

# Poetics and consumption: A discourse analysis of Vietnamese culture

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## ABSTRACT

Consumption is a multifaceted social phenomenon that deeply intersects with both the social sciences and the humanities. This complexity arises from the way in which cultural, economic, and societal factors converge to shape consumer behavior. Furthermore, poetics and consumption are closely intertwined, offering insights from different cultural perspectives, as poetry can combine social and consumer experiences to expand the language of consumption and the scope of human understanding (Tonner, 2019). This article utilized discourse analysis and interpretive analysis within a qualitative framework to explore the intricate relationship between poetics and consumption. By employing Foucauldian Discourse Analysis as a foundational theory, the study located contextual levels that facilitate the analysis and interpretation of interdisciplinary phenomena situated at the crossroads of linguistics and economics. The findings demonstrate a significant connection between poetry and consumption patterns in Vietnam, revealing how these patterns can be understood within their specific cultural context. Poetry acts as a powerful lens through which we can investigate consumption behaviors throughout different historical and cultural periods, thereby emphasizing the complex interplay between artistic expression and everyday life. Moreover, poetry not only reflects Vietnamese culture but also critiques and engages with various social practices, including contemporary consumption trends. Understanding these dynamics can provide valuable insights for businesses, informing effective marketing and promotional strategies that influence consumer purchasing decisions.

**Keywords:** Consumer norm; Foucauldian discourse analysis; poetics; Vietnamese consumption

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## INTRODUCTION

Kumar (2024) posits that consumer preferences are multifaceted and dynamically shaped by the intricate interplay of cultural (Cleveland et al., 2016; Craig & Douglas, 2006; Johri et al., 2024), linguistic (Cleveland et al., 2015; Zhang et al., 2003), socio-economic (Ajetunmobi & Laobangdisa, 2024), demographic (Kälviäinen et al., 2000), and psychological factors inherent to individual consumers (Janssen & Jager, 2001; Kimmel & Kimmel, 2018), along with their interactions with objects and media (Dholakia et al., 2010; Lisun et al., 2024). These preferences transcend the functional utility of goods and services and frequently embody

profound personal and collective values, identities, and coping mechanisms (Ferraro et al., 2011; Roberti, 2024).

Meanwhile, poetry constitutes a significant element of humanity's spiritual existence, serving as a potent medium for emotional and experiential expression and thus offering a distinctive lens through which consumer preferences can be articulated (Tonner, 2019). Born out of the realities of life, poetry captures our lived experiences, habits, and lessons, reflecting the culture of a particular ethnic group (Dilthey, 1985; Espinosa & Moore, 2000). The poet uses this medium to express and document their worldview. Through this creative

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process, the essence of life and the cultural characteristics of a nation or community find their way into poetry (Hojimatov, 2025; Urys et al., 2021). As such, poetry not only fulfills spiritual needs but also serves as a repository of knowledge encompassing humanity's entire material world. Engaging with poetry allows analysts to glimpse the authentic life of a nation during a specific period. By delving into poetry, one can gain insights into the lived experiences of a society during a specific era.

Moreover, poetry facilitates diverse interpretive possibilities, enabling readers to derive personal significance and fulfillment while affording an 'emic experiential language' and opportunities for self-reflexivity beyond conventional research constraints (Wallendorf & Arnould, 1991). It embodies a unique cognitive mode that engenders novel perceptions transcending ordinary cognitive operations (Saunders, 2003). Within moral economics, these perceptions are construed as 'aesthetic aspects,' which may prompt individuals to conceptualize economics as 'works of art' and to endeavor to 'transform our own lives into works of art' (Giri, 2024). Meanwhile, poetic language can engender a 'land of symbolic exchange' that challenges conventional economic mechanisms and the accumulation of meaning (Baron-Milian, 2020). Poetry also invites readers to interpret its verses in myriad ways, allowing them to find personal meaning and satisfaction. Consequently, interactions between poets and listeners typically yield multiple interpretations while fostering empathy and behavioral harmony. Therefore, analyzing poetry is an effective discursive method for understanding consumer preferences through the poet's lens.

Additionally, traumatic life events can precipitate emotional consumption behaviors that function as therapeutic processes, particularly in the context of arts and crafts (Bettany, 2022). Aristotle (1996) observed that artistic forms, such as poetry, possess the capacity to elicit emotions such as pity and fear, thereby enabling catharsis, or the purgation of these emotions. Tonner (2019) contends that poetry's efficacy resides in its facility to deconstruct language and investigate the distinctive 'language of experience,' which is pivotal for comprehending the nuances of consumer preference articulation and for illuminating mundane everyday practices as well as concealed forms of consumption. Paradoxically, poetry is characterized as 'uneconomical and useless.' Yet, this attribute renders it a locus of resistance against conventional communication and cognitive automation, yielding unique insights into reality that reflect consumer predilections for symbolic, authentic, and highly significant attachment values

over purely utilitarian or exchange values (Baron-Milian, 2020). Thus, poetry not only employs language to interpret consumer behavior but also shapes consumer preferences.

Although the relationship between poetry and consumption has been acknowledged in both theory and practice, most studies adopt a discursive approach, articulating this relationship through intermediary objects or metaphors. The literature typically examines poetry from two perspectives: (1) as a cultural force that shapes consumption, and (2) as a cultural product consumed within social contexts. Consequently, these studies often encounter challenges related to objectivity and affective distance, particularly when researchers struggle to maintain neutrality or experience a "pathological distance from emotions" when engaging with unfamiliar cultures (Bettany, 2022; Easthope, 2013; Tonner, 2019). Moreover, common limitations associated with artistic forms, including poetry, such as ambiguity and lack of focus (Brown, 2014), issues of representativeness and incompleteness (Sherry & Schouten, 2002), and difficulties in fully and authentically capturing experience (Tonner, 2019), pose additional barriers. These constraints have contributed to the limited academic acceptance of research on poetry within consumption studies (Sherry & Schouten, 2002; Tonner, 2019).

The Vietnamese culture is rich with folk songs, poems, and proverbs that encapsulate the values of human life across different periods. These poetic expressions, passed down through generations, include insights into the consumption habits of the Vietnamese people. As such, a careful analysis of poetic discourse in Vietnam can vividly illustrate these consumption patterns. Subjectively, the authors are native speakers possessing comprehensive knowledge of Vietnamese culture and substantial experience in consumer behavior research within Vietnam. This enhances cultural safety by promoting critical reflection on personal, professional, organizational, and societal biases (Lock et al., 2022; Russell-Mundine, 2012), thereby addressing a common limitation in poetry-focused consumption studies. Objectively, the poetic discourse texts the authors selected to interpret the relationship between poetry and consumption are exclusively drawn from Vietnamese textbooks published between 1981 and 2000. These texts function as instruments for language socialization, encapsulating social norms, cultural values, and prevailing ideologies (Curd-Christiansen, 2017). Consequently, they shape behavioral patterns among children and adolescents within their societal framework (Al-Barakat & Al-Karasneh, 2005) while providing cultural orientation

that extends beyond youth to encompass school culture and educators (Smart et al., 2020). In essence, it allows analysts to forecast Vietnamese population consumption needs through the lens of poetry.

While consumption and poetry are traditionally considered distinct domains within the social sciences and behavioral studies, they are not mutually exclusive. For these reasons, we undertake a study of the relationship between consumption and poetry within the context of Vietnamese culture. Specifically, this article aims to address the following research questions:

1. What is the nature of the relationship between poetics and consumption in terms of linguistic domains?
2. In the context of Vietnam's economy, what social practices exemplify the relationship between poetics and consumption?

### **Poetics and Culture**

Poetry emerged to meet humanity's spiritual needs. Over the course of history, it has gradually become an integral part of national culture, establishing a reciprocal relationship with it. In this article, we explore the impact of poetry on the cultural life of various ethnic groups.

### **Reflecting Culture**

Literature plays a pivotal role in shaping social values, and poetry, as a central component of literature, contributes significantly to this process. Poetry reflects societal values, class structures, cultural norms, and political systems (Keerthika, 2018). In Vietnamese culture, poetry deeply permeates everyday life and is instrumental in conveying society's authentic values.

One of the most distinguished works in Vietnamese literature is *The Tale of Kieu*, which is widely known internationally by its English title. This monumental poem captures the cultural values of feudal Vietnam, highlighting the underestimation of women's worth, the prevalence of prostitution, and the hierarchical relationships that characterized society during the reign of kings. The poetic essence of *The Tale of Kieu* is revealed through its depiction of the cultural realities of Vietnamese feudal society.

Studying and teaching *The Tale of Kieu* within Vietnam's educational framework allows for a critique of the immoral values of feudal society, promotes feminist ideals, and supports the development of a modern society that values gender equality. Thus, *The Tale of Kieu* continues to play a vital role in contemporary cultural life, illustrating the profound connection between poetry and culture.

The following two verses beautifully capture a cultural aspect of the Vietnamese people, reflecting the love between couples and the bond between husband and wife:

*Đậm đà cái tích trâu cau  
Miếng trâu đỏ thắm, nặng sâu tình người*

Meaning:

Good essence of betel and areca,  
The red betel slice with deep human affection

*Truyện cổ nước mình / Our fairy tale – Lam Thi My Da*

Vietnamese folklore includes a legend about "betel and areca," which explains the custom of chewing betel in Vietnam. This practice, rooted in history, involved chewing betel leaves, areca nuts, and lime to enhance the color and strength of teeth. The legend tells the story of two twin brothers and their wife, who, due to life's misfortunes, died side by side. After their deaths, they transformed into the betel vine, the areca tree, and limestone. This legend symbolizes that chewing betel, areca, and lime produces a bright red color, reflecting the deep brotherly and marital love cherished by the Vietnamese people.

### **Exposing and Challenging Cultural Norms**

Poetry serves to reflect the positive cultural attributes of an ethnic group by recording the norms of human life. Through poetry, readers gain insight into the realities captured by poets. Human life, rich with experiences, becomes a significant source of inspiration for poets, making it natural for them to document these realities.

*Khi con tu hú gọi bầy  
Lúa chiêm đương chín, trái cây ngọt dần  
Vườn râm dậy tiếng ve ngân  
Bắp rây vàng hạt đầy sân nắng đào  
Trời xanh, càng rộng càng cao  
Đôi con diều sáo lộn nhào tầng không...*

Meaning:

When the cuckoo calls the flock,  
Rice ripens golden, fruits grow sweet,  
In the garden, cicadas sing,  
Corn spreads its golden grains in the garden.  
The sky stretches wider, higher,  
Two kites twirl in the airy sweep...

*Khi con tu hú / When koel calls – Tô Hữu*

Tô Hữu vividly painted a charming picture of nature, incorporating typical imagery from Vietnamese life, such as cuckoos, ripe rice, sweet

fruits, the sound of cicadas heralding summer, golden corn drying in the yard, the cool blue sky of the chive season, and children flying kites on clear summer days. His poetry beautifully recreates the essence of summer life for the Vietnamese people.

Moreover, poetry not only acknowledges cultural norms but also serves as a tool to challenge them. Through their verses, poets can critique negative habits and reprehensible practices, condemning the less admirable aspects of human life (Sam, 2022). Readers often resonate with the author's perspective, which can shape their views and foster a collective understanding that promotes the condemnation of undesirable norms.

*Thừa tiền mua pháo đốt chơi  
Pháo nổ lên trời, tiền vút xuống ao*

Meaning:  
With spare money to play firecrackers,  
They burst in the sky, the cash sinks away.

Ca dao Việt Nam / Vietnamese Folk

In the context of Vietnam's past, when poverty was prevalent, the practice of buying firecrackers for significant family occasions was viewed as a negative habit. The loud bangs of firecrackers were meant to express joy during celebrations, a custom shared with other cultures influenced by China. However, for a country grappling with poverty, setting off firecrackers "exploding into the sky" was akin to "throwing money into the pond." This folk song critiques the wasteful practice of spending money on frivolous items like firecrackers, reflecting a societal pushback against such behavior during important family and village events.

**Poetic Language as a Reflection of Vietnamese Life and Cultural Values**

Language is the medium through which all facets of human life are conveyed, and poetry is no exception. Accordingly, poetry is a mode of human

communication occurring between author and reader. From a linguistic perspective, poetry encapsulates Vietnamese life and cultural values through the Ideational metafunction. For instance, the following poem captures the essence of the traditional Vietnamese Lunar New Year, depicting familiar images such as the early morning of the first day, when children are not allowed to go out, receive five and a half cents (a former currency unit) as lucky money, and wash their faces with scented water to welcome a prosperous new year.

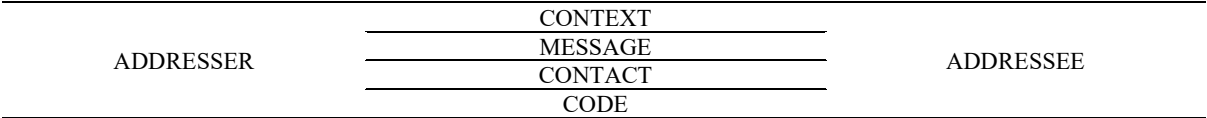
*Sáng ngày mồng một sớm tinh sương  
Mẹ tôi cấm chúng tôi ra đường  
Mở hàng mỗi đứa năm xu rưỡi  
Rửa mặt hoa mùi, nước đượm hương*

Meaning:  
The morning of the year with dawn's light aglow,  
My mother forbids us from venturing out.  
Each child receives five and a half cents  
Washing their faces in fragrant water with good smell

*Tết của mẹ tôi/My mother's Tet - Nguyen Binh*

Poetry operates as a communicative medium that forges a dialogic connection between the author and the reader, facilitating the exchange of meaning, emotion, and interpretation. In any speech event or verbal communication, several key components can be identified. The SENDER conveys a MESSAGE to the RECEIVER. For the message to be compelling, it requires a relevant CONTEXT that is comprehensible to the receiver, expressed verbally or through other means. Additionally, a CODE must be shared, either fully or partially, between the sender and receiver (or, in different terms, between the encoder and decoder of the message). Finally, CONTACT serves as both a physical channel and a psychological link, facilitating ongoing communication between the sender and receiver. These essential elements of verbal communication can be organized as follows (Jakobson, 1960).

**Figure 1**  
*Communicational Schema in Poetics*



Source: Jakobson, 1960

Thus, poetry fulfills the function of conveying messages from the writer (the poet) to the reader. As a unit of language (discourse), poetry captures and reflects the values of life and culture within a nation.

**Culture and Consumer Behavior**  
Culture exerts substantial influence on the values, beliefs, perceptions, norms, and behaviors of individuals within societies (Fu et al., 2004; Overby

et al., 2005; Touseef et al., 2023). Individuals function as conduits of cultural transmission and are frequently influenced by ethnocentrism and cultural relativism when formulating comparative judgments, particularly in consumption decisions (Asamoah & Chovancová, 2016; Lee & Sirgy, 1999). As posited by Crane (2016) and Knight and Cavusgil (2004), enterprises pursuing market expansion in globalized contexts require an understanding of the target demographic's cultural characteristics and the strategic navigation of consumers' reliance on cultural relativism to stimulate purchasing behavior effectively.

A culture's social structure comprises foundational elements including social groups, institutions, stratification systems, inter-class dynamics, and social resource allocation (DiMaggio, 2019; Ridgeway, 2001). Culture shapes social formations (Xu et al., 2022), while reciprocally, these groupings perform pivotal roles in cultural preservation and evolution (Blake, 2011). Each social collective (subculture) contributes differentially to cultural maintenance and development contingent upon distinctive group attributes (Jenks, 2004). Individuals typically occupy multiple group memberships, each associated with divergent status positions and class affiliations as delineated by societal conventions (Settles & Buchanan, 2014). Consequently, market targeting requires enterprise identification of consumer group affiliations to devise appropriately aligned marketing strategies congruent with cultural frameworks.

Institutional economics establishes that preference-shaping customs originate from individuals' cultural milieus (Bowles, 1998; Spong, 2019). These cultural forces advance fundamental, universal values, often at the expense of particularized individual needs (Schwartz, 1999, 2013). Such values represent paramount individual aspirations, functioning as potent behavioral catalysts that pervasively influence quotidian activities (Ford, 1992; Sagiv et al., 2017). All material economic phenomena are affected by sociocultural valuations (Kovalenko, 2022). Within this paradigm, consumers lack complete sovereignty; their preferences emerge from internalized cultural constructs, while social conventions, status considerations, and communal aesthetics mediate choices.

Socio-cultural transformations typically derive from extensive macro-level influences instigating progressive shifts with considerable and profound ramifications (Kanger & Schot, 2019; Kasdan, 2016). Phenomena pertaining to customs, lifestyles (Featherstone, 1987; Wind & Rangaswamy, 2001), religious factors (Finke, 2016; Finke & Stark, 2003),

and belief systems (Gries et al., 2022) may reconfigure market demand architectures. Socio-cultural determinants further directly impact corporate cultural environments, group dynamics, and the attitudinal frameworks, behavioral patterns, and relational strategies among managerial personnel, employees, commercial partners, and clientele (Sabri, 2004).

### **Context of Poetry Discourse**

Discourse analysis from a Foucauldian perspective (Foucault, 1972) emphasizes the necessity of situating discourse statements within a particular context. Consistent with this view, a Foucauldian discourse analyst examines how “games of truth” operate within broader social and political contexts, rather than focusing on meaning construction in everyday interactions (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2017). Halliday and Hasan (1989) distinguish two types of context: cultural and situational. To establish a framework for interpreting the relationship between poetry and consumption in Vietnam, we will ground our analysis in this theoretical foundation. As Wang and Xu (2009) note, folk culture significantly influences consumer beliefs and behaviors. Consequently, poetic forms rooted in folk culture—such as folk songs, nursery rhymes, and “ca trù”—play a crucial role in shaping consumption patterns in Vietnam. Folk culture is generally homogeneous, maintaining a relatively stable character across time and geography (Rubenstein & Bacon, 2014). By contrast, contemporary Vietnamese culture is embedded in a broader popular culture, characterized by transience, emerging trends, and rapid changes driven by mass media. This folkloric context provides insights into the traditional values underpinning Vietnam's consumption practices, while poetic expressions from popular culture reflect the prevailing social norms of the present era.

### **Previous Studies**

We conducted a comprehensive analysis to identify relevant studies at the intersection of poetry and consumption, focusing on articles published between 2020 and 2024. Utilizing the Scopus database with the keywords “poetics” and “consumption,” we identified a total of 79 articles that included these terms. This set formed the foundational dataset for the current study. We imported the dataset into VOSViewer, a software tool that visualizes frequently repeated keywords related to our main topic of investigation.

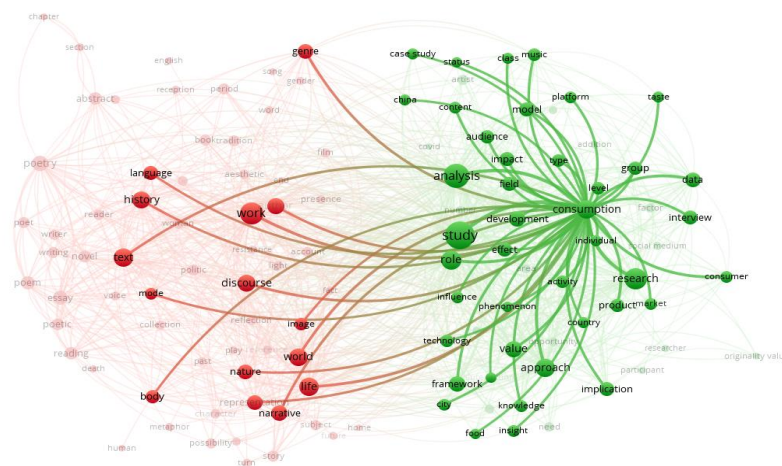
To enhance the validity and relevance of our findings, we performed a meticulous manual

selection process, narrowing the results to 20 studies deemed most relevant. This bibliometric approach aids in understanding the research landscape by providing a visual representation of the topic network and keyword density.

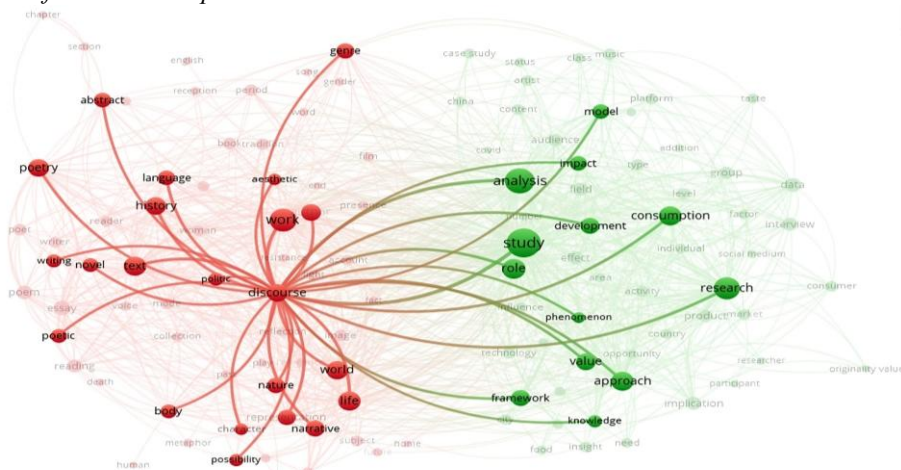
Figures 2 and 3 visually illustrate how the themes of “consumption” and “poetics” form two prominent but distinct clusters within the overall framework. While these clusters are separate, they share several important overlapping terms that connect both areas of research, underscoring the

nuanced relationships between them. The size of the circles in the diagrams represents key issues and themes closely related to these concepts, highlighting their significance in a broader context. The spacing between the circles emphasizes the nature of the relationships between keywords, revealing the dynamics at play in this research context. The main thematic clusters center on prominent keywords such as “discourse” and “research,” reflecting current trends in scholarship on these pivotal topics.

**Figure 2**  
*Keywords Matrix of Consumption Topic*



**Figure 3**  
*Keywords Matrix of Discourse Topic*



Overall, the visual arrangement not only highlights the themes of consumption and poetry but also contextualizes them within the larger narrative of contemporary academic inquiry. Although the thematic groups of “poetry” and “consumption” are not directly correlated, as demonstrated by the considerable distance between them and the absence

of links, Figure 3 indicates that discourse serves as the common intermediary focus in studies linking poetry and consumption. The bibliometric analysis suggests that recent studies engaging the keywords “poetry” and “consumption” predominantly employ discourse-analytic methods, narrative analysis, and case-study designs.

### **Discourse Analysis Approach**

Swearingen and Cutting-Gray (2003) undertake an interdisciplinary discourse analysis situated within postmodern culture. They examine representations of extreme beauty across diverse contexts and material conditions, contending that such beauty cannot be understood in isolation; instead, it emerges from the confluence of political narratives and existential reflections on mortality. From a multicultural Asian-Australian perspective, Morris (2008) conducts a metaphor analysis that traces how Asian-Australian writers mobilize oppositional poetics to articulate personal experience and address persistent forms of racism and sexism, while elucidating the entanglements of consumption, food, and agency in their novels. Brewer (2013) employs historical-critical discourse analysis to examine eighteenth-century French culture, demonstrating how the material conditions of literary production, dissemination, and consumption shaped emergent Romantic sensibilities during the French Revolution.

Similarly, Wright (2011) analyzes discourse surrounding Samoan culture and translation poetics. By treating translation as a locus of cultural difference, the study reveals how Western aesthetics intersect with neocolonialism and consumerism within translational practice. Kinnahan (2012) investigates modern New York subculture, examining the poetry of pioneering women writers in dialogue with economic theories of gender, and foregrounding tensions between capitalist consumer economies and feminist socio-economics. Goul (2014) argues that Renaissance culture, deeply informed by Greek mythology, shapes François Rabelais's work; the analysis probes representations of waste to theorize abundance and scarcity, showing how these depictions signify the tension between excess and insufficiency and expose broader conceptual entanglements.

In a related vein, Alatas (2016) explores Islamic culture in Indonesia, framing pilgrimage as a poetic enterprise capable of conveying spiritual ideals while highlighting structural affinities with other forms of tourism, with an emphasis on experiential dimensions. Kalinowski (2020) undertakes an ecocritical and textual analysis within British culture, reading Peter Larkin's poetic discourse on scarcity to illuminate the interdependence of the natural world and human finitude in contexts of economic consumption. Van den Hengel (2023) examines ecopoetics through discourse analysis in Appalachia, focusing on queer identity in relation to environmental and socio-economic concerns and highlighting the intersections among ecology, identity, and consumption. MacKenzie (2023)

likewise analyzes discourse at the nexus of Middle Eastern and Asian cultural interaction through the lens of spices, arguing that spice discourse encompasses poetry, sensuality, travel, difference, and coloniality, and that contemporary spice consumption is inseparable from social order and historical context.

### **Narrative Analysis Approach**

Recent scholarship demonstrates growing interest in deploying poetic analysis to interrogate cultural phenomena and consumption. Wijland and Fell (2009) advocate narrative analysis to uncover how marketing artefacts convey cultural meanings, offering a distinctive alternative to conventional brand recontextualization. Crow (2019) undertakes a comparative analysis of early modern English and religious cultures through Robert Herrick's poetry, illuminating the poet's subtle critique of social instability via formal manipulation. Extending this trajectory, Stoica (2022) compares Eastern and Western cultural formations in the postcolonial era, examining the poetics of excess across literature and film. Most recently, Gross (2023) provides a comparative literary study of post-Napoleonic European culture, applying Barthes's sociological theory of food to analyze a "poetics of spice" as satirical commentary on consumption, and highlighting the societal reach of Thomas Moore's poetry. Collectively, these studies attest to the utility of poetic analysis for elucidating complex cultural dynamics and social critique.

### **Case Study Approach**

The interdisciplinary inquiry into culture, poetics, and consumption—at the intersection of literary studies, sociology, and cultural studies—has yielded substantial insights into the relations between cultural artefacts and social life. Building on Cheang et al. (2018), Wood (2010), Binotto and Payne (2017), Ray et al. (2020), and Bakker (2013), this body of work demonstrates how established and emergent cultural forms encode social meanings, mediate power, and shape material realities. From Cheang et al.'s (2018) account of Taiwan's cultural heritage amid digitization, to Wood's reading of Lucretius at the juncture of research, creativity, poetics, and consumerism, to Bakker's analysis of Homeric imagery within agricultural history, culture appears as a dynamic process continually produced, contested, and reimagined through textual and visual representation. Complementarily, Binotto and Payne (2017) elucidate the poetics of aesthetics in contemporary fashion and waste, while Ray et al. (2020) foreground Indigenous and street-food cultures in India to decolonize expectations of taste.



Together, these studies underscore the centrality of narrative analysis to understanding how culture both shapes and is shaped by social, economic, and historical forces.

Similar to the bibliometric results, most studies on this topic employ discursive methods, with the relationship between poetry and consumption often mediated by an intermediary object or metaphorical image. These studies approach poetry through two primary perspectives: first, examining it as a cultural aspect that influences consumption, and second, considering it as a cultural product that can be consumed within social contexts.

Building upon the strengths of these related studies, we employ the discursive method to interpret the content of the selected poetic data in this article. Additionally, to ensure relevance to the Vietnamese cultural context and the local consumption landscape, we employ interpretive methods in the discussion section to clarify the relationship between poetry and consumption in Vietnam.

## **METHODS**

This study employs a qualitative research design that integrates Foucauldian discourse analysis with interpretive analysis. The Foucauldian approach investigates how discourse shapes individuals' understanding of poetry and its cultural significance (Barker & Galasinski, 2001; Easthope, 2013). By contrast, interpretive analysis enables examination of the data from the researcher's perspective, emphasizing the context and meaning underlying the findings (Yanow, 2000). The origins of Interpretive Analysis as a research method can be traced to the nineteenth century, with Max Weber (1864–1920), whose *verstehen* approach is described as a systematic interpretive process in which an external observer seeks to relate to the subject and render it comprehensible to others (Kadyschuk, 2023). This methodology is particularly well-suited for examining the relationship between poetry and consumption in Vietnam.

In this study, culture is treated as an intermediary object to illuminate how poetry influences consumption patterns in Vietnam. The conceptual framework draws on cultural studies theory, with a focus on cultural materialism, which examines the historical, cultural, and material contexts that shape poetry and reflect ideological shifts within society (Dollimore & Sinfield, 1985). This perspective maintains that poetry both conveys meaning and shapes individuals' cultural experiences (Greenblatt, 2013), and it provides a theoretical basis

for understanding culture's influence on consumer behavior (Khalifa, 2015).

A comprehensive corpus of fifty renowned poetic works has been assembled to foreground Vietnamese literature and to acknowledge the contributions of notable authors. The poems were selected according to the criterion that they contain vocabulary directly related to Vietnamese consumer behavior. Nine of these works were chosen for in-depth discourse analysis to reveal their nuanced reflections on consumption in contemporary Vietnam. This analysis seeks to uncover the layers of meaning embedded in the texts, illustrating how poets employ language to critique, celebrate, and navigate the complexities of consumption in Vietnamese society today.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS**

### **Cultural Narratives**

Cultural narratives establish frameworks through which individuals construct their identities and life stories (Koch et al., 2021). These narratives significantly influence consumer preferences by providing themes that resonate with personal experiences (Rahmanian et al., 2021). These expressions manifest in diverse forms, including literature, myths, legends, proverbs, cultural values, beliefs, and rituals (Stern, 1989). Bettany (2022) posits that cultural narratives are frequently articulated through poetic forms. Specifically, within Vietnamese culture, this phenomenon can be exemplified by the subsequent poem:

*Thu ăn măng trúc, đông ăn giá  
Xuân tắm hồ sen, hạ tắm ao.*

Meaning:

Autumn feasts on bamboo, winter enjoys beans;  
Spring relaxes in lotus, summer in ponds.

*Cảnh nhàn* / Leisure scene - Nguyen Binh Khiem

Bamboo shoots from the deep forests of Yen Tu—recognized as the cradle of Buddhism in Vietnam—represent not only a meaningful gift but also a delightful product of the mountains. Bamboo shoots from the deep forests of Yen Tu—recognized as the cradle of Buddhism in Vietnam—represent not only a meaningful gift but also a delightful product of the mountains. Bamboo shoots, harvested in the fall, highlight the practice of enjoying seasonal products, a hallmark of Vietnamese culinary culture. Likewise, the cold winters in Northern Vietnam often cause discomfort, underscoring the need for increased energy intake to combat the cold. Consequently, careful dietary choices are paramount for providing



adequate energy and bolstering the immune system. Nutritionists recommend consuming foods like soybean sprouts and green beans, which are rich in protein, fat, carbohydrates, sodium, phosphorus, iron, calcium, and essential trace elements. This poem thereby captures the diverse culinary culture of the Vietnamese people.

The two lines excerpted from Nom poem number 73, in the collection "*Bach Van Quoc Ngu Thi*" (Bach Van's National Language Poetry) by Nguyen Binh Khiem, composed in the 16th century, express the author's philosophy of living harmoniously with nature. The narrative about daily life reflects the folk cultural belief that "each season has its own food" within Vietnamese consumption practices. This is evident in the price trends of seasonal products in Vietnam; for instance, the price of lychee in June 2024 soared to three times higher than the previous year, attributed to a 50% drop in production due to unfavorable weather conditions. Seasonal consumption often leads to the "good harvest, low price" phenomenon in Vietnam, contrasting with countries that rely on genetically modified organisms (GMOs) to provide off-season products at lower costs (Choi, 2010). In Vietnam, agricultural products typically sell at lower prices during bumper harvests due to challenges with long-term preservation and ineffective supply and distribution chains, reflecting society's ability to translate cultural concepts into actual consumer behavior (Carrus et al., 2018).

### Rituals and Traditions

Traditions serve as behavioral principles established within specific contexts and passed down through generations (Bronner, 2011). In the era of globalization, traditions offer a sense of cultural identity and continuity, guiding individuals in establishing their styles and choosing their behaviors (Corner & Harvey, 1991). Within the context of consumption, traditions dictate what is purchased,

when, and how products are consumed (UNESCO, 2022). For example, during the Vietnamese New Year (Tet), the consumption of essential products demonstrates this tradition:

*Gạo nếp ngày xuân gói bánh chưng  
Cà đêm cuối chạp nướng than hồng.  
Quần đào, áo đỏ, tranh gà lợn,  
Com tấm dưa hành, thịt mỡ đông.*

#### Meaning

Spring sticky rice to wrap Banh Chung,  
Night lunar final month, roast hot coals.  
Peach pants, red shirt, chicken, pigs' paintings,  
Fragrant rice, pickled onions, frozen fatty meat

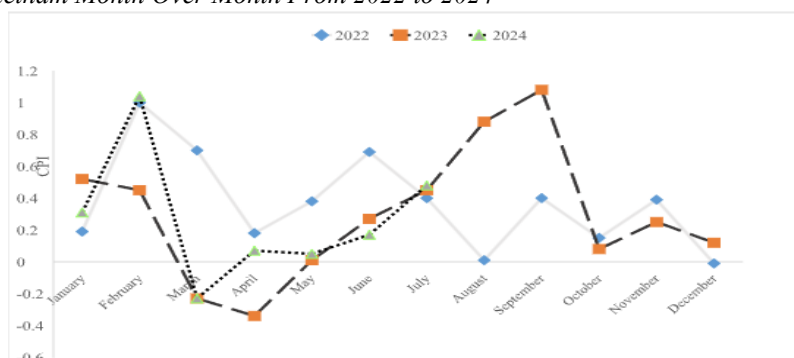
*Tết Quê Bà* / Tet in my grandma's hometown - Doan Van Cu (1941)

The imagery of Tet in my hometown begins with sticky rice wrapped in Chung cake, a familiar and traditional symbol of Tet for the Vietnamese. On the final night of the twelfth lunar month, the warmth from a charcoal grill creates a joyful atmosphere for family reunions. Visual elements like peach branches, red shirts, chicken and pig paintings, sticky rice, pickled onions, and braised pork craft a vivid tapestry of Tet celebrations.

Folk songs in Vietnamese culture reflect these traditions, as illustrated in the lines: "Fatty meat, pickled onions, red parallel sentences. Tet pole, green Chung cake." This shows that modern cultural poetry, such as Doan Van Cu's "Tet in my grandma's hometown," not only mirrors contemporary social norms but also conveys the traditional values inherent in Vietnamese identity. Indeed, consumption conventions during Tet have a substantial impact on the Vietnamese commodity market, particularly in the first quarter of each year, where the average Consumer Price Index (CPI) increases by 0.5-1% compared to other quarters, sometimes rising 2-3% compared to the previous year (Vietnam Ministry of Finance Electronic Information Portal).

Figure 4

Average CPI in Vietnam Month Over Month From 2022 to 2024



Moreover, traditions evoke emotions and memories that can significantly influence consumer decisions, creating distinct consumption rituals for events and festivals characteristic of local cultures. Such rituals often unfold at special times and places, staged through symbols and signs within the consumption process (Gainer, 1995; Vohs et al., 2013; Wallendorf & Arnould, 1991). These rituals help preserve cultural heritage and honor traditions, reminding communities of their worldview and historical narratives (UNESCO, 2022). In Vietnam, the reunion dinner symbolizes the traditional Tet holiday, prompting businesses to leverage this imagery in their marketing and branding strategies at the start of the year. A notable example is the Nepturn campaign, "*Tet Reunion: Come Home for Tet, Family Above All*," which has been running since its launch in 2013 and continues to generate strong social media engagement, with millions of views across platforms like YouTube and TikTok.

### Social Structure and Class

Social structure refers to a hierarchy of social relationships and arrangements shaped by factors such as class, status, roles, and institutions (Calhoun, 2010). Consumers often use products to signal their status and how they wish to be perceived by others (Nelissen & Meijers, 2011). Unlike countries with distinct class divisions, such as India (Jayapalan, 2001) and Brazil (Costa, 2016), the social hierarchy in Vietnam primarily stems from a wealth gap (Nguyen & Hoang, 2015). However, Vietnamese social capital is characterized by strong community cohesion, particularly among small groups of acquaintances and close friends (An & Phuong, 2021). As a result, Vietnamese consumer behavior often does not strongly reflect social hierarchy, especially concerning products with cultural significance, such as rustic dishes or national specialties like Banh Mi and Pho.

*Cánh thuyền thợ làm ăn vất vả  
Phở xơi no cũng đỡ nhọc nhằn  
Khách làm thơ, đêm thức viết văn  
Được bát phở cũng đỡ buồn khoăn óc bí  
Bọn đào kép, con nhà ca kỹ  
Lấy phở làm đầu vị giải lao  
Chúng chị em sớm muộn, tối đào  
Nhờ có phở cũng đỡ hao nhan sắc*

Meaning:

The boatmen work hard,  
A bowl of Pho makes them feel less tired.  
The poets stay up all night writing,  
A bowl of Pho makes them feel less anxious...  
The actors and actresses, and singers,  
Take Pho as a leisure after work  
The girl with plum morning, peach night

Thanks to Pho, their beauty less damaged.

Pho dục tụng / Virtues Praise of Pho - Tu Mo (1933)

The lines convey the central role of Pho, a beloved dish, in the lives of the Vietnamese people. Pho is universally appreciated and enjoyed at various times throughout the day, most commonly for breakfast and late at night. Phrases like "*Cánh thuyền thợ*" (referring to fishermen), "*Khách làng thơ*" (referring to writers), "*Bọn đào kép*" (calling traditional art performers in feudal times), and "*chúng chị em sớm muộn, tối đào*" (referring to women with many lovers) highlight the broad appeal of Pho. These verses illustrate that Pho is deeply intertwined with Vietnamese cultural life, reflecting its universal enjoyment at different times of the day. The poetry underscores the values of culture, particularly culinary traditions, in the daily existence of the Vietnamese people.

Through the folk poetry form of Ca trù (Vietnamese tally card songs), the author reflects on Vietnamese consumption as classless. In the past, during the feudal period, the Vietnamese social structure comprised scholars, farmers, workers, and merchants, which led to noticeable distinctions in consumer behavior. Yet, traditional folk culture satirizes this system of social stratification with the folk rhyme "First scholar, second farmer. Out of rice, run around, first farmer, second scholar", illustrating that society does not accept such divisions. Thus, the author Tu Mo employs folk poetics to reaffirm the contemporary social norm of consumption as classless in Vietnam, highlighting how poetry embodies and expresses cultural consumption across various social contexts.

This social classless image in consumption is further exemplified by the culinary experiences of prominent figures such as former Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull at a sidewalk sandwich shop in Da Nang and former US President Barack Obama at the Huong Lien Bun Cha restaurant in Hanoi. These experiences suggest that professional status, wealth, and education do not determine product value in Vietnam.

### Individual vs. Collective

Vietnamese folk songs often contain wisdom, such as the saying, "One tree cannot make a forest; three trees together can make a high mountain," which reflects the tradition of solidarity and collective spirit ingrained in Vietnamese society throughout history. Moreover, the Socialist regime in Vietnam represents a transitional stage toward Communism, characterized by a collective class structure (Resnick

& Wolff, 1988), making Vietnamese society a quintessential example of a collectivist culture (Dinh & Ho, 2020). Poetry, particularly works emerging after the New Poetry movement, advocates for this collective spirit, epitomizing the social values of Vietnamese society. Tho Moi (New Poetry), emerging after 1941-1945, marked a Vietnamese movement in which poets shifted from traditional forms such as Tang poetry and Hat Noi to embrace French romantic and symbolic techniques (Phinney, 2008; Raffin, 2008; Tien & Truong, 2020). This creative change transformed both poetic style and aesthetics, creating a distinct era. The shift reflected cultural needs by expressing national identity and contemporary context, while offering a comparative perspective on past and present (Tien & Truong, 2020). It brought unique value to Vietnamese poetry, later gaining recognition and inclusion in Vietnamese high school textbooks from 1981 to 2000 (Vietnamese Literature Class 11, 2000).

*Một ngôi sao chẳng sáng đêm  
Một thân lúa chín, chẳng nên mùa vàng  
Một người – đâu phải nhân gian?  
Sống chẳng, một đốm lửa tàn mà thôi!*

Meaning

A star not light the night.  
Ripe rice not give a bumpy golden yield.  
A person, can't present a people?  
Living, is just a brief, fading fire ember

*Tiếng ru / Lullaby - To Huu (1966)*

The poem captures familiar images for the Vietnamese people, such as *stars, rice stalks, people, and fire* - countless figures. Through these symbols, the author conveys the message that an individual cannot create a beautiful world alone; a single star cannot illuminate the night sky, and a solitary rice plant cannot form a golden rice field. This highlights the vital importance of collective solidarity in society and human life. The poem encourages us to love, protect, and unite with one another to foster positive outcomes for our country.

Contemporary poetry mirrors the social norms of its time, and to align with the collective spirit in modern Vietnam, businesses in the consumer market must establish connections with the community and embrace the principles of social entrepreneurship (Berkley, 2008). This approach contributes to creating sustainable economic values (Dufays & Huybrechts, 2014) and a foundation for a connected society (Van Dijck et al., 2018). In practice, corporate community engagement campaigns have garnered positive responses and enthusiastic public support. One notable example is the Fireflies Den education

promotion program initiated by the Dutch Lady brand of Friesland Campina Vietnam Company, which has spanned over 20 years, resulted in the establishment of 25 schools, and provided thousands of scholarships to impoverished yet diligent students in Vietnam. Additionally, initiatives such as "*I box of milk, I brick*" and "*Love nutrition, sharing together*" have encouraged Vietnamese consumers to favor Dutch Lady products, helping the brand secure its place among the top 10 brands in Vietnam today.

**Time Orientation**

Time perspective significantly influences consumer decision-making styles (Dao, 2017; Legohérel et al., 2009). The research by Ho et al. (2020) indicates that most Asian countries, including Vietnam, possess a nostalgic time orientation that emphasizes cultural values more than in other regions. This sentiment is poignantly reflected in modern Vietnamese poetry, exemplified by Xuan Dieu's famous poem "*Vội vàng / Hastily*" and Te Hanh's "*Quê hương / Homeland*".

*Chẳng biết nước có giữ ngày, giữ tháng  
Giữ bao nhiêu kỷ niệm giữa dòng trôi  
Hỡi con sông đã tắm cả đời tôi!  
Tôi giữ mãi mối tình còn mới mẻ*

Meaning

Do water keep the days, and the months  
Keep how many memories in the flowing stream?  
Oh, the river that bathed my whole life!  
I will forever keep love like the start

*Quê hương tôi / My Homeland - Te Hanh (1939)*

The latter poem beautifully describes the river and its water, invoking the association of rivers with the homeland in Vietnamese and other Eastern cultures. In these societies, all human activities are closely tied to rivers, as Eastern civilizations historically flourished along riverbanks. Vietnamese rivers preserve time and memories, capturing images of children playing in the water and young lovers enjoying each other's company by the riverside in the 1960s. The poem expresses the author's profound love for his homeland, transcending both space and time. Patriotism occupies the paramount position within the value system of the Vietnamese people, encompassing profound life philosophies that have early on evolved into a way of living, ideals, and beliefs integral to their spiritual fabric throughout history (Do & Quang, 2023; Van, 2025). This philosophy plays a pivotal role in educating younger generations, leading esteemed poetic works such as "*My Homeland*" to be not only highly revered and widely disseminated among the populace but also consistently integrated into educational curricula, in addition to being adapted into musical compositions

and broadcast on Vietnam Television programs, including "Giải điệu cuộc sống" and "S-Vietnam."

Through this poem, we see that the Vietnamese people have a deep attachment to their "homeland," making the preservation of traditional cultural values a fundamental instinct and obligation for social progress in Vietnam (Schlecker, 2005). Indeed, several businesses have achieved considerable success by focusing on cultural values and historical contexts in their marketing campaigns. A prime example is the footwear company Biti's Vietnam. The campaign "Cherish Vietnamese Feet," with its evocative message—"Au Co's footsteps up the mountain, Lac Long Quan's footsteps down to the sea; Tay Son's footsteps at lightning speed; footsteps crossing the Truong Son range; footsteps entering the new millennium"—successfully connected the brand to consumers in 2002. The figures of Au Co and Lac Long Quan, regarded as the legendary ancestors of the Vietnamese people, symbolize the union of the fairy and the dragon and represent the mythical origin of Vietnam's cultural identity. The reference to the Tay Son evokes the brief yet significant 18th-century period marked by victories over the Siamese and Qing forces. At the same time, the mention of the Truong Son range recalls the historic Ho Chi Minh trail, a powerful symbol of national resilience during the Vietnam War.

Following this achievement, Biti's launched the series "With Biti's, Children Love Folk Culture More" in 2017, promoting the spirit of #ProudlyMadeinVietnam and consistently releasing collections inspired by folk culture, such as the "Hanoi Culture Patchwork" for the 1010th anniversary of Thang Long-Hanoi and the "Blooming Central" collection. This approach has sustained support among Vietnamese consumers over the past 35 years. Currently, Biti's boasts an expansive distribution network throughout the country, with seven branch centers, 156 marketing stores, and over 1,500 retail outlets, producing more than 20 million pairs of shoes annually.

## CONCLUSION

Consumption is a complex social phenomenon where individuals engage with goods or services for reasons that extend beyond mere functional use. It reflects the culture in which such behaviors occur. According to McCracken (1987), culture forms categories of people, time, space, activities, and objects that shape consumption behaviors, along with distinctions such as class, gender, age, and occupation (McCracken, 1990). In this cultural context, poetry reflects social values and norms related to consumption (Middleton,

2005). Using a qualitative approach to discourse analysis, this article examines the relationship between Vietnamese poetry and consumption. It situates poetry within two levels of language use: situational and cultural (Halliday & Hasan, 1989). Poetry thus becomes a lens through which we can examine consumption patterns within a specific historical and cultural milieu, revealing the intricate interplay between art and everyday life (Sherry & Schouten, 2002). The narratives and cultural expressions in Vietnamese poetics delineate a coherent ethic of consumption and identity. The depiction of everyday life affirms the folk principle that each season is matched with its proper foods, thereby promoting consumption within cyclical temporalities. Vietnamese folk songs—particularly those associated with Tết—simultaneously mirror contemporary social norms and transmit enduring values central to national identity. Patterns of consumer behavior, especially regarding rustic dishes and regional specialties, frequently resist rigid social hierarchies, privileging shared cultural meaning over status display. Poetry, moreover, advances a collective ethos while articulating a profound, transhistorical attachment to homeland. In concert, these elements illustrate how aesthetic expression, ritual practice, and quotidian consumption mutually constitute a resilient social imaginary in Vietnam. Vietnamese poetry, in reflecting the material culture of contemporary society, also influences consumer perceptions. Leveraging these influences, many businesses in Vietnam have developed targeted communication and promotional strategies, successfully capturing consumer attention and encouraging purchasing decisions.

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