Social Media Effect on Gen Z's Perception of Employer Branding

Research Thesis

Course title: Human Resource Management

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the influence of social media on Generation Z's perception of employer branding, focusing on how digital platforms shape their understanding and engagement with potential employers. As Generation Z (born between 1997 and 2012) increasingly enters the workforce, due to their unique characteristics and digital-savvy nature, it is necessary to look into the role social media plays in their job-searching behaviours and employer evaluations. This study explores the extent to which social media reviews, comments, and employer-generated content impact Generation Z's perceptions of employer brand, work culture, and employment desirability.

The research is structured around several key areas: the habits and preferences of Gen Z regarding social media use in job seeking, the influence of social media on employer branding, and the effects of online reviews and influencer on Gen Z's application decisions. A qualitative approach was adopted, utilizing in-depth survey to collect data for this research.

Findings reveal that social media platforms serve as a primary source of information for Generation Z, with significant reliance on sites such as LinkedIn, Instagram, and Glassdoor for gathering insights about potential employers. Reviews and comments on social media can form an initial impression of employer brand but not powerful enough to influence their decision. The study also highlights the importance of existing employees in shaping employer brand perceptions, noting that candidate experience is crucial in relation to accepting an offer.

Moreover, the research identifies key factors that Gen Z considers when evaluating employer brands on social media, including organisational values, candidate experience, and opportunities for professional development. These factors are

critical in shaping Gen Z's perception of an employer and influence their decision-making process when applying for jobs.

This dissertation concludes with the genuine effect of comments and reviews on social media platforms, and the vital role of candidate experience in employer branding and the recruitment process. Findings also point out the significant influence of current employees and future trend of using social media and influencers as tools of employer branding. As a result, this research recommends organisations to employ social media as promotional tools to promote core value; collaborating with current influencers or cultivating employees to be employee influencers to attract talents of Generation Z; and enhancing candidate's experience to establish a desirable employer brand.

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This section is a supplement to the main assignment, to be used if AI was used in any capacity in the creation of your assignment; if you have queries about how to do this, please contact your lecturer. For an example of how to fill these sections out, please click here.
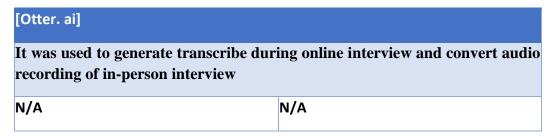
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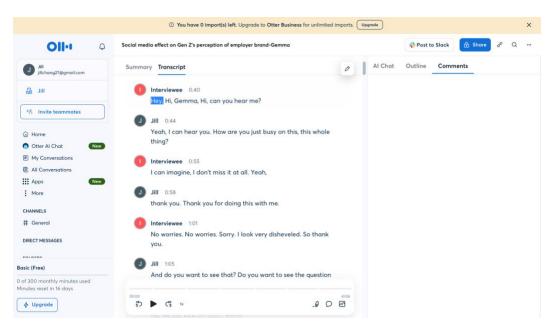| Tool Name	Brief Description	Link to tool
Otter.ai	Transcript conversion	https://otter.ai/home

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Table of Content

Chapter 1: Background

1.1 Generation Z

From Silent Generation, Baby Boomers, Generation X, Generation Y, to Generation Z (Gen Z), there are five generations that are collaborating in the modern workforce (Flores, 2023). Among all the generations, Gen Z is the youngest generation as well as the most influential generation to the future labour market (Edward, 2023). In respect to the year of Gen Z, there are many different definition periods, it can be loosely defined from 1995 to 2010, or from 1997 to 2012. Considering the political, economic, social, and technological factors, Dimock (2019) stated that 1997 is the year where Generation Z begins, therefore, the definition of Generation Z in this research is people who are born between 1997 to 2012. As this group of people are born and grown up with smartphones, social media, and advanced technology (Flores, 2023), which makes them a hypercognitive generation that is comfortable combining online and offline experiences, who gather information from a variety of sources and cross referencing it (Francis, and Hoefel, 2018), Gen Z are also known as the Digital Natives.

By 2024, the age of Gen Z is between 12 to 27, which means that some of Gen Z have entered the labour market. A report from the World Economic forum (2021) predicted that by 2025, Gen Z will make up about 27% of the workforce. Flores (2023) also indicated Gen Z is going to make up more than quarter of the US workforce. In that sense, it is critical to understand the expectation and aspirations of this new generation of employees, and how to attract, retain and communicate with them (Rzemieniak, and Wawer, 2021). The first connection between organisations and young talents is recruitment. In relation to searching for a job, whether it is a part-time or full-time job, members of Gen Z have distinct perspectives and manners on selecting future employers. Various research has

shown that young talents tend to find a job that fits their personal values and lifestyle, supports the development of careers, and with prestige and good reputation (Carbajal-Cribillero, Javier-Niño, Mäckelmann, and Gallardo-Echenique, 2022; Mărginean, 2021). Consequently, it is vital for employers to tailor their recruitment process in respect of communicating values align with their expectations, and the diversity of their genders. Such factors will affect Gen Z's perception of employer brand while seeking a future employer (Rzemieniak, and Wawer, 2021).

The other significant characteristic of members of Gen Z is related to the nature of being digital natives. As it is aforementioned, social media and advanced technology are full of Gen Z's life, thus, they tend to use social media platforms as a source of collecting information such as organisational culture, vision, value, and workplace, etc (Francis, and Hoefel, 2018). More than that, they also make decisions based on comments, experiences, and satisfactions shared by other people, whether it is regarding to daily decisions or career-related decisions. Generally, this cohort is identified as easily being affected by social media and friends (Wübbelt, and Tirrel, 2022). Research revealed that more than 40% job seekers use social media to search for job vacancies in 2019, and there is a high possibility that job seekers refuse to potential employer due to bad comments on social media platform (Jobvite, 2019).

1.2 Employer Brand and Employer Branding

The initial concept of employer brand came out in the early 1990 as an extension of organisational brand in marketing, which use the ideas of product branding to promote employer brands. (Taylor, 2021, Backhaus, 2004). Since then, employer branding has been widely used in human resources area as a strategy to attract potential talents and retain current employees (Sengupta, Bamel, and Singh, 2015). Employer brand can be seen as employer image that is the result of combining the

brief perceptions that different stakeholders have of specific aspects of the business's value as an employer (Lievens, and Slaughter, 2016). On the other hand, employer branding is the process of creating an identifiable and recognisable employer brand, which involves sharing a distinct perspective of what makes a company attractive as an employer of choice both inside and outside the organisation (Backhaus, 2004). An increasingly competitive job market has made it necessary to attract and retain the best workers, and employer branding is a relatively new strategy for pursuing it. Employer branding and advertising will become more and more crucial as companies look to both recruit and retain current employees (Eger, Micik, and Rehor, 2018). Employer branding can not only help organisations outstand from its competitors but also assist to win the ongoing talent war as an instrument (Backhaus, and Tikoo, 2004; Sullivan, 2002).

The purpose of promoting employer brand externally is to position the company as an employer of choice, which helps it recruit in the best people. It is assumed that the brand's distinctiveness enables the company to hire unique human resources. Additionally, after being drawn in by the brand, prospective employees form opinions about working for the company that they will maintain throughout their employment, reinforcing their dedication to the company and supporting its values (Backhaus, and Tikoo,2004). However, jobseekers' decision-making process may be influenced by the employer brand (Wilden, Gudergan, and Lings, 2010). Recruitment process is part of the employer branding as well as the first impression of organisations to prospective employees. The recruitment process and employees in charge of communicating with applicants are regarded as essential elements of an organisation's employer brand (Russell, and Brannan, 2016). Rynes, and Bretz (1991) found that even an organisation with a good reputation among job seekers and labour market in the past, unpleasant experience of candidates with unprofessional or impolite recruiters could lead to negative brand image. Thus, it

is likely that while the organisation may have a positive reputation among the public, a particular individual may have a different opinion based on individual experiences (negative image), or vice versa (Lievens, and Slaughter, 2016). Prospective workers were able to learn vital details about the personality of the organisation from employer brand, which made it easier to evaluate how well they fit in (Russell, and Brannan, 2016). As a result, employer brand can affect job seekers' opinion on searching future employer, in addition, recruiting process and candidate experience play significant roles on employer branding.

1.3 Social media platform in recruiting process

Nowadays, social media is broadly used by various areas as it is a common channel of communication between young generation such as millennials and Gen Z. Social media platforms are web-based platforms which enable two or more individuals to communicate or exchange information (Andrew, 2012). In respect of human resources, social media platforms are an efficient recruitment tool with a more direct and focused approach in the current technologically sophisticated era (Lal, and Aggarwal, 2013) in relation to e-recruitment. E-recruitment employs web-based resources, such as an organization's internal or public website, to fill positions. E-recruitment involves advertising, screening, and tracking applicants; selecting, and either offering or rejecting candidates (Armstrong, 2006). More than that, the use of social media platforms has become crucial for developing an employer brand. These platforms' rapidity and connectivity increase their reach in terms of potential candidates (Lal, and Aggarwal, 2013).

There are few social media platforms that are commonly used by jobseeker and recruiters, including Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram and Glassdoor. Although Facebook and Instagram are sociable platforms, there still are some organisations establish their own page and use it to advertise job vacancies, promote organisational culture, and communicate with potential employees or applicants. LinkedIn is the most well-known job search platform. Not only employers and organisations can build up employer brand but also individuals establish personal brand from their career experiences. Thus, LinkedIn is the most popular networking website for seeking employment due to its large database (Lal, and Aggarwal, 2013). Glassdoor is a platform where individuals can search jobs and share their review and experience of employment or interview.

Nonetheless, Davison, Maraist and Bing (2011) argue that people may create a fake image, whether it is good or bad, depending on intended viewer, also it is unclear exactly which type of information is provided accurately and which information is not, such as employment experience, degree held, etc. Similarly, those reviews or work experience on social media could be fake, and very objective.

In summary, it is obvious that a clear connection between younger generations' job search behaviour and the use of social media, thus, it will be beneficial for companies to develop strategies on it in order to be present on as many social media platforms as possible. Furthermore, the internet profile of organisations also has an impact on the choice of potential employer for young talents (Karácsony, Izsák, and Vasa, 2020).

1.4 Research Problem

The concept of employer brand and using social media as recruiting method have been discussed for a while and most of previous research proved that organisation can build employer brand via social media, further, to attract suitable talents.

Nevertheless, followed by the emergence of Gen Z, who could be the majority in the future, a new habit of using social media to seek job appears where social media is no longer a platform for organisation to establish unique image to attract potential staff as well as to push off potential talents. Therefore, as aforementioned, it is critical to understand Gen Z's perception of employer brand portrayed on social media platforms.

1.5 Research Aim

This research aims to understand the genuine effects of social media on Gen Z's perception of employer brand. This research aims to discover how significant impact that social media has on young jobseekers' decision on choosing their future employer.

By examine the effect of social media on Gen Z, it provides direction to organisations on developing strategies of employer branding and recruitment process to attract young talents. With improvement of employer branding and recruiting process, it can be aligned with organisational strategy to achieve business objectives and core value effectively.

1.6 Methodology of the Research

Qualitative approach is going to be employed in this research by interviewing Gen Z workers who are currently employed or have experiences of searching job on social media. Throughout interviews with Gen Z workers, it can be clarified that the genuine impact of social media and identify the direction for company to work on their employer brand.

1.7 Structure of Dissertation

This dissertation is organised into six chapters, each chapter has distinct subjects and purpose.

Chapter 1: Introduction
This chapter provides background of this research, research problem, research aims, and research methodology.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter reviews previous research in respect of Gen Z's perception of employer brand, relativeness between employer brand and social media, and the effect of social media on Gen Z.

Chapter 3 Research Methodology

This chapter details suitable research philosophy and methodology of this study as well as targeted sample and data collection process.

Chapter 4 Findings and Analysis

This chapter outlines findings from main data. Findings are organised and presented thematically with participants' comments as quotations and explanations to each theme.

Chapter 5 Discussion

This chapter discusses the achievement of research objectives as well as findings of this research and previous literatures.

Chapter 6 Conclusion

The final chapter provides theoretical contributions of this dissertation, and practical implications and recommendations.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews the previous research on Gen Z's habit of using social media for job searching, the correlation between social media and employer branding, and Gen Z's expectation towards future employment and how they perceive employer brand.

2.2 Gen Z's usage of social media

As precedingly mentioned, members of Generation Z born or grow up with advanced technology and various social media, so researchers also called them Digital Natives (Barhate, and Dirani, 2022). With the nature of Digital Natives, social media usage comes naturally for Gen Zers (Halová, and Müller, 2021). Social media platforms are virtual platforms that enable individuals to provide and acquire information they need in multiple respect. (Andrews, 2012).

Nowadays, there are multiple social media platforms that are used by Gen Zers with divergent functions. Instagram is the network that Generation Z uses the most (Carbajal-Cribillero, M. et al., 2022; Halová, and Müller, 2021). It is mostly used by Generation Z to follow celebrities, interesting businesses/brands, and friends' updates (Halová, and Müller, 2021). Sullivan (2002) added that Gen Z users mostly use Instagram, WhatsApp, YouTube, and Snapchat for private purposes, while Facebook is rarely used by Gen Z. Nevertheless, Gen Zers are aware that social media can be used to perform a company search (Sullivan, 2002). They believed that using social media for job searches allowed people to learn about potential employers on an insider level and establish connections with existing co-workers (Wübbelt, and Tirrel, 2022). According to Newcombe (2014) young people entering the workforce with expectation that organisations to be active on social

media whether it is about recruiting or internal messaging. However, when it comes to job searching, LinkedIn is believed to be the most reliable site where recruiters can reach a wider audience and find their ideal applicant (Mohamed, El-Menawy and Salah Saleh, 2023). LinkedIn is a highly utilised social media platform created especially to link employers and job seekers (Karácsony et al., 2020), on LinkedIn, organisations can build its own page with relevant information such as organisational culture, working environment, business value, and job opportunities. More than that, job seekers can also build their personal page with professional background to attract potential employers. Through LinkedIn, potential applicants can learn more about a company's personnel and get in touch with them to learn more about it. This direct approach of contact precisely allows existing employees to discuss their experiences at work (Carbajal-Cribillero, M. et al., 2022). The latest and popular job searching website is Glassdoor., On Glassdoor, job seekers can not only find job vacancy and the information about organisation, but also reviews and comments from people who previously or currently work in that organisation.

The popularity of the rating website like Glassdoor resulted from the Gen Z's habit of using social media. Most of job seekers will look into the company and the position they are interested in before they apply (Grossman, 2022). The other impactful habit is that Gen Z users share experiences concerning interview and employment on social media or rating websites like Glassdoor and LinkedIn (Miles, and McCamey, 2018). Some research stated that Gen Z are more likely to share negative than positive content on social media (Sullivan, 2002; Wübbelt and Tirrel, 2022). Those negative experiences posted on social media platforms as well as reviews influence prospective employees in the future. Job seekers might drop out of the application process because of negative comments (Sullivan, 2002; Miles, and McCamey, 2018). Interestingly, Grossman (2022) conducted a survey to investigate the behaviour of sharing experiences, in 2021, there are 75 percent of

candidates share positive experience with their inner circle like families, close friends and close peers, and more than half candidates share their negative. With the regards to share experiences publicly, which means posting review on website like Glassdoor, or on personal social media sites, only 50 percent of candidates are willing to share, and less than 40 percent candidates want to share negative experience publicly (Grossman, 2022). Lee and Tao (2020) also argued the negative social media engagement of employee is less frequent than the positive presence; unless they are extremely motivated to do so, they might not openly discuss unpleasant aspect of an organisation as well as some people deem employee's negative word-of-mouth as unethical.

Despite Halová, and Müller (2021) argued that Gen Z members are not accustomed to using these platforms for job searches and Facebook groups with specific purposes are the only exceptions. A survey done by Karácsony et al., (2020) proves that more and more small and large businesses use Facebook for recruitment and over half of respondents said they have already gotten a job offer through the social media platform. In their research, Facebook (34.4%), LinkedIn (26.9%), and Instagram (12.4%) are the most popular platforms that are used by Gen Z for job searching.

2.3 Social media and employer branding

Social media not only benefit potential employees, but it is also an effective recruitment technique with a more direct and targeted approach in the modern, technologically advanced era (Lal, and Aggarwal, 2013). The amount of people using social media on recruiting is rising rapidly (Davison, Maraist, and Bing, 2011). Result from this tendency, more and more recruiters recently deem social media as a crucial component of hiring procedure (Koch, Gerber, and de Klerk,

2018; Sullivan, 2002). Lal, and Aggarwal (2013) asserted that utilising social media channel is now essential for establishing an employer brand. With the rapidity and increasing connectivity of these platforms, companies can expand their talent pool effectively. The rapid growth of social media and the growing amount of people using social media for job searching and gaining employed information indicate that employers must accommodate social media as tools of recruitment (Karácsony et al., 2020).

According to the survey by Halová, and Müller (2021), companies not only use social media to advertise products, services but also, they use it for hiring. While one of respondents uses LinkedIn exclusively for work, the others use Instagram, Facebook, and LinkedIn (Halová and Müller, 2021). Since the primary purpose of using social media in recruiting is to attract Gen Z, the main social media platforms that are used by modern organisations is similar to Gen Z's preference. Among all the social media platforms, LinkedIn plays a crucial role in recruitment process as well as an important platform for recruiters and job seekers (Koch et al., 2018). Another study additionally reveals that LinkedIn is the most common networking site for job seekers due to its large user base and extra amenities like job highlighting and customised email alerts (Lal, and Aggarwal, 2013). Sullivan (2002) also mentioned that Gen Z members might be impacted by ratings from the employer rating website such as Glassdoor. Additionally, more recruiters in other research also recognise the potential of social medias to attract both active, passive, and semi-passive candidates (Koch et al., 2018). As a result, many researchers strengthen the unreplaceable role of social media as a channel to connect employers and talents in procurement at the moment and in the future. In addition to interaction with potential talents, organisations must create quick response systems since candidates anticipate an instant reaction time. In the future, it should be

remembered that channel popularity is always shifting and that choosing the right channels requires consideration of the quick speed (Sullivan, 2002).

Employer branding is a new aspect of recruitment in recent research. Sivertzen, Nilsen, and Olafsen (2013) define employer branding as a process of creating an employer identity to target current and potential employees and differentiate organisation from competitors. Employer branding is used to increase employer awareness and enhance employer attractiveness (Sivertzen et al., 2013). Mohamed et al. (2023) suggest that companies must adopt a more flexible strategy to improve their brands' appeal to younger job seekers if they want to stay competitive. Findings suggest that social media can enhance an organization's corporate image, which raises the possibility of recruiting retaining more candidates (Mohamed et al., 2023). Miles, and McCamey (2018) further suggested that maintaining employer brand and company reputation as an appealing employer on social media become gradually more important. Organisations may use it for posting content and reach a wider audience. Because the format is dynamic, rapid and visual, which could be easily accepted by interviewees (Carbajal-Cribillero, M. et al., 2022; Halová, and Müller, 2021). Halová, and Müller (2021) agreed that in order to attract Generation Z's interest and make them want to follow the firm on social media, they must produce engaging content. It is essential to add an assessment to company's current recruitment career website so that employer brand could be more successfully expressed (Gunesh and Maheshwari, 2019). Organisations need to figure out how to leverage social media to draw in young candidates for open positions. It seems like these methods of communication have not yet reached their full potential (Halová, and Müller, 2021).

Although organisations can build a favourable, desirable and positive employer brand on company website and recruiting website to attract potential employees,

there are several factors may affect job seekers such as staff word of mouth, candidate experience, and employee influencer. Torrington (2008) pointed out a significant amount of recruitment occurs informally through word of mouth; thus, it is equally critical that current employees are informed of their employer's brand proposition. Establishing and capitalising word of mouth is an efficient and economical mean to broaden candidate pools (Collins, and Stevens, 2002). Staff's word of mouth can be referred as a process by which former and current employees share information and thoughts about the company both inside and outside their social network (Keeling, McGoldrick, and Sadhu, 2013). Lee, and Tao (2020) found that the negative word-of-mouth carried by employees via in-person interactions substantially decrease the positive views and purchase intentions of customers, similarly to the intention of applying for job. Hence, employer should make better use of internal resources, such as endorsement from existing employees in particular word-of-mouth now gain more trust (Pham and Tran, 2021). Keeling et al. (2013) suggest employers must ensure employees provide correct information about organisation since job seekers approach employees for information regarding company and it can enhance company's appeal as a choice of employer, further improve employer brand.

Second effect on employer brand is candidate experience. Driscoll (2023) emphasize the connection between candidate experience and employer brand, each step of recruitment process affects employer brand. Candidates experience relates to the interaction between applicants and organisations, such as recruiters, hiring managers, the business and the brand, during the recruitment process including social, digital, and in-person experiences (Grossman, 2022). These interactions occur from the initial application until the point whether candidates proceed in the process and receive offer ultimately, or candidates stop in any stage due to organisation's decision (Grossman, 2022). Grossman (2022) pointed out that public

reviews of candidate experience influence potential applicants' decision, he further quoted data from Society of Human Resources Management, more than 80 percent of jobseekers depend on public reviews to make their decision on applying or not. Carbajal-Cribillero, M. et al. (2022) emphasised an organisation's brand could be harmed if an employee uses social media to complain a company. Additionally, an employee may resign and then voice their displeasure if the organisation fails to give applicants accurate information about the position. Grossman (2022) concluded the importance of sustainably improving and investing candidate experience can produce higher return on employer brand and bring quality of candidates.

The last impact, which is also a brand-new concept, is employee influencer. Influencer marketing, along with the influence of family and friends, has a significant impact upon potential applicants (Sullivan, 2002; Wübbelt, and Tirrel, 2022). Employee influencers are content creators who use their workplace as a content and mean to influence, impact, and persuade internal and/or external audiences on social media (Jacobson, Gomes Rinaldi, and Rudkowski, 2023). Researchers also draw a clear difference between employees and employee influencers. The latter provide content about their company with the aim of influencing both internal and external audiences, while the former do not always post about their employer (Jacobson et al., 2023). Every employee is likely to become an employee influencer, and they could have different influence on audience depending on various factors and individual characteristics (Jacobson et al., 2023). By sharing the experiences as employees, their relationships with the community, and other enjoyable moments such as supporting the company culture and standing up for co-workers, employee influencers express their feelings about their workplace (Jacobson et al., 2023).

The research outcomes of Jacobson et al. (2023) indicate that employees have an enormous effect on how the public perceives their employer among a range of audiences, including immediate social network friends and family, internal stakeholders such as current employees, and external stakeholders such as current and potential customers and employees. Such positive employee voice indicates that the employer and employees are working together to build a great brand that could provide them a competitive advantage (Jacobson et al., 2023).

2.4 Gen Z's perception of employer brand

There are few reasons that make Gen Z draw on attention from recent research. Firstly, Gen Z is expected to reach 27 percent of the workforce by 2025 (McAllister, 2024) which takes a big part of labour force and could reshape the society and workplace with their distinguished beliefs and priorities in many respects (Harvard Business Review, 2023). Secondly, the expectations of Gen Z towards employer are different from other generations, the most significant difference is to work in a positive and fun team environment (Lassleben, and Hofmann, 2023). Organisations must be aware of the values and expectations of this generation has for work (Pauli, Guadagnin, and Ruffatto, 2020), Gen Z is characterised by having a global perspective, being able to develop cross-border virtual communications, being widely exposed to social and economic issues, and being incredibly curious (Lev, 2021). Individual learning and development are greatly supported by internet search engines and YouTube short films (Lev, 2021).

A survey conducted by Deloitte (2024) indicated that the top factors for Gen Z choosing their organisation including good work-life balance, high salary or other financial benefits, positive organisation culture, flexibility in working hour, learning and developing opportunities, and the purpose of work and self-identity

that derived from work. Therefore, instead of financial benefits, Gen Z tends to prioritise work-life balance, purpose-driven work, and career development regarding workplace and selecting future work (Simon, 2023, Pandita, 2022, CNBC International, 2023). Felling happy and satisfied is vital for Gen Z in choosing future employment (Pauli et al., 2020). Jelena and Snežana (2022) also listed three main criteria affect young talents' choice of an employer: opportunities for career growth, a vibrant and challenging work environment, and chances for personal development.

Pham and Tran (2021) confirmed that employer brand plays a significant role in the job search process for Vietnamese Gen Z, particularly for those who have some work experience already. Findings also suggest that job seekers' shape their perceptions of employment by general perceptions of the organisation (Sovina, and Collins, 2003). Vieira, Gomes da Costa and Santos (2024) identified workplace conditions and social responsibility belonging to the corporate culture attribute in employer brand; salary, career and learning opportunities, and work–life balance is also part of employer brand symbols attribute as well as company reputation; and lastly, coaching and personal development constitutes psychological contract attribute the employer brand. Concerning to job offers, Generation Z is interested in learning more about the offers, particularly their required qualifications, as these will increase their desire to be a part of an organisation and, in certain situations, could even affect their decision to accept an offer (Carbajal-Cribillero. et al., 2022). As a conclusion, organisations need to demonstrate and promote advantages in those aspects, which are part of employer brand. Gen Z's decision to join a relevant organisation is influenced by numerous elements and forces behind employer branding (Pandita, 2022). Employer brand is a message to existing and potential employees about what they can expect from the company (Vieira et. Al., 2024), and the employer brand message will influence a prospective employee's decision-

making process (Wilden, et al., 2010). In Deloitte's survey (2024), there are nearly half of Gen Z interviewees said they would turn down job offers or work that do not align with individual value. Collins, and Stevens (2002) also stated that organisations with strong brand identities would be chosen over those with weak or unfavourable brands.

There are several channels for Gen Z to receive employer brand message and relative information they need for decision-making process. Undoubtfully, social media is the primary and the handiest channel for Digital Natives. According to Gen Z's habit of using social media, they filter prospective employers and organisations by comments and experience posted by strangers who claimed they are existing or former employees （Miles and McCamey, 2018). For instances, Gen Zers are able to cancel a job application or refuse an offer because of negative public reviews on social media websites like Glassdoor (Jobvite, 2019). There are risk lies in the phenomenon, rather than using the formal information providing by organisations, job seekers can acquire informal information through comments made by current employees (Ladkin and Buhalis, 2016).

The second channel is from families, friends, and people who currently work or have worked in the company. HR managers categorised members of Gen Z as being influenced by friends and acquaintances as well as social media (Wübbelt, and Tirrel, 2022). Collins, and Stevens (2002) found that in the early stage of job search, applicants may highly rely on opinions and information from others while assessing job opportunities. Job seekers examine information and personal experiences to generate opinions concerning process, approaches, and the people who represent the organisation (Miles, and McCamey, 2018). Moreover, according to Jacobson, Gomes Rinaldi, and Rudkowski (2023), staff members have an enormous effect on the public perception of their employer among a variety of audiences, including

friends and family in their immediate social network, internal stakeholders like current employees, and external stakeholders like current and potential customers and employees.

To summarise, previous literatures and findings theorised that strong employer brand contribute to developing first impression of an organisation in the eyes of job seekers, giving employer a competitive edge in labour market (Sovina and Collins, 2003). Before contacting and applying, candidates are also research deeper into career website, social media, and job sites like LinkedIn, Glassdoor and Indeed to gain a comprehensive understanding of company (Grossman, 2022). Enhancing corporate image and shaping organisational brand as employer of choice on social media platforms like LinkedIn or Instagram organisational profile are crucial than ever (Miles and McCamey, 2018) and can draw Gen Z's attention, then broaden talent pool (Halová, and Müller, 2021). Meanwhile, some research results prove that social media can bring positive reputation to employer brand the facilitate young talent's intention of application (Sivertzen et al., 2013). In contrary, recent researchers found Gen Z's might cancel an interview or turn down an offer because of the comments on that (Miles, and McCamey, 2018). Hence, this phenomenon brings up the research questions, what is the genuine effect of social media? Does social media actually help organisations building up a positive employer brand or it potentially reduce job seekers' intention of application?

Chapter 3 Research Method

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the philosophical framework of the research, details about data collection process and how the sample is selected.

3.2 Research Question Aim and Objective

Followed by the literature review, it can be reasonably inferred that comments and reviews on social media platforms, whether it is on public or private social media, lead to impactful influence on Gen Z's perception of employer brand. Thus, the main objective of this research is to find out how this phenomenon results from and to reveal the effect of the phenomenon on future labour market. In this purpose, the research question and objectives are listed as below:

- How reviews on the rating website or social media affect Gen Z's decision on selecting future employers, or the intention of application?
- Examine how important the role of social media website in Gen Z's job seeking process and employer branding.
- Identify what is the genuine effect of social media on Gen Z's perception of employer brand.

Interviews will be undertaken in response to the research questions. The research study recruits 10 volunteers who are in age of Gen Z and currently employed or have work experience to participate the interview.

The research aim is to provide a further understanding about young talent's perception of employer brand and the change or effect caused by social media platforms in particular to the comments and review, further contributing to the

modern organisation in respect of managing employer with social media and establishing employer brand as employer of choice.

3.3 Research Philosophy

To begin with the research method, research paradigm is the first thing that needs to be identified. Research paradigm is constituted by assumptions and means the way of looking at the world as well as the view of how research should be done (Punch, 2014). There are three paradigms to present different types of assumptions including ontology, epistemology, and methodology (Punch, 2014). Ontology refers to what is the nature of reality (Punch, 2014; Saunder, 2019), which connects to the research questions of this study about the real effect of social media on Gen Z.

According to Saunders (2019), research philosophy is a set of beliefs and assumptions on development of knowledge. Interpretivism is one of the research philosophies emphasising the meaning that individuals create from experience and behaviours, and which they use to make sense of the world (Punch, 2014). The purpose of interpretivist research is attempting to gain an insight into an ongoing development, and discovering a new, deeper perspective of social environments (Saunders,2019), which fits the objective of this research. Interpretivism believes that social reality is subjective (Quinlan, 2011). In summary, the nature of this research is to examine the influence of social media on Gen Z concerning to employer brand that is similar to the interpretivism, hence, it is positioned as ontology interpretivist research.

This research is positioned as phenomenological research. Phenomenology is to present a perception of personal awareness and experience (O'Leary, 2021). It

focuses on the lived experience of participants, and explores the relationship between things, objects, and individuals (Quinlan, 2011, O'Leary, 2021). Based on the aim of this research, which is to find out the phenomenon of social media effect on Gen Z and how it changes their point of view regarding to employer brand, it seems that phenomenology is the most suitable research strategy for the study.

3.4 Research Methodology

There are multiple methods for conducting research, including mono quantitative, mono qualitative, and mixed. Quantitative research is frequently described as an objective positivist research into a single truth, and typically involves large scale hypotheses (O'Leary, 2021). On the other hand, qualitative approach deep into social complexities to thoroughly examine and understand lived experience, process, interaction, and belief systems (O'Leary, 2021). Quantitative data are in form of number (Punch, 2014), in contrast, data of qualitative is non-numeric and express emotions, ideas, thoughts, and understanding (Quinlan, 2011).

Considering to the research objective that is to explore the new circumstances and impact result from social media to employer brand, mono qualitative research will be applied as the primary method for this study, additionally, interpretivist research is often associated with qualitative approach (Punch, 2014; Saunders, 2019). Qualitative research focuses on single phenomenon or concept and use an open-ended question as research questions (Creswell, 2008), which are aligned with the objective of this research and feature of research questions. Under qualitative method, among the various tools for conducting qualitative research, in-depth interview is the most suitable tool as the purpose of it is to record participants' opinions in order to concentrate on their perception (Saunder, 2019). Therefore, the implication of in-depth interviews allows participants share individual perceptions

openly and freely as well as interviewer acquire comprehensive information to further analysis.

3.5 Sampling and Data Collection

For sampling strategy, there are few common types of sampling strategies such as snowball, convenience, purposive and theoretical sampling (Gill,2020). Qualitative research tends to use deliberate sampling also known as purposive sampling (Punch, 2014). The chosen sampling strategy for this study is purposive sampling, it is an approach that researcher select volunteering participants who are familiar with or have experience about the phenomenon being studied (Gill,2020).

As the aim of this research is to understand the change of Gen Z's perception of employer brand after using social media, undoubtedly, individuals who are theoretically categorised as Gen Z, born between 1997 to 2012, are target population of the research. In addition to aging requirement, the other essential condition of interviewee is the experience of using social media for job seeking. Participants who fulfil these two criteria can provide more relevant and depth insight to research aim. A small sample size of ten to twelve participants is considered as small number of in-depth cases are commonly employed in qualitative studies. (O'Leary, 2021). The sample size is determined at 10 participants for this research.

The types of interviews including structured interviews, group interviews, and unstructured interviews (Punch, 2014). Unstructured interviews are used to explore individual's interpretation and meaning of situations and phenomenon (Punch, 2014) which lines up with the aim of this research and is the suitable instrument for the research.

Interviewees are recruited through researcher's personal connection. The interview will be taking place on June 2024 and July 2024 and be undertaken in-person or via Zoom online meeting platform depending on the preferences and availability of interviewees. All interviews were recorded and transcribed automatically with interviewee's consent. Transcriptions were examined and revised manually after auto transcribed.

During the interview process, interviewees were asked fifteen questions concerning to personal employment background, job seeking process, perception of comments and reviews on social media platform, and change of perception on employment decisions (the questions asked is attached in Appendix A). The length of the interview is approximately 30 to 40 minutes or longer if there are extend questions based on interviewee's responses.

Regarding to ethical consideration, this research was conducted in adherence to NCI's research ethics guidelines and GDPR regulations. Each interviewee attended the interview by their freewill, interview date and time were scheduled in advance with participants' available time as well as permission of recorded interview, and the purpose of the research and the storage of data were explained before the interview. Participant's personal data is confidential, audio and transcribe were kept in an encrypted file.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter explained the research philosophy, the chosen research methodology, and the process of data collection for this study. This research was conducted under comprehensively ethical considerations and research method was designed to align with the core objective of research. Detailed analyses and findings from collected data will be explored in the following chapter.

Chapter 4 Findings and Analysis

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, findings of this research are summarised, analysed, and presented by thematic analysis. Thematic research is a research method used to analyse and identify themes or patterns in a set of data (Naeem, Ozuem, Howell, and Ranfagni, 2023), which is the most popular approach for qualitative research (Naeem et al., 2023) This research is positioned as phenomenological research which was conducted by qualitative approach Research data was collected by in-depth interviews during June and July 2024. Thus, to in line with the research, thematic analysis is the best fit for analysing collected data.

There are 10 Gen Z volunteers participated in the research including one male and 9 female. The birth year of 10 participants is from 1998 to 2003. All of the participants are currently working in a full-time or part-time position and have experience regarding to using social media platform such as LinkedIn or Instagram as their job searching tool. Table 1 presents order of interviewees, gender, job type, and the birth year of participants.

Table 1 Participants Demographic

Participants' Gender	Interviewee Code	Birth year
Male	Interviewee 1	1998
Female	Interviewee 2	1998
Female	Interviewee 3	1998
Female	Interviewee 4	1999
Female	Interviewee 5	1999
Female	Interviewee 6	2000
Female	Interviewee 7	2001
Female	Interviewee 8	2002
Female	Interviewee 9	2002
Female	Interviewee 10	2003

Findings of this research was summarised to three main topics which are Gen Z's job searching process, habits of using social media platforms, and Gen Z's perception of comments on social media. Details of each topic can be found in the sections 4.2, 4.3, and 4.4.

4.2 Job-searching process

In the beginning of the interview, interviewees were asked about their job searching process. Unsurprisingly all the answers are involved to social media websites. When Gen Z start to seek for a new opportunity, they are very purposeful and proactive. The first step is to browse positions on job searching website, such as LinkedIn, to find a preferred position. Moreover, some of them search for certain organisations that they want to work for and have followed for long time, in order to develop more opportunities for themselves.

'When I'm looking for a job, I look for keywords that I want. So, if I want to work part-time, I will pop a keyword in part-time. So that it's not showing me all these results for night shifts, for things that I cannot like feasibly to do. So that's one kind of example. I will also do, I'm a graduate now. So, I will kind of go for jobs that require graduates, because it just, it could lend, like, it could lead me to some good jobs, you know. And then what I'll also do is, yeah, the keywords would be mainly what I do. So, I'll search those first' (Interviewee 7)'.

'I kind of always keep an eye out on websites, such as LinkedIn, or indeed or Glassdoor, or even the career website of my university. I also have maybe kind of a couple of companies or a couple of companies really that in my head, I would like to work for. And so sometimes I keep an eye out to see whether they are hiring. Sometimes I even emailed them, asking them if they had any vacancies' (Interviewee 8)'.

Regarding to the future employer, most of respondents mentioned about location, flexible working hour and atmosphere in the organisation are three factors that they value most when choosing future employer. It shows that, Gen Z workers expect more flexibility of managing their working time, they do not expect to travel for long hour to work. However, if employers can provide other benefits, or job seekers can find more detailed information from their personal connection, previous employees, or current employees, the location factor can be compromised. Concerning to working environments, half of the interviewees described an ideal working environment as transparent, teamwork, allow employees to speak for themselves, and be able to communicate.

'Be open-minded and able to talk to like, without being a negative person and more transparent (Interviewee 1)'.

'I accepted it because I could fix my own hours, I could do kind of between eight to 10 start time and to it was four to six end time, and so I didn't feel late. If I was gonna get in at nine. I finally knew my later that the supervision I got, I'm getting is great. It's once a week with the manager and it's, I, you know, it's a hospital setting. Is clinical. The only thing with bothering is the commute. All of the other bits kind of outweigh the commute. So, I don't mind the commute because I'm enjoying the nature of the job' (Interviewee 9)'.

After they find the position or company attracting them, they will do research of the organisation and position. The primary research tool is social media platforms and the organisation's official website, As the nature of being digital natives, Gen Zers are expert in using search engines, forums, and social media to gather information. Secondly, they will ask opinions from friends, families, or

acquaintances who have similar employment experience. The intention of background research is to verify if personal value align with organisation's core values; financial and non-financial benefit meet their expectation, and to have a picture of being employed in the organisation. As a result, when they discover their personal value is different from the company, they can easily refuse an offer. Furthermore, Gen Zers are not afraid to interact with recruiting team during hiring process, they believe that proactive interaction between candidates and recruiters or employees is helpful for building positive image of candidates also understanding more about potential colleagues and employers. For instance, an interviewee shared her experience about walking into the store asked current staff regarding to employment experience.

'I did also look up the company core brand values, So I looked at the core brand values. And I basically wrote a cover letter in which I wanted to forward that I really do believe in the brand values, and I wanted to push them forward through the job. And then when it comes to interviewing processes, I always do research on the company. Beforehand, always just so I have that extra background knowledge. I just rejected an internship because the company gets from a factory in China that does use child labour, so I didn't take the internship because of that reason, yeah. In my in my conscience, I know I couldn't like to feel good about myself' (Interviewee 10).

'And I'd ask them I was like, how is it working here? Like, what's it like and such, and I got their feedback on the job before I took it because I was offered a position. Yeah, I was still kind of a bit like, right. I just want to make sure that everybody isn't just being smiley and happy because they need new stuff (Interviewee 5).

To summarise, a typical job searching process for Gen Z starts from seeking opportunities they are interested in or based on personal circumstances on job searching website. Then doing research via social media platforms like Instagram and Glassdoor, or even interacting with recruitment team directly. It is inevitable to find negative comments during information gathering process, further findings about Gen Z's perception of comments will be outlined in the following section. However, when considering apply a position, most of applicants would not be affect by negative comments, they will only take those negative into account when it comes to accepting an offer.

'I'd say like, after you get a brief idea on how's the organisation like, whatever you want to go with. I guess, I'll just give it a try. Just give it a try and see what happens (Interviewee 1)'.

4.3 Habits of using social media platforms

4.3.1 Habits of social media platforms

When speaking of job searching website, Indeed is the most commonly mentioned by respondents, followed by LinkedIn and Glassdoor. Besides, some of the participants who are in designing industry answered Instagram is one of their job-searching tools as to present their work and portfolio to attract potential employers. Interestingly, most of job seekers use multiple medias, at least two different websites, for information gathering and application. LinkedIn and Indeed are most frequently used platforms for background research. According to one of the participants, instead of applying through job searching websites, sending applications directly on organisation's official career page can provide better impression to potential employers. Hence, they tend to deem social media platforms as tools for collecting necessary information and applying on the official website. Additionally, three interviewees stated that Instagram is the main platform they use to keep an eye out on vacancies of desirable organisations.

'I've heard some blogs don't like when people apply through indeed because they get the impression that like, you're just job hunting for anything, which kind of or if you'd like go, I prefer to like email or ring them kind of directly like and then it gives the impression' (Interviewee 4)'.

4.3.2 Habits of sharing personal experiences

The other habit is concerning to sharing employment experiences on social media platforms. There are two main features related to it. Firstly, compare to sharing personal employment experiences publicly, they prefer to share it privately with friends, families, or even connection on LinkedIn by direct message. There are only two participants said they are willing to share employment experiences publicly on

LinkedIn or anonymously on Glassdoor. The reason behind this phenomenon is that Gen Z as a cohort growing up with advanced technology and social media platforms, they are clearly aware of the power of internet. They understand the risk of leaving critical or negative comments publicly might cause an effect for their future career.

'I've heard some blogs don't like when people apply through indeed because they get the impression that like, you're just job hunting for anything, which kind of or if you'd like to go, I prefer to like email or ring them kind of directly like and then it gives the impression. I'd rather not say anything negative about the company in public because you don't know if one day it's going to be like a double-sided tape. It's going to hurt you, or people might use it against you. So, if I ever leave the feedback in public or online, I will definitely just say something good, or I'd rather not say anything' (Interviewee 2)'.

'I do feel comfortable, but I won't share it on my social media platforms. So, the ones which are anonymous, which they cannot see the person who's writing the comment, so, I prefer that but because tomorrow it does not get me into trouble' (Interviewee 6)'.

The second feature is about the content, 9 out of 10 participants agreed that if they are going to share personal experiences, they either share extremely good or extremely bad experiences online, and perhaps they share more negatives than positives. If it is an adequate experience, they would not share it actively unless someone ask about it. A participant shared her experience about revealing bad behaviour of her previous manager on her personal social media to tell other people what happened in this workplace.

'Let's say like something crazy happened, I would be like, okay, maybe I need to let other people know, but nothing, it was nothing out of the ordinary, ... Unless I had something important to say, ... I think, we don't tend to leave reviews that are okay. I think it's either when we leave any kind of review for food, for work, for products, I think it's usually we will be driven to leave a review if it is disappointing or if it's really exciting' (Interviewee 7)'.

'I think I always try to keep in mind that it's easier to write a negative review than a positive one. Because you know, if you're ever if it's negative, you know, you're angry, and you want to complain, while you're if everything goes, well, no one ever says anything, obviously (Interview 8)'.

4.4 Gen Z's perception of comments on social media

Along with Gen Z's job searching process and habit of using social media platforms to collect relevant information, it is inevitable to read review and comments on the social media platform. All participants responded that they read the comments on Glassdoor, LinkedIn, forums, or Google reviews. Despite all ten interviewees confirmed the behaviour of reading, only one person would take online comments seriously, others stated that they only deem online comments as a pinch of salt. Before accepting for positions, they solely take it as reference to form first impression.

'Definitely I will go, I usually go to this kind of website and just see how people rate this company or this position, how they feel, what's their feedback about this position. And I usually use it as just as a reference. It won't actually affect my decision that much, but of course, I mean, it's not hard to take that into consideration too' (Interviewee 2)'.

'I definitely check the website, but I mainly use Instagram. I would take them seriously because usually, it's from people who've like worked for the company. So, I'd take them more seriously than the actual like, company or management managers statements' (Interviewee 4)'.

'It is hard to be media literate and to read these comments and like take them with a grain of salt, if you know what I mean. So do not take them too seriously, but to listen to what people have to say and just take it into account.' (Interviewee 7)'.

During the interview, the researcher realised that Gen Z not only can collect information from internet, but also identify reality of information and filter out what they want and what they need. Interviewees shared how they distinguish comments on social media. Firstly, content of reviews is important. If the content is about personal emotions, or something is fixable, they will bear this in mind but not take it into account. In contrast, when the content involves illegal behaviour such as sexual harassment, they might consider not to apply it or drop out from hiring process, as well as when negative comments are more than positive ones.

'Everyone has individual experiences, and people can be very different. But it's just interesting to just kind of see what they what others have what others have taken from working' (Interviewee 3).

'I can only imagine some situation can have that much power to change it, then definitely it will be something like, let's say, racism happens in the company or the sexual harassment, something like that. As long as they go to this very serious situation, then definitely they will take a really big part in my decision making' (Interviewee 2).

Secondly, they checked the posting time of comments and reality of account that left the review. In terms of time, they examined when the review is left, if it is a review that left five or ten years ago, it is not necessary to view it or value it. Similarly, if the person who leave the negative review has left the organisation for more than five years, they might not be influenced by that review.

'You can do it with like an actual profile, or some people have like just anonymous fake profiles. If a majority of the bad reviews are from anonymous, fake profiles, I just ignore them' (Interviewee 5).

'I may look at their account and see when they worked there, because depending on how the high the turnover is, this could have been someone that works there 10 years ago. I kind of have a more up to date idea of what I'm going into' (Interviewee 9).

For this reason, all interviewees stated that, the sole effect of comments and reviews on social media platforms, forums, and job searching websites is to anticipate working condition, and thinking twice about applying the position, or accepting the offer. None of interviewees have rejected an offer merely because of comments.

Instead of comments, the main reason for rejecting a job offer is their candidates experience. A respondent shared her lived experience regarding to a negative interview experience. The recruiting team rescheduled the interview time for their own convenience, so she had to wait for half an hour for the interview, and asked inquisitive and irrelevant questions made her uncomfortable during the interview. Thus, she refused to take offer from the company based on her unpleasant interview.

'If there is a position I like, I would just apply, and then do the interview, and the interview, like if they invited me for an interview, obviously, I would do the interview, then the interview already gives me an understanding, because I am a firm believer that the interview is not only for the employer, it's also for the employee' (Interviewee 8)'.

'it's a mix of both that personal experience, as well as like keeping aware of what other people are saying' (Interviewee 7)'.

The other interesting factor is influencers on Instagram or TikTok. According to an interviewee, when she applied for a position, she looked up videos or posts from influencers or content creators who shared their interview or work experience with the organisation, or employees from the company shared their employment experience. It gives her a mindset about brand image, organisational culture, and working conditions. Moreover, she deems employees as micro influencers who is part of employer brand and have the power to influence customers and potential talents.

'I suppose with our generation, like a lot of people do listen to influencers in regard to everything. There's influencers that promoted very positively and because of their positive influence, people are going to brand anyway, so being able to kind of see how an influencer is promoting a brand, and how they're talking about things, because influences I find are fascinating, and how they try anything, and even just like, I suppose the evocative language, things like that, it almost puts myself in a mindset of, I'm going to be like, a micro influencer when I'm working and I'm on the shop floor, like, I want to be able to influence people to do this, or, like, promote this and that kind of way. So, it's a good, like depiction of what I want to portray from working in that job' (Interviewee 9)'.

4.5 Conclusion

To summarise findings of research, it can be seen that social media platforms play a vital role in Gen Z's job searching process. From the beginning of process like seeking potential opportunities and developing vacancies in preferred organisations, to background research regarding to prospective positions and companies. Undoubtedly, social media platforms are necessary tools for Gen Z. While doing background research, job seekers usually read comments and reviews from current or previous employees on job searching websites where they use for gathering information as reference. In this phase, job seekers form their initial impressions of organisations but do not affect their final decision of accepting job.

Most of Gen Z members are clearly aware of the nature of internet, thus, they are cautious about contents of reviews and contents they shared online. While reviewing comments, content is the first thing they checked, they also checked about reality of the account that left reviews. Lastly, how long has the comment been left affect the reliability of it. Generally, most of interviewees agreed that rather than online opinions from strangers, they considered more to lived experience from friends, family, and people they know or meet in real life as well as actual interactions between them and recruiting team, which is a crucial factor in accepting offer.

Chapter 5 Discussion

5.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses how findings reflect to research questions and objectives and compare findings to previous literatures. Research objectives are set out in chapter 3 as below:

- How reviews on the rating website or social media affect Gen Z's decision on selecting future employers, or the intention of application?
- Examine how important the role of social media website in Gen Z's job seeking process and employer branding.
- Identify what is the genuine effect of social media on Gen Z's perception of employer brand.

In chapter 4, all the findings are organised by relevant themes in relation to job searching process, Gen Z's habits of using social media, and Gen Z's perception of comments on social media platforms. Each thematic finding reflects research objectives and responds to research questions. Research questions are presented as following headlines to address each question and relevant findings.

5.2 How reviews affect Gen Z's decision on selection, or application

Overall, findings indicate that the effect of comments and reviews on social media and rating websites is not strong enough to influence Gen Z' s selection of future employers or intention to apply a position or organisation they are interested in. According to interviewees, before receiving a job offer, comments are only reference to them, even though they viewed some negative comments on websites or forums, they would still apply for it. For job seekers, there is no harm for

application. The present findings show same result from literatures in terms of factors about making decision on accepting offer. Cheesman (2017) stated that elements determined candidates' decision to accept particular offer including organisational culture, salary, company reputation, brand value, and interview experience. Most of interviewees agreed that salary is important but if brand value does not match with personal value, or organisational culture is not they expect, they would reject the offer.

Among all factors, the primary factor that is powerful enough to influence Gen Z's decision-making is candidates' experience. Miles and McCamey (2018) stated that applicants evaluate information and experiences to create opinions, which is proved in this research. It is found in this study that Gen Z job seekers use online sources to gather information, meanwhile, they still prefer to develop their own perception of organisation along with hiring process. This finding highlight importance of candidate's experience within entire hiring process, candidates' experience can bring significant outcomes for organisations (Miles and McCamey, 2018). In contrary, a poor candidate experience can negatively impact employer brand (CIPD, 2015). Except of an effective hiring process, employees who are engaged in recruitment are also essential for building employer brand (Russell and Brannan, 2016). Addressing these interactions with individuals involved, in addition to ideal candidates, is critical to maintaining employer brand (Miles and McCamey, 2018).

5.3 Important role of social media in job-searching and employer branding

In respond of this objective, interviewees were asked questions in relation to Gen Z's job searching process, findings from this study showed habits of usage of social media platforms and habits about sharing experiences on social media. The former habits reflected unreplaceable status of social media platforms in modern society; the latter implied a significant role of social media in employer branding.

Literatures pointed out two features of Gen Z: the first one is their digital nature as growing up with technical surroundings, which is to utilise social media and advanced technology spontaneously (Halová, and Müller, 2021). Secondly, Grossman (2022) stated that before applying, job seekers tend to research the position and organisations they are interested in. It can be seen from participants' respond that these two features were fully reflected. When participants were explaining individual job searching process, all started with using job searching websites such as LinkedIn and Indeed. Similarly, when participants talked about gathering information of relevant position or company, social media platforms are essential tools for them.

In terms of diverse platforms, LinkedIn is the most reliable website for job searching or establishing professional connections between potential employers and employees (Mohamed et al., 2023; Karácsony et al., 2020). Instagram is normally deemed as personal platform where users share personal life and is primary platform used by Gen Z (Sullivan, 2002; Carbajal-Cribillero, M. et al., 2022; Halová, and Müller, 2021). Halová, and Müller (2021) added that Gen Zers are not only use Instagram to follow friends, but also follow potential employers to learn more about the organisation including values, working conditions, and latest vacancies. The findings of this study are identical with literatures where most of interviewees recognised Instagram as the sole social media platform to follow organisations and find more inner information about it; LinkedIn is a platform to

create professional image in order to attract recruiters when searching for job. More than that, depending on different industry, Instagram can be used to attracting potential employers, such as designing or creative industries. Indeed is another job searching website that is commonly mentioned by participants, however, among all the participants, only one participant, who did not mention Indeed, does not work in Ireland currently, it can be referred reasonably that Indeed is a regional based job searching website. Organisation's official website is the other source for applicants for research beforehand. According to the interviewees, organisational website is helpful to learn company's core value, employee's benefit, and organisational culture, further, they can prepare interview based on that information. Or filter decide to accept the offer or not. In addition, another interested habits about social media platforms is that job seekers prefer to use at least two different platforms for application and research. For example, they use Indeed or LinkedIn to search for positions then they will apply on the company's official website. if the organisation has one. This phenomenon results from an idea of giving recruiters a positive impression, and one of respondents said some recruiters prefer to select applicants who apply from company website instead of general job searching websites. It is a topic that has not been discussed by previous literatures and for future research to develop and explore.

Regarding to employer branding, it is evident in Halová, and Müller's survey (2021) that most of contemporary companies are using social media as tools to build attractive employer brand for procurement. Nevertheless, employer branding is not only about image on social media, but also staff word of mouth and candidate's experience. According to Lee and Tao's (2020) research, the negative reviews that are conveyed by employees through direct communication are more impactful as well as public review of candidate's experience (Grossman, 2022). These two

influencing powers are related to Gen Z's habit of sharing experience on social media or rating website (Miles, and McCamey, 2018). Researchers suggested higher possibilities of Gen Z to share negative experience publicly (Sullivan, 2002; Wübbelt and Tirrel, 2022). Findings of this study are aligned with literatures. Most of participants agreed that if they are going to share personal experience, they share either extremely good or extremely bad experiences rather than adequate one. Furthermore, participants believed that feedback from friends, families, and acquaintances is more reliable than anonymous online reviews.

5.4 Identify what is the genuine effect of social media on Gen Z's perception of employer brand.

Finally, the research objective of this study is to identify genuine effect of social media on Gen Z's perception of employer brand. Most of previous studies indicated the ratings and reviews could have impact on Gen Z (Sullivan,2002); more than 80 percent of jobseekers make their decision of application by comments on internet in their early phase of job searching process (Grossman, 2022; Collins, and Stevens, 2002); moreover, Gen Zers could withdraw applications because of negative online reviews (Jobvite, 2019).

However, this study's findings contradict the literature reviews, it identified the genuine effect of reviews and comments on social media is allowing job seekers to visualise prospective employment experience, potential risks, and future colleagues. It is proven that online reviews are not as influential as literatures illustrated. Although applicants do search for reviews intentionally, they are clearly aware of what is behind the reviews then distinguish reviews from multiple aspects like when this review was left; how long the person was employed by the company, and the content of the review.

Collins, and Stevens (2002) stated that while evaluating employment opportunities, Gen Z could heavily rely on opinions from others. Job seekers can obtain informal information via comments made by preset employees (Ladkin and Buhalis, 2016). It is also different from literatures and findings of this research. From this research finding, Gen Z solely take comments from social media as a pinch of salt, they understand that personal experiences can be different and form their own perceptions of employers by own experiences as well as application and accepting offers. Gen Z candidates decided to apply a position by examining personal abilities and requirements listed on job description, they will apply directly once they feel they are matched. Concerning to accepting an offer, they consider personal needs such as financial situations, accessibility of commuting, brand value and personal value, future development of career, and organisational culture.

Compared to comments and reviews on social media effects, employees have greater influence on internal stakeholders like friends and families, and external stakeholders such as customers and potential employees, regardless of current or previous employees (Jacobson et al., 2023). Findings of this research and literatures are coordinated in respect of this. Most of candidates tend to ask existing employees directly about their employment, if the feedback from employees is positive, their impression of the company is more positive; if the feedback is negative, they will reconsider to accept the offer.

5.5 Limitations and future research

The limitation of this research is diversity of interviewees' background about industry. During the data collection process, this researcher noticed that the job searching process and tools might have slightly different due to different industry cultures as well as different countries and cultures. Therefore, it limited this research to identifying social media as effective tools on employer branding in certain industry. The other limitation is that most of interviewees are employed in Ireland, which leads to the types of social media platforms are relatively regional. Despite LinkedIn and Instagram are worldwide platforms, it is likely that different countries or regional have different preferences on job searching and rating websites.

Hence, future research can either narrow the participants' background to explore the influence in specific industry, or recruit participants from particular regions to discover regional preferences of social media. Furthermore, as previous mentioned, findings of this research bring out an undiscovered phenomenon in relation to employer's opinions about applying from job searching websites and organisation's official website. Future research can focus on exploring the differences between organisations' perceptions and job seekers' point of view.

Chapter 6 Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1 Introduction

This study explores the changing environment of employer branding through perspectives of Generation Z, emphasising the critical role of social media in shaping perceptions of job seekers. The research aims to reveal the genuine effects of social media platforms and identify the role of social media between job seekers and potential employers. By addressing research questions, this study sheds light on how Gen Z interacts with prospective employers in digital age.

6.2 Conclusion of Research Findings

From the study's findings, all participants agreed that they viewed comments and reviews on the job searching website or rating websites, some of them would even search for reviews of particular organisation on forum or social media during hiring process. While various literature suggest that online reviews are likely to heavily influence job seekers (Sullivan,2002; Grossman, 2022; Collins, and Stevens, 2002), the findings indicate Gen Z views these reviews with caution. They are aware of potential biases and inaccuracies in online comments. They prefer trusted and in-person sources over anonymous opinions, such as families, friends, acquaintances, or employees.

Besides the genuine impact of social media on shaping Gen Z's perception of employer brand, this study also confirms the critical role of social media within employer branding and job seeking. In respect of job seeking, social media allows job seekers to gain insights into organisational culture, from sourcing potential opportunities to conducting background research on desirable employers and positions, and picture themselves as working in the organisation. That information further influences their perceptions and decisions. On the other hand, the findings highlight the importance of social media as a tool of employer branding. Gen Z

forms initial perception from social, they value transparency, and alignment between personal values and the company's values. As a result, social media platforms, including organisational official websites, are vital channel to convey those values and information to potential applicants.

Not only social media plays a critical role in employer branding, but also for candidate's experience. Literature review and data collected support that candidate's experience has great influence on Gen Z's decision about selecting future employers. Moreover, an awful candidate's experience or employment experiences might be shared with candidate's personal connection privately or publicly on social media.

In conclusion, this research successfully responds to all the research questions and achieve the stated objectives. The study provides comprehensive analysis of Generation Z's perception of employer branding through social media platforms. In Gen Z's perception, social media is vital for acquiring information to form initial impressions of organisation but personal experiences and interactions with employees during hiring process are decisive factors to making final decisions. Data collected strengthen how social media has become an integral part of Gen Z's job seeking process and employer branding.

6.3 Recommendations

In this section, some practical recommendations focusing on recruitment and employer branding are suggested based on the research results. According to research results, candidates experience plays a vital role in attracting Gen Z talents and establishing a positive employer brand, thus, streamlining recruitment process in order to enhancing candidate experience is primary recommendation. Secondly, from this research, it is evident that social media platforms are where job seekers

and young talents form their first impressions of an organisation, as a result, leveraging influencers on social media platforms and employee influencers, which is mentioned in chapter 2, is the other strategy that will be introduced. Recommendations below including timeframe and cost considerations as acknowledgment for organisations.

6.3.1 Recruitment: Enhancing candidate's experience

Literatures and collected data of this study have proof that organisations should concentrate on delivering a seamless and engaging candidate experience to attract Gen Z talents. This involves providing authentic content that highlights company culture, brand ethic, and professional development. To streamline the recruitment process, it can start with survey existing employees about their previous candidate experience with organisations as well as current candidates and applicants. By examining current recruiting processes from candidates' perceptions, HR department can easily identify which part of recruitment process needs to be improved, also it can be customised to meet the needs of target audiences to further build attractive employer brand.

Timeframe and financial considerations

This project can be separated to three stages, the first stage is to collect feedback from existing staff and candidates, which takes time, it might take one to two months to collect data and another month to organise all feedback. The second phase is planning solutions. After figuring out which area should be improved, HR departments also need to design appropriate approaches to address those problems then implementing new recruitment process. The last stage is examining, by asking feedback again regarding to new process to review the availability of new process. The entire project may require six months from the first stage of survey to execute new recruitment process. Regarding the cost, during the first stage, the

questionnaire of survey can be produced by online tools for free and distributed via internal communicating channels so there is no or minimal cost for this stage. The cost of second stage depends on what kind of issues need to be addressed from the survey. If it involves in interviewers or recruiters, training may be introduced as a resolution. When training is provided internally from HR department, the cost includes materials, classroom, and equipment could be minimised. On the other hand, if the training is provided by external professionals, the remuneration for external trainer is inevitable which might vary from different professions but approximately around €1,000 to €3,000. In the third stage, it is similar to phase 1, feedback and reviews can be collected through internal channels or online questionnaires to reduce the cost. There is no extra cost in this phase unless extra training or equipment upgrades are required. Although timeframe of this project is estimated for six months, recruitment process needs to be examined and enhanced regularly.

6.3.2 Employer branding: leveraging influencers on social media platforms and employee influencers

Presented data of this research shows that organisations can benefit from engaging influencers on social media platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, or Tiktok to promote employer brand and working environment, or leveraging employees as brand advocates to share positive employment experience authentically on those social media platforms. Social media is deemed as the primary channel to communicate with Gen Z in modern labour market, moreover, Gen Zers value peer recommendation and gather information via social media. Therefore, this strategy can resonate with Gen Z's reliance on peer recommendations and social media.

This strategy including two parts, the first part is collaborating with existing influencers. Every influencer has different image and target audience so when organisation is selecting influencers, it is important to considerate if influencer's personal image, values, and target audience is aligned with organisational value and brand image. Content is another point when partnering with influencers, HR and PR departments must discuss the content with partner influencers to assure it is related to brand value, working environment, employment experience, non-financial rewards, and employee voice, which are factors that young talent value the most.

Secondly, HR department can also implement employee advocacy program to encourage current employees become employee influencers and promote organisational values. According to this study's findings, most of job applicants seek for opinions and experiences from current employees and that feedback has great impact on candidates' decision making. As a result, current employees are the most impactful cohort. Organisations can recruit one or two staff members from main departments or from HR and marketing departments then providing training and workshop concerning to organisational values, creating contents, and communicating with audiences. By doing this, the organisation can also convey certain information by employee influencers such as procurement, corporate social responsibility, and working environment.

Timeframe and financial considerations

For the partnership with existing influencers, it is short-term project, from selecting influencers to production, it might take one to three months. However, the cost of this short-term project can be different depending on the scale of influencers and platforms. For instance, on Instagram, collaboration with micro-influencers, who owns 10,000-50,000 followers might cost €100- €500 per post on Instagram; mid-tier influencers, who owns 50,000-100,000 followers, per post cost €500- €5,000,

and for macro-influencers, the number of followers is between 100,000-500,000, charges €5,000- €10,000 per post. Besides posts, influencers on Instagram also charge €100 to €7000 per Instagram reels depending on account reach, and a cost range of €50 to €1250 for posting time-limited story.

Compared to partner with current influencers, training and cultivating employee influencers may cost less money but more time. Since employees might not have experience to create content whether it is posts, videos or pictures, training is necessary for volunteering employees. A three-hour workshop of being an Instagram influencer may cost €300 per person. Not only training and workshops are necessary as well as incentive program. To attractive employees participating this program, organisation must provide incentives as encouragement of employee's presence on social media. However, the timeframe of this project is difficult to estimate but organisations can examine result of this project by analysing data regularly and conducting survey to potential candidates about information sources and employer brand.

6.3.3 Employer Branding: Improving employer brand throughout social media platforms

Findings of this study highlight the significance of social media as a tool for communicating with Gen Z talents, as well as the alignment of organisational core values and individual values. For this reason, organisation should promote their core values, corporate social responsibility program, or employer brand image via posts on official social media accounts with keywords. Moreover, posts and stories can be boots throughout the advertising scheme of social media so that those posts will be spreading faster and wider, and approach to more potential target audiences. This program can also combine with the employee influencers program. Employers

assign particular content in relation to organisational value, brand image, and corporate social responsibility to trained employee influencers to post, in that way, organisations can not only promote employer brand with less cost but also examining the performance of employee influencers program.

Timeframe and financial considerations

Promoting employer brand on social media is a constant project, negative effect may result from inadequate management or lack of presence on social media (Carbajal-Cribillero, M. et al., 2022). Thus, HR departments must create content to share and post regularly, also maintain good interactions with followers and audience, all the behaviours will be deemed as part of employer brand by Gen Z talents. For financial cost, organisations can pick one or two post to advertise through advertising scheme on social media. For instance, on Instagram, budget can be set up by users, so organisations can select the duration of advertisement depending on their budget, and it can be adjusted at any time. Most social media platforms provide data to track performance of the advertising, which can be used as evidence to improve the content and update budget.

Personal Learning statement

My inspiration of this research topic comes from personal experience and observations of my friends. When I was looking for jobs, the first tool that came my mind is job-searching websites, and when my friends share their experiences with me, they always mentioned about seeking recommendations from forums, social media platforms, or even Google searches. This made me notice the importance of reviews and comments to an organisation on employer brand and recruitment.

Before I started this research, I had bias against Gen Z, thinking they would blindly believe and be influenced by every comment on the social media and internet. However, after conducting research and interviews with Gen Z participants, I realised that they do not perceive information blindly. They understand what is behind information and have their own initiatives to distinguish the information.

Through this research, I learned about the unique and deliberate job search process of Gen Z and the change of Gen Z's perception of employment and recruitment. More and more young talents recognise that an interview is not only an opportunity for organisations selecting future employees, but also a chance for job seekers to become more familiar with their future employers, colleagues, and working environments. As a foreign student who is about to enter the Irish labour market, I also benefited from data collection process. From all the life experience sharing by participants, I recognised the culture of Irish labour market and the primary tools and websites that have been used from job seekers and recruiters.

In general, I was driven by curiosity to initiate and complete the entire dissertation, and I found myself enjoying in interviewing and discovering diverse aspects from interviewees. Learning from individuals and discovering new aspect from existing phenomena that contribute to HR industry is main purpose and motivation for this

research. The results and experience of my research will benefit my future development in an HR career.

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Appendix 1: Interview Questions

Background Questions:

- What is your birth year?
- Are you working full-time or part-time now?
- How did you find your current job?
- Please briefly describe your work experience.
- Have you ever used social media platforms for job searching?
- Have you heard about the term 'employer brand?'/ are you familiar with the term employer brand?
- If so, can you briefly tell me about your understanding of employer brand?

Main Questions:

1. Can you tell me about your job searching process, for example when you start searching for a job, what would you do?
2. When you are looking for a future employer, what kind of characteristics are you looking for? Among those factors, which is the most important?
3. If you are interested in an organisation or a position, how would you learn more about it? What channels do you usually use for that information?
4. When you search for a job on social networking sites such as LinkedIn or Glassdoor, will you read those comments on the website, or will you contact former or current employees for their opinions?
5. How do you feel about those comments or reviews?
6. How do you make your decision about applying for the position, or accepting an offer?
7. Do those reviews or opinions change your perception of the employer or position you want to apply for?
8. Would you like to share your working or interview experience online, regardless good or bad, whether you share on your personal social media or public website like LinkedIn, Glassdoor, or Google review?