THE IMPACT OF ESG PERCEPTION ON JOB CHOICE INTENTION: EVIDENCE FROM GENERATION Z UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN TAIWAN

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Abstract

In the context of global sustainability, Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) has become a crucial indicator of corporate operations and long-term competitiveness. While prior research has primarily focused on the impact of ESG on financial performance and investor behavior, relatively little attention has been given to its role in human resource management and talent attraction. As Generation Z increasingly dominates the labor market, their values and career choices warrant greater attention, particularly regarding how their perception of corporate ESG commitments influences job choice intention.

This study surveyed 300 Generation Z university students in Taiwan and developed a research framework linking ESG perception to job choice intention. Using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), the study validated the measurement and structural models. Results confirmed satisfactory reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity through the Fornell-Larcker criterion and HTMT ratio. Structural model analysis revealed that ESG perception significantly and positively influences job choice intention ($\beta = 0.498$, $p < 0.001$), with an explanatory power of $R^2 = 0.248$ and an effect size of $f^2 = 0.330$. These findings highlight ESG perception as a strong predictor of Generation Z's job-seeking behavior.

The study contributes to the literature by integrating ESG with human resource management, addressing gaps in existing research. Practically, it suggests that companies seeking to attract Generation Z talent should actively implement and communicate their ESG initiatives, particularly in environmental sustainability, social responsibility, and governance transparency. The results enrich theoretical perspectives and provide actionable implications for corporate talent strategies and sustainable management..

Keywords

ESG perception, job choice intention, Generation Z, PLS-SEM, sustainability management

1.1 Research Background

In recent years, sustainable development has become a central issue in global economic and social progress. With the increasing severity of climate change, environmental pollution, and energy crises, the United Nations introduced the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015 to guide governments and businesses worldwide toward sustainable operations. Against this international backdrop, Corporate Social

Responsibility (CSR) has gradually transformed and extended into the integrated framework of Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG). ESG is not only an assessment tool for external investors but also an important benchmark for evaluating a firm's long-term competitiveness and value creation (Eccles et al., 2014).

In the past, corporate operations were primarily driven by financial performance. However, in modern society, firms that pursue only short-term financial returns often fail to gain long-term stakeholder support. With the rise of social consciousness, stakeholders now expect businesses to demonstrate responsibility and commitment in environmental protection, social engagement, and governance transparency, rather than focusing solely on financial outcomes (Friede et al., 2015). Therefore, companies must develop clear strategies across the three ESG dimensions in order to maintain competitiveness in the marketplace.

At the same time, talent has been recognized as a critical resource for sustainable development. The labor market is increasingly dominated by Generation Z (born after 1995), who have been deeply influenced by globalization, digitalization, and sustainability awareness. Unlike previous generations, this cohort not only values traditional factors such as salary, career development, and job stability, but also places significant emphasis on whether companies assume social responsibility and implement sustainability initiatives (Nguyen et al., 2021). According to Deloitte's (2023) global survey, more than 60% of Gen Z respondents reported that they prioritize a company's commitment to sustainability and social responsibility when considering job opportunities, and some are even willing to accept lower pay in order to work for firms that align with their personal values. This demonstrates that ESG has become an important driver of job choice intentions among the younger workforce.

In Taiwan, the discourse on corporate sustainability has also attracted significant attention. Since 2023, the Financial Supervisory Commission (FSC) has mandated certain publicly listed companies to disclose sustainability reports, thereby promoting the implementation of ESG indicators in corporate management. Meanwhile, higher education institutions emphasize that young students should cultivate sustainable thinking and social responsibility. For Generation Z students who are at the intersection of academics and career development, their perceptions of ESG are likely to influence their employment decisions and reshape corporate human resource management strategies.

Nevertheless, existing research has largely focused on the impact of ESG on financial performance, investment decisions, and consumer behavior (Kotsantonis et al., 2016), while relatively little attention has been given to how ESG perceptions influence the job choice intentions of younger generations. In particular, empirical studies in Taiwan that target Gen Z and integrate ESG with human resource management remain scarce. Therefore, this study takes "ESG perception" and "job choice intention" as its core constructs, applying Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to examine the relationship between them.

The research motivations can be summarized as follows:
1. Addressing the theoretical gap: To clarify the relationship between ESG perception and job-seeking behavior, thereby extending ESG research into the fields of human resource management and talent attraction.
2. Responding to generational differences: To highlight the role of ESG as a decisive factor in job choice among Generation Z, offering insights for employer branding and recruitment strategies.
3. Meeting practical needs in Taiwan: To provide empirical evidence that informs corporate decision-making in talent recruitment and sustainable organizational development within the rapidly evolving ESG landscape.

2.1 The Concept and Development of ESG

Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) has gradually emerged since the early 21st century as a new paradigm for evaluating corporate sustainability. Its concept originated from the Principles for Responsible Investment (PRI) proposed by the United Nations in 2006, which incorporated ESG factors into investment decision-making standards, emphasizing that companies should not only pursue financial performance but also bear social and governance responsibilities (Kotsantonis et al., 2016).

In terms of the environmental dimension (E), ESG stresses that companies should take proactive actions, such as energy conservation and carbon reduction, pollution control, eco-friendly product design, and ecological preservation, to mitigate the risks of climate change (Friede et al., 2015). The social dimension (S) covers employee rights protection, workplace safety, diversity and inclusion policies,

customer rights, and community engagement. Studies indicate that strong corporate social responsibility practices enhance employees' organizational identification, thereby improving job involvement and performance (Glavas, 2016; Glavas & Piderit, 2009). The governance dimension (G) concerns corporate governance structures, transparency of information, board independence, and anti-corruption mechanisms (Eccles et al., 2014).

The widespread adoption of ESG has also been driven by capital markets. Friede et al. (2015), through a meta-analysis of over 2,000 empirical studies, confirmed a significant positive relationship between ESG performance and corporate financial performance. This finding suggests that ESG is not merely an ethical or social obligation but is also closely linked to corporate value creation. Furthermore, the KPMG (2022) survey reported that 96% of the world's largest 250 companies have published sustainability reports, highlighting that ESG disclosure has become a standardized practice in corporate operations.

2.2 Theoretical Foundations and Determinants of Job Choice Intention

Job choice intention refers to an individual's psychological tendency to prefer a particular organization when faced with multiple employment options (Vroom, 1964). Within job search research, job choice intention is often regarded as an important antecedent of actual employment behavior (Chapman et al., 2005).

Vroom's (1964) Expectancy Theory emphasizes that an individual's decision to pursue a specific job depends on the perceived connection between effort, performance, and rewards. If applicants believe an organization can provide outcomes that align with their expectations and values, they are more likely to display stronger job choice intentions. Highhouse et al. (2003) further developed the Organizational Attraction Scale, incorporating factors such as compensation, benefits, development opportunities, and organizational reputation, and demonstrated that organizational attractiveness is closely associated with job choice intention.

Moreover, Chapman et al. (2005) conducted a meta-analysis showing that salary, promotion opportunities, job stability, organizational culture, and value congruence are significant predictors of job choice intention. Similarly, Turban and Greening (1997) found that a firm's social performance image positively influences applicants' perceptions of organizational attractiveness, which subsequently impacts job choice. These studies have gradually expanded the research framework of job choice intention to include non-financial factors, laying the foundation for linking ESG with talent management.

2.3 Generation Z Values and Career Behaviors

Generation Z (born after 1995) is gradually becoming the dominant cohort in the labor market. Their upbringing has been shaped by the Internet, social media, and globalization, leading to distinct values and career expectations compared to previous generations. Research has shown that Gen Z pays particular attention to environmental sustainability, social justice, and value congruence, viewing work not only as a source of income but also as a means of self-fulfillment and social contribution (Nguyen et al., 2021).

The Deloitte (2023) global survey reported that more than 60% of Gen Z respondents consider whether companies have concrete ESG strategies during their job search, with some even willing to accept lower salaries in order to work for organizations committed to sustainability. Likewise, the KPMG (2022) report revealed that an increasing number of young job seekers review corporate sustainability reports or ESG ratings prior to submitting applications, using them as a criterion for evaluating potential employers.

Compared to previous generations, Gen Z exhibits a stronger need for value congruence (Aguinis & Glavas, 2019). When organizations demonstrate sustainability and social responsibility, Gen Z is more likely to develop identification and a sense of belonging, thereby strengthening their job choice intentions. Conversely, when companies lack social responsibility or are involved in controversies, Gen Z tends to avoid them, reflecting their heightened sensitivity toward ESG.

2.4 Research on ESG Perception and Job Choice Intention

Prior literature has indicated a positive relationship between corporate social responsibility (CSR) and organizational attractiveness, which in turn affects job seekers' employment decisions (Turban & Greening, 1997; Greening & Turban, 2000). Within the ESG framework, scholars have further conceptualized ESG as an integral component of employer branding, asserting that it significantly enhances an organization's competitiveness in the talent market (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004).

Fatma et al. (2020) argued that companies can build trust through CSR, which subsequently enhances brand equity and reputation, indirectly contributing to talent attraction. Similarly, Glavas (2016), in an integrative review, emphasized that CSR practices not only improve employee attitudes but also strengthen organizational attractiveness and competitive advantage.

Recent surveys have shown that Gen Z's emphasis on ESG performance extends beyond career choice alone. They prefer organizations that embody personal values and social responsibility (Deloitte, 2023; KPMG, 2022). This suggests that companies aiming to attract younger talent must place ESG at the core of their recruitment strategies and employer communications.

3.1 Research Framework and Hypothesis

This study aims to examine the impact of Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) perception on job choice intention. As an extension of the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), ESG has increasingly drawn attention from Generation Z job seekers and may influence their employment decisions (Fatma et al., 2020). On the other hand, job choice intention reflects an individual's perception of organizational attractiveness and employment inclination, serving as an important variable for assessing an organization's ability to attract talent (Highhouse et al., 2003).

H1: ESG perception has a significant positive effect on job choice intention.
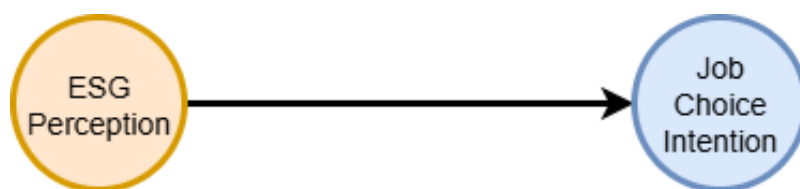

Figure 3.1 Research Framework

3.2 Research Design and Questionnaire Development

This study adopted a quantitative research approach and employed a survey method to collect empirical data. The research participants were graduating students from universities in Taiwan (Generation Z job seekers). As this group is at the early stage of their career entry, exploring the relationship between ESG perception and job choice intention holds significant research value.

The questionnaire was designed in three parts:
1. Demographic Information: Including gender, age, academic major, and whether the respondent has prior job-seeking experience.
2. ESG Perception Scale: Adapted from Glavas and Piderit (2009) and Fatma et al. (2020), covering three dimensions—environmental responsibility, social responsibility, and corporate governance. The scale consisted of 12 items, measured on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree).
3. Job Choice Intention Scale: Adapted from the "Organizational Attraction Scale" by Highhouse et al. (2003), including job preference, organizational attractiveness, and career fit. The scale comprised 9 items, measured on a five-point Likert scale.

3.3 Data Collection and Analysis Methods

The data collection was scheduled between July and August 2025. Convenience sampling was conducted through campus distribution and online social platforms. After excluding incomplete or invalid responses, the target was to obtain 200–250 valid samples, which meets the requirements for Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) analysis.

The data analysis was performed using SmartPLS 4.1.1.2, and the main steps were as follows:
1. Descriptive Statistics: Presenting the distribution of respondents' demographic characteristics.
2. Measurement Model Evaluation:
3.

    [1] Reliability: Assessed by Cronbach's α and Composite Reliability (CR), with values greater than 0.7 considered acceptable.

    [2] Convergent Validity: Evaluated by the Average Variance Extracted (AVE), with values greater than 0.5 considered acceptable.

    [3] Discriminant Validity: Tested using the Fornell-Larcker criterion and the heterotrait–monotrait ratio (HTMT).

4.   Structural Model Evaluation:

[1] Path Coefficients and Significance: Examined by t-values and p-values.
[2] Coefficient of Determination (R²): To assess explanatory power.
[3] Predictive Relevance (Q²) and Model Fit (SRMR): To evaluate model adequacy.

Through this analysis, the study aims to provide a clear examination of whether ESG perception directly influences the job choice intention of Generation Z.

4.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents
A total of 300 valid samples were collected in this study, primarily from Generation Z university students in Taiwan. Among the respondents, female students accounted for 54.0% (n = 162), while male students accounted for 46.0% (n = 138), indicating a relatively balanced gender distribution, with a slightly higher proportion of females.

In terms of age distribution, respondents ranged from 20 to 25 years old, with an average age of 22.48 years (SD = 1.64). The majority were 23 years old (19.0%) and 22 years old (18.0%), followed by 24 years old (18.3%) and 20 years old (16.0%), suggesting that the sample was concentrated among students who were about to graduate or had recently graduated.

Regarding academic majors, most respondents came from business administration–related fields (34.0%, n = 102), followed by finance and banking (23.0%, n = 69), information management (16.3%, n = 49), and hospitality management (15.0%, n = 45). Additionally, 11.7% (n = 35) of respondents were from other disciplines.

As for internship experience, 62.3% (n = 187) of respondents reported having prior internship or part-time work experience, whereas 37.7% (n = 113) indicated they had no such experience. Overall, these findings suggest that the majority of Generation Z students in the sample had already gained a certain level of exposure to the workplace.

Table 4-1 Demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 300)

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	138	46
	Female	162	54
Age	20 years	48	16
	21 years	27	9
	22 years	54	18
	23 years	57	19
	24 years	55	18.3
	25 years	59	19.7
Academic Major	Business Administration	102	34
	Finance and Banking	69	23
	Information Management	49	16.3
	Hospitality Management	45	15
	Others	35	11.7
Internship Exp.	Yes	187	62.3
	No	113	37.7

4.2 Measurement Model Analysis

4.2.1 Outer Loadings
All item outer loadings met the recommended threshold of 0.70, with the exception of ESG_S4 (0.677), which still falls within the acceptable range (Hair et al., 2019). This indicates that all measurement items demonstrated satisfactory explanatory power for their respective constructs.

Table 4-2Outer Loadings of Measurement Items

Construct	Item	Outer Loading
ESG Perception	ESG_E1	0.732
	ESG_E2	0.754
	ESG_E3	0.77
	ESG_E4	0.745
	ESG_S1	0.763
	ESG_S2	0.781
	ESG_S3	0.783
	ESG_S4	0.677
	ESG_G1	0.712
	ESG_G2	0.735
	ESG_G3	0.759
	ESG_G4	0.774
Job Choice Intention	JCI1	0.713
	JCI2	0.754
	JCI3	0.768
	JCI4	0.802
	JCI5	0.821
	JCI6	0.795
	JCI7	0.707
	JCI8	0.739
	JCI9	0.764

4.2.2 Reliability and Convergent Validity

The Cronbach's α, rho_A, and Composite Reliability (CR) values of both constructs exceeded 0.90, indicating high internal consistency. The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values were greater than the 0.50 threshold, confirming satisfactory convergent validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Table 4-3 Construct Reliability and Convergent Validity

Construct	Cronbach's α	rho_A	Composite Reliability (CR)	AVE
ESG Perception	0.928	0.931	0.938	0.558
Job Choice Intention	0.919	0.92	0.933	0.603

4.2.3 Discriminant Validity

1. Fornell-Larcker Criterion: The square root of AVE for each construct was greater than its correlations with other constructs, indicating adequate discriminant validity.
2. HTMT Ratio: The HTMT value between ESG perception and job choice intention was 0.532, below the recommended threshold of 0.85, further confirming good discriminant validity.

Table 4-4 Fornell-Larcker Discriminant Validity Test

Construct	ESG Perception	Job Choice Intention
ESG Perception	0.747	0.498
Job Choice Intention	0.498	0.777

Table 4-5 HTMT Discriminant Validity Test

Construct Pair	HTMT Value	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper
ESG Perception ↔ Job Choice Intention	0.532	0.434	0.621

4.3 Structural Model Analysis

4.3.1 Explanatory Power
The model demonstrated that ESG perception explained 24.8% ($R^2 = 0.248$; Adjusted $R^2 = 0.245$) of the variance in job choice intention, indicating a moderate level of explanatory power (Cohen, 1988).

Table 4-6 R^2 and Adjusted R^2

Endogenous Construct	R^2	Adjusted R^2
Job Choice Intention	0.248	0.245

4.3.2 Path Coefficients and Effect Size
The PLS-SEM results showed that ESG perception had a significant positive effect on job choice intention ($\beta = 0.498$, $t = 11.484$, $p < 0.001$). The effect size ($f^2 = 0.330$) was classified as medium-to-large, supporting the hypothesis.

Table 4-7 Path Coefficients and Effect Size

Path	β (Original)	β (Mean)	Std. Dev.	t-value	p-value	f^2
ESG Perception → Job Choice Intention	0.498	0.500	0.043	11.484	<0.001	0.330

4.3.3 Model Fit
The model fit indices indicated good overall model fit. Both SRMR (Saturated/Estimated = 0.042) values were below the recommended threshold of 0.08. The NFI value of 0.946 met acceptable standards. The chi-square statistic was 190.54, further supporting the adequacy of model fit.

Table 4-8 Model Fit Indices

Indicator	Value
SRMR (Saturated)	0.042
SRMR (Estimated)	0.042
NFI	0.946
Chi-square	190.54

5. Conclusion and Recommendations
This study investigated the relationship between ESG perception and job choice intention among Generation Z university students in Taiwan. The results indicate that the measurement scales demonstrated satisfactory reliability and validity. Most outer loadings exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, with only a few items slightly below but still within acceptable limits. Both constructs had Cronbach's α and Composite Reliability (CR) values greater than 0.90, and their Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values exceeded 0.50, confirming strong internal consistency and convergent validity. Moreover, discriminant validity was supported through the Fornell-Larcker criterion and the HTMT ratio.

In the structural model, ESG perception showed a significant positive effect on job choice intention ($\beta = 0.498$, $t = 11.484$, $p < 0.001$), thus supporting the hypothesis. The explanatory power was moderate, with $R^2 = 0.25$, indicating that ESG perception accounted for approximately one-fourth of the variance in job choice intention. The effect size ($f^2 = 0.330$) was classified as medium to large. These findings suggest that Generation Z considers corporate performance in environmental responsibility, social engagement, and governance transparency when evaluating potential employers, highlighting ESG as a critical factor influencing young people's job intentions.

The main contribution of this study lies in bridging ESG with the field of human resource management, addressing a gap in prior research that has predominantly emphasized financial performance or investor perspectives. The findings confirm that sustainability initiatives not only influence external investors but also play a pivotal role in talent market choices. From a practical standpoint, companies aiming to attract Generation Z talent should enhance their communication and disclosure of ESG strategies. Actions such as implementing carbon reduction and energy efficiency policies, promoting diversity and inclusion, strengthening community involvement, and ensuring transparent governance can significantly enhance employer brand attractiveness and strengthen competitiveness in the labor market.

Nevertheless, this study is subject to several limitations. First, the sample was limited to university students in Taiwan, which may restrict the generalizability of the results. Second, the research model examined only two constructs—ESG perception and job choice intention—thus limiting explanatory power and excluding other potentially relevant factors. Third, the use of cross-sectional data prevents observation of long-term dynamics and weakens causal inference.

Based on these limitations, future research could expand the sample to include participants from different regions and industries, as well as conduct cross-generational comparisons to examine differences in ESG attitudes across groups. It is also recommended to incorporate mediating or moderating variables, such as organizational attractiveness, salary expectations, or value congruence, to enhance explanatory power. Furthermore, longitudinal studies could be employed to track the long-term influence of ESG perception on actual employment decisions and career development, thereby offering more comprehensive theoretical and practical insights.

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