

EMPLOYEE RETENTION FACTOR AT IT STARTUP COMPANY: JOB SATISFACTION AS MEDIATING VARIABLE

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Abstract

This study analyzes factors that have implications for employee retention in IT-Startup companies. This study aims to explain factors that contribute to employee retention with job satisfaction as a mediating variable. Employer branding, psychological contract, organizational commitment and job environment are predictors of employee retention. This quantitative study applied a purposive sampling technique, involving 350 employees in IT startup companies as respondents. They were employees who have worked for the company for at least 3 years, held at least a staff-level position, and work in an IT startup company. Data were analyzed using Structural equation modeling (SEM) to depict the direct and indirect effects of the factors on employee retention. Job satisfaction was examined as the mediating variable. The study showed that the employer branding, organizational commitment, and job environment directly affected employees' job satisfaction. These three variables also indirectly affected employee retention. Meanwhile psychological contract was found not to directly affect employees' job satisfaction and not to indirectly affect the employee retention IT startups are recommended to improve their psychological contract in order to enhance the employees' job satisfaction. Employees' professionalism and contribution are pivotal in improving the company's business quality. Organizations should be able to meet employees' need comprehensively according to the business achievement.

Keywords: Employer Branding; Organizational Commitment; Job Environment; Psychological Contract; Job Satisfaction; Employee Retention

JEL Classification: 015; D23; D91

Article History: Submitted: 2024-07-20; Revision: 2024-09-13; Accepted: 2024-09-17; Published: 2025-01-18

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How to Cite: Azmy, A., & Arifin, A. L.. (2025). Employee Retention Factor at IT Startup Company: Job Satisfaction as Mediating Variable. *Media Ekonomi dan Manajemen*, 40(1), 12-41.

INTRODUCTION

A business organization requires fresh breakthroughs for employee retention and turnover (Mamun & Hasan, 2017). Previous findings discovered that employee retention is the key to maintaining long-term business sustainability (Mitchell et al., 2001). The employment termination

problem often occurs in every company or business organization. The company's inability to reduce turnover becomes a big short- and long-term loss. Employee retention is an important thing that must be considered by all companies, especially IT startup companies. Finding new employees triggers new problems and challenges for

the company to maintain its business operation optimally.

An effective retention process requires a strategic approach, which will determine the company's successful, comprehensive human resource development. IT startup companies always face high turnover. This causality occurs because companies require employee commitment and contribution to all business activities during the business establishment. Types of businesses engaged in information technology require ideas and creativity according to market needs. Employee retention has been reported to be significantly helpful for a company (Gurumani, 2010). Companies must understand that losing employees equals losing a key to achieving a successful business.

Employer branding and psychological contracts are among the primary factors considered when an employee decides to stay at a company (Dhanpat & Parumasur, 2014; Tanwar & Prasad, 2016a). A company's brand may serve as an attractive point, and the main reason for employee decides to make a long-term career plan. This process involves a considerable decision-making period, causing one to move to other companies quickly. This condition would likely harm startups as they must return to the earlier business phase to find new employees. Therefore, companies should be able to retain potential employees long-term (Narayanan et al., 2019).

The professional relationship between employees and companies contains unwritten expectations between the two parties. They are usually called the psychological contract, representing a psychological bond between employees and employers (Mathis et al., 2015). Most startups need help understanding the importance of psychological contracts in affecting employee retention. IT Startups tend to develop a physical relationship with their employees and pay limited attention to the psychological contract

(Ganguly et al., 2022). In other words, they are inclined to maximize the employees' contribution and do not develop a long-term relationship with the employees. This condition is responsible for the employee's decision to move to other companies.

Low employee retention is also accounted for by the absence of organizational commitment and employees' low job satisfaction (Jayatilake & Gamage, 2017). This condition is very reasonable at the beginning of the company's business process, which has limited resources to meet the needs of employees. This condition could be better for companies wanting to retain employees for a certain period. IT startups have long suffered issues of high turnover (Swadia, 2017). Therefore, scrutinizing the components promoting employee retention is essential, which may eventually maintain the stability of the business process. Every business activity must be supported optimally by employees' contributions. In IT, a company differentiates through ideas and innovation according to the market needs.

Previous studies have examined employee retention using organizational commitment and employer branding (Matongolo et al., 2018; Naz et al., 2020). The previous study used psychological contracts and job environments to analyze the effect of employee retention (Bibi et al., 2016; Deas & Coetzee, 2020). Job satisfaction is a mediating variable for employee retention (Bharadwaj et al., 2022; Ibrahim et al., 2023). Despite myriad studies on this topic, there currently needs to be studies combining the effect of organizational commitment, employer branding, psychological contract, and work environment simultaneously on employee retention. The combination of these variables is able to prove the highest implications on employee retention. This study has the advantage of combining aspects of commitment, branding, psychology, and internal organization in measuring employee retention. Indirect

influence is also measured by job satisfaction as a mediator in the research model. The results of the study are more comprehensive with proof of job satisfaction which is assumed as a connector to employee retention. This study is expected to be used as a reinforcement of factors that must be considered in retaining employees, especially in start-up level companies in the information technology sector.

Job satisfaction serves as the leading variable mediation. The selection of job satisfaction as a mediator assumes that the variable as a predictor can produce a factor in employee retention. Several studies measure employee retention on the indirect effect with job satisfaction as a mediator. (Ndiango et al., 2024; Upadhyay et al., 2020). Job satisfaction is widely used to measure employee retention which is influenced by many variables such as employee engagement, employee recognition, performance appraisal, and team effectiveness. The difference with this study is that it uses a combination of employer branding, psychological contract, organizational commitment, and job environment variables as predictors of employee retention. The assumption that is built is that the satisfaction felt by employees indirectly results in the growth of loyalty, pride, and comfort at work.

This study analyzed the effect of organizational commitment, employer branding, psychological contract, and job environment on employee retention. Job satisfaction is a mediating variable for analysis of direct and indirect effects on employee retention. The result of this study is expected to strengthen previous studies on the factors of employee retention. This study shows the highest implications for employee retention both directly and indirectly. The research results are expected to strengthen employee retention in IT startups. This research provides problem boundaries according to the focus and recommendations that can be given to the organization.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Startup Company

Startup organizations commonly need help with employee retention. Some are concerned with finding and retaining employees with excellent track records. Employees are the spearhead of the business organization's success. As the term suggests, employee retention refers to efforts to retain employees to achieve comprehensive success (Kyndt et al., 2009). The retention practice aims to make employees stay at the organization for an extended period. Startup companies are oriented to retain their employees according to their business needs. Managing a business's sustainability through employees' optimal performance is necessary. Reward systems, career opportunities, and employee relationships have been reported to affect employee retention (Ghani et al., 2022; Khalid & Nawab, 2018).

A startup company is a group of individuals committed to new business processes or products based on market dynamics with precise business models and can compete with high business uncertainty. (Reisdorfer-Leite et al., 2020). The startup company process is based on the same commitment and perspective in forming a business organization with technology-based products (Kolosok & Koniukh, 2018). Utilizing all-digital technology, startup companies have tremendous pressure to enter the free market with the ability to reach a wide range of consumers. The problem often faced is converting conventional business processes into digital form, an opportunity for IT startup companies. Building a startup has a high risk if it is not adaptive to the proper form of business. Another definition explains that a startup company is an organization formed temporarily to find a suitable business model in high uncertainty (Batista de Oliveira & Perez Zotes, 2018). The initial initiation time becomes a challenge in ensuring the

retention of employees who have joined the pioneering organization. Turnover will be a problem that can occur, but employee retention is a challenge in ensuring long-term business sustainability (Sujlana et al., 2013). IT startup company that has more than five years, the organization will change according to the business scale and market coverage.

Employee Retention

Employee retention is a process of a company's ability as a business organization to retain employees who have the best potential, talent and performance and are supported by organizational components, career opportunities, rewards, task design, and employee relations (Mathis et al., 2015; Mishra, 2022). Retention is essential for business organizations in designing talent with an integrated strategy to increase work productivity and develop future-based human resources. (Naalu & Kuuyelleh, 2021). Companies as professional organizations need employees in the stage of starting a business so that sustainability becomes something definite and consistent. Every year, the organization strives to retain employees as a continuous business and a significant responsibility for company management, especially top management. Turnover must be reduced to the lowest level to optimize employee retention. Indicators to measure employee retention include reward systems, career opportunities, and employee relationships (Ghani et al., 2022; Khalid & Nawab, 2018; Kyndt et al., 2009).

A successful employee retention program will likely maintain individual and organizational performance stability. It could be done by implementing competitive rewards, career opportunities, and employee-conducive relationships. Employee retention programs will likely improve employees' motivation, passion, and productivity (Naim & Lenka, 2018). The effectiveness of the employee retention program may be reflected in the

discipline program, turnover rate, and the work atmosphere. IT startup company requires conditions that drive employees to stay at the organization longer. Employee retention plays a crucial role in a startup's business journey.

Employer Branding

Employer branding is an effort to create an image as a good workplace accompanied by promotions for prospective candidates with the talents, knowledge and skills according to the organization's needs to meet business goals. (Lievens & Slaughter, 2016). Branding for a company requires a push and pull in developing positive credibility and inviting the best talent to join the company (Reis et al., 2021). This activity applies to employee retention to last longer and become part of the company's history of success. Companies with the best reputation will be a reason for employees to stay and develop careers in the long term. However, the employee retention process depends on the company's ability to take care of both financially and psychologically. The indicators used for employer branding consist of social, interest, economic, development, and application values (Backhaus et al., 2014).

A company's reputation highly relies on its image, credibility, and business performance in a certain period (Martin & Sinclair, 2019; Monteiro et al., 2020). It is usually visualized through the company's employer branding, representing A company's effort to develop long-term communication with the candidate and existing employees (Biswas & Suar, 2016). Employer branding could be created through coworkers and employees' candidates' perceived business images and reputations. The company's image could reflect its reputation (Martin et al., 2011; Tkalac Verčič & Sinčić Ćorić, 2018). Employer branding aims to maintain employees with high productivity and the company's business achievement (Cascio, 2014). It comprises various

dimensions: social, interest, economic, development, and application values (Backhaus et al., 2014). These five values are deemed capable of explaining the employer branding of a business organization. A company with a good reputation would likely be able to create a good brand regarding social aspects, employees' interests, human resource development, and equal opportunities for all employees. It may create an optimal employee branding capable of retaining employees in the long term to achieve business achievement.

Psychological Contract

Employee retention is mainly affected by explicit and implicit psychological aspects. The psychological contract refers to an unwritten contract between a company and the employee, which is perceived through expectations based on his/her contribution to the company's business achievement (Mathis et al., 2015). Psychological contract theory believes the existence of both parties, i.e., the company and the employee, expect one another explicitly or implicitly (Rousseau, 1990). Employee's perspective expectations may include career promotion, performance-based salary increase, financial security, and other non-financial aspects, including comforts and conduciveness at the workplace. A psychological contract aims to minimize uncertainty by looking at the agreement, either in written or verbal form, required to optimize the working process (Adkins et al., 2001). Companies and employees must establish a professional relationship to secure successful business performance. Sharing common expectations and dreams may create mutualism. Both parties should trust each other in order to ensure optimal business achievement.

The psychological contract comprises several dimensions, including relational and transactional contracts and internal balance (Rousseau, 2001). These dimensions encompass employees'

relationship with the company related to the financial and non-financial aspects in a certain period. A transactional contract encompasses a relationship from financial, short-term oriented perspectives. Meanwhile, a relational contract is a long-term, emotion-oriented relationship between employees and their companies. Internal balance highlights a balanced relationship in order to create mutualism. Considering the dynamics between companies and their relationship, a psychological contract is crucial as it may positively contribute to the organization's goal achievement.

Job Environment

A company's internal aspects may promote employee retention in a business organization (M. W. Allen et al., 2009; Kundu & Lata, 2017). One of the internal aspects most companies consider is the job environment. The job environment conduciveness emerges as one of the factors the company should consider as a part of the working process. Employees are required to meet the job target set by the organization, and Their job environment may affect their work outcome comprehensively (Christensen et al., 2020; Oludeyi, 2015). A comfortable job environment has been reported to be one of the employee's considerations when deciding to stay at a business organization. Therefore, the company must make supportive spatial planning and atmosphere that supports the work process effectiveness. A comfortable, flexible, and conducive work environment is one of the employees' needs the company should provide. Fulfilling such a need may reflect the company's efforts to retain its employees in the long run. The job environment has several dimensions, including work relationships, work atmosphere, job regulation, lighting, ventilation, and security (Colquitt et al., 2023). A conducive work environment is deemed helpful for achieving more optimal work outcomes. IT startups demand that their employees present new ideas and

innovative business processes the market needs. In other words, employees' contributions and productivity are vital for the company's business success.

Organizational Commitment

Organizational commitment could be defined as employees' emotional responses to their organizations (Meyer et al., 2002). It depicts a psychological bond grounded on trust, values acceptance, and efforts to achieve organizational success (Yahaya & Ebrahim, 2016). As an organization's vital component, employees should be committed to building the organization's business. Organizational commitment has been used to analyze employees' inclination, identification, and involvement in contributing to organizational performance achievement (Soeling et al., 2021). It consists of three dimensions: affective, normative, and continuance dimensions (N. J. Allen & Meyer, 1996). They measure employees' commitment to the organization's expectations of their performance. IT startups require employees with high organizational commitment in mind to growth. Their optimal productivity and contribution are significantly helpful for accelerating the company's business target achievement. A shared commitment developed by employee-company togetherness would be a part of the business's success. Therefore, the organization needs to develop employees' affective, normative, and continuance commitment to retain their employees.

The Mediating Role of Job Satisfaction

A working outcome could be optimized through passion, optimism, and motivation (Janssen & Van Yperen, 2004). Employees' behavior in understanding and favoring their jobs may be perceived emotionally to deliver the most optimal result for the organization. Job satisfaction is the psychology employees feel to make the best contribution to work with optimal results (Locke, 1969; Wyrwa &

Kaźmierczyk, 2020). Psychologically, perceived satisfaction may mediate the employee's working outcome. The psychological aspect of job satisfaction is measured by the accumulation of working time at the company with maximum achievement and contribution to the company's business processes. Employees feel positive factors, so that job satisfaction is one of the reasons to stick with the company's business development. Work experience, inspiration, and motivation form the basis for evaluating employees during the company's long journey. The dimension of job satisfaction includes the work itself, supervision, coworkers, promotion, and compensation (García-Mainar & Montuenga-Gómez, 2020; Johnson & Johnson, 2000). These dimensions are commonly used to account for employees' job satisfaction. Previous studies have investigated the mediating role of job satisfaction on employee retention, talent retention, and intention to stay (Kalyanamitra et al., 2020; Salleh et al., 2024; Xie et al., 2024). Employees may perceive motivation when working professionally and supported by coworkers and supervisors.

Hypotheses Development

Employer Branding on Job Satisfaction and Indirect Effect on Employee Retention

Employer branding represents a positive perception made by a company or a business organization through its reputation and credibility (Berthon et al., 2005). As the executor, employees would likely exhibit higher satisfaction when they work for an organization with better credibility in the business market. They may devote their pride and loyalty to achieving the organization's success, thus improving their job satisfaction. Several studies have reported that employer branding positively affects job satisfaction (Bharadwaj et al., 2022; Imansari & Ardiyanti, 2019). This variable asserts that the company's image may affect

employees' satisfaction. Employees' contribution and productivity are among the factors leading to a company's business achievement. Employer branding becomes a positive perspective based on job satisfaction felt by employees. This perspective becomes an accumulation of time in forming a positive employer branding in the labor market. IT startups always try to develop good employer branding for the employee candidates. Good employer branding helps find the best candidate for the organization's needs.

Employer branding is the main factor to be used as a reason to stay in a company (Prajapati & Patel, 2017). A positive brand and good credibility in the business market will be helpful for IT startups to retain their employees during their business process. Employee candidates and permanent employees tend to consider employer branding when staying at their organization. Previous studies have reported the positive indirect effect of employer branding and employee retention (Khan et al., 2021; Salameh et al., 2023; Tanwar & Prasad, 2016a). The difference with this study is that it uses job satisfaction to mediate employee retention. The choice of this variable is to measure the ability of the company's image on employee retention, which is moderated by job satisfaction. Employee retention is likely easier when the company has good employer branding. This study assumes that employer branding directly and positively affects job satisfaction and indirectly affects employee retention.

H1: Employer branding has a positive, direct effect on the job satisfaction.

H2: Employer branding positively affects employee retention, mediated by job satisfaction.

Psychological contract on job satisfaction and Indirect Effect on Employee Retention

The psychological contract is one of the aspects affecting employees' job

satisfaction (McDonald & Makin, 2000). This satisfaction could be seen from the company's commitment to fulfill its employees' needs during the work process. The company needs to pay attention to employees' unwritten expectations. A previous study by (Ampofo, 2020; Rayton & Yalabik, 2014) found that psychological contracts positively affect job satisfaction. These variables are interrelated, as Psychological contracts may promote higher job satisfaction. Employees will likely have a positive perception when having a professional contract. However, the unwritten, psychological contract between employees and the employer is also necessary. The psychological contract is proven to affect employees' job satisfaction positively.

Employee retention could be achieved through a comprehensive psychological contract (De Vos & Meganck, 2009; Deas & Coetzee, 2020). Employees' perceived job satisfaction may enhance their professionalism and productivity. Previous studies have reported psychological contracts' indirect, positive effects on employee retention (Mohamed et al., 2014; Nayak et al., 2021). This research uses job satisfaction as a mediating variable to see the implications of employee psychological aspects as part of causality for long-term survival. Other previous study used organizational identification as the mediating variable (Dhanpat & Parumasur, 2014; Pradhan & Jena, 2017). It is assumed that psychological contract is considered by employees when deciding to stay at the organization for a long time and is moderated by employees' job satisfaction.

H3: Psychological Contract positively affects job satisfaction

H4: The psychological contract indirectly positively affects employee retention moderated by job satisfaction.

Organizational Commitment on Job Satisfaction and Indirect Effect on Employee Retention

Employees' organizational commitment could be actualized through employees' perceived job satisfaction (Lok & Crawford, 2001). Commitment is a strong urge to stay and become part of the organization's success (Chénard-Poirier et al., 2021). Organizational commitment plays an essential role in employee retention. It could be implemented based on employees' perceived satisfaction. The commitment is formed through the organization's policy to achieve the work target and maintain business sustainability. Previous studies have reported that organizational commitment positively affected job satisfaction (Ela & Sadeet, 2020; Pool & Pool, 2007; Yiing & Ahmad, 2009; Yousef, 2002). Organizational commitment represents the emotional responses perceived by employees toward their contribution at work. Job satisfaction is a positive perception built individually based on one's contribution to his/her job. Organizational commitment indirectly positively affects employee retention (Nguyen et al., 2014; Quratulain et al., 2018). The difference with this study is that it uses job satisfaction as a mediating variable. The assumption built is that job satisfaction can increase employee retention indirectly with the high commitment of employees. Employees' perceived job satisfaction will lead to employee retention. Previous studies show that job satisfaction may predict the indirect effect of organizational commitment on employee retention (K. Naga Sumalatha et al., 2019; Komang et al., 2021). Employees' organizational commitment may positively affect their job satisfaction, and successful target achievement may indirectly affect employee retention.

H5: Organizational commitment positively affects job satisfaction

H6: Organizational commitment indirectly and positively affects employee retention, with job satisfaction as the mediating variable.

Job Environment on Job Satisfaction and Indirect Effect on Employee Retention

The job environment is one factor in employees' perceived job satisfaction (Hoffmann & Paulsen, 2020). Facilities and infrastructures provided by the organization may support employees' work process. IT startups attempt to create a work environment that supports employees' work processes. They attempt to create flexible working spaces conducive and supportive to the employees' work process, as IT startups need ideas and creativity from their employees to support the business process. A previous study by (Anand & Vohra, 2020; Djukic et al., 2014) found that job environment positively affects job satisfaction. Employees' perceived comfort may support their performance, which likely supports the achievement of work outcomes set by the company.

Employees' comfort at the workplace emerges as one of the factors determining employee retention. (Putri et al., 2019). Employees' perceived job satisfaction may serve as one of the factors of employee retention. Work environment is a component that directly relates to employees' work process. Flexibility, creativity, and comfort are among the factors employees consider to stay at the organization (Ismail et al., 2021; Jyoti & Dimple, 2022). A comfortable work atmosphere may contribute to employees' job satisfaction. Job environment has been reported to indirectly and positively affect employee retention (Bibi et al., 2016; Halim et al., 2021). The assumption is that employees feel satisfied with the job environment for work processes that can be completed optimally. The job environment prepared by the company provides positive psychology for

employees to work productively according to job demands. The focus of the difference in this study is job satisfaction as a mediating variable between the job environment and employee retention.

H7: Job Environment positively affects job satisfaction

H8: Job environment positively and indirectly affects employee retention by mediating job satisfaction.

Job Satisfaction on Employee Retention

Job satisfaction is one of the primary factors of employee retention. Employees' perceived satisfaction is one of the considerations in deciding to stay at the organization for the long term. Their satisfaction may be reflected in their positive attitude towards presenting maximum work outcomes. The company's expectation could be optimally achieved when employees perceive positive job satisfaction. IT startups need employees during their early business process, indicating the importance of retention. Organizations should provide financial and non-financial support as a part of the work process, as employees' positive perceptions would be accumulated toward job satisfaction. The relationship between job satisfaction and employee retention emerges as a combination of the research model. Other studies also report job satisfaction's direct, positive effect on employee retention (De Sousa Sabbagha et al., 2018; Kalyanamitra et al., 2020; Ohunakin et al., 2019). The accumulation of employees' satisfaction can be one of the main reasons to contribute to the company's business. Therefore, it is assumed that job satisfaction positively affects employee retention.

H9: Job satisfaction positively affects employee retention.

The proposed model assumes that employer branding, psychological,

contract, organizational commitment, and job environment directly affect job satisfaction. As shown in Figure 1, job satisfaction was examined as the mediating variable of employee retention. It is assumed that employer branding, psychological contract, organizational commitment, and job environment indirectly affect employee retention through job satisfaction's mediating role. The high turnover rate has emerged as the hindrance that hampers IT startups' efforts in establishing an efficient business process. Human resources serve as the pivotal component in developing business quality. Employees' productivity in the form of new ideas is significantly needed to deliver innovations. The research model was developed based on hypotheses of direct and indirect effects on employee retention. Based on the explanation in the literature review and hypothesis formulation,

RESEARCH METHODS

Research Design

This study was designed using a quantitative approach with hypothesis formulation. This study assumes direct and indirect influences with the use of mediating variables. Employer branding, psychological contract, organizational commitment, and job environment were examined as independent variables. Employee retention was examined as the dependent variable. Meanwhile, job satisfaction was used as the mediating variable. The object of the study was conducted at an IT-Startup company with 4 sectors, namely educational technology, IT consultants, software & hardware design, and IT infrastructure. Research recommendations to increase attention to employee retention with IT-Startup companies as research objects.

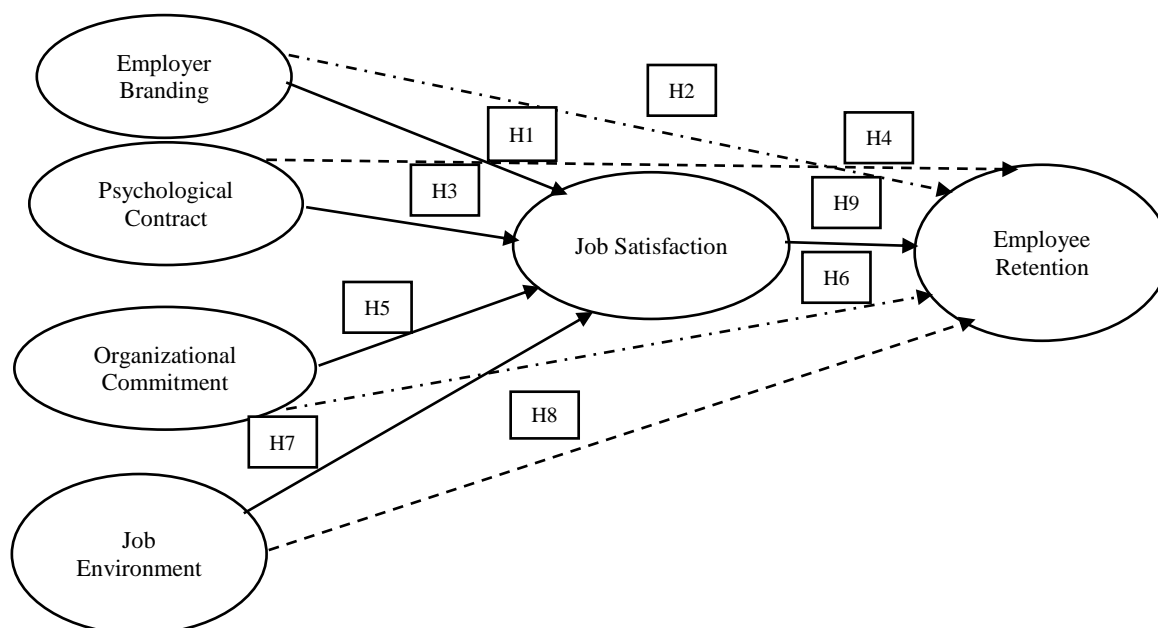


Figure 1. Research Model

Research Instrument

The data were collected using a 4-point Likert scale questionnaire. The response options included 1 (strongly disagree), 2 (disagree), 3 (agree), and 4 (strongly agree). The use of 4 Likert scales is based on collecting opinions from respondents regarding the perspectives built on the implications of variables in the research model (Kam, 2020). Respondents' perspectives serve as the basis for research information to measure the direct and indirect effects on employee retention. Respondents are selected based on employees who work in IT startup companies. Respondents were recruited using a purposive sampling technique based on specific criteria. The questionnaire contained forty-three items. Employer branding was measured using sixteen items covering social, interest, economic, development, and application values (Backhaus et al., 2014). Meanwhile, a psychological contract was measured using six items covering relational, transactional, and internal balance (Rousseau, 2001). Organizational commitment was measured using four items: affective, normative, and continuance (N. J. Allen & Meyer, 1996). Job satisfaction was measured using six items covering job

conditions, coworkers, promotion, and compensation (García-Mainar & Montuenga-Gómez, 2020; Johnson & Johnson, 2000). Employee retention was measured using a reward system, career opportunities, and employee relationships (Ghani et al., 2022; Khalid & Nawab, 2018). Job environment is measured by work relationships, work atmosphere, work regulations, lighting, ventilation, and security (Colquitt et al., 2023) (Colquitt et al., 2019) (The questionnaire was designed following each dimension of the variable. Data were analyzed following the research model.

Participant and Procedure

Data were collected by distributing the questionnaire online through Google Forms. Respondents were recruited using a purposive sampling technique. A sampling technique was used for this research, with several criteria to ensure they fit the research purpose and were representative of the population (Tongco, 2007). The sampling technique is a purposive approach following the data availability given access by the research object (Sekaran & Bougie, 2020). The initial process of the research needed to know the size of the existing population so that this

technique was considered suitable for measuring the sample. Overall data amounted to 473 respondents. The filtering process to check each answer from the questionnaire was reduced to 350 respondents. This technique was selected to obtain the data that fit the research purpose. The study focused on startups in the IT sector. Respondents were employees in IT startups who have worked for at least three years and have at least a staff-level position. They were employees who had worked for the company for at least three years, held a staff-level position, and worked in an IT startup company.

Data Analysis

This study applied Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with a Partial Least Square (PLS) approach. Structural equation modeling is a technique that combines path and factor analyses (Hair Jr. et al., 2017). Meanwhile, PLS is commonly used to explain the relationships among variables in a research model (Sarstedt et al., 2020). The research model evaluation was begun by testing the goodness of fit of the data. In this stage, every indicator with an outer loading value of > 0.7 was deemed representative of the research model (Méndez-Suárez, 2021). In the next step, the data were tested for validity and reliability based on Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability, and Rho values of at least 0.7 (Shmueli et al., 2019). After passing the validity and reliability tests, the next step was to examine the Average Variance Extracted (AVE). In this step, variables with AVE values of at least 0.5 met the discriminant validity (Henseler et al., 2015). The test was followed by

examining the coefficient of determination (r-square). In this step, independent variables with values close to 100% were assumed to have a strong relationship with the dependent variable. In the last step, the proposed hypotheses were tested using a T-test. Hypotheses with a p-value of < 5% and T-statistics > T-table were accepted and assumed to affect the dependent variable in the proposed mode significantly.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Respondent Profile

Most respondents were male employees (n=187, 53%), and 163 were female (47%). Most of them were 26-30 years of age (n=145, 41%), 115 respondents were 21-25 years of age (30%), and 90 respondents were above 30 years of age (26%). Most respondents have worked for 6-10 years (n= 165, 42%), 147 respondents have worked for 0-5 years, and 40 respondents have worked for more than ten years (11%). Classification of 350 respondents: 231 respondents were at the staff level (66%), and 119 were at the managerial level (34%). Concerning the business sector, most respondents worked in educational technology startups (n=127, 36%), 95 respondents worked in software and hardware startups (27%), 89 respondents worked in IT consultant startups (26%), and 39 respondents worked in IT infrastructure startups (11%). This respondent profile could be used as the basis for research data, considering that they met the focus on analyzing employee retention in IT startups. Respondent data can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Respondent Profile

Information	Description	Total	Percentage
Gender	Male	187	53%
	Female	163	47%
Age	21-25 years old	115	33%
	26 - 30 years	145	41%
	>30 years	90	26%

Table 1. Continue

Information	Description	Total	Percentage
Length of service	0-5 years old	147	47%
	6-10 years old	165	42%
	>10 years	40	11%
Position	Staff	231	66%
	Managerial	119	34%
Business field	Educational Technology	127	36%
	IT Consultant	89	26%
	Software and Hardware	95	27%
	IT Infrastructure	39	11%

Statistical Analysis

As mentioned previously, the research model was tested by first identifying the goodness-of-fit of each indicator in the questionnaire based on its Outer loading value, as shown in the following Table 2 and Figure 2. Table 2 explained all indicators have met the outer loading standard, as they exhibited a value higher than 0.7. In other words, they could represent the variables in the proposed model. The next step was to test the validity, reliability, and discriminant validity. The results are presented in the following Table 3.

Table 3 shows that all variables meet the validity and reliability criteria, as indicated by Cronbach's Alpha, Rho_a, and Composite reliability values of higher than 0.7. The AVE values were also higher than 0.5, indicating that the variables met the discriminant validity criteria and could be used as the information basis for testing the model. The interpretation process in this study begins with a coefficient determination of the R-square value, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4 shows that the Fornell-Larcker Criterion value is greater than the Average Variance Extracted value, which indicates that all variables meet the discriminant validity indicators. All variables meet the validity and reliability components. Then the next step is the coefficient of determination on the r-square value in Table 5. As displayed in Table 5, employer branding, psychological

contracts, organizational commitment, and job environment simultaneously account for employee retention by 67.7%. In contrast, the rest, 32.3%, was accounted for by other variables outside the proposed model. As the mediating variable, job satisfaction simultaneously accounts for the effects on employee retention by 70.3%, while other variables outside the proposed model explained the other 29.7%. The coefficient of determination of the four independent and mediating variables strongly affected employee retention. In other words, the proposed model in this study possesses a high coefficient of determination. The next step was to test the hypotheses on the direct and indirect effects using the T-test. Table 6 below presents the result of the direct effect test.

Table 6 shows employer branding, job environment, and organizational commitment directly affect job satisfaction. Meanwhile, a psychological contract was found not to affect job satisfaction directly. Therefore, H1, H5, and H7 were accepted, as they exhibited a p-value of < 5% and t-statistics > t-table (1.96). H3 was rejected because it exhibited a p-value of > 5% and t-statistics < t-table (1.96). Job satisfaction directly affected employee retention, meaning that H9 was accepted (p-value < 5% and t-statistics > t-table of 1.96). To conclude, the direct effect test showed that employer branding, job environment, and organizational commitment directly affected employees' job satisfaction, but not a

psychological contract. Job retention was found to affect employee retention directly. The next step was to test the indirect effects, and the test result is presented in the following Table 7. Table 7 shows that employer branding, job environment, and organizational commitment positively affected employee retention, as indicated by the p-value of < 5% and t-statistics > t-table (1.96). Unlike the other three variables, the psychological contract did not indirectly affect employee retention. Hypotheses 2, 6, and 8 were accepted, showing that the three variables indirectly affected employee retention through job satisfaction as the mediating variable. In contrast, Hypothesis 4 was rejected, meaning that psychological contracts did not indirectly affect employee retention through job satisfaction as the mediation variable. Figure 3 describes the research model output.

Table 2. Outer Loading

Variable	Item Code	Outer Loading
Employer Branding	EP1	0.801
	EP10	0.748
	EP12	0.815
	EP13	0.856
	EP14	0.786
	EP15	0.750
	EP16	0.792
	EP2	0.796
	EP3	0.772
	EP4	0.762
	EP6	0.760
	EP7	0.750
	EP9	0.734
Psychological Contract	PC1	0.728
	PC10	0.796
	PC3	0.758
	PC4	0.837
	PC6	0.809
	PC7	0.790

:

Table 2. Continue

Variable	Item Code	Outer Loading
Organizational Commitment	OC1	0.876
	OC2	0.855
	OC4	0.733
	OC5	0.792
	OC5	0.792
Job Satisfaction	JS1	0.749
	JS2	0.798
	JS3	0.831
	JS4	0.791
	JS5	0.771
	JS6	0.730
Job Environment	JE1	0.712
	JE2	0.819
	JE3	0.799
	JE4	0.830
	JE5	0.764
	JE6	0.710
Employee Retention	ER1	0.816
	ER10	0.777
	ER11	0.741
	ER2	0.871
	ER3	0.872
	ER4	0.852
	ER5	0.769
	ER6	0.823
	ER9	0.711

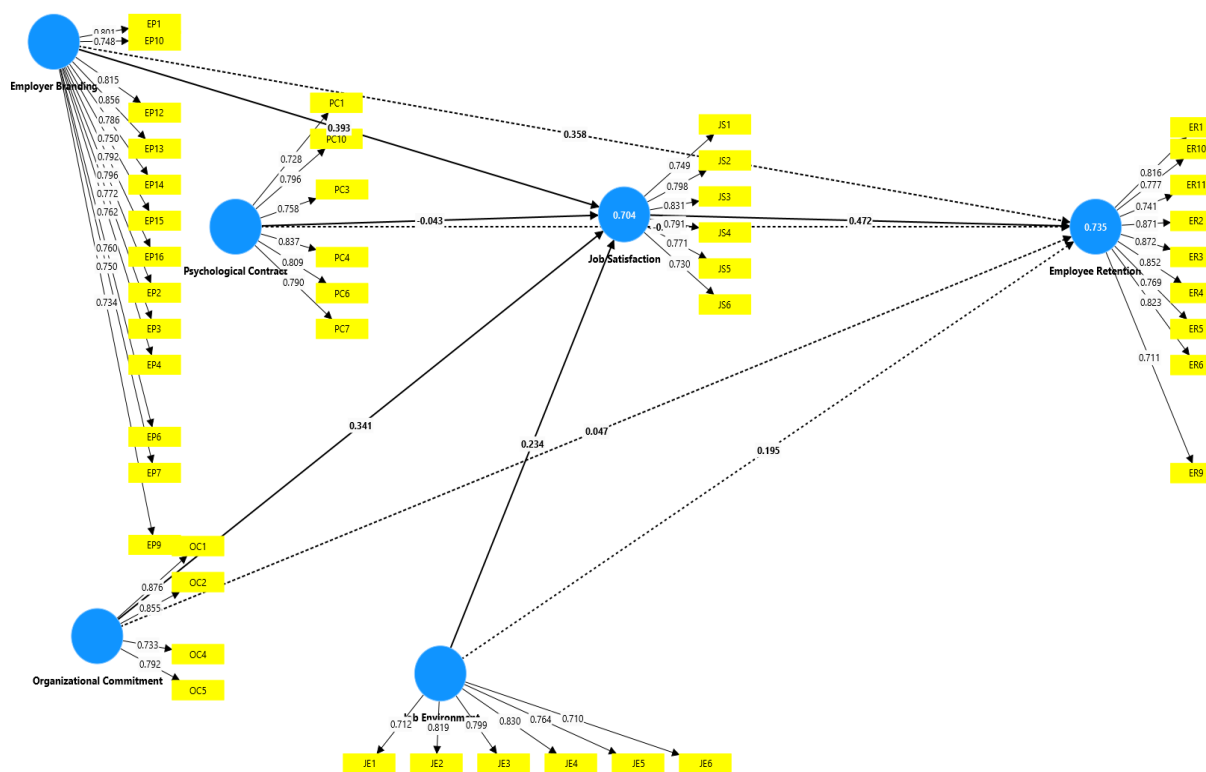


Figure 2. Outer Loading Measurement

Table 3. Validity, Reliability, and Discriminant Validity

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	rho A	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Employee Retention	0.933	0.938	0.943	0.603
Employer Branding	0.958	0.960	0.962	0.571
Job Environment	0.866	0.873	0.899	0.600
Job Satisfaction	0.870	0.875	0.902	0.607
Organizational Commitment	0.831	0.845	0.888	0.666
Psychological Contract	0.877	0.879	0.907	0.620

Table 4. Discriminant Validity

Variables	Employee Retention	Employer Branding	Job Environment	Job Satisfaction	Organizational Commitment	Psychological Contract
Employee Retention	0.776					
Employer Branding	0.788	0.756				
Job Environment	0.729	0.771	0.774			
Job Satisfaction	0.823	0.788	0.728	0.779		
Organizational Commitment	0.698	0.742	0.683	0.756	0.816	
Psychological Contract	0.664	0.853	0.730	0.699	0.711	0.787

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Table 5. R-Square

Variable	R Square
Employee Retention	0.677
Job Satisfaction	0.703

Table 6. Direct Effect

Intervariable Relationship	Original sample (O)	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P Values
Employer Branding -> Job Satisfaction	0.418	3.478	0.001
Job Environment -> Job Satisfaction	0.215	2.709	0.007
Job Satisfaction -> Employee Retention	0.823	27.328	0.000
Organizational commitment -> Job Satisfaction	0.338	3.944	0.000
Psychology Contract -> Job Satisfaction	-0.055	0.477	0.633

Table 7. Indirect Effect

Intervariable Relationship	Original sample (O)	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P Values
Employer Branding -> Job Satisfaction -> Employee Retention	0.344	3.401	0.001
Job Environment -> Job Satisfaction -> Employee Retention	0.177	2.666	0.008
Organizational commitment -> Job Satisfaction -> Employee Retention	0.278	3.852	0.000
Psychology Contract -> Job Satisfaction -> Employee Retention	-0.045	0.476	0.634

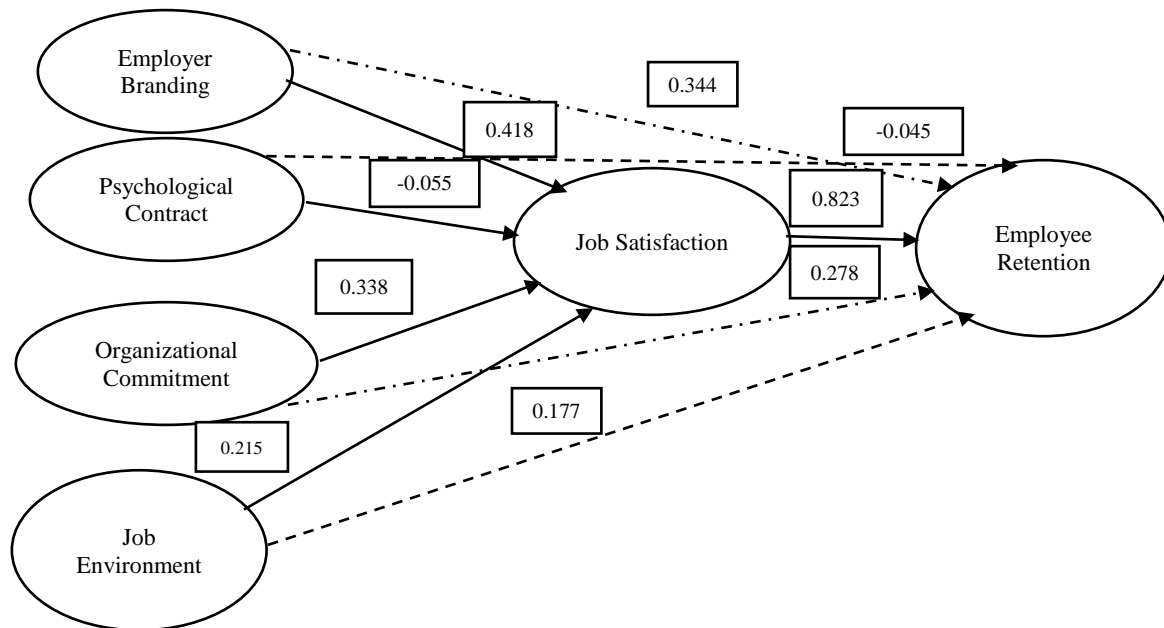


Figure 3. Research Model Output

Discussion

This study concludes the presence of direct and indirect effects. The former shows employer branding, job environment, and organizational commitment directly affected job satisfaction. Employer branding is able to provide a significant increase in job satisfaction. A company's branding has an effect on its reputation and credibility in the eyes of the labor market. (Azhar et al., 2024; Chițu & Russo, 2020). Employer branding can create pride in employees. So, this can be one of the main reasons employees stay long and start a career in the company. Loyalty and pride are one of the considerations for employees compared to moving to another company. The business target achievement process emerges as the main priority determining organizational success. Employees may perceive satisfaction when they exhibit their best contribution to the company's business. This finding supports previous studies reporting that employer branding positively affects job satisfaction (Kaur et al., 2020; Tanwar & Prasad, 2016b). Based on the results, every company needs employer branding for a good perspective in employee mindset. IT startups develop good employer branding in the labor and business markets. A

business organization's reputation may attract employees to stay with it for a long time. Employer branding and job satisfaction are interrelated (Davies et al., 2018; Heilmann et al., 2013)

Job environment has a significant impact on job satisfaction. The implications resulting from the work environment are organizational support for employee work processes in the form of a comfortable, safe, and healthy work environment. Job environment can have a direct impact on the quality of work. (Findlay et al., 2013). Work comfort is needed to maintain focus in achieving work targets. Satisfaction felt by employees by continuing to work in the company for the sake of achieving performance. The company has an obligation to provide a work environment and supporting facilities in the work process. It shows that the job environment could enhance employees' perceived satisfaction. The job environment's conduciveness and comfort are pivotal factors in supporting employees' work quality and business target achievement (Andargie & Azar, 2019). This finding supports previous studies showing that job environment positively affects job satisfaction (Anasi, 2020; Kumar, 2021;

Molina-Hernández et al., 2021). In this regard, IT startups need to focus on creating a work environment that meets their employees' needs, as a good work environment may stimulate better ideas and creativity. This finding implies that employees may perceive job satisfaction when organizations provide a work environment that supports their needs.

Organizational commitment has a significant impact on job satisfaction. Companies at the start-up level require employee commitment to advance the company's business. As a professional business organization, the company must have the ability to fulfill professional commitments to employees both financially and non-financially. The satisfaction felt by employees is a sense of trust to work longer and contribute to the success of the company's business. This finding supports previous studies reporting that organizational commitment positively affects job satisfaction (Cherif, 2020; Čulibrk et al., 2018). Employees' commitment may reflect their job satisfaction. These two variables play pivotal roles in the organization as parts of professionalism. Hence, the organization should be able to develop employees' organizational commitment. Employees' commitment should be seen as a part of organizational success and organizational support is significant for the commitment for business growth.

Psychological contracts have a negative impact on job satisfaction. This research contradicts previous studies on the positive effect of psychological contracts on job satisfaction (Liang, 2017; Rayton & Yalabik, 2014). The reality faced by companies at the start-up level is to instill an emotional attachment to employees. This psychological contract can be grown with work professionalism and good employee relations with the company. Although this variable did not significantly affect job satisfaction, it is still vital for IT startups to consider developing psychological contracts between employees and

the company. A good relationship between employees and the company ensures quality business (Agarwal, 2014; Cullinane & Dundon, 2006). A balance between rights and responsibilities will likely be viewed positively by employees. Job satisfaction may be perceived in financial and non-financial aspects. It serves as a positive evaluation to build good work relationships.

Job satisfaction has a high influence on employee retention. This study proves the direct effects generated by employer branding, organizational commitment, and job environment. Job satisfaction plays an important role in the description of the direct influence on employee retention efforts in IT-start-up companies. It supports previous studies showing that job satisfaction positively affects employee retention (Ashton, 2018; Islam et al., 2019). Job satisfaction is one of the factors most employees consider when deciding to stay and develop a long-term career in a company (Habtamu et al., 2021). In this regard, IT startups should be able to maintain their employee's job satisfaction in order to improve their employee retention program. Job satisfaction is essential in explaining the effect of the three variables in this study on employee retention. Of four independent variables, psychological contract emerges as the only variable that did not directly affect job satisfaction.

Regarding the indirect effect test result in which job satisfaction is the mediating variable, the psychological contract did not affect employees indirectly. Employer branding has the highest implications for employee retention. This result is in line with the fact that in formulating employee retention, companies must be able to improve employer branding in both the labor market and business. The image of the company is used as one of the consideration factors in employee retention. This effort can make it easier for companies to get the best employee

candidates according to job needs. It supports previous studies showing employer branding affects employee retention (Cascio, 2014; Hadi & Ahmed, 2018). Other studies also report the indirect effect of employer branding on employee retention through the mediation of organizational identification and commitment (Arasanmi & Krishna, 2019; Bharadwaj & Yameen, 2020; Khan et al., 2021). In this study, job satisfaction was examined as the mediating variable. The indirect effect test showed that employer branding emerges as one of the components of employee retention. It implies that most employees consider their companies' reputation, image, and credibility when deciding to stay for a long time. Therefore, IT startups need to be able to invest in their branding aspect in both the business and labor market. This study highlights the importance of employer branding in IT startups' employee retention efforts.

Organizational commitment has a significant indirect influence on employee retention. It supports previous studies reporting the positive effect of organizational commitment on employee retention (Naseer et al., 2019; Soenanta et al., 2021). Organizational commitment is one of the components most employees consider when deciding to participate in the company's business achievement. Employees' high commitment is essential in the effort to develop new businesses. Hence, the company must enhance its employees' organizational commitment. The indirect effect found in this study is a driver to develop employees' commitment as a part of employee retention efforts.

Job environment has a positive effect on employee retention which is mediated by job satisfaction. It supports previous studies reporting the positive effect of job environment on employee retention (Alhmoud & Rjoub, 2020; Frye et al., 2020). The job environment is positively associated with ideas and creativities the organization needs, as

Employees need a work environment that supports their work process. The indirect effect of the job environment highlights the importance of employee retention. IT startups must invest to stimulate new ideas and innovation through job environment conduciveness. A job environment that supports flexibility, conduciveness, and comfort will likely be why employees stay at the company.

A different finding was noticed in the psychological contract, which indirectly decreased employee retention. However, psychological contracts did not indirectly affect employee retention when job satisfaction was the mediation variable. This finding is different from several studies reporting the positive effect of psychological contracts on employee retention (Holland & Scullion, 2021; Zupan et al., 2018). In this study, psychological contracts exhibited insignificant indirect effects on employee retention. The finding indicates the limitations possessed by IT startups. Startups need to set priorities in building their business process. Their early stage is usually to initiate the business and achieve the organizational target. Therefore, they must possess adequate capacity to meet all employees' needs. Their main priority usually involves fulfilling employees' rights and responsibilities explicitly mentioned in the written professional contract.

This study showed that employer branding, job environment, and organizational commitment directly affect job satisfaction. The most significant direct effect was job satisfaction on employee retention. Regarding the indirect effect, employer branding, job environment, and organizational commitment indirectly affect employee retention. These three variables exhibited positive, indirect effects on employee retention through the mediating role of job satisfaction. Psychological contracts exhibited neither direct nor indirect effects on job satisfaction and employee retention. This

study is different from the existing works on the effect of psychological contracts on job satisfaction and employee retention.

This study contributes by proving that predictors of employer branding, job environment, and organizational commitment have an effect on employee retention mediated by job satisfaction. Companies at the start-up level must have a plan to improve employer branding in the labor market. The company's reputation and credibility are serious considerations for employees to continue their careers in the long term. Companies as business entities always maintain commitment and an environment for employees in creating work comfort. Job satisfaction has proven that in several studies it can be a mediator in the context of employee retention with different industries such as retail, health, and tourism. (Aman-Ullah et al., 2022; Hassan, 2022; Tirta & Enrika, 2020).

The contribution of research with psychological contracts in IT-startup companies has important information for employee retention. Although the results of the direct influence there is a decrease in job satisfaction and have an impact on indirect influence on employee retention. Companies must increase job satisfaction with psychological contracts and have an indirect impact on employee retention. The results of this study prove that employee retention is not only in the normative aspect, but psychological management must be significantly improved. A sense of happiness and pride must be instilled since being accepted as an employee. The company's start-up level requires employees who are willing to fight together to increase business targets. Therefore, psychological contracts are a major concern according to the presentation of the research results.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study concludes that employer branding, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment directly and

positively affect job satisfaction and indirectly affect employee retention. Psychological contracts did not directly or indirectly affect job satisfaction and employee retention. It is recommended that IT startups develop professional relationships through professional contracts with their employees. However, the psychological contract's effect on the business quality is relatively insignificant. Despite its insignificant effect in improving employees' success, it is still necessary to establish optimal results. Future studies should include other variables, such as organizational development, workplace spirituality, and work ethics. The model could be extended by involving different industrial sectors and adjusted to the research objectives. Confirmatory Factor analysis, panel regression, and logistic regression were recommended following the study's needs.

This study has limitations that focus on IT-startup companies. These limitations are caused by access to data and information obtained for the distribution of research questionnaires. The results of this study strengthen employee retention practices in a business organization. Employee retention will be felt with job satisfaction. Psychological contracts must be instilled in employers and employees so that retention can be carried out in the long term. Employer branding must be strengthened to make it easier for companies to find new employee candidates. The regeneration of employees who have entered retirement must be filled with the younger generation. Reality challenge for startups that experience business turbulence with high competition complexity. New variables that can be used as model development with workforce agility, organizational performance, and employee behaviour with implications for employee retention. Mediation variables that can be used include employee voice, green behaviour, and others with a connecting function in the research model.

Employee retention is one of the keys to successful business achievement (Singh, 2019). IT startups demand employees' contributions and productivity to achieve their business targets. While startups need employees' roles to achieve the business target, most encounter high turnover rates. Therefore, employee retention should be seen as an organizational focus at the startup or corporate levels. Several factors play important roles and are considered when employees decide to stay at the organization and become part of its success. Employee branding, job environment, and organizational commitment indirectly affect employee retention through the mediating role of job satisfaction. The indirect effect plays a vital role in retaining employees. This study shows that the company must fulfill employees' job satisfaction to retain them. Employees' decision to stay at the organization will likely involve many factors. This study showed that employer branding, job environment, and organizational commitment positively affect job satisfaction. Another aspect the organization should consider is the need to develop a positive perception of the psychological contract between employees and the company as a business organization. Although this study found that psychological contract does not affect job satisfaction and employee retention, IT startups must develop professional relationships with employees. This mutualism will be an advantage for the organization. Thus, such a relationship should be evaluated to create employee and company benefits.

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