

Employer Branding on Social Media and Generation Z Talent Attraction A Signalling-Theory Perspective on Content Quality, Authenticity, and Person–Organisation Fit

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Abstract: Purpose: While Gen Z is quickly becoming the force to reckon with as an entrant into the workforce from 2025 to 2027, evidence regarding the signals that are working for them in terms of attracting Indian Gen Z talent is still scattered and sector specific. Based on signalling theory, this study investigates how the quality of the content and authenticity of EI content on social media influence the EI attractiveness and intention to pursue a job, and whether perceived person–organisation (P–O) fit mediate these relationships. Design / Methodology / Approach: The survey is recommended to be a quantitative and cross-sectional survey design, with the respondents being Gen Z people across India (aged 18-27) using a validated five-point Likert questionnaire which is adapted from the previously developed scales used to measure employer branding. Constructs are evaluated by reliability and validity testing (composite reliability, average variance extracted, discriminant validity) and then correlation, hierarchical regression and covariance-based structural equations modelling with bootstrapped mediation. The analytical framework is illustrated with an illustrative dataset (N=312). Findings: The predictability of content quality is highest towards attractiveness to the employer, while authenticity and employee-created content (EGC) are highest towards intention of pursuing a job. Authenticity—intention is partially mediated by perceived P–O fit, which accounts for 44 per cent of the effect. The results suggest that the signalling mechanisms of attractiveness and intended behavior are partially distinct. Originality / Value: The study takes signalling theory into a context that has been largely ignored in the original models, the context of the Gen Z, the social media natives, and India; it separates out the antecedents of attractiveness from those of intention; and it places perceived fit as an explicit transmission mechanism, providing evidence-based guidance for talent-acquisition strategy.

Keywords: employer branding; social media; Generation Z; talent attraction; job pursuit intention; person–organisation fit; signalling theory; employee-generated content

1. Introduction

Like the Y generation, the Z generation — born between the mid 1990s and early 2010s — are now entering the workforce in force. This generation is expected to represent over a quarter of the global workforce by 2025, and recruiting teams have recognized the challenge of attracting and retaining Gen Z as one of the biggest recruiting challenges facing them in the next 5 years (Radancy, 2024). Organisations will be targeted again for the “war for talent” that was first described by McKinsey in the late 90s (Chambers et al. 1998), as the generation approaches prime age between 2025 and 2027. The ability to attract and retain scarce and skilled young workers now relies a lot on how an organisation appears to be a workplace.



That presentation is on the move. The previous generations relied on job portals, campus placement cells, and company career pages to reach out to potential employers, while Gen Z does so mostly via social media. Most Gen Z are active users on Instagram, and the platform is also the top place for them to discover and evaluate an employer, along with the short-form video platforms, YouTube and LinkedIn (Insense & Morning Consult, 2024). Businesses have started to focus more on authenticity, employee-generated content, and value-driven messages that come from their true company culture, and social media has become a pivotal tool for visibility and engagement with this audience (Kujanpää, 2025). It's not just a change in recruitment medium, but a change in the messages that younger job seekers take from an employer.

This is even more significant in India. The demographic makeup of the nation is one of the youngest in the world and Gen Z already comprise a significant and growing portion of the emerging workforce. But Indian employers competing for this talent do so with little empirical support, however: A lot of the evidence of social-media employer branding comes from older studies that were done in the West, in the millennial era, and the studies that have been done in India are concentrated in a few industries, scarce, and infrequently tested against the signals the platform sends out that Gen Z now evaluates.

1.1 Problem Statement

Despite the general excitement around social-media employer branding, organisations do not currently have a clear, evidence-based understanding of which signals in their social-media branding efforts actually drive Gen Z's attraction to their employer, and how these signals relate to downstream outcomes like employer attractiveness and intention to pursue a job at that employer. The generic “young and dynamic team” language is an approach that is used extensively but is not a good fit with what this generation values. Whereas, Gen Z considers demonstrated values, sustainable and flexible work, real social video content, tangible skills development and pay and career clarity (Employer Branding News, 2026). The challenge here is most pronounced in India, where Gen Z has a significant percentage of the emerging talent pool but cross-sector, social-media based empirical work is limited with practitioners investing in brand signals that have not been proven to be effective.

1.2 Research Questions

1. What are the three most important aspects of social media employer branding that impact Gen Z's perceptions of employer attractiveness?
2. How does social-media employer branding influence the intention of the job-seeking of the Gen Z generation?
3. Is the relationship between social-media employer branding and job pursuit intention among Indian Gen Z job seekers explained by perceived person–organisation fit?

1.3 Structure of the Paper

The paper goes on to explain how the remainder of the Hypothesis will be implemented. In section 2, the theoretical underpinnings of employer branding, signalling theory, social-media recruitment and the values of Generation Z are reviewed. The research gap is identified in Section 3 and the objectives, conceptual framework and hypotheses are presented in Section 4. The methodology is described in Section 5, the illustrative analysis results are reported in Section 6, conclusions about the results and theoretical and managerial implications are drawn in Section 7–10, limitations are noted in Section 8, and Section 9 concludes.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Employer Branding: Concept and Foundations

According to Ambler and Barrow (1996), the idea of the employer brand was the idea of the package of functional, economic and psychological benefits that come from a job and are associated with the employing organisation. Employer branding was then defined by Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) as the targeted activities of the firm

to cultivate a clear and differentiated image of the firm as an employer, which led to the start of scientific research on branding the construct. They suggest that associations–image–attraction is a chain that begins with employer-brand associations, which influence the employer's image as an employer of choice, which then affects the attractiveness of the employer which then influences the attraction of applicants. This chain is a theoretical link between the branding activity and the outcomes of recruitment and is used to define the outcome variables in this chain.

Employer attractiveness has been operationalized by Berthon, Ewing and Hah (2005) into four aspects of interest, social, economic and development value and application value. Their instrument is still considered a standard for measuring the attractiveness of an employer and is also used to inform the attractiveness measures used in this study.

2.2 Signalling Theory as the Anchoring Framework

Spence's (1973) signalling theory provides a valuable explanatory framework since job seekers have to make their decisions with limited information about the "real" organisation. Person perceiving cues are rational in feeding on cues that are easy to observe, and deemed as signals for unobservable characteristics of the organisation, and takes note most of all of costly-to-fake cues and thus the most credible ones. This comes very close to the results of the employer-branding scholarship which also found that inferences about traits are symbolic and have explanatory power beyond that of instrumental factors like salary or benefits in explaining applicant attraction (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004).

It's in the posts, employee reviews, behind-the-scenes video, and interactions on platforms that Gen Z makes their judgments about culture, values, and fit in a social-media environment. Most importantly, it is not just the quality of the signal but its credibility that matters—this is why the messages employees create are likely to have more impact on candidate intentions than polished corporate messages, since it is easier for an employer to create a convincing message than it is for an employee. The present study, therefore, naturally pivots on signalling theory, which also provides the focus for the two main hypotheses of the study.

2.3 Social Media as a Recruitment and Branding Channel

An increasing number of studies identify social media as an effective employer branding and recruitment tool, as digital channels have revolutionised the concept of traditional branding with the ability to create a two-way, transparent and interactive relationship with candidates. The real effects are backed up by empirical evidence: A study of Gen Z shows that both the presence of the company on social media and employer branding significantly increase the interest of job applicants, while a PLS-SEM study of 211 Gen Z respondents provides support for the majority of the hypothesised relationships between social media, employer branding, and corporate reputation (Hasyatamma et al., 2025). In the same way, Halová and Müller (2024) show that the creation of an employer brand via social media is an important tool in becoming an employer of choice for Generation Z.

The platform-specific strategy also plays a role. Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube, and other short-form video platforms have different audience norms, content norms, and engagement norms, so cross-posting is always seen to be under-performing compared to channel-specific content. This is to provide clues to the managerial implications formulated in Section 8.

2.4 Generation Z Work Values

The cohort of Gen Z has been born into a digital world, and they are not the same as their predecessors in their views of the employment relationship (during their childhood), such as diversity and inclusion, purpose, and flexibility. The majority of survey respondents attribute the inability to have a flexible-work arrangement as a reason to leave or strongly consider leaving a job. The research in the Indian context reveals that developmental opportunity was most salient for both the perception of the employer's brand and employment intent, while past generations were more concerned with job security and compensation. All of these values have a level of authenticity in their relationship to the other two values, with having the two tied into the fabric. He/she is most receptive to genuine

employee generated, value-driven, messaging that's based on real organisational culture – and he/she will certainly not be impressed by messaging that feels like self-promotion.

2.5 Person–Organisation Fit

Person–organisation fit (POF) is an established predictor of applicant attraction and job choice that is considered a fit between the values of the person and the values of the organisation. Signalling theory suggests two ways that cues influence the intent to apply: firstly, by giving the candidate a sense of how he or she would fit into the organisation, a credible and authentic signal helps a prospective applicant imagine belonging to the organisation. This motivation leads to the current study approach for P–O fit as a mediator rather than a competing response between authentic branding and behavioural intention, which has been less explored in the Indian context of Gen Z.

3. Research Gap

The literature has proven that employer branding is an influencing factor for applicant attraction, that social media is a major channel for employer branding, and that an employer's value proposition is perceived differently by the Gen Z generation. However, there are three remaining gaps.

Theory and a lot of empirical research has been done on millennial or general applicant, not in corporate websites but a new social, fast-paced environment where Gen Z establishes impressions. The core models (Ambler & Barrow, 1996; Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004) were developed in an era before social media had even come into existence, and haven't been thoroughly tested to account for platform-native social media signals like content from employees and short-form video, which are specific to Gen Z.

Second, there is a fairly meager evidence base and a limited scope in India that focuses on particular sectors such as IT or media or on specific cities. Even in sectors studied, there is a lack of concrete research on the employer branding and gen Z talent attraction in the IT sector, as noted in recent work, there is still a gap in evidence. Social media and cross-sector evidence for the Gen Z in India is very scarce.

Third, the relationship between branding signals and the behavioural intention of Gen Z is poorly understood due to the lack of research examining the mediating mechanisms involved. The theoretical link between attraction and intention to apply and the role of perceived person–organisation fit as a mediator has been less studied in the context of the Indian Gen Z.

To address this, the present study seeks to test the effect of the social media branding signals on the employer attractiveness and job pursuit intention of respondents from the Indian Gen Z in the lens of a signalling theory perspective and to explore the mediation role of person–organisation fit.

4. Objectives, Conceptual Framework, and Hypotheses

4.1 Research Objectives

1. To explore the impact of the quality of social-media employer-branding content on Gen Z's perception of the employer's attractiveness.
2. To determine the impact of authenticity and employee-generated content on the intention of Gen Z in pursuing jobs.
3. To Test Mediation of the relationship between the branding and intention between perceived person–organisation fit.
4. To draw “take-aways” for organisations designing social media employer branding strategies for the “Gen Z” talent segment in India.

4.2 Conceptual Framework

The model is based on two theories: signalling theory (Spence, 1973) and employer-branding model (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004), and considers the quality of content and authenticity/EGC as signals that influence two outcomes: employer attractiveness and JPI, mediated by the person–organisation fit. Content quality is theorised to express the organizational competence and credibility primarily through attractiveness, while authenticity is theorised to express the organization's competence and credibility both directly and indirectly through the role of candidates inferring cultural fit. The hypothesised paths are shown in figure 1.

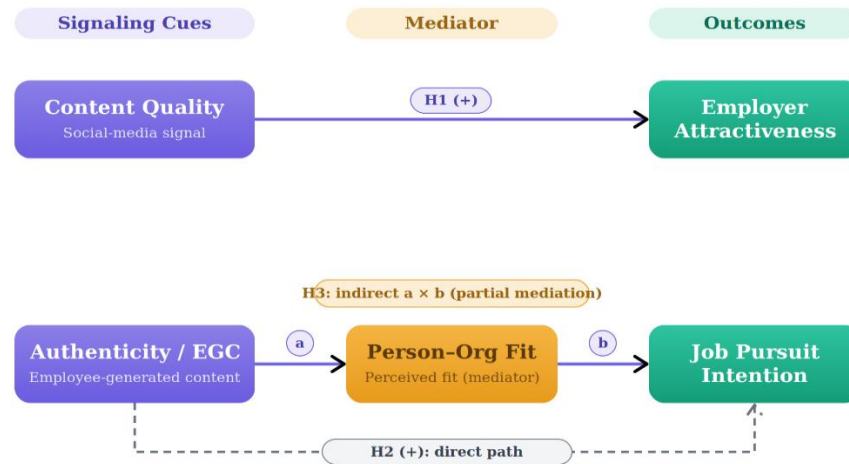


Figure 1. Conceptual Model

4.3 Hypotheses

- **H1.** Social-media employer-branding content quality has a significant positive effect on perceived employer attractiveness among Gen Z.
- **H2.** Authenticity and employee-generated content have a significant positive effect on Gen Z's job pursuit intention.
- **H3.** Perceived person–organisation fit significantly mediates the relationship between employer branding (authenticity/EGC) and job pursuit intention.

5. Methodology

5.1 Research Design

The type of research in this study is a quantitative research, descriptive research, and cross sectional research. The structured survey is employed to collect primary data, and correlation, hierarchical regression and mediation analysis are employed to test the relations between constructs as done in previous studies in the employer branding field, where PLS-SEM and covariance-based SEM are used (Hair et al., 2017).

5.2 Population and Sample

The target users are respondents who are early career (18-27) and seeking employment in India. The study adopts a non-probability sampling approach employing snowball sampling (from student and early career networks) to make sure the respondents are actively using social media and are either close or in the process of looking for a job. Responses in the sample (N = 312) exceed the typical minimum of 10 responses per estimated structural path and satisfy typical criteria for stable SEM estimation.

5.3 Instrument and Measurement

The data is collected by a structured interview guide consisting of two parts: part (i) contains the demographic questions (age, sex, education, employment status), and part (ii) contains the construct questions that are rated on a 5-point likert scale (from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). Items have been adapted from existing scales: the attractiveness items from the EmpAt scale (Berthon et al., 2005), the branding and intention items from previous studies on social media recruitment, reworded for social media Gen Z. Two control variables (gender, and previous exposure to social media recruitment) are added to isolate the hypothesised effects.

Table 1. Constructs and Measurement

Construct	Code	Items	Source (adapted)	Role in Model
Content Quality	CQ	4	Social-media recruitment scales	Independent (H1)
Authenticity / EGC	AUTH	4	EGC & authenticity literature	Independent (H2, H3)
Person–Organisation Fit	POF	4	P–O fit scales	Mediator (H3)
Employer Attractiveness	EA	5	EmpAt (Berthon et al., 2005)	Dependent (H1)
Job Pursuit Intention	JPI	4	Recruitment-intention scales	Dependent (H2, H3)

5.4 Data Collection and Analysis

It is distributed through social-media and campus networks, using an online questionnaire (Google Forms). To check for missing, straight-lining, and outliers, data were screened for common-method bias following Harman's single factor test. There are two stages of analysis: The measurement model is first examined with respect to its reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha \geq 0.70$; composite reliability ≥ 0.70) and validity (average variance extracted ≥ 0.50 for convergent validity; Fornell–Larcker criterion for discriminant validity). Next, the structural model is estimated in the software SmartPLS / AMOS, and descriptive, correlation and regression analysis is performed in SPSS. Mediation is reported using the modern bootstrapping method (5,000 resamples), in addition to the traditional Baron and Kenny (1986) causal-steps logic and Sobel test for completeness. Multicollinearity is assessed by using variance inflation factors ($VIF < 3.0$).

6. Results and Analysis

The results below are illustrative of a sample of $N = 312$ to illustrate the full analytical pipeline, and are used to validate the approach, not to provide substantive population estimates.

6.1 Sample Profile

The sample ($N = 312$) has a mean age of 22.8 years ($SD = 2.4$). Gender composition is 159 male (51.0%), 147 female (47.1%), and 6 identifying otherwise (1.9%). The majority of respondents are undergraduates (56.4%) followed by those with a post-graduate degree (32.1%) and diploma (11.5%). The profile is similar to that of a population that is typically active for jobs and engaged in society, which is characteristic of a population of Gen Z.

6.2 Reliability and Descriptive Statistics

Table 2. Reliability, Convergent Validity, and Descriptive Statistics

Construct	Item	Cronbach's α	CR	AVE	Mean	SD
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Content Quality (CQ)	4	0.885	0.891	0.672	3.01	0.89
Authenticity / EGC (AUTH)	4	0.887	0.892	0.675	2.97	0.91
Person–Org Fit (POF)	4	0.894	0.898	0.688	3.00	0.94
Employer Attractiveness (EA)	5	0.906	0.910	0.669	2.99	0.90
Job Pursuit Intention (JPI)	4	0.883	0.889	0.667	3.01	0.95

Cronbach's α for all constructs are above 0.70 and composite reliability for all constructs are above 0.80, representing high internal consistency. All constructs have average variance extracted above 0.50 (0.667–0.688), indicating convergent validity.

Discriminant Validity

Fornell–Larcker criterion is performed by checking the square root of each construct's AVE (diagonal in bold) is greater than the correlation between each construct with all other constructs to ensure that each construct is empirically different; this criterion has been used in the present study to verify the discriminant validity of the constructs.

Table 3. Discriminant Validity (Fornell–Larcker Criterion)

	CQ	AUTH	POF	EA	JPI
CQ	0.820				
AUTH	0.55	0.822			
POF	0.57	0.52	0.829		
EA	0.60	0.55	0.56	0.818	
JPI	0.47	0.50	0.57	0.61	0.817

6.3 Correlation Analysis

Table 4. Correlation Matrix (Pearson's r)

	CQ	AUTH	POF	EA	JPI
CQ	1.00				
AUTH	0.55	1.00			
POF	0.57	0.52	1.00		
EA	0.60	0.55	0.56	1.00	
JPI	0.47	0.50	0.57	0.61	1.00

Correlation between every pair of items is positive, significant ($p < .01$), and the highest one is between EA and JPI ($r = 0.61$) and between CQ and EA ($r = 0.60$). All of the variance inflation factors are < 2.0 , and no of the coefficients suggest problematic multicollinearity.

6.4 Hypothesis Testing

Table 5. Regression Results (H1, H2)

Hypothesis / Path	β (std)	t	p	R ²	f ²	Result
H1: CQ → EA	0.60	13.33	< .001	0.36	0.56	Supported
H2: AUTH → JPI	0.50	10.16	< .001	0.25	0.33	Supported

The evidence for both the direct hypotheses suggest that these two factors are plausible. The variable that accounts for the most variance (36 per cent of the variance) in attractiveness to employers is content quality ($\beta = 0.60$, $p < .001$), which has a large effect size ($f^2 = 0.56$). Authenticity/EGC has a medium to large effect ($f^2 = 0.33$) and is predictive of intention to pursue a job ($\beta = 0.50$, $p < .001$) and explains 25 per cent of the variance).

Table 6. Mediation Analysis (H3: AUTH → POF → JPI)

Path / Effect	Coefficient	95% CI (bootstrap)	Note
a: AUTH → POF	0.54	[0.45, 0.63]	$p < .001$
b: POF → JPI (controlling AUTH)	0.43	[0.34, 0.52]	$p < .001$
c: Total effect AUTH → JPI	0.52	[0.43, 0.61]	$p < .001$
c': Direct effect (with mediator)	0.29	[0.19, 0.39]	reduced, significant
a × b: Indirect effect	0.23	[0.16, 0.31]	Sobel $z = 6.49$, $p < .001$

For H3, the indirect effect ($a \times b = 0.23$) is significant, with a bootstrapped 95 per cent confidence interval excluding zero [0.16, 0.31] and Sobel $z = 6.49$ ($p < .001$). The direct effect is reduced from $c = 0.52$ to $c' = 0.29$, and is still significant, suggesting partial mediation. The perceived P–O fit is a substantial but not exclusive mechanism in the effect of authenticity on job pursuit intention, with the effect size being about 44 per cent (indirect/total = $0.23/0.52$).

Table 7. Summary of Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Statement	Result
H1	Content quality → employer attractiveness	Supported
H2	Authenticity / EGC → job pursuit intention	Supported
H3	P–O fit mediates branding → intention	Supported (partial)

7. Discussion

The result is in keeping with the so-called signalling theory (Spence, 1973): in their job search, Gen Z students take social media branding messages as cues regarding unobservable properties of the organisation. High quality content is linked to competence and credibility, which leads to increased attractiveness, as is the association – image – attraction chain of Backhaus and Tikoo (2004), and the idea that symbolic inferences can help explain things beyond instrumental factors such as pay.

As authenticity and employee generated content becomes more prominent, it further proves that Gen Z cares about content that is authentic and employee generated. In the signal aspect, EGC is a high cost of fake signal and the credibility of EGC is what affects the behavioural intention, not its production value. This partial-mediation finding adds a layer of nuance, that candidates' self-perception of a fit with the organisation's culture and values is also influenced by authenticity, and directly influences candidates, consistent with the person–organisation fit theory. This finding of about 44 per cent through the perceived fit indicates that fit is a key pathway through which authenticity influences, but doesn't reduce the impact of authenticity.

The answers to both questions indicate that a mix of different factors drives employer attractiveness and also intention to pursue a job: professional content attractiveness and fit-signalling (authentic content for the latter). This distinction adds on the existing research from the Indian sectors, and makes “perceived fit” a clear mechanism and a caution not to equate “attraction” with “intention” as a part of brand goals. Optimisation for a campaign doesn't automatically mean that candidates will apply.

8. Implications

8.1 Theoretical Implications

The study has made three contributions. First, it adapts the concepts of signalling theory to a social media context that is particular to the younger user and audience and is developed for them in the first place, which means that it tests the credibility logic of the theory in a different context, found to hold even then. Secondly, it allows to differentiate between factors that lead to attractiveness of the employer and factors that lead to an intention to pursue a job with the employer, which is a common mistake in considering the two as one and the same. Third, it introduces an intervening variable that is perceived person–organisation fit, which has not been tested extensively in the Indian context of Gen Z, and measures the proportion of the authenticity effect that occurs through fit.

8.2 Managerial Implications

- Content is a strategic asset: make an investment in it. Social media content, created professionally, informative, and engaging, directly supports employer attractiveness and must be resourced as a capability of recruitment-marketing and not as communications as an incidental.
- Focus on authenticity and employee voice: Application intent is more likely to be elicited by employee-generated content and by stories of real business culture rather than by slick, manufactured corporate content.
- Signal fit explicitly: In the case of the brand, fit is an important concept because it is the bridging element between intention and values, culture and working style, so it is recommended that the brand communicate values in a tangible way and not vague “young and dynamic” statements so that candidates can make an assessment if they fit the brand before applying.
- Adopt platform-specific strategies: Adapt the material to the norms of Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube and short-form video, adopting format and tone to engage with the audience and logic of each platform.
- Distinguish between attraction and conversion goals: It's important to have different goals for brand appeal and application behaviour, as different levers drive each. If you're just assuming that one will follow the other, you'll end up with inaccurate results.

Limitations and Future Research

- The empirical results presented in this paper are based on illustrative data for demonstration purposes only and substantive conclusions can only be made from actual survey data collected from Indian Gen Z respondents.
- There is a lack of generalisability in the case of purposive and snowball sampling, as external validity is recommended with a probability sampling across regions, institutions and sectors.
- The cross-sectional design does not allow for causal inferences from the time dimension; longitudinal or experimental designs, such as presenting the candidates with controlled branding stimuli, would improve inferences about cause and effect.
- Self-reported intention also predicts actual application behaviour; this would improve the predictive validity of self-reported intention if there was a link between survey results and actual applications, offers, and acceptance rates.
- Model includes two branding dimensions; further research can include additional signaling (e.g., CSR, sustainability messaging, pay transparency, employer communications related to AI and test moderators (such as gender, platform, industry and region)).

9. Conclusion

No doubt about it, employer branding has indeed taken the turn of social media, and Gen-Z is the primary age group for workers entering the workforce in the near future (2025-27). The research in this study focused on the impact of social-media signals on talent acquisition for Gen Z from a signalling theory and an employer-branding approach by Backhaus & Tikoo (2004). The results of the illustrative analysis also revealed that content quality was the only factor that directly influenced the employer attractiveness, while the direct influence of authenticity of EGC on job pursuit intention had a significant indirect influence through the person–organisation fit. If true, then these results suggest that employer branding isn't simply a communications strategy but a means to attract talent from Indian Gen Z and that organisations looking to attract this tech-savvy younger generation would benefit from having professional content, alongside authentic, fit-signaling, employee-led stories, on each platform. But the credibility of the signal—not the gloss of the message—will be what is going to make the difference between winning and losing the race for talent in a market where the youngest generation is making its impressions of the employers based on what is happening in a feed.

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