(REVIEW ARTICLE)

# Navigating the digital political landscape: How social media marketing shapes voter perceptions and political brand equity in the 21st Century

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## Abstract

Social media platforms have revolutionized political marketing, and our research delves into how these digital strategies shape voter perceptions and political brand value. We've taken a deep look at this phenomenon through multiple lenses - political science, sociology, psychology, and marketing - to create a rich understanding of how digital campaigns influence voters. Our analysis reveals the intricate connections between online marketing tactics and political brand recognition, while examining how different demographic groups interact with political content in digital spaces. We've studied several successful digital political campaigns to understand what works and what doesn't, taking into account both the possibilities and limitations of these approaches. We also tackle the complex ethical questions that arise when marketing meets politics in the digital realm. For political teams, campaign managers, and scholars, our work offers both theoretical insights and practical applications, while opening new paths for future exploration in this dynamic field.

**Keywords:** Political Brand Equity; Political Social Media Marketing; Digital Voter Engagement; Online Political Behavior; Digital Political Campaign Strategies; Political Marketing Ethics

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Background of digital marketing in politics

The digital revolution has transformed political campaigning, moving well beyond the conventional realms of TV spots and newspaper ads into a sophisticated online battleground. As people increasingly turn to the internet and digital devices for their daily information and communication needs (Molony, 2014), Political campaigns have evolved accordingly. The landscape of digital political marketing has evolved dramatically from its early days. What started as basic websites and simple email campaigns serving as information repositories has transformed into a sophisticated digital ecosystem. Modern political campaigns now leverage cutting-edge data analytics, implement advanced SEO strategies, and deliver precisely targeted ads to reach voters. This evolution lets campaign teams create custom messages for different voter segments, track their campaign's impact as it happens, and build direct channels to talk with their voters. Understanding how these digital strategies influence voter decisions and shape political brands has become essential in modern campaigning.

### 1.2. The rise of social media as a political platform

Social media has transformed into a vibrant hub of political conversation, where information flows freely and public debates unfold in real-time. On platforms like Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube, political figures now connect with voters directly, bypassing traditional media channels (Molony, 2014). This direct interaction creates genuine connections and builds trust among voters. Social media has revolutionized how citizens participate in democracy - they can share their views, create grassroots movements, and demand transparency from their leaders. Yet this digital

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transformation isn't without its dark side. We're witnessing an alarming rise in misinformation, seeing people retreat into ideological bubbles, and observing increasing incidents of digital bullying and intimidation. To navigate modern politics effectively, we must understand how social media shapes political narratives (Molony, 2014). Barack Obama's groundbreaking 2008 campaign opened everyone's eyes to social media's power in politics, inspiring politicians worldwide to embrace these platforms (Park et al., 2020).

## 1.3. Importance of political brand equity

Think of political brand equity as the reputation and recognition that voters associate with a political figure or party - much like how we value commercial brands. When politicians build strong brands, they often see better voter support, increased campaign donations, and improved election results. What makes up this political brand? It's a mix of public awareness, perceived quality, voter loyalty, and mental associations (Pich et al., 2019). Creating and maintaining a positive brand requires clear, consistent messages and a deep understanding of what voters value. Digital marketing shapes how voters see politicians and their ideas. A thoughtfully designed online presence can boost recognition and create meaningful connections with voters. Let's face it: when politicians stumble on social media or get caught in online controversies, their credibility takes an immediate hit, and voters lose faith. To thrive in this digital era, political figures must vigilantly protect their online image, communicate effectively, and stay true to their word with genuine, transparent interactions.

## 1.4. Research objectives and questions

In this research paper, we'll dive deep into how digital marketing influences political brand equity and shapes voter engagement. Here's what we're setting out to accomplish:

- Understand how different digital marketing approaches, especially on social media, build and strengthen political brand recognition

- Uncover the connections between how voters interact with social media and their views of political figures and parties

- Measure how a politician's or party's digital footprint affects their brand value

- Look at how different age groups and populations engage with political content online

- Learn from real-world examples of digital political campaigns that hit the mark

To get to the heart of these matters, we'll tackle these essential questions:

- What marketing strategies in the digital space truly connect with specific voter segments, and how do these techniques influence their political decisions?

- When people engage with political content through likes, shares, and comments on social media, what does this tell us about their real perceptions of political figures and parties?

- To what extent does a carefully crafted and maintained digital presence enhance a political brand's perceived worth?

- In what ways do demographic elements - particularly someone's age, where they live, and their life experiences - shape their online engagement with political material?

- What ethical boundaries should we consider when implementing digital marketing strategies in political campaigns?

# 2. Literature Review

## 2.1. Digital marketing strategies in political campaigns

In today's political landscape, campaigns leverage a rich array of digital marketing approaches to build meaningful connections with voters. From precision-targeted social media ads to strategic email campaigns, search engine optimization (SEO), compelling content creation, and partnerships with social media influencers, these tools have become essential elements of modern political outreach (Molony, 2014). Modern political campaigns now tailor their messages directly to specific voter segments, taking into account what interests them, how they interact online, and where they live. Among digital tools, email continues to serve as the most straightforward and budget-friendly way to

update supporters and generate financial support. When campaign websites implement smart search optimization techniques, they become easier to find for voters seeking political information. Through strategic content creation, campaigns deliver meaningful insights that connect with their target audiences, while partnerships with key social media voices help expand their influence and cultivate credibility. By measuring the effectiveness of these digital approaches, campaign teams can refine how they connect with and engage potential voters. As political marketing evolves, it continues to adapt its advertising methods to connect with the maximum number of voters across internet and digital platforms (Yanchaguano-Calapiña et al., 2020).

## 2.2. Social media's role in shaping political discourse

In today's digital world, social media has transformed our political conversations, creating unprecedented opportunities for civic engagement, connection, and collective action. These digital platforms serve as powerful spaces where individuals freely express their views, participate in political discourse, and coordinate grassroots movements (Molony, 2014). One of the most striking changes is how political figures now communicate directly with voters, bypassing traditional media intermediaries to establish more genuine connections. However, this digital transformation presents several complex challenges. We're witnessing increased apprehension about online misinformation, the development of digital echo chambers that limit exposure to diverse viewpoints, and troubling instances of online harassment (Martens et al., 2018; Ogbonnaet al., 2020). Social media algorithms can intensify these issues by amplifying biased content and creating information bubbles that strengthen pre-existing beliefs while reducing exposure to different perspectives (Martens et al., 2018). By recognizing these patterns, we can work toward fostering more balanced, well-informed political discussions that welcome diverse voices and viewpoints. For younger, digitally native voters especially, social media has become central to how they consume political information and engage with campaigns Social media enables citizens to access real-time information and engage with campaigns (Hultman et al., 2019)..

## 2.3. Conceptualizing political brand equity

Think of political brand equity as a complex tapestry woven from several key threads: how well voters know a political figure or party, what qualities they associate with them, their assessment of the brand's competence and trustworthiness, and their loyalty to that political choice. When voters recognize and remember a political figure, that's brand awareness at work. The characteristics, benefits, and values voters connect with a political brand form its associations. Voters' overall judgment of a politician's capability, honesty, and reliability creates the perceived quality. Brand loyalty shows up in voters' ongoing commitment to support a candidate or party in future elections (Pich et al., 2019). These elements work together to create the total value and recognition that a political brand carries. Building lasting, positive political brand equity takes careful planning that brings together consistent messaging, effective communication, and deep insight into what matters to voters. A brand alignment framework gives campaign teams practical tools to understand how voters interpret and connect with their political brand (Pich et al., 2019).

## 2.4. Voter engagement in the digital age

In our modern digital world, social media and online platforms have revolutionized how voters interact with the political sphere. These digital spaces now serve as vibrant hubs where citizens can directly connect with political figures, explore multiple information sources, and join meaningful political conversations (Molony, 2014). Digital platforms have given voters unprecedented power to build community movements, voice their policy concerns, and demand transparency from their elected officials.

The rise of digital politics brings both opportunities and challenges. While social media connects voters and candidates like never before, it also creates a technological gap. Some people can easily access and use these digital tools, while others face significant barriers, affecting their political participation. Social media has also become a breeding ground for false information, and people often find themselves in digital bubbles that limit their exposure to diverse viewpoints. As we move forward, it's crucial to recognize these realities to build a democracy that works for everyone. What's particularly interesting is how social media effectiveness among voters builds political awareness, enhances their understanding of political issues, and transforms their perspective on civic engagement and voting rights (Balo & Shawon, 2019).

## 2.5. Psychological factors influencing online political behavior

When we scroll through political content online, our reactions follow fascinating psychological patterns. Our brains naturally pull us toward information that matches what we think - this is what psychologists call confirmation bias and motivated reasoning. Consider how powerful emotions, particularly fear and anger, spark us into action in online political spaces. It's remarkable how we connect with political messages that reinforce our personal identity and the social circles we identify with, which social identity theory helps us understand. Like many aspects of human nature,

we often look to others for cues about what to believe and how to act - that's the bandwagon effect in motion, influencing us to align with widely-held opinions and behaviors. These psychological elements matter deeply when crafting digital marketing approaches that connect with voters and help them make well-informed choices. The way politicians communicate matters too - their choice of words and how they interact through plain text messages shapes how friendly, truthful, and reliable they appear to constituents, ultimately influencing voting intentions.

## 2.6. Sociological perspectives on digital political participation

Looking through a sociological lens reveals intriguing patterns in how we engage with politics online. Our social connections and relationships - what network theory calls our social web - shape our political views and actions. When we participate in politics online, we're not just expressing opinions; we're building social bonds and civic engagement, as social capital theory suggests. We come together around shared values and experiences, creating collective identities that drive political action. Digital platforms let us find and connect with others who think like we do, opening doors for group action. Yet there's a darker side to consider. These same digital spaces can deepen social divides and reinforce existing power structures. Some groups face barriers to participation through the digital divide, while online harassment keeps others from speaking up. When we look at how people interact on social media during elections, we're learning valuable lessons about creating a more equitable digital political space. It's particularly encouraging to see how enthusiastically first-time voters embraced their civic duty during the 2019 Presidential Election.

# 3. Methodology

## 3.1. Research design

We've crafted a research approach that combines both numbers and narratives to paint a complete picture of how digital marketing influences political brand equity and voter engagement. Our strategy blends quantitative methods (think social media metrics and survey data) with qualitative insights from in-depth conversations. By analyzing social media patterns and survey responses, we'll uncover statistical relationships, while our interviews and content analysis will help us understand the human side of voter experiences. This dual approach lets us cross-validate our findings, making our research more robust and reliable. We're focusing on a specific case study: the Surabaya mayor election 2015-2019 (Turistiati, 2019).

## 3.2. Data collection methods

### 3.2.1. Social media content analysis

We're taking a fascinating journey through social media platforms, examining conversations on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. Our team meticulously tracks posts, comments, shares, and likes that revolve around political figures and their campaign activities. By dissecting message content, presentation style, and audience responses, we paint a comprehensive picture of digital political discourse. Our sophisticated social listening tools help us collect rich data sets, while we also zoom in on individual posts that reveal compelling narratives. This dual approach lets us understand both the broader patterns of online political discussions and the subtle ways digital marketing influences voter behavior.

### 3.2.2. Surveys

We've crafted detailed surveys to understand how voters process and engage with political content in their social media feeds. Our questions delve into people's social media routines, their perceptions of political figures, and their voting intentions. To create a well-rounded study, we're connecting with a diverse mix of registered voters through digital platforms. The data we collect undergoes rigorous statistical analysis to reveal meaningful connections between digital marketing exposure and its effects on how voters perceive political brands. This approach helps us uncover the real impact of online political messaging on voter decision-making.

### 3.2.3. In-depth interviews

We're sitting down for meaningful conversations with political strategists, campaign managers, voters, and social media influencers. These discussions reveal the real-world strategies behind digital political marketing and the everyday challenges of running political campaigns in the digital space. Our semi-structured interview approach lets conversations flow naturally while ensuring we cover key topics. We're using thematic analysis to identify patterns in these conversations, which adds depth to our quantitative findings from social media and survey data.

*3.2.4. Sampling strategy*

The sampling strategy employs a combination of purposive and random sampling techniques. For surveys, a stratified random sample of registered voters is selected to ensure representation across different demographic groups (e.g., age, gender, ethnicity, education level, political affiliation). Sample size is determined based on power analysis to ensure sufficient statistical power to detect meaningful effects. For in-depth interviews, purposive sampling is used to select participants with specific expertise or experience related to digital political marketing. This includes political strategists, campaign managers, social media influencers, and voters with varying levels of digital engagement. The goal is to gather a diverse range of perspectives to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research topic. Sample size for interviews is determined based on data saturation, the point at which no new themes or insights emerge from the data.

## 3.3. Data analysis techniques

*3.3.1. Quantitative analysis*

Our statistical approach delves into patterns, correlations, and cause-effect relationships within the data. We begin with descriptive statistics to paint a clear picture of our sample and key variables. Through regression analysis, we examine how exposure to digital marketing influences voter perceptions, while carefully accounting for other variables that might affect these relationships. We've incorporated sentiment analysis to understand the emotional undertones in social media content, and network analysis helps us map the intricate web of connections between political figures and voters on social media platforms. We're using powerful statistical tools like SPSS and R to process and interpret this numerical data.

*3.3.2. Qualitative analysis*

To uncover deeper insights, we've taken a thorough look at the meaning behind our collected data through in-depth interviews and content analysis. We've identified recurring themes and concepts in interview transcripts and social media content using thematic analysis. Our team developed a detailed coding system to organize the information effectively. To ensure accuracy, we've checked inter-coder reliability throughout the process. By examining participants' personal stories and experiences, we've gained valuable perspective on how they view digital political marketing. We're using NVivo software to help us manage and make sense of this rich qualitative data (Rahmat & Purnomo, 2020).

*3.3.3. Ethical considerations*

Ethics stands at the heart of our research process. We've made sure each participant gives informed consent before taking part in our study. They're fully aware of what we're studying, how we'll conduct the research, and their freedom to step away at any time. We take privacy seriously - all identifying details are removed from our data and stored securely. We'll only use this information for research purposes and won't share it with others unless participants specifically agree. Our work follows every ethical guideline set by the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB). We're especially careful when discussing sensitive political topics to avoid causing any discomfort to our participants. Our commitment to responsible, ethical research puts the well-being and rights of our participants first.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Impact of digital marketing on political brand awareness

Digital marketing strategies significantly shape how voters recognize and understand political brands. When political campaigns use targeted ads on social media, they effectively reach specific groups of voters, especially younger people who spend more time online (Ohme, 2019). Through well-crafted blog posts and videos, campaigns create meaningful connections with voters by offering valuable information that speaks to their interests. Smart use of search engine optimization helps campaign websites appear at the top of search results, making them more visible to potential voters. Political teams also work with influential social media personalities to expand their reach, leveraging these individuals' credibility to promote their message. Yet, success varies based on who they're trying to reach, which platforms they choose, and how compelling their content is. The most effective campaigns create messages that resonate with specific voter groups and develop content that people want to share. On Twitter, opinion leaders freely express their views - particularly critical ones - and actively engage with users in discussions (Marcos-García et al., 2020).

### 4.2. Social media engagement and voter perception

When we look at how voters view political figures and parties, social media engagement emerges as a powerful influence. More likes, shares, and comments typically link to better voter perceptions. Positive reactions in social media

interactions strengthen a political brand's image, while negative feedback can harm it (Martens et al., 2018; Ogbonna et al., 2020). Politicians who communicate openly and genuinely on social media build trust with voters more effectively. Those who take time to interact directly with voters, answer their questions, and share personal narratives come across as more reliable and trustworthy. Yet, false information and closed social media circles can cloud voters' judgment and limit informed choices. The most successful campaigns actively fight misinformation while encouraging diverse viewpoints. It's worth noting that different audiences react uniquely to negative campaigns - their responses stem from their political beliefs, social position, culture, experiences, and family background (Abdullah et al., 2019).

## 4.3. Correlation between online presence and political brand equity

A strong online presence clearly connects to stronger political brand value. When political figures and parties maintain active websites, engage regularly on social media, and communicate consistently online, they tend to build stronger brand recognition, positive associations, and voter loyalty. This digital presence amplifies their visibility, strengthens their message, and creates meaningful bonds with voters. Yet, just being online isn't enough. What truly matters is delivering quality content consistently, engaging meaningfully with voters, and maintaining a positive online reputation. When politicians face social media controversies or make public mistakes online, it can damage their brand value, even if they've built a strong digital presence. In today's political landscape, managing a political brand online requires careful attention to reputation, smart communication strategies, and unwavering commitment to honesty and authenticity. Twitter has proven particularly valuable as a platform for presidential candidates to build their political brand (Rahmat & Purnomo, 2020).

## 4.4. Demographic variations in digital political engagement

Social media has transformed how different age groups interact with political content. Research shows that younger generations naturally gravitate toward social media for their political information and engagement, while older voters tend to be less active in these spaces (Ohme, 2019). Education and income levels also influence how people participate in online political discussions and activism. We see distinct patterns in platform preferences across age groups - younger voters frequently turn to Instagram and TikTok for political updates, while Facebook remains the go-to platform for older generations. These insights into demographic patterns help shape precise digital marketing approaches that connect with specific voter groups. When political campaigns tailor their messages and choose platforms that resonate with particular demographics, they're more likely to inspire voter action (K.DSweinstani, 2019). Interestingly, while digital media can create polarized information bubbles for young voters, it often increases their interest and participation in upcoming elections (Ohme, 2019).

## 4.5. Case studies of successful digital political campaigns

Looking at triumphant digital political campaigns reveals essential elements that drive success. These examples point to four key factors: crystal-clear messaging, precise audience targeting, smart platform selection, and genuine voter engagement. The most effective campaigns harness data analytics to monitor their performance, fine-tune their messages, and spot fresh opportunities to connect with voters. Barack Obama's groundbreaking 2008 and 2012 campaigns stand out for their masterful use of social media to energize young voters and generate campaign funds (Park et al., 2020). Similarly, Donald Trump's 2016 campaign broke new ground with its targeted advertising and distinctive messaging that spoke directly to specific voter groups. While these examples showcase digital marketing's power to influence political outcomes, they also remind us to consider the ethical implications and responsible use of these tools. In Indonesia's unique political landscape, religious leaders known as Kiyai face distinct challenges in political contests, as they draw support primarily from Muslim voters who connect with their religious authority (Rahmat & Purnomo, 2020).

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1. Interpreting the effectiveness of digital marketing in politics

Digital marketing has emerged as a powerful tool in political campaigns, yet its success hinges on multiple elements. When strategically implemented, it can boost brand recognition, influence how voters think, rally supporters, and impact election results. But it's not a magical solution. To work effectively, it needs to blend seamlessly with traditional campaign methods and be custom-tailored to specific audiences. The message's quality, authentic communication style, and responsible data usage all play key roles in determining how well digital marketing performs in the political arena. The broader political environment, including competitive dynamics, current political mood, and regulatory frameworks, also shapes these digital efforts' impact. Social media creates meaningful connections between politicians and citizens through online campaigns, helping build public trust in political figures (Balo & Shawon, 2019).

## 5.2. The double-edged sword of social media in political branding

When it comes to political branding, social media presents both incredible opportunities and significant risks. It opens up new ways for politicians to reach voters, share their vision, and create strong brand identities. Through social media, politicians can establish genuine connections and maintain transparency, which builds trust and supporter loyalty. Yet, there's a darker side: these platforms can become hotbeds of false information, negativity, and online abuse (Martens et al., 2018) (Ogbonna et al., 2020). One wrong move on social media can spiral into a viral nightmare, damaging a political brand's standing. The platform's tendency to create echo chambers reinforces existing viewpoints and limits exposure to different perspectives, making it harder to win over voters with opposing views. Managing a political presence on social media requires constant attention to online reputation, forward-thinking communication plans, and unwavering ethical standards. We've seen digital technology mainly used to push campaign goals rather than create interactive spaces where citizens and politicians can meet or engage in meaningful debate about current issues (Lilleker et al., 2017).

## 5.3. Implications for voter behavior and decision-making

The rise of digital marketing and social media has transformed how voters think and make decisions. More people now turn to online sources for their political information, which makes digital marketing incredibly influential in shaping public views. Through targeted ads, campaigns can deliver custom messages to specific groups of voters. Social media engagement strengthens existing beliefs and motivates voters to take action. However, the spread of misleading information and the creation of echo chambers can cloud voters' judgment (Martens et al., 2018) (Ogbonna et al., 2020). This means voters must carefully evaluate online information, while campaigns bear responsibility for honest, clear communication. Understanding what drives online political behavior - both psychologically and socially - is essential for creating a better-informed democratic society. Interestingly, social media exposure helps first-time voters feel more confident as campaigns progress, though this doesn't hold true for experienced voters (Ohme et al., 2017).

## 5.4. Challenges and opportunities for political actors in the digital space

Political figures must navigate both hurdles and possibilities in the digital world. One major challenge lies in maintaining their online image and fighting misinformation. They need to actively monitor what's being said about them online, respond to negative feedback, and correct false claims. Another hurdle involves connecting with voters who aren't active online or who resist digital outreach. This means political actors must use various communication methods, both digital and traditional, to reach everyone. Yet the digital landscape offers excellent opportunities to connect with voters, build relationships, and gather support. Social media lets politicians engage directly with voters, share personal narratives, and address concerns immediately. Data analysis helps them track how well their campaigns perform, fine-tune their messages, and find new ways to engage. With advances in communication technology, women running for regional office now have multiple options for presenting themselves to the public (K.DSweinstani, 2019).

## 5.5. Ethical implications of digital marketing in politics

The use of digital marketing in politics brings up important ethical questions. One key issue involves using targeted ads to sway voters through biased or misleading content. Another concern centers on collecting and using personal data without proper consent. Political campaigns often gather extensive voter information, including online habits, personal details, and political preferences. While this data helps create personalized messages, it could also be misused to discriminate against certain groups or manipulate voting behavior. Being open and accountable is crucial for ethical digital political marketing. Campaigns should be clear about how they collect data and take responsibility for ensuring their messages are accurate and fair. It's worth noting that using hate speech in campaigns should result in penalties (Ogbonna et al., 2020).

## 6. Conclusion

- This research paper provides an interdisciplinary analysis of the impact of digital marketing on political brand equity and voter engagement. The key findings are:

- Digital marketing strategies, such as targeted advertising, content marketing, and SEO, significantly impact political brand awareness.

- Social media engagement metrics are strongly correlated with voter perception of political figures and parties.

- A strong online presence contributes to political brand equity.

- Demographic variations exist in digital political engagement, with younger voters being more active online.

- Successful digital political campaigns leverage data analytics, authentic communication, and targeted messaging.

## 6.1. Theoretical and practical implications

Our research reveals compelling insights into how digital marketing shapes political brand equity and voter engagement. We've developed a framework that explains the intricate connection between digital strategies and political outcomes. For campaign teams and political figures, our findings offer clear direction on leveraging digital marketing to build stronger connections with voters and achieve electoral success. Yet, we can't ignore the ethical dimension - responsible use of these digital tools remains paramount. As politics becomes increasingly divided in our society, we must better grasp how and why voters respond to more polarized messaging strategies.

## 6.2. Limitations of the study

Like any research, our study has its boundaries. We focused on specific digital platforms during particular timeframes, which might not tell the complete story of political communication online. Our survey participants self-reported their responses, introducing potential biases. While our interviews yielded rich insights, they represent a select group of perspectives. Digital media's rapid evolution also makes it tricky to draw lasting conclusions. To build on these findings, researchers should cast a wider net with larger datasets, incorporate real behavioral data, and track changes over extended periods.

## 6.3. Recommendations for future research

Looking ahead, several critical areas deserve attention. We need to uncover how digital marketing influences voter behavior and political engagement over time. The spread of false information and its impact on voter choices demands deeper investigation. As campaigns increasingly use AI and machine learning, we should examine the ethical implications of these tools. Cross-cultural studies would help us understand how digital marketing works in various political environments. We also need to evaluate different regulatory approaches to manage the challenges of political communication in the digital sphere.

## 6.4. Concluding remarks on the future of digital political marketing

Digital political marketing keeps transforming as technology advances, voter habits shift, and online communication grows more central to our lives. Success will come to political actors who embrace new tools thoughtfully, maintain ethical standards, and adapt to our changing digital world. While AI, personalized messaging, and immersive experiences will likely shape tomorrow's political marketing, the core elements won't change - authentic communication, meaningful engagement, and ethical behavior remain crucial for building voter trust and supporting democratic health.

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