The Influence of Social Media Marketing on Voting Intention in Indonesia

Abstract

Purpose- The present research aims to describe the impact of social media marketing (SMM) on voting intention (VI) and the mediating effect of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), Candidate's image (CI), and religious beliefs (RB) in Indonesia.

Methodology- This research applies Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) and bootstrapping methods to examine the study's data. It is hypothesized that SMM, eWOM, CI, and RB have a significant positive effect on VI.

Findings- The result shows that eWOM, CI, and RB partially mediate the relationship between SMM and VI.

Contribution- This research affords better comprehension of the critical issues influencing Indonesian voters to vote for any candidate or party that SMM influences.

Keywords: social media, social media marketing, voting intention, election, Indonesia

Introduction

With the rapid daily increase in internet users (Statistica, 2021a), social media have become an inseparable part of everyday life. Consequently, they have become one of the primary sources to help consumers form an opinion regarding various goods and services. The social media domain may contain but not be limited to political services such as choosing politicians and different forms of public policy (Safiullah et al., 2017). Furthermore, different social media such as YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter, provide extensive platforms for politicians to present themselves and their policies and for the voters to gather information (Tufail et al., 2015; Bélanger, 2019; Tenhunen and Karvelyte, 2015). This phenomenon has turned social media into a considerable tool for improving and sustaining democracy. As a result, one sees more and more emphasis on social media marketing strategies in political campaigns.

Social networking sites have been progressively assuming a fundamental role in the election process, as was clearly shown in the 2019 Indonesian Presidential Election Campaign (Sihombing and Pramono, 2021; Wildana, 2021; Irawanto, 2019; Salahudin et al., 2020; Virgy et al., 2020). Out of a general population of 268 million, 150 million actively used the Internet and social networking sites (Rizal, 2019). These users were mainly recognized as eligible voters between 18-34 years. Typically, they use numerous virtual newsrooms or social networking sites and spend over 50% of their internet time on social media (Statista, 2021b). The Indonesian people share their aspirations about the candidates and presidential elections until one week after the television's presidential debate. Some non-political nature accounts were also associated with political conversations, which increased the candidates' popularity (Rizal, 2019).

Prior studies have explained and focused on offline political action (Borah et al., 2018; McGuire, 2018; Jacobson, 2015), but few studies have dealt with social media's involvement in political actions (Bélanger, 2019; Marozzo and Bessi, 2018; Raymond et al., 2022; Cohen, 2021). Moreover, said studies lean more toward the political side of political marketing. This, in turn, leaves room for more studies on the marketing side. On another note, the body of literature on the role of social media in the Indonesian political market is still relatively young (Susila et al., 2020; Rahman and Prihatini, 2019). Therefore, there is still much to be discussed regarding the interaction between social media and political marketing, especially in the Indonesian political market. To add to that, Indonesia is among the few states that, while having a functioning democracy, also possesses a considerable religious populous. According to the latest statistics, with 231 million Muslims, Indonesia is among the top ten countries with the most number of Muslims.[1] In order to fill part of this gap, the present study discusses social media marketing's influence on voting intention with electronic word of mouth, religious beliefs, and the candidate's image as the mediating variables. Social media marketing activities include four aspects, namely entertainment, interaction, trendiness, and customization.

The remainder of the paper will be as follows. First, an analysis of the body of literature presents a conceptual framework for forming the voting intention. Next, the literature review is conducted, followed by the hypotheses development based on the body of literature. Afterwards, the methodology of the study is explained. Then, the results of the empirical model are discussed. Finally, the conclusions are provided, including the study's limitations and suggestions for further studies.

The Conceptual Framework

Voting, in its essence, is a collective act. Therefore, it is best analysed based on collective choice theory (CCT). From social choice theory, CCT analyses how combining individuals' opinions, preferences, interests, or welfare results in a collective decision (Sen, 1977; Ganzer-Ripoll et al., 2019). There are several facades to a collective choice, or in other words, the outcome of a voting process. Among these are the normative indicators that play a crucial role in forming collective choice (Sen, 1977). They are part of the individual's set of institutions which help make decisions by decreasing transaction costs and improving predictability (North, 1992; Cian et al., 2020). North (1992), as one of the key figures in the literature on institutionalism, defines them as the rules of the games. They are the set of formal laws and regulations as well as traditions and norms that define the limitations of any form of interaction in society; for instance, a country's constitution, the criminal code of conduct, and the unwritten norms of the market, to name a few.

The collective decision-making process is based on the decision-makers' choice function, which comprises their trust in a particular candidate. Trust is a choice set where for any set X of nonempty sets, a choice function f is defined on X and maps each set of X to an element of the set.

$$\forall X[\emptyset \notin X \rightarrow \exists f{:}X \rightarrow \cup X \quad \forall A \in X(f(A) \in A)] \quad (1) \text{ (Jehel, 2001)}$$

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[1] World population review, https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/muslim-majority-countries

The electoral college is a three-membered set of alternatives (Kagal et al., 2001). Decision-makers (voters), decision-objects (candidates), and information-providers (media) are the three agents involved in an election. There are always going to be winners and losers in any informational system. "Structural holes" is the term used to describe this phenomenon in the academic literature (Burt, 2021). Because of these voids, recommendations are an integral part of any deliberation procedure (Kleinberg and Raghavan, 2005; Resnick et al., 2000; Bakos and Dellarocas, 2011; Dash et al., 2004).

One source of voters' confidence in candidates is the information they already have, and another is the information they learn about the candidates over time. This latter view emphasizes the role of political marketing as a promotional method of political communication in which candidates present their ideas and seek voter support (Ozturk and Coban, 2019). Campaign management is the study, planning, and execution of campaigns to shape public opinion according to specific demographics' preferences (Winchester et al., 2016). The following diagram provides a high-level framework for the basic argument.
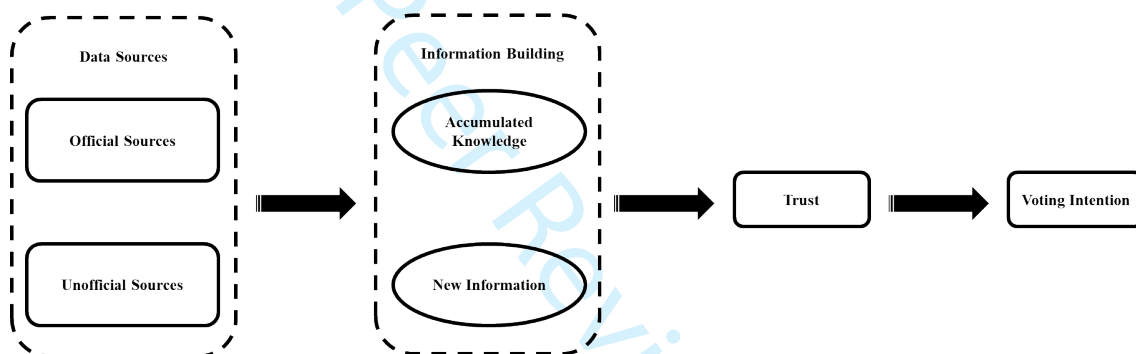
**Figure 1.** The main idea behind the conceptual research framework (Source: Researchers Design)

In figure 1, as will be discussed in the following sections, the source of information would be social media, electronic word of mouth and religious belief would be unofficial sources, and Candidate's image would be an official source which together comprises the structure of the voters' knowledge (new and accumulated). Furthermore, following the aforementioned debate and combining it with the logic of discrete choice models (Maddala, 1986, 22; Greene, 2019, 765), the study suggests a mathematical schematic depiction of the model in the next section.

Mathematical Depiction

Each voter i has the choice function Y_{ij}, which means voting for candidate j. The choice function has the following binary structure:

$$Y_{ij} = \begin{cases} 1 \, , & P_{ij} \\ 0 \, , & 1 - P_{ij} \end{cases} \text{ (1) (Source: Maddala, 1986)}$$

Where P_{ij} is the probability of voter i choosing to vote for candidate j (voting intention). Following the argument mentioned above, the probability of choosing to vote for each candidate is a function of the voter i trust in candidate j, henceforth indicated as T_{ij}. Being a binary equation suggests that the probability function follows a logistic structure.
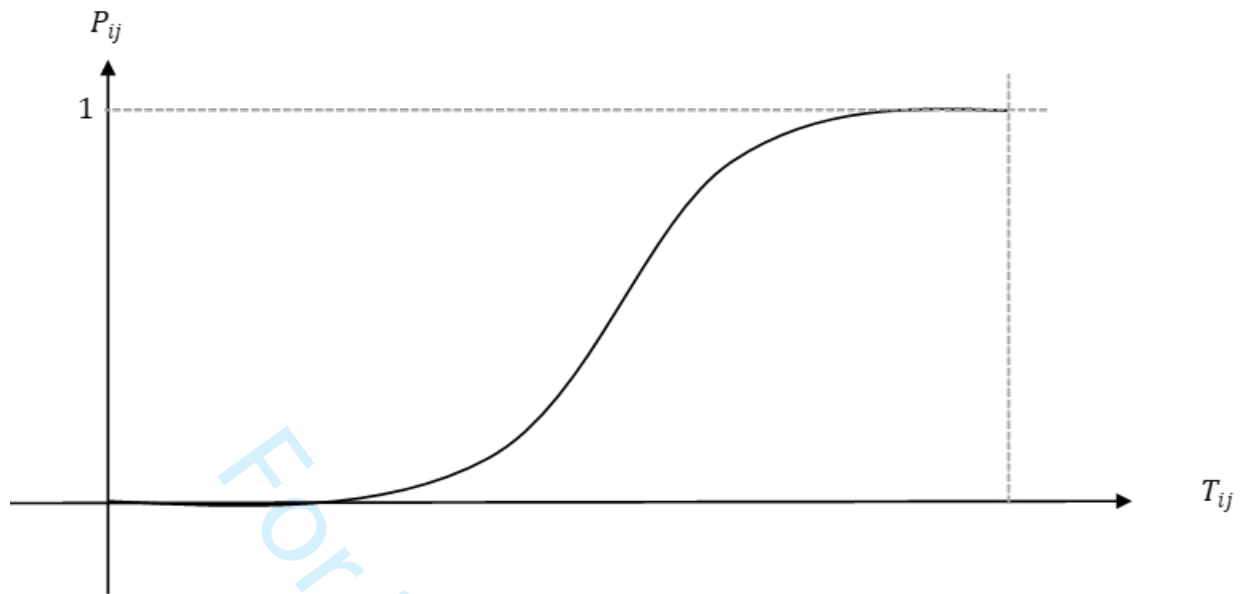
Figure 2. The probability function of voter *i* choosing to vote for candidate *j*
Source: Authors

Consequently, the probability of voter *i* choosing to vote for candidate *j* will be based on the following equation.

$$P_{ij} = \frac{e^{T_{ij}}}{1 + e^{T_{ij}}} \quad (2) \text{ (Source: Maddala, 1986)}$$

Based on the following stochastic matrix, the overall system can be indicated based on the fact that "n" voters are choosing between "m" candidates.

$$\begin{bmatrix} P_{11} & \cdots & P_{1m} \\ \vdots & \ddots & \vdots \\ P_{n1} & \cdots & P_{nm} \end{bmatrix} \quad (3) \text{ (Source : Maddala, 1986)}$$

Where each row indicates the probability of the voter voting for each candidate. The candidates act as substitutes for the voter. Therefore, the summation of each row ($\sum_{j=1}^{m} P_{ij}$) equals 1. On the other hand, the columns indicate the probabilities of each voter choosing to vote for a certain candidate. Thus, the probability of all the candidates voting for candidate *j* (P_j) equals to $\prod_{i=1}^{n} P_{ij}$. Consequently, the probability of candidate *j* being chosen as a function of candidates' trust will be as follows.

$$P_j = \frac{e^{\sum_{i=1}^{n} T_{ij}}}{1 + e^{\sum_{i=1}^{n} T_{ij}} + \sum_{i=1}^{n} e^{T_{ij}} + \sum_{i}^{n} \sum_{k}^{n} e^{T_{ij} + T_{kj}} | i \neq k} \quad (4) \text{ (Source : Maddala, 1986)}$$

Literature review and hypotheses development

This part elaborates on each variable's role in this research: social media marketing, electronic word of mouth, Candidate's image, religious beliefs, and voting intention. These variables have been chosen based on the previous studies after reviewing different research endeavours on social media marketing (Kim and Ko, 2010; Zhu and Chen, 2015; Bernritter et al., 2016; Popp and Woratschek, 2016), voting intention

(Chuchu, 2015; Spackman and Larsen, 2017; Bukari et al., 2022), and Muslim majority states (Eulau et al., 2015; Morgan et al., 2010) and choosing the standard variables in said studies. Choosing too many variables would decrease the estimations' degree of freedom drastically. Therefore, the study includes the common factors according to the specific conditions of the population.

Election and 2019 Indonesia general election

An election is an official procedure of choosing an individual for public office or accepting or rejecting a political proposition by democracy through voting (Eulau *et al*., 2015). An election is among the methods for choosing agents for different decision-making positions. They could be executive, legislative, or judicial. Furthermore, depending on the situation, they could be local, regional, national, or even international.

The Indonesian General Elections Commission (KPU) (2018) organized a general election on April 17th, 2019. This election was the first time in Indonesia's history when on the same day, the eligible voters elected the president, the vice-president, the members of the People's Consultative Assembly, and the members of the legislative and local representative councils. More than 190 million Indonesians took part in this historical and political milestone.

There were two candidates for the presidential election, and sixteen parties participated in the 2019 Indonesian general election. In September 2018, candidates' nominations for the general election, including the presidential election, were finalized. The campaign ran from October 13th, 2018, to April 13th, 2019, followed by an 'election silence' during the last three days ahead of the voting day.

The one in April 2019 was the fourth presidential election in Indonesia. The result comes from a direct and straightforward majority system. Based on the Indonesian government's official website, the country's election follows the provisions of Article 465 of Law Number 7 of 2017 on Election. Galih (2017) stated that the General Elections Commission (KPU) is a legally independent government agency responsible for organizing elections. According to the General Election Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu in Indonesian, 2017), this agency has the task and responsibility to monitor the vote. Bawaslu is also authorized to rule on any violations of the election regulations. (For instance, vote-buying and administrative errors).

Political relationship marketing

Since the late 1960s, classical marketing tools have gradually been applied in areas other than business. Kotler's (1972) "generic concept of marketing" encompasses all exchanges of values between two parties, turning conventional campaigning into sophisticated marketing activities. The former is seen as merely the art of attracting voters by intuition, whereas the latter is science in action (Kotler, 1982). Since then, political marketing has been typically characterized by sophisticated marketing strategies and activities to obtain the electorate's support (Parsons and Rowling 2015). Notwithstanding, there has been a paradigm shift in recent years caused by technological advances in mass communication and changing public expectations regarding political participation (Jackson and Lilleker 2009). As such, voters, like consumers of business products, tend to avoid exposure to mass advertisements and are instead increasingly looking for more authentic forms of political engagement.

Dalton (2008) and Welzel (2013), among others, argue that the social and political modernization of advanced capitalist societies has systematically altered the distribution of citizenship norms. More specifically, education and diversified knowledge in advanced societies have enabled individuals to make better-informed choices in life. This cognitive empowerment has fundamentally transferred individual notions of citizenship from being allegiant (duty-based) to being assertive (engaged) (Inglehart and Welzel, 2005: Dalton, 2008). Allegiant citizens restrict their political lives to routinized, conventional forms of political activities. In contrast, assertive citizens are involved in a less conventional but more authentic expression of political participation, such as petitioning, protests, strikes and boycotts (Dalton, 2008: 81). Technological advances and new patterns of mass communication have accelerated this process of diversifying citizenship norms. Social media, in particular, have offered ample opportunities for assertive citizens (as well as candidates) to interact with others directly, bypassing the gatekeepers of traditional media outlets (Cogburn and Espinoza-Vasquez, 2011).

The changing environment has brought about a greater emphasis on authentic relationship marketing, thus challenging political parties' conventional political marketing practices with their top-down, elite-to-mass style of political engagement with the electorate (Jackson and Lilleker 2009). The campaigns of Barack Obama and Donald Trump exemplify the effectiveness and importance of this new mode of political communication to establish authentic relationships with citizens.

In more recent years, political relationship marketing has evolved considerably. Different scholars have expanded on the matter elaborately in their studies. For instance, Dean et al. (2014) examine how image management is intertwined with political relationship marketing. Furthermore, Parsons and Rowlin (2015) take a more detailed jab at the matter and study the stakeholders involved in political relationship marketing; and how said stakeholders could be targeted and observed. In addition, Johanse (2016) is among those who argue the potential in political relationship marketing for managing voters' participation and improving the quality of their participation. Finally, more recent studies such as Hughes (2018) and Lees-Marshment (2019), discuss how this concept provides a platform for direct marketing and a two-way relationship via developing political messages.

Social media and social media marketing factors

Social media applications have become an essential part of daily life, changing the way of interpersonal interaction and challenging conventional forms of customer relationship management (Zhu and Chen, 2015). Social media platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Line and WeChat, have become indispensable for a growing number of industries to conduct commercial activities and communicate effectively with target audiences (Chang et al., 2015). Recent research has highlighted the role of social media in enhancing brand awareness, brand equity and commercial transactions (Bernritter et al., 2016; Popp and Woratschek, 2016) and its importance in increasing public participation in the marketing process (Kumar et al., 2016).

Social media have also fundamentally changed how businesses communicate with current and potential customers. They have sophisticated relationship marketing and also outperformed conventional marketing strategies. In recent years, the traditional marketing concept of aggressively presenting products to reach the masses has been supplanted by a pull approach to entice consumers into conversations to build long-term relationships

(Parsons and Rowling, 2015). Schulz (2016) notes that after decades of excessive advertisements on TV, in print and online media, consumers are exhausted and avoid exposure to any form of advertisements. Instead, successful marketing campaigns offer the general public opportunities to voice their opinion. Memorable encounters with real people in real-life situations (word of mouth) on social media platforms have proven more effective than excessively utilizing conventional advertising tools (Schulz 2016).

The rise of social media is indicative of the emergence of novel forms of media that facilitate active participation (Boyd and Ellison, 2007; Manning, 2014). Everyday people use them to communicate their tastes and opinions. They are helpful in gathering data and as an effective medium for sharing that data (Zhao and Collier, 2016). Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram are currently the most widely used social networking platforms (Adobe Spark, 2021; Statista, 2021c).

Social media is an excellent tool for news dispersion and digital marketing (Zhao and Collier, 2016). Media marketing has been growing fast because of the high market demand and a crucial role in people's daily routines. The ease of access to information they provide makes social media a desirable substitute for traditional marketing methods such as TV ads or billboards (Cravens and Piercy, 2009). In other words, marketing strategies have expanded from traditional media planning, such as advertisements on television and radio, and in newspapers, to digital media marketing, such as the Internet or web-based advertisements, including social media (Wertime and Fenwick, 2008). Social media can also provide firms with crucial information regarding consumers' preferences and behaviour. That is because customers often use social networking to make decisions about particular products or services (Filo *et al*., 2015).

In their study of luxury fashion brands, Kim and Ko (2010) discovered that social media marketing activities consist of five constructs: entertainment, trendiness, word of mouth, interaction, and customization. This research discusses the Indonesian election's social media marketing activities through a new framework proposed by Kim and Ko (2010). Political candidates in recent studies have been considered as a form of product (Fossen, 2019). Moreover, since the latter half of the 2010s political campaigns have gained a considerable social media aspect (Safiullah et al., 2017; Okan et al., 2014; Vesnic-Alujevic, 2013; Baines et al., 2002; Husnal'Az'Hari, 2022). Therefore, in turn, social media marketing is a critical factor in studying the developments of political marketing.

Entertainment is perceived as the output of fun, interesting, and playful social media experiences (Bates and Ferri, 2010; Godey et al., 2016). According to Park et al. (2009), entertainment is included in social media to enhance users' participation. Moreover, Song et al. (2014) discovered that the entertainment experience boosts the brand or organization's value through consumers' perception.

Daugherty et al. (2008) remarked that social interaction significantly affects user-created content. Further, social networking sites provide a desirable platform for exchanging ideas and conducting debates (Daugherty et al., 2008; Godey et al., 2016; Jiang et al., 2010). Social networking websites' intensive interactions can motivate individuals to change their purchasing intention (Clark and Phillips Melancon, 2013). Social media can also increase an individual's trust in the organization (Jakic *et al*., 2017). To that end, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) discovered that feedback and interaction are essential aspects of all social media.

By providing quick access to fresh content and conversation starters, social media have rapidly replaced traditional search engines as the go-to resource for finding just about anything (Godey et al., 2016; Naaman et al., 2011). Mangold and Faulds (2009) state that users prefer corporate-supported correspondence over traditional promotion activities and view various social media as credible evidence sources. The same behaviour is also true when deciding which political candidate to vote for, and it can help voters become more knowledgeable about the issues at stake in elections. The voters are kept up to date on the party's current initiatives and plans. According to research by Song et al. (2017), a brand's ability to share trending content is crucial, as it can significantly boost consumer engagement.

Zhu and Chen (2015) described customization as the users' act of posting messages on a social networking website. Further, they categorized posts into two types depending on the customization level, distinguishing the customized broadcast and message. The customized broadcast contains information or content that targets all interested users (for instance, tweets on Twitter). On the other hand, the customized message targets a particular user or group (for instance, postings on Facebook). Yahia et al. (2018) discovered that individuals tend to be somewhat picky in the information they consume. Furthermore, Godey et al. (2016) discovered that social media marketing customization is quite convenient, especially for consumers with specified tastes.

Online communication tools, such as social media, can affect how people engage and share their experiences through eWOM (Zhang et al., 2017). According to Zhang et al. (2017), eWOM is a particularly significant component of current communication tools. Active social media users are more likely to exchange their opinions or experiences and finalize their decision-making process by engaging in eWOM positively and negatively (Zhang et al., 2017). On the other hand, Kim and Ko (2012) revealed in their study that it is vital for the customer to share opinions and information on social media. Therefore, this study hypothesizes that:

H1: SMM has a significant positive effect on eWOM

Wang et al. (2015), taking a publishing company's use of Facebook as a case study, discovered that social media marketing positively impacted the company's brand image. Moreover, other studies found that social media marketing significantly affects the organization's brand image (Perera and Perera, 2016; Seo and Park, 2018). Consequently, this study proposes a positive relationship between social media marketing and a person's image. Farrag and Shamma (2014) confirmed that media significantly delivered a political brand to voters. Also, there was an extensive impact when political candidates or parties used social media. Hence, it is hypothesized that:

H2: SMM has a significant positive effect on CI

Hjarvard (2011) found that when media become producers and suppliers of religious substance, not only do the artistic, institutional, and technical qualities of the media impact religion's boundaries but also. They affect how users would interact with religion. Media may become a data source about religion. They might create virtual worlds and narratives which welcome individuals to have encounters with religious-like characters. On the other hand, social media could provide a platform for exchanges and community building between individuals with similar religious beliefs.

Furthermore, according to Cheong et al. (2012), there is a complex relationship between digital media and religiosity on Web 2.0. Coman and Coman (2017) argued that the new media could be the space to transform the content of specific religions, rites, and beliefs. Social media could provide an extra benefit since they allow believers and non-believers to engage in easy interactions with each other by giving them such a platform. Hence, it is hypothesized that:

H3: SMM has a significant positive effect on RB

Electronic word of mouth (eWOM)

eWOM is an effective limitless tool for sharing information with one's peers (Hudson et al., 2015; Kim and Ko, 2012). According to Chu and Kim (2011), eWOM on social media is divided into three underlying behavioural motives: opinion-seeking, giving, and passing. As for decision-making, users with higher opinion-seeking behaviour are more likely to seek information and guidance from other users. Moreover, users with higher opinion-giving behaviour have the most significant impact on consumers' behaviour and attitudes. They are also defined as opinion leaders.

Social media has an online electronic aspect. Contrary to previous forms of socializing in person, which took considerable time to form, social media allows users to instantly transform their thoughts and opinions to others on a massive scale. Users of social network services tend to use said platforms to spread their thoughts and feelings about different topics. According to Kamtarin (2012), word of mouth is an exchange of spoken and written words conveying personal experience. Therefore, social media marketing through electronic word of mouth is defined as the actions performed by individuals who deliver information regarding a specific brand and upload content on social media (Godey et al., 2016).

Electronic word of mouth is the same as word of mouth in many aspects. However, it is also quite different from the regular word of mouth in many ways. A regular word of mouth takes time to form the snow globe regarding a concept (Gelper et al., 2018). This gives time for the recipients to pay more profound attention to what they hear. On the other hand, electronic word of mouth takes much less time to form even more giant snow globs of data and information (Donthu, et al., 2021). This raises the risk of biased information, fake news, and distracting campaigns (Chu and Chen, 2019; Donthu et al., 2021; Chih et al., 2020). Therefore, electronic word of mouth becomes a crucial part of a reliable study on social media marketing. More so in the case of political marketing.

Kim and Ko (2010) found that word of mouth positively affected the intention to purchase. Sharing opinions and information between consumers on social media is essential (Chang and Dong, 2014; Kim and Ko, 2010). When engaged in casual interaction with others and with brands, consumers could make the intention to purchase. Based on the same argument, the same platform could affect voting intentions. Considering the candidate as a product and the act of voting the same as the act of purchasing, voters could form their voting intention through eWOM. Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

H4: eWOM has a significant positive effect on VI

Candidate's image

Based on numerous studies, the candidate's image is among the key factors forming the intention to vote. A candidate's image has been defined as the depiction of the candidate's personality traits in advertisements or media (Kinder, 1994; King, 1997; Newman and Sheth, 1985; Pancer et al., 2002). The essential traits of a candidate include acumen, ethics, authority, trustworthiness, control, and capability. Choosing a political representative is much like choosing a piece of clothing in a big store. In the end, what matters the most is the voter's perception of the candidate, i.e., the candidate's image.

There were two presidential candidates in the past election in Indonesia; Joko Widodo, known as Jokowi, and Prabowo Subianto. Jokowi chose Ma'ruf Amin as his running mate and Sandiaga Uno was Prabowo's. The voters perceived Jokowi as a moderate leader with a clear vision to increase infrastructure developments, education and health facilities, especially in rural areas. However, Prabowo was known for his conservative leadership style, and with his military background, he represented Indonesia's earlier authoritarianism. Ma'ruf Amin was a Muslim cleric who led Indonesia's most prominent Muslim council. Ma'ruf was expected to help Jokowi get the more traditional, conservative, and rural voters. Sandiaga Uno was a businessman and investor who leaned closer to Indonesia's Muslim middle class. Sandiaga was expected to get potential voters from urban areas (Rahn and Spross, 2019).

Newman and Sheth (1985) discovered seven factors affecting voting intention, among the most important factors being a candidate's image. Other studies also confirmed that the candidate's image significantly affects voting intention (Cwalina et al., 2010; Farrag and Shamma, 2014). Therefore, it is supposed that:

H5: CI has a significant positive effect on VI

Religious beliefs

The population under study in the present research endeavour is the Indonesian public, eligible to vote. Indonesia is among the top ten states in the world where the most significant number of Muslims reside. [2] Being among the world's major religions, Islam requires its followers to follow various daily routines to the T. This makes religious beliefs a considerable part of almost every action each Indonesian makes, individual or social. Consequently, religious beliefs are considered one of the key variables in this study.

Plante and Boccaccini (1997) defined religious beliefs as a group and collection of practices, values, and beliefs taught by a spiritual leader. In the marketing sector, Fam *et al*. (2004) gave global marketers advice that they should spend more effort and time to understand the resources and religious beliefs when entering a new market. They should consider and never underestimate the influence of a society's religion on the value systems and its impact on marketing. Singhapakdi et al. (2013) reported in their study that the dimensions of religiosity significantly impact marketing managers' ethical intentions. The result revealed that individuals with a higher degree of intrinsic religiosity

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[2] World population review, https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/muslim-majority-countries

would gravitate to be more ethical in their intentions than individuals with a higher degree of extrinsic religiosity.

According to former studies, religious beliefs significantly influence individuals' behaviour and attitude (Abu-Alhaija et al., 2018; Kuzma and Kuzma, 2009). Fam *et al*. (2004) confirmed that religious beliefs impact particularly controversial products and social or political groups. Fastnow et al. (1999) found that religion significantly influences voting behaviour. They also found that religion's impact, including the ideologies of several religious groups on social issues, has changed over time. Wald *et al*. (2005) discovered that the candidate and political party who mentioned and stressed their religious beliefs and ideologies could win the citizens' sympathy and vote during the elections. Therefore, it is supposed that:

H6: RB has a significant positive effect on VI

Voting intention

Chuchu (2015) stated that voting intention turns out to be a global issue regarding its success and effectiveness in political elections. Farrag and Shamma (2014) stated that voting intentions are the voter's behavioural intentions to vote in government elections. Lam and Hsu (2006) defined intention as a person's premeditated or anticipated future behaviour. They also defined the intention as a person's intention not to vote in an upcoming election and used it in the context of their study.

Social media marketing positively affects purchase intention (Gautam and Sharma, 2017). The consumer relationship plays a significant role in affecting consumers' luxury fashion brands' purchase intention. Spackman and Larsen (2017) also argue that there is a significant correlation between social media marketing and purchase intention. Based on their results, the entertaining and interactive marketing via Facebook, which followers mostly share, could establish a closer relationship between students and educational institutions, consequently increasing the enrolment intention. This study proposes a positive relationship between social media marketing and voting intention. Farrag and Shamma (2014) confirmed that media have a significant role in delivering the political brand to the voters, and there was an extensive impact when political candidates or parties used social media. Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

H7: SMM has a significant positive effect on VI

The mediating effect of eWOM, CI, and RB on VI

This study recommends electronic word of mouth as a mediating variable. This finding is supported by numerous research and experts in prior studies, which discovered that electronic word of mouth could be a good mediator and makes avoiding overlapping with other variables possible (Farrag and Shamma, 2014; Septiari, 2018; Ozturk and Coban, 2019). Then, there are also prior studies which discovered that there are factors affecting voting intention with a similar definition and can be a part of the electronic word of mouth, such as friends and family influence, social imagery, and policy discussions (Farrag and Shamma, 2014). Consequently, it is hypothesized that:

*H8: eWOM mediates the effect of SMM on VI*

Moreover, this study proposes that the Candidate's image also acts as a significant mediator toward the influence of social media marketing on voting intention. The Candidate's image variable is essentially connected to social media marketing and voting intention. Hultman et al. (2019) stated that the better interaction, delivered content, credibility, and electronic word of mouth included in social media marketing, the more strongly it influenced the candidate's image, while that image was also able to cause better voting intention. Moreover, Bright et al. (2019) argued that using social media as a marketing tool in a campaign could broadly enhance the interaction between the candidate and the voters, leading to better recognition of the candidate's name and image. In addition, Julina et al. (2015) highlighted that the Candidate's image is an integral part of the campaign strategy that enables the candidate to gain more voters and voting intention. Based on all this, we can hypothesize that the Candidate's image is potentially mediating the relationship between social media marketing and voting intention. Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

H9: CI mediates the effect of SMM on VI

Furthermore, the present study suggests religious beliefs as an effective mediator for the influence of social media marketing on voting intention. Religious beliefs significantly influence every aspect of Indonesian life, making it a key variable when studying voting intention and other factors affecting it. Permani (2011) discovered that the government enthusiastically engages with religion and supports contributions from numerous religious organizations to expand social investment in Indonesia. This discovery suggests that religious values are considered essential and assimilated on a higher level in several parts of Indonesian life.

Furthermore, Ebbighausen (2019) argued that religious beliefs significantly shape the current political situation. Political agents have used religious beliefs mainly for political campaigning. In the last presidential election in Indonesia, political Islam played a dominant role in the electoral campaign. Experts discovered that young voters who make the cut mostly tend to support conservative Islam (Ebbighausen, 2019). As mentioned, there were two candidates in the 2019 Indonesian presidential election, Joko Widodo (known as Jokowi) and Prabowo Subianto. Prabowo criticized Jokowi for not being sufficiently Islamic and accused him of not being capable of reciting the Quran correctly in Arabic. Consequently, Jokowi's electoral team had to remedy this situation with the claim that Jokowi attended a Muslim school to strengthen Jokowi's religious reputation. Based on this line of argument, it is hypothesized that:

H10: RB mediates the effect of SMM on VI
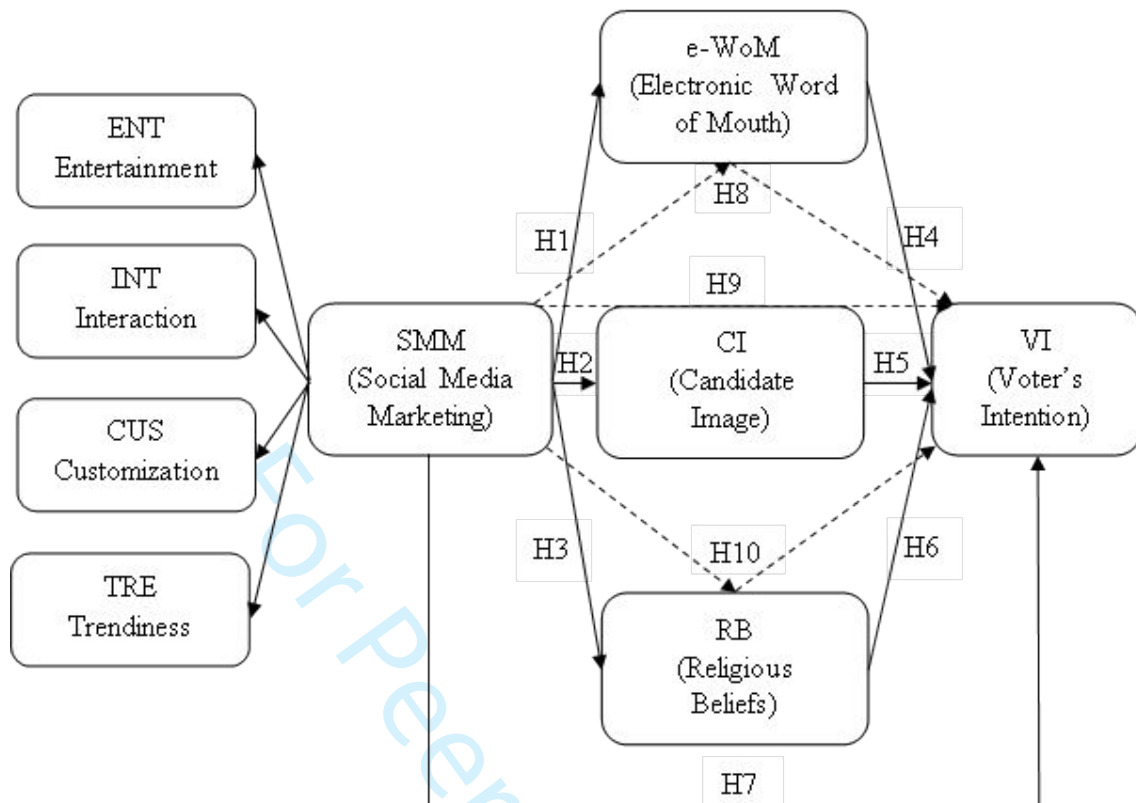
Figure 3. The research conceptual framework and hypotheses
Source. Researchers' design.
Note. The dashed lines are indicative of mediation effects

Methodology

Scale operationalization

This study gathers information based on the previous literature review with some modifications to fit the context of the study, including Kim and Ko (2010), Godey et al. (2016), Newman and Sheth (1985), Plante and Boccaccini (1997), Glynn et al. (2009), and Duffett (2017). Afterwards, via the application of confirmatory and exploratory factor analysis, the dataset is examined, and the hypotheses are tested. There are thirteen (13) items to measure social media marketing, three (3) items to measure electronic word of mouth, five (5) items to measure the Candidate's image, four (4) items to measure religious beliefs, and four (4) items to measure voting intention. This survey uses the five-point Likert Scale, ranging from 1 "strongly disagree" to 5 "strongly agree."

Data collection

This study uses a questionnaire, convenience and snowball sampling for its primary data collection. The survey was distributed via online questionnaires (Google form). In this study, the respondents are Indonesians who use social media and have electoral rights. The questionnaires were provided in two versions, written in English (the original) and in Bahasa Indonesia (the translated).

14

The present research is based on data which is gathered via the distribution of a standardized questionnaire. Thus, there is a first need to choose an efficient sample size with a small enough error margin to adequately represent the population adequately Cochran's formula determines the optimal size of a study's sample by looking at the demographics of the whole population, which is a valuable tool for this purpose. The majority (74%) of Indonesia's 273.5 million residents are eligible to vote in the country's presidential election. Therefore, considering this equation:

$$n = \frac{Z^2 pq}{e^2} \ (4)$$

Source: (Cochran, 1940)

The sample size can be estimated with a 95% degree of confidence as follows.

$$n = \frac{(1.96)^2 (0.741)(0.259)}{(0.05)^2} \approx 295$$

Rather than taking any chances, 396 online questionnaires were randomly

distributed and collected.

Data analysis result

This section covers the empirical side of the study. The data are examined via the application of Structural Equation Models. This somewhat popular method (Tarka, 2018) is conducted using the AMOS extension of SPSS 26.

Demographic results

Table 1 provides a more comprehensive picture of the sample. 43.7% of them are male, and 56.3% are female. The respondents' ages varied between 17 and 60 years old; most were 22-26 years (43.9%). Meanwhile, most respondents had a bachelor's degree level as their highest education level (64.9%). Over half of the total respondents (53.6%) are employees. More than two-thirds of the respondents (70.2%) regard themselves as Muslims in terms of religion. In terms of social media, all respondents use social media (100%), and most respondents (58.3%) use Instagram more often than other social media. In 2019 during the presidential election, 154 million people voted out of 192.8 registered voters (JakartaGlobe, 2019), and 166.1 million were active social media users (Statistica, 2021). In other words, 80 per cent of registered voters participated in the election, and 60 per cent of the country was active social media users.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics (Source: Researchers Calculations)

Profile	Categories	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	173	43.7
	Female	223	56.3
	Total	**396**	**100**
Age	17-21	82	20.7

	22-26	174	43.9
	27-31	97	24.5
	32-37	24	6.1
	Above 38	19	4.8
	Total	**396**	**100**
Education Level	High School/Equal	82	20.7
	Bachelor's Degree	257	64.9
	Master's Degree	53	13.3
	Doctorate's Degree	4	1.1
	Total	**396**	**100**
Employment Status	Employed	212	53.6
	Not Employed	3	0.8
	Self-Employed	35	8.8
	Homemaker	29	7.3
	Student	117	29.5
	Total	**396**	**100**
Religion	Muslim	278	70.2
	Protestant	48	12.1
	Catholic	39	9.8
	Buddhism	21	5.3
	Hinduism	2	0.5
	Confucianism	8	2.1
	Total	**396**	**100**
Most Often Used Social Media	Facebook	86	21.7
	Instagram	231	58.3
	YouTube	63	15.9
	Twitter	14	3.5
	Blogger	2	0.6
	Total	**396**	**100**

Measurement model and scale accuracy testing

The first analysis consists of an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to measure the variables' loading and assess the validity of the measurement items in this study. Eight variables were extracted, consisting of 4 independent variables (ENT, INT, CUS and TRD), three mediating variables (eWOM, CI and RB), and one dependent variable (VI). Figure 3 shows the study's measurement model.
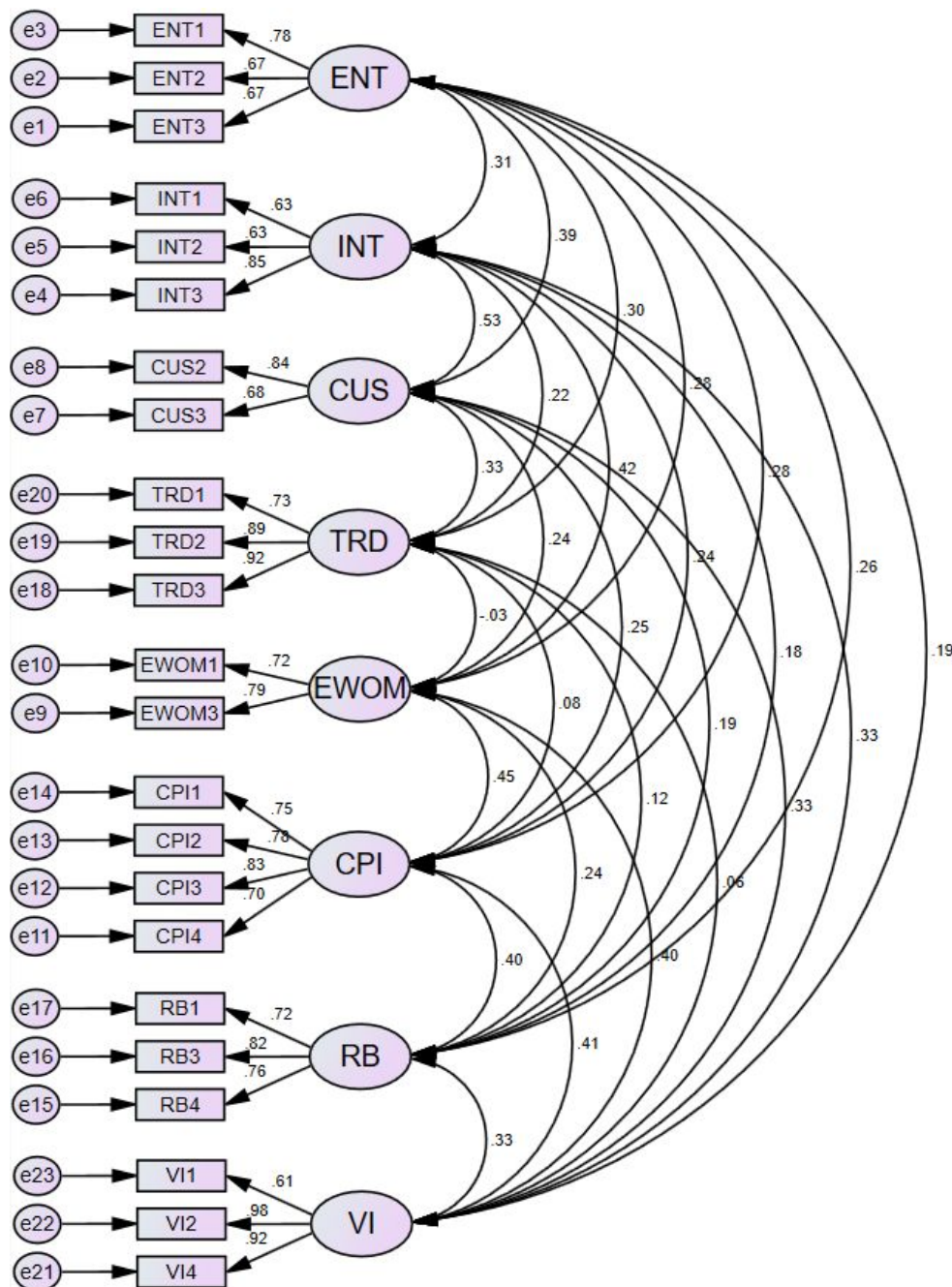
Figure 4. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) Framework
Source: Researchers Estimates, AMOS output

The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test (KMO) was 0.80 (P < 0.00), with a total variance extracted of 74.72%, which indicates an adequate and efficient sample structure. Table 2 provides the detailed EFA's results that consist of component, mean, SD, variance extracted explained, and total KMO and variance extracted for overall variable items. The most common test used to determine the reliability or internal consistency of a set of test items is Cronbach Alpha (Tavakol and Dennick, 2011). The values of Cronbach Alpha indicate the reliability of the study. According to George and Mallery (2003), the common rules that are generally accepted in measurement for Cronbach's Alpha value are: >.9 is excellent, >.8 is good, >.7 is acceptable, >.6 is questionable, >.5 is poor, and <.5 is unacceptable.

Table 2. Factor loadings, instrument validity, and instrument reliability measures (Source: Researchers Calculations)

Variables	Items	EFA Loading	CFA Loading	Mean	SD	Cronbach's Alpha (α)	Variance Extracted Explained
ENT	ENT1	0.81	0.78	4.05	0.87	0.75	66.57
	ENT2	0.81	0.67	4.02	0.77		
	ENT3	0.75	0.67	4.13	0.89		
INT	INT1	0.79	0.63	4.29	0.78	0.75	66.26
	INT2	0.77	0.63	4.06	0.75		
	INT3	0.78	0.85	4.18	0.82		
CUS	CUS2	0.80	0.84	4.16	0.81	0.73	78.69
	CUS3	0.85	0.68	4.22	0.82		
TRD	TRD1	0.85	0.73	3.87	0.98	0.88	81.09
	TRD2	0.90	0.89	3.86	1.05		
	TRD3	0.90	0.92	3.98	1.01		
eWOM	EWOM1	0.84	0.72	4.17	0.77	0.73	78.50
	EWOM3	0.80	0.79	4.16	0.74		
CI	CI1	0.79	0.75	4.13	0.83	0.85	68.98
	CI2	0.82	0.83	4.21	0.77		
	CI3	0.83	0.70	4.21	0.77		
	CI4	0.75	0.78	4.26	0.76		
RB	RB1	0.82	0.72	4.41	0.67	0.81	72.50
	RB3	0.86	0.82	4.41	0.66		
	RB4	0.80	0.76	4.37	0.70		
VI	VI1	0.69	0.61	4.14	0.79	0.86	78.90
	VI2	0.92	0.98	4.11	0.76		
	VI4	0.89	0.92	4.14	0.71		
Instrument Total	KMO					0.80	

Note(s): Items details for each construct: ENT-About the election, ENT1: the information on social media is interesting. ENT2: the information on social media is exciting. ENT3: it is enjoyable to get information through social media INT-Social media helps. INT1: information sharing with others. INT2: helps to give and to receive information about the election. INT3: to express my opinion to others. CUST-Social media and candidates. CUS2: The candidates' social media provide customized services. CUS3: I can access the information through social media about my candidates anytime and everywhere. TRD-Candidates' social media. TRD1: share information that is up to date. TRD2: provide the latest information and issues. TRD3: follow the current trend. eWOM: Through social media, I would like to. EWOM1: pass out information about the candidates/parties and their issues to my friends. EWOM3: the opinions of the candidates and their issues with my acquaintances. CI-My candidate. CI1: is trustworthy. CI2: is stable. CI3: has high integrity. CI4: is articulate. RB-My religion/faith. RB1: is important to me. RB3: provides a meaning/purpose in my life. RB4: is a source of comfort. VI-Because of social media. VI1: I voted in the past election. VI2: I voted as often as possible in the past. VI4: I am willing to participate in the next election.

      Convergent validity safeguards the validity of the relations between the variables. Discriminant validity ensures the absence of unreliable connections. According to Hair et al. (2010), specific parameters are commonly used to verify validity and reliability. The overall results show that the validity and reliability of all components used in this study are in the acceptable range (Blankart, 2012; Moslehpour et al., 2017), as shown in Table 3. Moreover, there is the risk of collinearity between the two main control variables, CI and RB. However, as table 3 indicates, the correlation between CI and RB is less than 0.5, indicating a weak enough correlation. In other words, the results do not indicate the issue of multicollinearity between the two variables. At the extreme, there is a mild collinearity between the two variables which is not uncommon in statistical studies (Vanhove, 2021).

Table 3. Test of Discriminant Validity, Convergent Validity, and Composite Reliability

	CR	AVE	MSV	Max r	ENT	INT	CUS	TRD	E-W	CI	RB	VI
ENT	0.75	0.50	0.154	0.393	**0.709**							
INT	0.75	0.51	0.279	0.528	0.310	**0.713**						
CUS	0.74	0.59	0.279	0.528	0.393	0.528	**0.766**					
TRD	0.89	0.73	0.107	0.327	0.302	0.216	0.327	**0.851**				
E-W	0.73	0.57	0.204	0.452	0.283	0.424	0.240	0.031	**0.756**			
CI	0.85	0.59	0.204	0.452	0.275	0.235	0.249	0.079	0.452	**0.767**		
RB	0.81	0.59	0.162	0.410	0.216	0.176	0.190	0.124	0.240	0.403	**0.769**	
VI	0.88	0.72	0.168	0.410	0.192	0.331	0.327	0.056	0.401	0.410	0.326	**0.850**

Note: CR > 0.7; AVE > 0.5; MSV < AVE; $\sqrt{AVE}$ > Max r, $\sqrt{AVE}$ is **bold face diagonal**

A confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) procedure is conducted to ensure the convergent validity of the proposed framework model's measurement items by checking the fit indices to examine the model fit. Table 4 presents the detailed results of the CFA model analysis with overall achieving minimum standards values. The proposed model framework has a good level of fit: $X^2/df = 1.89$, (p < 0.001), Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) = 0.93, Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = 0.96, Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) = 0.94, and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = 0.05.

Table 4. Model fit indices of the measurement model (N=396)

GOF Index	Acceptable Value	CFA Model
X^2 (Chi-square)		381.86
df (Degree of freedom)		202
X^2/df	< 3	1.89
GFI	> 0.9	.93
CFI	> 0.9	.96
TLI	> 0.9	.94
RMSEA	≤ 0.08	.05

Structural model and hypotheses testing

After achieving an acceptable model fit from previous analyses, the subsequent analysis relates to the structural modelling. Structural Equation Modelling is used to analyse and assess the relations and hypotheses between research variables. Figure 4 shows the structural model's design, estimated for this study's purposes.
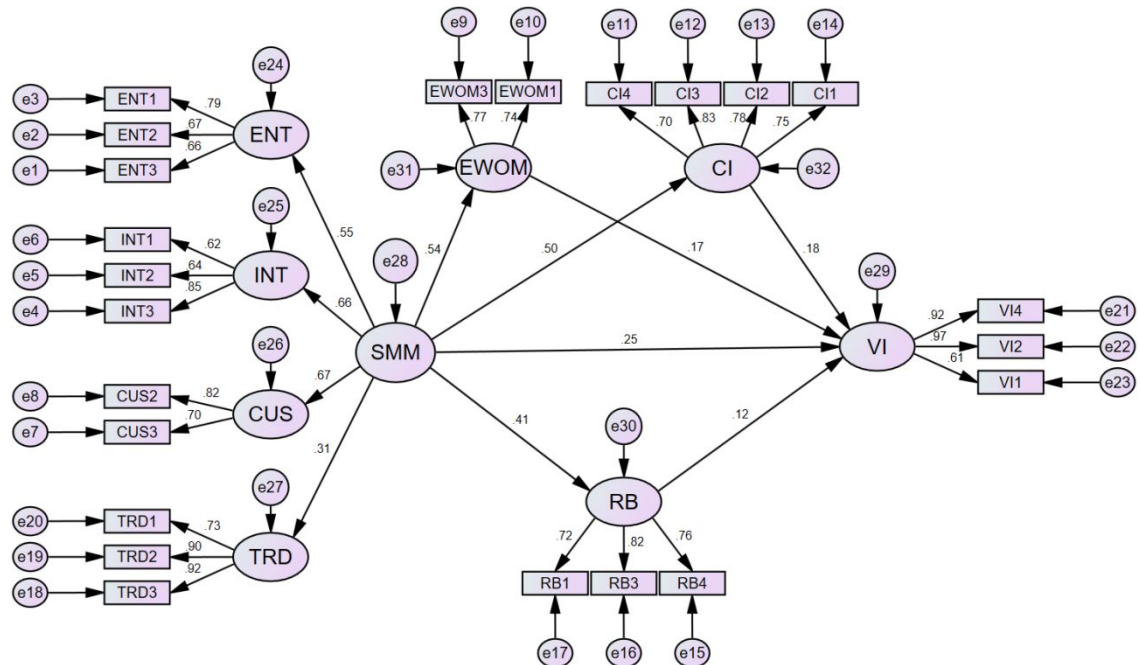
Figure 5. The result of the Structural Equation Model (SEM) path analysis
Source. Researcher Estimates, AMOS output

All hypotheses were supported. Table 5 presents the detailed results of the hypotheses that were formerly proposed.

Table 5. Result of the hypotheses testing and statistical significance

Hypotheses	Path	β	S E	P-value	Result
H1	SMM→eWOM	0.54***	0.152	0.000	Supported
H2	SMM→CI	0.50***	0.139	0.000	Supported
H3	SMM→RB	0.41***	0.105	0.000	Supported
H4	eWOM→VI	0.17*	0.083	0.022	Supported
H5	CI→VI	0.18**	0.069	0.006	Supported
H6	RB→VI	0.12*	0.080	0.038	Supported
H7	SMM→VI	0.25*	0.178	0.019	Supported

*$p < 0.1$, **$p < 0.05$, ***$p < 0.01$ (Source: Researchers calculations)

Test the mediating effect of electronic word of mouth, Candidate's image, and

religious beliefs

MacKinnon (2015) revealed that the mediating variable is one of the most crucial in research. Bootstrapping method is used as a resampling method, which is undoubtedly needed in mediation analysis to validate the mediation effect. This method is performed by establishing the distributions of sampling, and the purpose is to estimate the standard errors and the confidence intervals. Before the bootstrapping method, the researcher uses four steps to verify that the variable has a mediating effect (Baron and Kenny, 1986).

The fourth step of mediation analysis results indicates that three hypotheses (H8, H9, and H10) have mediating effects. As shown in Table 6, H8, H9 and H10 are concluded as partial mediation because the effect of SMM on VI in the presence of eWOM, CI, and RB as mediators is reduced in absolute size and makes the ratio of direct effect (c') smaller than the ratio of total effect (c). Moreover, Figure 1 presents a review of the outcome of the Structural Equation Model (SEM) testing with eWOM, CI, and RB as mediating variables.

Table 6. Result of Mediation Analysis

Path	Total	Direct	Indirect	Mediation	
SMM→(eWOM+CI+RB) →VI	0.48**	0.25*	0.23**	Supported	(Partial Mediation)

Hypotheses	Path	Total	Direct	Indirect	Mediation	
H8	SMM→eWOM→VI	0.41***	0.30**	0.11***	Supported	(Partial Mediation)
H9	SMM→CI→VI	0.41***	0.31**	0.10***	Supported	(Partial Mediation)
H10	SMM→RB→VI	0.41***	0.34**	0.07***	Supported	(Partial Mediation)

$*p < 0.1, **p < 0.05, ***p < 0.01$
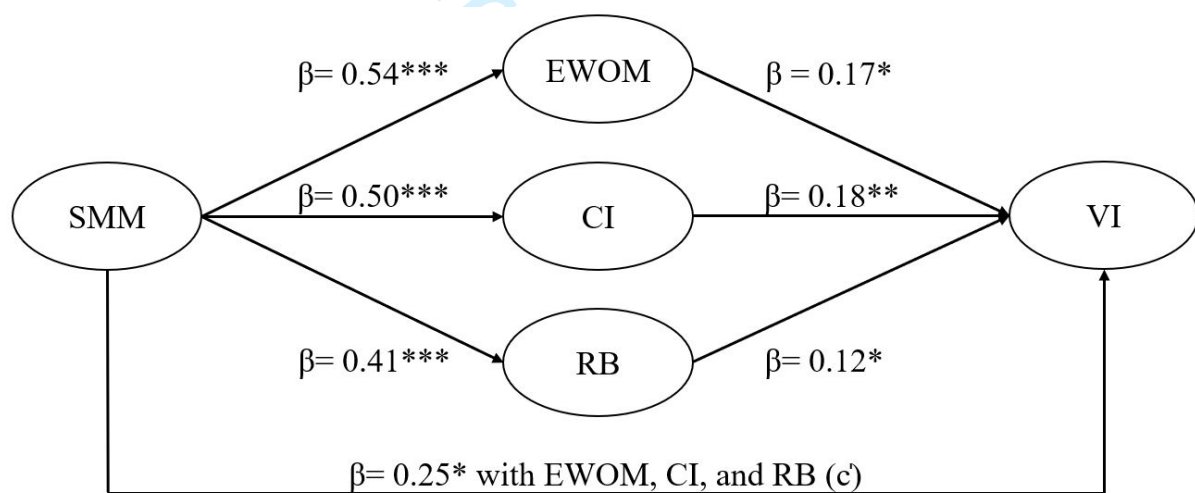
Figure 6. Structural Equation Model (Source: Authors calculation and design)

Result and discussion

While this study's framework was constructed based on previous studies, none specifically focused on the influence of social media marketing on voting intention. The outcomes of prior studies mainly support the outcomes achieved in this research. This study analysed ten hypotheses using five variables: one independent variable (SMM), three mediating variables (eWOM, CI, and RB), and one dependent variable (VI).

The statistical analysis outcomes indicate that social media marketing significantly influences electronic word of mouth ($\beta = 0.54***$). This is in accordance with the work of Zhang et al. (2017) and Kim and Ko (2012). Marketing strategies regarding the candidate's social media might impact the electronic word of mouth towards them. Therefore, candidates can plan accordingly. The fact that voters share their ideas or experience on social media as their communication tool can benefit the

candidates as well; since they can introduce or promote themselves by engaging in eWOM. Furthermore, the voters' decision making can be influenced by eWOM. However, the candidates must be aware of social media engaging in eWOM, because it can positively or negatively influence the voting intention. Therefore, it would be better to maximize only those dimensions on social media that influence the voters' eWOM in terms of positive ways.

Several studies reveal that organizations' marketing on social media has a positive effect on brand image. This study's results are also consistent with previous studies (Godey et al., 2016; Perera and Perera, 2016; Seo and Park, 2018; Wang et al., 2015). This study indicates that social media marketing significantly impacts the candidate's image ($\beta = 0.50***$). It suggests that the candidate's image will become more positive if they can appropriately manage their social media marketing. Media plays a significant part in presenting a particular kind of politician to the voters, and using social media by political candidates or parties has a widespread impact (Farrag and Shamma, 2014). Therefore, it would be better to be aware of the dimensions of social media which positively influence the voters' perception of the candidate's image.

The results presented in this research reveal that social media marketing directly and positively impacts religious beliefs ($\beta = 0.41***$). This study also reported similar results from studies conducted by Coman and Coman (2017), Cheong *et al*. (2012), and Hjarvard (2011). However, this study contributes some new knowledge and information because social media marketing significantly influences religious beliefs that were not considered in previous research. So, it can be said that if candidates can efficiently control their marketing on social media, they will positively impact their religious beliefs. The prospective voters are likely to vote for the candidate who can efficiently manage the religious image through social media marketing. Hence, it is necessary to focus on those social media marketing strategies that can affect religious beliefs in a positive direction because social media can provide the benefit of allowing believers and non-believers to use the space that is given to them for easy interactions with each other (Coman and Coman, 2017).

Kim and Ko (2010) discovered that word of mouth positively impacted consumers' purchase intention. This study shows that electronic word of mouth has directly and significantly impacted voting intention ($\beta = 0.17*$). Considering candidates as consumer products (Fossen et al., 2019) which suggest a similarity between voting intention and purchase intention, Kim and Ko's argument can be extended to political marketing. Therefore, it can be stated that the greater the voters' engagement in electronic word of mouth, the greater the voter's intention to vote for the candidate or electoral party in the election. In the context of purchase intention, when consumers are engaging in casual interaction and sharing opinions with others, they could make the intention to purchase a product or service (Kim and Ko, 2010).

Meanwhile, this situation in the election can benefit voters because they can do word of mouth through social media to share their ideas and experiences. The voters will do the word-of-mouth campaign by spreading their ideas and opinions to their relatives or friends. The voters also can pass out information about the candidate to others. The more information they get, the closer voters will become to the candidate because voters tend to choose the more familiar candidate rather than the one they don't recognize. This activity can influence the voter's intention and affect which candidate or electoral party votes. Hence, it is important to provide an interactive site that allows voters to share a

common interest and express opinions to increase candidates' chances of obtaining their votes.

It has been confirmed that the Candidate's image directly impacts voting intention (Cwalina et al., 2010; Farrag and Shamma, 2014; Newman and Sheth, 1985). The result obtained in this study indicates a significant positive relationship between the image of a candidate and the voter's intention ($\beta = 0.18^{**}$). This outcome signifies that the better the Candidate's image perception or view is in voters' minds, the higher the voters' intention to vote for them. Before making a voting decision, voters will observe and evaluate the candidate's image. An individual's chances of being elected are directly related to how voters perceive them. Voters are more likely to support and select a candidate they perceive to have a positive public persona. Because of this favourable impression, the candidate is more likely to be selected (Farrag and Shamma, 2014). These traits can range from being trustworthy to being stable or articulate or having high integrity. Therefore, the candidate must try to ensure that their image in the voters' minds is positive and that they are perceived as good, reliable, trustworthy, stable, articulate or having high integrity.

Farrag and Shamma (2014) revealed that their study in Egypt about factors influencing voters' intention added religious beliefs as one essential variable to Newman and Sheth (1985). Moreover, several studies reported by Wald *et al*. (2005), Permani (2011), and Ebbighausen (2019) also showed the same consistent results. This research's statistical analysis outcomes show that religious beliefs significantly and positively influence voting intention ($\beta = 0.12^*$). The candidate or political party that appropriately uses religious beliefs as a marketing tool will increase their chance to win the voters' sympathy. By winning the voters' sympathy, it can be easier for the candidate or political party to sustain a better connection with potential voters who will eventually vote for them. Religious beliefs are essential because they can affect every aspect of people's lives, including behaviour, attitudes, and preferences, especially as far as social and political ideas and groups are concerned. The voters may check and evaluate the candidate's religious reputation or how the candidate's religious beliefs have evolved during the campaign or in the past. If the candidate's religious reputation is not good enough for voters, they may not vote for them. Some political parties and their campaign team try to strengthen the religious reputation of one particular candidate as a marketing tool to win the potential voters' support (Ebbighausen, 2019). This study also revealed that religious beliefs are associated with important things in people's life, that religion provides a meaning or purpose in life, and as such is also a source of comfort. Therefore, the candidate or political party and their team must be able to build a good religious reputation or use religious beliefs as an effective marketing tool to influence voting intention.

Prior studies revealed that organizations' marketing on social media has a positive influence on purchase intention. The results of this study are consistent with the previous findings. (Gautam and Sharma, 2017; Kim and Ko, 2010; Spackman and Larsen, 2017). This study indicated that social media marketing significantly impacts voting intention ($\beta = 0.25^*$). So, it can be concluded that the better the management of a social media marketing campaign run by a candidate or political party and their team, the more significant influence it will have on the voting intention. When political candidates or parties use social media as an effective marketing tool in their political campaigns, they will play a significant role in influencing voting intention (Farrag and Shamma, 2014). In this study, social media marketing activities consist of 4 components: entertainment,

interaction, trendiness, and customization. These four aspects should be considered one unity when planning social media marketing (Godey et al., 2016). Therefore, the candidate or political party and their team had better consider efficiently maximising each aspect of social media marketing to achieve a more significant impact on voting intention. This study also showed the mediating effects of electronic word of mouth, Candidate's image, and religious beliefs on the relationship between social media marketing and voting intention. The mediating role of these three variables will be discussed in other sections.

Theoretical and managerial implications

This study examines how social media marketing activities influence voters' intention with electronic word of mouth, candidate's image, and religious beliefs as mediating variables. Social media marketing is one of the essential aspects of marketing. It can also be considered a political marketing tool and campaign instrument. Social media provide an easy-to-use and low-cost platform to share information about an election, candidate, or political party. If a candidate or party can use social media appropriately, it will provide them with many benefits and conveniences.

The findings in this study provide some practical aspects for the success of a political party and their team if they can use social media as a political marketing tool. This study explains the aspects of essential considerations for voters' intention to vote for a particular candidate when influenced by social media marketing. Based on this study's results, social media marketing, electronic word of mouth, the candidate's image, and religious beliefs significantly affected voters' intentions. Moreover, to answer the other research questions in this study, it was also discovered that social media marketing's dimensions that had the most considerable effect on voting intention were interaction and customization.

This study focuses on electronic word of mouth, candidate's image, and religious beliefs as mediating variables, and it turns out that the results that were gained are interesting. The three mediating variables mediate the relationship between social media marketing and voting intention. It indicates that electronic word of mouth, the candidate's image, and religious beliefs play a significant role in this study.

Secondly, the candidate or political party and their team should not use social media marketing only to reach potential voters and as a valuable tool for creating electronic word of mouth, Candidate's image, and religious beliefs. Because this study presents that electronic word of mouth, candidate's image, and religious beliefs strongly influence voters. If political campaign managers can activate voters' word of mouth and have a good perception of the candidate's image and religious beliefs, potential voters will not be unwilling to vote for their candidate or political party.

Conclusion

Based on the statistical analysis results in a recent study, the proposed mediating effect of electronic word of mouth in the relationship between social media marketing and voting intention reported a significant result. It can be concluded that the social media marketing efforts used by a candidate or political party can increase the voting intention with the voters engaging in electronic word of mouth. So, if a candidate or political party

24

and their team want to influence voters' intentions in such a way that eligible voters will be more inclined to vote for them, they must be concerned about the positive effect of electronic word of mouth between the voters and others by using social media as an effective tool and campaign method. The impact of electronic word of mouth will directly influence voting intentions. Hence, it is also essential to provide sufficient social media facilities that allow voters to share and express their opinions to influence more potential voters.

Moreover, the Candidate's image plays a significant role in the mediating effect of social media marketing on the voter's intention to vote. From the findings of this study, it can be deduced that the candidate and their team should focus on social media marketing and allocate their endeavours to build political marketing content that can develop a positive and strong image of the candidate. Suppose the candidate or political party successfully creates political marketing content that links positive personality traits (such as being trustworthy, stable, articulate, and having high integrity) with the candidate's image. In that case, voters will have a good image in their minds, increasing their voting intention.

Based on the statistical analysis results in this study, the proposed mediating effect of religious beliefs in the relation between social media marketing and the voters' intention reported a significant result. It can be assumed that the candidate and their teams should not underestimate the influence of religious beliefs while they try creating political campaigns by using social media to increase the voters' intention to vote. The candidate or political party should also make more effort to consider religious beliefs because they can influence many aspects of human life, including political life. They can also use religious beliefs as an effective political marketing tool by using several social media facilities. If the candidate or political party can create a political marketing context that focuses on the good or strengthen the candidate's religious reputation in the voters' minds, it will increase the number of potential voters. Therefore, in this study, religious beliefs can be a strong mediator, demonstrating the substantial influence of social media marketing on voters' intentions.

Limitations and future research

This study has some limitations. This study's first limitation is the generalization and the respondents used; this study focused only on Indonesian social media users with electoral rights as respondents. Moreover, this study uses only 396 samples which is a minimal number representing all of the voters in Indonesia. Furthermore, the representativeness of the sample may have some unpredictable biases. Therefore, future studies can gather more samples in different areas of Indonesia to obtain more representative samples. Another suggestion is to conduct a similar study in different countries to understand better the effect of social media marketing on voters' intentions. Additionally, the suggestion to compare voters' intentions in different countries would be more interesting and provide more in-depth study results.

The second limitation is the conceptual framework used in this study. This study used one independent variable, three mediating variables, and one dependent variable. Future studies can consider adding other variables that may influence the voters' intention. For instance, a future study could add more mediation variables, such as trust issues and policies, social imagery, and current or personal issues. Besides, adding other

dimensions of social media marketing, such as advertisements or information, can also be considered.

Third, three forms of relations form in the context of political marketing; candidate to voters, voters to voters, and voters to candidates. Including all three relations would surpass the confines of a single paper. Therefore, this study has focused on the first two. The third is worth studying in future research.

Fourth, the study's primary focus has been on the positive side of social media marketing on voting intention. In other words, it has only argued how social media could induce the intent to participate in the formation of democratic elections. However, future studies could complement this study's findings by taking a closer look at the dark side of social media marketing. Social media has much fewer limitations for publication compared to conventional media. Moreover, presentation is more important than truth for a post to spread effectively. This point, in turn, creates the risk of misinformation spreading simply because of a more appealing presentation than the truth. This is an important aspect of the relationship between social media marketing and voting intention, which was beyond the confines of this study. Therefore, future studies could put more light on this aspect.

26

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