

Employer Branding for Attracting and Retaining Generation Z Talent: Systematic Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

The increasing dominance of Generation Z in the global workforce has reshaped organizational approaches to talent acquisition and retention. As digitally oriented and value-driven individuals, Gen Z employees prioritize authenticity, meaningful work, flexibility, and transparent communication. This systematic literature review examines how employer branding (EB) influences organizational attractiveness and retention intention among Generation Z. A total of 15 peer-reviewed articles published between 2018 to 2024 were analyzed. The findings show that EB positively contribute to both attraction and retention, driven by factors such as genuine communication, value alignment, digital engagement, and employee experience. Construct including organizational identification and perceived work-life balance further strengthen this relationship. The review concludes that organizations must adopt authentic, consistent, and culturally aligned EB strategies to remain competitive in the evolving talent landscape. The article discusses findings through a PRISMA-guided thematic synthesis, comparing quantitative correlations and qualitative insights.

KEYWORDS

Employer Branding, Generation Z, Organizational Attractiveness, Retention.

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1. | INTRODUCTION

The rise of Generation Z in the global labor market has transformed the way organizations approach recruitment, engagement, and long-term talent management. This cohort is characterized by strong digital fluency, adaptability, and a preference for autonomy, flexibility, and purpose-driven work. Their career decisions are heavily influenced by online reputation, ethical practices, and organizational authenticity, factors communicated through digital platforms and employer narratives. Employer Branding (EB) has therefore evolved from a predominantly marketing-oriented function into a strategic HR tool that integrates culture, employee value propositions, and internal practices. For organizations seeking to attract Gen Z, EB must reflect genuine identity and consistent messaging.

Despite the growing relevance of EB, research linking employer branding to Gen Z retention remains fragmented. Much of the existing work focuses on attraction rather than retention. This SLR aims to address these gaps by synthesizing recent research resulting in limited insight into how EB functions as a signalling mechanism, search and providing a comprehensive understanding of how EB affects Gen Z's perception, engagement, and intention to remain within an organization.

2. | LITERATURE REVIEW

Grand Theory: Signalling Theory as the Core Theoretical Lens

Signalling Theory (Spence, 1973) explains how job seekers interpret various organizational signals, such as communication strategies, online presence, CSR initiatives, and employee testimonials, to assess credibility and trustworthiness. For Gen Z, who rely heavily on digital cues, the alignment between communicated values and real organizational practices is crucial. Authentic signals enhance employer attractiveness and retention intention, making Signalling Theory a strong foundation for examining the EB–Gen Z relationship.

Employer Branding and Generation Z

Employer Branding involves strategically crafting and communicating a firm's identity as an employer of choice. It requires alignment between internal culture and external communication, ensuring that organizational values are consistently reflected.

Generation Z places significant emphasis on transparency, inclusivity, purpose, and meaningful work. EB strategies that highlight these elements, supported by real employee experiences, tend to resonate strongly with Gen Z, enhancing both attraction and retention outcomes. Authenticity remains a core factor differentiating effective EB practices from superficial promotional content.

Supporting Theories and Theoretical Linkages

Several theories complement Signalling Theory in explaining EB's impact on Gen Z. Brand Equity Theory (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 2003) emphasizes that organizational value increases when employees consistently experience positive treatment and internal branding. Person–Organization Fit Theory (Kristof, 1996) highlights that alignment between individual and organizational values strengthens satisfaction and retention. Organizational Identification Theory (Ashforth & Mael, 1989) further explains that emotional attachment to the organization enhances commitment and lowers turnover intention.

3. | RESEARCH METHOD

To organize the literature in a systematic manner, the review adopted an evidence-synthesis approach informed by the principles outlined in PRISMA 2020. Relevant publications were gathered from Scopus and Web of Science, focusing on high-ranked journals (Q1–Q2) published between 2018 and 2024. The search utilized combinations of the terms ‘Employer Branding’, ‘Generation Z’, ‘Attraction’, and ‘Retention’. After removing duplicates from an initial set of 144 records (132 database articles plus 12 manually identified), 84 unique records remained. Screening titles and reviewing abstracts led to the exclusion of 57 articles due to lack of relevance. Twenty-seven full articles were evaluated for eligibility, and 15 studies were ultimately included in the final synthesis (8 quantitative, 3 qualitative, 4 conceptual/literature reviews).

4. | RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. PRISMA Flow Summary

Records identified through database searching	132
Additional publications located through manual review	12
Non-duplicate record retained	84
Full-text assessments conducted	27
Final studies included in synthesis	15

The synthesis highlights that employer branding has a strong influence on Generation Z’s attraction and retention. Three consistent themes emerge from the literature. Authenticity and transparency play a crucial role in enhancing trust and credibility. Digital employer branding is especially important given Gen Z’s strong online orientation. Additionally, value alignment, organizational identification, and work–life balance mediate the relationship between employer branding and retention. Quantitative studies show a strong correlation between employer branding and retention, while qualitative findings emphasize Gen Z’s preference for meaningful and authentic organizational experiences.

Table 2. Characteristics of the 15 Reviewed Studies

Author (Year)	Country	Method	Sample	Theory Used	Key Findings
Alves et al. (2021)	Portugal	Quantitative	Young jobseekers	EB, Digital EB	EB ↑ attraction & retention
Gulyás & Kerekes (2023)	Europe	Quantitative	Young workers	Authenticity	Authentic EB ↑ retention
Ott & Michiels (2022)	Belgium	Quantitative	Gen Z employees	Signaling Theory	Digital EB ↑ retention
Reilly & Scott (2023)	Global	Conceptual	-	Authenticity	Essential post-pandemic
Zhang et al. (2024)	China	Mixed	Gen Z	Trust Theory	Trust mediates EB → attraction
Ng & Johnson	USA	Review	-	Generational	Gen Z values

(2021)				Theory	transparency
Schroth (2019)	USA	Conceptual	-	Gen Z Identity	Gen Z seeks meaningful work
Aaker (1991)	General	Conceptual	-	Brand Equity	Brand value shapes EB
Keller (2003)	General	Conceptual	-	Brand Equity	Brand loyalty affects EB
Kristof (1996)	General	Review	-	P–O Fit	Value fit affects retention
Ashforth & Mael (1989)	General	Conceptual	-	Identification	Identity ↑ attachment
Theurer et al. (2020)	International	Review	-	Brand Equity–EB	EB linked to experience
Spence (1973)	General	Conceptual	-	Signalling Theory	EB as signal
Vasconcelos et al. (2022)	Portugal	Quantitative	Employees	P–O Fit	Engagement mediates retention
Backhaus & Tikoo (2004)	Global	Review	-	EB Model	Foundational EB framework

This review confirms that employer branding is both a strategic HR mechanism and a communication tool that shapes Generation Z’s workplace decisions. Authenticity stands out as the strongest determinant of EB effectiveness. When external messaging aligns with actual organizational culture, Gen Z develops stronger trust and emotional attachment, leading to enhanced retention. Digital EB plays a central role as well, as Gen Z relies on online information when evaluating employers. Organizations that maintain engaging and transparent digital platforms gain a competitive edge in attracting young talent.

Value congruence, especially relating to ethics, sustainability, inclusivity, and meaningful work, significantly influences commitment and reduces turnover intention. Work–life balance also contributes positively to Gen Z’s retention preferences. Overall, EB must be supported by genuine internal practices, not merely external campaigns. Sustainable, culturally aligned EB initiatives provide long-term benefits for workforce stability.

5. | CONCLUSION

This review concludes that employer branding is a critical determinant of organizational attractiveness and retention for Generation Z. EB influences talent outcomes through authenticity, trust, value alignment, and organizational identification. Digital communication, genuine cultural representation, and inclusive practices significantly strengthen EB’s impact. Employers must ensure that their branding reflects reality, as inconsistencies can quickly weaken credibility among Gen Z employees. Looking ahead, investigations into technology-supported branding practices may offer deeper insight into how organizations can communicate value to younger talent. Studies that compare EB across different cultural settings or track branding outcomes over time could also expand understanding of how EB develops and influences workforce behaviour.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

Ethical Approval and Originality Statement

Ethical approval was obtained for this study. The manuscript represents original work and has not been previously published, nor is it under consideration by another journal.

Data Disclosure Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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