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Exploring Young Consumers' Continued Intention to Choose Vegetarian Buffet Meals: The Influence of Consumer Perceived Values and Ethical Concerns

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KEYWORDS

Animal welfare, consumer perceived values, young consumer, vegetarian buffet meal, vegetarian.

ABSTRACT

In the context of the strong development of sustainable eating trends, different forms of vegetarian food were born, including vegetarian buffet meals (VBM), becoming an option for youth consumers. However, the factors driving this trend have not been clarified in the current research literature. Therefore, to fill this research gap, the aim of the current study is to explore the factors that influence the intention of young people in Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC) to continue choosing VBM. Specifically, the study focuses on the role of consumer perceived values and ethical concerns (animal welfare concerns) in the formation of attitudes and intentions. The study collected data from 250 participants aged 18–37 who had eaten VBM recently through direct surveys at vegetarian places in HCMC. Analysis of Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling shows that consumer perceived values are important predictors of positive attitudes towards VBM, which in turn influences the intention to continue choosing VBM. In addition, animal welfare concerns influence both attitude and intention. This study provides important implications for managers to develop VBM services in line with ethical consumption trends and attract young consumers interested in the values of vegetarian nutrition.

1. Introduction

Vegetarianism is gaining increasing interest worldwide as a healthy eating trend, driven not only by concerns about personal health but also by ethical concerns. This is even more evident in younger generations; vegetarian choices have gone beyond mere dietary choices to better reflect the individual's ethical stance. (Abebe et al., 2024; Martinelli & De Canio, 2021).

Vegetarianism in Vietnam is becoming more popular and diverse than before. Nowadays, vegetarianism is not limited to Vietnamese traditional holidays or full moon days, but has developed into a healthy and sustainable eating trend that is popular with all ages, especially young people. According to Euromonitor International, the vegetarian food market in Vietnam is estimated at about one billion USD and is expected to grow by 10% to 15% per year (VTV.vn, 2024). Vegetarianism is no longer just a temporary

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trend but has become a sustainable lifestyle, associated with concern about health and ethics. Today's young people mostly choose vegetarian meals according to their preferences, flexible vegetarianism instead of lifelong vegetarianism like previous generations.

In particular, Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC) is considered the center of this trend with a thriving vegetarian buffet meal model, showing the richness of both the number of dishes and culinary styles. Many vegetarian buffet restaurants offer menus ranging from traditional Vietnamese dishes to Asian-European cuisine-influenced dishes, with dozens of different dishes, focusing on nutrition and aesthetics. Some typical examples can be mentioned, such as Tue vegetarian restaurant, which stands out with its Asian-European buffet menu; Man Tu Vegetarian restaurant has a pure Vietnamese flavor, frugality, and a variety of more than fifty dishes; D'Gemma Vegetarian Buffet, with a system of more than sixty dishes changing weekly, is reasonably priced.

Just search on Google with the phrase "vegetarian buffet", the results returned show that there are hundreds of vegetarian buffet restaurants and vegetarian buffet eateries operating in HCMC. Moreover, diners who love VBM can search for more vegetarian buffet restaurants on sites such as hotdeal.vn, foody.vn to be able to get discount buffet tickets. These restaurants and eateries serve VBM in many different segments, with prices ranging from a few tens of thousands to several hundred thousand VND per serving (e.g, Man Tu vegetarian buffet restaurant with a vegetarian buffet form paid at will, a vegetarian restaurant with buffet ticket price only 50,000 VND, D'Gemma Vegetarian Buffet with fares from 99,000 VND), suitable for many consumer groups. The menus here are extremely rich, often with dozens of diverse vegetarian dishes (such as spring rolls, salads, noodle soup, vermicelli noodles, mushroom hotpot, curry, etc.) that are attractively processed, meeting both the needs of enjoying new flavors and the nutritional requirements of young diners. This development clearly reflects the increasing popularity and demand of consumers, especially young people, in modern urban life, such as HCMC.

What makes VBM different from Vegetarian à la carte or other common vegetarian meals is its own characteristics, including selectivity and self-service, along with a variety of dishes of many different cuisines that allow diners to truly combine harmonious and delicious food according to personal needs. All dishes in a vegetarian buffet meal are made primarily from plant-based ingredients, which may include eggs, dairy but do not include meat, fish, or seafood. Besides, a fixed price but being able to eat as much as you want is another advantage of this form of eating that attracts lovers of culinary experiences. However, understanding the basic motivations that motivate young Vietnamese consumers to choose VBM meals is still limited, and there has been no such research in the HCMC market.

In the field of consumer behavior research, previous literature has emphasized the importance of both consumer perceived values and ethical considerations in shaping consumer behavior in general and food in particular (Joshi et al., 2021; Sheth et al., 1991). Integrating these perspectives into the Attitude-Intention-Behaviour model (Ajzen, 1991) will provide a powerful theoretical lens to examine how value perceptions and ethical concerns influence young consumers' intentions toward vegetarian buffet meals.

Given the unique cultural and social context of HCMC, this study aims to fill in some of the gaps in the literature by exploring the role of consumer values and ethical concerns in the younger consumer segment for attitudes and intentions to choose a vegetarian buffet experience. The results of this study not only contribute to the theoretical expansion of consumer behavior research but also provide practical insights for restaurant managers, marketers, and policymakers to effectively drive the trend of plant-based sustainable consumption towards young consumers in HCMC.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Theory of Consumer Perceived Value (PV) and Consumer Behavior

Consumer Perceived Value (PV) was defined as a consumer's assessment of a product, based on their perception of the benefits obtained and the costs they have to spend to achieve those benefits (Sweeney & Soutar, 2001). PV is an important concept because it is the basis for forming consumers' attitudes towards the things they buy. Sheth et al. (1991) argue that consumers offer a multidimensional framework of perceived values. Accordingly, functional, social, emotional, epistemic, and conditional values are values that influence product selection. Additionally, Sweeney and Soutar (2001) found that functional value is made up of two sub-values, quality value and price value (economic value). From there, Sweeney and Soutar (2001) proposed that PV consists of four components: emotional, social, price, and quality. These values encompass the emotional and cognitive aspects of the individual, along with social influences.

In the context of this study, PV may reveal new insights into how young consumers in HCMC feel about VBM. With the characteristics of VBM, the values that are expected to be able to affect young people are functional values (quality), economic values (prices), knowledge values, and social values. In particular, (i) the functional value focuses on the practical benefits of VBM as nutrition, health, quality, and food safety; (ii) economic value is the evaluation of the reasonableness of the price compared to the

quality that VBM brings; (iii) the emotional value captures the feeling of satisfaction, excitement, and attraction derived from the vegetarian experience; (iv) epistemic value emphasizes the aspects of novelty, curiosity, and unique experiences about VBM; and (v) finally, social values focus on the influence of society, such as recognition from others and a sense of pride when choosing a healthy lifestyle, thereby creating sympathy with those around them.

2.2. Attitude - Intention - Behavior Model

The Attitude-Intention-Behavior model, which is derived from theories such as the theory of Rational Action (TRA) and the theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991). This model assumes that consumer behavior is primarily determined by intention, which is previously shaped by attitude. TRA and TPB have shown the ability to interpret consumer behavior in various contexts related to green products, vegetarian foods, and other sustainable products (Joshi et al., 2021; Martinelli & De Canio, 2021; Onwezen et al., 2014).

Based on this model, consumer attitudes toward VBM can be shaped based on an overall assessment of PVC and ethical considerations for dietary choices. Therefore, this model provides an important theoretical foundation for investigating the subsequent determinants of intention and behavior related to the consumption of vegetarian buffet meals by young people in HCMC.

3. Hypotheses Development and Conceptual Framework

3.1. Consumption value of VBM

3.1.1. Functional value (FCV)

Functional value, also known as perceived quality, is defined as the degree to which a product/service provides benefits such as quality, nutrition, safety, and convenience (Sweeney & Soutar, 2001). In the VBM context, diners can directly evaluate dishes through form, nutritional information, and dining experience. Therefore, FCV is easier to identify, thereby influencing attitudes more strongly than other types of eating.

Many previous studies have affirmed the role of FCV in shaping attitudes, such as Choe and Kim (2018) found that product quality is a factor driving positive attitudes towards local food. Therefore, there is a basis to expect that when consumers are well aware of the FCV of vegetarian dishes in VBM, they will tend to form a more positive attitude towards VBM.

H1: FCV positively influences attitudes towards vegetarian buffet meals.

3.1.2. Emotional value (EMV)

EMV reflects the emotions generated by the product (Sweeney & Soutar, 2001), such as satisfaction, joy, feeling light, and being healthy. Liu et al. (2021) suggest that EMV is the perception of the degree to which a product evokes emotions or emotional states, such as the feeling of comfort provided by meals.

In the current study, VBM can arouse positive emotions such as comfort, safety, and satisfaction because VBM is considered a healthy meal that is good for health and the ecosystem. Therefore, when consumers realize that VBM brings positive emotions, their attitude towards VBM will be strengthened in a more positive direction. In addition, previous studies have shown the role of EMV in attitude formation. For example, a study by Choe and Kim (2018) shows that EMV positively affects travellers' attitudes towards local food. On that basis, the author puts forward the following research hypothesis:

H2: Emotional value positively influences attitudes towards vegetarian buffet meals.

3.1.3. Economic value (ECV)

ECV influences consumer attitudes because it reflects the level of benefits that the product/service provides compared to the total cost spent (Joshi et al., 2021). In other words, ECV reflects the rationality between costs and benefits, reflecting the consumer's perception that the product/service is worth the money spent.

In the context of VBM, ECV is not only a matter of being cheap or expensive but lies in the consumer's perception. When comparing rich and quality food with an affordable fixed price, they want to eat as much as they want without being charged extra money. This creates a sense of cost-benefit, thereby increasing the positive attitude towards VBM. Previous studies have shown a relationship between ECV and attitudes. Especially in the context of buying green products, Joshi et al. (2021) show that ECV influences attitudes towards buying this product.

From the above arguments, it can be expected that consumers will form a positive attitude towards VBM if they feel that VBM's ECV is through reasonable prices, diverse dishes, and experiences. Therefore, the author puts forward the following research hypothesis:

H3: Economic value positively influences attitudes towards vegetarian buffet meals.

3.1.4. Social value (SV)

Social value (SV) reflects the benefits gained when the individual's actions are linked to social groups with good images (Sheth et al., 1991). Positive social value will bring social recognition, group acceptance,

improved self-image, or create sympathy with others, thereby helping to maintain good social relationships.

The choice of food is not only to meet individual needs but also to reflect SV and individuals' desires recognized by the community. In relation to VBM, vegetarianism is becoming a popular social trend, associated with values such as ethics (compassion for animals) and health. These behaviors are similar to modern social values and healthy lifestyles and promote sustainability. Choosing VBM can make individuals feel socially conscious and easily accepted or appreciated in communities that share their values. Many previous studies have shown the relationship between SV and attitudes. Typically, in the context of green consumption, research by Roh et al. (2022) shows that SV positively influences attitudes towards organic food.

From the above arguments, it can be expected that consumers will form a positive attitude towards VBM based on the social value it brings to them. From there, the author proposes the following hypothesis:

H4: Social values positively affect consumers' attitudes towards vegetarian buffet meals.

3.1.5. Epistemic value (EPV)

EPV refers to the perceived value that consumers acquire when a product or experience stimulates their curiosity, brings a sense of novelty, and expands their knowledge (Sheth et al., 1991) In other words, EPV reflects a desire to explore and learn new things.

In the current research, VBM can bring unique culinary experiences to diners, as shown by the creative transformation of plant-based ingredients to create dishes with Eurasian traditions (such as vegetarian spring rolls, vegan Indian curries, vegetarian sushi, vegetarian Thai hotpot, etc.). For individuals with a high need for new experiences, trying VBM can stimulate curiosity, explore new tastes, and thereby form a more positive attitude towards VBM.

Many previous studies on green consumption have shown a relationship between EPV and attitudes. Typically, Roh et al. (2022) show that EPV has a positive effect on attitudes towards organic products. From the above bases, the author makes the following hypothesis:

H5: Epistemic value positively influences attitudes toward vegetarian buffet meals.

3.2. Attitude towards vegetarian buffet meals (ATT)

The formation of behavioral intentions has long been effectively explained by models of behavioral psychology, notably the theory of intentional behavior (Ajzen, 1991) According to the TPB, attitude reflects the degree to which an individual has a favorable or unfavorable assessment of a particular behavior, plays a central role in forming intention, and is a strong predictor of future behavior.

Previous studies in different contexts have documented diverse findings, typically (Tandon et al., 2020a) in the context of buying organic food, showing that there is no relationship between attitudes and intentions. Meanwhile, Kopplin and Rausch (2022) show that attitudes strongly influence the intention to buy vegetarian food. This shows the need to examine this relationship in different contexts, such as VBM.

In this study, when consumers have a positive attitude towards VBM Vegetarian Buffet (such as delicious, healthy, a variety of dishes, and a fixed fee to eat as much as they want), they will tend to choose VBM more often, or in other words, the attitude based on the evaluation of the benefits that the vegetarian buffet brings is the basis for forming the next intention to continue to choose VBM. In addition, this hypothesis is also strongly reinforced by the TPB theory and empirical studies in the context related to vegetarianism, such as the study by Kopplin and Rausch (2022). From there, the author proposes the following research hypothesis:

H6. Attitude towards vegetarian buffet meals has a positive effect on continued intention to choose vegetarian buffet meals.

3.3. Animal welfare concern (AWC)

In recent years, animal welfare concerns have emerged as a central element in theories explaining sustainable and ethical consumer behavior. Consumers who have a strong belief that animals have the right to live and not be treated cruelly often develop positive attitudes towards plant-based alternatives (Abebe et al., 2024; Martinelli & De Canio, 2021).

The choice of VBM is not only based on health or taste factors but also associated with deep moral values, thereby forming a more positive attitude towards VBM and increasing the intention to continue choosing VBM among consumers who are interested in animal welfare. Therefore, the addition of the AWC factor to expand the values structure of PVC will help increase the model's explainability for the intention to continue choosing VBM. Animal welfare concerns reflect consumers' respect for animal rights and deference to cruelty-free practices (Martinelli & De Canio, 2021). Many scholars have pointed to the influence of animal welfare concerns on consumer attitudes and behaviors, such as Martinelli and De Canio (2021) indicated that animal welfare concerns impact attitudes towards vegetarian food, thus increasing purchase intention. In another study, Abebe et al. (2024) found that animal welfare concerns influence the intention to switch to a plant-based diet. The above arguments provide the basis for the following hypothesis:

H7. Animal welfare concerns positively influence attitudes toward vegetarian buffet meals.

H8. Animal welfare concerns have a positive effect on continued intention to choose vegetarian buffet Meals.

3.4. Research framework

Based on the theories and practices above, the hypotheses from H1-H8 are integrated to build a comprehensive research framework presented in Figure 1.

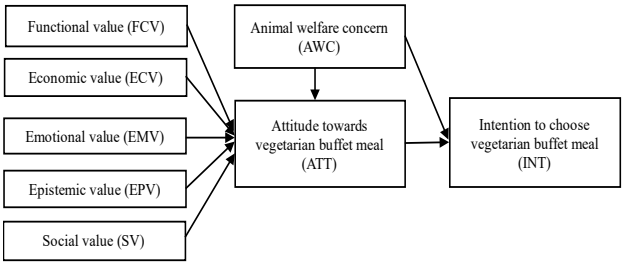

Figure 1. Research framework

4. Methodology

4.1. Sampling and data collection

The quantitative survey method will be employed, targeting young consumers aged between 18 and 37 years old. Additionally, the selected young consumers were selected based on their experience of choosing VBM within the last three months because they are considered a group with practical experience, suitable for evaluating factors affecting VBM selection behavior. The technique of selecting non-probability samples by the convenience method (convenience sampling) will be applied. The sample was collected at vegetarian shops/restaurants and vegetarian restaurants in HCMC with a direct survey method using a questionnaire.

The total number of votes issued was 312; the number of votes collected was 268. After eliminating 18 unanswered votes. The total number of valid votes collected is 250. The sample size of 250 is 5.5 times the minimum sample size of 45 proposed by Cohen (1992) with a model with 5 independent variables acting on a dependent variable to achieve a statistical sensitivity of 80% for the detection of the smallest R-square value of 0.25 (Hair et al., 2017).

4.2. Measures

The measurements of the structures in this study were adapted from the previous study. All entries use a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Specifically, they are as follows: FCV (Liu et al., 2021), ECV (Choe & Kim, 2018), EMV (Liu et al., 2021), EPV (Liu et al., 2021)), SV (Liu et al., 2021; Sweeney & Soutar, 2001), AWC (Weerawarna N.R.P et al., 2024), ATT (Tandon et al., 2020), and INT (Onwezen et al., 2014).

The initial scale in English is translated into Vietnamese to suit the survey audience through a translation process involving experienced experts to ensure the reliability and value of the scale. The translation was then continued to be discussed with 10 diners who had eaten VBM to adjust the content to be more concise. Some minor adjustments have been made to increase the naturalness and ease of expression.

4.3. Data analysis

Variance-based partial least squares model analysis (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 4 software was used in this study to evaluate the measurement model and structural model. PLS-SEM is a commonly used method of analysis with the goal of discovering new relationships. In addition, the evaluation standards for measurement models and structural models are based on the guidance of (Hair et al., 2017).

5. Results, discussion and conclusion

5.1. Respondent profile

The demographic profiles of the subjects surveyed (Table 1) show that the distribution of gender, age, and occupation is quite similar to other studies on vegetarianism (Martinelli & De Canio, 2021). Specifically, women account for the majority (82%), and the occupation is mainly office workers (66%). In addition, most of the subjects belong to the group of people who mainly eat meat (93%). This shows that the majority of young people eat vegetarian in a flexible way, suitable for the dynamic pace of life in HCMC.

Table 1. Profile of respondents

Description	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	45	18%
Female	205	82%
Age group		
18–22 years	18	7%
23–27 years	65	26%
28–32 years	95	38%
33–37 years	72	29%
Education		
Below university	25	10%
University	201	80%
Postgraduate	24	10%
Diet type		
Mostly vegetarian	18	7%
Mostly meat-based	232	93%

Occupation		
Office worker	165	66%
Business owner	12	5%
Freelancer	44	18%
Student	27	11%
Others	2	1%

5.2. The assessment of the measurement model

5.2.1. Reliability Assessment

To evaluate the reliability of the structures, an outer loading test is first conducted. (Hair et al., 2017) gave the recommended outer loading threshold of the resulting scale of 0.7. The results of the PLS-SEM algorithm analysis, shown in Table 2, show that the scales are satisfactory. Specifically, as follows: the outer loading factor is greater than 0.7. The largest outer loading is ATT1 (0.868), and the smallest is FCV1 (0.759).

Next, Cronbach's alpha and Composite reliability rho_a analysis are combined to reflect a more thorough reliability assessment with the following thresholds: Cronbach's alpha ≥ 0.7, Composite reliability ≥ 0.7 (Hair et al., 2017). The results of the PLS-SEM algorithm analysis shown in Table 2 show that the factor structures have good reliability with Cronbach's alpha and Composite reliability (rho_a), both greater than 0.7. Specifically, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient of all scales is greater than 0.7. With Cronbach's alpha being the largest is AWC (0.875), the smallest is the ECV scale (0.806). More importantly, the composite reliability (rho_a) is in the range of 0.7-0.9. With the largest CR being AWC (0.876), the smallest being ECV (0.814).

Table 2. Reliability and validity

Variable/item	Outer loadings	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Attitude toward VBM (ATT)		0.847	0.849	0.686
ATT1	0.868			
ATT2	0.855			
ATT3	0.792			
ATT4	0.795			
Animal welfare concern (AWC)		0.875	0.876	0.727
AWC1	0.840			
AWC2	0.851			
AWC3	0.853			
AWC4	0.867			
Economic value (ECV)		0.806	0.814	0.631
ECV1	0.801			
ECV2	0.768			
ECV3	0.811			
ECV4	0.796			
Emotional value (EMV)		0.832	0.836	0.664
EMV1	0.836			
EMV2	0.793			
EMV3	0.822			
EMV4	0.808			
Epistemic value (EPV)		0.849	0.865	0.687
EPV1	0.864			
EPV2	0.830			
EPV3	0.808			
EPV4	0.812			
Functional value (FCV)		0.842	0.848	0.611
FCV1	0.759			
FCV2	0.800			
FCV3	0.809			
FCV4	0.774			
FCV5	0.767			
Continued Intention to choose VBM (INT)		0.831	0.831	0.747
INT1	0.859			
INT2	0.859			
INT3	0.875			
Social value (SV)		0.843	0.849	0.679
SV1	0.807			
SV2	0.826			
SV3	0.812			
SV4	0.851			

5.2.2. Convergent Validity Assessment

The AVE (Average Variance Extracted) index provides information about the convergence value of the scale. Hair et al. (2017) suggest that a scale achieves a convergence value if the AVE reaches 0.5 or more. The results of the PLS-SEM algorithm analysis, shown in Table 2, show that the factor structures all ensure convergence. Specifically, the largest AVE is INT (0.747), and the smallest is FCV (0.611). Proving that the scales have achieved convergence values.

5.2.3. Discriminant Validity Assessment

The differentiation value shows the difference of a structure when compared to other structures in the model. The distinguishing value is tested using the Fornell and Larcker index and the HTMT index. According to Fornell and Larcker (1981), discrimination is ensured when the AVE quadratic root of a factor is greater than all the coefficients of correlation of that factor with the other factors in the model (Hair et al., 2017). The results of the PLS-SEM algorithm analysis in Table 3 show that the factors in the model are differentiated.

Furthermore, Henseler et al. (2015) proposed an HTMT threshold value of ≤ 0.9 to ensure discriminant validity. The PLS-SEM algorithm results in Table 4 reveal that all constructs have HTMT values below 0.9. In conclusion, the above indicators collectively confirm the reliability and validity of the measurement model.

5.3. Structural Model Evaluation

5.3.1. Assessment of Multicollinearity

Hair et al. (2017) proposed that VIF value thresholds less than 3 be used to ensure that the model does not experience collinearity. The results of the PLS-SEM algorithm analysis in Table 5 show that the factor structures all have VIF < 3, so it ensures that the model does not have multicollinearity.

Table 3. Discriminant validity - Fornell-Lacker criterion

	ATT	AWC	ECV	EMV	EPV	FCV	INT	SV
ATT	0.828							
AWC	0.623	0.853						
ECV	0.456	0.389	0.794					
EMV	0.482	0.465	0.209	0.815				
EPV	0.398	0.399	0.201	0.178	0.829			
FCV	0.416	0.336	0.189	0.286	0.174	0.782		
INT	0.704	0.584	0.463	0.440	0.427	0.368	0.864	
SV	0.462	0.454	0.287	0.246	0.279	0.273	0.454	0.824

Table 4. Discriminant validity-heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) Matrix

	ATT	AWC	ECV	EMV	EPV	FCV	INT	SV
ATT								
AWC	0.722							
ECV	0.543	0.459						
EMV	0.568	0.544	0.247					
EPV	0.459	0.464	0.243	0.212				
FCV	0.490	0.391	0.223	0.330	0.202			
INT	0.839	0.683	0.563	0.524	0.500	0.440		
SV	0.544	0.526	0.338	0.291	0.320	0.320	0.539	

Table 5. VIF-Inner model matrix

	ATT	AWC	ECV	EMV	EPV	FCV	INT	SV
ATT							1.634	
AWC	1.802						1.634	
ECV	1.205							
EMV	1.309							
EPV	1.210							
FCV	1.181							
INT								
SV	1.323							

5.3.2. Evaluation of Relationship Significance

Bootstrapping analysis with 5000 bootstrapping times on SmartPLS 4 software is performed to evaluate the relationships in the structure model. The results of direct effects and indirect effects shown in Table 6 show that the hypotheses are statistically significant (p-value less than 0.05).

5.3.3. The predictive power of the model

R-squared adjusted in Table 7 shows that the five consumer perceived values and AWC explain 54.2% of the variation of the ATT. In addition, ATT explains 52.6% of the change in the INT.

Table 6. Hypothesis Testing

	β	Sample mean	Standard deviation	T statistics	P values	Outcome
Direct Path						
ATT -> INT	0.556	0.557	0.049	11.347	0.000	H6 supported
AWC -> ATT	0.269	0.266	0.055	4.849	0.000	H7 supported
AWC -> INT	0.238	0.237	0.050	4.799	0.000	H8 supported
ECV -> ATT	0.207	0.207	0.043	4.773	0.000	H3 supported
EMV -> ATT	0.206	0.207	0.048	4.273	0.000	H2 supported
EPV -> ATT	0.143	0.146	0.044	3.234	0.001	H5 supported
FCV -> ATT	0.163	0.164	0.045	3.590	0.000	H1 supported
SV -> ATT	0.145	0.147	0.049	2.996	0.003	H4 supported
Indirect Path						
AWC -> ATT -> INT	0.149	0.148	0.032	4.626	0.000	supported
ECV -> ATT -> INT	0.115	0.116	0.027	4.214	0.000	supported
EMV -> ATT -> INT	0.114	0.115	0.029	3.926	0.000	supported
EPV -> ATT -> INT	0.080	0.081	0.027	3.002	0.003	supported
FCV -> ATT -> INT	0.090	0.091	0.026	3.502	0.000	supported
SV -> ATT -> INT	0.081	0.082	0.029	2.771	0.006	supported

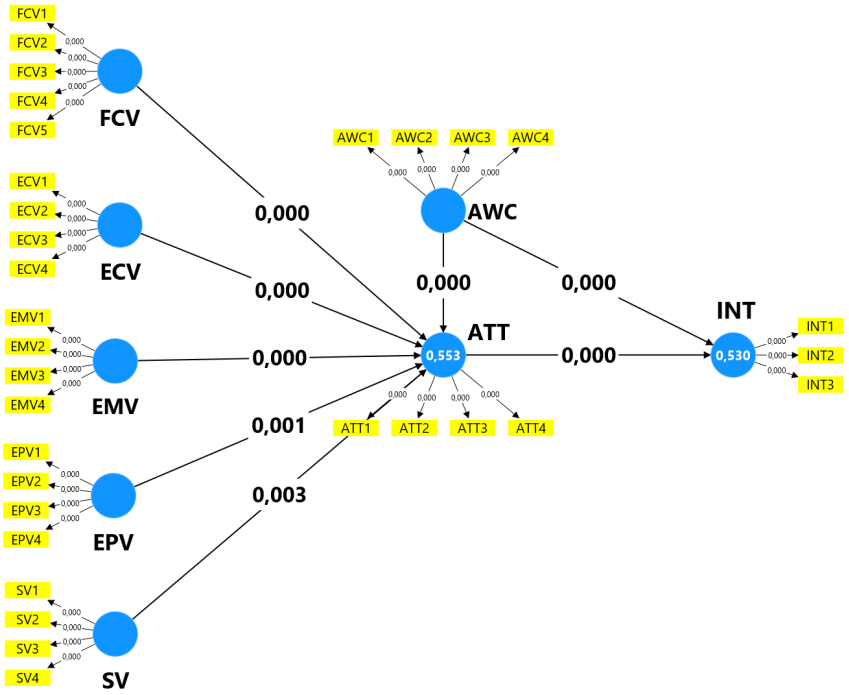

Figure 2. Results of structural modelling

Table 7. R-square and R-square adjusted

	R-square	R-square adjusted
ATT	0.553	0.542
INT	0.530	0.526

5.3.4. Assessing the effect size

The *f*-square effect size, recommended by Cohen (1988) as cited in Hair et al. (2017), was employed to evaluate the importance of independent variables. The PLS-SEM algorithm analysis results presented in Table 8 show that the ATT variable has a strong impact, whereas AWC has a small impact on INT. Moreover, PV demonstrates a small impact on ATT.

Table 8. f-square matrix

	ATT	AWC	ECV	EMV	EPV	FCV	INT	SV
ATT							0.402	
AWC	0.090						0.074	
ECV	0.080							
EMV	0.072							
EPV	0.038							
FCV	0.050							
INT								
SV	0.036							

5.3.5. Multigroup Analysis

To examine whether there are significant differences in the structural model between gender groups and between occupation groups, Multigroup Analysis (MGA) was conducted. The results of the bootstrap show that there are no significant differences in the effects between gender groups and between occupational groups (p-value > 0.05).

5.4. Discussion

First, this study evaluates the formation of ATT and INT for VBM vegetarians in young people by combining the theory of consumer perceived value and the attitude-intention-behaviour model. The results show that the combination of these three approaches is consistent with the behavioural intention model for VBM through the mediation of ATT. The suitability of the model highlights the indispensable role of PV and AWC in forecasting the ATT and INT of young diners for VBM.

Similar to previous studies in the context of plant-based nutrition, this study shows that ATT is the strongest factor affecting INT (Kopplin & Rausch, 2022) with β = 0.556; AWC has a positive impact on ATT (Martinelli & De Canio, 2021) with β = 0.269. Among the PV, this study shows the positive effects of EMV and EPV on ATT (similar to Choe and Kim (2018)), the positive impact of ECV and EMV on ATT (similar to Joshi et al. (2021)), the positive impact of SV on ATT (similar to Roh et al. (2022)), and the positive impact of FCV on ATT (similar to Choe and Kim (2018). Among PV, ECV is the factor with the strongest impact on ATT, followed by EMV, EPV, FCV, and SV, respectively. Therefore, ECV is the most important factor that managers should pay attention to in promoting consumers' positive attitudes towards VBM.

Besides, in contrast to Kopplin and Rausch (2022), this study shows that AWC has an impact on ATT, even though this impact is small (f-square = 0.090). These findings are important because they expand our understanding of the formation of attitudes towards VBM from the perspective of young people in HCMC. These results imply that PV and AWC have strengthened their attitude towards VBM, a form of healthy and ethical eating, and motivated them to increase their demand for VBM.

5.5. Conclusion

5.5.1. Theoretical implications

This study contributes to the theory by clarifying the multidimensional influence of PV in the formation of attitudes towards VBM. Unlike previous studies that focused primarily on a few single factors, the current model simultaneously examines five value categories (functional, economic, emotional, epistemic, and social), thereby providing a more comprehensive view of consumer motivation in the context of sustainable cuisine.

In addition, the study expands the understanding of the mediating relationship between PV and the intention to continue VBM selection through attitudes, with the addition of AWC variables as a factor that directly affects both ATT and INT, which has not been fully exploited in previous models. Thereby, the research contributes to the development of models for forecasting vegetarian behavior in the new context, specifically VBM, in a large market of HCMC. HCMC, where the vegetarian trend has been growing strongly recently.

5.5.2. Managerial implications

In practical terms, the results of the study provide important suggestions for restaurant managers, vegetarian food brands, and policymakers in promoting healthy vegetarian eating behaviors. Identifying the five value categories that affect ATT and INT helps managers build more effective communication strategies. Specifically, as follows:

For FCV and ECV, the findings in the study provide a basis for managers to formulate messages that emphasise food quality and nutrition at a reasonable cost. In addition to promoting ECV and SV, community marketing activities, experience-sharing programs, or celebrity communication can help arouse this value in young diners. In addition, the study also shows the role of EPV in ATT, so administrators should focus on introducing new, innovative dishes to engage consumers who love to explore.

Another important point is related to the AWC factor. To effectively harness the impact of this factor on ATT and INT, marketing and public education campaigns need to be subtly designed to integrate animal welfare awareness messages. Specifically, communicating the issues surrounding the conditions of animal captivity, exploitation, and the ethical impact of consuming animal-derived products will help form empathy, thereby promoting a more positive attitude towards the vegetarian diet.

Finally, the research results emphasize that understanding and applying consumer values flexibly will help improve the efficiency of reaching and retaining young consumers in a growing and highly competitive vegetarian food market such as HCMC.

5.5.3. Limitations and further research

Although this study has made significant contributions, there are still some limitations that need to be considered. First, the survey subjects are young people in HCMC, most of whom are women, and the convenient sample selection method can reduce the ability to generalize the research results. Therefore, further studies should expand the survey audience to sample groups with more diverse demographic characteristics and in different geographical regions with random sampling techniques to increase representativeness.

Second, the current research focuses only on VBM selection behavior, while vegetarianism can exist in many different forms. Therefore, future studies should expand the scope to other flexible vegetarian contexts. Personal, psychological, and social factors affecting vegetarian behavior can change through many different situations, thereby improving the applicability and generalization of the research model.

Finally, current research focuses on intentions rather than actual behaviors. Future studies should examine the longitudinal effects to better understand the transition from intention to practical behavior.

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