



Digital Natives and Political Engagement: Exploring the Role of Personal Branding and Social Media Marketing in Generation Z's Voting Behavior

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Abstract

This study investigates how personal branding and social media marketing jointly shape Generation Z's voting behavior in an emerging democracy, with particular attention to the cognitive-affective mechanisms underlying candidate-centered political evaluation. While prior studies have examined youth political participation and digital campaigning, limited research explains how personal branding and social media marketing interact to influence voter perceptions and electoral decisions among digital-native voters. Drawing on political personalization, impression management, and digital political marketing theories, this study develops and tests a structural model linking personal branding, social media marketing, voter perceptions, and voting behavior. Using a quantitative explanatory survey of 400 Generation Z voters in Tangerang Raya, Indonesia, covariance-based Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) is employed to examine both direct and mediated relationships among the constructs. The findings indicate that social media marketing exerts a strong and direct influence on both voter perceptions and voting behavior, underscoring the mobilizing role of interactive and visually driven political communication. In contrast, personal branding primarily affects voting behavior indirectly through perception formation, positioning perception as a key mediating mechanism through which authenticity and engagement translate into electoral support. These results suggest that Generation Z voters process personalized political messages through intertwined cognitive and affective evaluations rather than purely instrumental considerations.

By integrating personal branding and social media marketing within a single explanatory framework, this study extends personalization theory to emerging democratic contexts and offers strategic insights for designing digital-first political campaigns targeting Generation Z.

Keywords; Emerging democracy; Generation Z; Personal branding; Political personalization; Social media marketing; Voting behavior

Introduction

Generation Z, generally defined as individuals born between 1995 and 2010, represents a cohort that has grown up immersed in the digital world (Djafarova & Fouts, 2022; Gorea, 2021). As digital natives, they are often characterized by their fluency in technology, with social media serving as a central platform for both communication and political engagement (Joshi, 2025; Vițelar, 2019). However, despite their connectivity and the transformative role that social media plays in modern political discourse, Generation Z faces significant challenges in political participation (Asmiyanto et al., 2021; Ponsree & Naruetharadhol, 2025). Political alienation, skepticism toward traditional political systems, and feelings of disenfranchisement are prominent issues among this demographic (Marx, 2025; McNeil & Sturgis, 2024). Many from this cohort exhibit ambivalence toward political action, often questioning the efficacy of their involvement in a political landscape they perceive as largely indifferent to their needs (Ammassari et al., 2025). This sense of disconnection is compounded by a lack of representation and engagement strategies that resonate with their values and beliefs, resulting in lower participation rates compared to older generations (Fadhli et al., 2019).

The political landscape in Indonesia has been particularly affected by these trends (N. Ahmad, 2021). Social media has dramatically reshaped political communication, providing new avenues for youth to express political views, engage in activism, and participate in political discourse (de Lange et al., 2025; Klüver, 2024). Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok offer young voters a sense of agency, enabling them to mobilize around issues and candidates that align with their personal beliefs (Dommett & Power, 2024; Elhersh & Alqawasmeh, 2024; Shaikh et al., 2025). Social media allows for tailored forms of political expression that reflect individual experiences, making political engagement more personal and accessible (Sinpeng, 2024). While these platforms have undoubtedly empowered youth to become more politically active, they also come with challenges. The prevalence of misinformation, fake news, and polarized narratives on social media can create confusion and exacerbate disillusionment with formal political processes (Bär et al., 2025). This dual impact of empowerment

through social media and the challenges of misinformation highlights the complexity of modern political participation, especially for youth in Indonesia.

Moreover, Generation Z's approach to political engagement is shifting away from traditional forms of political participation (Benevento, 2024). One notable trend is the increasing preference for "person-over-party" politics (Wauters, 2024). Youth voters are increasingly gravitating toward candidates who possess personal qualities that resonate with them, rather than aligning with political parties (Farquhar, 2024). In Indonesia, this trend has been amplified by the rise of social media, where young people can engage with political figures on a more personal level (Susilo et al., 2019). Candidates who cultivate a strong personal brand defined by authenticity, relatability, and trustworthiness are more likely to capture the attention of young voters (Biswas, 2024). This shift in political engagement has led to a greater emphasis on the individual traits of candidates, rather than their party affiliation. Through social media platforms, candidates are able to build emotional connections with voters, offering an alternative to traditional party-based politics (Bhattacharjee et al., 2025).

Habib Idrus Salim Aljufri is a young figure who combines the role of a dai, businessman, and politician from the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS). As a member of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Indonesia for the 2024–2029 period from the Banten III constituency, he obtained 184,407 votes, occupying second place after Airin Rachmi Diany (dpr.go.id, 2025). Previously, he served as Special Staff to the President of PKS for the 2019–2024 period. Habib Idrus is active in preaching through social media, conveying moderate and inclusive Islamic values to the millennial generation. He has also served as the General Chairman of the Indonesian Dai Youth Association (HDMI) since 2018, and was the Chairman of the Representative of the World Muslim Youth Council (WAMY) Gombak Branch, Malaysia, in 2011–2012 (M Sholahadhin Azhar, 2023).

Habib Idrus' education reflects his commitment to science and da'wah. He studied at the Institute of Islamic and Arabic Sciences (LIPIA) Jakarta, then continued his studies in Sharia at the Islamic University of Medina, and earned an M.B.A. in Islamic Banking and Finance from the International Islamic University Malaysia. As the grandson of the National Hero Sayyid Idrus bin Salim Al-Jufri, the founder of the Alkhairaat College, Habib Idrus inherited the spirit of da'wah and education (Aljufri, 2025). He used social media to answer the concerns of young people, discussing various issues such as stocks, the role of working wives, and alms. His work reflects the synergy between Islamic values and active participation in national politics, making him an important figure in the context of e-governance and community empowerment in Indonesia (Triyoga, 2023).

The role of personal branding in modern political campaigns has become increasingly important, especially in the age of social media (Bøggild & Jensen, 2024). Candidates today must cultivate personal brands that resonate with voters, focusing on authenticity, transparency, and relatability (Vițelar, 2019). Effective non-verbal cues, appearance, and overall presentation are vital in shaping voter perceptions and influencing political behavior (Gupta et al., 2024). In this context, personal branding allows political figures to distinguish themselves not just by their party affiliations, but as individuals whom voters can trust and identify with. Social media further amplifies this trend, offering candidates an immediate, direct connection to voters, particularly the younger demographic (Hultman et al., 2019).

In addition to the role of personal branding, social media serves as a powerful tool for political mobilization and engagement (Awallun et al., 2024). Research indicates that social media platforms have been instrumental in fostering greater political participation, especially among younger voters (T. Ahmad et al., 2019). Higher engagement with platforms like Instagram and Twitter correlates with increased political interest and a greater likelihood of voting (Sinpeng, 2024). Social media provides a space for activism, enabling young voters to express their political beliefs, organize events, and engage in discussions (Abid & Harrigan, 2020). It serves as a bridge between traditional political processes and modern, grassroots political engagement. As social media continues to permeate daily life, its role in shaping the political behaviors of Generation Z becomes more pronounced, marking a shift toward more personalized and effective voter engagement strategies (Seemiller & Grace, 2018).

The conceptualization of all variables in the are Personal branding is conceptualized as authenticity, relatability, and direct engagement (Vițelar, 2019; Gorbatoev et al., 2018). Social media marketing refers to political campaign strategies through digital platforms (Kayode et al., 2019). Perception represents voters' cognitive and affective evaluation of candidates, while voting behavior reflects intention and actual decision to vote (Gupta et al., 2024). A conceptual framework has been added for clarity.

Research on voting behavior has been carried out a lot, including regarding voting behaviours, motivation, political participations, and ideals (Alexander, 2022; Asmiyanto et al., 2021; Guo, 2020; Haryadi & Rakhman, 2019; Matthes, 2022; Saud et al., 2020), perception of the use media social in politics, and social media engagement (Alam & Yousuf, 2023; Gorea, 2021; Kayode et al., 2019; Shawky et al., 2019; Trunfio & Rossi, 2021), uses and gratification, motivational factors, and birdwatchung behaviour (Abid & Harrigan, 2020; Falgoust et al., 2022; Ifinedo, 2016; Ma et al., 2021), social media marketing and costumer passion (Hultman et al., 2019; Mukherjee, 2019), brand resonance, brand transgression, brand management, and political leaders (Burgess et al., 2020; Jain et al., 2018), and personal branding on social media, and politics (T. Ahmad et al., 2019; Asmariyani, 2017; Dida et al., 2018; Gorbatoev et al., 2018; Safiullah et al., 2017; Setiawan & Nurmandi, 2020; Vițelar, 2019). While prior studies examined youth political participation globally (Matthes, 2022; Dommett & Power, 2024), few have focused on Indonesia's Generation Z and the combined role of personal branding and social media marketing. Our study addresses this gap.

This research aims to explore how personal branding and social media marketing (SMM) influence voting behavior among Generation Z, particularly in the context of Indonesia. The study will focus on Generation Z in Tangerang Raya, a region that has seen an increasing political engagement from young voters, driven in part by the growing role of social media. By investigating how personal branding and SMM impact the perceptions and voting behaviors of Generation Z, this study seeks to provide insights into how political candidates can better engage with this digital-savvy demographic. This research will also contribute to the broader understanding of political marketing strategies in the age of social media, focusing on the intersection of personal branding, digital engagement, and youth political participation.

The findings of this study are expected to have significant implications for political campaigns, especially in Indonesia, where the influence of Generation Z on the political process is becoming increasingly evident. By understanding the mechanisms through which personal branding and social media marketing shape youth voting behavior, political candidates can develop more effective strategies to connect with and mobilize younger voters, ensuring greater political participation and engagement in the democratic process.

Author have explicitly formulated five hypotheses based on relevant literature, each hypothesis links personal branding, social media marketing, perception, and voting behavior. For example:

- H1: Personal branding positively influences perception.
- H2: Personal branding positively influences voting behavior.
- H3: Social media marketing positively influences perception.
- H4: Social media marketing positively influences voting behavior.
- H5: Perception positively influences voting behavior.

These hypotheses are supported by prior studies (Setiawan & Nurmandi, 2020; Hultman et al., 2019; Dommett & Power, 2024).

Literature Review

Personal branding

Personal branding is a strategic process by which individuals market themselves and their career as a brand (Zhou et al., 2020). This concept was introduced by Tom Peters in 1997 and is defined as a conscious attempt to shape public perceptions of individuals through consistent and authentic positioning (Park et al., 2020; Wahid et al., 2023). Conceptually, personal branding is an adaptation of traditional marketing principles applied to individuals. Like any organizational or product brand, personal branding requires consistent differentiation, positioning, and narrative (Dumont & Ots, 2020; Hassan et al., 2024; Scheidt et al., 2020). A personal brand is formed through a series of interactions that show a person's values, communication style, skills, and personality that are shared with the public strategically. The end goal is to foster positive perceptions and strengthen credibility in the eyes of relevant audiences (Ledbetter & Meisner, 2021).

Some of the key elements that make up personal branding include authenticity, consistency in behavior and communication, and clarity in the delivery of self-values. Authenticity is important to build trust, while consistency reinforces the image you want to build. The message conveyed must also be aligned with personal values and professional goals. These three elements are the foundation for creating a strong and long-lasting personal brand, especially in a competitive environment such as the world of work or business (da Silva e Silva & Leandro, 2025; Marin & Nilă, 2021; Shavit & Konrádová, 2025). From a theoretical perspective, personal branding is rooted in a number of classic theories such as *self-presentation theory* (Goffman), *impression management*, and *social capital theory*. *Self-presentation theory* explains how individuals structure their social "appearances" to influence the perception of others (Jacobson, 2020). Meanwhile, *impression management* highlights individual strategies in managing the impression left to the public (Venciute et al., 2024). The *social capital theory* emphasizes the importance of social networks and relationships in forming and expanding the influence of personal brands, especially in the digital context (Zarandouz et al., 2023).

A personal branding strategy can be divided into several important stages: identifying your own values and uniqueness, segmenting your audience, developing your main message, and choosing your communication channel. This process is similar to a product marketing strategy, only the object is the individual (Hedeshian et al., 2024; Szántó et al., 2025). Along with the development of technology, social media is now the main platform for personal branding development. Platforms like LinkedIn, Instagram, and Twitter provide individuals with the opportunity to share personal and professional narratives with a wide audience (Chen et al., 2021; Latif & Hariawan, 2021). Social media facilitates the distribution of content and allows for direct interaction with the public, but it also demands consistency and prudence in conveying personal information (Gorbatov et al., 2024). The benefits of personal branding are vast, especially in a professional context. With a strong brand, individuals can increase visibility, trust, and career opportunities. Effective personal branding also contributes to reputation, strengthens the perception of professionalism, and provides a competitive advantage in the recruitment, promotion, and career negotiation process (Laaksonen et al., 2020; Metz et al., 2020; Pich & Newman, 2020). Personal branding also faces challenges. One of the main challenges is maintaining a balance between authenticity and professional image, as well as avoiding manipulative perception or pseudo-imagery (Meisner & Ledbetter, 2020). In addition, individuals must be able to manage public expectations and face pressure to appear "perfect" in the digital space (Okafor & Godfrey, 2024).

Social Media Marketing

Social media marketing is a digital communication strategy that utilizes social media platforms to spread messages, build relationships, and influence audience behavior (Mason et al., 2021). Not only used by commercial companies, this strategy is also applied by social organizations, individuals, and political actors who want to reach the public widely and instantly (Abid et al., 2025). Social media allows its users to share information, form opinions, and interact in real-time in a dynamic digital environment. This makes social media a very strategic space in shaping perceptions, including in the context of politics and the participation of the younger generation. The uniqueness of SMM also lies in its strong social and community nature (Jacobson et al., 2020; Zhuravskaya et al., 2020). Platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and X encourage the formation of digital communities that are connected through specific values, interests, or affiliations (Abid et al., 2025). In political contexts, these communities are often intensive discussion spaces, where opinions are formed, disseminated, and amplified. Marketing strategies through social media cannot only be transactional, but must consider the emotional and cultural aspects of the targeted audience (Dwivedi et al., 2021; Farkas & Bene, 2020).

Unlike other forms of digital marketing, social media marketing relies on the ability to create meaningful social interactions (Theocharis et al., 2023). The strategy implemented focuses not only on spreading the message, but also on building long-term relationships with the online community. This approach includes the use of storytelling, strong visualization, and the use of language that matches the characteristics of the platform. Each channel has a unique communication logic, so campaigns must be tailored to the norms and expectations of users on each platform (Knoll et al., 2018; Papakyriakopoulos et al., 2020). The development of digital technology has also driven a major transformation in social media marketing practices. The high mobility of smart devices and the widespread availability of internet connections make social media the main means of information consumption, especially among the younger generation. These changes not only affect the way information is consumed, but also how communication strategies are built (Dam Hee Kim & Ellison, 2021; Lewandowsky et al., 2020). Campaigns must now be adaptive, real-time, and responsive to ongoing social events, as audiences expect direct engagement from the actors they follow on social media (Rhodes, 2022). One of the most significant impacts of SMM is the democratization of the mass communication process. Anyone with internet access can now become a content producer and build public influence. This creates a new ecosystem where personal branding becomes the main weapon in attracting attention and building an audience. This phenomenon is particularly relevant to Generation Z who tend to judge political messages based on the relevance of values and authenticity of the message, rather than solely institutional authority. In the midst of a highly visual and fast-paced digital culture, personal and genuine content has the power to go viral and mobilize opinions (Ali Abbasi et al., 2022; Parviainen & Coeckelbergh, 2021).

In the realm of politics, social media marketing has become the main tool to shape self-image and build public trust. Politicians, activists, and even young voters use social media as a means to show their values, ideological positions, and personalities (Guest et al., 2023; Weismueller et al., 2022). The success of political communication is no longer determined by how big the campaign budget is, but by how strong the ability to build personal narratives and emotional connections through the content disseminated. Social media provides an open stage for anyone to participate in political discourse. The effectiveness of campaigns through social media marketing can be measured concretely through various digital metrics such as reach, impressions, engagement rates, and conversions. Social media analytics enable message senders to monitor public responses in real-time, evaluate campaign performance, and make strategic adjustments quickly. This feature provides a huge advantage over traditional media, as it allows for data-driven decision-making. In the context of political campaigns, the speed of responding to public opinion is key in maintaining trust and credibility (Hruska & Maresova, 2020; Kent & Li, 2020; Shutsko, 2020).

However, social media marketing also carries risks that cannot be ignored. The spread of negative information or misinformation can spread quickly and damage reputations instantly. When campaigns are not carefully packaged or fail to understand audience sensitivities, the potential backlash can outweigh the benefits. Careful planning, a deep understanding of the audience, and the ability to manage communication crises are crucial aspects of an effective SMM strategy.

Political Engagement

Political engagement refers to the involvement of individuals in activities related to the political process, either directly or indirectly. However, there is no single definition agreed upon (Le & Nguyen, 2021; Thelma & Chitondo, 2024). Political engagement includes emotional, cognitive, and behavioral dimensions, including interest in political issues, opinions, and active participation (Donbavand & Hoskins, 2021). Political engagement can mean being emotionally active on political issues, even if they don't always take part in real actions such as demonstrations or elections (Theocharis et al., 2023). Traditionally, political engagement has been defined as participation in formal activities such as general elections and political parties. However, modern approaches see engagement as a broad spectrum that includes non-conventional actions, such as digital activism or issue-based campaigns. These changes reflect the dynamics of society and new media (Borbáth et al., 2021; Toff & Nielsen, 2022).

Political engagement consists of three main dimensions: (1) cognitive, political interest and knowledge, (2) emotional, such as enthusiasm or disappointment with politics, and (3) online behavior, voting, demonstration, or activism. The combination of these three determines the type and intensity of a person's political involvement (Beesley & Hawkins, 2022; Smith, 2022; Yilmaz et al., 2024). It is important to distinguish between political

engagement and political participation. One can be emotionally and cognitively involved in politics without having to actively participate. Meanwhile, the emergence of social media has redefined forms of political engagement (Bherer et al., 2023). Digital activism, such as sharing online petitions or debating on social media, is part of *engagement 2.0*, which brings together the online and offline worlds (Kucinkas & Stewart, 2022).

Political involvement is largely formed from a young age through formal education, community experiences, and family interactions. Institutions such as schools and youth organizations play a huge role in shaping the political awareness and skills of the younger generation (Abrajano et al., 2025). Political engagement can be divided into several forms: conventional (voting), non-conventional (protest), and symbolic (expression through art or media). Engagement can also be individual or collective. In addition, social class and access to resources greatly influence political engagement. Low-income or low-educated groups tend to be less politically engaged due to structural and psychological barriers (Ariel et al., 2024; Chan et al., 2022).

Political engagement also has an impact on welfare. Engagement in traditional forms (such as voting) tends to increase a sense of control and life satisfaction, while more confrontational forms of activism sometimes correlate with stress or emotional exhaustion (Besco et al., 2022). Political engagement is a complex and multidimensional concept, encompassing more than just voting or being a party member. A broader and inclusive understanding of forms of political engagement will help develop strategies of democratic participation that are more relevant to today's social realities (Bursztyrn et al., 2021; J. Kim & Rojas, 2025).

Methodology

This study adopts a quantitative research approach with an explanatory survey method (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) to examine the impact of personal branding and social media marketing (SMM) on the voting behavior of Generation Z in Tangerang Raya, Indonesia. The goal is to assess the relationships between personal branding, social media marketing, perceptions, and voting behavior, using survey data to identify patterns and test hypotheses.

2.1 Research Design

The explanatory survey method is employed because it enables researchers to explore and explain the causal relationships between different variables. This method is suitable for understanding the impact of personal branding and social media marketing on Generation Z's political behavior. Surveys are ideal for gathering data from a large sample and can offer insights into broader trends, such as how media exposure or political engagement through social media influences voting decisions. This method also allows for statistical analysis, providing an empirical basis for testing hypotheses and identifying correlations between the studied variables (McCabe et al., 2024).

2.2 Population and Sample

The target population for this research consists of Generation Z individuals residing in the Tangerang Raya area, which includes Tangerang City, South Tangerang City, and Tangerang Regency. Generation Z, as defined for this study, includes individuals aged between 17 and 27 years, as this age group is eligible to participate in voting and is actively involved in political engagement through social media platforms. A sample size of 400 respondents were selected proportionally from Tangerang City, South Tangerang, and Tangerang Regency using stratified random sampling to ensure demographic representativeness was determined using Slovin's formula, which provides an appropriate sample size based on the population size and a 5% margin of error. The respondents were selected to ensure a representative distribution across various demographics, such as age, gender, and educational background. The inclusion of respondents from different regions within Tangerang Raya helps ensure that the study results are applicable across a diverse urban area in Indonesia.

2.3 Data Collection

Data were collected using structured questionnaires designed to capture information on the key variables, personal branding, social media marketing, perceptions, and voting behavior. The questionnaire was distributed both online and offline, ensuring accessibility for all participants. It consisted of closed-ended questions, including Likert-scale items to measure attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors, as well as demographic questions to gather background information on the respondents. Figure 1 show the survey was designed to capture specific data related to; the impact of personal branding on perceptions of political candidates, the role of social media marketing in shaping political preferences and behavior, voting behavior among Generation Z, with a focus on social media usage, political participation, and attitudes toward candidates and political parties.

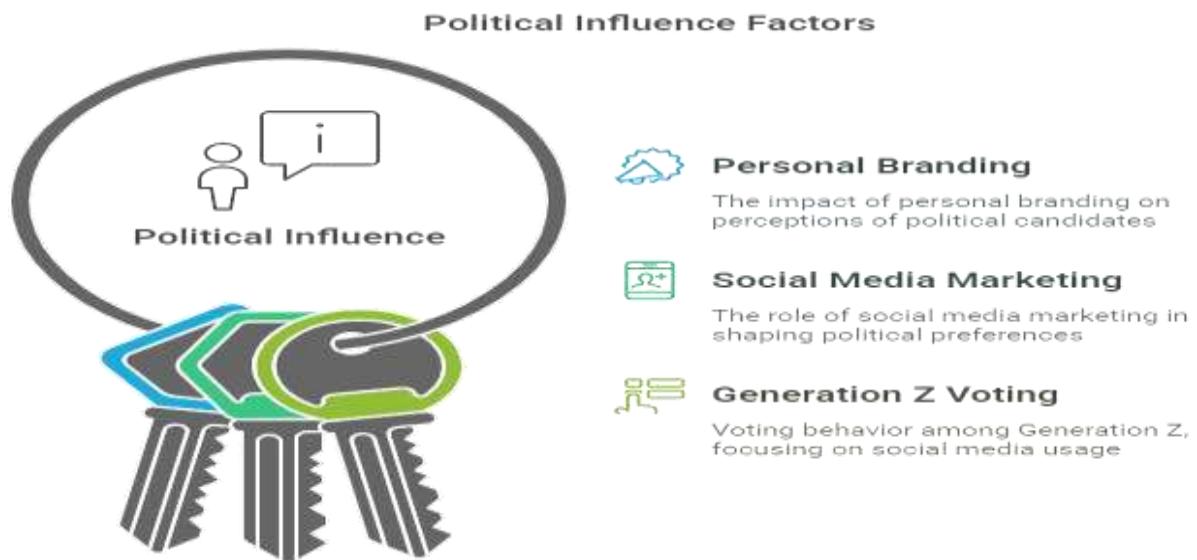


Figure 1. Political influence factors ((Bhattacharjee et al., 2025))

2.4 Ethical Considerations

This study complied with the Declaration of Helsinki and ethical guidelines for arts, humanities, and social sciences research. Informed consent was obtained from all participants; written parental consent and minor assent were secured for participants under 18, while verbal consent was obtained from adult participants to facilitate accessibility in online and informal settings. Participant anonymity, confidentiality, and the right to withdraw at any time were ensured. All survey instruments were designed to maintain neutrality and minimize bias. Ethical approval was granted by the Universitas Padjadjaran Research Ethics Committee (Ref. No. 021/UNPAD/ETHICS/2024).

2.5 Data Analysis

The data collected from the survey were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), a statistical technique that allows for the examination of complex relationships between observed and latent variables. SEM is particularly suitable for this study as it can analyze the direct and indirect effects of personal branding and social media marketing on voting behavior, while controlling for potential confounding variables (Dodeigne & Pilet, 2024). The SEM approach helps in evaluating the impact of multiple interrelated variables simultaneously, providing a detailed understanding of how personal branding, social media marketing, and perceptions influence voting behavior.

The data analysis process involved the following steps; descriptive analysis was conducted to summarize the demographic characteristics of the respondents and their responses to the key survey questions, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was used to validate the measurement model and ensure the reliability and validity of the constructs (personal branding, social media marketing, perceptions, and voting behavior). CFA helps assess whether the observed variables accurately reflect the latent constructs they are intended to measure, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) is carried out to test the validity and reliability of constructs by referring to Hair et al., (2019). An item is declared valid if it has a loading factor of ≥ 0.50 , is reliable if the construct reliability (CR) is ≥ 0.70 , and meets the convergent validity if the average variance extracted (AVE) is ≥ 0.50 . The fit model was evaluated using several indicators such as $\text{Chi-square/df} \leq 3$, $\text{RMSEA} \leq 0.08$, CFI and $\text{TLI} \geq 0.90$. (Shorrocks & Sanders, 2024), Hypothesis testing was performed using SEM to examine the relationships between the variables. Figure 2 show this step allowed for the testing of the five hypotheses outlined in the study, determining whether personal branding and social media marketing significantly influence perceptions and voting behavior among Generation Z.

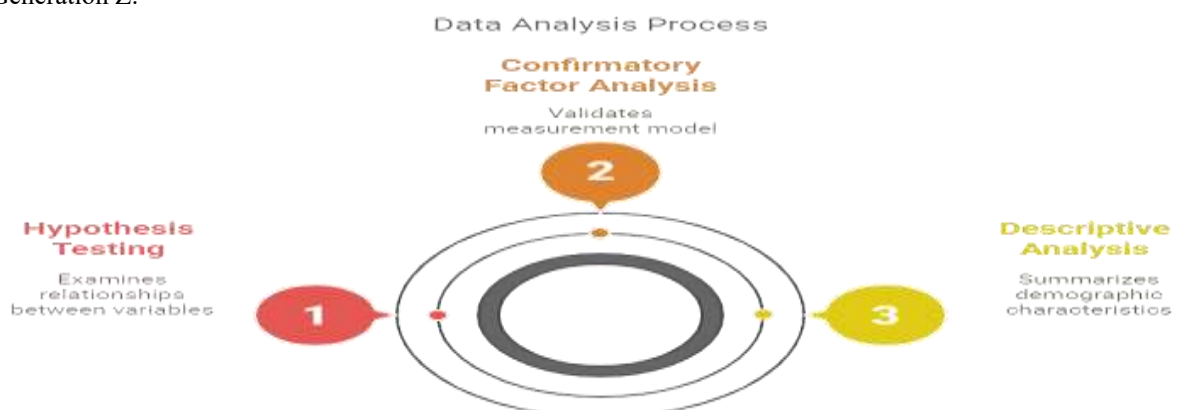


Figure 2. Data analysis process (Mueller, 1999)

The statistical software LISREL was used to conduct the SEM analysis, which is widely recognized for its robustness in handling complex models and large datasets. The goodness-of-fit indices from SEM, including RMSEA, CFI, and NFI, were used to assess the model's fit to the data, ensuring that the hypothesized relationships between the variables were well-supported by the data (Breyer, 2024).

3. Results

This section presents the findings from the survey data collected to explore the impact of personal branding and social media marketing (SMM) on the voting behavior of Generation Z in Tangerang Raya. The data analysis was conducted using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to evaluate the relationships between personal branding, SMM, perceptions, and voting behavior.

3.1 Respondent Demographics

A total of 400 respondents participated in the study, all of whom were part of Generation Z, aged between 17 and 27 years. The sample was selected from three areas within Tangerang Raya, including Tangerang City, South Tangerang City, and Tangerang Regency. Figure 3. show Age distribution, 16-19 years: 32% (128 respondents), 20-23 years: 63.5% (254 respondents), 24-27 years: 4.5% (18 respondents).

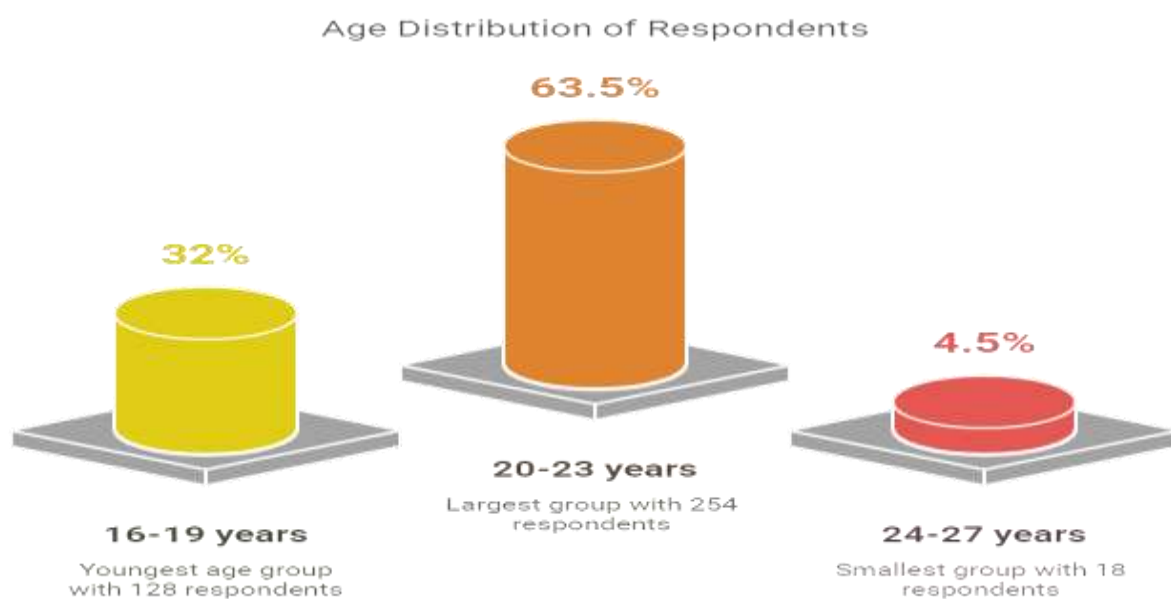


Figure 3. Age distribution (Sources: Data processing results in 2025)

Figure 3 describes the age distribution of the respondents highlights that the study predominantly focuses on young adults in the 20-23 years age group, making them the most politically engaged segment within Generation Z. This demographic is most likely to be influenced by social media campaigns and personal branding strategies. However, the inclusion of younger and slightly older age groups provides a comprehensive view of political socialization and engagement patterns across the full spectrum of Generation Z in Tangerang Raya. Understanding these patterns can help political candidates and campaign strategists tailor their outreach to effectively engage this critical voter base.

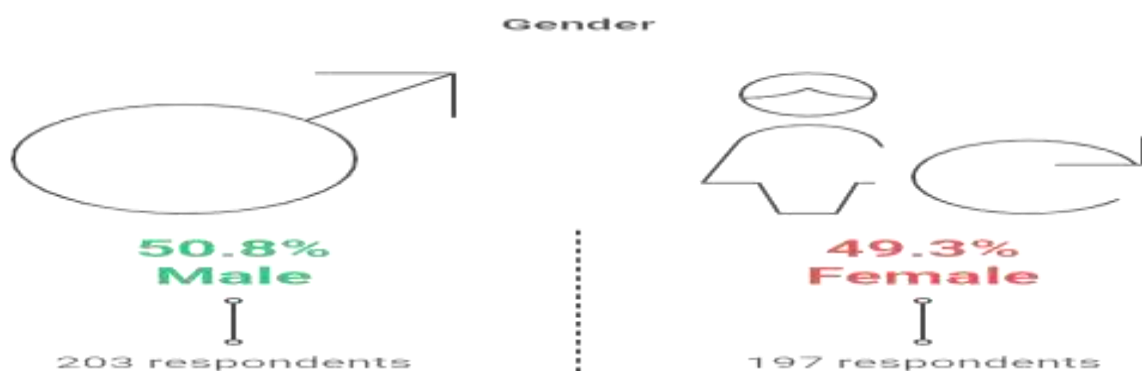


Figure 4. Gender distribution (Sources: Data processing results in 2025)

Figure 4. describe gender distribution, Male: 50.8% (203 respondents), Female: 49.3% (197 respondents). The gender balance in the study's respondent pool supports the validity and inclusivity of the research, offering insights into the political behavior of both young men and women within Generation Z. Given that political engagement strategies, especially those centered around personal branding and social media marketing, can have different effects based on gender, this study ensures that its findings are reflective of both groups. Political campaigns

aiming to engage Generation Z voters must consider gender-specific messaging and platform preferences, while also ensuring that they speak to the shared concerns of both male and female voters.

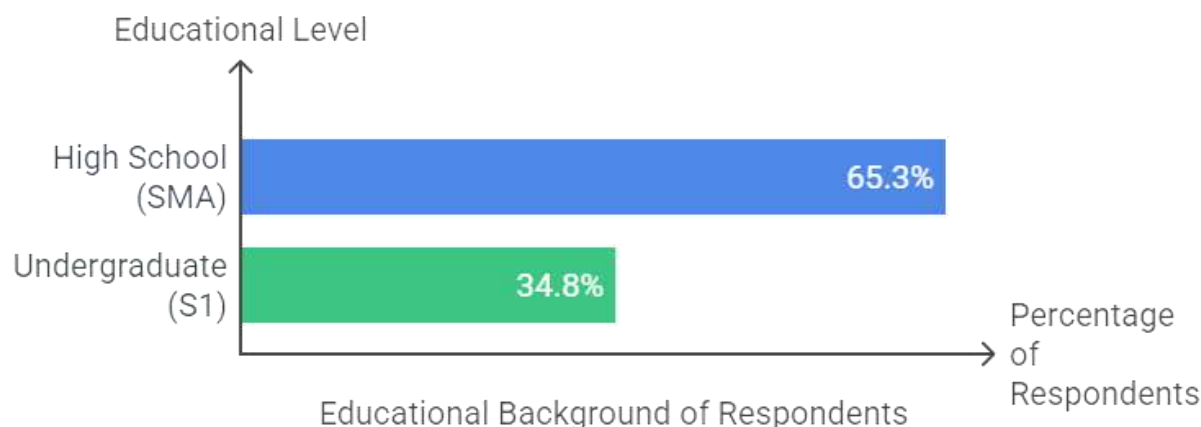


Figure 5. Educational background (Sources: Data processing results in 2025)

Figure 5 describes educational background, High School (SMA): 65.3% (261 respondents), and Undergraduate (S1): 34.8% (139 respondents). The study shows that most respondents are high school students, representing a younger generation forming their political identity. However, undergraduate students, more politically engaged and eligible to vote, make up a significant portion of the sample. This demographic has substantial political influence, actively participating in the democratic process. Political campaigns targeting Generation Z should tailor strategies for both groups, focusing on education, authenticity, and digital engagement, while building long-term voter loyalty. Understanding these distinct educational backgrounds is crucial for shaping effective outreach strategies and mobilizing younger voters in future elections.

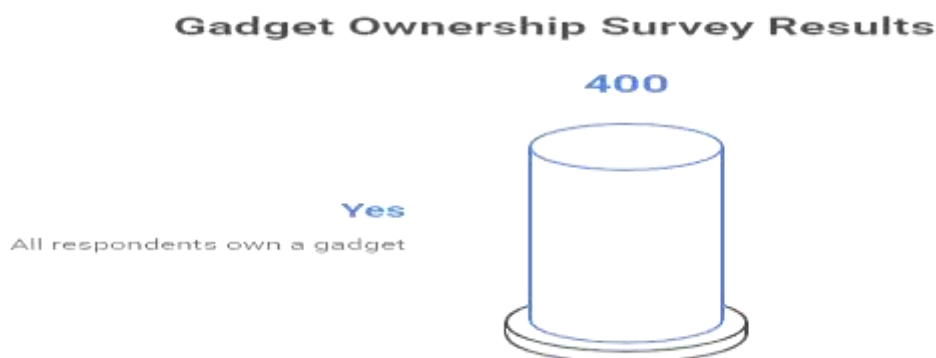


Figure 6. Gadget ownership survey (Sources: Data processing results in 2025)

Figure 6 shows that 100% of respondents own a gadget, highlighting Generation Z's digital-native identity. This underscores the importance of mobile-friendly content and social media in political campaigns, making mobile-based outreach essential for engaging and mobilizing this always-connected demographic in digital democracy.

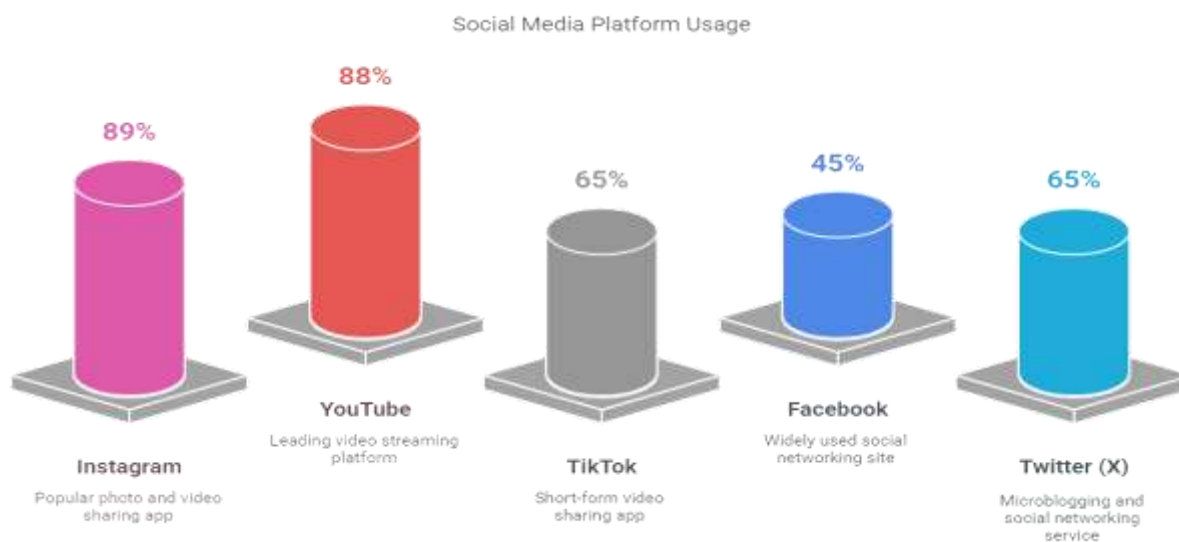


Figure 7. Social Media Usage (Sources: Data processing results in 2025)

Figure 7 describe Social media usage, Instagram: 89% (356 respondents), YouTube: 88% (352 respondents), TikTok: 65% (260 respondents), Facebook: 45% (180 respondents), and Twitter (X): 65% (260 respondents). The high social media penetration among respondents reflects Generation Z's strong engagement with digital platforms, which influences their political behavior. The usage of Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok highlights the importance of visual content and interactive media in capturing their attention. These platforms offer opportunities for political candidates to reach young voters. Facebook, with its lower usage, can be utilized for distributing detailed content and organizing events. Twitter (X) remains essential for real-time engagement and political discourse. By tailoring content to the unique features of each platform, political candidates can effectively engage and build a loyal voter base among Generation Z.

3.2 Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

To ensure the validity and reliability of the constructs in the study, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted for the four primary constructs; Personal Branding (PB), Social Media Marketing (SMM), Perception (P), and Voting Behavior (VB).

Table 1. Personal Branding (X_1)

X_1	SLF ³ 0.50	Error	CR ³ 0.70	VE ³ 0.50	Conclusion
X1.1	0.81	0.34	0.85	0.65	Good Validity
X1.2	0.80	0.36			Good Validity
X1.3	0.81	0.34			Good Validity

(Sources: Data processing results in 2025)

Table 1 show the results of the CFA calculation for X_1 above show that the CR (Construct Reliability) and VE (Variance Extracted) values have met the criteria, namely with a CR of 0.85 and VE of 0.65; where the minimum CR value is 0.70 and the minimum VE value is 0.50. The results obtained show that Variable X_1 has met both criteria. Based on these results, all X_1 indicators have met the requirements and criteria of the CFA and can be used for SEM analysis.

Table 2. Social Media Marketing (X_2)

X_2	SLF ³ 0.50	Error	CR ³ 0.70	VE ³ 0.50	Conclusion
X2.1	0.87	0.24	0.85	0.74	Good Validity
X2.2	0.85	0.28			Good Validity

(Sources: Data processing results in 2025)

Table 2. show the results of the CFA calculation for X_2 above show that the CR (Construct Reliability) and VE (Variance Extracted) values have met the criteria, namely with a CR of 0.85 and VE of 0.74; where the minimum CR value is 0.70 and the minimum VE value is 0.50. The results obtained show that Variable X_2 has met both criteria. Based on these results, all X_2 indicators have met the requirements and criteria of the CFA and can be used for SEM analysis.

Table 3. Perception (Y)

Y	SLF ³ 0.50	Error	CR ³ 0.70	VE ³ 0.50	Conclusion
Y.1	0.68	0.54	0.81	0.52	Good Validity
Y.2	0.74	0.45			Good Validity
Y.3	0.69	0.52			Good Validity
Y.4	0.76	0.42			Good Validity

(Sources: Data processing results in 2025)

Table 3. show the results of the CFA calculation for Y above show that the CR (Construct Reliability) and VE (Variance Extracted) values have met the criteria, namely with a CR of 0.81 and VE of 0.52; where the minimum value of CR is 0.70 and the minimum value of VE is 0.50. The results obtained show that Variable Y has met both criteria. Based on these results, all indicator Y has met the requirements and criteria of the CFA and can be used for SEM analysis.

Table 4. Voting Behavior (Z)

Z	SLF ³ 0.50	Error	CR ³ 0.70	VE ³ 0.50	Conclusion
Z.1	0.77	0.41	0.88	0.60	Good Validity
Z.2	0.79	0.38			Good Validity
Z.3	0.78	0.39			Good Validity
Z.4	0.79	0.38			Good Validity
Z.5	0.75	0.44			Good Validity

(Sources: Data processing results in 2025)

Table 4. show the results of the CFA calculation for Z above show that the CR (Construct Reliability) and VE (Variance Extracted) values have met the criteria, namely with a CR of 0.88 and VE of 0.60; where the minimum value of CR is 0.70 and the minimum value of VE is 0.50. The results obtained showed that Variable Z had met both criteria. Based on these results, all indicators Z have met the requirements and criteria of the CFA and can be used for SEM analysis.

3.3 Hypothesis Testing

After the overall test is carried out, the next step is to conduct individual tests, namely to see whether all hypothesized pathways have a good level of significance or not. To find out whether each path has a high level of significance or not is done by looking at the t-calculated value obtained. A path is said to be significant if the t-calculated value for that path is greater than 1.96. Figure 8 illustrates the T-Value diagram for each hypothesized path in the structural model, while Figure 9 presents the standardized solution values, highlighting the strength of the relationships among variables as estimated by the SEM analysis.

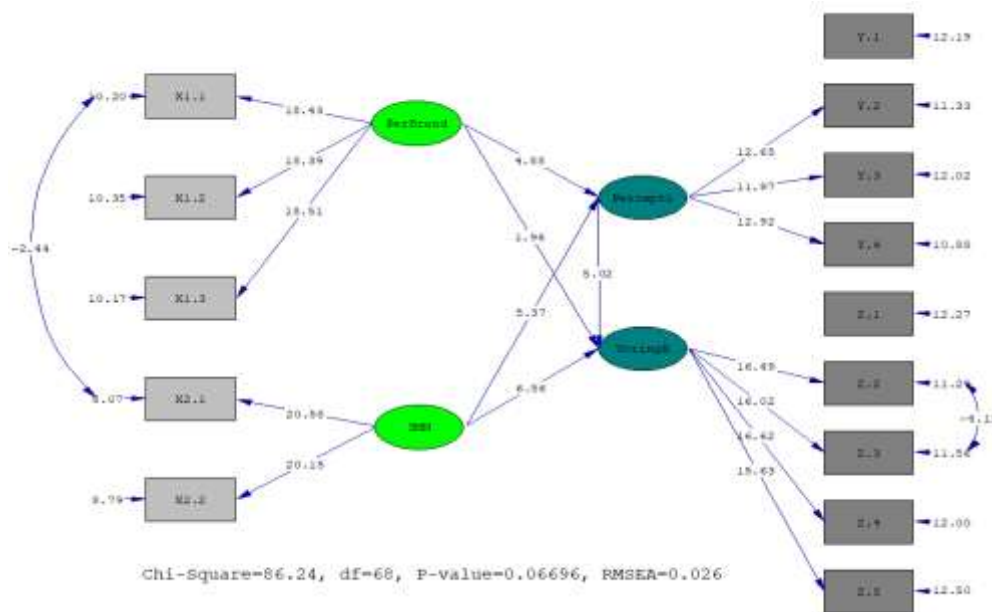


Figure 8. Graph T-Value (Sources: Data processing results in 2025)

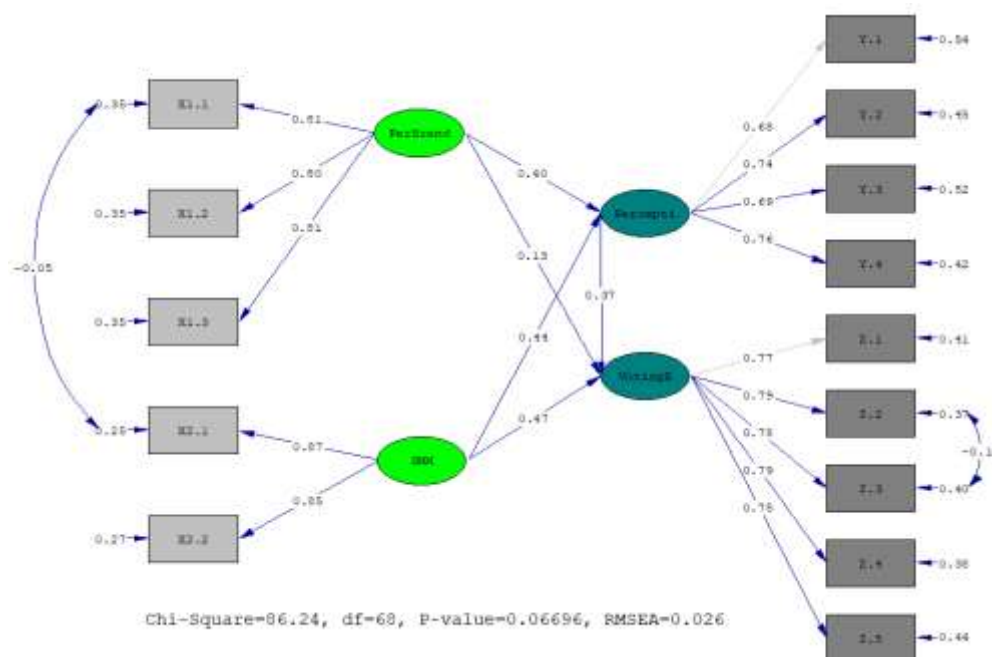


Figure 9. Grafik Standardized Solution (Sources: Data processing results in 2025)

A summary of the results of *T-values* and *Standardized Solution* in the *output results of LISREL 8.54* can be seen in the following table:

Table 5. Loading *Factor* and t-Value of Calculation Results

Variabel	Indicator	Loading Factor	T-Value	T-Table
PerBrand (X ₁)	X1.1	0.81	18.43	1,96
	X1.2	0.80	18.39	1,96
	X1.3	0.81	18.51	1,96
Social Media Marketing (X ₂)	X2.1	0.87	20.58	1,96
	X2.2	0.85	20.15	1,96
Perception (Y)	Y.1	0.68	---	---
	Y.2	0.74	12.65	1,96
	Y.3	0.69	11.97	1,96
	Y.4	0.76	12.92	1,96
Voting Behavior (Z)	Z.1	0.77	---	---
	Z.2	0.79	16.49	1,96
	Z.3	0.78	16.02	1,96
	Z.4	0.79	16.62	1,96
	Z.5	0.75	15.63	1,96

(Sources: Data processing results in 2025)

Using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), the relationships between the constructs were tested. Table 5 show the hypotheses outlined in the methodology were examined through path analysis, which helps determine the strength and significance of the direct and indirect relationships between the variables.

- Hypothesis 1 (H1), Personal Branding (PB) affects Perception (P)

The results showed a positive significant relationship (T-value = 4.88, $p < 0.05$) between Personal Branding and Perception. This indicates that candidates who effectively establish their personal brand can positively influence the perceptions of Generation Z voters.

- Hypothesis 2 (H2), Personal Branding (PB) affects Voting Behavior (VB)

The analysis revealed a positive but weak significant relationship (T-value = 1.96, $p < 0.05$) between Personal Branding and Voting Behavior. This suggests that while personal branding has an impact on voting decisions, other factors, such as candidate policy and party affiliation, may also play significant roles.

- Hypothesis 3 (H3), Social Media Marketing (SMM) affects Perception (P)

A strong positive relationship was found (T-value = 5.37, $p < 0.05$) between Social Media Marketing and Perception, supporting the idea that social media efforts can enhance the way candidates are perceived by Generation Z voters.

- Hypothesis 4 (H4), Social Media Marketing (SMM) affects Voting Behavior (VB)

A significant positive relationship (T-value = 6.56, $p < 0.05$) was confirmed between Social Media Marketing and Voting Behavior. This indicates that social media marketing plays a crucial role in influencing the voting decisions of younger voters, particularly in the digital age.

- Hypothesis 5 (H5), Perception (P) affects Voting Behavior (VB)

The results showed a strong positive relationship (T-value = 5.02, $p < 0.05$) between Perception and Voting Behavior. This suggests that how Generation Z perceives a candidate, shaped by personal branding and social media marketing, directly influences their likelihood to vote for that candidate.

3.4 Model Fit and Goodness-of-Fit Indices

The overall fit of the SEM model was assessed using multiple goodness-of-fit indices. The results indicated that the model fit the data well, table 6 show RMSEA (Root Mean Square Error of Approximation) = 0.026 (Good Fit), NFI (Normed Fit Index) = 0.99 (Good Fit), GFI (Goodness of Fit Index) = 0.97 (Good Fit)

Table 6. Test Compatibility on Several Criteria *Goodness of Fit Index*

<i>Goodness of Fit Index</i>	<i>Cut Off Value</i>	Research Results	<i>Conclusion</i>
Free degrees (DF)	Positif	68	Good Fit
RMSEA	≤ 0,05	0,026	Good Fit
Root Mean Square Residual (RMR)	≤ 0,05	0,012	Good Fit
Normed Fit Index (NFI)	≥ 0,90	0,99	Good Fit
Relative Fit Index (RFI)	≥ 0,90	0,99	Good Fit
Goodness Fit Index (GFI)	≥ 0,90	0,97	Good Fit

(Sources: Data processing results in 2025)

All of the above coefficients indicate the compatibility of the model with a good level of compatibility. Based on these coefficients, it is concluded that the model obtained has met the criteria for a good model.

3.5 Summary of Findings

The findings suggest that both Personal Branding and Social Media Marketing have significant effects on Perception and Voting Behavior among Generation Z. Figure 10 describe specifically, personal branding enhances the perception of candidates, which in turn influences their voting behavior, albeit to a lesser extent, social media marketing has a stronger effect on both perceptions and voting behavior, highlighting the importance of digital engagement strategies for political candidates, perception, influenced by personal branding and social media marketing, plays a pivotal role in motivating Generation Z to engage in the voting process. These results emphasize the critical role of personal branding and social media marketing in shaping political behavior, particularly for younger, digitally-savvy voters.

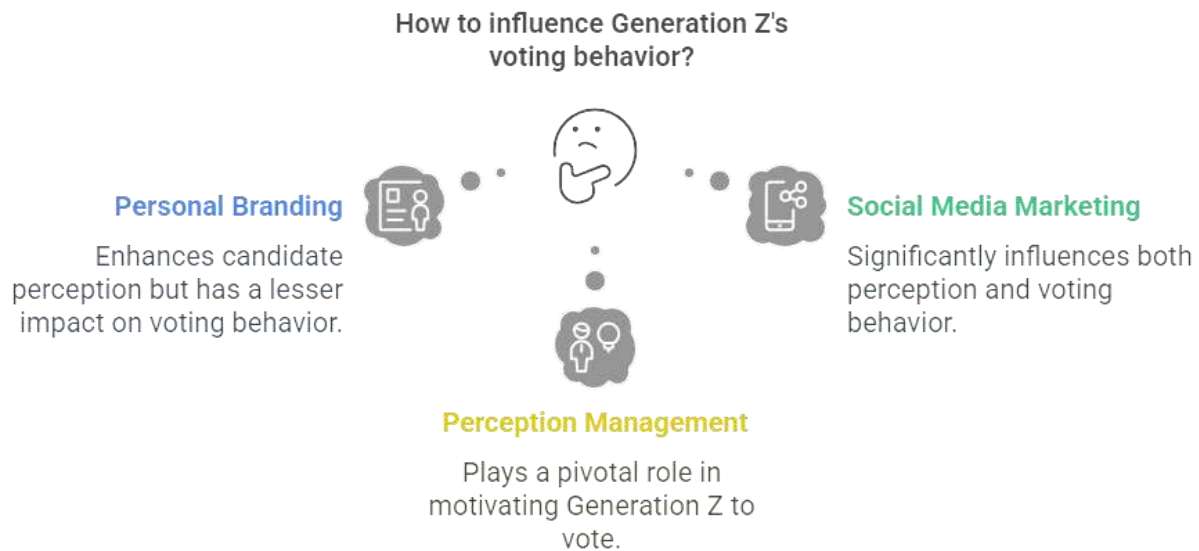


Figure 10. Summary of Findings (Neihouser & Dubois, 2024)

4. Discussion

The findings of this study provide crucial insights into the influence of personal branding and social media marketing (SMM) on the political behavior of Generation Z in Tangerang Raya, Indonesia. As the results indicate, both personal branding and social media marketing play pivotal roles in shaping how young voters perceive political candidates and ultimately decide how to vote. These findings align with broader trends observed in other democracies where younger generations, especially digital natives, are becoming increasingly engaged with political processes through digital platforms (Dommett & Power, 2024).

4.1 The Power of Personal Branding in Political Engagement

One of the key takeaways from the study is the significant impact of personal branding on the perception and voting behavior of Generation Z. Personal branding allows candidates to establish a distinct, relatable identity that resonates with younger voters, particularly when aligned with their values and aspirations (Setiawan & Nurmandi, 2020). The findings confirm that authenticity is a critical element of personal branding that plays a significant role in influencing Generation Z voters' preferences. Generation Z voters are more inclined to support candidates who appear genuine and authentic, as these attributes foster an emotional connection that enhances political engagement (Nkouaga, 2024). This connection is crucial because it helps candidates differentiate themselves from traditional party affiliations, offering a fresh approach that is often more appealing to younger, disillusioned voters. Furthermore, the study highlights the importance of direct communication and engagement through social media platforms. Generation Z is adept at using these platforms to engage in two-way communication with political figures. This ability to interact directly with candidates whether through live streams, comments, or responses to questions helps build trust and credibility (Dodeigne & Pilet, 2024). Candidates who actively engage with voters, share personal stories, and respond to concerns in real-time can strengthen their personal brand, fostering a sense of connection and involvement (Sajid et al., 2024).

However, personal branding also presents challenges. One of the concerns is the potential for candidates to be perceived as too polished or inauthentic, especially if their messaging is overly scripted or commercialized. In an age of heightened political polarization, voters may be skeptical of candidates who seem to prioritize image over substance. This highlights the delicate balance candidates must strike between crafting a relatable personal brand and maintaining authenticity. Over-emphasis on personal branding, without aligning with substantive political issues, can lead to voter disillusionment.

4.2 The Role of Social Media Marketing in Shaping Political Behavior

Social media's role in political participation cannot be overstated, particularly among Generation Z (Lamprou et al., 2025). The study's results indicate that social media marketing significantly influences voter perceptions and voting behavior, confirming that platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube are powerful tools for political engagement. As digital natives, Generation Z primarily consumes political content on social media, which not only informs but also mobilizes their political actions. The study found a strong correlation between the level of engagement on social media and an increased likelihood of voting, suggesting that social media acts as a mobilizing agent in the democratic process.

However, social media also has its pitfalls. The study identifies the risk of misinformation and polarization as significant challenges. While social media platforms offer unprecedented levels of engagement and interaction, they also contribute to the spread of misinformation and biased narratives. This can lead to superficial engagement, where political issues are reduced to oversimplified messages, soundbites, or memes rather than in-depth discussions. For example, the rapid spread of fake news can distort voter perceptions of candidates, leading to misguided voting decisions based on false or incomplete information (Balles et al., 2024). This underscores the importance of critical media literacy among young voters to help them navigate the complex political narratives online.

Another challenge highlighted in the findings is the transient nature of social media content. Unlike traditional political campaigns, where messages may have lasting impact through advertisements or speeches, social media posts have a short shelf life. This can lead to fluctuating support for candidates as public attention shifts rapidly. Additionally, the emotional and visual appeal of social media content can sometimes overshadow more important policy discussions. As social media marketing becomes more prevalent in political campaigns, candidates must be strategic in ensuring their messages are not only eye-catching but also substantively enriching to foster sustained support (Breyer, 2024).

4.3 Implications for Political Candidates

The study's results provide valuable implications for political candidates aiming to engage Generation Z voters. First, candidates must recognize that personal branding is a powerful tool for connecting with this demographic. However, it must be rooted in authenticity and genuine engagement. Generation Z voters are highly attuned to perceived inauthenticity and are more likely to reject candidates who fail to align their personal brand with their values and actions (Sinpeng, 2024).

Moreover, candidates should embrace social media marketing as an essential component of their electoral strategy. The findings suggest that candidates who successfully leverage social media platforms can enhance their visibility, foster engagement, and mobilize support among younger voters. However, they must be mindful of the potential pitfalls of social media, such as misinformation and the risk of oversimplified discourse. Candidates need to develop robust strategies for combating misinformation and promoting critical political discussions on social media. To compare findings with studies from Europe, the US, and Asia. For example, similar patterns of candidate-centered politics among Gen Z were found in Belgium (Dodeigne & Pilet, 2024) and Thailand (Sinpeng, 2024). This situates Indonesian Gen Z within a broader global context.

Finally, the study underscores the importance of maintaining consistency across all forms of engagement, both online and offline. A coherent message that aligns with a candidate's personal brand, political ideology, and public actions is essential in building and maintaining voter trust. Interactive social media campaigns that encourage active participation, such as live Q&A sessions, opinion polls, and direct responses to voter concerns, can further strengthen the connection between candidates and their potential voters (Sajid et al., 2024).

4.4 Limitations and Future Research

While the study provides important insights into the role of personal branding and social media marketing in shaping the political behavior of Generation Z, there are limitations that must be addressed in future research. The study focuses on a specific geographic region (Tangerang Raya, Indonesia), which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other areas or populations. Future research should expand the scope to include multiple regions or countries to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how personal branding and social media marketing affect youth voter behavior in different political and cultural contexts. suggestions for future research: (1) cross-cultural comparisons of Gen Z political engagement across Southeast Asia, and (2) longitudinal studies to track the evolving influence of social media marketing over multiple election cycles

Additionally, the study relied heavily on quantitative methods, which may not fully capture the nuances of voter engagement and the emotional factors influencing political behavior. Future studies could incorporate qualitative methods such as interviews or focus groups to explore the deeper motivations behind Generation Z's political decisions and to understand how personal branding and social media marketing intersect with other forms of political communication.

5. Conclusion

This study provides valuable insights into the impact of personal branding and social media marketing on the voting behavior of Generation Z in Tangerang Raya, Indonesia. The findings reveal that both personal branding and social media marketing significantly shape how young voters perceive candidates and influence their likelihood of participating in elections. Generation Z, as a digital-native demographic, is highly attuned to candidates who engage with them in authentic and relatable ways, particularly through social media platforms.

The research shows that personal branding, when aligned with authenticity and direct engagement, plays a crucial role in building trust and emotional connection between candidates and voters. It enhances voter perceptions, which in turn influences their voting behavior. Similarly, social media marketing is a potent tool for mobilizing younger voters, as it provides an accessible and engaging platform for political communication. The interactive nature of social media allows candidates to establish a direct connection with voters, making political engagement more personalized and impactful.

However, the study also highlights the challenges of social media, particularly the risks of misinformation, polarization, and superficial engagement. These challenges emphasize the need for candidates to navigate the complexities of the digital landscape carefully. To succeed, political candidates must maintain authenticity while strategically managing their personal brand and social media presence to resonate with younger voters.

This research contributes to the broader understanding of how digital tools and personal branding are reshaping political engagement in emerging democracies, offering implications for political campaigns targeting younger demographics. It also suggests areas for future research, particularly in exploring the cross-cultural application of these strategies and the long-term effects of digital political engagement on voter loyalty.

6. Implications

Based on the conclusions stated above, the following will outline the implications of research both theoretically and practically

6.1. Theoretical Implications

The findings of this study provide significant theoretical contributions to the fields of political communication, voter behavior, and digital media studies. First, the research expands political communication theories by introducing personal branding as a vital strategy for political engagement, particularly among younger voters. Traditionally, political communication has focused on party affiliation and ideological alignment; however, this study shows that personal branding, which emphasizes authenticity and relatability, is crucial in shaping voter perceptions and engagement. This aligns with emerging theories in candidate-centered politics, where voters are more drawn to individual candidates than to party loyalty, especially among younger, more digitally-connected populations.

Furthermore, the study advances digital voter behavior theories by demonstrating the profound impact of social media on political participation. It shows that Generation Z's political behavior is increasingly influenced by digital platforms, where they seek not only information but also opportunities for interaction and political expression. This contributes to Uses and Gratifications Theory, as it illustrates how social media offers young voters active engagement and gratification beyond passive consumption. The research also provides insights into social media's dual impact, supporting existing media effects theories while highlighting the complexities of digital engagement, such as misinformation and the oversimplification of political discourse.

Additionally, the study contributes to the literature on political marketing, reinforcing the growing importance of personal branding in political campaigns. It suggests that personal branding is not just a tool used in consumer goods marketing but is increasingly central in political marketing strategies, particularly in democracies with high social media engagement. By emphasizing the emotional connection between candidates and voters, the study extends current theories of voter mobilization, offering a fresh perspective on how branding, when coupled with social media engagement, can mobilize younger voters in ways that traditional party politics cannot.

6.2. Practical Implications

From a practical standpoint, this research offers valuable guidance for political candidates and campaigns aiming to engage Generation Z. Personal branding and social media marketing have emerged as essential tools for building trust and credibility with younger voters. Campaigns that prioritize authenticity and genuine engagement through social media are more likely to resonate with this demographic, who value transparency and relatability in their political representatives. Candidates should focus on presenting their personal stories, values, and experiences in a way that aligns with the concerns and interests of Generation Z, using social media as a platform for direct interaction and dialogue.

Additionally, the study highlights the importance of consistency across all platforms. Political candidates need to maintain a coherent message that aligns with their offline persona, as this helps strengthen voter trust and recognition. Social media offers an opportunity to engage with voters on a more personal level, but candidates must ensure that their online persona is consistent with their real-world actions and values. Given the visual nature of social media, candidates should also invest in creating visually appealing and emotionally resonant content to capture the attention of younger voters.

The study also underscores the risks associated with social media, particularly the spread of misinformation and the oversimplification of complex political issues. Political campaigns must take a proactive role in combating misinformation by ensuring that they provide accurate, fact-checked information and educate voters on how to critically evaluate political content online. Interactive and informative campaigns that encourage deeper political discussions, rather than reducing issues to soundbites, can help foster more substantive engagement.

Lastly, the study suggests that candidates should leverage influencers to amplify their message, as influencers have a strong impact on the perceptions of Generation Z. Collaborating with well-established influencers who align with the candidate's values can help broaden their reach and build credibility, especially in a digital environment where young voters are more likely to trust peer opinions over traditional advertising.

Political candidates must adapt to the digital-first world of Generation Z by crafting a strong personal brand and engaging voters through authentic, personalized social media content. While social media presents new opportunities for voter engagement, candidates must be strategic in navigating its complexities, ensuring that their messages are clear, consistent, and grounded in authenticity. By doing so, they can mobilize young voters effectively, fostering greater participation in the democratic process.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have influenced the work reported in this paper.

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