

Exploratory Factor Analysis of Influences on Social Integration and Religious Practice Among Catholic Students: Evidence from Hanoi- Vietnam

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Abstract

The study contributes to the existing knowledge by introducing how various factors determine religious commitment and practices among Catholic students in Hanoi, Vietnam, an under-studied region in academic literature. In this gap, the research study investigates the impact of social support networks, cultural identity, educational environment, and social integration on the students' religiosity. The study method is justified, as the researcher employed a well-constructed questionnaire based on previous literature and expert consultations. Thus, the collected data from a stratified random sample of 200 university students in Hanoi over 2020-2022 was analyzed through Structural Equation Modelling (SEM). The study's findings show a positive relationship between social support networks, cultural identity, educational environment, and the dependent variable of religious commitment to the students. Moreover, there is a positive relationship between the dependent and independent variables, as noted in the first significant correlation. These results help bridge the gap and provide practical implications for educators and religious leaders in approaching Vietnamese youth. This can assist their overall spiritual health and help them engage effectively in religious and educational practices in Vietnamese society.

Keywords: *Religious Commitment, Social Support Networks, Cultural Identity, Educational Environment, Social Integration, Catholic students*

INTRODUCTION

In an age of rapidly changing socio-economic structures and growing complexities of identity formation, young adults' interest in social integration and religious adherence becomes particularly relevant (Hoang et al., 2023). This interest is further enhanced in the case of Hanoi, Vietnam, as the co-dependency between traditional value systems, religious beliefs, and modern influences play a significant role in the lives of Catholic students (Labbe et al., 2022; Nguyen & Duchère, 2023). Vietnam's capital, known for its culturally rich experience and urbanizing forces, could represent a unique background where researchers can analyze how young Catholics respond to the challenges and opportunities of maintaining their beliefs and socially integrating into the religious community in a broader socio-cultural context (Nguyen & Duchère, 2023). However, the exploration of such aspects, conducted mainly in a quantitative manner, may be insufficient, and there is a growing research gap that this study seeks to address (Hoang et al., 2023). Vietnam's experience modernizing and integrating into global processes has demonstrated substantial shifts in many socio-cultural areas, including religious practice and social conduct. For Catholic students in Hanoi, these changes are not external but intrinsic to their being and reflect on their choices, relationships, and forms of community engagement (Truong & Tran, 2014; Yun et al., 2022). The core value of this research is its capacity to offer a more profound understanding of how religious adherence co-exists with social activity in the face of rapid socio-cultural transformations. Therefore, the study's value translates into broader implications for the community's functioning, the individual's development, and intercultural dialogue.

Given the importance of religious identity and social integration in contemporary societies, it is critical to note that the available literature often lacks an analysis of such phenomena from a quantitative point of view, specifically regarding particular religious groups. As Casey (2017) noted, most published work sets to generalize across all religious identities or uses qualitative methodologies with low scalability and generalization powers. Although qualitative studies provide valuable insight, they are often insufficient to reveal the true scope of the discussed issues. Moreover, while such studies can inform further quantitative research, they often lack methodological precision, thus limiting the potential for expanded inquiry. Thus, the lack of quantitative

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research focused on Catholic students in Vietnam represents a significant limitation in understanding how these individuals balance their religious views with the challenges and opportunities of modern urban life (Edwards et al., 2023). The general purpose of this study is to apply a quantitative methodology to systematically examine and quantify the significant factors contributing to the social integration and religious practice of Catholic students in Vietnam (Moschella, 2023). This way, the study will employ empirical data that can be analyzed to identify patterns, correlations, and possible causal factors. Thus, this attempt aims to advance the discourse on religion and society and provide practical insights for policy-making, educational planning, and community development programs oriented toward the needs of young Catholics in an urban environment. It is based on the assumption that Catholic students' experiences of religion and social life in the capital of Vietnam are multifactorial and multi-dimensional. Personal beliefs and family background may influence circumstances, the school environment, and social expectations. A quantitative approach is suitable because it allows the researcher to assemble a . . . According to the available data, there is a chronic lack of quantitative studies on how these and other factors affect Catholic young people's experiences of religion in a particular setting.

The potential impact of this research is far-reaching and applicable to various fields. Educators and academic institutions can utilize this data to design curricula and support services that respect religious diversity and foster social inclusivity. Religious leaders and communities can use this information as a roadmap to develop youth programs that resonate with the experiences and challenges of modern youth. Policymakers can leverage the research findings to ensure that the needs and contributions of religious minorities are taken into account in formulating socially inclusive policies. In essence, by enhancing the understanding of the interplay between spiritual experience and socialization, this research contributes to creating a more cohesive, tolerant, and empathetic society.

LITERATURE REVIEWS

Social support networks are an intrinsic part of the human social experience that provides emotional, informational, and instrumental support (Berkman & Glass, 2000). This collective is also essential in shaping and maintaining religious beliefs and practices. As stated by Rini (2022), religious commitment is not merely individual-based but is heavily influenced by the community of believers in which a person is immersed. Social and cultural interactions support and enforce religious norms and expectations. Aral's (2016) theory of strength of weak ties further explains the importance of collective support systems. According to scholars, even the most peripheral interactions fundamentally impact individuals' opinions and feelings and lead to, among other things, the cultivation of religious connection (Trickett & Jones, 2007). A study by Rajkumar et al. (2022) revealed a correlation between social support and religious commitment. Lim and Putnam (2010) reported a higher level of satisfaction with their life among religious communities due to a strong sense of community. T

he empirical evidence suggests that social relationships, not just the spiritual factor of religious involvement, are critical in manifesting commitment (Lim & Putnam, 2010). Considering youth and religion, the results of Regnerus, focusing on American teenagers, support these findings (Regnerus, 2003). Teens with a firm reliance on their families and spiritual communities have a higher commitment rate (Lim & Putnam, 2010). These results confirm the vital role of social culture in shaping and supporting religious beliefs among young people (Shohet, 2010). The cultural environment of Vietnam is one of the specifics in exploring social support networks and religious commitment. Given the collectivist nature of Vietnamese society, it is presumable that social networks within the Catholic community in Hanoi are the foundation for the religious commitment of students (Hoang et al., 2023). The interactions of these networks provide emotional and spiritual support. Moreover, social connections reflect and embody the religious identity that is formed and committed by a person.

Based on the literature reviewed, we propose *Hypothesis 1 (H1): Social support networks positively and meaningfully impact religious commitment among Catholic students in Hanoi, Vietnam.*

The social identity theory offers a theoretical basis for the influence of cultural identity on religious commitments (Stets & Burke, 2000). The cultural identity theory is a concept in which individuals are proud and gain high self-estimation as members of unique cultures, such as religious ones (Kitayama et al., 1995). Cultural practices are a valuable shield to protect and preserve social norms and values (Sam & Berry, 2010). The theory claims that the stronger one identifies with his or her cultural practices, the stronger the hold its

social norms and practices will have over them (Foucault, 2013). Foucault further argues that culture affirms religious practices, defining it as a societal culture that is an entrapment system of one's knowledge and perception of the world (Edgell, 2012). Thus, culture could be another mediator of cultural identity influencing religious commitments. Several studies have been conducted to ascertain the psychological validity of the relationship between cultural identity and artistic religious practices (Beit-Hallahmi & Argyle, 2014). Reacher on cultural psychology reports that people strongly adhere to religious practices in a heterogeneous society, especially those with excellent adherence to the practice of expressing art. Thus, research on cultural identity could help study the impact of religious practices on the religious commitment of Catholic students in Hanoi. The relationship between cultural identity and religious commitment has become a more sensitive issue in the majestic land of Vietnam, with diverse and rich cultural and religious traditions. Catholics' religious practice is culturally correlated with Vietnamese practice (Ngo et al., 2015; Nguyen, 2019). Vu et al. (2023) confirm that cultural identity builds faithful identity and is centered on great Vietnamese practice. Thus, In studying the Vietnamese case, Nguyen (2019) revealed the possible role of cultural identity in the religious commitment of the students.

Drawing from the reviewed literature, we propose *Hypothesis 2 (H2): Cultural identity positively and meaningfully impacts religious commitment among Catholic students in Hanoi, Vietnam.*

The educational environment influencing religious commitment can be linked to Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (Ryan, 2001), which posits that an individual's development is affected by various environmental systems. The microsystem, which includes institutions like schools, directly impacts an individual's development (Eccles & Roeser, 2015). Schools, as microsystems, can significantly influence students' religious beliefs and practices through the values they promote, the social interactions they facilitate, and the sense of community they foster (King, 2019).

Akers and Jennings (2015) also provide a framework for understanding this relationship, suggesting that individuals learn behaviors, norms, and values through observing and imitating role models within their social environment, including teachers and peers in educational settings.

Research has demonstrated that schools with a strong religious or moral ethos can reinforce students' religious beliefs and practices. A study by Regnerus (2000) in the United States found that students attending religiously affiliated schools were likelier to report higher levels of religious engagement and commitment than their counterparts in non-religious schools (Semplonius et al., 2015). Ebstyn King and Furrow (2008) highlighted the positive impact of religious education on students' moral and ethical development, suggesting a link between educational environments and spiritual commitment.

The relationship between educational environments and religious commitment has been studied less in the Vietnamese context, particularly among Catholic students (Bankston & Zhou, 1995). However, the general importance of education in shaping values and beliefs in Vietnamese culture suggests that educational settings could significantly influence students' religious commitment (Regnerus, 2003). This influence may manifest through integrating moral and ethical teachings aligned with Catholic values, spiritual symbols, and activities within the school and encouraging community service and social engagement, reflecting Catholic social teachings (Eick & Ryan, 2014).

For Catholic students in Hanoi, the educational environment may serve as a crucial arena for exploring and reinforcing their religious identity (Ung, 2023). Schools and universities that acknowledge and support religious diversity, provide opportunities for spiritual expression, and foster an inclusive community may positively influence students' commitment to their faith (Waheed et al., 2010). This is particularly relevant in a socio-cultural context like Vietnam's, where religious practices are deeply intertwined with cultural identity and community life.

Based on the literature reviewed, we propose *Hypothesis 3 (H3): The educational environment positively and meaningfully impacts religious commitment among Catholic students in Hanoi, Vietnam.*

Durkheim's classical sociological theory regarding the functions of religion explains the importance of social integration for the maintenance of religious communities and individual religiosity Durkheim (1912). In his views, outlined in his book on suicide in 1912, religion functions as a social semen that brings people together (Herrera et al., 2023). At the same time, it may be inferred that more social integration into the religious community can lead to more outstanding individual commitment to the faith (Lim & Putnam, 2010). This relationship can be further clarified by the concept of social capital, as outlined by Herrera et al. (2023). Semplonius et al. (2015) argue that social networks and the principles of reciprocity and trust born of them are crucial aspects of community and societal well-being. Applied to the understanding of religiosity, it may be suggested that greater social integration into religious and social networks will increase an individual's adherence to faith since they rely on the support and shared values of people tied to the same belief system (Lim & Putnam, 2010). Research confirms that social integration is related to more outstanding religious commitment. For example, a study by Bankston & Zhou (1995) indicated that strong relations with one's religious social network are associated with higher levels of religiosity on the personal level. Furthermore, Delle Fave et al., 2022 found that the social aspect of the religious community is the most significant factor supporting religious commitment, as those who are more tightly integrated into religious social networks are more dedicated to their faith (Hoang et al., 2021).

In the case of Vietnam, where social and familial relations have a vital significance, the effect of social integration on religious commitment is likely to be even more significant. The collectivist culture of this country emphasizes harmony and interconnectedness above individual achievement, which may spill over to the use of religious communities, reinforcing the religiosity of well-integrated individuals (Astin et al., 2010). Catholic students in Hanoi may integrate socially into various spheres, from family and educational institutions to religious communities and broader societal relationships. The extent to which they feel a part of their immediate and extended communities, including the spiritual community, is likely to affect their commitment to religious practices and beliefs. Since Catholic worship strongly focuses on community spirit and participating together, social integration into the spiritual and broader community will significantly shape students' adherence to the faith (Maton & Pargament, 2014).

Drawing from the reviewed literature, we propose *Hypothesis 4 (H4): Social integration positively and meaningfully impacts religious commitment among Catholic students in Hanoi, Vietnam.*

Religious commitment and practice are closely related; however, the two constructs are separate within the sociology of religion (Roberts & Yamane, 2015). Religious commitment refers to the individual's connection to religion, including beliefs, a relationship with the sacred, and a deeply internalized sense of religious identity (Saroglou, 2011). It can be linked to spiritual practice or, as opposed to religious practice, refer to the outer expressions of spiritual commitment, such as church attendance, prayer, participation in rituals, and community-related functions (Canda et al., 2019). The relationship between the two concepts is central to understanding the process through which deeply entrenched religious beliefs translate into manifest behaviors (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). The theory of reasoned action and planned behavior outlines that individuals' attitudes based on religious commitment significantly shape behavioral intentions and actions – religious practice (Ajzen, 1991). The stronger the commitment to a church, the more frequent and significant religious practices. Fontaine's model of multidimensional religiosity stresses that the outer dimension of religiosity, religious practice, and the inner dimension, religious commitment, are closely interrelated but may possess different correlations across different religions or cultures (Canda et al., 2019).

Across different religions and cultures, studies into religious behavior consistently find that religious commitment always plays a vital role in predicting religious practice (Saroglou, 2011). Thus, Kim proved that strong, religiously committed people are likelier to attend church and partake in personal rituals, such as prayer and Scripture study (Kim, 2003). Hardy also proved the hypothesis based on the adolescent cohort that taking into account personal religious commitment increases the overall explained share of variance in religious attendance and engagement in religious youth groups (Fontaine et al., 2005; Hardy et al., 2019). The studies mentioned above confirm the theoretically assumed nature of the relationship between religious commitment and practice (Pearce et al., 2017).

For a country with a venerated position of Buddhism and multiple minority Catholic communities, such as Vietnam, the relationship between personal religious commitment and conversion of this commitment into practice is an underexplored area. For the predominantly Buddhist Vietnam, Catholic communities present an indigenous phenomenon (Ngo et al., 2015). Within the Catholic frameworks of Hanoi, the correlation between religious commitment and the manifestation of this commitment through personal practice might be exceptionally high due to the solid societal and family pressures and high commonality of religious expression. Hanoi Catholic students are pressured to accept Buddhist tenets as part of the national identity, and taking part in Catholic practices manifests much stronger in students with the highest personal religious commitment.

Drawing from the reviewed literature, *Hypothesis 5 (H5) is proposed: Religious commitment positively and meaningfully impacts religious practice among Catholic students in Hanoi, Vietnam.*

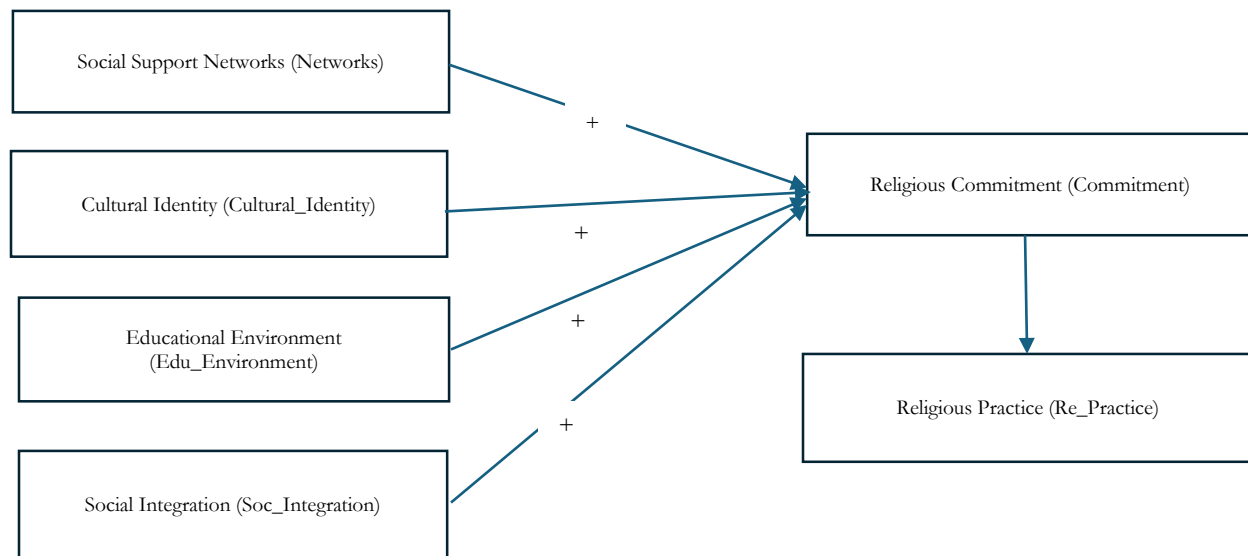


Figure 1 Research model

METHODOLOGY

Instrument and Participant

This work's questionnaire development also referred to the conscientious review of the prior literature on the topic and valuable consultations with two respectable sociologists on the subject of sociology of religion, according to Oosterveld (1996). As Martin (2006) stated, this questionnaire was dual-section, the first to acquire concise profile data from the respondents. The second measure collected study-related data and essential information, which shall be analyzed in this study (Piga et al., 2020). The first questionnaire was subjected to a pilot study of 40 people before its use. This step was critical in ensuring that the two sections aligned with the population's specific characteristics to be sampled (Kyriazos, 2018). At the time, feedback from specialists in the surveyed field was crucial in enabling the optimal selection of the same questionnaire for the primary research collection (Appendix). The participants were recruited from a selection of students across respected universities in Hanoi, specifically from the University of Foreign Trade, Hanoi Faculty of Law, University of Science and Technology, National Economics University, and the Ha Noi Vietnam National University of Hanoi. The suitable collection involved a random selection of the students who represented the specific profile of the study and yielded 200 students, which were used to optimize the SEM analytical requirements according to a review (Bush & White, 1985). The questionnaire was issued and dispatched by the research teams, who collected and administered the questionnaire using a pencil, which facilitated the immediate collection of all the data and thus upheld the 100% validity of the sample. The questionnaire was collected at the beginning of 2021-2022, an auspicious time since it was close to Vietnam's Culturally Significant Lunar New Year. All material

relevant to the interview was obtained according to the relevant ethical considerations in data collection. The interviewees were informed, and all the researchers maintained the confidentiality of the lab results since it is in line with what was previously stated (Shrader-Frechette, 1994).

Table 1 Demographic characteristics of survey participants

		Soc_Eco_Status					
		High		Low		Middle	
		Count	Row N %	Count	Row N %	Count	Row N %
Age	Over 21 years old	6	21.4%	4	14.3%	18	64.3%
	18 years old	9	30.0%	4	13.3%	17	56.7%
	19 years old	9	15.8%	10	17.5%	38	66.7%
	20 years old	9	14.8%	15	24.6%	37	60.7%
	21 years old	3	12.5%	11	45.8%	10	41.7%
Gender	female	8	21.1%	6	15.8%	24	63.2%
	male	28	17.3%	38	23.5%	96	59.3%
University	Foreign Trade University	11	32.4%	6	17.6%	17	50.0%
	Hanoi Law University	4	16.7%	3	12.5%	17	70.8%
	Hanoi University of Science and Technology	6	14.6%	8	19.5%	27	65.9%
	National Economics University	13	20.6%	17	27.0%	33	52.4%
	Vietnam National University Hanoi	2	5.3%	10	26.3%	26	68.4%
Major	Business Administration	10	24.4%	10	24.4%	21	51.2%
	Commercial Law	9	20.0%	15	33.3%	21	46.7%
	Computer Science	9	12.3%	12	16.4%	52	71.2%
	Psychology	8	19.5%	7	17.1%	26	63.4%
Residential_Status	Renter	7	15.6%	10	22.2%	28	62.2%
	Living with parents	12	26.7%	10	22.2%	23	51.1%
	Student Housing	17	15.5%	24	21.8%	69	62.7%
Ethnicity	Ethnic minority	12	24.0%	13	26.0%	25	50.0%
	Kinh	24	16.0%	31	20.7%	95	63.3%

Reliability Analysis

Reliability analysis using Cronbach's alpha is a fundamental statistical method employed to assess the internal consistency of a scale or measurement tool, ensuring that the instrument reliably measures the construct it is intended to evaluate (Agbo, 2010). This analysis aims to determine how closely related a set of items are as a group. A higher Cronbach's alpha value, typically above 0.7, indicates that the items have relatively high internal consistency and are likely measuring the same underlying concept (Park, 2021). This criterion is crucial for research validity, as it reflects the extent to which the instrument produces consistent results under consistent conditions. In essence, Cronbach's alpha helps researchers evaluate the reliability of multi-item scales (e.g., questionnaires or tests), guiding the improvement of measurement tools by identifying items that do not contribute to scale reliability (Robinson, 2018). It serves as a critical step in developing and validating measurement instruments, ensuring they can be trusted to accurately capture the constructs of interest.

Table 2 Summary of Reliability

Scales	Number of variables observed	Reliability coefficients (Cronbach Alpha)	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
<i>Commitment</i>	4	0.756	0.779	0.472
<i>Networks</i>	4	0.780	0.783	0.477
<i>Cultural Identity</i>	4	0.803	0.804	0.507
<i>Edu Environment</i>	4	0.785	0.786	0.480
<i>Soc Integration</i>	4	0.747	0.769	0.478
<i>Re Practice</i>	4	0.756	0.779	0.472

CR is critical in assessing constructs' reliability and internal consistency within SEM and other latent variable models (Cheung et al., 2023). Unlike Cronbach's alpha, which assumes that all items have equal loadings on the underlying factor, CR considers the actual observed loadings of the indicators on the latent construct, providing a more accurate measure of the reliability of complex constructs. The calculation of CR involves the sum of the squared factor loadings of the indicators (representing the explained variance) divided by the sum of the squared factor loadings plus the sum of the error variances (representing the unexplained variance) (Ab Hamid et al., 2017). The criteria for acceptable levels of CR typically suggest a threshold of 0.7 or higher, indicating that the construct has good internal consistency and that the items together reliably measure the intended latent variable (Arisekar et al., 2024). This higher threshold ensures that the construct is well-defined and accurately represented by its indicators, making CR a valuable tool in validating measurement models in research studies. Researchers applying CR can confidently interpret their latent constructs, knowing they reflect a reliable and coherent aggregation of their indicators (Cheung et al., 2023).

AVE is a crucial procedure in assessing the validity of constructs within research models, particularly in terms of convergent validity (Henseler et al., 2015). AVE measures the average variance a construct captures from its indicators relative to the amount of variance due to measurement error. It is calculated by taking the sum of the squared loadings of the indicators on the construct and dividing it by the number of indicators (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The criterion for acceptable AVE values is typically set at 0.50 or higher, indicating that, on average, the construct explains more than half of the variance of its indicators. However, in particular research contexts and preliminary studies where constructs are not well-defined or are being explored for the first time, AVE values slightly below 0.50 are still acceptable. In these cases, researchers should proceed cautiously, interpreting their findings while acknowledging the potential for improvement in construct measurement (Hair et al., 2019; Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Lower AVE values suggest that a significant portion of the variance in the indicators is not accounted for by the construct, signaling the need for further refinement of the measurement model or a reevaluation of the construct's indicators ((Hair et al., 2019; Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Table 2 presents the results of the reliability and validity tests for the research questionnaire (Hair et al., 2019; Henseler et al., 2015). The Cronbach's alpha coefficients for all items were more significant than 0.74, indicating satisfactory internal consistency and reliability of the questionnaire (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Composite reliability, a measure of the reliability of a defined structure with five to eight items, met the minimum threshold of 0.70 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The table shows that all items have a factor loading greater than 0.74, indicating good convergent validity (Hair et al., 2019; Henseler et al., 2015). The AVE of all items was approximately 0.50, an acceptable threshold for further analysis (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). These results demonstrate that the questionnaire items have satisfactory reliability and validity for analyzing the proposed research model.

Factor Analysis

Factor analysis is a statistical technique used to identify underlying variables, or factors, that explain the pattern of correlations within a set of observed variables (McDonald, 2014). It is commonly applied in research to reduce data complexity, improve construct validity, and identify dimensions of latent constructs. Two critical criteria in factor analysis are the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett's test of sphericity (Shrestha, 2021). The KMO index assesses the suitability of data for factor analysis, with values closer to 1 indicating a higher proportion of variance likely to be shared among variables, and a value above 0.6 is generally considered acceptable. Bartlett's test of sphericity evaluates the hypothesis that the correlation matrix is an identity matrix, which would indicate that variables are unrelated and unsuitable for factor analysis; a significant test result ($p < 0.05$) confirms that the variables are sufficiently related for the analysis (Shrestha, 2021). Additionally, the number of factors to retain is often determined by eigenvalues greater than 1, known as the Kaiser criterion, and the scree plot, which provides a visual method to identify the point at which the explained variance by factors levels off, indicating diminishing returns by adding more factors (Patil et al., 2008). Together, these criteria guide researchers in conducting factor analysis effectively, ensuring the reliability and validity of the identified factors.

Table 3 Result of factor analysis

Rotated Component Matrix ^a						
	Component					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Edu_Environment2	.763					
Edu_Environment1	.752					
Edu_Environment4	.686					
Edu_Environment3	.678					
Networks4		.777				
Networks2		.748				
Networks1		.674				
Networks3		.611				
Commitment4			.768			
Commitment2			.730			
Commitment1			.676			
Commitment3			.588			
Cultural_Identity1				.728		
Cultural_Identity3				.712		
Cultural_Identity2				.645		
Cultural_Identity4				.624		
Re_Practice3					.720	
Re_Practice2					.698	
Re_Practice1					.636	
Re_Practice4					.622	
Soc_Integration3						.760
Soc_Integration1						.698
Soc_Integration4						.646
Soc_Integration2						.629
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.						
a. Rotation converged in 6 iterations. b. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (KMO) = 0.896 c. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity (Chi-Square = 1787.381; df= 276; sig.=0.000) d. Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings = 60.938; Initial Eigenvalues = 1.115						

Table 3 presents the factor analysis results conducted to validate the research questionnaire. Bartlett's test of sphericity was statistically significant (Sig. = 0.000), and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin coefficient (KMO) = 0.896 (>0.5), indicating that the observed variables are correlated in the population and are, therefore, suitable for factor analysis. The factor loading coefficients for all variables ≥ 0.5 indicate the validity of the factor analysis. The criterion for the practical significance of factor loading is a minimum level = 0.3, an essential level = 0.4, and a practical level = 0.5. Table 3 shows that all variables have factor loading coefficients ≥ 0.5 , demonstrating the validity of the factor analysis. The total load squared extraction for the six factors = 60.938% (>50%), indicating that the extracted factors can explain significant variance in the data. The initial eigenvalue

of the 6 factors = 1.115 (> 1.00), indicating that the extracted factors have eigenvalues more significant than one and are, therefore, valid. These results demonstrate the suitability and validity of exploratory factor analysis for the proposed research model (Hair et al., 2019; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2019).

Structural Equation Modeling

SEM is a comprehensive statistical approach that allows researchers to examine complex relationships among observed and latent variables (Fan et al., 2016). This method combines aspects of factor analysis and multiple regression analysis, enabling the testing of theoretical models that hypothesize relationships between variables. SEM is particularly valued for its ability to assess direct and indirect effects, providing a nuanced understanding of the pathways through which variables influence each other (Tarka, 2018). The criteria for evaluating SEM models involve several key fit indices, including the Chi-square test, Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), and Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI). An acceptable model fit is often indicated by a non-significant Chi-square (although it is sensitive to sample size), RMSEA values of 0.06 or less, and CFI and TLI values of 0.95 or higher (Henseler et al., 2015). These criteria ensure that the model accurately reflects the data and that the hypothesized relationships between variables are supported, thereby providing robust evidence for the research's theoretical assumptions. Scholars can validate complex theoretical models through SEM and contribute to advancing knowledge in their respective fields.

Table 4 Regression Weights

			Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	
Commitment.	<---	Soc_Integration	.210	.097	2.170	.030	support
Commitment.	<---	Cultural_Identity.	.229	.097	2.352	.019	support
Commitment.	<---	Networks.	.170	.070	2.413	.016	support
Commitment.	<---	Edu_Environment.	.170	.085	1.991	.046	support
Re_Practice.	<---	Commitment.	.878	.145	6.075	***	support

The analysis results, as shown in Figure 2, indicate that the SEM model satisfies the standard requirements. The Chi-square statistic = 308.631 with 241 degrees of freedom (P-value = 0.000, < 0.05), Chi-square/df ratio of 1.281, Goodness of Fit Index (GIF) = 0.888 (approximately equal to 0.9), TLI = 0.951, and RMSEA = 0.038. The results of the SEM analysis are presented in Table 4, which shows the relationship between the variables. Overall, the results suggest that the SEM model fits well with the data and represents the proposed research model well.

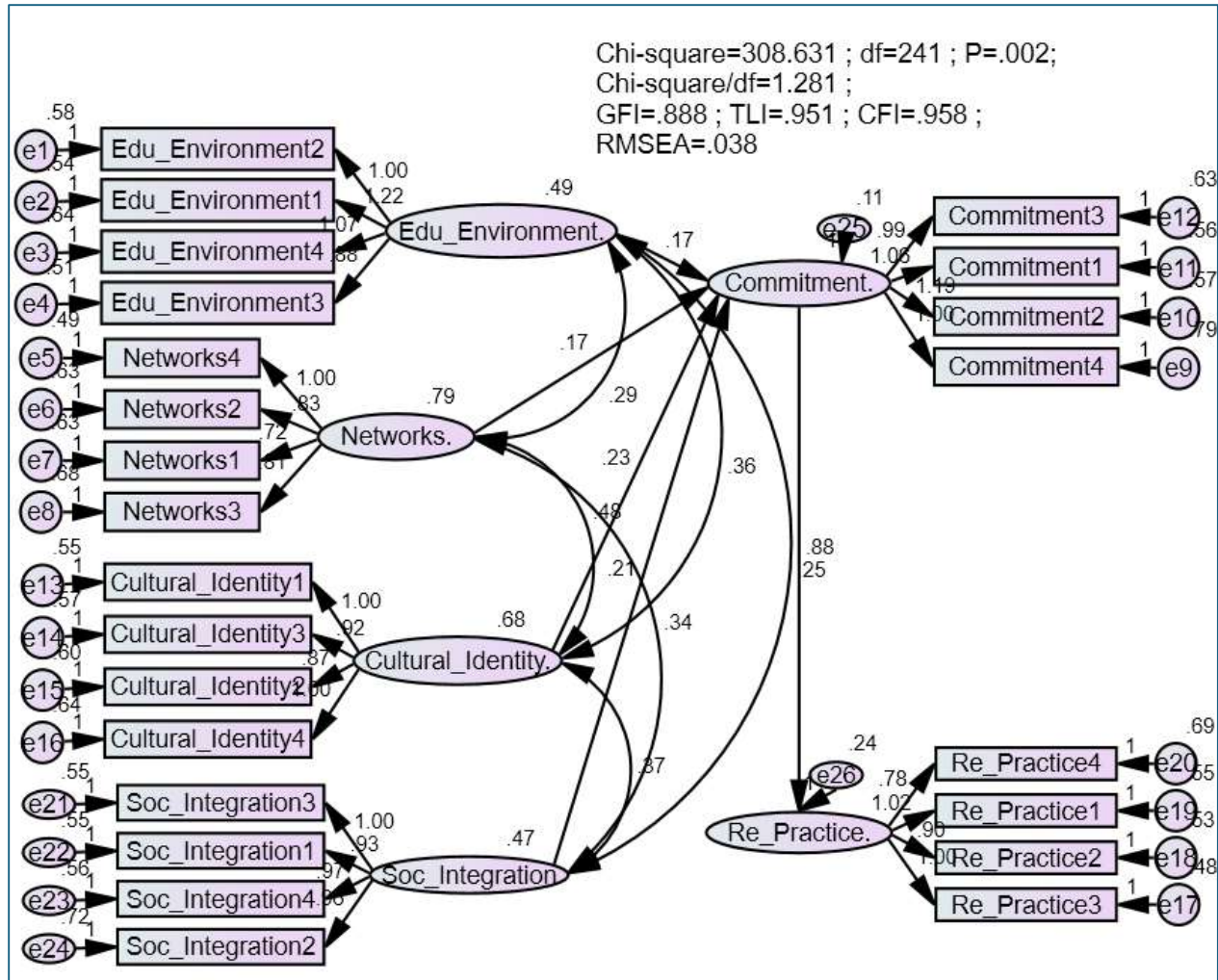


Figure 1 SEM analysis results

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The empirical analysis presented in Table 4 rigorously examines the influence of various factors on Catholic students' religious commitment in Hanoi, Vietnam, thereby laying a solid foundation for validating our research hypotheses.

The statistical analysis reveals a significant positive relationship between social support networks and religious commitment, with a regression coefficient (β) of 0.170. This association is statistically significant, as evidenced by a p-value of 0.016, lending strong support to our first hypothesis (H1) that social support networks have a beneficial effect on the religious commitment of Catholic students. This result emphasizes the critical role that social support plays in creating an environment that nurtures spiritual engagement.

Moreover, the influence of cultural identity on religious commitment is substantial, as indicated by a regression coefficient (β) of 0.229 and a p-value of 0.019, thereby endorsing our second hypothesis (H2). This finding underscores the importance of cultural identity as a critical factor in forming religious commitment, suggesting that it is a more potent predictor than social support networks.

The analysis also confirms the positive impact of the educational environment on religious commitment, with a reported regression weight (β) of 0.170 and a p-value of 0.046, supporting our third hypothesis (H3). This

validates the notion that a supportive educational setting significantly enhances students' religious commitment, aligning with theoretical expectations about the influence of educational contexts on individuals' development and values.

Additionally, a significant positive correlation between social integration and religious commitment is identified, with a regression coefficient of 0.210 and a p-value of 0.030. This finding corroborates our fourth hypothesis (H4), demonstrating that greater levels of social integration are linked with heightened religious commitment. This highlights the importance of community cohesion and integration in fostering religious fidelity.

Most strikingly, the study uncovers a deep-seated link between religious commitment and practice among students, as evidenced by a significant regression coefficient of 0.878 and a p-value of less than 0.001. This finding, supporting our fifth hypothesis (H5), illustrates that religious commitment is a crucial predictor of spiritual practice. This relationship's strength unequivocally illustrates commitment's fundamental role in bridging internal beliefs with outward religious expressions.

In summary, this study methodically validates the profound impact of social support networks, cultural identity, educational environment, and social integration on fostering religious commitment among Catholic students in Hanoi. The distinct contribution of each factor in shaping the religious ethos within this group and the pivotal role of religious commitment in guiding religious practices offers significant insights into the dynamics between individual, social, and cultural elements in spiritual engagement. These conclusions not only affirm our hypotheses but also provide valuable contributions to the understanding of religious commitment and practice dynamics.

Discussion

The research delves into the determinants of religious commitment and practices among Catholic students in Hanoi, Vietnam, revealing a complex interplay of social, cultural, and educational factors (Hoan et al., 2023). This study distinguishes itself by focusing on a specific religious cohort within a unique socio-cultural and geographical context, offering nuanced insights into how various external influences collectively shape religious identity and observances. Among its critical findings is the paramount influence of religious commitment on practices, indicating a deep connection between internal faith and outward religious expression.

The distinctiveness of this research lies in its detailed exploration of how social support networks, cultural identity, educational environment, and social integration contribute to fostering religious commitment among Catholic students in Hanoi. This approach contrasts with broader analyses of spiritual engagement, as it probes into the specifics of the Vietnamese Catholic experience, enriching our understanding of the intricate dynamics that underpin religious life. The significant correlation between religious commitment and practices, underscored by a substantial regression weight, underscores the critical role of intrinsic faith in guiding religious behaviors, marking an essential advancement in our understanding of religious adherence among students (Scales et al., 2014).

The findings bear implications that span theoretical and practical domains. Theoretically, the research extends our knowledge of religious engagement by marrying social, cultural, and educational perspectives with individual belief systems, offering a comprehensive framework for investigating religious commitment (Saroglou, 2011). Practically, it highlights the importance for educators, spiritual leaders, and policymakers of creating supportive communities and educational structures that respect and incorporate cultural identities, thereby enhancing religious practices among students (Chickering et al., 2015). The study advocates for an environment that honors diverse cultural backgrounds, essential for nurturing religious commitment.

Moreover, this work lays the groundwork for future research into religious engagement across various settings and demographics. It opens the door to further studies on the impact of modern factors, such as digital media, on religious beliefs and practices, particularly among students. Comparative research involving different religious groups within Vietnam could provide deeper insights into the influence of cultural, educational, and social contexts on spiritual commitment and practices.

In conclusion, this research sheds light on the intricate factors influencing religious commitment and practices among Catholic students in Hanoi, Vietnam, emphasizing the central role of personal faith in religious observance. By offering an in-depth examination of the links between social support, cultural identity, educational environment, and social integration, the study contributes valuable insights into promoting religious engagement among students, significantly contributing to scholarly discourse and practical initiatives in spiritual and educational communities.

CONCLUSION

The investigation into the determinants of religious commitment and practices among Catholic students in Hanoi, Vietnam, unveils a complex matrix of socio-cultural influences that mold religious engagement within this group. By dissecting the roles of social support networks, cultural identity, educational environment, and social integration, this research contributes significantly to the existing body of knowledge, mapping a previously underexplored terrain within a distinct cultural and geographic milieu. The nuanced understanding gained from examining how these external factors shape religious identity and adherence among students adds a valuable dimension to the scholarly dialogue on religiosity.

The quantitative analysis, leveraging Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), provides a robust framework to elucidate the interrelationships between the variables as mentioned above. The empirical evidence gathered underscores the critical contribution of each variable to fostering religious commitment, which subsequently acts as a catalyst for religious practices. Notably, the study foregrounds religious commitment as the cornerstone in the nexus between personal belief systems and the manifestation of religious observance, pointing to an intrinsic link that merits further academic attention.

The theoretical and practical ramifications of this study are manifold. Academically, it enriches the discourse on the sociology of religion by integrating socio-cultural determinants within the analysis of religious behavior. The findings offer actionable insights for educators, spiritual leaders, and policymakers on nurturing environments conducive to religious commitment development. These environments, characterized by support, cultural inclusiveness, and engagement, promote vibrant religious practices among youth. Thus, the research serves as a guiding light for initiatives aimed at bolstering spiritual well-being and engagement in educational settings, contributing to the holistic development of students.

While this study marks a significant advancement in understanding the socio-cultural dynamics of religiosity among Catholic students in Hanoi, it has its limitations. One of the primary constraints is the contextual specificity of the research setting, which may hinder the extrapolation of findings to different religious or cultural landscapes. The intricacies of the Vietnamese socio-cultural environment, combined with the focus on Catholic students, suggest that the results might not seamlessly apply to other contexts without careful consideration of local nuances.

Furthermore, the reliance on self-reported measures introduces an element of subjectivity that could potentially skew the data. Despite efforts to mitigate this through methodological rigor, the inherent nature of self-reporting may affect the accuracy and objectivity of the responses collected, reflecting personal biases or perceptions.

Looking ahead, the pathway for future research is ripe with opportunities to expand the horizons of understanding in this field. Comparative studies that span across various religious and cultural settings are essential for delineating the universal versus context-specific factors that influence religious commitment and practices. Such research could provide a more global perspective on the dynamics at play, enhancing the applicability and relevance of the findings across diverse environments.

Additionally, the advent of digital media has revolutionized the landscape of religious expression and community building, presenting a novel area for investigation. Understanding the impact of digital platforms on students' religious beliefs and practices could shed light on emerging trends and challenges in spirituality, offering fresh insights for academics, practitioners, and religious communities alike. This avenue of research promises to uncover the evolving nature of religiosity in the digital age, contributing to a more comprehensive and contemporary understanding of religious engagement among younger populations.

Funding: This research was funded by the Vietnam National Foundation for Science and Technology Development (NAFOSTED) under grant number 601.99-2020.300.

Institutional Review Board Statement: The Ethical Committee of NAFOSTED, Vietnam, approved this study on 21 September 2020 (Ref. No. 601.99-2020.300).

Transparency: The authors state that the manuscript is honest, truthful, and transparent, that no critical aspects of the investigation have been omitted, and that any differences from the study as planned have been clarified. This study followed all writing ethics.

Data Availability Statement: The corresponding author can provide the supporting data for this study upon reasonable request.

Competing Interests: The author declares no competing interests.

Authors' Contributions: The author, solely responsible for the study's conception and design, has reviewed and consented to the manuscript's published version.

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