.

The Influence of Internal Corporate Communication on Brand Community

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ABSTRACT

Many companies implement brand community strategies to increase brand loyalty and brand engagement. Previous research on the brand community has focused more on the marketing aspect, with consumers as the target audience of the strategy. Many startup companies in Jakarta are adopting this strategy internally to increase employee engagement with the brand. This article further analyzes the brand community strategy in human resource management, which has been very little discussed by previous research. By hypothesizing that internal corporate communication is a factor that increases brand community strategy activities for employees, this study examined the relationship between internal corporate communication and brand community for millennial employees at digital startup companies in Jakarta. An online survey was conducted by distributing questionnaires to startup millennial employers and got 107 responses. SEM test analyzes the relationship between internal corporate communication (independent variable) and brand community (dependent variable). The dimensions used in this study's internal corporate communication variables refer to brand message effectiveness, brand feedback, and communication channels. In contrast, brand community variables' dimensions refer to the experience of information, socialization, human-machine interaction, and entertaining activity. This study's results indicate the company's internal communication management's strong influence on brand community activities. As novel insights, the results of this study are the first quantitative research to explain the relationship between internal corporate communication and the brand community, especially in the human resource management communications sphere.

Keywords

Internal corporate communication, brand community, millennial employees, startup companies, human resource management

INTRODUCTION

Currently, the discussion about the millennial generation is being discussed in many forums and research. This is because this generation is known to dominate the population in various countries in the world, including Indonesia. according to the Central Bureau of Statistics (2015), of the approximately 250 million Indonesian population today, around 34.47% of the population or around 82 million people are aged 15-34 years. In essence, the millennial generation has become the majority of residents throughout the world today for the next few years, especially in Indonesia, which is being predicted that in 2025 will enter the demographic bonus, namely a situation where

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the number of productive age is increasing, while the elderly are getting less and young people are not. many. With population domination by this generation,

Therefore, many studies have attempted to discuss the character and workings of the millennial generation. Research by (Utomo, 2019) who researched 500 millennials in Indonesia found that millennials consider the process of work as a process of self-development rather than a process of earning income. In addition, research by (Fortunnisa, Elsyah, Fathihah, & Ananda, 2019) said that the millennial generation is a generation that likes to collaborate with others. Millennial workers like jobs that can facilitate them in collaborating, exchanging ideas and opinions, developing themselves, and networking. This refers to research by (Alnıaçık & Alnıaçık, 2012) who said that employees need a platform that can bind themselves to the company, and to form bonds with employees it is important for companies to understand the character of these employees at work. The container for protecting several people against a particular brand is known as a brand community.

Research on brand community has become an interesting topic in the 21st century today (Constantin, Plato, & Orzan, 2014) especially in the field of corporate marketing (Stokburger-Sauer, 2010). Brand community is broadly defined as a community that talks about brands. Through the brand community, community members can discuss, negotiate, and socialize the form of good brand meaning (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). Through the community, the company seeks to create loyalty among community members towards the company's brand, creating value added for the company such as increased sales, positive reviews from community members, to the good image of the company. (Constantin et al., 2014). and influence the perception and behavior of community members based on brand-related discussions in community activities (Thompson & Hamilton, 2006).

The many benefits that are felt from the success of this brand community strategy have made many companies, especially digital startup companies which are new start-up companies, seek to create marketing strategies through various community activities by inviting the public and consumers to participate in activities held by the company. As time goes by, seeing the development of brand community research in its effect on creating loyalty and interactivity in consumers as members, many researches in the field of HR or human resource management also discuss brand community strategies in HR studies with targets on company employees.

This is because employees are the center of corporate brand management, which according to research by (King & Grace, 2008) employees have the potential to make or break a corporate brand. The same thing was said by (Punjaisri & Wilson, 2007) which says that employees are the main center of the company's brand management which means, employees play a major role in the product brand and company brand. In conclusion, no matter how well the brand is presented to consumers through external marketing such as advertising and other marketing mix tools, only company employees are able to save or even damage the presentation of the brand from internal companies to external parties (King & Grace, 2008).

In addition, the study also found that employees are part of internal marketing which is also as important as the marketing process to consumers. Companies must have internal marketing activities, namely the process of marketing brand value to employees which is the same effort as the activity of the brand value marketing process to consumers (Devasagayam, Buff, Aurand, & Judson, 2010). This internal marketing process involves HR activities as a whole starting from the recruiting process such as clarity of information and benefits provided to new employees in joining the company, selecting new employees such as HR behavior in recruiting and interviewing new employees, to the training and adapting process with employees being the key. from internal marketing processes to employees (Salem & Iglesias, 2016). In addition, research by King & Grace (2008) mentions that internal marketing activities are needed in understanding employee needs so as to facilitate the branding process into oneself and the work process of all company employees (Devasagayam et al., 2010). In another study, Wijaya & Amir (2022) found that internal corporate communication with compassion (*Komunikasih*) practiced by Nutrifood Indonesia through the Rumah Kedua program implied positive leadership and working climate among employees.

Therefore, in brief, the branding process established by the company cannot only focus on external parties such as consumers, but must also be able to focus on employees. (Mazzei & Ravazzani, 2016; Morocco & Uncles, 2009; Sheikh & Lim, 2015). The branding process for employees

is intended so that employees are able to have the same thoughts, goals, and behaviors with the culture and big goals of the company. By having loyal employees and having good brand engagement, employees are not only part of delivering the company's brand promise, but employees are also able to become brand guardians, brand ambassadors, and become volunteers who voluntarily help and improve the company's good name through various efforts. individual efforts which certainly improve the performance and good image of the company (Henkel, Tomczak, & Wentzel, 2007; Mazzei & Quaratino, 2015; Quaratino & Mazzei, 2018)

In the branding process, in influencing the behavior and attitudes of the intended person in the branding process, it is regulated in marketing control theory, namely the process for companies in influencing the attitudes and behavior of the target audience. In the marketing control process is divided into 2 types, namely formal control and informal control. In research by (Henkel et al., 2007) said that formal control and informal control can be two tools in regulating employee behavior towards the brand. This is because, the level of realization of the brand promise depends on the ability of employees to live up to the brand promise which is greatly influenced by how well the company's ability to control and manage its employees. (Aurand, Gorchels, & Bishop, 2005).

The formal control is a company management activity in influencing employee work behavior as expected by the company by using written media such as branding brochures, book-guides, employee magazines, etc. Meanwhile, informal control is an instrument of employee management with the characteristics of direct interaction between managers or supervisors and employees. Some informal control activities are internal team activities, events, or even encouraging employees to become brand ambassadors for the company. In research by (Henkel et al., 2007) said that informal control plays the most important role compared to formal control where formal control is a complementary tool in carrying out informal control. Informal control is also expressed as the company's ability to create activities that can improve branding to employees through improving the quality of human resource management, the quality of internal communication, and is strongly influenced by the role of leaders or managers in the company (Mazzei & Quaratino, 2015).

This marketing control process is also applied by many digital startup companies to employees. These companies understand the importance of creating loyalty from employees in order to make employees become brand guardians or brand ambassadors for employees. This effort begins by understanding that millennial workers have a great desire to work as a place to develop themselves. Therefore, digital startup companies seek to create activities that have a brand community concept as a place for employees to discuss, develop themselves, negotiate, gather, and exchange ideas and opinions which indirectly become positive inputs and new ideas for the company (Elsyah, 2020).

Brand community is usually done by digital startup companies online or commonly called online brand community. The activities carried out are related to the use of social media networks through posting interesting content that invites consumers to see the latest information from the company's brand. Through content distributed on social media, companies can easily interact with consumers and through these online activities, companies can increase brand awareness and brand engagement with consumers. In addition, through the online brand community, companies can also easily sell or market the latest products, or the latest product information such as product promotions, or activities related to products and consumers such as online quizzes, brand campaigns, and so on.

The increase in the performance of the online brand community is supported by the fact that internet and social media users are increasingly using internet technology and social media in Indonesia (Farmania, Elsyah, & Tuori, 2021). This supports the creation of an online brand community culture that is not only aimed at consumers but can also be two-way with employees and consumers.

For example, a digital startup company called Traveloka, which in addition to focusing on providing accommodation ticket purchase services online, also seeks to attract consumer engagement by creating communities such as travelokaeats for culinary lovers with various interesting content and promos on its Instagram social media called Travelokaeats. The content on travelokaeats is the result of the thoughts of Traveloka employees who also have an interest in the culinary world and this travelokaeats activity is a place for employees to express ideas and develop themselves through collaboration with many parties who are indirectly part of the company's branding process. research by Elsyah (2020) who found that several digital startup companies

periodically held gatherings between employees from various departments and community activities with the community such as Tokoin which is a digital startup that often holds campus visits to various regions in Indonesia, and the PAYFAZZ company which often holds fazztalk activities. which invites the public to chat and discuss with PAYFAZZ employees.

Therefore, Brand community activities can be divided into two parts, namely brand community among employees (employees), and community activities between employees and consumers or society (employees-society) (Elsyah, 2020). Community activities among employees are called internal brand communities (Devasagayam et al., 2010; Salem & Iglesias, 2016). Meanwhile, community activities between employees and the community are called employee-people brand communities (Elsyah, 2020).The impact of these activities is the process of increasing employee insight and knowledge about the company's brand and is one of the processes in improving internal branding for employees so that employees are expected to be able to identify brands well and internalize brand values on the behavior and attitudes of millennial employees at work. (Devasagayam et al., 2010; Punjaisri & Wilson, 2007; Salem & Iglesias, 2016)

Therefore, the success of brand community activities for the company is an important strategy that benefits the company in increasing loyalty and brand engagement among employees and the community at the same time. For this reason, brand community activities certainly require coordination between internal companies in order to be able to make community activities successful and smoothly. This is supported by research Salem & Iglesias (2016) which states that brand community activities require virtual communication and physical communication or direct communication. In addition, brand community activities also require good coordination with employees so that in these activities employees are able to effectively communicate the brand promise to the company's consumers (De Chernatony, Drury, & Segal-Horn, 2004; Quaratino & Mazzei, 2018). In addition, with the right understanding of brand values, employees will very easily achieve emotional attachment to the company (Morhart, Herzog, & Tomczak, 2009) as a result of brand community activities that are run or followed by employees. For this reason, internal communication is needed, in this case internal corporate communication is needed to coordinate brand community activities to millennial employees.

This research is the latest research that discusses the concept of brand community from the point of view of human resource management and its relationship to internal corporate communication. Although research on internal corporate communication has been widely carried out, until now there has been no research on the relationship between internal corporate communication and brand community quantitatively. In addition, previous research on brand community strategy focuses on the marketing aspect where this strategy is aimed at consumers. In fact, as described in the background above, a brand community strategy can be the best way for companies to increase brand engagement for employees which as a result can improve employee performance. Based on this background,

Internal corporate communication is generally defined as the flow of communication between people within a particular organization or company (Mazzei, 2010). Internal communication as a tool in directing employees intellectually and emotionally towards company goals (Salem & Iglesias, 2016). With good internal communication, employees can more easily understand the strategies, methods, and goals achieved from an activity carried out in the process of working in the company, including in organizing and holding brand community activities both to employees and external parties such as consumers and the community. So far there has been no research that discusses the relationship between internal corporate communication and brand community in employees.

These brand community activities can be carried out in physical or virtual meetings within the company which aims to increase employee understanding of brand meaning (Devasagayam et al., 2010). There are several methods in building a brand community that involve two parties, namely internal marketing and external marketing. This two-party method is described as service marketing where internal marketing is the party that builds and forms a brand promise according to experience and knowledge of the brand. (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018). Meanwhile, external marketing parties prepare (setting) the brand promise which is conveyed from interactions with internal marketing parties. The picture of service marketing triangle is shown below:
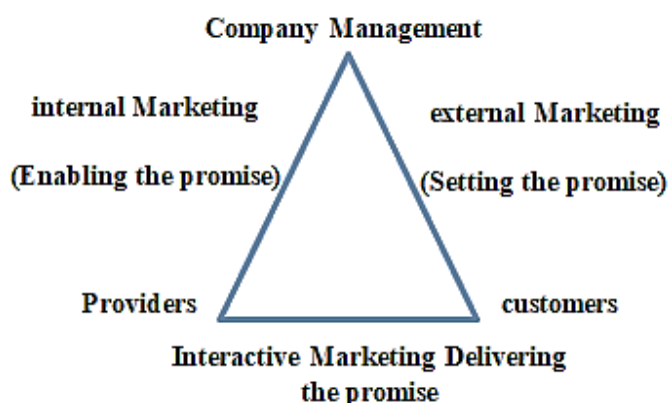
Figure I Service Marketing Triangle

Based on the image of the service marketing triangle above, it can be seen that there are 3 roles that play in presenting the brand promise of a product or company through a community, namely the provider or those who provide the message, the customer who manages the message, and company management who tries to regulate the course of interaction and presentation of brand promise between internal and external parties. The triangular image indicates that there is a converging relationship between internal and external marketing that is controlled by the company's management, in this case as a provider of internal branding activities through brand communities.

The service marketing triangle process that is formed through the brand community activities above is formed by enabling the promise or the process of creating brand promise information, as well as setting the promise or regulating the course of interaction in presenting the brand promise. This process of creating a brand promise process is achieved through internal discussion, negotiation, and outreach (Bendapudi & Bendapudi, 2005; Marzocchi, Morandin, & Bergami, 2013) which requires close communication between internal parties which in this case is part of the ICC (internal corporate communication). Thus, the relationship between ICC and the brand community that will be studied in this research is divided into two, namely internal marketing which seeks to find out the ICC process in enabling the promise and external marketing which seeks to determine the ICC process studied from ICC message effectiveness and ICC channels on setting the promise which examined on brand community activities in 3 conditions, namely before, during, and after (evaluation) the implementation of brand community activities.

Research by Salem & Iglesias (2016) states that the internal variables of corporate communication and brand community are part of the internal dimensions of branding, namely Internal branding is the process of internalizing brand values so that employees behave in accordance with the company's values given through the brand promise (Vallaster & De Chernatony, 2006). However, in their research, the two variables are separate dimensions, and no research discusses the relationship between internal corporate communication and brand community. Therefore, this study analyzes the relationship between internal corporate communication and millennial employees' brand community in Jakarta's digital startup companies.

METHOD

This study uses qualitative methods and quantitative methods. Qualitative research is research aimed at understanding the phenomena of what is experienced by research subjects, examples of behavior, perceptions, motivations, actions, and so on. In qualitative research, the methods commonly used are interviews, observation, and document utilization (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010).

This qualitative research method aims to analyze how the internal corporate communication strategy is implemented by digital startup companies that have held brand community activities both online and offline. While the quantitative method is a method with certain measuring instruments to determine the relationship between ICC and brand community.

This research uses two variables: variable X or independent variable which is internal corporate communication, and variable Y or dependent variable which is brand community. the dimensions of variable X include brand message effectiveness, communication channels, brand feedback. Meanwhile, the dimensions brand community are interaction, socialization, negotiation, and entertaining. The research framework of this study is shown below:
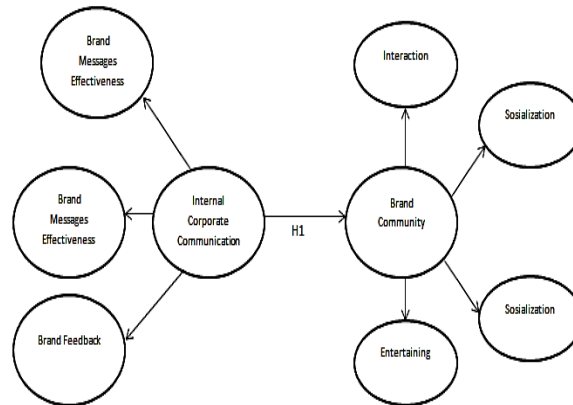

Figure 2 Research Framework

H1: Internal Corporate Communication positively influences the brand community

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The characteristics of sample in this research using quantitative research method is shown in table 1 below:

Table 1 Samples

Description	Freq.	Perc.
Age		
19-25 y.o	31 people	28,97%
26-30 y.o	28 people	26.17%
30-35 y.o	48 people	44.86%
Gender		
Male	52 people	48,6%
Female	55 people	51.4%
Last education		
Middle school/high school/equivalent	25 people	23.36%
Voc.	12 people	11.22%
Undergrad.	61 people	57%
Grad.	9 people	8.42%
Department		
Finance	12 people	11.21%
GA & Administration	10 people	9.34%
IT	9 people	8.41%
Marketing	33 people	30.84%
Human Resources	37 people	34.58%
Operational	6 people	5.61%

Source: Research doc.

The first quantitative test is to test the feasibility of the data with validity and reliability test tools. The validity test was carried out to ensure that the data obtained from the respondents were valid or appropriate to proceed to the next test, while the reliability test was carried out to determine whether the data obtained were reliable or reliable to be used in explaining the research variables. Validity test is done by comparing the value of r-count with r-table where if r-count > r-

table then the data obtained is valid. While the reliability test was carried out by comparing the Cronbach Alpha value (α) with a standard level of reliable measuring instrument where if the Cronbach Alpha value obtained is more than 0.6 then the data is reliable. The results of the validity test found that the r-table value for df (107-2=105) and the 2-way significance level of 0.05 was 0.190. The results of the validity test in this study for the ICC and brand community variables were found to be valid with each value > 0.190. So, it can be concluded that the research data is valid. While the reliability test of this research is as follows:

Table 2 Reliability Test Results

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Result
Internal Corporate Communication	0.751	Reliable
Brand Community	0.793	Reliable

Source: Research doc.

SEM-Model Test Results

Based on the results of the SEM-Model test, it was found that ICC has a positive effect on Brand Community where the internal corporate communication variable affects the brand community by 0.80 or 80% which has a high enough value in explaining the relationship between ICC variables and brand community. That is, this study found that internal communication affects brand community activities up to 80%. In addition, this study also found that each dimension has an effect on each variable with an overall direct effect value of > 0.6. These results can be seen in the following SEM-Model diagram:
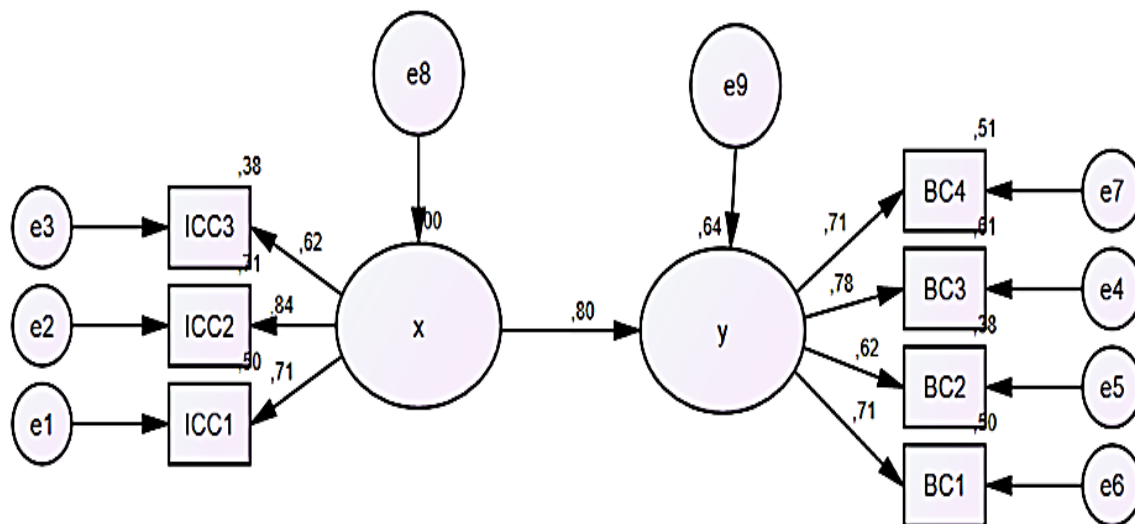

Figure 3 SEM-Model Test Results (*Source*: Research doc.)

The results indicate that the four dimensions of brand community are influential and can explain the brand community variables in this study. This indicates that the results of this study are in line with research by Nambisan & Nambisan (2008) who found that the brand community variable was influenced by the interaction experience of community members in obtaining information, socializing, and also as an entertaining forum for community members who are members of the same company brand.

Table 3 Hypothesis SEM-Model Results

			Estimate	SE	CR	P	Results
BC	←	ICC	1.126	,194	5,810	***	Positive Effect
ICC1	←	ICC	,723	,105	6,908	***	Positive Effect
ICC2	←	ICC	1,383	,200	6,908	***	Positive Effect
ICC3	←	ICC	1.018	,181	5,617	***	Positive Effect
BC3	←	BC	,972	,173	5,629	***	Positive Effect
BC2	←	BC	,705	,118	5,989	***	Positive Effect
BC1	←	BC	,725	,106	6,864	***	Positive Effect
BC4	←	BC	,756	,109	6,919	***	Positive Effect

Source: Research doc.

The results also show that the establishment of a brand community for employees can assist employees in obtaining information which supports research by Algesheimer, Dholakia, & Herrmann (2005) which states that the brand community can speed up the process of disseminating information about the company's brand. In addition, the results of this study also show that brand community can facilitate the process of socializing and entertaining employees while working in the company. This is in line with research by Franke, Nikolaus, & Sonali (2003) which states that brand communities can increase social engagement among community members.

In addition to brand community variables, the results of this study also support research by Muniz & O'Guinn (2001) and Sharma & Kamalanabhan (2012) that internal corporate communication variables are influenced by 4 dimensions, namely ICC message effectiveness, ICC channels, and feedback. This means that the effectiveness of the company's internal communication at Digital Start-Up companies in Jakarta in this study depends on the communication information message conveyed, the accuracy in the message content, the channel or communication tool used, and depends on the feedback or employee response in responding to information or communication. delivered. In addition, this study explains the correlation between the two variables, namely that there is a positive influence of internal corporate communication on brand community.

Research by Fortunisa, Sedyowidodo, Djamaris, & Novianti, (2018) revealed that there is a close relationship between the success of the company's internal communication with organizational performance or company performance. Brand community is one of the company's strategies that is built not only to consumers but also to employees in order to increase solidarity and closeness between employees by forming a community. The results of this study are in line with research by Fortunisa (2021) which reveals that good internal communication can accelerate the effectiveness of the company's strategy and performance, including the brand community strategy.

This is as expressed in the results of the hypothesis test above in table 3 which shows that each dimension in the X and Y variables has a positive effect in explaining the variables and the ICC variable has a positive effect on the brand community variable with a significance value of 0.000. The magnitude of the influence of each factor and variable based on the image of the SEM-Model test results above is shown in the following table:

Table 4 Standardized Regression Weights

			Estimate
y	←	x	,801
ICC1	←	x	,705
ICC2	←	x	,841
ICC3	←	x	,619
BC3	←	y	,780
BC2	←	y	,617
BC1	←	y	,706
BC4	←	y	,711

Source: Research doc.

Based on table 4 above, it is concluded that the influence of internal corporate communication on brand community is 0.801 or 80.1%, which means that there is a strong influence between the two variables. This shows that 80% of the success of the brand community strategy towards employees at start-up companies in Jakarta can be influenced by the success of internal corporate communication. The results of this study are also shown by information from social media such as the Instagram account @lifeatgojek which won the Best Employer Award as a company with outstanding achievement in managing their workforce. This award was achieved because inclusive communication and internal culture were built by this start-up company to improve the quality of the brand community for employees.

CONCLUSION

This study seeks to analyze two variables that are often discussed in previous research in separate topics and discussions and there has never been a study that has attempted to discuss the relationship between the two variables, namely the internal corporate communication variable on brand community. This study shows that an important element in an organization or company, namely internal communication, is very influential not only in forming work synergies in the internal scope but also affects employee performance when faced with an external scope.

Currently, it has been widely applied, especially to digital start-ups in forming close relationships between community members and brands. The role of employees is very necessary in supporting the success of this activity. This research refines previous research by Sharma & Kamalanabhan (2012) which has discussed the relationship of internal corporate communication to the effectiveness of internal branding. In a follow-up study by Devasagayam et al., (2010); Salem & Iglesias, (2016) It is stated that one of the important points or dimensions in internal branding is brand community activity.

This study found that internal corporate communication examined from three dimensions, namely brand message effectiveness, brand feedback, and brand channels had a positive effect on brand community activities consisting of 4 dimensions, namely information, socialization, human-machine interactivity, and entertaining. This study uses two research methods, namely qualitative methods to find a clear picture of employees regarding the internal process of corporate communication in brand community activities and then validate the results of interviews in a larger sample scale, namely 107 respondents using the SEM-Model test. The ICC variable has a positive effect on brand community.

In addition, this study also advises start-up companies to increase brand engagement not only to focus on consumers but it is important to focus these strategies on employees in order to increase employee loyalty, brand experience, and brand engagement with the company. This study suggests to companies to build closeness between brands and employees such as building training and development not only for new employees but also valid for old employees, or forming inter-departmental gatherings to be able to increase employee intimacy so that brand community strategies can be formed internally within the company.

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