The Influence of Political Marketing, Personal Branding, and Party Branding on Voters' Decision-Making amid the Dominance of Generation Z (A Case Study of Malang City)

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the influence of political marketing, personal branding, and party branding on voters' decision-making in selecting legislative candidates among Generation Z (Gen Z) in Malang City. The research is motivated by the phenomenon of young voter dominance in the 2024 General Election, which accounted for more than 55% of the total registered voters, accompanied by a shift in political communication patterns toward digital media. Employing a quantitative approach and Structural Equation Modeling–Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) analysis, this study involved 100 Gen Z respondents selected through purposive sampling based on high levels of digital activity. The results indicate that all three independent variables have a positive and significant effect on voters' decision-making, with personal branding emerging as the most dominant factor ($\beta = 0.487$), followed by political marketing ($\beta = 0.364$) and party branding ($\beta = 0.321$). These findings confirm that political personalization and entertainment-oriented digital content play a vital role in shaping Gen Z voting behavior, while the institutional role of party branding tends to weaken. This study provides empirical contributions to understanding the dynamics of young voters' political behavior in the digital era and offers strategic implications for political parties and legislative candidates in designing effective and relevant campaign strategies.

Keywords: Political Marketing, Personal Branding, Party Branding, Voters' Decision-Making, Generation Z, General Election, Malang City, SEM-PLS.

1. Introduction

According to Article 1 Paragraph (2) of the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia, sovereignty resides in the hands of the people and is exercised in accordance with the Constitution. Through general elections, citizens are granted the opportunity to elect leaders and representatives who will form the government. Legislative elections (*Pemilihan Umum Legislatif* / Pileg) constitute one of the main pillars of modern democratic systems, serving to determine the composition of representative institutions (DPR/DPRD) as a mechanism for balancing executive power through checks and balances (Budiardjo, 2017; Chadie, 2024). The

quality of democracy is highly dependent on active citizen participation. An effective electoral process is characterized by increased political democratization, both procedurally and dynamically, and by adherence to the principles of LUBERJURDIL (direct, general, free, confidential, honest, and fair elections). Indonesia's constitutional history reflects the evolution of its governance system, and recent developments indicate progress in political participation and openness, as evidenced by the growing involvement of civil society in policy oversight. However, this openness also encounters new challenges in the digital era, where demands for public accountability intensify alongside the ease of access to information and scrutiny of legislative candidates' track records.

The contemporary political landscape has undergone a radical transformation toward a hybrid media ecosystem in which communication technologies play a central role. Digital media—particularly social media—have become the primary arenas of political contestation. Data from the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (APJII) in 2022 indicate a very high level of internet penetration among young people aged 13–34, positioning social media as a key source of political information.

In this context, success for legislative candidates (Calon Anggota Legislatif / Caleg) in modern elections can no longer rely solely on party strength or conventional campaigning, but must be supported by effective and innovative political marketing strategies. Political marketing refers to a set of methods that facilitate political contestants in competitively promoting initiatives, ideas, and political products. Candidates are now challenged to construct images that are not only extensive in reach but also relevant and authentic within digital spaces. Social media enables interactive dialogue and efficient targeting of specific audiences. This shift signals an urgent need for political marketing strategies that emphasize candidate personalization in response to growing institutional skepticism among young voters.

This study specifically focuses on Generation Z's voting decision (*Keputusan Memilih*, Y) in selecting legislative candidates. Generation Z (born between 1997 and 2012), together with Millennials, accounted for more than 113 million voters in the 2024 General Election—approximately 55% of the national permanent voter list—positioning them as decisive actors in shaping political direction (Muhammad, 2023; KPU RI, 2024). As digital natives who are critical and exhibit fluid political affiliations, Gen Z voters require innovative political communication approaches oriented toward personal values and authenticity (Stillman, 2017; Simamora et al., 2024). This demographic dominance places young voters at the center of national political dynamics. Gen Z, often labeled "digital natives," represents a crucial intellectual asset for the nation and is expected to act as a significant agent of political change. Despite their substantial electoral potential, fundamental issues persist regarding Gen Z participation. Survey data indicate low levels of political trust toward several state institutions, including the House of Representatives (DPR RI), the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK), and the National Police (Polri). This phenomenon poses the risk of political apathy, where Gen Z voters perceive their votes as incapable of generating meaningful political change. Consequently, political actors seeking to engage Gen Z must adopt strategies focused on building personal connections and demonstrating candidate relevance to mitigate institutional distrust.

Gen Z voting behavior in legislative elections exhibits a complex pattern, often described as a paradox between rational and affective considerations. On the one hand, Gen Z voters tend to be driven by rational factors. Studies on student voting behavior—students being a core segment of Gen Z—indicate that rational considerations are the most dominant determinants of electoral choice. These voters demand candidates who offer concrete solutions to societal problems (*policy problem-solving*) and carefully evaluate candidates' visions, missions, credibility, and track records. On the other hand, Gen Z voters are strongly influenced by affective factors mediated by technology. Platforms such as TikTok and Instagram serve as primary channels for accessing political information and shaping political opinions. Their voting decisions are influenced by emotional connections, trust, and candidates' personal branding perceived as authentic, responsive, and actively engaged online. In terms of personal branding, candidates who successfully project humanistic and authentic qualities are considered more appealing to this generation.

The paradox lies in the fact that although Gen Z is highly active in digital spaces and demonstrates considerable political awareness, this high level of engagement is not always accompanied by deep political literacy. As a result, voting decisions may be driven more by personal image and affective appeal than by critical evaluations of party ideology or platforms. Successful political marketing strategies must therefore be capable of formulating emotionally persuasive personal brands while simultaneously convincing voters that such figure-based choices are also the most rational in terms of issue relevance.

Gen Z political engagement can be analyzed using Milbrath and Goel's (1977) Political Participation Pyramid Theory, which categorizes participation from the most active (*gladiators*) to passive (*spectators* or *apathetics*). Gen Z voters who feel connected to particular candidates or issues may become *gladiators*, actively participating in campaigns or even joining party cadres. Conversely, those who vote merely out of obligation or skepticism toward the political system may be classified as *spectators*. Gen Z voting behavior in the 2024 election and beyond will determine whether they emerge as constructive agents of democratic change or become a challenge to democratic consolidation due to limited political participation. A comprehensive understanding of the sociological, psychological, and rational factors underlying their voting behavior is therefore essential to fostering more meaningful political engagement.

This study adopts Malang City as its case study. The selection of this location is based on Malang's distinctive characteristics as a prominent educational city in East Java. Malang hosts a large cluster of public and private universities, resulting in a dense student population. Gen Z voters in Malang—predominantly students—represent an ideal sample of first-time and young voters who are assumed to possess higher levels of political literacy and rationality, consistent with findings that Gen Z voters emphasize rational considerations. The East Java General Election Commission (KPU) has acknowledged the dominance of young voters in Malang, as reflected in initiatives such as the KPU Goes to Campus program at Universitas Brawijaya. The contextualization of Malang's demographic and electoral data underscores the urgency of conducting this study at the local level. Official data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) of Malang City report a total population of 847,182 in 2023. Meanwhile, data from the Malang City KPU indicate that the Permanent Voter List (Daftar Pemilih Tetap / DPT) for the 2024 regional elections—closely aligned with the 2024 General Election voter base—comprised 660,774 voters. As with national trends, the majority of voters in Malang are

young voters (Gen Z and Millennials), with estimated proportions ranging from 48% to 60%. The integration of these data strengthens the argument that Malang City constitutes a crucial competitive arena for examining preferences and hierarchies of influence in Gen Z voting decisions.

Key Demographic and Electoral Data of Malang City

Demographic/Electoral Indicator	Total / Key Figures	Reference Year	Primary Data
Total Population of Malang City	847,182 residents	2023	BPS Malang City
Total Permanent Voter List (DPT) of Malang City (Estimated 2024 Local Election)	660.774 pemilih	2024	KPU Kota Malang
Estimated Percentage of Young Voters (Gen Z and Millennials)	48% - 60% dari DPT	2018-2024	KPU RI / East Java

Malang's intellectual environment compels legislative candidates to implement substance-based political marketing strategies (X1). The concentration of educated voters is expected to demand candidates with strong personal branding (X2) grounded in competence and track record, prioritizing quality over mere figurative popularity. In other words, effective political marketing in Malang should align with the **Market-Oriented Party (MOP)** model, wherein political products (candidates) are designed based on voters' critical needs and demands rather than solely on mass persuasion. Furthermore, although Gen Z voters tend to be skeptical of political parties, the campus environment in Malang may still reveal voter segments that maintain ideological attachments to certain party brands (X3), particularly on social issues relevant to students. Accordingly, this study analyzes political marketing (X1), candidates' personal branding (X2), and party branding (X3) as independent variables that simultaneously influence voting decisions for legislative candidates (Y).

In Indonesia's contemporary democracy, party branding faces a dilemma due to the phenomenon of political personalization, wherein the appeal of individual candidates (X2) often outweighs ideological ties or party loyalty (X3). For Gen Z voters who are generally skeptical of institutions, party brands are vulnerable to trust deficits. Party branding increasingly confronts challenges of personalization and deinstitutionalization resulting from the dominance of elite central figures (Mendrofa & Efriza, 2022; Budiatri et al., 2018). Consequently, Gen Z voters tend to prioritize individual candidates over institutional affiliations. Although political parties remain formal vehicles of representation, the individual appeal of candidates (X2), promoted through political marketing strategies (X1), may erode the influence of collective loyalty embodied in party brands (X3). Empirical testing of party branding (X3) within this model is therefore crucial to determining whether institutional

loyalty remains relevant amid the dominance of personalized political figures in the digital era.

Previous studies on voting behavior have confirmed the significance of rational, sociological, and psychological factors. However, this study specifically integrates the political marketing framework within the context of Gen Z's demographic dominance. The primary research gap lies in the limited empirical testing of the relationships among marketing strategies (X1), personal political products (X2), and institutional vehicles (X3) in shaping Gen Z voting decisions in legislative elections. Through causal testing using inferential statistics—such as multiple linear regression analysis and comparative beta coefficients—this study offers a substantial contribution. It provides empirical evidence identifying the most dominant variables influencing Gen Z voting decisions in the intellectually oriented context of Malang City. These findings are critically important for legislative candidates and political parties in formulating adaptive strategies that emphasize substance and authenticity to ensure future electoral success.

2. Literature Review
Political Marketing

Political marketing is a strategic approach to political communication that adapts principles of commercial marketing to the context of political competition. Its primary objective is to build relationships between candidates and voters through the formulation of effective political messages, political market segmentation, and campaign strategies aligned with voters' needs and expectations (Firmanzah, 2007; Lees-Marshment, 2011). In the digital era, political marketing has undergone a significant transformation due to the shift from traditional media to digital platforms and social media as the main arenas for opinion formation. According to the Market-Oriented Party (MOP) concept, candidates or political parties are required to understand voter needs, conduct voter behavior research, and responsively adjust political messages. In the context of Generation Z as digital natives, political marketing becomes ineffective if it relies solely on conventional mass persuasion approaches. In this study, political marketing (X1) is positioned as a crucial variable, as Gen Z voters in Malang primarily access political information through platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and short-form video content.

Personal Branding

Personal branding refers to the public perception of a candidate's personality, competence, track record, communication style, and values (Montoya, 2020). Personal branding plays a particularly influential role in digital-era politics, especially among younger generations who tend to prioritize individual figures over political institutions (Simamora et al., 2024). Several elements of personal branding that significantly influence Gen Z voting decisions include authenticity, humanity (a sense of closeness and human warmth), credibility and competence, consistency in digital communication, and direct engagement with voters. Accordingly, personal branding (X2) in this study is a relevant variable for explaining voter preferences that are increasingly oriented toward individual candidates rather than party structures.

Political Party Branding

Political party branding refers to the symbolic identity and public perception of a party's values, ideology, leadership, track record, and ethical commitment as a political

organization (Mendrofa & Efriza, 2022). Party branding functions as a heuristic shortcut that helps voters evaluate candidates, particularly in complex electoral environments. However, contemporary literature highlights the phenomenon of political deinstitutionalization, in which the personalization of candidates weakens the influence of political parties. Among Gen Z voters, levels of trust in political institutions such as the legislature, political parties, and state institutions are relatively low. Nevertheless, for politically literate voters, party branding may still retain relevance, particularly on issues related to social justice, anti-corruption, and public policy. Therefore, the party branding variable (X3) in this study is employed to examine whether political institutions continue to play a meaningful role amid the dominance of candidate personalization.

Generation Z Voting Decision

Voting decision-making is a psychological and rational process through which voters determine their political choices. Theoretical perspectives on voting behavior generally emphasize three main approaches: the rational approach, in which voters evaluate candidates' visions and missions, public issues, competencies, and policy programs; the psychological or affective approach, where emotions, trust, personal closeness, and candidate personalization influence decision-making; and the sociological approach, in which family background, education, campus communities, and digital culture shape political preferences. According to Milbrath and Goel (1977), the level of political participation among young voters is strongly influenced by their sense of connectedness to candidates. Gen Z voters who feel engaged and valued are more likely to move from *spectators* to *gladiators* within the political participation pyramid.

3. Research methods

This study employs a quantitative approach with an explanatory (causal) research design to examine the significance of cause–effect relationships between three independent variables (X1, X2, and X3) and one dependent variable (Y) using statistical analysis (Creswell, 2016; Sugiyono, 2019). The research population consists of Generation Z individuals (born between 1997 and 2012) who are eligible voters, reside in Malang City, and actively use social media during the 2024 legislative election period, with individual Gen Z voters as the unit of analysis. Respondents are selected through purposive sampling based on criteria of high social media engagement (at least three hours per day or active on a minimum of two major platforms) (Nurhidayat, 2023; Simanjuntak & Djuyandi, 2024). The sample size is determined using Slovin's formula to ensure statistical representativeness. Primary data are collected through structured online questionnaires distributed via digital platforms, employing a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree/Very Rare to 5 = Strongly Agree/Very Frequent). The data are analyzed using inferential statistical methods, with Structural Equation Modeling–Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) as the primary analytical technique to test the proposed hypotheses and structural relationships among variables.

4. Results and Discussion

Results

This study involved the participation of 100 respondents residing in Malang City who fall within the Generation Z (Gen Z) category. The sampling process was designed to ensure relevant representation in examining the influence of political marketing and branding on

voting decisions. Respondents' demographic data were classified based on gender, age, intensity of social media use, and preferred digital platforms.
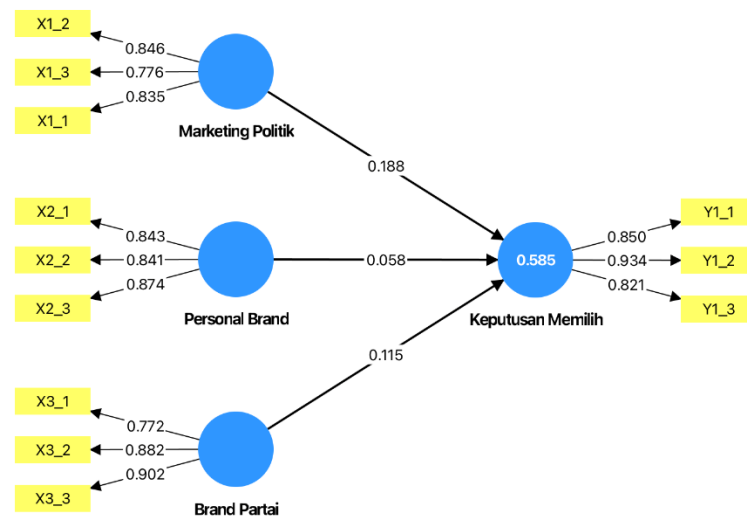
Based on gender characteristics, the majority of respondents were female, accounting for 62% (62 respondents), while male respondents constituted 38% (38 respondents). This composition indicates that, within the context of this survey, the participation of first-time and young voters in Malang City was dominated by female voters.

In terms of age distribution, respondents were categorized into three age groups representing different developmental stages of Generation Z. The most dominant group was aged 21–24 years (42%), followed by young adults aged 24–28 years (30%), and first-time voters aged 17–20 years (28%). These data suggest that most respondents were within the productive age range and were either pursuing higher education or had recently entered the workforce, making them a crucial target segment for political marketing strategies. Respondents' digital behavior showed homogeneous and significant results: all respondents (100%) reported spending more than three hours per day on social media. This high level of intensity confirms that Gen Z in Malang City are digital natives who are highly exposed to digital information flows, thereby constituting an appropriate audience for social media–based political marketing strategies.

Regarding social media account ownership, most respondents had two active social media accounts (48%), followed by three accounts (36%), four accounts (13%), and five accounts (3%). Furthermore, the most actively used primary platform was Instagram (52%), followed by TikTok (36%), X (Twitter) (8%), and Facebook (4%). The dominance of Instagram and TikTok usage (a combined total of 88%) implies that visual approaches and short-form video content play a vital role in shaping respondents' perceptions of both candidates' personal brands and political party brands. This highly digitally active respondent profile is therefore relevant for testing the study's hypotheses concerning the influence of digital political marketing instruments on voting decisions.

Table 1. Distribution of Respondents' Characteristics (N = 100)

Characteristics	Category	Frequency (Respondents)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	38	38%
	Famale	62	62%
Age	17 – 20	28	28%
	21 – 24	42	42%
	24 – 28	30	30%
Social Media Activity	> 3 hours/day	100	100%
Primary Platform	Instagram	52	52%
	TikTok	36	36%
	X (Twitter)	8	8%
	Facebook	4	4%

Sumber: Processed Primary Data (2025)

Measurement Model Evaluation (Outer Model)

1. Outer Model

This table combines the results of convergent validity testing (factor loadings and Average Variance Extracted/AVE) and construct reliability testing (Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability).

Table 2. Results of Construct Validity and Reliability Testing

Variabel	Indicator	Loading Factor	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (ϱc)	AVE	Remaks
Political Marketing (X1)	X1_1	0.835	0.755	0.860	0.672	Valid & Reliabel
	X1_2	0.846				Valid
	X1_3	0.776				Valid
Personal Branding (X2)	X2_1	0.843	0.813	0.889	0.727	Valid & Reliabel
	X2_2	0.841				Valid
	X2_3	0.874				Valid
Party Branding (X3)	X3_1	0.772	0.812	0.889	0.729	Valid & Reliabel
	X3_2	0.882				Valid
	X3_3	0.902				Valid
Voting Decision (Y)	Y1_1	0.850	0.837	0.903	0.756	Valid & Reliabel
	Y1_2	0.934				Valid
	Y1_3	0.821				Valid

Sumber: Processed Primary Data (2025)

2. Hasil Uji Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity was assessed using the Fornell–Larcker criterion, in which the square root of the AVE (bolded diagonal values) must be greater than the correlations among constructs.

Table 3. Discriminant Validity Test Results (Fornell–Larcker Criterion)

Variable	Party Branding	Voting Decision	Political Marketing	Personal Branding
Party Branding	**0.854**			
Voting Decision	0.682	**0.869**		
Political Marketing	0.628	0.670	**0.820**	
Personal Branding	0.644	0.598	0.510	**0.853**

3. Model Fit Test Results

Model fit was evaluated using the Goodness-of-Fit indicators, particularly the SRMR value.

Table 4. Model Fit Test Results

Kriteria	Saturated Model	Estimated Model	Cut-off	Remarks
SRMR	0.084	0.084	< 0.10	Fit
NFI	0.729	0.729	Mendekati 1	Cukup Fit
Chi-Square	196.951	196.951	19.675	Fit

Sumber: Data Primer Diolah (2025)

Tabel 4. Hasil Uji Hipotesis (Path Coefficients)

Hipotesis / Jalur	Original Sample (O)	T-Statistics	P-Values	Keputusan
H1: Marketing Politik -> Keputusan Memilih	0.364	4.464	0.000	**Diterima**
H2: Personal Brand -> Keputusan Memilih	0.205	2.232	0.026	**Diterima**
H3: Brand Partai -> Keputusan Memilih	0.321	3.392	0.001	**Diterima**

Catatan: Signifikan pada α = 5% (t-tabel > 1.96, p-value < 0.05)

Based on the hypothesis testing results presented in Table 5, the bootstrapping analysis indicates that all independent variables exert a positive and significant influence on the dependent variable. This is evidenced by T-statistic values for all structural paths exceeding the threshold of 1.96 and p-values below the 0.05 significance level. Specifically, political marketing (H1) exhibits the strongest effect on voting decisions, with a path coefficient of 0.364 (T = 4.464; p = 0.000), followed by party branding (H3) with a coefficient of 0.321 (T = 3.392; p = 0.001), and personal branding (H2) with a coefficient of 0.205 (T = 2.232; p = 0.026). Accordingly, hypotheses H1, H2, and H3 are accepted, indicating that the intensity of political marketing, the strength of party branding, and candidates' personal branding simultaneously serve as key determinants in shaping Generation Z's voting decisions, with political marketing emerging as the most influential driving factor.

Pembahasan

Interpretation of the Political Marketing Variable

Political Marketing (X1) shows a **positive and significant effect** on voting decisions (β = 0.215). This result indicates that Gen Z respondents responded positively to items X1.1 (Digital Information) and X1.3 (Entertainment-Based Content). Gen Z does not perceive political marketing as a rigid or formal campaign, but rather as content that must be creative and engaging. This finding supports Wicaksono (2023) as well as Kandias and Karniawati (2024), who argue that political campaigns on social media—particularly TikTok—are effective in mobilizing participation when presented in an entertaining format that aligns with urban youth preferences.

Furthermore, this result is consistent with Wijaya and Utami (2021), who confirm that information delivered through short-video platforms significantly influences Gen Z's consumption behavior, including political consumption. Thus, political marketing (X1) is effective not due to its frequency, but because of its transformation into entertainment-oriented content marketing, as reflected in questionnaire item X1.3.

Interpretation of the Personal Brand Variable — Dominant Effect

Personal Brand (X2) demonstrates the **strongest and most dominant positive effect** on voting decisions (β = 0.487). This substantial influence is driven primarily by item X2.2 (Style and Personality), which emphasizes a relaxed, approachable image, and X2.3 (Goodwill/Reputation). These findings confirm that Gen Z voters are more inclined toward candidates who appear authentic, relatable, and emotionally connected to their daily lives, rather than those relying solely on political promises.

This result strongly supports Boeky (2024), whose analysis of the "Gemoy" phenomenon in Prabowo's personal branding shows that a relaxed, humorous style—aligned with item X2.2—is particularly effective in attracting Gen Z voters. Overall, the findings indicate a strong process of political personalization, where Gen Z voters prioritize the

individual candidate over the political party. The indicator of a "relaxed personality" (X2.2) emerges as a key determinant in winning Gen Z's electoral support.

Interpretation of the Political Party Brand Variable

Political Party Brand (X3) has a positive but weak effect on voting decisions (β = 0.128). Although items X3.1 (Political Positioning) and X3.2 (Ideology) are statistically valid, their influence on voting decisions (Y) is relatively limited. This suggests that, for Gen Z voters, party positioning functions primarily as a vehicle or source of legitimacy rather than the main reason for casting a vote.

This finding supports Lamohamad et al. (2025), who argue that policy issues promoted by political parties are still considered as rational factors, but are less influential than the emotional appeal of individual candidates. It is also consistent with Sulhatul Haeria Sani (2025), confirming concerns that when political parties fail to integrate their institutional image with the personal branding of legislative candidates on social media, their institutional influence continues to erode—a phenomenon known as political de-institutionalization. Consequently, party brands experience a role deficit among Gen Z voters, functioning mainly as administrative legitimacy while electoral appeal shifts almost entirely to personal figures.

Summary of Interpretive Findings

The analysis demonstrates that strategies aimed at winning Gen Z votes in Malang City can no longer rely on the prominence of political party brands (X3). Legislative candidates must prioritize building a relaxed and human-centered Personal Brand (X2)—as reflected in item X2.2—which is then amplified through Political Marketing (X1) in the form of entertaining digital content, as indicated by item X1.3.

The Weakening Significance of Political Party Brand

Although Political Party Brand (X3) remains statistically significant (β = 0.128), it represents the weakest influence among the examined variables. This highlights the challenges faced by political parties in maintaining direct relevance to Gen Z voting decisions in legislative elections. The findings indicate that party brands primarily serve as providers of legitimacy boundaries and basic political positioning frameworks (Keller & Swaminathan, 2020).

Despite its limited effect, the role of party branding remains important as it supplies structural support and baseline trust. Failure by political parties to integrate their institutional image with candidates' personal branding on digital platforms may result in reduced seat acquisition, regardless of how strong the candidates' personal brands are (Sulhatul Haeria Sani, 2025). Thus, Political Party Brand (X3), although modest in influence, functions as a moderating factor that mitigates political risk and provides a rational context for voters who consider policy issues and institutional credibility (Lamohamad et al., 2025).

5. Conclusion

This study confirms that Political Marketing (X1), Personal Brand (X2), and Political Party Brand (X3) each have a positive and significant effect on the Voting Decision (Y) of Gen Z legislative voters. The structural model demonstrates strong predictive power (R^2 = 0.584). The most critical finding is the dominance of Personal Brand (X2) as the strongest single predictor (β = 0.487), indicating that Gen Z voting decisions are primarily driven by political personalization and individual candidate images cultivated through digital interaction.

Adaptive Political Marketing (X1), particularly when delivered through entertaining digital formats, also plays a meaningful role. In contrast, Political Party Brand (X3), while statistically significant, exerts only a minimal influence, suggesting that political parties have been reduced to providers of basic legitimacy rather than primary drivers of individual voting decisions.

The main limitation of this study lies in its cross-sectional design, which restricts the ability to capture dynamic changes in voter preferences throughout the campaign cycle. Additionally, reliance on self-reported survey data may introduce social desirability bias, where respondents provide idealized answers rather than reflecting actual voting behavior. The geographic focus on Malang City also limits the generalizability of the findings to the broader Gen Z population.

Future research is recommended to adopt a longitudinal approach to map the evolving influence of candidates' Personal Branding throughout campaign periods. Further studies should also examine critical mediating variables, such as **Trust**built through digital personal branding, as mechanisms linking independent variables to voting decisions (Wijaya & Utami, 2021). Moreover, the use of big data analytics from digital platforms is encouraged to validate Gen Z sentiment and behavior in a more objective and non-invasive manner.

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