

The Mediating Impact of Candidate Image on the Relationship between Religiosity and Voting Intention

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.56293/IJMSSSR.2024.4918>

IJMSSSR 2024

VOLUME 6

ISSUE 2 MARCH - APRIL

ISSN: 2582 - 0265

Abstract: This study aims to identify the influence of reliability on voting intentions. The research also investigates the role of the candidate image variable as a meditation between religiosity and voting intention. Four hypotheses were developed and tested using a quantitative approach. The theory used in this study is the theory of reasoned action. Primary research data was collected using the questionnaire through purposive sampling. The variable is measured using a Likert scale of five with a range of "very disagree (1) to "very agree." The data processing method applies the structural equation model using Smart-Partial Least Square (PLS) 3.0 software. The final sample consists of 155 respondents. Measurement model evaluation and structural model assessment are used to obtain research results. After passing the assessment of the measurement model, the structural model shows that the model has good relevance and predictive strength. The hypothesis testing indicates that candidate image mediates the relationship between religiosity and voting intention, and candidate images mediate the relation between religiosity and voting intention with a mediating complementary mediation. Furthermore, the results also show that four direct influences are also significant: (i) religiosity on candidate image (ii) candidate image on voting intention; (iii) candidate image mediates relations between the influence of religiosity and voter intention.

Keywords: Religiosity, Candidate image, Voting intention

Introduction

Indonesia is a democratic country with a government that grants equal rights to all its citizens to make decisions that can affect their lives, directly or indirectly. The President and Vice President are responsible for democratic governance in Indonesia (Park et al., 2020; Putra & Aprilson, 2022). Democracy requires procedural features, one of which is in the activities of political parties. Political parties are part of the democratic system and play an essential role in realizing democratic life. Political parties also have a responsibility to advance the well-being of the people by advocating for their interests and making their public policy. (Karimalla & Fajarini, 2022). According to information from the Central Statistical Agency (BPS) in Indonesia, voter turnout in the presidential election (Pilpres) has declined from 2004 to 2014; however, the figure rose again in 2019 to 81.97% (DataIndonesia.id, 2022).

The percentage of voter participation in Indragiri Hulu district (Inhu), Riau, and every implementation of the Presidential Election (Pilpres) since 1999 has continued to suffer a decline, which will be a hard work of the General Election Commission (KPU) to be able to regain the heart of the public, which is to take heed that before taking the right to vote or participate, one must precede the prior intention before using their right to vote. In the 1999 elections, the percentage of voters in the Indragiri Hulu district reached 92 percent. Then, in the 2004 elections, it decreased, with approximately 84 percent participation (Mediacenter.riau.go.id, 2014). Then, Indragiri Hulu district's presentation of invalid votes in the 2019 elections was the third highest, at 1.77% in the presidential election after Indragiri Hilir district (2.85%) and Meranti Islands (2.19%) (Hasanudin et al., 2021). Based on the urgency of the general election (election) in Indragiri Hulu district, it is necessary to make various efforts to increase the voting participation of the people by improving their religiousness, candidate image, and voting intention in the coming year 2024.

The lack of voting intention or intention to vote in the general election (Elections) in the Indragiri Hulu district in the forthcoming period becomes the primary basis for researchers in establishing the variable of the vote intention as a focus of this investigation. Involving voters with presidential candidates and vice presidents in 2024 on social media will encourage voters to vote. Voters can give their opinions about the country's policies and plans through voting, and participating in voting will make voters feel more. This research is based on a modification of a previous study by Moslehpour et al. (2021). Marketing literature explains that the variables that can influence the vote intention are religiosity (Cecilia et al., 2023; Farrag & Shamma, 2014; Moslehpour et al., 2021; Rini & Budiman, 2020; Sandi, 2021), candidate image (Abbas et al., 2023; De-Oliveira et al., 2022; Fitriani et al., 2021; Hati et al., 2017; Mad-A-Dam & Ismail, 2021; Van Steenburg & Guzmán, 2019).

Religiosity affects the level of candidate image, which is where candidate images are a process mainly oriented to evoke a positive emotional spirit in voters. (Cwalina et al., 2011). Therefore, religiosity has become essential to significantly increase voting intention and candidate image and indirectly affect the rate of presidential election participation in 2024. In line with the findings, research by Sandi (2021) also found that reliability versus voting intention. Religiosity is the belief that a product has a reliable quality to provide a benefit (Mcknight et al., 2002). Then, research reliability affects candidates (Benstead et al., 2015).

However, a study by Julina et al. (2019) noted that religiosity significantly influenced voting intention (Pradana et al., 2019). The difference between this research and previous research is that previous research on voting intention was conducted outside Indonesia. For example, Bukari et al. (2022) conducted a study on vote intention, which was the object of the presidential elections in Ghana in 2012 and 2016, followed by the study of trust and loyalty as a variable of mediation and political issues as a free variable. Then Ramadania (2020) conducted a survey on the vote of intention in Indonesia in the 2019 presidential election, with beliefs and women as their mediation variables and social media as their free variables (variabel dependent). However, research on the general election (election) still needs to be expanded in the territory of Indonesia, especially in the Indragiri Hulu district. So, the title of this study is The Influence of Religion on Voting Intention with Candidate Image as a mediating variable.

Literature Review

Theory of Reasoned Action

Current research uses the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) as the main theoretical framework to investigate factors associated with Ajzen (1991). This theory states that a person's behavior is influenced by their intention to commit such behavior and that the intention is affected by three main factors: the individual's attitude to such behaviors, the subjective norm referring to individual perceptions of whether the people that are important to them support or oppose such conduct and behavioral control, i.e., the individual's perception of his ability to control such behavior. The Theory of Planned Behavior is an evolution of the Theory of Reasoned Action, stating that intensity can be predicted from three forming elements: attitude, subjective norm, and control of perceived behavior.

In social media management, this theory can be used to understand how social media use influences individual interaction or participation in social activities including their willingness to elect candidates through social media campaigns, their subjective norms about such voters, and their perception of their ability to select them. Religiosity can also play a role in this theory because religion affects their attitude toward specific issues, their subjective norms of the political environment, and their perception of their ability to support political campaigns. Candidate image in a political context can influence the individual's attitude towards the candidate, the subject norms they receive from their political surroundings, and the perception they have about the ability of candidates to fulfill their campaign promises. Therefore, this study adopted the Theory of Planned Behavior to describe candidate image as attitudes and religiosity as controlling perceived behavior that can affect voting intentions.

Voting Intention

Voting intention in this study is another term in marketing literature called purchase intention. According to Ajzen (1991), intention is a person acting according to their intention, and the perception of control over the intention of their behavior is influenced by behavioral control and subjective norms. According to Moslehpour et al. (2021),

voting intention refers to a person's intention or tendency to support a particular candidate or political party in an election (Ajzen, 1991). Consumer intentions on the market and voter intentions in the virtual political market significantly highlight that a task is at stake (Arkorful et al., 2022). According to De-Oliveira dkk. (2022), explaining voting intention, the intention to vote can be understood as a tendency or desire of a person to choose a particular candidate in the context of a voter. According to Rini and Budiman (2020), the internal factors are knowledge, religious views, brand equity, and affinity. According to Sandi (2021), the intention to choose can be influenced by various factors, including religion, ethnicity, education, and other factors.

Religiosity and Voting Intention

Religion is an essential source of society's beliefs, attitudes, and values (Green & Keegan, 2020). Voting intention is a person's intention or a voter's tendency to support a particular candidate or political party in an election (Ajzen, 1991). Religiosity is a determining factor in voting intention, which means that the better the President's religiousness, the higher the vote intention in the 2024 presidential election.

Several previous studies have empirically proven that religiosity positively influences voting intentions (Farrag & Shamma, 2014; Julina et al., 2019; Sandi, 2021). Based on the results of previous research, the first hypothesis in this study can be developed as follows:

H1: Religiosity has a positive influence on voting intention.

Religiosity and Candidate Image

Religion is an essential source of society's beliefs, attitudes, and values (Green & Keegan, 2020). Candidate image is a process focused mainly on arousing a positive emotional spirit in voters (Cwalina et al., 2011). Religiosity is a determining factor in the candidate's image, which means that the better the President has religiousness, the better the candidate's image will be in the 2024 presidential election.

Several previous studies have empirically proven that religiousness positively influences the candidate's image (Benstead et al., 2015). Based on the results of such previous studies, the first hypothesis in this study can be developed as follows:

H2: Religiosity has a positive influence on candidate image.

Candidate Image and Voting Intention

Candidate image is a process focused mainly on arousing a positive emotional spirit in voters (Cwalina et al., 2011). Voting intention is a person's intention or a voter's tendency to support a particular candidate or political party in an election. (Ajzen, 1991). Candidate image is a determining factor in voting intention, which means that the better the candidate image the President has, it will be able to increase the vote intention in the 2024 presidential election.

Several previous studies have empirically proven that candidate image has a positive influence on voting intention (Abbas et al., 2023; De-Oliveira et al., 2022; Fitriani et al., 2021; Gutiérrez-Rodríguez et al., 2023; Hati et al., 2017; Mad-A-Dam & Ismail, 2021; Van Steenburg & Guzmán, 2019). Based on the results of previous research, the first hypothesis in this study can be developed as follows:

H3: Candidate image has a positive influence on voting intention

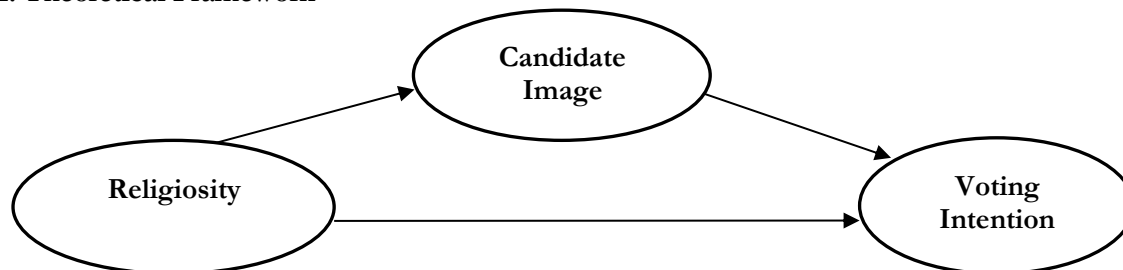
Candidate Image as Mediation

Religion is an essential source of society's beliefs, attitudes, and values. (Green & Keegan, 2020). Candidate image is a process focused mainly on arousing a positive emotional spirit in voters. (Cwalina et al., 2011). Voting intention is a person's intention or a voter's tendency to support a particular candidate or political party in an election (Ajzen, 1991). Suppose the President can have good reliability. In that case, this condition will enable the creation of a candidate image for the voter, and then the voters with a candidate image can have a high voting intention.

Some previous research has proven that candidate image mediates religiosity and voting intention (Dita et al., 2019). Based on the results of previous research, the fourth hypothesis in this study can be developed as follows: H4: Candidate image mediates the relationship between religiosity and voting intention.

The conceptual framework can be seen in the picture below:

Figure 1: Theoretical Framework



Methods

The research methods that the researchers used in this writing were quantitative methods and questionnaires to collect data directly. The sampling technique uses purposive sampling, in which only respondents who meet specific criteria are invited to complete the survey. Religiosity uses eight statements (Sandi, 2021). The candidate image uses three statements (Arkorful dkk., 2022). Voting intention uses five statements (Dabula, 2017). The ratings of the respondents used a five-point Likert scale, with a score of 5-1 and category: 5. Highly Agree (SS), 4 Agree (S), 3 Neutral (N), 2 Disagree (IS), and 1 Extremely Disagreed (STS). The statistical method used for data analysis is structural equation modeling (SEM)—part least squares (PLS), supported by previous research (Sefnedi et al., 2023).

Results and Discussions

The number of questionnaires distributed is 155. Thus, the number of questions ready to be analyzed is 155, so the response rate is 100%.

Table 1 Profil of Respondents

Demographics	Categories	Number	(%)
Gender	Male	55	35.5
	Female	100	64.5
Permanent Election List (DPT) on the district	Rengat	69	44.5
	Rengat Barat	16	10.3
	Batang Cenaku	10	6.5
	Lirik	7	4.5
	Kelayang	12	7.7
	Kuala Cenaku	15	9.7
	Pasir Penyu	5	3.2
	Seberida	15	9.7
	Sungai Lala	3	1.9
Rakit Kulim	3	1.9	
Social Media	Facebook	45	29.0
	Instagram	75	48.4
	Telegram	8	5.2
	Tiktok	27	17.4
Age	< 25 years old	62	40.0
	25 – 35 years old	71	45.8
	36 – 46 years old	12	7.7

	47 – 57 years old	9	5.8
	> 57 years old	1	0,6
Education	Elementary school	1	0.6
	Junior high school	2	1.3
	Senior high school	54	34.8
	Diploma	4	2.6
	Bachelor degree	88	56.8
	Master degree	3	1.9
	Doctoral Degree	3	1.9
Job	Civil servants	8	5,2
	Private	20	12,8
	Lecturer/Teacher	20	12.9
	BUMN officer/BUMD	27	17.4
	Bank officials	4	2.6
	Famers	2	1.3
	Student	26	16.8
	Labor	2	1.3
	Housewives	15	9.7
	Others	47	30.3

Table 1 showed that the respondents consist of 100 female (64.5%) and 55 male (35.5%). Further, those listed on the Permanent Election List (DPT) had a majority of 69 persons (44.5%), 16 persons (10.3%), 15 persons of Seberida and Kuala Cenaku (9.7%), 12 people of Kelayang (7.7%), 10 people of Batang Cenaku (6.5%), 7 people of Lirik (4.5%), then 5 people of Pasir Penyu (3.2%), and lastly 3 people of Sungai Lala and Rakit Kulim (1,9%). One of the most dominant social networks used by respondents was Instagram with 75 people (48.4%), followed by Facebook with 45 people (29%), TikTok with 27 people (17.4%), and Telegram with 8 people (5.2%).

In terms of age, the majority of respondents were between 25 and 35 years of age (71 (45.8%)), followed by respondents under the age of 25 (62 (40%)), respondents aged 36–46 (12%), respondents between 47 and 57 (9%), as well as respondents over 57 (0.6%). It can be concluded that young people dominated the general election conducted in the Indragiri Hulu district. The majority of respondents were 88 bachelor's degrees (56.8%), 54 high school students (34.8%), 4 diplomas (2.6%), 3 master's degrees, and doctoral degrees (1,9%), 2 junior high schools (1,3%), and elementary school 1 (0.6%). Based on the job positions, the majority were 27 lecturers (17.4%), followed by 26 students (16.8%) and 20 students (12.9%), 15 householders (9.7%), 8 employees (5.2%), 4 employees of BUMN officer/BUMD (26.6%), 2 employees of banks and laborers (1.3%), and others (47 (30.3%).

Measurement Model Assessment

The Assessment Model (MMA) is useful for testing each statement item with its latent variables, which consist of convergent and discriminatory validity. Convergence validity consists of external loads (>0.7), composite reliability (>0.07), and AVE (>0.5). Discriminatory validity consists of the Fornell-Larcker criteria and cross-loading methods (Hanum et al., 2023).

Table 2 Results of Convergent Validity

Items	Candidate Image	Religiosity	Voting Intention	CA	CR	AVE
Do you prefer the 2024 presidential and vice presidential candidates to have an attractive appearance	0.817			0.820	0.893	0.736
Do you prefer a charismatic 2024 presidential candidate and vice president	0.898					
Prefer the 2024 presidential and vice presidential candidates who have prepared	0.857					

themselves well and have a reputation for being the best political						
I am happy with the man who is religious and who will be the leader and vice president of Indonesia in 2024		0.724		0.881	0.910	0.628
I will give money, energy, and mental support to the 2024 presidential candidate and vice president.		0.848				
I will give political support to the 2024 presidential candidate and vice president.		0.798				
I will campaign and volunteer for the 2024 presidential candidate and vice president who is religious with me (R5).		0.786				
I will allow fraud or violation in the election because the 2024 presidential candidates and vice presidents are of the same religion as me.		0.801				
I am glad that 2024 presidential candidates and religious vice presidents were elected despite committing major violations or fraud.		0.792		0.706	0.856	0.751
The 2024 presidential candidate and vice president I will choose are looking at the country's problems.			0.957			
Engaging with political parties, presidential candidates, and vice presidents in 2024 on social media will encourage me to vote.			0.766			

Note: CA (Cronbach’s Alpha); CR (Composite Reliability); AVE (Average Variance Extracted)

Table 2 explains the result of convergent validity that has already excluded the invalid statement item; the item starts from the variables religiosity in R1 and R6, then the variable voting intention in VI1, VI4, and VI5. After all the items declared valid were performed, the composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha, as well as the average extracted variance (AVE), were assessed, and the statement clause said that the item was valid and reliable if it had a value of Cronbach's alpha > 0.7, composite reliability > 0.7, and average extruded variance > 0.5 (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). (Hair et al., 2014) According to the data processing results, each research variable, which includes statements, religiosity, candidate image, and voting intention, significantly influences the penalty variable.

Table 3 Results of discriminant validity with the Fornell-Larcker criterion method

	Candidate Image	Religiosity	Voting Intention
Candidate Image	0.858		
Religiosity	0.632	0.792	
Voting Intention	0.389	0.271	0.866

Table 3 found that the correlation score of the candidate image variable with the variable itself (candidate image) is 0.858. The correlation value is greater than the correlation between candidate images with religiosity (0,632) and voting intention (0,389). Thus, it can be concluded that this analysis of the Fornell-Larcker criterion already meets the required rule of thumb (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Table 4 Discriminant Validity with Cross loadings method

Items	Candidate Image	Religiosity	Voting Intention
Do you prefer the 2024 presidential and vice presidential candidates to have an attractive appearance	0.817	0.548	0.264

You prefer a charismatic 2024 presidential candidate and vice president.	0.898	0.595	0.313
You prefer the 2024 presidential and vice presidential candidates who have prepared themselves well and have a reputation for being the best political	0.857	0.483	0.423
I'm happy with the man who is religious with me and who will be the leader and vice president of Indonesia in 2024.	0.358	0.724	0.198
You will give money, energy, and mental support to the 2024 presidential candidate and vice president.	0.560	0.848	0.267
You will give political support to the 2024 presidential candidate and vice president.	0.483	0.798	0.205
I will campaign and volunteer for the 2024 presidential candidate and vice president who's religious with me.	0.476	0.786	0.300
You will allow fraud or violation in the election because the 2024 presidential candidates and vice presidents are of the same religion as me.	0.551	0.801	0.169
You will be glad if 2024 presidential candidates and vice presidents who are as religious as me are elected despite committing major violations or fraud	0.541	0.792	0.146
The 2024 presidential candidate and vice president I will choose are looking at the country's problems.	0.415	0.339	0.957
Engaging with political parties, presidential candidates, and vice presidents in 2024 on social media will encourage me to vote.	0.202	0.032	0.766

Table 4 shows that all declaration items used to measure a variable have a more significant correlation coefficient with each of its constructions than the value of the item's factor on the construction block in the other columns. Thus, each item in the block is a unique item and, indeed, measures the variable. Thus, good discriminant validity exists (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Table 5 Results of discriminant validity with the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio method

Variables	Candidate Image	Religiosity	Voting Intention
Candidate Image			
Religiosity	0.735		
Voting Intention	0.462	0.285	

Table 5 displayed the results of discriminant validity with the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio method, in which all variables of correlation values are below 0.85, so it is stated that only one construction has good discriminant validity (Henseler, dkk 2015).

R square and Q square

R square is helpful to measure how large an exogenic variable describes an endogenous variable. On the other hand, the Q square helps to find out how the exogenous variable predicts the endogenous variable. (Hair et al., 2014)The results of the R square and Q square analysis are as follows:

Table 6 Results of R Squares and Q Squares

Endogenous Variables	R Square	Description	Q Square	Description
Candidate image	0,400	Weak	0,287	Medium
Voting Intention	0,152	Weak	0,073	Weak

Table 6 found that the R square value of the candidate image variable is 0.400, meaning that religiosity's significant influence on candidate images is 40% or belongs to the weak category (Hair et al., 2014). The r square variable voting intention is obtained at 0.152, which means the excellent reliability and candidate picture against the voting intent are 15.2% and belong to the category weak (Hair et al., 2014). Besides, the variable candidate Image has a Q square of 0.287. It is in the medium category (Hair et al., 2014), meaning that variables and religiosities' ability to predict candidate imaging variables falls into the middle category.

Structural Model Assessment

The results of the structural model assessment (SMA) using the bootstrapping method are as follows:

Figure 2: Structure Model Assessment (SMA)

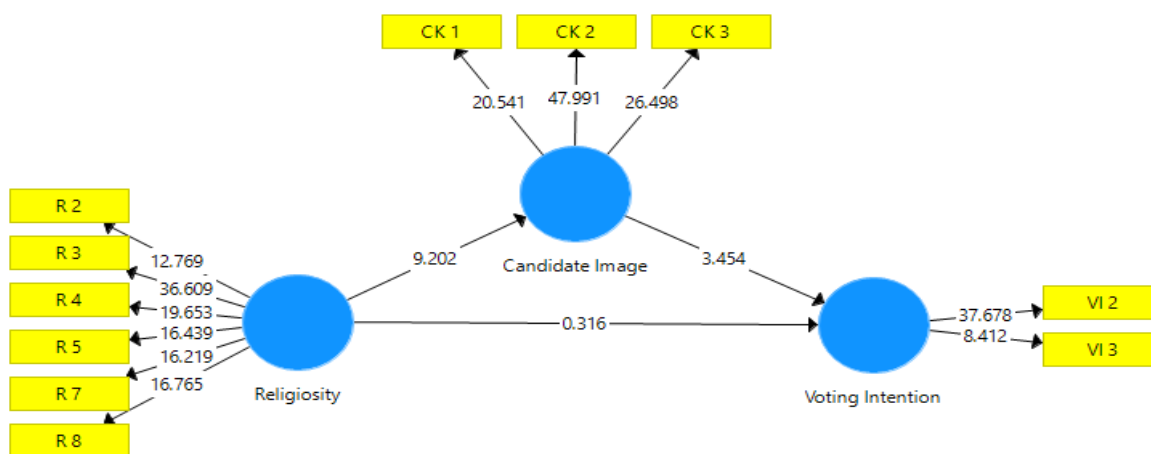


Table 7 Hypothesis Testing Results

Direction	Original Sample	T Statistics	P-values	Hipotesis
Religiosity -> Voting Intention	0,043	0,316	0,752	H1 Rejected
Religiosity -> Candidate Image	0,632	9,202	0,000	H2 Accepted
Candidate Image -> Voting Intention	0,362	3,454	0,001	H3 Accepted
Religiosity -> Candidate Image -> Voting Intention	0,229	3,651	0,000	H4 Accepted

Based on Figure 2 and Table 7, the influence of religiosity on voting intention has an original sample value of 0.033, a T-statistic of 0.316 (smaller than 1.96), and a P-value of 0.752 (larger than 0.05). This result can be interpreted as not influencing the voting intent for the election of the President and vice president in 2024. Thus, hypothesis 1 (H1) is rejected. The results of this study are in line with or supported by previous studies by Pradana et al. (2019) and Rini and Budiman (2020), which found that religiosity does not influence voting intention. Then Assari & Dwita (2020) also found that the degree of religiosity has no influence on the individual's intentions. However, it is inconsistent with the research (Farrag & Shamma, 2014; Julina et al., 2019; Sandi, 2021) that found that religiosity influences voting intention in the 2019 presidential election.

The influence upon the image of the candidate has a sample original value of 0.632, the statistics of T 9.202 (greater than 1.96), and a P-value of 0.000 (smaller than 0.05) thus it can be understood that religiosities have a positive and significant influence over the picture of candidates in the elections of the President and vice president in 2024. Therefore, hypotheses 2 (H2) are supported. The results of this study are in line with or supported by previous research (Benstead et al., 2015) that found that religiosity positively influences the candidate's image. Then another study that supports this study, Dita Restu Anggraneni (2019), found that religion positively influences a candidate's image.

The influence of candidate image on voting intention has an original sample value of 0.362, a T-statistics value of 3.454 (greater than 1.96), and a P-value of 0.001 (kecil dari 0,05). This result indicates that the candidate's image has a positive and significant influence on voting intention in the election of the President and vice president in 2024. Thus, hypothesis 3 (H3) is supported. The results of this study are consistent with or supported by previous intention studies (Abbas et al., 2023; De-Oliveira et al., 2022; Fitriani et al., 2021; Gutiérrez-Rodríguez et al., 2023; Hati et al., 2017; Mad-A-Dam & Ismail, 2021; Van Steenburg & Guzmán, 2019), which found that candidate image had a positive influence on voting intention.

The influence of candidate image as a mediation between religiosity and voting intention has an original sample value of 0.229 T-statistics 3,651 (larger than 1.96) and a P-value of 0.000 (smaller than 0.05), so it can be understood that the candidate picture mediates the relationship between religiosity and vote intention in the 2024 presidential and vice presidential elections. Thus, hypothesis 4 (H4) is accepted. The type of mediation of the candidate image variable is a mediation between religiosity and voting intention. (Zhao et al., 2010). The results of this study are in line with or supported by the results of previous research by Dita Restu Anggraneni (2019). which found that candidate image mediates the relationship between reliability and voting intention

Conclusion

This study empirically proves the influence of social media marketing and religiosity on voting intentions with candidate image as a mediation variable, with the number of respondents as large as 155 voters in Indragiri Hulu district, Riau. After a phase of analysis and testing of the hypothesis, the conclusion was as follows: 1. Religiosity does not influence the voting intention in the election of President and Vice President in 2024. 2. Religiosity positively impacts the candidate's image in the elections for President and vice president in 2024.

Limitations and Future Research

This research was only done in the Indragiri district, Hulu, so the research results do not necessarily apply to one district in Riau. Therefore, it is recommended that this research model be replicated to test it empirically in other districts. The number of respondents in this study is only 155, which can affect the determination of the results. Therefore, it is recommended that more respondents be researched to obtain higher results. The study only looked at social media marketing, religiosity, and candidate image as variables that affect voting intentions, suggesting that researchers subsequently add variables that may influence voting intention, such as trust, loyalty, knowledge, and others.

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