
Role of Mediation Factors in Social Media Marketing's Influence on Voting Intentions: Implications for Economic Development and Political Engagement

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Abstract:

This study aims to analyze social media activity in influencing voting intention through various mediating factors, such as political branding, virality (e-WOM), opinions, trust, and religious beliefs. The study employs a Structural Equation Modeling approach based on Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) to examine the relationships between variables in the research model. Data were collected from 226 respondents selected based on specific criteria. The findings indicate that Social Media Marketing significantly influences candidate image, party image, voter trust, voter opinion, virality (e-WOM), religious beliefs, and voting intention. Moreover, party image, voter trust, and voter opinion have significant effects on voting intention, while candidate image, virality (e-WOM), and religious beliefs do not show significant effects. In terms of mediation, voter opinion and party image are proven to mediate the relationship between social media activity and voting intention, whereas other variables do not demonstrate significant mediation effects. This study is expected to provide new insights into how social media interactions affect voting intention. The findings also suggest that the success of political campaigns in the digital era requires strategies tailored to specific audiences based on their demographics, social media usage preferences, and religious beliefs.

Keywords: *Social Media Marketing, Voting Intention, Mediating Factor, Political Marketing*

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1. Introduction

Technological developments have significantly affected the political sector, particularly through the application of digital technologies that shape political communication, participation, and policy-making processes (Gilardi, 2022). Technology enables online discussions, consultations with politicians and digital activism that increase political participation and accountability (Fazylzhan, 2022). In addition, technology-induced changes in the composition of the workforce influence voters' propensity to support pro-technology parties (Schöll & Kurer, 2024). In campaigns, technology enables microtargeting to optimize election outcomes (Hoferer et al., 2020). However, technology also raises ethical concerns regarding surveillance and state control, affecting democratic governance (Sjöstrand, 2021).

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Social media is becoming an important element in political strategy, with Twitter as one of the main platforms for political communication (Roca Trenchs et al., 2023). Politicians utilize it to build direct relationships with the public, encourage feedback and increase participation (Fatema et al., 2022). Social media is also used to express political views and engage people in offline political activities, especially where access to traditional communication is limited (Toros & Toros, 2022).

In Indonesia, social media such as Twitter and TikTok play a role in political communication and engagement (Khasabu et al., 2023). In campaigns, social media is used for political propaganda, such as memes in the 2019 presidential election, which influenced public opinion (Aminulloh et al., 2022). The platform also became a space to discuss political issues, such as the fuel price increase in 2022 (Riski, 2023). However, social media also poses challenges in the form of spreading hoaxes, which can affect public perception of the government (Sakti & Nainggolan, 2023). Therefore, people need to sort out information wisely.

Generation Z (Gen Z) in Indonesia, as the largest digital consumer, utilizes social media for entertainment, education and work while showing unique preferences through the use of slang and code-switching (Kadir, 2022; Evita et al., 2023; Kandiawan, 2022). While Gen Z is active in political discussions, they have also been criticized for contributing to the spread of false information during the COVID-19 pandemic (Nurhajati et al., 2023). Their critical participation on social media is considered significant in shaping Indonesia's political landscape (Mujiwati & Laili, 2023).

Previous research shows that social media influences voting intention through variables such as candidate image, trust and e-WOM, but these variables have not fully explained the relationship (Moslehpour et al., 2024; de-Oliveira et al., 2022). Virality (e-WOM) plays an important role in influencing young people's political behavior by increasing the effective dissemination of political messages (Alhabash & McAlister, 2015; Beriansyah & Qibtiyah, 2023).

This research aims to explore the role of social media in influencing Indonesians' political participation with a focus on voter trust, voter opinion, and e-WOM. These three factors are expected to provide strategic insights to strengthen candidate image, build public trust, and increase loyalty and voting intention in the digital era (Dash et al., 2021; Khan et al., 2024; Moslehpour et al., 2024).

The presence of social media as a means used to carry out political marketing activities is increasingly being applied by politicians and political parties. Previous studies have also proven that social media has the ability to connect political candidates with voters (de-Oliveira et al., 2022; Hultman et al., 2019; Moslehpour et al., 2024; Zaiter et al., 2023), so it can be said that social media is a profitable means of political communication for politicians. However, this advantage must be followed by deep consideration of determining the right image to use in certain situations and conditions.

Moslehpour et al. (2024) conducted research on factors that mediate the influence of voting intention and social media activities, such as e-WoM, candidate image, and religious belief. However, the study did not discuss the influence of other factors that can affect voting intention through social media activities. In another study, de-Oliveira et al. (2022) found that voting intention and social media activity can also be mediated by opinion and trust. In addition, party image is also one of the important factors that influence a voter's decision through social media activity, but this was not the focus of discussion in previous studies.

Referring to these arguments, the questions for this research are formulated, namely whether social media marketing affects voter trust, voter opinion, e-WoM, candidate image, religious belief, and party image in the context of political marketing, and whether social media marketing also affects voting intention in political marketing. In addition, this research also explores whether voter trust, voter opinion, e-WoM, candidate image, religious belief, and party image influence voting intention in political marketing. Furthermore, this study examines whether factors such as voter trust, voter opinion, e-WoM, candidate image, religious belief, and party image mediate the relationship between social media marketing and voting intention in political marketing.

2. Theoretical Background

Branding is defined by the American Marketing Association as elements such as names, terms, signs, symbols, or designs that distinguish a seller's products or services from competitors (Keller & Swaminathan, 2019). Branding not only creates a unique identity but also builds consumer perceptions and emotions, resulting in brand equity as an added value of consumer trust and recognition (Wahab et al., 2024). In politics, brand equity includes party and candidate brands, with dimensions such as awareness, association, loyalty and leadership qualities that influence voter intentions (Atzger et al., 2020; Rodríguez et al., 2023).

Branding elements such as names, logos, slogans, colors and designs play an important role in shaping a party or candidate's identity and creating strong associations in the minds of voters (Molokwane et al., 2023). These elements help strengthen the image, build emotional connections, and increase loyalty to the candidate or party (Pich, 2022). An integrated marketing communications (IMC) strategy ensures that the political brand message is consistent through various channels, such as advertising, public debates, and digital media, which is important for strengthening political brand equity (Šerić & Mikulić, 2023).

Digital branding plays a central role in strengthening a candidate or party's relationship with voters through platforms such as websites, apps, and social media. Social media enables direct interactions that increase voter engagement and loyalty, creating engaged communities and political brand relevance in the digital age (Bashir et al., 2024; Liu et al., 2024). As such, a strong branding strategy in digital media can accelerate the growth of political brand equity and support electoral success.

Political marketing has evolved since the late 1960s, when traditional marketing principles began to be applied to politics. Kotler (1972) introduced the “generic concept of marketing,” which turned political campaigns into a scientific approach. Modern political marketing strategies are results-oriented by utilizing communication technologies to build authentic and personalized engagement (Luebke & Engelmann, 2022). Social change is increasing voters' ability to make better political decisions (Dalton, 2008; Welzel, 2013). Social media is now an important tool, enabling direct communication between candidates and voters, replacing the traditional top-down approach (Moslehpour et al., 2024). The campaigns of Barack Obama and Donald Trump demonstrated the success of this approach with personalized digital strategies.

Social media marketing uses platforms such as Facebook and Instagram to build personal relationships with audiences (Moslehpour et al., 2024). This strategy is effective in increasing brand awareness and consumer engagement. The main elements of this marketing include entertainment, interaction, customization, and trendiness (Kim & Ko, 2010). Entertaining content attracts attention, while two-way interaction strengthens the relationship between candidates and voters (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Customization helps deliver messages that are relevant to specific segments (Zhu & Chen, 2015). Trendiness maintains candidate relevance by keeping up with current trends in social media, creating an innovative and responsive image. Candidate image is a key factor in determining voter choice. Elements such as intelligence, ethics and capability shape a candidate's appeal (Pancer et al., 1999). Mass media and social media reinforce this image through direct interaction with voters (Kelm et al., 2023). In the 2024 Indonesian Presidential Election, candidates such as Ganjar Pranowo, Anies Baswedan, and Prabowo Subianto build their respective images based on their values and policies. Running mates also play an important role in strengthening the image of the main candidate. Effective image management, especially on social media, is key to winning over voters.

Party image is the public's collective perception of political parties that includes attributes such as competence, ethics, and issue relevance (Dubrow, 2012). This image is important in influencing voters' decisions because it creates a stronger emotional attachment than the image of individual candidates, which tends to be more fickle. Party image has a central role in campaign strategy, especially to strengthen voter loyalty, which can be analogized to brand loyalty (Hoegg & Lewis, 2011). Voters tend to be more influenced by party image than substantive policies in the context of elections (Russmann et al., 2024). Political marketing strategies should be tailored to the profile of voters, including those who are undecided, by utilizing technology and social media for field research (Kocaman & Coşgun, 2024). In addition, a country's political context, such as political polarization, also affects the effectiveness of party image in shaping voters' voting intentions (Kekkonen et al., 2022).

Voter trust is the trust voters have in political candidates based on attributes such as competence, integrity, and moral values (S. Kim & Park, 2013). This trust is formed through perceptions of economic conditions and the fulfillment of people's needs. Demographic factors such as gender and education also influence voter trust

(Kayaoglu, 2017). Candidates who demonstrate personal integrity are more likely to gain voter trust, so building a trustworthy image is important in political marketing. Economic stability also contributes to trust, making it a strategic factor in political campaigns.

Voter opinion includes individual attitudes and expectations towards candidates, political parties and policies (Fernández-Gracia et al., 2014). Extrinsic factors such as the political environment and media have a major influence on the formation of voter opinions (Vliegenthart et al., 2024). Social media plays an important role in turning opinions into voting intentions through the rapid dissemination of information. In addition, factors such as party identification, ideology and candidate character also shape voter opinions (Gilliland et al., 2023). With a complex political environment, a deep understanding of these factors is necessary to accurately predict voter behavior.

Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) is the process of sharing opinions online that influence the views of consumers or voters (Cheung & Lee, 2012). Social media facilitates the wide and rapid dissemination of information, making it an effective tool for building public perceptions of candidates or parties (Morgan & Kulkarni, 2023). In political marketing, eWOM helps increase public awareness through direct interaction between candidates and voters. However, its effectiveness largely depends on the credibility of the information and trust in the opinion giver (S. Chu & Chen, 2019). A wise eWOM strategy can increase voter participation and engagement, making it an important instrument in modern political campaigns.

Religious beliefs include practices, values and beliefs taught by spiritual leaders (Plante & Boccaccini, 1997). In Indonesia, as a country with the largest Muslim population in the world, religious beliefs have a significant influence on spiritual, social and political aspects, including voter behavior. Voters tend to support candidates who align with their religious beliefs. In marketing, Fam et al. (2004) highlighted the importance of understanding religious belief values for culturally relevant strategies. Singhapakdi et al. (2013) found that intrinsic religiosity influences individuals' ethical decisions, including in marketing and politics. This confirms the importance of religious beliefs in analyzing individual and societal behavior.

Voting intention is the tendency of individuals to vote for a particular candidate or party (Vazquez et al., 2020). Social media allows political candidates to build closeness with voters through personalized content, improve communication, and understand public opinion (McGregor, 2018, 2020). Newman & Sheth (1985) explain that voter behavioral motives are similar to consumer behavior, but political decisions are more often characterized by uncertainty. Factors such as party loyalty, candidate track record and personal characteristics (race, gender, religion, age, education, origin and profession) can influence voting intention (Catt, 1991; Campbell & Cowley, 2014). Understanding these factors is important for effective campaign strategies.

3. Methodology

Research design is an important step that determines the basic framework for scientific research (Malhotra, 2021). There are two main categories of research design: exploratory, which aims to gain initial understanding, and conclusive, which is used to test hypotheses and measure relationships between variables (Malhotra, 2021). This study uses a conclusive design with a descriptive approach to describe the phenomenon and measure the relationship between variables. Data were collected through a survey using a systematically designed questionnaire, with a single cross-sectional approach. This research aims to analyze the factors that influence voter interest, involving eight variables related to social media and voting intention, and analyzed using Partial Least Square - Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM).

This research model draws on research by Moslehpour, Schafferer, et al. (2024), which found that social media influences the decision to vote for political candidates, mediated by candidate image, religious beliefs, and e-WoM. Political branding on social media can increase political success and voter participation, especially in developing countries (Zaiter et al., 2023). Social media serves as a significant e-WoM in influencing voting decisions, and political content that highlights positive traits strengthens candidate image, increasing voting intentions (Moslehpour et al., 2024). Religious beliefs also serve as an important mediator in the impact of social media marketing strategies on voting intention (Moslehpour et al., 2024).

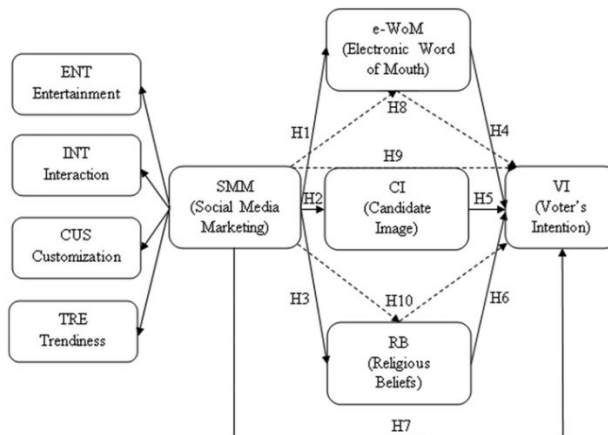


Figure 1. Reference model 1.

Another study conducted by de-Oliveira et al. (2022) which also discusses political marketing with social media states that the mediating factors involving voters to candidates are opinion and trust. These two variables were found to mediate between social media and political marketing. In this study de-Oliveira et al. (2022) found that social media positively affects voter opinion, voter trust, candidate image, and political party image. In the research of de-Oliveira et al. (2022) involved the variables of social media marketing, candidate image, party image, voter trust, voter opinion, and voting intention.

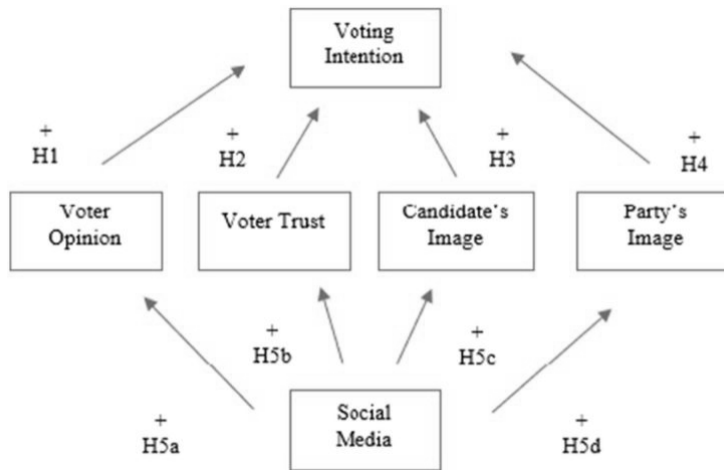


Figure 2. Reference model 2.

The study also found that opinion, trust, candidate image, and party image cannot fully explain the influence of social media marketing on political participation. Based on these explanations, this research will discuss the influence of social media on voting intention, both directly and through various mediating factors. Mediating factors in this study include political branding, which consists of party image and candidate (politician) image, virality or e-WOM, as well as opinion and trust. Based on the explanations above, a research model was formed as presented below. The research model used involves several variables, namely social media marketing, candidate image, party image, voter trust, voter opinion, e-WOM, religious belief, and voting intention.

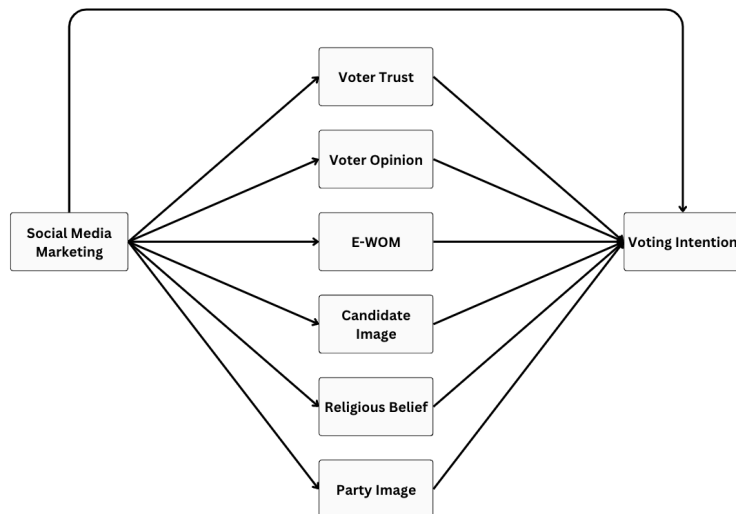


Figure 3. Research Model

In the context of elections increasingly influenced by digital technology, the use of social media has become one of the primary tools in campaign strategies. Social media marketing (SMM) is not only utilized to disseminate information but also to build emotional connections with voters, influence their perceptions of candidates and

political parties, and drive voting intention. The presence of social media enables voters to connect more closely with candidates, learn about their political views, and engage in discussions on important issues, ultimately shaping voter decisions at the ballot box.

This study explores the relationship between social media marketing and various factors that determine voting intention. Social media marketing serves not only as a communication tool but also as an instrument to influence candidate image, party image, and several psychological aspects of voters, such as their level of trust, opinions, and beliefs. The research aims to analyze how social media marketing can significantly impact the formation of candidate and party images and how these factors influence voters' intentions to cast their votes.

From the existing literature, various factors can be mediated by social media marketing, including candidate image, party image, voter trust, voter opinions, and electronic word of mouth (e-WOM). Furthermore, factors such as religious beliefs may also play a role in shaping voter preferences for specific candidates. Therefore, the hypotheses developed in this study aim to examine whether social media marketing has a significant impact on these various factors and how these relationships ultimately contribute to increased voting intention.

The following hypotheses will be tested in this study, encompassing the direct and mediating effects of social media marketing on voting intention and related factors.

- The first hypothesis (H1) posits that social media marketing positively influences candidate image. This hypothesis is based on the belief that marketing efforts through social media can enhance the public image of a candidate. Social media allows candidates to interact directly with voters, build a stronger image, and create a positive impression in their minds.
- Next, the second hypothesis (H2) focuses on party image, proposing that social media marketing also positively impacts the political party's image. Social media serves as an effective channel for political parties to showcase their vision, mission, and activities, thereby influencing how voters perceive the party.
- The third hypothesis (H3) suggests that social media marketing positively influences voter trust. Social media can enhance transparency and facilitate more direct communication between candidates, political parties, and voters, thereby fostering voter trust in them.
- The fourth hypothesis (H4) asserts that social media marketing positively affects voter opinion. Voter opinions are significantly shaped by the information they receive, and social media plays a major role in forming these opinions by disseminating campaign messages and related information.
- The fifth hypothesis (H5) explains that social media marketing also impacts electronic word of mouth (eWOM), referring to the spread of information electronically through word of mouth. Social media campaigns can stimulate discussions and sharing of positive experiences, potentially creating an online buzz that boosts awareness and support.
- The sixth hypothesis (H6) posits that social media marketing positively influences religious belief. As an accessible platform, social media allows for the

dissemination of messages aligned with religious values, which may affect voters' perceptions of candidates based on their religious values.

- The seventh hypothesis (H7) proposes that social media marketing positively affects voting intention, which refers to voters' intention to vote. Effective social media marketing can encourage voters to feel more confident and motivated to cast their votes in an election.
- The eighth hypothesis (H8) states that candidate image positively influences voting intention. A positive candidate image can motivate voters to choose them, as voters are inclined to support candidates they perceive as possessing good qualities and trustworthiness.
- The ninth hypothesis (H9) suggests that candidate image mediates the positive effect of social media marketing on voting intention. In other words, social media marketing impacts candidate image, which in turn influences voters' intention to vote.
- The tenth hypothesis (H10) posits that party image positively influences voting intention. Voters often base their decisions on the image and reputation of the political party, and a positive party image can encourage voters to support candidates from that party.
- The eleventh hypothesis (H11) proposes that party image mediates the positive effect of social media marketing on voting intention. Social media marketing enhances the party's image, which subsequently impacts voters' intention to vote for candidates from that party.
- The twelfth hypothesis (H12) focuses on voter trust, asserting that voter trust positively influences voting intention. High trust in a candidate or political party increases voters' willingness to cast their votes.
- The thirteenth hypothesis (H13) states that voter trust mediates the positive effect of social media marketing on voting intention. Through social media, candidates and parties can build voter trust, which ultimately impacts their intention to vote.
- The fourteenth hypothesis (H14) posits that voter opinion positively influences voting intention. Voters with favorable opinions about a candidate or political party are more likely to vote for them.
- The fifteenth hypothesis (H15) suggests that voter opinion mediates the positive effect of social media marketing on voting intention. Discussions and opinions formed on social media influence how voters view candidates or political parties, which in turn impacts their voting decisions.
- The sixteenth hypothesis (H16) asserts that electronic word of mouth positively influences voting intention. Online discussions and recommendations can motivate voters to cast their votes, as they tend to trust recommendations from fellow voters.
- The seventeenth hypothesis (H17) proposes that electronic word of mouth mediates the positive effect of social media marketing on voting intention. Through social media, eWOM can amplify marketing effects, thereby enhancing voters' intention to vote.
- The eighteenth hypothesis (H18) posits that religious belief positively influences voting intention. Religious belief often plays a role in shaping voters' preferences when choosing candidates or political parties.
- The nineteenth hypothesis (H19) suggests that religious belief mediates the positive effect of social media marketing on voting intention. Through social

media, messages aligned with religious beliefs can strengthen voters' intention to vote for candidates or parties that resonate with their religious values.

The population in this study consists of men and women who participated in the 2024 Presidential Election, specifically voters actively using social media, as social media significantly influences voter decisions (Pangesti et al., 2024). This population amounts to 46.8 million individuals, approximately 22.85% of the total voters in Indonesia (Yolency, 2024). The study sample is a representative group of individuals from the larger population, selected using non-probability sampling techniques, particularly convenience sampling, which is efficient and easily accessible (Malhotra, 2021). The minimum required sample size is 165 respondents, considering the 33 indicators studied, as recommended by Malhotra (2021).

Data collection was conducted directly by researchers using a self-administered questionnaire through Google Forms. The questionnaire was distributed via social media platforms such as Instagram and WhatsApp. A filtering question ensured that only respondents who actively use social media (Instagram or TikTok) and participated in the 2024 Presidential Election could proceed with the questionnaire. The collected data was analyzed using the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) method.

The questionnaire was pre-tested on 30 respondents before being distributed to the main sample. It included questions that align with the study's objectives and are easy to understand. A five-point Likert scale was used to measure the respondents' agreement levels, ranging from "strongly agree" (5) to "strongly disagree" (1). The questionnaire consisted of an introduction, filtering questions, Likert-scale statements, respondent profiles, and a closing statement thanking the respondents.

The data in this study was analyzed using Partial Least Squares - Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), which allows for testing relationships between variables in complex models. PLS-SEM was chosen due to its focus on predictive causal approaches and suitability for models involving numerous constructs and indicators, as well as studies with small samples. The PLS-SEM analysis process comprises two stages: the measurement model (outer model) analysis and the structural model (inner model) analysis. For the outer model analysis, five criteria are used to assess the quality of indicators: Outer Loading, Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability, Average Variance Extracted (AVE), and Discriminant Validity. Outer Loading evaluates the extent to which indicators represent the measured constructs, with a recommended value of ≥ 0.70 . Indicators with low Outer Loading (< 0.40) must be removed as they do not significantly contribute to the construct.

The analysis model in this study involves two main components: the outer model and the inner model. At the outer model stage, the reliability and validity of the indicators were tested to ensure the instrument's reliability and suitability. Indicator reliability is measured by examining Outer Loading values, with values above 0.70 indicating good consistency. Internal consistency reliability was also evaluated using Composite Reliability and Cronbach's Alpha, both of which should exceed 0.70 to ensure

dependable instrument reliability. Convergent validity was tested through Average Variance Extracted (AVE), where AVE values above 0.50 indicate that the construct explains more than half of the variance in its indicators. To test discriminant validity, three common methods were used: Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT), Fornell-Larcker Criterion, and cross-loadings. For HTMT, the suggested threshold is 0.90 for highly similar constructs and 0.85 for constructs that are conceptually distinct.

After ensuring the outer model is reliable and valid, the next step is to analyze the inner model, which examines the relationships between latent variables. At this stage, the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) is used to evaluate collinearity among formative indicators. A VIF value greater than 5 indicates collinearity issues that need to be addressed by removing or combining constructs. Statistical significance tests of variable relationships were conducted by examining t-values and p-values. A t-value exceeding the critical value indicates a significant relationship, with commonly used critical values being 1.65 for 10% significance, 1.96 for 5%, and 2.57 for 1%. The coefficient of determination (R^2) was also used to measure the model's predictive strength, with higher R^2 values indicating better explanations of endogenous variables. Additionally, effect size measured by f^2 values indicates the magnitude of a predictor construct's contribution to the endogenous construct, with values of 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 indicating small, medium, and large effects, respectively. To evaluate the model's predictive strength outside the sample, the Q^2 predict value was used, where values greater than 0 demonstrate good predictive strength.

Mediation analysis in this study aims to evaluate whether a mediator variable explains the relationship between independent (predictor) and dependent (outcome) variables. Bootstrapping techniques were used to test direct and indirect effects simultaneously, without requiring normal distribution assumptions. This analysis identifies various types of mediation, including Complementary Partial Mediation, Competitive Partial Mediation, Indirect-only (Full Mediation), Direct-only (No Mediation), and No Effect (No Mediation). A suggested flowchart guides the testing of relationships among independent, mediator, and dependent variables, aiding in identifying the type of mediation occurring. This approach helps researchers understand whether the mediator strengthens, weakens, or fully explains the relationship between variables, providing more accurate conclusions about causal relationships in complex PLS-SEM models.

4. Empirical Findings/Result

A. Reliability & Validity Test

An initial test of the research model was conducted with 30 respondents to evaluate the reliability and validity of the instrument before the main data collection. The analysis used the PLS-SEM method, with construct reliability measured through Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability, both of which showed values over 0.7, indicating a reliable instrument. Construct validity was evaluated using outer loadings and Average Variance Extracted (AVE), with the results showing that the AVE value

was above 0.5, indicating that the instrument was valid in measuring the intended construct.

Table 1. Validity and Reliability Test Results

Variable	Code	Outer Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
<i>Candidate Image</i>	CI1	0.905	0.908	0.933	0.737
	CI2	0.895			
	CI3	0.853			
	CI4	0.909			
	CI5	0.715			
<i>Electronic Word of Mouth</i>	EW1	0.906	0.936	0.959	0.885
	EW2	0.972			
	EW3	0.943			
<i>Party Image</i>	PI1	0.965	0.961	0.975	0.928
	PI2	0.983			
	PI3	0.941			
<i>Religious Belief</i>	RB1	0.95	0.959	0.968	0.859
	RB2	0.922			
	RB3	0.939			
	RB4	0.923			
	RB5	0.899			
<i>Social Media Marketing</i>	SM1	0.839	0.920	0.935	0.645
	SM2	0.829			
	SM3	0.909			
	SM4	0.684			
	SM5	0.842			
	SM6	0.671			
	SM7	0.747			
	SM8	0.869			
<i>Voting Intention</i>	VI1	0.902	0.952	0.963	0.84
	VI2	0.913			
	VI3	0.915			
	VI4	0.937			
	VI5	0.917			
<i>Voter Opinion</i>	VO1	0.948	0.949	0.967	0.907
	VO2	0.958			
	VO3	0.952			
<i>Voter Trust</i>	VT1	0.893	0.937	0.96	0.888

VT2	0.975
VT3	0.957

Source: Data processed by researchers (2024)

The reliability and validity test results for the Candidate Image variable show that this instrument has good internal consistency, with Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values exceeding the 0.7 threshold. Although there is one indicator that has outer loadings below 0.7, this variable is still considered valid overall because the AVE obtained is more than 0.5, indicating that most of the indicator variance can be explained by the construct. The Electronic Word of Mouth variable provides excellent results, where all indicators have outer loadings above 0.7, and the very high AVE value indicates strong convergent validity. Reliability is also well maintained because the Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values show high internal consistency. Similar results were also found for the Party Image variable, where all indicators supported the construct well and reliability was very high. The high AVE value on this variable indicates that more than 90% of the variance of its indicators can be explained by the construct, ensuring very strong validity. The Religious Belief variable also showed similar results, with excellent Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability and AVE values, demonstrating consistency and strong construct validity across its indicators.

B. Main-Test

The main test in this study used Partial Least Square - Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) technique with SmartPLS software version 4.1.0. This research model measures latent variables using reflective indicators, with variables such as social media, candidate image, party image, religious beliefs, e-WOM, voter confidence, voter opinion, and voting intention. Model evaluation is conducted in two stages: first, outer model evaluation to ensure indicator validity and reliability, and second, inner model evaluation to assess the relationship between latent variables and prediction of endogenous variables. This model aims to understand the influence of social media on voting intention, both directly and through mediation, and to analyze the role of personal and institutional elements in voter decision-making.

After the main test data was obtained, the first stage of analysis was to evaluate the measurement model (outer model) using SmartPLS software. The evaluation was based on five criteria: outer loading, Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, Average Variance Extracted (AVE), and discriminant validity. These criteria ensure the validity and reliability of the model prior to structural model analysis. The evaluation results showed that some constructs, such as candidate image and social media marketing, had Cronbach's Alpha and AVE values that were below the recommended thresholds, signaling a lack of internal consistency and convergent validity. To correct this, indicators with low outer loadings (<0.4) were removed, such as CI1 and CI2 from candidate image, as well as some indicators from social media marketing. After the removal of the indicators, the model was retested and showed significant improvements in reliability and construct validity, with Cronbach's Alpha and AVE values meeting the recommended criteria for all constructs.

The HTMT (Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio of correlations) method was used to identify discriminant validity in the Partial Least Squares (PLS) model. HTMT measures the ratio between the correlation between indicators of different constructs (heterotrait) and the correlation between indicators of the same construct (monotrait). Discriminant validity is considered good if the HTMT value is below 0.90. If the HTMT value exceeds this threshold, there is an indication of a problem in discriminant validity. Based on the table of HTMT evaluation results, all pairs of constructs in the model show values below 0.90, which means that the discriminant validity of this model is achieved.

The Fornell-Larcker Criterion method was also used to verify discriminant validity. This criterion ensures that the average root variance extracted (AVE) of each construct is greater than the correlation between other constructs. The analysis results showed that the root AVE value for each construct was greater than its correlation with other constructs, indicating good discriminant validity. Furthermore, cross loading analysis is used to check whether each indicator has the highest loading value on the measured construct. The analysis results show that the indicators in the model have the highest loading value on their respective constructs, which supports discriminant validity.

Inner model measurement is carried out to evaluate the relationship between latent variables. One important step in this measurement is testing for collinearity using the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF). The results of the analysis show that all VIF values are below the threshold of 5, which indicates the absence of significant multicollinearity problems between the latent variables.

Table 2. Research Bootstrapping Results

Variable	Original Sample	St.Dev	T statistics	P values
<i>Candidate Image -> Voting Intention</i>	-0.103	0.071	1.461	0.072
<i>EWOM -> Voting Intention</i>	-0.019	0.086	0.217	0.414
<i>Party Image -> Voting Intention</i>	0.394	0.073	5.371	0
<i>Religious Belief -> Voting Intention</i>	-0.077	0.092	0.84	0.201
<i>Social Media Marketing -> Candidate Image</i>	0.279	0.081	3.428	0
<i>Social Media Marketing -> EWOM</i>	0.671	0.045	14.789	0
<i>Social Media Marketing -> Party Image</i>	0.512	0.074	6.871	0
<i>Social Media Marketing -> Religious Belief</i>	0.301	0.081	3.697	0
<i>Social Media Marketing -> Voter Opinion</i>	0.33	0.066	5.026	0
<i>Social Media Marketing -> Voter Trust</i>	0.233	0.088	2.664	0.004
<i>Social Media Marketing -> Voting Intention</i>	0.345	0.092	3.738	0
<i>Voter Opinion -> Voting Intention</i>	0.164	0.072	2.291	0.011
<i>Voter Trust -> Voting Intention</i>	0.165	0.064	2.584	0.005
<i>Social Media Marketing -> Voter Trust -> Voting Intention</i>	0.034	0.020	1,670	0.095

<i>Social Media Marketing -> Voter Opinion -> Voting Intention</i>	0.055	0.025	2,147	0.032
<i>Social Media Marketing -> Religious Belief -> Voting Intention</i>	-0.018	0.029	0.634	0.526
<i>Social Media Marketing -> Party Image -> Voting Intention</i>	0.199	0.047	4,212	0.000
<i>Social Media Marketing -> EWOM -> Voting Intention</i>	-0.010	0.056	0.175	0.861
<i>Social Media Marketing -> Candidate Image -> Voting Intention</i>	-0.029	0.024	1,185	0.236

Source: Data processed by researchers (2024)

The results of hypothesis testing show some significant mediation paths. For example, the Social Media Marketing -> Voter Opinion -> Voting Intention relationship has t-statistics of 2.147 and a p-value of 0.032, indicating a significant mediation path. In contrast, the Social Media Marketing -> Religious Belief -> Voting Intention path is not significant with t-statistics of 0.634 and p-value of 0.526. Overall, 15 significant relationships were found, while the rest were not significant. The evaluation of the coefficient of determination (R^2) shows how much the exogenous variables explain the endogenous variables in the model. The R^2 value for Voting Intention is 0.532, which means 53.2% of the variation can be explained by the exogenous variables, indicating good predictability. The e-WOM variable has an R^2 of 0.449, while Party Image has an R^2 of 0.261, indicating a moderate influence. Candidate Image, with an R^2 value of 0.078, shows a weak influence. Religious Belief and Voter Opinion have R^2 values of 0.091 and 0.109 respectively, indicating limited influence. Voter Trust has the lowest R^2 value of 0.054, indicating a very low influence.

Table 3. Research R2 Test Results

	R-square
<i>Candidate Image</i>	0.078
<i>EWOM</i>	0.449
<i>Party Image</i>	0.261
<i>Religious Belief</i>	0.091
<i>Voter Opinion</i>	0.109
<i>Voter Trust</i>	0.054
<i>Voting Intention</i>	0.532

Source: Data processed by researchers (2024)

These results indicate that some endogenous variables in the model have strong contributions from exogenous variables, such as Voting Intention and e-WOM. However, for other variables such as Candidate Image and Voter Trust, the contribution of exogenous variables to their variability is still relatively small, so further testing or additional models are needed to explore other factors that influence these variables. Further interpretation will be done in the discussion to understand the implications of these results in the context of the study.

The next stage in the analysis is to calculate the effect size using the f^2 value, which measures the relative contribution of the independent variable to the dependent variable. The interpretation of the f^2 value is based on the following criteria: 0.02 is considered a small effect, 0.15 is considered a medium effect, and 0.35 is considered

a large effect. If the f^2 value is less than 0.02, then the influence of the variable is considered negligible or insignificant (Hair et al., 2022).

Table 4. Research f^2 value

	f-square	influence
<i>Candidate Image -> Voting Intention</i>	0.021	Small
<i>EWOM -> Voting Intention</i>	0.000	Ignored
<i>Party Image -> Voting Intention</i>	0.210	Currently
<i>Religious Belief -> Voting Intention</i>	0.006	Ignored
<i>Social Media Marketing -> Candidate Image</i>	0.085	Small
<i>Social Media Marketing -> EWOM</i>	0.816	Big
<i>Social Media Marketing -> Party Image</i>	0.353	Big
<i>Social Media Marketing -> Religious Belief</i>	0.100	Small
<i>Social Media Marketing -> Voter Opinion</i>	0.122	Small
<i>Social Media Marketing -> Voter Trust</i>	0.058	Small
<i>Social Media Marketing -> Voting Intention</i>	0.115	Small
<i>Voter Opinion -> Voting Intention</i>	0.043	Small
<i>Voter Trust -> Voting Intention</i>	0.038	Small

Source: Data processed by researchers (2024)

Based on Table 4.21, the greatest influence in the model is seen in Social Media Marketing (SMM) and e-WOM with an f^2 value of 0.816, which falls into the large category. Similarly, the influence of SMM on Party Image has an f^2 value of 0.353, which also indicates a large influence. In contrast, very small or negligible f^2 values are seen in the relationship between e-WOM and Voting Intention with a value of 0.000, and between Religious Belief and Voting Intention with a value of 0.006. This indicates that these two variables do not make a significant contribution in influencing voting intention. Small effects were found in some pathways, such as between Social Media Marketing and Candidate Image (f^2 of 0.085), and between Voter Trust and Voting Intention (f^2 of 0.038). Party Image and Voting Intention with an f^2 value of 0.210, which indicates that perceptions about the party have a significant impact on voting intention. Overall, the f^2 value indicates that Social Media Marketing has a large influence on several pathways, especially in shaping e-WOM and Party Image, while the contribution of other variables, such as Religious Belief or e-WOM to Voting Intention, tends to be small or even negligible.

Predictive relevance testing is conducted using the Q^2 Predict value, which is used to evaluate the extent to which exogenous variables are able to predict endogenous variables in the model. Based on the guidelines of Hair et al. (2022), if the Q^2 Predict value is greater than 0, then the exogenous variable is considered to have predictive relevance to the endogenous variable. Conversely, if the Q^2 Predict value is less than 0, the model has no predictive relevance for that variable. Based on Table 4.22, all variables in the model have a positive Q^2 Predict value, indicating that this model has adequate predictive power for all endogenous variables. The e-WOM variable has the highest Q^2 Predict value of 0.440, which indicates excellent predictive ability of

variance in electronic word-of-mouth communication. Followed by the Voting Intention variable with a Q^2 Predict value of 0.312, indicating that the model is able to predict voting intention quite well.

Table 5. Q^2 Predict Research Value

Variable	Q^2 predict
<i>Candidate Image</i>	0.061
<i>EWOM</i>	0.440
<i>Party Image</i>	0.246
<i>Religious Belief</i>	0.067
<i>Voter Opinion</i>	0.095
<i>Voter Trust</i>	0.028
<i>Voting Intention</i>	0.312

Source: Data processed by researchers (2024)

These results indicate that the model has good predictive relevance for most of the endogenous variables, especially for variables related to perceptions and intentions, such as e-WOM and Voting Intention. However, the predictive relevance for variables such as Voter Trust and Candidate Image is still relatively weak, which may require refining the model to identify additional factors that can improve the predictive power of these variables. These results will be further explained in the discussion section to understand their implications for theory and practice.

After knowing the value of Q^2 , the next calculation is carried out to find the value of the q^2 effect size. The value of q^2 must be calculated manually because SmartPLS does not provide the value directly. To calculate the q^2 value of the endogenous latent variable, the $Q_{included}^2$ and $Q_{excluded}^2$ values are needed. The $Q_{included}^2$ value is obtained from the Q^2 value. While the $Q_{excluded}^2$ value is obtained from the Q^2 value whose model has been re-estimated by eliminating the specific latent endogenous variable that you want to know. (Hair et al., 2022). Based on the calculation, the q^2 effect size value is obtained which can be seen in Table 4.23 as follows.

Table 6. Q^2 Research Results Value

	Q^2 Included	Q^2 Excluded	q^2	Category
Candidate Image -> Voting Intention	0,312	0,312	0	No Effect
EWOM -> Voting Intention	0,312	0,314	0	No Effect
Party Image -> Voting Intention	0,312	0,313	0	No Effect
Religious Belief -> Voting Intention	0,312	0,31	0	No Effect
Social Media Marketing -> Candidate Image	0,061	0	0,06	Small Effect
Social Media Marketing -> EWOM	0,44	0	0,79	Big Effect
Social Media Marketing -> Party Image	0,246	0	0,33	Currently Effect
Social Media Marketing -> Religious Belief	0,095	0	0,1	Small Effect
Social Media Marketing -> Voter Opinion	0,095	0	0,1	Small Effect

Social Media Marketing -> Voter Trust	0,028	0	0,03	Small Effect
Voter Opinion -> Voting Intention	0,312	0,312	0	No Effect
Voter Trust -> Voting Intention	0,312	0,312	0	No Effect

Source: Data processed by researchers (2024)

As a relative measure of predictive relevance, q^2 values of 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 indicate that an exogenous construct has small, medium, or large predictive relevance to a particular endogenous construct, respectively (Hair et al., 2022). Based on the results of the Q^2 Predictive Relevance analysis, it was found that social media marketing is a strong predictor of elements such as E-WOM and Party Image. However, the contribution of social media marketing to Candidate Image, Religious Belief, Voter Opinion and Voter Trust variables tends to be weaker. In addition, the relationship between these brand elements showed insignificant predictive results. These findings indicate variations in predictive power between different variables in the research model.

C. Analysis of Hypothesis Test Results

Figure 4. shows shows the research model with the loading value and significance of each research variable. The loading value shows how much influence an item has on its construct variable, where the value represents the measurement model value. Meanwhile, the significance value which is the t-value shows how significant the value of the endogenous variable is to its exogenous. The relationship described by the significance value is the result of testing the research hypothesis. In Figure 4, it can be seen that if the relationship line between variables is dashed, it means that the proposed hypothesis is rejected.

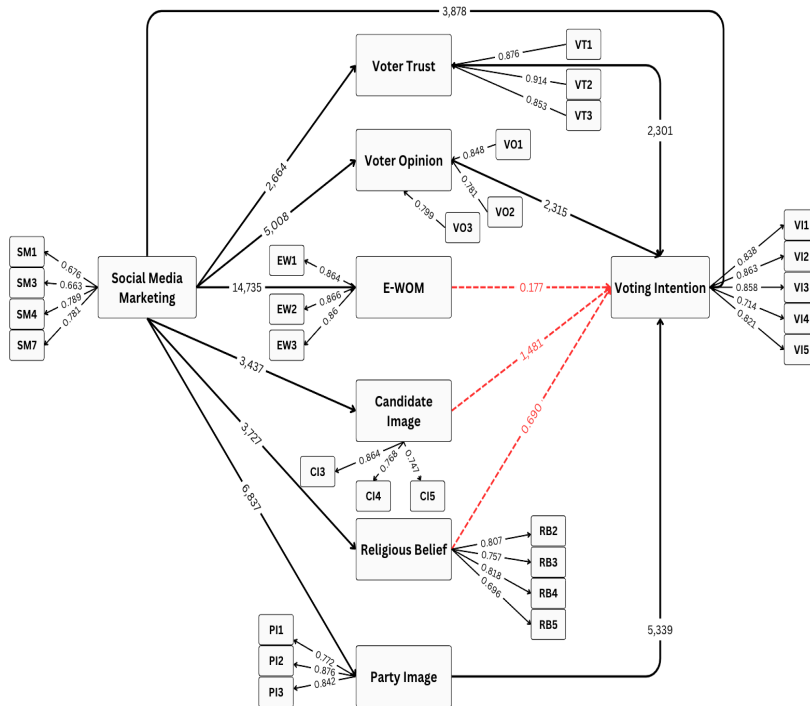


Figure 4. T-value and loading for each path in the hypothesis

Table 7. Hypothesis test results

	Hypothesis	t value	p value	Results
H1	Social Media Marketing -> Candidate Image	3,437	0.000	Accepted
H2	Social Media Marketing -> Party Image	6,837	0.000	Accepted
H3	Social Media Marketing -> Voter Trust	2,664	0.004	Accepted
H4	Social Media Marketing -> Voter Opinion	5,008	0.000	Accepted
H5	Social Media Marketing -> EWOM	14,735	0.000	Accepted
H6	Social Media Marketing -> Religious Belief	3,727	0.000	Accepted
H7	Social Media Marketing -> Voting Intention	3,878	0.000	Accepted
H8	Candidate Image -> Voting Intention	1,481	0.069	Rejected
H9	Social Media Marketing -> Candidate Image -> Voting Intention	1,185	0.236	Rejected
H10	Party Image -> Voting Intention	5,339	0.000	Accepted
H11	Social Media Marketing -> Party Image -> Voting Intention	4,212	0.000	Accepted
H12	Voter Trust -> Voting Intention	2,301	0.011	Accepted
H13	Social Media Marketing -> Voter Trust -> Voting Intention	1,670	0.095	Rejected
H14	Voter Opinion -> Voting Intention	2,315	0.010	Accepted
H15	Social Media Marketing -> Voter Opinion -> Voting Intention	2,147	0.032	Accepted

H16	EWOM -> Voting Intention	0.177	0.430	Rejected
H17	Social Media Marketing -> EWOM -> Voting Intention	0.175	0.861	Rejected
H18	Religious Belief -> Voting Intention	0.690	0.245	Rejected
H19	Social Media Marketing -> Religious Belief -> Voting Intention	0.634	0.526	Rejected

Source: Data processed by researchers (2024)

Based on Table 7, most of the hypotheses in this study were accepted, indicating significant relationships between the variables in the model. For example, Social Media Marketing (SMM) significantly affects Candidate Image (H1, $t = 3.437$; $p = 0.000$), Party Image (H2, $t = 6.837$; $p = 0.000$), Voting Intention (H7, $t = 3.878$; $p = 0.000$), and other mediating variables such as Voter Trust (H3, $t = 2.664$; $p = 0.004$) and Voter Opinion (H4, $t = 5.008$; $p = 0.000$). In addition, the mediating relationship such as between SMM through Party Image to Voting Intention was also significant (H11, $t = 4.212$; $p = 0.000$). However, some hypotheses were rejected as insignificant, such as the relationship between Candidate Image and Voting Intention (H8, $t = 1.481$; $p = 0.069$) and e-WOM to Voting Intention (H16, $t = 0.177$; $p = 0.430$). Similarly, the mediation paths between SMM through Candidate Image (H9, $t = 1.185$; $p = 0.236$) and through Religious Belief to Voting Intention (H19, $t = 0.634$; $p = 0.526$) were also not significant. Overall, of the 19 hypotheses tested, 12 were accepted, indicating that SMMs play an important role in influencing perceptions and voting intentions, both directly and through certain mediation pathways.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study underscore the crucial role of Social Media Marketing (SMM) in shaping various aspects of political campaigns, such as candidate and party image, voter trust, and ultimately, voting intentions. These results align with established theories and previous research on political marketing, highlighting the increasing importance of digital platforms in influencing electoral behavior.

First, the significant positive effect of SMM on Candidate Image and Party Image suggests that social media is a powerful tool for shaping public perceptions of political figures and parties. Social media allows candidates and parties to engage directly with voters, offering a platform for personalized communication, which is vital in a political landscape that is becoming more fragmented and digital. This supports the findings of Kim and Ko (2010), who emphasized that social media helps candidates build and manage their image, fostering stronger relationships with the electorate. Similarly, the work of Khan et al. (2024) suggests that voters increasingly rely on social media as a source of information about political candidates and parties, making it an essential component of modern campaign strategies.

Moreover, the study found that SMM has a significant influence on Voting Intention, both directly and indirectly. Voters who are exposed to strategic social media campaigns are more likely to develop clear intentions to vote, a finding consistent with McGregor's (2018) research. Social media provides a direct connection between candidates and voters, allowing campaigns to target specific groups effectively. This

is particularly important for engaging younger voters, who are more likely to be active on social media platforms, and for shaping their perceptions of candidates and parties. By fostering trust and reinforcing political opinions, social media helps solidify voting intentions, a point that has been highlighted by Moslehpour et al. (2024), who found that digital marketing plays a crucial role in building trust with voters.

The role of mediators, such as Voter Trust and Voter Opinion, in connecting SMM with Voting Intention is also noteworthy. Social media not only influences how voters perceive candidates and parties but also shapes their attitudes and trust towards them. This aligns with previous research, which suggests that social media can foster a sense of connection and trust between political figures and their supporters. By engaging with voters in a more personalized and transparent way, social media helps to create a stronger bond that can translate into greater voting intentions. This supports the conclusions of earlier studies that emphasize the importance of trust-building in political campaigns, particularly in an era where skepticism towards traditional media is on the rise (Zhu & Chen, 2015).

However, the study also reveals some nuanced findings. Certain hypotheses, such as the relationship between Candidate Image and Voting Intention, were not supported. This suggests that while candidates' images are crucial, they may not be sufficient on their own to influence voting decisions. Voters are influenced by a combination of factors, including party affiliation, policy positions, and trust, rather than solely by the image of the candidate. This insight aligns with the work of Pancer et al. (1999), who argued that while candidate image plays a role, it is not always the decisive factor in voter decision-making. Similarly, the lack of significance in the relationship between e-WOM (electronic word-of-mouth) and Voting Intention suggests that while online discussions and endorsements are valuable, they may not have the direct, strong influence on voter behavior that some might expect. This could reflect the complexities of online discourse, where the credibility of sources and the political context play a significant role in shaping the impact of e-WOM (Khan et al., 2024).

Additionally, the study did not find support for the mediating role of Religious Belief in shaping Voting Intention, which challenges previous research that has suggested religion can influence political behavior. This could reflect a broader shift in certain societies where political decisions are increasingly influenced by factors such as political ideology, social issues, and economic policies, rather than religious identity alone. As Singhapakdi et al. (2013) have noted, the influence of religion on political behavior can vary widely depending on the cultural and political context, which might explain the absence of a significant effect in this study.

Overall, the study confirms that SMM is a powerful tool in contemporary political campaigns, shaping voter perceptions and intentions in multiple ways. However, it also highlights the complexity of political marketing, where various factors interact to influence electoral outcomes. Social media's role is not limited to direct influence; it also acts as a facilitator of trust, opinion formation, and image-building. Future research could further explore how these factors interact in different political contexts

and how new digital strategies might evolve to meet the changing expectations of voters.

6. Conclusions

This study analyzes the influence of Social Media Marketing (SMM) on various political elements such as Candidate Image, Party Image, Voter Trust, Voter Opinion, e-WOM, and Religious Belief, and their impact on Voting Intention. The main findings show that SMM has a significant influence on political elements such as candidate image, party image, voter opinion, and voter trust, all of which have an impact on voting intention. However, e-WOM, Candidate Image, and Religious Belief have no direct influence on Voting Intention. Meanwhile, Voter Opinion and Party Image proved to be important mediators in connecting SMM with Voting Intention. This research confirms that social media plays a vital role in building strategic relationships between candidates, parties and voters, and increasing voting intention. The findings provide practical insights for political campaign teams to optimize digital marketing strategies to increase voter support.

This research makes significant contributions both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, this research integrates various concepts from previous studies to produce a comprehensive framework regarding the influence of SMM in political communication. From a practical perspective, this research provides guidance to candidates and political parties to utilize social media effectively to build relationships with voters. It also offers insights into how political elements such as Voter Trust and Party Image can be brought into focus in social media-based campaigns, and how this approach is relevant to the Indonesian political context.

The results highlight the importance of tailoring digital marketing strategies to the characteristics of voters, especially the younger generation who are active on social media. Political campaigns should utilize platforms such as Instagram and TikTok to appeal to young voters through creative and interactive content. In addition, to increase the relevance of the campaign, it needs to be tailored to local issues and the professional background of voters. The campaign team is advised to strengthen the candidate's image through transparent and honest narratives, and prioritize policies that are relevant to the needs of the community. The implementation of this integrated and value-based digital marketing strategy will help build stronger relationships between candidates and voters, increase engagement, and increase voting intentions.

This research is limited to the use of specific social media and has not taken into account synergies with other communication platforms. Therefore, future research is expected to explore the role of various communication platforms in building political relationships.

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