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The Effect of Brand Communities on Public Brand Loyalty And Private Brand Loyalty Of Professional Electronic Sports Team

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Abstract

Each e-sports team usually has a loyal and fanatic fan community. Fans often participate in supporting their favorite teams through various activities such as watching tournaments, fan meetings, and purchasing official merchandise. In the competitive e-sports industry, a team's presence must stand out more than others to be better recognized by consumers. This research aims to understand the potentially different impacts of brand community identification on the relationship between brand identification and various aspects of brand loyalty. This study identifies the influence of the brand community on brand loyalty, both from a public and private perspective, particularly in the context of electronic sports. This research uses a quantitative approach and convenience sampling technique conducted with 122 respondents who are fans of an electronic sports team. The SEM smartPLS analysis results show that brand identification and brand community positively and significantly influence both public and private brand loyalty. This research provides insights into the impact of brand identification and brand community on the public and private brand loyalty that consumers have towards a brand. Thus, it will help marketing managers to more effectively utilize brand communities in generating consumer behavior that supports the brand.

Keywords: Social identity, brand identification, brand community, public brand loyalty, private brand loyalty.

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INTRODUCTION

E-sports, also known as electronic sports, is not just an ordinary electronic game, but it has become a community (Glenniza, 2018). The growth of e-sports is very rapid worldwide, including in Indonesia, where e-sports has become a popular entertainment among various groups. E-sports has been recognized as a sport and is overseen by the PBESI (Indonesian E-sports Management), and participates in international leagues such as the 2019 SEA Games (Kurniawan, 2019). There are many e-sports competitions at various levels, from local to international, which are participated by Indonesian e-sports teams, showing the popularity of electronic sports in Indonesia. E-sports teams have emerged as places for professional e-sports players, also known as pro-players, to compete in various electronic sports branches, from local to international levels (Reza et al., 2021).

Some e-sports teams that are still active and well-known in Indonesia are Onic E-sports, Evos E-sports, and RRQ (Rex Regum Qeon) E-sports. Each e-sports team usually has a loyal and fanatic fan community that often participates in supporting their favorite teams through various activities such as watching tournaments, fan meetings, and purchasing official merchandise. In the competitive e-sports industry, a team's presence must stand out more than others to be better recognized by consumers. Creating a strong and trustworthy relationship with customers is a key factor to remain competitive in a dynamic business market (Habibi et al., 2016). One approach that can be used is to apply relationship marketing strategies by building and forming a brand community.

According to Bagozzi and Dholakia (2006), a brand community can be defined as a form of enthusiasm from fans towards the brand they like. This involves sharing information and experiences about the brand, as well as engaging in active interactions with community members. For example, the brand community of Team RRQ is formed online, connecting fans with the e-sports team established by the brand. Research on brand communities has provided academics and practitioners with an understanding of the complex networks formed among fans of a particular brand (McAlexander et al., 2002; Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001). However, the impact arising from brand communities, such as their potential in building consumer loyalty, has not been fully explored (Kuenzel and Vaux Halliday, 2008; Stokburger-Sauer, et al., 2012). This has led practitioners to have a limited understanding of the role of brand communities and the overall influence of consumer relationships with brands.

This research can provide a deeper understanding of consumer identification with brands and different brand communities. This duality of identification was evident during

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the launch of the European Super League in football some time ago, which ended in failure. At that time, brand communities held massive protests against their own clubs (brands), clearly demonstrating a divide between fans who identify with the brand community versus the brand itself (The Guardian, 2021). Nevertheless, research on the influence of brand communities on brand loyalty in the context of the e-sports industry is still limited, including in Indonesia. Therefore, further research is needed to identify the influence of brand communities on brand loyalty, both from a public and private perspective.

Therefore, this study aims to provide a deeper understanding of consumer identification with brands and different brand communities. This research specifically investigates the mediating role of brand community identification in the existing relationship between brand identification and brand loyalty in the context of Team RRQ E-Sports. Thus, this study contributes to providing new insights into the mechanisms through which brand communities positively influence brand loyalty (Kumar, 2019; Won et al., 2020).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Identity Theory

Social identity theory posits that an individual's membership in a group or community they favor and their commitment to it is an integral part of their self-concept (Tajfel, 1982). This understanding allows individuals to use groups, such as brand communities, to externally display their self-concept and develop individual self-esteem. Therefore, social identity theory provides theoretical support for the development of the concept that impression management within groups like brand communities is crucial for consumer self-concept and self-esteem. As a brand community becomes more important to an individual and integral to their self-concept, the greater the pressure felt by the individual. Algesheimer et al. (2005) state that as consumers become more involved with a brand community, they will feel increasing pressure not to disappoint the expectations of the group or community. Ultimately, this can influence their intention not only to remain loyal to the brand and community but also to be seen as loyal.

Brand Identification

Brand identification has been recognized as a trigger for various brand-supportive behaviors, such as commitment (Tuškej et al., 2013), feedback (Ahearne et al., 2005), word of mouth (WOM) (Kuenzel & Vaux Halliday, 2008; Tuškej et al., 2013), loyalty

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(Ahearne et al., 2005; Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003), and repeat purchase (Kuenzel & Vaux Halliday, 2008). According to Melewar (2008), brand identification is the formation of a relationship between customers and the brand, serving as a connection between corporate branding, brand identity, and communication strategy. This connection is useful in specific contexts and with specific customer segments. Brand identification is a key aspect of brand management where customers develop a sense of connection with a brand. The concept of identification with a brand community originates from social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), which suggests that individuals tend to reinforce their self-concept by aligning themselves with certain social groups (Lam et al., 2010).

Brand Community

The concept of community has been a major focus in philosophical and social thought over the past century (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). The widespread growth of internet usage in recent years has enabled the development of communities both online and offline, with information exchange occurring both digitally and face-to-face (Islam & Rahman, 2017). The influence that communities have on their members has drawn academic interest for many years (Dholakia et al., 2004), initially in conjunction with an understanding of consumer communities (Boorstin, 1974). Consumer communities form and operate as groups of consumers united by their use of a particular product. Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) further developed the concept of consumer communities, shifting the focus from a single product to a community structure that is interested in a brand as a whole and all its elements. They argue that a brand community is formed by a group of individuals who share a common liking or identification with a particular brand.

Public and Private Brand Loyalty

Ratner dan Kahn (2002) argue that individual behavior changes when observed by others compared to when a person is alone. Therefore, they explain that public brand loyalty is defined as an individual's tendency to exhibit brand-related behaviors that can be observed by others. In contrast, private brand loyalty refers to a consumer's tendency to exhibit brand-related behaviors that are not easily observed by others. This distinction highlights the different ways in which consumers may express their loyalty depending on the social context and the visibility of their actions.

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RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

Based on the description and explanation of theoretical investigations and hypotheses, a research model can be created which is used in this research. This research model is shown in the following figure 1.

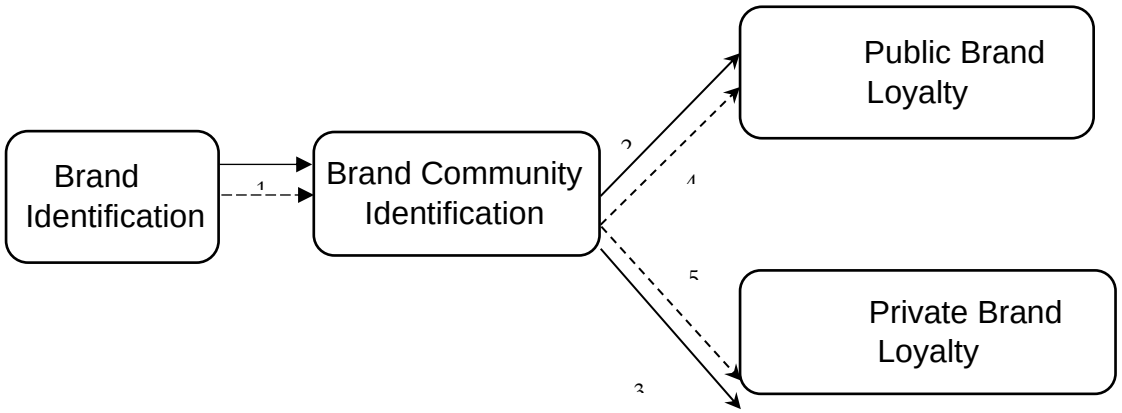


Figure 1: Research Framework

RESEARCH METHODS

This research uses a quantitative method that employs statistical procedures and statistical testing in data analysis (Creswell and Poth, 2018). The objects studied in this research are the public and private brand loyalty of fans of Team RRQ E-Sports. The sampling method used in this research is non-probability sampling with a convenience sampling technique. According to Mooi et al. (2018), accurate sample selection will be more effective than a large sample size. Therefore, a small sample selected with specific criteria (120 and above) will be more reliable and valid than a large sample chosen randomly (Memon et al., 2020). This research uses primary data from 122 respondents who actively play online games and are fans of Team RRQ E-Sports. Questionnaires were distributed via Google Forms, and subsequently, the data was analyzed using descriptive analysis and statistical analysis with the help of SmartPLS 3.2.9 software.

RESULTS

Descriptive Analysis

The descriptive analysis results of the respondents showed that out of 122 fans of Team RRQ E-Sports, 92.62% were male, with 55.74% aged 19-23 years, and 49.18% spent 3-5 hours playing online games (Table 1)

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Table 1: Respondents Profile

Demographic Variables	N	%
Gender		
Male	113	92.62
Female	9	7.38
Age		
< 14 years old	0	0
14 – 18 years old	19	15.57
19 – 23 years old	68	55.74
24 – 27 years old	32	26.23
> 27 years old	3	2.46
Time Spent Playing Online Games in a Day		
< 1 hour	9	7.38
1 - < 3 hours	34	27.87
3 - < 5 hours	60	49.18
5 - < 7 hours	18	14.75
> 7 hours	1	0.82

Source: The results of the analysis from the primary data source (2024)

Outer Model

Convergent Validity Test

Convergent validity testing must consider the Outer Loading Indicator and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). An indicator is considered valid if its Outer Loading Indicator value exceeds 0.70 (Ghozali and Latan, 2015) and the AVE value is acceptable if it is at least 0.50 (Hair et al., 2021).

Table 2: Convergent Validity Test

Variable	Item	Loading Factor	AVE
Brand Identification	IM1	0,838	0,743
	IM2	0,849	
	IM3	0,880	
	IM4	0,885	
	IM5	0,856	

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Brand Community	KM1	0,871	0,833
	KM2	0,938	
	KM3	0,940	
	KM4	0,911	
	KM5	0,901	
Public Brand Loyalty	LPu1	0,945	0,879
	LPu2	0,940	
	LPu3	0,949	
	LPu4	0,914	

Source: The results of the analysis from the primary data source (2024**)**

Based on Table 2, it can be concluded that all indicators passed the convergent validity test because they have factor loading values > 0.7. The AVE values for each variable greater than 0.5 indicate that all indicators of each variable can be used to show the variance of indicators supported by their constructs (Hair et al., 2021) and do not have problematic indicators in measurement.

Discriminant Validity Test

Discriminant validity testing is conducted to measure the extent to which a construct is empirically distinct from other constructs in the structural model (Hair et al., 2021). The Fornell-Larcker Criterion states that the cross-loading value (the square root of the AVE) must be compared to the square root of the AVE of each construct. The square root of the AVE value must be greater than the square root of the AVE of each construct.

Table 3: Discriminant Validity Test

Construct	Brand Identification	Brand Community	Private Brand Loyalty	Public Brand Loyalty
Brand Identification	0,862			
Brand Community	0,816	0,913		

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Private Brand Loyalty	0,705	0,768	0,957	
Public Brand Loyalty	0,750	0,837	0,886	0,937

Source: The results of the analysis from the primary data source (2024)

Based on Table 3, it can be concluded that all items are valid and can be used to explain the constructs of each variable. This is because all variables in the study have cross-loading values greater than the correlation values between constructs.

Data Reliability Test

Reliability testing in this study uses Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, where a variable can be considered reliable if it has a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient ≥ 0.60 (Babin and Zikmund, 2015). Besides Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability values are also needed to test reliability. Reliability with values between 0.60 and 0.70 is still acceptable, while values between 0.70 and 0.90 are considered good and satisfactory.

Based on Table 4, it can be concluded that all variables have Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values > 0.7 in the reliability test. This indicates that the data is reliable and can be used for further testing.

Table 4: Reliability Test

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability
Brand Identification	0,913	0,935
Brand Community	0,950	0,961
Private Brand Loyalty	0,954	0,967
Public Brand Loyalty	0,969	0,978

Source: The results of the analysis from the primary data source (2024)

Inner Model

R-Square

The Coefficient of Determination (R-square) test is conducted to determine the proportion of the dependent variable explained by the independent variables. The

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following is an image of the test results for the R-Square values using the SmartPLS application:

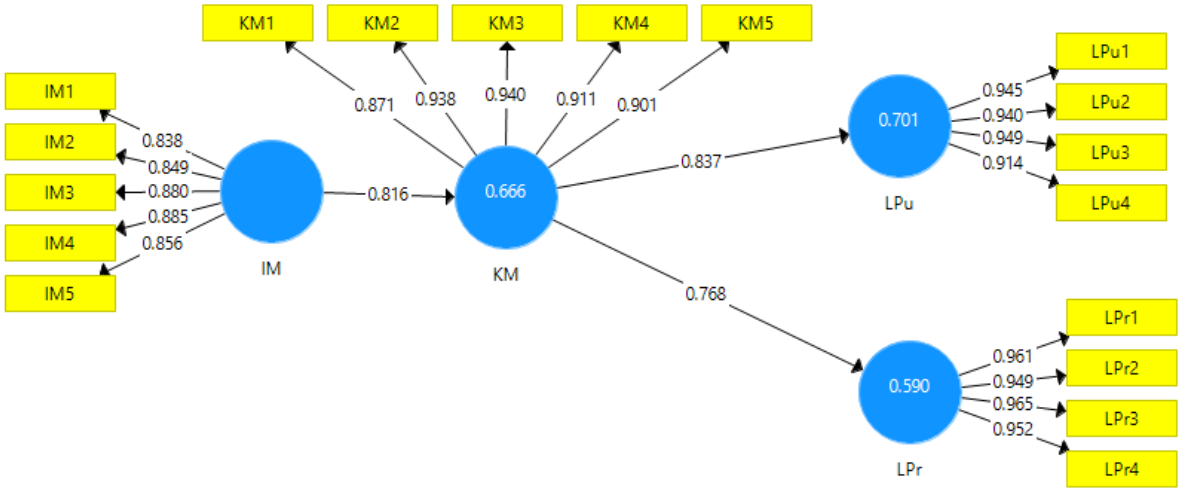


Figure 2: Coefficient Determination Test

The criteria for testing the R-square value according to Hair et al. (2021) are: if the R-square value is 0.75, then it is said to have a strong model value; if the R-square value is 0.50, then it can be said to have a moderate model value; whereas if the R-square value is 0.25, then it can be said to have a weak model value.

Table 5: R-Square

Variable	R-Square	R-Square Adjusted
Brand Community	0,666	0,663
Private Brand Loyalty	0,590	0,586
Public Brand Loyalty	0,701	0,699

Source: The results of the analysis from the primary data source (2024)

Based on Table 5, the brand identification variable has an influence of 66.6% with an R-square value of 0.666 on the brand community, thus it is said to have a moderate model value. Meanwhile, the brand community variable has an influence of 70.1% with an R-square value of 0.701 on public brand loyalty, thus it is said to have a moderate model value. Furthermore, the brand community variable has an influence of 59.0% with

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an R-square value of 0.590 on private brand loyalty, thus it is said to have a moderate model value.

Hypothesis Test

The hypothesis testing is determined from the path coefficient test results, which show the degree of significance of the hypothesis testing results using the t-test from bootstrapping. Table 6 and Figure 3 show the results of the hypothesis test and the results of the path coefficient test. Hypothesis testing can be determined from the path coefficient test results. In this study, the researcher conducted hypothesis testing by looking at the p-value and t-statistics. The standard significance criteria for the p-value in this study is less than 0.05 (p-value < 0.05). Meanwhile, the standard significance criteria for the t-statistics used in this study is more than 1.96 (t-statistics > 1.96). Thus, the standard significance value in this test is t-statistics > 1.96 and p-value < 0.05.

Based on Table 6, it was found that the brand identification variable towards the brand community has a t-statistic value of 22.473 and a p-value of 0.000, making it significant. The brand community variable towards public brand loyalty produces a significant value with a t-statistic value of 21.824 and a p-value of 0.000. Furthermore, the brand community variable towards private brand loyalty produces a significant value with a t-statistic value of 15.316 and a p-value of 0.000, making it significant. The brand community variable is able to mediate the influence of the brand identification variable on public brand loyalty with a t-statistic value of 11.695 and a p-value of 0.000, making it significant. Finally, the brand community variable is also able to mediate the influence of the brand identification variable on private brand loyalty with a t-statistic value of 14.423 and a p-value of 0.000, making it significant.

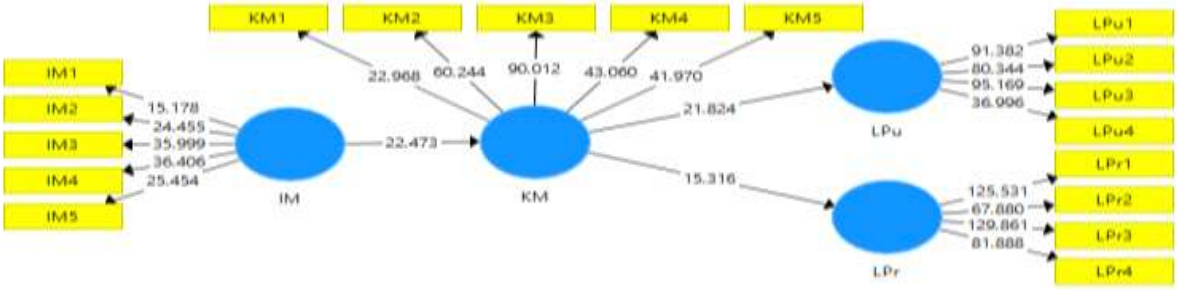


Figure 3: Path Coefficient Test

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Table 6: Hypothesis Test

Variable	t-Statistics	P-Value
IM → KM	22,473	0,000
KM → LPu	21,824	0,000
KM → LPr	15,316	0,000
IM → KM → LPu	11,695	0,000
IM → KM → LPr	14,423	0,000

Source: The results of the analysis from the primary data source (2024)

DISCUSSION

The Effect of Brand Identification on Brand Community Identification

The research findings show that the relationship between the brand identification variable and the brand community identification variable has significant results, so H1 "Brand identification has a positive effect on brand community identification" is accepted. This research result aligns with previous research by Confente and Kucharska (2021), which showed a significant influence of consumer brand identification on brand community identification. However, this research result does not align with the research conducted by Jalaludin et al. (2023), which found no positive relationship between the brand identification variable and the brand community identification variable.

The results of this study may indicate that brand identification affects brand community identification. The higher the consumer's brand identification, the higher the brand community identification they possess. RRQ E-Sports can interact with consumers on social media to reach consumers who previously did not identify themselves with the company's brand. The RRQ E-Sports team can emphasize the values held by the brand to increase the sense of pride among consumers, making them fans of the brand and interested in joining the community.

The Effect of Brand Community Identification on Public Brand Loyalty

The research findings show that the relationship between the brand community identification variable and the public brand loyalty variable has significant results, so H2 "Brand community identification has a positive effect on public brand loyalty" is accepted. This research result aligns with previous research by Kaur et al. (2020), which stated that brand community identification positively influences consumer brand loyalty. However, this research result does not align with the research conducted by Coelho et al. (2008),

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which showed no positive influence of brand community on brand loyalty. The interaction within the brand community on social media was found to be insignificant in creating brand loyalty.

The results of this study can be interpreted that brand community identification affects public brand loyalty. The higher the brand community identification, the higher the public brand loyalty. The brand community identification of RRQ E-Sports fans occurs due to the shared feelings with fellow community members. Fans of the RRQ E-Sports team also feel proud to use merchandise from the RRQ E-Sports team and talk about it with others. In this regard, the RRQ E-Sports team can develop their community by appreciating and providing various benefits that can enhance community activities, so that the RRQ E-Sports fan community can become part of the marketing of the RRQ E-Sports brand itself.

The Effect of Brand Community Identification on Private Brand Loyalty

The research findings show that the relationship between the brand community identification variable and the private brand loyalty variable has significant results, so H3 "Brand community identification has a positive effect on private brand loyalty" is accepted. This research result is consistent with previous research by Zheng et al. (2017), which stated that brand community identification has a significant influence on consumer brand loyalty. However, this research result does not align with the research conducted by Thompson and Sinha (2008), which found no significant relationship between the brand community identification variable and consumer brand loyalty. That research emphasized that companies that are quicker to market new products than their competitors had different outcomes.

The results of this study may indicate that brand community identification affects private brand loyalty. The higher the brand community identification, the higher the private brand loyalty. It is important for marketing practitioners of the RRQ E-Sports team to pay attention to the brand community to maintain long-term private brand loyalty among consumers. Consumers' private brand loyalty, which is related to emotional attachment and commitment, can be crucial for the RRQ E-Sports team, especially when facing difficulties.

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The Effect of Brand Identification on Public Brand Loyalty Mediated by Brand Community

The research findings show that the relationship between the brand identification variable and public brand loyalty with the mediation of brand community has significant results, so H4 "Brand identification affects public brand loyalty with the mediation of brand community" is accepted. This research result is supported by previous research by Supriyanto et al. (2019), which concluded that the brand community mediates the consumer brand identification on brand loyalty. The brand community is seen as a factor influencing the active involvement of consumers in the community. However, this research result does not align with the research conducted by Jalaludin et al. (2023), which did not support the idea that consumer brand identification affects brand loyalty.

The results of this study can be interpreted that the brand community mediates the brand identification variable on public brand loyalty. Consumer identification with the brand community becomes important because the brand community mediates the relationship between brand identification and public brand loyalty. The RRQ E-Sports team can develop consumer identification relationships with the brand community so that consumers can better identify themselves with the brand. This can make consumers voluntarily strive to use merchandise from the RRQ E-Sports team and encourage consumers to engage in Word-of-Mouth (WOM) marketing by talking about the brand to others.

The Effect of Brand Identification on Private Brand Loyalty Mediated by Brand Community

The research findings indicate that the relationship between brand identification variables towards private brand loyalty, mediated by brand community, yields significant results, thereby accepting hypothesis H5: "Brand identification influences private brand loyalty through brand community mediation." These results are consistent with prior research by Mills et al. (2022), demonstrating that brand community fully mediates the relationship between brand identification and private brand loyalty. However, they contrast with findings from Zheng et al. (2017), suggesting that consumers who identify with a brand community will not develop brand loyalty until they have identified with the brand itself.

These findings suggest that brand community mediates the relationship between brand identification and private brand loyalty. Strong consumer brand identification encourages active engagement within the brand community, thereby enhancing private

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brand loyalty. Consequently, RRQ E-Sports can devise marketing strategies focused on building and strengthening brand communities. This approach can bolster private consumer loyalty towards the brand, enhancing satisfaction and long-term commitment to supporting RRQ E-Sports.

CONCLUSION

The study aimed to examine the influence of consumer brand identification on brand community identification, and subsequently, to evaluate the impact of this consumer identification on public and personal loyalty. Based on the analysis and discussion of this research, online gamers identifying with RRQ E-Sports are more likely to identify with the RRQ E-Sports fan community. Those who identify with the RRQ E-Sports fan community are likely to proudly display RRQ E-Sports merchandise in public and enthusiastically discuss RRQ E-Sports with others. Moreover, RRQ E-Sports fans demonstrate personal brand loyalty by committing to long-term support of RRQ E-Sports.

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