



Building a Community: A Key in Sustainable Eating Lifestyle of Young Urban Professionals

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Abstract: Sustainable practices are strongly promoted as an alternative way for the people to conserve the environment and to improve the quality of life. While sustainable practices cover a spectrum of areas, perhaps one of the most central is that related to eating lifestyle. Recent data shows that a minimal number of Filipinos are vegetarian and vegan. However, there is no clear data on the other sustainable eating lifestyle (SEL) continuum. Using a researcher administered online key informant interview with ten (10) young urban professionals (YUPs) living in Metro Manila, and thematic analysis we described their relationship and experience with their sustainable eating lifestyle. Community building is essential in sustaining the SEL of YUPs. Amidst the challenges on food sourcing, preparation, and information sharing, they became resilient because of the support system they had with their friends, family, colleagues and established physical and virtual community. It is recommended that further studies on different age brackets be performed to examine their philosophies and a quantitative research to further analyze the emerging themes of this research.

Key Words: Community; Sustainable Eating Lifestyle; Food; Eating; Young Urban Professionals; Sustainability

1. INTRODUCTION

Sustainable practices are strongly promoted as an alternative way for the people to conserve the environment and to improve the quality of life. While sustainable practices cover a spectrum of areas, perhaps one of the most central is that related to eating lifestyle. At present, young urban professionals (YUPs) are seen as changemakers in providing demand for a sustainable eating lifestyle (SEL). Most of them are knowledgeable on the benefits and effects of practicing this lifestyle and are willing to allot resources as a manifestation of being environmentally aware, socially attuned, and weighs the personal, community and planetary outcomes (Pícha & Navrátil, 2019).

Sustainable eating lifestyle is popular for eating less meat and/or consuming local produce. Macdiarmid (2013), stated that a sustainable diet contributes to food and nutrition security by having low environmental impacts and promotes healthy life for present and future generations consisting of less animal and more plant-derived food that delivers both health and ecological benefits. Additionally, Alsaffar (2016), identified six (6) components of sustainable diet: well-being and health; biodiversity, environment; equity, fair trade; eco-friendly, local, seasonal foods; cultural heritage, skills; and food and nutrient needs, food security, accessibility. Essentially, it is about maximizing the local seasonal produce and its



nutritional content. Examples of this sustainable eating lifestyle continuum are not limited to vegans, vegetarians, pescatarians and flexitarians.

SEL has been growing in the Philippines for the past years. In 2014, 5% or approximately 2 million Filipinos were vegetarian while 2% or 800,000 are vegan (The Manila Times, 2014). The United Kingdom is the most popular country for veganism in 2019, followed by Australia and New Zealand (The Vegan Society, 2020). Moreover, the number of vegans in the United States grew by 600% from nearly 4 million in 2014 to 19.6 million in 2017 (The Vegan Society, 2020). Thus, their governments are establishing different measures in supporting sustainable lifestyles in terms of business and research, unlike in the Philippines.

Eating offers opportunities to show care with frequent individuals whom we eat with, have a significant informal conversations, and care through sharing of food and associated experiences among groups and families that strengthens the relationships (Neely, Walton, & Stephens, 2014). It can also be experienced through the enjoyment of sensory qualities, like aesthetics, smell and taste (Landry, et al., 2018). In Contento’s model of influences on food choices, taste is part of the biological determinants and the core that represents the integral movements of human behavior (Contento, 2007). Furthermore, eating is considered as a social practice for the people (Delormier, Frohlich, & Potvin, 2009). It helps strengthen social relationships among people who constantly eat and prepare food together (Neely, Walton, & Stephens, 2014).

YUPs who have chosen to pursue sustainable eating lifestyles express their connection to the earth through mindful food consumption (Von Essen & Martensson, 2014). It is argued that people practicing a sustainable eating lifestyle have better health outcomes (Gabriel, Nimomiya, & Uneyama, 2018). These individuals chose to change their lifestyle because of religious, cultural, social and ethical foundations or philosophies. Thus, they also find meaning in their lifestyle through community building or achieved a sense of belongingness, and eating with season (Kennedy, 2005). Distinctly, some of these are associating signification through their type of food and daily food consumption. They acknowledge its relevance in the present times, because of the increasing environmental concern and rise of obesity, that can lead to terminal non-communicable diseases. Furthermore, they do not want to be part of the global burden of disease with

2.1 billion adults overweight or obese that has been prevailing for the past 30 years (Kim, Hall, & Kim, 2019).

Inevitably, YUPs who have chosen to pursue SEL experienced different challenges including their sourcing of food, preparation of food, and finding a community. Little is known about the experience of the Filipino young urban professionals on sustainable eating lifestyle. It is the objective of this research to provide an in-depth analysis on how a community affects their sustainable eating lifestyle.

2. METHODOLOGY

The study used a qualitative descriptive method to showcase the relationship YUPs experience in their SEL. The researcher utilized online interview as a method, specifically researcher – administered interview guide as data collecting tool.

The participants are ten (10) YUPs chosen through a purposive sampling of convenience method. They are residing in Metro Manila; between ages twenty (20) to thirty five (35); and have been practicing SEL continuum for at least six (6) months.

Full consent of the participants participated in the data collection are gathered. They are assured on the confidentiality and anonymity of the information they have provided. A thematic analysis inspired by Braun and Clarke (2006) was used to elaborate the important aspects of the data.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Building a community through the act of eating is a key element in the socialization process. The food that we eat and who we eat with is a significant factor to this. Hence, the themes of food that the participants consume are important in identifying who they socialize and where they source their food.

Table 1. Food that they eat

Themes	Category
Specially prepared food	Pescetarian and Vegan Food Home cooked meals
Natural Foods	Vegetables and fish



	Organic Food Grains, Beans, and Fruits
Processed Foods	Processed Foods and Dairy Cereal, Oatmeal and Bread

With these types of food, the participants are sourcing their food from market, supermarket, abroad, specialty stores and through subscriptions in community shared agriculture.

Choosing a different eating lifestyle during young professional years is not an easy decision for the participants because they understand that they will face numerous challenges. In the Philippine setting, most of the YUPs are living with their family unless they are married or intend to live independently. This scenario is evident with our research participants as most of them still live with their family. It is an opportunity and a threat to their eating lifestyle. Considering that most of them are the only people at home who have a different eating lifestyle, family members either support and be open to new concepts or neglect their chosen eating lifestyle and not consider them in food preparation. Furthermore, elders are given a high regard in the community. Thus, their suggestions and offers are always accepted and when denied, it is considered a disrespect.

Table 2. Challenges experienced in sustainable eating lifestyle

Themes	Category
Cultural beliefs and practices	Food preparation at home Misconception about SEL Filipino culture in respect for the elders Building a network and community
Nature of work	Working in a meat industry
Lack of options	Lack of food options in the workplace Satisfying cravings Avoiding fast food chains and processed foods

Incorrect information and no knowledge and skills in cooking	Knowledge and time allotment for cooking Incorrect information about the eating lifestyle Eliminating chicken and seafood Expensive ingredients and meals
Societal pressure	Fear of judgment from other people Adjusting with the people around No sense of community
Not challenging	Not challenging at all

SEL needs creativity and discipline in preparing healthy nutritious meals and determination to care for self-health and in building a supportive community. Careful planning and preparation must be exercised to ensure convenience for themselves, family, friends, workmates and community. Finding their grit in establishing their own supportive community physically and virtual supports their SEL. These communities helped to sustain their healthy mental condition resulting to a mindful consumption.

Table 3. Sustaining their chosen eating lifestyle

Themes	Category
Preparation and sourcing of food	Planning and preparing creatively healthy meals Ensuring emergency food, available Food sourcing and meal subscriptions
Building a community	Supportive and considerate family, friends and co-workers Consciousness of other people Choosing your own physical and virtual community Establishment of business Journeying with a significant other
Care for physical and mental health	Care for physical health Care for mental health Living aloe Reflection and gradual



	change
Research and sharing of information	Continuous research Sharing of information to friends through meals Sharing of information through social media postings

The empowerment achieved by the participants are based on the information they have known on how it was sourced and prepared. In addition, they have also shared that they intend to contribute to the community and to the environment through supporting local farmers and not using single use plastic to create an impact for the future generation.

Table 4. Meaning of SEL to self

Themes	Category
Empowerment through health and learning	Positive health benefits experienced Empowerment Happiness and fulfillment Unlearning and learning new skills Re-alignment of resources Proving of the lifestyle through actions Eliminating misconceptions
Contribution to the community and the environment	Advocacy for oneself Contribution to future generation Contribution to the environment Helping the local industry Care for animals

As YUPs, the workplace is one of the identified communities they are actively engaged with. Pre-pandemic setting made them live with their colleagues at least eight (8) hours a day, encouraging them to eat together and share common goals. Some of the participants decided to work for the companies that advocates sustainable eating. However, for those who are not, they are actively sharing information about their eating lifestyle and introduces different dishes to their colleagues as a start of conversation.

Table 5. Relevance of eating lifestyle to workplace

Themes	Category
Direct connection of eating lifestyle to present work	Connection of eating lifestyle to work Understanding of the food system Workplace as a community Support system within the workplace
Sharing of information and adjustment with workmates	Conversations with workmates Movie recommendations Meal subscriptions delivered at work Adjustment with workmates food preferences

Community is defined as a “group of people with at least shared perspectives and is linked by social ties, share common perspectives, and engage in joint action in geographical locations or settings” (MacQueen K. M., et al., 2001). However, YUPS has defined their own community with like-minded individuals sharing a common goal of healthier eating lifestyle in a fun, and enjoyable way. Due to limited mobility because of the pandemic, YUPs have expanded and maximized the virtual platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Youtube and Reddit in sharing information, recommendation and best practices.

Table 6. Signification of eating lifestyle to community

Themes	Category
Investment on the health of the community	Sharing of information about animal cruelty Introduction of different activities and dishes Influencing the family’s meals and diet Sharing of information through media Supportive friends Membership in virtual and physical community
Mindful lifestyle	Minimalist lifestyle Mindful consumption Energy of other people



Contribution to the future generation	Awareness on environmental issues Investment on health and community
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4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that community building is essential in sustaining the SEL of YUPs. Amidst the challenges they faced in food sourcing, preparation and information sharing, they became resilient because of the support system they had with their friends, family, colleagues and established physical and virtual community.

In addition, they prefer to work in institutions that adhere or support their eating lifestyle. If not, they are finding ways to integrate their eating lifestyle through conversations, and institutional policies. These ensures that they are actively engaged in their chosen workplace community.

The initiative of the YUPs to change their eating lifestyle evolved around their reason care for their physical and mental health, environment including the animals and to create a greater contribution or the next generation. With this, the research found that a healthy population is not only focused on the physical and mental health of the people but also on how they contribute to the society and live-in harmony with nature.

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