

Conceptualization Theory of Employee -People Brand Community

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Abstract

The focus of this research is to describe the conceptual analysis of the employee-people brand community theory on millennial workers towards the company's internal branding, which is the new theory of brand community related to the employee, to complete the previous theories about internal branding. The strategy of employee-people brand community has been well-known used in digital start-up companies (offline and online events). However, there is no existing literature discussing this strategy's concept. This strategy discussed in this paper can overcome the gap in academic research on brand community theory. The research method of this paper is a comparative research method by doing a literature review of brand management and brand community theories and observing the implementation of brand community strategy as the practical approach. This study reveals the basic concept of employee-people brand community theory, including the flowchart, characteristics, elements, and goals of this strategy.

Keywords

employee-people brand community, internal branding, millennials workers.

1. Introduction

Huselid, Jackson, and Schuler (1997) said that the importance of human resource management in improving the effectiveness of the positive work condition could affect the productivity of the company, the company's financial performance, and the company's stock in market value. In addition, according to (Gratton, 1998; Hamed & Prahalad, 1994), human resource management can also improve a company's competency in terms of competitive advantage that can differentiate the company from the competitors. This competitive advantage can be achieved by attracting employees through training and development, as well as providing the appropriate compensation to the employees (Jeanquart 2014). This process shows how important human resource management is within the company.

One of the company's strategies to improve its competitive advantage is to use the brand to offer the product identity that distinguishes it from competitors' products. A brand is generally set up in a few words, designs, or particular symbols. A good image of a brand product or company has a good impact that can be beneficial for the company, while a negative image would hurt the company's good name. For decades, many companies have invested heavily in marketing efforts to build a good brand for customers or external companies to target more customers or stakeholders (Dechawatanapaisal 2019). As a result, many companies failed to consider the employee's role in realizing the company's brand strategy more deeply. This shows us that a brand must describe the connection between the company and employees and between the company and customers (Malanda & Ndubisi 2013).

Companies with an employee-oriented in building the organizational culture and brand may create positive results in consumer confidence due to the nature of the great respect given by the employee to the consumer (King & Grace 2006). This is because the employee becomes a significant focus of the company's corporate branding process. As a result, the employee has a suitable brand identification and can work with brand-building behavior according to the company's expectations in addressing or dealing with customers and stakeholders. In the corporate branding process, the internalization of the brand to all employees within the company is known as a concept of internal branding activity.

Internal branding activity is internalizing brand value into the employee (Fathima, 2016). To create that process, the company must understand how to establish or build a deeper understanding of the brand to build employee commitment to the company's brand (Silverthorne 2004). However, according to the research (Dechawatanapaisal, 2019), the differences in generation in the company's workers can lead to differences in models of personal characteristics, values, attitudes and behavior, and the view of work within the company.

Speaking about employees, the millennial generation has dominated the population of many countries in the world. Therefore, the millennial generation can also be predicted to dominate the workplace in the following years. As the data from (BPS 2017) states, about 66,64% of the workers in urban areas consist of the millennial generation. About 67,75% of the workers in the rural areas also consist of the millennial generation. Therefore, understanding the right way to internal branding on millennial workers is essential for a company to survive in the demographic bonus era. It is because the millennial generation has a different character and different perspective on how to work within the company.

According to the research (Idntimes 2019), the millennial generation considers work in the company as a process of self-development. They appreciate the process of working and finishing the task given to them and also appreciate the process of interaction and other social activities. This generation also is known as knowledge workers who appreciate the knowledge and has more curiosity about all information. Besides, this generation has a character called technology-savvy who is essential in this globalization era.

To that end, the company must create a platform for the millennial generation to understand the brand and take action to work following the company's brand value. According to (Fathima 2016), one way to facilitate the employees is to understand, negotiate, and discuss among employees a brand known in the theory of internal brand community. The internal brand community is a platform that helps employees to spread the brand values and ideas associated with the brand (Fathima 2016). With this internal community, that can be done directly or through a virtual employee who can discuss the brand with other employees.

However, research on the internal brand community explains the community brand concept with employees as members of this community. The brand management process and the theory of marketing services require the continuous connection between the employees as providers of brand messages and consumers as recipients of brand messages. With this continuity between employees and customers in a community brand, then presenting the brand promise by the company will be increased, and for both parties would be easy to understand the value of the brand itself and indirectly will be able to internalize the brand value in itself primarily on the employee as a presenter of brand value from the internal company to external company. Therefore, the company needs the community to provide a place between employees and customers to work together and discuss about brand inside the activity of the company. In fact, there are many companies right now that make the activity between employees and customers inside the activity from the company's community. However, there are no theories discussing and researching that strategy yet. This research is essential to understand how the employee-people brand community strategy can affect the internal branding activities within a company.

1.1 Objectives

This study represents the comprehensive explanation of employee-people brand community theory. As more companies focus to increase the brand quality, this study provided the solution for the gap between academic and practical approach in branding strategy. In academic approach, brand community is identified as one of the marketing strategy where company build this community to improve brand loyalty among customers. Otherwise, current situation shows that company need to create the bonding not just for the customer but also for the employee because employee has the ability to influence the good name of brand. Employee-people brand community is the theory to describe the

strategy for both marketing and human resource management in branding aspect. There is no existing literature to describe this theory extensively, hence this paper intended to be the first empirical evidence in explaining the theory of employee-people brand community

2. Literature Review

2.1 Internal Branding

(Ambler & Barrow, 1996) for the first time introducing the concept of corporate brand and attempting to apply it in human resource management as an employee be the target audience of brand management. A close relationship between employees and the company's brand can be described through their employee's brand building and brand-supportive behaviors that contribute to its branding efforts (Lohndorf & Diamantopoulos 2014). In creating these two things, the previous research seeks to explore more the corporate branding on employees. The concept that refers more to the corporate branding for all internal companies is the internal branding concept.

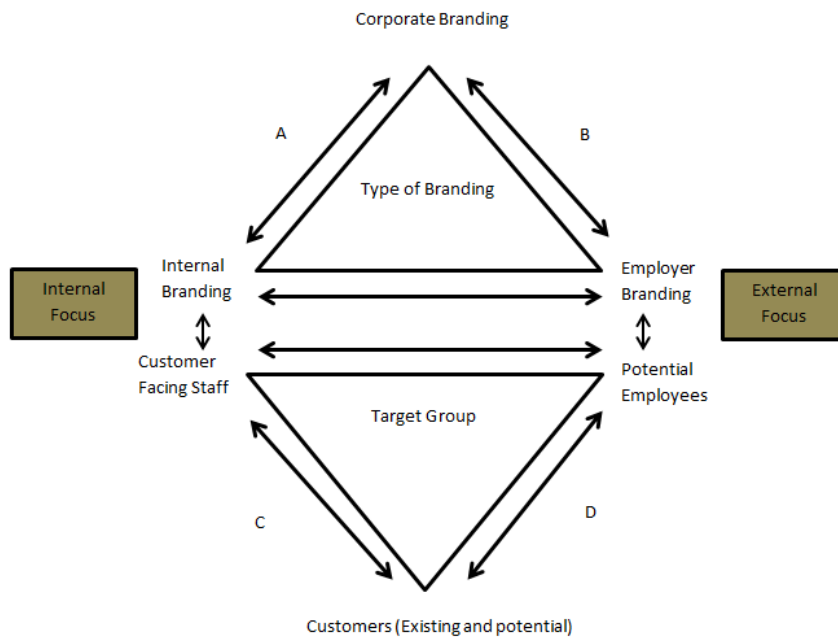


Figure 1. Flowchart of Corporate Branding

Figure 1 describes the flowchart of corporate branding in two different focuses; internal focus and external focus (Dechawatanapaisal 2019). It is mentioned that the company developing branding strategy can not focus on customers only but also on developing the same strategy for the employee. Internal branding is a derivative of the corporate branding that focuses on the employee as a target audience (Dechawatanapaisal 2018). Since many companies are too focused on the process of brand marketing or product brand to consumers or external companies and ignore the process of presenting the brand by the internal company (Boone 2000), internal branding is deemed as a solution to overcome the disconnection between companies to develop brand messages between internal and external companies. Employees are known as a bridge for companies displaying the company's brand to external companies. Employees can make the brand alive through the experience and services employees serve to customers.

Therefore, to create the brand identification into employees from the previous research known as internal branding activity. Internal branding has a concept of an activity from a company to promote the brand value to their employee (Mitchell 2002). (Asha & Jyothi 2013) on their research found that the outcomes of internal branding process are brand identification, brand commitment, and brand-building behavior (brand-citizenship behavior). The internal branding process has been an effort of the company to treat employees as their internal customers and helps them to understand the value of the company (Foster, Punjaisri, & Cheng 2010). This activity also facilitated the precise information from brand messages to employees so that the employee could have emotion and intense passion towards the brand. As a result, the employee can be the protector or guardian of the brand and be the brand image ambassador.

The brand value has been fused with the thoughts and emotions of employees while working in the company every day (Dechawatanapaisal 2019).

The objectivity of internal branding is to ensure that employees have an attitude and behavior to provide a good name or brand and support the company's brand value in their actions while working in the company. The mechanism of internal branding contains terms of improving employee knowledge, increasing understanding of the brand meaning, and sharpening employees' skills in presenting the brand promise (Punjaisri & Wilson, 2017). Therefore, to improve the effectiveness of the branding program, the company must focus on the employees first in the branding process as the object pursued by the company. The employee is the main center of the brand management company (Foster et al. 2010), which means that employees play a significant role in the company's brand and products. Only employees of the company that was able to save or even damages the brand presentation from internal to external parties (King & Grace 2008).

2.2 Brand Community

According to (Webster, 1992), employees need some kind of 'glue' that is able to bind them to the company so that employees can shape their behavior to be consistent with the expectations of consumers and the company's brand. To create the internal branding process, the company must have a bonding agent that is useful for giving directions to the employees so that they are able to know when, how and by whom their energy is spent on work processes within the company (King & Grace 2008).

The millennial generation is technology savvy which is they happy to surfing on the internet and social media everytime, and this is very important for company right now to move their strategy into online media such as internet, apps, website, etc. For millennial workers, a company needs to treat the employee as internal consumer to build brand awareness and brand loyalty with the company. In addition to building brand awareness to consumers, companies usually spread their strategy by entering online network to form interaction, conversation, and engagement with consumers through online media (Nusantara 2015). In creating easy access to build those activities, the company also formed an social media account as an online community that in theory we called one of our brand community activities.

Brand community is broadly defined as where consumers can obtain more information about the product (Nusantara, 2015). Through this social media or online communities, companies can easily access the latest information about the brand products, provide depth education about the company's brand, and establish two-way communication between company and consumer. With the brand community, consumers also can gain experience with the brand. The experience gained by the consumer according to (Nambisan & Nambisan 2008) is gaining experience to obtain information about the brand, the socialization experience, experience the quality of interactions between people and technology through the application or the Internet well as hedonistic experience for entertainment purposes only. Through a brand community, members can also discuss, negotiate, and disseminate the form of brand meaning good (Muniz & O'guinn 2001).

2.3 Limitation of Previous Researches

The previous research on brand community was more focus on the process of marketing brand or product brand management with the target audience of these activities is consumer (Nusantara, 2015);(Cahyani, 2018); (Putro D. A. 2017); (Muniz & O'guinn 2001). According to the research from (Muniz & O'guinn, 2001) stated that companies create brand community aims to build brand awareness of consumers to the brand. So far, there is no research that discussed the role of brand community on employees.

On the research from (Saleem 2016) and (Raj & al 2010) found that one of the dimensions or components in internal branding is internal brand communities. A Internal brand communities by (Saleem 2016) is a platform that helps in spreading the brand values and ideas associated with a brand that can be formed in the virtual or direct activity with the purpose to helping employees understand the brand very well. This is in line with the objective of brand community which seeks as a platform that helps members to understand the brand. However, so far no research has elaborated more on the internal brand communities on internal branding process. In addition, research on brand management is still experiencing inequality between HR practices builds on the branding and brand management on marketing. In the process of HRM, internal brand management focus on branding and employer branding through a system of recruiting, training and development, staffing, and rewarding (Saleem 2016). While in the process of marketing, brand management system focused on advertising and product marketing mix including creating brand on social media

community (Memon & Kolachi 2012). In fact, in practice human resource management holds the overall role within the company, including marketing. As explained earlier, the overall focus on internal branding activity is all of employees, not just the employees who deal directly with consumers (front-office), but also employees in the back-office.

Seeing the fact of increased activity in social media and the Internet, making the company realize its strategy of branding with online brand community. Brand development community in social media as a means to share information and experiences on products and services, the completion of the problems experienced by consumers, and interaction with other consumers as well as with representatives of the company (Mc Williams & Gill 2010). Brand community considered as an effective solution to introduce brand meaning better to member of community so they can has a close relationship with brand through brand experience from brand community activity. Some of the previous researches that discussed the result from brand community activity significantly said that brand community can increased brand trust, brand commitment, and also brand loyalty on consumer (Wulandari & Alversia 2015); (Cahyani 2018), (Putro 2017). Research about brand community is still minimum especially in the field of HR practices. Brand community activity known widely on the marketing field with target audience is consumer and has a purpose to increased brand awareness on consumer to product and company's brand.

Instead, the process within company, employee has a big role to build the activity on online brand community or offline brand community. Although the main purpose from establishment the brand community is to attract more consumers, however, indirectly the employee is the first member of this community that has an effort to discuss, create, and build brand of company or product. So far, the research about connection between brand community and hr practices is still low. Research from (Devasagayam 2010) and (Saleem 2016) found that one of dimensions from internal brand is internal brand communities. Moreover, the research from (Fortunnisa, Elsyah, Fathiha, & Ananda, 2019) stated that the component that affect internal branding one of them is brand community. However, those researches didnt explained the detail about role of brand community towards internal branding but only mentioned it as the dimensions of internal branding process. To that end, the study sought to shed light and an explanation of how the process and the role of brand community towards internal branding to all employees.

3. Methods

This study use comparative research method by reviewing existing literature about community in marketing and human resource management theory. The result of academic literature review then will be compared with the practical approach by doing field research about the application of employee-people brand community strategy. This study describe comprehensively about employee-people brand community strategy based on the practical approach in companies and academic approach of theory of branding community

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Research About Branding Community Strategy

According to (Balmer 2012) on (Fathima 2016) said that brand management has evolved from the identification process on build brand awareness in the target audience to be the arrangement of a promising relationship between the product and the audience. Right now, brand management effort is not only to build a good image to increase brand awareness on customer but also expected to form the experience with brand. In brand management activity was divided into 2 focuses which is product brand and employment brand. It can be illustrated from the chart study by (Memon & Kolachi 2012) below :

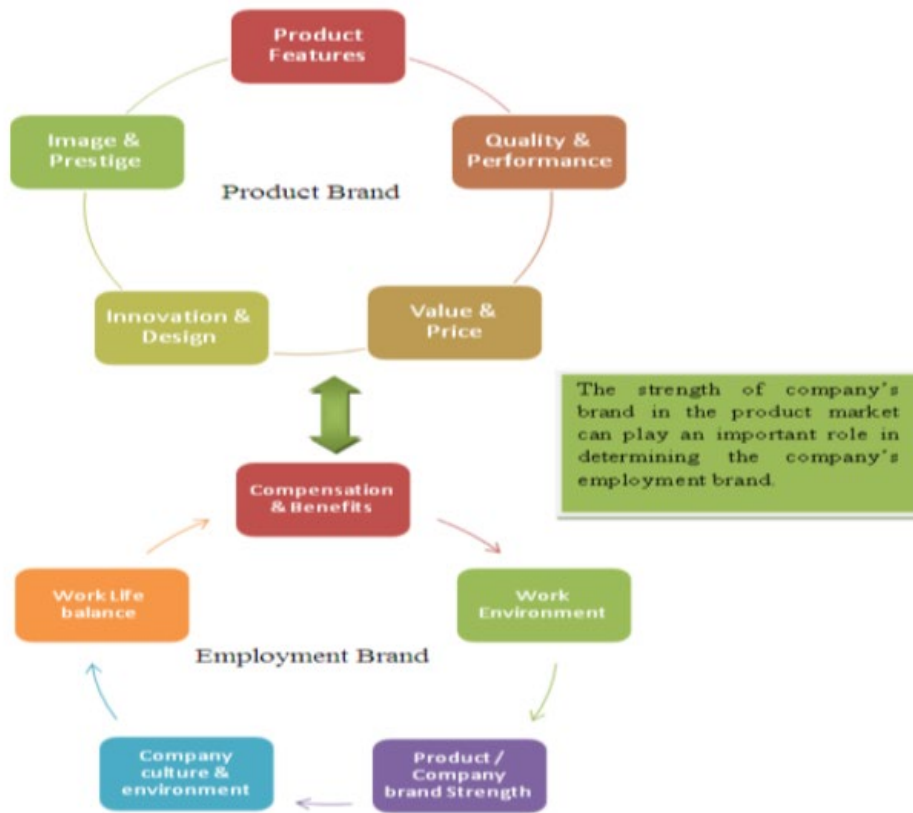


Figure 2. Types of Corporate Brand Management Strategy

Figure 2 above draws employment and product brand play an important role to determine the good image of the company. Thus, company is not only focus on product development but also had to build a good brand to employee from employment brand activity. In a study by (Dechawatanapaisal 2019) said that employment brand is arranged by corporate branding which is divided into two focuses, employer branding and internal branding. In improving the image of the company to all employees, the most appropriate strategy to use is internal branding which seeks to increase employee understanding of the brand, employee commitment to the company's brand, and seeks to shape the behavior of employees in accordance with the company's brand (Fathima 2016). Internal branding strategy is considered to be effective way on employment brand because this strategy was targeting all of employee not just employee on front office but also employee on back office.

However, to get better result from the effort of internal branding is not easy, especially to millennial workers that has unique perspective about working within the company. According to the research from (Dechawatanapaisal 2019) attempt to tested the internal branding activities into employees from generation X and generation Y (millennial generation). By using the same internal branding activity in both generation, it has a different results which is generation X has a high level of brand identification rather than millennial generation. This suggests that, internal branding activity of the millennial generation needs a better approach than the previous generation to be able to create understanding of the brand to millennial workers and is also expected to have a high commitment with company and projecting the brand values into their daily working process.

The easiest step to do is to identify perspective of millennial workers while working on company. According to research from Idntimes by (Utomo & al. 2019) said that, the most important thing to work on millennial perspective is as way to self-development. This generation wants to work on company as part of self-actualization, in contrast to the previous generation that considers work as a process of obtaining the reward that could sustain their daily needs. Millennial generation wants to work that is capable to forming his expertise and knowledge, able to socialize and interact, and collaborate with other people who have the knowledge and skills of more than herself.

At the end, there are many companies right now who attempted to build a forum to facilitated millennial generation so they can improve their knowledge with different topics from the activity created by company. With this forum, indirectly the company can introduced his brand and also build connection with this generation who likes to collaborate, come to forum or talk show or even community that allowed them to get new insight from it.

As it already mentioned before, the theory about brand community from previous research is still focus on consumer as member of this community. In fact, millennial workers also need the same approaches with using community or forum to get brand experience and close relationship with company’s brand so they can behave like brand desired and not just work like a robot who came and finished their daily task but also can get connection with brand and as the result employee can has a high commitment with company through the right way from internal branding activity. According to (Webster, 1992) employee needs some of ‘glue’ that can tied them with company so the employee can behave like what company wants to. This thing can be achieved by building the brand community strategy into employee which is in this research called with new theory that is employee-people brand community. Employee-people brand community has a different concept with previous research about brand community which is until now the theory of brand community said that the member of this community filled with consumers of brand. This theory of brand community from previous researches can be illustrated with the chart below :

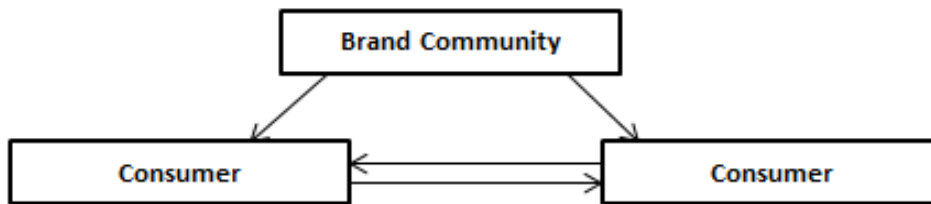


Figure 3. Brand Community Theory

The theory about brand community from previous studies in accordance with the chart above is only formed consumer as the member of this strategy. Brand community build by company in order to create connection between consumer and brand so consumer that being a member can shared their experience or review about brand, provide their ideas or aspiratations related with brand, and invited or share brand knowledge with their colleagues or friends or even their family so they can get better approaches about brand through the member of this community (Nusantara 2015); (Cahyani 2018). In another study, the theory of brand community on employees known as the theory of internal brand community. According to (Raj & al. 2010) and (Fathima 2016) stated that the internal brand community is a platform for employees to discuss, negotiate, and share their experience about brand to other employees. This platform facilitated all employees to share their ideas about brand. Research on internal brand community can be illustrated in the following chart below:

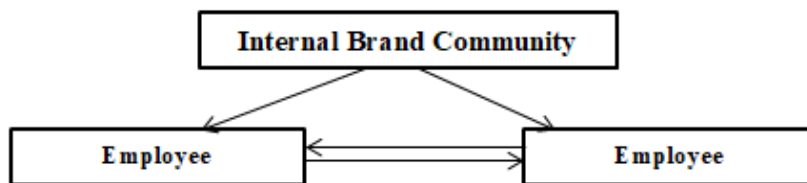


Figure 4. Internal Brand Community Theory

The process of delivering the brand promise in interactive marketing takes the customer as an external marketing that make, receive, and also to follow and spread the brand promise as well as internal marketing providers. Providers of brand messages for the company is a employee who gives their ideas, aspirations and develop the uniqueness of the brand through discussion and brainstorming with internal company. These parties then also delivering the brand promise to external parties, which is consumer of brand. Parties who act as the providers are employees. Therefore, the conclusion is brand community also requires employees as parties to form and build brand mesages before being served or delivered to external parties which is consumers and stakeholders.

In addition, employee not only need the other employee to create brand messages, but as we can see from the service marketing triangle by (Devasagayam, 2010) above, employee also needs information or brand perspective from external company that is consumer. With the right interaction between employee and consumer can make brand more alive. In fact, according to (Devasagayam, 2010) employee needs bonding agent where they are able to understand the brand well and even capable to present brand with external parties. It is can be easily done through employee-people brand community strategy

4.2 The Concept of Employee-People Brand Community

The theory of employee-people brand community tried to be the concept to connected between employees and customers within the same forum or activity build by the community. According to (Nusantara, 2015) brand community can be formed through online and offline. The theory of employee-people brand community is using the same directions and concepts with the theory of brand community because it has the implementation within the company. The point of these both theories is employee create the brand community activity in improving the brand identification, brand commitment, and brand loyalty toward the members.

Right now, in Indonesia there are so many companies which trying to build an account on instagram or any social media that designed to employee to share their daily working on company, or even they can being influencer of brand and sheir their knowledge or skills on activity shared by content on company's instagram such as instagram namely @designatgojek by Gojek as digital startup company, or instagram account namely @lifeatpayfazz by Payfazz as financial technology who seeks to show the existence from internal company to external parties from the contents on their instagram. This activity through online media is part of improvement the internal branding into employees because this activity can make employee loyal with brand, improve employee's knowledge about brand's character, and in fact they can be influencer of brand which is increased employee's commitment with brand.

Employee-people brand community activities also can build the interaction between employees and customers through the activity held by company from this community. So, employee-people brand community can increasing consumer engagement with brand and also increased brand understanding of employees and facilitated them to be able to demonstrate their knowledge or skills related with topics from brand community's activity on online or offline so this employee become influencers or in fact can be brand guardian which is part of the process of self development desired by millennial generation to work within company. for example, right now many companies especially digital company tried to build brand community activity who facilitated customer or external parties to come and discussed specific theme or topic that can increased their insight with the employee as a informant on the event. Therefore, the strategy of employee-people brand community can completed the previous research about brand community towards the employee. This theory can be illustrated on the following chart below :

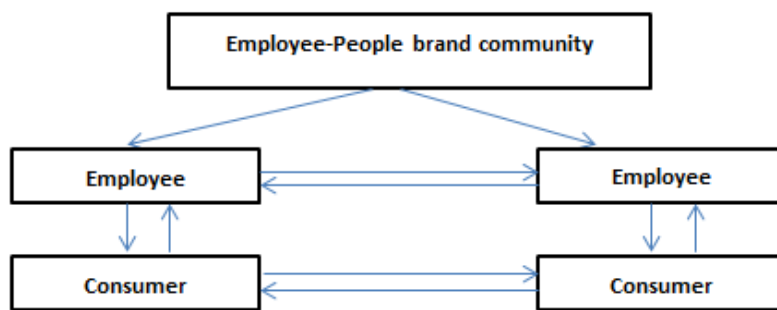


Figure 5. Employee-People Brand Community Theory

The characteristics of employee-people brand community is summarized in table below :

Table 1. Characteristics of Employee-People Brand Community Theory

Indicators	Explanation
Definition	Employee-People Brand Community is strategy built by the company in developing the bonding activities through the community by involving both internal (employee) and external (consumer or society)
Elements	Employee-People Brand Community theory is consisted with four elements: activity, community member, brand experience, interaction, and platform/place (online and offline)
Types of Activity	Internal activities of brand shared by the employee in official social media of company
	External Activities of brand using online platform involving employees and customers at the same event
	External activities involving employees and customers when all community members can interact directly (example: brand gathering)

5. Conclusion

Theory of employee brand community will be the right strategy for the company to be able to improve the internal branding on millennial workers who has unique perspective about working as the process to self-development. This community was built based on the character from millennial who likes to get collaborate in social community, being influencer or guardian about brand community, or wants to share their knowledge in front of many people on the activity built by company. with this strategy, employees get better understanding of the needs of the brand from internal and external company, can get better place to discuss, provide ideas and aspirations related to the brand, and forming offline activity such as meetup with millennial generation or stakeholders and customers by inviting them to the event build by this community and the employee as the providers or informant of brand messages. From the strategy of employee brand community, millennial workers can gained many advantage that can increased their commitment, knowledge, and built their behave as brand desired which is the outcome of internal branding activity. The outcome of employee brand community strategy as the process of actualization of millennial workers while working within the company can be summarized by the following chart below :

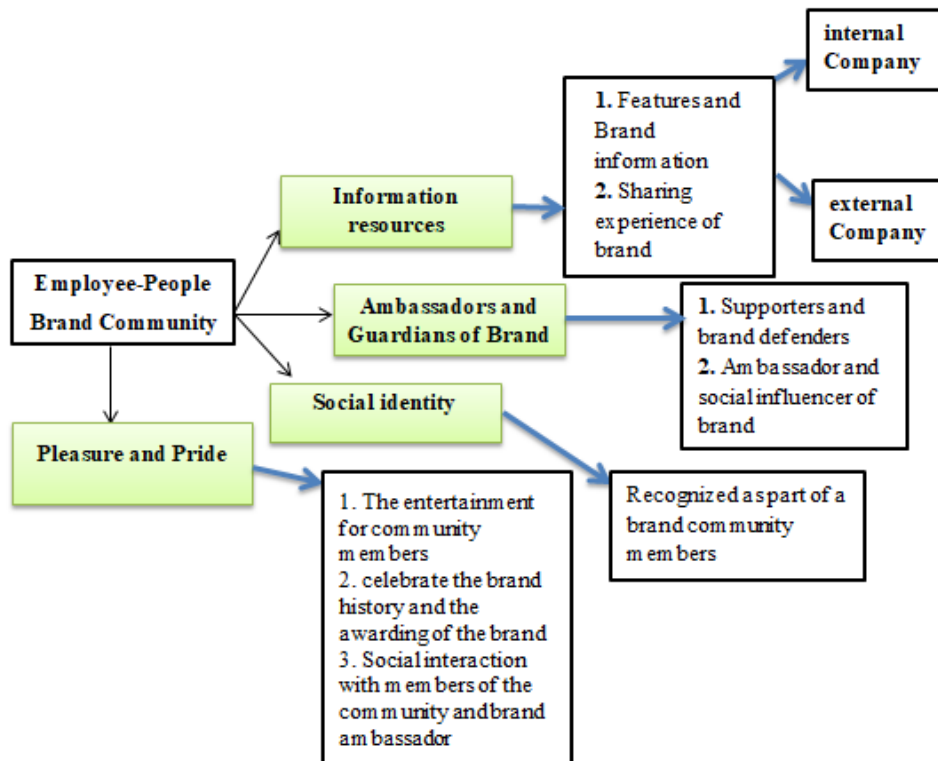


Figure 6. The Overall Concept of Employee-People Brand Community

6. Research Directions

This study provides the basic theory of employee-people brand community that seeks to completed the previous theories about brand community or internal brand community theory. For futher research, this study suggests to develop data research using quantitative research method to complete this theory.

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