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Employer Signals and Pre-Application Attraction Among Young People Considering Tourism Employment in Ho Chi Minh City

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Abstract

This study examines whether five perceived employer signals are associated with pre-application attraction and pursuit intention among young people who had applied to, or were considering applying to, tourism companies in Ho Chi Minh City. A cross-sectional online survey was conducted from January to March 2025 with a purposively recruited sample of 306 respondents aged 18-25. The proposed five-predictor model was estimated using partial least squares structural equation modeling. Employer reputation, social-media recruitment information and engagement, career development opportunities, compensation and benefits, and perceived work-life support each showed a positive, individually significant partial association with the dependent construct. Compensation and

benefits produced the largest point estimate; however, pairwise coefficient-difference tests were not conducted, so the estimates do not establish a statistically distinct ranking. The model explained 69.8% of the variance in the sample. The non-probability, student-dominant, tourism-oriented sample, single-wave self-report design, and incomplete retained measurement-model documentation limit causal and population-level inference. Tourism employers should provide specific, credible, and mutually consistent information about pay, benefits, schedules, development pathways, and recruitment. The study integrates symbolic, digital, developmental, economic, and work-sustainability signals in a context-bounded model of applicant attraction in an urban Southeast Asian tourism labor market.

Keywords: Applicant Attraction, Employer Signals, Tourism Employment, Young Job Seekers, Ho Chi Minh City

1. Introduction

Tourism firms compete not only for visitors but also for employees who can deliver reliable, emotionally demanding and experience-intensive services. Recruitment is therefore a strategic capability rather than a purely administrative function. Employees interpret destination and organizational promises in real time, and shortages of suitable applicants can weaken service quality, constrain growth and intensify turnover pressures (Baum *et al.*, 2016; Goh and Lee, 2018) ^[3, 11]. The scale of the labor challenge has increased as tourism activity has expanded. Viet Nam received nearly 21.2 million international visitors and approximately 137.5 million domestic visitor trips in 2025, with total tourism receipts estimated at about VND 1 quadrillion (Viet Nam National Authority of Tourism, 2026) ^[32].

Ho Chi Minh City provides a relevant urban setting in which to examine applicant attraction. Its tourism economy includes travel agencies, tour operations, accommodation-linked services, events, transport, destination services and digital travel platforms. These employers compete for young workers not only with one another but also with retail, banking, logistics, education services and digital businesses. The employment proposition offered by tourism companies must therefore address both the symbolic appeal of tourism and practical questions about pay, schedules, work pressure and career continuity.

Young people aged 18-25 constitute an important pool of potential entrants. Research on Generation Z in hospitality and tourism portrays young workers as digitally oriented and attentive to employability, working conditions and work-life sustainability (Ababneh *et al.*, 2026; Goh and Okumus, 2020; Kapuscinski *et al.*, 2023; Sakdiyakorn *et al.*, 2021) ^[1, 12, 19, 23]. Before organizational entry, however, applicants cannot directly observe management quality, fairness, development opportunities or everyday working conditions. They must infer likely employment quality from observable cues such as reputation, recruitment communication, compensation information, development promises and work-life-supportive practices. Applicant attraction and job-pursuit intentions have been examined extensively in general recruitment research (Chapman *et*

al., 2005; Highhouse *et al.*, 2003; Uggerslev *et al.*, 2012) [8, 17, 31]. Tourism research has also highlighted the difficulty of attracting and retaining younger workers. Nevertheless, fewer studies have estimated symbolic, digital, developmental, economic and work-sustainability signals simultaneously within an urban tourism labor market in Viet Nam. This matters because tourism employment combines high-contact service work and destination appeal with irregular hours, seasonal demand, mobility and emotional labor. The same signal may therefore be interpreted differently in tourism than in more standardized office-based employment.

The present study examines five perceived employer-signal domains: employer reputation, social-media recruitment information and engagement, career development opportunities, compensation and benefits, and perceived work-life support. The dependent construct is described as pre-application attraction and pursuit intention because its items cover organizational attractiveness, employer preference, willingness to apply and willingness to attend an interview. The study addresses two questions: (1) Is each employer-signal domain positively associated with pre-application attraction and pursuit intention? and (2) How much variance does the combined model explain within the tourism-oriented sample?

The contribution is deliberately bounded. First, the study integrates five substantively different signal domains in one model, allowing their partial associations to be estimated jointly. Second, it extends applicant-attraction evidence to a young, tourism-oriented sample in a major Southeast Asian city. Third, it adopts a disciplined interpretation of PLS-SEM output: a statistically significant path is treated as evidence of an individual partial association, whereas differences in coefficient magnitude are not interpreted as a tested hierarchy unless pairwise comparisons are conducted. This distinction strengthens the credibility of the theoretical and managerial conclusions.

2. Theoretical Background and Hypotheses

2.1 Signaling theory and applicant attraction

Signaling theory explains how decision makers use observable cues to infer attributes that are costly or impossible to observe directly (Connelly *et al.*, 2011; Spence, 1973) [9, 26]. In recruitment, prospective applicants typically know less than the employer about actual work demands, fairness, career opportunities and employment stability. Job advertisements, social-media posts, compensation information, organizational reputation and employment policies can reduce this information asymmetry by signaling what the employment relationship may be like (Bangerter *et al.*, 2012; Celani and Singh, 2011) [2, 7].

Signals are more informative when they are visible, specific, consistent and credible. A well-known reputation may signal legitimacy; transparent pay information may signal fairness; detailed recruitment content may reduce uncertainty; development programs may signal investment in human capital; and work-life-supportive practices may signal organizational care. Employer-attractiveness research complements this logic by distinguishing instrumental employment values, such as pay and development, from symbolic values, such as prestige and identity (Berthon *et al.*, 2005; Lievens and Slaughter, 2016; Theurer *et al.*, 2018) [4, 20, 30].

The present design does not directly measure signal

credibility, information asymmetry or a mediating inference process. It therefore uses signaling theory as an explanatory lens for associations between perceived employer cues and pre-application attraction rather than claiming a complete test of the signaling process.

2.2 Pre-application attraction and pursuit intention

Recruitment decisions develop through stages. Before an application is submitted, individuals form overall attraction, employer preferences and intentions to pursue employment opportunities (Chapman *et al.*, 2005; Highhouse *et al.*, 2003; Uggerslev *et al.*, 2012) [8, 17, 31]. These outcomes are related but not identical: attraction reflects a favorable evaluation, whereas pursuit intention concerns willingness to apply, interview or continue in the recruitment process.

The dependent measure used in this study combines these closely related pre-application responses. To avoid overstating measurement precision, it is referred to as pre-application attraction and pursuit intention. This broader label is more consistent with the administered items than a narrow claim that the scale captures only the act of submitting an application.

2.3 Employer reputation

Employer reputation is a broad symbolic and credibility signal. A favorable reputation can reduce uncertainty about organizational legitimacy, stability and likely employment quality. It may also provide social recognition and career legitimacy to applicants. Prior recruitment research links organizational reputation and image with attraction and job-pursuit outcomes (Cable and Turban, 2003; Jones *et al.*, 2014; Lievens and Slaughter, 2016) [5, 18, 20]. In tourism, where service quality is visible and brand names often carry destination-related meaning, reputation may be particularly salient. Accordingly:

H1: *Perceived employer reputation is positively associated with pre-application attraction and pursuit intention.*

2.4 Social-media recruitment information and engagement

Social media and online recruitment channels make vacancies, workplace narratives, employee experiences and recruitment procedures visible before formal contact. For digitally oriented applicants, these channels may reduce search costs and information asymmetry while increasing familiarity with the employer (Sivertzen *et al.*, 2013; Thang and Trang, 2024) [25, 29]. Recent hospitality evidence also suggests that organizational responses and inclusive cues on online employee-review platforms shape how job seekers interpret employers (Zhang *et al.*, 2025, 2026) [33, 34]. Their influence depends on credibility: highly promotional content that conflicts with job descriptions or employee experiences may be discounted. The construct used here combines exposure to, attention toward, perceived detail of and active search for recruitment information. Accordingly:

H2: *Perceived social-media recruitment information and engagement is positively associated with pre-application attraction and pursuit intention.*

2.5 Career development opportunities

Training, mentoring, job rotation and transparent advancement pathways can signal that an employer is willing to invest in employees' future value. This signal is especially relevant to early-career applicants, who may

evaluate a job not only by its immediate tasks but also by its contribution to skills and employability (Berthon *et al.*, 2005; Kapuscinski *et al.*, 2023; Tanwar and Prasad, 2017) ^[4, 19, 27]. Recruitment materials in Asian hotels also communicate development as a component of the employer value proposition (Lo *et al.*, 2025) ^[21]. Accordingly:

H3: *Perceived career development opportunities are positively associated with pre-application attraction and pursuit intention.*

2.6 Compensation and benefits

Compensation and benefits signal economic value and the terms of the prospective employment exchange. Salary, bonuses, insurance and allowances can reduce uncertainty about financial feasibility and perceptions of fairness. Economic information may be especially important in tourism roles that involve peak-period pressure, weekend work or mobility (Berthon *et al.*, 2005; Tanwar and Prasad, 2017) ^[4, 27]. Accordingly:

H4: *Perceived compensation and benefits are positively associated with pre-application attraction and pursuit intention.*

2.7 Perceived work-life support

Tourism jobs may involve irregular schedules, holiday work, customer pressure and difficulty separating work from personal life. Policies concerning scheduling, leave, well-being support and role-appropriate flexibility can therefore signal that the employer recognizes the sustainability of work. Experimental evidence indicates that communicated well-being policies can improve applicant attraction (Dierickx *et al.*, 2025) ^[10], while hospitality research highlights young workers' concern with sustainable employment conditions (Goh and Okumus, 2020) ^[12]. Accordingly:

H5: *Perceived work-life support is positively associated with pre-application attraction and pursuit intention.*

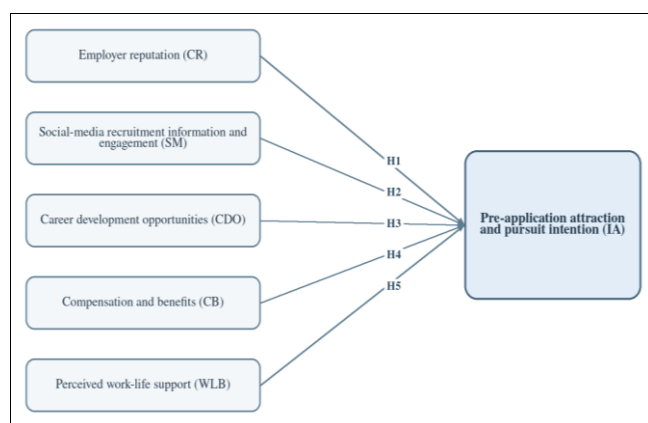


Fig 1: Proposed research model

3. Materials and Methods

3.1 Research design, participants and procedure

The study used a quantitative, cross-sectional explanatory design. An online questionnaire was distributed through Google Forms from January to March 2025. The target group comprised people aged 18-25 who had previously

applied to, or were considering applying to, tourism companies. This eligibility criterion defines a tourism-oriented applicant pool; the study does not claim to represent all young residents of Ho Chi Minh City.

The final analytical sample included 306 valid responses. Women represented 59.5% of respondents and men 40.5%. Respondents aged 18-21 accounted for 48.0%, while those aged 22-25 accounted for 52.0%. Students formed 73.9% of the sample and employed respondents 26.1%. The sample therefore primarily reflects students and early-career individuals rather than a representative cross-section of the city's young workforce.

A non-probability online recruitment approach was used to reach the defined group. Selection probabilities and a conventional population response rate could not be calculated. Participation was voluntary and anonymous, and the analytical dataset contained no personally identifying information. The questionnaire screened respondents by age and tourism-employment orientation before collecting demographic and construct measures.

Because the design is cross-sectional, temporal ordering and causal effects cannot be established. The screening criterion may also have restricted variance by selecting respondents already oriented toward tourism employment. The findings are therefore interpreted as partial associations within the recruited sample.

3.2 Measures

All items were rated on five-point Likert scales ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The measures were author adaptations informed by established work on employer attractiveness, reputation, social-media recruitment and applicant attraction (Berthon *et al.*, 2005; Cable and Turban, 2003; Caputo *et al.*, 2023; Highhouse *et al.*, 2003; Santiago, 2019; Sivertzen *et al.*, 2013; Tanwar and Prasad, 2017) ^[4-6, 17, 24, 25, 27]. Table 1 summarizes the construct definitions and provides one example item for each construct.

Employer reputation (CR) comprised five items. Social-media recruitment information and engagement (SM), career development opportunities (CDO), compensation and benefits (CB), and perceived work-life support (WLB) each comprised four items. The dependent construct, pre-application attraction and pursuit intention (IA), comprised five items covering attractiveness, preference, desire to work, willingness to apply and interview acceptance.

All constructs were specified reflectively in the original PLS-SEM analysis. This specification is retained to report the study as analyzed. Nevertheless, the breadth of the SM, WLB and IA item sets should be considered when interpreting construct meaning, and future scale development should formally examine whether narrower reflective factors or formative specifications provide a better representation.

The retained research documentation did not include a separate qualitative interview stage, cognitive interviewing report or documented pilot study. The evidence for contextual content validity therefore rests mainly on literature mapping and transparent disclosure of the item wording.

Table 1: Constructs and measurement bases

Construct	Code	Items	Operational interpretation	Example item	Principal sources
Employer reputation	CR	5	Perceived legitimacy, recognition and favorable evaluation of the employer	This company is well recognized in the tourism industry.	Cable and Turban (2003) ^[5] ; Caputo <i>et al.</i> (2023) ^[6]
Social-media recruitment information and engagement	SM	4	Exposure, attention, perceived information detail and active search through social media	The company's social-media profiles provide detailed information about job opportunities.	Sivertzen <i>et al.</i> (2013) ^[25] ; Thang and Trang (2024) ^[29]
Career development opportunities	CDO	4	Perceived training, mentoring, advancement and future career value	The company provides good training and mentoring programs.	Berthon <i>et al.</i> (2005) ^[4] ; Tanwar and Prasad (2017) ^[27]
Compensation and benefits	CB	4	Perceived salary, benefit competitiveness and total reward value	The company offers an attractive total reward package.	Berthon <i>et al.</i> (2005) ^[4] ; Tanwar and Prasad (2017) ^[27]
Perceived work-life support	WLB	4	Perceived scheduling flexibility, role-appropriate remote work, well-being support and special leave	The company offers flexible working time.	Tanwar and Prasad (2017) ^[27] ; author adaptation
Pre-application attraction and pursuit intention	IA	5	Employer attractiveness, preference, desire to work, willingness to apply and interview acceptance	This company would be among my preferred employers.	Highhouse <i>et al.</i> (2003) ^[17] ; Gomes and Neves (2011) ^[13] ; Santiago (2019) ^[24]

Source: Author's compilation. One example item is shown for each construct.

3.3 Data analysis

The data were analyzed in SmartPLS 3. PLS-SEM was used to estimate a model with multiple latent predictors and an explanatory-predictive orientation (Hair *et al.*, 2019, 2022) ^[15, 14]. The measurement model was assessed before the structural model.

Internal consistency and convergent validity were evaluated with Cronbach's alpha, rho_A, composite reliability and average variance extracted (AVE). Discriminant validity was evaluated with the heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT). The structural model was assessed using standardized path coefficients, bootstrapped t statistics and p values, R², adjusted R², f², Q² and the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR). The available output contained indicator-level variance inflation factors (VIFs); construct-level inner VIFs were not retained in the analysis record.

All focal variables were self-reported by the same

respondents in one survey. Anonymity was the main procedural safeguard. No marker variable, temporal separation or documented latent method-factor test was included; common-method variance cannot therefore be ruled out (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003) ^[22].

The five path coefficients were tested individually. Pairwise tests of coefficient differences were not conducted. Consequently, coefficient magnitudes are used only for descriptive comparison and not as evidence that one predictor is statistically stronger than another.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Sample profile

Table 2 summarizes the 306 respondents. All participants met the study's age and tourism-employment-orientation screening criteria. The predominance of students and the non-probability recruitment process limit external validity.

Table 2: Demographic profile of respondents

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	124	40.5
Gender	Female	182	59.5
Age	18-21 years	147	48.0
Age	22-25 years	159	52.0
Occupation	Student	226	73.9
Occupation	Employed	80	26.1
Total sample		306	100.0

Source: Author's analysis.

4.2 Measurement model

Cronbach's alpha values ranged from 0.783 to 0.868, rho_A values from 0.790 to 0.870, composite reliability values from 0.850 to 0.904, and AVE values from 0.531 to 0.701 (Table 3). These results exceed commonly used construct-level thresholds for internal consistency and convergent validity (Hair *et al.*, 2022; Tavakol and Dennick, 2011) ^[14, 28].

The largest retained HTMT ratios were WLB-CB = 0.884, WLB-IA = 0.870, CB-IA = 0.867 and SM-IA = 0.852. All were below 0.90, although several were close to this threshold and one exceeded the more conservative 0.85 guideline (Henseler *et al.*, 2015) ^[16]. The construct-level results are therefore encouraging but should be interpreted cautiously, particularly because the full indicator-loading table and bootstrap HTMT confidence intervals were not

retained in the available analysis output.

Table 3: Construct reliability and convergent validity

Construct	Cronbach's alpha	rho_A	Composite reliability	AVE
CDO	0.798	0.803	0.869	0.625
CB	0.857	0.860	0.903	0.701
WLB	0.827	0.842	0.885	0.660
CR	0.783	0.790	0.850	0.531
SM	0.823	0.825	0.883	0.654
IA	0.868	0.870	0.904	0.655

Source: Author's analysis.

4.3 Structural model

The model produced SRMR = 0.067, R² = 0.698, adjusted R² = 0.693 and Q² = 0.446 (Table 4). These statistics indicate substantial in-sample explanatory power and

positive predictive relevance for the dependent construct. They should not be interpreted as out-of-sample forecasting performance because a PLSpredict assessment or holdout sample was not reported.

Indicator-level VIF values ranged from 1.277 to 2.552. These values do not indicate problematic collinearity at the indicator level, but they do not replace inner VIFs among the five predictor constructs. Predictor collinearity therefore remains a qualification when small partial path coefficients are interpreted.

Table 4: Model fit and explanatory-predictive relevance

Indicator	Value	Interpretation
SRMR	0.067	Reported approximate-fit diagnostic
R ² for IA	0.698	In-sample explained variance
Adjusted R ² for IA	0.693	Adjusted in-sample explained variance
Q ² for IA	0.446	Positive in-sample predictive relevance

Source: Author's analysis.

Each estimated path was positive and individually significant: CR → IA (beta = 0.086, p = 0.014), SM → IA (beta = 0.245, p = 0.001), CDO → IA (beta = 0.092, p = 0.035), CB → IA (beta = 0.332, p < 0.001) and WLB → IA (beta = 0.251, p = 0.007). H1-H5 were therefore supported at the level of individual path tests. The f² values indicate a very small incremental contribution for CR, small contributions for SM, CDO and WLB, and a small-to-moderate contribution for CB. Because pairwise coefficient-difference tests were not performed, the point-estimate ordering is descriptive only.

Table 5: Structural model results

Hypothesis	Path	Beta	t statistic	p value	f ²	Decision
H1	CR → IA	0.086	2.455	0.014	0.017	Supported
H2	SM → IA	0.245	3.198	0.001	0.085	Supported
H3	CDO → IA	0.092	2.108	0.035	0.021	Supported
H4	CB → IA	0.332	4.509	< 0.001	0.142	Supported
H5	WLB → IA	0.251	2.698	0.007	0.077	Supported

Source: Author's analysis. Coefficient magnitudes were not compared with pairwise significance tests.

4.4 Interpretation of findings

The estimated model indicates that the five perceived employer-signal domains were each positively associated with pre-application attraction and pursuit intention in the tourism-oriented sample. The pattern is consistent with a signaling account: when applicants cannot directly observe employment quality, they use symbolic, informational and instrumental cues to evaluate whether an employer is worth pursuing (Bangerter *et al.*, 2012; Celani and Singh, 2011; Connelly *et al.*, 2011) [2, 7, 9].

Compensation and benefits produced the largest point estimate (beta = 0.332) and the largest f² value (0.142). This is substantively plausible in tourism, where irregular schedules, peak-season work and mobility can make economic feasibility especially visible to prospective employees. Clear salary and benefit information may reduce uncertainty about whether the employment exchange is worthwhile. Nevertheless, the coefficient cannot be described as statistically stronger than the coefficients for perceived work-life support or social-media recruitment because pairwise comparisons were not conducted.

Perceived work-life support and social-media recruitment information and engagement also showed meaningful

positive associations. Work-life-supportive cues may be particularly salient in a sector characterized by holiday work, variable schedules and customer-contact demands. Social media can make vacancies and workplace information accessible before formal contact, but the construct also captures applicant engagement. Its coefficient should therefore be interpreted as an association between digital recruitment information/engagement and pre-application attraction, not as proof that promotional content causes application behavior.

Career development opportunities and employer reputation had smaller partial coefficients. This does not imply that young applicants consider them unimportant. Partial coefficients represent unique association after shared variance with the other predictors is controlled. Reputation may function as a broad legitimacy cue, while development may become more influential when training and advancement pathways are concrete and credible. Their modest f² values suggest that managerial claims should focus on incremental rather than dominant explanatory value.

The contrast between high construct means reported in the original analysis record and smaller partial coefficients should not be treated as evidence of a sequential psychological mechanism. Means describe endorsement levels, whereas partial coefficients describe conditional associations. Restricted variance, screening on tourism orientation, shared variance among predictors and measurement breadth can all contribute to this pattern.

4.5 Theoretical implications

The study contributes to tourism recruitment research by organizing employer cues into five signal-content domains and estimating them simultaneously. The results suggest that symbolic credibility, digital information, development value, economic value and work sustainability each retain a positive partial association within the same model. This supports a substantive view of employer branding in which image-based communication and actual employment conditions are complementary rather than interchangeable.

The findings also clarify the appropriate scope of a signaling claim. The study does not measure signal credibility, sender costs or an intervening inference process, and it does not test mediation, interaction or temporal sequencing. Its theoretical contribution is therefore evidence consistent with signaling logic in a specific labor-market context, not the identification of a new universal hierarchy of applicant signals.

Finally, the disciplined separation of path significance from coefficient-difference testing is important. A larger standardized coefficient is not automatically statistically stronger than another coefficient. This reporting principle is particularly relevant in multi-predictor PLS-SEM studies where predictors may share substantial variance.

4.6 Practical implications

Tourism employers should communicate an employment proposition that is specific, credible and internally consistent. Recruitment materials can make salary ranges, benefit eligibility, schedule expectations, leave arrangements, training pathways and promotion criteria more visible. These practices are more verifiable than broad claims about being a good place to work.

Digital communication should be aligned with employment

substance. Social-media posts, job advertisements, recruiter messages and employee-facing policies should communicate compatible information. Attractive content may generate attention, but inconsistencies between promotional messages and actual pay or working conditions can undermine credibility.

The results support attention to all five domains rather than a rigid sequence based on coefficient size. Employers should use their own applicant data to determine whether priorities differ by job type, tourism subsector and applicant group. Frontline service roles, office-based roles and digital tourism positions may require different combinations of compensation, flexibility and development information.

4.7 Limitations and future research

First, the sample was non-probabilistic, limited to respondents aged 18-25, and predominantly composed of students. The results should not be generalized to all young people, all job seekers or the wider tourism workforce in Ho Chi Minh City. Replication should include non-student applicants, experienced job seekers and probability-based or more diverse recruitment channels.

Second, eligibility required previous application to, or consideration of, tourism employers. This produced a substantively relevant but pre-oriented sample and may have restricted variation in the dependent construct. Future studies should compare tourism-oriented applicants with individuals who are undecided or prefer alternative sectors.

Third, the item wording referred to 'this company', but the retained documentation does not establish whether all respondents used a standardized focal employer or comparable employer type. Future questionnaires should name a specific vacancy, provide a common employer scenario, or require respondents to identify and consistently evaluate one focal organization.

Fourth, all variables were self-reported in a single cross-sectional survey. Common-method variance, reverse association and reciprocal evaluation cannot be ruled out. Longitudinal, experimental and multi-source designs should examine whether employer signals predict actual applications, interviews, offers and job acceptance.

Fifth, the adapted questionnaire did not have a documented qualitative pretest, cognitive interview stage or formal pilot in the retained research record. The SM, WLB and IA item sets also cover multiple facets. Future research should conduct expert review, cognitive interviewing and pilot testing, and should compare reflective, formative and multidimensional specifications where theoretically appropriate.

Sixth, the available analysis record did not retain full outer loadings, bootstrap HTMT confidence intervals, construct-level inner VIFs or a documented common-method diagnostic. These statistics should be reported in future replication and, where recoverable, in supplementary material. Out-of-sample predictive assessment should also be added before making strong prediction claims.

Finally, future studies should test boundary conditions across tourism subsectors, employer size, domestic versus international ownership, student versus employed applicants and different recruitment stages. Formal coefficient-difference, mediation and interaction tests are needed before proposing a hierarchy or sequence of signals.

5. Conclusion

This study examined five perceived employer-signal domains among 306 young respondents who had applied to, or were considering applying to, tourism companies in Ho Chi Minh City. Employer reputation, social-media recruitment information and engagement, career development opportunities, compensation and benefits, and perceived work-life support each showed a positive, individually significant partial association with pre-application attraction and pursuit intention. The model explained 69.8% of the variance within the recruited sample. The findings support a context-bounded view of applicant attraction in which tangible employment conditions and employer communication both matter. They do not establish causal effects, population-wide priorities or statistically significant differences between the path coefficients. The most defensible implication is that tourism employers should communicate credible employment substance across multiple domains and validate priorities with their own applicant evidence.

6. Declarations

6.1 Use of generative AI and AI-assisted technologies

Generative AI tools, including Gemini, ChatGPT, Perplexity and Claude, were used to support language editing, formatting review, reference-style normalization and clarity checks of the author's original manuscript. The author reviewed the manuscript, verified the empirical results reported from the retained analysis output and remains fully responsible for the accuracy, originality and integrity of the content.

6.2 Ethics and informed consent

The study used an anonymous questionnaire survey of respondents aged 18-25. Participation was voluntary. Respondents received information about the research purpose, confidentiality and intended data use before completing the questionnaire, and informed consent was obtained electronically. No personally identifying information was included in the analytical dataset.

6.3 Funding

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

6.4 Competing interests

The author declares no competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have influenced the work reported in this manuscript.

6.5 Data availability

The anonymized survey data and retained SmartPLS output files are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request, subject to ethical and institutional requirements.

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