Original Research

The Role of Employer Branding in Work-life Balance and Employee Retention Relationship among Generation Z Workers: Mediation or Moderation?

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Abstract

Objective: This study aims to investigate two models that examine the role of employer branding in the relationship between work-life balance and employee retention in Generation Z workers.

Design/Methods/Approach: This study applied quantitative methods by distributing questionnaires using google forms. A purposive sample of 189 Generation Z workers in Greater Jakarta, Indonesia, was used to test the models. The data was processed using SmartPLS 3 Software.

Findings: The results of the PLS-SEM analysis revealed a significant relationship between work-life balance, job stress, emotional exhaustion, and employee retention. Instead of mediating the relationship between work-life balance and employee retention, this study revealed that employer branding significantly moderated the relationship between emotional exhaustion and employee retention among Generation Z workers. These findings could be used to develop a human capital strategy to retain Generation Z employees.

Originality: Among many studies on the relationship between work-life balance and employee retention, only a few focus on Generation Z workers. This generation also places greater emphasis on employer branding when considering their workplace. However, employer branding is rarely integrated into work-life balance research. This study extends the application of social exchange theory to explain the relationship between work-life balance (WLB) and employee retention by integrating employer branding into the model.

Practical/Policy implication: Given the results, organizations may provide flexibility that enables employees to work from anywhere and anytime. Moreover, companies must design strategies to manage WLB, such as flexible working hours to allow employees to manage their work schedules according to their needs and reduce workplace conflicts. Companies are advised not to assign responsibilities that do not correspond to the employee's position or job description. Organizations may provide mindfulness training through meditation during breaks or before and after work hours to help them relax from their workload and avoid emotional exhaustion. Lastly, companies must engage in internal marketing activities by creating positive work culture, designing clear career paths, providing training, offering attractive benefits, and providing opportunities for employees to grow and develop.

Keywords: Employer branding, Emotional exhaustion, Employee retention, Generation Z, Job stress, Work-life balance

JEL Classification: M500, M540, M590

1. Introduction

Despite the high uncertainties due to the Covid-19 pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine, emerging Asian and developing countries can maintain steady economic growth (Asian Development Bank, 2022). Indonesia is one of the emerging Southeast Asia nations with the highest economic value (Asia Fund Managers, 2022). This country is expected to benefit from a demographic bonus in 2030, with a productive age reaching 64 percent of the nearly 297 million population dominated by Generation Z (Populix, 2021). Generation Z is result-oriented, has greater economic well-being, and is highly educated compared to previous generations. However, they are prone to psychological stress at work, affecting their performance (Schroth, 2019). Due to this tendency, many Generation Z workers prioritize work-life balance (WLB hereafter) and work flexibility (Kennedy, 2021). Generation Z is the youngest generation of employees, with a higher number of employees every year. They understand the importance of financial stability and enjoy their jobs so they can provide good performance at work, so they face life sacrifices to work hard at work (Mahmoud *et al.*, 2020). Due to this tendency, many Generation Z workers prioritize work-life balance (WLB hereafter) and work flexibility (Kennedy, 2021).

Employees' reactions toward work flexibility through implementing a work-from-home policy during the Covid-19 pandemic vary. Some of them feel comfortable due to the flexible working hours, while others experience difficulties focusing on their work tasks because of the distraction of occupants of the household (Waizenegger, McKenna, Cai, & Bendz, 2020). Many employees perceive an increased workload and spend more time working than usual when working from home (Atkins, 2020). At the same time, household obligations are increasing. The employees' dual roles as employees and parents result in higher job stress and a decline in mental health (Azharudeen & Andrew, 2018; Economic Times, 2020). When employees experience job stress, their performance and efficiency will decline (Kluge *et al.*, 2019). Job stress creates mental disorders and emotional exhaustion for some workers (Hsu, 2019). Especially during the Covid-19 pandemic, due to an imbalance between family life and work life, as well as uncertainty about the future situation related to the pandemic (Serrão *et al.*, 2021) and have a greater tendency to quit the company (Khalid & Nawab, 2018). Attention to emotional exhaustion is important due to its negative impact on employee performance (Klusmann *et al.*, 2020). Emotional exhaustion is the main element of burnout (Maslach *et al.*, 2001) that responds the most to the essence and intensity of job stress (Greenglass, 2007). Different job conditions are generally more heavily associated with emotional exhaustion than the other dimensions of burnout, which are depersonalization and lack of personal accomplishment (Greenglass, 2007). Employees must adapt to the latest working style as the working culture is changing because of the Covid-19 pandemic. In some cases, it may disrupt WLB, leading to job stress and employees' mental health, which refers to emotional exhaustion. As Generation Z prioritizes mental health, emotional exhaustion in this segment must be studied further.

The understanding of the relationship between WLB, psychological conditions, and employee retention is scattered. For instance, Giauque *et al.* (2016) looked at the role of WLB in stress reduction and employee turnover intention. Schwartz *et al.* (2019) investigated the impact of WLB on employee burnout. Kelly *et al.* (2020) connected WLB with job stress, burnout, and job satisfaction. Gribben and Semple (2021) connect WLB with job stress and burnout, while Ahmad (2022) explains the relationship of WLB to job stress, interpersonal conflict, and employee turnover intention.

Most studies on the relationship between WLB and employee retention tend to disregard the effect of employer branding, which may effectively retain employees. If the employer branding is considerably high, there will be few reasons for employees to leave the company (Bussin & Mouton, 2019). However, the role of employer branding in the relationship between WLB and employee retention, particularly among Generation Z workers, has yet to be explored. This study aims to fill this gap by integrating employer branding with the WLB employee retention model. Two models are examined. The first considers employer branding as a mediator in the relationship between WLB and employee retention. The second concerns employer branding as a moderator in the relationship between emotional exhaustion and employee retention.

This study adds several contributions to the literature. This study extends the application of social exchange theory to explain the relationship between WLB and employee retention by integrating employer branding into the model. Branding is a marketing concept that may be put in the Human Resource Management field as it may be the outcome of the Human Resource strategy implementation or strengthen the strategic outcome. As the role of employer branding in social exchange theory is unclear, this study is one of the few that examine the potential mediating and moderating role of employer branding in the relationship between WLB and employee retention. This research may benefit Human Resource Management practitioners in designing strategies to retain generation Z employees who are currently starting to dominate the workforce, with a different lifestyle from the previous generations.

As this research aims to extend the social exchange theory by testing the mediation and moderation roles of employer branding, the proposed hypotheses are tested using PLS-SEM. Data were collected from Generation Z employees in Greater Jakarta using purposive sampling. The elaboration of Generation Z employees, key constructs, and the research model and main hypotheses can be found in the next section. The methodology and the presentation of the results of hypotheses testing follow it. This paper is closed with a discussion of the theoretical and managerial implications and suggestions for future research.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Generation Z in the Workplace

Generation Z differs from the older generations in terms of exposure to technology and life situations when they grow up, which affects their values and attitudes (Pichler et al., 2021). Generation Z is more individual in learning, interacting, and communicating (Chicca & Shellenbarger, 2018). This generation is the youngest generation of employees, with an increasing number of employees each year. Compared to generations X and Y, generation Z frequently changes jobs with an average of 1-3 months (31.82%) (Integrity Asia, 2019).

Generation Z employees understand the importance of financial stability and enjoy their jobs. They are result-oriented, confident, and capable of working in teams (Ozkan & Solmaz, 2015). They are against the older generations' beliefs in sacrificing life for work to perform well (Mahmoud et al., 2020). They are prone to mental health issues, in which they cannot perform well when they are depressed and anxious at work (Schroth, 2019).

2.2. Employee Retention

Retaining skilled employees is a critical issue for organizations as it affects their ability to meet their objectives (Khalid & Nawab, 2018). As the costs of retaining superior employees are significantly lower than the costs of recruiting new ones, organizations implement various policies and strategies to keep their high-performing workers (Ghani et al., 2022). An organization with high employee turnover indicates poor retention management due to its failure to understand the factors to make employees remain committed, loyal, and productive (Fahim, 2018). Employees tend to remain in an organization that offers competitive compensation, fair treatment, appropriate organizational culture (Ghapanchi & Aurum, 2011), a fine working environment, social support, a normal workload, and WLB (Christeen & George, 2015).

Social exchange theory explains the relationships between antecedents of employee retention. This theory believes that interactions between two parties may result in specific commitments (Emerson, 1976). In organizational research, the social relationship between employer and employee determines organizational outcomes. Suppose the employees receive superior treatment from their organization. In that case, they will return the good deed with positive results such as a favorable attitude toward the organization, higher satisfaction, productivity, and commitment (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005).

Good retention management strategies can be achieved by creating a motivating climate and implementing best practices in human resource and talent management (Vu & Nwachukwu, 2020). It enables companies to reduce unnecessary expenses on recruiting and training new employees (Kumar, 2021). The failure to do so may cause employees to feel dissatisfied with their jobs, not come to work, choose to leave the company, or take early retirement (Saari & Judge, 2004).

2.3. WLB and Employee Retention

WLB is the balance between work and various aspects of life (Rashmi & Kataria, 2021). WLB occurs when an individual can maintain an equilibrium between his role in the family and at work (Shaffer et al., 2015). WLB practices include a range of initiatives, such as flexible work scheduling and arrangements, family leave, employee assistance programs, counselling services, and childcare services (Oludayo *et al.*, 2018).

Job stress is a condition that depresses the psychology and physiology of an individual resulting from work aspects such as role dimensions, increased job demands, role conflicts, and workload (Alphin, 2021). High work intensity or a heavy workload can undoubtedly increase fatigue and anxiety and lower the quality of family life (White et al., 2003). Since employees tend to bring job stress into their personal lives (Massoud & Younis, 2020), companies must improve WLB by managing job stress through flexible work schedules and workload arrangements. A non-optimal work-life integration leads to failure to create and maintain a healthy work environment, which results in higher stress, poorer employee productivity, and lower loyalty (Devadhasan, 2015).

Every individual prefers a balanced job, social, and family life. When an employee has longer work hours or a higher workload, his personal life will be affected. Due to this imbalanced nature, he will experience a negative psychological state (Azharudeen & Andrew, 2018). A poor WLB will increase psychological pressures on employees (Aazami *et al.*, 2015) and drop employee performance and productivity (Alofi & Khan, 2021). Johari et al. (2018) also reported that a poor WLB will increase employee stress levels, and their level of satisfaction will decrease as a result. Rather than putting salary as the top priority, Generation Z emphasizes WLB as the main focus when working (Hernández *et al.*, 2019). Chiang *et al.* (2010) found that improper WLB implementation increased job stress, sequentially impacting employee performance. The relationship between WLB and job stress is as follows:

H1: **WLB will decrease job stress.**

Job stress is a condition that suppresses an individual's psychology and physiology because of work-related factors such as multirole, increasing job demands, role conflict, extra workload, time constraints, and lack of responsibilities (Robbins & Judge, 2018; Xu & Yang, 2018). When job stress reaches its peak, it causes a psychological reaction in the

form of an emotional outburst (Lee *et al.*, 2019). If this job stress is complemented by extra job roles, a lack of self-control, and a lack of social support, it will result in poor individual health and organizational performance (Arshadi *et al.*, 2013).

As employees try to manage their job responsibilities, tasks, and pressures at work, they experience higher job stress, which eventually leads to physical and emotional exhaustion, anxiety, low self-confidence, and poor performance (Bhui *et al.*, 2016). Burnout is the long-term effect of job stress that deteriorates the employee's emotional and physical aspects (Portoghese *et al.*, 2017). Employee burnout is expressed through emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and low personal accomplishment (Kokkinos, 2007). Emotional exhaustion is an individual feeling of continuous emotional fatigue due to excessive work, demands, and stress (Aronsson *et al.,* 2017; Wullur & Werang, 2020). It occurs when the company expects employees to perform to their fullest with excessive workloads that force employees to work long hours and sacrifice their family time. Greater job stress causes higher emotional exhaustion, as reported by Özdemir & Kerse (2020). The following hypothesis demonstrates the relationship:
H2: Job stress will increase emotional exhaustion.

Excessive emotional exhaustion due to work-related elements may produce cynicism (Maslach *et al.*, 1996), which in the end will drop employee performance (Klusmann *et al.*, 2020), decrease job satisfaction, reduce organizational commitment, and increase intention to quit (Alarcon, 2011). Generation Z is known for their penchant for changing jobs and has the lowest loyalty to his/her work compared to other generations (Utami & Siswanto, 2021). A global survey shows that Generation Z prioritizes happiness and will choose to leave the company to enjoy life (Randstad, 2022). The same tendency is presented by Indonesian generation Z employees who prioritize WLB and do not hesitate to leave the company if it is not achieved (Rohmah, 2022). Emotional exhaustion may plunge one's enthusiasm and passion for work (Leiter & Maslach, 2005) and impact their workload and well-being (Charoensukmongkol & Phungsoonthorn, 2020). An emotionally exhausted employee does not have enough energy to work well and feels dissatisfied with his job, which triggers him to leave the organization (Yanchus *et al.*, 2016). On the contrary, employees with low emotional exhaustion will have a more positive attitude toward the company and are less likely to leave (Bakker, 2021).

Due to the negative effects of emotional exhaustion on employee retention (Dishop *et al.*, 2019), organizations must minimize these factors in their workplace. To reduce employees' desire to quit, organizations must avoid emotional exhaustion by managing workloads, lowering employees' frustration in completing work, and reducing job stress (Azharudeen & Andrew, 2018; Lee & Ashforth, 1996). The relationship is presented as follows:
H3: Emotional exhaustion will decrease employee retention.

2.4. Employer Branding in the relationship between WLB and Employee Retention
Organizations must have favorable branding to attract potential employees and retain high-performing employees (Ela, 2016). Employer branding consists of symbolic and functional elements used as the company's differentiation and superiority in the labor market (Ahmad *et al.*, 2019; Backhaus, 2016). Symbolic elements enable prospective employees to feel the prestige of a company, whereas the company provides instrumental elements through working hours, compensation, location, and benefits (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Lievens *et al.*, 2007). Employer branding has two forms: external and internal branding (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). External branding aims to create positive brand associations that shape employer image in the eye of the target population (Backhaus, 2016), including potential new employees. Internal branding provides a perception of corporate identity and culture, which leads to employee loyalty, productivity, and commitment (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Bussin & Mouton, 2019; Kashyap & Verma, 2018).

Employees seek organizations that provide a positive work culture, WLB, clear career paths, and job stability (Sirgy & Lee, 2018). As one way to attract new employees and retain current employees, many companies nowadays emphasize work flexibility to improve employees' WLB (Fahim, 2018). It shows the company's concern for its employees' families and personal life. WLB may be perceived differently across individuals and generations, so companies must know how each generation comprehends WLB to improve their branding (Hernández *et al.*, 2019). It is found that employer branding components such as higher pay, implementation of WLB, greater opportunities for career enhancement, and flexible work arrangements remain the primary reasons for generation Z to consider changing jobs (Smith, 2023). Hence, organizations need to attach these components to their employer branding.

Referring to social exchange theory, if employees feel they experience WLB while working at a particular company, they tend to have a greater affection for the company (Carrubi *et al.*, 2021). The organizational practice of WLB will increase employee engagement, which sequentially affects their communication behavior with external parties, known as advocating behavior (Lee, 2021). Maurya *et al.* (2020) reported that WLB as part of the work culture could strengthen employees' pride, trust, and sense of belonging to the organization, which in the end, enhances the employer branding. Strong employer branding will make the company a desirable place to work. Favorable employer branding also makes current employees feel fortunate to work there, indirectly affecting their performance and productivity (Taylor, 2010), and making them hesitant to leave because other companies do not look appealing to them (Bussin & Mouton, 2019). This study proposes the following relationship (Figure 1):
H4a: Employer branding mediates the relationship between WLB and employee retention.

Positive employee branding indicates that the company can provide the best environment for its employees. Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) argue that employer branding may create a psychological contract between the organization and employees. A strong internal brand becomes the organization's competitive advantage that may be incompatible with other companies. This positive competitive advantage will make employees feel satisfied and hesitant to leave the company because they are unlikely to find another organization that provides a better work environment (Bussin & Mouton, 2019). On one side, employees are more likely to leave the organization, which makes them emotionally exhausted (Yanchus et al., 2016). This condition may reduce the tendency of emotionally exhausted employees to leave.

As individuals tend to avoid risks and uncertainties, positive employer branding may cause emotionally exhausted employees to reconsider quitting since they may find other organizations not as good as their current employer. On the other hand, their consideration of career advancement and employer brand image may hinder employees from quitting (Ahmad et al., 2019). The proposed moderating relationship is as follows (Figure 2):

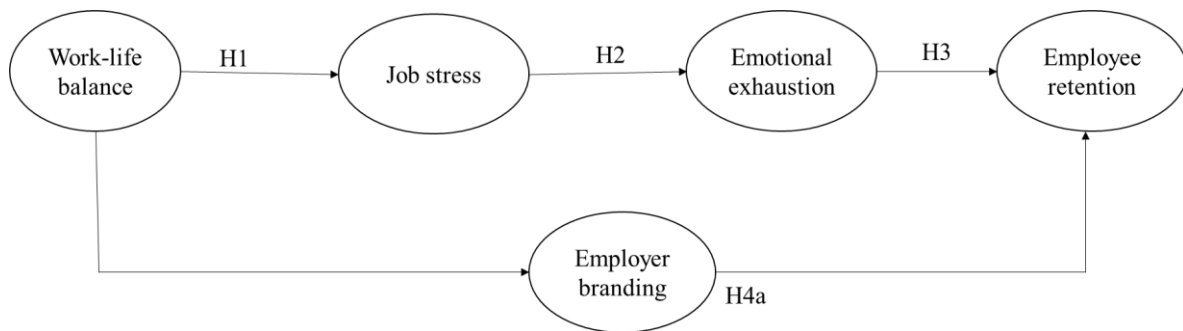**H4b: Employer branding moderates the relationship between emotional exhaustion and employee retention**.

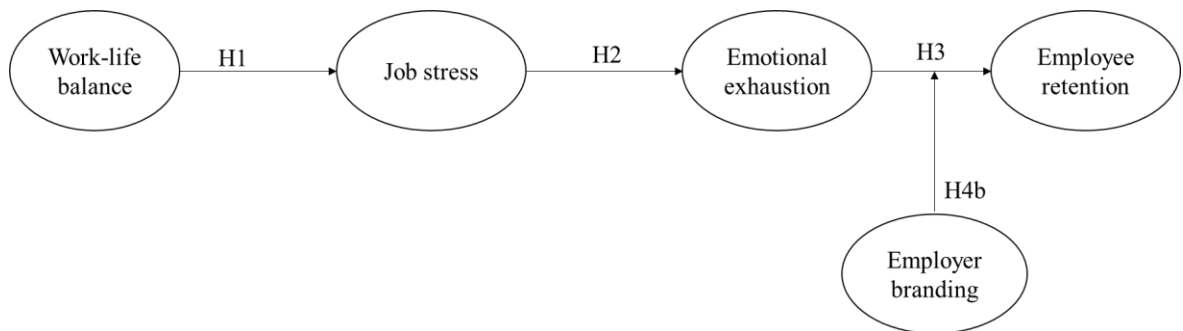Figure 1. Employer Branding as Mediating Variable (Model 1)

Figure 2. Employer Branding as Mediating Variable (Model 2)

3. Method

This quantitative study targeted Generation Z workers since they are expected to dominate the productive-age workers in 2030 (Bayu, 2021). This generation is accustomed to instant gratification, easily adaptable to online-based technology and applications (Turner, 2015), and considers many factors when choosing a job (Iorgulescu, 2016). This study focused on Generation Z workers in Greater Jakarta, the area with the highest GDP in Indonesia (Indonesia Statistics, 2022), who have experienced working from home for at least 3 months in their present company. The minimum sample size needed for this study was 150, following the sample-to-item ratio.

Data was collected by distributing an online questionnaire through social media from January 25 to June 25, 2022. The questionnaire was delivered in Indonesian to ease respondents' understanding of its contents. The questionnaire had three sections: screening questions, respondent data, and variable measurement. All items were measured using a 5-point Likert scale. The measurement items were double-back translated to ensure no difference in meaning from the original version. WLB was measured by 7 items by Smeltzer et al. (2016), job stress was measured by 5 items, and emotional exhaustion was measured by 6 items adopted from Mansour and Tremblay (2016). Employer branding was measured by 7 items by Tanwar and Prasad (2017), and employee retention was measured by 5 items by Youcef et al. (2016). Details of the measurement items can be found in the Appendix.

This study aims to test the role of employer branding in the relationship between WLB and employee retention, either as a mediator or moderator. Two models can be used, namely PLS-SEM and CB-SEM. The CB-SEM model tests existing theories or confirms a theory (Hair *et al.*, 2019). PLS-SEM helps predict complex main constructs (Sarstedt *et al.*, 2017) and expands existing structural theories (Hair *et al.*, 2019). PLS-SEM is used per the criteria of research objectives, which is to expand the existing social exchange theory by integrating employer branding as mediating or moderating variable in the research model. The PLS-SEM is also suitable for this study as the number of valid responses after cleaning the data was less than the minimum sample size for CB-SEM (Hair *et al.*, 2018). The PLS-SEM consists of a measurement model and a structural model. The measurement model aims to ensure the validity and reliability of the research instrument. Two validity measurements are to be fulfilled, namely convergent validity and discriminant validity. The requirements of convergent validity are minimum factor loading of 0.5 and a minimum AVE of 0.5.

For reliability, the rule of thumb is that composite reliability should be at least 0.7 (Hair et al., 2011). In contrast, the requirement of discriminant validity based on the Fornell-Larcker criterion is that the square root of the AVE of each variable should be higher than its correlation with other variables (Hair *et al.*, 2011). The structural model tests the relationships between variables. The hypothesis is supported if the t-value is greater than 1.96 and the p-value is less than 0.05 (Hair *et al.*, 2011).

4. Results and Discussions

4.1. Results

After cleaning the 207 obtained samples, 189 responses could be used for further analysis. Table 1 shows that the gender composition of respondents was nearly balanced. Almost all of them were between 20 and 27 years old, with more than 70 percent holding tertiary education degrees. Most respondents were in the early stages of their careers based on their job position and range of salaries.

Table 1. Respondent Profiles

	Characteristics	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Gender	Male	93	49.2%
	Female	96	50.8%
Age	17 - 19	15	7.9%
	20 - 23	84	44.4%
	24 - 27	90	47.6%
Marital Status	Single	183	96.8%
	Married	6	3.2%
Education	High school	42	22.2%
	Diploma	7	3.7%
	Undergraduate	135	71.4%
	Graduate	5	2.6%
Job Position	Staff	133	70.4%
	Supervisor	26	13.8%
	Manager	10	5.3%
	Others	20	10.6%
Type of Company	Private	138	73.0%
	Multinational	35	18.5%

	Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
	State company	8	4.2%
	SME	1	0.5%
	Government	2	1.1%
	Foreign Companies	4	2.1%
	Others	1	0.5%
	IDR 4.500.000 or less	15	7.9%
	IDR 4.500.001 - 8.500.000	131	69.3%
Monthly salaries	IDR 8.500.001 - 12.000.000	34	18.0%
	More than IDR 12.000.000	9	4.8%

Three invalid items were removed from the analysis, and the remaining 27 items had factor loadings ranging from 0.631 to 0.897, AVEs ranging from 0.531 to 0.697, and composite reliability (CR) ranging from 0.849 to 0.92 (Table 2). These items also passed the discriminant validity requirement based on the Fornell-Larcker criterion (Table 3).

Table 2. Results of Convergent Validity and Reliability

Variable	Item	Factor Loading	AVE	CR
Work-Life Balance (WLB)	WLB 1	0.781		
	WLB 2	0.824		
	WLB 3	0.836		
	WLB 4	0.631	0.602	0.913
	WLB 5	0.768		
	WLB 6	0.826		
	WLB 7	0.748		
Job Stress (JS)	JS 1	0.794		
	JS 2	0.765		
	JS 3	0.738	0.580	0.873
	JS 4	0.763		
	JS 5	0.746		
Emotional Exhaustion (EE)	EE 1	0.832		
	EE 2	0.857		
	EE 3	0.712	0.634	0.895
	EE 4	0.681		
	EE 5	0.879		

Variable	Item	Factor Loading	AVE	CR
	EE 6*	-		
	EB 1*	-		
	EB 2	0.666		
	EB 3	0.730		
Employer Branding (EB)	EB 4	0.698	0.531	0.849
	EB 5*	-		
	EB 6	0.830		
	EB 7	0.707		
	ER 1	0.782		
	ER 2	0.826		
Employee Retention (ER)	ER 3	0.814	0.697	0.920
	ER 4	0.851		
	ER 5	0.897		

Note : (*) is non-valid item

Table 3. Result of Discriminant Validity

	EB	EE	ER	JS	WLB
EB	**0.728**				
EE	0.042	**0.796**			
ER	0.273	-0.366	**0.835**		
JS	0.052	0.756	-0.395	**0.762**	
WLB	0.021	-0.710	0.264	-0.654	**0.776**

Figure 2 presents the results of hypothesis testing with bootstrapping with a sub-sample of 5,000. All hypotheses in Model 1 were supported except for H4a. WLB had a significant negative effect and substantially predicted job stress (β= -0.654, p = 0.000, f^2=0.746), supporting H1. Job stress had a significant negative effect and was very substantial in explaining emotional exhaustion and has been shown to reduce emotional exhaustion (β= 0.756, p = 0.000, f^2=1.335), so H2 was supported. Emotional exhaustion had a significant negative effect on employee retention, and its effect was moderate (β = -0.414, p = 0.000, f^2=0.179), supporting H3. However, the data did not support H4a predicting the positive effect of WLB on employer branding (β= 0.021, p = 0.423). A two-stage approach method was used to test the moderating effect in Model 2. The coefficient of determination of Model 2 was greater by 2.6 percent than Model 1. Employer branding significantly moderates the relationship between emotional exhaustion and employee retention, although the effect was small (β = 0.148, p = 0.022, f^2=0.035), indicating that H4b was supported. The slope analysis in Figure 3 shows that emotionally exhausted employees tended to have lower employee retention in organizations with unfavorable branding than in organizations with positive branding.

$R^2 = 0.427$ $R^2 = 0.572$ $R^2 = 0.215$

Work-life balance → -0.654** → Job stress → 0.756** → Emotional exhaustion → -0.375** → Employee retention

$R^2 = 0.000$

0.021 (n.s) → Employer branding → 0.285**

n.s: $p > 0.05$ * $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.001$

Model 1

$R^2 = 0.428$ $R^2 = 0.572$ $R^2 = 0.241$

Work-life balance → -0.654** → Job stress → 0.756** → Emotional exhaustion → -0.414** → Employee retention

0.148*

Employer branding
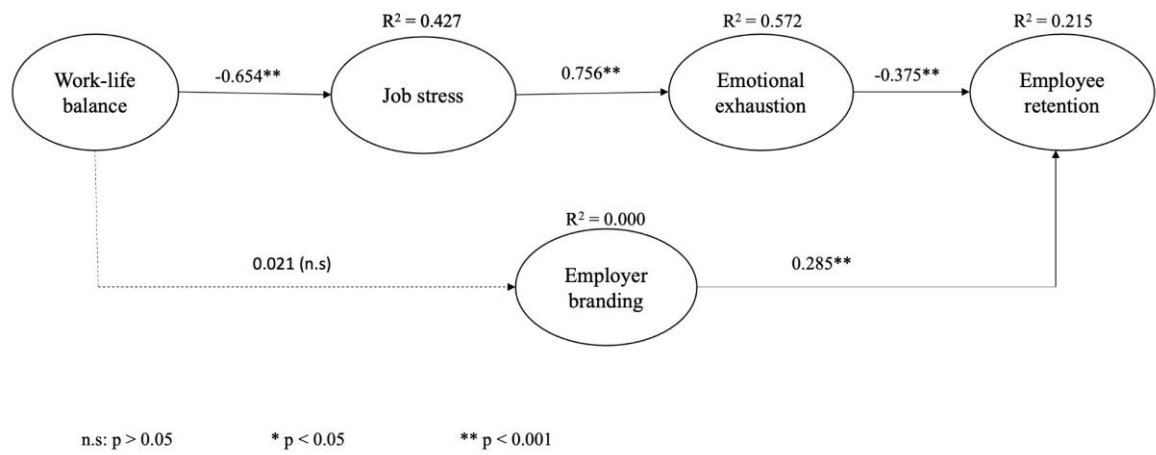
n.s: $p > 0.05$ * $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.001$
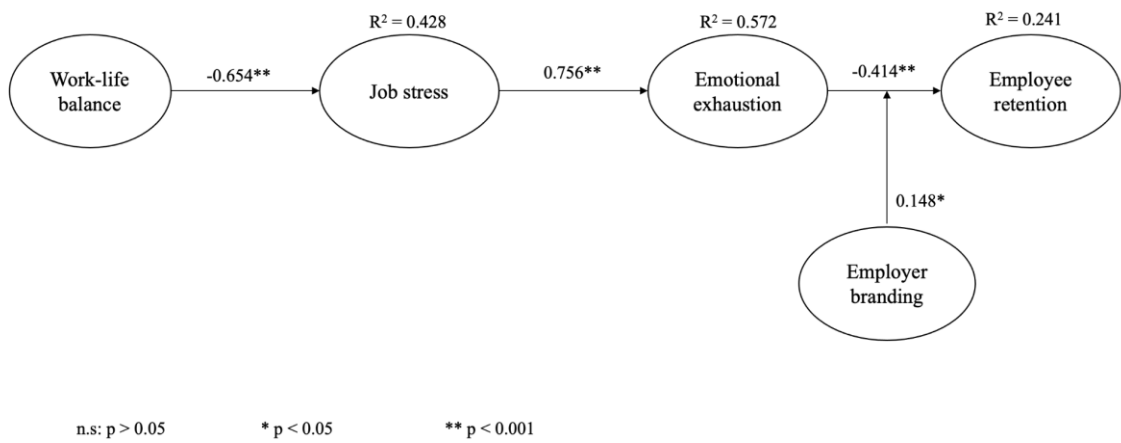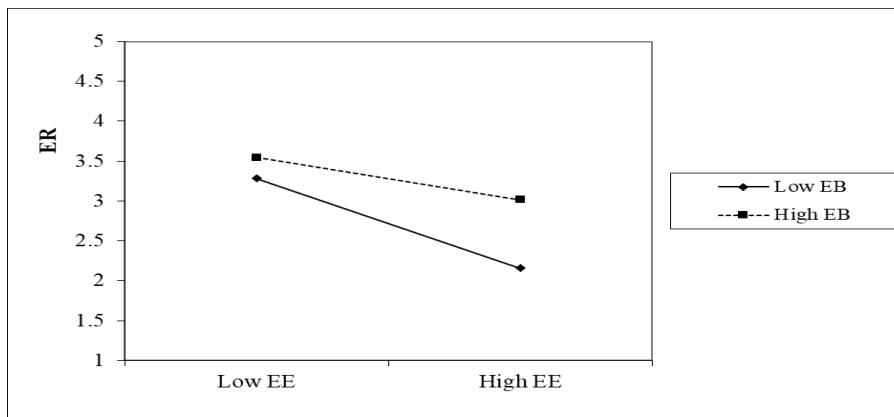
Model 2
Figure 2. Path diagram

Figure 3. Slope Analysis

4.2. Discussions

This study focuses on Generation Z workers who dislike the traditional 9 to 5 work pattern (Sidorcuka *et al.,* 2017). This study supports the social exchange theory that discusses the relationship between WLB and employee retention through job stress and emotional exhaustion. The first hypothesis (H1) that tests the effect of WLB on job stress is significant and consistent with previous research by Irfan *et al.* (2021). Research by Devadhasan (2015) found that non-optimal WLB resulted in higher stress, lower organizational loyalty, and lower employee productivity. It has been shown that the non-optimal implementation of WLB balance may stimulate job stress in employees, leading to

physical vulnerabilities, such as disease susceptibility and cynical behavior toward coworkers or customers. Thus, job stress must be resolved because increased job stress leads to emotional exhaustion (Hu *et al.*, 2017).

This study supports H2, where job stress has a significant positive effect on emotional exhaustion. In other words, the effect of job stress and emotional exhaustion was directly proportional to the respondents. This finding is consistent with previous research by Serrão *et al.* (2021), who reported that job stress causes emotional exhaustion in some workers, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic, due to an imbalance between family life and work life, as well as uncertainty about the pandemic's future situation. The results from Alonso *et al.* (2020) show that job stress and emotional exhaustion at work are significantly associated. Salami (2011) also found that work stress has a positive effect on emotional exhaustion. Furthermore, job stress, resulting from increased job demands and burdens, will cause emotional exhaustion (Barello *et al.,* 2021). Therefore, work stress employees feel they must be managed properly so that burnout in the form of emotional exhaustion can be reduced (Golparvar *et al.*, 2012).

Emotional exhaustion can have a negative impact on employees, reducing their ability to meet and cope with emotional demands and work in their position. It eventually has an indirect impact on the organization (Opoku *et al.*, 2021; Shukla & Srivastava, 2016). According to this study's findings, emotional exhaustion has a negative effect on employee retention, which gives support to H3. This research is in accordance with Mahajan and Lal's (2018) and Gensimore *et al.*'s (2020) studies that reported a significant direct effect of emotional exhaustion in decreasing employee retention. An emotionally exhausted employee lacks the energy to work effectively and is dissatisfied with his job, heightening his desire to leave (Yanchus, Osatuke, & Periard, 2016). Thus, the greater the employee's emotional fatigue, the lower the employee's desire to stay with the company (Wright & Cropanzano, 1998). When combined with the characteristics of Generation Z employees who do not plan long-term work for a company, they are ready to leave when new and better opportunities arise (Sidorcuka et al., 2017). Generation Z is very concerned about their mental health.

WLB, through the implementation of flexible work arrangements, is part of an instrumental element of employer branding (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004), which may make employees hesitant to leave the organization (Bussin & Mouton, 2019). However, this study finds no significant effect of WLB on employer branding among Generation Z workers (H4a), which contradicts Aradhya *et al.* (2021) and Maurya *et al.* (2020). Hernández et al. (2019) mention that each generation may hold different perceptions toward WLB. Aradhya *et al.*'s (2021) and Maurya *et al.*'s (2020) studies involved Generation Y workers who have experienced traditional and flexible working systems. This generation may already be married and have children, so they highly value WLB. On the other hand, this study focuses on Generation Z workers; almost all respondents are single. Furthermore, some of them started working during the Covid-19 pandemic, leading them to perceive flexible work and WLB as common organizational practices. As such, WLB is not seen as a distinctive competitive advantage that shapes employer branding among Generation Z workers.

A favorable employer branding presents an organization's competitive advantage that may cause employees to stay in the company (Ahmad et al., 2019; Bussin & Mouton, 2019), as found in this study (H4b). Positive employer branding may generate a psychological contract between the organization and employees (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). Even emotionally exhausted employees tend to leave the organization (Yanchus *et al.*, 2016). They may reconsider their intention since other organizations probably do not offer the same benefits, such as work flexibility, career advancement, and work culture as their current employer. Generation Z workers prioritize companies' reputations over older generations regarding WLB, basic needs fulfilment, personal development, or leadership style (Grow & Yang, 2018; Leslie *et al.*, 2021). Thus, good employer branding may hinder them from quitting even though the workers feel emotionally exhausted from their jobs.

5. Conclusions

This study supports the social exchange theory as reflected by the WLB-employee retention model. Generation Z workers are different from those in previous generations. They will choose work comfort and convenience over salary since their personal life is just as important as their professional life (Leslie *et al.*, 2021), and they value mental health (Schroth, 2019). Thus, WLB is crucial in retaining Generation Z employees. This study extends the theory by integrating employer branding with the WLB-employee retention model. Unlike the prediction, WLB does not contribute to developing employer branding among Generation Z workers. It might be because this generation considers WLB as a must and not distinctive to a particular organization only. Instead of becoming a mediator, this study gives evidence of the moderating role of employer branding in the relationship between emotional exhaustion and employee retention.

It is believed that the costs to recruit new employees are typically higher than the costs to retain potential ones. Thus, organizations must identify the influential factors to maximize employee retention. As each generation has different characteristics that may affect their demand for working conditions and intention to stay in the organization, this study focuses on Generation Z employees who prioritize work flexibility (Kennedy, 2021) and mental health (Schroth, 2019). This study verifies the WLB-employee retention model on Generation Z employees and the moderating role of employer branding in the relationship between emotional exhaustion and employee retention. The inability to provide WLB to these workers may result in negative psychological conditions such as job stress and emotional exhaustion,

further lowering employee productivity (Hadi *et al.*, 2021). Therefore, organizations may provide work flexibility that enables employees to work from anywhere and anytime.

This study reports a significant relationship between WLB and job stress so companies must design strategies to manage WLB, such as flexible working hours to allow employees to manage their work schedules according to their needs and reduce workplace conflicts (Hernández *et al.*, 2019). Companies are advised not to assign responsibilities that do not correspond to the employee's position or job description (Putra & Suwandana, 2020). As a response to employees who experience negative emotions from jobs, organizations may provide mindfulness training which may be in the form of meditation during breaks or before and after work hours to help them relax from their workload and avoid emotional exhaustion (Charoensukmongkol & Puyod, 2020).

Not only critical for retaining employees (Cascio, 2014), this study discovered that employer branding might reduce the negative effects of emotional exhaustion on employee retention. Generation Z emphasizes motivating leadership, a supportive work environment, flexible time, financial stability, and personal development (Grow & Yang, 2018; Leslie *et al.*, 2021). Thus, companies must engage in internal marketing activities by creating positive work culture, designing clear career paths, providing training, offering attractive benefits, and providing opportunities for employees to grow and develop, indirectly benefiting the company's performance and brand. Companies must also engage in external marketing activities, such as promoting the company's brand via both traditional and digital media to attract potential employees.

There are several limitations to this study. First, this study only focuses on Generation Z workers. Some of them just started working during the pandemic period. This may lead them to believe that flexible work systems are common, influencing the results of an insignificant relationship between WLB and employer branding. Their evaluation of the importance of WLB might differ from the older generations. Thus, future research may consider testing this research model by comparing Generation Y and Z employees. Second, this study involves Generation Z in Greater Jakarta only. Second, due to the different economic development levels, the unemployment rate of each province, and cultural values, the way Generation Z in different provinces perceived WLB might be different. The implementation of WLB in each area may also differ. Future studies could involve Generation Z employees outside Greater Jakarta to accommodate this issue. Third, this study only looked at one dimension of job burnout: emotional exhaustion. Even though this dimension is reported as the main contributor to job burnout (Maslach *et al.*, 2001), future research may include the other job burnout dimensions to obtain a complete picture of the WLB-employee retention relationship. Lastly, further research could investigate the role of organizational and social support in mitigating the negative effects of emotional exhaustion on employee retention.

Author Contribution
Author 1: conceptualization, writing original draft, investigation, review and editing, validation, visualization.
Author 2: conceptualization, writing original draft, data curation, formal analysis, investigation, methodology.
Author 3: conceptualization, writing original draft, data curation, formal analysis, investigation, methodology.
Author 4: conceptualization, writing original draft, data curation, formal analysis, investigation, methodology.

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Conflict of Interest
The authors declare that the research was conducted without any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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Appendix.

Variable	Definition	Measurement Items	Source
Work - life balance	Balance between work and personal life regarding matters of time, energy and demand goals (Smeltzer et al., 2016).	1. My personal life suffers because of work. (R) 2. I neglect personal needs because of work. (R) 3. I miss personal activities because of work. (R) 4. I struggle to juggle work and nonwork. (R) 5. I am happy with the amount of time for non-work activities. 6. Personal life gives me energy for my job. 7. I am in a better mood at work because of my personal life.	Smeltzer et al. (2016)
Job stress	The interaction between the individual and the work environment or job demands in the process of developing stress (Mansour & Tremblay, 2016).	1. I feel stressed with my work. 2. I feel rushed; I do not seem to have enough time to finish my work. 3. I lack concentration, I cannot focus on my work. 4. I feel a great weight on my shoulders because of my job. 5. I feel preoccupied, tormented, or worried when thinking about work.	Mansour & Tremblay (2016)
Emotional exhaustion	Psychological problems caused by prolonged, repetitive and uncontrollable stressful situations that result in fatigue and frustration in individuals (Mansour & Tremblay, 2016).	1. I feel emotionally drained from my work. 2. I feel used up at the end of the workday. 3. I feel fatigued when I get up in the morning and have to face another day on the job. 4. Working with people all day is really a strain for me. 5. I feel burned out from my work. 6. I feel frustrated by my job.*	Mansour & Tremblay (2016)
Employer branding	A set of attributes that contain the functional, economic, and psychological benefits provided by an organization that make the organization different and have a unique work experience (Tanwar & Prasad, 2017).	1. My organization provides autonomy to its employees to take decisions. * 2. My organization provides us with online training courses. 3. My organization communicates a clear advancement path for its employees. 4. My organization provides overtime pay. 5. My organization provides insurance coverage for employees and dependents. * 6. My organization provides flexible-working hours. 7. My organization offers opportunities to work from home.	Tanwar & Prasad (2017)
Employee retention	An estimate of the probability that an individual will stay or leave the organization for which they work	1. I would be reluctant to leave this organization. 2. I plan to stay at this organization as long as possible. 3. I often think about quitting my present job. (R) 4. I will probably look for a new job next year. (R)	Youcef, Ahmed, & Ahmed (2016)

(Youcef, Ahmed, & Ahmed, 2016).	5. As soon as possible, I will leave this organization. (R)

Note: (R) is for a reverse statement

(*) is deleted item