

Sungnoi, Pattareya; Soonthonsmai, Vuttichat

Article

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Investigating the brand equity strategy of halal food in a promising emerging Islamic market in a non-Muslim country

Pattareya Sungnoi^a  and Vuttichat Soonthonsmai^b 

^aFaculty of Management Sciences, Rajabhat University, Khao Rup Chang, Songkhla, Thailand; ^bInstitute of Science, Innovation, and Culture, Rajamangala University of Technology Krungthep, Bangkok, Thailand

ABSTRACT

This research study highlighted the factors that influence the brand equity strategy of halal food products. In this study, the researchers have chosen to address the gap in the literature pertaining to non-majority Muslim country. The study aimed to identify the influence of consumer behavior, marketing strategies, integrated marketing communication, and added value on halal food brand equity in Thailand. A quantitative study was conducted using a structural equation model by LISREL. Data were collected through online questionnaires and personal interviews with 460 Muslim consumers residing in Thailand. Quota sampling was employed for each province, and descriptive statistics and structural equation modeling analysis were performed. The empirical data was consistent with the causal relationship model. Brand equity was directly influenced by added value and indirectly influenced by consumer behavior and marketing strategy, while integrated marketing communication influenced it through added value.

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1. Introduction

In the current landscape of food consumption, which is influenced by a variety of consumers and diverse cultures and beliefs, religion plays a significant role in shaping values, attitudes, and consumer behavior. Marketing literature confirms that major religious beliefs and practices impact consumer behavior, such as the importance of dietary fasting and feasting on patterns of food purchases and consumption, adherence to taboos on clothing styles, roles, and activities of women, practices of personal hygiene related to purchases of certain products and cosmetics, and influences on housing, lifestyles, and entertainment choices (Hati et al., 2021; Bailey & Sood, 1993; Czinkota & Ronkainen, 2012). Consequently, this interrelationship between religion and consumption often leads to the development of specialized products and services designed and targeted at consumers of different religions worldwide. Additionally, the emergence of religion-specific products and services has given rise to new areas of study and research focusing on consumers within the context of their religious affiliation. Halal marketing is a well-known marketing strategy that recognizes the influence of religion on consumer choice and follows Islamic laws, principles, and guidelines in strategic marketing decisions for designing, communicating, and delivering products and services to Muslim customers globally (Islam & Chandrasekaran, 2013). The significance of halal food extends beyond the Muslim community. With the global Muslim population on the rise, the demand for halal products is increasing, becoming a significant aspect of the worldwide food industry. Numerous nations mandate halal food certification for exports to Muslim-majority countries, rendering it a crucial facet of international trade (Mohd Nawawi et al., 2020; Perdana et al., 2018; Sthapit et al., 2023).

Furthermore, the presence of halal food choices is vital for Muslim consumers, particularly while traveling or residing in non-Muslim-majority regions. According to Said et al. (2022) reported that as Muslim-minority countries like Taiwan, South Korea, and Japan venture into promoting their own halal

CONTACT Vuttichat Soonthonsmai  vuttichat.s@mail.rmutk.ac.th  Institute of Science, Innovation, and Culture, Rajamangala University of Technology Krungthep, Bangkok, Thailand

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tourism brands, questions arise regarding whether their existing practices can fully cater to the needs of Muslim travelers. Halal food is also regarded as a symbol of quality, safety, and ethical standards within the food industry, making it an important consideration for consumers from diverse backgrounds. Nonetheless, there are currently several challenges associated with halal food, including marketing issues (Triansyah, 2023), especially in Muslim minority countries. However, there is a limited body of research on Halal food marketing in growing and emerging Islamic markets such as Thailand.

Thailand, a non-Islamic majority-population country or non-member of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), possesses the potential for the growth of halal foods. The southern border provinces of Thailand, including Narathiwat, Yala, Pattani, Songkhla, and Satun, which represent the majority with approximately 60% of the Muslim population in Thailand, are characterized by a multicultural society comprising Thai and Chinese ethnicities with Buddhism as well as a Malay population predominantly practicing Islam. As a result, the way of life and cultural practices, especially regarding consumption patterns, are distinctly different from other regions of the country since Muslims generally consume only approved halal food. Consequently, non-Muslim cooks and firms perceive a market opportunity to produce food for sale to Islamic consumers, complete with a halal certification mark. Moreover, non-Muslim consumers prioritize their health by considering halal food as a clean and hygienic production process (Alzeera et al., 2018; Banmonta, 2020). The concept of halal marketing aims to ensure that the human body, which Allah has entrusted us with, remains free from what is prohibited in the Holy Quran and Sunna's teachings (Alserhan, 2011). As halal marketing gains traction, three major Asian countries—Malaysia, Indonesia, and Pakistan—are starting to produce halal products.

As of 2021–2022, the Muslim population in Thailand accounted for 6.1% of the total Thai population (National Statistical Office of Thailand, 2022), while the global Muslim population exceeds 30% of the world's population. It is estimated that by 2030, the Muslim population will reach 2.2 billion people, constituting approximately one-third of the world's population (Lugo et al., 2011), which presents tremendous growth opportunities in the food market (Fakir et al., 2023; World Population Review, 2023; Salaheldeen & Battour, 2023). Therefore, halal products are expected to experience significant growth, providing entrepreneurs with opportunities to enter the global halal market (Phatarasiriworakul, 2018). Consequently, both non-Islamic and Islamic entrepreneurs utilize consumers' confidence and brand perception as a marketing strategy, as Muslims who choose to purchase food and beverages primarily consider the value, quality, and brand before making a purchase. The brand reflects consumers' awareness of the image, quality, perception of Islamic values, and loyalty to the teachings of Islam (Khan et al., 2019). Enhancing a brand necessitates a key marketing strategy, namely, creating outstanding, credible, and recognizable brand equity perceived by consumers (Tungpradit et al., 2017).

To develop the most effective brand equity, entrepreneurs should integrate various halal marketing strategies based on Muslim consumers' behavior. A literature review on consumer-focused marketing strategies influencing brand equity highlights major marketing factors, including consumer behavior, marketing strategy, integrated marketing communication, and added value of halal food products (Englund et al., 2020; González-Mansilla et al., 2019; Joko & Hurriyati, 2020; Nayeem et al., 2020); however, the findings remain ambiguous. This may be influenced by the area of study and the differences in spatial consumer behavior in the emerging halal food market (Sthapit et al., 2023).

Previous findings suggest that brand equity is the value perceived by consumers from the added value offered by a halal food business. It can be observed through consumers' feelings and actions towards the product, eventually leading to brand loyalty (Kotler & Keller, 2016). From the literature review, several researchers have examined factors affecting the perception of brand equity (Klaysung et al., 2018). For example, consumer behavior directly influences added value (Kim et al., 2019) and directly and indirectly influences brand equity (Satvati et al., 2016; Sehar et al., 2019). Moreover, halal marketing strategy and integrated marketing communication directly influence added value (Subramaniam & Khan, 2019) and directly and indirectly influence brand equity (Grubor et al., 2017; Kim & Lee, 2020). The objective of this study is to identify the influence of consumer behavior, marketing strategies, integrated marketing communication, and added value on halal food brand equity in Thailand. There is a dearth of empirical studies investigating Muslim consumers' experiences with halal food (Phatarasiriworakul, 2018; Sthapit et al., 2023; Adaha, 2023) in non-Muslim majority countries. Thailand, in spite of being a Muslim-minority country, is able to dominate the halal market in Southeast Asia while becoming the fifth

largest halal producer in the world (Sudrajat, 2022; Abdullah & Azam, 2020; Biancone et al., 2019). This is achieved by the country's strategy to become a global halal player, as well as a Muslim-friendly tourism destination (Sutikno et al., 2023; Hossain et al., 2019; Mohd Nawawi et al., 2020; Jeaheng et al., 2019), thereby highlighting the research gaps and focus of this study.

The scope of this research is to study the brand equity strategic model with the marketing strategy, consumer behavior, added value, and integrated marketing communication of ready-to-eat halal food. The study focuses on Muslims aged 20 years and above residing in the five southern border provinces of Thailand, namely Narathiwat, Yala, Pattani, Songkhla, and Satun provinces. The choice to focus the scope of a study on Muslims aged 20 years and older can be justified based on several considerations. It is clearly stating the scope of the study is important to establish the target population for research. In this case, if the research aims to understand specific aspects of the lives, beliefs, behaviors, or experiences of Muslims, then defining the age group can help narrow the focus. According to Cauffman and Steinberg (2000), adults aged 20 and older are more likely to have the capacity to provide informed and consented participation in the study. They are also more likely to have a greater degree of autonomy in their decision-making, which can be important in research involving sensitive topics. Furthermore, working with minors, additional ethical considerations come into play, including obtaining parental consent and ensuring the well-being of the participants (Kawas et al., 2020).

2. Literature review

2.1. Brand equity

Brand equity refers to the added value perceived by consumers from a business. It can be observed through consumers' feelings and actions towards a product, leading to brand loyalty. According to Rizwan et al. (2021) and Khan et al. (2021), brand equity which is known as the incremental value that provides reason to buy a halal food brand. Previous studies presented the theory within services and tourism context, by measuring the activities of brand equity dimensions after the tourists have encountered all the halal services and products at the destination. Undeniably, this approach of using the theory has been validated in similar research (Shafaei & Mohamed, 2015; Im et al., 2012; Battour et al., 2022), where halal brand equity activities were measured after tourists encountered their halal products and services. In this regard, brand equity theory could be applied in context to explore the understanding of halal destination brand equity of Muslim tourists halal brand equity dimensions such as halal brand awareness, halal brand image, halal brand value and halal brand perceived quality on halal destination site in a non-Islamic country (Preko et al., 2021).

From a ready to eat halal food consumer perspective, brand equity is composed of six main dimensions based on customer-based brand equity (CBBE) model (Kotler & Keller, 2016): 1) Brand Salience, 2) Brand Performance, 3) Brand Imagery, 4) Brand Judgments, 5) Brand Feelings, and 6) Brand Resonance. Previous recent researches have used some of these dimensions as factors influencing the perception of Halal brand equity (Klaysung et al., 2018; Yousaf et al., 2017; Ugwuoke, 2023; Sharifirad, 2023; Tali et al., 2023; Triansyah, 2023). In this study, these six dimensions serve as a guideline for developing the conceptual measurement of brand equity variables, as they influence long-term relationship building and product loyalty.

2.2. Added value

Added value in halal food marketing can be achieved through consumer-based marketing activities and quality assurance (Mabkhot, 2023; Cahyani, 2023). The global halal food market has experienced rapid growth, driven by an increasing Muslim population, higher disposable income, and heightened awareness of halal food products. This growth has led to a rising demand for halal-certified foods, offering a unique opportunity for food manufacturers and marketers. One of the key benefits of halal food marketing is the ability for companies to differentiate their products in a competitive market. By obtaining halal certification and incorporating it into their marketing strategies, companies can position themselves as catering to a specific and growing consumer base. This targeted marketing approach allows brands to

stand out from competitors and appeal to the religious and cultural sensibilities of Muslim consumers, who prioritize halal products in their purchasing decisions (Mabkhot, 2023). Trust plays a crucial role in driving sales and brand loyalty in the context of halal food marketing (González-Mansilla et al., 2019; Joko & Hurriyati, 2020; Nayeem et al., 2020).

There has been a rise in demand for halal goods and meals in nations where Muslims do not predominate, like Thailand. Among the nations of Southeast Asia, Thailand has become a prominent producer of halal food. The nation has quickly developed into a worldwide recognized halal hub and is among the top five halal food producers in the area (Abdul Hamid, 2016; Al-Shami & Abdullah, 2023). Since 2015, several Muslim countries such as Brunei, Malaysia, Pakistan, and Kuwait as well as non-Muslim majority countries such as Japan, Singapore, South Korea, the Philippines, and Cambodia have acknowledged Thailand's expertise in halal matters, including halal certification, halal assurance system, and halal accreditation (Mohd Nawawi et al., 2020). Since it has greatly expanded the amount of halal trade that Thailand has with these countries, this accreditation is vital (Rahim & Sulaiman, 2023; Adaha, 2023; Musthofa et al., 2023; Rachmiatie et al., 2022).

Halal certification involves strict scrutiny of food production and handling methods to ensure compliance with Islamic dietary guidelines. By obtaining this certification, food manufacturers demonstrate their commitment to meeting the religious requirements of Muslim consumers, fostering trust between consumers and the brand. This transparency leads to stronger customer relationships and increased brand loyalty. Another value-added aspect of halal food marketing is the focus on health and quality assurance (Aleid, 2024; Febriati et al., 2024). Halal certification requires strict adherence to hygienic food production practices and the use of high-quality ingredients. This results in a cleaner and healthier end product, appealing to consumers beyond the Muslim demographic. By emphasizing these qualities in their marketing strategy, halal food manufacturers can expand their target market and attract health-conscious consumers seeking better food options (Perdana et al., 2018; Sthapit et al., 2023).

With an estimated 2 billion Muslims worldwide, the halal food market presents substantial growth potential for food manufacturers and marketers (Ahmad et al., 2023; Salaheldeen & Battour, 2023). By adopting halal marketing strategies, businesses can tap into this lucrative market and expand their global reach. Additionally, the growing acceptance and awareness of halal food products among non-Muslim consumers create further opportunities for market expansion. This trend can be attributed to the perception of halal food as a symbol of quality and ethical production practices, resonating with an increasingly conscious global consumer base (Wilkins et al., 2019). By offering Muslim-friendly amenities in Thailand, such as halal food and merchandise, the Thailand tourism bureau has advanced its efforts to draw and welcome Muslim travelers. This benefits the global branding of Thai halal products. According to reports (Sudrajat, 2022; Teerakunpisut & Kongpiam, 2023), the Muslim-friendly amenities offered by the Thai government make Muslim visitors from nations like Malaysia and the Middle East feel more at ease when they are in Thailand, including wireless technology, Muslim friendly accommodations, a variety of prayer spaces, and halal dining options.

When consumers perceive added value as worth the money they pay, it leads to repurchasing due to their engagement and perception of brand equity. Five dimensions of added value influence consumers' purchasing decisions (Yeo et al., 2016): functional value, social value, emotional value, epistemic value, and conditional value of halal food.

2.3. Consumer behavior, brand equity, and added value

Understanding consumer behavior is essential for businesses, particularly in niche markets like halal food. Research indicates that religious beliefs, cultural values, and ethical considerations are primary drivers of consumer behavior in the halal food market (Bonne & Verbeke, 2008). Muslim consumers prioritize halal certification and compliance with Islamic dietary laws when making purchasing decisions (Alserhan, 2010; Talib et al., 2018). Additionally, non-Muslim consumers are becoming increasingly aware of and interested in halal food products. This can be attributed to factors such as health consciousness, concerns about food safety, and ethical considerations (Wilson & Liu, 2010; Sthapit et al., 2023). This shift in consumer behavior presents valuable opportunities for halal food marketers to broaden their target market and cater to a diverse range of consumers.

Brand equity plays a vital role in the halal food market as it represents the added value a brand provides to a product or service. Halal certification serves as a significant source of brand equity, signaling quality, safety, and adherence to religious guidelines (Aziz & Chok, 2013; Talib et al., 2018). By obtaining halal certification and incorporating it into their marketing strategies, businesses can establish a strong brand image and differentiate themselves from competitors (Hanzaee & Ramezani, 2011; Subramaniam & Khan, 2019). Brand awareness, perceived quality, and brand associations have been identified as crucial determinants of brand equity in the halal food market (Alam & Sayuti, 2011; Syukur & Nimsai, 2018). Effective communication of the benefits of halal products and building a strong brand image can create a positive perception of the products and enhance brand equity. Value-added aspects of halal food marketing include brand differentiation, consumer trust, health and quality assurance, and global market expansion. As mentioned earlier, halal certification allows companies to differentiate their products and appeal to a specific consumer base (Talib et al., 2018). This targeted marketing approach enables brands to stand out from competitors and capitalize on the growing demand for halal products.

According to a 2017 study by The Express Tribune, Thailand certified 16,000 halal products, of which 6,000 were food items. Because there aren't any rules regulating the halal certification industry to stop malpractice and misuse, a large number of halal certifications issued by the Central Islamic Council of Thailand (CICOT) may encourage irresponsible halal producers to further exploit and abuse the certification. The dissemination of problems like the use of fake halal logos, disobeying halal laws, and failing to maintain the halal certification (Ab Talib et al., 2015) would eventually weaken the spread of Thailand's halal brand image questionable in misusing halal certifications. It is discomfort with Thailand's halal products' image (Ager et al., 2015). Just 1% of Thailand's halal producers identify as Muslims, despite the country having a well-established Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) system for halal quality control (Okpala & Korzeniowska, 2023; Atieqoh et al., 2023). The declining degree of trust in Thai halal product image is partly due to Muslim manufacturers' absence from the halal product production process (Zannierah Syed Marzuki et al., 2012; Mabkhot, 2023).

Consumer trust is another critical aspect of value addition in halal food marketing. By obtaining halal certification and maintaining transparency in their production processes, companies can foster trust among consumers and build brand loyalty (Atieqoh et al., 2023; Firdaus et al., 2023; Nadeem et al., 2019). Furthermore, the focus on health and quality assurance in halal food production attracts health-conscious consumers, broadening the potential market for halal food products (Wilson & Liu, 2010; Talib et al., 2018). Finally, the global market expansion potential of halal food marketing allows businesses to tap into new markets and achieve sustainable growth (Tieman, 2011; Joko & Hurriyati, 2020; Nayeem et al., 2020). By effectively targeting these consumers and leveraging the value-added aspects of halal food marketing, businesses can establish a competitive advantage and capture a significant share of this expanding market. Consumer behavior encompasses the study of consumers' purchasing behavior and provides information about target customers, influencers, purchasing decisions, and the decision-making process (Kotler & Keller, 2016). From the literature review, four indicators were identified to measure consumer behavior: the influencers of purchasing decisions, consumers' preferences, reasons for purchasing a product, and the decision-making process. It was also found that consumer behavior directly influences added value (Kim et al., 2019), directly influences brand equity (Satvati et al., 2016), and indirectly influences brand equity (Sehar et al., 2019; Choi et al., 2018; Kim et al., 2019).

As a result, the following hypotheses were formulated.

- H1. Consumer behavior directly influences the brand equity of halal food.
- H2. Consumer behavior directly influences the added value of halal food.
- H3. Consumer behavior indirectly influences the brand equity of halal food through added value.

2.4. Marketing strategy, brand equity, and added value

Marketing strategy comprises four basic components: product, price, place, and promotion, which stimulate demand and deliver value to meet consumers' needs (Kotler et al., 2018). Additionally, packaging, positioning, and people are three additional components that provide firms with a competitive

advantage (Tracy, 2014). From the literature review related to halal food, an effective marketing strategy is crucial for businesses to succeed in the competitive halal food market. According to Alserhan (2010), the key components of a successful halal food marketing strategy include product development, pricing, distribution, and promotion. Previous research indicates that incorporating halal certification and cultural considerations into product development can lead to increased consumer satisfaction and brand loyalty (Bonne & Verbeke, 2008; Abdul-Talib & Abd-Razak, 2013; Subramaniam & Khan, 2019; Potluri & Potluri, 2018). In terms of pricing, it is important for halal food marketers to consider the affordability of their products to cater to a diverse range of consumers (Abdul-Talib & Abd-Razak, 2013). The distribution channels for halal food products should ensure easy access for Muslim consumers while also reaching non-Muslim consumers interested in halal food (Tieman, 2011; Wahyudi & Amri, 2021). Promotional strategies should focus on educating consumers about the benefits of halal food, such as quality, hygiene, and ethical practices (Wilson & Liu, 2010; Ramadhani et al., 2021). Additionally, employing culturally sensitive marketing communications is crucial to resonate with the target audience and create a positive brand image (Alam & Sayuti, 2011; Perdana et al., 2018; Ramli et al., 2023).

Brand equity, which represents the added value that a brand provides to a product or service, plays a vital role in the halal food market. Research suggests that halal certification serves as a significant source of brand equity, signaling quality, safety, and adherence to religious guidelines (Aziz & Chok, 2013; Perdana et al., 2018). By obtaining halal certification and incorporating it into their marketing strategies, businesses can establish a strong brand image and differentiate themselves from competitors (Hanzaee & Ramezani, 2011; Perdana et al., 2018). Several studies have found that brand awareness, perceived quality, and brand associations are essential determinants of brand equity in the halal food market (Alam & Sayuti, 2011; Bashir et al., 2019). By effectively communicating the benefits of halal products and building a strong brand image, marketers can create a positive perception of their products and enhance brand equity. Value-added aspects of halal food marketing include brand differentiation, consumer trust, health and quality assurance, and global market expansion. As discussed earlier, halal certification allows companies to differentiate their products and appeal to a specific consumer base. Marketing strategy directly influences added value (Wahyudi & Amri, 2021; Wu & Li, 2018; Bashir et al., 2019; Wahyudi & Amri, 2021), directly influences brand equity (Joko & Hurriyati, 2020; Pomeroy, 2017), and indirectly influences brand equity through the added value of halal food (Mukherjee & Shivani, 2016; Teerakunpisut & Kongpiam, 2023). As a result, the following hypotheses were formulated.

H4. Marketing strategy directly influences the brand equity of halal food.

H5. Marketing strategy directly influences the added value of halal food.

H6. Marketing strategy indirectly influences the brand equity of halal food through added value.

2.5. Integrated marketing communication and brand equity

Integrated marketing communication (IMC) involves the integration of marketing promotion tools. The five basic tools in communication include advertising, sales promotion, personal selling, public relations, and direct and digital marketing (Kotler et al., 2018). From the literature review, these five communication tools were used as indicators in developing the conceptual framework of integrated marketing communication suitable for halal food products and the context of the current sample group in the southern border provinces in Thailand (Potluri & Potluri, 2018). The findings suggest that integrated marketing communication directly influences added value (Subramaniam & Khan, 2019), directly influences brand equity (Grubor et al., 2017; Bashir et al., 2019), and indirectly influences brand equity through added value (Grubor et al., 2017; Kim & Lee, 2020). This responds to consumers' needs with a contemporary and religious affiliation marketing strategy combined with technology to deliver brand equity (Vishnoi et al., 2018; Mohd Nawawi et al., 2020).

According to Brewer and Rojas (2008), customers today also want transparency with regard to the manufacturing process. In the Muslim world, halal food manufacturers need to follow the Halal processing criteria through carefully thought-out marketing communication, according to extensive research by Abidin et al. (2021) and Mila and Barlian (2022). According to Sukri et al. (2022) and Hussain et al. (2016),

surimi and food processing based on surimi must follow halal regulations in order to provide consumers with halal values. Additionally, according to Mokhtar et al. (2021) and Mila and Barlian (2022), it's critical to ascertain the manufacturer's halal certification in order to assess their product processing techniques and create well-prepared marketing communications. As a result, the following hypotheses were formulated.

H7. Integrated marketing communication directly influences the brand equity of halal food.

H8. Integrated marketing communication directly influences the added value of halal food.

H9. Integrated marketing communication indirectly influences the brand equity of halal food through added value.

2.6. Added value and brand equity

There are five dimensions of added value that influence consumers' purchasing decisions (Yeo et al., 2016): functional value, social value, emotional value, epistemic value, and conditional value. The value-added aspects of halal food marketing are manifold. By focusing on brand differentiation, building consumer trust, emphasizing health and quality assurance, and leveraging the potential for global market expansion, halal food manufacturers can establish a competitive advantage in the market (Talib et al., 2018). As the demand for halal-certified products continues to grow, businesses that effectively utilize halal food marketing strategies will be well-positioned to capture a significant share of this burgeoning market (Perdana et al., 2018; Sthapit et al., 2023).

A review of the literature on the idea of 'added value' for food products (Banmonta, 2020; Majid et al., 2016; Nikhashemi et al., 2016) found three indicators: functional value, social value, and emotional value. These are used to measure the added value that consumers have for certain food products that meet their dietary needs, like halal food. An added value directly influences the brand equity of halal food (Majid et al., 2016). The halal brand ultimately maintains a competitive edge in the halal food industry (Solem, 2016). According to Islam (2022), the aim of Muslim consumers to purchase halal cuisine in both majority and non-majority Muslim nations enhances brand value and raises brand awareness of the halal menu.

Through a variety of industrial procedures, the halal industries collaborate with one another to ensure the legitimacy of their halal brands through the use of the halal mark and other types of halal added value. Gaining the trust of customers is crucial for these firms as it is an intangible and invisible asset (Santosa et al., 2022; Billah et al., 2020). Customers behave responsibly and purchase halal items based on the reliability of adding value to the halal mark. As a result, the following hypothesis was formulated.

H10. Added value directly influences the brand equity of halal food.

Previous literature has primarily focused on specific marketing factors influencing brand equity, lacking integration of marketing factors in formulating halal food marketing strategies suitable for target groups. However, it was also discovered that the marketing factors used to study the factors influencing brand equity, including consumer behavior, marketing strategy, and integrated marketing communication, act as independent variables, with added value playing a mediated role, while brand equity serves as the dependent variable, which can be developed into a conceptual framework and research hypotheses as shown in Figure 1.

3. Method

3.1. Population sample and data collection

This study selected a newly emerging Islamic market to examine the impact of demographic factors, social values, and lifestyle on food consumption patterns. In Thailand, although the majority of the population is Buddhist or non-Muslim, the Muslim population is expected to experience tremendous growth, and Thai society is receptive to the Muslim way of life. This phenomenon has led to

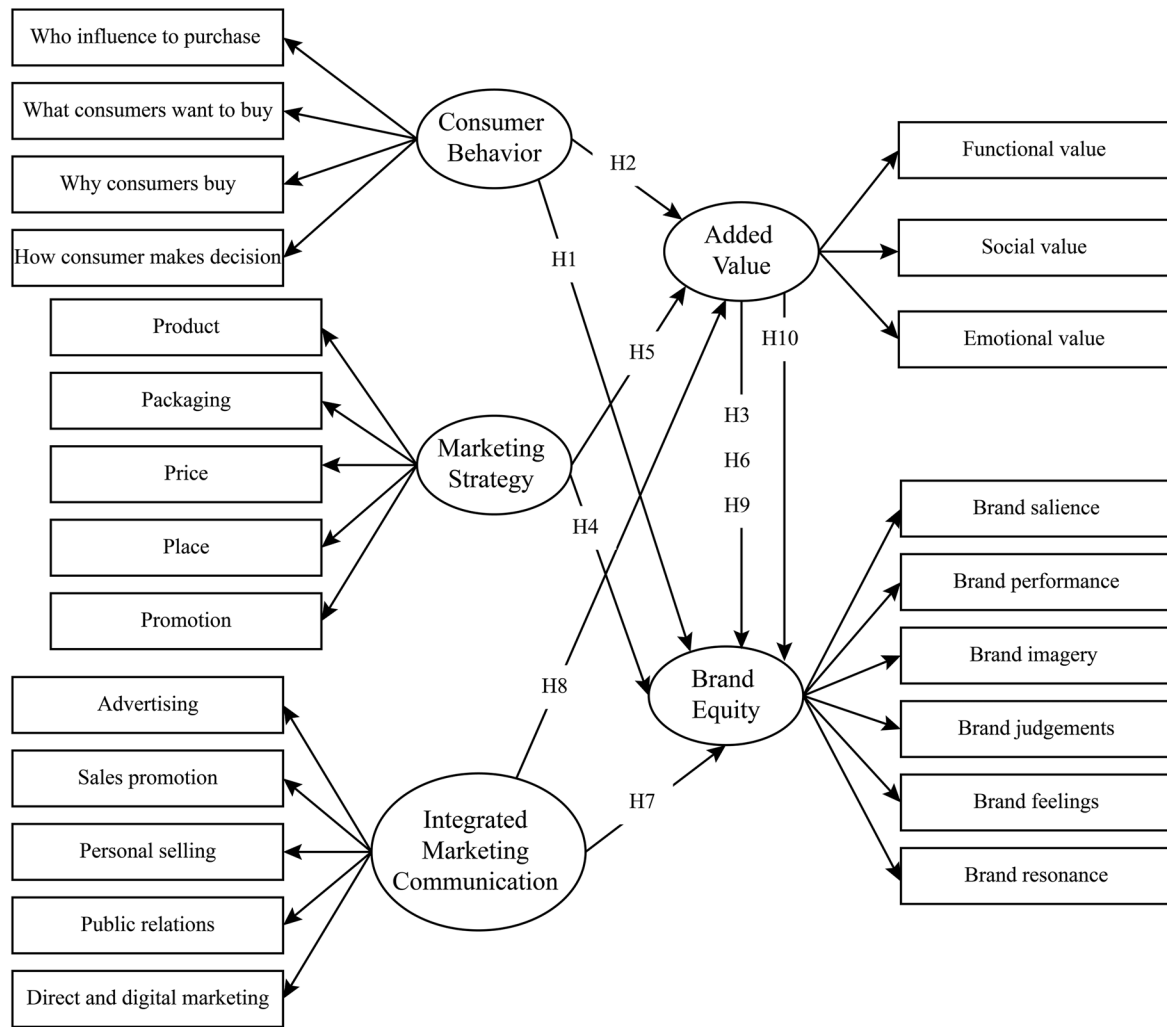


Figure 1. Research model.

opportunities in the business and food industry sectors in Thailand. The specific population for this study consisted of Muslim consumers aged 20 years old and older residing in the major Muslim residential areas of the five southern border provinces of Thailand: Narathiwat, Yala, Pattani, Songkhla, and Satun. These provinces account for nearly 30% of the Muslim population in Thailand (Phiriyasart et al., 2023; Almine, 2023). The sample size was determined using the criteria for the structural equation model (SEM), which is 20 times the number of observed variables (Hair et al., 2014). With a study model consisting of 23 observed variables, a total of 460 samples were collected through quota sampling.

The sample was selected using quota sampling based on two criteria for categorizing the sample based on age and residential area of population. This included 92 participants per province, with each province having an age range of 20–29, 30–39, 40–49, 50–59, and 60 years old and above, representing approximately 23%, 21%, 19%, 17%, and 20% of the Muslim population in the region, respectively. The sample aimed to closely represent and reflect the population structure as shown in Table 1. The selection process involved convenience sampling based on specific qualifications using screening questions.

Data collection involved the utilization of an online self-administered questionnaire and in-person interviews. Specifically, 250 online survey questionnaires were distributed to participants via Facebook, while an additional 250 questionnaires were administered through 20 to 30-minute face-to-face interviews at universities and mosques. The selection of participants was based on quota sampling, considering their regional location. To ensure a diverse set of respondents, questionnaires were initially distributed through convenience sampling, followed by email.

Table 1. Sample size allocation (n = 460).

Age group (Year) Province	20–29 (23%)	30–39 (21%)	40–49 (19%)	50–59 (17%)	60 ++ (20%)	Total (100%)
Narathiwat	21	19	17	16	19	92
Yala	21	19	17	16	19	92
Pattani	21	19	18	16	18	92
Songkhla	22	20	17	15	18	92
Satun	21	19	18	16	18	92

Note: Sample proportion in the parenthesis.

The advantages of the online survey method include the rapid receipt of responses without geographical constraints. Out of the 250 paper-based interview questionnaires distributed, 240 were completed and returned, and 220 out of the 250 online ‘Google form’ questionnaires were also completed via Facebook with the search function by using tap the search icon, and search for a name or group name, then filter the results by location, tap ‘People’, select the filter icon, then tap ‘City’ like Narathiwat, Yala, Pattani, Songkhla, and Satun, to search by the city. Data collection took place over a span of ten weeks, resulting in a total of 460 respondents and a response rate of 92%.

3.2. Measurement and data analysis

The research instrument employed in this study was a questionnaire comprising closed-ended questions. The questionnaire design drew on data extracted from textbooks, documents, concepts, theories, and existing research. All indicators used in the questionnaire were adopted from previous studies and measured on a five-point Likert scale. The study focused on four major independent variables: consumer behavior developed from the concept of consumer behavior by Kotler and Keller (2016), marketing strategy developed from the concept of halal marketing strategy by Ramli et al. (2023), added value derived from the concept of added value for food products (Banmonta, 2020; Majid et al., 2016), and integrated marketing communication developed from the five basic tools in communication, including advertising, sales promotion, personal selling, public relations, and direct and digital marketing (Kotler et al., 2018). The dependent variable, brand equity, was scaled based on the concepts of Kotler and Keller (2016) in terms of customer-based brand equity (CBBE), so-called Keller’s CBBE model (1993), which was identified accordingly.

The measurement of content validity was assessed using the item objective congruence (IOC), with indices ranging from 0.60 to 1.00, indicating acceptable validity. In the exploratory study, Cronbach’s alpha was calculated for each dimension, yielding the following results: consumer behavior (0.861), marketing strategy (0.881), integrated marketing communication (0.882), added value (0.915), and brand equity (0.953). These values confirmed the reliability of the research instrument used. The validity of the factor analysis was supported by the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of 0.828 and a highly significant Bartlett’s sphericity test. The obtained alpha coefficients, which were approximately equal to or higher than 0.70, were considered acceptable for measuring the variables in this study (Hair et al., 2014).

Quantitative data from the questionnaire formed the basis of this study’s major findings. The data analysis was conducted using concepts related to consumer behavior, marketing strategies, integrated marketing communication, added value, and brand equity. Descriptive statistics were calculated to present frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviations, skewness, and kurtosis. Inferential statistics included confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modeling (SEM) to examine the consistency of the model with the empirical data using various fit indices such as chi-squared test (χ^2), relative chi-square (χ^2/df), comparative fit index (GFI), adjusted goodness of fit index (AGFI), comparative fit index (CFI), and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA). Path analysis was used to analyze the direct and indirect influences according to the conceptual framework. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) using software like LISREL is a powerful and versatile statistical technique that is chosen for data analysis in many research studies. SEM allows researchers to model these relationships effectively. It can handle both observed variables (measured directly) and latent variables (unobserved, underlying constructs) (Kline, 2023; Ranasinghe et al., 2023). SEM also enables researchers to test and model causal relationships between variables. It allows researchers to specify directional pathways, which can be crucial when their research is interested in understanding cause-and-effect relationships among different factors in the study (Scheiner et al., 2023; Coutts, 2023; Arif & MacNeil, 2023).

4. Analysis

There are two parts of data analysis. The first part is descriptive statistics were performed and presented in Tables 2 and 3 to describe the demographic characteristics of the sample and analyze consumer behavior, marketing strategy, integrated marketing communication, added value, and brand equity of halal food based on the study's findings, respectively. The second part is an analysis of structural equation model was presented in Figure 2, Tables 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7.

4.1. Descriptive statistics

From Table 2, the majority gender is male, representing 56.5%, while the age group of 20–29 years old is the age group with the highest number, representing 23.0%. K12 or lower is the education level, constituting 33.9%, while the majority occupation is enterprise owner and farmer, accounting for 67.6% of the total sample.

From Table 3, for the research variables, there were 27 items, and the average score for consumer behavior is 4.02. The standard deviation is 0.561 (mean = 4.02, S.D. = .561). For the marketing strategy variable, there were 25 items, and the mean score is 4.21. The standard deviation is 0.574 (mean = 4.21, S.D. = 0.574). The integrated marketing communication variable had 21 items with the mean of 3.43, but the relatively high standard deviation is 1.004 (mean = 3.43, S.D. = 1.004). The added value variable had 12 items, and the mean score is relatively high at 4.54 with a standard deviation of 0.561 (mean = 4.54, S.D. = 0.561). For brand equity, there were 23 items. The mean score is 4.36 and the standard deviation is 0.624 (mean = 4.36, S.D. = 0.624). According to normal-distribution consideration, this analysis also accommodates normally distributed data, which often occurs in behavioral studies with skewness and kurtosis measures (Chin, 1998). Measures of skewness and kurtosis of consumer behavior (SK = −0.491, Ku = 0.210), marketing strategy (SK = −0.802, Ku = 0.952), integrated marketing communication (SK = −0.184, Ku = −0.812), added value (SK = −1.891, Ku = 4.584), and brand equity (SK = −1.290, Ku = 1.891). According to Hair et al. (2014), the values of skewness as well as kurtosis range from −2 to +2, assuming a normal distribution. All measure variables in the model except added value are accepted. However, it is well suited to handling complex models incorporating both reflective constructs (when the construct causes the measurement of the indicator variables) and formative constructs (when the indicator variables cause the measurement of the construct) and has fewer restrictions regarding assumptions about data (Hair et al., 2014).

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for demographic characteristics of the sample (n=460).

Variables	Classification	Frequency	Percent (%)
Gender	Male	260	56.5
	Female	200	43.5
Age	20–29	106	23.0
	30–39	96	21.0
	40–49	87	18.9
	50–59	79	17.1
	60 and older	92	20.0
Education	K12 or lower	156	33.9
	Vocation	130	28.3
	Bachelor	81	17.6
	Graduate	93	20.2
Occupation	Student	24	5.2
	Government Officer	61	13.3
	Private Employee	64	13.9
	Enterprise owner & Farmer	311	67.6
Sample size (n)		460	100.0

Table 3. Descriptive statistics for the research variables.

Variables	No. of item	\bar{X}	S.D	Skewness (Sk)	Kurtosis (Ku)	C.V
Consumer behavior	27	4.02	0.561	−0.491	0.210	0.140
Marketing strategy	25	4.21	0.574	−0.802	0.952	0.141
Integrated marketing communication	21	3.43	1.004	−0.184	−0.812	0.293
Added value	12	4.54	0.561	−1.891	4.584	0.121
Brand equity	23	4.36	0.624	−1.290	1.891	0.143

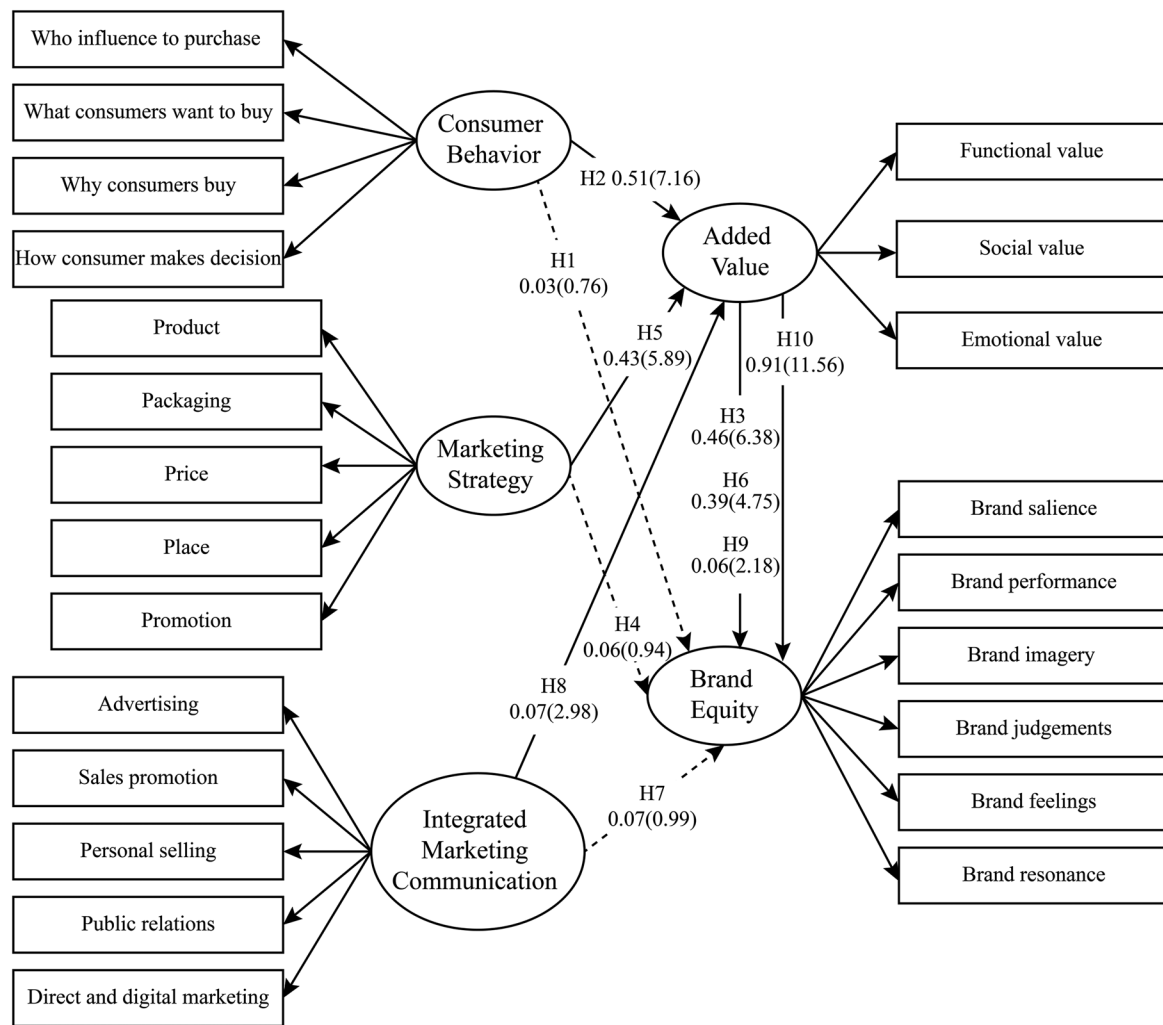


Figure 2. Structural equation modeling of brand equity strategic model of halal food.

Note: → No significance effects → Have significance effects.

Table 4. Discriminant validity of the constructs – correlations between constructs.

Latent Variables	CB	MS	IMC	AV	BE
Consumer behavior (CB)	0.633				
Marketing strategy (MS)	0.638**	0.789			
Integrated marketing communication (IMC)	0.698**	0.625**	0.790		
Added value (AV)	0.667**	0.645**	0.450**	0.819	
Brand equity (BE)	0.705**	0.654**	0.627**	0.557**	0.756
rV (AVE)	0.401	0.622	0.624	0.671	0.573
rC (Composite Reliability)	0.762	0.773	0.813	0.793	0.801

Note. ** $p \leq .01$. Bold diagonals indicate the square root of AVE.

4.2. Structural equation model analysis

4.2.1. Measurement model

Once the reliability and validity of the measurement model were established, the structural model was estimated to test the hypotheses proposed in the conceptual model, as depicted in Figure 1. The predictive power of the model and the relationships between the constructs were examined, as shown in Figure 2. The results presented in Table 4 further confirm the reliability of the structural equation modeling (SEM), with all factors demonstrating excellent levels of internal consistency, indicated by their composite reliability (CR) values ranging from 0.762 to 0.813.

Table 5. Results of a confirmatory factor of consumer behavior, marketing strategy, integrated marketing communication, added value, and brand equity of halal food.

Indicators	Factor loading		T	R ²	ρ_c	α
	b (SE)	β				
Consumer behavior (CB)					0.701	0.921
Who influence to purchase halal food	0.331 (0.041)	0.403	8.061**	0.164		
What customer wants to buy halal food	0.233 (0.062)	0.360	3.680**	0.132		
Why customer buys halal food	0.704 (0.042)	0.822	18.221**	0.671		
How customer makes decision	0.422 (0.020)	0.804	19.46**	0.640		
$\chi^2 = 0.021$ df = 1 $p = 0.893$ CFI = 1.00 GFI = 1.00 AGFI = 1.00 RMSEA = 0.000						
Marketing strategy (MS)					0.811	0.946
Product	0.520 (0.023)	0.841	21.460**	0.701		
Packaging	0.574 (0.020)	0.902	23.921**	0.802		
Price	0.461 (0.030)	0.731	17.720**	0.540		
Place	0.522 (0.020)	0.840	21.631**	0.711		
Promotion	0.441 (0.033)	0.614	13.651**	0.372		
$\chi^2 = 3.002$ df = 3 $p = 0.392$ CFI = 1.00 GFI = 1.00 AGFI = 0.99 RMSEA = 0.000						
Integrated marketing communication (IMC)					0.890	0.951
Advertising	0.873 (0.042)	0.870	22.761**	0.760		
Sales promotion	0.860 (0.040)	0.852	22.060**	0.732		
Personal selling	0.460 (0.033)	0.643	14.314**	0.405		
Public relations	0.531 (0.030)	0.690	16.122**	0.472		
Direct and digital marketing	0.980 (0.040)	0.860	22.365**	0.745		
$\chi^2 = 4.962$ df = 3 $p = 0.175$ CFI = 1.00 GFI = 1.00 AGFI = 0.98 RMSEA = 0.038						
Added value (AV)					0.621	0.861
Functional value	0.492 (0.030)	0.744	16.910**	0.550		
Social value	0.324 (0.051)	0.331	6.030**	0.110		
Emotional value	0.425 (0.032)	0.670	14.571**	0.451		
$\chi^2 = 3.871$ df = 2 $p = 0.140$ CFI = 0.99 GFI = 0.99 AGFI = 0.99 RMSEA = 0.045						
Brand equity (BE)					0.901	0.953
Brand salience	0.583 (0.030)	0.841	21.220**	0.710		
Brand performance	0.541 (0.03)	0.830	20.941**	0.691		
Brand imagery	0.511 (0.030)	0.780	19.150**	0.613		
Brand judgements	0.494 (0.031)	0.754	17.311**	0.564		
Brand feelings	0.405 (0.031)	0.682	15.731**	0.461		
Brand resonance	0.512 (0.030)	0.741	17.701**	0.550		
$\chi^2 = 7.012$ df = 5 $p = 0.220$ CFI = 1.00 GFI = 0.99 AGFI = 0.98 RMSEA = 0.030						

Note. ** $p < 0.01$, b=factor loading, SE=standard error, β = standardized factor loading, R^2 = estimated coefficient, ρ_c = factor validity, α = Cronbach's alpha coefficient.

Table 6. Path coefficients for the structural model.

Hypothesis	Paths	Estimate (Beta)	t-value	Results
H1: CB directly influences BE	CB → BE	0.030	0.761	Not supported
H2: CB directly influences AV	CB → AV	0.511	7.162**	Supported
H3: CB indirectly influences BE	CB → AV → BE	0.463	6.380**	Supported
H4: MS directly influences BE	MS → BE	0.062	0.941	Not supported
H5: MS directly influences AV	MS → AV	0.432	5.892**	Supported
H6: MS indirectly influences BE	MS → AV → BE	0.390	4.750**	Supported
H7: IMC directly influences BE	IMC → BE	0.071	0.991	Not supported
H8: IMC directly influences AV	IMC → AV	0.072	2.983**	Supported
H9: IMC indirectly influences BE	IMC → AV → BE	0.061	2.181*	Supported
H10: AV directly influences BE	AV → BE	0.905	11.562**	Supported

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

4.2.2. Confirmatory factor analysis

The factor models of all five variables were supported by the empirical data as shown in Table 5.

From Table 5, when considering the estimated coefficient (R^2), the variance ratio was greater than 0.50% with the 1st and 2nd highest standardized factor loadings, which are important as indicators. It was found that consumer behavior included the reason why consumers buy a product and the purchasing decision process, with standardized factor loadings of 0.331 and 0.704, factor validity of 0.701, and Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.921.

Table 7. Analysis results of the effect of factors in structural equation modeling of the brand equity strategic model of halal food.

Predictor variables	Variable					
	Added value (VA)			Brand equity (BE)		
	DE	IE	TE	DE	IE	TE
Consumer behavior (CB)	0.511*	–	0.511*	–	0.463*	0.463*
Marketing strategy (MS)	0.432*	–	0.432*	–	0.390*	0.390*
Integrated marketing communication (IMC)	0.072*	–	0.072*	–	0.061*	0.061*
Added value (AV)	–	–	–	0.905*	–	0.905*
R ²		0.821			0.833	

$\chi^2 = 158.04$, $df = 137$, $p = 0.105$, $\chi^2/df = 1.15$, CFI = 1.00, GFI = 0.98, AGFI = 0.94, RMSEA = 0.02

* $p < 0.05$ (t-value ≥ 1.960).

DE = Direct Effect, IE = Indirect Effect TE = Total Effect.

Halal marketing strategy included packaging and place with standardized factor loadings of 0.441 and 0.574, factor validity of 0.811, and Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.951. Integrated marketing communication included public relations and direct and digital marketing with standardized factor loadings of 0.460 and 0.980, factor validity of 0.890, and Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.953. Added value included functional value with standardized factor loadings of 0.324 and 0.492, factor validity of 0.621, and Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.861. Brand equity included brand salience and brand performance with standardized factor loadings of 0.405 and 0.583, factor validity of 0.901, and Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.953. The marketing strategy, integrated marketing communication, added value, and brand equity of Halal Food had an average variance extracted between 0.573 and 0.671, higher than 0.50, except for consumer behavior which was slightly lower than 0.50. When considering the validity of the factor, it was higher than 0.60, resulting in an acceptable average variance extracted (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

4.2.3. Structural model

The structural model fit (Figure 2) demonstrates strong predictive relevance (Amaro & Duarte, 2015). All statistics were accepted, Chi-square $\chi^2/df < 2$, with CFI, GFI, and AGFI > 0.95 , RMSEA and SRMR < 0.05 . The model indices showed that Chi-Square (χ^2), a measure of the goodness of fit of the model, is 158.04, which suggests a better fit, but this value should be interpreted in conjunction with other fit indices. χ^2/df is the normalized chi-square value; a value close to 1 indicates a good fit; CFI (Comparative Fit Index) is an index that measures how well the model fits the data; and a perfect fit is indicated by a value of 1.00. GFI (Goodness of Fit Index) is a measure of overall model fit with a value of 0.98, while AGFI (Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index) is similar to GFI but adjusted for degrees of freedom with a value of 0.94. RMSEA (Root Mean Square Error of Approximation) is a measure of the model's fit in relation to the number of degrees of freedom, and a low value indicates a good fit (RMSEA = 0.02). It suggests that the relationships between the predictor variables and brand equity are not likely due to random chance.

4.2.4. Testing of structural model

The results of the effect of factors in the structural equation modeling of the brand equity strategic model of halal food can summarize the hypothesis testing as shown in Table 6.

The hypotheses testing results of the brand equity strategic model with the marketing strategy of halal food in Thailand revealed, as shown in Figure 2 and Table 6, that brand equity was not directly influenced by consumer behavior, marketing strategy, and integrated marketing strategy (H1: t-values = 0.761; SLF = 0.030, H4: t-values = 0.941; SLF = 0.062, and H7: t-values = 0.991; SLF = 0.071). However, brand equity was directly influenced by added value (H10: t-values = 11.562; SLF = 0.905), a very high effect of path coefficient, and indirectly influenced by consumer behavior (H3: t-values = 6.380; SLF = 0.463), a moderate effect of path coefficient, followed by the marketing strategy (H6: t-values = 4.750; SLF = 0.390), a low effect of path coefficient, and integrated marketing communication (H9: t-values = 2.181; SLF = 0.061).

Added value was directly influenced by consumer behavior (H2: t -values = 7.162; SLF = 0.511) and a moderate effect of the path coefficient, followed by the marketing strategy (H5: t -values = 5.892; SLF = 0.432), and a moderate effect of the path coefficient and integrated marketing communication (H8: t -values = 2.983; SLF = 0.072).

From Table 7, the results of the effect of factors in the structural equation modeling of the brand equity strategic model of halal food are presented. Table 7 contains analysis results from a structural equation model (SEM) that assesses the effects of various factors on the brand equity of halal food, specifically after improving a strategic model. Predictor variables are the factors that are believed to influence brand equity (BE), added value (AV), consumer behavior (CB), marketing strategy (MS), and integrated marketing communication (IMC). These variables are used to predict brand equity (BE). Path coefficients represent how much one variable directly or indirectly affects another. Consumer behavior, marketing strategy, and integrated marketing communication have a direct effect of 0.511, 0.432, and 0.072, respectively, on added value. And consumer behavior, marketing strategy, and integrated marketing communication have an indirect effect of 0.463, 0.390, and 0.061, respectively, on brand equity through added value. In this result, the R-squared values are 0.821 for brand equity (BE) and 0.833 for added value (AV). These values indicate that the model explains 82% of the variance in brand equity and 83% of the variance in added value.

In summary, this table presents the results of a structural equation model that evaluates the impact of specific predictor variables on brand equity in the context of halal food. It provides information on the strengths of these relationships, model fit indices, and the level of significance of the observed effects.

5. Discussion

The research objectives of this study center around examining and analyzing various aspects related to halal food in the context of Thailand. These objectives encompass consumer behavior, marketing strategy, integrated marketing communication, added value, and brand equity. Let's delve into the discussion for each of the research objectives.

The analysis of the brand equity strategic model for halal food, consumer behavior, marketing strategy, and integrated marketing communication have no directly influences brand equity (H1, H4, and H7). These findings are not consistent with the study of Satvati et al. (2016); however Muslim consumers generally prioritize halal certification and compliance with Islamic dietary laws when making purchasing decisions (Alserhan, 2010; Talib et al., 2018). Additionally, non-Muslim consumers are becoming increasingly aware of and interested in halal food products with their health consciousness, concerns about food safety, and ethical considerations (Wilson & Liu, 2010; Sthapit et al., 2023). Businesses can portray themselves as serving a particular and expanding customer base by gaining halal certification and implementing it into their marketing tactics. By not only using this focused marketing strategy, integrated marketing communication but also added value with halal certification, companies can differentiate themselves from rivals and appeal to Muslim consumers' cultural and religious sensibilities, who give halal products top priority when making purchases (Mabkhot, 2023).

Consumer behavior directly influenced added value (H2) and indirectly influenced brand equity through added value (H3). It demonstrated that the purchasing decision, particularly the reason why customers purchased a product and the purchasing decision process, showed that the purchasing decision was made by the reason that led to the purchase and the perception of the product's quality from the purchasing decision process until it became an experience affecting the satisfaction and added value perceived by consumers. The findings are consistent with the study of Abdur Razzaque and Nosheen Chaudhry (2013), which found that, contrary to the perception in non-Muslim cultures where food products are often considered low-involvement items, these products hold a significant level of importance for devout Muslims. It appears that religious devotion plays a role as a precursor to the extent of Muslim consumers' engagement in brand-related decisions, whereas it does not significantly affect their involvement in product-related decisions (Uzir et al., 2021; Abdur Razzaque & Nosheen Chaudhry, 2013; Yarahmadi Dehavi, 2022). This result is also consistent with the study by Choi et al. (2018), and Kim et al. (2019), reporting that experiences positively affected consumer satisfaction and perceived value-added

products. Also, experiences significantly enhanced the added value of the business's products, significantly affecting consumers' behavioral intentions and added value, which would be useful for boosting brand equity to reach marketing goals (Tsai & Wang, 2017; Sthapit et al., 2023).

The marketing strategy directly influenced added value (H5) and indirectly influenced brand equity through added value (H6). This indicated that the marketing strategy of halal food was a factor affecting good relationship building with Muslim consumers, particularly the packaging conveying information about the product to provide consumers with confidence in their purchasing decisions. Similarly, the studies by Potluri and Potluri (2018) and Syukur et al. (2021) found that packaging and halal certification on the packaging were crucial for Muslims to choose a product, and the place would facilitate the purchase decision between halal and non-halal food as well as linking to other products to increase sales opportunities. This is consistent with the study of Syukur and Nimsai (2018), which stated that the product placement in the distribution place showed the entrepreneur's halal awareness and religious knowledge, which greatly influenced the intention to buy halal food. Both indicators of the marketing strategy would have a significant influence on added value and a positive effect on building brand loyalty (Wu & Li, 2018; Bashir et al., 2019; Wahyudi & Amri, 2021), directly influence brand equity (Joko & Hurriyati, 2020; Pomeriing, 2017), and indirectly influence brand equity through added value (Mukherjee & Shivani, 2016; Islam, 2022). This included added value to all stakeholders involved in the marketing process that is directly influences brand equity (Joko & Hurriyati, 2020; Pomeriing, 2017), and indirectly influences brand equity through added value. The marketing process created added value for the product from a personal and social perspective (Pomeriing, 2017), which is related to the objectives of the business and responds to consumers' needs with a contemporary and religious affiliation marketing strategy combined with technology to deliver brand equity (Vishnoi et al., 2018; Mohd Nawawi et al., 2020).

Integrated marketing communication directly influenced added value (H8) and indirectly influenced brand equity through added value (H9), indicating that integrated marketing communication played a key role in the process of developing and maintaining brand equity of halal food, especially in advertising and direct and digital marketing (Mila & Barlian, 2022; Mokhtar et al., 2021). Digital media, online marketing, mobile media, and social media platforms were the key media tools in advertising campaigns. Each tool must be effectively integrated under the concept of integrated marketing communication to suit the target Muslim audiences to deliver added value for the halal product (Subramaniam & Khan, 2019), and indirectly influence brand equity through added value (Grubor et al., 2017; Kim & Lee, 2020). This responds to consumers' needs with a contemporary and religious affiliation marketing strategy combined with technology to deliver brand equity (Vishnoi et al., 2018; Mohd Nawawi et al., 2020; Abidin et al., 2021). As a result, consumers felt good and trust about the brand and the organization. This is consistent with the study by Finne and Grönroos (2017) who found that various forms of social media platforms or internet advertising had a significant positive effect, especially on communicating messages, such as posting a short message which created added value that influences the brand. This showed that consumers perceived added value of the product from the message content via advertising platforms. The perception of added value to consumers was direct and indirect related to intention to purchase and word of mouth (Huang et al., 2019), building a relationship marketing strategy which is contributing to business sustainability and brand equity (Subramaniam & Khan, 2019).

Moreover, the findings show that added value directly influenced brand equity (H10), indicating that success in building the perception of the brand was related to added value, especially functional value that met the need or reason to purchase. This affected and led to Muslim consumers' satisfaction and purchasing decisions of consumers. These findings consistent with the studies by Nikhashemi et al. (2016) and Sthapit et al. (2023) found that the functional value of a product positively influenced consumers' brand perception to have satisfaction and trust in that brand (Majid et al., 2016; Nikhashemi et al., 2016). This will eventually lead to brand loyalty. This value also includes the form or appearance of the product to create added value that affects brand perception, resulting in a positive effect on the brand loyalty and competitive advantage. Additionally, added value was offered through the participation of all stakeholders involved in marketing activities through the satisfaction of these consumers with the brand. It is essential component to strengthen the halal brand and sustains a competitive advantage of halal food eventually as an intangible and invisible asset (Solem, 2016; Santosa et al., 2022; Billah et al., 2020).

6. Conclusion

Halal brand equity strategic model of halal food revealed that there are the strong interrelationships among the major cause and effect variables with the mediator. Accordingly, brand equity was directly influenced by added value, and a moderate effect of path coefficient, followed by the halal marketing strategy and a relatively low effect of path coefficient of the integrated marketing communication. These indicated that the Halal marketing strategy reflected a factor affecting good relationship building with Muslim consumers, particularly the packaging conveying information about value and benefits of the product to provide the consumers with confidence in their purchasing decisions. In addition to added value was directly influenced by Muslim consumer behavior in Thailand as a non-Muslim majority country, followed by the halal marketing strategy, and a moderate effect of the path coefficient, and integrated marketing communication with a very low effect. Variables in the brand equity strategic model and the marketing strategy of halal food could be used together to explain the halal brand equity of food by 83%.

7. Managerial implications, limitations, and future research

It demonstrated that the halal food purchasing decision, particularly the reasons why customers purchased halal food and the purchasing decision process, showed that the purchasing decision was made by the main reason that led to the purchase and the perception of the food or product's quality from the purchasing decision process. This leads to an experience affecting the satisfaction and added value perceived by Muslim consumers and to be the guideline to develop the brand equity strategy for the new product.

This study has limitations that may be overcome in future research. First, the measurement of variables was based on self-reports and was conducted at one point at a time, which increases the threat that a common method bias influenced the research results. Although some improvements were made to minimize the potential effects of bias on the findings, in future research, collecting data from different sources is recommended. This study is a so-called cross-sectional study in a certain region of Thailand. The results may be a limited generalization to global Islamic consumers in other regions of the world.

Future research is recommended as follows: First, as for academic recommendations, scholars can apply knowledge from the findings that require further investigation. This may depend on the area of study of Muslim consumer purchase situations as well as the differences in spatial consumer behavior. Second, the findings suggested that halal food brand equity was the value that consumers perceived from the added value offered by a business. It could be seen from the feelings and actions toward the product until becoming a loyal customer to the brand. Halal brand equity strategic model with the marketing strategy to develop the potential for halal food entrepreneurs to utilize their marketing strategy activities and integrated marketing communication tools that create added value and a positive effect on halal brand equity to suit the context of target customers and markets. Future studies would be more extensive to prove causal relationships among Muslim consumer behavior, brand equity, marketing strategy, and added value across cultures and regions. Third, according to the findings, future research can also be studied in detail to obtain empirical data on other related halal products for the maximum benefit to consumers and to compare with other samples in Muslim and non-Muslim countries as an approach to improving marketing strategies sustainably. And last, as for professions or implementation, halal food entrepreneurs should prioritize integrated marketing tools, such as using packaging as a communication tool to inform product information and QR codes to create awareness and build network relationships with specific consumers, relating to religious beliefs and personal benefits that Muslim and non-Muslim consumers will gain from the product, to encourage consumers to accept and make purchasing decisions. Moreover, the public sector should encourage further in-depth research and development of marketing tools to suit the specific needs of Islamic target groups and markets and provide competitive opportunities for entrepreneurs.

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About the authors



Dr. Pattareya Sungnoi is now the lecturer of department of marketing at Rajabhat University Khao Rup Chang Subdistrict, Mueang District, Songkhla Province, Thailand. Her research interests focus on Islamic marketing and consumer behavior. With her twenty years research experiences, she has published many research and academic papers related to her expertise.



Dr. Vuttichat Soonthonsmai is currently active in his professional career in academic area and practical arena. He is working as an associate professor of Marketing and International Business of department of Management Science at ISIC, RMUTK, Thailand. Dr. Vuttichat is actively eager and enthusiastic for conducting the consumer-focused marketing and neuro marketing research in Wellness and Health Tourism and marketing fields with innovative strategic collaborative technology management. His interested research topics are also related to how to upgrade and apply the online platforms for entrepreneurs to achieve the domestic and international competitive advantages.

ORCID

Pattareya Sungnoi  <http://orcid.org/0009-0008-0788-1513>

Vuttichat Soonthonsmai  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-9661-9999>

Data availability statement

The datasets generated or analyzed during the current study are not publicly available due to the sensitive nature of the sample group. However, they are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

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