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Structural equations modeling for the entry into becoming a sport sponsorship of the halal product in Thailand

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Abstract: This research study aims 1) to create a structural equation model for sports sponsorship of halal products in Thailand and 2) to examine the direct and indirect influence of variables that are components of the structural equation model for halal products, specifically in the context of becoming a sports sponsorship for halal products in Thailand. The study focused on a sample group of Thai Muslims interested in watching and following the news and participating in Thai sporting events. The researcher chose a sample size of 400 participants from this population, excluding backup data gathering and data analysis, to ensure the questionnaire's quality and dependability. The results of the data analysis from the structural equation model created show that it is consistent with empirical data. The results of the statistical hypothesis test reveal that the level of religious adherence and the level of awareness of entering into sponsorship have both direct and indirect influences on consumer attitudes and purchase intentions with statistical significance at 0.01. It can also be identified that if a sponsor increases awareness among Muslim viewers through branding or product presentations in events that feature halal symbols or indicate compliance with religious standards, it will lead to a more positive attitude and higher purchase intentions. This insight can be applied to marketing promotion in administrative regions or countries where the majority of the population is Muslim.

Keywords: sport sponsorship perceptions; halal product; Thailand

1. Background and importance of the problem

Halal products in Thailand are considered one of the sub-categories that generate high income. This is because Thailand has the ninth market share of halal products globally when considering the number of Muslim believers in Thailand, which is only 3.40 million people in 2020, but the information in Kettani's literature in 2010 presented the growth trend of the world's population practicing Islam (Thanyamai, 2019). In Thailand, it has been found that the population is continuously growing and is expected to have a high trend of increasing in the future. The growth of the Muslim population has resulted in the creation of products that must be consistent with the Muslim way of life, which must be focused on "halal" formats with standard requirements to be consistent with religious guidelines (Tasneem, 2019).

When considering the context of Thailand, Thailand is regarded as a country with great potential for producing and exporting products, including products certified to halal product standards. Thailand is among the top 5 countries exporting halal products (Ariya, 2016). The Muslim population is a new generation that will become a large group of the Muslim population in the future who still demand and give importance to

the consumption of goods or products that have the halal logo or have been strictly certified to halal standards, even though there is a change in the matter of novelty or adjustment in lifestyles that change continuously all the time. Regarding quality and standards of production of halal products, Thailand is considered to have high quality and acceptance (Nantida and Suphansa, 2021).

According to information from the Policy and Planning Department, The Sports Authority of Thailand (SAT) in 2021 has provided information regarding the budget for promoting and organizing sports competition activities in Thailand that the budget amount has been allocated as high as 2,703,987,000 baht for organizing famous activities. It is said that it will create a vast number of spectators and participants in the competition is, therefore an excellent opportunity to present and use the space of competition activities or live broadcasts through various media as a channel for communicating and promoting brand products well (Cornwell and Kwon, 2020; Hsiao et al., 2021; Lin and Bruning, 2021; Panithan, 2021; Paramin, 2022).

Halal products also require business operations to profit and must be marketed like regular products (Fuseini et al., 2021; Shah et al., 2019). Communicate and promote marketing by becoming a sponsor (sponsorship) in competitive activities is, therefore, one of the marketing approaches that will help promote good marketing effectiveness for halal products by marketing promotion strategies using sponsorship has been around for a long time, and Yukyoum's (2014) meta-study describes and summarizes the use of sponsorship methods (Borowy, 2013; Dun and Rachdi, 2023; Wakefield et al., 2020). Systematically, it was found that operations involving branded products or even the product owner organization will receive good results in business and marketing from sponsoring various competitive activities.

Thailand is the country with the second-largest Muslim population (according to data from the National Statistical Office). The latest survey revealed that the number of Muslims in Thailand is as high as 3,639,232 people, making them the second-largest group of the national population. In some areas, certain provinces have a Muslim population that ranks first. When considering the context of organizing sports activities that require funding from sponsors, the decision to use halal products becomes crucial in creating mutual marketing and public relations benefits.

Therefore, in this research, the researcher is interested in studying the structural equations modeling for the entry into becoming a sport sponsorship of the halal product in Thailand. The research employs a quantitative methodology, collecting data using a scale developed by the researcher, with a questionnaire as the tool to gather data. The characteristics of the data are analyzed, and the process of developing the structural equation model is applied to predict the influence of various variables related to the context of this study. This research aims to explore investment opportunities for halal product brands or owners of halal products who are interested in sponsoring sports events in Thailand.

1.1. Research objectives

- 1) To develop a structural equation model for sponsoring sports competitions for halal products in Thailand.

- 2) To examine the direct and indirect influence of variables, which are components of the structural equation model, on sports competition sponsorship of halal products in Thailand.

1.2. Research conceptual framework

1.2.1. Halal and religious strictness of Muslims

Muslims hold the firm belief that “There is no god except Allah, and Prophet Muhammad is the messenger of Allah”. They believe that Allah is the creator of humans and everything in the universe. Therefore, Allah’s commands (as found in the Al-Quran), the teachings, and the examples set by Prophet Muhammad (Sunnah) are paramount and must be followed sincerely and earnestly. This means practicing what is permissible (halal) and abstaining from what is forbidden (haram) willingly and joyfully (Nattamon and Preedaporn, 2020).

Muslims have a distinct way of life that differs from most people’s. They do not alter the principles or provisions of Islam according to changing cultural or social trends but instead apply Islamic principles to their daily lives (Hason, 2003). In Islam, “halal” means permissible or legal, which is a significant awareness for Muslims and is considered a duty that every Muslim must observe strictly.

1.2.2. Religiosity

Religiosity refers to the level of an individual’s religious practice, which includes beliefs and practices related to religion. Individuals with high religious faith often follow religious symbols, such as prayers and rituals, to draw closer to the sacred or the supernatural. This is reflected in their behavior (Asih et al., 2020; Sholihin et al., 2022). The concept of religiosity has been widely applied in marketing in academic studies (Abror et al., 2021; Junaidi et al., 2022; Kusumawati et al., 2022; Mulyana et al., 2020; Usman et al., 2022). In the context of its use as a marketing driver, particularly in the study of marketing promotion through product sponsorships, it remains relatively rare today. This is because the products used to align with religious strictness and product fit in competitive events face specific limitations, requiring the selection of appropriate products (Cicco et al., 2021).

1.2.3. Attitude

Attitude refers to a person’s overall feelings and thoughts toward something or more, shaped by their readiness or inclination of mind toward a system. These feelings arise from sensory experiences that interact with various stimuli around a person and are expressed through behaviors such as agreement or disagreement (Boontham, 1997).

Many scholars have defined “attitude” similarly, describing it as a person’s overall emotional and cognitive stance, which can be positive or negative. Attitudes manifest through preferences, biases, opinions, fears, or strong beliefs about particular matters. These attitudes are expressed and reflected through opinions (Thurstone and Chave, 1966). Therefore, a person’s opinion can be seen as a symbol of their underlying attitude. And since this research aims to study the level of attitude that will increase positively to measure whether it will affect consumers’ purchase intentions, the researcher sought supporting literature. It was found that various studies have

examined attitudes and found that they influence purchase intentions in the field of marketing (Garg and Joshi, 2018; Sharma et al., 2016; Tumpal and Wirdania, 2020).

Kim and Pysarchik (2000) explained that purchase intention is when consumers desire to choose the best option for themselves. It does not solely depend on the product itself but also includes other factors, such as the care taken by the entrepreneur and the benefits the purchase provides to meet their needs. Therefore, purchase intention represents an opportunity that can lead to an actual purchase decision. Millar and Abrahams (2009) defined purchase intention as the intention consumers form through brand evaluations. This includes their attitudes toward brands and services, significantly influencing their purchase intentions.

Newaz et al. (2016) studied the purchasing behavior of Muslims to examine the relationship between religiousness and attitudes toward products for Muslims. Their study, conducted with both government and private organizations using questionnaires, found that religiousness directly influences the attitude and purchase intention of Muslim consumers. This finding is consistent with the literature of Ustaahmetoglu (2020). There are numerous studies investigating the relationship between the level of religiosity and attitudes toward Muslim products (Garg and Joshi, 2018; Newaz et al., 2016; Sharma et al., 2016; Tumpal and Wirdania, 2020; Ustaahmetoglu, 2020). Ustaahmetoglu (2020) and Garg and Joshi (2018) also explain that, in addition to religiousness affecting attitudes, there are direct and indirect influences on purchase intention. These findings allow researchers to formulate the following research hypotheses:

Research hypothesis 1: The religiousness of Muslim consumers has a direct positive influence on the attitude toward halal products that support sporting events among Muslim consumers in Thailand.

Research hypothesis 2: The religiousness of Muslim consumers has a direct positive influence on the intention to purchase halal products that support sporting events among Muslim consumers in Thailand.

Sponsorship in any competition will positively impact the brand's image and products or services. Yukyoum's (2014) literature explains this positive trend towards organizations or their products becoming sponsors of competitive activities based on meta-study results. Kim's meta-analysis explains that individuals or fans who feel a sense of belonging to a team tend to support the products or brands that sponsor their favorite team or sport. This includes developing a positive attitude and good feelings towards those products or brands. This idea is consistent with much literature, allowing researchers to formulate additional hypotheses (Chang et al., 2017; Huettermann et al., 2020; Melovic et al., 2019; Tsodia et al., 2017):

Research hypothesis 3: Sponsorship of sports events by halal products has a direct positive influence on the attitude of Muslim consumers in Thailand towards these products.

Research hypothesis 4: Sponsorship of sports events by halal products has a direct positive influence on the intention to purchase these products among Muslim consumers in Thailand.

A large body of literature supports the study of attitudes toward consumer behavior and purchasing intentions (Wirtz et al., 2017; Zaremohzzabieh et al., 2020). In the literature of Garg and Joshi (2018), a study was conducted on the effect of

attitude on the purchase intention of brands focused on halal criteria by collecting data from Muslim consumers. It was found that product attitudes influence the purchase intentions of Muslim consumers. This finding is consistent with the work of Tumpal and Wirdania (2020) and the literature of Widyanto and Sitohang (2020). Moreover, it is well established in the literature that consumer attitude significantly influences consumer purchase intention. Several reference studies have consistently demonstrated this relationship (Garg and Joshi, 2018; Huettermann et al., 2020; Sharma et al., 2016; Tumpal and Wirdania, 2020). Based on these findings, the researcher formulated the following additional research hypothesis:

Research Hypothesis 5: Attitude toward halal products has a positive direct influence on the intention to purchase halal products that support sporting events among Muslim consumers in Thailand.

The researcher created a framework based on the above literature review and hypotheses, as shown in **Figure 1**.

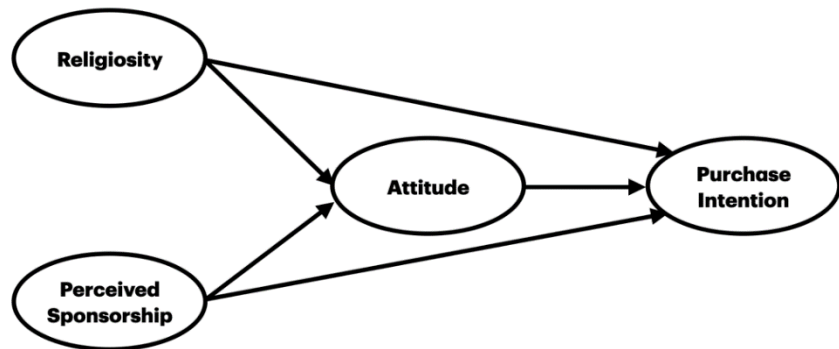


Figure 1. Research conceptual framework.

2. Research methodology

2.1. Research design

This research study employs quantitative research methods (quantitative research method).

2.2. Population and sample

The population for this study consists of Thai Muslims interested in watching and following news related to sporting events in Thailand. From this population, the researcher selected a sample size of 400 people. This sample size was determined based on the appropriate sample size for structural equation modeling (SEM) proposed by Hair et al. (2010). According to this concept, an appropriate sample size for analyzing structural components should range between 200 to 400 samples. Alternatively, there should be at least 10–20 samples per parameter or five samples per observed variable (Bentler and Chou, 1987).

To ensure consistency with Natthaya’s (2013) work, which suggests that a sample size of 300 is suitable for SEM statistical analysis and 500 samples is excellent, the larger the sample size, the better, as it better represents the population. Therefore, for this research, the appropriate sample size was 400 samples. This does not include

backup data collection and the data used to check the quality and reliability of the questionnaire.

For data collection from the sample, the researcher used quota sampling, determining the characteristics of sports spectatorship, both in terms of live attendance at events and viewing through other communication devices such as smartphones, tablets, computers, or TVs that can present advertising media for products certified with the halal standard. The data was collected using two types of questionnaires: one for in-person field collection conducted by the researcher and another for online collection. The questionnaire was designed with the first question intended to filter out those who are not Muslim and those who do not follow sports events, excluding them from providing data for this research.

2.3. Research tools

The tool used to collect data in this research is a questionnaire. This questionnaire was developed from textbooks and literature reviews of related research. The questions were closed-ended and divided into two sections:

- 1) General information about the respondents: This section collects demographic and other background information.
- 2) Opinion levels about the studied variables: This section gathers information on the respondents' opinions regarding sponsorship perception, religiosity, consumer attitude, and purchase intention.

The questionnaire's reliability was checked using Cronbach's standard criterion-checking method. The test analysis results indicated that the measurement tools for each section—perception as a supporter, religiosity, consumer attitude, and purchase intentions—were reliable. The questions for data collection were adapted and developed from the literature of Tyler et al. (2021), Demirel (2020), Huetterman et al. (2023), Lestari et al. (2020), Nurhayati and Hender (2020), Memon et al. (2020), Tuhin et al. (2022), Rizkitysha and Hananto (2022).

3. Data analysis

The data analysis for this quantitative research involved collecting data from both secondary and primary sources. Secondary sources included a literature review, concepts, theories, and related research. Primary data was collected using the researcher-developed questionnaire.

The analysis was conducted using statistical packages and included:

- 1) Descriptive statistics: To analyze and describe the nature of the data.
- 2) Inferential statistics: To examine relationships and test the hypothesis about the relationships between variables.

The consistency of the data with the generated model was checked using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). The influence weights between each variable, direct and indirect, were explained using path analysis, part of the structural equation modeling (SEM) process.

4. Research results

The sample group that collected data was predominantly male, with 279 respondents accounting for 72.47 percent. The majority of respondents were aged between 31 and 50, totaling 287 people or 74.5 percent. Additionally, 276 respondents, or 71.7 percent, were married.

In the statistical analysis that followed, the researcher defined the variables as follows: the *RE* variable as the level of religiousness, the *SP* variable as the level of awareness of becoming a sponsor, the *AT* variable as the consumer attitude level, and the *PU* variable as the level of intention. The measurement model was tested using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to check the validity and reliability of the scale. The confirmatory factor analysis results were obtained by analyzing the relationship between the variables. Initially, the factor loading values of the observed variables were lower than the criteria, specifically for the *RE1* variable. Consequently, the researcher eliminated this variable and performed the analysis again. The characteristics of the measurement model after the adjustments are shown in **Figure 2**.

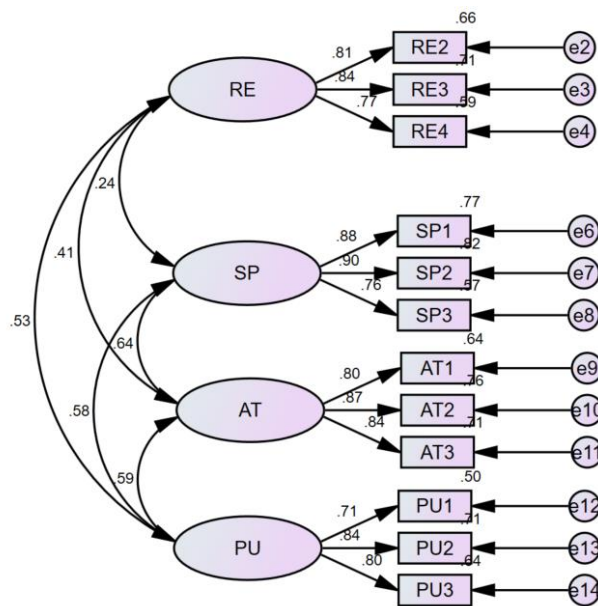


Figure 2. Image of the analysis of the measurement model (measurement model), improved by eliminating observed variables with low factor loading values.

The test found that the factor loading values of all observed variables were higher than 0.7. Considering the fit indices, the model was consistent with the empirical data and exhibited a perfect fit without considering dragging the relationship with the revision index value (modification index: MI) to increase the relationship between variables within the model. The fit indices were as follows: CMIN/df = 3.189, GFI = 0.937, NFI = 0.944, RFI = 0.923, IFI = 0.961, TLI = 0.946, CFI = 0.961, RMSEA = 0.076, which were found to exceed the criteria. Additionally, it can be observed that the correlation values between each latent variable are lower than the influence between each latent variable construct and its respective observed variables. These values exceeded the criteria defined by Hair et al. (2010), indicating a well-fitting

model. The researcher then examined the reliability of the constructs, virtual precision testing, discriminant validity test, and CFA (confirmatory factor analysis) test. The researcher considered the construct reliability test's results based on the composite reliability (CR) coefficient, as cited from the literature of Fornell and Larcker (1981). They used the remaining observable variables from testing the measurement model, which totaled 12 variables, presented in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Construct reliability, composite reliability, and average variance extracted (AVE).

Latent Variable	Number of Observed Variables	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
RE	3	0.849	0.652
SP	3	0.885	0.721
AT	3	0.875	0.701
PU	3	0.828	0.617

It can be seen that the construct reliability coefficient of every variable is greater than 0.60. Therefore, it can be concluded that each latent variable can be used to convey the meaning of the measurement of the set of observed variables, and every latent variable is according to the model. Measurement created by the researcher (Diamantopoulos and Siguaw, 2000; Saarani and Shahadan, 2012). The researcher examined convergent validity by using analysis of the average variance extracted (average variance exacted: AVE), which from the table shows that the AVE values of each latent variable are all higher than 0.50 as per the criteria, indicating adequate precision in measuring the variables (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). Results of the discriminant validity test, (discriminant validity) based on criteria from the literature of Fornell and Larcher (1981), they found that the square root of the average variance extracted from the variables is greater than the pairwise correlation coefficient of each latent variable with other latent variables in the model. Therefore, it was considered to have sufficient discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2014). The researcher then performed a CFA analysis test. The results of considering the goodness of fit indices found that the CMIN/df values were value 3.189, which is less than 5, GFI has a value of 0.937 which is greater than 0.80, NFI has a value of 0.944 which is greater than or equal to 0.9 (Bentler, 1999; Loo and Thrope, 2000). IFI has value 0.961 which is greater than or equal to 0.9 (Bentler, 1999). TLI has the value is 0.946 which is greater than or equal to 0.9, the CFI has a value of 0.961 which is greater than or equal to 0.9, and the RMSEA has a value of 0.076 which is less than or equal to 0.08, allowing the researcher to obtain (Bentler, 1999; Hair et al., 1998). The structural equation model is consistent with the empirical data as shown in **Figure 3**.

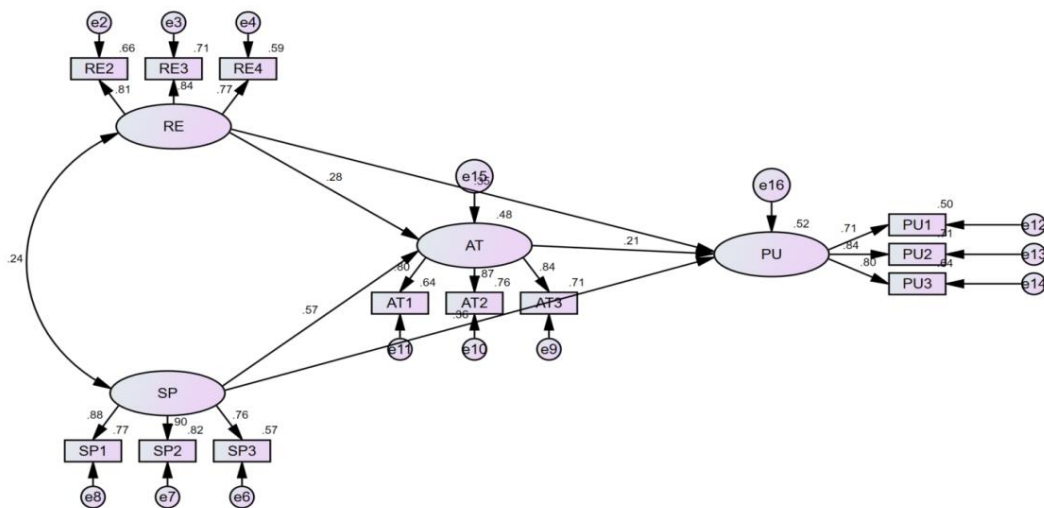


Figure 3. The structural equation model that has been adjusted until it is consistent with the empirical data.

Upon examining **Figure 3**, it can be seen that there is a collinearity problem between the latent variable *RE* and the latent variable *SP* because they are related. This causes the researcher to draw a line of relationship as shown in the picture according to the program proposal, which has been examined and found to be consistent. Such a relationship is well-suited to the empirical data.

The results of the hypothesis analysis found that “Research hypothesis 1: The religiousness of Muslim consumers has a direct positive influence on their attitude towards halal products that support sports competition activities among Muslim consumers in Thailand”. The analysis testing results found that the hypothesis was accepted at the statistical significance level of 0.01 with a *P*-value lower than 0.01 and a factor weight equal to 0.28. “Research hypothesis 2: Religiousness of Muslim consumers has a direct positive influence on purchase intention. Halal products that support sports competition activities for Muslim consumers in Thailand.” The test results found that the hypothesis was accepted at a statistically significant level of 0.01 with a *P*-value lower than 0.01 and a weight factor equal to 0.36. “Research hypothesis 3: Becoming a sports sponsor of halal products has a positive direct influence on the attitude towards the product of Muslim consumers in Thailand.” The test results found that the hypothesis was accepted at the statistical significance level of 0.01. The *P*-value is lower than 0.01, with a factor weight equal to 0.57. “Research hypothesis 4: Becoming a sports sponsor of halal products has a positive direct influence on the intention to purchase sponsored halal products. Sports activities of Muslim consumers in Thailand.” The test results found that the hypothesis was accepted at a statistical significance level of 0.01 with a *P*-value lower than 0.01 and a factor weight equal to 0.36. “Research hypothesis 5: Attitude towards halal products have a positive direct influence on the intention to purchase halal products that support sports competition activities among Muslim consumers in Thailand.” The test results found that the hypothesis was accepted at the statistical significance level of 0.01 with a *P*-value. value is lower than 0.01 with a weight factor equal to 0.21. The researcher carried out an examination of the influence path analysis by examining the influence weight of each factor and the influence in the form of direct influence. The indirect influence

and overall influence of each latent variable that has an influential relationship with each other are presented in **Table 2**.

Table 2. Paths of influence between variables in the structural equation model (path analysis).

Path Analysis	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	Total Effect
RE → AT	0.278	-	0.278
RE → PI	0.355	0.059	0.413
PS → AT	0.574	-	0.574
PS → PI	0.357	0.122	0.478
AT → PI	0.212	-	0.212

The researcher developed a structural equation model from statistical hypothesis testing and influence path analysis, as shown in **Figure 4**.

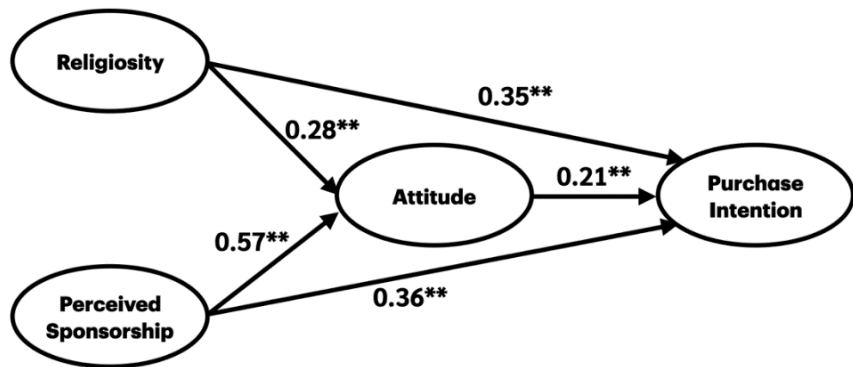


Figure 4. The structural equation model of the research.

5. Discussion of the results

The research results and the confirmatory factor analysis to develop the structural equation model found that the structural equation model was in good agreement with the empirical data. The results of testing all five hypotheses can be summarized with the following details:

Hypothesis 1: Religiousness of Muslim consumers has a direct positive influence on their attitude toward halal products that support sporting events among Muslim consumers in Thailand.

The results indicate that the religiousness of Muslim consumers significantly influences their attitudes towards halal products supporting sports competition activities at a statistical significance level of 0.01. This can be explained by the fact that presenting halal-certified products during sports events creates a positive attitude among Muslim consumers in Thailand. Since Muslim attitudes towards sponsorship may vary based on the nature of the product, it must align with Islamic principles, reflecting the importance of religious values in consumption behavior (Dun and Rachdi, 2023).

This finding is consistent with the literature by Newaz et al. (2016) and Ustaahmetoglu (2020), who found that highly religious consumers tend to have positive attitudes toward products they are interested in purchasing or learning about.

This consistency also extends to other studies (Garg and Joshi, 2018; Sharma et al., 2016; Tumpal and Wirdania, 2020; Widyanto and Sitohang, 2020).

Hypothesis 2: Religiousness of Muslim consumers has a direct positive influence on the intention to purchase halal products that support sports competition activities among Muslim consumers in Thailand.

The analysis revealed that religiousness significantly influences the purchase intentions of Muslim consumers for halal products supporting sports activities at a statistical significance level of 0.01. This indicates that the more religious Muslim consumers are, the stronger their intention to purchase halal-certified products showcased in sports events. This finding aligns with studies that show religious values heavily influence purchase decisions in Muslim communities (Ali et al., 2020; Vizano et al., 2021).

Hypothesis 3: Becoming a sports sponsor of halal products has a positive direct influence on the attitude towards the product of Muslim consumers in Thailand.

The results confirmed that sports sponsorship by halal products significantly improves the attitudes of Muslim consumers towards these products at a statistical significance level of 0.01. This suggests that sponsorship increases the perceived value and trustworthiness of the products among Muslim consumers, consistent with findings from other literature on sponsorship and consumer attitudes (Chang et al., 2017; Huettermann et al., 2020; Melovic et al., 2019).

Hypothesis 4: Becoming a sports sponsor of halal products has a positive direct influence on the intention to purchase halal products that support sports activities among Muslim consumers in Thailand.

The analysis indicated that sponsorship positively influences purchase intentions at a statistical significance level of 0.01. This means Muslim consumers are more likely to purchase products associated with halal sponsorship in sports events. This finding supports the idea that sponsorship can enhance purchase intentions by associating products with positive and trusted events or activities (Yukyoun, 2014).

Hypothesis 5: Attitude toward halal products has a positive direct influence on the intention to purchase halal products that support sports competition activities among Muslim consumers in Thailand.

The results showed that attitudes towards halal products directly influence purchase intentions at a statistical significance level of 0.01. Positive attitudes towards halal-certified products presented in sports events increase the likelihood of purchase among Muslim consumers. This finding aligns with extensive literature indicating that positive consumer attitudes significantly drive purchase intentions (Huettermann et al., 2020; Jung et al., 2020; Kurdi et al., 2022; Zaremohzzabieh et al., 2020). Focusing on administrative areas or regions with a dense Muslim population, awareness can be increased through advertising to influence consumer awareness. When combined with the high level of religiosity of the target group, this can further enhance positive attitudes, ultimately leading to the decision to purchase the product. Therefore, it is important to emphasize the halal certification prominently in advertisements or promotional materials for the product to increase visibility.

6. Conclusion

The research confirms the strong influence of religiousness and sponsorship perception on consumer attitudes and purchase intentions among Muslim consumers in Thailand. These results highlight the importance of aligning marketing strategies, such as sponsorship, with religious values to engage Muslim consumers effectively. The findings contribute to understanding consumer behavior in the context of halal products and provide valuable insights for businesses looking to market their products in Muslim-majority regions.

Author contributions: Literature review, KI; introduction, idea generation, method, SL; conclusion, HS; data collection, PLA; data analysis, MSK. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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