for innovative, flexible, and socially responsible work environments (Deloitte, 2024). Unlike previous generations that often prioritized job stability and financial compensation, Gen Z places greater emphasis on sustainability, work-life balance, inclusivity, and corporate social responsibility (Twenge, 2017; Jakpat Survey Report, 2024). A survey by Jakpat (2024) found that 64% of Indonesian Gen Z respondents consider social and environmental issues important when choosing an employer, while 50% actively seek companies committed to sustainability. Furthermore, 28% admitted feeling ashamed working for companies that do not demonstrate concern for environmental and social aspects.

The evolving expectations of Gen Z have led to a paradigm shift in employment preferences. They view work not merely as a source of income but as a reflection of personal identity and core values (Twenge, 2017). Additionally, mental well-being has emerged as a crucial factor influencing their employment decisions, with 59% of Gen Z considering it a top priority when evaluating potential employers (Schroth, 2019; Jakpat, 2024). Research also indicates that employee well-being correlates directly with retention rates and overall job satisfaction (Kowske et al., 2010). Therefore, organizations must align their employer branding strategies with these emerging trends to remain competitive in attracting young talent.

Moreover, Gen Z is deeply concerned about broader societal issues such as economic inequality (60%), mental health (51%), human rights (42%), access to education (34%), and climate change (31%) (Statista, 2024). These concerns significantly influence their career choices, pushing companies to demonstrate genuine commitments to social responsibility through transparent business practices and corporate policies (Robinson & Stubberud, 2014). Traditional recruitment strategies centered around salary competitiveness are no longer sufficient to attract and retain this generation.

Employer branding plays a pivotal role in addressing these challenges. Defined as the process of shaping an organization's image as an attractive workplace, employer branding influences organizational attractiveness and candidate decision-making (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). According to Berthon et al. (2005), five key dimensions of employer branding include economic value, social value, development value, application value, and psychological value. Companies aiming to stay competitive must tailor their branding strategies to reflect the diverse values of modern employees, especially Gen Z.

In Indonesia, several leading companies such as Bank Mandiri, Telkom Indonesia, and Danone Indonesia have successfully implemented employer branding strategies that emphasize work-life balance, innovation, and sustainability (LinkedIn, HR Asia, SWA, 2024). These firms frequently appear on lists of best workplaces and top employers for Gen Z, highlighting the effectiveness of their approaches. However, many other companies, including Company A, struggle to build a compelling employer brand despite their strong industry positions.

Data from Prosple Indonesia (2024) reveals that Company A does not feature among the top 100 employers preferred by Gen Z in Indonesia. Internal data from 2024 also shows that only 2.7% of Company A's workforce consists of Gen Z, compared to 50.8% Millennials and 46.5% Generation X. While Gen Z currently represents a small proportion of the company's total employees, their potential contribution to digital transformation, innovation, and inclusive culture is significant.

Despite prior efforts to enhance employee welfare and foster an inclusive corporate culture (Garrick et al., 2024), Company A remains largely unknown among Gen Z job seekers. To address this gap, this study proposes a strategic employer branding framework tailored to Gen Z using the Design Science Research (DSR) approach. DSR is a research methodology focused on developing scientifically grounded solutions applicable to real-world problems (Hevner et al., 2004). It involves six stages: problem identification, solution objective definition, design and development, demonstration, evaluation, and communication of results (Peffer et al., 2007).

By employing DSR, this research aims to create an evidence-based employer branding model that enhances Company A's appeal to Gen Z candidates. The resulting strategy will be evaluated for its effectiveness before being disseminated as a practical HRM solution. Moreover, the findings are expected to contribute to broader HR practices by offering insights into how traditional companies can evolve their employer branding to meet the expectations of the new generation.

Given that Company A anticipates a large wave of retirements 16% of employees within five years and 39% within ten years it is crucial to strengthen recruitment strategies targeting Gen Z. Failure to attract young talent could result in significant skill gaps and reduced competitiveness. Therefore, this research is timely and strategically relevant for ensuring sustainable workforce regeneration and long-term organizational success.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Employer branding has evolved as a strategic tool that organizations use to differentiate themselves in the competitive labor market. It is defined as the process of shaping an organization's image as an attractive workplace, influencing both organizational attractiveness and candidate decision-making (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). The concept borrows heavily from marketing principles, where the employer brand is seen as a product that must appeal to its consumers—potential employees (Ambler & Barrow, 1996). This branding encompasses three main benefits: functional, economic, and psychological, which collectively form the Employer Value Proposition (EVP), a key driver in attracting talent, especially Generation Z (Gen Z) (Špoljarić & Dosen, 2023).

The EVP plays a crucial role in employer branding by communicating the unique value that an organization offers to its employees. Functional benefits include opportunities

for skill development, career advancement, and innovation within the work environment (Silva & Dias, 2022). Economic benefits refer to financial rewards such as salary, bonuses, health benefits, and job stability (Alves et al., 2020). Psychological benefits, on the other hand, relate to emotional attachment, a sense of belonging, and alignment of personal values with the company's mission and culture (Hein et al., 2023). These dimensions are particularly important for Gen Z, who prioritize meaningful work, mental well-being, and corporate social responsibility over traditional incentives like high salaries (Jakpat Survey Report, 2024).

Strategic employer branding not only enhances recruitment but also improves employee retention and engagement. According to Berthon, Ewing, and Hah (2005), there are five key elements that influence organizational attractiveness: interest value, social value, economic value, development value, and application value. These components help companies position themselves effectively in the eyes of potential candidates. However, for these strategies to be successful, organizations must ensure consistency between external promises made through branding efforts and the internal reality experienced by employees (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). A mismatch can lead to disillusionment among new hires and damage the company's reputation.

In the context of Gen Z, segmentation, targeting, and positioning (STP) have become essential tools in crafting effective employer branding strategies. Segmenting involves dividing the labor market into distinct groups based on characteristics such as values, preferences, and digital behavior (Kampamba, 2015). Targeting focuses on selecting segments that align with the company's goals and capabilities, while positioning ensures that the employer brand message resonates with the chosen audience (Correia & Rodrigues, 2023). For instance, Gen Z prefers flexible working arrangements, inclusive cultures, and socially responsible organizations (Deloitte, 2024). Therefore, companies aiming to attract this generation must tailor their messaging accordingly and leverage digital platforms where Gen Z is most active (Kaur, 2022).

Intention to apply is a critical outcome of effective employer branding. According to the Theory of Planned Behavior, individuals are more likely to take action when they hold positive attitudes toward it and perceive social support (Ajzen, 1985). In the context of recruitment, intention to apply is influenced by three factors: company attractiveness, intentions toward the company, and company prestige (Highhouse et al., 2003). Strong employer branding increases all three, thereby enhancing the likelihood that talented young professionals will consider applying to an organization.

Generation Z, born between 1997 and 2012, is a digitally native generation that brings unique expectations to the workforce. They are highly adaptable to change and place significant emphasis on sustainability, work-life balance, inclusivity, and corporate social responsibility (Twenge, 2017; Jakpat Survey Report, 2024). Unlike previous generations, Gen Z values purpose-driven work and seeks employers who align with their ethical and environmental beliefs (Robinson & Stubberud, 2014). Moreover, mental well-being has emerged as a crucial factor influencing their employment decisions, with 59% considering it a top priority when evaluating potential employers (Schroth, 2019). Organizations that fail to address these concerns risk losing out on top young talent.

Given the changing dynamics of the labor market and the unique characteristics of Gen Z, innovative research methodologies are required to develop practical and evidence-

based solutions. Design Science Research (DSR) offers a structured approach to solving real-world problems by creating and evaluating artifacts such as models, methods, or systems that can be applied in practice (Gregor & Hevner, 2013). DSR consists of six phases: problem identification, solution objective definition, design and development, demonstration, evaluation, and communication of results (Peffer et al., 2007). This methodology is particularly suitable for developing employer branding strategies tailored to Gen Z, as it allows for iterative testing and refinement based on stakeholder feedback.

Furthermore, DSR enables researchers to bridge the gap between theory and practice. It supports the development of knowledge at multiple levels, including artifact development, design principles, and theory building (Gregor & Zwikael, 2024). At the artifact level, DSR contributes tangible tools or frameworks that can be used in HR practices. At the design principle level, it generates actionable guidelines for implementing effective employer branding strategies. Finally, at the theory level, DSR contributes to the broader understanding of employer branding by integrating empirical findings with existing theoretical constructs. By adopting DSR, this study aims to develop a comprehensive employer branding strategy for Company A a firm that currently does not feature among the top employers preferred by Gen Z in Indonesia (Prosple Indonesia, 2024). Through a systematic process of identifying the problem, designing a solution, demonstrating its feasibility, evaluating its effectiveness, and communicating the findings, this research will contribute both practically and academically to the field of human resource management.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative research approach, specifically utilizing the Design Science Research (DSR) methodology, which focuses on developing practical and evidence-based solutions to real-world problems. The DSR framework enables the creation and evaluation of an employer branding strategy tailored to attract Generation Z (Gen Z) in the context of Company A. Unlike purely theoretical studies, this research emphasizes the development of an artifact—in this case, a strategic employer branding model—that can be implemented and tested within the organizational environment. This method aligns with the need for actionable insights that bridge academic theory and practical application in human resource management.

Data for this research were collected through multiple qualitative techniques, including semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with two primary participant groups: Gen Z individuals who are actively seeking employment and internal stakeholders of Company A, particularly members of the Human Resources department. These interviews aimed to explore the expectations, preferences, and decision-making criteria of Gen Z regarding employer attractiveness, as well as the current challenges and opportunities faced by the company in its recruitment strategies. Focus group discussions were organized to validate emerging themes and gather collective insights from both target audiences, enhancing the richness and credibility of the findings.

The data sources used in this study include primary and secondary sources. Primary data were obtained directly from participants through interviews and FGDs, ensuring firsthand perspectives on employer branding and Gen Z's job-seeking behavior. Secondary data were drawn from academic literature, industry reports, and internal company documents

related to HR policies and branding initiatives. These secondary sources provided contextual background and theoretical foundations that guided the design and interpretation of the employer branding strategy.

The types of data collected encompass qualitative textual data, including interview transcripts, field notes from FGDs, and documented materials related to employer branding practices. These data reflect both subjective perceptions and objective information about how Gen Z evaluates potential employers and how Company A currently positions itself in the labor market. The emphasis on qualitative data allows for a deeper understanding of the values, motivations, and behavioral patterns that influence job application intentions among young talent.

To analyze the data, thematic analysis was employed following the six-phase approach proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). This involved familiarization with the data, coding of relevant excerpts, identification of initial themes, review and refinement of themes, definition and naming of final themes, and production of the final report. Through this process, key patterns and insights were extracted regarding Gen Z's expectations, gaps in Company A's current employer branding efforts, and opportunities for improvement. The resulting themes formed the basis for designing the employer branding model.

Throughout the research, iterative processes were applied to ensure rigor and relevance. Initial findings informed the design of the employer branding artifact, which was then demonstrated and evaluated through stakeholder feedback. Revisions were made based on expert input, ensuring that the final model was not only theoretically grounded but also practically applicable. The communication phase ensured that the developed strategy was clearly articulated and ready for implementation, contributing both academically and managerially to the field of employer branding in the context of attracting Gen Z talent.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The findings of this study are derived from qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), and document analysis involving key stakeholders from Company A and members of Generation Z (Gen Z) who are actively seeking employment or have recently joined the company. These insights were analyzed thematically using the framework developed by Braun and Clarke (2006) and integrated into the Design Science Research (DSR) process to develop an evidence-based employer branding model tailored for Gen Z.

### **Identification of Key Employer Branding Challenges**

One of the primary challenges identified was the lack of a structured Employee Value Proposition (EVP) that could resonate with Gen Z. As noted by internal management representatives, EVP messaging was fragmented across communication channels and lacked consistency in tone and content delivery (MGT1, MGT2). This aligns with Backhaus and Tikoo's (2004) assertion that effective employer branding requires a unified value proposition that reflects organizational identity and appeals to target audiences.

Additionally, there was a notable absence of segmentation strategies targeting Gen Z. Most employer branding efforts were generic and did not reflect the unique preferences of digital-native job seekers. This finding supports previous research indicating that Gen Z values personalized experiences and expects employers to understand their distinct needs (Jakpat Survey Report, 2024; Deloitte, 2024).

Another significant issue was the inconsistency in brand messaging across departments. Human Capital, Corporate Communication, and business units often operated in silos, leading to conflicting representations of the company's culture and values (MGT1, MGT3). This lack of alignment contradicts Berthon et al.'s (2005) emphasis on internal coherence in employer branding, which is essential for building trust and credibility among potential candidates.

### **Perception of Employer Branding Among Gen Z**

Feedback from Gen Z respondents highlighted several key expectations and pain points related to employer branding:

1. Preference for Visual and Interactive Content :  
Gen Z respondents expressed a strong preference for dynamic, visual, and storytelling-based content over static text-heavy materials. They found current employer branding content from Company A too formal and impersonal. This observation is consistent with Kaur (2022), who notes that Gen Z responds more positively to video content, behind-the-scenes glimpses, and employee-generated stories.

2. Importance of Transparent Communication :

One respondent shared:

“I once applied and waited for a month without any update. But when I applied somewhere else, they responded within a week—even if I failed, they told me. That made me respect them.” (Verbatim – GZ1)

This highlights the importance of timely and transparent communication, even during rejection. Such practices contribute significantly to perceived employer fairness and respect—factors that influence long-term brand perception.

3. Desire for Meaningful Work and Personal Expression :

Respondents emphasized the need for work that aligns with personal values and allows for creative expression. Pratt and Ashforth (2003) define this as meaningful work, where employees feel their contributions reflect their identities. Gen Z associates such experiences with inclusive, innovative, and socially responsible organizations.

4. Inefficiencies in the Recruitment Process :

Many applicants reported frustration with long application timelines, lack of feedback, and poor responsiveness. These inefficiencies may deter high-potential candidates, especially those accustomed to fast-paced digital interactions.

### **Evaluation of Proposed Employer Branding Model**

Following the design and development phase of DSR, an employer branding model tailored for Gen Z was created and demonstrated to both internal stakeholders and target users. The model incorporated five core dimensions based on existing literature (Berthon et al., 2005; Ambler & Barrow, 1996):

1. Economic Value
2. Social Value
3. Development Value
4. Application Value
5. Psychological Value

Each dimension was mapped to specific employer branding strategies aligned with Gen Z preferences, such as flexible work policies, CSR initiatives, learning opportunities, innovation-driven roles, and mental health support.

**Table 1**  
**Stakeholder Evaluation of Employer Branding Strategy**

<b>Evaluation Criteria</b>	<b>Score (1–5)</b>	<b>Interpretation</b>
Alignment with Employer Branding Needs	5	Very Aligned
Relevance to Characteristics of Company A	5	Highly Relevant
Clarity and Structure of Strategy	5	Very Clear
Ease of Understanding and Implementation	4	Understandable, with minor simplification needed
Potential Contribution to Engagement	4	Strong potential, but requires clustering focus

Stakeholders rated the proposed strategy highly in terms of alignment, relevance, and clarity. However, suggestions were made to simplify implementation steps and better cluster engagement strategies according to different Gen Z segments.

This study makes significant contributions to both theoretical understanding and practical application within the domain of employer branding, particularly in relation to attracting and engaging Generation Z (Gen Z) talent. By employing the Design Science Research (DSR) methodology, this research extends existing employer branding literature by demonstrating how established theoretical models—such as those proposed by Ambler & Barrow (1996) and Backhaus & Tikoo (2004)—can be effectively adapted to local organizational contexts, especially in developing countries like Indonesia. These models, originally developed in Western settings, are recontextualized here to reflect the unique generational values and expectations of Gen Z, thereby enriching the discourse on cross-cultural and intergenerational differences in workplace preferences.

Theoretically, this research contributes to the growing body of knowledge that explores how employer branding functions not only as a strategic tool for recruitment but also as a mechanism for aligning organizational identity with the evolving values of young professionals. It underscores the importance of employer branding strategies that emphasize personal development, social responsibility, work-life balance, and digital integration, which resonate strongly with Gen Z’s career aspirations.

From a practical standpoint, the employer branding model developed in this study offers a structured and actionable roadmap for organizations such as Company A, enabling them to enhance their appeal among Gen Z candidates. The incorporation of STP (Segmentation, Targeting, Positioning) principles ensures that branding efforts are not generic but rather tailored to specific generational characteristics and job seeker profiles. Moreover, the emphasis on transparency in communication, meaningful work experiences,

and digitally enabled engagement aligns closely with the expectations of Gen Z, thus increasing the likelihood of attracting and retaining high-potential young talent.

One of the key innovations of this study lies in its methodological contribution. While DSR has traditionally been applied in fields such as information systems and engineering, its successful implementation in the domain of human resource management—specifically employer branding—demonstrates its versatility and relevance beyond technical disciplines. This application provides a new methodological lens for addressing real-world HR challenges through evidence-based design and iterative evaluation, offering researchers and practitioners alike a robust framework for developing practical solutions.

## CONCLUSION

This study successfully developed an evidence-based employer branding strategy tailored to attract Generation Z (Gen Z) talent at Company A, utilizing the Design Science Research (DSR) methodology. Through thematic analysis of qualitative data collected via semi-structured interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), key employer branding elements influencing Gen Z's intention to apply were identified, including company reputation, inclusive organizational culture, clear career development opportunities, work-life balance, and strong diversity and inclusion initiatives. The proposed employer branding model was designed using a Segmenting, Targeting, and Positioning (STP) framework and structured around four core components: Flexibility First, Growth Driven, Tech & Mobile Friendly, and Transparent & Fast Process. Stakeholder evaluations confirmed the model's relevance and practicality, offering a strategic roadmap for Company A to enhance its appeal among Gen Z candidates. Based on the findings, several recommendations are proposed to further strengthen the company's attractiveness to Gen Z: (1) offer project-based or flexible work arrangements to support autonomy; (2) enhance digital training and mentorship programs to foster soft skills development; (3) integrate authentic Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives that reflect real societal impact; (4) introduce long-term well-being policies such as mental health leave; and (5) streamline and digitize recruitment and onboarding processes using mobile-friendly platforms to improve candidate engagement. This research contributes both theoretically by extending employer branding literature into a developing country context and practically by providing a validated, actionable strategy for engaging Gen Z in a rapidly evolving labor market. Future studies should consider expanding the model's application across different industries and conducting longitudinal assessments to evaluate long-term effectiveness.

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