

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Background

Organisations competing in contemporary labour markets face persistent difficulty in attracting qualified talent, a challenge that has intensified as Generation Z, broadly defined as individuals born approximately between 1997 and 2012, constitutes the primary cohort of new labour market entrants (Vieira et al., 2024). This generation holds career values and organisational expectations that differ meaningfully from those of preceding generations, placing elevated importance on corporate social responsibility (CSR), employer reputation, employee benefits, and career development opportunities when evaluating prospective employers (Vieira et al., 2024). For organisations, understanding which of these attributes most strongly influences Generation Z candidates' intention to apply has become a strategic human resource management priority.

Talent attraction is defined as the set of organisational attributes and activities that motivate qualified individuals to seek and pursue employment at a specific organisation (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). Research identifies employer attractiveness as the central construct linking organisational attributes to prospective employees' application decisions, encompassing both functional attributes such as compensation and career prospects and symbolic attributes such as brand reputation and organisational values (Lievens & Slaughter, 2016). The Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), developed by Lent et al. (1994), provides the theoretical foundation for understanding how candidates form career intentions

based on their outcome expectations. Perceived employee benefits and career development directly correspond to these outcome expectations, whilst employer brand and CSR function as organisational signals that communicate quality to candidates who lack direct information about the organisation (Spence, 1973).

The distinctiveness of this cohort sharpens the challenge. As the first fully digital-native generation, Generation Z forms impressions of prospective employers largely through online and social media channels, and it weighs job security, purpose, and development opportunities alongside pay when judging where to apply (Ma & Fang, 2024; Mahmoud et al., 2021). Because these candidates frequently evaluate employers from a distance, and often across national borders, the attributes an organisation is able to signal, rather than those a candidate can directly verify, become decisive in shaping whether an application is made.

Before any hiring decision can be made, a candidate must first form an intention to apply, the motivational step that opens the recruitment funnel; without a sufficient pool of willing applicants, later selection and retention efforts have little to work with (Dassler et al., 2022). A systematic review of the employer attractiveness literature concludes that perceived employer attributes translate into application intentions through candidates' judgements of fit and expected reward (Dassler et al., 2022). This is consistent with person-organisation fit theory, which holds that candidates are drawn to organisations whose values they perceive as congruent with their own (Kristof-Brown et al., 2023), and with signalling theory, which explains how candidates infer such congruence from the limited cues an employer makes visible (Connelly et al., 2011). The present study is positioned at this early and decisive stage of the recruitment process.

Gandasari et al. (2024), in a study published in *Cogent Business & Management*, examined the factors influencing candidates' intention to apply by testing a model comprising four predictors: CSR, employer brand, employee benefits, and career development. Their study was conducted with 324 Generation Z respondents in Indonesia and confirmed that employer brand, employee benefits, and career development each significantly and positively influenced intention to apply. Although CSR did not produce a statistically significant direct effect on intention to apply in their sample, it exerted a strong indirect influence through employer brand. This study provided a well-validated, SCCT-grounded talent attraction model with a formal measurement appendix derived from established scales, published in a fully open-access journal indexed on Google Scholar.

Despite the contribution of Gandasari et al. (2024), their study was conducted in a single-country, culturally homogeneous Indonesian context, which limits the generalisability of findings to other populations and settings. SolBridge International School of Business in Daejeon, South Korea, presents a distinctive and underexplored research context. SolBridge is an internationally accredited business school whose student population represents more than 80 nationalities, making it one of the most internationally diverse business schools in Asia (SolBridge International School of Business, 2026). SolBridge undergraduate students are Generation Z individuals who are actively evaluating organisations across international labour markets, including South Korea, their home countries, and other global destinations, as candidates for internship, part-time, and full-time employment.

Prior research establishes that each of the four attributes is positively associated with candidates' intention to apply. Corporate social responsibility relates positively to job pursuit intention among young job seekers (Thang et al., 2022; Song et al., 2024). Employer brand is one of the most consistently reported correlates of application intention, operating both directly and through organisational image and reputation (Thang & Trang, 2024; Halová & Müller, 2024). Employee benefits, as anticipated rewards, correlate positively with the motivation to apply (Tumasjan et al., 2020), and career development shows a comparably strong positive association, particularly for a generation that prioritises rapid professional growth (Rani & Suneja, 2026; Gandasari et al., 2024). These converging relationships provide the empirical basis for examining all four attributes together in a single model.

This study extends the talent attraction model of Gandasari et al. (2024) to the SolBridge context by testing whether corporate social responsibility, employer brand, employee benefits, and career development each directly and positively influence undergraduate students' intention to apply. Each respondent identifies one specific organisation they are currently considering as a potential employer and evaluates that organisation across all four constructs. The study adopts a quantitative, explanatory research design and applies multiple linear regression analysis using IBM SPSS Statistics.

1.2 Research Question

Based on the background of the study, the research questions are formulated as follows:

1. Does the perception of corporate social responsibility have a positive and significant influence on undergraduate students' intention to apply at SolBridge International School of Business?
2. Does the perception of employer brand have a positive and significant influence on undergraduate students' intention to apply at SolBridge International School of Business?
3. Does the perception of employee benefits have a positive and significant influence on undergraduate students' intention to apply at SolBridge International School of Business?
4. Does the perception of career development have a positive and significant influence on undergraduate students' intention to apply at SolBridge International School of Business?

1.3 Research Scope

To clarify the variables used in this study, the research scope is defined as follows.

Referring to Carlini et al. (2019), corporate social responsibility (CSR) is defined as the responsibility of companies to develop and implement policies and practices that address the three pillars of ecological, economic, and social sustainability, which maximise positive outcomes for all stakeholder groups beyond the requirements of legislation.

Referring to Cable and Turban (2001), employer brand is defined as the set of beliefs held by prospective employees about an organisation's attributes as an employer, encompassing both tangible and intangible dimensions such as working environment, organisational culture, and promotional opportunities. This construct

is closely related to employer attractiveness, and prior evidence from the Indonesian higher-education context reinforces its importance: Pramudita et al. (2024) found that employer attractiveness had a positive and significant influence on the job application interest of final-year management students at Universitas Atma Jaya Yogyakarta.

Referring to Yoopetch et al. (2021), employee benefits are defined as a total reward package comprising both tangible components, such as salary and bonuses, and intangible components, such as work-life balance and social status, provided by an organisation to its employees.

Referring to Creed and Hood (2019), career development is defined as the process through which both individuals and their employers manage various tasks, behaviours, and experiences within and across jobs and organisations over time, with implications for employees' professional growth and work-related identity.

Referring to Carlini et al. (2019), intention to apply is defined as the extent to which a potential employee is motivated to pursue a job at a specific organisation.

Respondents: Undergraduate (Bachelor of Business Administration) students enrolled at SolBridge International School of Business, South Korea, who are actively evaluating at least one specific organisation as a potential employer.

Exclusions: Internal employer recruitment strategies and organisational decision-making processes are beyond the scope of this study.

1.4 Research Objective

Based on the research questions, this study aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To analyse the influence of corporate social responsibility on undergraduate students' intention to apply at SolBridge International School of Business.
2. To analyse the influence of employer brand on undergraduate students' intention to apply at SolBridge International School of Business.
3. To analyse the influence of employee benefits on undergraduate students' intention to apply at SolBridge International School of Business.
4. To analyse the influence of career development on undergraduate students' intention to apply at SolBridge International School of Business.

1.5 Research Benefits

1.5.1 Theoretical Benefit

This study contributes to the human resource management literature by extending the talent attraction model of Gandasari et al. (2024) from an Indonesian Generation Z sample to an internationally diverse undergraduate student population at SolBridge International School of Business. By testing the same four-factor model in a new geographic and institutional context, this study provides evidence on the cross-contextual applicability of Social Cognitive Career Theory as a framework for explaining candidates' organisational application intentions. The findings enrich existing knowledge on employer attractiveness and Generation Z talent acquisition in internationally diverse educational settings.

1.5.2 Practical Benefit

For human resource managers and talent acquisition professionals seeking to attract internationally educated Generation Z talent, this study provides evidence-

based guidance on which employer attributes most strongly predict application intention amongst SolBridge BBA students. By identifying the relative influence of CSR, employer brand, employee benefits, and career development on intention to apply, organisations can prioritise their employer branding investments and recruitment communications more effectively. This is particularly relevant for multinational corporations and global employers that recruit from internationally diverse business schools, where candidates simultaneously evaluate organisations across multiple dimensions.

1.6 Systematics of Writing

This thesis is organised into five chapters. Chapter 1 presents the research background, research questions, scope, objectives, and benefits. Chapter 2 reviews the theoretical background and each variable, presents previous research, develops four hypotheses, and presents the research framework. Chapter 3 describes the research methodology. Chapter 4 presents the empirical findings and discussion. Chapter 5 provides conclusions, managerial implications, research limitations, and suggestions for future research.