

The impact of Mukbang video consumption on viewers' physical health: A critical analysis

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ABSTRACT

Mukbang, originating from South Korea, merges "Meokneun" (to eat) and "Bangsong" (broadcasts) to showcase large-scale food consumption online (Cho, E.H. et al; 2020). Popularized globally since 2015, it engages 38% of South Koreans seeking social connection and escapism (Kobaco. et al; 2019). Despite its sensory appeal and cultural reflection, Mukbang's influence on unhealthy eating behaviors and mental health warrants careful consideration (Anjani et al., 2020; Siqueira, 2020).

Keywords: Mukbang, Eating disorders, Food show, Psychological impact.

INTRODUCTION

Mukbang, a neologism formed by combining the Korean terms "Meokneun" (to eat) and "Bangsong" (broadcasts), describes an online entertainment practice that focuses on showing people consuming large amounts of food (Cho, E.H. et al; 2020). Originating in South Korea, Mukbang was first broadcast by the Afreeca television channel in 2008, with its notoriety expanded globally from 2015 (Hong SK. et al; 2017). This rise has allowed the practice to gain considerable prominence among the Korean population, with about 38% of them engaging in observing this online entertainment phenomenon (Kobaco. et al; 2019).

Thus, the rise in popularity is related to the growing use of the internet and social media, especially among those dissatisfied with their offline lives, seeking instant gratification and a sense of "escapism" from reality (Sanskrit, S., et al. 2023). Mukbang may be a way to avoid loneliness when sharing a meal virtually, possibly reflecting the social nature of dining in South Korean culture. Anjani et al. (2020) claim that Mukbang is a way to avoid loneliness by sharing a meal virtually, reflecting the social nature of dining in South Korean culture. The aversion to eating alone, especially in public spaces, has contributed to the popularity of the Mukbang as a form of entertainment and social connection, the authors conclude. In addition, the sensory response provided by Mukbang, including stimulation of the autonomic sensory

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meridian, can provide pleasure and satisfaction to viewers (Anjani, L., et al. (2020). This sensory aspect, combined with the social and emotional benefits, can be a contributing factor to the attractiveness and consumption of this type of content online.

In this regard, research has shown that the habit of watching Mukbang can have negative effects on viewers. A study conducted by Bruno Al et al. (2017) indicates an increase in food consumption among those who watch this type of content, influenced by social comparison and imitation of observed behaviors. In addition, frequent exposure to Mukbang can distort viewers' understanding of healthy eating habits by modeling inappropriate eating-related behaviors (Kim, M., et al. 2017).

It is worth noting that individuals who already have an eating disorder such as anorexia and bulimia nervosa when they develop the habit of watching Mukbang videos may end up evolving their previous psychological and psychiatric conditions. It is noteworthy that the harms of Mukbang are not limited only to eating disorders, but can also trigger generalized anxiety disorders, insomnia, irritability, withdrawal, among others, says Siqueira (2020).

Another worrying aspect is the promotion of obesity and the emergence of eating disorders, resulting from the glorification of gluttony and overeating present in Mukbang's videos. Susceptible individuals, including those who already have symptoms of eating disorders, may be especially vulnerable to the negative effects of this type of content. Therefore, while the Mukbang may be a source of entertainment for many, it is important to consider its potential adverse impacts on viewers' health and eating behavior (Loth KA., et al. 2014).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study is characterized as an analysis with a qualitative methodological approach. For the construction of this document, active searches were carried out on several academic platforms, including the Virtual Health Library (VHL), the Scientific Electronic Library Online (SciELO), the National Library of Medicine of the United States (PUBMED) and Google Scholar. The descriptors used for the search were: Mukbang, Obesity, Eating disorder and Food show. In the initial phase of the research, data were collected broadly and without restrictions, resulting in the identification of 11 articles, 2 from SciELO, 2 from Pubmed and 7 from Google Scholar. To refine the searches, a specific time range was established, covering the period from 2017 to 2024. The choice of this period is justified by the greater concentration of relevant publications. The selected articles discuss food binge entertainment online, excluding those that do not address Mukbang and the impact of eating disorders, or that were published more than 5 years ago.



RESULTS

A parasocial relationship, established between the presenter of the videos and the audience through the recurrent viewing of Mukbang's videos, is a concept frequently employed in netnographic studies. This parasocial relationship has expanded the interpersonal interaction of spectators, in addition to attenuating the feeling of loneliness (CUREUS, 2023). However, this mitigation of loneliness or paradigm of cohesive everyday association disintegrates when the existence of an underlying psychological tension is perceived. Specifically, the taste expressions that the host displays when chewing, swallowing, or even opening a can of soda or a packet of food, can offer viewers a diverse range of satisfactions.

However, regardless of whether the meal was prepared or purchased, virtually all of the videos analyzed showed some type of meal based on ultra-processed and/or fast food. This turned out to be a distinctive feature of the Brazilian Mukbang, not being observed in the practice carried out in other countries. These data contradict the findings of Kang et al (2020) in their research on the Mukbang in South Korea.

Viewers develop a sense of emotional relationship and empathy with the Mukbangers, which can be attributed to the fact that the Mukbang host often shares his personal or everyday life experiences with the audience, which gives viewers a sense of community. Viewers develop a sense of emotional relationship and empathy with Mukbangers (CUREUS, 2023). It has also been discovered that watching Mukbang can be a significant source of entertainment. As a result, the Mukbang feeds and is fed by this industry, even if the authors are not financially compensated for it (KICKABURUN et al., 2020).

The issue becomes even more relevant when contextualized in the COVID-19 pandemic, a period in which recent studies have shown an increase in the consumption of food delivery services, specifically large fast-food chains. An example of this is the study conducted by the startup Mobills, which identified a 103% increase in Brazilians' spending on food in the period from January to June (MOBILI, 2020). Mukbang practitioners, on the other hand, do not remain immune to these changes, evidencing an even greater increase in the consumption of these products (KICKABURUN et al., 2020b). This is reflected in the contemporary, post-pandemic world, where the consumption of this type of content emerges as a dominant force in the understanding of food. Not that there is a high influence, but rather that this type of content ends up being consumed in a less selective and conscious way.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In view of the exhibitions, it can be deduced that the understanding of the motivations that involve the increase in the consumption and production of mukbang and the impact of this type of content on the health of contemporary society is crucial for the development of strategies and resources aimed at mitigating such practice, in order to minimize damage and prevent possible future negative consequences.



However, the understanding of this practice is still incipient, making it unfeasible, for the time being, to establish a clear understanding of how this material psychologically influences the individual, either positively or negatively. Similarly, this gap is justified by the scarce production of research that addresses the problem as a potential challenge for the community.

Despite the previously highlighted statement, it is recognized in the scientific community, although little publicized, a significant variation in the effect of this practice, leading some individuals to increase their food intake, while it may seem to have a suppressive effect of binge eating in others, or even a reduction of effects related to mood disorders. Therefore, it is essential to deepen the knowledge about this activity so that its effects on human beings can be better elucidated.

It is hoped that this document can facilitate the elaboration of the expanded abstract by the authors, as well as the review by the reviewers.

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