

THE IMPACT OF EMPLOYER BRANDING ON JOB SEEKER ATTRACTION: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF PERCEIVED EMPLOYER ATTRACTIVENESS AND THE MODERATING EFFECT OF COMPETITOR INFLUENCE - A CASE STUDY OF VJC

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: This research examines the influence of employer branding on job-seeker attraction in the luxury fashion e-commerce industry, using VJC as a case study. Amidst fierce competition in the labor market, especially for digital and creative roles, employer branding is a key strategy to attract top talent. However, challenges arise when companies like VJC have to compete with widely recognized global brands. This study aims to determine whether employer branding is sufficient to drive application intentions, whether its effectiveness depends on perceptions of the company's attractiveness as a workplace, and whether the presence of competitors affects the relationship.

Method: This study uses a quantitative approach employing Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). Data were obtained from 166 respondents interested in digital technology and products. The three main constructs analyzed were employer branding, perceived employer attractiveness, and job seeker applications, with competitor influence as a moderating variable.

Result: Results show that employer branding has no direct effect on application intentions, but significantly affects perceived employer attractiveness, which in turn leads to increased application intentions. Competitor influence is shown to moderate this relationship; when competitor branding is stronger, the effect of perceived attractiveness on application intentions is weakened. These findings confirm that employer branding occurs in a competitive context, where perceptions of competitors largely determine the effectiveness of a company's branding strategy.

INTRODUCTION

Employer branding has become an important factor in attracting, engaging and retaining top talent in today's highly competitive job market. Ambler and Barrow (1996) define employer branding as a package of functional, economic, and psychological benefits offered by a company and associated with the company's identity. This branding is not just

a recruitment tool, but also forms the company's image as a coveted workplace. In the context of globalization, technological developments, and changing labor expectations, employer branding is a strategic tool to build a company identity, convey a value proposition for employees (EVPs), and improve workforce stability (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). When a company's reputation aligns with the candidate's expectations such as growth opportunities, a healthy culture, or meaningful work, greater trust and loyalty will be created.

In the luxury fashion e-commerce industry, employer branding has an increasingly vital role. Unlike traditional retail businesses, luxury fashion e-commerce platforms like VJC must balance elements of prestige, exclusivity, and digital innovation to attract professionals in marketing, technology, products, and customer experience. However, the luxury fashion industry is currently experiencing a slowdown, affecting business performance and employment trends. Reports show that the global luxury fashion market has experienced a decline in sales, for example Capri Holdings recorded a decline in revenue of 11.6% in Q3 of 2025, and Gucci experienced a 25% decline that led to a change of creative director (Fashion Dive & Reuters, 2025). Factors such as misalignment of branding strategies and declining demand in key markets such as China are the main causes.

This condition has a direct impact on employment aspects, including job security, recruitment freezes, and employee retention rates at e-commerce companies such as VJC. Weakened financial performance limits a company's ability to attract new talent, creates instability in workforce planning, and increases turnover risk as employees move to industries that are considered more stable such as technology or mainstream retail. Therefore, VJC must build strong employer branding as a risk mitigation strategy, while increasing the attractiveness of the company in the eyes of candidates and potential employees. However, a positive image from competitors does not necessarily reduce interest in VJC, as job seekers may view the luxury fashion industry as a whole as an attractive field.

VJC itself is a luxury fashion trading company that operates online, connecting global consumers with world-renowned brands. VJC does not design or manufacture its own products, but focuses on providing a seamless shopping experience and maintaining close relationships with brand partners. VJC has a mission to provide maximum satisfaction to customers in meeting their expectations of luxury products, and a vision to become a global platform where consumers can find personal style and quality products. VJC also emphasizes working with brands that are socially responsible and meet high quality standards. With a global reach and efficient logistics, VJC serves key markets such as the US, Canada, Europe, and Asia-Pacific.

However, the main challenge faced by VJC is the lack of visibility as an employer brand in the eyes of job seekers. Many applicants apply not because they want to work at VJC specifically, but because the positions available match their skills. This causes the quality of applicants to be inconsistent and has an impact on the decrease in the number of applications, as seen from the 55.71% decrease in the Affiliate Marketing Specialist position (Dealls, 2024). VJC also struggles to compete with large companies such as Gucci, Louis Vuitton, or tech startups in attracting digital and creative talent. Without a clear employer branding strategy, the recruitment process becomes slower, expensive, and prone to losing the best talent.

Based on these conditions, this study aims to understand how employer branding affects job applicants' intentions towards VJC. Its main focus includes: (1) the impact of employer branding on the intention to apply for a job; (2) the mediating role of the perception of the company's attractiveness; and (3) the influence of moderation from perceptions on competitors. This research will also evaluate how VJC can build a stronger corporate image in the eyes of potential employees, as well as understand the dynamics of the labor market in the digital-based luxury fashion industry that is undergoing a transition. Thus, the results of this study are expected to provide relevant strategic recommendations for strengthening VJC's competitiveness in acquiring and retaining superior talent.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Employer Branding

Employer branding has become a strategic concept in human resource management, particularly in highly competitive and dynamic industries. The term employer branding was first introduced by Ambler and Barrow (1996), who defined it as a set of functional, economic, and psychological benefits provided by an organization and identified with the employing company. Employer branding reflects how organizations communicate their values, culture, and employment propositions to both current employees and potential job seekers.

Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) explain that employer branding plays a dual role, functioning externally to attract potential employees and internally to enhance employee commitment and retention. From an external perspective, a strong employer brand serves as a signal to job seekers regarding what it is like to work for a particular organization. This aligns with Signaling Theory proposed by Spence (1973), which suggests that job seekers rely on observable organizational cues—such as reputation, employer image, and communication—to reduce uncertainty when evaluating potential employers.

In the digital era, employer branding has evolved beyond traditional recruitment channels. Online platforms, corporate websites, and social media have become essential tools for shaping employer perceptions (Lievens & Slaughter, 2016). For companies operating in digital-based industries, such as luxury fashion e-commerce, employer branding must integrate elements of innovation, creativity, organizational culture, and career development opportunities to appeal to skilled professionals in marketing, technology, and product development.

Several studies indicate that companies with strong employer branding enjoy lower recruitment costs, higher-quality applicants, and improved employee retention (Berthon et al., 2005). In industries facing economic uncertainty, such as luxury fashion, employer branding becomes increasingly important as a mechanism to maintain organizational attractiveness despite market challenges.

Perceived Employer Attractiveness

Perceived Employer Attractiveness (PEA) refers to the extent to which a job seeker views an organization as a desirable place to work. Berthon et al. (2005) conceptualize employer attractiveness as the benefits that a potential employee sees in working for a specific organization. These benefits may include career development opportunities, organizational culture, compensation, work-life balance, and corporate reputation.

Lievens and Slaughter (2016) emphasize that perceived employer attractiveness is a psychological evaluation formed through both direct and indirect information sources. Direct sources include personal experience or interaction with the company, while indirect sources include employer branding messages, word-of-mouth, and media exposure. In this sense, employer branding serves as a critical antecedent to perceived employer attractiveness.

Research consistently demonstrates that employer branding positively influences perceived employer attractiveness, which in turn affects job seekers' behavioral intentions (Backhaus, 2016). When job seekers perceive a company as attractive, they are more likely to develop favorable attitudes toward the organization and consider it as a potential employer.

In the context of luxury fashion e-commerce, perceived employer attractiveness is shaped not only by company-specific attributes but also by industry-related perceptions, such as prestige, exclusivity, and global exposure. However, economic downturns and declining performance in the luxury sector may weaken perceived attractiveness if not managed through effective employer branding strategies.

Job Application Intention

Job application intention refers to the likelihood or willingness of a job seeker to apply for a position within a specific organization. According to Ajzen's (1991) **Theory of Planned Behavior**, intention is a key predictor of actual behavior. In recruitment research, job application intention is widely used as an indicator of recruitment effectiveness (Highhouse et al., 2003).

From a signaling perspective, employer branding influences job application intention by shaping job seekers' beliefs about organizational quality, work environment, and career prospects (Spence, 1973). When employer branding communicates clear and positive signals, job seekers are more confident in their decision to apply.

Empirical studies show that employer branding has a direct positive effect on job application intention and an indirect effect through perceived employer attractiveness (Berthon et al., 2005; Lievens & Slaughter, 2016). Job seekers tend to apply to organizations that they perceive as reputable, stable, and aligned with their personal values and career goals.

In competitive labor markets, job application intention is also influenced by alternative employment options. Job seekers often evaluate multiple employers simultaneously, comparing organizational attributes before making

application decisions. This comparative process highlights the importance of differentiation in employer branding strategies.

Competitor Influence

Competitor influence refers to the extent to which competing organizations affect job seekers' perceptions and application decisions. In industries with strong and well-known brands, such as luxury fashion, employer branding does not operate in isolation. Job seekers frequently compare employers based on reputation, prestige, compensation, and career opportunities (Lievens & Slaughter, 2016).

Comparative employer branding suggests that the attractiveness of one employer may be weakened or strengthened depending on the perceived attractiveness of competitors. For example, global luxury brands such as Gucci or Louis Vuitton may exert strong employer branding influence due to their established reputations and brand prestige. This may moderate the relationship between perceived employer attractiveness and job application intention toward less visible companies.

Research indicates that competitor influence can function as a moderating variable, altering the strength of the relationship between employer attractiveness and job application behavior (Cable & Turban, 2003). When competitor employer branding is perceived as significantly stronger, job seekers may prefer applying to competitors even if they view the focal company positively.

In the case of VJC, competitor influence is particularly relevant because the company operates within the same industry ecosystem as major luxury brands while lacking similar levels of employer brand visibility. Understanding how competitor perceptions shape job seeker behavior is therefore essential for developing effective employer branding strategies.

Conceptual Framework

Based on signaling theory and employer branding literature, this study proposes a conceptual framework to explain how employer branding influences job seekers' intention to apply for a job at VJC. In the recruitment context, job seekers often face information asymmetry when evaluating potential employers. Therefore, they rely on observable signals such as corporate reputation, employer image, and communicated employment values to reduce uncertainty (Spence, 1973).

Employer branding functions as a strategic signal that communicates the organization's identity, work environment, and employee value proposition to the labor market (Ambler & Barrow, 1996; Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). A strong employer brand can enhance organizational credibility and increase job seekers' confidence in the company, which in turn encourages them to consider applying for available positions. Previous studies have consistently found that employer branding has a positive influence on job seekers' behavioral intentions, including the intention to apply for a job (Berthon et al., 2005; Lievens & Slaughter, 2016). Based on this argument, the first hypothesis is proposed H1: Employer branding has a positive effect on job seekers' intention to apply at VJC.

Beyond its direct effect, employer branding is also expected to shape job seekers' psychological evaluations of the organization, particularly in terms of perceived employer attractiveness. Perceived employer attractiveness refers to the degree to which an organization is viewed as a desirable place to work based on expected benefits, career opportunities, organizational culture, and work environment (Berthon et al., 2005). Employer branding provides critical information that helps job seekers form these perceptions, especially when direct experience with the organization is limited. Accordingly, a strong and consistent employer brand is likely to enhance perceived employer attractiveness.

Empirical research supports the notion that employer branding significantly influences perceived employer attractiveness, as job seekers tend to associate positive employer branding signals with favorable employment outcomes (Lievens & Slaughter, 2016). Therefore, the following hypothesis is formulated H2: Employer branding has a positive effect on perceived employer attractiveness.

Perceived employer attractiveness plays a crucial role in shaping job seekers' application decisions. When individuals perceive an organization as attractive, they are more inclined to develop positive attitudes toward the employer and demonstrate a higher intention to apply (Highhouse et al., 2003). In line with the Theory of Planned

Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), positive perceptions increase intention, which serves as a strong predictor of actual behavior. In the context of luxury fashion e-commerce, perceived attractiveness may stem from factors such as global exposure, innovation, career growth, and organizational prestige.

Based on this reasoning, perceived employer attractiveness is expected to positively influence job seekers' intention to apply. Thus, the third hypothesis is proposed: H3: Perceived employer attractiveness has a positive effect on job seekers' intention to apply at VJC.

Furthermore, perceived employer attractiveness is expected to act as a mediating variable in the relationship between employer branding and job application intention. Employer branding shapes initial perceptions about the organization, which are then translated into behavioral intentions through perceived attractiveness. This mediation mechanism is consistent with signaling theory, which suggests that signals influence behavior indirectly by shaping perceptions and evaluations (Spence, 1973). Several studies have confirmed the mediating role of employer attractiveness in recruitment-related outcomes (Berthon et al., 2005; Backhaus, 2016). Therefore, this study proposes the following mediation hypothesis H4: Perceived employer attractiveness mediates the relationship between employer branding and job seekers' intention to apply at VJC.

In addition to the direct and mediated relationships, this study considers the role of competitor influence as a moderating variable. In highly competitive industries such as luxury fashion, job seekers rarely evaluate employers in isolation. Instead, they compare multiple organizations simultaneously, particularly well-known luxury brands with strong reputations and established employer images (Lievens & Slaughter, 2016). The presence of strong competitors may alter how perceived employer attractiveness translates into job application intention.

When competitor employer branding is perceived as stronger, job seekers may be less likely to apply to a focal company even if they perceive it as attractive. Conversely, weaker competitor influence may strengthen the effect of perceived employer attractiveness on application intention. Based on comparative employer branding theory, competitor influence is expected to moderate the relationship between perceived employer attractiveness and job application intention. Thus, the final hypothesis is formulated as follows H5: Competitor influence moderates the relationship between perceived employer attractiveness and job seekers' intention to apply at VJC.

Based on the proposed hypotheses, a conceptual framework is developed to illustrate the relationships among employer branding, perceived employer attractiveness, competitor influence, and job application intention. The conceptual model of this study is presented in Figure 1.

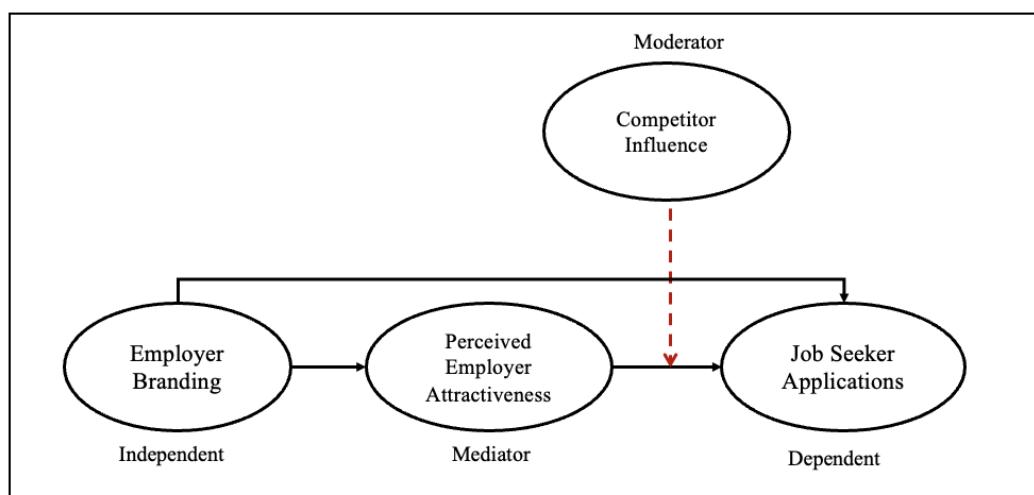


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

METHOD

Research Design

This study uses a quantitative approach with descriptive and explanatory designs to analyze the influence of employer branding on job seekers' intention to apply at VJC, a company in the luxury fashion e-commerce industry. Data is collected through structured surveys, allowing for numerical analysis and hypothesis testing. This method allows an objective measurement of job seekers' perception of VJC's employer branding, their level of interest in the company, and their intention to apply. The study also examined the role of moderation from competitors' influence on the relationship between perception of attractiveness and intent to apply.

Online surveys are used as the main method of data collection because they efficiently reach many respondents in a short time. The target respondents are job seekers or potential applicants in the field of digital marketing, technology, and product design, which plays a strategic role in the growth of VJC and is urgently needed in the luxury fashion e-commerce industry. Surveys are disseminated through Google Forms and distributed to various communities such as career groups, digital forums, emails, university alumni networks, and technology communities. The target number of respondents ranged from 150 to 200 people, following general statistical guidelines for survey research to ensure results were representative and conclusively analysed.

The main instrument is a structured questionnaire with a 5-point Likert scale, from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), to measure perceptions consistently. Sample questions include: whether respondents are familiar with VJC's reputation as an employer, whether VJC's employer brand encourages them to apply, and perceptions of the work environment and career growth opportunities at VJC. In addition, three open-ended questions are provided to capture additional insights into the company's attributes that are considered attractive and suggestions for improving the employer brand. These open-ended answers are analyzed thematically and support the interpretation of quantitative data. Below outlines the alignment between theoretical constructs and survey questions, ensuring coherence with the conceptual framework.

Table 1. Summary of Variables and Survey Constructs

Variable	Definition	Survey Example Question	Related Theory
Employer Branding Awareness	Job seekers' familiarity with VJC as an employer	<i>"Have you heard of VJC as a potential employer before?"</i>	Signaling Theory (Spence, 1973)
Perceived Employer Attractiveness	Job seekers' perception of VJC desirability	<i>"Do you believe VJC offers strong career opportunities?"</i>	Employer Attractiveness Model (Berthon et al., 2005). Lievens & Slaughter (2016)
Competitor Influence	The impact of luxury brands on job seeker decisions	<i>"Would you prefer applying to Gucci or Louis Vuitton over VJC?"</i>	Comparative Employer Branding (Lievens & Slaughter (2016)
Job Seeker Application	Likelihood of applying to VJC	<i>"Would you apply to VJC based on its employer branding?"</i>	Signaling Theory (Spence, 1973)

Data Analysis

For data analysis, a Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) approach based on Partial Least Squares (PLS) was used with SmartPLS 4 software. This procedure was chosen because it is able to handle complex models with latent variables and remains valid even though the sample size is relatively small. The analysis began with descriptive statistics to describe the demographics of the respondents, then followed by the evaluation of measurement models through validity and reliability tests, such as indicator loadings, Composite Reliability (CR), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). The validity of the discriminator is also checked to ensure that each construct is unique.

The structural model (inner model) is then analyzed to test the relationships between variables in a conceptual framework. The test included the direct effect of employer branding on the intention to apply, the mediating role of perceived employer attractiveness, and the moderation effect of competitor influence on the relationship. Competitor variables are measured through respondents' perception of the strength of employer branding from competing brands. The moderation test was carried out by adding an interaction term, and all relationships were tested through the bootstrapping technique with 5,000 subsamples. The results were analyzed using path coefficients, t-values, p-values, and R² to evaluate the strength and significance of the relationship between variables.

To strengthen the primary data, this study also uses secondary data such as luxury fashion industry reports, competitor employer branding analysis results, academic literature on employer brand equity and labor retention, as well as economic and labor market reports. This secondary data helps to place the survey findings in a broader industry context and provides an overview of external factors influencing job seekers' decisions, such as labor market conditions and perceptions of job stability.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Results

Respondent Demographics

To contextualize the target audience of this study, a demographic analysis was conducted based on responses from 166 individuals who completed the questionnaire. The analysis focused on three key attributes: gender, age, and educational background. These insights are essential for understanding the profile of potential job seekers VJC aims to attract. As summarized in Figures 2 to 4, the majority of respondents are mid-career professionals with higher education qualifications and relevant experience in fields such as digital marketing, technology, and product development aligning with VJC's talent acquisition strategy.

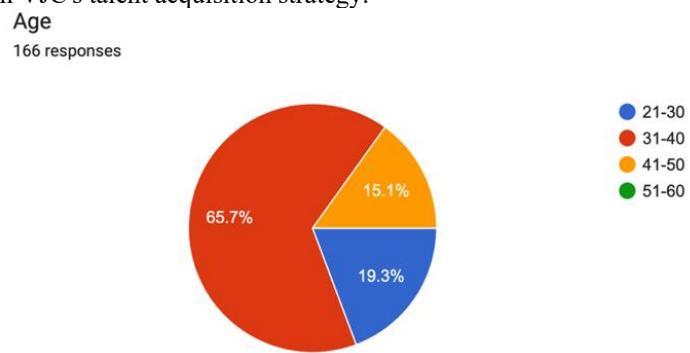


Figure 2. Respondents' Age Distribution

The age profile (Figure 2) reveals that a significant portion (65.7%) of respondents are between 31–40 years old, characterizing them as mid-career professionals who may be actively considering job transitions. Additionally, 19.3% are aged 21–30, and 15.1% fall within the 41–50 age bracket. This distribution indicates a representative sample encompassing both early-career and more experienced individuals, although the dominant group is clearly mid-career.

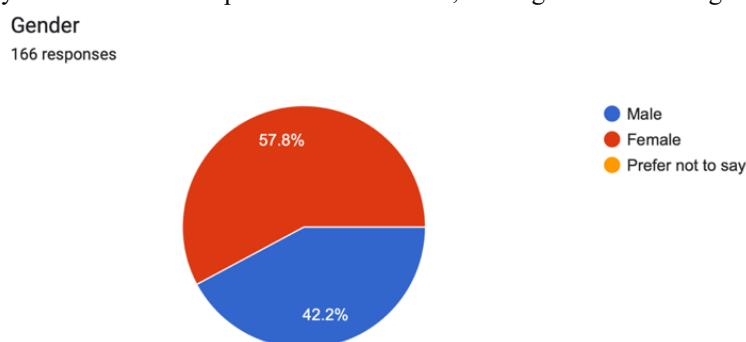


Figure 3. Respondents' Gender Composition

Figure 3 shows that 57.8% of respondents identify as female. This skew may reflect the nature of the fashion e-commerce industry, which often engages a predominantly female workforce or consumer base. The implication for VJC is that its employer branding efforts should be sensitive to the preferences and expectations of a largely female job seeker pool.

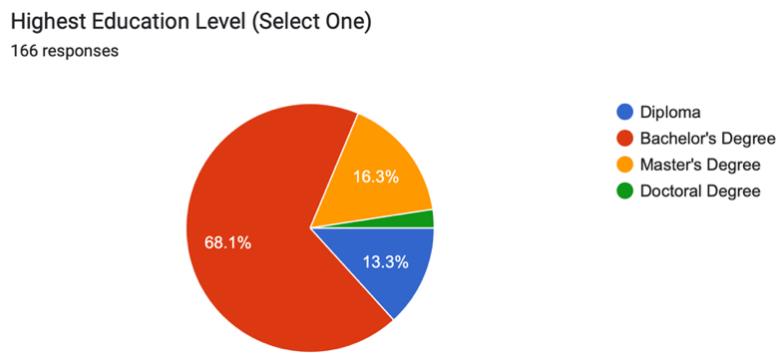


Figure 4. Respondents' Educational Attainment

As illustrated in Figure 4, 68.12% of respondents possess a bachelor's degree, while 16.3% have earned a master's degree, 13.3% hold diplomas, and 2.4% have doctoral qualifications. This high level of academic attainment is consistent with the knowledge-intensive roles within digital and tech-driven industries. Hence, employer branding strategies should highlight intellectual challenge, opportunities for career development, and alignment with professional growth aspirations.

Descriptive Statistics of Constructs

Before proceeding with structural analysis, descriptive statistics were calculated for the study's four key constructs: Employer Branding (EB), Competitor Influence (CI), Perceived Employer Attractiveness (PEA), and Job Seeker Application (JSA). Each was measured using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree), and the results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Constructs

Construct	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Employer Branding (EB)	166	3.67	1.18
Competitor Influence (CI)	166	3.64	1.22
Perceived Employer Attractiveness (PEA)	166	3.76	1.27
Job Seeker Applications (JSA)	166	3.72	1.13

All four constructs recorded mean scores above the neutral midpoint (3.00), suggesting generally positive perceptions among respondents. PEA emerged as the highest-rated construct ($M = 3.76$), followed by JSA ($M = 3.72$), EB ($M = 3.67$), and CI ($M = 3.64$). The relatively high rating of CI emphasizes that job seekers remain influenced by competing brands, underscoring the competitive context in which VJC operates.

The standard deviations ranging from 1.13 to 1.27 indicate a fair degree of variation in individual responses. This variation is especially pronounced in PEA and CI, suggesting diverse perceptions shaped by personal experiences, expectations, or familiarity with VJC and its competitors.

These findings underscore that while VJC is perceived as an attractive employer, such perceptions are not uniform. Differences in values, priorities, and professional backgrounds lead to variation in how job seekers assess employer attractiveness and brand influence.

Measurement Model (Outer Model)

To assess the measurement model, both reliability and convergent validity were examined. Table 2 confirms that all item loadings exceed the recommended threshold of 0.70, supporting convergent validity and ensuring that indicators appropriately reflect their respective latent variables. Further, Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability (CR), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) were assessed to confirm internal consistency. Table 3 shows that all values meet accepted thresholds ($\alpha > 0.7$; $CR > 0.7$; $AVE > 0.5$).

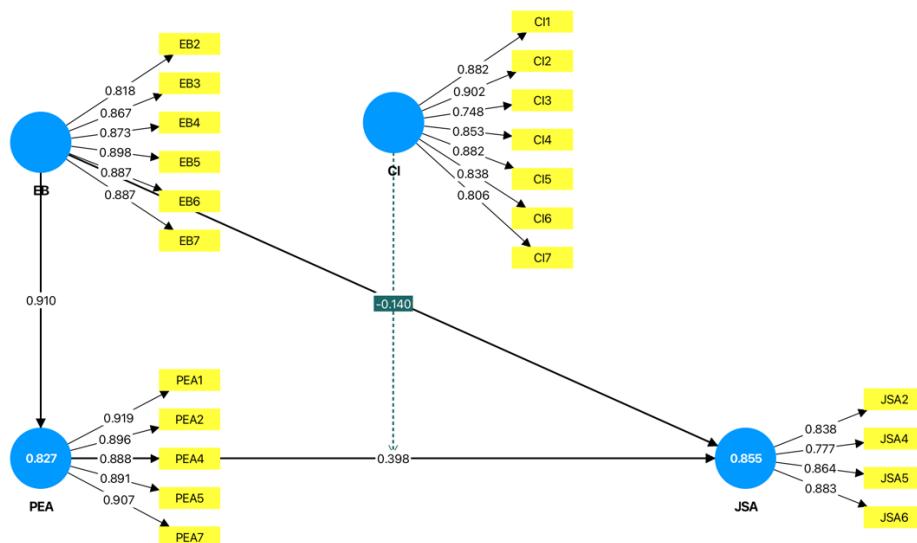
Table 3. Reliability and Convergent Validity

Construct	Cronbach's α	Composite Reliability (CR)	AVE
Employer Branding (EB)	0.937	0.950	0.760
Perceived Emp. Attractiveness (PEA)	0.941	0.957	0.810
Competitor Influence (CI)	0.933	0.946	0.715
Job Seeker Application (JSA)	0.862	0.906	0.708

Discriminant validity was tested using the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) Ratio. All HTMT values fall below the conservative threshold of 0.85, indicating clear conceptual distinction between constructs. Additionally, multicollinearity was assessed via Variance Inflation Factor (VIF), with all values reported (in Appendix) below the threshold of 5.0, confirming the absence of multicollinearity concerns.

Structural Model and Hypothesis Testing

The structural (inner) model evaluates the hypothesized relationships among constructs. Figure 5 presents the final SmartPLS path model, which includes standardized path coefficients and R^2 values. The model accounts for 82.7% of the variance in Perceived Employer Attractiveness (PEA) and 85.5% of the variance in Job Seeker Application (JSA), suggesting a robust explanatory framework.

**Figure 5. Final PLS-SEM Model with Path Coefficients and R^2 Values**

To determine the significance of hypothesized paths, bootstrapping (5,000 subsamples) was performed. The resulting path coefficients (β), t-values, p-values, and effect sizes (f^2) are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4. Structural Model Results: Path Coefficients, Significance and Effect Sizes

Hypothesis	Path	β (Std. Coefficient)	t	p	f^2
H1	EB \rightarrow JSA	0.030	0.309	0.757	0.001
H2	EB \rightarrow PEA	0.910	34.826	0.000	4.770
H3	PEA \rightarrow JSA	0.398	3.425	0.001	0.111
H4	EB \rightarrow PEA \rightarrow JSA (mediation)	Indirect Only	-	<.001	-
H5	(PEA x CI) \rightarrow JSA (moderation)	-0.140	2.760	0.006	0.058

- Employer Branding (EB) has no significant direct effect on Job Seeker Application Intention (JSA), with a t-statistic of 0.309 and a p-value of 0.757. Therefore, H0 is accepted and H1 is rejected.
- Employer Branding (EB) has a significant positive effect on Perceived Employer Attractiveness (PEA), with a t-statistic of 34.826 and a p-value of 0.000. Therefore, H0 is rejected and H2 is accepted.

- c. Perceived Employer Attractiveness (PEA) has a significant positive effect on Job Seeker Application Intention (JSA), with a t-statistic of 3.425 and a p-value of 0.001. Therefore, H0 is rejected and H3 is accepted.
- d. The path from Employer Branding (EB) through Perceived Employer Attractiveness (PEA) to Job Seeker Application Intention (JSA) has a significant indirect effect with a p-value < 0.001, indicating that Perceived Employer Attractiveness mediates this relationship. Therefore, H0 is rejected and H4 is accepted.
- e. The interaction between Perceived Employer Attractiveness (PEA) and Competitor Influence (CI) on Job Seeker Application Intention (JSA) is significant, with a t-statistic of 2.760 and a p-value of 0.006, indicating a moderation effect. Therefore, H0 is rejected and H5 is accepted.

In conclusion, the results show that Employer Branding influences Job Seeker Application Intention indirectly through Perceived Employer Attractiveness, while Competitor Influence moderates this relationship. These findings indicate that strong employer branding strategies must enhance perceived attractiveness and consider competitive labor market conditions to effectively increase job seekers' intention to apply.

Qualitative Insights Analysis (Q1–Q3)

As a complement to the quantitative findings, the study also analyzed three open-ended questions (Q1, Q2, and Q3) in the survey to capture respondents' perceptions more deeply about the attributes they value from employers and how VJC can improve its employer branding image. This qualitative insight provides context and nuances that are not always reflected in statistical figures, and shows strategic areas that need to be of concern to the VJC HR team.

The Influence of Employer Branding on Job Application Decisions (Q1)

The first question delves into the extent to which the company's branding influences respondents' decision to apply for a job. The majority of respondents stated that employer branding only has a significant impact if it is able to clearly convey the values that the company offers to employees, such as benefits, work values, and career development opportunities. In other words, the popularity of a brand alone is not enough to attract job seekers.

Instead, respondents emphasized the importance of authenticity of the branding message, which is reflected in the employee's real experience, the value of the work culture, and the concrete benefits offered. Employer branding that displays a realistic career path, inclusive work culture, and attention to employee welfare is considered to have a positive influence on interest in applying. Meanwhile, branding messages that are generic or seem "too perfect" actually raise doubts. Thus, credibility and transparency are crucial elements in conveying employer branding.

These findings are in line with previous quantitative results that the influence of employer branding is mediated by perception of employer attractiveness (PEA). Branding is a signal, but the content of the perceived message (e.g. "this company values growth and work-life balance") is a determining factor in shaping the intention to apply. Summary of Q1 Responses is presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Q1 Response Summary

Category	Count	Percentage (%)	Example Response
Reputation & Stability	69	41.6%	"Bigger and known brand guarantee more sustainability and growth."
Culture & Values	67	40.4%	"I think a company's culture really matters. Especially in how they treat people."
Transparency & Authenticity	19	11.4%	"Trust and honesty really shape my perception of the brand."
Career Development	9	5.4%	"I look for company that offer space to grow in my career."
Other	2	1.2%	-

Key Factors in the Decision to Apply to VJC (Q2)

The second question aims to identify the main factors that drive respondents' interest in applying to companies such as VJC. The results of the analysis show that the company's reputation in the industry, a positive and inclusive work culture, competitive compensation, and career development opportunities are the dominant themes. Some respondents also mentioned their interest in companies that are known to be innovative and have visionary leadership, indicating the importance of perception of the company's prestige and strategic direction.

These findings reflect indicators in the construction of *Perceived Employer Attractiveness (PEA)*: reputation with aesthetic value, culture with social value, compensation with economic value, and career development with growth

value. Interestingly, only a few respondents explicitly mentioned "employer branding" as the main factor. Their focus is more on the substance behind the branding, such as the culture and real career opportunities.

For VJC, this shows that employer branding must be built on a strong and relevant *Employee Value Proposition (EVP)*. Communication strategies can include highlighting employee success stories, diversity and inclusion programs, and promoting competitive benefits. When branding aligns with the values that job seekers value, their likelihood of applying will increase. Summary of Q2 Responses is presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Q2 Response Summary

Category	Count	Percentage (%)	Example Response
Salary & Benefit	78	47%	<i>"Competitive salary is a strong motivator."</i>
Team Culture	53	32%	<i>"Workplace environment really influences my willingness to apply."</i>
Career Development	20	12%	<i>"Opportunities for career growth make a huge difference."</i>
Work-Life Balance (Flexibility)	15	9%	<i>"Flexible work hours really matter to me."</i>

Proposed Increase in Employer Branding at VJC (Q3)

The last question asked for suggestions from respondents on how VJC can strengthen its employer branding strategy to attract more talent. The dominant theme is the importance of authenticity and transparency. Many respondents suggested that VJC share more content that shows the real conditions of working at the company, such as employee testimonials or "a day in the work" story, which is able to reflect the work culture in an authentic way.

Some respondents also suggested that VJC highlight specific programs such as flexible work policies, mental health initiatives, mentoring opportunities, or community involvement, to strengthen the credibility of its employer branding. This approach is considered to be able to build an emotional connection with job seekers because it feels more human and trustworthy than marketing content that is too polished.

In addition, increasing digital presence, especially on platforms such as LinkedIn, is also an important input. Respondents recommend the use of the "Life at VJC" page with regularly updated content or involvement in digital career events as a strategy to expand the company's reach and appeal, especially in the face of competition with other major brands.

Overall, this qualitative feedback emphasizes that effective employer branding must be aspirational but still aligned with the company's internal reality. By ensuring consistency between external messages and the actual employee experience, VJC can build a credible and appealing employer image in the eyes of potential job seekers. Summary of Q3 Responses is presented in Table 7.

Table 7. Q3 Response Summary

Category	Count	Percentage (%)	Example Response
Exposure on Digital Content	51	30.7%	<i>"Improve social media presence with real stories from employees."</i>
Remuneration & Employee Program	49	29.5%	<i>"Provide more info on benefits, invest in mental health and wellness programs."</i>
Employee Experience	44	26.5%	<i>"Show how feedback from employees drives change."</i>
Transparency Culture	20	12%	<i>"Give clarity on expectations and career mapping."</i>
Other	2	1.2%	-

Discussion

The Influence of Employer Branding on Job Seeker Application Intention

The results of this study indicate that Employer Branding does not have a significant direct effect on Job Seeker Application Intention ($t = 0.37$; $p > 0.05$). This finding suggests that employer branding alone is insufficient to directly motivate job seekers to submit applications. In line with signaling theory, employer branding functions primarily as an initial signal that raises awareness rather than directly triggering behavioral intention. Without being supported by concrete employment attributes, branding messages may fail to translate into application decisions.

This result implies that job seekers tend to evaluate employment opportunities pragmatically, focusing on tangible factors such as compensation, career development opportunities, organizational culture, and work-life balance. Merely projecting a positive employer image does not necessarily lead to application behavior if job seekers do not perceive clear personal benefits. From an HR perspective, this finding highlights that employer branding should not be treated as a standalone recruitment tool, but rather as a supporting mechanism that must be aligned with a strong Employee Value Proposition (EVP).

The Influence of Employer Branding on Perceived Employer Attractiveness

The findings demonstrate that Employer Branding has a strong and significant positive effect on Perceived Employer Attractiveness ($t = 34.83$; $p < 0.001$). This result confirms that employer branding plays a crucial role in shaping how attractive an organization is perceived by potential job seekers. Consistent with employer branding theory, organizational communication related to values, culture, reputation, and career opportunities significantly influences attractiveness perceptions.

Effective employer branding helps job seekers form favorable impressions by signaling what it is like to work for the organization. This includes the clarity and consistency of messages communicated through career websites, social media, and recruitment campaigns. From an HR standpoint, this finding emphasizes that employer branding is not merely a marketing activity but a strategic tool that shapes talent perceptions. However, the credibility of employer branding is essential; messages must reflect the actual employee experience to sustain perceived attractiveness.

The Influence of Perceived Employer Attractiveness on Job Seeker Application Intention

The results further indicate that Perceived Employer Attractiveness has a significant positive effect on Job Seeker Application Intention ($t = 3.43$; $p = 0.001$). This finding supports recruitment and attraction theories, which suggest that individuals are more likely to apply to organizations they perceive as attractive employers. Attributes such as career growth, organizational culture, job security, and employer reputation contribute to these positive perceptions.

This result implies that perceived attractiveness serves as a key psychological mechanism that transforms employer branding signals into actual application intention. For VJC, enhancing perceived attractiveness requires more than visibility; it involves communicating meaningful and relevant employment attributes that align with job seekers' expectations. HR initiatives such as showcasing employee testimonials, transparent career paths, and organizational values can strengthen these perceptions and increase application intention.

The Mediating Role of Perceived Employer Attractiveness

The mediation analysis reveals that Perceived Employer Attractiveness fully mediates the relationship between Employer Branding and Job Seeker Application Intention. This indicates that employer branding influences application intention indirectly by first shaping attractiveness perceptions. Once perceived attractiveness is considered, the direct effect of employer branding on application intention becomes insignificant.

This finding aligns with signaling theory, which argues that signals only influence behavior when they are interpreted as meaningful and valuable by the receiver. Employer branding acts as a signal, but it must enhance perceived attractiveness to motivate job seekers to apply. From a practical perspective, this suggests that HR strategies should prioritize the substance behind employer branding, ensuring that branding messages highlight real employment benefits rather than superficial image-building.

The Moderating Effect of Competitor Influence

The results also show that Competitor Influence significantly moderates the relationship between Perceived Employer Attractiveness and Job Seeker Application Intention ($t = 2.76$; $p < 0.01$). The negative interaction effect indicates that stronger competitor influence weakens the positive impact of perceived attractiveness on application intention. This suggests that job seekers evaluate employers comparatively rather than in isolation.

In competitive labor markets, even organizations perceived as attractive may struggle to convert interest into applications if competitors are perceived as offering superior opportunities. This finding highlights the importance of competitive positioning in employer branding. For VJC, differentiating itself from competitors by emphasizing unique strengths—such as faster career advancement, flexibility, or a distinctive organizational culture—can help mitigate the negative impact of competitor influence.

In summary, the results demonstrate that employer branding plays a powerful role in attracting job seekers primarily through the mechanism of perceived employer attractiveness. While the direct effect of Employer Branding on Job Seeker Application Intention was not supported, the indirect effect through perceived attractiveness was strong and significant. This indicates that employer branding must translate into concrete perceived value, in the form of a clear and credible Employee Value Proposition (EVP), in order to effectively motivate job seekers to apply.

The structural model exhibits strong explanatory power, accounting for 82.7% of the variance in Perceived Employer Attractiveness and 85.5% of the variance in Job Seeker Application Intention. These results highlight the

importance of perceptual and evaluative factors in shaping job seeker behavior and confirm that attraction is not driven by branding visibility alone, but by how branding is interpreted and valued by potential applicants.

The findings also reveal that the competitive environment plays a critical role in shaping job seeker decisions. Competitor influence was found to weaken the relationship between perceived attractiveness and application intention, suggesting that job seekers evaluate organizations comparatively rather than in isolation. While competition may increase overall awareness of the industry, it can simultaneously dilute VJC's relative appeal when candidates compare multiple employment options.

These quantitative results are further reinforced by qualitative feedback from respondents, many of whom emphasized the importance of meaningful employment factors such as company reputation, organizational culture, compensation, and career growth opportunities over surface-level branding. Job seekers consistently expressed the need for an employer image that feels authentic, credible, and clearly differentiated from competitors.

Taken together, these findings suggest a dual strategic focus for VJC's HR function. Internally, VJC must strengthen and clearly articulate its Employee Value Proposition to ensure that employer branding reflects real value and aligns with job seekers' expectations. Externally, the company needs to sharpen its competitive positioning by communicating what truly differentiates it in the labor market—whether through its agile organizational structure, deep local market expertise, or innovation-driven culture.

Overall, the study emphasizes that clear, consistent, and authentic employer branding is essential, particularly in competitive labor markets. Job seekers compare employers based on perceived values and relevance, making it crucial for VJC to stand out while remaining true to its actual offerings in order to attract the right talent.

The following chapter discusses the practical implications of these findings and presents strategic recommendations. It focuses on how VJC can leverage the confirmed relationships—particularly the central role of perceived employer attractiveness—to strengthen its employer branding strategy, improve recruitment outcomes, and address both managerial implications and study limitations.

CONCLUSION

This study examined how employer branding affects job seeker attraction in the luxury fashion e-commerce context, with VJC as a case study. It focused on Perceived Employer Attractiveness (PEA) as a mediating variable and Competitor Influence (CI) as a moderator. Using data from 166 respondents and PLS-SEM analysis, the findings show that employer branding impacts job seeker attraction indirectly, by first enhancing perceived attractiveness.

The direct effect of employer branding on application intention was not significant, highlighting that branding must create meaningful perceptions of value to be effective. PEA plays a critical role in translating branding efforts into application interest, underscoring that job seekers respond to how attractive they perceive a company to be not just to branding messages.

The study also found that Competitor Influence weakens the impact of perceived attractiveness on application intent, suggesting that job seekers compare employer brands side by side. While CI was not tested as a direct predictor, its moderating role emphasizes the need for both internal appeal and external differentiation.

Qualitative feedback echoed these findings, with job seekers emphasizing reputation, culture, compensation and growth opportunities as key factors. They also stressed the need for employer branding to be authentic, relatable and backed by visible proof.

In conclusion, VJC's employer branding will be most effective when it strengthens perceived attractiveness through a strong EVP and clearly positions the company among strong competitors. These findings offer both theoretical insight and practical guidance for HR teams in talent-driven industries.

Suggestion

From a managerial and human resources perspective, the results of this study emphasize that effective employer branding does not only depend on attractive visual appearances, but must also reflect an authentic and meaningful work experience. In the context of VJC, the attractiveness of job seekers is not enough to be formed by branding messages alone, but rather by how real the values offered by the company are in accordance with the expectations of the candidate. Therefore, VJCs need to highlight concrete elements such as career development opportunities, an inclusive work culture, competitive benefits, work flexibility, and clear organizational goals. Consistency between external messages and internal experiences is essential for a company's image to remain credible amid increasingly open access to information.

Moreover, in the competitive luxury fashion e-commerce industry, differentiation is key. VJC should take advantage of uniqueness such as organizational agility, entrepreneurial spirit, and attachment to the local market as the main selling point rather than just imitating a global brand. Strategic steps such as establishing partnerships with universities, participation in industry activities, and providing internship programs that reflect the company's values can strengthen the reputation of the employer brand in the eyes of young talent. HR is also advised to periodically collect feedback

from candidates and employees to evaluate and adjust branding strategies on an ongoing basis. With a consistent and responsive approach to labor market dynamics, VJC can build a strong and authentic corporate image to attract and retain top talent.

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