

HOW SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING OF CANDIDATES AFFECTS VOTERS' INTENTION TO VOTE IN THE 2024 INDONESIA GENERAL ELECTION

Alisya Pricilla^{1*}, Muhammad Yasser Iqbal Daulay²

^{1,2}Management, Universitas Bengkulu, Indonesia

*Corresponding Author: alisyapricilla03@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Celebrity politicians are prominent individuals in the public eye who are intentionally created, portrayed, and commercialized by the media and cultural sectors, and who actively engage in politics. The objective of this study is to ascertain the intentions of potential Indonesian voters concerning their participation in the 2024 election. This study investigates the impact of social media marketing (SMM) efforts, including social media interaction, social media credibility, and word of mouth (WOM), on the perceived image of a candidate and its influence on voting intention in the context of Celebrity Politicians in Indonesian Politics. The article explores the relationship between social media interaction, word of mouth, social media credibility, and vote intention, with candidate image acting as a mediator. This analysis is based on branding literature and social identity theory. The study employed a design technique that utilized an online questionnaire survey. The survey was conducted using purposive sampling, and a total of 454 Indonesian voters were sampled for the study. The collected primary data were analyzed using the SmartPLS program. The results of this study indicate that social media interaction, word-of-mouth (WOM), and social media credibility have a beneficial impact on candidate image. However, it was shown that social media interaction and social media credibility do not have a direct relationship with vote intention. The study emphasizes the significance of social media marketing (SMM) efforts and the image of candidates in influencing prospective candidates and the general elections commission to motivate election participants to vote. The disadvantage of this study lies in the inability to collect a large sample size due to time restrictions.

Keywords: social media interaction, word of mouth, social media credibility, candidate image, vote intention

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INTRODUCTION

The person who is known for his well-knownness is commonly regarded as a celebrity. There are various kinds of celebrities, including artists, sports stars, models, comedians, and politicians (MBGON, n.d.). Celebrity politicians are well-known public figures who have been produced, portrayed, and commercialized by the media and cultural industries who have been involved in politics and related affairs either to further their political agendas, the agendas of political actors with whom they have collaborated, or their political objectives (Ahmad, 2020).

The role of media and politicians' public personas in politics is growing. However, even though social media marketing (SMM)'s increasing importance and powerful influence are highlighted in the general marketing literature (Saridakis et al., 2016), it's still mostly untapped in the field of political marketing (Hultman et al., 2019). Social media is known to be a double-edged sword since it has made it easier and harder for firms to build trusting relationships with their customer (Muntinga et al., 2011). Since social media is seen by users as a more personal and participatory space, it has made things easier on the one hand. However, this ease of use has also created difficulties in determining which content is most effective for certain audiences (Godey et al., 2016). Voter behavior and political

campaigns are believed to be influenced by a candidate's image (Hultman et al., 2019). Based on this gap the study explores the role of SMM activities and Candidate image in determining vote intention.

Political marketing research can shed light on the effectiveness of different policy communication strategies and their impact on public perceptions. The impact of this research can inform policymakers about the most effective ways to communicate complex issues to the public, leading to more informed decision-making and potentially improved governance.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

Social Identify Theory

Based on social identity theory, the widespread use of social media has supported the development of human brands (Saboo et al., 2016). Social identity theory was originally formulated by social psychologists Henri Tajfel and John Turner in the 1970s and 1980s. It introduces the concept of social identity to explain intergroup behavior. This theory explores the phenomena of 'ingroup' and 'outgroup' and is based on the view that identity is formed through a process of differences that are defined relatively or flexibly depending on the activities a person undertakes. This theory predicts intergroup behavior based on perceptions of group status differences, perceptions of the legitimacy and stability of those status differences, and perceptions of the ability to move between groups. Consumer engagement and the development of relationships between users and companies are increasing as a result of increasing levels of interaction on social media platforms (Moulard et al., 2015).

Social Media Interaction

Social media's ability to provide a forum for sharing and exchanging ideas is one of the main factors contributing to the current prominence, ideas, or sentiments regarding various topics (Godey et al., 2016). In addition to offering a venue for social engagement, social media also allows like-minded people to communicate with each other and a brand in a more personal setting than traditional media (Muntinga et al., 2011). Consumer enthusiasm for a business can be triggered by the interactions they have on social media platforms (A. J. Kim & Ko, 2012). Such sentimental associations can influence how consumers perceive a brand (Zhang, 2015). One factor that contributes to users' propensity to communicate and participate on social media is their desire to learn more about the users behind the profiles.

Word-of-Mouth

Word of mouth is the process by which information or recommendations about a product, service, or experience are communicated from one individual to another through verbal conversation (Standing et al., 2016). Apart from that, word of mouth can also be interpreted as a form of communication that occurs verbally between many individuals in a community or group (Finch, 2017). Word of mouth is considered a very powerful form of communication because it involves interactions between individuals and is often considered more trustworthy than formal promotions by companies. With word of mouth, one can plan a marketing strategy that focuses on building a positive reputation, product quality, and adequate customer service to stimulate and support positive communication between consumers.

Social Media Credibility

Social media credibility is the level of trust or credibility of information conveyed via social media platforms (Dedeoglu, 2019). Social media credibility is an important component in building a source of consumer trust (Bhattacharjee & Sanford, 2006). This is especially true because the material is intended for marketing purposes. When using social media as a source of information, it is important to be a critical and vigilant consumer of information. Having skills in assessing the credibility of information will help prevent the spread of fake or inaccurate news. There are several factors related

to social media credibility, including the accuracy, reliability, and sustainability of information found on various platforms (Alrubaian et al., 2018).

Vote Intention

Vote intention is a person's tendency or intention to vote for a particular candidate or party in a political election (McGregor, 2018). Apart from that, vote intention can also be interpreted as the intention to vote expressed by voters before the actual election (Swami et al., 2018). This is an early indicator that reflects public support for a political entity at a certain time. Vote intention surveys are often conducted by survey institutions or research institutions to measure public support for certain candidates or political parties. The results of the survey can indicate the popularity and electoral chances of the candidate or political party.

Candidate Image

Candidate image has many meanings, but in this context candidate image is the public's image or perception of a political candidate (McCombs & Valenzuela, 2020). Apart from that, a candidate's image can also be interpreted as the image or image formed by a political candidate during an election campaign (Warner & Banwart, 2016). This image includes various aspects such as leadership, integrity, policies, track record, and the potential candidate's characteristics. In the digital era, a candidate's image is also greatly influenced by their online presence, including social media. Candidates often use these platforms to communicate directly with voters, build support, and manage their image (Farkas & Bene, 2021).

Social Media Interaction and Candidate Image

Candidates can gain positive or negative exposure through social media depending on how they interact with their voters or audience (Ohme, 2019). Comments likes, and shares can be a measure of positive exposure, while criticism and negative feedback can be detrimental to an image. Therefore, candidates need to plan and manage their social media presence carefully to achieve the desired communication and image goals. This is in accordance with research from (Godey et al., 2016), (Muntinga et al., 2011), and (A. J. Kim & Ko, 2012) which states that social media interaction has a positive and significant influence on candidate image.

H1: Social media interaction has a significant positive effect on candidate image

Social Media Interaction and Vote Intention

Social media allows users to openly share their opinions, views, and political support. Through discussions and various content, users can influence public opinion about a particular candidate or issue, which in turn can influence voter intentions. However, in reality, social media can also be a place for the spread of inaccurate or distorted information, so users must be critical of the content they consume and participate in discussions in a responsible way. This is in accordance with research from (Hultman et al., 2019), (Y. Kim, 2011), and (Vitak et al., 2011) which states that social media interaction has a positive and significant influence on voting intention.

H2: Social media interaction has a significant positive effect on voting intention

Word-of-Mouth and Candidate Image

Word-of-mouth has the power to build trust (Gildin, 2022). When someone hears positive recommendations about a candidate from others, this can increase the level of trust in that candidate. The speaker's credibility also plays an important role. If the recommendation comes from someone who is respected and considered to have relevant knowledge or experience, it can have a positive impact on the candidate's image. This is in accordance with research from (Hultman et al., 2019), (Chu, 2011), and (Fitriani et al., 2021) which states that word-of-mouth has a positive and significant influence on candidate image.

H3: Word-of-mouth has a significant positive effect on candidate image

Word-of-Mouth and Vote Intention

Word-of-mouth or word-of-mouth recommendations can have a significant influence on vote intention in a political context. Word-of-mouth is often considered more trustworthy than information received through mass media or political advertising. If someone hears positive or negative information about a candidate through conversations with friends, family, or coworkers who are considered trustworthy, it can influence their perception of the candidate. A good perception of a candidate will create greater voting intentions among people. This is in accordance with research from (Hultman et al., 2019) and (Chu, 2011) which states that word-of-mouth has a positive and significant influence on vote intention.

H4: Word-of-mouth has a significant positive effect on vote intention

Social Media Credibility and Candidate Image

Social media credibility can have a significant impact on a candidate's image, especially in the context of politics or general elections (Lalancette & Raynauld, 2019). Social media credibility creates an impression of transparency and openness. If a candidate actively uses social media platforms to communicate with voters and provide clear information, this can increase voters' trust in the candidate. However, in reality, social media can also be a powerful tool to build or damage a candidate's image. Therefore, candidates need to use these platforms wisely, focusing on transparency, quality content, and positive interactions with voters to increase their credibility. This is in accordance with research from (Hultman et al., 2019), (Bhattacharjee & Sanford, 2006), and (Yuan et al., 2016) which states that social media credibility has a positive and significant influence on candidate image.

H5: Social media credibility has a significant positive effect on a candidate's image.

Social Media Credibility and Vote Intention

Voters often rely on social media for political information (Howard et al., 2018). If a source of information on social media is deemed credible, voters are more likely to trust it. The credibility of information sources can shape voters' perceptions of a particular candidate or political party, which then influences their intention to vote. Overall, social media credibility can be an important factor in shaping voter intentions. Therefore, it is important to promote good and critical media literacy and increase transparency in the management of political information on social media. This is in accordance with research from (Hultman et al., 2019) and (Lee et al., 2016) which states that social media credibility has a positive and significant influence on vote intention.

H6: Social media credibility has a significant positive effect on vote intention

Candidate Image and Vote Intention

The relationship between candidate image and vote intention refers to how a candidate's image can influence voters' decisions to vote for that candidate. Voters tend to be more inclined to vote for candidates who are considered to have a good reputation and high integrity (Whiteley et al., 2016). A positive image in this case can increase voters' intentions to support the candidate. Thus, a candidate's image has a direct impact on vote intention, and candidates often try to form a positive image in the eyes of voters to win their support in elections. This is in accordance with research from (Hultman et al., 2019), (Winchester et al., 2014), and (Saputra et al., 2023), which states that candidate image has a positive and significant influence on vote intention.

H7: Candidate image has a significant positive effect on vote intention

Candidate Image as mediation between Social Media Interaction and Vote intention

Active interaction on social media can influence vote intentions by spreading campaign messages, building mass support, or utilizing digital campaign strategies (Dabula, 2017). This

interaction can create buzz or excitement on social media, which can influence voters' attitudes and vote intentions. Candidate image can act as a mediator between social media interactions and vote intentions. If a candidate succeeds in establishing a positive image through social media, this can increase the likelihood that voters will support him. This is in accordance with research from (Sihombing, 2019), (Moekahar et al., 2022), and (Rizki & Nurjaman, 2023) which states that social media interaction has a positive and significant influence on vote intention which is mediated by candidate image.

H8: Social media interaction has a significant positive effect on vote intention through candidate image

Candidate Image as Mediation between Word-of-Mouth and Vote Intention

Word-of-mouth can be a powerful tool to shape voters' opinions and intentions towards candidates through shaping the candidate's image (Chowdhury & Naheed, 2020). This influence can be very significant, especially because people are often more likely to trust recommendations or opinions from people they know and trust. Candidate Image can act as an intermediary or mediator between WOM and Vote Intention. That is, the influence of WOM on vote intentions can be largely explained by how the information shapes perceptions of the candidate's image. This is in accordance with research from (Baber et al., 2016), (Ozturk & Coban, 2019), and (Nibbelink & Brewer, 2018) which states that word-of-mouth has a positive and significant influence on vote intention which is mediated by candidate image.

H9: Word-of-mouth has a significant positive effect on vote intention through candidate image

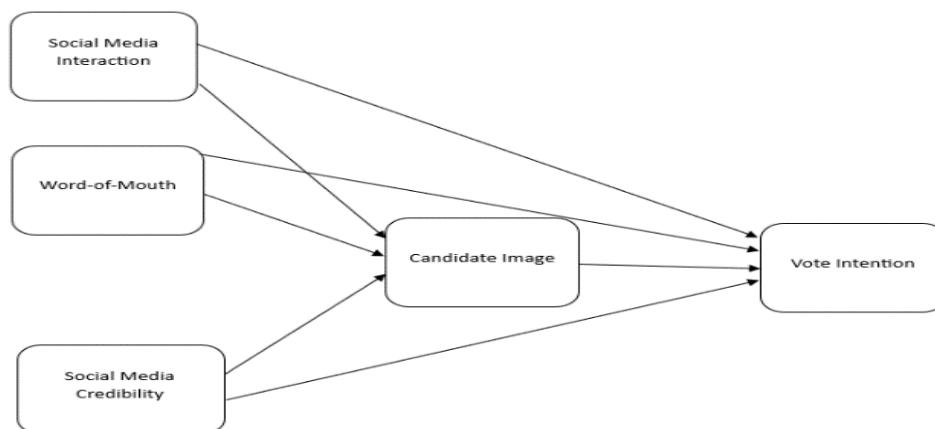
Candidate Image as mediation between Social Media Credibility and Vote intention

Social media credibility can influence a person's vote intention through its influence on a candidate's image (Hultman et al., 2019). If someone believes that the information they get from social media is credible, it can form a positive image of a particular candidate, which in turn can influence their vote intention. In this context, the candidate's image acts as a mediator between trust in information obtained from social media credibility and vote intention. This is in accordance with research from (Yodiansyah, 2017), (Khalid, 2019), and (Hultman et al., 2019) which state that social media credibility has a positive and significant influence on vote intention which is mediated by candidate image.

H10: Social media credibility has a significant positive effect on vote intention through candidate image

Figure 1

Conceptual Model



RESEARCH METHODS

In general, researchers adopt the concept (Hultman et al., 2019) in measuring existing variables. The question scale used for the social media interaction variable focuses on the intensity of respondents interacting with political content on social media. The question scale used for the word-of-mouth variable focuses on the scope of the respondent's social network and the extent to which political messages are spread through personal interactions. The question scale used for the social media credibility variable focuses on the respondent's level of trust in the political information they encounter on social media. The question scale used for the vote intention variable focuses on the respondent's intention to vote in the election. The question scale used for the candidate image variable focuses on identifying the candidate attributes or characteristics that are most important to the respondent.

Survey Instrument Development

The population of this study consists of participants in the 2024 Indonesian elections. Purposive sampling is seen as the most suitable sampling strategy for this investigation because it allows researchers to collect precise and reliable data. Researchers can also use this technique to select respondents who know celebrity candidates running in the 2024 Indonesian election. By utilizing sample data, construct validity and reliability measurements can be verified. To measure construct-related parameters, a reflective model is used. The PLS algorithm is calculated to evaluate various test measures, such as indicator reliability, convergent validity, AVE, and composite reliability for internal consistency reliability (McQuitty, 2018).

Data Collection

This research uses quantitative techniques to describe an event (Cooper & Schindler, 2014). This study concentrates on facts obtained in the field, while the theoretical basis of quantitative techniques is used as a guide. In addition to providing a broad overview of the research background and a substantive discussion of the research findings, the theoretical framework is also useful (Cooper & Schindler, 2014). Therefore, the use of a quantitative approach in this research is quite appropriate. The data collection and analysis stage will use a quantitative approach. Survey construction was sourced from existing literature and adapted for this research. Social media content is based on items collected from (A. J. Kim & Ko, 2012) and (Bhattacharjee & Sanford, 2006). To measure WOM, three items from (Vaerenbergh & Holmqvist, 2014) and interaction were measured using three items from (A. J. Kim & Ko, 2012). Message credibility was measured using items from (Bhattacharjee & Sanford, 2006) and (Chang et al., 2015). The second level formative construct, candidate image, was created based on the literature on human/celebrity brand image and candidate image. It consists of six first-order constructs: trustworthy, interesting, honest, morality, originality, and competence (McCroskey & Teven, 1999), (Moulard et al., 2015), (Newman & Sheth, 1985), (Yuan et al., 2016).

Validity Test

Convergent and discriminant validity are two categories of PLS-SEM validity (Binus, 2023). The principle that constructs dimensions should be highly correlated is referred to as the convergent validity relationship (Hamid & Anwar, 2019). This validity test was carried out using reflective indicators in the SmartPLS 4.0 program. The loading factor value for each construct indicator is shown. The minimum value is 0.7 (Hair et al., 2019). Meanwhile, discriminant validity itself is defined as the idea that measurements of different constructs should not show significant correlations (Hamid & Anwar, 2019).

Table 1
Convergent Validity Test Results

Indicator Items	Convergent Validity		Status
	Loading Factor	AVE	
SMI1	0.717	0.659	Valid
SMI2	0.871		Valid
SMI3	0.840		Valid
WOM1	0.865	0.762	Valid
WOM2	0.902		Valid
WOM3	0.851		Valid
SMC1	0.904	0.821	Valid
SMC2	0.902		Valid
SMC3	0.911		Valid
SMC4	0.909		Valid
CI1	0.889	0.778	Valid
CI2	0.851		Valid
CI3	0.892		Valid
CI4	0.907		Valid
CI5	0.864		Valid
CI6	0.890		Valid
VI1	0.926	0.755	Valid
VI2	0.750		Valid
VI5	0.919		Valid

Source: Primary Data, processed 2023

Based on Table 1, the loading factor and AVE values for all variables in convergent validity testing are >0.5, so in this case each item can be said to be valid.

Table 2
Discriminant Validity Test Results

Variable	Social Media Interaction	Word of Mouth	Social Media Credibility	Candidate Image	Vote Intention
SMI1	0.717	0.417	0.497	0.299	0.308
SMI2	0.871	0.542	0.587	0.418	0.413
SMI3	0.840	0.619	0.589	0.440	0.408
WOM1	0.568	0.865	0.693	0.542	0.477
WOM2	0.577	0.902	0.758	0.731	0.654
WOM3	0.577	0.851	0.665	0.506	0.512
SMC1	0.674	0.707	0.904	0.649	0.587
SMC2	0.601	0.732	0.902	0.610	0.576
SMC3	0.612	0.754	0.911	0.695	0.634
SMC4	0.612	0.743	0.909	0.657	0.564
CI1	0.565	0.733	0.745	0.785	0.745
CI2	0.558	0.652	0.706	0.683	0.625
CI3	0.592	0.689	0.750	0.793	0.713
CI4	0.584	0.700	0.772	0.972	0.709
CI5	0.573	0.651	0.704	0.709	0.954
CI6	0.538	0.711	0.723	0.784	0.729
VI1	0.539	0.662	0.702	0.815	0.763
VI2	0.469	0.482	0.509	0.464	0.469
VI5	0.557	0.709	0.725	0.751	0.694

Source: Primary Data, processed 2023

Based on Table 2, all indicator loadings on constructs are greater than their cross-loadings. For example, the SMII1 indicator has a loading value of 0.717, which is greater than the cross-loadings for

other constructs, namely 0.417, 0.497, 0.299, and 0.308. Therefore, this model can be said to have met the requirements for discriminant validity.

Reliability Test

Reliability testing can be used to prove or show that an instrument is accurate, reliable, and stable when measuring a particular construct (Hamid & Anwar, 2019). The composite reliability value, whose Cronbach's alpha must be greater than 0.7, is a general rule for assessing construct reliability (Hair et al., 2019).

Table 3
Reliability Test Results

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Status
Social Media Interaction	0,741	0,852	Reliable
Word of Mouth	0,844	0,906	Reliable
Social Media Credibility	0,928	0,948	Reliable
Candidate Image	0,943	0,955	Reliable
Vote Intention	0,836	0,901	Reliable

Source: Primary Data, processed 2023

Based on Table 3, the reliability test for the variables social media interaction, word of mouth, social media credibility, candidate image, and vote intention shows that the Cronbach's alpha value for each variable is 0.741, 0.844, 0.928, 0.943, and 0.836, respectively with value above 0.7. Likewise, the composite reliability values also both show results of more than 0.7, namely 0.852, 0.906, 0.948, 0.955, and 0.901 so that in this case each item can be said to be reliable.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This research uses primary data obtained directly from the research object through a questionnaire. The data collection approach was conducted by disseminating online questionnaires to all participants in October 2023. During the data collection process, 454 questionnaires were filled out. However, only 402 respondents met the specified participation criteria, including being Indonesian citizens, registered for the 2024 Indonesian election, and knowing the celebrity legislative candidates in the election. This figure is declared valid for statistical analysis.

Table 4

Respondent Characteristics			
Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Man	143	35.6
	Women	259	64.4
Domicile	Sumatera	191	47.51
	Jawa	202	50
	Kalimantan	6	1.49
	Sulawesi	3	0.745
Last education	SD	1	0.25
	SMP	11	2.74
	SMA/SMK/MA	250	62.19
	D3	25	6.22
	S1	105	26.12
	S2	9	2.24
	S3	1	0.25

Profession			
	Student	265	65.92
	Private employee	52	12.94
	BUMN employee	16	3.98
	Civil servant	11	2.74
	Self employee	25	6.22
	Housewife	7	1.74
	Professional	6	1.49
	Freelancer	18	4.48
	Retired	1	0.25
	Honorary	1	0.25

Source: Primary Data, processed 2023

The route coefficient in this study is deemed statistically significant at a 10 percent probability level. The path coefficients in the structural model represent the anticipated correlations between the latent variables. The study of the significance level of the structure path coefficients in Table 5 indicates that there is no positive association between the variables of social media interaction and social media credibility with voting intentions. Meanwhile, other variables seem to have a positive effect on candidate image and voting intentions.

Before interpreting the hypothesis test, the researcher found that the t-table value in this study with a significance level of 0.05 was 1.66. The relationship between each variable is elucidated through hypothesis testing:

Based on the output results obtained from the t statistical hypothesis test results, the direct influence of the social media interaction variable on the candidate image variable is $1.993 > 1.66$ and the p-value is $0.046 < 0.05$. So H1 is accepted. In this study, it has been found that the variable of social media interaction has a notable and favorable impact on the variable of candidate image.

The t-statistical hypothesis test findings indicate that the social media engagement variable has a direct influence of 1.224 on the vote intention variable. This influence is not statistically significant, as it falls below the critical threshold of 1.96. Additionally, the p-value of 0.221 is greater than the significance level of 0.05. So H2 is rejected. This means that in this study the social media interaction variable has an insignificant negative influence on voting intention.

Table 5
Result of Partial Least Square (PLS) Structural Model Method

	Original Sample	Sample Mean	Standard Deviation	T Statistic	P Values	Sig.
SMI→CI	0.081	0.082	0.040	1.993	0.046	Support
SMI→VI	0.048	0.051	0.039	1.224	0.221	Not Support
WOM→CI	0.292	0.292	0.054	5.425	0.000	Support
WOM→VI	0.107	0.106	0.053	2.027	0.043	Support
SMC→CI	0.539	0.539	0.057	9.447	0.000	Support
SMC→VI	0.095	0.094	0.050	1.894	0.058	Not Support
CI→VI	0.647	0.646	0.048	13.484	0.000	Support
SMI→CI→VI	0.052	0.053	0.026	2.005	0.045	Support
WOM→CI→VI	0.189	0.188	0.037	5.115	0.000	Support
SMC→CI→VI	0.349	0.348	0.047	7.469	0.000	Support

Source: Primary Data, processed 2023

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The t statistical hypothesis test findings indicate that the word-of-mouth variable has a significant direct effect on the candidate image variable, with a coefficient of 5.425. This coefficient is greater than the critical value of 1.66, suggesting a strong positive relationship. Additionally, the p-value of 0.000 is less than the significance level of 0.05, further confirming the statistical significance of the relationship. So H3 is accepted. In this study, it has been found that the word-of-mouth variable has a notable and favorable impact on the candidate image variable.

The t statistical hypothesis test findings indicate that the word-of-mouth variable has a direct influence of 2.027 on the vote intention variable, which is greater than the threshold of 1.66. Additionally, the p-value of 0.043 is lower than the significance level of 0.05. So H4 is accepted. In this study, it has been found that the word-of-mouth variable has a statistically significant and favorable impact on the vote intention variable.

The t statistical hypothesis test indicates that the social media credibility variable has a significant direct influence on the candidate image variable, with a value of 9,447, which is greater than the critical value of 1.66. Additionally, the p-value is 0.000, which is less than the significance level of 0.05. So H5 is accepted. This means that in this study the social media credibility variable has a significant positive effect on the candidate image variable.

The t statistical hypothesis test findings indicate that the social media credibility variable has a direct influence of 1,894 on the vote intention variable, which is less than 1.96. Additionally, the p-value is 0.058, which is greater than 0.05. So H6 is rejected. This means that in this study the social media credibility variable has an insignificant negative influence on voting intention.

The t statistical hypothesis test findings indicate that the candidate image variable has a significant direct influence on the vote intention variable, with a value of 13,484, which is greater than the critical value of 1.66. Additionally, the p-value of 0.000 is less than the significance level of 0.05. So H7 is accepted. Consequently, the analysis reveals that the candidate image variable exerts a substantial and favorable influence on the vote intention variable.

Based on the output results obtained from the t statistical hypothesis test results, the direct influence of the social media interaction variable on the vote intention variable which is mediated by the candidate image variable is $2.005 > 1.66$ and the p-value is $0.045 < 0.05$. So H8 is accepted. In this study, it has been found that the variable of social media contact has a noteworthy and favorable impact on the variable of vote intention. This impact is influenced by the variable of the candidate image.

The t-statistical hypothesis test findings indicate that the word-of-mouth variable has a significant direct effect on the vote intention variable, which is mediated by the candidate image variable. The effect size is 5.115, which is greater than the critical value of 1.66. Additionally, the p-value is 0.000, which is less than the significance level of 0.05. So H9 is accepted. In this study, it was found that the word-of-mouth variable has a significant and favorable impact on the vote intention variable. This impact is influenced by the candidate image variable.

The t-statistical hypothesis test findings indicate that the social media credibility variable has a significant direct influence on the vote intention variable, which is mediated by the candidate image variable. The resulting value of 7,469 is greater than the critical value of 1.66, and the p-value of 0.000 is less than the significance level of 0.05. So H10 is accepted. This means that in this study the social media credibility variable has a significant positive effect on the vote intention variable which is mediated by the candidate image variable.

The results of this study indicate that engaging with social media, word-of-mouth communication, and the credibility of social media platforms have a favorable impact on the perception of political candidates. However, it is important to note that engaging with social media and the credibility of social media platforms do not have a direct influence on individuals' voting intentions. This study highlights the importance of SMM activities and candidate image to prospective candidates and the KPU in encouraging election participants to vote.

Based on the relationship between the variables and the candidate's image, each variable is positively correlated, but social media interaction and social media credibility are not directly related to voting intentions. The findings of this research explain that social media interactions and social media credibility only support the image of celebrity political candidates.

Many celebrities who try to enter politics do not have sufficient political experience. They may be well-known in the entertainment field, but their lack of deep understanding of political issues and how government functions may make them less likely to be seen as viable candidates by rational-minded voters. This explains that their interactions on social media also do not affect their intention to vote because of the perceptions inherent in society. These results are consistent with the completed research (Sihombing & Pramono, 2021), the study concludes that social media interactions have no substantial impact on buying intentions. Although this has often been researched in the business world, it is still very limited in political marketing.

The findings in this research are that social media credibility is not correlated with voting intention. Social media is often used to spread unverified or false information. Social media users often doubt the veracity and reliability of the information they find on these platforms. This distrust can influence voters' trust in campaign messages and promises or prominent celebrity candidates. Fake news refers to deliberately fabricated news headlines and stories that are created and published on websites that mimic authentic news platforms. These false narratives are then spread through social media channels (Rochlin, 2017). Similar to a deceptive predator, false news disguises itself as genuine news to infiltrate vulnerable areas where it can cause significant harm and reap substantial benefits. In addition to catering to the recreational preferences of marginalized communities, social media platforms also offer a venue for individuals to disseminate political viewpoints and information (Napoli, 2015). This activity of sharing opinions and information has encouraged word-of-mouth communication on social media.

The mediation study demonstrates a robust and favorable association between SMM factors and perceptions of candidate image. This finding may be due to several factors. For instance, the perception of a candidate is enhanced when there exists a well-established connection between customers or voters and the brand, candidate, or political party (Hultman et al., 2019).

CONCLUSIONS

The study determined that word-of-mouth is the primary factor driving vote intention for legislative candidates affiliated with celebrity politicians. Models based on social media interaction and social media credibility did not show a significant correlation to vote intention. However, variables of social media interaction, word-of-mouth, and social media credibility showed an impact on creating a candidate image, which can influence a voter's intention to vote. Legislative candidates affiliated with celebrity groups can create a favorable public persona using social media marketing to bolster their chances of gaining votes during the 2024 Indonesia general election.

Celebrity politicians are currently in the process of developing their public image. This can explain why there is a need for further improvement to attract voters in upcoming elections. Moreover, these individuals need to prioritize building trust with their constituents. The use of trustworthy and reputable social media marketing can aid in shaping positive public perceptions and encourage people to vote for them. Regular assessments must be conducted by high-profile politicians to safeguard their public image.

The limitation of this study on sample variation which is too large in a short time due to time constraints. Since this study focuses on consumer behavior, moderating characteristics including age, gender, profession, and education level can be incorporated into future research to produce more comprehensive research findings.

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