

THE TRANSFORMATION OF TRADITIONAL BUDDHIST VEGETARIANISM INTO A MODERN LIFESTYLE TREND: EXPLORING THE INTENTION TO ADOPT A PERIODIC VEGETARIAN DIET

A TRANSFORMAÇÃO DO VEGETARIANISMO BUDISTA TRADICIONAL EM UMA TENDÊNCIA DE ESTILO DE VIDA MODERNA: EXPLORANDO A INTENÇÃO DE ADOTAR UMA DIETA VEGETARIANA PERIÓDICA

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The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest

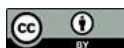
Abstract

The study aims to forecast the Intention to adopt a Periodic Vegetarian Diet (PVD), a form of vegetarianism based on Buddhist philosophy, in line with the current growing trend of sustainable eating. Quantitative study with a survey of 378 Vietnamese consumers and the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) analysis to assess the role of religious values (RG), physical health benefits (PH), and psychological health benefits (PSH) in forming attitudes towards PVD (AT), thereby impacting the intention to apply PVD (IN). The results showed that RG, PH, and PSH had a direct positive impact on both AT and IN. In addition, AT plays a key intermediary role in promoting IN. The study contributes to the theory by incorporating religious values and health benefit aspects in forecasting intention to adopt PVD. At the same time, the results have implications for managers in designing strategies to promote plant-based sustainable eating behaviors.

Keywords: Physical Health. Psychological Health. Periodic Vegetarian Diet.

Resumo

O estudo visa prever a intenção de adotar uma Dieta Vegetariana Periódica (DVP), uma forma de vegetarianismo baseada na filosofia budista, em consonância com a crescente tendência atual de alimentação sustentável. Trata-se de um estudo quantitativo com um questionário aplicado a 378 consumidores vietnamitas e análise de Modelagem de Equações Estruturais por Mínimos Quadrados Parciais (PLS-SEM) para avaliar o papel dos valores religiosos (VR), benefícios para a saúde física (BSF) e benefícios para a saúde psicológica (BSP) na formação de atitudes em relação à DVP (AT), impactando, assim, a intenção de adotá-la (IA). Os resultados mostraram que VR, BSF e BSP tiveram um impacto positivo direto tanto na AT quanto na IA. Além disso, a AT desempenha um papel intermediário fundamental na promoção da IA. O estudo contribui para a teoria ao incorporar valores religiosos e aspectos de benefícios para a saúde na previsão da intenção de adotar a DVP. Ao mesmo tempo, os resultados têm implicações para gestores no desenvolvimento de estratégias para promover comportamentos alimentares sustentáveis à base de plantas.



Palavras-chave: Saúde Física. Saúde Psicológica. Dieta Vegetariana Periódica.

1 INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, vegetarianism is becoming a more sustainable way of life. This shift may reflect how people's ideas about health and morality are changing over time. In Vietnam, particularly in Ho Chi Minh City (HCM), vegetarian culture weaves together traditional spiritual beliefs with modern lifestyles, showing how Buddhist practice and sustainable consumption can naturally intersect (Ánh, 2025).

According to a report by IMARC Group (2024), the vegan food market in Vietnam reached over 103 million USD and is expected to increase to nearly 221 million USD by 2033, reaching an estimated growth rate of 8.1%/year (My, 2025). During monthly religious vegetarian days or in vegetarian months like the first and seventh of the lunar calendar, the number of people choosing vegetarian meals tends to surge. Such occasions tend to generate a noticeable increase in sales for vegetarian restaurants and supermarkets, with revenue rising by roughly 15–20% compared to normal periods (Mỹ, 2025).

Although vegetarianism has become increasingly common, there's still not much research that looks closely at why people choose to follow vegetarian practices, especially those who eat vegetarian only on certain days. As people start paying more attention to their physical and mental well-being, it becomes more relevant to ask how faith and health motivations might come together in shaping these choices. This study focuses on how religious values, perceived physical health benefits, and psychological well-being relate to people's attitudes and intentions toward eating vegetarian food in Ho Chi Minh City. The findings are expected to broaden existing theoretical discussions and, more importantly, give organizations some grounded insights into how they can promote healthier and more sustainable eating habits in the community.

2 BACKGROUND THEORIES

2.1 Behavioral theories

Many studies have attempted to explore the motivations that drive sustainable eating behaviors. Among these, the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) and the Value-Attitude-Behavior (VBA) model serve as a valuable theoretical framework for the study of sustainable eating behavior in general and vegetarianism in particular.

First of all, according to Fishbein and Ajzen (1975), TRA holds that an individual's behavior is directly determined by behavioral intentions, and that this intention is governed by two main factors, including attitudes toward behavior and subjective norms. Secondly, according to Homer and Kahle (1988), VAB explains the relationship between personal values, attitudes, and actual human behavior. Values are seen as stable beliefs that serve as a collection of comprehensive attitudes that accumulate over time, thereby shaping attitudes and behaviors in specific contexts (Govaerts & Ottar Olsen, 2023).

Although both the TRA and VAB models have often been used to explain why people choose certain foods, the way they apply to vegetarian behavior is still worth a closer look (Govaerts & Ottar Olsen, 2023). In this study, these two frameworks are brought together to explore how faith-related values and ideas about health might interact in shaping a person's attitude and intention to follow PVD.

2.2 Buddhism and Periodic vegetarian diet (PVD)

Buddhism is known as the philosophy of awakening. Its teaching doesn't praise wealth or pleasure-seeking but leans toward calm living, compassion, and the search for enlightenment. For ordinary Buddhists, daily conduct is guided by five basic rules: not to kill, steal, lie, commit sexual misconduct, or use intoxicants (Kumar, 2020). Among them, the first, non-killing, is the root of Buddhist vegetarian practice.

Vegetarianism in general and vegetarianism in particular in Buddhism is not merely abstaining from animal products, but also symbolizes compassion, purity, and self-control. Here, the vegetarian diet is understood as mostly plant-based, may include eggs and dairy products, and excludes the "five strong-smelling spices": garlic, onion,

chives, leeks, and shallots. Few followers maintain this diet all the time. Most prefer to keep it on certain lunar days, like the 1st, 8th, 14th, or 15th, or during the first and seventh lunar months. This approach is called a periodic vegetarian diet. This type of diet is more flexible than lifelong veganism; it happens in phases, shaped by each person's faith, health, and how much discipline they can manage.

3 HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

3.1 Religiosity value (RG)

Religion has been identified as a very important cultural factor that has a significant influence on consumer attitudes and behaviors (Madni et al., 2016) In aspects of religion, religious values provide normative guidance for religious followers on what to consume, how much, and when (Mathras et al., 2016) The influence of religious values on consumer behavior has been mentioned in many previous studies. Accordingly, religious values have the potential to profoundly influence consumer attitudes, values, decision-making processes, and lifestyles (Agarwala et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2020).

Fasting is an activity that is in accordance with the precepts and is encouraged in Buddhist religious values. Therefore, people with high religious values are expected to have a more positive attitude towards the adoption of periodic vegetarian diets. Besides, many previous studies have shown that religious values are an important predictor of intention to perform ethical or religiously appropriate consumption behaviors (Singh Yadav & Kumar Kar, 2025). Therefore, VAB, TRA, and empirical research support the hypothesis that religious values will positively impact attitudes and intentions to adopt vegetarian diets. From the above bases, the author makes the following research hypothesis:

H1a. RG positively influences attitudes towards PVD

H1b. RG positively influences Intention to adopt PVD

3.2 Physical Health Benefit (PH)

The physical health benefits of vegetarianism have been shown in many studies, such as helping reduce the risk of cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, high cholesterol, high blood pressure, cancer, and death (Appleby & Key, 2015; Tonstad et al., 2009) In this study, the physical health (PH) benefits reflect an individual's beliefs about the benefits that a vegetarian diet can bring to their body, such as helping them improve their physical health, heal, and prevent disease. TRA theory and empirical studies show that perceived benefit is an important driver of behavioral attitude and intention formation (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Prati et al., 2012) Therefore, if consumers notice the physical health benefits of a vegetarian diet, they will have a positive attitude and increase their intention to adopt this vegetarian diet. From there, the author gives the following research hypothesis:

H2a. HB positively influences Attitude towards PVD

H2b. HB positively influences Intention to adopt PVD

3.3 Psychological Health Benefit (PSH) and Attitude towards Periodic Vegetarian Diet (AT)

There is ample evidence that vegetarian diets have important potential for improving psychological health (Blanchflower et al., 2013) (Conner et al., 2017) (Null & Pennesi, 2017) such as reducing stress, improving positive emotions, satisfaction in life, and happiness. In this study, the psychological health benefits (PSH) reflect an individual's perception of the psychological health benefits that PVD brings, such as helping to cope well with stress, managing relationships well, and having a positive outlook on oneself and life.

TRA theory and empirical studies show that perceived benefit is an important driver of behavioral attitude and intention formation (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Prati et al., 2012) Therefore, if consumers perceive the psychological health benefits of a vegetarian diet, they will have a positive attitude and increase their intention to adopt this vegetarian diet. From there, the author gives the following research hypothesis:

H3a. PSH positively influences Attitude towards PVD

H3b. PSH positively influences Intention to adopt PVD

3.3 Attitude towards Periodic Vegetarian Diet (AT) and intention to adopt Periodic Vegetarian Diet (IN)

In this study, attitudes towards PVD reflect consumers' positive evaluations of PVD, and intentions reflect consumers' willingness to adopt a vegetarian diet. The relationship between attitude and behavioral intention has been effectively explained in TRA theory, VAB, and empirical studies. Typically, D'Souza et al. (2022) show that attitude towards a vegan diet is a strong predictor of intention to adopt this diet. From there, the author proposes the following research hypothesis:

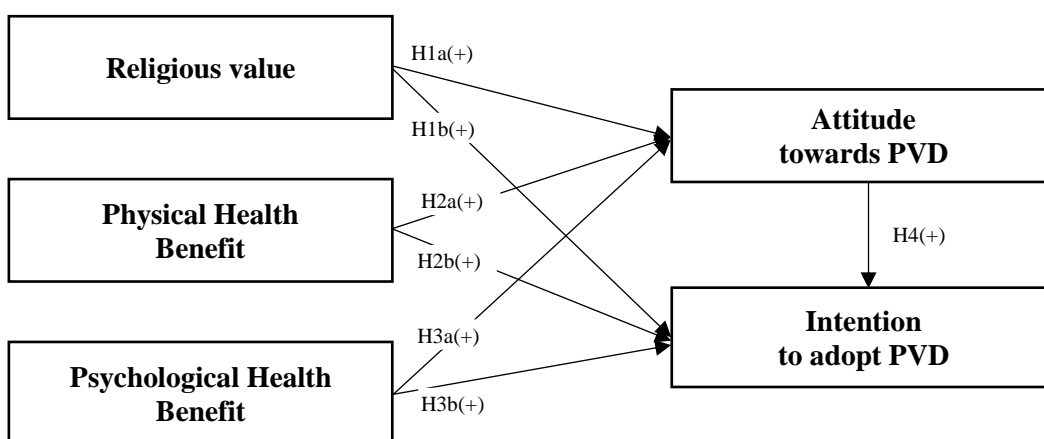
H4. AT positively influences Intention to adopt PVD

3.4. Research model

Based on background theory and empirical studies, the relationships from H1-H4 have been systematically presented in a conceptual framework to explain the interaction between religious values and health benefit aspects in the formation of attitudes and intentions towards PVD. The study model and hypotheses are depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Proposed research model



Source: Author's compilation

4 METHODOLOGY

The quantitative study was conducted with survey subjects who were interested in a vegetarian diet in the Buddhist tradition. A convenient sampling method is adopted. Samples were taken at vegetarian restaurants, vegetarian food stores, and pagodas in Ho Chi Minh City with the questionnaire survey method.

The total number of votes issued was 400; the number of votes received was 390. After removing 12 votes that have not been fully answered. The total number of valid votes collected is 378. The scales used in this research were taken from earlier studies, with a five-point Likert scale (Diener et al., 2009; Renner et al., 2012; Shin et al., 2024; Singh Yadav & Kumar Kar, 2025). During adaptation, the items were first translated and later refined in wording and meaning. Some new statements were added after discussions with experts and several consumers, mainly to make sure the questions sounded clear and practical in the local market. These steps were intended to keep the scale valid and reliable while still reflecting the research context.

5 RESULTS

The data collected from the survey were analyzed using the PLS-SEM technique in SmartPLS 4. The demographic results showed that most respondents were women, which may imply that females tend to prefer a vegetarian diet more than males. In addition, many participants mentioned that they follow a vegetarian diet on the first and fifteenth days of the lunar month. This pattern suggests that cultural and religious traditions still play an important role in determining vegetarian eating habits.

5.1 Evaluate the measurement model

The results of the PLS-SEM algorithm analysis demonstrated that the measurement model achieved reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. Specifically, all outer loadings, Cronbach's alpha, and composite reliability (ρ_a) values exceeded the threshold of 0.7 (Table 1). Therefore, it can be concluded that the constructs exhibit internal consistency reliability (Hair et al., 2017). In addition, all

constructs reported Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values greater than 0.5, indicating satisfactory convergent validity.

Then, as shown in Table 2, the Fornell–Larcker criterion was met, since the square root of each construct’s AVE was higher than its correlations with other latent constructs in the model (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Also, the HTMT (Table 3) values across all constructs stayed below 0.90, so the discriminant validity requirement was considered satisfied (Henseler et al., 2015). In summary, these indicators confirm that the measurement model satisfies the reliability and validity requirements.

Table 1

Reliability and validity

Variables/items	Outer loadings	Cronbach’s alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Attitude towards PVD (AT)		0.819	0.820	0.580
AT1	0.727			
AT2	0.781			
AT3	0.773			
AT4	0.799			
AT5	0.725			
Intention to adopt PVD (IN)		0.831	0.850	0.668
IN1	0.733			
IN2	0.902			
IN3	0.880			
IN4	0.740			
Physical health benefits (PH)		0.833	0.835	0.545
PH1	0.705			
PH2	0.787			
PH3	0.733			
PH4	0.727			
PH5	0.762			
PH6	0.712			
Psychological health benefits (PSH)		0.882	0.883	0.549
PSH1	0.775			
PSH2	0.717			
PSH3	0.792			
PSH4	0.747			
PSH5	0.739			
PSH6	0.732			
PSH7	0.712			
PSH8	0.711			
Religious value (RG)		0.797	0.807	0.623
RG1	0.774			
RG2	0.722			
RG3	0.782			
RG4	0.872			

Source: Author's analysis

Table 2

Fornell-Lacker Index

	AT	IN	PH	PSH	RG
AT	0.762				
IN	0.656	0.818			
PH	0.683	0.597	0.738		
PSH	0.636	0.555	0.682	0.741	
RG	0.382	0.615	0.324	0.259	0.789

Source: Author's analysis

Table 3

Heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT)

	AT	IN	PH	PSH	RG
AT					
IN	0.786				
PH	0.818	0.721			
PSH	0.738	0.649	0.798		
RG	0.461	0.746	0.392	0.305	

Source: Author's analysis

5.2 Structural model evaluation

The results of the PLS-SEM algorithm analysis presented in Table 4 indicate that all constructs have VIF values below 3, confirming that no multicollinearity issues exist among the independent variables (Hair et al., 2019).

Table 4

VIF—Inner model matrix

	AT	IN
AT		2.199
PH	1.953	2.341
PSH	1.874	2.080
RG	1.121	1.182

Source: Author's analysis

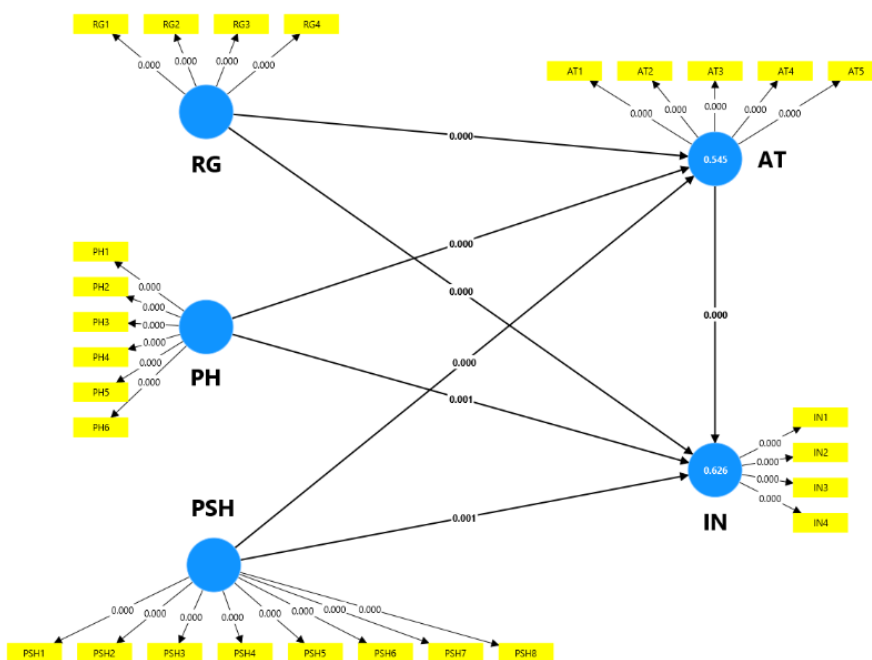
The bootstrapping analysis was conducted to evaluate the statistical significance of the relationships within the structural model. The results presented in Table 5 indicate that all hypothesized relationships are statistically significant, with *p*-values less than 0.05. This finding suggests that the proposed hypotheses are supported.

Table 5
Hypothesis Testing

	β	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values	Results
AT -> IN	0.292	0.292	0.051	5.741	0.000	supported
PH -> AT	0.420	0.422	0.050	8.335	0.000	supported
PH -> IN	0.159	0.158	0.049	3.247	0.001	supported
PSH -> AT	0.306	0.305	0.045	6.839	0.000	supported
PSH -> IN	0.155	0.155	0.046	3.376	0.001	supported
RG -> AT	0.167	0.168	0.039	4.252	0.000	supported
RG -> IN	0.412	0.413	0.036	11.486	0.000	supported

Source: Author's analysis

Figure 2
Structural model results.



Source: Author's analysis

The adjusted R² values presented in Table 6 indicate that the exogenous variables explain 54.5% of the variance in AT, and the exogenous constructs account for 62.6% of the variance in IN, indicating a substantial explanatory capability of the model.

Table 6

R-square and R-square adjusted

	R-square	R-square adjusted
AT	0.545	0.542
IN	0.626	0.622

Source: Author's analysis

The effect size (f^2) values presented in Table 7 indicate that RG has a strong effect on IN ($f^2 > 0.35$). In contrast, PH exerts a moderate effect on AT ($0.15 \leq f^2 < 0.35$), while the remaining factors demonstrate small effects.

Table 7

f-square index

	AT	IN
AT		0.103
PH	0.199	0.029
PSH	0.110	0.031
RG	0.055	0.383

Source: Author's analysis

6 DISCUSSION

The findings highlight the significant influence of RG, PH, and PSH on both AT and IN. These results go in the same direction as earlier studies (D'Souza et al., 2022; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Homer & Kahle, 1988; Singh Yadav & Kumar Kar, 2025), which pointed out that religiosity and benefits play important roles in shaping attitudes and intentions. This supports the idea that individual values and interests can strongly influence how consumers see and act toward certain behaviors, particularly in situations related to diet choices influenced by religion.

Last but not least, this study goes a step further. It helps explain more clearly how RG, PH, and PSH interact in forming attitudes and intentions within Buddhist vegetarian practice. More specifically, the model results show that PH, PSH, and RG all have a positive impact on AT and IN. In particular, PH and PSH are the factors that have the strongest impact on AT, respectively ($\beta_{PH} = 0.420$, $\beta_{PSH} = 0.306$), indicating that both aspects of health benefits play an important role in forming positive attitudes. Notably, RG had the strongest direct influence on IN ($\beta = 0.412$), demonstrating the prominent role of religious values in behavioral orientation.

7 IMPLICATIONS

7.1 Theoretical implications

This study takes a closer look at what drives people to adopt PVD within the Buddhist religious context. The results show that three main factors, including religious values, physical health, and psychological health, play key roles in building a positive attitude toward PVD, which in turn encourages the intention to follow such a diet.

From a theoretical point of view, the findings broaden the TRA and VAB frameworks by weaving in religious values as both moral and normative motivations. These motivations appear to influence vegetarian behavior directly and also indirectly through attitudes. In this sense, religious values emerge not only as a core belief system but also as a cognitive element that helps explain and even predict behavior.

Another point worth noting is the separation between physical and psychological health benefits. This distinction helps refine the idea of “perceived health benefits” in eating-behavior models. It shows that people think about health not just in physical terms but also in psychological ones, which matches the more holistic view of health held by today’s consumers.

Lastly, by emphasizing PVD, the study offers new empirical evidence on a topic that has rarely been explored. It also opens a direction for further research into religion-based consumption and suggests that the vegetarian behavior model can be extended to more flexible or even ceremonial contexts.

7.2 Managerial implications

From a practical perspective, the results of this study have some important implications for organizations that deal in vegetarian food, plant-based food services, and religious and social organizations in promoting vegetarian behavior.

To begin with, managers should find ways to bring religious values into their marketing and product strategies. One practical approach is to connect the idea of “vegetarianism for compassion and purity” with the message of health and well-being. When these two aspects are presented together, they can form a sense of balance between religious beliefs and personal health goals. In practice, companies might collaborate with

temples, churches, or other faith-based groups to host events such as “Vegetarian Week for Health and Compassion.” During these periods, especially on full-moon days, the first lunar days, or religious holidays, businesses can offer special menus or themed promotions that encourage people to keep up regular vegetarian habits.

Secondly, the results show that awareness of physical and mental health benefits plays an important role in forming positive attitudes; therefore, businesses should communicate emphasizing the holistic impact of vegetarianism on the body and mind (such as reducing stress, purifying the mind, improving sleep, and increasing life energy). This combination will help improve communication efficiency.

Finally, health authorities and policymakers can leverage religious values and health benefits as social leverage to encourage healthy diets in the community. The development of a nutrition education program that combines religious and cultural factors can contribute to the goal of sustainable development of public health, and at the same time create a foundation for a "healthy spiritual eating" policy in accordance with Asian cultural characteristics.

8 LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Although this research has made significant theoretical and administrative contributions, it also has some limitations. The restrictions focus on convenient sampling methods, and the limitation in the geographic area is HCM. In addition, the study focuses on PVD, a form of vegetarianism according to the Buddhist tradition, so it does not cover all other forms of vegetarianism according to different religious traditions or other diverse forms of vegetarianism.

To increase generality and representation, future studies should take statistical sampling with an extensive range in different geographic regions and diverse forms of vegetarianism (eg, flexible vegetarianism, healing vegetarianism, or vegetarianism according to Christianity, Islam, or Cao Dai) that reflect unique religious and cultural peculiarities. These research directions will help provide a deeper picture of understanding consumer vegetarian behavior in the broader context.

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Authors' Contribution

All authors contributed equally to the development of this article.

Data availability

All datasets relevant to this study's findings are fully available within the article.

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