



Trust in Political Parties, Party Image, Digital Literacy, and Young Voter Loyalty in Renon Traditional Village

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Abstract

Voter loyalty in contemporary digital democracies is increasingly shaped by how citizens access and evaluate political information online, yet the conditions under which this occurs remain insufficiently understood. This study examines the effects of trust in political parties and party image on young voter loyalty, and tests digital literacy as a moderating variable that has rarely been examined in this role. A quantitative survey design was used, collecting data from 370 respondents in Renon Traditional Village, South Denpasar District, through purposive sampling and a five-point Likert-scale questionnaire. Data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) in JASP software. Trust in political parties and party image both had positive and significant effects on young voter loyalty, with party image the stronger predictor. Digital literacy significantly strengthened both relationships, confirming its role as a moderating mechanism rather than merely a direct predictor of political engagement. As the data are cross-sectional and were collected through purposive sampling in a single village, the findings are indicative rather than generalizable and are best understood as characterizing a broad young-adult voter segment rather than first-time voters specifically. By demonstrating that the influence of trust and party image on voter loyalty depends on voters' capacity to critically evaluate political information, this study extends voter behavior theory beyond its conventional focus on institutional and branding factors alone.

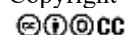
Keywords: trust in political parties; party image; digital literacy; young voter loyalty; PLS-SEM

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INTRODUCTION

According to Dalton (2017), the sustainability of political parties in democratic systems depends not only on their ability to win elections but also on their capacity to maintain long-term voter loyalty. In the contemporary era of digital communication, however, the process of developing political commitment has undergone a fundamental transformation. Puspitasari (2024) argues that voter commitment is no longer shaped primarily by ideological proximity; instead, it increasingly emerges from a dynamic process of evaluating political information. This transformation is particularly evident among young people, who rely extensively on digital platforms as their primary source of political information and as a basis for evaluating political actors (Dalton, 2017). Such a shift reflects broader changes in political communication, where information is continuously produced, disseminated, and contested through digital media. Understanding how young voters navigate this information environment is therefore essential to explaining voter loyalty in digital democracies, and it is this question that motivates the present study.

For the purposes of this study, “young voters” is used to describe a broad young-adult voter segment rather than first-time voters alone. Because age was recorded in grouped categories and the oldest category was “>40 years,” the data do not permit a precise separation between respondents aged 41–44 and those above that range. The age composition is therefore reported transparently, and the >40 group is treated as a boundary group in the Methods, Results, and Limitations sections.

Bali Province illustrates this digital transformation clearly, with internet penetration reaching 91.81% in 2026, among the highest rates in Indonesia (APJII, 2026). Renon Traditional Village in South Denpasar was purposively selected for this study on the basis of three characteristics directly relevant to its objectives: a high proportion of productive-age residents, official designation as an Election Law Awareness Village reflecting active civic and electoral engagement, and a substantial voter base of 8,892 registered voters. Beyond administrative convenience, this designation is theoretically relevant because Election Law Awareness Villages receive structured civic education programming and closer engagement from election authorities, which plausibly increases residents' exposure to formal political information and opportunities for civic learning relative to non-designated areas. This heightened information environment makes Renon Traditional Village a strategic site for observing how trust, party image, and digital literacy jointly shape voter loyalty under conditions of relatively high civic exposure, rather than a setting chosen for convenience alone.

Political trust has consistently been identified as a fundamental determinant of voter loyalty. Topçuoğlu et al. (2023) argue that trust develops when political parties are perceived as possessing integrity, policy consistency, and the capacity to represent public interests effectively. Under such conditions, voters are more likely to maintain stable political preferences over time. Similarly, Devine & Valgarðsson (2024) emphasize that political trust enhances the continuity of electoral support by strengthening the long-term relationship between citizens and political institutions. Conversely, declining trust increases the likelihood of electoral defection when political parties fail to meet public expectations (Dalton, 2017). Institutional transparency also contributes to strengthening public trust by enhancing perceptions of accountability and legitimacy (Crepaz & Arikan, 2024). In line with this



literature, the present study conceptualizes political trust as a multidimensional construct encompassing perceived integrity, competence, responsiveness, transparency, and policy consistency, and the corresponding measurement items were developed to reflect these dimensions (see Methods).

Beyond political trust, party image constitutes another important determinant of voter loyalty. Party image reflects voters' perceptions of a political party's reputation, credibility, leadership quality, and organizational identity. According to DasGupta & Sarkar (2022), a favorable party image facilitates political identification and strengthens voters' willingness to maintain long-term political support. Likewise, Bukari et al. (2025) demonstrate that a strong political brand enhances voter attachment by reinforcing perceptions of competence and credibility. In contrast, negative evaluations of party credibility and leadership reduce public confidence and increase the probability of changing electoral preferences in subsequent elections (Banerjee, 2024). Priedols et al. (2022) further argue that changes in public perceptions of political parties are closely associated with shifts in political support. Consistent with this perspective, party image is conceptualized here as a multidimensional construct spanning leadership image, institutional reputation, ideological identity, program credibility, and digital branding, with measurement items developed to capture these facets (see Methods).

The rapid expansion of digital media has made the relationships among political trust, party image, and voter loyalty increasingly complex. In digital environments, voters are exposed to vast amounts of political information originating from multiple sources with varying levels of credibility. Chen et al. (2020) argue that individuals' evaluations of political institutions are largely influenced by their ability to access, process, and critically assess digital information. Similarly, Murni et al. (2024) contend that digital literacy extends beyond protecting individuals from misinformation; it fundamentally shapes how citizens interpret political institutions and political communication. Theoretically, this moderating role is expected to operate through a strengthening rather than a weakening mechanism: digital literacy enables voters to verify and contextualize political information, which converts trust and favorable party perceptions into more deliberate, evidence-based commitments rather than uncritical or “blind” loyalty. Because such deliberated trust is more resistant to disconfirmation, digital literacy is hypothesized to amplify, rather than erode, the influence of political trust and party image on voter loyalty.

Despite the growing body of research on voter loyalty, existing studies have primarily examined direct relationships among political trust, party image, and political behavior. For example, Topçuoğlu et al. (2023) and Devine & Valgarðsson (2024) focused on the influence of political trust on voter loyalty, whereas DasGupta & Sarkar (2022) and Bukari et al. (2025) investigated the contribution of party image to political preferences and electoral support. Meanwhile, research on digital literacy has largely emphasized its direct association with political participation and civic engagement (Chen et al., 2020; Pérez-Escoda & Freire, 2023). This body of work reveals three distinct gaps. Empirically, few studies have tested political trust, party image, and digital literacy within a single model of voter loyalty. Theoretically, digital literacy has rarely been positioned as a moderating mechanism rather than a direct predictor. Contextually, evidence at the local community level remains scarce, particularly within the Indonesian setting.



Addressing this research gap, the present study develops an integrative empirical model that examines the effects of trust in political parties and party image on young voter loyalty while positioning digital literacy as a moderating variable. Focusing on young voters in Renon Traditional Village, South Denpasar, this study seeks to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms underlying voter loyalty in contemporary digital democracies. The findings are expected to contribute to the literature on voter behavior and political communication while offering practical insights for political parties in designing more effective digital communication strategies for young voters.

METHODS

This study employed a quantitative research approach using a survey design to examine the effects of trust in political parties and party image on young voter loyalty, as well as the moderating role of digital literacy. The research was conducted in Renon Traditional Village, South Denpasar District, Denpasar City, Bali Province, Indonesia. The study site was purposively selected because it possesses characteristics that align with the objectives of the research, including a high level of digital information accessibility, its strategic location within the administrative center of Bali Province, and a sufficiently large population of registered voters to investigate young voters' political behavior.

Population and Sample

The study population consisted of 8,892 registered voters listed in the 2024 Permanent Voter Register (Daftar Pemilih Tetap/DPT) of Renon Traditional Village. The sample was selected using purposive sampling based on three inclusion criteria: (1) respondents were at least 17 years of age, (2) were permanent residents of Renon Traditional Village, and (3) possessed legal voting rights. The Raosoft Sample Size Calculator was used to set a target sample benchmark under conventional assumptions of a 95% confidence level, a 5% margin of error, and a 50% response distribution, yielding a target of 369 respondents. Because the final sample was purposive rather than probability-based, these parameters are treated as sample-planning benchmarks rather than design-based estimates of sampling error. A total of 370 valid responses were collected and included in the analysis. The sampling criteria did not impose an upper age limit beyond legal voting eligibility; consequently, 89.5% of respondents were aged 17–40 and 10.5% were recorded in the >40 category. Because the latter category does not distinguish respondents aged 41–44 from older respondents, it is treated as a boundary group in the interpretation of the results.

Instrument Development

The final questionnaire comprised 62 items across four latent constructs: trust in political parties (15 items across three indicators – integrity, commitment, and transparency), party image (15 items across three indicators – competence, empathy, and reputation), digital literacy (17 items across five indicators – photo-visual, reproduction, branching, information, and socio-emotional literacy, following Eshet's (2004) framework), and young voter loyalty (15 items across three indicators – consistency of electoral support, intention to vote again, and willingness to recommend or defend the party publicly). All items employed a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), with reverse-worded items recoded prior to analysis.



The trust in political parties scale was adapted from Devine & Valgarðsson (2024), Murni et al. (2024), and Topçuoğlu et al. (2023); an example item is “Political parties are consistent between their promises and their actions” (integrity indicator). The party image scale was adapted from DasGupta & Sarkar (2022), Kaloka et al. (2025), and Bukari et al. (2025); an example item is “Political parties are able to formulate policies relevant to public needs” (competence indicator). The digital literacy scale followed Eshet's (2004) five-dimension framework, with indicators further informed by Tinmaz et al. (2022); an example item is “I am able to understand political messages conveyed through infographics or videos” (photo-visual literacy indicator). The young voter loyalty scale was developed based on established indicators of electoral support consistency, voting intention, and public advocacy for the party; an example item is “I do not easily switch my support to another political party” (electoral support consistency indicator). All items were developed directly in Bahasa Indonesia based on the indicators and literature underlying each construct, rather than translated from an existing foreign-language scale; consequently, no translation/back-translation procedure was applicable to this instrument.

Data Collection

Primary data were collected through a structured online questionnaire administered via Google Forms and distributed to eligible respondents in Renon Traditional Village between 25 July and 2 August 2026. Respondents completed the questionnaire independently after providing informed consent, and completed responses were screened for eligibility before inclusion in the final dataset of 370 valid responses.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) implemented in JASP (version 0.98.21.0). The analysis was conducted in two stages. The first stage evaluated the measurement model (outer model) through indicator loadings and internal consistency reliability using Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability (Jöreskog's rho), and Dijkstra–Henseler's rho (ρ_A).

The second stage evaluated the structural model (inner model) using the coefficient of determination (R^2 and Adjusted R^2), effect sizes, path coefficients, and multicollinearity diagnostics. Direct paths were evaluated from the PLS-SEM structural model using two-tailed tests, whereas moderation effects were tested with the two-stage interaction approach and 5,000 bias-corrected and accelerated bootstrap replicates. A significance level of 5% was applied.

Moderation effects were tested using the two-stage approach: construct scores were first obtained from the measurement model, after which interaction terms were formed by multiplying the predictor construct score with the moderator (digital literacy) construct score. INT1 represents the interaction between trust in political parties and digital literacy, and INT2 represents the interaction between party image and digital literacy.

Common method bias was assessed using Harman's single-factor test, and multicollinearity was assessed using the variance inflation factor (VIF) for all predictors, including the interaction terms.

RESULTS

Respondent Characteristics

Table 1. Respondent Characteristics

Characteristics	Category	n	%
Gender	Male	177	47.8
	Female	193	52.2
Age	17–20 years	51	13.8
	21–25 years	73	19.7
	26–30 years	82	22.2
	31–35 years	69	18.6
	36–40 years	56	15.1
	>40 years	39	10.5
	≤ Junior High School	31	8.4
Education	Senior High School	152	41.1
	Diploma or Bachelor's Degree	145	39.2
	Postgraduate	42	11.3

The study involved 370 respondents who met the predetermined inclusion criteria. Female respondents accounted for 52.2% of the sample, while 47.8% were male. Regarding age distribution, the majority of respondents were between 26 and 30 years old (22.2%), followed by those aged 21–25 years (19.7%) and 31–35 years (18.6%), indicating that the sample was predominantly composed of young adults.

In terms of educational attainment, most respondents had completed senior high school (41.1%) or held a diploma or bachelor's degree (39.2%). Furthermore, 85.7% of the respondents had participated in previous elections, indicating relatively high levels of electoral participation. Concerning internet usage, 39.5% reported spending 5–7 hours per day online, whereas 28.4% used the internet for more than seven hours daily. Instagram (21.1%) and TikTok (17.6%) emerged as the primary digital platforms through which respondents obtained political information, highlighting the dominant role of social media in shaping political information consumption among young voters.

Of the 370 respondents, 89.5% were aged 40 or younger and 10.5% were recorded in the >40 category. Because only 33.5% of the sample was aged 17–25, the findings are more appropriately interpreted as reflecting a broad young-adult voter sample rather than first-time or adolescent voters specifically. The >40 category cannot be subdivided further from the available grouped data, and formal age-based subgroup analysis was not conducted in this study.

Table 1b. Additional Respondent Characteristics

Characteristics	Category	n	%
Prior Election Participation	Yes	317	85.7
	No	53	14.3
Daily Internet Use	Less than 5 hours	119	32.1
	5–7 hours	146	39.5
	More than 7 hours	105	28.4
Primary Political-Information Platform	Instagram	78	21.1
	TikTok	65	17.6
	Other platforms*	227	61.3



*“Other platforms” aggregates all remaining individual platforms (e.g., Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, X/Twitter, news portals), none of which was reported individually in the original analysis; [author action: confirm this residual figure and, if available, report the breakdown of individual platforms within it].

Measurement Model Evaluation

The measurement model was evaluated before structural model assessment, focusing on indicator loadings and internal consistency reliability.

Table 2. Construct Reliability

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (Jöreskog's ρ)	Dijkstra–Henseler's ρ_A	Interpretation
Trust in Political Parties	0.9694	0.9800	1.0000	Reliable
Party Image	0.9595	0.9737	1.0000	Reliable
Digital Literacy	0.9761	0.9812	1.0000	Reliable
Young Voter Loyalty	0.9632	0.9761	1.0000	Reliable

All constructs demonstrated Cronbach's Alpha values exceeding 0.95 and Composite Reliability values above 0.97, indicating excellent internal consistency. Likewise, Dijkstra–Henseler's rho (ρ_A) reached 1.000 for all constructs, confirming a very high level of construct reliability. Because these coefficients approach the upper bound of the 0–1 range, two supplementary diagnostics were conducted to rule out artificial sources of these high values. First, variance inflation factor (VIF) values across all predictors, including the interaction terms, ranged from 1.001 to 1.039, well below the conventional threshold of 5, indicating no meaningful multicollinearity. Second, Harman's single-factor test showed that a single unrotated factor accounted for 35.71% of the total variance, below the 50% threshold conventionally used to flag common method bias. Together, these diagnostics indicate that the high reliability values are not attributable to multicollinearity or common method variance, although item redundancy arising from similarly worded indicators remains a plausible contributor and content validity should still be considered alongside these statistics.

Discriminant validity has not yet been fully established for this model: the heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT) could not be computed because the intra-block and inter-block indicator correlations were not uniformly positive or negative, which JASP flags as a precondition failure for the HTMT calculation. [Author action, required before submission: report discriminant validity using an alternative approach – for example, the Fornell-Larcker criterion (comparing the square root of each construct's AVE against its correlations with other constructs) – or investigate and resolve the correlation-sign inconsistency so that HTMT can be computed directly. Until one of these is reported, discriminant validity should not be described as established.]

Table 3. Indicator Loadings

Construct	Loading
Trust in Political Parties	0.9668–0.9730
Party Image	0.9570–0.9644
Digital Literacy	0.9436–0.9552
Young Voter Loyalty	0.9641–0.9656

The evaluation of indicator loadings revealed that all measurement items achieved loading values above 0.94, substantially exceeding the recommended threshold. Consequently,

every indicator was retained because it adequately represented its corresponding latent construct.

Structural Model Evaluation

Table 4. Structural Model Assessment

Indicator	Value
R ² (base model)	0.559
Adjusted R ² (base model)	0.555
R ² (with interaction terms)	0.853
SRMR	0.020
CFI	0.962
IFI	0.962
NFI	0.953
NNFI	0.952
RMSEA	0.100
GFI	0.752
Hoelter's CN	102
GoF	0.719

The structural model produced an R² value of 0.559 (Adjusted R² = 0.555) for the base model containing the three direct predictors, indicating that trust in political parties, party image, and digital literacy collectively explained 55.9% of the variance in young voter loyalty. The model demonstrated a satisfactory level of fit on most indices: SRMR = 0.020, CFI = 0.962, IFI = 0.962, NFI = 0.953, and NNFI = 0.952, all of which exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.90. However, RMSEA = 0.100 exceeded the conventional 0.08 cut-off typically applied in covariance-based SEM, and GFI = 0.752 fell below the usual 0.90 benchmark. Because RMSEA and GFI were originally developed for covariance-based SEM and their applicability and cut-off values remain debated for variance-based PLS-SEM, these two indices are reported for completeness but interpreted cautiously alongside the more PLS-SEM-appropriate indices (SRMR, NFI, and the composite reliability and loading diagnostics reported above). For the same reason, the Goodness-of-Fit (GoF) index (0.719) is reported as a supplementary descriptive statistic rather than a definitive test of model fit, consistent with the ongoing methodological debate over its use in PLS-SEM.

Effect sizes (f^2) for the three direct predictors were 0.526 for trust in political parties, 0.775 for party image, and 0.015 for digital literacy, corresponding to large, large, and below-small effects respectively by conventional benchmarks (0.02 = small, 0.15 = medium, 0.35 = large). The comparatively small effect size for digital literacy's direct path is consistent with the finding, reported below, that this direct effect does not reach conventional two-tailed statistical significance. Adding the two interaction terms (INT1, INT2) in the second stage increased R² from 0.559 to 0.853 ($\Delta R^2 = 0.294$, $p < 0.001$), indicating a very large combined effect size for the interaction block and providing strong evidence that digital literacy's moderating role accounts for additional variance in young voter loyalty well beyond the three direct effects alone. Predictive relevance (Q^2) was not computed for this analysis and is therefore not reported; [author action: if the target journal requires Q^2 , obtain it via the blindfolding procedure and report both the value and the method used].

Hypothesis Testing

Table 5. Hypothesis Testing Results

Path	β	SE	z / t	p	95% CI	f^2	VIF	Decision
H1: Trust in Political Parties $\rightarrow$ Young Voter Loyalty	0.4836	0.0366	13.22	<0.001	0.412, 0.554	0.526	1.003	Accepted
H2: Party Image $\rightarrow$ Young Voter Loyalty	0.5859	0.0338	17.33	<0.001	0.517, 0.650	0.775	1.002	Accepted
H3: Trust in Political Parties $\times$ Digital Literacy $\rightarrow$ Young Voter Loyalty	0.4320	0.0255	16.97	<0.001	0.382, 0.480	–	1.029	Accepted
H4: Party Image $\times$ Digital Literacy $\rightarrow$ Young Voter Loyalty	0.3622	0.0304	11.92	<0.001	0.298, 0.418	–	1.039	Accepted
Additional (not hypothesized): Digital Literacy $\rightarrow$ Young Voter Loyalty	0.0837	0.0475	1.76	0.078	–0.012, 0.174	0.015	1.001	Not significant

Note: H1, H2, and the additional path are estimated from the PLS-SEM structural model (z -test); H3 and H4 are estimated from the two-stage interaction regression, with SE and CI from bootstrapping (5,000 replicates, bias-corrected and accelerated; $t = \beta/SE$). p -values are two-tailed. f^2 for the interaction terms is not separately available; adding both interaction terms increased R^2 from 0.559 to 0.853 ($\Delta R^2 = 0.294$, $p < 0.001$), reported in the text. The one-tailed p -value for the additional path ($p = 0.039$) is not used here, as this path was not part of a pre-specified directional hypothesis.

The hypothesis testing results, summarized in Table 5, are based on the structural model's total effects. Trust in political parties has a positive and statistically significant effect on young voter loyalty ($\beta = 0.4836$, $SE = 0.0366$, $z = 13.22$, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [0.412, 0.554]), supporting H1. Party image exerts a positive and significant influence on young voter loyalty ($\beta = 0.5859$, $SE = 0.0338$, $z = 17.33$, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [0.517, 0.650]), supporting H2 and confirming a stronger predictive effect than political trust, consistent with its considerably larger effect size ($f^2 = 0.775$ versus 0.526).

Regarding the moderating hypotheses, tested using the two-stage interaction approach described in Methods, the interaction between trust in political parties and digital literacy positively and significantly influences young voter loyalty ($\beta = 0.4320$, $SE = 0.0255$, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [0.382, 0.480]), supporting H3. Likewise, the interaction between party image and digital literacy also demonstrates a positive and significant effect on young voter loyalty ($\beta = 0.3622$, $SE = 0.0304$, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [0.298, 0.418]), supporting H4.

The analysis also examined whether digital literacy has a direct effect on young voter loyalty independent of these interactions ($\beta = 0.0837$, $SE = 0.0475$, $z = 1.76$, 95% CI [–0.012, 0.174], $f^2 = 0.015$). This path does not reach conventional two-tailed statistical significance ($p \approx 0.078$), and its confidence interval includes zero; the one-tailed p -value of 0.039 sometimes reported for directional tests should not be applied here, as this path was not part of a pre-specified directional hypothesis. Taken together with its small effect size, this finding indicates that, in this sample, digital literacy's influence on young voter loyalty operates specifically through its moderating role (H3, H4) rather than as an independent direct predictor – reinforcing, rather than undermining, the study's central argument that digital literacy functions as a moderating mechanism.

DISCUSSION

The Effect of Trust in Political Parties on Young Voter Loyalty

The findings indicate that trust in political parties has a positive and significant effect on young voter loyalty. This result suggests that higher levels of trust in political parties reflected in perceptions of institutional integrity, policy consistency, and the ability to represent public interests are associated with stronger long-term political commitment among young voters. Rather than being driven solely by short-term electoral preferences, voter loyalty appears to develop through continuous evaluations of the credibility and performance of political institutions.

This finding can be interpreted through the lens of political trust theory, which conceptualizes trust as the foundation of sustainable relationships between citizens and political institutions. Dalton (2004) argues that political trust emerges when citizens perceive political institutions as capable of performing their representative functions effectively, transparently, and accountably. In contemporary democracies, trust is increasingly shaped by public evaluations of institutional governance rather than by ideological attachment alone. As Dalton (2017) further explains, citizens tend to maintain political support when political parties consistently fulfill their commitments and demonstrate responsible governance. Consequently, political trust serves as an essential mechanism through which long-term voter loyalty is established.

The present findings are consistent with previous empirical evidence. Devine & Valgarðsson (2024) reported that stable political trust contributes to sustained electoral support because voters are more likely to maintain their political preferences when they perceive political parties as trustworthy. Likewise, Topçuoğlu et al. (2023) demonstrated that trust strengthens voter loyalty by reinforcing party attachment, whereas Okolikj et al. (2024) highlighted the heuristic role of political trust in maintaining ideological proximity between voters and political parties. Institutional transparency has also been identified as an important driver of public trust, thereby enhancing political legitimacy (Crepaz & Arikan, 2024). Similarly, Manuel & Cruz-Rubio (2025) emphasized that ethical governance within political parties contributes substantially to strengthening public confidence in political institutions. Collectively, these studies indicate that political trust represents more than a psychological disposition; it functions as a strategic mechanism for sustaining long-term relationships between political parties and voters.

The contribution of this finding is best framed as contextual rather than a wholly new theoretical claim: unlike many previous studies conducted at national or cross-national levels, this research examines political trust among young voters within a specific, highly digitalized local setting in Renon Traditional Village. Despite the widespread availability of political information through digital platforms, trust in political parties remains a significant determinant of voter loyalty in this setting. This finding suggests that abundant political information does not automatically diminish the importance of political trust; rather, it appears to encourage young voters to evaluate political parties more critically with respect to institutional integrity, policy consistency, and accountability before deciding to maintain their political support. This local-level evidence complements, rather than overturns, the work of Dalton (2017), Topçuoğlu et al. (2023), Devine & Valgarðsson (2024), and Okolikj et al.



(2024), reinforcing that political trust continues to play a central role in fostering voter loyalty within digitally mediated political environments.

The Effect of Party Image on Young Voter Loyalty

The results demonstrate that party image has a positive and statistically significant effect on young voter loyalty. This finding indicates that favorable perceptions of a political party's reputation, credibility, organizational competence, and institutional identity constitute important foundations for developing long-term political commitment. Young voters are therefore more likely to maintain support for political parties that consistently demonstrate organizational quality, effective leadership, and values aligned with their expectations.

From the perspective of political branding, party image represents the collective perception that voters develop regarding the identity, values, and characteristics of a political party through continuous interactions and political communication. DasGupta & Sarkar (2022) argue that a favorable party image enhances perceived organizational quality, thereby increasing voters' willingness to maintain long-term political preferences. This perspective is reinforced by Kaloka et al. (2025), who emphasize that consistent value representation strengthens voters' identification with political parties. Consequently, party image functions not merely as a symbolic attribute but also as a psychological mechanism through which durable relationships between voters and political parties are established.

These findings are further supported by previous empirical studies. Bukari et al. (2025) found that a strong party brand image positively influences electoral preferences by strengthening public perceptions of political competence and credibility. Similarly, Banerjee (2024) demonstrated that positive political brand experiences increase citizens' intentions to maintain electoral support over time. Fahad (2024) additionally reported that political human brand equity strengthens emotional attachment between voters and political actors, thereby increasing the likelihood of sustained political loyalty. Taken together, these findings suggest that party image represents a strategic organizational asset capable of shaping political behavior through the formation of trust, identification, and long-term voter attachment.

The present study contributes additional empirical evidence by examining young voters operating within an intensive digital communication environment. In this context, party image is no longer constructed solely through conventional political campaigns but is continuously shaped by political discourse circulating across social media and other digital communication platforms. Consequently, young voters have broader access to information regarding party performance, leadership, political programs, and institutional reputation, making the process of image formation considerably more dynamic than in traditional political environments. Therefore, this study extends previous findings reported by DasGupta & Sarkar (2022), Kaloka et al. (2025), and Bukari et al. (2025) by demonstrating that party image remains one of the strongest predictors of voter loyalty even when political evaluations occur within highly interactive digital information ecosystems.

From a practical perspective, these findings suggest that political parties should prioritize building a consistent and credible public image through transparent political communication, relevant policy agendas, and organizational integrity. Image-building strategies that rely exclusively on short-term campaign activities are unlikely to generate sustainable voter loyalty. Instead, long-term political commitment is more likely to emerge



when party image is supported by consistent organizational performance, credible leadership, and authentic political communication.

The Moderating Role of Digital Literacy in the Relationship between Trust in Political Parties and Young Voter Loyalty

The findings reveal that digital literacy positively and significantly moderates the relationship between trust in political parties and young voter loyalty. This result indicates that the positive influence of political trust on voter loyalty becomes stronger among individuals with higher levels of digital literacy. In other words, the ability to access, evaluate, and utilize political information critically enables voters to translate institutional trust into more enduring political commitment. These findings suggest that political trust alone may not be sufficient to foster sustainable voter loyalty unless voters possess the necessary competencies to critically assess the quality and credibility of political information.

This moderating effect can be explained through the concept of digital literacy, which extends beyond technical proficiency in using digital technologies. Eshet (2004) conceptualizes digital literacy as a multidimensional competency encompassing the ability to access, interpret, evaluate, and apply digital information critically. Expanding this perspective, Tinmaz et al. (2022) argue that digitally literate individuals are better equipped to distinguish factual information from misinformation and disinformation, thereby making more informed judgments. Within the context of political communication, these competencies enable citizens to evaluate the integrity, transparency, and policy consistency of political parties more objectively, reinforcing the trust that underpins long-term political loyalty.

The present findings are consistent with previous studies examining the political consequences of digital literacy. Chen et al. (2020) demonstrated that digital literacy enhances political participation by improving citizens' capacity to process political information effectively. Likewise, Pérez-Escoda & Freire (2023) emphasized that digital literacy strengthens citizens' ability to verify political information before forming political attitudes. Furthermore, Dash (2024) found that the effectiveness of political communication through social media depends substantially on the credibility of information perceived by citizens. Collectively, these studies suggest that digital literacy not only influences political behavior directly but also reinforces the process through which political trust develops into long-term voter loyalty.

The contribution of this study extends beyond previous research by positioning digital literacy as a moderating mechanism rather than merely an independent predictor of political participation. While earlier studies primarily examined the direct effects of digital literacy on political engagement, the present findings demonstrate that digital literacy strengthens the influence of political trust on voter loyalty. This finding indicates that information-processing competencies determine whether political trust evolves into stable electoral commitment, thereby providing a more comprehensive explanation of voter behavior within digitally mediated democratic environments.

From a practical perspective, these findings imply that strengthening young voter loyalty requires more than enhancing public trust in political parties. Political parties should also promote transparent, evidence-based, and easily verifiable political communication that supports citizens' critical evaluation of political information. As Crepaz & Arikan (2024) argue, institutional transparency contributes significantly to public trust, while Murni et al. (2024)



emphasize the importance of accountable political communication in strengthening institutional legitimacy. Consequently, improving digital literacy alongside transparent political communication may provide a more sustainable strategy for fostering long-term voter loyalty.

The Moderating Role of Digital Literacy in the Relationship between Party Image and Young Voter Loyalty

The results further demonstrate that digital literacy positively and significantly moderates the relationship between party image and young voter loyalty. This finding indicates that the influence of party image on voter loyalty is not uniform across individuals but varies according to voters' ability to critically access, interpret, and evaluate political information obtained through digital media. Consequently, a positive party image is more likely to translate into sustained political loyalty among voters who possess higher levels of digital literacy. These findings suggest that the formation of voter loyalty in the digital era depends not only on how political parties construct their public image but also on how citizens critically interpret the information that shapes those perceptions.

From a theoretical perspective, this finding can be explained through the concept of digital literacy proposed by Eshet (2004), who argues that critical thinking constitutes the core of effective digital information use. Rather than functioning solely as a technical skill, digital literacy enables individuals to evaluate source credibility, compare competing perspectives, and recognize misleading or biased information. Tinmaz et al. (2022) further describe digital literacy as a multidimensional competence encompassing cognitive, technical, and evaluative abilities required to navigate increasingly complex digital environments. Within political communication, these competencies enable voters to develop more objective evaluations of party reputation, institutional identity, and organizational credibility.

These findings are also consistent with previous research on political branding. DasGupta & Sarkar (2022) argue that party image represents citizens' collective perceptions of a political party's identity and quality, developed through political communication and accumulated political experiences. Similarly, Bukari et al. (2025) found that a positive party brand image strengthens voter attachment when citizens perceive consistency between a party's public image and its organizational competence. Together, these studies suggest that the effectiveness of party image depends not only on political communication itself but also on citizens' ability to evaluate political information critically. Therefore, digital literacy strengthens the relationship between party image and voter loyalty by enabling more rational and evidence-based political evaluations.

Unlike previous studies that primarily examined the direct influence of party image on voter loyalty (DasGupta & Sarkar, 2022; Bukari et al., 2025), the present study demonstrates that this relationship is conditional upon voters' digital competencies. Individuals with higher levels of digital literacy are more likely to construct political perceptions through careful verification of multiple information sources, whereas those with lower levels of digital literacy may be more vulnerable to inaccurate or misleading political information. This interpretation is consistent with Pérez-Escoda & Freire (2023), who argue that digital literacy substantially improves citizens' capacity to evaluate political information circulating within digital environments.



The findings also extend the literature on political branding within contemporary digital democracies. Traditionally, party image has been viewed primarily as the outcome of strategic political communication conducted by political parties. However, the present study demonstrates that the effectiveness of such communication depends equally on citizens' ability to interpret and evaluate political messages critically. Consequently, party image should be understood as a product of continuous interaction between political communication strategies and citizens' digital information-processing capabilities. This perspective provides new empirical evidence that digital literacy explains why similar party image strategies may produce different levels of voter loyalty across digitally diverse populations.

From a practical standpoint, these findings indicate that political parties should focus not only on increasing the intensity of digital political communication but also on improving the credibility and quality of the information they disseminate. Banerjee (2024) argues that positive political brand experiences emerge through consistent and credible interactions between political parties and citizens. Likewise, Murni et al. (2024) emphasize that transparent and accountable political communication strengthens public trust in political institutions. Therefore, evidence-based, transparent, and verifiable digital communication strategies are more likely to reinforce party image while simultaneously promoting sustainable voter loyalty among young voters.

The prominence of Instagram and TikTok as respondents' primary sources of political information (see Results) merits further theoretical attention. These visually driven, algorithmically curated platforms compress political messaging into short, emotionally resonant formats, which can simultaneously strengthen party image through frequent, favorable exposure and heighten vulnerability to misinformation when content is not critically evaluated. Within this study's framework, digital literacy likely functions as the mechanism that determines which of these tendencies dominates: voters with higher digital literacy may be better equipped to distinguish credible political content from misleading or manipulated material circulating on these platforms, thereby converting frequent exposure into more accurate, trust-reinforcing evaluations, whereas less digitally literate voters may be more susceptible to image manipulation or misinformation from the same sources. Future research using platform-specific content analysis would help clarify these dynamics more directly.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that trust in political parties and party image are significant determinants of young voter loyalty in Renon Traditional Village, South Denpasar District, with party image exerting the stronger influence. Digital literacy significantly strengthens both relationships, confirming its role as a moderating mechanism rather than merely a direct predictor of political engagement. Voter loyalty in contemporary digital democracies is therefore shaped not only by institutional trust and party image but also by citizens' capacity to critically evaluate political information.

Theoretically, this study's contribution is best understood as incremental rather than foundational: it extends existing voter-behavior and political-branding literature by empirically testing digital literacy as a moderator, rather than a direct predictor, within a specific local political context and a specific empirical model integrating trust, party image, and digital



literacy. Its novelty rests on this combination of moderation framework, local context, and integrated model, rather than on any single element considered in isolation.

Practically, political parties should complement efforts to build public trust and a positive party image with transparent, evidence-based digital communication, while initiatives that strengthen citizens' digital literacy can further support the development of informed and sustainable political loyalty among young voters.

This study is subject to several limitations. First, the cross-sectional research design captures voter perceptions at a single point in time and therefore cannot explain changes in political loyalty over time. Second, the study was conducted exclusively in Renon Traditional Village using purposive sampling, which limits statistical generalization to other social and political contexts. Third, the age composition is broader than a narrow first-time-voter definition: 33.5% of respondents were aged 17–25, while 10.5% were recorded in a >40 category that does not permit separation of respondents aged 41–44 from older respondents. Accordingly, the findings should be interpreted as reflecting a broad young-adult voter sample, and age-based subgroup differences were not formally tested. Future research is therefore encouraged to employ longitudinal research designs; conduct multi-village comparisons; perform explicit age-group subgroup analyses; and incorporate additional variables such as political efficacy, party identification, misinformation exposure, and platform-specific social media engagement to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing voter loyalty in the digital era.

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ETHICS STATEMENT

This study did not undergo formal review by an institutional ethics committee, and no formal approval number was issued. The questionnaire was anonymous and posed minimal risk to respondents, and all participants provided informed consent prior to voluntary participation. [Author action: please confirm this reflects your institution's actual policy for this type of research – e.g., whether anonymous minimal-risk survey research is exempt from formal ethics review at Undiknas Graduate School – and adjust the wording if a different basis applies.]

