



Momma: Understanding Young Farmers' Perspective of Betel Nut Chewing in Bashoy, Kabayan, Benguet, Philippines

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Abstract

This paper explores how young farmers in Bashoy, Kabayan, Benguet perceive betel nut chewing through the reasons, beliefs, and social meanings they attach to the practice. The researcher employed the qualitative research design through the conduct of in-depth interviews and participant observation. The respondents of this study provided a new perspective on betel nut chewing as it is already an integrated part of their farming life. They claim betel nut chewing as a productive vice because it provides them with benefits such as warmth, strength, focus, relaxation, and hunger and thirst regulation. Betel nut chewing has also become an integral part of creating and cementing friendship among farmers as it is also a part of their celebratory practice after every harvest and other occasions. It has slowly built its place as an agent of communication among chewers which are also farmers.

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Introduction

Chewing betel nut is already a habit among young farmers in Kabayan, Benguet. It is practiced due to the belief that it brings benefits to those who chew it. According to Balangcod and Balangcod (2018), the betel nut or *buwa* as the Ibaloi people call it, is chewed and sometimes swallowed for its anthelmintic properties that helps kill parasites in the intestine (Strickland, 2002). It is also claimed to strengthen one's teeth (Ahuja & Ahuja, 2011). This has been the primary reason heard from young farmers who made it a habit to chew betel nut, before, during and after their work in the farm.

In addition, young betel nut chewers today are chewing based on their own socially constructed beliefs and meanings. According to Bourdieu, as cited by Brubaker (1985), social life is materially

grounded and conditioned, but material conditions affect behavior in large part through the mediation of individual beliefs, dispositions and experiences. Hence, this study aims to understand the underlying social meanings, reasons and beliefs of young farmers of Bashoy, Kabayan, Benguet in relation to the consumption of betel nut through exploring their betel nut chewing experiences.

Social Meanings Attached to Consuming Momma

The anthropological perspectives on the use of the areca nut of Strickland (2002), states that, "...the widespread practice of sharing areca nut is a means of facilitating relaxed behavior, whether between strangers or acquaintances." This is also closely associated with courtesy since offering and acceptance of the '*momma*' when greeting

someone or when leaving can be viewed as an agent of feeling a sense of belongingness. Thus, chewing betel nut cannot be separated from establishing good relationship with fellow men. Chewing betel nut together is seen as a way of strengthening bonds. The mere act of letting someone share with one's piper betel leaves (*gawed*), lime (*apog*) and betel nut (*buwa*) is already an act of showing someone that he is welcome to the group. Ascribed social status is also often ignored in a nice way through the offering and sharing of '*gawed*', '*apog*' and '*buwa*'. In a sense, chewing '*momma*' lessens social stratification based on a person's social status.

Strickland (2002) also mentioned that a practice such as areca (betel nut) use distinguishes an ethnic minority from the majority of the population. Chewers do not necessarily regard non-betel nut chewers as "others"; they feel more secure being with someone whom they can share the same interest with, their co-betel nut chewers.

Moreover, betel nut is also used in courtship and marriage practices among peoples in the lands bordering the Indian Ocean and South China Sea. The exchange of betel nut between the bride and groom is taken as a symbol or token of love (Strickland, 2002).

In the Philippine Cordilleras, chewing betel nut also expresses meaning that is beyond mere vice and habit. According to Bulwayan et al. (2023), the significance of chewing betel nut is clearly manifested in the Kalinga epic, *Ullalim*. One of the best features of chewing that was manifested in the study is the practice of chewing betel nut as a gesture of friendship and a means of maintaining camaraderie and friendship among the chewers. Additionally, the *Ullalim* highlights the importance of betel nut in courtship, marriage and assertion of masculinity in men, particularly among warriors. Chewing is one of the manifestations of bravery and a celebration for a victorious battle (Bulwayan et al., 2023).

Young Farmers and Betel Nut Chewing

Nelson and Heischouer (1999) established that betel nut chewing is addictive, like the consumption of nicotine. Betel nut chewing starts before adolescence, under the influence of the family structure and cultural traditions. Adding the '*momma*' recipe with tobacco can even worsen

the dependence to this habit for the use of tobacco as an additive encourages continued betel nut use and possibly tobacco use in adulthood.

Young farmers consume betel nut because it has become a part of their daily routine without necessarily ignoring its possible adverse health effects. According to the study of Javed et al. (2010), chewers cited the habit of chewing betel nut as "beneficial" because it helped them control hunger. Farming requires physical strength and tends to drive the body's metabolism faster. Therefore, as a way for farmers to finish their job easily and efficiently, chewing betel nut while performing their task is the best option instead of being disrupted by hunger and thirst.

The World Health Organization Report (2012) also acknowledged that the use of betel nut is associated with both immediate and long-term physiological effects such as heightened awareness, hot sensation, diminished thirst and hunger, and more importantly, a relaxed and happy feeling. Reid, as cited by Strickland (2002), likewise argue that the use of betel nut must be attributed primarily to its relaxant properties. For young farmers, these are regarded as positive effects of chewing betel nut rather than a harmful effect.

M e t h o d o l o g y

Individuals construct their self, identity and interaction through meaning-making. The social self (Mead, 1934) as cited by Holstein and Gubrium (2007) is viewed as the anchor of the meaning-making process. The study sought to prove that betel nut chewing of farmers is anchored in their daily interaction and meaning-making process which these farmers have experienced and tested through time.

Specifically, this study sought to understand chewing betel nut habit of the young farmers of Bashoy, Kabayan, Benguet by determining their reasons and beliefs for chewing while also studying the social meanings that they attach to betel nut chewing.

The study used a qualitative research design using in-depth interviews while considering the ethnographic approach. The study tried to determine the reasons and beliefs of the young



farmers for chewing betel nut and studied the social meanings attached to the practice. The study also explored how the betel nut chewers experience and understand betel nut chewing. Prior to data collection, the researcher asked the consent of the participants and explained the research objectives, with the guarantee of anonymity, confidentiality, and assurance of the voluntary nature of their participation. The data was gathered through participant observation, in-depth interviews and narratives from 15 young farmers of Bashoy, Kabayan, Benguet ages 16 to 34 years old who have been using betel nut for years. The recorded observation and interviews were manually transcribed, coded and analyzed thematically.

Results and Discussion

Reasons for Chewing Betel Nut

Trend

Participants trace local betel nut chewing's immense popularity to have started in 2015. They followed the trend of chewing betel nut from the Kalanguya group. The practice started from mere curiosity until it became very popular among all ages. In 2015, when chewing has become a trend in Kabayan, most of the male locals of Bashoy, Kabayan including younger boys were seen chewing betel nut. Most of the research participants narrated that they started using betel nut in 2015 during the time when betel nut chewing has become so popular among men. In the same year, a lot of betel nut residues were observed on every corner of the roads. The chewers asserted that these residues and the number of individuals chewing sparked their interest to follow the trend. According to most of the participants, they didn't take an interest in chewing betel nut the first time it became popular. They found the chewing residues spread everywhere to be dirty and nauseous. Later on, the practice became very popular and a lot of men from all age group started to take part with the trend. Two of the respondents felt left out because most of their *'barkadas'* or peers and co-farmers were already chewing, so they eventually joined into the practice. *'Edi ingalkal kami ma, singa arigtoma e parti kami ni binadegan min dugad. Singa balodaki may meka pandekna.'* (When we started chewing, we felt that we are

already a part of the society where we were born and raised. We eventually felt like we're starting to live like adults.) a respondent in his 20s explained.

Influence

There are two primary influencers of chewing that surfaced in the study, the male family members and peers. First, chewers were influenced by their male family members such as their fathers, uncles, brothers and grandfathers. Most of them started chewing because it is what they have observed as a dominant practice of most men in the community and in their family. While growing up, they have been exposed in an environment of chewers and they eventually acquired the habit of sharing betel nut with their family members. While the older folks didn't exactly teach them how to chew, they were not also necessarily lectured not to follow their path as chewers. One chewer even joked that chewing betel nut is not necessarily taught, it is learned because we've been chewing (food) to survive for the longest time.

"Igshaak intud-an ja mengalkal, naka onoshi bengat. Say nanshugian to imusun sikak ket hota kapiyan koson iparas nu ngane nanam to, sunga nangdaakshi sokbong nen angkel ko nunta maramay apit nuntan shi kadnan mi. Kwansha ishan ji para pejed ni agang tan agas ni bedey. (No one really taught me how to chew betel nut, I just picked it up for a taste. It all started when I acquired the betel nut chewing ingredients from my uncle's 'sukbong' (a small bag which contains all the betel nut chewing ingredients). It was during harvest time in our farm when I first tried it because I always hear them say that chewing cures hunger and tiredness.)" a young farmer narrated.

Indeed, betel nut chewing may start even before or during adolescence, under the influence of the family structure and cultural traditions present in the community where an individual belongs (Nelson & Heischouer, 1999).

Second, the younger research participants narrated that they started chewing betel nut during their elementary days and junior high school years due to peer influence. Most of their friends are chewing betel nut and as a way of showing that they belong to the group, they also started chewing.



When they were still not chewing, they claimed that they feel left out. Though no discriminatory words were said, they felt awkward seeing their friends chewing betel nut and they were not. They claim to feel shy and restless not being able to participate in the activity of their peers. They explained that they were not forced to follow their friends but the urge to feel a sense of belongingness especially in an unfamiliar atmosphere such as at the school pushed them to chew betel nut.

Another young chewer also explained that although no one forced him to chew betel nut, he felt pressured because he is the only person in his group who doesn't chew. He also added that chewing is his springboard to find friends who share common interests as students and farmers. Indeed, chewing betel nut helps reinforce self-identity and a sense of belonging (Ma et al., 2017). This may be seen as a reason why it is a rare sight in school and in the community that a non-chewer is constantly with a group of chewers.

Substitute to Smoking

The respondents claimed that before chewing betel nut has become popular, vices revolved around drinking alcohol and smoking cigarette. Although chewing betel nut did not lessen the number of men in the community who drink liquor especially after harvests and other occasions, the chewers asserted that most men in the community can now be seen chewing rather than smoking. They even added that it is already rare for a father or an uncle to carry a child while smoking because they are already chewing, which they claim is safer. Also, some of the research participants narrated that chewing betel nut became their best option to stop smoking cigarette. "*Shubda nen I singa bisyok jet idi nakamangka bala insalsheng ko. Insadat koy buwa ... kalkal.* (Smoking cigarette was my first vice but when I felt something wrong with my liver, I stopped smoking. I resorted to chewing betel nut instead)," a farmer in his thirties narrated.

It usually takes time before someone can truly give up cigarette smoking; others cannot even cope with the changes and experience withdrawal symptoms. The generalized estimating questions in Hendricks et al. (2006) revealed that abstaining smokers displayed greater withdrawal than those who were just instructed to smoke lesser cigarettes than they used to. Nonetheless,

in this study, some of the former smokers have found a remedy to give up smoking through betel nut chewing which they claim is a better option among other vices because according to them, compared to smoking, chewing betel nut have not manifested any significant adverse effect on their health.

Habit and Dependence

Despite the number of enumerated reasons by the farmers who were betel nut chewers, habit and dependence were the common denominators. The betel nut chewers for almost 3 to 7 years now, have already become dependent of chewing betel nut.

Thus, the study of Nelson and Heischouer (1999) on the addictiveness of betel nut chewing holds true for the young farmers who were aware that their dependence is most likely caused by the tobacco ingredient that they mix into what they chew (*kalkal*). Aside from the tobacco, the everyday chewing routine has already developed into a *siring* or habit.

Based on the chewers' narratives, this habit and dependence on betel nut chewing is rooted in the toothache that most of the chewers pointed out as the main reason they are chewing. Most chewers argued that their chewing habit is not out of vice or addiction but medication.

Some of the betel nut chewers argued that they are not addicted as they can function normally even without chewing. However, they needed to chew betel nut when they experience toothache. Chewing betel nut has already become their first aid for toothache. According to the study of Benegal et al. (2008) on betel nut dependence, they enumerated ache and pain reduction as one of the beneficial effects of betel nut chewing. Balangcod and Balangcod (2018) in their study on plant utilization in Kabayan also cited betel nut as a cure for toothache.

Unlike non-chewers who immediately ask for pain killers and antibiotics, some betel nut chewers look for a good quality betel nut to ease the pain brought by toothache and eventually heals it. They even argue that chewing cures better and faster than over-the-counter medicine. Strickland (2002) found out that betel nut has both sedative and analgesic properties that moderate feeling and relieve pain.



However, in the long run, the toothache which they have claimed as their reason for chewing betel nut turned into a tooth itch. Through listening to the chewers' stories, it was found out that they generally feel a prompt when they needed to chew betel nut. "*Nu igkita mingalkal singa unsakit I sangi.* (If we don't chew betel nut, it seems that we will experience toothache)," *one farmer in his thirties explained.* "*Kami ka mingalkal nu unkatel I sangi mi tan kami ka man-iilol.* (We chew betel nut when we feel tooth itchiness and salivation)" two teenage farmers narrated.

Generally, the prompts identified by the farmers before chewing were the cold weather, salivation, toothache and tooth itch. They chew betel nut to immediately feel warmth and to stop salivation.

Still, the most mentioned reason for chewing is because of the urge brought by the itchiness of their teeth. Oftentimes, just because they feel a sensation in their teeth that they mistake it for toothache (*sakit ni sangi*) when in fact it's just a tooth itch (*katel ni sangi*) which is according to them was a result of their everyday habit of betel nut chewing.

Beginners' Taste Test

Some chewers do not see any health risk in betel nut chewing. But they recall that they experienced some unpleasantness when they just started the habit of chewing betel nut.

The respondents narrated that their first time chewing betel nut was not as relaxing and fun as they are experiencing now. Accordingly, their first try chewing betel nut made them dizzy because of the tobacco ingredient and the lime or '*apog*', the white powder which is usually made out of meticulously grounded shells.

Within minutes of chewing the betel nut, chewers may experience nausea or dizziness because the ingredients are absorbed directly into the blood stream via the oral mucosa (WHO, 2012). The effects such as dizziness and heart palpitations are caused by the activation of the sympathetic pathway by the betel nut alkaloids (Rooban et al., 2005 as cited by the World Health Organization, 2012). In addition, one reason for these experiences is the alkaloid in the betel leaf that produces cocaine-like reactions (Nelson & Heischöber, 1999).

Nelson and Heischöber (1999) also proved that the novice betel nut user experiences sensations like that of novice nicotine users such as dizziness and usually, a beginner begins vomiting and flushing after a large dose of betel quid.

Hence, they knew about the unpleasant smell brought by their chewing. They also felt uncomfortable with the smelly essence of betel nut chewing at first, so some have been mixing pandan leaves with the betel nut to mask the smell. They kept this practice of mixing pandan to dispel the unpleasant smell during their first months of chewing. However, as they have adapted to the smell with frequent chewing, the pandan leaves were slowly discarded. Scientifically, when someone is always exposed with the same odor or taste stimulus, it can result to sensory adaptation as the stimulus will be perceived as decreasing in intensity while sensitivity to that stimulus also decreases (O'Mahony, 2007). In the case of betel nut chewing, the adaptation of chewers due to constant practice and exposure has turned into habit and dependence.

Choosing the Right Ingredient

Some betel nut chewers argued that the adverse effects of chewing will depend upon the consumer and the ingredients being used.

For the chewing farmers, chewers will always have the option to remove tobacco from the ingredients if they wish to not be too dependent to it. As argued by Benegal et al. (2008), the combination of betel nut and tobacco significantly increases the dependence rate of chewers. Given the addiction potential of nicotine present in tobacco, the prevalence of dependence among those using betel nut with tobacco additives was much higher than among persons using betel nut alone (Benegal et al., 2008).

Betel nut chewing has three main ingredients, betel nut (*buwa*), piper betel leaves (*gawed*) and the lime (*apog*) whereas tobacco is optional (Figure 1). These three combined is enough to produce the copious red saliva (WHO, 2012). To start chewing, all the ingredients may either be wrapped together and wholly placed in the mouth or may be added individually. A young betel nut chewer explained that aside from tobacco, choosing the wrong lime might cause harm to the chewer. According to him, the wrong or harmful lime



Figure 1

Betel Nut Chewing Ingredients



Tobacco leaves (*tabako*)



Lime powder (*apog*)



Betel leaves (*dawed*)



Betel Nut (*buwa*)



Betel nut chewing ingredients

is characterized by having a paper white color which may be a chemical powder used to cure vegetable club root in cauliflowers and broccoli. Accordingly, if a chewer is not careful, he might end up using this kind of lime that is poisonous. The chewer described this type of lime as something that does not just bite but may cause mouth sores.

The chewer argued that the safe lime for chewing is made of shells and has a dirty white color. Wilson et al. (1983), as cited by the WHO (2012), also stated that the lime powder used in betel nut chewing is usually obtained from locally available sources produced by burning coral rock, sea coral or shells. The lime powder which contains calcium oxide is used to enhance the stimulant effect of the betel nut (Norton, 1998 as cited by WHO, 2012). Additionally, the use of lime with betel nut contributes to the reduced rate of dental caries to some chewers because it provides a source of calcium for re-mineralization of the tooth enamel (Alependava, 1992 as cited by the WHO, 2012).

Chewer's Hygiene

Despite the view that chewing betel nut is an unhygienic vice, most of the chewers interviewed still provided ways of maintaining proper hygiene. Among these were their daily routines starting when they began chewing up until now. *"Igmi etngu shan tetdenen* (We don't swallow the betel nut chewing residue)."

They jokingly explained that they were chewers not swallows. One of them even explained that compared to drinking alcoholic beverages which are directly ingested, chewing betel nut is safer since they do not swallow it. They spat the betel nut refuse directly on the ground or in a spittle bottle especially in public institutions where chewing is prohibited. After chewing, they also make it a habit to properly gargle and brush their teeth.

After finishing their farm tasks, they go home, gargle and rinse the betel nut residue in their mouth, take a bath if they came from spraying their crops and eventually eat a proper meal. This way, they are satisfy the need of their body to replenish their energy.

With regards to the chewers' discolored teeth, they admitted that chewers who were not cautious



with their teeth might have forgotten the use of the fibrous husk of the betel nut. The fibrous husk of betel nut is also used after brushing and gargling to remove the stains left by chewing.

On the other hand, two of the respondents did not mind about their discolored teeth because they argued that the discoloration is a form of protection and it adds strength to their teeth's. Interestingly, several studies have discussed the role of tooth stain in a reduced rate of dental caries in regular betel nut users, acting as a physical barrier to tooth demineralization (Howden 1984; Moller et al., 1977; Nigam & Srivastava, 1990 as cited by WHO, 2012).

Beliefs Associated with Betel Nut Chewing

Chewing Provides Strength and Focus

Most young farmers in Bashoy, Kabayan claim that when they chew betel nut it gives them extra strength and focus while working in the farm. "*Para kedsang nu mangabjon...tan say egkita ma-boring shi garden* (It gives us strength while preparing the soil bed. It helps us avoid boredom while in the farm)." This was claimed by most of the young farmers interviewed.

Hirsch (1995) as cited by Strickland (2002) argued that betel nut use can aid one's cognitive performance. Heightened cognition can lead to good sense of concentration; thus the chewers claim that they were able to focus and feel motivated while they are working. Accordingly, while chewing betel nut, they were able to easily finish their task in the farm especially during the preparation of soil beds, planting, application of fertilizers, spraying their crops, and harvesting. Nelson and Heischober (1999) stated that betel nut is prepared as a herbal mixture which may be added to certain beverages and is advertised to be useful for any physical activity which includes activities that require enhanced endurance and stamina, in the case of the respondents, farming.

Chewing betel nut among chewers is regarded to help in productivity in the farms. Farmers are focused in finishing more tasks when they are chewing as the ingredients are readily available in their '*sukbong*', usually kept in their pocket. They readily put the ingredients in their mouths and proceed with the farm task. It is less time consuming, unlike smoking which they have to pause from their tasks in order to light a

cigarette. In agriculture, time is valuable and farmers would rather go with chewing betel nut that is less time consuming and is able to increase their focus and productivity.

Chewing Cures Hunger and Thirst

"*Kalkal para pejed ni agang tan sesho* (Chewing betel nut cures hunger and thirst)," the young farmers collectively expressed.

Due to the arduous activities in the farm, the farmers oftentimes rise up early in the morning and stay in the farm until late to tend to their crops even without eating a proper breakfast. Hence, they are prone to feeling hunger and thirst. Nevertheless, according to the young farmers, they do not necessarily go home to eat since with the help of chewing betel nut, their thirst and hunger is suppressed. Even with the presence of a nipa hut near their farms which is accessible for them to easily take a break, they still rather chew believing that their hunger or thirst will die down and they will finish more tasks before the day gets hotter.

"*Imbes ja ingkita mengan, megalkal etngu... medebkanan malay agang* (Instead of dismissing ourselves in the farm to eat, we just chew betel nut then we gradually forget our hunger.)," a farmer who has been chewing betel nut for 5 years explained.

World Health Organization (2012) stated that betel nut chewing diminishes thirst and hunger because of the product's appetite suppressant properties. Moreover, Javed et al. (2010) argued that the use of betel nut may modulate metabolic signals that helps regulate or suppress human appetite for food. The reason why farmers chew betel nut during and after hard work in the farm is they do not feel hunger or their hunger has been decreased (Ahuja & Ahuja, 2011). Similarly, Valdes (2004) as cited by Ahuja and Ahuja (2011) also asserted that the Igorots of the Philippines even before believe that chewing betel nut fends off hunger. It is within this frame that farmers who are chewers are more likely to finish their task while chewing because of the diminished need for food and water while working. Strickland et al. (2002) on their study about the connection between areca (betel) nut and hunger in Asian men also affirmed the customary belief that betel nut suppresses hunger.



Chewing Betel Nut Provides Warmth

"*Kita ka unpetang nu mingalkal kita* (We feel warm if we chew betel nut)," all the chewers unanimously said.

Bashoy, Kabayan has a cold temperature especially in the morning which may hinder farmers to go out early. But with betel nut chewing, it keeps them warm and relaxed and are able to tend to their crops even with the cold morning. In the farm, where there is a need to reposition the water sprinkler, spray chemicals, check the growth of their crops and assess the presence of pestilence, chewing provides them with sufficient warmth to be fully geared and proceed with their task. Betel nut accordingly has metabolites that affects the thermoregulatory pathways which may induce the production of heat in the body (Garg et al., 2014).

Generally, farmers who are chewers prefer to work in the farm early in the morning when the temperature was cooler because they can chew betel nut to keep them warm and comfortable while working. It is in this aspect that chewing is deemed beneficial to the farmers.

Social Meanings Attached to Betel Nut Chewing

Sustaining and Building Friendship

Chewing is not simply a vice among young farmers, it plays a vital role in creating and strengthening bond and friendship. "*Singa adibay I pingalkal tep kamika mantotokmang, mangkinshawi, tan sikatoy kadan ni dadsak* (Chewing betel nut is like a bond for us chewers because we chew together (while telling stories), there is a give and take exchange of ingredients, and it is where our joy is)," two young farmers explained in the group interview.

Seeing a group of farmers, facing each other while chewing betel nut and spitting the residues in front of their peers without hesitation is a normal sight in the farm areas and in community occasions in Bashoy, Kabayan. For the chewers, this is the best way of bonding with their co-farmers and chewers. It is during this session that they can share their ingredients with one another, tell stories about life or about the vegetable's prices, or just to laugh about something that they find amusing. Among the

chewers, chewing is actually something that both creates and sustains bond and friendship among them.

Since chewing is already popular among all ages in Bashoy, Kabayan, betel nut has also slowly broken the barriers of making friends only with someone within the same age bracket. Nowadays, farmers who are chewers consider making friends with anyone regardless of age because of the connection that is usually formed through betel nut sharing. Accordingly, the feeling of shyness is forgotten when betel nut, tobacco, betel leaves or lime are shared. The closeness may just start with the need of betel nut but as time goes on when they felt comfortable being with the group and constantly share ingredients, the friendship is sustained that may be manifested in times of helping each other during harvest season or through the *amuyo* system. *Amuyo* is a non-monetary practice in which one helps the other in accomplishing a farm task especially before planting season, and likewise, the favor is returned through labor. During these times of helping each other, chewing is one significant aspect that binds and connects them. "*Buwam ka* (Can I ask for betel nut)?"

During occasions, when a chewer meets with an acquaintance and wanted to start a conversation, asking for a betel nut can be a good starting statement. The chewing will serve as a starting point for the conversation. It may usually start with a question about the news on their crops' current status and price, which will then be followed about the news of their friends or co-farmers who were either unfortunate or lucky with their harvest.

In other cases, when a friend is in need of money to borrow either for personal matters or for farm inputs, the agreement between the parties may start with chewing betel nut together. Betel nut sharing may also be a springboard to start connecting with a friend whom one previously had conflict with. The mere act of sharing betel nut may be viewed as a gesture of settling issues. When someone ask for betel nut and the other gave him, it may be taken as an accepted apology or a rekindling of the friendship. Indeed, chewing as a practice is used when affirming partnerships or concluding negotiations and restoring peace after a conflict (Nelson & Heischober, 1999).



Chewing betel nut is also associated with welcoming a guest or a newcomer in the community especially during occasions. May it be a chewer or non-chewer, the community always has a way of welcoming visitors which may be in a form of simple acknowledgement such as smile, nod, handshake or offering coffee and food. "Man-sijop (Let's have some coffee)."

For non-chewing visitors, the usual greeting is for one to have coffee with the host. Chewers can also be more friendly to visitors which may then be attributed to the betel nut's stimulant and relaxant properties (Benegal et al., 2008; Strickland, 2002) believed to relieve muscular or body tension resulting to having confidence in dealing with new people despite being reserved.

Chewers usually have the habit of offering betel nut as a way of showing visitors that they are welcome. Accordingly, it is also a way of making the visitor feel that he should feel a sense of belongingness despite being a visitor in the community. Inviting someone to chew betel nut with them is also an effective means of starting a conversation with an unfamiliar person (who is also a chewer). This is where they are able to get to know the visitor and usually, these newcomers turn out to be a relative from another place. Oftentimes, even if the newcomer is not really someone who talks a lot, simply sitting and chewing with them is already a form of group conversation. This may be viewed as a reason why during different occasions, groups of men would sit together while sharing and chewing betel nut.

Strickland (2002) specifically pointed out in his study that the widespread practice of sharing betel nut is a means of facilitating a relaxed behavior, whether between strangers or acquaintances. It is also a form of courtesy indicated by offering and accepting betel nut when greeting someone or on the departure of a visitor, observed especially among southeast Asian countries. Marshall (1987) as cited by Hobbis and Hobbis (2023) likewise argued that betel nut is an essential ingredient in intercourse between both individuals and groups...[signaling] amity, goodwill, and a desire to cooperate. In any case, Hobbis and Hobbis (2023) also asserted that betel nut serves a purpose in building relationships.

Celebratory Practice

Chewing betel nut is a celebratory practice among farmers which may be manifested during the planting season towards the harvest time.

"*Nu aishe kalkal ni mengepit ket singa igma-atngan* (If the farmer who is harvesting his crop doesn't offer betel nut, we feel lazy to help him)," a young farmer said in a joking manner.

It appears humorous but chewing indeed serves as a "snack" for chewers. If the farmer has a *sukbong* with betel nut, sharing betel nut to the harvesters will be his way to show that he is grateful for the help.

Betel nut also provides a good break during work. When they sit together and chew, they feel re-energized to continue working again. As a result, farmers who are chewers practice to at least offer betel nut during the harvest season as a way of celebrating and showing gratefulness towards his co-farmers who helped him harvest and carry his crops.

Chewing is not entirely viewed by the farmers as some kind of reward or motivation. Instead, chewing is a part of celebrating a good harvest. When a farmer comes back from the market and his crops were sold at a good price, most of them usually bring home a stock of betel nut which are shared among their colleagues and friends who helped during the harvest season. Indeed, abundant betel nut can mean a good harvest. It was observed and experienced by these young farmers that whenever one has a good harvest, a farmer shares more betel nut to his colleagues as a form of thanksgiving and celebration.

Indeed, these young farmers' treat chewing not as a mere vice but as part of practicing revelry, joy and celebration before, during and after every farm tasks. It is their way of celebrating their livelihood and cementing rapport with their fellow farmers and chewers. Ma et al. (2017) stated that chewing betel nut reflects the celebration of simple abundance in indigenous life and the attitude towards life that accentuates the importance of learning to live in enduring companionship of lifelong friends and everlasting harmony with the environment and nature.



Truly, individuals are meaning-making individuals just like these young farmers who are betel nut chewers. A non-chewer might view their practice differently but for them, they have reasons, beliefs, and socially constructed reasons why they chew betel nut. As Mead as cited by Holstein and Gubrium (2007) explained, individuals construct their self, identity and interaction through meaning-making.

Conclusion

The paper has provided an insight about the social meanings, reasons and beliefs of the farmers of Bashoy, Kabayan, Benguet for chewing betel nut and how they mitigate its possible adverse health effect.

The young farmer respondents of Bashoy, Kabayan, Benguet claimed that their chewing betel nut practice was rooted from the trend, family and peer influence, substitute to smoking, habit and dependence. The young farmers believe that betel nut chewing gives them strength and focus while doing their task in the farm. It also helps suppress their hunger and thirst as well as it provides them with warmth while working on cold mornings. The chewers mitigate possible adverse health effect by not swallowing the residue, gargling, brushing their teeth, using betel nut shuck to remove teeth discoloration, and eating a proper meal. If they have felt any discomfort with chewing betel nut, they could only trace it with the unpleasantness experienced by a beginner. Betel nut chewing among the young farmers is also a way of building and strengthening bond and friendship. It serves both as a break and snack during farm duties and is a form of thanksgiving and celebration during and after the harvest season.

Indeed, chewing betel nut is not simply a trend or phenomena or vice. Despite studies claiming that chewing betel nut is harmful, this study highlighted more of the importance of betel nut chewing for the farmers. Chewing helps them efficiently perform their farm task, communicate effectively, feel relaxed to get to know other people, and strengthen their friendship with their peers and colleagues. Hence, the significance of betel nut chewing for the farmers and other chewers can be summarized with the 3Cs which is communication, celebration and comfort.

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