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VOTER BEHAVIOR, BRANDING, AND VOTING DECISIONS IN A SINGLE-CANDIDATE ELECTION: EVIDENCE FROM THE 2024 PANGKALPINANG MAYORAL ELECTION

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Abstract

The 2024 Pangkalpinang Mayoral Election, which featured a single candidate pair, created an electoral context with limited voter choice, making candidate branding and political communication critical strategic factors. This study analyzes the relationships among voter behavior, candidate branding, and voting decisions and evaluates the role of branding in shaping electoral choices. Data were collected from 399 registered voters across seven subdistricts using stratified random sampling and analyzed using multiple linear regression and path analysis. Voter behavior significantly influenced branding (F = 46.154), and voter behavior and branding jointly and significantly influenced voting decisions (F = 69.316). At the partial level, political factors (t = 6.288), institutional factors (t = 3.643), and socio-economic factors (t = 5.151) had significant positive effects on branding, whereas social factors (t = 1.384) and demographic factors (t = 1.780) did not. Voter behavior (t = 3.497) and branding (t = 4.535) also had significant positive effects on voting decisions. Voter behavior explains 36.2% of the variation in branding, while voter behavior and branding together explain 40.2% of the variation in voting decisions. Path analysis reveals that voter behavior influences voting decisions both directly (B = 0.118; p = 0.001) and indirectly through branding (indirect effect = 0.03564; Sobel Z = 2.169; p = 0.030), indicating that branding partially mediates the relationship between voter behavior and voting decisions. Unlike in competitive elections, branding in a single-candidate race serves as a crucial mechanism for building trust, public acceptance, and electoral support. These findings indicate that electoral support depends more on a candidate's ability to construct a credible and relevant value proposition than on the differentiation strategies commonly found in competitive elections. This study contributes to political branding theory by demonstrating that, under conditions of limited electoral choice, branding serves primarily as a mechanism for building public acceptance and electoral support, and it enriches the voter behavior and political marketing literature by highlighting the greater influence of political, institutional, and socio-economic factors on branding relative to social and demographic factors.

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1. Introduction

Local leadership elections are political markets in which candidates compete as brands to influence voter preferences (Yusuf, 2025). Political branding shapes voters' perceptions by forming a candidate's identity, conduct, communication, and performance (Risberg & Varga, 2024). Strategic brand management, anchored in research and integrated marketing, is crucial for building awareness, associations, and loyalty (Noor, 2023). This strategy strengthens political brands in the digital campaign era, in which authentic messaging and the ethical use of data build trust and engagement (Lees-Marshment et al., 2019).

From a political marketing perspective, voter behavior refers to the patterns of voter response, evaluation, and action toward political stimuli that are influenced by social, demographic, political, institutional, and socio-economic factors during the electoral decision-making process. As political consumers, voters process information by seeking, evaluating, and interpreting various marketing stimuli; factors such as message quality, the suitability of communication channels, and the level of engagement determine perceptions of a candidate's brand and the subsequent conversion of those perceptions into voting decisions (Ahmad, 2013). Integrated marketing communication influences voter behavior and electoral decisions positively or negatively depending on the appropriateness of the segmentation, messaging, and campaign channels employed (Gunarto & Hurriyati, 2020). Branding serves as a mediating mechanism that can either reinforce or weaken voting decisions by shaping voters' perceptions of, associations with, and trust in the candidate (Abbas et al., 2021).

Various studies have confirmed that candidate branding is a strategic instrument for shaping perceptions, trust, and voting intentions. Candidates who project a brand personality characterized by authenticity, charisma, ethics, and commitment to the public interest tend to receive more positive evaluations from voters, thereby enhancing their acceptance (Sumerta et al., 2024). In digital communication, elements such as interaction, emotion, and storytelling boost engagement and foster a sense of closeness between voters and candidates, ultimately strengthening the effectiveness of political branding (Utami & Fathana, 2024). These findings are particularly relevant to elections featuring a single candidate, in which the limited range of alternatives makes a candidate's ability to build trust, gain public acceptance, and convey a distinctive value proposition through branding a crucial factor in voting decisions.

The political marketing literature indicates that research on voting behavior generally focuses on competitive elections, using perspectives such as market orientation, political branding, political communication, and consumer behavior as analytical frameworks (Kocaman & Coşgun, 2024; Lees-Marshment et al., 2019). In Indonesia, most studies similarly emphasize competition between candidates and the factors influencing voter preferences in competitive electoral environments (Abbas et al., 2021; Gunarto & Hurriyati, 2020). Meanwhile, recent

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systematic reviews highlight that research on political marketing in elections with limited choices or a single candidate remains scarce and warrants further attention (Kocaman & Coşgun, 2024).

Although previous studies have successfully explained the roles of political branding, political communication, and voter behavior in competitive elections, how these relationships operate in single-candidate elections remains unclear. Existing studies assume that branding functions as a mechanism for differentiating candidates in competitive political markets. Consequently, understanding of whether voter behavior, branding, and voting decisions interact differently when voters are presented with only one candidate and an alternative in the form of an empty box remains limited. This study addresses this gap by examining the relationships among voter behavior, candidate branding, and voting decisions in a single-candidate election, thereby extending the political branding literature beyond the context of electoral competition.

In political marketing, candidates are positioned as political products promoted to foster relationships, trust, and alignment with voter aspirations, with voters acting as the key agents in determining electoral outcomes (Dawood et al., 2026). Various candidate attributes play a crucial role in shaping political branding and voter evaluations. Empirical evidence indicates that a candidate's personal characteristics and appearance can influence voter perceptions and assessments (Sari et al., 2024). These findings suggest that the success of political marketing is determined not only by the communication of political programs and messages but also by the candidate's ability to cultivate a brand and build trust that resonates with voter expectations (Vargas-Merino et al., 2025).

Recent studies show that candidate branding mediates the effects of social media marketing and religiosity on voting intention in the 2024 presidential election and positively affects voting decisions (Guntia et al., 2024). Candidate branding has also been identified as a key factor shaping voting intention by mediating the effects of information integrity and media dynamics (Ekaputri et al., 2025). Furthermore, branding acts as a bridge between political marketing and voting intention (Abbas et al., 2021).

Unlike competitive elections, single-candidate elections operate in a political marketplace with limited choices; consequently, voter preference formation hinges not on comparing candidates but on the level of acceptance of the available candidate. In this context, political branding serves not merely as a tool for differentiation but also as a mechanism for establishing legitimacy, trust, and value in the eyes of the electorate. Candidates must therefore create value through issue mastery, a clear value proposition, evidence of performance, and the design of a political experience capable of mitigating skepticism and enhancing public acceptance of the political brand.

These conditions indicate that applying branding concepts to single-candidate elections requires a different emphasis than in competitive elections, as branding success is determined more by the ability to foster voter acceptance than by outperforming political rivals. Accordingly, this study examines the influence of voter behavior on candidate branding and the implications of both for voting decisions in the 2024 Pangkalpinang Mayoral Election.

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2. Literature Review

2.1. Voter Behavior

From a political marketing perspective, voter behavior is defined as the pattern of voter responses, evaluations, and actions regarding political stimuli that influence preferences and electoral decisions. Voter behavior reflects not only the final choice made at the ballot box but also the process of perception formation, which is shaped by social, demographic, political, institutional, and socio-economic factors. From a marketing management perspective, voters are viewed as political consumers who actively seek, evaluate, and interpret political information, including campaign messages, candidate attributes, and communication channels, albeit in a context distinct from commercial consumer behavior (Lees-Marshment et al., 2019). Consequently, voter behavior is a crucial construct for explaining how voter characteristics and evaluations contribute to the formation of candidate branding and voting decisions (Mohanachandran & Govindarajo, 2020).

Research in the *Journal of Political Marketing* shows that voting is shaped by social, demographic, political, channel, and economic factors, which are often analyzed using segmentation–targeting–positioning (STP), branding, and integrated communication frameworks (Kocaman & Coşgun, 2024).

In the digital realm, studies on political marketing via social media demonstrate that engagement and participation can be enhanced through social interaction on digital platforms (Simons, 2020). Consequently, integrated marketing communication strategies should be community-oriented and tailored to platform-specific characteristics in order to convert attention into action (Abid et al., 2025; Naidu et al., 2023). These findings indicate that voter responses to political messages are not random but are shaped by various characteristics and conditions that influence voter behavior. Consistent with this, Antono et al. (2021) explained that voter participation and behavior are dynamic and shaped by a range of factors that contribute to the formation of political perceptions and decisions.

In this study, voter behavior is represented by social, demographic, political, institutional, and socio-economic factors that shape perceptions of candidates and electoral decisions. Social factors, such as education and group membership, can enhance political literacy and the perceived legitimacy of information through the influence of reference groups (Kocaman & Coşgun, 2024). Demographic factors, including age, gender, and education, influence preferences for communication channels and responses to political messages, thereby serving as a crucial basis for voter segmentation (Parihar & Mahavidhyalya, 2024; Wilf & Mishra, 2025). However, in single-candidate elections, the influence of social and demographic factors tends to diminish because voters are not presented with alternative candidates that would allow preference differentiation based on the characteristics of specific groups or segments (Bukari et al., 2023).

Political, institutional, and socio-economic factors are expected to exert a stronger influence on candidate branding. Within the political marketing framework, candidate quality, the issues championed, reputation, and communication effectiveness directly shape voter perceptions of the candidate (Sophocleous et al., 2024). Furthermore, the accessibility of

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communication channels and the quality of election management bodies influence information reach, engagement, and voter participation (Abid et al., 2025). Socio-economic factors, particularly income levels and the social conditions of the community, also determine the reception of political messages and the relevance of the value propositions offered by candidates (Parihar & Mahavidhyalya, 2024; Sophocleous et al., 2024). Therefore, in single-candidate elections, political, institutional, and socio-economic factors are expected to play a more dominant role in shaping candidate branding than social and demographic factors.

Campaign strategists should develop STP strategies grounded in these five factors and integrate cross-channel marketing communication tailored to key segments and communities. This cohesive approach enables measurable improvements in political brand perception and voter participation through effective message design, appropriate channel selection, and stronger engagement mechanisms (Abid et al., 2025; Kocaman & Coşgun, 2024).

2.2. Candidate Branding

In political marketing, candidate branding is understood as a holistic perception encompassing associations, trust, and perceived quality shaped by a candidate's identity, behavior, communication, and performance record (Farhan et al., 2020). When managed through market research, political product development, and integrated marketing communication, such branding builds political brand equity in voters' minds (Lees-Marshment et al., 2019).

The political marketing literature indicates that candidate branding is constructed through a combination of personal attributes, emotional connections with voters, performance credibility, and the value offered to the public (Clementson et al., 2021). Various studies have identified value propositions, emotional associations, integrity-based competence, and performance track records as key dimensions shaping political brand associations and voter preferences (Naidu et al., 2023; Parihar & Mahavidhyalya, 2024; Sophocleous et al., 2024). These dimensions reflect how voters evaluate candidate qualities, establish emotional bonds, and assess a candidate's capacity and credibility to perform leadership functions.

This perspective aligns with research on candidates as brands, which views branding as the integration of market research, political identity, communication, and voter experience rather than merely a visual representation of the candidate (Lees-Marshment et al., 2019; Nwanganga et al., 2017). Consequently, value propositions, emotional elements, storytelling, candidate personality, and testimonials must be crafted consistently to reinforce brand meaning and drive voting intentions. Emotions, interactive experiences, and accessible narratives have been shown to enhance voter engagement with and affinity for the candidate, thereby strengthening the effectiveness of political branding (Abid et al., 2025; Naidu et al., 2023; Parihar & Mahavidhyalya, 2024).

Based on this theoretical framework, this study operationalizes candidate branding through five indicators: unique characteristics, behavior, speech, personality, and intelligence. The selection of these indicators is based on Arifany et al. (2024), who emphasize that voters' perceptions of a candidate are largely shaped by personal attributes that voters can directly observe. Unique characteristics represent the value proposition that distinguishes the

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candidate from other political figures, whereas the candidate's behavior, speech, and personality reflect emotional associations and integrity-based competence formed through political interactions and public communication. Meanwhile, intelligence reflects voters' perceptions of the candidate's capacity, competence, and performance credibility in governing.

In regional elections featuring a single candidate, these indicators become increasingly relevant because voters lack alternative candidates for direct comparison. Consequently, voters' evaluations of the candidate's personal characteristics and qualities become the primary basis for shaping public perception, trust, and acceptance. Candidate branding thus serves not only as a tool for political differentiation but also as a mechanism that translates voters' assessments of candidate attributes into actual voting decisions.

2.3. Voting Decision

Voting decisions can be understood through theories of political consumer behavior. Rational actor theory posits that voters evaluate the material, symbolic, and socio-political costs and benefits before making political choices. Meanwhile, social identity theory emphasizes that identity alignment between voters and candidates can strengthen preferences, affiliations, and voting intentions, similar to the mechanism of brand identification in marketing (Lees-Marshment et al., 2019). Thus, the decision to vote is determined not only by rational considerations of expected benefits but also by social identity factors that foster a psychological bond between voters and candidates (Jaráiz et al., 2024).

The political marketing literature indicates that a marketing mix comprising the political product, promotion, place, and socio-psychological costs influences voters' evaluations, intentions, and decisions, particularly when these strategies align with the characteristics of the target segment (Sophocleous et al., 2024). In the digital realm, integrated marketing communication (IMC), which combines consistent messaging, appropriate channels, and meaningful engagement, has been shown to enhance participation and influence voter preferences throughout the political decision-making journey (Abid et al., 2025; Naidu et al., 2023).

Although voting occurs in a different context from commercial purchasing decisions, a marketing perspective remains relevant for explaining how voters evaluate candidates, receive political messages, and form electoral preferences. Peng and Hackley (2009) emphasized that voting behavior is influenced by civic norms, political identity, and collective consequences that are not fully present in commercial markets. Nevertheless, voters still undergo information search, evaluation of alternatives, perception formation, and decision-making similar to consumer behavior; consequently, frameworks such as STP, branding, and integrated marketing communication remain relevant for explaining the formation of voting decisions (Kocaman & Coşgun, 2024; Lees-Marshment et al., 2019).

Based on this theoretical perspective, this study adopts the voting decision indicators developed by Syafhendry (2016): norms, ideology, interests, ethnicity, socio-political rewards, and economic rewards. Norms and ideology represent voters' value orientations and political identities, whereas interests, socio-political rewards, and economic rewards reflect

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rational considerations of the benefits expected from a chosen political option. Ethnicity is positioned as an aspect of social identity that can influence psychological closeness and political affiliation, particularly in contexts of strong social and cultural interaction. These six indicators were selected because they represent the theoretical underpinnings of the political decision-making process (Lees-Marshment et al., 2019; Syafhendry, 2016).

2.4. Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses

Public figures or influencers, community support, and earned media play a role in enhancing candidate credibility and mitigating voters' perceived risk, thereby strengthening the link between candidate branding and voting decisions (Abid et al., 2025; Naidu et al., 2023). Based on the theoretical review above, this study develops a conceptual model that positions voter behavior as a construct comprising social, demographic, political, institutional, and socio-economic factors that influence candidate branding and voting decisions (Dias et al., 2019), with candidate branding as a mediating variable that bridges the influence of voter behavior on voting decisions.

Political marketing theory explains that voter behavior is shaped by social, demographic, political, institutional, and socio-economic factors. Political branding theory further positions branding as a mechanism that translates political information into perceptions of the candidate's unique characteristics, behavior, speech, personality, and intelligence. Meanwhile, voting decisions are influenced by norms, ideology, interests, ethnicity, socio-political incentives, and economic incentives. Therefore, voter behavior is expected to influence candidate branding and voting decisions, while candidate branding is expected to influence voting decisions and mediate the relationship between voter behavior and voting decisions. Accordingly, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: *Voter behavior factors influence candidate branding.*

H2: *Social factors influence candidate branding.*

H3: *Demographic factors influence candidate branding.*

H4: *Political factors influence candidate branding.*

H5: *Institutional factors influence candidate branding.*

H6: *Socio-economic factors influence candidate branding.*

H7: *Voter behavior factors influence voting decisions.*

H8: *Candidate branding influences voting decisions.*

H9: *Candidate branding mediates the effect of voter behavior on voting decisions.*

The research model developed by modifying the theoretical perspectives of Kocaman and Coşgun (2024), Parihar and Mahavidhyalya (2024), Sophocleous et al. (2024), Abid et al. (2025), Arifany et al. (2024), Lees-Marshment et al. (2019), and Syafhendry (2016) is presented in Figure 1.

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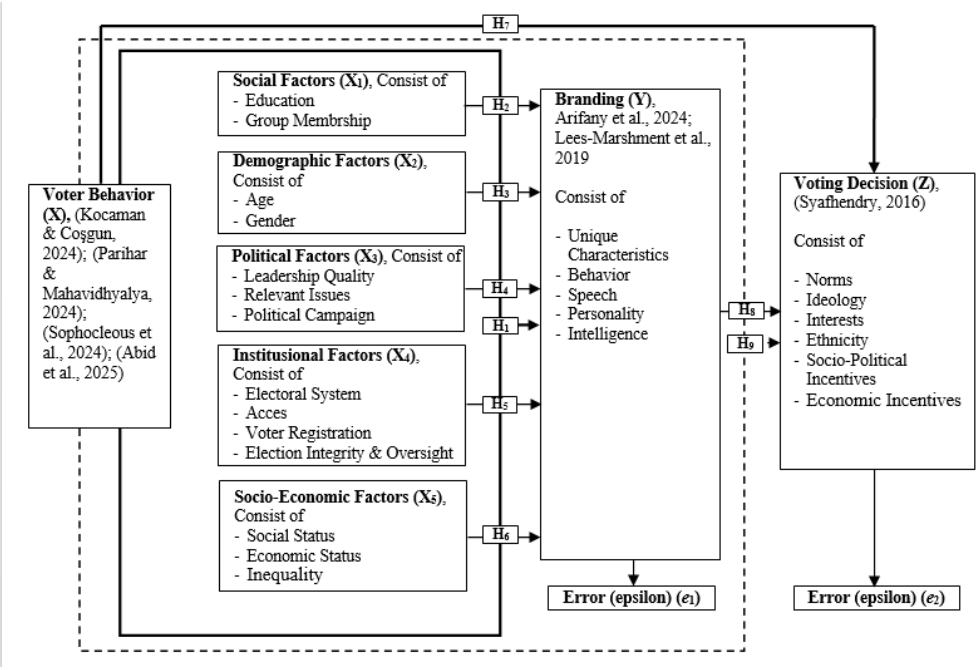


Figure 1. Research Model
Source: Developed by the authors (2025)

3. Research Methods

3.1. Research Design

This study employs a quantitative approach with an explanatory design to test a theoretical model of the relationships among voter behavior, candidate branding, and voting decisions. Using multiple linear regression and path analysis, the study examines the direct and indirect effects among variables to test the hypotheses derived from the literature review.

3.2. Population, Sample, and Sampling Technique

The study population comprises eligible voters in Pangkalpinang City, totaling 164,330 registered voters distributed across seven subdistricts, as stipulated in Decree No. 314 of 2024 of the Pangkalpinang City General Election Commission concerning the Permanent Voter List for the 2024 re-run mayoral and deputy mayoral election.

The sample size was calculated using Slovin's formula with a 5% margin of error:

$$n = N / (1 + N \cdot e^2) = 164{,}330 / (1 + 164{,}330 \times 0.05^2) \approx 399 \quad (1)$$

Data were collected using stratified random sampling, in which the population was first divided into smaller, more homogeneous groups (strata), namely subdistricts, and samples were then drawn randomly from each stratum. The sample size for each subdistrict was determined proportionally using the sampling fraction (Abubakar, 2021):

$$n_i = (N_i / N) \times n \quad (2)$$

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where n_i is the sample size of subdistrict i, N_i is the population of subdistrict i, N is the total population, and n is the total sample size. The resulting distribution of the 399 respondents is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Population and Sample

Subdistrict	Villages	Population (N_i)	Sample (n_i)
Bukit Intan (N_1)	7	30,097	73
Taman Sari (N_2)	5	14,580	35
Pangkalbalam (N_3)	5	15,906	39
Rangkui (N_4)	8	27,298	66
Gerunggang (N_5)	6	36,281	89
Gabek (N_6)	6	25,990	63
Girimaya (N_7)	5	14,178	34
Total	**42**	**164,330**	**399**

Source: Processed data (2025).

3.3. Operational Definitions of Variables

The operational definitions of voter behavior, candidate branding, and voting decisions are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Operational Definitions of Variables

Variable	Sub-variable	Dimension	Indicator	Scale
Voter Behavior (X)	Social factors (X_1)	Education	Importance of education	Ordinal
		Group membership	Participation in social groups	
	Demographic factors (X_2)	Age	Significance of age	Ordinal
		Gender	Gender differences	
	Political factors (X_3)	Leadership quality	Perceived leadership performance	Ordinal
		Relevant issues	Political issues during the election	
		Political campaign	Implementation of political campaigns	
	Institutional factors (X_4)	Electoral system	Type of electoral system applied	Ordinal
		Access	Accessibility of voting facilities	
		Voter registration	Voter registration system	
		Election integrity and oversight	Public trust in electoral integrity and fairness	

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Variable	Sub-variable	Dimension	Indicator	Scale
	Socio-economic factors (X_5)	Social status	Importance of individual social status	Ordinal
		Economic status	Importance of individual economic status	
		Inequality	Impact of economic inequality and social gaps	
Branding (Y)		Unique characteristics	Distinct candidate attributes	Ordinal
		Behavior	Candidate behavior	
		Speech	Remarks and communication style	
		Personality	Appeal of candidate personality	
		Intelligence	Candidate intelligence	
Voting Decision (Z)		Norms	Norm similarity	Ordinal
		Ideology	Ideological congruence	
		Interests	Alignment of interests	
		Ethnicity	Ethnic similarity	
		Socio-political incentives	Socio-political benefits	
		Economic incentives	Economic benefits	

Source: Processed data (2025).

3.4. Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using validity and reliability tests, classical assumption tests (normality, heteroskedasticity, and multicollinearity), multiple linear regression, F-tests, t-tests, the coefficient of determination, and path analysis with the Sobel test to examine mediation. The model consists of the following sub-structures:

$$Y = \alpha + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \beta_4 X_4 + \beta_5 X_5 + e_1 \quad (3)$$

$$Z = \alpha + \beta_{XZ} X + e_2 \quad (4)$$

$$Z = \alpha + \beta_{YZ} Y + e_2 \quad (5)$$

$$Z = \alpha + \beta_{XZ} X + \beta_{YZ} Y + e_2 \quad (6)$$

where X denotes voter behavior; X_1 social factors; X_2 demographic factors; X_3 political factors; X_4 institutional factors; X_5 socio-economic factors; Y branding; Z voting decision; α the constant; β the regression coefficients; and e_1 and e_2 the error terms. Equations (3)–(6) correspond to Sub-structures 1–4, respectively.

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4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Validity and Reliability Tests

The validity test measures the validity of the questionnaire items. An item is considered valid if its Pearson correlation (r_{count}) exceeds r_{table}, which is 0.098 for this sample. As shown in Table 3, all r_{count} values exceed r_{table}; thus, all research instrument items are valid.

Table 3. Validity Test Results

Variable	Item	r_{count}	Result
Social factors (X_1)	Item 1	0.913	Valid
	Item 2	0.869	Valid
Demographic factors (X_2)	Item 3	0.854	Valid
	Item 4	0.849	Valid
Political factors (X_3)	Item 5	0.784	Valid
	Item 6	0.742	Valid
	Item 7	0.757	Valid
	Item 8	0.740	Valid
Institutional factors (X_4)	Item 9	0.768	Valid
	Item 10	0.777	Valid
	Item 11	0.742	Valid
	Item 12	0.645	Valid
Socio-economic factors (X_5)	Item 13	0.806	Valid
	Item 14	0.877	Valid
	Item 15	0.845	Valid
Branding (Y)	Item 1	0.723	Valid
	Item 2	0.723	Valid
	Item 3	0.793	Valid
	Item 4	0.755	Valid
	Item 5	0.654	Valid
	Item 6	0.703	Valid
Voting decision (Z)	Item 1	0.646	Valid
	Item 2	0.665	Valid
	Item 3	0.516	Valid
	Item 4	0.759	Valid
	Item 5	0.572	Valid

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Variable	Item	r_{count}	Result
	Item 6	0.532	Valid

Note: $r_{table} = 0.098$.
Source: Processed data (2025).

As shown in Table 4, all variables have Cronbach's alpha coefficients above 0.600. Therefore, the questionnaire items measuring each variable are reliable.

Table 4. Reliability Test Results

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Result
Social factors (X_1)	0.736	Reliable
Demographic factors (X_2)	0.621	Reliable
Political factors (X_3)	0.749	Reliable
Institutional factors (X_4)	0.710	Reliable
Socio-economic factors (X_5)	0.796	Reliable
Branding (Y)	0.819	Reliable
Voting decision (Z)	0.668	Reliable

Source: Processed data (2025).

4.2. Classical Assumption Tests

4.2.1. Normality Test

For Sub-structure 1 (branding), the histogram shows a normal distribution pattern, and the points on the normal P–P plot are spread around and follow the direction of the diagonal line (Figure 2).

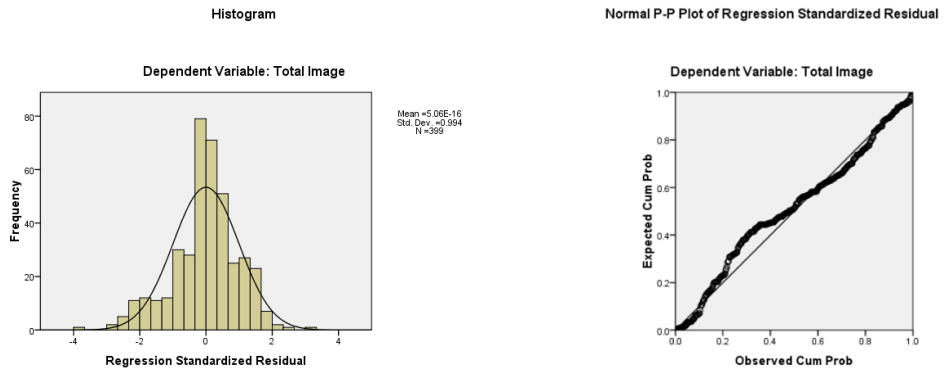


Figure 2. Normality Test Results for Sub-structure 1
Source: Processed data (2025)

These two graphs indicate that the regression model meets the normality assumption. Similarly, the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test in Table 5 yields a significance value greater than 0.05 (0.490 > 0.05), indicating that the residuals are normally distributed.

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Table 5. Kolmogorov–Smirnov Test for Sub-structure 1

Statistic		Unstandardized Residual
N		399
Normal parameters[a]	Mean	.0000000
	Std. deviation	3.17477858
Most extreme differences	Absolute	.158
	Positive	.158
	Negative	−.158
Kolmogorov–Smirnov Z		.208
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)		.490

a. Test distribution is normal.
Source: Processed data (2025).

For Sub-structure 2 (voting decision), the histogram likewise shows a normal distribution pattern, and the points on the normal P–P plot are spread around and follow the direction of the diagonal line (Figure 3).

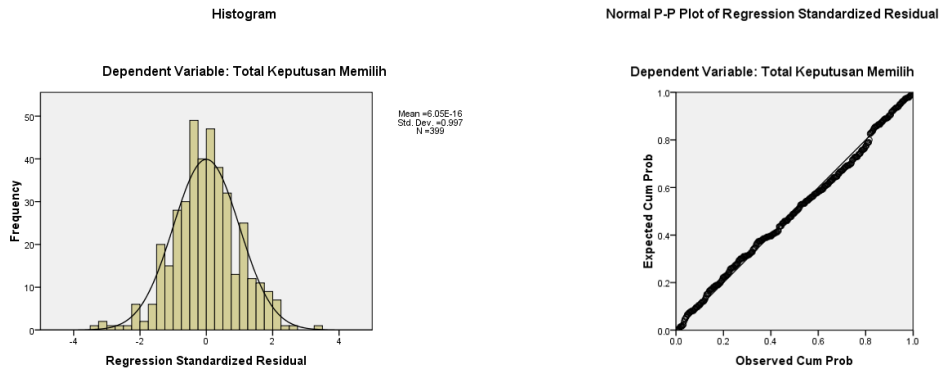


Figure 3. Normality Test Results for Sub-structure 2
Source: Processed data (2025)

These two graphs indicate that the regression model meets the normality assumption. The Kolmogorov–Smirnov test in Table 6 also yields a significance value greater than 0.05 (0.564 > 0.05), indicating that the residuals are normally distributed.

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Table 6. Kolmogorov–Smirnov Test for Sub-structure 2

Statistic		Unstandardized Residual
N		399
Normal parameters[a]	Mean	.0000000
	Std. deviation	4.20259955
Most extreme differences	Absolute	.039
	Positive	.039
	Negative	−.030
Kolmogorov–Smirnov Z		.788
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)		.564

a. Test distribution is normal.
Source: Processed data (2025).

4.2.2. Heteroskedasticity Test

The scatterplot for Sub-structure 1 (branding) shows points scattered randomly above and below zero on the y-axis without a clear pattern (Figure 4). Thus, there is no heteroskedasticity in the regression model.

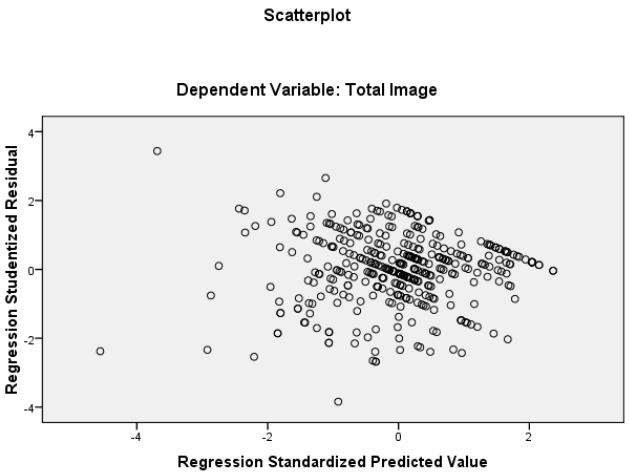


Figure 4. Heteroskedasticity Test Results for Sub-structure 1
Source: Processed data (2025)

Similarly, the scatterplot for Sub-structure 2 (voting decision) shows data points distributed randomly above and below zero on the y-axis without any discernible pattern (Figure 5). Thus, there is no heteroskedasticity in the regression model.

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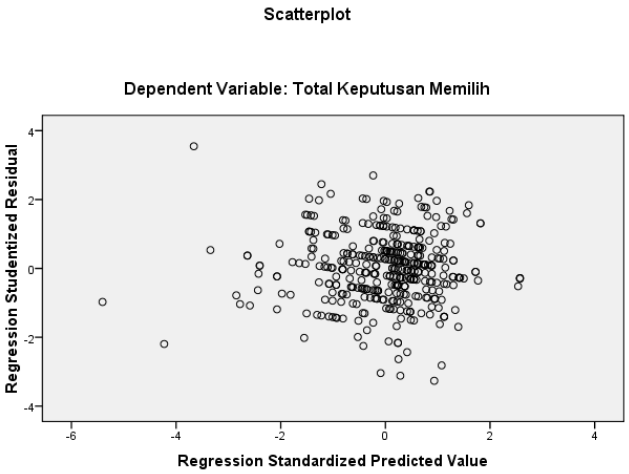


Figure 5. Heteroskedasticity Test Results for Sub-structure 2
Source: Processed data (2025)

4.2.3. Multicollinearity Test

For Sub-structure 1 (branding), all tolerance values exceed 0.10 and all VIF values are below 10 (Table 7); therefore, there is no multicollinearity among the independent variables in the regression model.

Table 7. Multicollinearity Test for Sub-structure 1

Variable	Tolerance	VIF
Social factors	0.689	1.452
Demographic factors	0.679	1.473
Political factors	0.559	1.789
Institutional factors	0.562	1.780
Socio-economic factors	0.867	1.153

Note: Dependent variable = branding.
Source: Processed data (2025).

For Sub-structure 2 (voting decision), the tolerance values likewise exceed 0.10 and the VIF values are below 10 (Table 8); therefore, there is no multicollinearity among the independent variables in the regression model.

Table 8. Multicollinearity Test for Sub-structure 2

Variable	Tolerance	VIF
Voter behavior	0.768	1.301
Branding	0.786	1.301

Note: Dependent variable = voting decision.
Source: Processed data (2025).

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4.3. Multiple Linear Regression Analysis

The results of the regression analysis of the effect of voter behavior on candidate branding are reported in Table 9.

Table 9. Regression Results of Voter Behavior (X) on Branding (Y)

Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta
(Constant)	9.173	1.293	
Social factors	0.131	0.094	0.067
Demographic factors	0.165	0.095	0.035
Political factors	0.501	0.080	0.337
Institutional factors	0.284	0.078	0.195
Socio-economic factors	0.316	0.061	0.221
Voter behavior	0.270	0.071	0.106

Note: Dependent variable = branding.
Source: Processed data (2025).

The constant (α) is 9.173, and the regression coefficients are $\beta_1 = 0.131$, $\beta_2 = 0.165$, $\beta_3 = 0.501$, $\beta_4 = 0.284$, and $\beta_5 = 0.316$. The multiple linear regression equation for Sub-structure 1 is therefore as follows:

$$Y = 9.173 + 0.131X_1 + 0.165X_2 + 0.501X_3 + 0.284X_4 + 0.316X_5 + e_1 \quad (7)$$

The equation can be interpreted as follows:

1. The constant (α) of 9.173 indicates that if all voter behavior factors are zero, the baseline value of candidate branding is 9.173.
2. The social factor coefficient ($\beta_1 = 0.131$) indicates that a one-unit increase in the social factor increases candidate branding by 0.131 units, assuming the other variables remain constant.
3. The demographic factor coefficient ($\beta_2 = 0.165$) indicates that a one-unit increase in the demographic factor increases candidate branding by 0.165 units.
4. The political factor coefficient ($\beta_3 = 0.501$) is the highest among the independent variables, indicating that political factors exert the strongest influence on the formation of candidate branding. In other words, candidate quality, political issues, reputation, vision, work programs, and the effectiveness of political communication are the primary determinants of voter perceptions of the candidate.
5. The institutional factor coefficient ($\beta_4 = 0.284$) indicates that the more positive voters' perceptions of access to information, the quality of election administration, and the credibility of political institutions, the stronger the resulting candidate branding.
6. The socio-economic factor coefficient ($\beta_5 = 0.316$) indicates that the socio-economic conditions of the community influence the formation of candidate branding: the more

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relevant a candidate's programs are to the community's economic and social needs, the more positive voters' perceptions of the candidate become.

The regression results for the effects of voter behavior and branding on voting decisions are presented in Table 10.

Table 10. Regression Results of Voter Behavior (X) and Branding (Y) on Voting Decisions (Z)

Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta
(Constant)	11.493	1.756	
Voter behavior	0.118	0.034	0.196
Branding	0.132	0.050	0.295

Note: Dependent variable = voting decisions.
Source: Processed data (2025).

The constant (α) is 11.493, with regression coefficients of 0.118 for voter behavior (β_{XZ}) and 0.132 for branding (β_{YZ}). Accordingly, the effects of voter behavior (Sub-structure 2) and candidate branding (Sub-structure 3) on voting decisions, and their joint effect (Sub-structure 4), are formulated as follows:

$$Z = 11.493 + 0.118X + e_2 \quad (8)$$

$$Z = 11.493 + 0.132Y + e_2 \quad (9)$$

$$Z = 11.493 + 0.118X + 0.132Y + e_2 \quad (10)$$

4.4. Hypothesis Testing

4.4.1. Simultaneous Test (F-Test)

The F-test was used to examine the simultaneous effect of the voter behavior variables, namely social, demographic, political, institutional, and socio-economic factors, on branding. The results are presented in Table 11.

Table 11. ANOVA Results of Voter Behavior (X) on Branding (Y)

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	2,355.574	5	471.115	46.154	0.000
Residual	4,011.529	394	10.207		
Total	6,367.103	398			

Note: Predictors: social, demographic, political, institutional, and socio-economic factors; dependent variable: branding.
Source: Processed data (2025).

As shown in Table 11, the F-test yields an F_{count} of 46.154, which exceeds the critical F_{table} value of 2.237 at the 0.05 significance level ($df_1 = 5$, $df_2 = 393$). Because $F_{count} > F_{table}$ (46.154 > 2.237) and the p-value is 0.000 (< 0.05), H_0 is rejected and H_1 is accepted. This indicates that the voter behavior variables, comprising social, demographic, political, institutional, and

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socio-economic factors, simultaneously have a positive and statistically significant effect on branding (Y).

Table 12. ANOVA Results of Voter Behavior (X) and Branding (Y) on Voting Decisions (Z)

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	330.727	2	165.363	69.316	0.000
Residual	7,029.414	394	17.751		
Total	7,360.140	398			

Note: Predictors: voter behavior and branding; dependent variable: voting decisions.
Source: Processed data (2025).

As shown in Table 12, the F-test yields an F_{count} of 69.316, which is higher than the critical value of 3.018 at the 0.05 significance level ($df_1 = 2$, $df_2 = 396$), with a p-value of 0.000 (< 0.05). Thus, H_0 is rejected, indicating that voter behavior (X) and candidate branding (Y) jointly have a positive and statistically significant effect on voting decisions (Z).

4.4.2. Partial Test (t-Test)

The partial test examines the effects of social (X_1), demographic (X_2), political (X_3), institutional (X_4), and socio-economic (X_5) factors on candidate branding (Y), as well as the effects of voter behavior (X) and candidate branding (Y) on voting decisions (Z) in the 2024 Pangkalpinang Mayoral Election. The results for candidate branding are presented in Table 13.

Table 13. Partial Test of X~1~–X~5~ on Candidate Branding (Y)

Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	9.173	1.293		7.096	0.000
Social factors	0.131	0.094	0.067	1.384	0.167
Demographic factors	0.165	0.095	0.035	1.780	0.157
Political factors	0.501	0.080	0.337	6.288	0.000
Institutional factors	0.284	0.078	0.195	3.643	0.000
Socio-economic factors	0.316	0.061	0.221	5.151	0.000
Voter behavior	0.270	0.071	0.106	3.534	0.000

Note: Dependent variable = branding.
Source: Processed data (2025).

As shown in Table 13, the t_{count} for social factors (X_1) is 1.384, which is lower than the critical value (t_{table} = 1.966), with a significance level of 0.167 (> 0.05). Therefore, H_2 is rejected, indicating that social factors have a positive but statistically insignificant effect on candidate branding (Y). Similarly, the t_{count} for demographic factors (X_2) is 1.780, which is also lower than t_{table} (1.966), with a significance level of 0.157 (> 0.05). Thus, H_3 is rejected, suggesting that demographic factors have a positive but insignificant effect on candidate branding (Y).

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Political factors (X_3) have a t_{count} of 6.288, exceeding the critical value (t_{table} = 1.966), with a significance level of 0.000 (< 0.05); accordingly, H_4 is accepted, demonstrating that political factors have a positive and significant effect on candidate branding (Y). Institutional factors (X_4) yield a t_{count} of 3.643 (> 1.966) with a significance level of 0.000 (< 0.05), indicating that H_5 is accepted and that institutional factors have a positive and significant effect on candidate branding (Y). Finally, socio-economic factors (X_5) show a t_{count} of 5.151 (> 1.966) and a significance level of 0.000 (< 0.05), supporting H_6 and confirming a positive and significant influence of socio-economic factors on candidate branding (Y).

The results of the partial t-test of the effects of voter behavior (X) and branding (Y) on voting decisions (Z) are presented in Table 14.

Table 14. Partial Test of Voter Behavior (X) and Branding (Y) on Voting Decisions (Z)

Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	11.493	1.756		6.547	0.000
Voter behavior	0.118	0.034	0.196	3.497	0.001
Branding	0.132	0.050	0.295	4.535	0.001

Note: Dependent variable = voting decisions.
Source: Processed data (2025).

As shown in Table 14, the t_{count} for voter behavior (X) is 3.497, exceeding the critical value (t_{table} = 1.966), with a significance level of 0.001 (< 0.05). Accordingly, H_7 is accepted, indicating that voter behavior (X) has a positive and significant effect on voting decisions (Z). Similarly, the t_{count} for branding (Y) is 4.535, which is also greater than t_{table} (1.966), with a significance level of 0.001 (< 0.05). Thus, H_8 is accepted, confirming that branding (Y) positively and significantly influences voting decisions.

4.4.3. Coefficient of Determination

The coefficient of determination (R^2) indicates the proportion of variance in the dependent variable explained by all independent variables in the regression model and is therefore useful for evaluating the model's explanatory power (Table 15).

Table 15. Coefficient of Determination of Voter Behavior (X) on Branding (Y)

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Std. Error	Durbin–Watson
1	0.608	0.370	0.362	3.195	1.586

Note: Predictors: social, demographic, political, institutional, and socio-economic factors; dependent variable: branding.
Source: Processed data (2025).

As shown in Table 15, the adjusted R^2 is 0.362, meaning that 36.2% of the variance in candidate branding (Y) is explained by the voter behavior variables (X), namely social (X_1), demographic (X_2), political (X_3), institutional (X_4), and socio-economic (X_5) factors. The remaining 63.8% is explained by factors beyond the scope of this study, potentially including

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levels of political trust, the intensity of media exposure, party identification, perceptions of incumbent performance, political party image, voters' political experience, and the influence of public opinion circulating in digital media. Such variables can shape how voters form perceptions, beliefs, and evaluations of candidates, thereby contributing to political branding.

Table 16. Coefficient of Determination of Voter Behavior (X) and Branding (Y) on Voting Decisions (Z)

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Std. Error	Durbin–Watson
1	0.712	0.449	0.402	4.213	1.641

Note: Predictors: voter behavior and branding; dependent variable: voting decisions.
Source: Processed data (2025).

As shown in Table 16, the adjusted R^2 of 0.402 indicates that voter behavior and candidate branding explain 40.2% of the variance in voting decisions (Z), while the remaining 59.8% is explained by factors beyond the scope of this study. Theoretically, voting decisions are influenced not only by voter behavior and candidate branding but also by political trust, party identification, exposure to political media, perceptions of incumbent performance, political loyalty, political emotions, ideological orientation, and the influence of social networks and communities. In a single-candidate election, these factors can affect the level of acceptance of the candidate as well as voters' inclination to choose the empty box as an alternative political option.

4.4.4. Sobel Test

The Sobel test was conducted to determine whether branding mediates the effect of voter behavior on voting decisions, using a = 0.270 (SE_a = 0.071) and b = 0.132 (SE_b = 0.050). The indirect effect and Sobel statistic were calculated as follows:

$$IE = a \times b = 0.270 \times 0.132 = 0.03564 \quad (11)$$

$$Z = ab / \sqrt{(b^2SE_a^2 + a^2SE_b^2)} = 0.03564 / \sqrt{(0.00008783 + 0.00018225)} = 0.03564 / 0.01643 = 2.169 \quad (12)$$

The Sobel Z-value of 2.169 exceeds the critical value of 1.960, and the p-value of 0.030 is below 0.05. Consequently, H_0 is rejected and the alternative hypothesis is accepted, indicating that branding mediates the influence of voter behavior on voting decisions in the 2024 Pangkalpinang Mayoral Election. The results of the hypothesis tests are summarized in Tables 17 and 18.

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Table 17. Direct Effect Test Results

Hypothesis	F_{count}	F_{table}	t_{count}	t_{table}	B	Sig.	Decision
H1: Voter behavior → Branding	46.154	2.237	–	–	0.481	0.000	Accepted
H2: Social factors → Branding	–	–	1.384	1.966	0.131	0.167	Rejected
H3: Demographic factors → Branding	–	–	1.780	1.966	0.165	0.157	Rejected
H4: Political factors → Branding	–	–	6.288	1.966	0.501	0.000	Accepted
H5: Institutional factors → Branding	–	–	3.643	1.966	0.284	0.000	Accepted
H6: Socio-economic factors → Branding	–	–	5.151	1.966	0.316	0.000	Accepted
H7: Voter behavior → Voting decision	–	–	3.497	1.966	0.118	0.001	Accepted
H8: Branding → Voting decision	–	–	4.535	1.966	0.132	0.001	Accepted

Note: Significance level α = 0.05.
Source: Processed data (2025).

Table 18. Mediation Test Results

Hypothesis	Indirect Effect	Sobel Z	p-Value	Decision
H9: Voter behavior → Branding → Voting decision	0.03564	2.169	0.030	Accepted

Source: Processed data (2025).

4.5. Discussion

4.5.1. The Effect of Voter Behavior on Candidate Branding

The F-test results confirm a significant effect of voter behavior (X) on candidate branding (Y), as indicated by an F_{count} of 46.154, which exceeds the critical value of 2.237, and a significance level of 0.000 (< 0.05); thus, H_1 is accepted. These findings are consistent with Kocaman and Coşgun (2024) and Abid et al. (2025), who indicate that information seeking, interaction with political messages, and engagement in political communication contribute to the formation of awareness of, associations with, and trust in a candidate. However, these results diverge from the portion of the political marketing literature that positions social and demographic factors as the primary determinants of voter segmentation; in this study, political, institutional, and socio-economic factors emerged as the most influential elements of candidate branding. The findings demonstrate that voter preferences are shaped not only by candidate characteristics but also by how voters evaluate political issues, institutional quality, and the benefits offered by the candidate.

This discrepancy can be attributed to the context of the 2024 Pangkalpinang Mayoral Election, which featured only a single candidate pair. Under these circumstances, voters did not compare candidates as in competitive elections but instead evaluated the suitability and acceptability of the available candidate or opted for the empty box as a form of political expression. Consequently, branding functioned more as a mechanism for building trust and

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perceived legitimacy than as a tool for political differentiation (Otjes et al., 2020). Theoretically, these findings expand the political branding literature by demonstrating that, in political markets with limited choices, branding effectiveness is determined more by a candidate's ability to construct a credible and relevant value proposition than by the social and demographic segmentation strategies commonly employed in competitive elections (Lees-Marshment et al., 2019; Sophocleous et al., 2024).

4.5.2. The Effect of Social Factors on Candidate Branding

The t-test results indicate that social factors (X_1) do not significantly influence candidate branding (Y), as shown by a t_{count} of 1.384 ($< t_{table} = 1.966$) and a significance level of 0.167 (> 0.05); thus, H_2 is rejected. These findings differ from those of Kocaman and Coşgun (2024), who demonstrated that family networks, social groups, and communities can reinforce political perceptions through recommendations and the influence of reference groups. Similarly, Abid et al. (2025) found that digital community interactions through sharing, commenting, and content creation contribute to the formation of political trust and engagement. This study did not confirm such an influence, indicating that social factors are not the primary determinants of candidate branding in the context examined.

This discrepancy can be attributed to the specific characteristics of the 2024 Pangkalpinang Mayoral Election, which featured only a single candidate pair. Under these circumstances, the influence of reference groups tends to diminish because voters are not presented with alternative candidates to compare through their social networks. The presence of the empty box option also shifts voters' focus away from social recommendations toward a more substantive evaluation of the candidate's suitability and proposed programs. Theoretically, these findings suggest that, in single-candidate elections, the effectiveness of political branding does not necessarily rely on the social influence and reference group mechanisms described in the political marketing literature but is instead driven by factors that directly shape perceptions of the candidate's credibility, quality, and relevance to voters.

4.5.3. The Effect of Demographic Factors on Candidate Branding

The t-test results show that demographic factors (X_2) do not significantly influence candidate branding (Y), as indicated by a t_{count} of 1.780, which is less than the t_{table} value of 1.966, and a significance level of 0.157 (> 0.05); thus, H_3 is rejected. These findings are consistent with Kocaman and Coşgun (2024), who state that demographic variables serve more to explain variations in voter perceptions and behaviors than to directly shape political branding. However, they differ from Parihar and Mahavidhyalya (2024), who found that demographic characteristics, particularly age, influence responses to political messages and preferences for communication channels. This discrepancy indicates that the influence of demographic factors on branding is contextual and not necessarily a primary determinant in every political contest.

In the 2024 Pangkalpinang Mayoral Election, which featured only a single candidate pair, demographic characteristics such as age and gender appeared to play a lesser role in shaping perceptions of the candidate, as voters had no alternative candidates for comparison. Instead, voters focused more on candidate quality, political issues, and the benefits offered than on traditional segmentation characteristics. These findings reinforce the argument that, in single-

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candidate elections, the effectiveness of political branding is determined more by the relevance of the value proposition and candidate credibility than by the alignment of messages with specific demographic segments. Theoretically, these results expand the political marketing literature by demonstrating that the role of demographic segmentation may diminish in political markets with limited choices, while substantive candidate-related factors become more dominant in shaping political branding (Lees-Marshment et al., 2019; Sophocleous et al., 2024).

4.5.4. The Effect of Political Factors on Candidate Branding

The t-test results demonstrate that political factors (X_3) have a positive and significant effect on candidate branding (Y), as indicated by a t_{count} of 6.288, which exceeds the critical value (t_{table} = 1.966), and a significance level of 0.000 (< 0.05); accordingly, H_4 is accepted. These findings are consistent with Sophocleous et al. (2024), who indicate that candidate quality, policy clarity, message consistency, and political communication effectiveness are key determinants of voter perceptions of candidates. The results also align with Lees-Marshment et al. (2019), who emphasize that political branding is built not merely through visual identity but through the integration of strategy, voter research, communication, and evidence of performance. However, these findings reveal a stronger influence of political factors than is typically reported in political marketing studies, which often position social and demographic segmentation as the primary basis for shaping candidate branding.

In the 2024 Pangkalpinang Mayoral Election, which featured only a single candidate pair, political issues, governance quality, leadership track records, and program relevance became the primary bases for voter evaluation, given the absence of alternative candidates. This situation made branding more dependent on the candidate's ability to establish credibility and trust through substantive issues, such as the cost of living, public services, and governance, than on political differentiation between candidates. Furthermore, the empty box option prompted voters to evaluate the quality of the available candidate more critically. Theoretically, these findings expand the political branding literature by demonstrating that, in single-candidate elections, political factors serve not only as an instrument of differentiation but also as a source of perceived legitimacy that determines public acceptance of the candidate. In a political market with limited choices, branding success is thus determined more by the credibility of the issues and the political value propositions offered than by competition between candidates (Lees-Marshment et al., 2019; Sophocleous et al., 2024).

4.5.5. The Effect of Institutional Factors on Candidate Branding

The t-test results indicate that institutional factors (X_4) have a positive and significant effect on candidate branding (Y), as shown by a t_{count} of 3.643, which exceeds the critical value (t_{table} = 1.966), and a significance level of 0.000 (< 0.05); therefore, H_5 is accepted. These findings are consistent with Abid et al. (2025), who state that perceptions of the transparency, accessibility, and fairness of the electoral process contribute to public trust in candidates. The results also align with Naidu et al. (2023), who demonstrate that the accessibility of communication channels and digital community engagement can reinforce voters' perceptions and political preferences. However, unlike political marketing studies that

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emphasize candidate characteristics as the primary source of branding, this study indicates that the quality of democratic institutions and processes is also a crucial factor in shaping candidate branding.

In the 2024 Pangkalpinang Mayoral Election, institutional factors played a more strategic role, as voters evaluated not only the candidate but also the credibility of the electoral process itself. The empty box option made transparency, access to information, and procedural fairness key elements influencing public acceptance of the candidate. When election management bodies are perceived as credible, candidates tend to become associated with the integrity and legitimacy of the democratic process. Theoretically, these findings expand the political branding literature by demonstrating that, in single-candidate elections, branding is shaped not only by candidate attributes and communication strategies but also by the quality of the institutional environment that fosters public trust. Institutional factors thus serve as a source of legitimacy that reinforces branding effectiveness in a political marketplace characterized by limited choices (Abid et al., 2025; Lees-Marshment et al., 2019).

4.5.6. The Effect of Socio-economic Factors on Candidate Branding

The t-test results indicate that socio-economic factors (X_5) have a positive and significant effect on candidate branding (Y), as evidenced by a t_{count} of 5.151, which exceeds the critical value (t_{table} = 1.966), and a significance level of 0.000 (< 0.05); accordingly, H_6 is accepted. This finding is consistent with Parihar and Mahavidhyalya (2024), who show that voters' social and economic conditions shape expectations regarding the programs and solutions offered by candidates. The results also align with the systematic review of Kocaman and Coşgun (2024), which asserts that socio-economic factors influence how voters receive political messages, evaluate value propositions, and form perceptions of candidates. However, unlike studies that treat social identity as the primary determinant of political preferences, this study shows that considerations of welfare, employment opportunities, and the community's economic conditions are more dominant in shaping candidate branding than specific social characteristics.

In the 2024 Pangkalpinang Mayoral Election, which was contested by only one candidate pair, socio-economic factors became increasingly important because voters lacked alternative candidates to compare and tended to evaluate the tangible benefits offered by the candidate for their daily needs. The empty box option also encouraged voters to assess whether the programs and policies offered were relevant enough to merit political support. This situation explains why issues of welfare, unemployment, the cost of living, and social inequality are important foundations of candidate branding. Theoretically, these findings extend the political branding literature by showing that, in single-candidate elections, perceptions of socio-economic benefits and the relevance of political value propositions play a greater role than the candidate differentiation common in competitive elections. The success of political branding in a political market with limited choices is thus determined more by the candidate's ability to connect programs to the socio-economic needs of the community (Lees-Marshment et al., 2019; Sophocleous et al., 2024).

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4.5.7. The Effect of Voter Behavior on Voting Decisions

The t-test results demonstrate that voter behavior (X) has a positive and significant effect on voting decisions (Z), as indicated by a t_{count} of 3.497, which exceeds the critical value (t_{table} = 1.966), and a significance level of 0.001 (< 0.05); therefore, H_7 is accepted. These findings are consistent with Kocaman and Coşgun (2024), who indicate that voter behavior is a crucial determinant of political preferences and decisions. The results also align with Abid et al. (2025) and Naidu et al. (2023), who found that voter interaction with political information, digital communities, and political communication can influence candidate evaluations and electoral choices. However, unlike studies of competitive elections, which frame the voting decision as the outcome of a comparison between candidates, this study demonstrates that voter behavior plays a significant role even when the available political choices are extremely limited.

In the 2024 Pangkalpinang Mayoral Election, voter behavior determined not only support for the candidate but also the decision to vote for the empty box as a form of political expression. When alternative candidates are unavailable, voters tend to base their decisions on evaluations of the candidate's quality, the relevance of the platform, and the extent to which the candidate aligns with their political expectations. Consequently, information seeking, issue evaluation, and interaction with political messages become increasingly important in shaping electoral decisions (Dewi et al., 2020). Theoretically, these findings expand the voter behavior and political marketing literature by demonstrating that, in single-candidate elections, voting decisions are influenced not merely by differentiation between candidates but also by the level of acceptance of the available candidate. Voter behavior thus functions as an evaluative mechanism that determines whether a candidate gains support or faces resistance through votes for the empty box (Kocaman & Coşgun, 2024; Lees-Marshment et al., 2019).

4.5.8. The Effect of Candidate Branding on Voting Decisions

The t-test results indicate that candidate branding (Y) has a positive and significant effect on voting decisions (Z), as shown by a t_{count} of 4.535, which exceeds the critical value (t_{table} = 1.966), and a significance level of 0.001 (< 0.05); therefore, H_8 is accepted. These findings are consistent with Sophocleous et al. (2024), who demonstrate that voters evaluate candidates based on attributes such as integrity, competence, and emotional connection. The results also align with Silaban and Komaladewi (2025), who assert that the more positive the perception of a brand, the higher the resulting level of acceptance and preference. From a political marketing perspective, strong branding achieved through issue clarity, message consistency, and public trust can enhance candidate acceptance and drive the conversion of voting intentions into actual voting behavior (Lees-Marshment et al., 2019). However, unlike studies conducted in competitive elections, this research shows that the influence of branding remains significant even when voters have no alternative candidates for comparison.

In this scenario, branding functions not primarily as a tool for differentiating between candidates but as a mechanism for building acceptance, trust, and perceived legitimacy for the available candidate. The empty box option means that voters evaluate not whether the candidate is superior to a competitor but whether the candidate is worthy of political support.

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Perceptions of the candidate's integrity, competence, and ability to address community needs therefore become crucial factors in voting decisions. Theoretically, these findings extend the political branding literature by demonstrating that, in single-candidate elections, branding functions as an instrument of legitimacy and public acceptance rather than merely as a strategy for political differentiation. They support the argument that branding success in a political market with limited choice is determined more by the credibility of the value proposition, public trust, and the relevance of the programs offered to voters (Lees-Marshment et al., 2019; Naidu et al., 2023; Sophocleous et al., 2024).

4.5.9. The Mediating Role of Branding in the Effect of Voter Behavior on Voting Decisions

The path analysis results indicate that voter behavior has a positive and significant effect on candidate branding (B = 0.270; $p < 0.001$), and that voter behavior (B = 0.118; $p = 0.001$) and candidate branding (B = 0.132; $p = 0.001$) also have positive and significant effects on voting decisions. The indirect effect of voter behavior on voting decisions through candidate branding is 0.03564, with a total effect of 0.154. The Sobel test yielded a Z-value of 2.169 ($p = 0.030$), indicating that candidate branding partially mediates the relationship between voter behavior and voting decisions; therefore, H_9 is accepted. These results are consistent with Kocaman and Coşgun (2024), Abid et al. (2025), and Naidu et al. (2023), who demonstrate that voter engagement in information seeking, issue evaluation, and interaction with political messages contributes to the formation of preferences and electoral decisions.

In the 2024 Pangkalpinang Mayoral Election, the mediating role of branding became increasingly critical because voters lacked alternative candidates for comparison. Unlike in competitive elections, where branding serves as a tool for differentiation between candidates, in a single-candidate context branding functions as a mechanism for building trust, acceptance, and perceived legitimacy for the available candidate. Information obtained through the media, communities, social networks, and prior political experience shapes perceptions of the candidate before these perceptions are translated into a vote for the candidate or for the empty box. Theoretically, these findings extend the political branding and political marketing literature by demonstrating that, in political markets with limited choices, branding serves not only as an instrument of political differentiation but also as a mediator linking voter behavior to electoral decisions through the establishment of trust, credibility, and relevant political value propositions (Lees-Marshment et al., 2019; Sophocleous et al., 2024). The research model results are presented in Figure 6.

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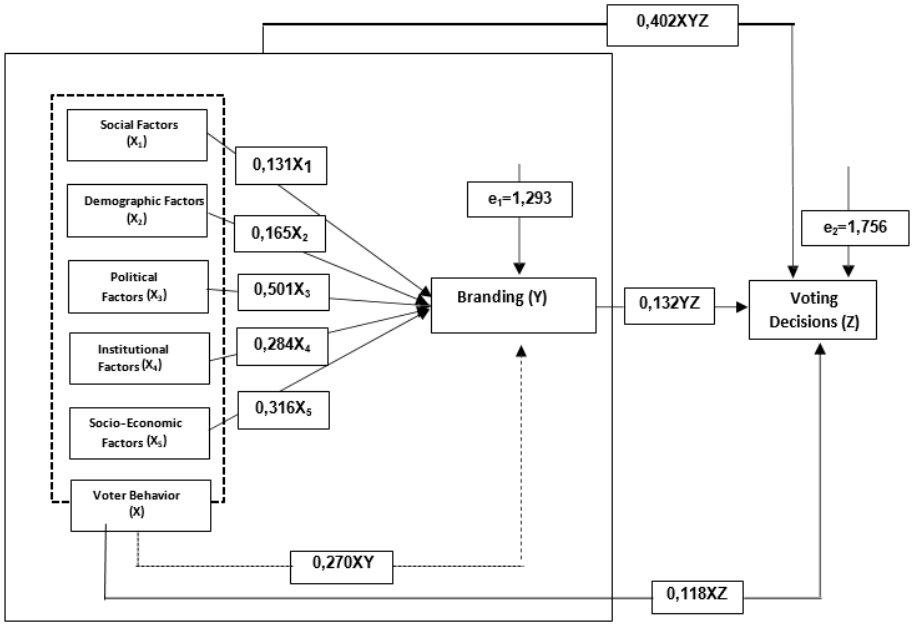


Figure 6. Research Model Results
Source: Processed data (2025)

5. Conclusion and Suggestion

Based on the empirical analysis, this study demonstrates that voter behavior, represented by social, demographic, political, institutional, and socio-economic factors, simultaneously influences the formation of candidate branding in the 2024 Pangkalpinang Mayoral Election. Among these factors, political, institutional, and socio-economic factors exert significant positive effects on candidate branding, whereas social and demographic factors do not. These findings indicate that voters prioritize political issues, institutional credibility, and the relevance of programs to socio-economic conditions over social and demographic characteristics when forming perceptions of candidates.

The study also identifies candidate branding as a crucial variable that is shaped by voter behavior and directly influences voting decisions. Positive branding enhances voter trust, acceptance, and support, whereas unconvincing branding may increase the likelihood of voters choosing the empty box as a form of political expression in a single-candidate election. Voting decisions are significantly influenced by both voter behavior and candidate branding, and the path analysis reveals that voter behavior has both a direct effect on voting decisions and an indirect effect through candidate branding. The Sobel test confirms that candidate branding partially mediates this relationship, suggesting that branding serves as a vital mechanism linking voters' evaluations of political issues, socio-economic conditions, and the democratic process to their electoral choices, including the decision to support the candidate or vote for the empty box.

Political campaign strategies for regional head elections featuring a single candidate should therefore prioritize political, institutional, and socio-economic factors, as these exert the most

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significant influence on the candidate's brand. Campaign teams are advised to emphasize program clarity, consistency in political stance, performance track records, governance quality, and concrete solutions to the community's socio-economic issues. Given that political factors are the dominant determinant of candidate branding, political communication should focus on conveying strategic issues, performance evidence, and value propositions relevant to voter needs rather than relying merely on social or demographic segmentation.

Because candidate branding partially mediates the relationship between voter behavior and voting decisions, branding must be managed consistently by reinforcing the candidate's credibility, integrity, and quality of political communication and by presenting programs that are easily understood and aligned with public expectations. In single-candidate elections, such efforts are crucial for enhancing public acceptance of and trust in the candidate and for mitigating voters' tendency to choose the empty box as a form of political expression.

Future research is recommended to employ more comprehensive analytical approaches, such as structural equation modeling (SEM), to simultaneously test complex relationships among constructs and mediating effects. Longitudinal studies are also needed to examine changes in voter behavior, branding perceptions, and voting decisions over time, and comparative studies across regions or electoral settings, particularly between single-candidate and competitive elections, may provide a broader understanding of political branding dynamics. Future models may also incorporate additional variables, such as political trust, media exposure, party identification, incumbent performance, political efficacy, and voter emotions, to improve the explanatory power of electoral decision-making models in contexts with limited political alternatives.

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