

Research Article

The Influence of Employer Branding on College Students' Willingness to Apply: Exploring Social Media as a Moderator

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Abstract.

This study aims to investigate the influence of employer branding on the willingness to apply for a job at a startup company, using social media as a moderating variable. The respondents of this research are 409 third-year students from the top 10 universities in Indonesia. This study employs a quantitative method with a purposive sampling approach. It utilizes surveys and data analysis through PLS-SEM. The findings of this study indicate that five indicators of employer branding, namely interest value, social value, economic value, development value, and application value, have a significant impact on job application intention. Furthermore, the study also reveals that social media does not directly influence these aspects of employer branding, except application value. This research is expected to provide insights and a foundation regarding the impact of employer branding and the use of social media on job application intention for relevant companies.

Keywords: employer branding, social media, willingness to apply, start-up

1. Introduction

The Great Resignation is an economic occurrence in which many workers resign at once [1]. This began in early 2021 and affected all industries. Glints found that 1,693 employees are exhibiting an increased level of selectivity when it comes to choosing their employers [2]. Companies engage in fierce rivalry not only to attract potential customers, but also to recruit potential staff [3]. Organizational competencies are necessary for the purpose of attracting, cultivating, and retaining talent in order to achieve superiority and competitiveness [4]. Employer branding plays a crucial role in this context. The phrase “employer branding” was first introduced by Ambler & Barrow and refers to the practice of communicating the functional, economic, and psychological advantages that a business can offer to potential employees [5]. Employer branding efforts can be conducted through traditional or digital means [6,7]. Traditional approaches include attending job fairs, displaying recruitment notices on billboards, publishing job advertising in newspapers, and authoring articles about office culture in magazines. One way

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to employ digital approaches is through generating adverts, solicitations, content, or company profiles on websites and social media platforms.

Social media serves as a digital platform for conducting employer branding. Social media is widely seen as a more successful method for employer branding [8]. Given the large number of social media users, organizations can readily utilize this platform to identify potential job candidates [9]. Companies benefit from using social media due to its unrestricted and user-friendly nature, as well as its ability to facilitate quicker reaction times for user interactions and activities. Social media can serve as a cost-efficient means to assess the efficacy of company signals in the employer branding process, with the aim of attracting prospective employees [10]. Companies utilize social media content to enhance their employer branding, including content related to life at Company X, podcasts, QnA sessions, and other forms of content [11].

Most organizations use social media channels to improve their employer branding efforts. This is a frequent phenomenon in the start-up sector. Start-ups are technology-focused businesses that often cause major disruptions by replacing traditional procedures with digital and technology-based approaches [12]. Start-ups often take a proactive strategy to enhance their reputation as employers through the use of social media. This is done to address the unique characteristics of their workforce [13,14]. Furthermore, further inquiry is necessary to explore the use of social media in the context of workplace branding. This is due to the limited exploration of research on the impact of social media on employer branding [15]. Further research is required to examine the human resources component in the start-up industry in Indonesia, given its substantial influence on the Indonesian economy. The digital economy of Indonesia has the potential to increase thrice, from \$27 billion in 2018 to \$100 billion by 2025. The growth of the e-commerce, ride-hailing, online travel, and online media sectors is the main driving force behind this phenomenon [16].

Companies apply diverse factors for recruiting new personnel, based on the company's objectives and preferences [17]. Companies consider age as a significant criterion when choosing potential employees [18,19]. Companies have initiated a competition to attract these personnel, as they are currently students or at the tertiary level. This is seen in the various initiatives aimed at students, including (1) apprenticeship programs; (2) career fairs; and (3) corporate workshops. These diverse efforts are conducted to establish firm branding as a reputable employer [7]. Companies seeking skilled prospective employees find college graduates to be highly desirable among the younger generation.

Social media has a significant role in this context or topic, given its strong connection with the younger generation [20]. Higher education institutions must facilitate the integration of potential graduates into the competitive job market, while prospective

graduates must comprehend the advancements and methodologies involved in utilizing social media platforms for job hunting and recruitment [21]. Therefore, it is essential for both aspiring college graduates and enterprises to effectively establish and promote their image and identity. A company's competitive advantage increases in proportion to the effectiveness of its talent recruiting and retention strategies [22,4].

Young workers have distinct attributes when selecting employment. The selection of a job can be based on five employer branding values: (1) Interest value, which encompasses innovation and employee enthusiasm for products and services; (2) Social values, which involve the work environment and relationships among employees; (3) Economic value, which includes the financial benefits that employees receive; (4) Development values, which pertain to the potential for future job opportunities; and finally, (5) Application value, which refers to the opportunity for employees to apply their prior knowledge and skills to benefit the company. These five principles are mutually reinforcing, however multiple researches imply that certain values have a more significant influence than others.

The objective of this study is to examine how employer branding influences students' inclination to apply to start-up organizations, with social media serving as a moderator variable. Besides, this study also aims to determine the importance of each employer's branding value in influencing interest in job applications. Further investigation is required in Indonesia to explore related research in a broader context, as existing studies in the country tend to concentrate on individual companies or are limited to case studies.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Employer Branding

The phrase "employer branding" was used by Ambler & Barrow, refer to the practice of conveying information regarding the practical, financial, and emotional advantages that a business might offer to potential employees [5]. Employer branding can be considered synonymous with employer image management or employer image management [23]. Companies in contemporary human resource management must possess a thorough comprehension and effective execution of employer branding [24]. The effectiveness of workplace branding can be evaluated by examining the degree of employer appeal. Further measurement can be conducted using either the employer attractiveness scale or the Four Scale, which encompasses five features or indicator dimensions [3]. The five indicators are interest value, social value, economic value, development value, and application value.

2.2. Use of Social Media in Employer Branding

In general, social media is defined as anything that facilitates online communication, networking, and/or collaboration [25]. Kaplan & Haenlein define social media as a group of Internet-based applications built on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 [26], these applications also enable the creation and exchange of user-generated content.

Employer branding needs to communicate to employees and potential employees what attractive values the company has built, in this case, social media is important because social media can communicate it more broadly and extensively [20]. The role of social media is very essential due to the importance of communicating brand identity [27] in order to increase the willingness to apply for prospective employees in the future [28].

2.3. Willingness to Apply

Willingness is associated with calculations made by decision-makers about advantages and disadvantages, costs and benefits, which are considered at a conscious and unconscious level [29]. The desire to apply for a job is caused by the attraction of the employer [30]. Based on this, interest in applying for this research is only represented by one indicator, namely attraction. This attraction arises from the existence of two things, namely credibility, and satisfaction. The credibility in question is about how credible the employer is.

2.4. Hypotheses

The conceptual model of this study is presented in Figure 1. The study conducted by Dabirian et al. demonstrates that interest value plays a crucial role in both attracting and retaining personnel [31]. Additionally, firms should prioritize highlighting the captivating nature of their work in both external and internal branding endeavors. In their study, Chi et al. discovered that the influence of job interest on the desire to apply was more significant compared to pay and business image [32]. A study conducted by Kashive et al. [20] revealed that within the Information Technology industry, the concept of interest value plays the most significant impact in shaping employer branding. Thus, the proposed hypothesis is:

H1: There is a significant effect between Interest Value and willingness to apply

Individuals place significant importance on the satisfaction they get from a favorable work environment, amiable colleagues who possess similar principles, the team's approach to resolving issues, and an organizational culture that prioritizes the well-being of its members [33]. According research conducted by Biswas & Suar [34] and Dabirian et al. [31], social value is considered the most significant value among the five values of employer branding. Kashive et al. also found that social value is the most important value in employer branding in the manufacturing industry sector [20]. Therefore, the proposed hypothesis is:

H2: There is a significant effect between Social Value and willingness to apply

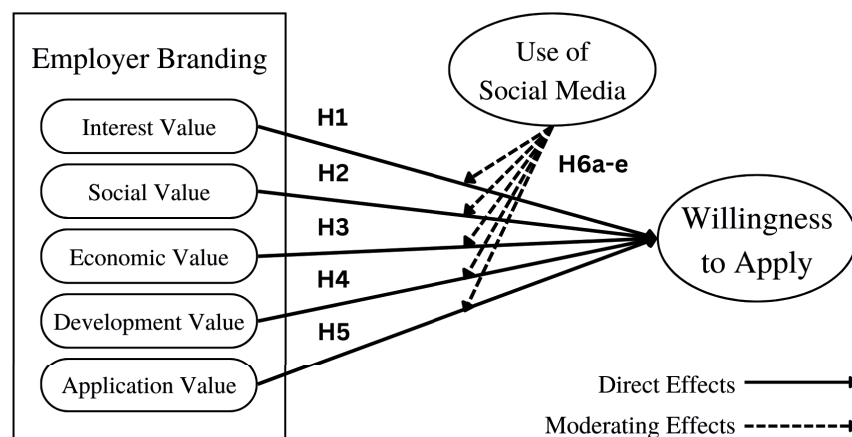


Figure 1: Conceptual Model.

Chi et al. found that salary has a significant positive influence on willingness to apply [32]. Apart from that, this research also found that salary can have a moderating effect on willingness to apply. The study conducted by Styśko-Kunkowska & Kwinta further supports this notion [35]. The research revealed that participants showed a preference for job offers from firms with a less favorable employer branding but offering higher incomes, as opposed to companies with a great employer branding but offering fewer appealing salaries. However, Kucherov et al. found that job searchers prioritize working for companies with stronger employer branding, even if those companies provide lower salaries [36]. Thus, the proposed hypothesis is:

H3: There is a significant effect between Economic Value and willingness to apply

A study conducted by Prajapati & Patel found that development value plays a crucial role in influencing applicants' intention to apply for a job and is regarded as a key aspect of job attractiveness [37]. Therefore, we proposed the following hypothesis:

H4: There is a significant effect between Development Value and willingness to apply

The study conducted by Sivertzen et al. has found that the application value of a company has a substantial influence on its corporate reputation and the level of interest in applying to it [9]. Thus, the proposed hypothesis is:

H5: There is a significant effect between Application Value and willingness to apply

Social media has a beneficial impact on employer branding, particularly in managing the public perception of a company and generating interest from potential job applicants [19]. According to Wolf et al., there has been a transfer of power in the ownership and creation of information from organisations to consumers [38]. This shift also applies to employer branding efforts, which are now being driven by social media. Several firms perceive social media as an unparalleled platform for attracting and engaging both current and prospective employees [39]. Nevertheless, a study conducted by Kissel & Büttgen indicates that social media does not directly influence individuals' perception of employer interest and their intents to apply for a job [40]. Instead, this influence is entirely mediated by the presence of a strong company image. Therefore, the proposed hypothesis is:

H6a: The use of social media moderates the influence of interest value on willingness to apply

H6b: The use of social media moderates the influence of social value on willingness to apply

H6c: The use of social media moderates the influence of economic value on willingness to apply

H6d: The use of social media moderates the influence of development value on willingness to apply

H6e: The use of social media moderates the influence of application value on willingness to apply

3. Methodology Research

3.1. Research Design

This study employed quantitative method and online survey questionnaire to examine the influence of employer branding on willingness to apply for college students. All the questionnaire items use a standard five-point Likert-type scale ranging from Very Strongly Disagree (1) to Very Strongly Agree (5).

3.2. Samples and Data Collection Methods

The study population comprises students in Indonesia. Nevertheless, this study will specifically examine the top 10 tertiary schools in Indonesia as determined by the Quacquarelli Symonds World University Ranking 2023 (2022). A purposive sampling method was adopted with the following criteria, students who were in their seventh semester or higher, and were selected from the top 10 institutions in Indonesia. The number of samples in this study was determined using the Slovin method. After applying the formula, it was determined that there should be 398.223 samples. This value was rounded up to 399 students.

This study utilizes Partial Least Square – Structural Equation Model or PLS-SEM. The initial step in processing research data involves the measuring or outer model, which seeks to assess the construct validity and reliability of each indicator. Subsequently, the assessment of reliability will be conducted by the utilization of Cronbach's Alpha and composite reliability. The next step in processing study data is constructing the structural or inner model. The purpose of this stage is to examine the relationship between the measured constructs, namely by the t-test of the partial least square method. The investigation will proceed with hypothesis testing. At this juncture, the research will additionally establish connections between research findings and prior scholarly articles or studies.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Result

4.1.1. Respondent Profile

Demographics profile of the respondents are presented in Table 1. The study includes a total of 409 respondents, with 178 (44%) being male and 231 (56%) being female. The majority of the respondents are female. In terms of age distribution, the respondents are fairly evenly spread across different age groups. The largest age group is 21 years old, comprising 168 (41%) of the respondents, followed by 22 years old (131 or 32%), 23 years old (79 or 19%), and 24 years old (31 or 8%). The respondents represent a diverse range of universities. The most prominently featured universities include Institut Teknologi Sepuluh Nopember with 130 respondents (32%), Universitas Diponegoro with 53 respondents (13%), and Universitas Brawijaya with 37 respondents (9%). Other universities are also represented to varying degrees, with no single university dominating the sample. Respondents' social media usage is predominantly on LinkedIn,

with 272 (67%) indicating its use. Twitter is the second most used platform, with 59 (14%) respondents. Instagram is used by 31 (8%), Facebook by 15 (4%), and YouTube by 32 (8%) of the respondents.

TABLE 1: Respondent's Profile.

Characteristic		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	178	44%
	Female	231	56%
Age	21	168	41%
	22	131	32%
	23	79	19%
	24	31	8%
University	Universitas Gadjah Mada	26	6%
	Institut Teknologi Bandung	17	4%
	Universitas Indonesia	26	6%
	Universitas Airlangga	27	7%
	Institut Pertanian Bogor	34	8%
	Institut Teknologi Sepuluh Nopember	130	32%
	Universitas Padjajaran	25	6%
	Universitas Diponegoro	53	13%
	Universitas Brawijaya	37	9%
	Universitas Bina Nusantara	34	8%
Social Media	Linkedin	272	67%
	Twitter	59	14%
	Instagram	31	8%
	Facebook	15	4%
	Youtube	32	8%

4.2. Measurement Model Evaluation

The results of the measurement model are presented in Tables 2. The validity and reliability were determined using factor loadings (FL), composite reliability (CR), Cronbach's Alpha (CA), and average mean-variance (AVE). As depicted in Table 2, the items are free from convergence validity errors since all items have FL values greater than 0.7, and AVE values were higher than the acceptable limits of 0.5. In addition, the composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha values are more than 0.7 [41], ensuring the constructs' reliability.

TABLE 2: Convergent validity, Construct Reliability, and Validity Result.

Constructs	Items	Factor Loading	CR	AVE	α
Interest Value			0,851	0,589	0,770
	IVA1	0,812			
	IVA2	0,727			
	IVA3	0,782			
	IVA4	0,745			
Social Value			0,856	0,664	0,747
	SVA1	0,831			
	SVA2	0,808			
	SVA3	0,805			
Economic Value			0,881	0,650	0,821
	EVA1	0,816			
	EVA2	0,780			
	EVA3	0,833			
	EVA4	0,795			
Development Value			0,882	0,652	0,822
	DVA1	0,782			
	DVA2	0,801			
	DVA3	0,839			
	DVA4	0,807			
Application Value			0,864	0,679	0,764
	AVA1	0,825			
	AVA2	0,859			
	AVA3	0,786			
Use of social media			0,902	0,698	0,855
	USM1	0,828			
	USM2	0,794			
	USM3	0,858			
	USM4	0,860			
Willingness to Apply			0,877	0,641	0,814
	WTA1	0,804			
	WTA2	0,770			
	WTA3	0,808			
	WTA4	0,820			

The second phase of the analysis, following the confirmation of the reliability and validity of the measurement model, involved the evaluation of the structural model. The assessment of the structural model occurred in two distinct steps: model fit and hypothesis testing. Model fit was ascertained by considering the R² values, which gauged the proportion of variance explained in each predicted construct within the model. Additionally, the significance of the proposed hypotheses was assessed through the examination of beta coefficients and t statistics. Table 3 depicts the results of the structural model evaluation. The estimated R² values for the endogenous variables willingness to apply (WTA) were 0.680. Based on Chin's classification, we can conclude that the R² values in our model fall within the moderate to substantial range, where 0.19 represents a weak, 0.33 a moderate, and 0.76 a substantial relationship [42].

The results in Table 3 indicate that interest value ($\beta = 0.102$, $p < 0.05$), social value ($\beta = 0.096$, $p < 0.05$), economic value ($\beta = 0.198$, $p < 0.05$), development value ($\beta = 0.242$, $p < 0.05$), and application value ($\beta = 0.227$, $p < 0.05$) positively and significantly influence willingness to apply. Thus, H1, H2, H3, H4, and H5 are supported. Further, the study reveals that the moderation effect of the use of social media between interest value ($\beta = 0.014$, $p > 0.05$), social value ($\beta = -0.005$, $p > 0.05$), economic value ($\beta = 0.049$, $p > 0.05$), development value ($\beta = -0.079$, $p > 0.05$) and willingness to apply is insignificant. Therefore, the results of the study do not support H6a, H6b, H6c, and H6d. However, H6e is supported, it indicates that the use of social media moderates the influence of application value on willingness to apply ($\beta = 0.068$, $p < 0.05$).

TABLE 3: Hypotheses results.

Hypotheses	β	T Values	p-values	R ²	Results
H1: IVA → WTA	0.102	2.273	0.023	0.680	Supported
H2: SVA → WTA	0.096	2.453	0.015		Supported
H3: EVA → WTA	0.198	3.663	0.000		Supported
H4: DVA → WTA	0.242	3.946	0.000		Supported
H5: AVA → WTA	0.277	4.900	0.000		Supported
Moderating effects					
H6a: IVA x USM → WTA	0.014	0.377	0.706		Not Supported
H6b: SVA x USM → WTA	-0.005	0.126	0.900		Not Supported
H6c: EVA x USM → WTA	0.049	0.721	0.471		Not Supported
H6d: DVA x USM → WTA	-0.079	1.315	0.189		Not Supported
H6e: AVA x USM → WTA	0.068	2.222	0.027		Supported

Note: β = Beta; IVA = interest value; SVA = social value; EVA = economic value; DVA = development value; AVA = application value; USM = use of social media; WTA = willingness to apply.

5. Discussion

According to the analysis results, interest value significantly influences the willingness to apply. Individuals who are genuinely interested in a particular employer or organization are more likely to express an intention to apply for positions within that organization. In simpler terms, a strong attraction or interest in an employer's offerings can positively impact an individual's willingness to seek employment with that organization. This suggests that building and communicating this interest value can be a crucial aspect of employer branding efforts. This finding supports Bhasin et al. discovery that interest value is the strongest indicator of employer branding [43]. Biswas & Suar also suggested that interest value is the second strongest indicator of employer branding after social value [34]. From the R-square values in the previous section, we can deduce that the impact of employer branding on the intention to apply, moderated by social media usage, is quite strong.

The findings of the study show that social value has a significant impact on the willingness to apply. Individuals place great emphasis on the satisfaction they receive from a favorable working environment, friendly colleagues with similar principles, a team approach to solving problems, and an organizational culture that prioritizes the well-being of its members [33]. It becomes clear that social value transcends mere relevance and plays a decisive role in influencing the decisions and perceptions of future applicants. This centrality can be attributed to several core aspects of social value that individuals have high respect for. This study supports the research conducted by Biswas & Suar [34] and Dabirian et al. [31], who found that social value is considered to be the most important value of the five employer brand values. In addition, the study also supports Kashive et al. discovery that social value is the most important value in the branding of employers in the manufacturing sector [20].

Economic value is found to have a relationship with willingness to apply. It suggests that economic considerations, such as salary, benefits, and financial incentives offered by a prospective employer, play a significant role in influencing individuals' decisions to apply for job positions. In light of this, the current investigation lends empirical support to the findings of prior research by Chi et al. that found pay has a substantial and beneficial impact on the willingness to apply [32]. In addition, this study also discovered that compensation can exert a moderating influence on the inclination to submit an application. The findings of this study further corroborate the research conducted by Styśko-Kunkowska & Kwinta, which revealed that participants displayed a preference for job offers from companies with a less favorable employer branding but higher wages, as opposed to enterprises with a strong workplace branding but lower salaries [35].

This study also found that development value is positively associated with the willingness to apply. The finding indicates that individuals' willingness to apply for employment openings inside an organization is positively influenced by their view of prospects for personal and professional growth, skill advancement, and career progression within that organization. The findings of this study align with the research conducted by Prajapati & Patel, which concluded that the value of development significantly influences applicants' inclination to apply for a job and is considered a fundamental part of job attractiveness [37].

Further, the application value has a significant impact on the willingness to apply, which aligns with the findings of prior research conducted by Sivertzen et al. [9]. The finding suggests that the perceived ease, convenience, and overall quality of the job application process have a significant impact on individuals' willingness to apply for job positions.

According to Sivertzen et al., social media has a beneficial impact on employer branding, particularly in managing the public perception of a company and generating interest from potential job applicants [9]. Nevertheless, the findings of this study indicate that the use of social media does not influence or regulate the four aspects of employer branding, namely interest value, social value, economic value, and development value, in relation to the willingness of college students to seek for jobs. Moreover, the sole use of social media serves as a moderator for the impact of application value on the propensity to apply. The findings highlight the multi-faceted role of social media in the recruitment process. While social media can effectively create awareness and generate initial interest in an organization, it may not have a direct and significant impact on the four central dimensions of employer branding. Instead, its influence seems to manifest more strongly in how applicants perceive the job application process itself.

This suggests that organizations should consider a balanced approach to their recruitment strategy. Social media can be a valuable tool for creating a positive public image and attracting potential applicants, but the critical dimensions of employer branding are often influenced by a more extensive array of factors, including company culture, compensation, and opportunities for growth. Furthermore, the study underscores the importance of ensuring that the application process is user-friendly and well-managed, as this can directly impact the likelihood of applicants completing the process.

6. Conclusion

This study contributes to the current understanding of how employer branding influences students' interest in applying to start-up organizations, with social media as a

moderator, and the significance of each employer's branding value in job application interest. Interest value, social value, economic value, development value, and application value play an important role in influencing applicants' decisions. However, the use of social media does not directly influence these aspects of employer branding, except application value. Therefore, it is imperative for organizations to adopt a well-rounded recruitment strategy that takes into account crucial elements such as company culture, compensation, and prospects for advancement. In addition, it is necessary for them to reassess the approach and execution of employer branding via social media with the aim of enticing potential employees. Although this research establishes a solid basis, there are abundant prospects for additional investigation and improvement. Future research should aim to expand the range of analytical methods, explore other factors, and investigate the socio-cultural and demographic elements of employer branding in specific settings, such as Indonesia. This will facilitate the cultivation of a more sophisticated comprehension regarding the optimal utilization of employer branding and social media by organizations to attract and retain top-tier human resources.

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