

Work Atmosphere and Career Development: Impact on Employee Engagement and Retention in Gen Z Workforce in Thailand

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Abstract

Existing studies on employer branding have mostly focused on attracting talents though a strategic purpose of employer branding is to attract and retain talents. To retain employees, offering a unique employer brand experience is vital. Employee engagement is proposed to be an underlying mechanism explaining how an employer brand experience impacts employee retention. Whilst generation differences are acknowledged, most studies to date have not yet focused on a particular generation, such as generation Z, which is becoming important workforce

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in the next five years. Grounded on the social exchange theory, this study aims to identify the mediating effect of employee engagement on the relationship between employer brand experience, particularly work atmosphere and career development, and employee retention from the perspective of Generation Z workforce in Thailand. An online survey was carried out with Gen Z, who are employed and reside in Thailand. In total, 163 questionnaires were returned and deemed usable. The sample size follows the sample-to-item ratio method. This study has identified a full mediation of employee engagement on the link between work atmosphere and employee retention, and a partial mediation on the link between career development and employee retention. For generation Z, career development opportunities attract them to retain with the organization more effectively than work atmosphere. Theoretical and managerial implications are discussed.

Keywords: Employer Brand, Work Atmosphere, Career Development,
Employee Engagement, Employee Retention

อิทธิพลของบรรยากาศการทำงานและโอกาสในหน้าที่การงาน ต่อการมีส่วนร่วมของพนักงานและการรักษานักงานยุค Gen Z ในประเทศไทย

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บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยในอดีตที่เกี่ยวข้องกับการสร้างแบรนด์ผู้ว่าจ้าง มักศึกษาเกี่ยวกับการดึงดูดผู้สมัครที่มีความสามารถสูง แม้ว่าจุดประสงค์เชิงกลยุทธ์ของการสร้างแบรนด์ผู้ว่าจ้าง คือ การดึงดูด และรักษาบุคลากรเหล่านี้ หากต้องการรักษานักงานให้อยู่กับองค์กร การสร้างประสบการณ์ของแบรนด์ผู้ว่าจ้างให้มีความโดดเด่น ถือเป็นเรื่องสำคัญ การมีส่วนร่วมของพนักงานอาจเป็นกลไกที่เชื่อมโยงความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างประสบการณ์แบรนด์ผู้ว่าจ้างและการรักษานักงานให้อยู่กับองค์กรได้ ในขณะที่คนแต่ละยุคสมัยมีลักษณะที่แตกต่างกัน การศึกษาที่ผ่านมายังไม่เจาะจงคนแต่ละยุคสมัยเท่าใด

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นัก โดยเฉพาะคนกลุ่ม Gen Z ที่จะกลายเป็นกำลังสำคัญของตลาดแรงงานในอีกห้าปีข้างหน้า งานวิจัยนี้จึงกรอบทฤษฎีการแลกเปลี่ยนทางสังคม โดยมีจุดมุ่งหมายที่จะศึกษาบทบาทของอิทธิพลสื่อกลางของการมีส่วนร่วมของพนักงาน ระหว่างความสัมพันธ์ของประสบการณ์แบรนด์ผู้ว่าจ้างและการรักษาบุคลากร จากมุมมองของคนวัยทำงานกลุ่ม Gen z ในประเทศไทย งานวิจัยนี้ใช้การสำรวจความคิดเห็นในรูปแบบออนไลน์ โดยมีแบบสอบถามที่ส่งกลับและนำไปใช้ในการวิเคราะห์ต่อไป ได้ทั้งหมด 163 ฉบับ จากคน Gen Z ที่มีงานทำ และอาศัยอยู่ในประเทศไทย จำนวนประชากรยึดตามหลัก sample-to-ratio งานวิจัยนี้พบอิทธิพลสื่อกลางของการมีส่วนร่วมของพนักงาน การมีส่วนร่วมของพนักงานเป็นอิทธิพลสื่อกลางที่สมบูรณ์ในความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างบรรยากาศที่ทำงานและการรักษาพนักงาน ในขณะที่การมีส่วนร่วมของพนักงานเป็นอิทธิพลสื่อกลางบางส่วนในความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างโอกาสในการพัฒนาอาชีพและการรักษาพนักงาน สำหรับคนทำงานกลุ่ม Gen z โอกาสในการพัฒนาอาชีพสามารถดึงดูดให้พวกเขาทำงานที่องค์กรต่อไปได้มีประสิทธิภาพมากกว่าบรรยากาศในการทำงาน งานวิจัยนี้ได้มีการนำเสนอแนะเชิงทฤษฎีและเชิงการบริหารจัดการต่อไป

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Introduction

Employer branding has become a significant strategy employed by an organization, aiming to attract and retain talents since the job market has increasingly become competitive. This is because talents contribute to the success of the organization (Ibrahim & Zayed, 2018). Employer branding is seen as an effort from the organization to position itself as an employer of choice in the mind of both potential and current employees (Theurer et al., 2018). Due to its significant role, research on employer branding has been on the rise, focusing on measuring determinants of employer brand and employer brand attractiveness. Most have focused on the Western and the US. Only recently, we have begun to see the research conducted in the Asian context such as China (Lee, Kao & Lin, 2018) and India (Gupta, Bhasin & Mushtaq, 2021). Yet, this remains limited.

Whilst attracting talents is important, making a positive impression on current employees is not to be overlooked. According to Rosethorn (2009), studies on employer brand as a means to attract the best candidates have outnumbered those on the role of employer brand in retaining current employees. How employees experience their working with the organization is worthwhile exploring to appreciate the role of employer branding in engaging them with their work and retaining them with the organization. When focusing on the role of employer branding in developing employer brand attractiveness, employer brand is regarded as a multi-facet construct, comprising various values, including social, economic, development and cooperation values (Berthon, Ewing & Hah, 2005; Santiago, 2019). On the other hand, when seeking to understand the perspectives of current employees, most studies on employer branding place an emphasis on understanding their experience with the employer brand. According to Ronda, Valor and Abril (2018), various attributes, namely, job, workplace, CSR and organizational attributes contribute to the conceptualization of an employer brand as concrete offerings from an employer to employees. These attributes are means for employees to attain benefits and perceived values they look for. Once these are made unique and communicated to potential and current employees,

the organization can be perceived as a unique employer brand. In addition to the end-state of employees as a result of employer branding, it is equally important to understand how they can be influenced to become engaged with their work, in order to better explain the role of employer brand in retaining talents. The right kind of workplace experience offered by the employer brand has a positive impact on employee's attitude and behavior (Ahmad, 2018). However, this understanding has remained limited, presenting a gap in the employer branding literature (Bhasin, Mushtaq & Gupta, 2019; Gupta, Bhasin & Mushtaq, 2021).

Based on the social exchange theory (SET), employee engagement is considered a mediator in the link between employer brand experience and employee retention. According to Gupta, Bhasin and Mushtaq (2021), most studies on employer brand experience have focused on its impact on employee satisfaction although employee engagement is considered to predict employees' outcomes more effectively than satisfaction (Shamaa, Al-Rabayah & Khasawneh., 2015). When their social interactions are fulfilled, employees become engaged with their work and organization. Engaged employees are found to express a higher intention to remain with the organization. Recent studies have focused on the mediating effect of employee engagement on the relationship between employer brand experience and organizational citizenship behavior (i.e. Gupta, Bhasin & Mushtaq, 2021; Newton & LePine, 2018) but not between employer brand experience and employee retention. Even the work of Chopra, Sahoo & Patel (2024), which has found employee engagement as a mediator, has not explored this link but the relationship between employer branding and employee retention.

Furthermore, research on employer branding has been broad but with a limited focus on any particular generation. Different generations are found to possess different characteristics and viewpoints. They may be motivated by different values. In the next five years, Generation Z or those who were born between 1996–2010 will account for one fourth of the total workforce market in Thailand (Adecco, 2023). However, Gen Z is known to make its mark in current employment. Since Gen Z seek equal treatment, raised with independence,

they value their engagement in making a decision. Yet, they do not accept the work environment that lacks appreciation (Lavri, 2024). Thus, they need to be approached differently to retain them (Rykun, 2025). Indeed, Thai Gen Zs seem to show a high intention to resign within two years (Maclean & Panyavaranant, 2025). Therefore, any organization, having an intention to develop its employer brand, should recognize such differences among generations. In an attempt to engage and retain them, employer branding should take into account the perspectives of Generation Z regarding the dimensions of an employer brand experience, served as unique employer brand offerings, and how it contributes to employer brand's ability to engage and retain current employees of Generation Z in Thailand. Indeed, Dolot (2018) have stated that young generations have different perceptions of the role of work in human life. Thus, it is becoming a challenge for an organization nowadays to recruit and retain the right employees of newer generations.

This study aims to understand the mediating role of employee engagement as an underlying mechanism explaining the link between employer brand experience and employee intention to retain with the organization. Specifically, this study seeks to understand how work atmosphere and career development opportunities can predict employee retention from the perspectives of the Thai Generation Z workforce. To address this literature gap, this study employed a descriptive research design, adopting an online survey with Thai Generation Z currently employed at the time of data collection.

Literature Review

Employer Brand Experience: Work Atmosphere and Career Development

Early days of employer brand focused on the field of personnel recruitment (Ambler & Barrow, 1996). Then, recent research has acknowledged a pivotal strategic role of employer branding in retaining talents (i.e. Cable & Turban, 2001; Love & Singh, 2011). In effect, employer branding represents an effort of an organization to apply branding, in particular, to human resources activities to ensure that the organization is perceived by the labor market as being a great place to work (Edwards, 2010; Ewing, Pitt & de Bussy, 2002). To become an employer of choice, an organization seeks to

provide employees with favorable experiences with various elements in an employer brand, including leadership, co-workers, supervisors, customers and work atmosphere (Gupta, Bhasin & Mushtaq, 2021). By providing an appropriate and appealing work experience, employees will thrive and be committed to perform at their best (Oladipo et al., 2013). According to the social exchange theory, which focuses on exchange and power through an understanding of technical and economic factors Blau, 1964, when provided with the right values in working, employees will become loyal and faithful (Hadi & Ahmed, 2018). As a result, the organizational image and reputation is nurtured, if not, enhanced.

The organization's offerings in exchange of employees' performance and loyalty are regarded as employment experience (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). Employees' employment experience is constituted by a number of aspects. One is a package of economic or financial rewards, which vary from one organization to the others. Another could be intrinsic rewards to fulfill socio-emotional needs (Ambler & Barrow, 1996). A package of functional, economic, and psychological offerings from the organization can be varied according to different organizations, creating a unique package of employer brand experience. Thus, employer brand experience as perceived by employees can help craft an employer brand, impacting on its image and reputation as a great place to work. The employer brand can, in effect, not only attract new talents, but also retain them with the organization. While recent work (e.g., Gupta, Bhasin & Mushtaq, 2021) has highlighted the effect of employer brand experience on employee engagement and organizational citizenship behavior, limited is known of the effect of different aspects (i.e. career development and work atmosphere) of an employer brand experience on employee engagement and retention (Saini & Jawahar, 2019).

One of the key employer brand experiences includes work atmosphere. It is one of the key factors that contribute to the corporate image (Huang et al., 2003). (Randstad 2018, cited in Gupta, Bhasin & Mushtaq, 2021) identifies work atmosphere as a key dimension of an employer brand, which induces employee retention. Various studies have included work atmosphere as one of the factors of employer brand experience, which satisfies employees' inner sustenance (Lee, Kao & Lin, 2018). Indeed,

how employees evaluate the work atmosphere (Lievens et al., 2005) represents the psychological dimension of an employer brand, 'wherein the organization fulfils the social needs of the employees by implementing flexi-work policies' (Tanwar & Prasad, 2017: p. 398). Furthermore, a healthy work atmosphere is considered critical to how employees appreciate their work experience. According to Tanwar and Prasad (2017), healthy work atmosphere represents '*a friendly and stress-free work atmosphere and the team spirit amongst the employees*' (p. 398). Each organization has its own unique work atmosphere, which can be used as one of the employer brand value propositions (Heilmann, 2010), as an offering in exchange. They argue that a positive and collaborative work atmosphere can motivate employees and retain them with the organization in the long run. Similarly, Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) have indicated that positive and fulfilled work atmosphere enables employees to perceive an employer brand as being attractive. Indeed, the supportive work atmosphere fulfils social value, which enhances employer brand attractiveness.

Another aspect of employer brand experience addresses the utilitarian value of employees, namely, career development (Lievens & Slaughter, 2016). An opportunity to advance in their career path is recognized as being an important human resource management activity to facilitate employees' ability to achieve their professional goal. Training and development programs, in particular, play a key role to improve employees' growth opportunities for their current and future position. According to Priyadarshi (2011), career is one of the factors contributing to employer brand, besides organization reputation, work environment, and organizational culture. Recent work of Nanjundeswaraswamy, Bharath & Nagesh (2022) has confirmed that career development opportunity is a vital factor to be considered in the assessment of employer brand alongside work atmosphere. Indeed, career development is one of the key dimensions of the employer brand scale offered by a number of authors (i.e. Mark & Toelken, 2009; Tanwar & Prasad, 2017; Tripathi, Rajlaxmi & Tripathi, 2020). It contributes to the employer brand attractiveness (Srivartava & Bhatnagar, 2010). Past studies have highlighted the role of career development in determining employee retention (Ahmad, Khan & Haque, 2020). According to Dachmer et al. (2021), career development enhances their personal growth experiences at work. In particular, career

growth is one of the key concerns of Gen Z. Therefore, career development needs to exist not only to attract but also retain Gen Z workforce Gandasari et al., 2024. Other factors that explain employer branding include compensation and benefits, corporate social responsibility, reputation and image, training and development, and work-life balance. These factors have been well studied to determine how they influence employer brand attractiveness compared to the two factors-work atmosphere and career development opportunity (see Nanjundeswaraswamy, Bharath & Nagesh, 2022). Thus, this study conceptualizes employer brand experience as encompassing work atmosphere and career development. It will focus on assessing the role of work atmosphere and career development in explaining employee retention through engagement.

Employee Engagement

According to the social exchange theory, an exchange between an employer and employees is based on what the organization is set up to provide employees with the necessary support in working (Chiaburu & Marinova, 2006). Based on employer branding initiatives, an organization in an attempt to become an employer of choice seeks to craft superior employer brand experience. Therefore, when employees evaluate employer brand experiences in a positive light, they become obliged to reciprocate with engaging behavior, commitment, and organizational citizenship behavior (Gupta, Bhasin, & Mushtaq, 2021).

Employee engagement represents employees' physical, cognitive, and emotional efforts to actively perform their work roles (Kahn, 1990; Rich, Lepine & Crawford, 2010). It is a state of mind that depicts the extent to which employees are motivated to go extra miles for the success of their organization (Mercer, 2007). It thus plays an important role in enhancing employees' commitment, which subsequently induces employees' likeliness to stay with the organization, and organizational citizenship behavior (Richman et al., 2008). Because employee engagement is a combination of the capability to work and willingness to work of employees, an employer brand should also provide the right support and resources (van Bogaert et al., 2013). Thus, Employer branding should be geared towards creating a culture

and a work environment that nurtures the development of engagement to increase retention (Allen, Bryant & Vardaman, 2010).

Conceptual and Hypothesis Development

Work Atmosphere and Employee Retention

Figurska and Matuska (2013) argue that the benefits of employer branding include engagement levels, retention rates, turnover rates, absenteeism, and productivity. They regarded a positive work atmosphere to be one of the employer branding success factors. Providing a positive work environment for employees is argued to have an impact on employee retention (Menor, 2010). Indeed, Tanwar and Prasad (2016) has found that work atmosphere is an important dimension that provides the right employer brand experience, which then has an impact of employee retention through job satisfaction and psychological contract with the organization as an employer brand. According to their study, work atmosphere should create an environment that is collaborative, friendly and safe for employees. It represents the social relations among employees and others and the working conditions. According to Osteraker (1999), work atmosphere thus falls into the social dimension and the physical dimension of the factors that explain employee retention. Similarly, past studies (i.e. Ambler & Barrow, 1996; Berthon, Ewing & Hah, 2005) have viewed employer brand's social values as a healthy work environment, fostering good interpersonal relationships. This social value has found to contribute to employer attractiveness (Silva & Dias, 2023), which influences employee retention. Therefore, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H1: Work atmosphere has a positive influence on employee retention.

Career Development

Career development opportunities are defined as an organization's initiatives around 'career planning, career mapping, career advancement strategies' (Nanjundeswaraswamy, Bharath & Nagesh, 2022). According to Tanwar & Prasad (2017), providing employees with an opportunity to improve not only their skills but also develop their growth for their current and future job positions is considered another critical dimension of an employer brand. Though career progression plans that are

efficient and effective is not easy, employees always appreciate opportunities to grow their career, which is vital to their workplace happiness Ahmed et al., 2022. When they find an opportunity to advance in their career, they perceive the organization as being attractive to work. It is thus not surprising to find that career development has a positive effect on employee retention (Sokro, 2012). Indeed, career development is considered one of the intangible components that constitute employer brand experience, which can facilitate employee retention (Cascio & Graham, 2016). The study of Kashyap and Verma (2018) has corroborated that the development value, conceptualized as career advancement and training opportunities, has a negative impact on employee turnover intentions. Organizations that believe in the development of their human resources can reduce fatigue and boredom, allowing them to work towards satisfying customers, which has a positive impact on company performance. Organizations that effectively link HRD to employer brand can expect talent attraction, engagement and retention (Itam, Misra & Anjum, 2020). Therefore, the following hypothesis is developed:

H2: career development has a positive impact on employee retention.

The Role of Employee Engagement

Employer branding enables human resource practices to drive employee engagement Kunert & Mosley, 2011. When employees perceive their employer brand to be unique and desirable to work for, they become engaged with their work roles (Ahmed et al., 2014). The organization should seek to provide the right management, policies, resources and support to not only attract and retain talents but also engage them to successfully enhance the organizational performance (Heilmann, Saarenketo & Liikkanen, 2013). When employees are provided with proper resources to fulfil their job such as training and development programs and positive and fulfilled work atmosphere, employee engagement can flourish (Markos & Sridevi, 2010). Recent study of Chopra, Sahoo & Patel (2024) have identified the partial mediating effect of employee engagement on the link between employer branding and employee retention. However, their study measures employer branding, whereby an impact of employer brand experience dimensions was not determined in the model. Yet, they have indicated that an employer brand that fosters an environment where employees

can live the brand through various factors, including training and career advancement, can attract and retain employees.

Specifically, previous studies have identified working environment as one of the key organizational supports, which enhances employees' engagement (Xerry & Brunetto, 2013). According to May et al (2004), supportive work environment motivates employees to become engaged with their work. Similarly, Schlager et al. (2011) have placed an emphasis on the social value as playing a predictor role of employee identification, which then influences employee engagement. In addition to work atmosphere, enhancing employees' awareness of the opportunity for their career development at employer is likely to prevent them from looking for one at another company (Parsley, 2006).

According to the social exchange theory, positive employer brand experience influences employees' engagement, commitment and other positive discretionary behavioral outcomes (Fredrickson, 2003; Kasekende, 2017; Sulea et al., 2012) because they feel a mutual bond with their organization (Samo et al., 2020). Low employer brand experience leads employees to become disengaged, resulting in lower productivity and citizenship behavior (Piyachat, Chanongkorn & Panisa, 2015). Therefore, when employees, supported by the positive employer brand experiences, will become engaged, which leads them to have a strong intention to stay with the organization. Sharma et al (2021) have identified the relationship between employee engagement with productivity, profitability, customer satisfaction and employee retention. This is in line with Fletcher et al. (2018), who have argued that employee engagement leads to an incline in leave intention. Previous studies have documented the role of employee engagement as a mediator of different discretionary behavioral outcomes, such as job satisfaction (Lee et al., 2022), commitment (Saks, 2006), organizational citizenship behavior (Gupta, Bhasin & Mushtaq, 2021) and recently, retention (Chopra, Sahoo, & Patel, 2024).

Therefore, the following hypotheses are formulated:

H3: Work atmosphere has a positive impact on employee engagement.

H4: Career development has a positive impact on employee engagement.

H5: Employee engagement has a positive impact on employee retention.

H6: Employee engagement mediates the link between work atmosphere and employee retention.

H7: Employee engagement mediates the link between career development and employee retention.

The conceptual model in Figure 1 presents the hypothesized relationships.

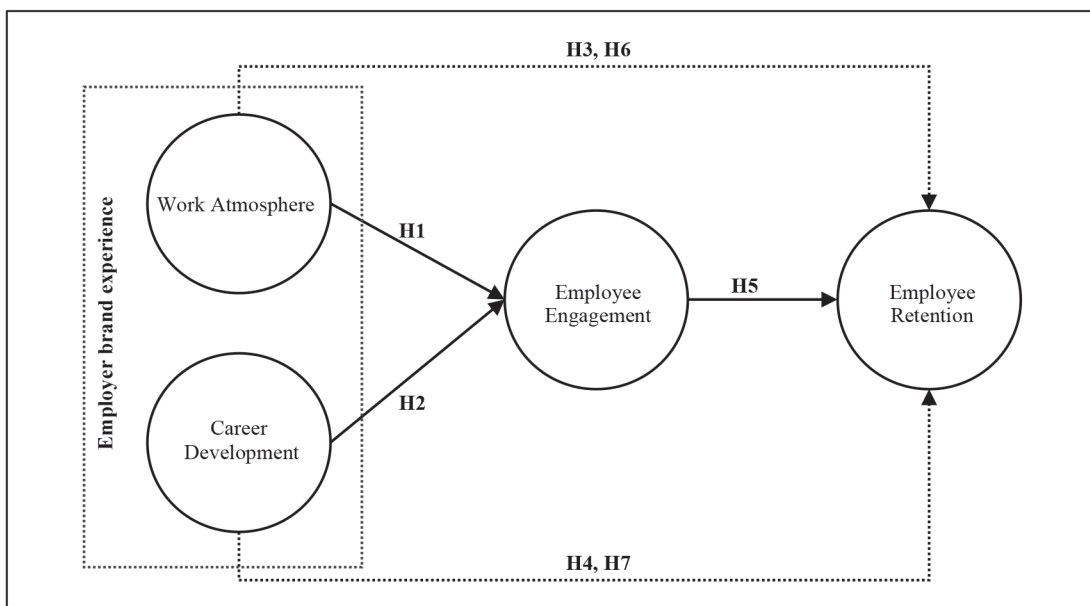


Figure 1: Conceptual Model

Research Methodology

Sampling and Data Collection

To test the hypothesized relationships, this study adopted a quantitative research approach, using an online survey method. Questionnaires were developed and distributed by posting a Google Form link via social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and LINE application. Social media platforms are common among Gen Z. They use these platforms on a daily basis. Most spend more than

12 hours a day on social media (Bank Finance, 2025), giving us an opportunity to penetrate the sample of this population. To avoid self-selection bias, specific details about the contents of the survey are kept general. Anonymity and confidentiality were strongly assured to all respondents; we had no knowledge of any identification of each respondent. Only when the respondents provided us with consent, they could then proceed to complete the questionnaire. The survey was open in September 2023 and closed in October 2023.

The population of this study consists of Thais of Generation Z who are currently employed in Thailand. One fourth of the workforce in Thailand in the next five years will be composed of the population from Generation Z (born between 1996-2010). Soon, these new generation people will be the important workforce of the country (Adecco, 2023). Furthermore, people of different generations have different motivations, and seek different values and benefits from work. For example, Baby Boomers express positive attitude towards workplace, and creativity and new ideas in work. Generation X then focus on self-development, good pay, and positive relations. Generation Y has been studied in recent research on employer branding (i.e. Khanolkar, 2013; Kurniawan, 2018; Micik & Micudova, 2018), albeit limited. Generation Z have remained under studied. In general, Generation Z are more open to a variety of themes, beliefs and identities as they represent diverse ethnicities and religious beliefs (Hais and Winograd, 2016). Due to their being digital cognizant, their preferred style of working is individual-oriented rather than team-oriented (Iorgulescu, 2016). Furthermore, for their career development, they seek jobs that are seen as interesting work (Pandita, 2022). In this study, convenience sampling was selected as a sampling method since we cannot access the sampling frame that contains every Generation Z employee in Thailand. Screening questions, including the year of birth and employment status, were posed to the participants after giving us consent. Only those born between 1996 and 2010, and currently employed in Thailand at the time of questionnaire completion, were able to proceed to complete the questionnaire. This is to ensure that the sample represents Gen Z workforce in Thailand. The sample size follows the sample-to-item ratio method (Hatcher, 1994), suggesting a ratio of 5 subjects to 1 item. This study has 22 items in total, requiring 110 subjects/respondents as a minimum number. In total,

163 questionnaires were returned and deemed usable. The descriptive background of the respondents is in Table 1.

Table 1: Descriptive Background of the Respondents

Characteristics		No.	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	30	18.4
	Female	133	81.6
Average Income per Month	Less than 15K THB	45	27.6
	15,000-20,000THB	48	29.4
	20,001-30,000THB	26	16
	30,001-40,000THB	20	12.3
	40,001-50,000THB	9	5.5
	50,001 or more	15	9.2
Length of Service	Less than a year	67	41.1
	1 – 2 years	71	43.6
	3 – 5 years	17	10.4
	6 years or more	8	4.9
Region	North	19	11.7
	Northern East	14	8.6
	Middle	110	67.5
	East	14	8.6
	West	1	0.6
	South	5	3.1

Measures Development and Data Assessment

All four constructs in this study were adapted from previous studies, using five-point likert scales, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5).

The two constructs, presenting employer brand experience, include 4 items of work atmosphere and 6 items of career development. Both were adapted from Tanwar and Prasad (2017). Employee engagement with 9 items was adapted from Hanaysha (2016). Employee retention, with 3 items, was adapted from Matzler and Renzl (2006). All scales were measured with reflective measurement models. The questionnaires were translated into Thai and was translated back into English by an academic in branding, who speaks bilingual. Pilot study was carried out with 10 respondents to assess the appropriateness of the language.

To assess the validity of scales, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed. Some items were deleted due to cross-loadings. Overall reliability and validity of the measurement instrument is good: composite reliability (CR) ranges from 0.959-0.898; average variance extract (AVE) is between 0.616-0.853; discriminant validity was satisfied as none of the squared correlations between pairs of constructs exceeded the AVE of the two constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Table 2 presents correlations, validity and reliability estimates.

Table 2: Correlations, Validity and Reliability Estimates

	CR	AVE	Career Development	Employee Retention	Work Atmosphere	Employee Engagement
Career Development	0.905	0.616	0.785			
Employee Retention	0.912	0.912	0.718	0.880		
Work Atmosphere	0.898	0.644	0.594	0.623	0.803	
Employee Engagement	0.959	0.853	0.644	0.823	0.620	0.924

Note: All correlations are significant at $p < .01$ level (2-tailed).

Hypothesis Testing and Results

Structural Model – Direct Effects

To test the hypothesized relationships, this study adopted IBM AMOS 24 to run Structural Equation Modelling (SEM). The overall fit measures indicate that the hypothesized model is a reasonable representation of the empirical data (Hair et al., 2006): $\chi^2 (125/265.254) = 2.122$, $p = .00$, CFI = .95; TLI = .94; RMSEA = .08. As depicted in Table 3, work atmosphere does not have a statistically significant direct effect on employee retention; $\beta = .089$, $p = .189$. Thus, H1 is rejected. Career development is however found to have a statistically significant positive direct effect on employee retention ($\beta = .293$, $p = .000$). H2 is thus supported. Unlike its effect on employee retention, work atmosphere is found to have a statistically significant positive relationship with employee engagement ($\beta = .370$, $p = .000$). Similarly, career development has a positive relationship with employee engagement too ($\beta = .422$, $p = .000$). Thus, H3 and H4 are all accepted. Finally, another direct effect between employee engagement and employee retention is also found to be statistically significant ($\beta = .579$, $p = .000$). Thus, H5 is supported.

Structural Model – Mediation effects

To test the mediating hypotheses (H6 and H7), Kelloway (1995) was adopted as a guideline for partial or full mediation conditions and Zhao et al. (2010) for indirect or direct effect conditions. The hypothesized relationship: work atmosphere $\rightarrow$ employee engagement $\rightarrow$ employee retention yielded a result of $\beta = .304$, $p = .009$ for the total effects, and $\beta = .241$, $p = .002$ for the indirect effects. Furthermore, since the direct effect of work atmosphere on employee retention is not statistically significant, the findings indicate a full mediation of employee engagement in this hypothesized model. Therefore, H6 is fully supported. Regarding H7 (career development $\rightarrow$ employee engagement $\rightarrow$ employee retention), the total effects of career development on employee retention represent $\beta = .537$, $p = .000$ while the indirect effects indicate $\beta = .304$, $p = .000$. However, since the direct path between career development and employee retention is significant, the mediational effect of employee engagement in this hypothesized model is partial. Thus, H7 is partially supported.

Table 3: Summary of Path Coefficients of All Hypotheses

Hypotheses		β	Type	Result
H1	Work atmosphere → Employee retention	0.089ns	Direct	Rejected
H2	Career development → Employee retention	0.293**	Direct	Supported
H3	Work atmosphere → Employee engagement	0.370**	Direct	Supported
H4	Career development → Employee engagement	0.422**	Direct	Supported
H5	Employee engagement → employee retention	0.579**	Direct	Supported
H6	Work atmosphere → Employee engagement → Employee retention Total Effects Indirect Effects	 0.304** 0.241**	Mediation	Supported (full mediation)
H7	Career Development → Employee engagement → Employee retention Total Effects Indirect Effects	 0.537** 0.304**	Mediation	Supported (partial mediation)

Note: * Significant at $\leq .05$ level; ** Significant at $\leq .01$ level; NS - non significant

Discussion

In the next five years, organizations in Thailand will be driven by new generations such as Generation Z. People from this generation seek different motivations from their work. Since birth, they have never been without digital technologies. Their generation is composed of a wide range of gender and religious beliefs. Therefore, their characteristics differ from other generations. Despite their being the new generation of workforce of organizations in Thailand, a limited number of studies in employer branding have been conducted to gain insights into their perspectives to understand what can appeal and attract them to work for and stay with the organization. Therefore, this study first contributes to the employer branding literature by presenting the perspective of Generation Z workforce in Thailand.

The study further shows that for the Thai Generation Z workforce, an employer brand should be effectively manage and plan the employer brand experience. In particular, this study highlights that work atmosphere and career development opportunities have a positive impact on increasing employee engagement with their work. Past studies have highlighted that work environment should be positive, flexible, and innovative (Halova & Muller, 2023; Pandita, 2022) if an employer brand wishes to develop and communicate work environment as one of the unique offerings, appealing to Generation Z. When employees perceive their workplace environment as being positive, they are motivated to spend their cognitive, physical and emotional energy to actively fulfil their job responsibilities (Markos & Sridevi, 2010), highlighting the important role of employer brand experience in inducing employee engagement. Not only work atmosphere, but also career development is also important in inducing employee engagement, which is in line with Parsley (2006).

Grounded on the social exchange theory, when employees perceive that the employer brand endeavors to offer a positive employer brand experience, they develop a mutual bond with the organization. This leads them to feel obliged to reciprocate the organization's effort. As a result, engaged employees are found to have higher productivity, and lower turnover intention. This study offers empirical evidence to support that employee engagement acts as an underlying mechanism explaining the influence of work atmosphere and career development on employee retention. Past studies such as Chopra, Sahoo & Patel (2024) have found employee engagement as a mediator between employer branding and employee retention. This study has further added to the literature that employer brand experience can influence employee retention through employee engagement. Specifically, this study has found a full mediating effect of employee engagement on the link between work atmosphere and employee retention. Although this study does not find a direct link between work atmosphere and employee retention, it has proved that work atmosphere can influence employee retention through its effect on employee engagement. Therefore, providing employees with favorable work atmosphere for Generation Z nurtures a positive work experience with the employer brand. In return, they become engaged, which subsequently leads to their intention to stay longer with the organization.

Unlike work atmosphere, career development can directly and indirectly influence employee retention, since employee engagement is found to partially mediate this relationship. This is in line with previous studies that have highlighted the positive effects of career development on employee engagement (Parsley, 2006) and retention Kashyap & Verma, 2018. Since Generation Z considers job security, providing them with an opportunity to grow in their career path can influence their engagement with their work, whilst increasing their retention rate. In particular, this study also indicates that career development has a seemingly stronger effect on both employee engagement and employee retention than work atmosphere does.

Based on the findings of this study, the organization aiming to craft an employer brand should pay attention to how they manage their human resource development planning. They should offer an efficient career planning and strategies to create a unique employer brand offering. When employees, particularly those from Generation Z, feel that they have an opportunity to advance in their career at the particular organization, they become more engaged and express an intention to stay with the organization longer. This also allows the organization to be perceived as an employer of choice. Besides career development opportunities, the organization is recommended to develop the right work environment to create a unique work atmosphere that contributes to the development of unique employer brand value proposition. As a result, management can expect employees of Generation Z who perceive the work atmosphere in a positive light to become engaged. The organization can hope to retain Generation Z through work atmosphere when it drives employee engagement. Both career development opportunities and work atmosphere are considered the offerings that management can provide their employees in exchange for their physical, cognitive, and emotional efforts toward their work, and subsequently their intention to stay with the organization, perceived as an employer of choice.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

This study is not without limitations. First, this study adopted a convenience sampling method. We used screening question to ensure that the respondents are of Generation Z. Also, we ensured that the respondents were from different regions of

Thailand. However, the sample may not be truly representative of the Thai Generation Z population. Furthermore, the sample size, although was appropriate for the number of latent and observed variables in this study, it remains small. Therefore, future research should try to adopt the sampling techniques which provide more statistical precision, and increase a sample size to enhance generalizability and representativeness. Besides, this study does not take into account any possible situational and personal factors, which may act as a moderator, changing the pattern of the studied relationships. Furthermore, employer brand experience is composed of a range of dimensions, beyond work atmosphere and career development. Future research can look to include other dimensions of employer brand experience and possible moderators in the model to gain a more comprehensive understanding of their interplay. Finally, it might be interesting to carry out a longitudinal study on employer branding to detect how employees who are first attracted to the employer brand become retained or not by their actual employer brand experience. This knowledge and understanding will be invaluable for the organization to continuously fine-tune their employer brand.

Conclusion

Grounded on the social exchange theory, this study has conceptualized employee engagement as an underlying mechanism, explaining the link between employer brand experiences and employee retention from the perspective of Generation Z, working in Thailand. The findings indicate that, when the organization offers employees with opportunities to advance in their career as well as positive work atmosphere, employees become actively engaged with their work. Through their engagement, the employer brand experiences can then induce employee retention. In particular, crafting an employer brand should focus on creating unique employer brand experiences. These experiences can be shaped by work atmosphere and career development opportunities. Organizations can craft these experiences as unique offerings in exchange for employee engagement and retention.

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