

Content Analysis Of Mukbang Videos: Preferences, Attitudes And Concerns

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Abstract

A recent internet phenomenon that mukbang is, this trend has creators and viewers across the globe of varied cultures and norms. With its increasing popularity, many mukbang video creators are continuously emerging. But not all content attracts views. The preference of the viewers is the means to gaining more views. This study is aimed at exploring the preference of the viewers through the content created and also in assessing their attitudes and concerns regarding mukbang and mukbanger through the comments they post under the videos. The attitudes and concerns of the viewers ranged across positive and negative. Some viewers even went to the extent of guilt tripping and body shaming the mukbanger despite themselves watching such videos. It is also seen that the views garnered by a video is affected by the content included in the video. Mukbang is therefore, a continuous process of exchange of attitudes and preferences between mukbanger and the viewers.

Keywords: Edit, Fat, Mukbang, Mukbanger, Skinny, Weight.

Introduction

YouTube eating broadcasts have been increasingly popular among the online audience since the mid-2010s. These eating broadcasts are popularly known as “mukbang”. Mukbang originated in South Korea around 2010 and was broadcasted through a video streaming platform called Afreeca TV (Wang, 2020). The popularity of mukbang soon spread from South Korea to across the world and is easily reflected in Google Trends analysis for the same. The Korean word “meokbang/ mukbang” is a portmanteau of the two Korean words “meokneun” (eating) and “bangsong” (broadcast) (Kang et al., 2020; Lawrenson, 2022), together meaning online eating broadcast (Indita, 2022). In such videos the host or the content creator, who is also known as mukbanger, consumes either alone or with someone an enormous amount of food ranging from large quantities of a single dish to a huge combination of dishes (Strand, 2020). Their food platter is not limited to a single-course

meal and is usually a three-course meal and at times the platter may consist only of desserts or appetizers. Such eating broadcasts are recorded in front of high-definition audio-visual devices under proper set-up and lighting conditions with some mukbangers communicating with the viewers through verbal or non-verbal interactions while others refraining from doing so. These properties along with content quality are required to achieve greater viewer engagement (Anjani, 2020; Kircaburun, 2020; Lawrenson, 2022).

The origin and popularity of mukbang can be correlated with the Korean dining culture (Indita, 2022). Jackson’s 2018 study (as cited in Strand & Gustafsson, 2020) defined dining in the South Korean society as a major social activity as people bond over food and drinks. The standard portion size in most of the Korean restaurants is to suffice more than a single person as the Koreans not only share tables but also dishes (Indita, 2022; Kang et al., 2020). Eating with families, friends or

acquaintances is a social norm in almost all cultures of the world and it affects the eating choices and behaviour of a person (Higgs et al., 2019). But with the increasing single-person households all over the globe, the act of living alone leads to dining alone and to compensate for this loneliness during dining, watching mukbang emerged as a popular trend first among the South Koreans and now worldwide (Indita, 2022; Kang et al., 2020).

The mukbang videos draw a lot of online engagement as people enjoy watching mukbangers devour copious amount of food which is not possible for a normal person to eat in a single sitting and the audience too enjoy seeing the mukbanger eat food which is otherwise not preferable for the viewer to consume either culturally or geographically. Moreover, the audience gets to enjoy the multisensorial experience such as the taste, the smell, the texture of the food, through the comments and gestures made by the content creator. The sounds made during cutting, washing, frying, plating, chewing, crunching and slurping during preparing, setting and eating of food, brings out in the audience an Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response (ASMR) (Lopez, 2015; Kang et al., 2020). The choice and behaviour of eating of a mukbanger draws online engagement to their videos. Not all mukbangers are alike and neither are their contents and way of eating. The number of views per video depends on the preference of the viewers as much as on the content and quality of mukbang. Kang et al. (2020) affirmed in their study that overeating and such other eating choice and behaviour in the mukbang videos draw popularity. But with popularity there always comes more exposure to criticism. On one hand, the mukbang videos serve as a bridge of virtual connectedness and as a tool of pleasure for the audience to indulge for entertainment, but on the other hand, the mukbang videos too expose the content creators to online bullying and body shaming, which in many cases takes a toll on their mental health

and forces them to abstain from further making such videos.

Mukbang has now become a global phenomenon and has an enormous online engagement. Indita (2022) states in their study the number of searches for mukbang on YouTube platform alone to have reached 100,000. The search volume for the term “mukbang” over the latest known 12 months of data for the United States of America and India depicts the numbers to be 365,000 and 16,000 respectively (YouTube keyword tool, n.d.). This shows that along with other parts of the world, mukbang is gaining popularity in India as well. There are many famous Indian mukbangers who have reached huge subscriber numbers. As many less studies have been conducted on this uprising trend, this study aims to analyze the content of mukbang videos and tries to understand the online attitude and concern prevalent among the viewers.

Methodology

The methodology for this study involves content analysis through derivation of themes and codes. Descriptive statistics were employed to the data collected to garner results.

Sample selection

Through the search terms “mukbang”, “food ASMR” and “Indian mukbang” five eating broadcasters each with more than one million subscribers have been purposively selected as the units of analysis for this study. Of the five mukbangers, two are Indian (MaddyEats and Spice ASMR), two are South Korean (Hamzy and Tzuyang) and one is American (Zach Choi ASMR) in nationality. For each streamer, five most watched videos and five least watched videos have been randomly selected for content analysis, that is, a total of fifty videos have been analyzed. The length of each video does not exceed 20 minutes and each video lies within the time frame of 2017-2021. The number of views garnered per video in case of the 25 most watched mukbang videos ranges between 10 million to 54 million, and in case of least

watched videos, the views ranges between 20 thousand to 2.2 million. From the video relevant themes and codes have been derived.

Derived Codes and Theme

Mukbang content analysis:

For the purpose of content analysis of the fifty mukbang videos, six themes have been identified. These themes will help in understanding the content shown in the videos of each mukbanger. Each theme is derived from relevant codes that have emerged from the videos.

Table 1. Codes and Themes for Mukbang Video Analysis

Code	Category	Theme
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-cooked • Plating 	Shown	Food preparation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plated food 	Not shown	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Studio/ home • Convenient store • Restaurants 		Food video location
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Korean • Indian • American • Others 		Cuisine
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instant food • Appetizer • Main course • Desserts • Soup • Beverage 		Food type
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overeating • Moderate 		Food consumption (Eating amount)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Messy • Non-messy 		Type of eater

YouTube comment analysis:

To understand the concern and attitude prevalent among the mukbang viewers, the twenty-five most watched videos of all the five

mukbangers are analyzed. The comments are filtered through the YouTube Comment Search extension added to chrome browser. The comments are filtered for each video for the following six search terms:

Weight gain
 Fat
 Skinny
 How
 Edit
 Cheat

The frequency of occurrence of each term in the comment section is calculated against the total comments loaded through the extension for each video. The comments were assessed to

show attitude and concern of the viewers. In order to do so, the comments were analyzed from positive and negative aspects through the selection of positively worded and negatively worded comments. The comments analyzed in

this study are limited to the comments written in English language.

Results:

Mukbang Content

Table 2: Content analysis for Least Watched Mukbang Videos

Least watched video						
Channel name	Food preparation	Food video location	Cuisine	Food type	Food consumption	Type of eater
Zach Choi ASMR	Self-cooked: 0 Plating: 0 Plated food: 100	Studio/ home: 100 Convenient store: 0 Restaurant: 0	Korean:0 Indian:0 Asian:0 American:0 Others:100	Instant food: 0 Appetizer: 40 Main course: 0 Desserts: 60 Soup:0 Beverage: 0	Overeating: 0 Moderate: 100	Messy: 0 Non-messy: 100
Hamzy	Self-cooked:40 Plating: 20 Plated food: 60	Studio/ home: 100 Convenient store: 0 Restaurant: 0	Korean:80 Indian:0 Asian:20 American:0 Others:0	Instant food: 40 Appetizer: 20 Main course: 40 Desserts:20 Soup:20 Beverage: 40	Overeating: 100 Moderate: 0	Messy: 0 Non-messy: 100
Tzuyang	Self-cooked:60 Plating: 60 Plated food: 40	Studio/ home: 100 Convenient store: 0 Restaurant: 0	Korean:80 Indian:0 Asian:20 American:0 Others:20	Instant food: 80 Appetizer: 40 Main course: 40 Desserts:0 Soup:0 Beverage: 80	Overeating: 100 Moderate: 0	Messy: 0 Non-messy: 100
MaddyEats	Self-cooked:0 Plating: 0 Plated food: 100	Studio/ home: 100 Convenient store: 0 Restaurant: 0	Korean:0 Indian:100 Asian:0 American:0 Others:0	Instant food: 0 Appetizer: 0 Main course:100 Desserts:20 Soup:0 Beverage: 0	Overeating: 20 Moderate: 80	Messy: 0 Non-messy: 100
Spice ASMR	Self-cooked:0 Plating: 0 Plated food: 100	Studio/ home: 100 Convenient store: 0 Restaurant: 0	Korean:20 Indian:20 Asian:40 American:40 Others:0	Instant food: 20 Appetizer: 40 Main course:0 Desserts:40 Soup:0 Beverage: 0	Overeating: 60 Moderate: 40	Messy: 0 Non-messy: 100

For each of the five mukbangers, the least watched mukbang videos are coded for six

themes. Each code has a percentage range of 0-100 where 0 means none of the five videos has

the following content and 100 means all the five videos have the content. This process of coding

and ascribing percentages is same in case of the most watched videos as well.

Table 3: Content analysis for Most Watched Mukbang Videos

Most watched video						
Channel name	Food preparation	Food video location	Cuisine	Food type	Food consumption	Type of eater
Zach Choi ASMR	Self-cooked: 80 Plating: 100 Plated food: 0	Studio/home:100 Convenient store:0 Restaurant:0	Korean:60 Indian:0 Asian:0 American:40 Others:0	Instant food: 60 Appetizer: 100 Main course: 0 Desserts: 0 Soup:0 Beverage: 60	Overeating: 100 Moderate: 0	Messy: 20 Non-messy: 80
Hamzy	Self-cooked: 100 Plating: 80 Plated food: 0	Studio/home:100 Convenient store: 0 Restaurant: 2az0	Korean:100 Indian:0 Asian:0 American:0 Others:0	Instant food: 40 Appetizer: 0 Main course: 60 Desserts:0 Soup:20 Beverage: 40	Overeating: 100 Moderate: 0	Messy: 0 Non-messy: 100
Tzuyang	Self-cooked: 0 Plating: 0 Plated food: 100	Studio/ home: 0 Convenient store: 0 Restaurant: 100	Korean:80 Indian:0 Asian:20 American:0 Others: 0	Instant food: 80 Appetizer: 40 Main course: 20 Desserts: 0 Soup:20 Beverage: 100	Overeating: 100 Moderate: 0	Messy: 0 Non-messy: 100
MaddyEats	Self-cooked:0 Plating: 0 Plated food: 100	Studio/ home: 100 Convenient store: 0 Restaurant: 0	Korean:0 Indian: 80 Asian: 20 American:0 Others:0	Instant food: 0 Appetizer: 0 Main course:100 Desserts:20 Soup:0 Beverage: 20	Overeating: 100 Moderate: 0	Messy: 100 Non-messy: 0

Spice ASMR	Self-cooked:0 Plating: 0 Plated food: 100	Studio/ home: 100 Convenient store: 0 Restaurant: 0	Korean: 0 Indian: 80 Asian: 0 American :0 Others: 20	Instant food: 0 Appetizer: 20 Main course: 80 Desserts:40 Soup:0 Beverage: 60	Overeating: 100 Moderate: 0	Messy: 40 Non-messy: 60
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Table 4: Least Watched and Most Watched Mukbang Video Content Analysis

Video type	Food preparation	Food video location	Cuisine	Food type	Food consumption	Type of eater
Least watched mukbang video contents	Self-cooked:20 Plating: 80 Plated food: 80	Studio/ home: 100 Convenient store: 0 Restaurant: 0	Korean:36 Indian:24 Asian:16 American:8 Others:27.3	Instant food: 28 Appetizer: 28 Main course:36 Desserts:28 Soup:4.6 Beverage: 24	Overeating: 56 Moderate: 44	Messy: 0 Non-messy: 100
Most watched mukbang video contents	Self-cooked:36 Plating: 16 Plated food: 60	Studio/ home: 80 Convenient store: 0 Restaurant: 20	Korean:48 Indian:32 Asian:8 American:8 Others:4	Instant food: 36 Appetizer: 32 Main course:52 Desserts:12 Soup:8 Beverage: 56	Overeating: 100 Moderate: 0	Messy: 32 Non-messy: 68

In case of table 4, the percentage range of 0-100 associated with each code is for 25 least and 25 most watched mukbang videos. The main difference seen between the least and most watched videos is in the food consumption pattern. All the 25 most watched videos had the mukbanger devour a huge amount of food in front of the camera. In case of type of eater, the most watched videos had 32% messy eating videos while the least watched had none. In 28% of the least watched and 36% of the most

watched videos, instant food mainly ramen was consumed. The main course in both the type of videos is either a Korean cuisine or an Indian cuisine. Of the three non-Indian mukbanger, the most watched videos mainly consisted of Korean cuisine while Indian cuisine was in the food platter of only the two Indians. Most of the videos had already plated food but viewers too preferred watching cooking and plating of food.

YouTube comment analysis

A total of 10,686 user comments containing at least one of the six search terms were included in this study. The user comments were analyzed through the six selected search terms in order to

understand the attitudes and concerns prevalent. For each of the five mukbanger, positively worded and negatively worded attitudes and concerns have been drawn out.

Table 5. Attitude and Concerns: Zach Choi ASMR

Attitude (positively worded)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I like his channel because he makes the food look so good and he shows how to make it do we can do it too
Attitude (negatively worded)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> anyone else just getting so triggered how we can't be eating like this? but no hate on Zach he cool
Concern (positively worded)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Zach probably doesn't eat big meals like this every day, he is keeping his weight together so he doesn't get fat.. A lot of mukbangers get fat though.. which is kinda sad. Metabolism barely accounts for weight, he probably eats healthy and works out when he's not making videos. And gaining weight from water is just water weight, that's normal and healthy. Don't attribute it to metabolism.
Concern (negatively worded)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> So, you just eat stuff, and record it? That's it? That's all there is to it? That's how you make your money? I can't believe this video has 10 million views!!! Jesus Christ, what the hell have I been doing with my life. He literally edits the parts out so it makes it look like he's eating it when he really just eats a small portion and throws the rest

Table 6. Attitude and Concerns: Hamzy

Attitude (positively worded)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exactly! You go girl! Don't let others think you can't be pretty in the way you want and also love food. It's just internalized misogyny at play when people think women who are feminine means they like clothes and makeup and are considered vain as compared to the "normal girl" who loves to eat and doesn't care about her looks (but only if they are skinny because if they're fat then they get shammed for being a pig!). It's reducing women to tropes when women can be more than just that. It's up to you if you like food, and it's also up to you if you like clothes, and you can like both!
Attitude (negatively worded)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a bit scary how much trash was produced in one meal... How much she ate was the snack for my whole month!!!
Concern (positively worded)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> From what I know, usually South Korean people take care of doing sports or other activities to maintain their body so they won't gain much weight from eating. Then again, most Korean foods are super spicy so it's actually help the digestion
Concern (negatively worded)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I haven't actually seen her swallow those foods. She takes big bites and chews it real good, but Everytime there's an edit I don't see her swallow.. When it comes to another angle it looks like she's chewing something but the big bite earlier is no longer there. Hmmm. I don't wanna think this is fake but I'm afraid it might be. How can someone so thin and eat like that don't gain weight right? Hmmm

Table 7. Attitude and Concerns: Tzuyang

Attitude (positively worded)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I love how it's a mukbang that doesn't go too excessive. Like, she's very polite and finishes her food while complimenting the restaurant
Attitude (negatively worded)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Girl be eating food for 5+ people and still don't gain weight while I'm gaining weight by just breathing
Concern (positively worded)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I think Tzuyang just has a really fast metabolism and should probably worry about gaining weight in her 30s or 40s but she seems fine now. Even if she doesn't like vegetables by themselves, she probably still eats enough because korean food is usually very healthy.
Concern (negatively worded)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How can someone eat all that food? I hope she doesn't have an eating disorder. I feel bad if she is just doing this to get views or clicks. It would be great if she shared her some food to homeless people instead! Nobody realizes that she only chews food and does not swallow any of them. Video editing can make this fake-eating video.

Table 8. Attitude and Concerns: MaddyEats

Attitude (positively worded)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I love how she eat the food with her hands. My mouth is watering lol. She's having fun eating day by day, I wish I could eat that much without gaining any weight
Attitude (negatively worded)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> She eats too slowly and with small bites and make me feel uncomfortable because she swallow looks hard, I don't know how much she can eat, but what I see here is not much, maybe she's popular because she looks mad?!? And the most important thing is she eats not beautifully, not attractively, this is not a good eating show to watch. How does her family members tolerate her Protein Fart after this? She must be left alone in the room until digestion!
Concern (positively worded)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plsss don't eat that much... It causes insulin resistance, weight gain.. If you become obese you get pcod, pcos hormonal imbalance... You may have many chances to get diabetes... Pls take care of yourself.. So many people suffering from pcos, irregular periods and infertility and if you have pcod it is very tough to get pregnant in your future times.. Plsss do eat much
Concern (negatively worded)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cant you eat healthy.. How much junk she is consuming mannn.. and that too every week.. She is anyway worsening her life but we as viewers should stop supporting her..Be a good citizen and support whats right and worth watching.. Its her life , let her do what she desires to, she will ultimately suffer and then only she would realize the importance of health. Do you have your periods regularly even after eating this much of fatty foods

Table 9. Attitude and Concerns: Spice ASMR

Attitude (positively worded)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Why you guys watch then .. Watch something that relates to your interest .. Let her do what she wants to.. Can you even have any idea how a hate comment affect someone mentaly? Such a shame.. Why are you watching and commenting when you dont like it.. Just dont senselessly comment ..
Attitude (negatively worded)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Yuck That so disgusting i feel like vomiting. Who makes noise like this while eating? And is she an elephant how can she eat like that

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are you fat?? I wouldn't be liking to see you fat. Every girl is beautiful not being fattt
Concern (positively worded)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Doctors are advising people to grind steamed rice and vegetables well with their teeth and swallow them. But if you chew half of the non-vegetarian food, the food will affect the digestive tract and cause gastrointestinal cancer. You will soon have to experience the consequences. And since you are a teenager you have a high percentage of risk of contracting bowel cancer soon ...Do not play for money. Focus on health. Eat well because you are young. This will greatly affect your health in the future and you will also be obese. Excess body fat can damage the heart and lungs, leading to problems such as weight gain.takecare Do not earn by spoiling your health. Life will not come again. Your parents earn by you because you are small girl.There are a thousand ways to make money on YouTube.Don't risk your life for useless likes and views on YouTube..i unsubscribed you
Concern (negatively worded)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I remeber when i was a kid i use to making so much noice when eating... my father told me to eat silently as its a gentleman habit and if u go out side in a 5 star hotel for a dinner u shouldnt be makig noices while eating.... FUN • People out there are dying out of hunger and she is showing off how much she can eat just to get more views and money... There are so many useless people nowadays .. it's disgusting

Discussion:

The content of the most watched videos is more or less similar for all the five mukbangers with only the Indian mukbangers including Indian cuisine into their food platter. The quantity of eating in case of all the five mukbangers is huge and the Indian mukbangers are mainly messy eaters while the Koreans and American mukbanger are less messy. These three qualities of quantity, way of eating and dishes included mainly distinguish the most watched videos from the least watched ones. The viewers are mainly amazed by the quantity that the mukbangers eat and there is a clear-cut increase in the quantity of food consumed among the least watched and most watched videos, thus implying that viewers prefer watching the mukbangers eat huge.

The user comment section portrayed a mixed response section wherein there were much appreciation comments along with comments showing concerns about the health of the mukbangers to discussing the authenticity of such mukbang videos. Many aspects of attitudes and concerns could be drawn out from the study. Strand and Gustafsson (2020) identified a viewer perspective and a participant perspective of the user comment analysis of YouTube videos and Reddit posts on mukbang. For the viewer perspective comments were categorized into five categories which included envy and amazement, body shaming, supportive, explanations and trend development whereas for the participant perspective, the comments were categorized into limits eating, increases eating, ambivalence, reduces loneliness, reduces guilt about own eating, and obsessive and self-destructive categories.

Table 10. No. of comments in each category

Comment category	Zach Choi ASMR	Hamzy	Tzuyang	MaddyEats	Spice ASMR	Total
WEIGHT GAIN	376	91	36	68	43	614
FAT	1722	241	67	104	247	2381
SKINNY	614	100	24	5	8	751
HOW	4831	332	154	515	369	6201
EDIT	21	75	18	418	84	616
CHEAT	0	2	6	100	15	123

In the category of weight gain, the user comments mainly expressed amazement at the quantity the mukbanger was able to eat without gaining weight or envy that the viewer could not eat as much as the mukbanger. A user commented “i’m jealous, i just breathe and then i had a gain weight” while another wrote “I wish I can eat whenever I want without getting calories/fat”. Though there were many positively worded comments but majority of the comments had a sarcastic undertone.

In case of the other three categories “fat”, “skinny” and “how”, the comment section was again filled with comments that either expressed wonder, query or envy. Many comments were found to depict body shaming as well. “I think she is a monster otherwise how a human can eat so many things” is what one user wrote under a mukbang video. Another comment said “She eating like a monster, o my God... How much hungry she is. Is she a woman or something else?”. Both these comments and many such more clearly depict the body shaming of the mukbanger by the viewers. Of the five mukbangers, the two Indians were majorly body shamed by the viewers.

There are also comments explaining why these mukbangers do not gain weight. While some user comments attribute the no weight gain to metabolism, some others attribute it to Asian body type while some users also accuse the mukbangers of cheating and editing the videos. Of the five mukbangers,

only in the case of the two Indian mukbangers the accusations of cheating and editing the video were more. “Such heavy editing.. I doubt if she is even swallowing even half of the food she is “fake-eating”. Any mukbang eating so much food and with so much editing is a clear fake eater” is what a user wrote.

Many users too tried to guilt trap the mukbangers into feeling sorry for eating such huge quantity of food while many people around the globe are starving. A user commented “Doesn't understand why she showing this things in front of camera while eating this ? Poor people doesn't have sense too see your video ? Because they can't have food or phone because you have no sense while you eating food like animal and showing on social account just for earnings??? Focus on your behave” under one such mukbang videos. This guilt tripping of the mukbangers by the viewers be it accusing them of editing the video or eating huge portions, is equivalent to online bullying and this affects the mental health of the video creators, at times forcing them to stop making and uploading such videos.

Conclusion:

Mukbang is not a trend that will decline with time. With increasing solo-lifestyles, there is increasing dependence on social media platforms and increase in activities of virtual social connectedness such as mukbang. This study clearly shows the preference of the type of content of the mukbang videos among the

viewers and thus the more views garnered. Through the comment analysis, positive and negative attitudes and concerns were clearly captured. Though majority of the comments fostered a negative attitude and concern but it seems to have a reciprocal relationship with views. Viewers' geography and demography of the mukbangers are expanding making them turn from local to global. Mukbang with its boons and banes is therefore, here to stay.

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