EMPLOYER BRANDING AND APPLICATION INTENTIONS: EVIDENCE FROM GENERATION Z IN VIETNAMESE HOSPITALITY

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ABSTRACT

In Vietnam, hospitality is growing strongly and contributing to economic growth, especially after being stagnant due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Recently, this business sector has encountered a shortage of human resources. Based on the person-organization fit theory, this study investigates how employer branding shapes Generation Z's desire to pursue employment in hospitality. The author used the quantitative method with data collected from 554 Gen Zers in Vietnam. SPSS 27 was employed to analyze the data. The findings indicated that payment attractiveness, employer reputation, working environment, and task attractiveness positively influence Gen Z's application intention. The result advocates an idea that investment in employer branding will attract young candidates, especially Gen Z workers. This recruitment strategy helps businesses in hospitality overcome human resources shortages and appear more competitive in the labor market.

Keywords: Employer branding, person-organization fit theory, application intention, Gen Z, hospitality, human resources.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary dynamic landscape with various occupations, workers constantly seek roles that align with their skills and ignite their interests. Businesses employ various methods to attract and engage potential candidates for positions within their organizations, a practice that gained popularity with the emergence of the notion of employer brand during the 1900s (Ambler & Barrow, 1996). This strategy, known as employer branding, is widely adopted by companies to attract and retain talented employees. It is of the utmost significance in determining whether or not people decide to apply for jobs at an organization in particular. A well-crafted employer branding strategy can significantly boost the likelihood of attracting prospective employees by bolstering the company's reputation (Samoliuk et al., 2022). About 96% of workers in Vietnam express their desire to work at reputable companies and the benefits that companies guarantee to bring to candidates in the future (Recruitment Market Report, 2023). Therefore, for Vietnam, a developed labor market with potential human resources, employer branding is one of the important factors in attracting potential candidates. The hospitality industry witnesses a strong recovery path with much development potential. 2023 was a booming year for the tourist market in Vietnam; the number of foreign tourists reached 11.2 million, over 80% of the established goal. Job opportunities in hospitality have increased, and organizations must compete to win talent. Therefore, understanding the effect of employer branding will help companies in this industry design appropriate recruitment strategies to ensure sufficient human resources.

After the pandemic, the tourism industry has recovered strongly, and the demand for relaxation from domestic and international tourists is increasing. Many restaurants and hotels lack the human resources to maintain business effectively. Young employees, especially freshers or inexperienced students, have difficulty finding the right workplace because they are afraid of whether the company meets their expectations or high demands in the job descriptions. The job requirements in the hospitality industry are usually demanding, from positive attitudes to good professional skills. Employees are expected to work in shifts and under pressure. Therefore, full-time job candidates tend to carefully research and select an organization in this industry to ensure a match between the business and their job aspirations, particularly through well-known brands and word-of-mouth activities. This study will examine the correlation between employer branding and intention to apply via young candidates in hospitality. The results will identify which factors management in hospitality needs to target to attract potential candidates, specifically Generation Z. Companies in this industry can plan for HR strategies to build strong employer branding for effective recruitment. This research attempts to answer the following questions:

- Which employer branding factors affect Gen Z's application intention in Vietnamese hospitality?
- To what extent does each factor influence Gen Z's application intention in hospitality?

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Person-Organization Fit Theory

The person-organization fit theory (P-O fit) originates from the person-environment fit notion, which surfaced in the 1980s through research on stress resulting from individual-environment interaction (Caplan, 1987; Caplan & Van Harrison, 1993). The theory posits that stress originates not from the individual or the environment alone but from the degree of compatibility between the two. Edwards and Van Harrison (1993) assert that a mismatch between the individual and the environment leads to various forms of stress, including psychological, physiological, and behavioral symptoms such as dissatisfaction, boredom, anxiety, depression, and smoking. Consequently, long-term satisfaction with employment and retention are higher among employees when a good fit exists between them and their work environment. Kristof (1996) describes harmony between employees and enterprises as occurring when: (a) no less than one party meets the needs of the other, (b) both parties hold equivalent requirements, or (c) both conditions are met. P-O fit emphasizes the alignment between the personal values, beliefs, and goals of employees and those of the organization (Velez & Moradi, 2012). Job seekers are inclined to be drawn to and apply for positions at companies that share their values and conditions and align with their aspirations.

2.2 Employer Branding

Employer branding, a strategic process, involves cultivating and managing an organization's credibility as a hiring organization, shaping perceptions of current and prospective workers. A strong employer brand includes corporate values, culture, working environment, and employee experience, attracting top talent sod enhancing engagement, retention, and overall organizational success. Cable and Turban (2001) emphasize the significance of building employer brands in attracting potential candidates. The interplay between brand management

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concepts and human resource practices has been explored in numerous studies, offering perspectives on enhancing employer attractiveness through branding strategies (Ambler & Barrow, 1996; Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Barrow & Mosley, 2005; Berthon et al., 2005).

2.3 Application Intention

Intention refers to a clear awareness of desire or aversion before engaging in an action, predicting the probability of future behavioral engagement. It is a motivational force propelling individuals toward specific actions (Ajzen, 1991). In the context of this research, the term application intention is employed to describe candidates' intentions when seeking employment with the organization. These intentions pertain to applying for a position, influenced by perceptions of how well the candidate's characteristics align with those of the organization and its desired future values. These attributes encompass both the tangible and psychological needs of employees. The compatibility between these attributes and the organization's ethos fosters a sense of attraction and dedication among employees toward remaining with the organization.

2.4 Employer Reputation and Application Intention

According to Cable and Turban (2003), an employer's reputation includes the general perceptions of outsiders about the work experience within the organization, such as the company's values, work environment, and employee experiences. Ewing et al. (2002) define employer reputation as a component of corporate reputation, focusing specifically on the perspectives of potential and current employees about the organization. They contend that a solid employer reputation might give an advantage over competitors by attracting high-quality talent and encouraging employee loyalty. Lievens and Highhouse (2003) highlight the importance of employer branding in shaping employer reputation. They argue that actively managing employer branding can positively impact how job seekers perceive the organization, thereby making it more appealing as a workplace. Employer reputation is a vital element of human resource management and strategic planning. It influences recruitment and retention, employee morale, and overall organizational performance. By fostering a positive employer reputation, organizations can build a strong, motivated workforce and achieve lasting success.

Gen Z job seekers extensively investigate potential employers, evaluating aspects such as company culture, career development opportunities, and corporate social responsibility. A strong, positive reputation can thus be a significant advantage in attracting these young professionals. Furthermore, social media and online reviews are crucial in forming an employer's reputation. Platforms like LinkedIn offer insights into the workplace environment and employee satisfaction, influencing Gen Z's application decisions. Companies with positive reviews and active, positive social media presence are more likely to attract Gen Z candidates. Therefore, in the hospitality sector, where customer service and employee satisfaction are closely linked, cultivating a positive employer reputation is essential for attracting and retaining Gen Z talent. Thus, the first hypothesis is stated as the following:

H1: Employer reputation positively influences Gen Z's application intentions in hospitality.

2.5 Working Environment and Application Intention

According to Barbera (2014), the working environment encompasses both tangible and intangible elements. Office design, temperature, ventilation, and level of noise are examples of tangible features that have an immediate impact on worker comfort and productivity. Conversely, intangible elements pertain to the organizational culture, values, leadership style, and interpersonal relationships within the workplace. The working environment significantly influences employee engagement, motivation, and job satisfaction (Judge & Robbins, 2017). Moreover, the working environment is not static but continuously evolving. Changes in technology, organizational structure, and societal norms can impact workplace dynamics, especially in the hospitality industry. Thus, organizations must remain vigilant and proactive in adapting their working environments to meet their employees' evolving needs and preferences. Especially in a competitive industry like hospitality, where customer experience is paramount, having a motivated and dedicated workforce can provide a significant competitive advantage. A positive working environment can differentiate a hospitality establishment from its competitors, attracting both customers and top talent.

Generation Z is known for its digital proficiency, pursuit of meaningful employment, and emphasis on achieving a work-life balance. In the hospitality domain, where customer service and immersive experiences are pivotal, the nature of the working environment significantly impacts employees' interest in joining the business (Chi & Gursoy, 2009). These studies highlight elements like job independence, flexible schedules, and avenues for honing skills as key attractors for workers in hospitality roles. A positive work setting characterized by supportive management, collaborative team dynamics, and a culture fostering innovation enhances Gen Z's perception of the industry as a promising career path (Chan et al., 2020). Thus, nurturing a working environment conducive to Generation Z's values and preferences is pivotal for attracting and retaining talent within the hospitality sector. Based on the above discussion, the next hypothesis is established as the following:

H2: The working environment positively influences Gen Z's application intention in hospitality.

2.6 Task Attractiveness and Application Intention

Task attractiveness is a complex concept in psychology and organizational behavior, involving various aspects that shape how individuals perceive the desirability of engaging in specific tasks. Deci and Ryan (1985) argued that tasks seen as inherently enjoyable, challenging, and aligned with individuals' values and interests are more likely to be attractive. The expectancy-value theory highlights the significance of tasks' perceived usefulness and value in determining individuals' motivation and engagement (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). Individual differences also significantly affect how people perceive a task's attractiveness. For example, studies on goal orientation indicate that individuals with a mastery orientation may find tasks more appealing when they view them as opportunities for learning and skill enhancement (Dweck & Leggett, 1988). Tasks perceived as challenging yet manageable and offering opportunities for skill development are often seen as more attractive (Grant & Parker, 2009).

Gen Z values factors like work-life balance, task attractiveness, and a positive working environment (ManpowerGroup, 2023). Consequently, tasks perceived as meeting these criteria, such as roles offering flexibility, skill enhancement prospects, and vibrant

organizational culture, tend to attract applications from this demographic. Ariza-Montes et al. (2022) inform a positive association between task attractiveness and application intention within Gen Z cohorts in the hospitality sector. Tasks perceived as both challenging and rewarding, like customer-facing roles with opportunities for creativity and interpersonal engagement, hold appeal for this particular workforce. Recognizing and leveraging the nexus between task attractiveness and application intention is crucial for hospitality recruiters seeking to secure and protect outstanding Gen Z personnel in an atmosphere of intense competition. Based on the discussion above, the next hypothesis is established as:

H3: Task attractiveness positively influences the application intentions of Gen Z in hospitality.

2.7 Career Opportunities and Application Intention

Career opportunities are often defined as the various possibilities for employment and advancement available to individuals within a particular field or industry. One common definition emphasizes the harmony of a person's beliefs, passions, and skills with the requirements and opportunities presented by different career paths (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Career opportunities can be seen as pathways for personal and professional growth, allowing individuals to develop their skills, pursue their passions, and achieve their goals (Arthur et al., 1995). These opportunities are not static but evolve in response to economic, technological, and societal changes (Savickas, 2005). Career opportunities are influenced by various factors, including education, experience, networking, and market demand (Mitchell, 1999). Globalization and technological advancements have expanded the scope of career opportunities, allowing individuals to work remotely, collaborate with colleagues worldwide, and access previously inaccessible markets (Bakker et al., 2020). This interconnectedness has created new possibilities for innovation, entrepreneurship, and cross-cultural collaboration in various industries.

Gen Z, being the first generation born into a digital world, is known for its adeptness with technology, entrepreneurial mindset, and quest for fulfilling professional experiences. Within hospitality, the availability of career prospects significantly influences their inclination toward applying for jobs. Smith and Strawser (2022) emphasize Gen Z's concern about career growth and skill enhancement when evaluating employment options, indicating the importance of clear pathways for advancement within the hospitality sector. Additionally, the industry's flexibility, including remote work options and diverse job roles, resonates with Gen Z's desire for autonomy and a balanced lifestyle. Therefore, to effectively attract and retain Gen Z talent, the author argues that hospitality organizations must carefully design and offer attractive career opportunities to prospective Gen Z employees. The following hypothesis is established:

H4: Career opportunities positively influence Gen Z's application intentions in hospitality.

## 2.8 Payment Attractiveness and Application Intention

Payment attractiveness, a multifaceted concept in the context of compensation and benefits, links to the appeal and competitive edge of a company's remuneration packages. It encompasses the monetary salary and additional benefits that make the overall compensation enticing to current and prospective employees. According to Armstrong and Taylor (2014), payment attractiveness is a crucial factor in talent acquisition and retention, influencing how

employees perceive the value of their work and their loyalty to the organization. Several components contribute to payment attractiveness. Base salary remains a fundamental aspect, while the total rewards package, including bonuses, health benefits, retirement plans, and other non-monetary perks like flexible working hours and professional development opportunities, enhances its allure (Gerhart & Milkovich, 1990). Companies striving for high payment attractiveness often benchmark against competitors to ensure their offerings are compelling. They also continually consider employee feedback and market trends to refine their compensation strategies. This holistic approach attracts top talent and boosts morale, productivity, and organizational commitment (Armstrong & Taylor, 2014).

Gen Z is attracted to businesses that genuinely care about p remuneration package, ensuring certainty in life and work. There is a positive association between pay attractiveness and intention to apply, showing that payment attractiveness attracts potential Gen Z candidates through factors such as compensation, benefits, and good perks (Agatha & Setiorini, 2024; Nguyen et al., 2022). Through the design and delivery of payment attractiveness, hospitality businesses can attract potential Gen Z candidates and effectively contribute to promoting recruitment strategies. Therefore, the next hypothesis is established as:

H5: Payment attractiveness positively influences Gen Z's application intentions in hospitality.

Figure 1: The Proposed Research Model
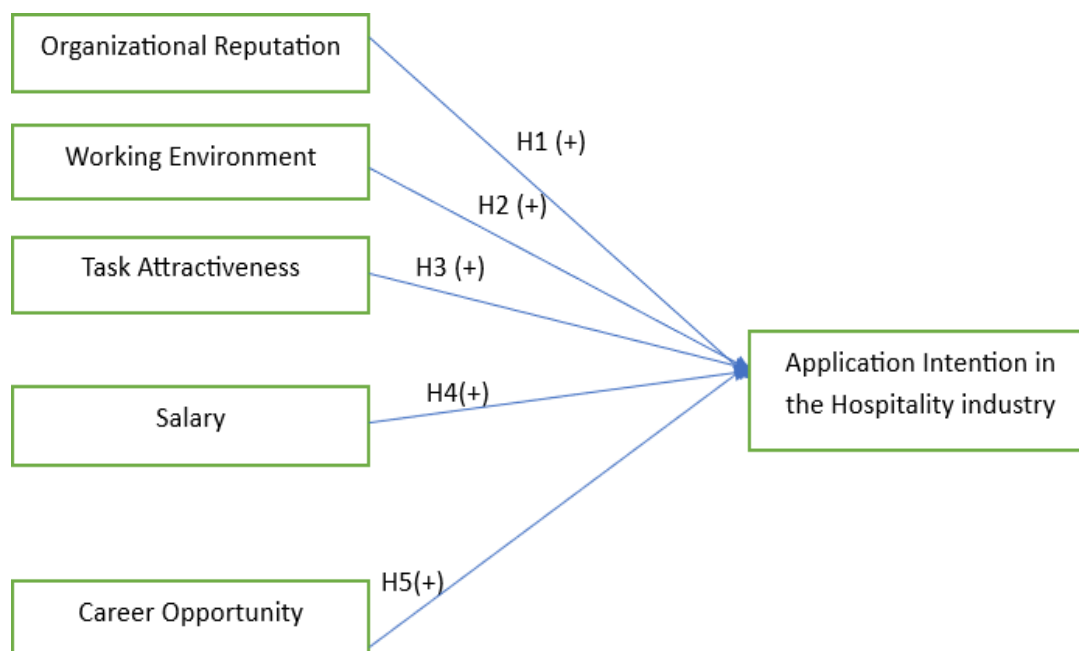
3.0 RESEARCH METHOD

3.1 Sampling Technique and Sample Size

This study applies a quantitative research method. This approach constitutes an empirical investigation tailored to scrutinize and comprehend a phenomenon, typically discernible through extensive surveying or testing of a significant populace (Cooper & Schindler, 2014).

Convenience and snowball sampling were adopted to reach the target participants for the time and cost savings. Participants are Gen Z people (those aged between 18 and 27) who wish to work in hospitality in Vietnam. The survey has two questions to filter the right participants: (1) Were you born between 1997 and 2006? and (2) Do you plan to work in the hospitality sector? People can continue the survey if they select "yes" to the above questions. Comrey and Lee (2013) suggest the rule for a sample size in the following: 50 (very poor); 100 (poor); 200 (fair); 300 (good); 500 (very good); over 1,000 (excellent). In this study, the author determined a sample size of 500 participants.

3.2 Questionnaire Design

Six variables in the research model are measured via 21 observable items, all using the Likert scale (from 1: totally disagree to 5: totally agree). Employee reputation (ER) includes four items from Collins (2007). Another four items to measure working environment (WE) were adapted from Collins (2007) and Harris & Fink (1987). Five items to measure task attractiveness were adopted from Lievens and Highhouse (2003). Career opportunities (CO), payment attractiveness (PA), and application intention (AI), each including four items that were adopted from Lievens and Highhouse (2003).

3.3 Data Collection

A pilot test with 24 participants was conducted to check whether the questionnaire was reasonable and error-free, making data collection easy and obtaining accurate results (Lavrakas, 2008). Afterwards, the researcher collected data through Google Forms that was sent to Gen Z participants who study hospitality management or work in the hospitality sector based on the author's business network. The data was collected from April to May 2024, and the author received 554 valid responses after two months.

4.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Demographic statistics

Among the 554 survey participants, 164 were males and 372 were females, accounting for 29.6% and 67.15%, respectively. 18 participants did not reveal their gender, accounting for 3.25%. There were 444 people aged between 18 and 22; the rest were between 23 and 27 years old. 429 respondents graduated from colleges; 88 participants graduated from high school; 21 got a master's degree; and 16 did not want to identify their educational background. Additionally, 213 participants planned to find a job in hotel management, 176 wanted to search for jobs in tourism, and 165 intended to look for jobs in food and beverage. It can be concluded that the target participants were appropriate for the survey, with all Gen Z respondents showing the intention to work in hospitality.

4.2 Reliability Test

A scale is reliable if its Cronbach's Alpha is 0.7 or greater (Hair et al., 2009; Nunnally, 1978). Table 1 exhibits Cronbach's Alphas of the six constructs in the study, all greater than 0.7. No deleted items were in the reliability test, confirming the measurement's reliability.

Table 1 Reliability Test

Construct	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Employer Reputation (ER)	4	.874
Working Environment (WE)	4	.869
Task Attractiveness (TA)	5	.904
Career Opportunities (CO)	4	.877
Payment Attractiveness	4	.893
Application Intention	5	.888

4.3 Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)

Factor analysis is satisfactory if the KMO coefficient equals or exceeds 0.5. There is a correlation between the observed variables, as demonstrated by the significance of the Bartlett test (sig Bartlett's test < 0.05). Figures 2 and 3 below show the KMO coefficients and Bartlett's Test for the independent and dependent variables.

Figure 2: KMO and Barlette's Test for the Independent Variables

KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.874
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	1462.915
	df	10
	Sig.	<.001

Figure 3: KMO and Barlette's Test for the dependent variable

KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.874
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	1462.915
	df	10
	Sig.	<.001

4.4 Correlation Analysis

Table 2 presents the correlations between the independent variable and the dependent variable. All the significance values are smaller than 0.001, confirming that all independent variables correlate with the dependent variable in the research model.

Table 2: Correlation Test

Correlations

		AI	ER	WE	TA	CO	PA
AI	Pearson Correlation	1	.712**	.732**	.672**	.679**	.713**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001
	N	554	554	554	554	554	554
ER	Pearson Correlation	.712**	1	.704**	.690**	.652**	.660**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001		<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001
	N	554	554	554	554	554	554
WE	Pearson Correlation	.732**	.704**	1	.681**	.721**	.678**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001		<.001	<.001	<.001
	N	554	554	554	554	554	554
TA	Pearson Correlation	.672**	.690**	.681**	1	.692**	.560**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001	<.001		<.001	<.001
	N	554	554	554	554	554	554
CO	Pearson Correlation	.679**	.652**	.721**	.692**	1	.684**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001		<.001
	N	554	554	554	554	554	554
PA	Pearson Correlation	.713**	.660**	.678**	.560**	.684**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	
	N	554	554	554	554	554	554

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

4.5 Regression Analysis

Table 3 presents the ANOVA results. The F-test significance value is smaller than 0.001, demonstrating that the regression model fits the data.

Table 3: ANOVA Test

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	219.296	5	43.859	227.866	<.001^b
	Residual	105.478	548	.192		
	Total	324.775	553			

a. Dependent Variable: AI

b. Predictors: (Constant), PA, TA, ER, CO, WE

Table 4: Model Summary

Model Summary^b

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.822^a	.675	.672	.43872	1.963

a. Predictors: (Constant), PA, TA, ER, CO, WE

b. Dependent Variable: AI

The adjusted R-square equals 0.672, meaning that five independent variables in the research model (ER, WE, TA, CO, and PA) explain 67.2% of the total variance of the dependent variable (AI).

Table 5: Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.281	.112		2.511	.012
	ER	.202	.040	.198	5.006	<.001
	WE	.241	.042	.237	5.742	<.001
	TA	.167	.038	.168	4.379	<.001
	CO	.072	.040	.073	1.793	.074
	PA	.254	.034	.278	7.449	<.001

a. Dependent Variable: AI

Except for the t-value of CO, which is greater than 0.05, other t-values of ER, WE, TA, and PA are below 0.05, indicating their statistical significance and confirming the linear regression with AI. Therefore, hypothesis 4 is rejected. The standardized regression equation can be formulated as follows:

$$AI = 0.198 * ER + 0.237 * WE + 0.168 * TA + 0.278 * PA$$

It can be concluded that employer reputation, working environment, task attractiveness, and payment attractiveness positively influence Gen Z's intention to apply for hospitality. On the other hand, career opportunities do not play an important role in Gen Z's intention to apply for jobs in this business sector.

Payment attractiveness is the factor that most positively influences Gen Z when seeking jobs in hospitality. This finding is consistent with previous studies (Aiman-Smith et al., 2001; Baum & Kabst, 2013). Gen Z cares about their salary because they want to receive compensation that is commensurate with their effort. Living expenses have increased rapidly after COVID-19. Thus, attractive compensation packages ensure employees' quality. Salary and benefits have become Gen Z's top concerns. Businesses in hospitality need to research the market and design competitive remuneration. Information about the payment should be clearly delivered throughout the recruitment process. Besides the periodical salary, organizations in this industry should be attentive in designing benefits and rewards since jobs regularly require shifts or overtime. Benefits that support employee health and work-life balance can be some suggestions for Gen Z's concerns.

The working environment positively impacts Gen Z candidates' job applications. This finding is aligned with the previous studies (Baum & Kabst, 2013; Chapman et al., 2005; Tuan & Minh, 2022). Gen Z intends to work in a comfortable environment with proficient and supportive colleagues. In this field, employees work with local and international customers. Businesses that invest in construction design and offer a modern and pleasant working atmosphere may gain advantages in attracting potential candidates.

Employer reputation is the third factor that positively impacts Gen Z's application intention. Gen Z desires to work at prestigious organizations because of their good branding. Having little experience in the workplace, Gen Z tends to seek prominent organizations in hospitality to reduce the risk in job choices. Working in a popular business with good branding is also a source of pride because Gen Z employees can talk about it with their families and friends. In addition, employer reputation helps Gen Z employees beautify their job resumes, preparing for their future careers. Employers in hospitality should explicitly communicate the company's values, vision, and missions through their web pages and social media channels such as LinkedIn, Facebook, or TikTok because Gen Z tends to search for information and read news from these sources. Short video clips with interactive information are helpful in attracting Gen Z. Companies should promote cooperative relationships with universities and professional colleges to organize job fairs and career seminars to advertise their brands and reach potential candidates.

Our findings show that career opportunities do not affect Gen Z's intention to apply for a hospitality position, extending evidence from recent research in Vietnam (Tuan & Minh, 2022). Unlike their predecessors, Gen Z still explores the world and places themselves in different roles in business. At their young ages, Gen Z can change jobs frequently until they find the ones that best fit their demands.

5.0 RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

This study enhances our understanding of the Person-Organization fit theory by extending its application to Gen Z workers. Focusing on employer branding, the research indicates that payment attractiveness, working environment, employer reputation, and task attractiveness positively influence Gen Z's intention to apply to the hospitality industry. Career opportunities, however, are not a strong factor in determining Gen Z's intention to apply for a job. These findings provide insight into Gen Z's attitudes and behaviors when selecting a job, helping hospitality businesses tailor their recruitment strategies. Identifying the most influential factors will assist employers by driving their resources to the right activities that best benefit talent attraction. Therefore, they can design and implement HR planning to remain competitive in a highly demanding hospitality industry.

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