

# Factors Affecting the Motivation of Religious Conversion: Evidence in Vietnam

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## Abstract

*This study investigates the motivations behind religious conversion in Vietnam, focusing on political, historical, personal, psychological, and socioeconomic factors. The research uses a quantitative approach to examine how external socio-political changes, personal life events, and religious influences shape individuals' decisions to convert. It highlights the dynamic responsiveness of religious beliefs to societal shifts and the profound impact of individual experiences on spiritual orientation. The study also explores the role of communal religious aspects and psychological well-being in the conversion process. While revealing the complexity of religious conversion in Vietnam's unique context, the study acknowledges methodological limitations and suggests future research directions, including qualitative analysis and cross-cultural studies. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of the multifaceted nature of religious conversion, emphasizing its individual, societal, and cultural dimensions.*

**Keywords:** Religious Conversion, Socio-Political, Personal Experiences, Psychological, Socioeconomic, Religious Affiliation, Cultural Context, Vietnam

## INTRODUCTION

Religious conversion represents the process wherein individuals alter their religious affiliation or beliefs. This transformation may involve a shift to a different religious group or a change in personal beliefs and practices within the same religious tradition, as outlined by Christensen (1963), Buckser & Glazier (2003), and Barro et al. (2010). Religious conversion has garnered significant attention in religious studies due to its implications for the individual convert and the religious community they join or leave, as highlighted by Turner (1979) and Rambo and Farhadian (1999).

The motives for conversion are diverse, ranging from an attraction to the teachings and practices of a particular faith to seeking a sense of community or connection with a larger spiritual purpose (Bass & Dykstra, 2011). Social or cultural factors such as marriage or immigration can also play a role in religious conversion (Chantler et al., 2009), as can personal spiritual experiences or crises (Pitt, 1991; Dawson, 1996).

Religious conversion studies encompass psychological, sociological, and anthropological perspectives (Kilbourne & Richardson, 1989). Researchers have delved into understanding the motives behind conversion and the social and cultural factors influencing the decision to convert (Akhter & Sumi, 2014). Moreover, the experiences of converts and the impact of conversion on their lives and relationships have been key areas of exploration (Rambo & Farhadian, 1999).

Religious conversion in Vietnam, the focus of this study, presents a unique case. The country's complex history, influenced by political, cultural, and social contexts, has shaped a diverse religious landscape. Traditional spiritual practices, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, ancestor worship, and recent religious movements like Christianity and Islam form part of this landscape (Chung, 2023). The 20th century's political and social upheavals, including the Indochina Wars and the Vietnam War, had profound effects on Vietnam's religious dynamics (Goh, 2005). The post-war period saw restricted religious freedom and government control over religious organizations, leading to religious affiliation and practice changes. However, recent years have witnessed a resurgence in spiritual interest and religious affiliation, partly driven by the internet and social media (Mercadante, 2014).

Particularly noteworthy in recent years is the rise in religious conversion to Christianity in Vietnam. This trend is linked to the country's rapid economic and social changes and a growing desire for freedom and autonomy

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(Ngo, 2010; Roszko, 2021). Young people, in particular, have been drawn to Christianity, viewing it as a form of resistance to government policies. Thus, studying religious conversion in Vietnam offers insights into how religion shapes individual and collective identities in a rapidly evolving society (Salemink, 2004; Salemink, 2003; Roszko, 2021).

This study aims to unravel the factors that drive individuals in Vietnam to change their religious affiliation or beliefs, exploring the diverse reasons and influences that contribute to the decision-making process in religious conversion.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### Religious conversion and theories of religious conversion

Religious conversion, encompassing a change in an individual's religious affiliation, has been a central topic in various scholarly disciplines. This area of study has evolved significantly over the years, with seminal works by Tracey (2012), Snow (2004), and McGuire (2008), who have explored the motives, processes, and influencing factors behind religious conversion.

The theoretical frameworks for understanding religious conversion are diverse. Psychological and sociological theories, prominently advocated by scholars such as Snook et al. (2019), suggest that conversion often occurs as individuals seek to cope with personal issues or integrate socially. This viewpoint is complemented by cognitive and developmental theories, as proposed by Valsiner (1999) and Simpson (1974), which view religious conversion as a natural element of human development, driven by mental and social factors that shape how individuals process information and experiences.

Furthermore, social influence theories, represented by the works of Fry (2003) and Sherkat (1997), argue that social factors, including the roles of family, friends, and religious leaders, largely influence the decision to convert. In contrast, rational choice theories, such as those posited by Spickard (1998) and Frank (2000), suggest that conversion decisions are based on a calculated cost-benefit analysis.

Transformative and deconversion theories offer additional perspectives. Molouki et al. (2020) and Paul (2014) elucidated that transformative theories describe religious conversion as a profound experience that fundamentally alters an individual's beliefs, values, and behaviors. On the other hand, deconversion theories, highlighted in the works of Fazzino (2014) and Streib & Keller (2004), focus on the motivations and processes behind leaving one's religion.

Empirical studies have demonstrated that conversion motives vary significantly across religious groups and cultural contexts. For instance, research has shown that motives for conversion to Christianity often involve personal crises, as Kirkpatrick and Shaver (1990) indicated. In contrast, conversion to Buddhism may be more influenced by spiritual seeking, as found in studies by Sandage and Moe (2013). Additionally, these motives can differ between Western and Eastern societies, suggesting a cultural dimension to the conversion experience.

Despite the extensive research, gaps in the literature still need to be discovered. These include a need for more focus on specific religious traditions and cultures beyond Christianity and an underrepresentation of studies on the impact of technology and the Internet on religious conversion. Furthermore, there is a need for more comprehensive research on the long-term effects of conversion, mainly concerning personal relationships, values, and overall well-being.

In conclusion, while the existing literature offers a broad understanding of the motives and processes behind religious conversion, it also highlights this phenomenon's complexity and multifaceted nature. As such, only some theories can fully explain all aspects of religious conversion, underlining the need for continued and diversified research in this field.

Factors affecting the motivation of religious conversion

### **Socio-Economic And Motivation of Religious Conversion**

Inkeles (1975) and Collar (2007) have laid the groundwork for exploring how socioeconomic conditions impact religious conversion. Siwale et al. (2023) further this research, indicating the dynamic relationship between an individual's economic situation and religious affiliations. McCleary (2008) addresses explicitly how financial circumstances can drive conversion, especially if the new religion is perceived as offering better economic opportunities. This aspect suggests that pragmatic considerations of financial well-being can sometimes influence the decision to convert.

The influence of education and occupation on religious conversion is another critical aspect. Thornton et al. (2010) highlight how these factors can broaden or limit an individual's exposure to different religious beliefs and practices, subsequently affecting their decision to convert. This indicates that higher levels of education and certain occupations may provide more opportunities for exposure to diverse religious ideas, potentially facilitating the conversion process.

Barro and McCleary (2003) discuss the vulnerability of individuals in challenging socio-economic conditions, such as poverty, unemployment, and limited social mobility, to the appeal of religious conversion. These conditions can make the promises or support offered by religious groups more attractive, catalyzing conversion.

However, the motivation for religious conversion is only sometimes driven by economic or material benefits. Seul (1999), Rambo (1993), and Cottrell (2009) point out that social pressures and the desire to belong to a particular community can also be significant factors. This aspect emphasizes the human need for social connection and acceptance, which can be fulfilled through religious affiliation.

In summary, the literature suggests that socio-economic factors, including financial status, education level, occupation, and broader socio-economic challenges, significantly influence religious conversion. While these factors can directly motivate individuals to convert, the decision is often also shaped by the desire for social belonging and community ties. This complexity indicates that religious conversion is not merely a spiritual or personal choice but is deeply intertwined with socio-economic realities and the human need for social integration.

### **Personal Experiences and Motivation For Religious Conversion**

In religious conversion, personal experiences are pivotal in influencing an individual's decision to adopt a new faith. This conversion aspect has been extensively studied, revealing many personal factors that can lead to such a significant life change. Greil (1977) and Albrecht & Cornwall (1989) have highlighted the profound impact that personal experiences can have on an individual's inclination towards a particular religion. These experiences can range from deeply spiritual encounters to life-altering crises. King (2019), for instance, underscores the potential of a profound spiritual experience to drive a person toward seeking a new religious community. Similarly, as Taylor (2007) discussed, life-changing events or personal crises often prompt individuals to reassess their beliefs, leading them to explore new religious traditions that they perceive as offering comfort and guidance.

Direct exposure to a religion's teachings and practices is also crucial. Paloutzian et al. (1999) and Vaughan (2002) suggest that individuals might be drawn to a religion due to their experiences with its specific doctrines and cultural practices. This exposure can resonate deeply and personally, attracting individuals to the religion. Beyond spiritual experiences and life events, a person's family background, cultural identity, and personal values influence the conversion process. Hirschman (2004) and Wolin & Bennett (1984) point out that an individual's alignment with the beliefs and practices of a religion, or their desire to explore new perspectives distinct from their upbringing, can be a substantial factor in their conversion. McLeod (1986) furthers this perspective by emphasizing the role of personal values and beliefs in finding resonance with certain religious teachings.

Moreover, the influence of personal relationships cannot be understated. Rambo and Farhadian (1999) note that connections with religious community members or a particular spiritual leader can be crucial in an

individual's conversion journey. These relationships often provide a sense of belonging and understanding, which can motivate conversion.

In summary, the literature on personal experiences and motivation for religious conversion underscores the complexity and diversity of factors that influence this profound life decision. From individual spiritual experiences and crises to the influence of family background, cultural identity, personal values, and relationships, each element contributes uniquely to the journey toward religious conversion.

### **Religious Influence and Motivation for Religious Conversion**

Studies by Graham and Haidt (2010) and Weaver and Agle (2002) emphasize the significant role of religious influence in an individual's decision to convert. A crucial component of this influence is the role played by religious leaders. Priests, ministers, imams, and other spiritual leaders are often key figures in introducing individuals to new religious traditions, as highlighted in the works of Toni-Uebari and Inusa (2009) and Akinloye (2018). The impact of these leaders can be profound, offering guidance, knowledge, and a sense of community to those exploring a new faith.

Religious texts, teachings, and practices also play a pivotal role in the conversion process. Shanneik (2011) and Cahill (2005) have explored how exposure to the doctrines and rituals of a particular religion can profoundly influence an individual's decision to convert. This exposure often occurs through interactions with friends, family, or other community members, as Gombrich (2006) and Cahill (2005) noted. The appeal of a religion's message and the sense of belonging within its community can be powerful motivators for conversion.

Moreover, the influence of religious media is an increasingly relevant factor in religious conversion. Hjarvard (2012) and Baffelli (2016) shed light on how books, movies, and websites introducing different religions and their practices can spark curiosity and lead to deeper exploration, potentially culminating in conversion.

The impact of social and political events on religious conversion is another significant aspect. Questier (1996) points out that some individuals may be drawn to a particular religion due to its perceived role in promoting social or political change. This aspect underscores the complex interplay between religion and broader societal dynamics.

It is important to note that religious conversion is often the result of a confluence of factors. Personal experiences, social interactions, and various religious influences intertwine, making the conversion journey unique for each individual. This complexity is reflected in the literature, which acknowledges that conversions are rarely attributable to a single factor. Instead, they result from a combination of personal, social, and religious influences, each contributing to the individual's decision to embrace a new faith.

### **Psychological Factors and Motivation for Religious Conversion**

The role of psychological factors in the motivation for religious conversion has been a subject of considerable interest in the psychology of religion. The literature reveals a spectrum of psychological elements that can significantly influence an individual's journey toward embracing a new religious faith. Central to this discussion is the work of scholars like Gorsuch (1988) and Roberts (1965), who have highlighted the influence of psychological states and traits in the decision to convert. A key aspect identified is the search for meaning and direction. Roberts (1965) elaborates on how individuals grappling with uncertainty, insecurity, or a perceived lack of purpose may find solace and direction in a new religious tradition. This search for meaning often leads to a profound reorientation of life's goals and values.

Another important psychological aspect involves dealing with negative emotions. Roberts (1965) and Vergote (1993) discuss how guilt, shame, or disconnection from one's religious tradition can drive individuals toward new faiths that offer forgiveness, acceptance, and a sense of belonging. This transition often represents a quest for emotional healing and spiritual fulfillment.

Personality traits, coping mechanisms, and cognitive styles are also pivotal in the decision to convert. McCrae (1984) and Saroglou (2013) have explored how individual differences in personality, such as openness and a propensity for self-transcendence, influence religious exploration and conversion. For instance, an open-

minded, curious individual is more likely to delve into various religious traditions and potentially find a new spiritual home.

Mental health issues, such as depression, anxiety, or trauma, also play a role in religious conversion. Pargament et al. (1988) discuss how conversion can be seen as a coping mechanism to deal with these psychological challenges. For some, adopting a new religious tradition provides a framework for understanding and addressing their mental health struggles.

In summary, the literature underscores the significant role of psychological factors in religious conversion. An individual's mental and emotional state, combined with their personality traits and coping styles, can profoundly influence their inclination to explore and ultimately adopt a new religious tradition. This body of work suggests that the journey of religious conversion is not just a cultural or social phenomenon but also a deeply personal and psychological one.

### **Political And Historical Factors and Motivation for Religious Conversion**

The influence of political and historical factors on the motivation for religious conversion is a complex and multi-dimensional aspect of religious studies. The literature in this field reveals how these factors shape individual decisions to adopt new religious traditions, often intertwined with personal, psychological, and socio-economic considerations.

Political and historical contexts have been crucial in understanding religious conversion, as scholars like Ensminger (1994) and Steigenga (2002) noted. Laitin (1986) and Brubaker (2013) discuss how living in a society where a specific religion is dominant can significantly influence an individual's decision to convert. This decision may be driven by the desire to gain social and economic opportunities or, in some cases, to avoid persecution. This phenomenon demonstrates how religious affiliation can be closely linked to societal status and personal safety.

Mitchell (2006) and Greeley (1989) highlight another dimension where a significant minority might influence individuals following a particular religion. The appeal of a minority religion's message and community can be a powerful draw, leading to conversion as individuals seek a sense of belonging and identity within these communities.

Historical events such as wars, colonialism, and forced migration have also played a critical role in shaping religious landscapes and influencing conversions. Clarke (2004) and Castles (2003) explore how these factors have historically compelled or encouraged individuals to convert, either as a means of survival during wars and colonial conquests or as a way to assimilate into new societies following migration.

Furthermore, the literature suggests that political motivations can be a driving force behind religious conversion. Individuals may be drawn to certain religions' social or political messages, converting to promote change in their society or align with specific political movements. This aspect of conversion highlights how religious beliefs can be deeply intertwined with political ideologies and social justice movements.

In summary, the literature on political and historical factors in religious conversion underscores the significant impact of societal and historical contexts on individual decisions to adopt new religious traditions. These factors are often interconnected with personal experiences, psychological motivations, and socioeconomic circumstances, contributing to religious conversion's complex and multifaceted nature. Despite extensive research in this area, gaps still need to be found, particularly in understanding converts' deeper motivations and experiences and the role of religious organizations and leaders in the conversion process. This indicates a need for more comprehensive and nuanced research to grasp the myriad factors influencing religious conversion fully.

Based on literature reviews, the following hypotheses are proposed:

Hypothesis 1 (H1) Socio-economic factors have a positive and meaningful impact on the motivation of individuals to convert to a particular religion in Vietnam.

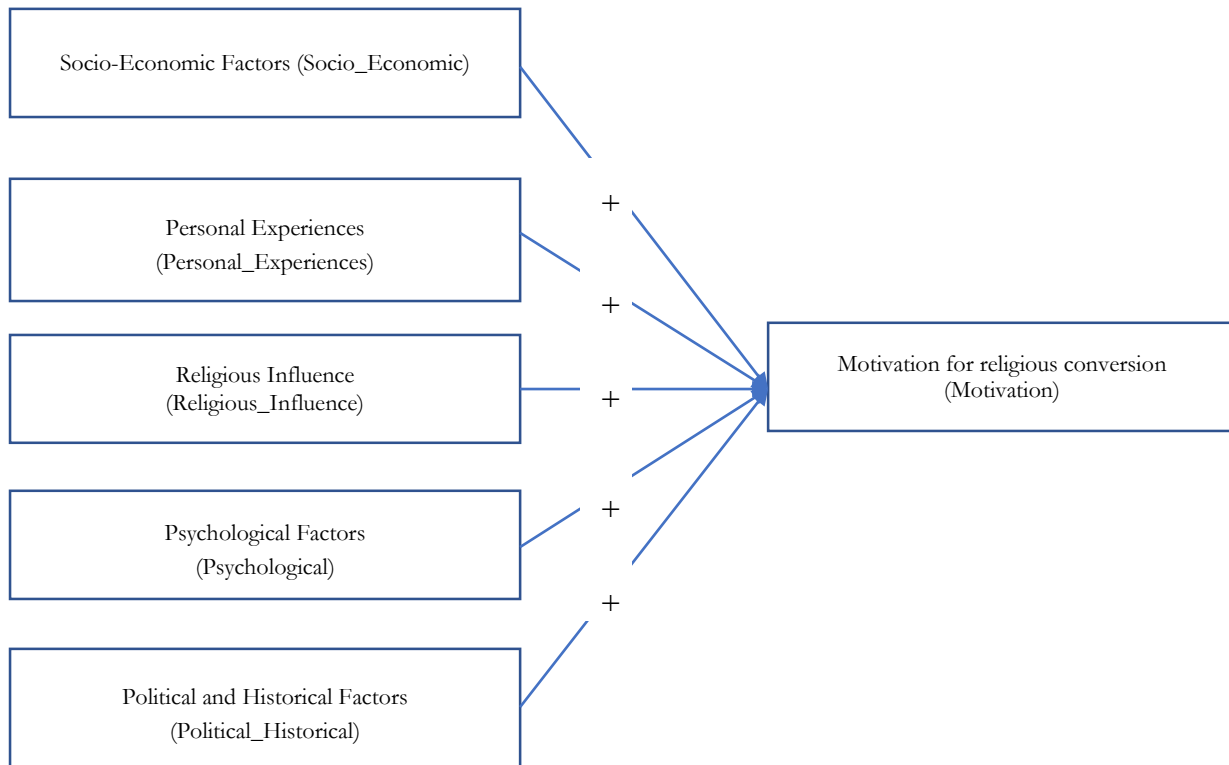
Hypothesis 2 (H2): Personal Experiences have a positive and meaningful impact on individuals' motivation to convert to a particular religion in Vietnam.

Hypothesis 3 (H3). Religious Influence has a positive and meaningful impact on the motivation of individuals to convert to a particular religion in Vietnam.

Hypothesis 4 (H4). Psychological Factors have a positive and meaningful impact on the motivation of individuals to convert to a particular religion in Vietnam.

Hypothesis 5 (H5). Political and Historical Factors have a positive and meaningful impact on the motivation of individuals to convert to a particular religion in Vietnam.

Based on the research hypotheses, the following research model is proposed (Figure 1).



**Figure 1** Proposed research model

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Instrument and Participant**

In early 2023, post-Lunar New Year, a questionnaire was developed and administered in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, informed by an extensive literature review and consultations with expert sociologists in religious studies (Rassel et al., 2022). This instrument, bifurcated into demographic and research-specific sections, underwent a pilot study with 40 participants in these cities to ensure its appropriateness and relevance. Adjustments from this phase refined the questionnaire for the primary survey (Banerjee, 2019).

The study, targeting adult religious converts in these urban centers, selected 200 participants through a random sampling method, balancing statistical robustness and practicality. This sample size was ideal for linear multivariate computational analysis and representative of Vietnam's urban religious convert population (Shieh, 2003).

Ethical standards, particularly regarding consent and confidentiality, were stringently upheld. The questionnaire distribution and collection were direct and systematic, ensuring data integrity, evidenced by a 100% validity rate

in responses (Table 1). This approach and the choice of Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City provided a comprehensive urban perspective, enhancing the study's depth and relevance.

**Table 1 Demographic characteristics of survey participants (Source: Author's compiled results)**

		Occupation							
		Farmer		Housekeeper		Teacher		Worker	
		Count	Row N %	Count	Row N %	Count	Row N %	Count	Row N %
Gender	Female	59	42.8%	17	12.3%	16	11.6%	46	33.3%
	Male	22	35.5%	12	19.4%	9	14.5%	19	30.6%
Age	25-30 years	11	29.7%	6	16.2%	10	27.0%	10	27.0%
	31-35 years	58	43.3%	17	12.7%	13	9.7%	46	34.3%
	Above 50 years	12	41.4%	6	20.7%	2	6.9%	9	31.0%
Education	Bachelor's degree	27	44.3%	5	8.2%	7	11.5%	22	36.1%
	High school Diploma	41	39.4%	18	17.3%	10	9.6%	35	33.7%
	Master's degree	13	37.1%	6	17.1%	8	22.9%	8	22.9%
Ethnic	Ethnic minority	61	43.0%	21	14.8%	13	9.2%	47	33.1%
	Kinh people	20	34.5%	8	13.8%	12	20.7%	18	31.0%
Current Religion	Buddhism	47	44.3%	13	12.3%	11	10.4%	35	33.0%
	Catholic	14	40.0%	5	14.3%	6	17.1%	10	28.6%
	Indigenous religion	20	33.9%	11	18.6%	8	13.6%	20	33.9%
Former religion	Catholic	12	42.9%	3	10.7%	3	10.7%	10	35.7%
	Protestantism	69	40.1%	26	15.1%	22	12.8%	55	32.0%

## Reliability Analysis

Reliability analysis is pivotal in evaluating the consistency or stability of measurement tools or tests in statistical methods. This method is integral in determining whether results obtained from a measurement tool or test are replicable and can be dependably repeated over time. As emphasized by Cronbach (1951) and Taber (2019), the core of reliability analysis lies in assessing the degree of agreement between multiple measurements or assessments of the same concept or construct. This assessment is crucial for ensuring the precision and dependability of measurement tools.

Reliability analysis can be conducted through various approaches, including test-retest, inter-rater, and internal consistency methods. Each method offers a different perspective on reliability, catering to the specific nature of the measurement tool or test being evaluated. The outcomes of these analyses are instrumental in providing insights into the stability and accuracy of measurement tools. This is essential for making informed and valid inferences from the data gathered.

In this study, Cronbach's Alpha analysis is employed as the primary method for reliability analysis. Cronbach's Alpha is a widely recognized statistic for measuring a scale or test's internal consistency or reliability. It calculates the average correlation among all possible item pairs within a test or scale, with values ranging from 0 to 1 (Cronbach, 1951; Taber, 2019). A higher Cronbach's Alpha value signifies greater internal consistency, indicating that the items on the scale measure the same underlying construct and are highly interrelated. Generally, a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.7 or above is acceptable for most scales, suggesting adequate reliability. Conversely, a value below 0.6 might signal a lack of internal consistency, necessitating further scale refinement (Hair et al., 2010).

The findings of this study, as presented in Table 2, demonstrate that the factor scales employed meet the established reliability standards. This conclusion affirms the scales' dependability and suitability for use in subsequent factor analysis. Such a level of reliability is essential for ensuring the validity and credibility of the study's findings, thereby contributing to the robustness of the research.

**Table 2 Summary of Reliability and Relative Minimum Variables of Scales (Source: Author's compiled results)**

Scales	Number of variables observed	Reliability coefficients (Cronbach Alpha)	The correlation coefficient of the smallest total variable
Socio_Economic	3	0.711	0.507
Personal_Experiences	3	0.737	0.537
Religious_Influence	3	0.748	0.553
Psychological	3	0.784	0.615
Political_Historical	3	0.664	0.460
Motivation	5	0.765	0.493

### Exploratory Factor Analysis

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) is employed in this study as a robust statistical technique designed to simplify and clarify the structure of a large set of variables. The primary objective of EFA is to distill these variables into a more manageable number of underlying or latent factors. This process is instrumental in uncovering the intrinsic structure within a dataset, facilitating a clearer understanding of the interrelationships among variables and aiding in drawing meaningful conclusions from the data (Cerny & Kaiser, 1977; Beck et al., 1991). The extracted factors from EFA serve as a foundation for further analyses and modeling.

Following the assessment of Cronbach's Alpha to ensure the reliability of the scales, the authors proceed with EFA. This analysis uses Principal Components Analysis Factor Extraction combined with Varimax rotation. This approach is chosen for its efficiency in grouping variables, with the criteria that the factor loading of the observed variables should exceed 0.5. This threshold ensures that variables converge on the same factor and are clearly distinguishable from factors associated with other variables.

KMO, a measure of sampling adequacy, is utilized to assess the suitability of factor analysis for this dataset. According to Cerny & Kaiser (1977) and Kaiser (1974), the KMO value should fall within the range of 0.5 to 1. The results, as depicted in Table 3, indicate that the factor loading coefficients of the observed variables surpass the 0.5 benchmark. Furthermore, the Bartlett test results are significant (Sig. = 0.000), and the KMO coefficient stands at 0.886, confirming the appropriateness of conducting EFA for this dataset.

The EFA has successfully extracted 20 items into six factors, each with Eigenvalues equal to or greater than 1.040, accounting for a cumulative variance percentage of 62.826%. This extraction demonstrates a clear and meaningful structure within the dataset, with each factor representing a distinct underlying variable. Based on these findings, the research model, encompassing five independent and one dependent variable, is well-positioned for linear regression analysis and subsequent hypothesis testing. The EFA results provide a solid foundation for understanding the relationships among the variables in this study, thereby enhancing the clarity and precision of the subsequent analyses.

**Table 3 Exploratory factor analysis (Source: Author's compiled results)**

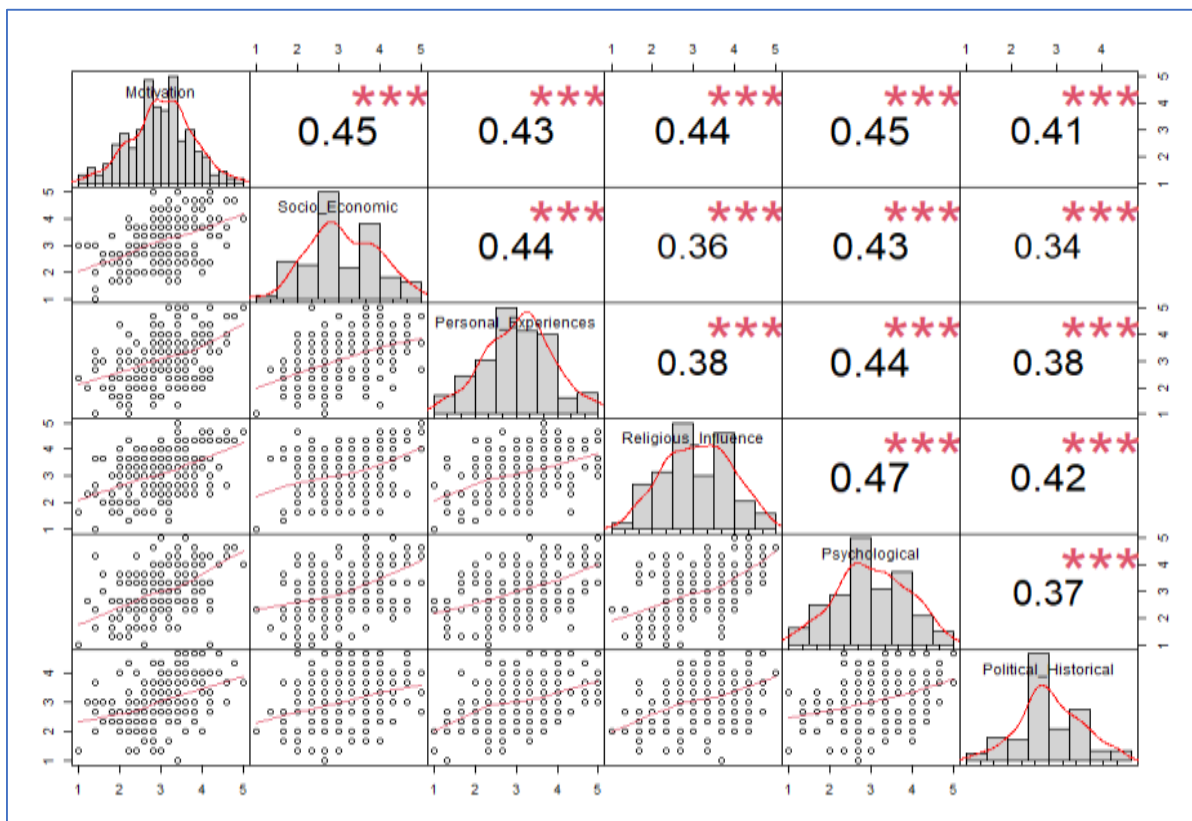
Rotated Component Matrix						
	Component					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Motivation 4	.733					
Motivation 1	.727					
Motivation 2	.635					
Motivation 5	.633					
Motivation 3	.576					
Psychological 1		.784				
Psychological1 2		.780				
Psychological1 3		.716				
Socio_Economic 2			.732			
Socio_Economic 3			.729			



Socio_Economic 1	.712
Religious_Influence 2	.798
Religious_Influence 1	.756
Religious_Influence 3	.679
Personal_Experiences 2	.768
Personal_Experiences 1	.763
Personal_Experiences 3	.709
Political_Historical 3	.758
Political_Historical 1	.732
Political_Historical 12	.660
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.	
a. Rotation converged in 6 iterations. b. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO)=0.886 c. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity: Chi-Square =1242.2; df=190; p.value =0.000 d. Initial Eigenvalues = 1.04; Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings = 62.826	

### Pearson Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation is a statistical method that measures the linear relationship between two continuous variables. It produces a coefficient ranging from -1 to 1, where -1 represents a perfect negative correlation, 1 represents a perfect positive correlation, and 0 represents no correlation. The authors used Pearson correlation to analyze the interrelation between quantitative variables. Figure 2 shows that the 5% significance level correlation coefficient demonstrates that their relationship gains statistical significance (Sig. < 0.05). The magnitude of the correlation coefficients assures that there is no multicollinearity. Other statistics, therefore, might be utilized to validate the relationship between them.



Note: \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

Figure 2 Pearson correlation analysis results (Source: Author's compiled results)

### Multivariate Linear Regression Analysis

Multivariate Linear Regression is a statistical method that models the relationship between dependent and multiple independent variables. It is used to predict the value of a dependent variable based on the values of one or more independent variables. Multivariate linear regression aims to find the best-fitting line to describe the relationship between the dependent and independent variables (Hair et al., 2019). The line is represented by an equation including the regression coefficients, which indicate the strength and direction of the relationship between each independent and dependent variable (Greene, 2003). Next, the authors conducted a multivariable linear regression analysis on the relationship between one independent and five dependent variables. As shown in Table 4, the multivariable linear regression model with  $R^2 = 0.406$  designed matches the dataset = 0.406%. Therefore, it shows that all five independent variables have a statistically significant impact on the dependent one.

**Table 4 The results of multiple linear regression analysis**

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Dependent variable:
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Motivation
-----
Socio_Economic      0.185*** (0.061)
Personal_Experiences 0.132**  (0.060)
Religious_Influence  0.152**  (0.062)
Psychological         0.128**  (0.060)
Political_Historical  0.149**  (0.064)
Constant             0.727*** (0.224)
-----
Observations         200
R2                   0.364
Adjusted R2          0.347
Residual Std. Error  0.596 (df = 194)
F Statistic          22.174*** (df = 5; 194)
VIF                  Socio_Economic factor = 1.40, Personal_Experiences = 1.45,
                    Religious_Influence = 1.46, Psychological = 1.53;
                    Political_Historical = 1.35.
=====
Note:      *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01
    
```

Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) is a statistic used in multiple linear regression analysis to quantify the extent to which the independent variables correlate. High VIF values indicate that the independent variables are highly correlated and may cause multicollinearity in the model (Kutner et al., 2005). Multicollinearity is a problem in regression analysis because it makes it difficult to determine the unique effect of each independent variable on the dependent variable. A VIF value of 1 indicates no multicollinearity, while a VIF value greater than 1 indicates the presence of multicollinearity (Kutner et al., 2005). A general rule of thumb is that a VIF value greater than 10 indicates a high degree of multicollinearity, and the variable with the high VIF value may need to be removed or transformed to improve the model. A value between 1 and 5 indicates a moderate correlation between a given predictor variable and other predictor variables in the model, but this is often not severe enough to require attention (Kutner et al., 2005). The VIF coefficients of all variables are less than 1.5, so it shows that the regression model does not have multicollinearity (Table 4).

The F-statistic is a test statistic used in regression analysis to determine if a model is significant. It is calculated as the ratio of explained variance to residual variance. The F-statistic tests the null hypothesis that all the regression coefficients are equal to zero, meaning that the independent variables do not affect the dependent variable. If the F-statistic is large, it indicates that the model is a good fit and that at least one independent variable significantly affects the dependent variable. The F-statistic is compared to a critical value obtained from the F-distribution to determine the significance level. A large F-statistic with a small p-value (often less than 0.05) indicates that the model is significant and that the independent variables have a meaningful effect on the dependent variable.

## RESULTS

The study's results, detailed in Table 4, not only shed light on these factors but also confirm several hypothesized relationships. The study finds a positive and significant relationship between the political-historical context and motivation for religious conversion, indicated by a regression coefficient of  $\beta = 0.185$  and a p-value of 0.000. This strong correlation supports the hypothesis (H1) that political and historical factors in Vietnam, such as historical events and governmental policies, play a critical role in influencing religious conversion. This acceptance of H1 suggests that people may turn to new religious beliefs in response to political upheaval or significant historical changes (Thornton et al., 2010; Barro & McCleary, 2003).

Personal experiences are also significantly related to religious conversion, with a regression coefficient of  $\beta = 0.132$  and a p-value of 0.005, thereby accepting hypothesis H2. This finding emphasizes the importance of individual life events, personal crises, and spiritual experiences in motivating religious conversion. It illustrates that personal trajectories, including encounters with challenging life circumstances or a quest for existential understanding, can pivotally influence religious belief and conversion (King, 2019; Taylor, 2007).

The research validates hypothesis H3 by demonstrating a positive and significant effect of religious influence on conversion motivation ( $\beta = 0.152$ , p-value = 0.005). This outcome confirms the hypothesis that interactions with religious teachings, communities, and leaders influence an individual's propensity toward a particular faith. It highlights the persuasive power of religious engagement and doctrine in guiding religious preferences (Toni-Uebari & Inusa, 2009; Akinloye, 2018).

The study confirms hypothesis H4, finding a significant influence of psychological factors on the motivation for religious conversion ( $\beta = 0.128$ , p-value = 0.005). This underscores the interplay between psychological well-being and religious conversion, suggesting that mental and emotional health, coping strategies, and searching for psychological equilibrium can be decisive in choosing to convert (Saroglou, 2013; Pargament et al., 1988).

Finally, the study supports hypothesis H5, indicating a significant relationship between socioeconomic factors and religious conversion ( $\beta = 0.149$ , p-value = 0.005). This finding points to the influence of economic status, social mobility, and education in adopting new religious affiliations. It suggests that conversions might be sought for social betterment, economic advancement, or alignment with educational philosophies.

In summary, the research comprehensively illustrates that religious conversion in Vietnam is influenced by a complex interplay of political, personal, religious, psychological, and socioeconomic factors. Each of these factors, as hypothesized, contributes distinctly to shaping the dynamics of religious conversion, reflecting the intricate interplay of individual, societal, and cultural elements in the Vietnamese context (Clarke, 2004; Castles, 2003).

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

### Discussion

The research provides a comprehensive understanding of how the political and historical context in Vietnam significantly influences religious conversion. It suggests that shifts in the socio-political landscape, including political upheavals and critical historical events, can catalyze individuals to explore and adopt new religious beliefs (Cottrell, 2009). This finding highlights the dynamic nature of religious affiliation, showing its responsiveness to external societal changes.

Personal experiences also emerge as a critical factor in the study. The significant role of individual life events, personal crises, and spiritual quests in influencing one's religious orientation is underscored (Hirschman, 2004). This aspect of the findings illustrates the profoundly personal nature of religious conversion, where individual journeys marked by unique circumstances can pivotally shape one's spiritual path (Vaughan, 2002).

The research also highlights the influence of religious teachings, communities, and leaders on an individual's decision to convert (Akinloye, 2018). This finding points to the substantial impact of religious institutions and

leaders in guiding individuals toward specific faiths, emphasizing the importance of communal and doctrinal aspects in shaping religious preferences and conversion experiences (Hjarvard, 2012).

Psychological well-being is a crucial factor influencing the motivation for religious conversion (Saroglou, 2013). The study underscores the interplay between mental health, emotional balance, and religious beliefs, suggesting that individuals often turn to religion in search of psychological equilibrium and coping mechanisms (Vergote, 1993).

Socioeconomic factors, including economic status, social mobility, and education, are also found to influence religious conversion significantly (Steigenga, 2002). The study suggests that practical considerations, such as aspirations for social improvement or alignment with educational philosophies, can drive the decision to adopt new religious beliefs (Castles, 2003).

Despite these insights, the study acknowledges certain limitations. The sample representation, predominantly focused on Vietnam, calls for broader research across different demographics and cultures to enhance the generalizability of the findings (Nguyen-Duc et al., 2023). Additionally, the study's quantitative approach highlights the need for incorporating qualitative research methods in future studies to capture the depth of individual conversion experiences (Morello et al., 2012).

Looking forward, the study suggests several directions for future research. Incorporating qualitative methods would offer richer insights into the personal and emotional narratives behind religious conversion (Dufault-Hunter, 2005). Longitudinal studies could provide a dynamic view of how motivations for religious conversion evolve in response to changing personal and socio-political contexts (Gray & Watts, 2017). Comparative studies across different cultural and religious backgrounds could further elucidate the universal and context-specific aspects of religious conversion motivations (Snook et al., 2019).

In conclusion, the study contributes significantly to understanding religious conversion in Vietnam, illustrating the complex interplay of individual, societal, and cultural factors. Identifying limitations and proposing future research directions lays the groundwork for a more comprehensive exploration of religious conversion as a dynamic and multifaceted phenomenon.

## **Conclusion**

This research offers a multifaceted understanding of the motivations behind religious conversion in Vietnam, shedding light on the complex interplay between individual, societal, and cultural factors. The study underscores the significant influence of Vietnam's political and historical context on religious conversion. It highlights how shifts in the socio-political landscape, including political upheavals and critical historical events, can catalyze individuals to explore and embrace new religious beliefs (Snow, 2004; McGuire, 2008). This finding underscores religious affiliation's dynamic and responsive nature to external societal changes.

Furthermore, the research emphasizes the critical role of personal experiences in religious conversion (Barro & McCleary, 2003). It reveals how individual life events, personal crises, and spiritual quests profoundly influence one's religious orientation, illustrating the deeply personal nature of this process (Thornton et al., 2010). The study also highlights the significant impact of religious teachings, communities, and leaders in guiding individuals toward specific faiths, underscoring the importance of communal and doctrinal elements in shaping religious preferences and experiences.

The interplay between psychological well-being and religious conversion is another crucial aspect highlighted by the study (Saroglou, 2013). It suggests that individuals often turn to religion to achieve psychological equilibrium and cope with various life challenges (Mitchell, 2006). Additionally, the research identifies socioeconomic factors, such as economic status, social mobility, and education, as influential in the decision to convert, indicating that practical considerations can play a crucial role in this process (Clarke, 2004).

Despite these comprehensive insights, the study acknowledges limitations, particularly in its sample representation and methodological approach. The focus on Vietnam calls for expanded research across diverse demographics and cultures to enhance the findings' generalizability (Nguyen-Duc et al., 2023). Moreover, the

study's reliance on quantitative methods points to the potential benefits of incorporating qualitative research in future studies to delve deeper into the individual narratives and emotional aspects of religious conversion (Morello et al., 2012).

The study sets forth several directions for future research. Incorporating qualitative methods would provide richer insights into the personal and emotional stories behind religious conversion. Longitudinal studies could offer a dynamic perspective on how motivations for religious conversion evolve in response to changing personal and socio-political contexts (Gray & Watts, 2017). Furthermore, comparative studies across different cultural and religious backgrounds could elucidate religious conversion motivations' universal and context-specific aspects (Snook et al., 2019).

In summary, this study contributes significantly to understanding religious conversion in Vietnam, highlighting the complex interplay of various factors that influence this phenomenon. Identifying current limitations and suggesting future research avenues lays a solid foundation for a more comprehensive and nuanced exploration of religious conversion as a dynamic and multifaceted phenomenon.

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