



Indonesian Mukbang and Body Image: A netnography study from YouTube

Ratri Ciptaningtyas¹, Apriningsih Apriningsih², Mavianti Mavianti³, Ita Rahmania Kusumawati Kusumawati⁴ and Marni Br Karo⁵

¹Universitas Islam Negeri Syarif Hidayatullah
Jakarta, Indonesia

²Universitas Pembangunan Nasional Veteran Jakarta
Jakarta, Indonesia

³Universitas Muhammadiyah Sumatera Utara
Medan, Indonesia

⁴Universitas Hasyim Asy'ari
Jombang, Indonesia

⁵Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Kesehatan Medistra Indonesia
Bekasi, Indonesia

ratri.ciptaningtyas@uinjkt.ac.id

Abstract. Mukbang has been a global trend in social media since the first terminology was introduced in 2004 from South Korea. Most of the Mukbang posted in YouTube due to the definition of Mukbang is watching online eating. A netnography study was conducted to explore perspectives from viewers that involved body image concerns. Two Indonesian Mukbang YouTubers had more than 1 million subscribers and viewers. Most of their popular posts are related to spicy food. It is found that popular Mukbang videos are among the most subscribed and viewed related to gender stigma. Male Mukbang YouTuber commented with positive nuance regarding his health. On the other hand, a female Mukbang YouTuber commented specifically on her body figure despite her massive amount of food. Both Mukbang YouTubers provide entertainment that accentuates their performance such as using ASMR (Autonomous Meridian Sensory Response). It is not clear whether Mukbang has influence on the viewer's self-body image. However, watching Mukbang affects viewers' sensory and appetite to the type of meal.

Keywords: Mukbang, Body Image, Glocalization, Netnography

1 Introduction

Mukbang, which comes from Korean, is a combination of the words "meokda" which means eating and "bangsong" which means broadcast. Thus, etymologically, Mukbang means eating broadcast [Kang, 2020]. However, if examined more deeply, Mukbang specifically refers to eating activities that are broadcast live on the YouTube platform. [Kircaburun et al., 2021]. This phenomenon began to become popular in the early 2010s and quickly spread to various platforms, including YouTube, where various content creators display Mukbang with a variety of foods, from local cuisine to exotic international cuisine [Donnar, 2017]. Mukbang is rooted in Korean traditions that

emphasize the importance of sharing food to create a sense of togetherness even though it is done virtually, with large and varied portions of food served [Choe, 2020].

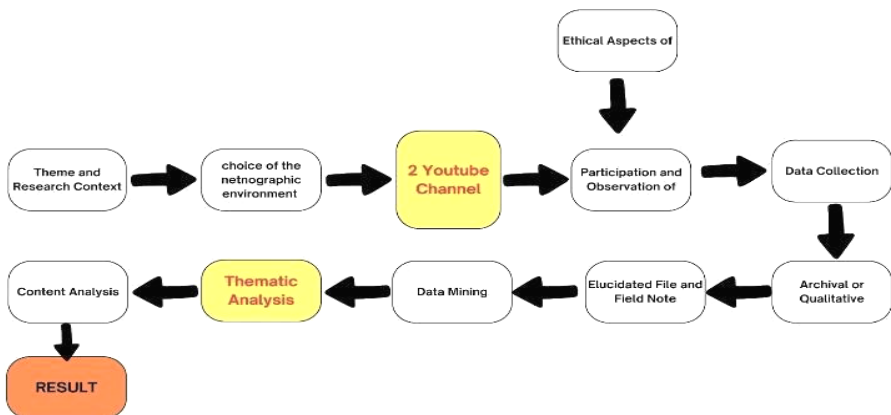
Since the early 2010s, Mukbang has seen a rapid increase in popularity, with many content creators having millions of followers and hundreds of millions of video views. According to data from Song, in 2020, YouTube had over 2.3 billion monthly active users, and Mukbang became one of the most searched content categories [Song, 2020]. However, Mukbang content can also have significant implications for an individual's body image. In modern society, body image is often one of the most noticed and discussed aspects. The relevance of Mukbang to body image cannot be ignored; in this context, body image refers to how individuals view and feel about their own bodies, which is influenced by various factors, including social media. Research shows that Mukbang content can influence viewers' perceptions of body size, eating habits, and beauty standards [Donnar, 2017]. Therefore, it is important to understand how this phenomenon contributes to the formation of body image among viewers and content creators.

According to Hong [2017], he explained that the phenomenon that occurred in the country that produced the K-wave and the conditions faced by the Korean millennial generation are as follows: The increasing population is the most striking change in Korea's social structure. The population of 5.2 million people ignores the tradition, which according to statistics is usually three to four family members living together, so the term "single economy" emerged which refers to one person's income for himself. This unique phenomenon creates audiovisual products that show one or more people eating and recording their activities live on the Internet. This provides an opportunity for internet users, especially those with a single economy, to witness the action and feel the social interaction while eating. Mukbang is now recognized as one of the most popular types of content on YouTube, attracting the attention of a wide audience through the uniqueness of food presentation.

In netnographic studies, Mukbang becomes an important object that reflects the perspective of the audience that is directly related to food and indirectly to the body image of the Mukbang actor. Research on Mukbang is very significant in the social and cultural context, because this content provides insight into how social media influences consumer behavior and body image through a better understanding of digital content that influences society. This study aims to provide deeper insight into the dynamics of body image in the context of Mukbang. This research is expected to provide further understanding of the complex relationship between body image and eating behavior, as well as provide insights that can help promote healthy and positive eating patterns in this digital era. The benefit of this writing is to contribute to the understanding of how social media influences consumer behavior and body image. Donner's [2017] study on Mukbang shows that this content influences consumer behavior in terms of food. In addition, the study also revealed that gender stigma in social media can affect the body image of the audience. In the context of Mukbang, the body image of the audience can be influenced by the comments and interactions they make with the Mukbang YouTuber.

2 Methodology

This study uses a netnography method, Kozinets [1998] combined two terminologies, network and ethnography. It has been a qualitative approach that focuses on social interactions in digital space [Kozinets, 1998]. With this approach, researchers observe and analyze the behavior and interactions of viewers and content creators on the YouTube platform. Data collection techniques used in this study include participant observation, where researchers watch and analyze various Mukbang videos to study online culture and behavior. The analysis of interactions on the YouTube platform was carried out with research subjects consisting of two Mukbang YouTubers who have significant and diverse followers, namely Tanboy Kun and Shevy Silvia. Tanboy Kun has joined YouTube since 2016, 19.7 million subscribers, 949 videos and 4,549,463,033 views. Another account is Shevy Silvia that was purposively selected for female Mukbang performers and consume plant-based food in most of her videos. She joined YouTube in 2019, has 2.09 million subscribers, 1,023 videos and 570,932,755 views. The comment extraction process was carried out through exportcomments.com which produced 6,856 comments, then further analyzed using a web-based qualitative tool, namely Dedoose. This tool allows researchers to see certain patterns in the comment text, so that dominant themes can be identified. From the analysis carried out, there were seven main themes identified from the comments. These themes include envy and admiration, assessment of body shape, support, health mysteries, criticism, sarcasm, and personal disclosure. Each of these themes provides a diverse picture of how people react to the topics discussed in the comments. This analysis aims to determine the types of comments given by viewers along with a comparison between comments received by male and female YouTubers. The data analysis technique used in this study is qualitative analysis. This approach is carried out with the aim of providing more insight into the relationship between Mukbang and body image in the digital era. The netnography steps are carried out as in Figure 1.



3 Results and Discussion

Two Indonesian Mukbang YouTubers have one million subscribers and viewers. After data mining through extracting comments, researchers observed most of their content focuses on spicy food. If you look closely at the two YouTubers, there are striking differences between them, especially in terms of gender stigma. The male YouTuber receives an abundance of positive comments, while the female YouTuber is often accompanied by comments highlighting her body shape, even though she eats a lot of food.

From the observation of the two Mukbang YouTubers above, the stigma of gender differences, especially related to body image, creates ambiguity regarding the influence of Mukbang on the body image of its viewers. Body image is a descriptive and evaluative belief about one's appearance [Papalia, Olds, and Feldman, 2008]. Body image is related to an individual's assessment of body size, weight, or other physical aspects that are reflected in perceptions, thoughts, and feelings about the body that lead to behaviors that indicate physical appearance. Some behaviors included in body image include envy and amazement, body shaming, providing support, "health mystery", taunting, sarcasm, and sharing personal information.

The results of the data analysis using the netnography method, which was developed as a qualitative approach to investigate consumer behavior in online communities, with an emphasis on researchers as participants [Kozinets, 1998]. In this netnography method, audience comments from the Mukbang videos of two famous YouTubers were analyzed. The results of the data analysis showed that there was a reference to body image in the comments directed at YouTubers.

Body image is influenced by various factors, one of which is interaction with others. Values regarding applicable physical appearance standards are instilled through interactions with parents, friends, lovers, or other individuals. Early adult women often exchange views through interactions regarding physical appearance, including weight, body shape, and diet [Cash and Pruzinsky, 2002]. Based on this explanation, it can be concluded that many interactions carried out by viewers end in various comments on the physical appearance of YouTubers, ranging from support, envy and amazement, discussions of "health mysteries", to negative comments and sarcasm.

Body Image Designation on the Support theme

According to the Great Dictionary of Indonesian Language or Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia, abbreviated as KBBI, "supporting" means to support, help, or support. In the context of the audience's comments to this YouTuber, "supporting" is interpreted as giving support to the YouTuber.

From the data obtained, the supportive type produced 115 keywords from the audience as a form of appreciation or encouragement. Some comments reflect a sense of liking, such as "So laughing seeing the person eating..while feeling spicy," which shows the audience's entertainment seeing the host's expression.

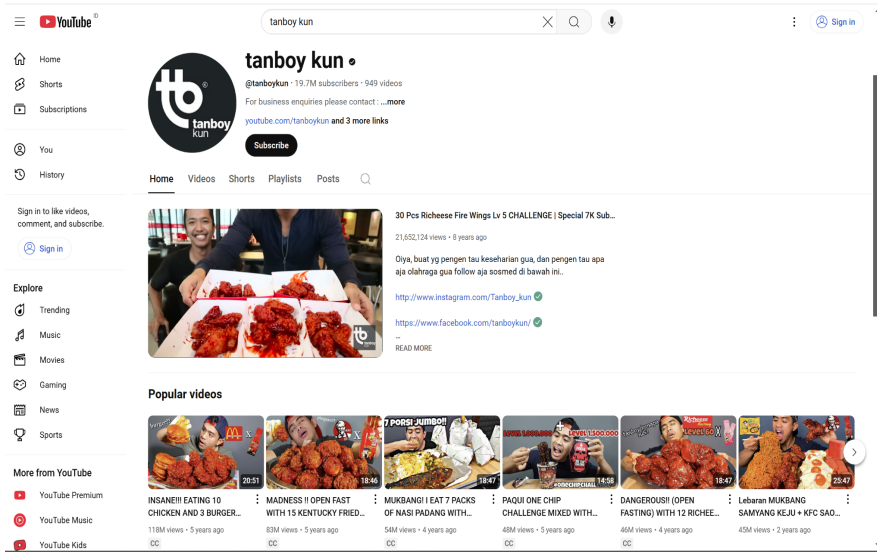


Figure 2. Most Videos from Tanboy Kun is eating Spicy Food

Other comments such as "The food is spicy, the person is sweet. It's the perfect combination! 🍋" describe the audience's appreciation for the physical appearance and content presented.

Watching the expression from YouTuber gives a satisfactory, thrill and anticipation feeling to viewers. Anjani [2020] categorized this as theatricality of eating which means the exaggerated and often extravagant nature of food consumption showcased in mukbang videos acts as a source of entertainment.

Body Image Designation on the theme of Amazement

According to the KBBI, Amazement describes a feeling of awe or surprise.

The data results show that the theme of amazement produced 15 keywords. This can be seen from the comments of viewers such as "He eats his rice later, why can't I eat like that, it has to be with side dishes if I do" reflecting a sense of awe towards YouTubers. The association of viewers with rice as a source of carbohydrates that can increase appetite can be considered as an interaction with visuals promoting clean eating which Wu [2024] said can contribute to the adoption of societal standards regarding physical appearance. This process of internalization can foster feelings of body dissatisfaction and an excessive focus on attaining a specific body type. Interestingly, another study showed Mukbang brings calm to viewers due to Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response (ASMR), reliable and physiologically-rooted experience that may have therapeutic benefits for mental and physical health [Poirio, 2018]. This explanation identifies viewers who admire

mukbang activities or YouTuber performances. Another study shows this unique form of performance goes beyond just visual representation, as it evokes strong emotional responses, ranging from feelings of revulsion to intense cravings [Nielsen, 2021].

Body Image Designation on the theme “The Health Mystery”

Health is defined as a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease [Fertman & Allensworth, 2010]. Here, health relates to viewer comments expressing concerns about health conditions. Although in the comments the YouTuber host does not actually have the type of disease mentioned, the comments made are simply an expression of surprise at consuming large amounts of plant-based foods with spicy sauces.

Text mining analysis showed the type "health mystery" produced 13 keywords, it was seen in the comment "No gastric acid wow" is an expression that reflects a sense of surprise, without intending to diagnose a disease. Wu [2024] revealed from their systematic review that exposure to content focused on clean eating has been linked to increased dietary restraint, potentially resulting in disordered eating patterns. Such content frequently advocates for an idealized perception of healthy eating, which may foster detrimental attitudes toward food and body image.

Body Image Designation on the theme of Shaming Body Attributes

According to KBBI, shaming is defined as a feeling of discomfort due to behavior that is considered bad. While body attributes describe the physical form of a person's body.

From the data, it shows that the body shaming type only produces 1 keyword. Negative comments such as "His lips are really long" reflect the act of shaming by mocking the body attributes of the host. Although it seems like just words, shaming comments like this are included in the negative impacts of watching Mukbang which are processed in the audience's perception as normal. Xiao [2024], Sutana [2022], Anari [2023] has the idea that the impact of watching Mukbang has psychological aspects that need to be considered besides just entertainment media. Jiang's study [2024] explains the role of intertemporal choice and voyeurism in the mechanism of the relationship between watching Mukbang and mental health problems. Mental health problems in this case include body shaming which is a prevalent issue in the internet world [Bin Zulkifli, 2024 & Dynel, 2024].

Body Image Designation on the Theme of Insulting

According to KBBI, mocking is an act that is a fault, to censure, to condemn, to criticize, and to insult. In addition, mocking can be interpreted as opening someone's sores because of exposing their stains and shortcomings, tending to criticize and condemn.

From the data obtained, the criticizing type produced 27 keywords. Comments such

as "Feel it, torture yourself!" indicate mocking expressions, while "Mukbang but not all food finished eaten .. is not Mukbang then :)" reflect criticism of content that does not meet audience expectations. The criticizing comments are comments that are realized by the audience who provide their comments, even though the purpose of the audience is only as a joke. This criticism is related to the phenomenon of Sung's study [2024] which shows a negative contribution from Mukbang viewers, namely the perception of "glamorizing binge eating" becoming normal. Although it does not link the gender of the audience to the theme, research by Jeong [2023] shows that there is a disparity in evaluation indicates that females are likely to perceive the implications of the content more acutely, reflecting a heightened awareness of its possible consequences on dietary habits.

Body Image Designation on Personal Information theme

Information is data that has been processed into a form that is meaningful to the recipient and is useful in making decisions now or in the future [Kelly, 2011]. In this study, the process of data mining extraction to content analysis provides rich information. Meanwhile, according to KBBI, a person is a human being as an individual (human self or self). Thus, it can be concluded that personal information is a form of individual data that is given in the form of information.

Personal information theme generated 4 keywords , with comments such as "I wonder how much money you spent" expressing curiosity about the costs, and "By the way, where are you from?" interpreting personal information in terms of the place of origin of the YouTuber presenter.

The sense of connectedness to the YouTuber from watching Mukbang is one of the motivations from Anjani's study in 2020. They said a significant number of viewers are drawn to Mukbang videos to experience a feeling of closeness and companionship with the YouTuber, like sharing a meal with a friend. This motivation highlights a yearning for social engagement, particularly among those who may dine alone. This relationship is also called parasocial [Song, 2023; Lee, 2023; Fong, 2024].

Body Image Designation on the Theme of Sarcasm

According to KBBI, sarcasm is the use of words that are intended to hurt the feelings of others who use words in the form of ridicule and harsh taunts. Sarcasm is a form of communication that is often used to express disapproval or criticism of something in a sharp and spicy way. The sarcasm that researchers mean is distinguished from insulting because the language used tends to be more polite.

From the analysis data, the type of sarcasm produces 2 keywords . Comments such as "eat slowly, honey" are examples of sarcastic expressions, while "only" " shows a form of mockery of the content presented by the host. Thus, the assessment of body image through audience comments implies a complex and diverse dynamic of social interaction.

Strand [2024] used a qualitative analysis of YouTube comments and Reddit posts on the topic of mukbang and disordered eating was performed, employing a netnographic approach described how watching mukbang can both limit and increase eating while for some, mukbang appears to be a constructive tool in increasing food intake, preventing binge eating, or reducing loneliness; for others, it is clearly a destructive force that may motivate restrictive eating or trigger a relapse into loss-of-control eating.

Park's [2024] study showed that the probability of obesity significantly increased among male adolescents who watched Mukbang compared to those who did not engage in Mukbang activities. A dose-response relationship was found between the frequency of Mukbang and Cookbang consumption and the risk of obesity in male adolescents because frequent fast food intake, or consumption of sweet drinks showed a significantly greater likelihood of obesity in the "Ever" category compared to those in the "Never" category. However, Mukbang viewers from both communities commented on positive body image because they appeared to have ideal body shapes. This difference in response exposure may be due to the type of food consumed by Shevy also being different from the Mukbang analyzed by Park, because it is plant-based or Sundanese food, so it is possible that the viewers of this account's Mukbang also consume different types of food.

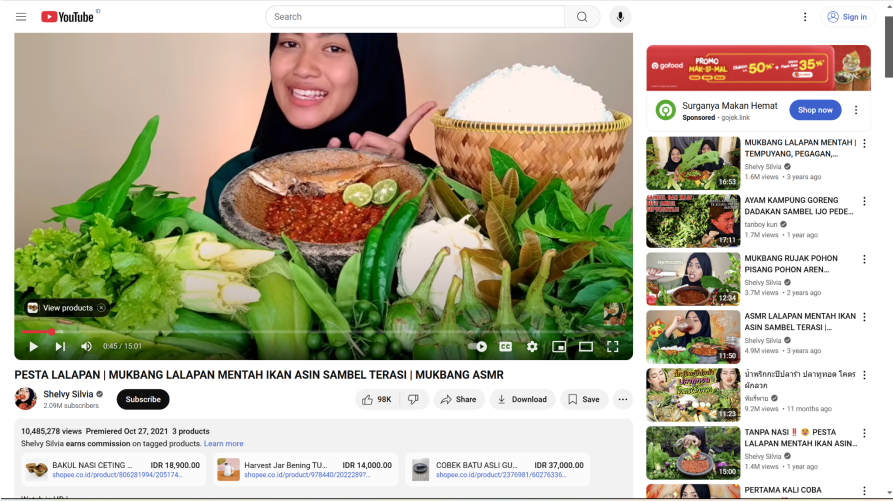


Figure 3. Most Viewed Video from Shevy Silvia is Eating Raw Vegetables with Salted Fried Fish and Fermented Shrimps Chilli Sauce

Even though YouTuber Shevy's type of food is classified as healthy food because it consists of plant-based food and is mostly raw (*lalapan*), Wu [2024] findings imply that the relationship between dietary information and personal perceptions of body image, as well as eating behaviors, is not uniform across all contexts. Consequently, it is essential to recognize that not all food-related messages exert the same influence on individuals' attitudes and actions regarding their eating practices.

4 Conclusion

In conclusion, this study underscores the complex relationship between Mukbang content, viewer engagement, and societal perceptions in the digital space. By applying a netnographic approach, the research delves into how audiences interact with and respond to Mukbang performances on YouTube, revealing the emergence of key themes such as envy, admiration, body image assessment, and health-related discussions. Notably, gender dynamics play a significant role, with male creators receiving comments focused on health and well-being, while female creators face more intense scrutiny regarding their body image, despite engaging in similar eating behaviors. These findings suggest that Mukbang videos, while primarily serving as entertainment, also fuel broader cultural conversations about food, health, and body image in the digital era. The study highlights the impact of sensory stimulation and appetite influence in Mukbang viewership, though the direct correlation with self-body image remains inconclusive. The results suggest that Mukbang is not only shaping online eating cultures but also reflecting societal norms and biases surrounding body image and gender expectations. Future research could further explore the long-term psychological effects of Mukbang consumption on viewers' perceptions of body image and its potential influence on eating behaviors.

References

- [1] Dictionary. (2024). In KBBI Online. accessed on 20 October 2024, retrieved from <https://kbbi.kemdikbud.go.id/>
- [2] Donnar, G. (2017). 'Food porn' or intimate sociality: Committed celebrity and cultural performances of overeating in meokbang. *Celebrity Studies*, 8(1), 122–127. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19392397.2016.1272857>
- [3] Kang, E., Lee, J., Kim, K. H., & Yun, Y. H. (2020). The popularity of eating broadcast: Content analysis of “mukbang” YouTube videos, media coverage, and the health impact of “mukbang” on public. *Health informatics journal*, 26(3), 2237–2248.
- [4] Choe, H. (2020). Mukbang as your digital tablemate: Creating commensality online. *Identity and ideology in digital food discourse: Social media interactions across cultural contexts*, 137–170.
- [5] Song, S. (2020). The evolution of the Korean wave: How is the third generation different from previous ones?. *Korea Observer*, 51(1).
- [6] Hong, S. K., & Park, S. (2017). Internet mukbang (foodcasting) in South Korea.
- [7] Papalia, D. E., Old, S. W., Feldman, & R. D. (2008). *Perkembangan Manusia*. Jakarta: Salemba Humanika.
- [8] Cash, T.F. (Ed.). (2004). *Body image: A handbook of theory, research, and clinical practice* (Paperback ed). Guilford Press.
- [9] Eleá, I. (Ed.). (2017). *Young & creative: Digital technologies empowering children in everyday life*. The International Clearinghouse on Children, Youth and Media, Nordicom, University of Gothenburg.
- [10] Fertman, CI, Grim, ML, & Society for Public Health Education (Eds.). (2022). *Health promotion programs: From theory to practice* (Third edition). Jossey-Bass, a Wiley brand.
- [11] Kircaburun, K., Yurdağül, C., Kuss, D., Emirtekin, E., & Griffiths, M.D. (2021). Problematic Mukbang Watching and Its Relationship to Disordered Eating and Internet Addiction: A Pilot Study Among Emerging Adult Mukbang Watchers. *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction*, 19(6), 2160–2169.

- <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11469-020-00309-w>
- [12] Kozinets, R.V. (2015). *Netnography: Redefined* (2nd edition). Sage.
 - [13] Moser, A., & Korstjens, I. (2017). Series: Practical guidance for qualitative research. Part 1: Introduction. *European Journal of General Practice*, 23(1), 271–273. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13814788.2017.1375093>
 - [14] Park, S., Eom, J., Choi, S., Kim, J., & Park, E.-C. (2024). Association between watching eating broadcast “Mukbang and Cookbang” and body mass index status in South Korean adolescents stratified by gender. *Nutrition Journal*, 23(1), 43. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12937-024-00946-0>
 - [15] Prajarto, N. (2018). Netizens and Infotainment: A Virtual Ethnographic Study on the Instagram Account @lambe_turah. *Journal of COMMUNICATION SCIENCE*, 15(1), 33–46. <https://doi.org/10.24002/jik.v15i1.1367>
 - [16] Anjani, Laurensia and Mok, Terrance and Tang, Anthony and Oehlberg, Lora and Goh, Wooi Boon.(2020). Why do people watch others eat food? An Empirical Study on the Motivations and Practices of Mukbang Viewers. isbn = {9781450367080}, Association for Computing Machinery, New York, NY, USA, <https://doi.org/10.1145/3313831.3376567>, doi = {10.1145/3313831.3376567}
 - [17] Wu, Y., Kemps, E., & Prichard, I. (2024). Digging into digital buffets: A systematic review of eating-related social media content and its relationship with body image and eating behavior. *Body Image*, 48, 101650.
 - [18] Jeong, S., & Olivo, D. (2023). The Complexities of Mukbang: Implications for Disordered Eating Behaviors and Sociocultural Influences. *Journal of Student Research*, 12 (3).
 - [19] Sung, B., & Lee, J. yeon. (2024). The influence of YouTube binge eating vlog viewing on perception and behavior among South Korean women, aged 20s to 30s, with binge eating tendencies: a qualitative analysis. *International Journal of Mental Health*, 1–27. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00207411.2024.2377810>
 - [20] Poerio, G.L., Blakey, E., Hostler, T.J., & Veltri, T. (2018). More than a feeling: Autonomous sensory meridian response (ASMR) is characterized by reliable changes in affect and physiology. *PloS one*, 13 (6), e0196645.
 - [21] Nielsen, L.Y., & Petersen, F.B. (2021). Regarding the mains of others: The spectacular bodies of mukbang videos. *MedieKultur: Journal of media and communication research*, 37 (71), 122-142.
 - [22] Song, H.G., Kim, Y.S., & Hwang, E. (2023). How attitude and para-social interaction influence purchase intentions of Mukbang users: A mixed-method study. *Behavioral Sciences*, 13 (3), 214.
 - [23] Lee, D., & Wan, C. (2023). The impact of mukbang live streaming commerce on consumers' overconsumption behavior. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 58(2-3), 198-221.
 - [24] Fong, B., & Chang, P. K. (2024). The Paradigm Shift in Malaysian Commensality: Symbolic Interactionism in Mukbang videos. *Journal of Ethnic and Diversity Studies (JOEDS)*, 2 (1). Xiao, Y., Zhong, T., Li, L., Wang, X., Tang, D., Song, P. G., Cheng, Y., & Xia, W. (2024). Psychological and physiological experiences of youth watching Mukbang in China: A qualitative study. *Children and Youth Services Review*.
 - [25] Sultana, S.F.S., & Das, M. (2022). Content Analysis Of Mukbang Videos: Preferences, Attitudes And Concerns. *Journal of Positive School Psychology*, 6 (9), 4811-4822.
 - [26] Manafi Anari, F., & Eghtesadi, S. (2023). The Relationship Between Watching Mukbang (Eating Show), Eating Behaviors, and Anthropometric Parameters in Iranian Female Students. *Journal of research in health sciences*, 23 (1), e00574. <https://doi.org/10.34172/jrhs.2023.109>
 - [27] Jiang, N., Khong, KW, Chen, M., Khoo, KL, Xavier, J.A., & Jambulingam, M. (2024). Why am I obsessed with watching ASMR mukbang? The roles of mediated voyeurism and intertemporal choice. *Plos one*, 19 (9), e0308549.

- [28] Bin Zulkifli, MS, & Bakar, K. (2024). Language Shaming on YouTube: Linguistic Features, Themes, and Social Implications. *Journal of Research in Applied Linguistics* , 15 (1), 128-144. doi: 10.22055/rals.2023.43456.3034
- [29] Dynel, M. (2024). Say what you want: Evaluation and engagement with YouTube broadcasts on ChatGPT. *Journalism*, 0(0). <https://doi.org/10.1177/14648849241251973>
- [30] Strand, M., & Gustafsson, S. A. (2020). Mukbang and disordered eating: a netnographic analysis of online eating broadcasts. *Culture, Medicine, and Psychiatry* , 44 (4), 586-609.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits any noncommercial use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

