What Attracts Gen Z to a Job? A Study on Talent Acquisition Preferences

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Abstract—**Generation Z, born between 1997 and 2012, is increasingly becoming a dominant presence in the global workforce. Unlike previous generations, Gen Z has been shaped by the digital age, economic uncertainty, and rising social consciousness, all of which influence their approach to employment. This study explores the key factors that attract Gen Z to job opportunities, with the aim of identifying how their expectations differ from traditional job-seeking norms. It investigates their preferences regarding work culture, compensation, flexibility, social impact, and career development.**

Using a mixed-methods research design, the study gathers insights from surveys and interviews conducted among Gen Z individuals across various academic and professional backgrounds. The findings reveal that while salary and job security remain important, Gen Z places a higher emphasis on non-monetary factors such as mental well-being support, remote work options, inclusive and transparent workplace culture, and opportunities for continuous learning. Digital engagement, employer branding, and organizational values also play a major role in shaping their job choices. The research contributes to the field of talent management and human resource development by offering actionable recommendations for recruiters and employers. To effectively attract and retain Gen Z talent, organizations must go beyond conventional recruitment strategies and build an environment that aligns with this generation's desire for meaningful work, flexibility, and ethical leadership. By understanding what motivates Gen Z, companies can enhance their talent acquisition practices and foster long-term employee engagement in an increasingly competitive job market.

Index Terms—**Generation Z, talent acquisition, job preferences, employer branding, workplace culture, recruitment strategies, employee engagement, career development, digital workforce, organizational values**

I. INTRODUCTION

In today's dynamic employment landscape, organizations are witnessing a generational shift as Generation Z—individuals born between 1997 and 2012—begins to make up a significant portion of the global workforce. Unlike previous generations, Gen Z has grown up in a highly digitized, diverse, and socially conscious environment, shaping their worldviews, communication styles, and career expectations in fundamentally new ways. As this cohort increasingly enters the labour market, businesses, recruiters, and human resource professionals face both the challenge and opportunity of understanding what truly attracts Gen Z to a job.

Unlike Millennials, who were defined by adaptability and collaboration, Gen Z tends to be more pragmatic, independent, and entrepreneurial in their approach to work. They place a strong emphasis on purpose, authenticity, and balance. Technologically fluent and globally aware, they value transparency in employer practices, seek meaningful work, and are highly selective about the organizations they choose to associate with. As such, traditional recruitment models—centered primarily around salary, job title, or location—are no longer sufficient to draw in top Gen Z talent.

This study aims to explore the core preferences of Generation Z in the context of talent acquisition and recruitment. It investigates the various factors that influence their job choices, including organizational values, compensation packages, work-life balance, remote work opportunities, digital engagement, social responsibility, and growth potential. With the rise of flexible work environments, digital hiring platforms, and employer branding, it has become increasingly important to tailor talent acquisition strategies to the expectations of this new generation.

Moreover, Gen Z's expectations reflect a broader shift in the employment value proposition. They prioritize mental health, inclusivity, learning and development, and corporate ethics—often evaluating potential employers based on their environmental, social, and

governance (ESG) practices. With the influence of social media and online company reviews, employer reputation has become more visible than ever, adding pressure on organizations to present a compelling, value-driven narrative.

Understanding these evolving preferences is essential not only for recruiting but also for retaining Gen Z employees in the long run. Failing to align with their expectations can result in high turnover rates, lower engagement, and difficulty in building a resilient, future-ready workforce. On the other hand, organizations that actively adapt and listen to the voices of this generation are more likely to foster innovation, loyalty, and a positive workplace culture.

This research therefore seeks to answer a central question: *What factors most influence Generation Z's decision when choosing a job, and how can employers align their talent acquisition strategies accordingly?* Through quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews with Gen Z individuals, this study provides data-driven insights to help organizations better attract, engage, and retain this emerging workforce.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a quantitative research methodology to examine the job preferences and talent acquisition expectations of Generation Z. The primary objective is to identify and analyze the key factors that influence Gen Z's decision-making when selecting job opportunities. A structured survey was used as the sole data collection tool, ensuring standardized and consistent responses from a large number of participants.

1. Research Design

The study follows a descriptive research design, suitable for gathering measurable data on trends, preferences, and attitudes. This design allows the researcher to quantify Gen Z's priorities in job selection and assess the relative importance of various job-related factors such as salary, work-life balance, employer reputation, and growth opportunities.

2. Population and Sampling

The target population for this research includes individuals belonging to Generation Z (aged 18–27 years) who are either students preparing to enter the job market or early-career professionals. A non-probability purposive sampling technique was used, selecting participants based on their age group and

relevance to the study. A total of 91 valid responses were collected through the online survey.

3. Data Collection Method

Data was collected through a Google Form questionnaire, which was distributed via email, messaging platforms, and social media. The questionnaire was self-administered and included a combination of multiple-choice questions, Likert-scale items, and ranking questions. These items were designed to assess preferences related to compensation, career development, work environment, flexibility, technology use, and organizational values.

4. Data Analysis

The collected data was exported from Google Forms to Microsoft Excel/Google Sheets for cleaning and basic processing. It was then analysed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations. These analyses helped identify patterns and trends in Gen Z's job preferences. Graphical tools such as bar charts and pie charts were used to visually represent the findings.

5. Validity and Reliability

To ensure content validity, the questionnaire was developed based on previous literature and aligned with the research objectives. A pilot test was conducted with a small group of respondents to check the clarity, relevance, and flow of the questions. Adjustments were made based on the feedback received. Reliability was ensured through consistent question formatting and unbiased data collection via the same survey tool for all participants.

6. Ethical Considerations

All participants were informed about the purpose of the research through a brief introduction at the beginning of the Google Form. Informed consent was obtained, and participation was entirely voluntary. No personally identifiable information was collected, ensuring the anonymity and confidentiality of respondents. The data collected was used solely for academic research purposes.

III. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The primary goal of this research is to examine the factors that attract Generation Z to job opportunities and to better understand their expectations from potential employers. The specific objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To identify the core motivators influencing Gen Z's job choices, including factors such as salary expectations, career advancement opportunities, work-life balance, and the desire for roles that align with their lifestyle and personal ambitions.
2. To explore the impact of personal values—such as authenticity, social awareness, and environmental consciousness—on Gen Z's career decisions and their perception of organizational culture and employer branding.
3. To evaluate the role of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and sustainability initiatives in shaping Gen Z's employment preferences, including interest in companies that demonstrate ethical labour practices, green operations, and active community engagement.

Data analysis & Interpretation
• Demographic profile of respondents
Understanding the demographic composition of the respondents is essential to ensure the reliability and representativeness of the data collected. The demographic section provides insights into the background characteristics of the participants who shared their views on job preferences and talent acquisition strategies relevant to Generation Z.

Gender
A total of 91 respondents participated in the survey. The gender distribution was almost evenly split, with 50.5% identifying as male and 49.5% identifying as female. No participants selected the non-binary option.
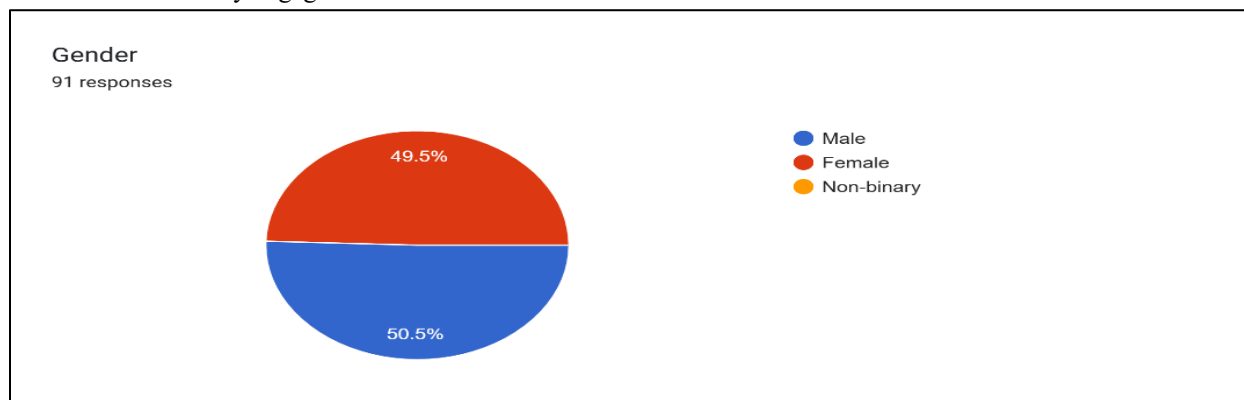
This balanced gender representation provides a fair and inclusive foundation for the analysis of responses. It allows for a more diverse understanding of Generation Z's job preferences, ensuring that insights are not skewed by a gender imbalance.

Respondents were also asked to indicate their highest level of education completed. As shown in the chart below, 48.4% had completed postgraduate education, followed closely by 47.3% who were undergraduates. The remaining respondents had completed high school, diploma courses, or were recent graduates.

Highest Level of Education Completed
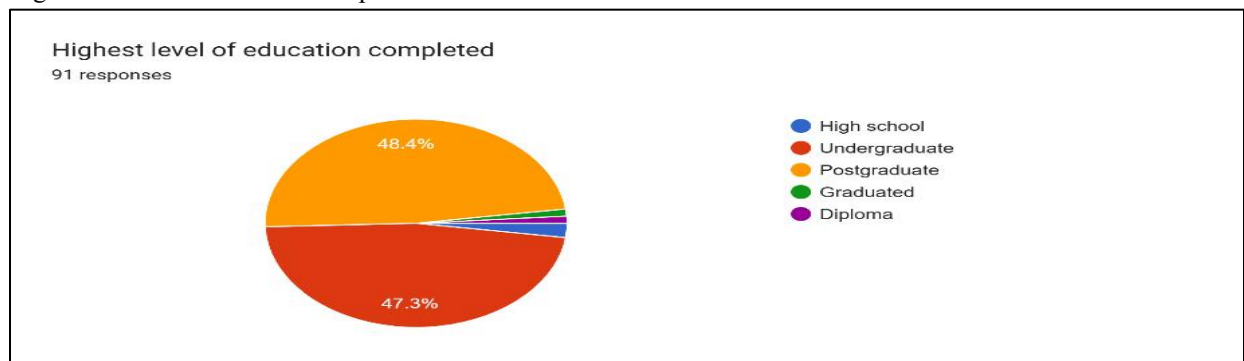
This indicates that the majority of participants are either pursuing or have recently completed higher education, making them highly relevant to the topic of early-career job preferences. Their feedback provides valuable insights into what educated Gen Z job seekers expect from potential employers in terms of recruitment practices and work environments.

Current Employment Status

The employment status of participants was also considered to contextualize their responses. As shown in the chart, 45.1% of respondents were students, while 41.8% were currently employed. 11% were unemployed, and 2.2% identified as freelancers or gig workers.
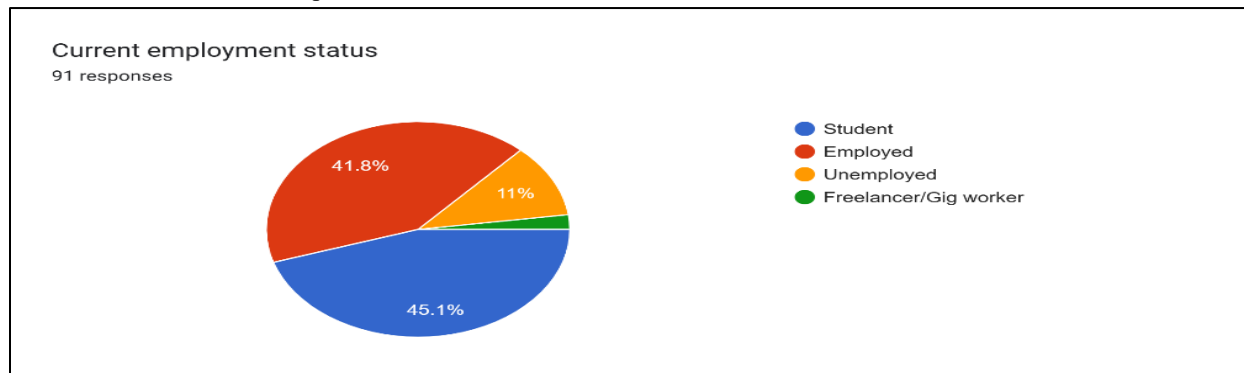

These figures show a diverse respondent base, with a majority either studying or already working. This adds value to the study by capturing a blend of expectations from those preparing to enter the job market and those with early job experiences.

- To gain deeper insight into the preferences of Generation Z regarding job selection, participants were asked to rate the importance of various job-related factors. Respondents evaluated each factor based on its perceived importance when choosing a job.

Competitive Salary

One of the key factors evaluated in this study was the importance of a competitive salary when choosing a job. Participants were asked to rate how significant salary is in influencing their job decisions.
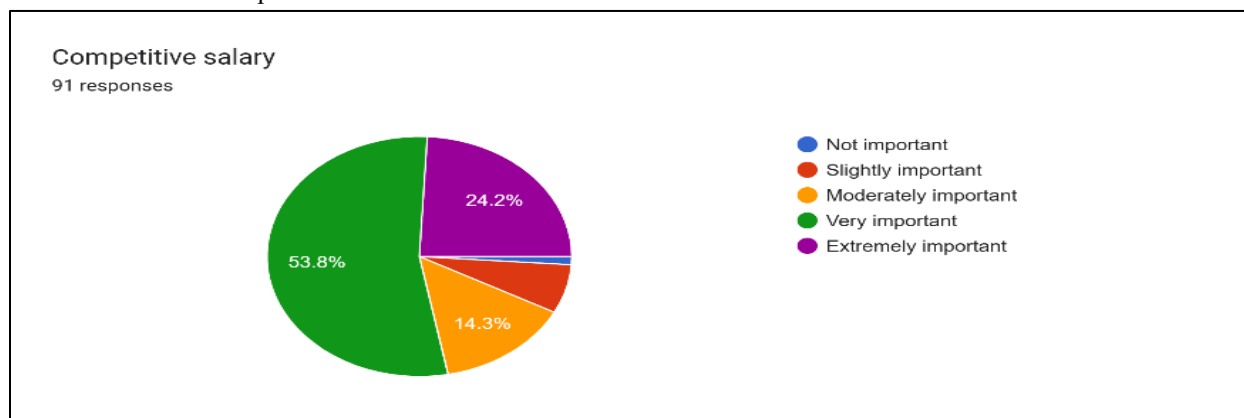

As shown above, the majority of respondents placed high value on salary. Specifically, 53.8% rated it as "Very Important", and 24.2% considered it "Extremely Important". Only a small portion—14.3% rated it as "Moderately Important", and even fewer (around 7.7%) rated it as slightly important or not important.

This finding confirms that competitive compensation remains a fundamental priority for Generation Z. However, it also supports earlier literature suggesting that while salary is essential, it functions more as a baseline expectation rather than a unique incentive (Schroth, 2019). Gen Z expects fair pay but often looks beyond monetary rewards when assessing job opportunities, especially when other values such as growth, flexibility, or culture are met.

Remote or Hybrid Work Options

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the adoption of flexible work models, making remote and hybrid options a key consideration for job seekers—especially among digital-native generations like Gen Z. This section explores how important such flexibility is to respondents when evaluating job offers.
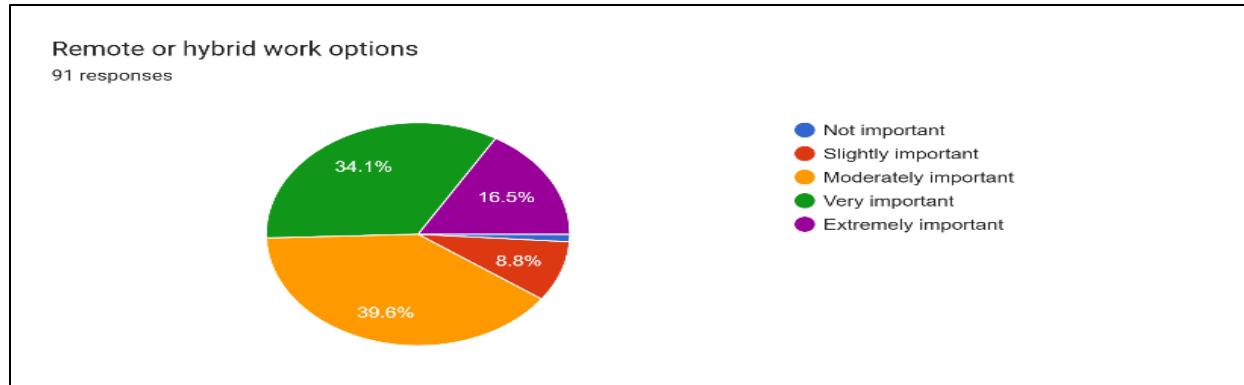
As shown in the above chart, 39.6% of respondents rated remote or hybrid work options as "Moderately Important", while 34.1% considered them "Very Important", and 16.5% marked them as "Extremely Important". Only a small segment—8.8%—found it "Slightly Important", and virtually none selected "Not Important."

These results suggest that flexibility in work arrangements is a growing priority for Generation Z. While it may not outrank factors like salary or growth opportunities, the significant proportion of respondents rating it as at least "Moderately Important" indicates that offering flexible work models can positively influence employer attractiveness. This finding is in line with current workplace trends that value autonomy, digital accessibility, and work-life integration.

Work-life Balance & flexible working hours
In recent years, work-life balance has emerged as a crucial criterion for job seekers, particularly among Gen Z, who value mental well-being, autonomy, and time for personal development. To assess this trend, respondents were asked to rate the importance of work-life balance and flexible working hours when choosing a job.
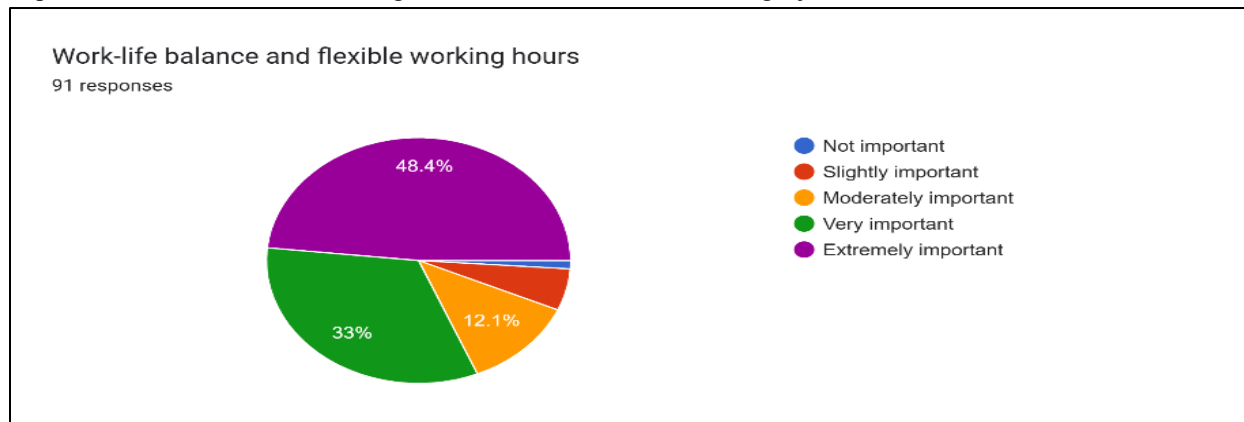

According to the results, 48.4% of respondents rated this factor as "Extremely Important", while 33% rated it as "Very Important." Together, over 81% of the participants consider work-life balance and flexibility highly significant. An additional 12.1% rated it as "Moderately Important," with only a small percentage rating it slightly or not important.

These results strongly support the conclusion that Gen Z job seekers prioritize mental well-being and flexible scheduling, often placing it on par with or even above traditional motivators like salary. The high emphasis on flexibility reflects a shift in generational mindset—where job satisfaction is closely tied to the ability to maintain a healthy equilibrium between professional and personal life.

Preference for Socially Responsible Companies
Generation Z is known for being values-driven, often aligning their career choices with organizations that reflect their social and ethical beliefs. This part of the study examined how important social responsibility is in influencing their job decisions.

I prefer to work for companies that are socially responsible
91 responses
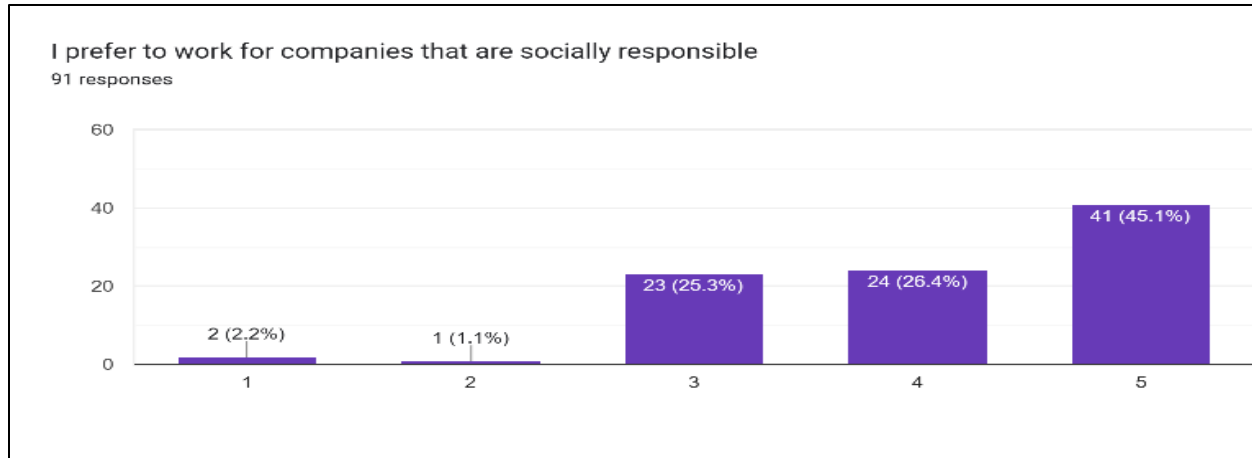
As seen in Figure, 45.1% of respondents gave the highest possible rating (5), indicating a strong preference to work for companies that are socially responsible. An additional 26.4% rated it a 4, and 25.3% rated it a 3, suggesting that for nearly all respondents, this factor carries at least moderate importance. Only 3 respondents (a combined 3.3%) gave it a 1 or 2, showing minimal concern.

These findings highlight that corporate social responsibility (CSR) is not just a branding effort but a decisive factor for Gen Z job seekers. They are increasingly drawn to employers who are ethically grounded, environmentally conscious, and active in community engagement. For recruiters, this reinforces the importance of clearly communicating a company's social values and sustainable practices during the hiring process.

Preference for Companies That Promote Diversity and Inclusion
Diversity and inclusion (D&I) have become defining principles for today's workplaces, and for Generation Z, they play a significant role in shaping perceptions of employer appeal. This section evaluates Gen Z's likelihood of joining companies that actively promote diversity and inclusion.

I'm more likely to join a company that promotes diversity and inclusion
91 responses
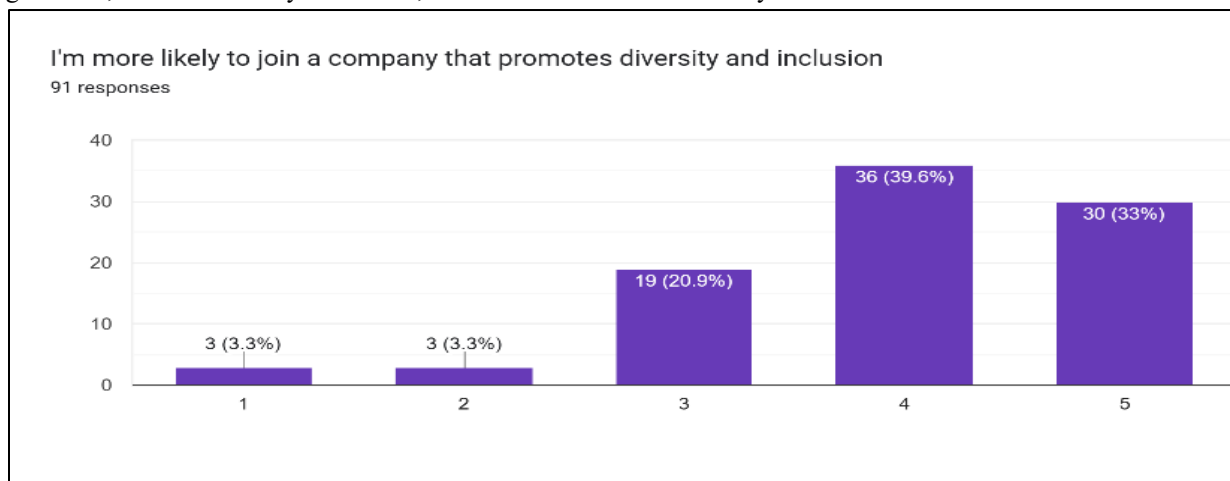
As shown above, 39.6% of respondents selected a rating of 4, and 33% chose the highest rating of 5, indicating that over 72% of participants place high importance on D&I practices. 20.9% rated it a 3, showing moderate agreement. Only a small percentage—6.6% combined—rated it as 1 or 2, suggesting low importance.

These results confirm that diversity and inclusion are key components of employer branding for Gen Z. They prefer organizations that foster inclusive environments, represent varied identities, and ensure equal opportunities across demographics. Companies that invest in diversity initiatives and communicate them transparently are likely to have a stronger appeal to Gen Z candidates.

Ethical Reputation and Employer Transparency

Ethical behaviour and transparency are increasingly influencing job seekers' decisions, especially among younger generations who value integrity and accountability in corporate culture. To evaluate this, respondents were asked whether they research a company's ethics and behaviour before applying for a job.
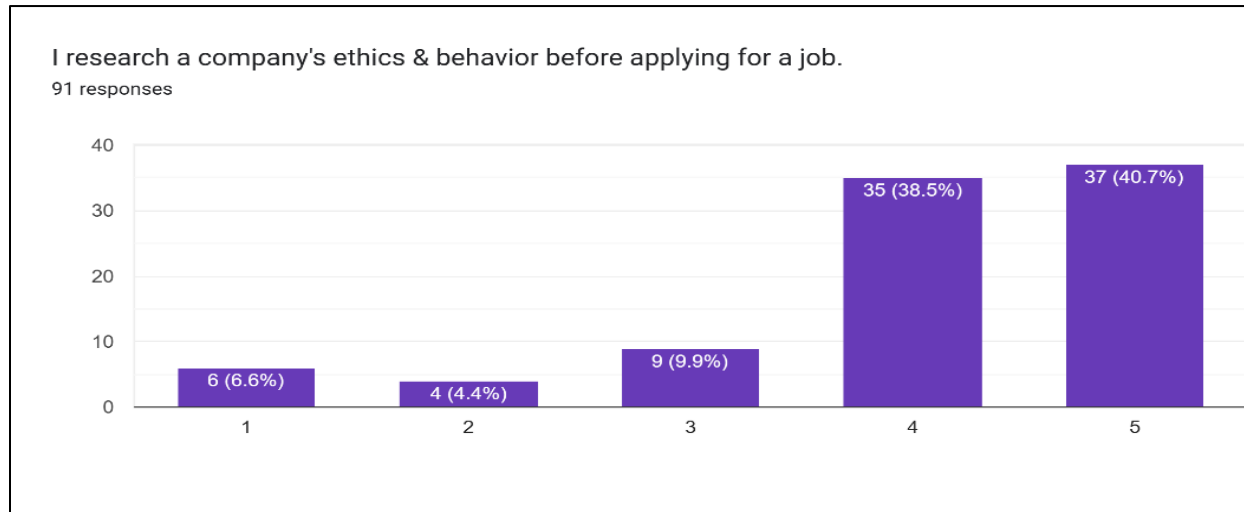

According to the results, 40.7% of participants gave the highest rating (5) and 38.5% gave a 4, indicating that nearly 80% of Gen Z respondents actively investigate a company's ethical standing before considering employment. A smaller proportion rated this as less important—9.9% selected 3, and only 11% combined selected 1 or 2.

These findings highlight a values-based shift in job-seeking behaviour, where ethical transparency, treatment of employees, and organizational behaviour play a direct role in attracting or deterring candidates. For Gen Z, a company's reputation goes beyond profitability—it must demonstrate fair labour practices, honesty, social accountability, and internal consistency.

Preference for Authentic Communication Over Brand Image

In the age of social media and curated employer branding, Generation Z appears to be prioritizing genuine, transparent communication from companies over polished corporate images. This part of the study evaluates whether authenticity in employer communication holds more value than the company's external image.
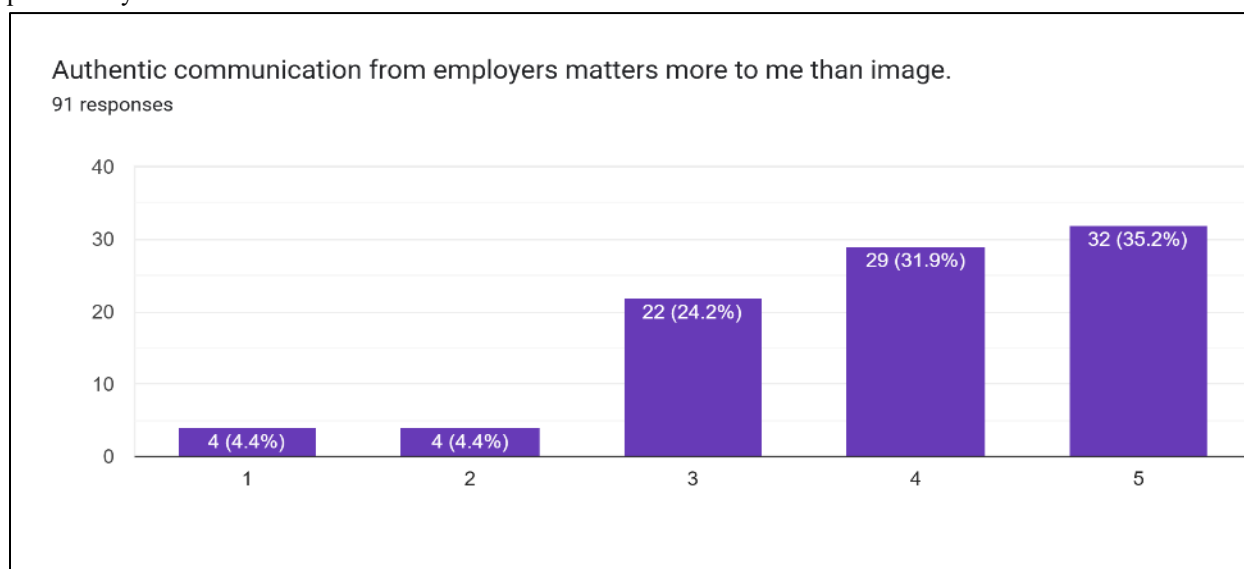
As shown above, 35.2% of respondents gave the highest rating (5) and 31.9% rated it a 4, indicating that over two-thirds of Gen Z respondents strongly value authentic communication. Additionally, 24.2% rated it a 3, suggesting moderate importance. Only 8.8% combined rated it at levels 1 or 2.

These findings confirm that Gen Z prefers companies that speak with honesty, clarity, and authenticity, rather than hiding behind a polished corporate image. They are more likely to engage with employers who are upfront about values, expectations, and workplace realities—an important signal for recruiters to focus on real, human-centered communication during employer branding and talent acquisition.

IV. SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

This study examined the preferences of Generation Z (individuals aged approximately 18–27) when choosing a job. The analysis of survey responses from 91 participants revealed several distinct trends that characterize Gen Z's priorities in employment. The following summarizes the most significant findings:

1. Demographic Insights
- Gender Distribution: The sample was nearly evenly split between male (50.5%) and female (49.5%) respondents, allowing for a gender-balanced perspective on job preferences.
- Education Levels: A combined 95.7% of participants were either undergraduates (47.3%) or postgraduates (48.4%), suggesting a well-educated respondent base with strong future employability prospects.
- Employment Status: 45.1% of respondents were students, and 41.8% were already employed. The rest were either unemployed (11%) or working as freelancers/gig workers (2.2%), indicating a mix of perspectives from both job seekers and early-career professionals.

2. Salary Expectations
- Competitive Salary remains a primary motivator, with 53.8% rating it as "Very Important" and 24.2% as "Extremely Important."
- Although Gen Z expects fair compensation, salary alone is not sufficient to secure their interest; it is seen as a baseline necessity rather than a unique benefit.

3. Work Flexibility and Location Preferences
- Remote or Hybrid Work Options were valued by a large portion of respondents:
  o 34.1% rated them "Very Important,"
  o 16.5% rated them "Extremely Important."
- Only 8.8% considered it "Slightly Important," showing that flexible work arrangements have become an expected norm, not a perk.
- This highlights Gen Z's desire for autonomy, control over work environments, and a technology-integrated work model.

4. Work-Life Balance
- 81.4% of respondents rated work-life balance and flexible working hours as either "Very" or "Extremely Important."
- This suggests that mental well-being, personal growth, and time autonomy are deeply intertwined with job satisfaction for Gen Z.
- Employers offering rigid or high-pressure environments may struggle to retain this demographic.

5. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)
- A significant 71.5% of Gen Z respondents prefer to work for socially responsible companies (26.4% rated 4, and 45.1% rated 5).
- This shows a strong alignment between personal values and professional decisions, where Gen Z prefers organizations that demonstrate ethical behaviour, sustainability, and community involvement.

6. Diversity and Inclusion (D&I)
- 72.6% of respondents are more likely to join companies that actively promote diversity and inclusion.
- Gen Z expects inclusive, safe, and equitable work environments and places high value on cultural representation and anti-discrimination practices in the workplace.

7. Ethical Reputation & Transparency
- Nearly 80% of respondents (38.5% rated 4, 40.7% rated 5) stated that they research a company's ethics and behaviour before applying.
- Gen Z is highly aware of employer reputation and prioritizes integrity, employee treatment, and ethical leadership when evaluating job opportunities.

8. Authentic Communication

- 67.1% rated "authentic communication from employers" as more important than brand image (31.9% rated 4, 35.2% rated 5).
- Gen Z is sceptical of corporate image-building and prefers organizations that communicate openly, honestly, and transparently about workplace culture, expectations, and values.

Overall Patterns:

- Gen Z prioritizes values-based employment, including flexibility, ethical alignment, personal growth, and mental well-being.
- They look beyond the pay check—seeking purposeful work in inclusive, socially responsible, and transparent environments.
- This signals a significant departure from traditional recruitment strategies focused primarily on salary and job security.

V. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study underscore a profound shift in employment expectations driven by Generation Z. While salary and job security remain foundational, this generation evaluates potential employers through a much broader lens—placing equal or greater value on intangible aspects such as work-life balance, corporate ethics, diversity, inclusion, and opportunities for growth and flexibility. The research clearly indicates that Gen Z seeks meaningful work aligned with their values, mental well-being, and lifestyle ambitions.

This generation is more informed, digitally native, and socially conscious than its predecessors. Their decisions are guided not only by compensation but also by whether organizations demonstrate authenticity, ethical behaviour, and social responsibility. The preference for remote or hybrid work models, flexible working hours, and transparent communication reflects their desire for autonomy and purpose-driven engagement.

For organizations aiming to attract and retain Gen Z talent, it is essential to move beyond traditional recruitment strategies. Building a strong employer brand based on trust, transparency, inclusivity, and purpose is now more critical than ever. Human resource practices must evolve to prioritize wellness, career development, and value-based leadership in order to resonate with this emerging workforce. By

understanding and adapting to Gen Z's preferences, companies can not only enhance their talent acquisition success but also foster a future-ready and resilient workforce.

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