

EMPLOYER BRANDING IN PRACTICE : FOSTERING JOB SATISFACTION AND SUSTAINING EMPLOYEE RETENTION IN THE PALM OIL INDUSTRY (A CASE STUDY OF PT SURYA ALAM PERMAI - PALEMBANG)



1*Sabeli Aliya, 2Putri Yulianti

*^{1,2}Department of Management, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities,
Bina Darma University, Palembang - Indonesia*

e-mail:

¹*khomeha@gmail.com (corresponding author)

²ptrylianti2903@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The highly competitive nature of the palm oil industry requires companies to implement strategic human resource management practices, with employer branding playing a crucial role in enhancing organizational competitiveness. This study investigates the effect of employer branding on employee retention, with job satisfaction acting as a mediating variable, at PT Surya Alam Permai. A quantitative research approach was employed using purposive sampling, involving 50 respondents selected from a total population of 150 employees. Data were collected through structured questionnaires and analyzed using Partial Least Squares-Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to evaluate the relationships among the research variables. The findings reveal that employer branding has a positive and significant effect on job satisfaction. Furthermore, employer branding directly enhances employee retention. Job satisfaction also exerts a positive and significant influence on employee retention. In addition, job satisfaction significantly mediates the relationship between employer branding and employee retention, indicating that a strong employer image increases retention both directly and indirectly through enhanced employee satisfaction. These results underscore the strategic importance of employer branding in fostering job satisfaction, strengthening employee loyalty, and reducing turnover rates. Ultimately, an effective employer branding strategy contributes to long-term organizational sustainability and competitive advantage.

Keywords: *Employer Branding; Employee Retention; Job Satisfaction;
Palm Oil Plantation; Processing Industry*

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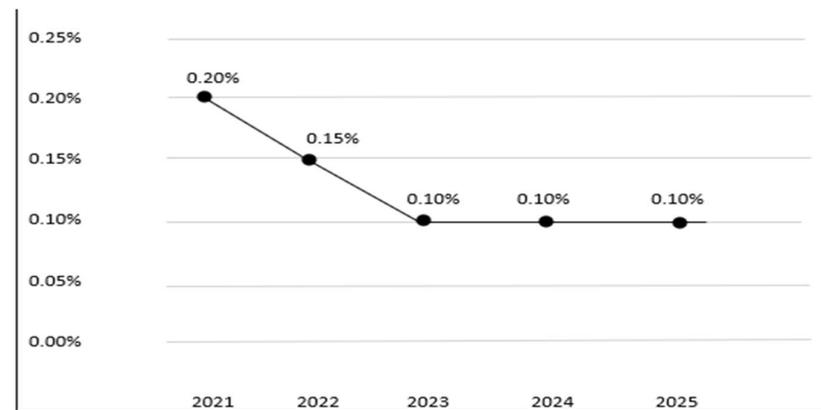
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INTRODUCTION

Employee retention, or the ability of a company to retain its workforce, represents a strategic challenge across industries, including the palm oil processing sector (Mathis & Jackson, 2011). High turnover rates not only disrupt operational continuity but also lead to declines in productivity, team stability, and increased recruitment and training costs (Harvida & Wijaya, 2020). Employees who leave often take with them valuable knowledge and skills that are difficult to replace, thereby weakening the organization's competitiveness (Khalid & Nawab, 2018). This phenomenon compels companies to gain a deeper understanding of the factors influencing employee retention in order to design effective strategies aimed at reducing turnover.

Over the past five years, PT Surya Alam Permai has experienced considerable fluctuations in employee turnover, with periods of relative stability in certain years. This condition reflects the ongoing challenges of retaining qualified employees within a highly competitive industry. To provide a clearer overview of this trend, the employee turnover data from 2021 to 2025 are presented in Figure 1.



Source: PT Surya Alam Permai, 2025

Figure 1
Employee Turnover Trends at PT Surya Alam Permai (2021-2025)

Based on employee turnover data, a declining trend can be observed from 2021 to 2025. In 2021, the turnover rate was recorded at 0.20%, decreasing to 0.15% in 2022, and remaining stable at 0.10% from 2023 through 2025. This downward trend reflects the company's efforts to reduce employee turnover.

This declining and stable trend has positioned the company's turnover rate well below the global average in the palm oil industry. For comparison, Wilmar International, one of the leading corporations in the sector, reported an overall employee turnover rate of 13.1% and a voluntary turnover rate of 8.7% in 2023, highlighting the persistent challenges of retaining skilled labor in both plantations and processing facilities (Tambun et al., 2023). This disparity underscores that, although turnover at PT Surya Alam Permai is relatively low, its impact remains significant and indicates potential retention challenges that must be anticipated through sustainability strategies to prevent competitive disadvantages.

One of the key factors influencing retention is employer branding. This concept refers to the company's image and reputation as an ideal workplace in the eyes of both current and prospective employees (Alzaid & Dukhaykh, 2023). A strong employer

branding strategy can foster employees' sense of pride and emotional attachment to the company, enhance their motivation, and promote long-term commitment (Riyanto et al., 2018). Previous studies have also shown that positive employer branding can attract high-quality talent while retaining existing employees by fostering a supportive work environment (Yulianti & Hartono, 2024).

In addition, job satisfaction functions as a psychological determinant of whether employees choose to remain with or leave an organization (Lisdayanti, 2015; Nainggolan et al., 2022). Employees who are content with their compensation, work environment, interpersonal relationships, and opportunities for career advancement are more likely to demonstrate higher levels of loyalty (Pitasari & Perdhana, 2018). Several studies have demonstrated that job satisfaction mediates the relationship between employer branding and employee retention (Kristianto & Handoyo, 2020; Panggabean et al., 2023). A positive corporate image contributes to more favorable work perceptions, which in turn fosters employees' intention to remain.

Nevertheless, empirical investigations into the relationship among employer branding, job satisfaction, and employee retention within the palm oil processing industry remain relatively scarce. Most prior studies have concentrated on the banking, retail, or service sectors (Alzaid & Dukhaykh, 2023; Kristianto & Handoyo, 2020), thereby leaving an important research gap to be addressed. It is therefore necessary to examine the interconnections of these three variables in the context of the palm oil plantation and processing industry.

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to providing a more contextual understanding of retention strategies within the palm oil industry, which possesses distinct characteristics compared to other sectors. Even relatively low levels of turnover can potentially disrupt operational continuity if not properly anticipated.

Building upon this background, the present study aims to analyze the effect of employer branding on employee retention, with job satisfaction serving as a mediating variable, at PT Surya Alam Permai, Palembang. The study is expected to provide practical implications for the company in formulating effective employer branding strategies to enhance both employee satisfaction and retention.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES

Employer Branding

Employer branding is defined as the set of functional, economic, and psychological benefits provided by employment, which differentiates an organization from others (Ambler & Barrow, 1996). It reflects the unique identity of the company that makes it attractive to current and potential employees (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). A strong employer brand builds positive perceptions of the organization, enhances employee loyalty, and reduces turnover rates (Alzaid & Dukhaykh, 2023). Key dimensions of employer branding include economic value, development opportunities, social value, interest value, and application value, all of which influence employee perceptions and organizational attractiveness (Rathee & Ritu, 2015). Thus, employer branding is a strategic tool not only for attracting talent but also for sustaining employee commitment and satisfaction (Yulianti et al., 2024).

Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction refers to a positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job or job experiences (Locke, 1976, as cited in Pitasari & Perdhana, 2018). It is associated with how employees perceive their work, rewards, supervision, and relationships with

colleagues (Handoko & Rambe, 2018; Sopiah, 2008). Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory distinguishes between motivators (intrinsic factors such as achievement, recognition, and career growth) and hygiene factors (extrinsic factors such as salary, policies, and working conditions) as determinants of job satisfaction. High job satisfaction not only reflects the fulfillment of employees' needs but also reduces turnover intentions and strengthens retention (Herzberg, 1959, as cited in Nainggolan et al., 2022).

Employee Retention

Employee retention refers to the ability of organizations to maintain competent employees and prevent them from leaving for competitors (Rahmawati, 2019). Retention strategies include competitive compensation, career development, supportive HR practices, and positive work environments (Harvida & Wijaya, 2020; Wilden et al., 2010). Mathis & Jackson (2011) emphasize that organizational culture, recognition, career opportunities, job design, and interpersonal relations are critical indicators influencing employee retention. Higher retention rates reduce recruitment costs, sustain organizational knowledge, and improve long-term performance (Jennifer, 2005; Putra & Rahyuda, 2016).

Relationship among Variables and Hypotheses Development

Employer branding also directly influences employee retention. Organizations with strong employer branding are more attractive to employees, reduce turnover intentions, and promote long-term loyalty (Alzaid & Dukhaykh, 2023; Kristianto & Handoyo, 2020). Hence, employer branding is expected to strengthen retention. Based on the theoretical arguments, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H¹: Employer branding has a positive and significant effect on employee retention among employees of PT Surya Alam Permai.

Employer branding has been recognized as a key determinant of employee perceptions and organizational attachment. A strong employer brand fosters a sense of pride and belonging among employees, thereby enhancing job satisfaction (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Nazwa & Irbayuni, 2024). This supports the assumption that employer branding positively influences job satisfaction. Based on the theoretical arguments, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H²: Employer branding has a positive and significant effect on job satisfaction among employees of PT Surya Alam Permai.

Furthermore, job satisfaction is widely considered a strong predictor of employee retention. Satisfied employees tend to exhibit higher commitment, lower turnover intentions, and a stronger willingness to remain with the organization (Herzberg et al., 1959; Nainggolan et al., 2022). This leads to the third hypothesis:

H³: Job satisfaction has a positive and significant effect on employee retention among employees of PT Surya Alam Permai.

Beyond these direct effects, job satisfaction also mediates the relationship between employer branding and employee retention. Employer branding enhances job satisfaction, which in turn strengthens employees' intention to stay (Panggabean et al., 2023; Pricilla & Martdianty, 2024). Thus, the fourth hypothesis is proposed:

H⁴: Job satisfaction significantly mediates the relationship between employer branding and employee retention among employees of PT Surya Alam Permai.

METHOD

This study was conducted at PT Surya Alam Permai, located on Jln. Kolonel Sulaiman Amin, Karya Baru, Alang-Alang Lebar District, Palembang City. The survey was carried out on-site from March 2025 to July 2025, with support from the management to strengthen the understanding of the company's operational context.

This study employed a quantitative method with an associative approach, aimed at examining the causal relationships among variables (Aliya & Ardila, 2024; Sugiyono, 2021). The population of this research consisted of all 150 employees of PT Surya Alam Permai. The sample was determined using purposive sampling, in which participants were selected based on predetermined criteria. The criteria included being a permanent employee with a minimum tenure of one year and willingness to participate as a respondent. Based on these criteria, a total of 50 respondents were obtained.

The research data were collected using a five-point Likert scale questionnaire, constructed based on the indicators of each variable. Data analysis was conducted using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) (Hair et al., 2019) with SmartPLS version 4.0. The analytical procedure began with the assessment of the outer model to examine convergent validity, including outer loadings and Average Variance Extracted (AVE), as well as construct reliability through Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values. Subsequently, the inner model was tested to evaluate the coefficient of determination (R^2), path coefficients, and the significance of both direct and indirect relationships among variables using the bootstrapping approach (Ghozali, 2018; Hair et al., 2021).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Data Analysis

The analysis began with testing the validity and reliability of the instruments through assessments of convergent validity, discriminant validity, and composite reliability to ensure the accuracy of variable measurement. Subsequently, the PLS-SEM approach was employed to examine the interrelationships among variables, with R^2 used to assess the model's explanatory power for the dependent variable. Hypothesis testing was conducted by evaluating path coefficients, and significant relationships served as the basis for hypothesis acceptance. In addition, the mediating role of job satisfaction was analyzed through indirect effects, with the significance of these effects confirming the existence of mediation within the research model (Hair et al., 2021).

Table 1 presents the results of the measurement model evaluation, conducted to ensure that all constructs meet the established criteria for validity and reliability (Mubarok & Purnamasari, 2025).

Tabel 1
Measurement Model Assessment: Factor Loadings, Reliability, and R-Square Values

Indicators	X	Y	Z
X.1	0.745	0.693	0.694
X.2	0.763	0.730	0.692
X.3	0.774	0.738	0.725
X.4	0.919	0.898	0.804
X.5	0.937	0.900	0.811
X.6	0.917	0.865	0.787
X.7	0.914	0.867	0.772
X.8	0.895	0.833	0.750
Y.1	0.767	0.850	0.782

Y.2	0.782	0.887	0.768
Y.3	0.711	0.720	0.677
Y.4	0.740	0.857	0.797
Y.5	0.821	0.886	0.766
Y.6	0.847	0.894	0.762
Z.1	0.802	0.788	0.897
Z.2	0.783	0.806	0.931
Z.3	0.682	0.713	0.902
Z.4	0.801	0.798	0.917
Z.5	0.709	0.724	0.916
Z.6	0.759	0.757	0.878
Z.7	0.678	0.692	0.900
Z.8	0.700	0.804	0.805
Cronbach's alpha	0.957	0.952	0.966
Composite reliability	0.963	0.959	0.970
AVE	0.726	0.702	0.767
Adjusted R-square		0.940	0.776

Source: Data Analyzed, 2025

Indicators and Outer Loadings

The data in Table 1 present the results of the measurement model analysis for the three main research variables: Employer Branding (X), Employee Retention (Y), and Job Satisfaction (Z). The outer loading values for each indicator are generally above 0.70, confirming that convergent validity has been achieved. For Employer Branding (X), the indicator loadings vary, ranging from 0.745 for X.1 to 0.895 for X.8, indicating differences in the extent to which each indicator explains the construct. Meanwhile, the indicators for Employee Retention (Y) and Job Satisfaction (Z) demonstrate consistently high loading values, with most approaching or exceeding 0.80, signifying strong construct representation.

Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

The AVE values obtained for Employer Branding (0.726), Employee Retention (0.702), and Job Satisfaction (0.767) all exceed the minimum threshold of 0.50. This indicates that more than 70% of the variance in the indicators can be explained by their respective constructs. Accordingly, convergent validity is further confirmed, and the measurement model can be considered robust.

Cross-Loadings and Discriminant Validity

Several cross-loading values indicate proximity among constructs. For instance, indicator X.4 has a loading of 0.919 on its intended construct, Employer Branding (X), but also loads highly on Employee Retention (Y = 0.898). A similar pattern is observed for X.5 (X = 0.937, Y = 0.900) and X.7 (X = 0.914, Y = 0.867). In the case of Job Satisfaction, indicator Z.8 records a loading of 0.805 on its original construct but also shows a relatively high loading on Employee Retention (0.804). These close values suggest potential overlap among constructs, although the highest loadings are generally observed on their respective intended constructs.

According to Hair et al. (2021), discriminant validity remains acceptable as long as the loading of an indicator on its intended construct is higher than its loadings on other constructs, and this is further supported by additional tests such as the Fornell-Larcker Criterion or HTMT. Accordingly, although some loadings appear relatively close across constructs, the indicators can still be retained as they continue to meet the criteria for discriminant validity.

To further confirm discriminant validity beyond cross-loading analysis, the Fornell–Larcker Criterion was applied, and the results are presented in Table 2.

Tabel 2
Discriminant Validity: Fornell – Larcker Criterion

Construct	Employer Branding	Job Satisfaction	Employee Retention
Employer Branding (X)	0.822		
Job Satisfaction (Z)	0.703	0.837	
Employee Retention (Y)	0.661	0.781	0.829

Source: Data Analyzed, 2025

Table 2 presents the results of the discriminant validity test using the Fornell–Larcker Criterion, where the square root of the AVE values on the diagonal is compared with the correlations among constructs. The results indicate that all diagonal values are greater than the correlations with other constructs, thereby confirming that the criteria for discriminant validity are satisfied. (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; as cited in Hair et al., 2019).

Construct Reliability

The Cronbach’s Alpha values for Employer Branding (0.957), Employee Retention (0.952), and Job Satisfaction (0.966) are all well above the minimum threshold of 0.70. Similarly, the Composite Reliability values for each construct exceed 0.95. These results confirm a very high level of internal consistency, indicating that the research instrument is reliable and capable of measuring the constructs with stability.

Adjusted R-Square

The adjusted R-square value indicates that Employee Retention (Y) is explained by Employer Branding (X) and Job Satisfaction (Z) by 94.0%, while Job Satisfaction (Z) is explained by Employer Branding (X) by 77.6%. These values demonstrate that the research model possesses a very high predictive power, thereby justifying its use for hypothesis testing of the relationships among variables.

Based on the analysis, it can be affirmed that the established validity and reliability, along with the high R-square values across all research variables, provide a solid foundation for examining the relationships among Employer Branding, Job Satisfaction, and Employee Retention. These results indicate that the developed model has a strong methodological basis and is suitable for further structural analysis.

Hypothesis Testing

Table 3 summarizes the results of the hypothesis testing through path coefficients, including t-statistics and p-values, to evaluate the significance of both direct and indirect relationships among the variables (Mubarok & Purnamasari, 2025).

Table 3
Path Coefficients, T-Statistics, and P-Values for Hypothesis Testing

	Original sample	Sample mean	Standard deviation	T statistics	P values
X → Y	0.746	0.750	0.071	10.437	0.000
X → Z	0.883	0.886	0.023	37.699	0.000
Z → Y	0.247	0.243	0.074	3.333	0.001
X → Z → Y	0.219	0.215	0.067	3.250	0.001

Source: Data Analyzed, 2025

The results of the structural model analysis in Table 3 indicate that Employer Branding has a positive and significant effect on Employee Retention ($\beta = 0.746$; $p < 0.05$). In addition, Employer Branding exerts a strong and significant influence on Job Satisfaction ($\beta = 0.883$; $p < 0.05$). Furthermore, Job Satisfaction is found to positively affect Employee Retention ($\beta = 0.247$; $p < 0.05$). The mediation test confirms that Job Satisfaction significantly mediates the effect of Employer Branding on Employee Retention ($\beta = 0.219$; $p < 0.05$). These findings underscore that strong Employer Branding not only enhances job satisfaction but also strengthens employee retention, both directly and indirectly.

Employer branding has a positive and significant effect on employee retention.

The findings indicate that employer branding plays a crucial role in enhancing employee retention. This result is consistent with the perspectives of Ambler & Barrow (1996) as well as Kristianto & Handoyo (2020) who emphasize that a positive corporate image as a workplace can strengthen employee loyalty. In the context of the palm oil industry, effective employer branding strategies such as corporate reputation, career development opportunities, and organizational cultural values emerge as key factors that discourage employees from leaving the company.

Employer branding has a positive and significant effect on job satisfaction.

Employer branding has been proven to enhance employees' job satisfaction. This finding aligns with the studies of Nazwa & Irbayuni (2024), and Samboan et al. (2025) which emphasize that positive perceptions of the company directly contribute to employees' sense of satisfaction at work. Such satisfaction arises when employees feel proud to be part of an organization with a strong workplace image and when their personal values align with the company's identity. Accordingly, employer branding functions not only as a recruitment strategy but also as an instrument that reinforces employees' internal satisfaction.

Job satisfaction has a positive and significant effect on employee retention.

Job satisfaction has been shown to be a decisive factor in strengthening employee retention. This finding reinforces the classical literature of Maslow (1943) and Herzberg (1959), who identified satisfaction as a key motivator for employee continuity within organizations (Ahmad Bani Melhem, 2019; Geremias et al., 2025; Nainggolan et al., 2022). In this study, employees who feel satisfied tend to develop stronger emotional bonds and higher levels of commitment, thereby reducing the likelihood of turnover. This is consistent with Lisdayanti (2015b) who found a close relationship between job satisfaction and employee retention across various sectors.

Job satisfaction significantly mediates the relationship between employer branding and employee retention.

The mediating role of job satisfaction demonstrates that the effect of employer branding on employee retention operates not only directly but also indirectly through enhanced job satisfaction. This result is consistent with the studies of Nurcahyo (2019) and Yulianti et al. (2024) which affirm that satisfied employees tend to be more loyal when working for companies with a strong image. In other words, robust employer branding fosters pride and satisfaction, which ultimately reinforce employees' commitment to remain. These findings suggest that corporate image management strategies should be integrated

with policies aimed at enhancing job satisfaction in order to achieve optimal employee retention.

Practical Implications for Companies

The findings of this study provide significant practical implications for the management of PT Surya Alam Permai as well as for similar companies in the palm oil plantation and processing industry. First, strong employer branding has been proven to strengthen employee loyalty. Therefore, companies need to carefully manage their workplace image through internal communication strategies, maintaining a positive reputation, and offering a distinctive employee value proposition, as suggested by Backhaus & Tikoo (2004).

Second, enhancing job satisfaction should be a primary priority in human resource policies, as job satisfaction has been shown to serve as a critical link between employer branding and employee retention. Companies can improve job satisfaction by providing fair compensation, supporting career development, and fostering a conducive work environment (Melhem, 2019; Geremias et al., 2025; Handoko & Rambe, 2018; Nainggolan et al., 2022).

Third, the findings also underscore that employee retention is not merely the outcome of recruitment or branding strategies, but also of fulfilling and satisfying work experiences. This aligns with the perspective of Kristianto & Handoyo (2020) who argue that millennials, in particular, are more likely to remain with companies that provide positive work experiences aligned with their personal values.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

This study reaffirms that employer branding plays a vital role in enhancing employee retention, both directly and indirectly through job satisfaction. The findings highlight that a positive corporate image not only fosters pride but also strengthens job satisfaction, which ultimately encourages employees to remain within the organization. Theoretically, these results enrich the literature on the mediating role of job satisfaction, while practically, they underscore the importance for companies to integrate employer branding strategies with initiatives to enhance job satisfaction in order to sustain employee retention.

This study has several limitations, particularly the relatively small sample size and its focus on a single company, which restricts the generalizability of the findings. In addition, the quantitative questionnaire-based approach does not fully capture the depth of employees' experiences, and the research model only considered job satisfaction as a mediating variable, while other potential factors such as employee engagement, compensation, or organizational culture were not examined.

Therefore, future studies are recommended to broaden the sample scope, employ a mixed-methods approach for more comprehensive insights. additional mediating or moderating variables. In addition, the conceptual model may be extended by incorporating other relevant variables such as employee engagement, compensation and benefits, organizational culture, and work-life balance, as these factors are theoretically associated with employees' attachment, satisfaction, and intention to remain. Integrating these variables would enable a more holistic understanding of the mechanisms underlying employee retention and strengthen the theoretical robustness of subsequent studies.

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