

**MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING  
NATIONAL ECONOMICS UNIVERSITY**

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**NGUYEN HUU DANG KHOA**

**EMPLOYER ATTRACTIVENESS, CORPORATE  
REPUTATION, AND JOB PURSUIT INTENTION:  
A STUDY OF EMPLOYER BRANDING IN THE  
VIETNAMESE YOUNG WORKFORCE**

**PHD DISSERTATION  
IN BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION**

**HANOI - 2026**

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**Specialization: BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION**

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**PHD DISSERTATION**

**Supervisor: Assoc. Prof. Dr. VU HUY THONG**

**HANOI - 2026**

## **DECLARATION**

I hereby declare that this PhD dissertation is my work. To the best of my knowledge, this dissertation has never been submitted, in whole or in part, to any other educational institution for a degree or a diploma. Except where specified otherwise by acknowledgment or reference, the work presented is entirely my own. I also certify that all of this PhD dissertation's references have been properly credited.

I have read and comprehended the University's policy on plagiarism and academic integrity violations. With my honor, I certify that the current PhD dissertation does not violate regulations on academic integrity.

*Hanoi, May 30, 2026*

**PhD candidate**

**Nguyen Huu Dang Khoa**

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABBREVIATIONS	FULL FORMS
AVE	Average Variance Extracted
CB-SEM	Covariance-Based Structural Equation Modeling
CR	Corporate Reputation
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
EA	Employer Attractiveness
HR	Human Resources
HTMT	Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio of Correlations
IT	Information Technology
JPI	Job Pursuit Intention
JSIB	Job Seeker Inspired-by
JSIT	Job Seeker Inspired-to
NEU	National Economics University
PLS-SEM	Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling
PR	Public Relations
SEM	Structural Equation Modeling
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
VC	Value Congruence
VIF	Variance Inflation Factor

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# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

## 1.1. Background of the research

Today, attracting high-potential individuals has become a strategic concern that extends beyond routine recruitment activities. Prospective employees do not evaluate organizations only through functional job attributes such as salary, career advancement, or job security. They also consider organizational values, symbolic meanings, broader judgments of credibility, and the perceived desirability of the organization as a place to work. As a result, employer branding and employer-related perceptions have received sustained attention in organizational psychology, marketing, and human resource management (Lievens & Slaughter, 2016). Recent review work further suggests that this field has expanded across multiple streams of study, including employer attractiveness, signaling-based employer evaluation, digital and social-media-based employer branding, and value-based or CSR-based employer positioning (Dassler et al., 2022; Reshma & Velmurugan, 2024; Thang et al., 2023; Thanh et al., 2024; Ivanov, 2025). However, the field still requires greater contextual diversity and stronger theoretical integration (Theurer et al., 2018; Wolfswinkel et al., 2023).

In this dissertation, employer branding is approached from the external, applicant-facing perspective. Employer branding refers broadly to the organizational efforts through which firms seek to build and communicate a desirable identity as employers (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). However, because the present study focuses on prospective applicants rather than internal organizational practices, the focus is on the perceptual outcomes through which employer branding is received and interpreted by potential applicants. In this sense, applicant-side employer perceptions can be understood as the set of perceptions and associations that potential applicants hold about an organization as a place to work (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Lievens & Slaughter, 2016; Dzhulai et al., 2022).

These issues are especially important in Vietnam, where the labor market has changed considerably in both scale and structure. According to the General Statistics Office (2026), the labor force aged 15 and above reached approximately 53.5 million people in 2025, while the number of employed persons reached 52.4

million, indicating a large and active labor market. Vietnam continues to face skill shortages and increasing competition for qualified talent, particularly in sectors shaped by digital transformation, automation, and changing business requirements (Robert Walters Vietnam, 2025; Navigos Group, 2026). In such a context, organizations compete not only through the jobs they offer, but also through the perceptions they generate among potential applicants before any direct employment experience occurs (Cable & Turban, 2003; Carpentier et al., 2019; Lievens & Slaughter, 2016; Theurer et al., 2018).

Recent evidence also suggests that employer evaluation is increasingly shaped by indirect and digital information environments. Prospective candidates may use social media, online reviews, company websites, recruitment communication, employee-generated information, and digital footprints to evaluate organizational authenticity and attractiveness before formal contact with the organization (Sivertzen et al., 2013; Dineen et al., 2022; El-Menawy & Saleh, 2023; Halová & Müller, 2023). In Vietnam, employer attractiveness has been shown to play an important role in linking Generation Z job seekers' CSR-related attitudes to job pursuit intention (Thang et al., 2023; Thanh et al., 2024). Related evidence also suggests that organizational image and reputation can influence intention to apply, and that this relationship may become stronger when organizational information is available through social media and other digital channels (El-Menawy & Saleh, 2023). Similar evidence from other Asian contexts shows that employer image and organizational attractiveness are closely linked to job pursuit outcomes, reinforcing the view that employer perceptions can become behaviorally relevant before direct organizational experience occurs (Kim & Chao, 2019; Nawakitphaitoon & Sooraksa, 2023).

Vietnamese evidence also indicates that employer branding is relevant to young people's intention to apply. In a survey of 257 young people in Hanoi, Nguyen and Hoang (2022) found that respondents perceived employer branding as affecting application intention, with compensation, career development, interesting work, and company reputation among the most influential employer-related elements. This evidence supports the view that young applicants do not

evaluate employers only through immediate job attributes, but also through a broader set of reputational, developmental, and symbolic considerations.

Since the target population evaluates organizations primarily through indirect information and publicly available cues rather than firsthand organizational experience, this dissertation focuses on applicant-side perceptions of employer branding, specifically corporate reputation and employer attractiveness, and on how these perceptions are associated with job pursuit intention. Corporate reputation and employer attractiveness are treated as two main evaluative dimensions. Corporate reputation reflects a broader institutional assessment of an organization's credibility, standing, and perceived quality, whereas employer attractiveness refers to the extent to which an organization is perceived as a desirable place to work (Berthon et al., 2005; Walker, 2010). Although related, these constructs are not identical. Employer attractiveness reflects a more personally filtered judgment of desirability, while corporate reputation reflects a broader institutional evaluation (Cable & Turban, 2003). Both may be understood as evaluative outcomes formed from organizational cues that help job seekers reduce uncertainty when direct knowledge is limited (Spence, 1973; Connelly et al., 2011; Heide et al., 2024).

This issue is particularly relevant for university students aged 19 to 22 who are approaching labor market entry. At this stage, many candidates begin to assess employers through company websites, professional networking sites, employee reviews, social media platforms, and peer discussion before submitting formal applications (Van Hove & Lievens, 2009; Theurer et al., 2018; Hanu et al., 2021). Consequently, early employer evaluation becomes important because employer perceptions may already be formed prior to direct organizational contact. Such evaluations extend beyond pay to include value alignment, career development, transparency, flexibility, workplace culture, and symbolic meanings (Talentnet Group, 2025; Robert Walters Vietnam, 2025). These patterns suggest that early-career applicants assess employers through a combination of instrumental, symbolic, and value-related considerations rather than through compensation alone.

However, favorable employer evaluation does not automatically become job pursuit intention. A student may perceive an organization as reputable or



attractive, but this positive evaluation may not immediately lead to stronger willingness to apply or pursue employment. Thus, it is necessary to explain how applicant-side perceptions of employer branding become motivationally meaningful. This dissertation addresses this issue by examining inspiration as a motivational mechanism and perceived value congruence as a condition that may strengthen the relationship between employer evaluations and early inspirational response. By doing so, the study seeks to provide a clearer explanation of how corporate reputation and employer attractiveness are associated with job pursuit intention among Vietnamese university students approaching labor market entry.

## **1.2. Significance of the study**

To explain how employer evaluations may become associated with job pursuit intention, this dissertation draws on Signaling theory and Social Identity theory. Signaling theory explains how candidates reduce uncertainty by using observable organizational cues as substitutes for characteristics that cannot be directly observed (Spence, 1973; Connelly et al., 2011). This is highly relevant in pre-employment contexts, where prospective applicants often have limited direct knowledge of an organization's internal culture, employment conditions, and actual work environment. Social Identity theory complements this explanation by showing why organizational meanings can become personally relevant when individuals perceive an organization as aligned with their values, aspirations, or desired identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Ashforth & Mael, 1989). This broader view is also supported by recruitment research showing that company reputation and identity congruence can affect job pursuit intention through cognitive social identity, particularly when applicants rely on information from media, company communication, and other indirect sources rather than direct organizational experience (Xie et al., 2015).

Although these theories explain why employer evaluations matter, they do not fully specify the psychological process through which such evaluations become action-oriented motivation. For this reason, this study investigates inspiration as a motivational mechanism. Inspiration was first conceptualized as a psychological experience involving both evocation and motivation, and was later operationalized as a two-component process distinguishing being inspired-

by from being inspired-to (Thrash & Elliot, 2003, 2004; Böttger et al., 2017). In the context of employer evaluation, this distinction is useful because a student may first admire or feel interested in an employer, and only later develop a stronger motivation to pursue employment with that organization. Hence, inspiration helps explain how favorable employer perceptions may move from positive judgment to stronger job pursuit intention (Böttger et al., 2017; Thrash & Elliot, 2003, 2004).

This study is also significant because it examines perceived value congruence as a condition that may strengthen the relationship between employer evaluation and motivational response. In recruitment and person–organization fit research, value congruence has often been studied as a direct predictor of attraction, preference, or organizational choice (Cable & Judge, 1996; Cable & DeRue, 2002; Kristof-Brown et al., 2023). This dissertation adopts a more conditional view by examining whether employer evaluations become more personally meaningful when students perceive alignment between their own values and those of the organization. Such examination is relevant in Vietnam because prior research in a transitional-economy context suggests that values are important for young people and that traditional and modern values may coexist rather than simply replace one another (N.T.T. Mai et al., 2009). In this sense, perceived value congruence may help explain why the same employer reputation or attractiveness can inspire some students more strongly than others.

From a theoretical perspective, the dissertation is significant because it examines corporate reputation and employer attractiveness as two applicant-side perceptual outcomes of employer branding. Corporate reputation reflects a broader institutional judgment of the organization’s credibility and standing, while employer attractiveness reflects a more personal evaluation of the organization as a desirable place to work (Cable & Turban, 2003; Lievens & Slaughter, 2016). By examining these two evaluative dimensions together, the study shows that employer evaluation is not a single and undifferentiated judgment. Rather, prospective applicants may form multi-layered perceptions of an organization before deciding whether it is worth pursuing as a future employer (Cable & Turban, 2003; Lievens & Slaughter, 2016).

The dissertation is also theoretically significant because it positions inspiration as a complementary motivational lens in pre-employment research. Constructs such as organizational identification, commitment, and person–organization fit have been widely studied in recruitment and organizational behavior research (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Kristof-Brown et al., 2023; Lievens & Slaughter, 2016). The present study does not suggest that inspiration replaces these constructs. Rather, it proposes inspiration as an additional mechanism that focuses more directly on how favorable employer evaluations may evoke a motivational response that moves an individual from judgment toward action (Böttger et al., 2017; Thrash & Elliot, 2003, 2004). This is particularly suitable for a pre-employment student sample, where deeper organizational attachment may not yet have developed.

In addition to theoretical significance, the study is contextually relevant. It focuses on Vietnamese university students aged 19 to 22, a clearly defined group of prospective student job seekers approaching labor market entry. At this stage, students begin to evaluate potential employers for internships, graduate recruitment, and entry-level employment, although their perceptions have not yet been shaped by long-term organizational experience (Van Hove & Lievens, 2009). The study adds empirical evidence from Vietnam, where research on employer evaluation and early job pursuit remains less developed than in many Western contexts. This context is also meaningful because young applicants in Vietnam often evaluate employers through indirect information, public reputation, and perceived value alignment before formal organizational entry (Van Hove & Lievens, 2009; Xie et al., 2015).

Finally, the dissertation has made managerial contribution to organizations that are trying to attract early-career talents. By clarifying how corporate reputation and employer attractiveness are associated with inspiration and job pursuit intention, the study offers a useful basis for designing credible and relevant employer communication. It helps organizations consider whether the way they communicate reputation, employer desirability, and organizational values is likely to resonate with Vietnamese student job seekers.

### **1.3. Research Gap**

Even though there have been many studies on employer perspectives, there are still some limitations in explaining, for instance, how perceptions become associated with recruitment outcomes (Lievens & Slaughter, 2016; Theurer et al., 2018). Recent review work also suggests that employer branding topic has expanded across multiple fields of study; however, it still limits to the Western context. Existing Vietnamese research has provided useful descriptive evidence on employer branding and application intentions among young people, including region-specific findings from Hanoi (Nguyen & Hoang, 2022). However, such studies have mainly identified influential employer-brand elements rather than explaining the psychological process through which employer evaluations become job pursuit intention. This indicates a continuing need for greater theoretical integration and contextual diversity in the field. In brief, contextual, literature and empirical gaps are identified and described below:

- First, more conceptual clarity is required to separate organizational cues related to employers from the assessments made by potential candidates. Particularly when it comes to employer branding, employer image, and related constructs, previous research has not always clearly distinguished organizational activities and external communication from the perceptions that applicants ultimately form. (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Lievens & Slaughter, 2016). This reduces the analytical precision of describing how various evaluative lenses are used to process more subjective assessments of desirability and broader institutional credibility. To address this issue, the current study treats employer attractiveness and corporate reputation as separate but complementary evaluative outcomes within an integrated framework;
- Second, literature still gives insufficient attention to the psychological and motivational process through which favorable employer evaluations become job pursuit intention in pre-employment contexts. Previous studies have shown that symbolic and employer characteristics matter for applicant responses, but they have not clearly explained how positive employer perceptions acquire the motivation needed to move an individual from

favorable judgment to intention behaviors (Lievens & Slaughter, 2016; Carpentier et al., 2019). Established constructs such as identification and person–organization fit remain valuable and well supported, but they do not fully specify the more immediate transition from perceiving an appealing organizational meaning to feeling motivated to act on it (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Cable & Judge, 1996; Kristof-Brown et al., 2023). In this respect, inspiration explains the mechanism better, especially when conceptualized as a sequential movement from inspired-by to inspired-to. This study responds to this gap by examining inspiration not as a vague affective reaction, but as a structured motivational mechanism through which positive employer evaluations become behaviorally meaningful

- Third, further empirical evidence is needed regarding the conditions under which employer evaluations become more influential. Although value congruence is often examined as a predictor in person–organization fit research, there is still room to investigate whether it also functions as an interpretive filter that strengthens the relationship between employer evaluations and motivational response (Cable & DeRue, 2002; Kristof-Brown et al., 2023). Recent work has already shown that value congruence can work as part of a sequential psychological chain linking employer prosocial orientation, employer attractiveness, and job pursuit intention among active fresh-graduate job seekers, but its role as a moderator or boundary condition remains less clearly specified (Song et al., 2024).
- Fourth, while recent studies in Vietnam and other Asian contexts have examined organization evaluation and application intention, the literature remains relatively limited compared with the broader Western-dominated tradition and still leaves important contextual questions unresolved (Kim & Chao, 2019; Soeling et al., 2022; Nawakitphaitoon & Sooraksa, 2023; Thang & Trang, 2024; Thanh et al., 2024). Furthermore, a lot of research works do not really differentiate between university students who are about to enter the workforce and more experienced workers, which leaves the factors influencing employers' assessments of the newest workers in the labor market unclear. Since early employer evaluation may function

differently in environments with indirect information, fast digital exposure, and changing value orientations, this contextual gap is particularly significant.

To fill these gaps, the dissertation takes a theory-driven approach, treating employer branding as a perception-based concept, looking at inspiration as a motivational mechanism, and taking value congruence as a boundary condition. It focuses on Vietnamese university students between the ages of 19 and 22. By doing this, it aims to give a more in-depth and accurate explanation of how employer assessments are linked to the intention to pursue a job.

#### **1.4. Research Contribution**

This study contributes to the literature on employer branding, employer evaluation, and job pursuit intention by offering a more process-oriented explanation of how favorable employer-related perceptions are associated with job pursuit intention among Vietnamese university students approaching labor market entry. The contribution of the dissertation does not rely on the assertion that each individual relationship among corporate reputation, employer attractiveness, value congruence, and job pursuit intention is entirely new. These constructs have already been examined in prior recruitment, organizational behavior, and employer brand research. Rather, the main contribution lies in explaining how employer-related evaluations may become motivationally active through a two-stage inspiration process in a pre-employment context.

First, the dissertation contributes by applying the two-stage inspiration framework to the study of early job pursuit intention. Prior studies have commonly examined applicant attraction, organizational attractiveness, or intention to apply as important outcomes, but they have less often explained the internal motivational sequence through which favorable employer perceptions become action-oriented. Drawing on the distinction between being inspired by and being inspired to (Thrash & Elliot, 2003, 2004; Böttger et al., 2017), this study examines inspiration as a sequential mechanism. The inspired-by state captures the initial response of admiration, interest, or psychological activation toward an employer, whereas the inspired-to state captures a more action-oriented motivational readiness. This

distinction allows the dissertation to clarify how positive employer evaluations may move from initial evocation to stronger job pursuit intention, especially before applicants have direct organizational experience.

Second, the study contributes by clarifying the different roles of corporate reputation and employer attractiveness within an applicant-side employer brand perception framework. Rather than treating employer evaluation as a single general judgment, the dissertation distinguishes between corporate reputation as a broader social and institutional evaluation of the organization and employer attractiveness as a more personal, employment-related assessment of the organization as a desirable place to work. This distinction is important because prospective applicants may perceive an organization as reputable without necessarily seeing it as personally attractive, and they may also find an organization attractive for reasons that go beyond its general public standing. By examining both constructs in the same model, the dissertation provides a more nuanced explanation of how different layers of employer perception are associated with early inspiration and job pursuit intention.

Third, the dissertation contributes by examining perceived value congruence as a boundary condition in the employer evaluation process. Much prior research has treated person–organization fit or value congruence as a direct predictor of applicant attraction and organizational choice. This study adopts a more conditional interpretation by examining whether perceived value alignment strengthens the relationship between employer evaluations and the initial inspired-by state. In this way, perceived value congruence is not positioned as the main explanatory pathway, but as an interpretive filter through which employer evaluations may become more personally meaningful. This contribution is particularly relevant in a pre-employment context, where students often infer organizational values from public cues, employer communication, social narratives, and digital information rather than from direct experience inside the organization.

Fourth, the study contributes contextual empirical evidence from Vietnam. Research on employer evaluation and applicant attraction remains more developed in Western contexts than in emerging and transitional economies. By focusing on Vietnamese university students aged 19 to 22, the dissertation

provides evidence from a clearly bounded group of prospective student job seekers who are approaching internships, graduate recruitment, and early employment decisions. This context is important because employer evaluations at this stage are often formed before formal organizational entry and are shaped by public reputation, perceived career opportunities, symbolic meanings, and value-related interpretations. The dissertation adds context-specific evidence on how young Vietnamese applicants evaluate potential employers and how these evaluations are associated with motivational and intention-related outcomes.

Finally, the dissertation offers a managerial contribution for organizations that want to attract early-career talent. By showing that favorable employer perceptions are associated with job pursuit intention through a sequential inspiration process, the study suggests that organizations should not rely only on general visibility or positive reputation. They also need to communicate employer meanings that can be understood as credible, personally relevant, and action-oriented by prospective applicants. The findings provide a basis for developing more focused employer communication, campus recruitment, early-career programs, and value-based messaging for Vietnamese student job seekers. This practical contribution is interpreted within the scope of the study, namely applicant-side perceptions among university students, rather than as evidence about all job seekers or all organizational recruitment practices.

### **1.5. Research Objectives**

The primary objective is to develop and examine a conceptual framework explaining how employer branding perceptions are associated with job pursuit intention among Vietnamese university students aged 19 to 22.

Specifically, the dissertation pursues the following objectives:

- To examine the associations among corporate reputation, employer attractiveness, and early inspirational response within a perception-based employer branding framework
- To examine the proposed sequential role of inspiration, represented through being inspired by and being inspired to, in explaining how employer branding perceptions are associated with job pursuit intention



- To investigate whether perceived value congruence functions as a condition that strengthens the relationship between employer branding perceptions and early inspirational response.
- To provide managerial implications for organizations seeking to strengthen corporate reputation, employer attractiveness, and recruitment communication among Vietnamese student job seekers.

## **1.6. Research Questions**

To address these objectives and respond to the identified research gaps, this dissertation seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How are corporate reputation and employer attractiveness associated with early inspiration and job pursuit intention among Vietnamese university students aged 19 to 22?
2. How does the two-stage construct of inspiration, represented by being inspired by and being inspired to, help explain the process through which employer branding perceptions are associated with job pursuit intention?
3. To what extent does perceived value congruence strengthen the relationship between employer branding perceptions and early inspirational response?

## **1.7. Scope and Limitations**

The theoretical scope of this study is limited to the external, applicant-facing dimension of employer branding. Within this scope, the dissertation examines employer branding through its perceptual outcomes, particularly corporate reputation and employer attractiveness. Specifically, the dissertation focuses on corporate reputation and employer attractiveness as two main employer-related evaluations formed by prospective applicants. It also examines inspiration as the motivational mechanism and perceived value congruence as a condition that may strengthen the relationship between employer evaluations and early inspirational response. Therefore, this study does not examine the full range of employer brand management activities inside organizations. It focuses on how prospective applicants perceive and interpret employers before they formally enter the organization.

The population scope of the study is limited to Vietnamese university students aged 19 to 22. These respondents are treated as prospective student job seekers because many students at this stage begin to prepare for internships, graduate recruitment, and entry-level employment. This group is suitable for the purpose of the dissertation because the study is interested in employer evaluation before long-term work experience has been formed. However, the findings should not be generalized directly to all job seekers, older applicants, or experienced employees. People with more work experience may evaluate employers differently because they may rely more on direct workplace experience, professional networks, and more concrete knowledge of employment conditions.

Another important limitation concerns the nature of students' knowledge about employers. Since the respondents were still in a pre-employment stage, their evaluations were mainly based on public information, digital information, social discussion, and general impressions of the focal employers. Their answers about corporate reputation, employer attractiveness, organizational values, work environment, salary expectations, employee treatment, and career opportunities should be understood as perceptions from the applicant side. They should not be interpreted as objective evidence of the actual internal conditions of those organizations. This limitation does not weaken the purpose of the dissertation, because the study is specifically interested in how employer perceptions are formed before organizational entry. However, it means that some responses may reflect public image, limited information, or halo effects.

The geographic scope of the study is limited to Vietnam. This context is relevant because young Vietnamese applicants increasingly evaluate employers through public reputation, digital visibility, peer information, and symbolic employer meanings. At the same time, the Vietnam focus limits the generalizability of the findings to other countries. Future research may examine whether the same model works in other Asian, Western, or comparative contexts.

Methodologically, the study uses a quantitative and cross-sectional survey design. This design is appropriate for examining relationships among the constructs in the proposed model, but it does not allow strong causal conclusions. For this reason, the relationships reported in the dissertation should be interpreted

as theoretically guided associations rather than definitive evidence of causality. In addition, because the data were collected from the same respondents at one point in time, common method bias and social desirability bias may still exist, although procedural and statistical checks were applied.

The measurement scope should also be noted. The constructs in this study were measured using shortened and context-adapted scales informed by prior studies. This approach was used to make the questionnaire suitable for Vietnamese university students and to keep the survey manageable. However, shortened and adapted scales may not capture all dimensions of the original measures. As a result, the findings should be interpreted according to the way the constructs were measured in this dissertation, rather than as full validation of the original measurement instruments.

Finally, the study examines job pursuit intention rather than actual job pursuit behavior. Although intention is an important outcome in recruitment research, it is not the same as actual application, interview attendance, job acceptance, or long-term employment decision. Within these boundaries, the dissertation seeks to provide a clear and context-sensitive explanation of how employer-related evaluations are associated with inspiration and job pursuit intention among Vietnamese university students approaching labor market entry

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

Chapter 2 reviews the literature related to the proposed model of employer branding and job pursuit intention. In this dissertation, employer branding is examined from the external, applicant-facing perspective. More specifically, the study focuses on the perceptual outcomes through which employer branding is received and interpreted by prospective applicants, especially corporate reputation and employer attractiveness. This perspective is appropriate because the target respondents are Vietnamese university students aged 19 to 22, who often have limited direct experience with the organizations they evaluate and rely on indirect information and publicly available cues when forming employer evaluations (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Lievens & Slaughter, 2016). Recent evidence from Vietnam also suggests that employer evaluation and talent attraction remain important issues in the labor market, and that these evaluations are increasingly shaped by digital information environments (Thang & Trang, 2024; Robert Walters Vietnam, 2025; General Statistics Office, 2026).

The chapter begins by clarifying the conceptual foundations and key definitions of the constructs used in the title and model. It then presents the theoretical foundations used to explain how organizational cues are interpreted and how they may become personally meaningful to prospective applicants. After that, the chapter reviews relevant empirical studies, develops the research hypotheses, and presents the proposed research model.

### **2.1. Conceptual foundations and key constructs:**

This section defines the core constructs examined in the dissertation and clarifies the conceptual boundaries among them. This clarification is important because several concepts used in employer-related research are closely connected, including employer branding, employer brand, corporate reputation, employer attractiveness, organizational image, inspiration, perceived value congruence, and job pursuit intention. If these concepts are not distinguished clearly, the model may appear to combine similar positive evaluations rather than explain a theoretically meaningful process.

As stated in Chapter 1, employer branding is treated as the broader conceptual domain because the study is concerned with how organizations become meaningful and attractive to prospective job seekers in the labor market. However, the empirical focus is not the full range of employer-branding activities implemented by organizations. The dissertation examines employer branding from the external, applicant-facing perspective. It focuses on the perceptual outcomes through which employer branding is received and interpreted by prospective applicants before organizational entry.

This distinction is especially important in the present research context. The respondents are Vietnamese university students aged 19 to 22 who are approaching internships, graduate recruitment, and entry-level employment. At this stage, they usually have limited direct organizational experience. Their employer evaluations are formed mainly through publicly available information, recruitment communication, social discussion, peer narratives, employee stories, company websites, and digital information. The analytical focus of the dissertation is the student's perception and evaluation of the employer rather than the employer's actual internal qualities or its complete branding strategy (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Lievens & Slaughter, 2016).

The model examines corporate reputation and employer attractiveness as two key applicant-side perceptual outcomes of employer branding. Corporate reputation represents a broader and more socially anchored evaluation of the organization's standing, credibility, and public regard. Employer attractiveness represents a more personal and employment-related judgment of whether the organization is desirable as a place to work. These constructs are related, but they are not identical. A company may be seen as reputable in the market, but this does not automatically mean that all students perceive it as attractive for their own employment choice. Similarly, a company may be attractive to some students because of perceived career opportunities, work environment, or personal value fit, even if reputation is only one part of that evaluation.

In addition to these employer evaluations, the dissertation examines inspiration as a motivational mechanism. Inspiration is treated as a two-stage process consisting of inspired-by and inspired-to. Inspired-by refers to the initial

cognitive-affective response through which the employer is perceived as interesting, admirable, or career-expanding. Inspired-to refers to the subsequent motivational readiness to move toward the employer. This distinction matters because being inspired by an employer is not the same as forming a more explicit intention to pursue that employer.

Job pursuit intention is treated as the behavioral intention outcome. It reflects the applicant's stated willingness or intention to apply to, choose, or recommend the focal employer. Perceived value congruence is examined as a boundary condition. It refers to the student's perceived alignment between personal values and the values attributed to the organization. In this dissertation, perceived value congruence is not treated as an objective similarity score between the individual and the organization. It is treated as the applicant's subjective judgment of value alignment, formed before employment and based on available employer cues. Its role in the model is to explain when employer evaluations become more personally meaningful and more likely to evoke an inspired-by response.

**Table 2.1: Summary of key constructs**

<b>Construct</b>	<b>Definition and scope</b>	<b>Theoretical role</b>
Corporate reputation	A broad evaluation of the organization's credibility, standing, public regard, and perceived quality.	A distal applicant-side evaluation that reflects organizational legitimacy and credibility.
Employer attractiveness	A more personal judgment of the organization as a desirable place to work.	A proximal applicant-side evaluation that reflects perceived employment desirability and career relevance.
Job seeker inspired-by	An initial cognitive-affective response in which the employer evokes interest, admiration, curiosity, or career-related imagination.	The receptive phase of the motivational mechanism.

<b>Construct</b>	<b>Definition and scope</b>	<b>Theoretical role</b>
Job seeker inspired-to	The motivational readiness, drive, or urge to move toward the employer.	The action-oriented phase of the motivational mechanism.
Job pursuit intention	The applicant's stated intention or willingness to apply for or pursue employment with the focal organization.	The behavioral intention outcome.
Perceived value congruence	The applicant's perceived alignment between personal values and the values attributed to the organization.	A boundary condition that may strengthen the relationship between employer evaluations and inspired-by.

*Source: author's synthesis*

### ***2.1.1. Employer branding versus employer brand***

Contemporary literature generally treats employer branding and employer brand as closely related but conceptually distinct. Employer branding refers to the strategic process through which an organization positions itself as a desirable employer, whereas employer brand refers to the set of meanings, associations, and evaluations that relevant audiences attach to the organization in its role as an employer (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Lievens & Slaughter, 2016; Theurer et al., 2018; Näppä, 2023; Reshma & Velmurugan, 2024). In other words, employer branding concerns what the organization seeks to communicate and build, while employer brand concerns how the organization is ultimately understood and judged as a place to work.

Employer brand reflects an interpretive outcome. It consists of the perceptions that prospective or current employees form about the organization's desirability, credibility, distinctiveness, and value as an employer. These perceptions may be shaped through multiple sources, including recruitment communication, organizational visibility, peer discussion, employee narratives,

third-party commentary, and digital channels (Lievens & Slaughter, 2016; Nguyen & Hoang, 2022). In the case of prospective applicants, especially those who have not yet entered the organization, employer brand is formed largely before employment through indirect information rather than firsthand work experience.

Employer branding refers to the broader set of activities, strategies, and communication efforts through which organizations seek to shape such perceptions. Prior literature has described employer branding as a strategic approach to attracting, engaging, and retaining talent by developing and communicating a distinctive employer value proposition and by aligning organizational identity with labor-market expectations (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Itam et al., 2020; Lievens & Slaughter, 2016; Theurer et al., 2018; Lukić & Lazarević, 2022; Bisht et al., 2025). In practice, employer branding may involve recruitment messaging, career websites, campus outreach, social media presence, employee advocacy, symbolic positioning, and the articulation of organizational values and culture. These activities are intended to make the organization more visible, attractive, and credible in the eyes of target talent segments.

The literature also commonly distinguishes between external employer branding, which is directed toward the labor market and prospective applicants, and internal employer branding, which is directed toward current employees and is more closely linked to identification, consistency, and retention (Dabirian et al., 2019; Dassler et al., 2022). This dissertation is situated within the external, applicant-facing side of employer branding. It does not attempt to measure the full range of organizational branding activities directly. Instead, it focuses on the perceptual outcomes through which employer branding is received and interpreted by prospective applicants, particularly corporate reputation and employer attractiveness.

This positioning is appropriate for Vietnamese university students aged 19 to 22. At this stage, many respondents are approaching labor market entry, but they typically do not yet possess direct and sustained work experience with the employers they evaluate. Their judgments are likely to be formed through publicly available information, social discourse, organizational visibility, and digitally mediated exposure rather than through long-term internal organizational experience.



In this dissertation, employer branding is operationalized through two key applicant-side perceptual constructs: corporate reputation and employer attractiveness. These constructs capture important ways in which employer branding becomes meaningful to prospective applicants in the pre-employment stage. This approach allows the dissertation to remain conceptually aligned with employer branding research while maintaining an empirically precise focus on applicant-side perception.

### ***2.1.2. Corporate reputation***

Corporate reputation refers to the student's overall evaluation of an organization's credibility, standing, and positive public regard. In the corporate reputation literature, reputation is commonly understood as a socially formed evaluation that develops through accumulated information about an organization's actions, performance, visibility, and stakeholder relationships (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990; Fombrun et al., 2000; Walker, 2010). It is broader and more enduring than an immediate image because it reflects judgments that are formed over time and influenced by multiple information sources.

In the present dissertation, corporate reputation is examined from the applicant side. This means that the construct refers to how student job seekers perceive the reputation of a focal organization before they enter the organization. Such perceptions are important because prospective applicants usually lack direct organizational experience and must rely on public, social, and digital information when interpreting employers. In recruitment research, job seekers' reputation perceptions can influence how they evaluate firms as potential employers, especially when direct knowledge about the organization is limited (Cable & Turban, 2003).

A useful distinction should be made between corporate reputation and related concepts such as organizational image, organizational prestige, and employer attractiveness. Organizational image often reflects more immediate impressions or associations, while corporate reputation places greater emphasis on relatively accumulated and socially shared evaluation. Organizational prestige is more closely related to perceived status and social esteem. Employer attractiveness, by contrast, refers to the applicant's more personal judgment of

whether the organization is desirable as a place to work. A company may be reputable, but it may not be equally attractive to every student as a future employer.

Corporate reputation also carries both informational and symbolic value. Informationally, it helps job seekers infer likely organizational quality, credibility, and employment conditions under uncertainty. Symbolically, it may reflect prestige, legitimacy, ethical standing, or social contribution, all of which can make the organization more meaningful to potential applicants (Cable & Turban, 2003; Lievens & Slaughter, 2016). Corporate reputation measurement studies also suggest that reputation can involve several content domains, including market reputation, workplace-related reputation, social and environmental responsibility, and competitive standing (Fombrun et al., 2000; Walsh et al., 2009).

In this research, corporate reputation is treated as a relatively distal employer evaluation. It reflects the student's broader perception of the organization's standing and credibility in the labor market and public information environment. It is expected to shape more personal employer-related judgments, including employer attractiveness, and may also contribute to early inspirational response.

### ***2.1.3. Employer attractiveness***

Employer attractiveness refers to the perceived desirability of an organization as a place to work. A widely used definition describes it as the envisioned benefits that a person associates with working for a particular organization (Berthon et al., 2005). Employer attractiveness reflects the individual's assessment of the organization's appeal relative to other employment options.

Unlike corporate reputation, which is broader and more socially anchored, employer attractiveness is more personal and employment-specific. It reflects the applicant's own sense of whether the organization is worth considering as a workplace (Santiago, 2019). This evaluation may be shaped by both instrumental and symbolic considerations. Instrumental aspects include rewards, stability, development opportunities, and career prospects. Symbolic aspects include prestige, values, purpose, identity meaning, and authenticity (Lievens & Slaughter, 2016; Kumari & Saini, 2018; Santiago, 2019).

In this dissertation, employer attractiveness is treated as an applicant-side perceptual outcome of employer branding. It is not the same as corporate

reputation. Corporate reputation answers the broader question of whether the organization is credible, respected, and well regarded. Employer attractiveness answers the more personal question of whether the organization appears desirable for the applicant's own employment future. This distinction is meaningful because a student may recognize that a company has a strong reputation, but may still not see it as suitable or attractive for his or her own career.

Employer attractiveness is considered a more proximal evaluation than corporate reputation. It reflects the student's more immediate perception of the focal employer as a desirable place to work. For this reason, employer attractiveness is expected to be closely associated with the initial inspired-by response in the proposed model.

#### ***2.1.4. Job pursuit intention***

Job pursuit intention refers to the intention or willingness to pursue employment with a specific organization. It captures the job seeker's active willingness to enter the applicant pool and is commonly treated as an important behavioral outcome in recruitment and employer evaluation research (Aiman-Smith et al., 2001; Highhouse et al., 2003; Lestari et al., 2023; Nisa et al., 2025). Unlike general attraction, job pursuit intention reflects a stronger behavioral orientation toward the employer, such as willingness to apply, choose, or seriously consider the organization as a future workplace.

In a student sample, job pursuit intention is an appropriate outcome because many respondents are still at an early stage of career planning. They may not yet have submitted applications or made actual employment decisions, but they can still express whether they are willing to pursue a specific employer. Recruitment studies in Vietnam also commonly use intention-to-apply measures as closely related applicant outcomes, which supports the broader relevance of intention-based outcomes in early employer evaluation research.

Conceptually, job pursuit intention should be distinguished from both employer attractiveness and inspired-to. Employer attractiveness reflects a favorable evaluation of the organization as a place to work. Inspired-to reflects a motivational state in which the person feels moved or energized toward possible action. Job pursuit intention, by contrast, reflects a more explicit behavioral

intention toward the employer. In other words, a student may find an employer attractive, may feel motivated by that employer, and then may form a clearer intention to apply or pursue employment.

In this dissertation, job pursuit intention is the principal outcome variable. The model seeks to explain how applicant-side perceptions of employer branding, particularly corporate reputation and employer attractiveness, are associated with this readiness to act through the two-stage inspiration process and perceived value congruence.

### ***2.1.5. Inspiration***

Inspiration is examined as a motivational state that can connect employer evaluations to job pursuit intention. The broader inspiration literature conceptualizes inspiration as involving evocation, transcendence, and motivation (Thrash & Elliot, 2003). This means that inspiration is not only a positive feeling. It involves being moved by an external stimulus and experiencing a motivational pull toward a possibility, idea, or goal.

Marketing research has further operationalized inspiration using a two-component structure, distinguishing between inspired-by and inspired-to (Böttger et al., 2017). Inspired-by refers to the receptive or activation state in which a stimulus evokes imagination, curiosity, new ideas, or a broadened mental horizon. Inspired-to refers to the action-oriented motivational state in which the individual feels a desire, motivation, or urge to move toward the object of inspiration. This two-stage structure is useful for the present dissertation because employer evaluation may first evoke interest or career-related imagination before developing into stronger motivation toward employment pursuit.

This perspective is relevant for employer evaluation because the perceptual outcomes of employer branding often involve symbolic meaning and aspirational impressions. A reputable and attractive employer may not only appear desirable, but may also evoke interest, admiration, aspiration, and a stronger sense of possible future direction. Inspiration provides a useful explanation of how favorable employer evaluation may become motivationally meaningful before employment entry.

In this dissertation, inspired-by and inspired-to are treated as related but distinct stages. Inspired-by refers to the initial cognitive-affective response in

which the employer evokes interest, admiration, curiosity, or career-related imagination. It captures the receptive phase of inspiration. Inspired-to refers to the subsequent motivational state in which the person feels moved, energized, or ready to move toward the employer. It captures the action-oriented phase of inspiration.

Inspired-to is also distinguished from job pursuit intention. Inspired-to reflects motivational readiness or the urge to move toward the employer, whereas job pursuit intention reflects a more explicit behavioral intention, such as willingness to apply, choose, or pursue employment with the organization. The two constructs are closely related because they are part of the same motivational sequence, but they do not have the same meaning. In the proposed model, inspired-to is treated as the motivational state that precedes job pursuit intention.

Inspiration is conceptually related to constructs such as organizational identification, affective commitment, and engagement, but it is not identical to them. Inspiration is positioned as an early motivational activation state that can occur before organizational membership, while identification and commitment often become stronger after deeper exposure and relationship development. Recognizing the distinction is essential because the current study focuses on students approaching the labor market rather than existing employees.

A further conceptual issue concerns whether inspired-by and inspired-to should be treated as one higher-order construct or as two linked components. Some work suggests convergence under a broader inspiration factor, while other work emphasizes the sequential process. In this dissertation, inspiration is modeled as a two-stage process in which inspired-by predicts inspired-to because this structure is more consistent with the logic of the proposed model and supports a clearer explanation of how employer evaluation may move from initial evocation toward job pursuit intention (Böttger et al., 2017).

#### ***2.1.6. Value congruence***

Perceived value congruence refers to the perceived alignment between an individual's values and the values attributed to an organization. The construct originates in the person–organization fit literature, which emphasizes compatibility between individuals and organizations, especially in terms of values, culture, and

organizational meanings (Cable & Judge, 1996; Kristof, 1996; Kristof-Brown et al., 2023). In the context of employer evaluation, perceived value congruence can be formed before employment through available employer cues, public narratives, recruitment communication, and perceived organizational conduct.

In this dissertation, perceived value congruence refers to the student's perceived alignment with the organization, rather than a calculated match between the student's personal value profile and the organization's actual value profile. This approach is appropriate for a pre-employment study because prospective applicants often make early judgments based on limited and indirect information rather than direct organizational experience. At this stage, what matters is whether the focal employer appears compatible with the student's own values, preferred work culture, and career aspirations.

This applicant-side interpretation is consistent with direct perceived-fit approaches in the person–organization fit literature (Cable & DeRue, 2002). Rather than requiring separate measurement of the individual's value profile and the organization's value profile, a direct perceived-fit approach captures the applicant's subjective judgment of compatibility. This is suitable for the present study because students evaluate employers from outside the organization, where complete knowledge of internal organizational values is not available.

Perceived value congruence matters because applicants do not evaluate whether an employer is attractive or reputable only in general terms. They also consider whether the organization seems compatible with their own values and identity. This is particularly important for students who are still shaping their professional identity and future career direction. Earlier fit research suggests that perceived value similarity can influence attraction, organizational preference, and choice intentions, especially when direct knowledge of the organization is limited (Cable & Judge, 1996). More recent evidence also shows that value congruence can positively influence employer attractiveness as part of a sequential chain leading to job pursuit intention among fresh graduates actively seeking jobs (Song et al., 2024).

In this dissertation, perceived value congruence is treated as a moderator rather than as a mediator. It is positioned as a boundary condition that may shape

when employer evaluations become more personally meaningful. Students may evaluate the same reputable or attractive employer differently depending on whether the employer's values appear relevant and compatible with their own. When perceived value alignment is stronger, employer evaluations such as corporate reputation or employer attractiveness may become more self-relevant and more likely to evoke an inspired-by response.

Accordingly, perceived value congruence is expected to strengthen the association between corporate reputation and inspired-by, and between employer attractiveness and inspired-by. This positioning is consistent with the broader fit literature and helps maintain conceptual clarity across later chapters.

## **2.2. Theoretical foundations**

Having clarified the core constructs examined in the dissertation, the next step is to establish the theoretical foundations used to explain the relationships among them. The present study draws primarily on Signaling theory and Social Identity Theory. These two perspectives were selected because they explain different but complementary parts of the organizational evaluation process. Signaling theory helps explain how prospective applicants form evaluations under conditions of limited direct knowledge. Social Identity theory helps explain why some of those evaluations become personally meaningful and psychologically motivating. In short, the two theories provide a coherent basis for examining how employer branding perceptions are associated with job pursuit intention among Vietnamese university students aged 19 to 22.

### ***2.2.1. Signaling theory***

Signaling theory originated in economics as a framework for explaining decision-making under conditions of information asymmetry (Spence, 1973). Information asymmetry exists when one party possesses more information than another, making it difficult for the less informed party to judge quality directly. In recruitment settings, this problem is highly relevant because organizations know much more about their internal culture, management quality, work environment, and development opportunities than external applicants do. Prospective job seekers, especially at the pre-employment stage, always rely on

available cues to infer whether an organization is likely to be a desirable and trustworthy place to work.

Connelly et al. (2011) extended Signaling theory to organizational research and argued that signals are useful when they convey information that recipients cannot easily observe directly. In workplace contexts, such cues may include corporate communication, media visibility, rankings, awards, social responsibility initiatives, employee reviews, and other publicly available indicators. These cues differ in visibility, consistency, and credibility, but all may contribute to how external audiences interpret the organization.

For university students preparing to enter the labor market, signaling processes are especially important because direct employment experience is absent. At this stage, applicants cannot verify many organizational claims through firsthand knowledge. As a result, they infer likely employer quality from the signals that are available to them. A favorable reputation may suggest credibility and stability. A coherent digital presence may signal professionalism and transparency. Employee-generated content may suggest authenticity. Under such conditions, Signaling theory provides a strong explanation for why employer perceptions may form early and why some cues appear more persuasive than others. Signaling theory is used primarily to explain how employer information is interpreted under uncertainty. It provides the theoretical basis for understanding why these evaluations can develop before employment begins and why those evaluations may vary according to the quality and credibility of available information. The study maintains an important conceptual difference between cues and evaluations. Corporate reputation and employer attractiveness are not treated as organizational signals in themselves. Rather, they are treated as perceived evaluations formed by students after they interpret available cues. This clarification is important because the theory concerns the relationship between observable information and interpretation, not the labeling of all perceptions as signals.

In short, this reduction of information asymmetry is especially important for young candidates. Despite their high levels of self-confidence and digital literacy, young labor market entrants often exhibit notable anxiety regarding



unwritten workplace rules and expectations (Chillakuri, 2020). Based on this logic, Signaling Theory helps explain how employer branding perceptions may develop under uncertainty and how such perceptions may be associated with later intention.

### ***2.2.2. Social Identity theory***

While Signaling theory explains how employer evaluations may form under uncertainty, it does not fully explain why some evaluations become personally meaningful or motivationally powerful. For this reason, Social Identity theory is also being based. Originally developed by Tajfel and Turner (1979), Social Identity theory proposes that individuals define themselves partly through their membership in social groups. These groups provide meaning, belonging, and a basis for self-evaluation. In organizational contexts, this perspective suggests that organizations can be evaluated not only for functional benefits but also for symbolic meaning, prestige, and value expression.

Social Identity theory explains that individuals derive a significant portion of their self-concept from their affiliation with prestigious organizations, actively seeking employers that enhance their social standing and self-esteem (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Xie et al., 2015; Seyfi et al., 2024; Hollstein et al., 2025). Although much organizational identification research has focused on existing employees, the broader logic of Social Identity theory is also relevant before formal employment begins. Even before joining an organization, prospective applicants may imagine whether the employer would represent who they are or who they aspire to become. Employer evaluation is not only an informational process but also an identity-related process.

This perspective is especially relevant because employer branding perceptions may become personally meaningful even before organizational membership. A student may perceive a reputable employer as prestigious, ethical, and socially respected. A student may perceive an attractive employer as representing a desirable future self, especially if the organization appears innovative, meaningful, or value-consistent. These perceptions can create an identity-based pull that goes beyond rational assessment of functional job attributes and may help explain stronger motivational responses.

Recruitment research also supports this interpretation. Xie et al. (2015) showed that company reputation and identity congruence influence job pursuit intentions through cognitive social identity, indicating that applicants may begin to identify with organizations on the basis of available information even before formal membership. This is especially relevant in pre-employment settings, where identification is more likely to develop first at a cognitive level than at a deeper affective level.

Social Identity theory is particularly useful in understanding the role of value congruence and inspiration in the present model. If job seekers perceive that an organization reflects values similar to their own, the employer may become more personally significant. If an employer appears admirable and aspirational, it may evoke inspiration not only because it seems attractive, but also because it appears connected to a preferred identity or possible future self. Social Identity theory helps explain why organization evaluations may become emotional and motivational significance rather than remaining purely cognitive judgments.

This identity-based interpretation is particularly relevant in the Vietnamese context, where prior research in a transitional-economy setting suggests that traditional and modern self-orientations may coexist rather than simply displace one another (N.T.T. Mai et al., 2009). Under such conditions, the meaning of the workplace may be important not only because they signal employment quality, but also because they provide symbolic resources for identity construction and future self-projection.

### ***2.2.3. The complementary use of Signaling theory and Social Identity Theory***

The combined use of Signaling theory and Social Identity theory requires explicit justification because each theory explains a different but complementary part of the employer evaluation process, and neither theory alone is sufficient to explain the full model proposed.

Signaling theory is especially strong in explaining how evaluations form under information asymmetry. It clarifies why prospective applicants rely on

available cues, why cue credibility matters, and why company information can shape judgments before direct experience occurs. However, it is less effective in explaining why some employer evaluations become emotionally meaningful or motivationally powerful. It can explain how favorable judgments develop, but it is less well suited to explaining why those judgments might be internalized as self-relevant and translated into stronger motivational states.

Social Identity theory explains that second part of the process. It is especially useful for understanding why organizational meanings matter, why value similarity can intensify attraction, and why symbolic employer attributes can evoke stronger psychological engagement. However, Social Identity theory alone does not fully explain how employer evaluations form under limited-information conditions. It assumes that symbolic meaning matters, but it does not provide a detailed account of how external cues are interpreted before those meanings become personal significance.

For this reason, the two theories are complementary. Corporate reputation and employer attractiveness are treated as employer branding perceptions formed through cue interpretation. Inspiration and value congruence are then examined through a logic in which those perceptions become motivationally significant when they are interpreted as value-relevant and identity-meaningful.

This combined use also helps the dissertation avoid two common weaknesses in employer research. A purely signaling-based explanation may remain too cognitive and may understate emotional and symbolic processes. A purely identity-based explanation may overstate psychological meaning without sufficiently accounting for how applicants form evaluations under uncertainty. By combining the two, the dissertation provides a more integrated explanation of how external interpretation and internal meaning-making may operate together in shaping job pursuit intention.

Recent review work also suggests that employer-branding and employer-evaluation research has expanded into multiple streams while remaining conceptually fragmented, reinforcing the need for a clearer explanatory structure linking information processing with psychological meaning (Theurer et al., 2018; Abdukhamidova et al., 2025).

#### ***2.2.4. Person-Organization fit***

Although Signaling theory and Social Identity theory are the principal theoretical foundations of the dissertation, other perspectives are also relevant. One important example is the person–organization fit literature, especially in relation to value congruence. Person–organization fit emphasizes compatibility between individuals and organizations, particularly at the level of values, goals, and characteristics (Cable & Judge, 1996; Kristof, 1996). This literature is highly relevant because value congruence is conceptually rooted in value-based fit. More recent evidence also shows that value congruence can positively influence employer attractiveness within a sequential chain leading to job pursuit intention among fresh graduates actively seeking jobs (Dineen et al., 2002; Song et al., 2024). For that reason, person–organization fit serves as an important supporting perspective in the dissertation, especially when clarifying why perceived compatibility matters in attraction and early organizational preference.

However, person–organization fit is not adopted as the principal framework because the dissertation also needs to explain how organization cues are interpreted before applicants can judge compatibility in a more developed way. Person–organization fit perspectives are strong in explaining why compatibility matters, but they are less effective in explaining cue interpretation under information asymmetry. Person–organization fit supports the conceptualization of value congruence, while Signaling theory and Social Identity theory provide the broader explanatory logic.

A second relevant perspective is the instrumental and symbolic framework, which distinguishes between functional employer attributes and symbolic or identity-related attributes in job seeker evaluation. This framework has been influential in employer image and employer attractiveness research because it shows that applicants respond not only to material benefits but also to meanings such as prestige, innovativeness, and social responsibility (Lievens & Slaughter, 2016). In other words, job seekers evaluate potential employers through an instrumental-symbolic framework in the way that tangible job attributes interact with symbolic cues like corporate reputation and employee recommendations to maximize employer attractiveness (Ahamad et al., 2023; Saini & Jawahar, 2019).

This perspective is useful in organizing the kinds of employer characteristics that may matter, but it does not by itself provide a complete explanation of cue credibility under uncertainty or of how those meanings become motivationally significant. For this reason, it is treated as an important organizing perspective rather than as the main theoretical foundation.

A third perspective is organizational identification. This construct helps explain psychological connection between individuals and organizations. However, organizational identification is more often examined in post-entry settings or in contexts where the relationship with the organization is already more developed. Inspiration is prioritized because it captures an earlier motivational movement from evaluation toward action, which is especially suitable for a pre-employment student sample. Organizational identification remains conceptually relevant, but it is not treated as the primary mechanism in the model.

### **2.3. Prior empirical research on employer branding and job pursuit intention**

This section reviews the empirical literature most relevant to the proposed model. The review focuses on how corporate reputation and employer attractiveness have been linked to one another, how each has been associated with applicant responses, how digital information environments shape employer evaluation, and what is currently known in Vietnam and other emerging-market contexts. This organization is appropriate because the dissertation seeks to explain not only whether applicant-side employer branding perceptions matter, but also how they may be associated with job pursuit intention among Vietnamese university students aged 19 to 22.

#### ***2.3.1. Corporate reputation and employer attractiveness***

Prior research suggests that corporate reputation and employer attractiveness are positively associated, although the two constructs remain conceptually distinct. Corporate reputation reflects a broader and more socially anchored evaluation of organizational credibility, standing, and public regard, whereas employer attractiveness captures a more personal and employment-focused judgment of desirability (Cable & Turban, 2003; Lievens & Slaughter, 2016). Job seekers may regard an organization as broadly reputable without necessarily perceiving it as attractive for their own employment choice.

Empirical research generally shows that favorable corporate reputation can contribute to employer attractiveness because it helps applicants infer organizational quality, stability, and trustworthiness under conditions of limited direct knowledge. Cable and Turban (2003) argued that reputation influences employer knowledge by shaping what applicants infer about job attributes and likely employment conditions. Research integrating employer branding, social identity, and person–organization fit has also shown that company reputation and identity congruence can affect employer brand attractiveness and job pursuit intentions through cognitive social identity (Xie et al., 2015). These findings indicate that reputation matters not only because it signals organizational quality, but also because it helps applicants interpret what the organization may mean for them as a potential employer.

This relationship should not be viewed as standard. Employer attractiveness may be shaped by reputation, but it is not fully determined by reputation. Its strength may vary according to industry, labor-market conditions, information environment, and applicant characteristics. This supports the decision to treat corporate reputation and employer attractiveness as related but distinct employer evaluations in the proposed model.

### ***2.3.2. Corporate reputation and applicant response***

Corporate reputation has been widely associated with applicant outcomes such as attraction, intention to apply, and willingness to pursue employment. Favorable reputation matters because it provides cognitive assurance under uncertainty and signals that the organization is credible, competent, and socially legitimate (Cable & Turban, 2003; Lievens & Slaughter, 2016; Silva & Dias, 2022). For prospective applicants who lack direct work experience with the employer, such broad evaluations can play an important role in shaping early employment intentions.

Prior research also suggests that the effects of reputation may operate through several overlapping channels. Some studies emphasize trust and legitimacy, while others point to prestige, symbolic value, and anticipated quality of organizational experience. In this sense, corporate reputation may influence applicant responses not only because it reduces uncertainty, but also because it

makes the organization appear more meaningful, respectable, or desirable as an affiliation target (Silva & Dias, 2022). Xie et al. (2015) further showed that company reputation affected job pursuit intentions through cognitive social identity, suggesting that reputational judgments can become behaviorally relevant when they contribute to early identification with the organization.

What remains less clear is how corporate reputation becomes psychologically meaningful enough to support stronger job pursuit intention. Many studies confirm the direct association between reputation and applicant response, but fewer explain how a positive reputation moves beyond broad favorable evaluation and becomes motivationally active. This issue is particularly relevant for pre-employment students and supports the dissertation's focus on inspiration as a more explicit motivational pathway.

### ***2.3.3. Employer attractiveness and applicant response***

Employer attractiveness is one of the most established predictors of applicant outcomes in recruitment research. It captures the perceived desirability of working for an organization and has consistently been associated with attraction, application intention, employer preference, and related behavioral intentions (Berthon et al., 2005; Chapman et al., 2005; Lievens & Slaughter, 2016; Samoliuk et al., 2022). Employer attractiveness is often treated as one of the most direct evaluative antecedents of job pursuit intention.

The literature also shows that employer attractiveness is multidimensional. Earlier work often emphasized instrumental attributes such as salary, job security, and advancement opportunities. Later research has given more attention to symbolic attributes such as values, prestige, innovativeness, social responsibility, and identity meaning (Lievens & Slaughter, 2016). Applicants may find an employer attractive not only because of what the organization offers materially, but also because of what the organization appears to represent.

Much of the literature focuses more on establishing the importance of employer attractiveness than on explaining how attractiveness becomes motivating. Literature presents more clearly that attractive employers are more likely to receive favorable applicant responses, but less clearly on how attractiveness, especially symbolic attractiveness, becomes psychologically

energizing. This is one reason why inspiration is being introduced in the present thesis. Inspiration provides a more specific explanation of how employer attractiveness may move beyond positive evaluation toward job pursuit intention.

#### ***2.3.4. Employer perceptions in digital information environments***

Employer evaluations are increasingly formed in digital information environments where official communication, peer narratives, employee-generated content, and third-party platforms all shape the credibility and attractiveness of the employer. This development is important in recruitment research because prospective applicants often depend on indirect information long before formal contact with an organization occurs (Theurer et al., 2018; Van Hove & Lievens, 2009). E-recruitment and digital employer branding have changed how candidates gather and compare employer information, particularly through social media, career websites, and online review platforms (Hanu et al., 2021; El-Menawy & Saleh, 2023; Hasyatamma et al., 2025; Iyer et al., 2026; Thanh et al., 2024; Permatasari et al., 2026).

The digital environment matters not only because it increases the availability of employer information, but also because it affects how cues are interpreted. In social media and online review settings, applicants may encounter information that confirms, contradicts, or complicates official HR communication (Panday et al., 2022). Organizations can communicate purpose, culture, values, and employee experience more visibly than before. At the same time, applicants can compare these claims with peer reviews, employee narratives, and wider social discourse. El-Menawy and Saleh (2023), for example, showed that social media platforms mediated the relationship between employer attractiveness and Generation Z intention to apply for a job.

Overall, the literature supports the view that digital information environments are central rather than peripheral to employer evaluation. This is especially important for younger individuals who rely heavily on publicly available information before formal labor-market entry. For Vietnamese university students approaching internships and entry-level employment, digital and publicly available cues may play an important role in shaping corporate reputation, employer attractiveness, perceived value congruence, and the inspirational responses examined in this dissertation.



## **2.4. Inspiration as the motivational pathway**

The preceding sections have shown that corporate reputation and employer attractiveness are often associated with applicant responses. Much of the literature has been more successful in identifying these associations than in explaining how positive employer evaluations become psychologically energizing enough to support active job pursuit. This issue is especially important because the target population who have not yet entered the organizations they evaluate. Their employer evaluations are formed mainly through indirect information rather than direct organizational experience. In this context, inspiration is examined as a motivational pathway that helps explain how favorable employer evaluation may move toward job pursuit intention before organizational membership occurs.

### ***2.4.1. Inspiration in psychology and in marketing***

Inspiration was conceptualized in psychology as a distinct motivational state involving evocation, transcendence, and movement toward action (Thrash & Elliot, 2003). In this view, inspiration is not merely a positive feeling or a general sense of liking. It refers to a psychological experience in which an external stimulus is perceived as meaningful, admirable, or elevating, and this experience is linked with motivation to act. Thrash and Elliot (2003, 2004) proposed that inspiration includes two related but distinguishable aspects. The first is being inspired by an object, idea, or stimulus. The second is being inspired to move toward action, realization, or goal pursuit. Inspiration thus contains both a receptive component and an activating component.

Later work extended this concept into marketing and consumer research. Böttger et al. (2017) operationalized inspiration in a dual-component form and showed that being inspired by a brand or marketing stimulus could lead to being inspired to act, with consequences for behavioral intentions. This extension is relevant to employer evaluation because employer-related perceptions, like consumer brand perceptions, often involve symbolic meaning, aspirational imagery, and identity-related interpretation. A prospective applicant may encounter an employer not only as a source of employment information, but also as an object of admiration, aspiration, or future self-imagination.

Research on employer-related perceptions also suggests that applicant responses are not purely cognitive. Rampl and Kenning (2014), for example, found that affect and trust can explain a high level of employer brand attractiveness among potential applicants. Although their study did not examine inspiration directly, it supports the view that emotional and motivational responses matter in early employer evaluation. Inspiration is useful in this respect because it captures something more specific than general positive feeling. A person may feel positively toward an organization without being moved to act. Inspiration, by contrast, implies both favorable evaluation and psychological activation.

#### ***2.4.2. The relevance of inspiration in pre-employment employer evaluation***

The use of inspiration is appropriate for the research context of this dissertation. The study focuses on university students who are approaching entry into the labor market. For this group, employer evaluations are formed before formal organizational membership and largely through indirect cues such as public reputation, digital communication, employee-generated content, recruitment information, and social discussion. In a pre-employment setting, an applicant may evaluate an employer as reputable and attractive without yet having developed a stable relationship with the organization.

At this stage, a mechanism is needed to explain early motivational movement rather than established attachment. Inspiration is suitable for this purpose because it captures an immediate and activating response to an external stimulus. A student who perceives an employer as admirable, meaningful, or connected with future aspirations may be inspired by that employer and may then become more motivated to move toward it. This sequence fits the logic of pre-employment evaluation better than constructs that normally assume longer-term relational experience.

It is particularly relevant in digital information environments. Younger applicants often encounter employers through symbolic and digitally mediated content before they consider a formal application. Such content may evoke admiration, aspiration, curiosity, or career-related imagination before direct contact with the organization occurs. Inspiration helps explain this early transition from employer evaluation to job pursuit intention among prospective student job seekers.

### ***2.4.3. Distinguishing inspiration from related constructs***

A major conceptual issue is to clarify why inspiration is prioritized as the motivational pathway rather than more established constructs such as person–organization fit, organizational identification, or affective commitment. These constructs are highly relevant to employer research, but they do not explain the same psychological process.

First, inspiration differs from person–organization fit. Person–organization fit, especially in its value-congruence form, refers to perceived compatibility between the individual and the organization (Cable & Judge, 1996; Kristof, 1996). It addresses whether the organization appears consistent with the applicant’s values, goals, or preferred way of being. This compatibility logic is important and is captured in this dissertation through perceived value congruence. Nevertheless, value congruence does not itself explain motivational activation. A person may perceive compatibility with an organization without necessarily feeling moved to pursue it. Inspiration differs from person–organization fit because it focuses on the movement from meaningful evaluation to energized intention.

Second, inspiration differs from organizational identification. Organizational identification refers to the perception of oneness with, or belongingness to, an organization (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). It usually implies a stronger and more stable psychological bond with the organization. Although anticipated identification before entry is possible, much of the identification literature has been developed in contexts where the individual has more substantial exposure to the organization. Inspiration captures a response that may arise earlier and more quickly, before deeper identity-based attachment is fully developed.

Third, inspiration differs from affective commitment. Affective commitment refers to emotional attachment to, involvement in, and identification with an organization. It has been studied mainly in existing employee populations and often implies an already established relationship with the organization through work experience, socialization, and ongoing exchange. This makes affective commitment less suitable as the central mechanism in the present study. The target respondents are not employees, and many have not had direct experience with the organizations they evaluate. Inspiration is more appropriate

because it can arise from symbolic evaluation and aspirational meaning without prior membership.

These distinctions are important for the dissertation model. Person–organization fit explains compatibility. Organizational identification explains psychological attachment or belonging. Affective commitment explains emotional attachment within an established relationship. Inspiration explains motivational activation that may occur when an external organization is perceived as admirable, meaningful, or aspirational. This final distinction is central to the study because the dissertation seeks to explain how employer branding perceptions may become sufficiently energizing to support job pursuit intention before organizational entry.

#### ***2.4.4. Modeling inspiration as a two-stage process***

A further issue concerns how inspiration should be conceptualized in the model. Thrash and Elliot (2004) observed that being inspired-by and being inspired-to can converge as indicators of a broader inspiration construct. Later, Böttger et al. (2017) demonstrated the usefulness of modeling inspiration as a sequential process in which being inspired-by precedes being inspired-to. This distinction matters because one of the main questions of this dissertation is how employer evaluations become associated with job pursuit intention.

The present study models inspiration as a two-stage process in which being inspired-by is associated with being inspired-to. Conceptually, the proposed model assumes that employer evaluations first evoke a sense of admiration, interest, curiosity, or aspiration. This initial response may then develop into a stronger motivational state directed toward possible action. Analytically, the two-stage form allows the dissertation to show how the motivational process unfolds rather than treating inspiration as a single undifferentiated construct.

This modeling choice does not reject the possibility that inspiration may also be conceptualized at a higher-order level. It reflects the specific purpose of this dissertation, which is to explain the process through which employer-related perceptions may move toward job pursuit intention. In this thesis, the distinction between inspired-by and inspired-to is useful because it makes the movement from symbolic evocation to action-oriented motivation more visible. Inspired-to

is also distinguished from job pursuit intention. Inspired-to refers to motivational readiness or the urge to move toward the employer, while job pursuit intention refers to a more explicit behavioral intention to apply for or pursue employment with the organization.

#### ***2.4.5. Inspiration as the link between employer evaluation and job pursuit intention***

The literature reviewed above indicates that inspiration is an appropriate motivational pathway for this dissertation. It is grounded in an established psychological framework, has been further developed in marketing research, and is conceptually suited to an early-career context in which employer evaluations are formed through symbolic and indirect information. It offers a process-oriented explanation of how positive employer evaluations may become associated with job pursuit intention.

In this study, inspiration links applicant-side perceptions of employer branding with job pursuit intention. Corporate reputation and employer attractiveness are expected to shape how the employer is evaluated, while inspiration helps explain how those evaluations may become psychologically energizing enough to support stronger intention. Inspired-by represents the initial response to employer evaluation. Inspired-to represents the movement from that initial response toward action readiness.

This process is not assumed to operate equally for all applicants. Its strength may depend on whether the employer is perceived as value-congruent. When students perceive stronger alignment between their own values and those attributed to the employer, favorable employer evaluations may become more personally meaningful. They may then be more likely to evoke the inspired-by state that begins the motivational pathway. This logic leads to the next section, which considers perceived value congruence as a boundary condition within the proposed model.

### **2.5. Perceived value congruence as a boundary condition**

The previous sections have shown that applicant-side perceptions of employer branding may become meaningful through inspiration. This process is unlikely to operate with equal strength for all applicants. Individuals differ in what they value, what they expect from an employer, and how personally meaningful

employer-related information appears to them. The dissertation examines perceived value congruence as a boundary condition that may strengthen the relationship between employer evaluations and inspiration.

### ***2.5.1. Perceived value congruence in recruitment and person–organization fit***

Perceived value congruence refers to the perceived alignment between an individual's personal values and the values that the individual attributes to an organization. The construct is rooted in the person–organization fit literature, which has long emphasized value compatibility as an important form of fit between individuals and organizations (Cable & Judge, 1996; Kristof, 1996; Kristof-Brown et al., 2023). In this tradition, applicants are more likely to feel attracted to organizations when they believe that the organization reflects beliefs, priorities, and norms that are consistent with their own values. Value congruence is not simply a general favorable impression. It is a specific judgment of compatibility at the level of values and identity.

In recruitment contexts, perceived value congruence is especially important because applicants often make judgments under limited direct knowledge. Before entering the organization, job seekers cannot fully observe its internal culture, ethical climate, or actual priorities. They rely on available information to infer whether the employer would be an appropriate place for them. Earlier fit research suggests that perceived similarity in values can positively influence attraction, organizational preference, and job choice intention, especially when applicants evaluate employers before direct organizational experience begins (Cable & Judge, 1996; Kristof, 1996). This makes perceived value congruence highly relevant to the present dissertation, which focuses on university students at the early career stage.

In this dissertation, perceived value congruence is understood as subjective alignment rather than an externally calculated comparison between the student's values and the organization's actual values. At the applicant stage, what matters most is not whether the employer's values and the individual's values are objectively identical, but whether the applicant perceives them as compatible. This perceived alignment is likely to shape how organizational information is interpreted and whether employer meanings are experienced as personally relevant.

### ***2.5.2. The moderating logic of perceived value congruence***

The dissertation treats perceived value congruence as a boundary condition because the impact of employer evaluations is likely to depend on how personally meaningful those evaluations become. This logic follows from the combined use of Signaling Theory and Social Identity Theory.

From a signaling perspective, job seekers interpret employer-related cues under uncertainty. The strength of that interpretation depends not only on the availability of cues, but also on whether those cues appear credible and relevant to the applicant. When applicants perceive stronger value alignment, cues related to ethics, culture, purpose, or social responsibility may appear more meaningful and more personally diagnostic. Favorable evaluations of corporate reputation or employer attractiveness are then more likely to be interpreted as relevant to the self rather than as distant or abstract information.

From a Social Identity Theory perspective, value congruence increases self-relevance. When an organization appears to reflect values compatible with one's own, it becomes easier for the applicant to imagine that organization as a meaningful target of affiliation. Employer evaluations are no longer only judgments about an external organization. They become connected with identity, aspiration, and possible belonging (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Under these conditions, favorable employer perceptions are more likely to evoke an inspired response because they are not only admired, but also experienced as personally significant.

Perceived value congruence can act as an interpretive filter that strengthens the movement from employer evaluation to the inspired-by state. When applicants perceive stronger alignment between their own values and those they attribute to the employer, positive employer evaluations are more likely to trigger motivational activation. This moderating logic explains why similar evaluations of the same employer may not lead to equally strong inspiration among all applicants.

### ***2.5.3. Empirical support for the boundary role of value congruence***

Empirical research provides strong support for the importance of value congruence in applicant decision processes, although it more often appears as a direct predictor than as an explicit moderator. The broader person–organization

fit literature consistently shows that perceived compatibility is positively associated with attraction, organizational preference, and job choice intention, particularly in contexts where applicants evaluate organizations before direct organizational experience (Cable & Judge, 1996; Kristof, 1996; Kristof-Brown et al., 2023). When job seekers perceive stronger alignment between their personal values and organizational values, person–organization fit may increase psychological attachment and the likelihood of pursuing employment (Cable & DeRue, 2002; McFarland et al., 2025; Song et al., 2024).

Value congruence can also operate within a sequential process leading to applicant outcomes. Song et al. (2024), for example, found that employer prosocial orientation positively influenced value congruence, which in turn positively influenced employer attractiveness and job pursuit intention among fresh graduates actively seeking jobs. This finding indicates that value-based compatibility is not a marginal consideration in employer evaluation. It can shape how organizational information becomes meaningful to applicants.

Explicit moderation tests remain less common than direct-effect models. The literature strongly supports the relevance of value congruence, but it is less clear whether value congruence also changes the strength of the relationship between employer evaluations and motivational response. This unresolved issue supports the decision to treat perceived value congruence as a boundary condition rather than only as a direct explanatory variable.

#### ***2.5.4. Perceived value congruence in the context of Vietnamese university students***

The role of perceived value congruence may be especially important in the context of Vietnamese university students. At the transition from education to employment, many students are still shaping their professional identity, work-related priorities, and future aspirations. Employer evaluation at this stage is likely to involve not only judgments about practical opportunities, but also judgments about whether the organization appears compatible with a broader sense of self.

This issue is meaningful in Vietnam, where prior research in a transitional-economy setting suggests that traditional and modern value orientations may coexist rather than simply displace one another (N. T. T. Mai et al., 2009). For university students approaching labor market entry, company information may be



filtered not only through practical concerns, but also through questions of whether the organization appears respectable, meaningful, ethical, developmental, or socially worthwhile.

In this context, perceived value congruence may be influential as a boundary condition. A reputable organization may be admired more strongly when its values appear consistent with the student's own beliefs. An attractive employer may be more inspiring when the organization appears to represent ideals the applicant personally endorses. Conversely, favorable employer evaluations may have weaker motivational consequences if the employer is perceived as inconsistent with the individual's values. Perceived value congruence helps explain why similar employer evaluations may not produce equally strong inspired responses across students.

#### ***2.5.5. Positioning perceived value congruence in the dissertation model***

In this thesis, perceived value congruence is not treated as a mediator between applicant-side perceptions of employer branding and job pursuit intention. It is treated as a moderating condition that may strengthen the relationship between employer evaluations and inspiration. More specifically, the dissertation proposes that perceived value congruence may strengthen the relationship between corporate reputation and inspired-by, and the relationship between employer attractiveness and inspired-by. When students perceive higher value alignment, positive employer evaluations are expected to become more capable of evoking an initial inspired response.

This positioning is theoretically appropriate for three reasons. First, it remains consistent with the person–organization fit literature by preserving the importance of value compatibility in early attraction. Second, it is consistent with Signaling Theory because perceived value congruence depends on how employer cues are interpreted rather than on the cues themselves. Third, it is consistent with Social Identity Theory because value similarity is one of the main ways in which organizational meanings become more personal and motivationally significant.

Overall, perceived value congruence helps explain why similar employer evaluations may not have the same motivational impact on all applicants. By treating

perceived value congruence as a boundary condition rather than as a stand-alone explanatory mechanism, the dissertation offers a more precise account of how applicant-side perceptions of employer branding may become motivationally effective for Vietnamese university students preparing to enter the labor market.

## **2.6. Research model and hypothesis development**

The preceding sections established the conceptual foundations, theoretical basis, and empirical background relevant to the proposed relationships. This section translates that review into the specific hypotheses of the study. The model follows a sequential explanatory logic. Corporate reputation and employer attractiveness are treated as two applicant-side perceptual outcomes of employer branding. These evaluations are expected to shape the initial inspired-by response, which then strengthens the inspired-to state and ultimately job pursuit intention. Perceived value congruence is introduced as a boundary condition that may strengthen the association between employer evaluations and inspired-by. In this way, the model integrates employer evaluation, motivational activation, and value-based interpretation within a single framework.

### ***2.6.1. Corporate reputation and employer attractiveness***

A positive association is expected between corporate reputation and employer attractiveness. This expectation follows from Signaling Theory. When applicants have limited direct knowledge of an organization, they rely on available cues to infer quality, trustworthiness, and likely employment conditions. A favorable corporate reputation reduces uncertainty and provides a broad basis for evaluating the organization as credible and desirable as a place to work (Cable & Turban, 2003; Connelly et al., 2011).

Prior research is broadly consistent with this expectation. Studies have shown that company reputation contributes to job-seeker responses not only because it signals organizational quality, but also because it supports more favorable psychological evaluation of the employer. Xie et al. (2015), for example, showed that company reputation contributed to employer brand attractiveness through cognitive social identity in a recruitment context. This suggests that broader evaluations of organizational standing can shape more personal judgments of employer desirability. At the same time, the two constructs

remain conceptually distinct. Corporate reputation is broader and more socially anchored, whereas employer attractiveness reflects a more personal and employment-focused evaluation.

Accordingly, Hypothesis 1 is proposed as follows:

***H1: Corporate reputation is positively associated with employer attractiveness***

### ***2.6.2. Corporate reputation and inspired-by***

Corporate reputation is also expected to contribute positively to the inspired-by state. This relationship can be explained through both Signaling Theory and Social Identity Theory. From a signaling perspective, corporate reputation summarizes multiple public cues into a relatively stable evaluation of organizational credibility, competence, and legitimacy. For applicants who lack direct experience with the employer, such reputation can signal not only organizational quality but also public standing and symbolic value. A reputable organization may become more noticeable as an object of admiration.

From a Social Identity Theory perspective, a reputable organization may also function as a symbolically desirable target of possible affiliation. Social Identity Theory suggests that individuals are drawn to groups and organizations that may enhance self-definition, prestige, and belonging (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). When students perceive an employer as highly reputable, they may see that organization not only as trustworthy, but also as prestigious, legitimate, and socially valued. This symbolic appeal may evoke the inspired-by state because inspired-by reflects an initial response to something perceived as meaningful, admirable, or aspirational (Thrash & Elliot, 2003, 2004).

This expectation is also consistent with recruitment research. Xie et al. (2015) showed that company reputation affected job pursuit intentions through cognitive social identity, suggesting that reputational judgments can become personally significant rather than remaining purely informative. In the present dissertation, this early identity-relevant response is expected to be captured more specifically through the inspired-by state.

Accordingly, Hypothesis 2 is proposed as follows:

***H2: Corporate reputation is positively associated with inspired-by.***

### ***2.6.3. Employer attractiveness and inspired-by***

Employer attractiveness is expected to contribute positively to the inspired-by state. While corporate reputation reflects a broad evaluation of organizational standing, employer attractiveness reflects the student's more immediate and personal judgment of the organization as a desirable place to work. This makes employer attractiveness especially relevant to inspiration because a desirable employer may appear not only favorable, but also personally meaningful for the applicant's future career.

From a signaling perspective, employer attractiveness represents the applicant's positive evaluation of available employer-related cues. When these cues are interpreted positively, the organization may be seen as offering desirable work conditions, career-enhancing opportunities, and meaningful employment possibilities. Compared with corporate reputation, employer attractiveness is closer to the applicant's own career concerns because it reflects whether the organization appears suitable and appealing for the individual's employment future.

From a Social Identity Theory perspective, employer attractiveness may become psychologically powerful when the employer appears to represent a possible future self. A student may feel inspired by an employer not only because the company is respected in general, but because working there appears to match the student's aspirations, preferred work environment, or desired professional identity (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). In such cases, employer attractiveness does not simply reflect liking. It may evoke admiration, possibility, and future-oriented aspiration, all of which are closely related to the inspired-by state.

Accordingly, Hypothesis 3 is proposed as follows:

***H3: Employer attractiveness is positively associated with inspired-by***

### ***2.6.4. Inspired-by and inspired-to***

The inspired-by state is expected to precede and strengthen inspired-to. This relationship follows directly from the dual-phase inspiration framework developed in psychology and later applied in marketing research. Thrash and

Elliot (2003, 2004) distinguish between being inspired by an external stimulus, which reflects evocation, and being inspired to act, which reflects motivational movement. Böttger et al. (2017) showed that inspired-by can function as an empirical precursor to inspired-to, thereby clarifying how initial admiration may develop into stronger goal-directed motivation.

This distinction is central to the proposed motivational sequence. The dissertation does not treat inspiration as a single undifferentiated state. Instead, it proposes that employer evaluations first evoke an initial response of admiration, interest, or aspiration, represented by inspired-by. This response may then develop into a more activated state oriented toward action, represented by inspired-to. In early employer evaluation, this sequence offers a useful explanation of how employer meaning may be translated into motivational readiness before actual organizational entry.

Accordingly, Hypothesis 4 is proposed as follows:

***H4: Inspired-by is positively associated with inspired-to.***

#### ***2.6.5. Inspired-to and job pursuit intention***

The stronger the inspired-to state, the stronger the expected job pursuit intention. Inspired-to represents a state of motivational readiness directed toward possible action. Job pursuit intention represents a more explicit behavioral intention to apply for, choose, or pursue employment with the target organization. Therefore, if students feel inspired to move toward a particular employer, they should be more likely to express stronger intention to apply, follow recruitment opportunities, or otherwise pursue employment with that organization.

This expectation is consistent with the inspiration framework. In a marketing context, Böttger et al. (2017) showed that inspired-to acted as a direct driver of behavioral intention. Although the domain is different, the underlying logic is relevant. In the employer evaluation context, inspired-to can be understood as the motivational state closest to job pursuit intention. It reflects the movement from being interested or inspired by an employer to feeling ready to take action toward that employer.

At the same time, inspired-to and job pursuit intention should still be distinguished. Inspired-to refers to motivational readiness or the urge to act, whereas job pursuit intention refers to a stated behavioral intention toward the employer. In the proposed model, inspired-to is treated as the immediate motivational antecedent of job pursuit intention rather than as the same construct.

Accordingly, Hypothesis 5 is proposed as follows:

***H5: Inspired-to is positively associated with job pursuit intention.***

#### ***2.6.6. The moderating role of value congruence in the relationship between corporate reputation and inspired-by***

Perceived value congruence is expected to positively moderate the relationship between corporate reputation and inspired-by. The logic of this moderation follows from both Signaling Theory and Social Identity Theory. When students perceive stronger alignment between their own values and those attributed to the employer, reputational evaluations may become more credible and personally meaningful (Connelly et al., 2011). In identity terms, a reputable employer that also appears value-consistent may become a more meaningful target of possible affiliation (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Under such conditions, corporate reputation is more likely to evoke an inspired-by response.

This expectation is also broadly consistent with the person–organization fit literature, which shows that value-based compatibility can intensify positive applicant responses such as attraction, preference, and job choice intention (Cable & Judge, 1996; Kristof, 1996). Although this literature does not always test moderation explicitly, it supports the broader proposition that perceived value alignment can strengthen the psychological significance of favorable employer evaluations. Hence, it is proposed that perceived value congruence strengthens the extent to which reputational evaluations become motivationally evocative.

Accordingly, Hypothesis 6a is proposed as follows:

***H6a: Value congruence positively moderates the association between corporate reputation and inspired-by, such that the association is stronger when value congruence is higher.***

### ***2.6.7. The moderating role of value congruence in the relationship between employer attractiveness and inspired-by***

Perceived value congruence is also expected to positively moderate the relationship between employer attractiveness and inspired-by. If employer attractiveness reflects the student's personal judgment of desirability, that judgment should be more likely to evoke inspiration when the employer is also perceived as value-consistent. In such cases, the employer does not appear attractive only in instrumental terms, but attractive in a way that feels personally meaningful and identity-compatible.

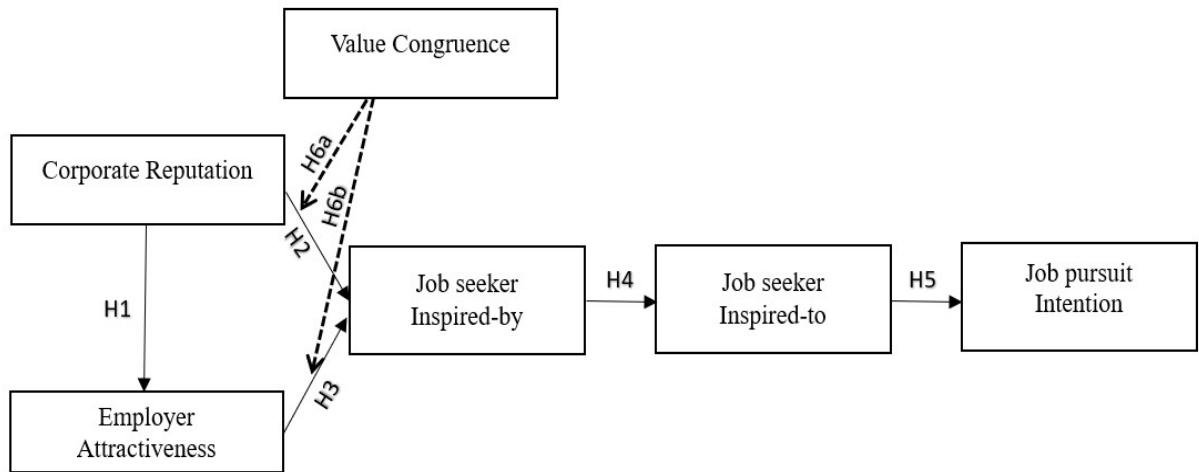
This expectation follows from Social Identity Theory as well as from the broader literature on perceived fit. When an organization appears both attractive and aligned with personal values, its symbolic meaning becomes more self-relevant. Recent evidence also suggests that value congruence is closely connected with employer attractiveness in applicant decision processes. Song et al. (2024), for example, found that value congruence positively influenced employer attractiveness within a sequential chain leading to job pursuit intention. Although that study did not test moderation, it supports the broader proposition that value-based alignment makes employer evaluations more meaningful. This suggests that when perceived value congruence is high, the association between employer attractiveness and inspired-by should be stronger.

Accordingly, Hypothesis 6b is proposed as follows:

***H6b: Value congruence positively moderates the association between employer attractiveness and inspired-by, such that the association is stronger when value congruence is higher.***

### ***2.6.8. Proposed research model***

Figure 2.1 presents the proposed research model of the dissertation. The model positions corporate reputation and employer attractiveness as employer evaluations, inspired-by and inspired-to as the sequential motivational mechanism, and job pursuit intention as the behavioral outcome. Value congruence is modeled as a moderator of the paths from corporate reputation and employer attractiveness to inspired-by.



**Figure 2.1: A proposed research model**

*(Source: author's own work)*



## **CHAPTER 3 - METHODOLOGY**

In Chapter 3, the methodology for testing the research model and hypotheses developed in Chapter 2 is presented. The model investigates the influence of employer branding perceptions, operationalized by corporate reputation and employer attractiveness on job pursuit intention via a two-stage inspiration pathway from inspired-by to inspired-to, and that perceived value congruence strengthens the relationships between employer evaluations and the initial inspired-by response, thus acting as a condition in the early motivational process.

This chapter explains how the study was designed, how the target population was defined, how respondents were screened and recruited, how the survey instrument was developed and administered, and how the data were analyzed. The empirical evidence is based on a cross-sectional survey of Vietnamese university students aged 19 to 22, treated as prospective applicants approaching labor market entry. Accordingly, the results are interpreted as evidence of associations among employer evaluations, motivational states, and job pursuit intention rather than as definitive evidence of causality. The chapter also explains the procedural and statistical steps taken to reduce and assess potential method bias.

### **3.1. Research Design**

This thesis adopts a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design for explanatory theory testing. A survey approach is selected because the key constructs in the model are perception-based and are most efficiently measured through standardized self-reported items. Corporate reputation, employer attractiveness, inspiration, value congruence, and job pursuit intention are all conceptualized as psychological evaluations or states occurring at the individual level. In addition, the proposed model includes multiple latent constructs, a sequential motivational pathway, and moderation effects. For these reasons, a structured questionnaire is suitable for capturing variation across respondents and for examining the proposed relationships within a latent-variable framework.

The unit of analysis is the individual student respondent as a prospective student job seeker. This focus is appropriate because they often evaluate

employers before having direct employment experience. It suggests that their evaluation of the employer branding perceptions is formed largely from indirect information and social cues rather than from lived organizational experience. A survey design can capture these early perceptions and the motivational responses associated with them at the point when students are actively forming preferences and intentions. Similar survey methods have been used in recent Vietnam-based research to investigate the relationship between intention to apply and perceived organizational image and reputation. This suggests that this approach is appropriate for the Vietnamese context and the early career evaluation stage.

However, the design has some drawbacks. The study is unable to establish a strong causal inference or track how students' perceptions and intentions change as they acquire more knowledge or practical work experience because all variables are measured at a single point in time. Additionally, common method bias, social desirability bias, and alternative causal ordering are still methodological risks because all measures are gathered from the same respondent. (Podsakoff et al., 2003). For these reasons, the dissertation interprets the findings as associations that are consistent with the proposed theoretical ordering rather than as evidence of causality. The statistical assessment techniques and procedural controls used to minimize and assess these risks will be described in the later parts of this chapter.

### **3.2. Sampling and data screening**

This study focuses on Vietnamese university students aged 19 to 22 who were approaching labor market entry. This target group is consistent with the purpose of the dissertation because the study examines employer-related perceptions before direct organizational experience. At this stage, many students begin to evaluate potential employers through public information, social information, digital communication, career events, internship opportunities, and early recruitment messages rather than through long-term experience inside the organization. This indicates that the empirical sample is appropriate for examining how prospective student job seekers form perceptions of corporate reputation, employer attractiveness, inspiration, perceived value congruence, and job pursuit intention.

The target population was deliberately defined in a narrow way. The dissertation is not intended to represent all Vietnamese citizens, all young people, or all university students in Vietnam. Instead, it focuses on current university students whose employer evaluations can reasonably be linked to near-term internship, graduate recruitment, or entry-level employment decisions. This delimitation is important because employer perceptions that are too distant from actual labor market participation may not be closely connected with job pursuit intention. By focusing on students aged 19 to 22, the study examines a group that is still in the pre-employment stage but already close enough to the labor market for employer evaluation to be meaningful.

### ***3.2.1. Target population***

The target population consists of Vietnamese university students aged 19 to 22 who were approaching labor market entry. This age range was selected because it corresponds to a stage at which many students begin to consider internships, graduate recruitment programs, entry-level positions, and early career choices. Since the dissertation examines employer-related perceptions before organizational entry, the relevant population is not students in general, but prospective student job seekers whose evaluation of employers can reasonably be associated with near-term career preparation.

To align the empirical data with this target population, only respondents who met the final inclusion criteria were retained in the analytic sample. This approach served two purposes. First, it ensured that the final sample reflected the respondent group required by the conceptual framework. Second, it reduced ambiguity about whether the sample could be interpreted as a pre-employment applicant-side sample rather than a broad student convenience sample.

### ***3.2.2. Sampling approach***

The study employed a non-probability sampling approach with restrictions based on age, university student status, and relevance to the pre-employment context. This approach was appropriate for the explanatory purpose of the dissertation because the study does not aim to estimate population parameters for all Vietnamese students. Rather, it aims to test theoretically specified relationships within a clearly bounded respondent segment.

Respondents were recruited through student-oriented and digital channels, including class-based networks, student communities, academic contacts, and career-related social media spaces. These channels were chosen because they were likely to reach students in the relevant age range and career transition stage. The recruitment process was also broadened across institutions, locations, and fields of study to reduce over-concentration in one university, city, or disciplinary group. This strategy should not be interpreted as producing a statistically representative sample. Instead, it was intended to increase diversity within the defined target segment and to support a more robust explanatory analysis.

### ***3.2.3. Data screening and final sample***

Before statistical analysis, the dataset was screened to verify accuracy, completeness, and suitability for structural equation modeling. The procedures followed established guidance for quantitative research and PLS-SEM analysis (Hair et al., 2021). The survey generated 1,021 raw returns. At the initial data-cleaning stage, abandoned questionnaires, severely incomplete submissions, and low-quality responses were removed. A response was treated as unusable if the respondent did not complete the survey or if the response pattern suggested inattentive completion, such as uniform straight-lining across major sections of the questionnaire.

Missing data were also examined at both item and case levels. The proportion of missing responses was minimal, with less than 2 percent per item, which was below the level likely to introduce serious bias (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). After this initial cleaning stage, 988 base usable questionnaires remained.

From this broader usable dataset, the final analytic sample was restricted to respondents who matched the dissertation's target population. In practice, this meant retaining current university students aged 19 to 22 who were positioned in a pre-employment stage of employer evaluation. As part of this restriction, 230 respondents aged 16 to 18 and 176 respondents aged 23 to 28 were excluded from the final analytic sample. The final dataset used for hypothesis testing consisted of 582 valid responses.

This screening flow is important because it shows that the final 582 cases were not treated as an undifferentiated convenience sample. They were retained

from a broader cleaned dataset on the basis of explicit theoretical and empirical criteria. The final sample is more closely aligned with the dissertation's focus on prospective student job seekers approaching labor market entry.

#### ***3.2.4. Sample size determination***

Sample size adequacy was evaluated with reference to model complexity and established guidance for structural equation modeling. The proposed model includes multiple latent constructs, several direct paths, a sequential motivational pathway, and two moderation effects. Because interaction effects generally require larger samples than simple direct-effect models, sample adequacy should be judged in relation to the overall complexity of the structural model rather than by simplified rules of thumb alone (Cohen, 1988; Green, 1991; Hair et al., 2021).

In the context of PLS-SEM, sample size adequacy must be judged in relation to the overall complexity of the structural model. The traditional "10-times rule" suggests that the sample size should be at least 10 times the largest number of structural paths directed at any single latent construct in the model (Hair et al., 2021). Given that the maximum number of predictors pointing to an endogenous construct in the proposed model is relatively small, this rule would suggest a minimum threshold of fewer than 50 respondents.

However, this heuristic has been widely criticized in modern methodological literature as overly lenient and insufficient for detecting meaningful effects. Instead, Hair et al. (2021) recommend supplementing or replacing this rule with a precise a priori statistical power analysis.

Following the guidelines established by Cohen (1988) and Hair et al. (2021), a minimum sample size was calculated to ensure sufficient statistical power for detecting a small-to-moderate level of explained variance in the endogenous constructs. Assuming a standard significance level ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ), a desired statistical power of 80% ( $1 - \beta = 0.80$ ), and a minimum  $R^2$  value of 0.10 for the endogenous constructs, the required minimum sample size for a model of this complexity is approximately 100 to 150 respondents. In addition, a conservative threshold of 400 participants is frequently advised for larger survey research aimed at finite populations to reduce sampling error.

This indicates that the sample of 582 is highly adequate for the selected PLS-SEM methodology, ensuring robust statistical power for the estimation of both direct and sequential pathways, as well as the moderation effects.

### ***3.2.5. Sampling limitations and mitigation***

The limitations of the sampling strategy should be noted: First, due to the nonprobability recruitment via student-oriented channels, the study does not generalize to the general Vietnamese youth population or to all university students in Vietnam; the sample is better understood as a specific segment of potential student job seekers. Second, identification of potential job seekers is partially based on self-reported information, and although the screening logic was intended to capture a plausible pre-employment stage, it cannot eliminate all variation in how actively or immediately respondents were preparing to pursue internships or jobs, and that is partly mitigated by the narrow target definition, the age restriction, and the later descriptive evidence that the retained respondents were meaningfully engaged in career preparation. Third, convenience-based recruitment may amplify self-selection bias; students who were more engaged in career planning or more active in digital student communities may have been more likely to participate, and this limitation is partly addressed by the use of multiple recruitment channels, the effort to broaden participation across locations and fields of study, and the transparent reporting of screening and exclusions. Nevertheless, the sampling and screening strategy is suitable for the purpose of the dissertation; it provides a transparent and theoretically consistent foundation for examining employer branding perceptions, inspiration, value congruence, and job pursuit intention among Vietnamese university students at an early labor market entry stage.

### **3.3. Data collection**

This section explains the administration of the questionnaire, the recruitment of respondents, and the management of ethical standards and data quality during fieldwork. Due to the study's self-reported, cross-sectional design, the data collection procedure was designed to minimize preventable errors, guarantee ethical compliance, and maximize response quality.

### ***3.3.1. Pilot testing***

Before the main survey, a pilot test was conducted to assess the clarity, relevance, and contextual suitability of the questionnaire. The pilot involved 30 respondents with characteristics close to those of the target population. Participants completed the questionnaire and then provided feedback on item comprehension, linguistic clarity, cultural relevance, and overall survey usability.

The pilot phase was important because several constructs in the model are conceptually close to one another. Items measuring corporate reputation, employer attractiveness, inspiration, perceived value congruence, and job pursuit intention could be misunderstood if the wording was too abstract, repetitive, or distant from the experience of Vietnamese students. The pilot test served not only as a technical check of the questionnaire, but also as a preliminary check of item clarity and construct distinction before the main survey was launched.

Feedback from this stage led to minor refinements in wording, presentation, and item order. For example, abbreviated wording was replaced with fuller wording where necessary, and items relating to inspired-by, inspired-to, and value congruence were reviewed to ensure that respondents could understand their intended meanings. These refinements helped make the final questionnaire more suitable for Vietnamese university students approaching labor market entry.

### ***3.3.2. Main survey administration***

The main survey was conducted online through a self-completed questionnaire created in Google Forms. Fieldwork took place over a four-week period in June 2024. The online mode was appropriate because it aligned with the communication habits of the target population and because it easily approached respondents across different locations.

To widen coverage, a multi-channel dissemination strategy was used. The survey was distributed through university/institutional channels such as email systems, class communication platforms, and academic networks to current students attending different universities in Vietnam, including National Economics University, the University of Economics and Business under Vietnam National University Hanoi, Eastern International University, International University under

Vietnam National University Ho Chi Minh City, Nguyen Tat Thanh University, Can Tho University, and Mien Trung Construction University, etc.

This recruitment strategy was intended to reduce over-concentration in any one university or city. The participation of all respondents was totally voluntary, anonymous, and unrelated to academic evaluation.

### ***3.3.3. Background variables and respondent profiling***

The first section of the questionnaire collected demographic and background information in order to describe the sample, support screening, and provide variables for descriptive analysis. These variables included age, gender, place of residence, and the broad field of the employer that the respondent would most prefer to apply to. Collecting these variables improved transparency in describing the analytic sample and reduced the risk that the employer evaluation model would be interpreted without reference to who the respondents actually were. The full sample profile is reported in Chapter 4.

### ***3.3.4. Consent, confidentiality, and respondent protections***

An online consent statement was presented to all participants prior to completing the questionnaire, informing participants of the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and that they could withdraw at any time without penalty, especially given that the respondents were students and thus required assurance that participation or non-participation would not impact their grades. Especially, anonymity was extremely important because the dissertation examines employer branding perceptions; respondents were more inclined to provide honest answers if they thought their answers would not be connected to them personally or revealed to employers, lecturers, or universities.

### ***3.3.5. Controls of common method bias***

Because the dissertation relies on a self-reported, cross-sectional questionnaire, common method bias is a methodological concern (Podsakoff et al., 2003; Nguyen & Vu, 2021). As a result, the data collection design included several ways to ease this type of concern.

Anonymity and confidentiality were emphasized from the beginning, which relieved respondents of pressure to give socially desirable or strategically



desirable answers; the wording of the questionnaire was clear and specific, not vague or ambiguous, which also reduced misunderstanding and the tendency to give generalized responses; and the instrument had been refined through pilot testing, which enhanced linguistic clarity and contextual appropriateness for the target population. Fourth, the questionnaire sequence moved from screening and background items to employer evaluation, then to inspiration, value congruence, and job pursuit intention. It is factual that data was gathered during a single survey session; however, this ordering created some psychological distance between the predictor, mechanism, moderator, and outcome variables.

Although these procedural control do not completely eliminate common method bias, they reduce the possibility that the method artifacts, rather than the construct itself, are the primary cause of observed relationships. Later in the dissertation, statistical techniques and analysis for common method bias are presented.

#### ***3.3.6. Data collection limitations***

Several limitations of the data collection process are acknowledged. First, the use of online, convenience-based recruitment means that participation depended partly on access to the survey link and willingness to respond. As a result, the final sample cannot be treated as statistically representative of the wider population. Second, because the survey used self-reported data collected at one point in time, some risk of common method bias and self-selection bias remains. Third, although multiple channels were used, the final sample is still concentrated in large urban centers, especially Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, reflecting both the logic of the recruitment process and the concentration of higher education institutions.

These limitations do not invalidate the study, but they do shape how the findings should be interpreted. The results should be understood as evidence of associations within a clearly defined segment of Vietnamese university students approaching labor market entry rather than as population-level estimates.

### **3.4. Measurement instrument and scale development**

This study used a structured questionnaire to measure applicant-side perceptions of employer branding, inspiration, perceived value congruence, and job pursuit intention at the individual level. Consistent with the perception-based

framing developed in Chapter 2, all constructs were measured as self-reported evaluations, perceptions, or psychological states. The questionnaire was designed for Vietnamese university students aged 19 to 22 who were approaching the early stage of career evaluation and were likely to evaluate potential employers mainly through indirect information rather than direct organizational experience.

Since the questionnaire was administered in Vietnamese, the scale items were translated from English into Vietnamese and then back-translated into English to improve semantic equivalence and reduce the risk of meaning distortion across languages (Brislin, 1970). Minor wording refinements were then made to ensure that the items were clear, natural, and suitable for Vietnamese university students. The English items reported in this chapter should be understood as the English version of the Vietnamese questionnaire items used in the survey.

As described in Section 3.3.1, the questionnaire was pilot tested with 30 respondents before the main survey. Feedback from this stage was used to improve item clarity, reduce possible misunderstanding, and ensure that closely related constructs could be reasonably distinguished by Vietnamese student respondents. This was particularly important for the inspiration items, perceived value congruence items, and job pursuit intention items, where some conceptual closeness was expected. Feedback from the pilot test also helped confirm that expressions relating to corporate reputation, employee treatment, social responsibility, and public regard were understandable in Vietnamese.

Because the proposed model contains several closely related latent constructs, particular attention was paid to item wording and construct boundaries. The instrument combined established measurement ideas from previous studies with contextual adaptation for the Vietnamese student and pre-employment setting. Accordingly, the measures used in this dissertation are treated as shortened and context-adapted measures informed by prior literature rather than as direct replications of the original measurement instruments. This approach is appropriate because several original scales were developed in different research contexts, such as general corporate reputation, consumer-based inspiration, broader multidimensional employer attractiveness, or applicant attraction in Western settings. The final measurement quality of the items was

assessed empirically in Chapter 4 through reliability, convergent validity, discriminant validity, and structural model assessment.

The questionnaire contained multi-item scales for each latent construct in the model. All items were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. This response format was chosen for self-administered survey data collection because it is simple, familiar to student respondents, and appropriate for perception-based research. It also keeps the instrument accessible to respondents in the target group while still providing sufficient variation for latent-variable analysis (Dillman, Smyth, & Christian, 2014).

### **Corporate reputation**

Corporate reputation was operationalized as the respondent's overall perception of the focal organization's public standing, credibility, and positive evaluation as a potential employer. Consistent with the conceptual framing in Chapter 2, the construct was measured from the applicant side. The focus was on how student job seekers perceived the organization's reputation before entering the organization, rather than on objective indicators of firm performance or on reputation ratings provided by external expert groups.

The measurement approach drew on both the corporate reputation literature and recruitment-context studies of job seekers' reputation perceptions. Fombrun and Shanley (1990) explain reputation as an evaluation formed through market, institutional, media, and social signals. This perspective is relevant to the present study because student job seekers often evaluate employers through public and indirect information. At the measurement level, the item wording was informed by Cable and Turban's (2003) recruitment-context measure of job seekers' reputation perceptions, which captures public image and general reputation. Broader corporate reputation measurement studies also supported the content domain of the construct, particularly the inclusion of market reputation, employee-related reputation, social responsibility, and public regard (Fombrun et al., 2000; Walsh et al., 2009).

For this dissertation, corporate reputation was measured using four concise items in the official questionnaire. The items asked whether the respondent

perceived the company as having a good reputation in the market, being well respected for treating employees well, being socially responsible, and being highly regarded in public or media-based information environments. These items were selected because they reflect aspects of reputation that are especially visible and meaningful to prospective applicants who do not yet have direct organizational experience.

All four items were administered in the main survey. As reported in Chapter 4, the initial measurement assessment showed that CR4 did not perform satisfactorily. Specifically, CR4 had an outer loading of 0.462, which was below the recommended threshold of 0.70. This result was also consistent with the preliminary reliability analysis, in which CR4 showed a negative corrected item-total correlation. As a result, CR4 was removed from the final measurement model. After this adjustment, the remaining three items provided a more coherent and reliable measure of students' perceived corporate reputation in the pre-employment context.

### **Employer attractiveness**

Employer attractiveness was measured as the respondent's perceived evaluation of the focal organization as a desirable place to work. The measurement was primarily informed by Berthon et al.'s (2005) employer attractiveness scale, which conceptualizes employer attractiveness as the envisioned benefits that a potential employee sees in working for a specific organization.

Berthon et al. (2005) developed the EmpAt scale as a multidimensional measure consisting of five dimensions: interest value, social value, economic value, development value, and application value. In the present dissertation, the full 25-item EmpAt scale was not reproduced because employer attractiveness was not examined as a separate multidimensional diagnostic construct. Instead, it was included as one latent construct within a broader model that also contained corporate reputation, inspiration, perceived value congruence, and job pursuit intention. A shorter measure was used to reduce respondent burden, avoid unnecessary item overlap, and maintain the overall clarity of the questionnaire for Vietnamese university students.

The five selected items were chosen to represent the main content domains of the original EmpAt scale. The item on an exciting and supportive work environment reflects the interest and social value dimensions. The item on good relationships among employees reflects social value. The item on competitive salary reflects economic value. The item on career-enhancing experience reflects development value. The item on applying knowledge and skills learned at university reflects application value. This implies that even though the measure is shorter than the original EmpAt scale, it preserves the core logic of Berthon et al.'s multidimensional conceptualization.

This operationalization is appropriate for the purpose of the dissertation. The study does not seek to validate the full EmpAt scale or compare the five original dimensions separately. Rather, it measures students' overall perception of whether the focal organization appears attractive as a potential employer. The item wording was translated, back-translated, and contextually refined for the Vietnamese student context, while the final measurement quality of the construct was assessed empirically in Chapter 4 through reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity tests.

### **Perceived value congruence**

Perceived value congruence was measured using four direct perceived-fit items. The construct is grounded in the person–organization fit literature, which emphasizes compatibility between individuals and organizations, especially in terms of values, culture, and organizational meanings (Cable & Judge, 1996; Kristof, 1996; Kristof-Brown et al., 2023). At the measurement level, the items followed the direct perceived-fit approach associated with Cable and DeRue (2002), as the study examines how prospective applicants subjectively evaluate their alignment with a focal employer before organizational entry.

In this study, perceived value congruence refers to students' perceived alignment with the organization, rather than a match between their personal value profile and the organization's actual value profile. This approach is suitable for a pre-employment study because prospective applicants have limited direct access to the organization's internal values and culture. At this stage, their responses are shaped by whether they believe that the company's values, culture, mission, and

broader organizational meanings are compatible with their own values and career expectations.

The four items assessed perceived value-based compatibility. They asked whether the company's values matched the respondent's personal values, whether there was a fit between what the respondent valued and what the company valued, whether the company's organizational culture appeared to fit the respondent, and whether the company's mission was aligned with what the respondent personally valued. This operationalization treats value congruence as a subjective applicant-side judgment of compatibility, not as an externally calculated value-match index.

### **Job seeker inspired-by and job seeker inspired-to**

The inspired-by state and the inspired-to state were used to operationalize inspiration as a sequential two-stage motivational process. The broader psychological foundation for inspiration comes from Thrash and Elliot (2003, 2004), who conceptualized inspiration as involving evocation, transcendence, and motivation. For the present study, the measurement was based on Böttger et al. (2017), whose two-state inspiration scale distinguishes between being inspired by a stimulus and being inspired to act.

Böttger et al.'s measure was originally developed in a consumer and marketing context. In this dissertation, the wording was adapted to the recruitment and job-seeking context by replacing consumer-oriented references with employer-related wording. This allowed the items to capture students' responses to a potential employer as the focal stimulus. The adapted items focused on whether learning about the company stimulated imagination, curiosity, new career-related ideas, broader career thinking, and motivation to move toward the employer.

The inspired-by items measured the extent to which the focal employer stimulated imagination, curiosity, new ideas, and broader career horizons. The inspired-to items measured a more action-oriented motivational state, including the desire, interest, motivation, and urge to apply for or pursue a career with the focal company. This distinction is consistent with the two-stage logic of inspiration, in which an initial response to a meaningful stimulus may develop into stronger motivation toward action.

Inspired-to and job pursuit intention are conceptually related, but they represent different stages in the motivational process. Inspired-to captures motivational readiness and the internal urge to move toward the employer, whereas job pursuit intention captures a stated behavioral intention to apply for or pursue employment with the organization. The distinction between these constructs was considered during the item-review and pilot-testing stage and was further assessed empirically in Chapter 4 through discriminant validity analysis.

### **Job pursuit intention**

Job pursuit intention was measured using four items informed by Highhouse, Lievens, and Sinar's (2003) applicant attraction framework and related recruitment research on intention to pursue employment. Highhouse et al. (2003) distinguish among general attractiveness, intentions to pursue employment, and perceived prestige. This distinction is relevant because job pursuit intention is treated as the outcome of the motivational process rather than as a general evaluation of employer attractiveness or corporate reputation.

The items captured respondents' stated willingness to move toward the focal organization as a potential employer. They assessed whether respondents intended to apply to the company, would choose the company if given the opportunity, were strongly interested in pursuing a job with the company, and were likely to recommend the company to friends as a good place to work. These items reflect a behavioral-intention orientation rather than a general favorable impression. This is appropriate for a student sample because many respondents were approaching labor market entry but may not yet have been involved in an active application process.

Job pursuit intention is conceptually related to inspired-to, but the two constructs represent different stages in the proposed model. Inspired-to captures the motivational state that follows from being inspired by the employer, including desire, motivation, and the urge to move toward the organization. Job pursuit intention, by contrast, captures the respondent's stated intention to pursue the organization as an employment option. In this sense, inspired-to represents motivational readiness, while job pursuit intention represents a more explicit employment-related intention.

The recommendation item was retained because Highhouse et al.'s applicant attraction framework includes willingness to recommend the organization as part of employment pursuit intention. This item is interpreted as part of a broader positive behavioral orientation toward the employer, not as actual employer advocacy. The empirical distinction between job pursuit intention and the preceding motivational constructs was assessed in Chapter 4 through reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity analysis.

Table 3.1 summarizes the initial measurement items and the literature basis used in the dissertation.

**Table 3.1: Measurement items**

<b>Construct</b>	<b>Code</b>	<b>Variable items</b>	<b>Primary measurement basis</b>
Corporate reputation	CR1	This company has a good reputation in the market.	Cable and Turban (2003)
Corporate reputation	CR2	This company is well-respected for treating its employees well.	Cable and Turban (2003)
Corporate reputation	CR3	This company is seen as socially responsible.	Cable and Turban (2003)
Corporate reputation	CR4	This company is highly regarded in the media.	Cable and Turban (2003)
Employer attractiveness	EA1	This organization offers an exciting and supportive work environment.	Berthon et al. (2005)
Employer attractiveness	EA2	Employees in this company have good relationships with each other.	Berthon et al. (2005)
Employer attractiveness	EA3	I believe I will receive a competitive salary from this company.	Berthon et al. (2005)



<b>Construct</b>	<b>Code</b>	<b>Variable items</b>	<b>Primary measurement basis</b>
Employer attractiveness	EA4	I believe I will gain career-enhancing experience.	Berthon et al. (2005)
Employer attractiveness	EA5	I can apply the knowledge and skills I learned at school when working for this company.	Berthon et al. (2005)
Perceived value congruence	VC1	This company's values match my personal values.	Cable and DeRue (2002)
Perceived value congruence	VC2	There is a fit between what I value and what this company values.	Cable and DeRue (2002)
Perceived value congruence	VC3	I believe this company's organizational culture fits me.	Cable and DeRue (2002)
Perceived value congruence	VC4	I feel aligned with the mission of this company.	Cable and DeRue (2002)
Job seeker inspired-by	JSIB1	This company inspires my imagination.	Böttger et al. (2017)
Job seeker inspired-by	JSIB2	I was intrigued by this company's development ideas.	Böttger et al. (2017)
Job seeker inspired-by	JSIB3	I unexpectedly and spontaneously got new ideas after learning about this company.	Böttger et al. (2017)
Job seeker inspired-by	JSIB4	This company helps me broaden my career horizons.	Böttger et al. (2017)

<b>Construct</b>	<b>Code</b>	<b>Variable items</b>	<b>Primary measurement basis</b>
Job seeker inspired-by	JSIB5	This company helps me discover new things about career orientation.	Böttger et al. (2017)
Job seeker inspired-to	JSIT1	I was inspired to apply for a job at this company.	Böttger et al. (2017)
Job seeker inspired-to	JSIT2	I felt a desire to apply for a job at this company.	Böttger et al. (2017)
Job seeker inspired-to	JSIT3	I have increased interest in the job openings at this company.	Böttger et al. (2017)
Job seeker inspired-to	JSIT4	I am motivated to work at this company.	Böttger et al. (2017)
Job seeker inspired-to	JSIT5	I felt an urge to pursue a career at this company.	Böttger et al. (2017)
Job pursuit intention	JPI1	I intend to apply to this company.	Highhouse et al. (2003)
Job pursuit intention	JPI2	I would choose this company if given the opportunity.	Highhouse et al. (2003)
Job pursuit intention	JPI3	I am strongly interested in pursuing a job at this company.	Highhouse et al. (2003)
Job pursuit intention	JPI4	I am likely to recommend this company to friends as a great place to work.	Highhouse et al. (2003)

*Source: author's synthesis*

The table reports the primary source used for item adaptation. Broader theoretical and conceptual sources supporting construct definitions and scale contextualization are discussed in the preceding paragraphs of this section. The

measures were translated, back-translated, and contextually refined for Vietnamese university students in the pre-employment setting.

### **3.5. Data analysis**

This section describes the analytical procedures used to evaluate the measurement instrument and to test the proposed hypotheses. The analysis proceeded in two stages. The first stage assessed the measurement model in order to establish reliability and validity. The second stage evaluated the structural model to test the hypothesized direct relationships, the proposed sequential inspiration pathway, and the moderating role of value congruence.

#### ***3.5.1. The statistical approach***

Data screening, descriptive statistics, and preliminary analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics. The research model was then estimated using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) in SmartPLS 4. PLS-SEM was selected because the proposed model includes multiple latent constructs, a sequential motivational pathway, and latent interaction effects. This method is appropriate when the research objective is explanatory and when the model involves mediation- and moderation-type relationships among reflective constructs (Hair et al., 2019; Hair et al., 2021).

A further reason for using PLS-SEM concerns the analytical focus of the dissertation. Covariance-based SEM is often preferred when the main objective is strict theory confirmation and the assessment of overall model fit to the covariance matrix. By contrast, the present study seeks to explain variation in employer attractiveness, inspired-by, inspired-to, and job pursuit intention among Vietnamese university students approaching labor market entry. PLS-SEM is suitable because it can estimate complex path relationships and assess the explanatory power of the proposed model.

#### ***3.5.2. Measurement model assessment***

Prior to testing the structural relationships, the measurement model was evaluated. The evaluation adhered to accepted standards for reflective measurement models since all substantive constructs were modeled as reflective latent variables.

Indicator reliability was examined using outer loadings. Loadings of 0.70 or above were treated as desirable because they indicate that the construct explains approximately half of the variance in the corresponding indicator (Hair et al., 2019). Internal consistency reliability was evaluated using both Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability. Values above 0.70 were treated as acceptable, while excessively high values were interpreted cautiously as possible evidence of item redundancy.

**Table 3.2. Interpretation of reliability score**

<b>Reliability coefficient</b>	<b>Interpretation</b>
.90 and up	Excellent
.80 - .89	Good
.70 - .79	Adequate
.60 - .69	May have limited applicability
Below .60	Inadequate

*Source: Cohen et al. (2007)*

Convergent validity was assessed using the average variance extracted (AVE). An AVE value of 0.50 or higher indicates that the construct explains more than half of the variance in its indicators (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The final retained constructs were evaluated against this threshold as part of the measurement validation process.

Discriminant validity was assessed to determine whether the latent constructs were empirically distinct from one another. The heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT) was calculated. HTMT values below 0.85 were treated as conservative evidence of discriminant validity, while values below 0.90 were considered acceptable for conceptually related constructs (Nguyen & Vu, 2021)

This assessment was especially important because several constructs in the model, including employer attractiveness, inspired-by, and inspired-to, are conceptually related and required clear empirical separation.

### ***3.5.3. Common method bias assessment***

Because all substantive variables were collected through a single self-reported survey at one point in time, common method bias was treated as a relevant methodological concern (Podsakoff et al., 2003; Nguyen & Vu, 2021). Procedural remedies were incorporated into the questionnaire design and data collection process, as described earlier. These included the use of anonymous responses, clear item wording, pilot testing, and the separation of major questionnaire sections.

In addition to these procedural remedies, a statistical diagnostic was conducted using the full-collinearity assessment within the PLS-SEM framework. This approach is appropriate because it evaluates whether excessive collinearity among latent constructs may indicate the presence of serious common method bias (Kock, 2015). Variance inflation factor values were examined for the relevant latent variables and interaction terms. Values below the conservative threshold of 3.3 were interpreted as evidence suggesting that common method bias was unlikely to be a major threat to the interpretation of the structural relationships.

### ***3.5.4. Structural model assessment and hypothesis testing***

Following validation of the measurement model, the structural model was evaluated in order to test the hypotheses.

Hypothesis testing was conducted using a nonparametric bootstrapping procedure with 1,000 resamples. For each hypothesized path, the analysis estimated standardized path coefficients, standard deviations, t-values, and p-values. A hypothesis was considered supported when the estimated coefficient was in the expected direction and statistically significant at the conventional level.

### ***3.5.5. Assessment of the proposed sequential indirect pathway***

The model suggests a sequential inspiration pathway that uses inspired-by and inspired-to to connect organization assessments to job pursuit intention. The pattern and size of the constituent structural paths estimated in the model were used to evaluate the suggested indirect process. By using the

suggested inspiration sequence instead of just direct relationships, this method allowed for the investigation of whether such assessments were linked to job pursuit intention.

Because the final analytical output did not retain a separate bootstrapped indirect-effects table, the indirect pathway was interpreted on the basis of the estimated structural path sequence rather than through a standalone bootstrapped test of specific indirect effects. Accordingly, the analysis focused on whether the constituent paths in the proposed sequence were positive, statistically significant, and theoretically coherent.

#### ***3.5.6. Moderation testing***

The model also proposes that value congruence acts as a condition by moderating the relationships between corporate reputation and inspired-by, and between employer attractiveness and inspired-by. These moderating effects were estimated in SmartPLS using interaction terms. The significance of each interaction coefficient was then assessed through bootstrapping.

This procedure enabled direct evaluation of whether the strength of the relationship between employer evaluations and inspired-by varied according to the level of perceived value congruence. Where moderation was statistically significant, the interaction was interpreted in substantive terms by examining the direction and magnitude of the effect.

In summary, the analysis strategy was designed to evaluate both the psychometric quality of the measurement model and the explanatory strength of the proposed structural model. By combining reliability and validity assessment, structural path estimation, assessment of the proposed sequential indirect pathway, moderation analysis, and common method bias diagnostics, the study provides a transparent and rigorous basis for examining how employer evaluations are associated with job pursuit intention among Vietnamese university students aged 19 to 22.

## CHAPTER 4: RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH

This chapter presents the empirical results of the study examining the relationships among corporate reputation, employer attractiveness, job pursuit intention, inspired-by, inspired-to, and value congruence. The analysis is based on a clearly defined final sample of Vietnamese university students aged 19 to 22 who were approaching labor market entry and were treated as student job seekers. The chapter reports the findings derived from Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), which was employed to assess both the measurement properties of the constructs and the structural relationships proposed in the research model.

The chapter proceeds in a logical sequence. It starts by describing the steps taken to determine the final dataset's quality as well as the data screening process. The descriptive statistics of the primary study variables are then reported, along with a profile of the retained respondents. Next, the chapter assesses the measurement model using tests of indicator reliability, internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. The potential influence of common method bias is then examined statistically. The subsequent sections report the structural model assessment, test the direct hypothesis-testing results, and assess the proposed sequential indirect pathway and the moderation analysis for value congruence. Given the cross-sectional and single-source nature of the survey data, the empirical results reported throughout this chapter are interpreted as evidence of theoretically specified structural associations rather than as definitive evidence of causality.

### **4.1. Sample profile**

#### ***4.1.1 Demographic profile***

All respondents retained in the analytic sample were current university students in Vietnam and fell within the age range of 19 to 22 years. In terms of gender, 58.6 percent of respondents were female, 39.7 percent were male, and 1.7 percent identified otherwise. This distribution shows a moderate female majority without implying a degree of imbalance that could influence how the analysis that follows is interpreted.

Geographically, the sample was concentrated in Vietnam's two largest educational and employment centers. Specifically, 54.0 percent of respondents were residing in Hanoi and 34.2 percent in Ho Chi Minh City, while the remaining 11.8 percent were distributed across other locations, including the North outside Hanoi, the Central region, the Southeast, the Southwest, and other provinces or municipalities. This pattern is consistent with the concentration of university education, internship opportunities, and graduate recruitment activity in the country's two main metropolitan areas.

Respondents were also asked to indicate the broad sector of the employer to which they would most prefer to apply. The most frequently selected sector was, marketing, media and Public Relations (33.5 percent), followed by finance and banking (17.2 percent), technology (12.9 percent), and education (10.3 percent). Smaller shares were oriented toward tourism, hospitality, and accommodation services (5.7 percent), fashion and garment (3.6 percent), construction (3.3 percent), and other sectors (13.6 percent). Overall, this sectoral spread suggests that the sample was not restricted to a single occupational segment.

**Table 4.1: Respondents demographics profiles**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Frequency (N)</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
<b>Gender</b>		
Female	341	58.60%
Male	231	39.70%
Other	10	1.70%
<b>Geographic region</b>		
Hanoi	314	54.00%
Ho Chi Minh City	199	34.20%
North (outside Hanoi)	21	3.60%
Central region	16	2.70%
Southwest	15	2.60%



<b>Variables</b>	<b>Frequency (N)</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Southeast	10	1.70%
Other	7	1.20%
<b>Preferred Employer Sector</b>		
Media, marketing, and Public Relations	195	33.50%
Finance and banking	100	17.20%
Information Technology	75	12.90%
Education	60	10.30%
Tourism and hospitality	33	5.70%
Fashion and garment	21	3.60%
Construction	19	3.30%
Other sectors	79	13.60%

*Source: Author's calculation from survey data*

Technically, the respondents were primarily sophomores, juniors, and seniors in universities corresponding to age ranges from 19-22. Students at this stage typically participate in graduation internships and career planning, meaning they are actively transitioning from school to the workplace.

In addition to their educational stage, the respondents demonstrated cognitive engagement by successfully identifying and evaluating a specific focal organization within their preferred industry. This ability reflects a practical awareness of the labor market and active experience in scanning potential employers.

In conclusion, the employer evaluations and job pursuit intentions examined in this study are based on realistic, near-term career considerations rather than distant or purely hypothetical preferences.

#### ***4.1.2 Focal employer selection and familiarity***

Because the questionnaire required respondents to evaluate a specific organization, it was necessary to establish that the selected focal employers were sufficiently outstanding to the students to support meaningful perceptual judgments.

The survey instrument used a self-selection design that demonstrated realistic job-seeking behavior instead of assigning the respondents to a predefined company. In particular, the survey's instructions asked participants to concentrate on a single organization that they most preferred to join for their future careers, such as a business for which they were currently preparing an application or resume. A sufficient baseline of cognitive accessibility and familiarity is provided by the respondents' ability to successfully identify such a target employer and assess it across multi-item constructs of corporate reputation and employer attractiveness. In contrast to arbitrary selection, purely hypothetical preferences, or poorly informed impressions imposed upon the respondents by the researcher, this self-selection approach guarantees that the ratings were based on acknowledged and actively considered organizational targets. Additionally, this strategy is entirely consistent with the study's theoretical premise, which states that prior to actual organizational entry, candidate perceptions and pursuit intentions in pre-employment contexts are shaped by external cues and active market exploration.

#### **4.2. Descriptive statistics**

Descriptive statistics were examined for all observed variables prior to formal assessment of the measurement model. Across the 582-case sample, item means ranged from 2.96 to 3.96 and standard deviations ranged from 0.647 to 1.406, indicating moderate to relatively strong levels of agreement with sufficient variation for subsequent analysis.

For corporate reputation, three items clustered at moderately favorable levels, with means of 3.74, 3.68, and 3.70, whereas one item was notably lower at 2.96 exhibited the largest standard deviation in the dataset. This pattern implies that, even at the descriptive stage, one reputation indicator was less closely aligned with the others. Employer attractiveness showed a comparatively stable profile, with item means ranging from 3.67 to 3.73 and standard deviations between 1.007 and 1.073, indicating consistently positive evaluations of the focal employer across the attractiveness indicators.

More moderate levels of agreement were found with Value congruence. Its four descriptive items were consistent, with means between 3.35 and 3.36 and

standard deviations around 1.20, suggesting that respondents were more cautious in affirming value alignment than in rating the general desirability or reputation of the employer.

The two inspiration constructs displayed clear progression. Inspired-by items ranged from 3.40 to 3.44, whereas inspired-to items ranged from 3.76 to 3.83, indicating that the behavioral dimension of inspiration was rated higher than the initial evocative dimension. Job pursuit intention yielded the highest means overall, ranging from 3.82 to 3.96, suggesting a relatively strong inclination to pursue employment with the selected organizations.

**Table 4.2: Constructs descriptive statistics**

Descriptive Statistics - CR					
		CR1	CR2	CR3	CR4
N	Valid	582	582	582	582
	Missing	0	0	0	0
Mean		3.74	3.68	3.70	2.96
Std.Deviation		1.066	1.122	1.097	1.406

Descriptive Statistics - EA						
		EA1	EA2	EA3	EA4	EA5
N	Valid	582	582	582	582	582
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0
Mean		3.73	3.70	3.69	3.72	3.67
Std.Deviation		1.007	1.046	1.061	1.071	1.073

Descriptive Statistics - VC					
		VC1	VC2	VC3	VC4
N	Valid	582	582	582	582
	Missing	0	0	0	0
Mean		3.36	3.36	3.35	3.36
Std.Deviation		1.203	1.195	1.208	1.206

Descriptive Statistics - JSIB						
		JSIB1	JSIB2	JSIB3	JSIB4	JSIB5
N	Valid	582	582	582	582	582
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0
Mean		3.43	3.44	3.43	3.40	3.42
Std.Deviation		0.682	0.694	0.647	0.702	0.694

Descriptive Statistics - JSIT						
		JSIT1	JSIT2	JSIT3	JSIT4	JSIT5
N	Valid	582	582	582	582	582
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0
Mean		3.76	3.78	3.82	3.83	3.79
Std.Deviation		0.888	0.861	0.821	0.882	0.902

Descriptive Statistics - JPI						
		JPI1	JPI2	JPI3	JPI4	
N	Valid	582	582	582	582	
	Missing	0	0	0	0	
Mean		3.94	3.96	3.94	3.82	
Std.Deviation		0.898	0.913	0.926	1.062	

*Source: Author's calculation from survey data*

Overall, these descriptive results indicate that respondents generally held favorable views of the focal employers, although the strength of agreement varied across constructs.

#### **4.3. Measurement model assessment**

Before evaluating the structural relationships among the latent constructs, the measurement model was assessed to determine whether the observed indicators adequately represented their intended theoretical constructs. Following the standard two-stage procedure in Partial Least Squares Structural Equation

Modeling (PLS-SEM), the assessment focused on indicator reliability, internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. The substantive constructs in the model, namely corporate reputation, employer attractiveness, value congruence, inspired-by, inspired-to, and job pursuit intention, were specified as reflective latent variables.

#### **4.3.1. Indicator reliability**

Indicator reliability was assessed by examining the standardized outer loadings of the observed items on their respective latent constructs. In PLS-SEM, outer loadings of 0.70 or above are generally regarded as satisfactory because they indicate that the construct explains approximately half of the variance in the corresponding indicator.

The initial assessment identified one problematic indicator within the corporate reputation construct. Specifically, CR4 exhibited an outer loading of 0.462, which falls well below the recommended threshold of 0.70. This result was consistent with the preliminary reliability analysis, in which CR4 also showed a negative corrected item-total correlation (-0.034), indicating that it was not functioning coherently with the remaining corporate reputation items. Because retaining this item would have weakened the internal consistency of the construct, CR4 was removed from the final measurement model.

Following the removal of CR4, the model was re-estimated. In the final specification, all retained indicators loaded satisfactorily on their intended constructs, with standardized outer loadings ranging from 0.725 to 0.940. All retained items exceeded the recommended threshold and captured a substantial proportion of the variance in their corresponding latent constructs.

**Table 4.3: Outer Loadings of Measurement items**

	CR	EA	JPI	JSIB	JSIT	VC	VC x CR	VC x EA
CR1	0.828							
CR2	0.861							
CR3	0.827							
EA1		0.814						

	CR	EA	JPI	JSIB	JSIT	VC	VC x CR	VC x EA
EA2		0.818						
EA3		0.823						
EA4		0.767						
EA5		0.759						
JPI1			0.847					
JPI2			0.855					
JPI3			0.828					
JPI4			0.748					
JSIB1				0.830				
JSIB2				0.783				
JSIB3				0.823				
JSIB4				0.797				
JSIB5				0.791				
JSIT1					0.836			
JSIT2					0.792			
JSIT3					0.826			
JSIT4					0.725			
JSIT5					0.768			
VC1						0.940		
VC2						0.779		
VC3						0.882		
VC4						0.850		
VC x CR							1.000	
VC x EA								1.000

*Source: Author's calculation from survey data*

#### ***4.3.2. Internal consistency reliability and convergent validity***

Internal consistency reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability. Although Cronbach's alpha remains a widely reported reliability coefficient, composite reliability is generally preferred in PLS-SEM because it considers the actual outer loadings of the indicators rather than assuming equal weighting across items. For both measures, values above 0.70 are typically interpreted as satisfactory.

As presented in Table 4.4, all retained constructs demonstrated acceptable internal consistency reliability. Cronbach's alpha values ranged from 0.789 to 0.909, while composite reliability values ranged from 0.877 to 0.922.

The initial assessment of Corporate Reputation (CR) indicated that the four-item scale did not meet the expected reliability standard. Specifically, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.535, suggesting insufficient internal consistency. A closer examination of the item statistics showed that CR4 had a negative corrected item-total correlation (-0.034), indicating that it was not functioning in a manner consistent with the remaining indicators of the construct. This finding suggests that CR4 did not adequately capture the same underlying dimension of corporate reputation as the other items. After its removal, the reliability of the CR scale improved substantially, with Cronbach's alpha increasing to 0.789. The corrected item-total correlations of the retained items ranged from 0.599 to 0.673, confirming that the remaining indicators were adequately aligned and jointly reflected a coherent construct. On this basis, CR4 was excluded from subsequent analyses.

The remaining constructs demonstrated satisfactory to strong levels of internal consistency. Employer Attractiveness (EA) yielded a Cronbach's alpha of 0.856, indicating a high degree of reliability. The corrected item-total correlations for this scale ranged from 0.633 to 0.720, suggesting that each indicator contributed meaningfully to the overall construct. These results support the view that the retained items consistently captured respondents' perceptions of employer attractiveness.

Value Congruence (VC) exhibited particularly strong internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.909. The corrected item-total correlations were uniformly high, ranging from 0.774 to 0.803, indicating a substantial degree of homogeneity across the items. This pattern suggests that the scale provided a reliable representation of the perceived alignment between individual and organizational values.

The two inspiration-related constructs also performed well. Job Seeker Inspired-by (JSIB) achieved a Cronbach's alpha of 0.864, with corrected item-total correlations ranging from 0.655 to 0.725. These results indicate that the items coherently captured the extent to which respondents felt inspired by the organization. Similarly, Job Seeker Inspired-to (JSIT) demonstrated satisfactory reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.848 and corrected item-total correlations ranging from 0.571 to 0.735. Although the strength of association varied somewhat across items, all indicators remained within acceptable levels, supporting the internal consistency of the scale.

Job Pursuit Intention (JPI) likewise showed good reliability. The scale produced a Cronbach's alpha of 0.833, while corrected item-total correlations ranged from 0.572 to 0.711. These values indicate that the retained items were sufficiently interrelated and collectively captured a consistent underlying intention to pursue employment with the focal organization.

**Table 4.4: Construct Reliability**

	<b>Scale Mean if Item Deleted</b>	<b>Scale Variance if Item Deleted</b>	<b>Corrected Item- Total Correlation</b>	<b>Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted</b>
Corporate reputation (CR): <i>Alpha</i> = 0,789				
CR1	7.37	3.928	0.599	0.747
CR2	7.44	3.506	0.673	0.666
CR3	7.42	3.755	0.620	0.725
Employer Attractiveness (EA): <i>Alpha</i> = 0,856				



	<b>Scale Mean if Item Deleted</b>	<b>Scale Variance if Item Deleted</b>	<b>Corrected Item- Total Correlation</b>	<b>Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted</b>
EA1	14.78	11.743	0.695	0.820
EA2	14.81	11.375	0.720	0.813
EA3	14.82	11.586	0.670	0.826
EA4	14.79	11.738	0.636	0.835
EA5	14.84	11.744	0.633	0.836
Value congruence (VC): $\alpha = 0,909$				
VC1	10.07	10.667	0.774	0.889
VC2	10.07	10.535	0.803	0.879
VC3	10.08	10.473	0.800	0.880
VC4	10.07	10.494	0.799	0.880
Job-seeker Inspired-by (JSIB): $\alpha = 0.864$				
JSIB1	13.69	4.898	0.725	0.825
JSIB2	13.68	5.025	0.658	0.842
JSIB3	13.69	5.038	0.722	0.826
JSIB4	13.72	5.005	0.655	0.843
JSIB5	13.70	5.024	0.662	0.841
Job-seeker Inspired-to (JSIT): $\alpha = 0.848$				
JSIT1	15.22	7.442	0.735	0.795
JSIT2	15.20	7.883	0.655	0.817
JSIT3	15.16	7.835	0.714	0.802
JSIT4	15.15	8.135	0.571	0.839

	<b>Scale Mean if Item Deleted</b>	<b>Scale Variance if Item Deleted</b>	<b>Corrected Item- Total Correlation</b>	<b>Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted</b>
JSIT5	15.19	7.862	0.616	0.828
<i>Job pursuit intention (JPI): Alpha = 0.833</i>				
JPI1	11.71	5.777	0.710	0.768
JPI2	11.70	5.711	0.711	0.767
JPI3	11.71	5.795	0.672	0.784
JPI4	11.84	5.635	0.572	0.836

*Source: Author's calculation from survey data*

Convergent validity was assessed using the average variance extracted (AVE), which indicates the extent to which a construct explains the variance of its indicators. An AVE value of 0.50 or higher is generally required to establish adequate convergent validity (Hair et al., 2019). In the final measurement model, AVE values ranged from 0.624 to 0.748, exceeding the recommended threshold for all constructs. These results indicate that the retained reflective measures demonstrated satisfactory convergent validity.

**Table 4.5: Reliability and convergent validity of constructs**

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
CR	0.789	0.790	0.877	0.703
EA	0.857	0.866	0.897	0.635
JPI	0.837	0.840	0.892	0.674
JSIB	0.864	0.866	0.902	0.648
JSIT	0.849	0.849	0.892	0.624
VC	0.909	0.996	0.922	0.748

*Source: Author's calculation from survey data*

#### 4.3.3. Discriminant validity

Discriminant validity was examined to confirm that the latent constructs were empirically distinct from one another. This assessment was particularly important in the present model because certain construct pairs, especially corporate reputation and employer attractiveness, as well as inspired-by and inspired-to, are conceptually related and require clear empirical separation.

Two complementary procedures were applied. First, the Fornell-Larcker criterion was assessed by comparing the square root of the AVE for each construct with its correlations with all other constructs. As reported, this criterion was satisfied for all retained constructs, since the square root of the AVE on the diagonal in each case exceeded the corresponding off-diagonal inter-construct correlations.

Second, discriminant validity was evaluated using the heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT), which is widely regarded as a more sensitive criterion in variance-based SEM. HTMT values below 0.85 are typically interpreted as evidence of satisfactory discriminant validity. As presented in Table 4.6, all HTMT values fell below this conservative benchmark. The highest observed HTMT value was 0.527, occurring between job pursuit intention and inspired-to. The HTMT value between inspired-by and inspired-to was 0.515. Even these highest ratios remained well below the threshold, thereby providing strong evidence that the conceptually related constructs in the model were empirically distinct.

**Table 4.6: Discriminant Validity (HTMT Ratio)**

	CR	EA	JPI	JSIB	JSIT	VC	VC x CR	VC x EA
CR								
EA	0.457							
JPI	0.133	0.067						
JSIB	0.200	0.211	0.278					
JSIT	0.071	0.171	0.527	0.515				
VC	0.036	0.037	0.076	0.066	0.105			
VC x CR	0.016	0.018	0.061	0.169	0.125	0.046		
VC x EA	0.016	0.010	0.030	0.318	0.116	0.036	0.427	

*Source: Author's calculation from survey data*

Overall, the results of the measurement model assessment indicate that the retained constructs demonstrated satisfactory indicator reliability, internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. The analysis proceeds to the assessment of common method bias before turning to the structural model evaluation.

#### **4.4. Assessment of Common Method Bias**

As stated in section 3.5, the study attempted to address the possibility of common method bias.

##### ***4.4.1. Procedural remedies***

First, prior to respondents starting the questionnaire, anonymity and confidentiality were stressed. Participants were told that their answers would only be used for academic purposes and would not be connected to their identities. This lessened evaluation anxiety and the propensity to give socially acceptable responses, especially when rating employer constructs like employer attractiveness and corporate reputation.

Second, the questionnaire used clear and specific wording rather than ambiguous statements. The instrument was also refined through pilot testing before the main survey, which improved linguistic clarity and contextual suitability for the target population. These steps helped reduce misunderstanding and discouraged respondents from relying on generalized response tendencies.

Third, the questionnaire sequence introduced a degree of psychological separation among the major constructs. The survey moved from screening and background items to employer evaluation, then to inspiration, value congruence, and job pursuit intention. Although all data were collected in a single session, this ordering reduced the likelihood that respondents would answer later items merely by reproducing earlier evaluative judgments.

Finally, the data preparation process was structured to reduce the influence of method artefacts associated with inattentive responding. Responses that did not satisfy the study's minimum quality standards were excluded prior to model estimation, thereby reducing the likelihood that mechanically completed questionnaires would distort the covariance structure of the retained dataset.

#### 4.4.2. Statistical diagnostics

Additional statistical diagnostics were needed to consider whether common method bias might compromise the interpretation of the empirical results. This assessment was based on the collinearity diagnostics obtained from the structural model. The VIF values ranged from 1.000 to 1.224, all of which were substantially below the recommended threshold of 3.0. This indicates that multicollinearity was not a concern in the estimation of the structural relationships. In conjunction with the procedural remedies implemented during questionnaire design and administration, these results suggest that common method bias is unlikely to have materially influenced the study findings.

**Table 4.7: Collinearity VIF values**

	CR	EA	JPI	JSIB	JSIT	VC	VC x CR	VC x EA
CR		1.000		1.170				
EA				1.170				
JPI								
JSIB					1.000			
JSIT			1.000					
VC				1.003				
VC x CR				1.224				
VC x EA				1.224				

*Source: Author's calculation from survey data*

#### 4.5. Structural model assessment and direct hypothesis testing

Once the adequacy of the measurement model had been established, the structural model was assessed in order to evaluate the hypothesized relationships among the latent constructs. Consistent with standard PLS-SEM procedure, this stage of the analysis focused on inner-model collinearity, explanatory power, effect size, and the statistical significance of the direct structural paths. Hypothesis testing was conducted using a bootstrapping procedure with 1,000 resamples to generate standard errors, t-values, and p-values.

#### ***4.5.1. Assessment of inner-model collinearity***

Before interpreting the structural paths, collinearity among the predictor constructs was examined using variance inflation factor (VIF) values. In PLS-SEM, VIF values below 3.0 are generally considered acceptable, indicating that multicollinearity is unlikely to distort the path estimates.

As reported in Table 4.7, all inner-model VIF values fell well below this threshold, ranging from 1.000 to 1.224. These results indicate that collinearity did not pose a meaningful problem in the structural model.

#### ***4.5.2. Explanatory power and effect size***

The explanatory power of the model was assessed using the adjusted coefficient of determination (adjusted  $R^2$ ) for each endogenous construct. In the present study, adjusted  $R^2$  values are reported because they provide a more conservative estimate of explanatory power by taking into account the number of predictors included in the model.

As shown in Table 4.8, the adjusted  $R^2$  values were 0.143 for employer attractiveness, 0.132 for inspired-by, 0.196 for inspired-to, and 0.197 for job pursuit intention. These values indicate that the model accounted for 14.3 percent of the variance in employer attractiveness, 13.2 percent of the variance in inspired-by, 19.6 percent of the variance in inspired-to, and 19.7 percent of the variance in job pursuit intention. The explanatory power of the model is modest but meaningful, particularly given that the constructs under study reflect perception-based and motivational evaluations in a pre-employment context.

**Table 4.8: Explanatory power of the structural model**

	$R^2$	Adjusted $R^2$
EA	0.145	0.143
JPI	0.198	0.197
JSIB	0.139	0.132
JSIT	0.197	0.196

*Source: Author's calculation from survey data*

The contribution of each exogenous construct to the explanatory power of the endogenous variables was further assessed using the  $f^2$  effect size, as reported in Table 4.9. In PLS-SEM, the  $f^2$  statistic is used to evaluate the specific contribution of a predictor to an endogenous construct by examining the change in  $R^2$  when that predictor is omitted from the model. Following the guidelines proposed by Cohen (1988) and commonly applied in PLS-SEM research,  $f^2$  values below 0.02 indicate a negligible effect, values from 0.02 to below 0.15 indicate a small effect, values from 0.15 to below 0.35 indicate a medium effect, and values of 0.35 or above indicate a large effect.

The results reveal considerable variation in the magnitude of the effects across the structural model. Corporate reputation exerted a medium effect on employer attractiveness ( $f^2 = 0.169$ ), indicating that corporate reputation made a meaningful contribution to explaining how attractive the organization was perceived to be by potential applicants. Two other relationships also showed medium effect sizes: the effect of job seeker inspired-by on job seeker inspired-to ( $f^2 = 0.246$ ), and the effect of job seeker inspired-to on job pursuit intention ( $f^2 = 0.247$ ). These findings underline the central role of inspiration in the model, particularly in the transition from initial affective stimulation to motivational activation and, ultimately, to job pursuit intention.

By contrast, several other relationships displayed only limited explanatory contribution. The effect of employer attractiveness on job seeker inspired-by was small ( $f^2 = 0.020$ ), whereas the effects of corporate reputation on job seeker inspired-by ( $f^2 = 0.013$ ) and value congruence on job seeker inspired-by ( $f^2 = 0.008$ ) were negligible. This pattern suggests that these antecedent variables, on their own, were less effective in directly generating an initial state of inspiration among respondents.

Regarding the moderating effects, the interaction between value congruence and employer attractiveness on job seeker inspired-by showed a small effect size ( $f^2 = 0.071$ ), indicating that value congruence modestly strengthened the influence of employer attractiveness on early inspiration. In contrast, the interaction effect of value congruence and corporate reputation on job seeker

inspired-by was negligible ( $f^2 = 0.002$ ), suggesting that this moderating mechanism contributed very little to the explanatory power of the model.

Overall, the  $f^2$  results suggest that the most substantive contributions in the model occurred in three relationships: corporate reputation to employer attractiveness, inspired-by to inspired-to, and inspired-to to job pursuit intention. These findings reinforce the view that the strongest explanatory mechanisms in the model lie not in the more distal direct effects, but in the pathways through which perceptions of the employer are translated into inspiration and subsequently into job pursuit intention.

**Table 4.9:  $f^2$  effect sizes of the structural model paths**

	CR	EA	JPI	JSIB	JSIT	VC	VC x CR	VC x EA
CR		0.169		0.013				
EA				0.020				
JPI								
JSIB					0.246			
JSIT			0.247					
VC				0.008				
VC x CR				0.002				
VC x EA				0.071				

*Source: Author's calculation from survey data*

#### **4.5.3. Hypothesis testing**

The direct relationships in the structural model were tested using standardized path coefficients ( $\beta$ ), t-values, and p-values obtained from the bootstrapping procedure with 1,000 resamples. The results show that all five direct hypotheses were supported.

Specifically, corporate reputation (CR) had a positive and statistically significant effect on employer attractiveness (EA) ( $\beta = 0.380$ ,  $t = 9.952$ ,  $p <$



0.001), thereby supporting H1. This was the strongest direct relationship among the employer evaluation variables and indicates that more favorable perceptions of corporate reputation were associated with higher levels of employer attractiveness.

Corporate reputation also had a positive and statistically significant effect on inspired-by (JSIB) ( $\beta = 0.113$ ,  $t = 2.800$ ,  $p = 0.005$ ), thereby supporting H2. Although the magnitude of this effect was relatively small, the result suggests that corporate reputation still played a meaningful role in evoking an initial positive emotional response among prospective job seekers.

Similarly, employer attractiveness (EA) had a positive and statistically significant effect on inspired-by (JSIB) ( $\beta = 0.143$ ,  $t = 3.207$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ), thereby supporting H3. Compared with corporate reputation, employer attractiveness showed a slightly stronger direct association with the initial inspirational response.

The results further indicate that inspired-by (JSIB) had a positive and statistically significant effect on inspired-to (JSIT) ( $\beta = 0.444$ ,  $t = 13.197$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), thereby supporting H4. This finding suggests that the initial evocative phase of inspiration was closely associated with the subsequent motivational phase that focuses more on action.

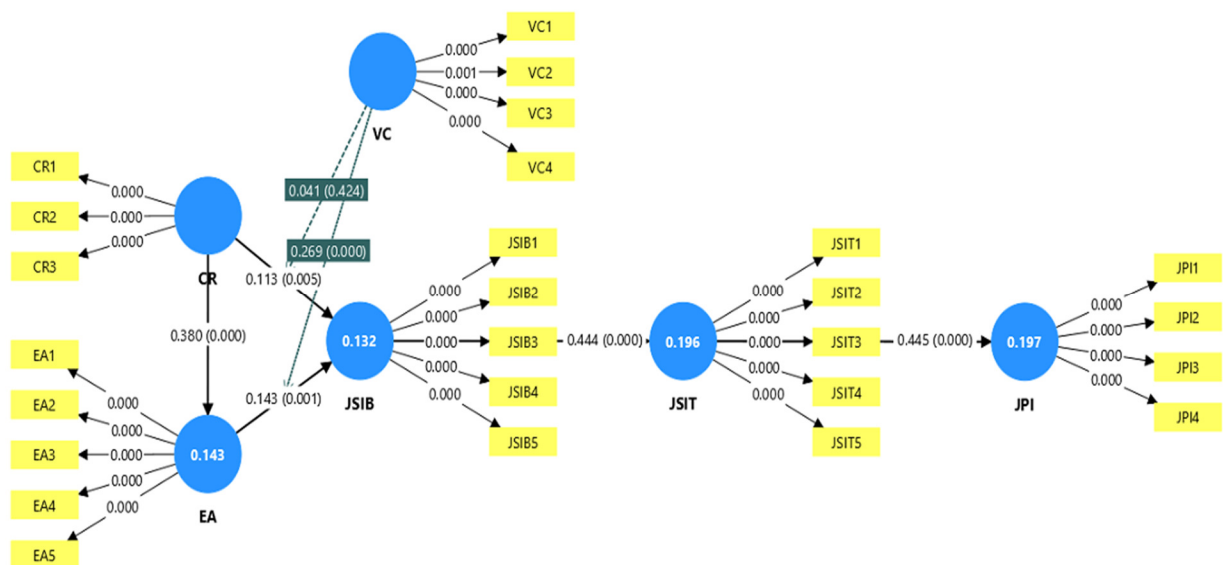
Finally, inspired-to (JSIT) had a positive and statistically significant effect on job pursuit intention (JPI) ( $\beta = 0.445$ ,  $t = 12.068$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), thereby supporting H5. This was the strongest direct path leading to the final outcome variable, indicating that action-oriented or behavioral inspiration was closely associated with the willingness to pursue employment opportunities with the focal organization.

Overall, the direct hypothesis-testing results reveal a coherent sequence in which employer evaluations were associated with early inspiration, early inspiration was associated with a stronger motivational state, and that motivational state was, in turn, associated with job pursuit intention. The moderating effects of value congruence are presented in the following section.

**Table 4.10: Results of hypothesis testing in the structural model**

Hypothesis	Structural path	( $\beta$ )	t-value	p-value	Decision
H1	CR $\rightarrow$ EA	0.38	9.952	< .001	Supported
H2	CR $\rightarrow$ JSIB	0.113	2.8	0.005	Supported
H3	EA $\rightarrow$ JSIB	0.143	3.207	0.001	Supported
H4	JSIB $\rightarrow$ JSIT	0.444	13.197	< .001	Supported
H5	JSIT $\rightarrow$ JPI	0.445	12.068	< .001	Supported
H6a	VC $\times$ CR $\rightarrow$ JSIB	0.041	0.801	0.424	Not supported
H6b	VC $\times$ EA $\rightarrow$ JSIB	0.269	3.849	< .001	Supported

*Source: Author's analysis from survey data*



**Figure 4.1: Estimated structural model**

*Source: Author's analysis from survey data*

#### 4.6. Assessment of the proposed sequential indirect pathway

Following the assessment of the direct structural paths, the analysis next examined the proposed sequential pathway through which employer evaluations are associated with job pursuit intention. In the conceptual model, inspiration is positioned as the explanatory process linking corporate reputation and employer

attractiveness to the final outcome variable. More specifically, the model proposes that these evaluations first contribute to the inspired-by state, which then develops into the more inspired-to state that focuses more on action, and finally relates to job pursuit intention.

Because the model does not specify direct paths from corporate reputation or employer attractiveness to job pursuit intention, the sequential pathway is assessed here through the pattern and magnitude of the constituent structural coefficients. Furthermore, because a separate bootstrapped indirect-effects table was not retained in the final output, the proposed pathway is interpreted on the basis of the estimated constituent paths while remaining consistent with the specification of the model.

#### ***4.6.1. Implied indirect associations***

The direct-path results presented in Section 4.5 provide the basis for assessing the proposed sequential pathway. Corporate reputation had positive effects on employer attractiveness and inspired-by, employer attractiveness had a positive effect on inspired-by, inspired-by had a positive effect on inspired-to, and inspired-to had a positive effect on job pursuit intention. All of these constituent relationships were statistically significant in the final structural model.

On the basis of the joint significance of these constituent paths, the implied sequential indirect association from employer attractiveness to job pursuit intention can be expressed as the product of the three relevant structural paths:

$$EA \rightarrow JSIB \rightarrow JSIT \rightarrow JPI = 0.143 \times 0.444 \times 0.445 \approx 0.028$$

This coefficient indicates a positive indirect association between employer attractiveness and job pursuit intention through the two-stage inspiration sequence.

For corporate reputation, two sequential routes are implied by the structural model. The first route operates directly through the inspiration process:

$$CR \rightarrow JSIB \rightarrow JSIT \rightarrow JPI = 0.113 \times 0.444 \times 0.445 \approx 0.022$$

The second route operates through employer attractiveness before entering the same inspiration sequence:

$$CR \rightarrow EA \rightarrow JSIB \rightarrow JSIT \rightarrow JPI = 0.380 \times 0.143 \times 0.444 \times 0.445 \approx 0.011$$

These two sequential routes imply a total indirect association of approximately 0.033 from corporate reputation to job pursuit intention through employer attractiveness, inspired-by, and inspired-to.

#### ***4.6.2. Interpretation of the sequential pathway***

The pattern of implied indirect associations is consistent with the theoretical logic of the model. Employer attractiveness showed a positive implied indirect association with job pursuit intention through inspired-by and inspired-to, while corporate reputation showed a somewhat larger total implied indirect association because it operated through two channels: a direct route to inspired-by and an additional route through employer attractiveness.

This interpretation is reinforced by the relative strength of the constituent structural paths. The strongest links in the sequence were those between inspired-by and inspired-to ( $\beta = 0.444$ ) and between inspired-to and job pursuit intention ( $\beta = 0.445$ ). By contrast, the more distal effects from corporate reputation and employer attractiveness to inspired-by were statistically significant but smaller in magnitude. This pattern suggests that the motivational sequence itself carried greater explanatory weight than the earlier employer-evaluation inputs.

Accordingly, the proposed sequential pathway indicates that employer evaluations become more closely associated with job pursuit intention not only through favorable employer perceptions, but also through the activation of an initial inspirational response that develops into a stronger behavioral-oriented and motivational state. In this respect, inspired-by and inspired-to can be interpreted as the central explanatory sequence linking favorable employer perceptions with stronger job pursuit intention.

The next section examines whether the earlier stages of this process vary according to perceived value congruence between the respondent and the focal organization.

#### **4.7. Moderation analysis**

Following the assessment of the direct structural paths and the proposed sequential indirect pathway, the study proceeded to examine the moderating role of value congruence. The interaction terms were generated in SmartPLS using the

product indicator approach and were tested using the same bootstrapping procedure with 1,000 resamples.

Hypothesis 6a proposed that value congruence positively moderates the relationship between corporate reputation and inspired-by. The results showed that this interaction effect was not statistically significant ( $\beta = 0.041$ ,  $t = 0.801$ ,  $p = 0.424$ ,  $f^2 = 0.002$ ). Thus, H6a was not supported. This finding suggests that the association between corporate reputation and the initial inspired-by response did not vary meaningfully across different levels of perceived value congruence.

In contrast, Hypothesis 6b proposed that value congruence positively moderates the relationship between employer attractiveness and inspired-by. The analysis revealed that this interaction effect was positive and statistically significant ( $\beta = 0.269$ ,  $t = 3.849$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $f^2 = 0.071$ ). Accordingly, H6b was supported. Although the effect size was small, it was meaningful in the context of the model and indicates that value congruence strengthened the relationship between employer attractiveness and early inspiration.

More specifically, the positive association between employer attractiveness and inspired-by became stronger when respondents perceived a higher degree of value congruence between themselves and the focal organization. By contrast, value congruence did not materially alter the relationship between corporate reputation and inspired-by. In substantive terms, these results suggest that employer attractiveness was more likely to evoke an early inspirational response when the organization was perceived not only as desirable, but also as value-consistent with the respondent's own beliefs and aspirations.

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

### 5.1. Discussion of Key Findings

The empirical findings support the proposed conceptual model and indicate that employer evaluations were associated with job pursuit intention through a sequential inspiration process. More specifically, corporate reputation and employer attractiveness were positively associated with the inspired-by state; inspired-by was positively associated with inspired-to; and inspired-to was positively associated with job pursuit intention. The results also showed a differentiated moderating pattern, in which perceived value congruence strengthened the relationship between employer attractiveness and inspired-by, but did not significantly moderate the relationship between corporate reputation and inspired-by.

#### *5.1.1. Employer evaluations and early inspiration*

The first part of the model examined how employer evaluations, specifically corporate reputation and employer attractiveness, were associated with the early inspired-by state. The results supported H1, H2, and H3, indicating that favorable employer evaluations were not limited to strictly cognitive judgments, but were also associated with an initial inspirational response among respondents.

The positive association between corporate reputation and employer attractiveness is consistent with the logic of Signaling Theory in recruitment contexts. Job seekers typically operate under conditions of information asymmetry because they do not yet possess direct internal experience with the organizations they evaluate. Under these conditions, they rely on publicly available organizational cues to infer what an organization may be like as a place to work (Cable & Turban, 2003; Connelly et al., 2011). The findings suggest that corporate reputation functions as a broad evaluative cue that shapes subsequent judgments of employer attractiveness. In other words, when an organization is perceived as reputable, credible, and well regarded, it is also more likely to be perceived as an attractive employer.

The findings further show that both corporate reputation and employer attractiveness were positively associated with the inspired-by state. This result

extends the interpretation of employer judgments beyond cognition alone. It suggests that favorable perceptions of an organization may evoke an early response characterized by admiration, interest, and psychological stimulation. Corporate reputation appears to provide a broad external basis for favorable organizational evaluation, whereas employer attractiveness reflects a more personally relevant assessment of desirability. Both were associated with the initial phase of inspiration, although employer attractiveness showed a somewhat stronger direct relationship with inspired-by than corporate reputation. This interpretation is consistent with prior work showing that employer evaluations contain both informational and symbolic meaning, particularly when applicants assess organizations before direct experience is available (Lievens & Slaughter, 2016).

These findings are notable considering the respondent group examined in this dissertation. The sample consisted of university students aged 19 to 22 who were approaching labor market entry rather than experienced applicants with extensive workplace exposure. The results suggest that meaningful employer evaluations, as well as the early inspirational response associated with them, can emerge in pre-employment contexts. Since students in this group often rely on public, social, digital, and recruitment-related information, employer-related meanings can be formed before direct organizational entry.

The distinction between corporate reputation and employer attractiveness is also analytically important. Prior research suggests that company reputation and identity-related processes matter in recruitment contexts because they contribute to employer attractiveness and job pursuit intentions (Xie et al., 2015). Similarly, recent Vietnam-based research indicates that employer attractiveness can function as an important explanatory mechanism among young job seekers approaching labor market entry (Thang & Trang, 2024). These studies suggest that employer perceptions should not be treated as a single undifferentiated judgment. Consistent with that logic, the dissertation results indicate that corporate reputation functions more as a broad institutional signal of prestige, legitimacy, and credibility, whereas employer attractiveness reflects a more personally filtered sense of employment desirability.

### ***5.1.2. The sequential inspiration pathway***

The second part of the discussion addresses the psychological mechanism through which early employer evaluations may be translated into job pursuit intention. The results showed a positive and statistically significant relationship between inspired-by and inspired-to (H4), followed by a positive and statistically significant relationship between inspired-to and job pursuit intention (H5). These two paths represent the central inspiration-based logic of the dissertation.

These findings are important because recruitment research often emphasizes attraction, intention, or related attitudinal outcomes without clearly differentiating the internal motivational sequence. The present findings suggest that inspiration is better understood as a two-stage process. The positive and empirically distinct relationship between inspired-by and inspired-to supports the theoretical distinction between being inspired by something, as an evocative cognitive-affective response, and being inspired to act, as a more goal-directed motivational state (Thrash & Elliot, 2003). In other words, admiring an organization appears to be an important precursor, but that early response must develop into action-oriented motivation before it becomes more closely associated with job pursuit intention.

This interpretation is supported by the pattern of the structural results. The estimated path structure suggests that employer evaluations become behaviorally relevant not only because respondents perceive the organization favorably, but also because those perceptions are associated with an initial inspirational response that develops into a stronger motivational state. This pattern is consistent with the inspiration framework developed in psychology and later extended into applied contexts, particularly the distinction between evocation and movement toward action (Böttger et al., 2017; Thrash & Elliot, 2003). Findings suggest that inspiration provides a complementary, process-based explanation of how employer evaluations may become motivationally meaningful. For a student sample with limited direct organizational experience, the movement from inspired-by to inspired-to appears especially relevant because it captures a stage of motivational activation that may arise before deeper attachment or identification has had time to develop.



This contribution becomes clearer when compared with related employer studies in Asian contexts. For example, studies in Vietnam have examined how CSR-related attitudes, employer attractiveness, and organizational image are linked to job pursuit intention among young job seekers, while research in Thailand has shown that employer image may contribute to job pursuit intention through organizational attractiveness (Nawakitphaitoon & Sooraksa, 2023; Thang et al., 2023; Thanh et al., 2024). The present dissertation extends this line of work by identifying a sequential motivational route in which an initial state of being inspired by an employer develops into a stronger state of being inspired to move toward the employer. In practical terms, favorable employer perceptions should not be understood as translating directly and automatically into stronger pursuit intentions. They may first evoke admiration, psychological stimulation, or a sense of future possibility, and only then develop into a more action-oriented state that is closer to behavioral readiness.

### ***5.1.3. The moderating role of value congruence***

The final part of the discussion addresses the conditions under which employer evaluations are more likely to trigger early inspiration. The moderation results yielded a differentiated pattern, with H6a not supported and H6b supported. This pattern provides useful insight when interpreted through the logic of person–organization fit and perceived value congruence.

H6a proposed that perceived value congruence would positively moderate the relationship between corporate reputation and inspired-by. Since H6a was not supported, it suggests that the positive association between corporate reputation and early inspiration did not vary meaningfully across different levels of perceived value congruence. It is possible that corporate reputation operates as a broad external evaluative cue of credibility, prestige, and legitimacy. As such, it may evoke a baseline level of admiration or interest even when deeper personal value alignment is not especially strong. This interpretation is broadly consistent with Signaling Theory, which suggests that reputable organizations can reduce uncertainty and command positive evaluation before more personal forms of alignment become central (Connelly et al., 2011).

By contrast, H6b proposed that perceived value congruence would positively moderate the relationship between employer attractiveness and inspired-by, and this interaction was supported. The results indicate that the positive relationship between employer attractiveness and early inspiration became stronger when respondents perceived greater alignment between their own values and those of the focal organization. This finding is consistent with the idea that employer attractiveness is a more personally filtered evaluative judgment than corporate reputation. An organization may be perceived as desirable in general terms, but that desirability appears more likely to evoke inspiration when the individual also perceives meaningful value alignment. This interpretation is closely aligned with person–organization fit research, which has long emphasized the importance of value similarity in attraction and organizational preference (Cable & Judge, 1996; Cable & DeRue, 2002; Kristof-Brown et al., 2023).

These findings suggest that perceived value congruence does not uniformly intensify all favorable employer evaluations. Rather, its role appears strongest when the evaluation already carries personal meaning for the applicant, as in the case of employer attractiveness. Hence, perceived value congruence functions as a condition under which employer attractiveness becomes more strongly associated with early inspiration among job seekers.

This differentiated pattern is also useful when compared with related recruitment research. Xie et al. (2015) suggest that identity congruence matters because it helps applicants interpret organizational signals in ways that support identity-relevant evaluation, while Sharma et al. (2021) found that person–organization fit conditioned the relationship between perceived organizational prestige and pursuit intention. These studies indicate that alignment-related variables become especially important when employer evaluations are interpreted as personally relevant rather than merely favorable in general terms. This is consistent with the present findings: perceived value congruence strengthened the relationship between employer attractiveness and inspired-by, but did not significantly alter the relationship between corporate reputation and inspired-by.

This result supports a more selective view of fit-based mechanisms in early job-seeker motivation. Corporate reputation may generate a relatively broad form of admiration because it signals legitimacy, prestige, and public credibility, even when deeper personal value alignment is not strong. Employer attractiveness, however, appears more likely to evoke early inspiration when the focal organization is perceived not only as desirable, but also as aligned with the respondent's own values and aspirations. This interpretation gives the moderation result greater theoretical precision and helps explain why only the employer-attractiveness pathway was strengthened.

## **5.2. Theoretical Contributions**

One of the main contributions of this dissertation is to advance the literature on employer evaluation in the pre-employment decision-making context by offering a more process-based explanation of how prospective job seekers respond to employer cues. By positioning inspiration as the central psychological mechanism and perceived value congruence as a boundary condition, the study makes three main theoretical contributions.

### ***5.2.1. Two-stage inspiration***

The first contribution concerns the introduction and clarification of the two-stage inspiration sequence within an early career evaluation context. In the existing literature, applicant reactions are commonly represented through broad constructs such as organizational attraction or job pursuit intention (Lievens & Slaughter, 2016). Although these constructs remain valuable, they often treat the movement from evaluating an employer to wanting to apply as a relatively undifferentiated psychological step.

The present study extends this literature by suggesting that this transition can be more usefully understood as a dual-state process. By distinguishing the inspired-by state from the inspired-to state, the dissertation clarifies the different roles of early evocation and action-oriented motivation in employer evaluation. The findings provide support for the proposition that admiring an organization, as an initial cognitive-affective state, and feeling motivated to pursue it, as a more goal-directed state, are related but empirically distinct phenomena (Thrash &

Elliot, 2003; Böttger et al., 2017). This distinction offers a more detailed framework for explaining how favorable employer perceptions are internalized and translated into behavioral readiness.

Recent studies in Vietnam and other Asian contexts have examined employer attractiveness, organizational attractiveness, prestige, and job pursuit outcomes, but they have generally given less attention to the internal motivational sequence through which employer evaluations become action-ready (Phan & Bae, 2021; Nawakitphaitoon & Sooraksa, 2023; Sharma et al., 2021; Thang & Trang, 2024). In this respect, the dissertation contributes a more process-based view of pre-employment decision-making. Rather than treating inspiration as a vague emotional reaction or collapsing it into broader attitudinal constructs, the study shows that inspiration can be understood as a structured sequence. This contribution is especially relevant in settings where employer perceptions are often formed through indirect information rather than direct organizational experience.

### ***5.2.2. Distinct roles of corporate reputation and employer attractiveness***

A second contribution lies in clarifying the conceptual distinction between corporate reputation and employer attractiveness as antecedents of early inspiration. Prior research has sometimes treated these constructs as overlapping dimensions of employer evaluation or as parallel inputs with similar effects (Cable & Turban, 2003; Lievens & Slaughter, 2016). This dissertation refines that relationship by positioning them as distinct employer evaluations, each with a different scope of meaning.

The findings show that corporate reputation functions as a broader institutional evaluation of prestige, credibility, and legitimacy. Employer attractiveness, by contrast, operates as a more personally filtered judgment of desirability regarding the organization as a specific place to work. Many studies on employer-related topics have shown that reputation, image, attractiveness, and prestige matter in applicant responses. However, it is necessary to explain clearly that these evaluations can operate at different levels of meaning and personal relevance. Although both constructs contributed to the inspired-by state, they did so from different evaluative positions. Corporate reputation provided a broad external basis for favorable

organizational evaluation, whereas employer attractiveness was more closely tied to personal relevance and employment desirability.

This distinction improves the theoretical precision of employer research. It suggests that organizations are not evaluated through a single undifferentiated impression, but through multiple layers of perception that may influence job seekers in different ways. By showing that corporate reputation and employer attractiveness matter, but that only the employer-attractiveness pathway was strengthened by perceived value congruence, the dissertation offers a clearer understanding of how employer evaluations shape early inspiration among potential job seekers.

### ***5.2.3. Value congruence as a condition***

The third contribution concerns the application of person–organization fit theory, specifically through the identification of perceived value congruence as a selective boundary condition rather than a universal moderator. The importance of value alignment is well documented in the literature (Cable & Judge, 1996; Cable & DeRue, 2002; Kristof-Brown et al., 2023). However, this study refines the field by showing that its moderating influence varies according to the nature of the employer evaluation being processed.

The findings indicate that perceived value congruence did not meaningfully alter the inspirational association between corporate reputation and the inspired-by state. This suggests that broader institutional reputation may evoke admiration and early inspiration even when perceived personal alignment is not especially strong. By contrast, perceived value congruence strengthened the relationship between employer attractiveness and inspired-by. In other words, favorable perceptions of the organization as a desirable workplace were more strongly associated with early inspiration when respondents also perceived meaningful alignment between their own values and those of the organization.

This result refines the application of person–organization fit theory in the pre-employment context. It suggests that perceived value congruence is not equally necessary for all positive organizational evaluations to become motivationally relevant. Instead, it appears to matter more strongly when the evaluation itself is more personal in nature, as in the case of employer

attractiveness. Perceived value congruence functions less as a universal condition for favorable employer response and more as an interpretive filter through which personal desirability is translated into a stronger inspirational response.

Overall, the dissertation offers a more clearly specified account of how favorable employer evaluations may be transformed into stronger job pursuit intention among university students approaching labor market entry.

### **5.3. Practical Implications**

The theoretical insights derived from the findings also carry practical implications for human resource professionals, recruiters, and organizational leaders seeking to attract early-career talent, particularly university students approaching labor market entry in Vietnam. By clarifying the psychological sequence through which employer evaluations become associated with job pursuit intention, the study provides a useful basis for informing pre-employment recruitment strategies.

#### ***5.3.1. Implications for organizations and recruiters***

One important practical implication concerns the two-stage inspiration sequence identified in the model. In many recruitment settings, organizations focus primarily on generating general applicant attraction, often treating it as a single outcome. The present findings suggest a more differentiated process. Triggering early interest and inspiration, as reflected in the inspired-by state, is an important first step, but it may not be enough to support stronger job pursuit intention.

Recruiters may benefit from designing recruitment activities that help prospective candidates move from initial admiration to action-oriented motivation. In practice, early-career recruitment activities such as campus recruitment programs, job fairs, employer talks, internship information sessions, management trainee introductions, and career workshops should not only present the organization as reputable or desirable, but also help students understand how they might realistically enter and grow within it. By combining positive corporate narratives with tangible next steps, such as realistic job previews, clear application guidance, and interaction with recent graduates or early-career employees, recruiters may be better able to convert initial inspiration into stronger job pursuit intention.

This implication is particularly important since the model's explanatory power is modest. Job pursuit intention is likely to be influenced by many factors beyond employer perceptions and inspiration, including salary expectations, job availability, perceived employability, peer influence, family expectations, and labor-market uncertainty. In this regard, employer branding activities should be connected with broad recruitment design and early-career support.

### ***5.3.2. Implications for employer communication strategy***

The distinct roles of corporate reputation and employer attractiveness, together with the moderating role of perceived value congruence, highlight the importance of a differentiated employer communication strategy. The findings imply that corporate reputation functions as a broad evaluative cue that can generate initial inspiration even without strong perceived personal value alignment. Accordingly, organizations seeking to attract early-career talent may benefit from consistently communicating indicators of institutional credibility, market standing, legitimacy, and social responsibility.

Communication concerning employer attractiveness should be more concrete and personally meaningful. Messages about the working environment, development opportunities, organizational culture, and career pathways are likely to be more effective when they also convey the organization's underlying values clearly. The results indicate that employer attractiveness becomes more strongly associated with early inspiration when candidates perceive meaningful value congruence. If attractive employment attributes are communicated in ways that are overly general or ambiguous, they may generate positive evaluation without producing a stronger inspirational response.

This suggests that employer communication should help students assess not only whether the organization appears desirable, but also whether it appears compatible with their own values and aspirations. This can be achieved through concrete stories about employee development, examples of value-in-action, mentoring practices, social responsibility activities, and visible support for young employees. Such communication should be credible and consistent, not only promotional.

### ***5.3.3. Implications for employers targeting student job seekers***

The study also offers specific implications for engaging Vietnamese university students approaching labor market entry. The results suggest that early-career candidates do not necessarily require direct organizational experience in order to develop meaningful employer evaluations. Students aged 19 to 22 often rely on indirect information environments, and their perceptions may be shaped by publicly available information, digital communication, campus recruitment, peer discussion, and symbolic organizational cues.

For organizations competing for emerging talent in Vietnam, this highlights the practical importance of carefully managing their digital and public presence. Company websites, social media channels, recruitment videos, digital campus-recruitment materials, and employee-generated narratives should be treated not merely as sources of information, but as important touchpoints at which employer evaluations are formed. Organizations are likely to benefit from ensuring that these channels communicate both credibility and values in a coherent manner.

Furthermore, the findings appear to indicate that organizations should invest not only in visibility, but also in interpretability. It is not enough for prospective applicants to know that an organization is well regarded. They also need to understand why it would be an attractive and meaningful place to begin their careers. Where digital and recruitment communication helps make this connection clearer, it is more likely to support the early stages of the inspiration process and, in turn, stronger job pursuit intention among candidates.

### **5.4. Limitations and Directions for Future Research**

While the dissertation offers useful theoretical and practical insights, these contributions should be interpreted within several important limitations, which also point to directions for future research.

First, the study employed a cross-sectional research design, with all data collected at a single point in time. Although the conceptual model was grounded in established theoretical frameworks, cross-sectional data limit the ability to draw definitive causal conclusions about the relationships among employer evaluations, inspiration, and job pursuit intention. In addition, the use of self-



reported data from a single source introduces the possibility of common method bias. Although procedural remedies and statistical diagnostics were used to reduce this risk, it cannot be ruled out entirely. Future research could strengthen causal inference by employing longitudinal or experimental designs. A longitudinal approach would make it possible to examine whether changes in employer evaluations and early inspiration precede subsequent changes in job pursuit intention over time.

Second, the generalizability of the findings is bounded by the sample and research context. The study was conducted with 582 university students aged 19 to 22 who were approaching labor market entry in Vietnam. This group is well suited to the early-career focus, but the findings may not extend fully to older or more experienced job seekers, or to applicants in different cultural, institutional, and economic contexts. Individuals with greater work experience may interpret company cues differently and may vary in the extent to which perceived value congruence shapes their responses. Future studies should examine the proposed two-stage inspiration sequence among non-student job seekers, across different sectors, and in other national settings in order to assess the broader applicability of the model.

Third, the respondents were prospective student job seekers with limited direct organizational experience. Based on this logic, some evaluations may have relied on public information, assumptions, general impressions, or halo effects rather than detailed internal knowledge of the companies being evaluated. This limitation is consistent with the pre-employment focus of the dissertation, but it should be considered when interpreting the findings. Future research could compare students with applicants who have more direct organizational contact, such as interns, trainees, or recent employees.

Fourth, the final outcome variable in this study was job pursuit intention rather than actual job pursuit behavior. Although intention is widely recognized as an important antecedent of behavior in the literature, it is not equivalent to concrete action. Prospective applicants may express strong job pursuit intention yet fail to apply because of external constraints, such as limited vacancies, competing opportunities, or changes in personal circumstances. Future research

could extend the model by linking the inspiration sequence to more objective behavioral outcomes, including actual application submission, interview attendance, offer acceptance, or early employment choice.

Fifth, a specific methodological limitation concerns the measurement scales. The dissertation used context-adapted measures informed by prior literature. These choices were appropriate for the research context and respondent group, but they require caution when interpreting the findings. Future research could use fuller multidimensional scales, or conduct additional content-validity assessment.

Sixth, the adjusted  $R^2$  values of the endogenous constructs were modest. This indicates that the model explains part of the variance in employer attractiveness, inspiration, and job pursuit intention, but does not provide a complete explanation of applicant behavior. This is reasonable in an early-stage, perception-based model, but it also suggests that other factors should be included in future research. Possible variables include salary expectations, job availability, employer familiarity, recruitment source credibility, internship experience, career self-efficacy, perceived employability, peer influence, parental influence, labor-market anxiety, and social media exposure.

In addition, a specific limitation concerns the assessment of the sequential indirect pathway. Because a separate bootstrapped indirect-effects table was not retained in the final statistical output, the proposed indirect pathway was interpreted on the basis of the estimated constituent paths rather than through a formal bootstrapped assessment of indirect effects. Accordingly, the analysis does not report specific indirect effects, total indirect effects, confidence intervals for indirect effects, or total effects. While interpreting the sequence through the constituent path structure is consistent with the specified conceptual model, future studies examining the same sequence should retain and report complete bootstrapped indirect-effects output to provide a more direct empirical assessment of the proposed indirect pathway.

Finally, even though the dissertation is framed within employer branding research, the empirical model captures applicant-side perceptual outcomes of employer branding rather than direct organizational branding activities. Future

research may extend the present model by incorporating direct measures of employer branding practices, such as employer value proposition design, recruitment communication, social media branding activities, employee advocacy, campus outreach, and internal employer branding. This would help connect organizational branding actions more directly to applicant perceptions and subsequent job pursuit outcomes.

## CONCLUSION

This dissertation examines how prospective job seekers interpret employer information and develop job pursuit intention in pre-employment contexts. Focusing on Vietnamese university students aged 19 to 22 who were approaching labor market entry, the study addressed a question that is relevant in both theory and practice: how do early employer evaluations become meaningful enough to support stronger intention to pursue employment? To answer this question, the dissertation developed and tested a model in which corporate reputation and employer attractiveness were positioned as core applicant-side employer branding perceptions, inspiration was treated as the central motivational pathway, and perceived value congruence was examined as a boundary condition shaping the strength of this process.

The findings indicate that employer evaluation in early career contexts is not only a matter of rational assessment. Corporate reputation and employer attractiveness were both positively associated with early inspirational response, while the sequence from inspired-by to inspired-to was positively associated with job pursuit intention. This suggests that favorable perceptions of an employer matter not only because they shape judgment, but also because they can activate a motivational process through which organizational meanings become more closely linked to behavioral readiness.

A central contribution of the dissertation lies in clarifying the sequential nature of inspiration. Rather than treating inspiration as a single undifferentiated state, the study distinguishes between being inspired-by and being inspired-to. This distinction highlights the difference between early admiration and more action-oriented motivation. The findings suggest that the initial inspirational response is meaningful, but it becomes more behaviorally relevant when it develops into a stronger motivational orientation toward action. In other words, favorable employer evaluations appear to matter not simply because they generate positive impressions, but because they may initiate a motivational sequence that strengthens job pursuit intention.

The dissertation also clarifies the different roles played by corporate reputation and employer attractiveness. Corporate reputation reflects a broader

evaluative basis of organizational credibility, prestige, and legitimacy. Employer attractiveness, by contrast, reflects a more personally filtered judgment of whether the organization appears desirable as a place to work. Although both evaluations were positively associated with the inspired-by state, they did not operate in identical ways. This separation is crucial because it suggests that job seekers do not respond to employers through a single generalized impression. Rather, they form layered evaluations, some of which are broader and socially grounded, while others are more personal and closely related to career expectations.

The findings regarding perceived value congruence further refine this interpretation. Perceived value congruence did not significantly alter the relationship between corporate reputation and inspired-by, but it did strengthen the relationship between employer attractiveness and inspired-by. This result suggests that broader institutional prestige may evoke early admiration even without strong personal value alignment, whereas the inspirational potential of employer attractiveness becomes stronger when the organization is also perceived as value-consistent. Therefore, perceived value congruence functions as an interpretive filter that helps explain why different people may be motivated differently by similar employer evaluations.

This context is significant because the dissertation focuses on university students who had not yet entered the organizations they evaluated and who formed perceptions largely through indirect information. The findings show that employer judgments, inspiration, and job pursuit intention can develop before direct organizational experience occurs. Prospective job seekers do not need to be employees to form meaningful reactions to an organization. They can evaluate, admire, and become motivated toward employers through the information environments in which those employers are encountered. This is particularly relevant in Vietnam, where young labor market entrants increasingly engage with organizations through digital, symbolic, and publicly available information.

The dissertation advances understanding of early talent attraction in modern labor markets. It suggests that organizations become meaningful to potential candidates not only by appearing reputable or attractive, but also by becoming interpretable in ways that connect with aspiration, value alignment, and

future possibilities. For organizations, this means that attracting early-career talent is not only a matter of visibility or positive image. It also involves creating employer meanings that can be translated into inspiration and, eventually, into stronger job pursuit intention.

The findings should be understood within the boundaries of the research design. They are based on a cross-sectional survey of a specific pre-employment student population in Vietnam and should be interpreted as evidence of theoretically specified associations rather than proof of causality. In addition, the study used self-reported data and shortened, context-adapted measures informed by prior literature. The assessment of the proposed sequential pathway was also based on the constituent structural paths rather than on a retained full bootstrapped indirect-effects table. These limitations do not reduce the value of the findings, but they define the boundaries within which the conclusions should be understood.

Within these boundaries, the study concludes that early-career job seekers do not simply evaluate employers as external employment opportunities. They interpret them, respond to them psychologically, and connect them to possible future selves. Corporate reputation and employer attractiveness matter because they shape those interpretations. Inspiration matters because it helps explain how those interpretations become motivationally meaningful. Perceived value congruence matters because it influences when employer desirability becomes more personally compelling. By bringing these elements together, the dissertation offers a more detailed explanation of how organizations achieve psychological significance in the eyes of young talent in Vietnam and how that significance is linked with job pursuit intention.

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Survey Code

## APPENDIX A

### SURVEY FORM

#### EMPLOYER ATTRACTIVENESS, CORPORATE REPUTATION, AND JOB PURSUIT INTENTION: A STUDY OF EMPLOYER BRANDING IN THE VIETNAMESE YOUNG WORKFORCE

Dear participant,

I am a doctoral researcher at the National Economics University (NEU), currently conducting a dissertation study entitled “*Employer attractiveness, corporate reputation, and job pursuit intention: a study of employer branding in the Vietnamese young workforce.*”

Your participation in this survey is highly appreciated. The insights you share will make an important contribution to advancing research on employer branding perceptions, marketing, and human resource management in Vietnam. The findings are expected to provide practical implications for organizations seeking to attract and engage young talent more effectively.

Please be assured that all information you provide will remain strictly confidential and will be used solely for academic and research purposes. Participation is entirely voluntary, and you may choose to withdraw at any point without any consequence.

Thank you very much for your time and thoughtful contribution to this doctoral research

*(When answering the following questions, please think of one specific company that you would most prefer to work for such as a business for which they were currently preparing an application or resume, and answer all questions with that company in mind.)*

#### A. DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

*Please tick (✓) or fill in the blanks where appropriate:*

1. What is your age range?

☐ 16 - 18

☐ 19 - 22

☐ 23 - 28

2. Where do you live and work?

- ☐ Hanoi
- ☐ Ho Chi Minh City
- ☐ Southeast Region (Binh Duong, Binh Phuoc, etc.)
- ☐ Southwest Region (Can Tho, Tien Giang, etc.)
- ☐ Central Region (Da Nang, Phu Yen, Da Lat, etc.)
- ☐ Northern region (Hai Phong, Bac Ninh, Bac Giang, etc.)

3. What is your gender?

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Other

4. What is your occupation?

- ☐ High school student
- ☐ University student
- ☐ Office worker
- ☐ Freelancer
- ☐ Engineer
- ☐ Teacher
- ☐ Other \_\_\_\_\_

5. Which field does the company you want to apply for operate in?

- ☐ Technology
- ☐ Fashion - Garment
- ☐ Finance - Banking
- ☐ Construction
- ☐ Media - Marketing - Public Relations
- ☐ Tourism – Hospitality
- ☐ Education
- ☐ Other \_\_\_\_\_

## B. MAIN SURVEY QUESTIONS

(Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements by using the scale below)

1 – Strongly Disagree | 2 – Disagree | 3 – Neutral | 4 – Agree | 5 – Strongly Agree

Statement	Level
<b>Corporate Reputation</b>	
1. This company has a good reputation in the market.	① ② ③ ④ ⑤
2. This company is well-respected for treating its employees well	① ② ③ ④ ⑤
3. This company is seen as socially responsible.	① ② ③ ④ ⑤
4. This company is highly regarded in the media.	① ② ③ ④ ⑤
<b>Employer Attractiveness</b>	
1. This organization offers an exciting and supportive work environment.	① ② ③ ④ ⑤
2. Employees in this company have good relationships with each other	① ② ③ ④ ⑤
3. I believe I will receive a competitive salary from this company.	① ② ③ ④ ⑤
4. I believe I will be gaining career-enhancing experience	① ② ③ ④ ⑤
5. I can apply the knowledge and skills I learned at school when working for this company	① ② ③ ④ ⑤
<b>Value Congruence</b>	
1. This company's values match my personal values.	① ② ③ ④ ⑤
2. There is a fit between what I value and what this company values.	① ② ③ ④

Statement	Level
	⑤
3. I believe this company's organizational culture fits me.	①②③④ ⑤
4. I feel aligned with the mission of this company.	①②③④ ⑤
<b>Job seeker Inspired-by</b>	
1. This company inspires my imagination	①②③④ ⑤
2. I was intrigued by new development ideas of this company	①②③④ ⑤
3. I unexpectedly and spontaneously got new ideas after learning about this company	①②③④ ⑤
4. This company helps me broaden my career horizons	①②③④ ⑤
5. This company helps me discover new things about career orientation	①②③④ ⑤
<b>Job seeker Inspired-to</b>	
1. I was inspired to apply for a job at this company	①②③④ ⑤
2. I felt a desire to apply for a job at this company	①②③④ ⑤
3. I am having an increased interest in the job openings at this company	①②③④ ⑤
4. I am motivated to work at this company	①②③④ ⑤
5. I felt an urge to pursue a career at this company.	①②③④ ⑤

Statement	Level
<b>Job Pursuit Intention</b>	
1. I intend to apply to this company.	① ② ③ ④ ⑤
2. I would choose this company if given the opportunity.	① ② ③ ④ ⑤
3. I am strongly interested in pursuing a job at this company.	① ② ③ ④ ⑤
4. I am likely to recommend this company to friends as a great place to work.	① ② ③ ④ ⑤

Thank you for your participation