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Abstract: Based on the value consumption theory and the social influence theory, this research investigates the impact of Facebook interactions on political voting. Data from 208 Facebook users was collected after Tunisian presidential elections in 2019. Findings show that values derived from the interactions with the candidate and with peers on Facebook impact positively the relationship quality with the candidate and the voting intents. The study also considers the moderating roles of skepticism, involvement in politics and social influence outside Facebook. Only the effect of the latter was significant. This result reflects the specific context of new democratic countries. In fact, citizens do not vote for the programs but for the candidate without paying attention to the political programs. In addition, results show that the vote is influenced by the choice of others, which shows a political immaturity and a lack of personal conviction about the programs. This research will help political candidates to better develop their electoral communication particularly on social media.

Keywords: vote; politics; social media; social influence theory; consumption value theory relationship quality.

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Biographical notes: Ghada Chourou graduated from the Marketing Department at the University of Tunisia's Higher Institute, exhibits a keen focus on customer behaviour and decision making within the marketing domain. With a specialisation in these areas, she delves deeply into the multifaceted aspects of consumer behaviour, spanning from cognitive biases to emotional responses.

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1 Introduction

The influence of social media on consumer behaviour has been widely demonstrated in several areas and contexts such as responsible consumption (Salazar et al., 2012), brand image and attachment (Barreda et al., 2020; Baum et al., 2018). This influence also extends to the political context, showing no exception. Indeed, social networks became a powerful channel for communicating with voters, engaging citizens in politics, and impacting their participation and preferences (Ali et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2009), and provides a strong evidence on the political landscape (Khasabu and Rahmanto, 2023).

In this context, Yanoshevsky (2010) and Bode (2012) present Facebook as an indispensable tool used by politicians to communicate with voters. Indeed, unlike traditional media, social platforms make it possible for politicians to have direct contact with voters without the presence of a 'middleman' which increases political engagement (Sahly et al., 2019).

Furthermore, Dewenter et al. (2018) have shown that social media, including Facebook and Twitter, have a significant impact on voting intentions and political preferences in countries such as the USA, Taiwan and India. In line with this research, Schürmann (2023) also emphasises that political candidates actively adopt Facebook as a platform for content creation and for voter communication. Similarly, Raynes-Goldie and Walker (2008) noted that Facebook allows fans to communicate with each other and build a friendship with the candidate. Harris and Harrigan (2015) investigated the role played by social media during the UK election campaign of May 2010. Recently, Amsalem and Zoizner (2023) showed that more and more voters turn to online platforms

to get their political information which makes social media an important source of political information.

The paper has noticed that more research is needed to focus on the role of social technologies and to bring theory up to speed with practice and recommended the development of relationship marketing strategies in politics. Indeed, according to the authors, social media communications can add significant value when implemented as part of a systematic and long-term online and offline relationship-building strategy (Alfiyani, 2018; Khasabu and Rahmanto, 2023).

Despite this enthusiasm for social media, previous works on this topic have focused on communication from politicians without highlighting voters' interactions (Acar and Uluğ, 2022; Bode, 2015, Bode, 2012). In addition, they have considered countries where democracy has long been established. However, in such contexts, the influence of social networks can be limited since the preferences of voters are already mature and stable and consequently not sensitive enough to online interactions. In this sense, Towner and Dulio (2011) studied the effects of exposure to various Web 2.0 sources during 2008 US presidential elections. They found that people exposed to the candidates' Facebook pages have a heightened sense that they influence the political system. However, the authors did not investigate the process of how Facebook does influence voters. Mochla et al. (2023) investigated the impact of the quality of the political website on voters' intentions. They found that the useful content and aesthetic design were the most significant dimensions of the voters' perception about the political websites' quality. Nevertheless, no attention was given to social networks or to the relationship with the candidate. In the same line, Ryoo and Bendle (2017) examined the themes covered within the social media strategies of candidates. They noted that Clinton's focus on Trump increases toward the end of the primary campaign. However, the research did not consider the relationship with followers. Yet, social networks are a honeycomb where peer influence plays an essential role in shaping consumers' preferences and behaviours. Furthermore, research on countries that are still learning democracy; where political preferences are still fragile under the influence of others, would be an asset to highlight the importance of social networks. Tunisia in North Africa has attracted worldwide attention since the 2011 revolution through its hitherto successful democratic path. Since, the country is learning democracy.. The social network Facebook played an important role in its transformation and even more in the 2019 presidential elections where many candidates have applied (Kais Said; Nabil Karoui; Abdelfattah Mourou and Nejib Chebbi). In this context, Facebook has witnessed a strong presence of voters as well as the emergence of several political pages and hyper-active sponsorship links.

Consequently, this article aims at exploring the influence of Facebook interactions on Tunisian votes. It mobilises in this sense the social influence theory and the theory of consumption value which are recommended by the existing literature to understand networks and members' engagements. The research question is as follows: to what extent did values derived from interactions with the political candidate and with peers on Facebook influence voting intentions during the 2019 presidential elections in Tunisia?

On a managerial level, this research will help political candidates to better develop their electoral communications, particularly on the digital. On a theoretical level, it will shed new light on political marketing as well as on the behaviour of online consumers, in particular through the influence of peers.

To answer our research question, this paper first sheds light on voting behaviour in order to identify its antecedents. Second, it will mobilise the theory of social influence

and the theory of consumption value. The conceptual model will then be developed before approaching our research methodology. The paper continues with the discussion of the results and concludes with contributions, limitations and future research avenues.

Table 1 Factors explaining voting behaviour

<i>Antecedents</i>	<i>Authors</i>	<i>Nature of the study</i>	<i>Study context</i>
Sociodemographic variables	Blais et al. (1995)	Quantitative	Quebec
Attachment to the country	Blais et al. (1995)	Quantitative	Quebec
	Mendelberg (2018)		
Influence of the economy	Blais et al. (1995)	Quantitative	Quebec
Candidate	Blais et al. (1995)	Quantitative	Quebec
	Stewart and Clarke (1992)		United Kingdom
	Campbell (1960)		
	Bean and Mughan (1989)		
	Stewart and Clarke (1992)		
	Goren (1997)		
Ideology and values	Swyngedouw et al. (1995)	Theoretical	Flanders
	Mendelberg (2018)		
	Sears (1993)		
Programs and political positions	Swyngedouw et al. (1995)	Quantitative	Flanders
	Clarke et al. (1982)		
Peers social communication	Swyngedouw et al. (1995)	Quantitative	Flanders
	Mendelberg (2018)		United States
	Ahn et al. (2013)		
	Lazarsfeld et al. (1948)		
	Ikeda and Richey (2005)		
Social media Twitter	Spierings and Jacobs (2014)	Quantitative	United States
Facebook	Chang et al. (2018)		Taiwan
Content generated on Facebook	Woolley et al. (2010)	Quantitative	United States

1.1 Voting behaviour

Voting behaviour has long been studied by previous research (Lewis-Beck, 1988). In social psychology, it has been considered from two perspectives. The first corresponds to rational school because the voter makes a logical assessment of the candidate on the basis of a rational calculation. The second perspective mobilises the sociological school where the social environment influences the political orientations. Moreover, Mendelberg (2018) evokes certain classic theories to explain voter behaviour, such as heuristics for example, which are cognitive shortcuts used by voters when assessing a candidate in order to reach ‘rational’ decisions, and this by referring to cues from their parties or interest groups.

To better understand voting decisions, Table 1 presents some explaining factors according to previous research. Furthermore, Bias et al. (1995) cited socio-demographic variables, explaining that people with different socio-demographic characteristics often vote for different candidates. Thus, it is more likely that an 18-year-old and a 60-year-old will vote for different candidates. In addition, the authors cited emotional factors such as feelings of attachment to the country, to values and to ideology. Swyngedouw et al. (1995) considered the influence of peers that operates through socialisation and identification.

Recent work also introduces social media into policy research. Ahn et al. (2013) focused on daily discussions between individuals and their influence on political behaviour. Ikeda et al. (2005) studied the impact of the influence of social networks in the physical world on political participation. They found that social networking fosters political participation. The analysis of Spierings and Jacobs (2014) also showed that Twitter has a significant influence on voting preferences. More recently, Chang et al. (2018) cited several studies that were carried out during the US elections in 2018 and showed that Facebook users tended to influence others' preferences towards a specific candidate or party. In addition, Biswas et al. (2014) highlighted the influence of social media on young voters' behaviours. Their study showed that social media plays a significant role in engaging young voters in politics by providing them a channel to communicate directly with the candidates.

In the continuity of these reflections and in order to understand the social influence on Facebook, the following paragraphs mobilise the theory of social influence and the theory of consumption value.

1.1.1 Social influence theory

In social psychology, this theory was defined by Latané (1981) as any influence exerted by others on feelings, thoughts or behaviours. It provides a clear framework for understanding the influence of individuals in their social environment (Chang et al., 2018). According to Deutsch and Gerard (1955), two types of social influence may occur. Firstly, informational influence refers to the influence exerted on others in order to accept the information given as a real fact. Second, normative influence drives individuals to conform to the expectations of an individual or a group. This conformity according to De Montmollin (1958) can be explained by two hypotheses. The first states that individuals have a need to belong to a group. While the second refers to a need for certainty and a need to be convinced of the opinion that seems most credible. In marketing, this theory has been widely used to explain consumer influences (Wood and Hayes, 2012).

For example, social networks cause changes in decision-making (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2013) and in the behaviour of others (Okazaki, 2009). With the expansion of internet and social media, research has shown that social influence does not require face-to-face contact. Indeed, it turns out that online communication can also be considered as a context conducive to social influence (Kim and Hollingshead, 2015).

Online communication via social media has certainly profound implications on consumers' decision-making, including their voting behaviour. However, the strength and the sign of such influence may depend on the individual assessment of one's interactions. Pennington et al. (2015) showed that simply following the candidate's page is unlikely to increase engagement or effectiveness in an election. The voter still needs to benefit from this monitoring. The theory of consumption value may offer some insights in this perspective. Originally, this theory has drawn attention to the benefits that individuals derive (Woodruff, 1997). When it comes to social media, they offer many benefits to members such information, fun, escape and social connection (Ben Yahia, 2006).

1.2 Theory of consumption value

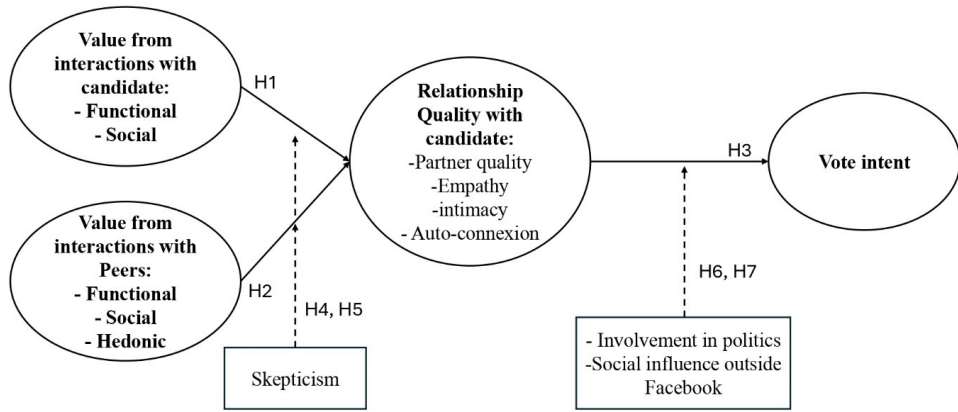
The notion of customer values represents a core concept in marketing literature. While value first emerged as a concept focusing on the costs and functional aspects associated with an offering, its conceptualisation has evolved to include other dimensions that determine the consumer choices (Chaouali et al., 2019). The theory of consumption values developed by Sheth et al. (1991) assumes indeed that consumer choice is a function of multiple consumption values which are functional, social and hedonic among others. This theory has been acknowledged as the dominant theoretical lens in value literature (Sweeney and Soutar, 2001). It has proved its effectiveness in many contexts such as online and offline retailing (Carlson et al., 2015), mobile social media (Carlson et al., 2019) and mobile banking (Chaouali et al., 2019). Indeed, due to the internet expansion, the theory of consumption values has been mobilised in the context of social media in order to understand the online consumer behaviour (Tanrikulu, 2021).

Functional value refers to whether the brand is able to perform its functional, utilitarian or physical purposes (Sánchez-Fernández and Iniesta-Bonillo, 2007). In addition, hedonic value refers to 'the fun, enjoyable, positive feeling and emotional responses aroused' [Sánchez-Fernández and Iniesta-Bonillo, (2007), p.438]. Social value is defined as 'perceived utility acquired from an alternative's association with one or more specific social groups. An alternative acquires social value through association with positively or negatively stereotyped demographic, socioeconomic, and cultural-ethnic groups. Social value is measured on a profile of choice imagery' (Sweeny and Soutar, 2001).

2 Conceptual framework

The proposed conceptual model relies upon previous research on voting behaviour particularly on the theory of social influence and the theory of consumption value (Figure 1). It stipulates those interactions on Facebook (with peers and with the candidate's official page) influence the voter's relationship with the candidate and consequently his voting behaviour. The model also considers the moderating effects of involvement in politics, skepticism about Facebook and social influence outside Facebook.

Figure 1 Impact of values derived from interactions on Facebook on vote intent



2.1 Values derived from Facebook interactions

During political campaigns, users can participate in a number of political activities, including becoming a ‘fan’ of a candidate, following his page and receiving his publications. Users can also join political Facebook groups, allowing them to engage with members in conversations related to the election (Pykett et al., 2014). The literature review highlights a similarity between political candidates and brands. Guzman et al. (2009) provided a conceptual framework for perceiving political candidates as brands. Lubrano et al. (2012) highlights the tendency of the voter-leader relationship to identify with the voter-brand relationship. Bou Nafeh (2016) found that it is legitimate to equate the relationship between the political leader and the voter with the relationship between the consumer and the brand. Based on this context, we study the relationship between the voter and the candidate in the same way as the relationship between the consumer and the brand or the company (Fournier, 1998). The concept of relationship quality is important because of its effects on the acquisition and retention of customers (Dowling, 2002). It is based on the concept of interpersonal relationships (Smit et al., 2007) and has several dimensions. First, the quality of the partner, which is defined as an assessment of the candidate’s rational qualities in terms of credibility and authenticity. Second, empathy, which is rather an emotional assessment of the candidate and his ability to put himself in the place of voters and understand their needs and problems. Third, intimacy is defined as the psychological link between the partner concerned and the brand. Fourth, auto-connection consists in the common points shared between the consumers and their brands and reveals that the brand is part of the self or part of the self-image.

Several studies have shown the importance of the interactions with brands on social networks (Ben Yahia and Chaabouni, 2014; Wolff and Sowon, 2012). In fact, consumers draw conclusions about the characteristics of the brand and therefore build a relationship with it (Kang and Shao, 2023; Hudson et al., 2015). In line with this work, we assume that interactions with the official page enhance the quality of the relationship with the candidate. Furthermore, previous research has shown that Facebook users interact with others, which influence their attitudes towards products and services (Kim and Park, 2023; Dolan et al., 2019; Jones and Glynn, 2019; Hudson et al., 2019; De Gregorio and Sung, 2010; Mukhopadhyay and Yeung, 2010). Consequently, we suppose that online

interactions with others orient voting behaviour through compliance and information channels (González-Bailón and Lelkes, 2023; Churchill and Moschis, 1979). In other words, users will be influenced by their interactions with others (Kuo and Feng, 2013; Jahn and Kunz, 2012) about the candidate, which will affect the quality of the relationship with him. Therefore, the following hypothesis is formulated.

- H1 Value derived from the interactions with the candidate impacts positively the relationship quality with the candidate.
- H2 Value derived from the interactions with peers impacts positively the relationship quality with the candidate.

2.2 Impact of the relationship quality on the vote intent

In the political context, although researchers agree that there is a personal assessment of the candidate, his character, his attitude and his behaviour (Tazdaït and Nessah, 2013) the impact of quality of the relationship with the candidate was not considered. However, the impact of the brand relationship on consumer behaviour and behavioural intentions has been extensively studied and validated by previous research in the relationship marketing field (Ekinci et al., 2005).

Smit et al. (2007) have found that the brand relationship quality positively influences future intentions to use a brand. In addition, Bowden (2009) also studied the service context and presented a conceptual model of the process by which new customers and repeat customers engage with a restaurant. Social networks are a new opportunity for political candidates to build a relationship with voters. Similarly, we assume that the relationship with the candidate fosters the voting intentions as described by the following hypothesis.

- H3 Quality of the relationship with the candidate impacts positively the voting intent.

2.3 Moderating effect of skepticism

In the framework of scientific research in marketing, skepticism has been defined as a form of consumer mistrust and disbelief in marketing actions (Foreh and Grier, 2003). It has been considered by several researches on corporate communication (Hernandez et al., 2019). On the one hand, this research, particularly in the field of corporate social responsibility, shows that the consumer can develop skeptical attitudes toward advertisement action which can affect these opinions and choices and moderate the impact of the actions of companies. On the other hand, Facebook social network can benefit from real and authentic information, but which can also confuse voters with rumours and completely incorrect information (Goyanes et al., 2023; Vraga and Tully, 2019). In this context, we assume that the more the voter is skeptical, the less the quality of the relationship with the candidate is sensitive to interactions with others and with the candidate. Consequently, the following assumptions are made:

- H4 The impact of value derived from interactions with the candidate on the relationship quality is weaker for more skeptical users (than for less skeptical users).
- H5 The impact of the value derived from interactions with peers on the relationship quality is weaker for more skeptical users (than for less skeptical users).

2.4 *Moderating effect of involvement in politics*

Involvement has often been considered one of the most important moderators that determine consumer purchasing behaviour (Celsi and Olson, 1988). Indeed, the concept of involvement has been the subject of marketing research, due to its importance. Krugman (1965, p.584) defines involvement as ‘the number of conscious or unconscious connections, of associative ideas, of personal reference that an individual makes between his own life and a persuasive stimulus’. Thus, a growing body of research has emerged in the literature regarding the consequences of involvement. Knox and Walker (2003) have shown that involvement with a product (or in our case, with politics) influences the nature of the decision-making process relating to purchasing behaviour (or voting behaviour). Researchers say there is a greater chance that customers with a high level of commitment to the product will show absolute brand loyalty (Knox and Walker, 2003). This leads us to consider involvement in political life as a moderator that intensifies the impact of the relationship quality on the vote intent. Consequently, the following hypotheses:

H6 Involvement in politics enhances the impact of relationship quality on voting intent.

2.5 *Social influence outside Facebook*

Previous research has shown the influence of face-to-face interactions with others on consumers’ decisions through the processes of identification and compliance listed by the social influence theory. Similarly, we assume that besides the influence of online peers in the social network Facebook, another pressure, that we cannot ignore, is exerted by influential people in the offline entourage. Consequently, based on this theory, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H7 The impact of relationship quality on voting intent is stronger when social influence outside Facebook is weaker.

3 **Methodology**

An online questionnaire was developed and published on various virtual communities on the Facebook social network. These groupings around political candidates or politics in general were active during the election period like ‘The way of the Tunisian people’; ‘Kais Saied Towards Carthage’ or ‘Popular campaign to support Abdelfattah Mourou’. The data collection lasted three months. 208 responses were deemed valid. 28.6% of the respondents were males, and 71.4% were females; 60.4% aged between 18–25 years, 24.6%, aged between 26–35 years and 10.9% between 46–55 years, 2.5% are 56 years and above.

All measurement scales were extracted from the literature and adapted to the needs of this study. In order to study interactions with the candidate and with others, we used measurement scales adapted by Jahn and Kunz (2012) and Kuo and Feng (2013) in their research. These scales have been selected not only because of their good psychometric quality, but also because they include items that are appropriate to our study such as: Following the activities of this candidate on Facebook was useful to me; The content shared/liked by my friends on Facebook about this candidate was helpful to me; I was

entertained when interacting with my friends on Facebook about this candidate (see Table 2). The quality of the relationship scale was inspired from the work of Fournier (1998) and Kim et al. (2014). This scale is multidimensional and consists of four dimensions: intimacy, partner quality, self-connection and empathy. Each dimension has a good psychometric quality. We also believe that the items used in previous research for the evaluation of brands can be adapted in our case to the political candidate. In addition, voting intention were measured by two items 'I intended to vote for this candidate' and 'I was going to vote for this candidate'. All items were measured on a five-point Likert scale (1 = 'Strongly disagree', 5 = 'Strongly agree'). The involvement in the political life was adapted from the scale of Strazzieri (1994) used by Chouk and Perrien (2005). Finally, skepticism was measured and adapted from the work of Skarmeas and Leonidou (2013).

3.1 Assessment of the measurement model

The collected data was verified in terms of outliers. Also, it should be noted that all of the survey responses were mandatory in order to avoid missing values. The exploratory analysis was conducted using SPSS 22. First of all, the normality of the variables was checked. During this analysis, we used a principal component analysis (PCA) to determine the quality of representation of the measurement indicators through the use of Kaiser Meyer and Olkin (KMO) indicator, as well as the Bartlett sphericity test. After the items purification, the explained variances of all variables were superior to 70% and the reliability of the measurement scales has been verified by the Cronbach alpha indicator (Cronbach alpha ≥ 0.7) (Carricano et al., 2010).

A second step was to assess the validity and reliability of our measurement model. As shown in Table 2, composite reliabilities of all the variables were higher than 0.70 (Naylor et al., 2012). Also, all the values of the AVE were superior to 0.50 which indicates that the convergent validity of our model is verified. Furthermore, our model presents a satisfactory discriminant validity (Table 3). Indeed, the value of the convergent validity is higher than the square of the correlations between the latent variables and the other variables (Chin, 1998).

3.2 Structural model

In order to test the relationships between the variables of our model, we selected the structural equation modelling (SEM) procedure using SMART PLS 3.0 (Hair et al., 2009) (Figure 2). As shown by Figure 2, R² are higher than 0 and satisfactory. The model explains 60% of the voting intentions, 30% of relationship quality; 70% of the dimension auto-connection, 50% of intimacy and 80% of partner quality. Findings presented in Table 4 show both values derived from the candidate and from peers impact positively the relationship quality (0.28; $p = 0.00$ and 0.318; $p = 0.00$ respectively). H1 and H2 are therefore accepted. In addition, the impact of the relationship quality on vote intent is positive (0.664; $p = 0.000$). Then H3 is accepted.

Table 2 Reliability of the conceptual model variables

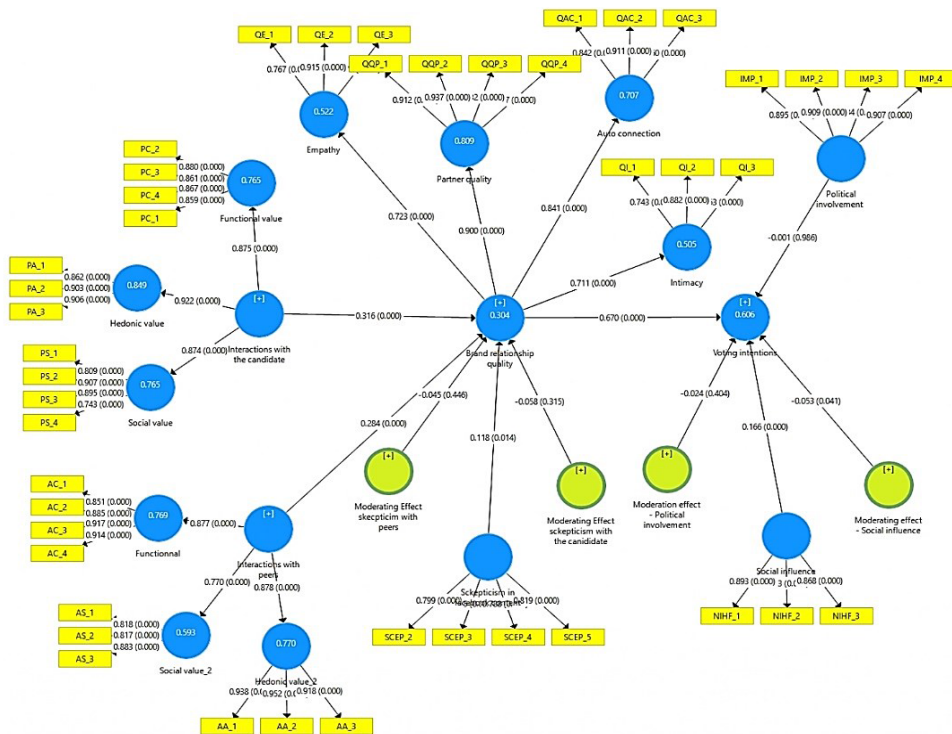
<i>Variables and dimensions</i>	<i>Item</i>	<i>Loadings</i>	<i>CR</i>	<i>AVE</i>
Auto connection	AC 1: This candidate and I have a lot in common	0.842	0.904	0.759
	AC 2: This candidate's image and my self-image are similar in a lot of ways	0.911		
	AC 3: This candidate says a lot about the kind of person I am or want to be	0.860		
Empathy	QE 1: This candidate pays attention to each customer individually	0.765	0.890	0.730
	QE 2: This candidate provides individual attention to its customers	0.914		
	QE 3: This candidate has customers' best interests at heart	0.876		
Partner quality	PQ 1: This candidate is trustworthy	0.912	0.959	0.855
	PQ 2: This candidate is credible	0.937		
	PQ 3: This candidate is reliable	0.932		
	PQ 4: This candidate is truthful	0.916		
Intimacy	IN 1: I know things about this candidate that many people just do not know.	0.741	0.870	0.691
	IN 2: I know a lot about the company that makes	0.880		
	IN 3: I feel as if I really understand this brand	0.864		
Interactions with the candidate (Functional value)	ICF 1: Following the activities of this candidate on Facebook was helpful to me	0.884	0.924	0.751
	ICF 2: Following the activities of this candidate on Facebook was functional to me	0.917		
	ICF 3: Following the activities of this candidate on Facebook was practical to me	0.913		
Interactions with peers (Functional value)	IPF 1: The content shared/liked by my friends on Facebook about this candidate was convincing to me	0.850	0.940	0.796
	IPF 2: The content shared/liked by my friends on Facebook about this candidate was helpful to me	0.884		
	IPF 3: The content shared/liked by my friends on Facebook about this candidate was functional to me	0.917		
	IPF 4: The content shared/liked by my friends on Facebook about this candidate was practical to me	0.913		
Interactions with peers (Hedonic value)	IPH 1: I enjoyed interacting with my friends on Facebook about this candidate	0.861	0.920	0.793
	IPH 2: I was pleased to share content on Facebook with my friends about this candidate	0.903		
	IPH 3: I was entertained when interacting with my friends on Facebook about this candidate	0.905		

Table 2 Reliability of the conceptual model variables (continued)

<i>Variables and dimensions</i>	<i>Item</i>	<i>Loadings</i>	<i>CR</i>	<i>AVE</i>
Interactions with the candidate (Hedonic value)	ICH 1: I felt pleased when following the activities of this candidate on Facebook	0.938	0.955	0.876
	ICH 2: I felt inspired when following the activities of this candidate on Facebook	0.953		
	ICH 3: felt enthusiastic when following the activities of this candidate on Facebook	0.918		
Interactions with the candidate (Social value)	ICS 1: Made me feel connected when following the activities of this candidate on Facebook	0.808	0.906	0.708
	ICS 2: Made me build personal connection	0.906		
	ICS 3: Make me feel important	0.895		
	ICS 4: Made me feel appreciated.	0.742		
Interactions with peers (Social value)	IPS 1: I expanded my social network on Facebook thanks to my interest to this candidate	0.817	0.877	0.705
	IPS 2: I shared with some of my friends on Facebook my interest to this candidate	0.818		
	IPS 3: My interest to this candidate strengthened my connections with some of my friends on Facebook	0.885		
Political involvement	PI1: I am interested in political or civic issues	0.892	0.951	0.830
	PI2: I am interested in public affairs	0.906		
	PI3: I pay attention to political or civic information	0.934		
	PI4: I like to stay informed about political or civic issues	0.906		
Skepticism in Facebook content	SFB 1: it is certain/uncertain that Facebook is concerned to improve the well-being of our society	0.762	0.890	0.669
	SFB 2: it is sure/unsure that Facebook content follows ethical standards	0.838		
	SFB 3: it is unquestionable/questionable that Facebook content is truthful	0.742		
	SFB 3: I do not believe in the information that Facebook provides	0.766		
Social influence	SI 1: People who are important to me think that I should vote this candidate	0.893	0.921	0.795
	SI 2: People who influence my behaviour think that I should vote this candidate	0.914		
	SI 3: People whose opinions that I value prefer that I vote this candidate.	0.866		
Vote intents	VI 1: I was willing to vote for this candidate	0.923	0.937	0.788
	VI 2: I voted for this candidate	0.916		
	VI 3: I wanted to contribute to this candidate	0.829		
	VI 4: I am willing to recommend this candidate to others	0.878		

Table 3 AVE and square of correlations between the model variables

	<i>Auto connection</i>	<i>Brand relation</i>	<i>Empathy_</i>	<i>Interactions</i>	<i>Interactions</i>	<i>Interactions</i>	<i>Interactions</i>	<i>Interactions</i>	<i>Interactions</i>	<i>Intimacy</i>	<i>Partner quality</i>	<i>Political involvement</i>
Auto connection	0.871											
Candidate relationship quality	0.841	0.742										
Empathy	0.503	0.723	0.854									
Interactions with the candidate (Functional value)	0.357	0.422	0.356	0.867								
Interactions with peers (Functional value)	0.328	0.407	0.258	0.387	0.892							
Interactions with the candidate (Hedonic value)	0.445	0.474	0.354	0.725	0.430	0.890						
Interactions with peers (Hedonic value)	0.313	0.378	0.311	0.339	0.629	0.444	0.936					
Interactions with peers	0.381	0.451	0.323	0.419	0.877	0.507	0.878	0.756				
Interactions with the candidate	0.430	0.471	0.399	0.875	0.437	0.922	0.452	0.522	0.767			
Intimacy	0.594	0.711	0.709	0.306	0.292	0.303	0.303	0.377	0.326	0.832		
Partner quality_	0.626	0.900	0.454	0.350	0.396	0.391	0.323	0.406	0.370	0.533	0.925	
Political involvement	0.267	0.247	0.163	0.216	0.154	0.067	0.172	0.199	0.107	0.309	0.193	0.911
Skepticism in Facebook content	0.047	0.128	0.073	0.065	-0.031	0.030	0.031	0.002	0.020	0.084	0.165	0.189
Social influence	0.302	0.338	0.144	0.169	0.338	0.217	0.311	0.373	0.206	0.242	0.348	0.131
Interactions with the candidate (Social value)	0.352	0.364	0.353	0.588	0.351	0.754	0.430	0.471	0.874	0.261	0.248	-0.006
Interactions with peers (Social value)	0.333	0.352	0.253	0.331	0.497	0.417	0.589	0.770	0.443	0.389	0.294	0.189
Voting intentions	0.577	0.754	0.397	0.354	0.400	0.371	0.362	0.426	0.367	0.461	0.795	0.205

Figure 2 Output of the conceptual model tests (see online version for colours)**Table 4** Results of the structural model

	Sample mean (M)	STDEV	T Statistics	P Values	
Interactions with peers → Candidate relationship quality	0.281	0.056	5.114	0.000	H1 supported
Interactions with the candidate → Brand relationship quality	0.318	0.057	5.509	0.000	H2 supported
Candidate relationship quality → Voting intentions	0.664	0.050	13.364	0.000	H3 supported
Candidate relationship quality → Auto connection	0.841	0.018	46.975	0.000	
Candidate relationship quality → Empathy	0.723	0.031	23.186	0.000	
Candidate relationship quality → Intimacy	0.712	0.030	23.381	0.000	
Candidate relationship quality → Partner quality	0.899	0.013	67.548	0.000	
Candidate relationship quality → Voting intentions	0.664	0.050	13.364	0.000	
Interactions with peers → Functional value	0.876	0.015	56.987	0.000	

Table 4 Results of the structural model (continued)

	<i>Sample mean (M)</i>	<i>STDEV</i>	<i>T Statistics</i>	<i>P Values</i>
Interactions with peers → Hedonic value	0.879	0.014	61.856	0.000
Interactions with peers → Social value	0.772	0.026	29.257	0.000
Interactions with the candidate → Functional value	0.874	0.015	59.162	0.000
Interactions with the candidate → Hedonic value	0.922	0.008	122.146	0.000
Interactions with the candidate → Social value	0.875	0.015	58.795	0.000

Table 5 Moderating effects

	<i>Sample mean (M)</i>	<i>STDEV</i>	<i>T Statistics</i>	<i>P Values</i>	
Skepticism with the candidate → Brand relationship quality	-0.061	0.055	1.050	0.294	H4 rejected
Skepticism with peers → Brand relationship quality	-0.042	0.057	0.785	0.433	H5 rejected
Political involvement → Voting intentions	-0.023	0.031	0.793	0.428	H6 rejected
Social influence → Voting intentions	-0.058	0.025	2.063	0.040	H7 supported
Political involvement → Voting intentions	0.001	0.031	0.018	0.986	
Skepticism in Facebook content → Brand relationship quality	0.127	0.049	2.407	0.016	
Social influence → Voting intentions	0.169	0.042	3.940	0.000	

Furthermore, the moderating variables were tested using Smart PLS software. The results show that the moderating role of skepticism is not significant ($p = 0.294$; $p = 0.433$). H4 and H5 are then rejected (Table 5). Similarly, involvement in politics has no significant moderating impact ($p = 0.428$), hence H6 is rejected. However, the moderating effect of social influence outside Facebook has a significant and negative effect on the impact of the relationship quality on vote intent (-0.058 ; $p = 0.040$). H7 is then accepted.

4 Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that social media users evaluate their interactions on Facebook regarding political candidates. This research indicates that when users perceive interactions with political candidates on social media as valuable, particularly through functional and social interactions, it has a positive impact on the quality of their relationship with the candidate. This enhanced relationship quality is characterised by factors such as partner quality, empathy, intimacy, and auto-connection. These findings

align with previous studies that have demonstrated the impact of social influence on Facebook generate a relationship with the candidate and on voting intentions (Chang et al., 2018). Similarly, Cameron et al. (2016) found that online social networks impact election voting and election results. On the other hand, the effect of peer-to-peer interaction, when it encompasses not only functional and social aspects but also hedonic content, positively impacts the quality of the relationship with the candidate. This implies that when the interaction between users goes beyond functional and social exchanges and incorporates hedonic elements, it has the potential to significantly influence the quality of the relationship (Aslam and Farhat, 2023). Those findings also confirm previous research in the field of relational marketing, which argues in favour of interactions between the consumers. Indeed, the study of Ting and Ahn (2023) investigates the impact of functional and emotional interactions between customers can build a strong quality of relationship with the brand.

The findings of the research also demonstrate that the quality of the relationship with the candidate directly influences the voter's intention to vote for them in an election. These findings align perfectly with the study conducted by Bove et al. (2009) and Revilla-Camacho et al. (2015) that emphasise the importance of voter orientation in terms of strengthening the quality of the relationship with political parties. This result complies with the relational marketing field and, once again, confirms the importance of the consumer's perception of a relationship. The most influential aspect of the relationship quality between voters and candidates is the perceived quality of the candidate as a partner. This confirms the results of Ben Yahia and Chaabouni (2014) as well. The author showed that interactions with the company in the context of virtual communities have a positive impact on the relationship with the brand and on the purchasing intentions.

Besides, unlike previous research that has largely shown the moderating impact of skepticism on the relationship between business actions and consumer perceptions, our results reveal that the moderating effect of skepticism is not significant. An explanation of this result would be that even if Tunisians are quite skeptical towards Facebook, they are also so accustomed to this skepticism that it has no more any effect on them. Cross-referencing the information from several sources is sufficient for them to rule out doubts.

On the other hand, unlike previous research, we found that involvement in political life has no significant moderating effect. The literature shows that rational voting focuses on the evaluation of the program and the political positions which requires voter involvement in political life (Swyngedouw et al., 1995). This unexpected result reflects the specific context of Tunisia as a newly democratic country. In fact, the common thought leads us to believe that citizens who vote are involved and participate in political life. However, in this case, our results show that citizens did not vote for programs but voted for people. In other words, citizens assessed candidates in terms of credibility, authenticity, and empathy without paying attention to their political programs. This finding is consistent with numerous research that indicates that voting is the result of assessing the candidate as a person (Blais et al., 1995; Stewart and Clarke, 1992; Goren, 1997; Garzia, 2012).

Moreover, the findings emphasise the substantial influence of social influence beyond Facebook in moderating the relationship between partner qualities and voting intentions. This observation aligns with the study conducted by Lee et al. (2011), which delves into the importance of social influence in strengthening consumer decision-making. Indeed, as

the strength of social influence increases, its impact on shaping the connection between individuals' perceptions of the relationship quality with the political candidates and their voting intentions becomes more pronounced. This finding confirms earlier work that mobilises the theory of social influence and research on reference groups which show that a certain social pressure is exerted on the consumer when constructing his choice. Indeed, this social pressure pushes the consumer to comply with the expectations of those that are important to him. This result also confirms that the vote in this newly democratic country was influenced by the choice of others (Paulsen et al., 2023), which shows a political immaturity and a lack of personal conviction about the programs.

5 Conclusions

This research studied the influence of Facebook on Tunisian vote intent in the 2019 presidential election. Findings showed that these interactions lead to a better relationship quality with the candidate and therefore to stronger election voting intent. The research also considered the effects of some moderating variables such as skepticism, social influence and involvement in politics. The results revealed that only the moderating role of social influence outside Facebook is significant. Although the impact of political involvement and skepticism was not significant, these results revealed interesting managerial implications. Theoretically, this research brings together two different disciplines: consumer behaviour and politics. Indeed, an analogy was made by considering the political candidate as a brand and the voter as a customer. This paper also gives some insights on consumer behaviour online.

At a managerial level and in order to guide candidates into developing efficient campaigns, our paper highlights some insights to be considered by political candidates. Indeed, these results emphasise the importance of paying particular attention to interactions on social media. For example, when communicating with the voters on Facebook, candidates are encouraged to answer their questions and post live videos. Finally, as shown earlier, the results reveal that Tunisian voters are far from being involved in the political life. Voters assess the candidate as a person and not as a program. Therefore, in a newly democratic country, a candidate's electoral campaign should focus more on the personality and the qualities of the candidate as a citizen rather than on his programs. It is important to communicate about the candidate's image by promoting his qualities and revealing details about his life and personality without affecting the candidate's credibility.

Finally, our paper has some limits. First, the moderating effect of skepticism was not significant. Other moderators such as gender and level of education can be taken into account to better clarify this effect. Besides, it would be interesting to conduct a qualitative study in order to understand the «paradoxical» behaviour of the Tunisian who, yet, votes despite his lack of involvement in political life. Finally, the research was conducted just after the 2019 presidential elections and investigated only the intent. Other research may explore the election voting effective behaviour and compare it with intents.

6 Managerial implication

In the context of political communication, Facebook has emerged as a critical platform for voter engagement and perception shaping (Ali et al., 2023). This study highlights the influential role of social media interactions with political candidates, and peer-to-peer interactions in determining the quality of the relationship between voters and candidates, as well as influencing voting intentions. These findings imply the importance of candidates to adapt their strategies and leverage the power of social media to effectively communicate and connect with voters. First, candidates should focus on building strong and meaningful interactions with internet users. This can be achieved by incorporating functional and social elements into their communication efforts. By providing valuable content, engaging in conversations, and demonstrating empathy towards users' concerns, politicians can foster a positive relationship quality with voters. Additionally, it is crucial for internet users to engage in peer-to-peer interactions that encompass hedonic, functional, and social aspects. These interactions play a significant role in determining whether individuals establish a positive and meaningful relationship with a candidate that involves partner qualities empathy, intimacy, and autoconnection. In this regards campaign should actively encourage individuals to share their perspectives and engage in discussions. By doing so, every post, repost, and 'Like' has the potential to reach a broader network of individuals, extending beyond their immediate circle of friends. To amplify their messages, electoral candidates can collaborate with opinion leaders or celebrities who serve as influential channels for delivering messages and generating positive word-of-mouth.

Additionally, politicians need to prioritise the quality and authenticity of their messages. In a landscape where exaggerated, distorted, and fake content is prevalent, it is crucial for positive campaigns to convey messages based on facts and avoid misleading or manipulative tactics. By focusing on delivering genuine and reliable information, candidates can enhance their credibility and build trust among internet users.

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