A Conceptual Framework for Organizational Attractiveness among Malaysian Millennial Jobseekers Aimed at the Aftermath of COVID-19

Fariha Anjum Hira[1], Harcharanjit Singh[1], Md. Moshiul Alam[2], Ahmad Ishtiak Nahid3

[1]Azman Hashim International Business School, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur 54100, Malaysia, [2]Razak Faculty of Technology and Informatics, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur 54100, Malaysia, [3]Department of Information and Communication technology, International Islamic University Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Email: hirafa92@gmail.com

Abstract
Attracting superior talent from the job market is a crucial task for the organization. Due to the technological paradigm-shifting in the direction of Industrial revolution 4.0, tech-savvy millennials are the organization's dominant priority to gain a competitive advantage. Scholars predict that the ongoing COVID-19 is likely to change millennial's job preferences. On the other hand, in this economic climate, where young people are at an amplified risk of being jobless, organizations must play a vital role in providing jobs and attract young entry-level millennial jobseekers. Millennials have unique expectations from employers, thus selective about organizations to join. Understanding the millennial job seeker's perception is imperative for the organization to create an "attractive employer" image. However, very little is known about the factor attracting entry-level millennial jobseekers towards an organization from literature. Consequently, the present study identifies four factors, corporate social responsibility, perceived work environment, individual value, and organizational reputation, which have organizational attractiveness. The study develops a conceptual model of organizational attractiveness utilizing social identity theory and signaling theory. Further, this concept will empirically be tested and validated in the future.
Keywords: COVID-19, Employee Attraction, Human Resource Management, Malaysia, Millennials.

Introduction
Organizations pass through a transitional period where the job market shifts towards various directions from traditional hierarchy (Jerome *et al.*, 2014). Industrial revolution 4.0 initiated this paradigm shift in the job market where an independent and capable workforce must cope with global diversity. Millennials are skilled, educated, adoptive, tech-savvy by nature; thus, organizations have prioritized recruiting them. However, the world is witnessing the COVID-

19 pandemic for around a year, negatively impacting the financial sector. Evidence from the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) of 2007-08 has shown that the unemployment rate increased, particularly among fresh graduates aged between 20 to 24 years old. Acceding to Human resource management (HRM), scholars believe that the pandemic is likely to be an even more severe challenge to the job market than GFC (Shehzad, Xiaoxing & Kazouz, 2020). They further predict that millennials career is at most vulnerable condition specifically fresh millennial graduates. An organization must redesign their policy to tackle the coming "career shock." The notion of "career shock" explains how this pandemic will change career choice (Cox 2020a; 2020b; Rudolph & Zacher, 2020).

Since GFC, millennials face the unfortunate reality of unemployment worldwide (Ismail & Seng, 2016). Globally, half of the total number of employees belongs to the millennial age group (Calk & Patrick, 2017). Ismail and Lu (2014) projected that this generation would grab a 75 percent share of the total global labor market within the next ten years. It is no wonder that the millennials are already dominating the United States labor market (Deloitte, 2016) and are projected to grab a 45.5 percent share of the Malaysian labor force (Ismail and Lu, 2014). Unlike other countries, unemployment among fresh millennial graduates in Malaysia is a severe problem (Ismail & Seng, 2016; Ramli *et al*., 2018). Around 24 percent of the country's graduates remain unemployed for a minimum of one year after graduation (Arumugam *et al*., 2014). This problem afflicts developing countries like India, Thailand, the Philippines, Indonesia, and developed countries like the US, UK, and Australia (Ismail & Seng, 2016; Moore & Khan, 2020).

Ibrahim and Mahyuddin (2017) mentioned that unemployment is significantly affecting the youths immediately upon graduation. Also, the International Labor Organization (ILO) has raised concerns about the unemployment trend that has shown a negligible change in the past few years, which is disadvantageous and alarming for millennial youths in the job market. Unemployment among entry-level millennial youths as the studies mentioned that unemployment at this stage has a long-term negative impact on millennials associated with future unemployment, lower-income risks (ILO, 2017). Attracting millennials towards organizations can potentially reduce unemployment and lower the risk of adverse impacts such as lower-income risks. On the other hand, in this era of K-economy and Industry revolution 4.0, organizations need tech-savvy, educated employees to remain competitive and millennial youths are the best match (Moore & Khan, 2020).

Understanding millennials' perceptions towards organizations will help the organization get a sufficient supply human resources and determine how to place themselves in the job market as an attractive employer (Linden, 2015). However, entry-level job seeker's organizational attractiveness heavily depends upon their perception as they hardly have work experience (Jones, Willness & Madey, 2014). Several reasons can play a vital role in the increased unemployment rate among millennial youths (Ramli et al., 2018). Millennials are selective in job search based on work ethics, organizations' policy, workplace comfort, etc. Therefore, they are not workaholics; consequently, they presume that organizations' attributes will match their values, lifestyle, and expectations (Appel-Meulenbroek *et al*., 2019). Millennials have specific expectations from an organization. Despite having educational qualifications and skilled millennial youths remain unemployed or choose to study further, they lack job fit (CoreNet Global, 2015; Ibrahim & Mahyuddin, 2017). For

instance, until last dacade, salary was an influential factor to attract job seekers, which is not applicable for millennial youths. Thus, the concept of organizational attractiveness (OA) has shifted toward more soft factors like job seeker's perceptions regarding the work environment and the organization's value in terms of contributing to environmental and social betterment. Therefore, organizations need to focus more on developing OA delivering the message related to social responsibility, work environmental factors kind of soft components (Appel, 2014). This remarkable paradigm shift in organizational attractiveness concept from millennials perspective makes it challenging for the organization to understand what attracts the millennial youths the most. Thus, this study attempts to fill this gap to guide employers on how to signal the millennial job seekers to find the organization attractive to join. In a nutshell, researchers are raising concerns that unemployment among young millennials is likely to increase even more due to the impending financial crisis caused by COVID-19. Therefore, this study focuses on entry-level millennial job seekers aged between 20 to 24 years old.

This study aims to examine to what extent the constructs, namely, corporate social responsibility (CSR), perceived work environment (PWE), Individual Value (InV), and Organizational reputation (OR) are related to Organizational Attractiveness (OA). Prior studies predominately studied millennial graduates' employability (Kinash et al. 2016; Tomlinson 2007), self-awareness of individuals career establishment (Moore & Khan, 2020), mostly from existing workers perceptive. Literature has discussed the influence of these constructs on organizational attractiveness context. Although a plethora of studies predominately studied employee retention, very few focuses on employee attraction. Very little attention has been given to examining millennial entry-level job seekers' perspectives towards an organization to work for (Catano and Morrow, 2016; Youn, Lee & Lee, 2018). Thus, this study aims to fill this gap. This study has been supported by two (2) theories, namely Signalling Theory (Spence, 1973) and Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1979), to test the relationship of four Individual variables, namely, corporate social responsibility, perceived work environment, individual value, organizational reputation with the dependent variable, organizational attractiveness. This study aims to fill up the gaps in existing literature with the support of theories. Suggestions for further study requirement by research has been taken under consideration in this study. Based on the problem statement and literature review, the study further extended the research framework developed by Catano and Morrow (2016) to contribute to knowledge that has practical implications on the HRM field.

Problem Statement

Youth unemployment rate refers to the unemployment rate of 20–24-year-olds group in Malaysia. Millennials began entering this age range in early 2000. According to the Malaysian Department of Statistics record, as Ibrahim and Mahyuddin (2017) mentioned, approximately a hundred thousand millennial graduates were unemployed in 2009. In 2010, unemployed graduates were 16.7% of the total unemployed labor force. Unemployment among millennials was 9.5% in 2014. The rate suddenly increased by 1.2% and become 10.78% in 2015, whereas national unemployment from 2014 to 2915 increased by only 0.2%. In 2016, a slight decline of 0.05% was noticed. However, in 2017, the graph again shows an upward trend. The youth unemployment rate was 13.2%. In 2018, 2019, the youth unemployment rate was 10.8 % and 9.5%, accordingly (IEBMC, 2019). Malaysia's youth unemployment rate fluctuates quite frequently and mostly remains above 10% on average (Premand *et al.*, 2016).

According to Ibrahim *et al*. (2016), "the unemployment rate among youths has dramatically increased by 1.2% to 10.7%, as compared to the national unemployment rate, which increased only by 0.2% from 2.9% to 3.1%." Historically it is evident that unemployment is a matter of concern for Malaysia which should not be underestimated (Ibrahim & Mahyuddin, 2017). This rate directly contributes to the country's total unemployment rate (Nachiappan *et al*., 2018; Premand *et al*., 2016).

Eventually, youth unemployment turned into a sensitive community issue, especially among graduates as many fresh millennial graduates are still waiting for employment (Arumugam *et al*., 2014; Hanapi & Nordin, 2014; Ismail & Seng, 2016; Nachiappan *et al*., 2018). Getting effective role-play function from millennials in the job market as a part of an organization is a tough challenge that Malaysia is currently going through (Ismail & Seng, 2016). In other words, "Stepping forward in strategizing action plans to meet the new demand" of millennials is a way to increase organizational attractiveness so that the millennials can think of themselves as prepared for the workplace. Ismail and Seng (2016) believe that increasing organizational attractiveness is vital to prepare the Malaysian millennial generation for the workforce. Starineca (2015) suggested that enhancing organizational attractiveness can ease this unemployment problem among millennial youths. Using meta-analysis, researchers evaluated several influencing factors that contribute to attracting millennial job seekers to the organization (Hendriks, 2016). Ismail and Lu (2014) suggested that we need to attract millennials toward the organizations under consideration in the Malaysian context due to the need for millennials' contribution to "*the New Economic Model*" (NEM) of Malaysia. The diversity and leadership quality of millennials triggered organizations to think about them for contribution of millennials to the Malaysian workforce, especially from 2020 and onwards.

The right quality and quantity of human capital is a fundamental requirement for an organization and a country (Ismail & Seng, 2016). Organizations face difficulty with human resource management and struggle to attract desired talent as job seekers' rudiments differ from generation to generation. Particularly during this era, with the challenge of attracting millennials, organizations face unprecedented and extraordinary employee attraction challenges (Yi *et al*., 2014). Millennials are unique by nature. Even if they join an organization, they tend to switch organizations frequently compared to other generations (Martin and Ottemann, 2016). Therefore, attracting them in the first place is very crucial for organizations. Thus, OA is a vital component to achieve a competitive advantage while attracting potential millennial job seekers. Organizations must redesign employee attraction policy and procedure to attract the best talents (Appel-Meulenbroek *et al*., 2019) of the generation. Ismail and Seng (2016) mentioned that despite a swift increase in the number of millennial graduates in the workforce, the organization failed to best use this educated generation because of a lack of understanding of their perspective and need. Thus, the absence of a "synergistic relationship" among graduate millennials and organizations is a matter of apprehension (Ismail & Seng, 2016).

A sizable number of studies are available on millennials, but very few studies are found on millennial fresh graduates' attractiveness towards an organization. Notably, there is a shortage of literature on entry-level millennial job seekers—this group of job seekers looking for job opportunities mainly based on their perception. Furthermore, there are many previous

studies on OA, but only a few studies discussed the influences of millennial job seekers' perception towards it (Appel-Meulenbroek *et al.*, 2019; Catano & Morrow, 2016; Linden, 2015). The further study requires millennial youths' perception regarding the job market (Linden, 2015). Moreover, most researchers considered existing employee retention rather than job-seeking millennial youths. However, there is no research in Malaysia on undergraduate students regarding organization attractiveness while preparing to enter into the job market and actively looking for a job (Ismail & Seng, 2016). According to Linden (2015), understanding millennials' perception towards organizations will help the organization get sufficient human resources supply and find out how to place themselves on the job market as an attractive employer.

Literature Review
Underpinning Theory
This study employees two theories, namely, (a) social identity theory and (b) signaling theory as underpinning theory of the conceptual model to test empirically.

Social Identity Theory
Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) was developed based on the concept of belonging. According to this theory, "people define themselves through involvement in groups of similar others" (Appel, 2014). The Social Identity Theory suggested that job seekers want to be a part of an organization with a strong positive reputation to have a higher self-image when working. "Social identity" and "self-concept" have decisive impact factors while defining individuals' organizational life and oneself. Organizational values enhance individuals' social identity positively. Job seekers seek self-esteem and pride to carry with them as a part of that particular organization. Membership of a specific group matters according to social identity theory (Cattano & Morrow, 2016). Group influence, high status, and services provided by the organization (the group) impact InV creation (Slade, Ribando & Fortner, 2016). Therefore, job seekers look for self and organizational value-fit factors while seeking employment. Besides, OR is a vital component of OA. Organizational reputation (OR) is capable of crafting an organization's image more attractively to a specific group of people or hiring diverse candidates. A positive corporate reputation is very appealing to millennial job seekers, and a negative reputation discourages being attracted toward that organization as millennials are conscious about self-enhancing employment setting (Xie, Bagozzi & Meland, 2015).

Signalling Theory
Spence (1973) developed the Signaling theory on the basics of the job market signaling concept. He further explained that, among the two parties, one of them would be involved in observable mechanism (such as millennial job-seeking youths) to another party exhibit its unobservable features (for example, efficiency). Signaling theory explains the behavioral reflection in terms of job market signaling. In this study context, two parties are (i) Job seeking individuals and (ii) organizations (employer) involved in information sharing. The decision making is based on their access to that different information. Here, organizations' signal through their activity; as a consequence, job-seeking individuals react accordingly. For instance, if the recruitment messages, advertisements, or other information sources signal about a healthy work environment, jobseekers are likely to respond positively. Job seekers interpret an organization's work environment and corporate social responsibility policy as a

signal before developing a sense of value-fit with the organization. Management scholars used this theory to explain the need for corporate social responsibility as it has potential benefits for the organization as a component of OA (Jones *et al.*, 2014; Su *et al.*, 2016). The organization has control over information sharing while attracting millennial job seekers. Jones et al. (2014) argued that information is a signal for job seekers to decide whether that particular organization is attractive enough to be a part of or not.

Hypothesis Development
This study develops a hypothesis and conceptual model considering the Social Identity theory and signaling theory as underpinning theories.

The Relationship between Corporate Social Responsibility and Organizational Attractiveness
Corporate social responsibility refers to the formation of organizational principles taking social responsibility into account and reflect it through the process of responsiveness, policies, strategies accordingly so that the outcomes can be observed (Catano & Morrow, 2016). Parks-Leduc, Feldman, and Bardi (2015) found that corporate social responsibility plays a crucial role in increasing organizational attractiveness. The authors argued that millennials, those willing to contribute to social well-being, intend to work with the organization with CSR policy and are active in conducting such activities (Parks-Leduc, Feldman, & Bardi, 2015). Another reason to believe that corporate social responsibility helps to attract talent is given by the social identity theory, suggesting that job seekers have a higher self-image when working for a socially responsible organization (Catano & Morrow, 2016). Job seekers perceive that organizations with positive corporate social responsibility policies *care for* their employees (Gully, 2013). Martin and Ottemann (2016) presented the findings regarding the use of requirement materials during a job fair. They recommended that organizations with attractive corporate social responsibility activities could influence more potential job seekers. Jones *et al*. (2014) revealed that in a job fair, the organization that advertised itself as being committed to society's betterment would be able to attract the attention of more job seekers than other organizations. The result of the study demonstrates a significant relationship between CSR and OA. However, job seekers, reclusive by nature, may not be attracted or have a smaller effect on OA due to CSR. Hence, more research is needed to test CSR and OA (Martin & Ottemann, 2016). Based on the discussion and suggestion, the following hypothesis was developed.

H1: Corporate social responsibility has a significant positive relationship with organizational attractiveness.

The Relationship between Perceived Work Environment and Organizational Attractiveness
Perceived Work Environment (PWE) refers to the workplace's physical features such as ventilation, lighting, and noise accessibility. These physical elements have a significant role in sustainability and the overall working environment. If there are problems in those elements, it can cause disaffection, different health problems, and decreased productivity (Sohlma, 2016). Organizations with a very casual working environment are attractive to millennial youths (Caraher, 2015). Policy regarding Healthy work environment promoting policies improves organizational attractiveness among millennial job seekers (Catano & Morrow, 2016). Millennial job seekers are extra cautious about the work environment; thus, they

search for information related to the work environment while seeking a job (Caraher, 2015). A workplace that is flexible and customizable is likely to attract millennial job seekers. Millennials care for an excellent place to work in an organization that is very careful in providing a healthy workplace environment (Taylor, 2014). Hendriks (2016) used a spreadsheet to conduct analysis using their own and most common concept regarding work environment and found positive relation with organizational attractiveness. Yi *et al*. (2014) inspected the physical workplace environment and OA's influence and found a positive relationship between them in the context of Scotland's call-center industry. Taylor (2014) found a positive relationship between perceived work environment attributes and organizational attractiveness. Based on the discussion, the following hypothesis was developed.

H2: Perceived work environment has a significant positive relationship with organizational attractiveness.

The Relationship between Individual Values and Organizational Attractiveness
Individual Values (InV) "are the representatives of the important goals for people or mental representatives of actuating forces. They are designated as emotional and intellectual principles that guide people's lives." In other words, InV is the basis of an individual's point of view; thus, InVs are integral parts of an individual's behavior at the beginning of a decision-making process. They are also the factors that shape and improve the understanding of people's behavior." (Kaygin, gulluce, 2013). Quite a few researches indicated that InV decides person-organization fit perception with the organization. A positive individual-organization fit perception is the push factor for the job seeker to feel attracted towards the particular organization (Catano & Morrow, 2016; Jones *et al*., 2016; Weeks *et al*., 2014). Story *et al*. (2016) conducted the only experimental study on individual value fit of job seekers based on their perception and found that job seekers esteem and expected treatment has a positive effect on organizational attractiveness. Individual value insists job seekers look for the comfort zone where they can work with similar others. Therefore, millennial job seekers seek the best organizational value match with their value as individuals (Catano and Morrow, 2016; Parks-Leduc *et al*., 2015).

In contrast, Gully (2013) argued that self-centered personality of individuals intendents to focus more on personal gain over other values. Therefore, this group of job seekers may have a different perspective regarding individual and organizational value fit that may show no relationship with organizational attractiveness. According to Jones et al. (2014), progressive policies of an organization may create a negative value perception among a self-centered group of millennials. Consequently, this group of people will be less attracted to such organizations with progressive policies and practices. Thus, prior studies found inconsistent results, and Catano and Morrow (2016) suggested further empirically testing the relationship between InV and OA. Based on the discussion and suggestion, the following hypothesis was developed.

H3: Individual value has a significant positive relationship with organizational attractiveness.

The Relationship between Organizational Reputation and Organizational Attractiveness
Organizational Reputation (OR) refers to "individual's global impressions of an organization and is defined as peoples' loose structures of knowledge and beliefs about an organization. The organizational image represents the net cognitive reactions and associations of customers, individual values, employees, and applicants to an organization's name. Accordingly, it serves as a template to categorize, store, and recall organization-related information." (Lievens, 2017). OR is the essential measure of OA from millennial job seekers perspective (Yuksel, 2015). Millennials consider their perception towards the company as a tool of organizational attractiveness that has a link with its reputation, and thus tend to search for the reputed organizations to work for (Jones et al., 2014). OR has a significant influence on OA, and it plays a crucial role in the recruitment process (Hendriks, 2016; Cho, 2015). Jones et al (2014) found that OR strongly influences OA and concluded the higher the positive reputation, the better attraction (Jones et al., 2014). However, the reputation can be negative as well. In case of a negative reputation, the job seekers will have a reverse decision. Nevertheless, more research is needed between OR and OA (Xie et al., 2015). Based on the discussion and suggestion, the following hypothesis was developed.

H4: Organizational reputation has a significant positive relationship with organizational attractiveness.

Research Framework
This study conceptualizes the research framework (Figure 1) to support underpinning theories namely, social identity theory and signaling theory. The study constructs (individual variable) are corporate social responsibility (CSR), perceived work environment (PWE), Individual value (InV), and organizational reputation (OR) that has a direct influence on organizational attractiveness (OA). According to the hypotheses developed in the previous section, CSR, PWE, InV, and OR have a significant positive relationship with the dependent variable, OA. Hence, based on the literature review and gap of research, the present study was carried out.
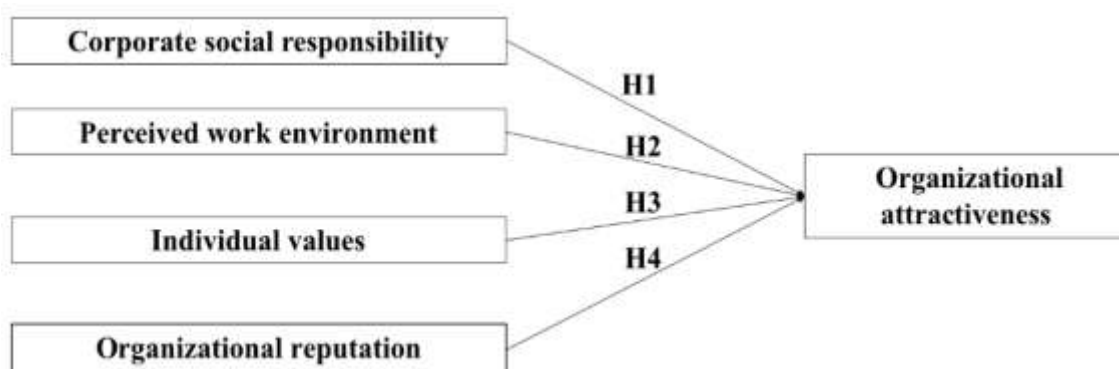

Figure 1. Conceptual framework

Research Methodology and Data Analysis
The study will follow the quantitative research methodology to reach the research aim. Ideally, a quantitative analysis offers objective data and is undertaken to incorporate programs in an aspect-oriented manner. Also, this analysis method guarantees the authenticity of conclusions supported with robust mechanisms of justification and definition. The model developed utilizing social identity and signaling theory will be empirically tested

using questionnaire distribution. Individual respondents will be selected from Malaysian research universities to generalize data, particularly in the contest of fresh graduates with research-intensive study background. Generalizability means "the validity of a theory in a setting different from the one where it was empirically tested and confirmed" (Lee & Baskerville, 2003, p.221). According to Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) table, the sample size should be 384. It is unlikely that all distributed questionnaires will be usable; therefore, an additional 10 percent of questionnaires will be distributed, for a total of 422. To get the maximum response, the person-to-person hard copy questionnaire will be distributed. The fundamental research will be conducted following the phases as illustrated in Figure 2.
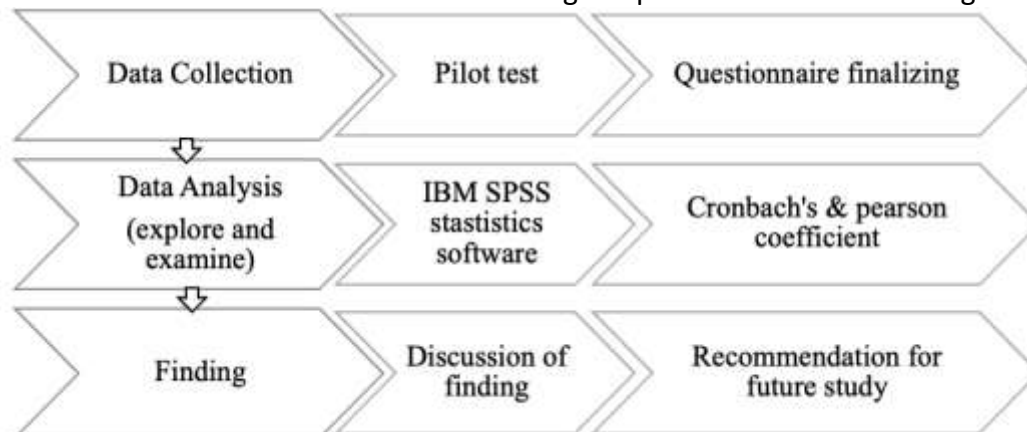

Figure 2. Research phases

Since the research will collect primary data for analysis, the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software will be used. Moreover, this study will consider both descriptive and inferential statistics to analyze the frequency, average, and standard deviation. A Cronbach's alpha is the mean of measuring and validating a Questionnaire's reliability; therefore, it will be calculated. A pilot test will also be conducted to validate the research instrument followed by the "Pearson correlation coefficient test" for strength measurement of a relationship and "correlations" between the variables. Considering the ethical aspect, the respondents will be given the right to deny participation; thus, the participants will be voluntary. Moreover, considering any implications for participants, their comments are anonymous, and all data are encrypted to protect their secrecy.

Conclusion

The prediction of prospective employees' choice of up taking an organization to work for can provide the organization better insight and understanding of their choice. Accordingly, the organizations can prepare themselves in terms of organizational policy to remain competitive in attracting the job market's best talents. It has been evident earlier that a crisis drastically changes young adults' job preferences, and the same is likely to occur in the post-pandemic work environment (de Haas, Faber & Hamersma, 2020). Therefore, this study finding from COVID-19 pandemic perspective will be helpful to refine and upgrade HRM policies.

This study has both theoretical and contextual significance. Firstly, the article identifies four influential factors of organizational attractiveness (CSR, PWE, InV, OR) from the literature and develops a conceptual framework to test it empirically. Secondly, this study fills the literature gap. Most of the study considers existing employee retention factors than fresh graduates' perspective who seek their first employer (organization) for a job. Thirdly, despite

evidence that unemployment among Malaysian millennials is a paramount concern, it remains underexplored. The present article bridges this contextual gap. Finally, COVID-19 has already caused a radical change in an organization's working condition compared to traditional work commencing activity in a pre-pandemic organizational setting (Porpiglia *et al.*, 2020), thus, exists a theoretical gap (Aguinis, Villamor & Gabriel, 2020). This secondary research conceptualizes a theoretical framework from an organizational attractiveness perspective. Furthermore, it supports and exhibits arguments to the explanation of social identity theory and signaling theory. Consequently, the study contribution remains significant for the HRM managers and decision-makers to plan accordingly in attracting millennials more efficiently.

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