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The Impact of Employer Brand on the Job Application Intentions of Generation Z, with a Focus on Corporate Campus Ambassador Programs.

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Abstract

The transition of Generation Z (Gen Z) into the workforce presents significant challenges and opportunities for corporate recruitment and talent management. This study examines the crucial role of Employer Brand in influencing the Job Application Intentions of this emerging generation of talent. Specifically, this research focuses on the growing organizational strategy of implementing Corporate Campus Ambassador Programs as a key mechanism for conveying and enhancing the employer brand. Utilizing a theoretical framework that integrates concepts from organizational behavior and strategic human resource management, this study aims to: analyze the direct influence of employer brand on Gen Z's intention to apply, and examine the mediating or moderating role of the campus ambassador program experience in this relationship. Data collection will involve a survey of university students who represent the Gen Z population, focusing on their perceptions of employer brand elements—such as organizational reputation, work environment, and values—as communicated through campus representatives. Preliminary analysis is expected to show a significant, positive relationship between a strong, attractive employer brand and higher job application intentions among Gen Z candidates, with the Campus Ambassador Program serving to concretize and humanize the brand message. The findings will provide practical recommendations for organizations, particularly those in competitive industries, on how to strategically deploy campus ambassador initiatives to strengthen their employer brand and secure future talent.

Keywords: Employer Brand, Job Application Intentions of Generation Z, Corporate Campus Ambassador Programs.

1. Introduction

Taiwan has recently faced concurrent trends of labor shortages and declining fertility rates. Reports indicate three significant shifts in the labor market. First, waning interest among younger cohorts in humanities- and social-science-oriented roles has reduced applications for administrative positions; more students are opting for STEM fields and expressing a limited willingness to accept low-wage, long-hour employment. Second, persistent shortages have impeded firms' ability to staff vacancies, leading some employers to relax job requirements to widen the talent pool. Third, excessive overtime and extractive managerial practices have lost traction; absent a change in organizational mindset, firms risk elevated turnover and heightened operational exposure (EBC Financial News, 2024).

Concurrently, Taiwan has entered an aging society. As highlighted in media interviews, demand for talent in electronics and innovation-intensive sectors (e.g., 5G, AI, and competent healthcare) has accelerated since the COVID-19 outbreak, making labor scarcity a persistent challenge. The former Minister of Labor, Hsu, underscored that this shortage will not be transient and emphasized policies aimed at expanding employment opportunities for middle-aged and older workers, as well as foreign professionals, to mitigate talent gaps. Universities and firms have also collaborated to enhance talent cultivation environments, aiming to increase the willingness of high-caliber individuals to remain with domestic enterprises (CommonWealth Learning Master Group, 2024).

Against the dual backdrop of a retirement wave and the imminent large-scale entry of Generation Z into the workforce, employer branding has become a pivotal corporate strategy. Employer branding encompasses internal and external initiatives. Internally, firms seek to retain talent by cultivating supportive work environments, offering development opportunities, and providing compelling benefits to elevate satisfaction, identification, and loyalty—thereby improving retention and fostering employee referrals. Externally, firms communicate distinct values, culture, and rewards to attract high-quality applicants, reduce recruitment costs, differentiate in competitive markets, and amplify industry influence. Robust employer brands thus help organizations shape market reputation, attract outstanding candidates, and consolidate incumbent employees' loyalty—leveraging human capital to sustain competitive advantage.

Nevertheless, even widely admired employer brands can encounter friction with Generation Z. Traditionally, society has valorized employers that offer high pay and generous benefits—even when accompanied by intense job demands—as coveted career destinations. By contrast, Generation Z places more substantial weight on work–life balance; consequently, employer brands that once appeared formidable may be reassessed through the lens of intergenerational value differences.

1.1 Research Purpose and Methods

Campus ambassador programs typically provide flexible and remote arrangements that enable students to balance academics, ambassadorial duties, and other commitments—aligning with Generation Z's work values while helping firms engage promising prospective talent. Through targeted training, companies both strengthen students' workplace capabilities for program execution and deepen ambassadors' understanding of corporate culture. Benefits and recognition further reinforce identification with the

firm, fostering organic advocacy and referrals. On this basis, the study addresses the following aims and questions:

- 1) Does a reputable employer brand increase Generation Z's intention to apply?
- 2) Does prior experience as a campus ambassador moderate the relationship between employer brand and job application intention?

This study examines the impact of employer branding on Generation Z's job application intentions, utilizing corporate campus ambassador programs as the empirical context. We employ a case study design coupled with qualitative interviewing. First, we conduct a literature review synthesizing domestic and international research on employer branding and job application intentions.

To deepen understanding of how Generation Z participants in campus ambassador programs perceive employer brands—and how such perceptions shape subsequent job choices—we use purposive sampling to select a firm that operates a campus ambassador program and conduct interviews with three current or former undergraduate ambassadors from Generation Z. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews balance flexibility with analytic focus and are guided by a pre-specified protocol (see Appendix 1). Interview data are analyzed using thematic analysis to inductively identify linkages between employer-brand attributes and Generation Z's job application intentions.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Job Pursuit Intentions

2.1.1 Definition

Early accounts of job pursuit intentions can be traced to Rynes et al. (1991), who, in work on recruitment, identified pre-recruitment variables such as applicants' impressions of recruiters, perceived job and organizational attractiveness, intentions to continue pursuing a position, expected likelihood of receiving an offer, and actual job choice. Aiman-Smith (2001) explicitly defined job pursuit intention as the intention to pursue a job or to remain in the applicant pool. Chapman et al. (2005) further construed it as an individual's intention to take actions that deepen knowledge about a firm, contact the firm, and seek an interview opportunity.

2.1.2 Related Theories

Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) explains behavior in specific contexts through three antecedents: attitudes toward the behavior (evaluations of the act), subjective norms (perceived social pressures), and perceived behavioral control (beliefs about the ease or difficulty of performing the behavior). Within recruitment research, TPB has been widely applied. For example, Fort, Pacaud, and Gilles (2015) reported a significant association between TPB components and job pursuit intentions; their results replicated the influence of subjective norms on job pursuit intentions and also found a substantial effect of applicant attitudes. By contrast, the relationship between self-efficacy and job pursuit intentions was comparatively weaker—potentially reflecting the measurement design employed. Prior work has also suggested that applicants' past job-search experience does not significantly moderate the link between TPB constructs and job pursuit intentions, plausibly because job search is a dynamic process in which such expertise exerts limited incremental influence.

In sum, TPB offers a parsimonious framework for understanding job pursuit intentions via (a) attitude—an applicant's evaluation of

a target employer; (b) subjective norms—essential others’ evaluations of the employer; and (c) perceived behavioral control—confidence in one’s ability to apply successfully. A selection of related studies is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Studies on Job Pursuit Intentions

Study	Key Focus and Findings
Tsai, Lin, Ma, & Wang (2015)	Building on social identity and signaling theories, the authors survey professional employees in Taiwan’s northern science parks to examine employer attractiveness, the mediating role of career development expectations, and the influences of corporate capabilities, corporate social responsibility (CSR), and positive publicity. They conclude that enhancing positive impressions of corporate capability, positive publicity, and CSR can indirectly elevate job pursuit intentions and word of mouth. Importantly, such intentions and advocacy cannot be achieved through ad-hoc recruitment promotion alone; managers must systematically strengthen capabilities, improve communication, and advance CSR initiatives.
Ngoc, Dung, Rowley, & Pejić Bach (2022)	Using the instrumental–symbolic framework, this study investigates how functional attributes (e.g., pay and benefits) and symbolic attributes (e.g., CSR, ethics) shape job pursuit among Vietnamese final-year undergraduates. Generation Z respondents prioritize symbolic attributes—such as workplace climate and ethics—over purely functional ones, while still attending to functional features and the symbolic meanings carried by CSR.

Source: This study compiled

2.2 Employer Branding

2.2.1Definition

Employer branding extends the broader concept of branding. The American Marketing Association characterizes a brand as a name, term, design, or combination thereof used to identify and position a firm’s products or services and to differentiate them in the marketplace. Translating branding concepts from marketing to human resource management, Ambler and Barrow (1996) define the employer brand as the package of functional, economic, and psychological benefits that an organization provides to its employees within the employment relationship. Conceptualizing the construct, Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) describe employer branding as the process of creating a recognizable and distinctive employer identity that distinguishes a firm from its competitors. Edwards (2009) frames employer branding as the application of brand-building principles to HR to cultivate favorable relationships among current and prospective employees. Srivastava and Bhatnagar (2010) similarly view the employer brand as the identity, image, and distinctiveness that attract potential employees and motivate and retain incumbents.

2.2.2Theoretical Perspectives

Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) were the first to comprehensively articulate the employer branding construct, distinguishing its functions in retaining current talent and attracting prospective talent; our focus is on the latter. For attraction, three components are salient:

- a) employer brand associations—job seekers’ partial beliefs, feelings, and images regarding a company as an employer;
- b) employer brand image—more complete cognitions and evaluations of what the firm offers, including functional benefits (e.g., pay, benefits, career opportunities) and symbolic benefits (e.g., prestige, prospects); and
- c) employer attractiveness—perceived resonance between the employer brand and applicants’ self-concepts, which fosters identification and enhances intentions to join.

This study organizes the relevant research on employer branding into Table 2 as follows.

Table 2. Studies on Employer Branding

Study	Key Focus and Findings
Berthon, Ewing, & Hah (2005)	Using six focus groups with Australian university students to elicit qualitative data on ideal employers, the authors develop and validate a scale via surveys of 683 undergraduates. Exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses yield five dimensions: development value (self-worth and career advancement), application value (opportunities to apply skills), economic value (compensation and stability), social value (enjoyable environment and collegial relations), and interest value (attraction to innovative and challenging environments).
Lin & Wu (2024)	A survey of prospective HR practitioners suggests that CSR has a positive impact on employer branding, which in turn increases applicants’ intention to apply. Employer branding partially mediates the relationship between CSR and application intention. The authors argue that meaningful CSR implementation enhances the employer brand and encourages potential applicants to submit their résumés.

Source: This study compiled

3. Interview Analysis

3.1 Interviewee Introduction

This study conducted qualitative analyses based on in-depth interviews with three participants. It examines how a one-year campus ambassador program at an internet-related firm shaped Generation Z participants’ employer brand perceptions and job-seeking intentions across the five core value dimensions—development, application, economic, social, and interest—proposed by Berthon et al. (2005). Basic background information on the three interviewees is summarized in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Interviewees' introduction

ID	Sex	Year of Birth	Discipline & Level	Ambassador Track
1	Male	2003	Finance cluster, M.A. Year 1	Career Courses Track
2	Female	2001	Socio-Psychology Cluster, M.A. Year 2	Career Courses Track
3	Female	2002	Foreign Languages cluster, M.A. Year 1	Social Media Track

3.2 Data Analysis of Findings

3.2.1 Analysis of Employer Brand Value Dimensions

Across all three interviewees, the one-year campus ambassador experience generated consistently positive feedback on all five value dimensions and fostered a deeper and more concrete understanding of the company.

1) Development Value

Participants indicated that the program effectively enhanced workplace soft skills—particularly communication/coordination and problem-solving. Many highlighted interactions with corporate mentors as providing tangible guidance for future career development.

2) Application Value

Before the program began, all three interviewees felt they had limited exposure to real work tasks. During the program, however, they were able to apply previously learned skills (e.g., slide design and presentation, communication) to actual projects, which contributed to a sense of accomplishment.

3) Economic Value

Economic incentives were the primary initial draw for most participants. The company's stipend and supplementary benefits—such as ride-hailing credits and complimentary professional ID photos—were perceived as superior to competitors. These exceeded expectations and further elevated their overall favorability toward the employer brand.

4) Social Value

All three interviewees reported a friendly team climate, open communication channels with mentors, and strong bonds among peers. These experiences dispelled prior stereotypes about corporate hierarchy and cultivated a stronger sense of belonging.

5) Interest Value

Interviewees agreed that the program offered sufficiently challenging tasks that sparked enthusiasm for work. One interviewee, who had served as a campus ambassador for a different company, contrasted that experience—mainly limited to posting product information on social media and therefore less engaging—with the present program, where well-structured tasks enabled a progressive, cumulative sense of achievement.

3.2.2 Job Application Intentions

Interviewees 1 and 2 stated that they would prioritize this company as a future employer. In addition to compensation, Interviewee 1 valued the organization's youthful departments, robust mentoring system, and positive team interactions. Interviewee 2 emphasized that increased familiarity, identification, and loyalty cultivated through the program made them more willing to apply;

nevertheless, both noted that actual vacancies and job content would ultimately determine their choices.

Interviewee 3 acknowledged the company's strong overall employer branding, yet, given a personal career plan focused on B2B marketing, would not rank the company as a first choice. Instead, they would leverage the marketing experience gained in the ambassador program to prioritize applications to marketing-oriented firms. This interviewee viewed campus ambassador programs as an "initial form of career exploration" that helps students clarify directions—especially those seeking to cross disciplinary boundaries—and serves as a stepping stone for later careers. For students wishing for deeper industry immersion or those with stronger prior foundations, long-term in-house internships were considered more suitable.

4. Conclusion and Suggestions

4.1 Conclusions

Drawing on preliminary qualitative interviews with three Generation Z students who served as campus ambassadors at an internet-related company, this study explored how the program influenced employer brand perceptions and subsequent job-seeking intentions.

In line with Berthon et al.'s (2005) five core value dimensions of employer branding, the findings suggest that economic value is the principal motivator for joining a campus ambassador program. However, once enrolled, participants begin to weigh other dimensions more concretely.

Notably, the social dimension—manifested through friendly mentor- and peer-level interactions—was critical in cultivating a sense of belonging. Regarding application value, the extent to which participants could apply existing skills influenced their sense of achievement at work.

Moreover, task design matters: assignments that are overly administrative or highly repetitive attenuate enthusiasm and engagement. Organizations should therefore ensure task structures that spark interest and value. Ultimately, when companies provide space and appropriate resources for participants' self-development—thereby delivering development value—even those who do not remain with the firm may still translate their ambassador experiences into positive career trajectories while continuing to advocate for the employer brand.

4.2 Directions for Future Research

Given the paucity of prior research on corporate campus ambassador programs, this exploratory study employed qualitative interviews with ambassadors from the same company, analyzing their experiences through Berthon et al.'s (2005) five value dimensions. Future studies could expand the sample size and include interviewees from diverse industries, disciplines, and backgrounds to provide a more comprehensive account of Generation Z's employer brand perceptions and their linkage to job-seeking tendencies.

4.3 Limitations

This study interviewed only three Generation Z students who participated in the same company's campus ambassador program. The limited sample size constrains cross-industry comparisons and the analysis of how educational backgrounds shape employer brand perceptions and job intentions. Subsequent work should broaden the sample to better illuminate the relationship between Generation Z's employer brand perceptions and job-seeking tendencies.

Appendix A. Interview Guide

This interview guide is designed with reference to the employer-branding value dimensions proposed by Berthon et al. (2005). It focuses on five core dimensions: Development Value, Application Value, Economic Value, Social Value, and Interest Value. A brief explanation follows:

1. Development Value:

This dimension concerns the extent to which the firm provides opportunities for personal growth and skill enhancement (e.g., professional knowledge, communication and coordination, problem-solving) as well as support for future career development (e.g., professional training courses, industry mentors, network expansion, and understanding of industry trends).

2. Application Value:

This reflects your expectation of applying knowledge learned at school or skills you already possess to the campus ambassador program, thereby gaining a sense of accomplishment and purpose.

3. Economic Value:

What are your expectations regarding compensation, stipends, bonuses, transportation subsidies, or other tangible benefits in the campus ambassador program (e.g., opportunities to participate in corporate events)?

4. Social Value:

This pertains to the team climate, interpersonal interactions, and organizational culture experienced in the campus ambassador program (e.g., friendly and supportive collegial relations, strong team cooperation, open communication channels).

5. Interest Value:

Do you expect the program content, the industry, or the firm itself to be innovative and challenging, and to spark enthusiasm and high engagement? How important to you are work interestingness and the alignment between job content and personal interests?

Confidentiality and Voluntary Participation

All interview content will be kept confidential and used solely for academic research. Please feel free to share your experiences. During the interview, if you have any questions or prefer not to answer any particular question, you may indicate so at any time.

Basic Information

- **Date of Birth:**
- **Gender:**
- **University:**
- **Department/Program:**
- **Period of Participation in the Campus Ambassador Program (semester):**

Before Participating in the Campus Ambassador Program

1. Prior to joining the campus ambassador program—or when searching for similar internship opportunities—what specific expectations did you hold for an “attractive campus ambassador program” across the five value dimensions introduced above (development, application,

economic, social, interest)? Please address each dimension separately.

2. Before formally joining the campus ambassador program of the firm you selected, what was your overall brand impression of that firm? From which sources did these impressions primarily arise (e.g., the firm’s public information, products/services, societal evaluations, seniors’/alumni experiences)? At that time, how well did you think the firm aligned with your expectations on the five value dimensions (development, application, economic, social, interest) described in the previous question?

During Participation in the Campus Ambassador Program

1. While actually participating in the campus ambassador program, how did the firm perform on each of the five value dimensions (development, application, economic, social, and interest)? Please describe your experiences and observations for each dimension in as much detail as possible.
2. In the campus ambassador program, how were the firm’s brand culture (e.g., its mission, vision, and core values) made concrete through the management of and interactions with ambassadors? How did these experiences influence your overall evaluation of the firm across the five value dimensions (development, application, economic, social, and interest)?

After Participating in the Campus Ambassador Program

1. After completing the program, would you include this firm among your priority choices when seeking full-time employment after graduation? To what extent was this decision influenced by the development, application, economic, social, or interest values you experienced in the program? Which dimensions had the most significant impact on you? Which had the least? If you were to rank them, what would the order be?
2. Compared with your pre-program perceptions, what specific changes occurred in your employer-brand impressions of this firm—particularly regarding the five value dimensions (development, application, economic, social, interest)?
3. If your experiences in the campus ambassador program diverged from your expectations, would this alter your view of the firm or your intention to apply for a job there? If so, how?

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