

You Want to Look Away, But You Can't: The Evolution of Mukbangs

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Abstract

This project aims to explore the anomalies in the evolution of the Mukbang culture with the rise of social media. Furthermore, to dissect the contentious issues surrounding the exploitation of food resources to captivate online audiences. By examining the consumption of distant or foreign cuisine, virtually, the research aims to discern the boundaries between societal normalities and the acceptance of unconventional practices within mukbang content. Through a methodical analysis of secondary sources, including academic literature and social media content analysis, the project will shed light on the controversies surrounding using taboo actions to lure viewers on platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube. Additionally, in regards to the ethical considerations surrounding the consumption of live animals for the sake of content engagement.

Thesis

As social media platforms continue to emerge, Mukbangs are gaining popularity among viewers worldwide. This paper will take a look into the virtual access to distant or foreign food and analyze the evolution of Mukbangs. Furthermore, dissect the morality vs. the acceptance of virtual Mukbang trends, especially with eccentric or exotic dishes that come into play when consuming food to boost content views.

Tracing Roots: The Origins of Mukbang Culture

- In 2010, Mukbangs aired on a popular Korean channel known as AfreecaTV. This station stands for "Any Free Broadcasting".
- The word mukbang is derived from the Korean phrase *meokneum* (eating) and *bangsong* (broadcast)
- Mukbangs are as "a video, especially one that is live streamed, that features a person eating a large quantity of food and addressing the audience"
- Mukbangs became popular in South Korea due Socioeconomic & Sociocultural → generation is called the *Sampo* or *Ying-Yeo* generation. The meaning behind the name resides in giving up basic elements of living within the youth. They've relinquished aspirations for courtship, marriage, and parenthood, as the economy has become increasingly complex and demanding, making it challenging for young people to secure stable full-time employment in competitive jobs. This is why the younger generation often dine alone, seeing it as a form of personal expression and individualization



Expanding Mukbang Reach: The Global Phenomenon

In March 2020, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic prompted people to remain indoors, leading to increased isolation and a significant decline in physical human interaction. Consequently, social media emerged as the primary avenue for individuals worldwide to connect, express emotions, and explore new hobbies and interests. Amidst this global shift, mukbangs gained immense popularity as a widely watched genre, with people turning to them as a source of entertainment and connection during the pandemic

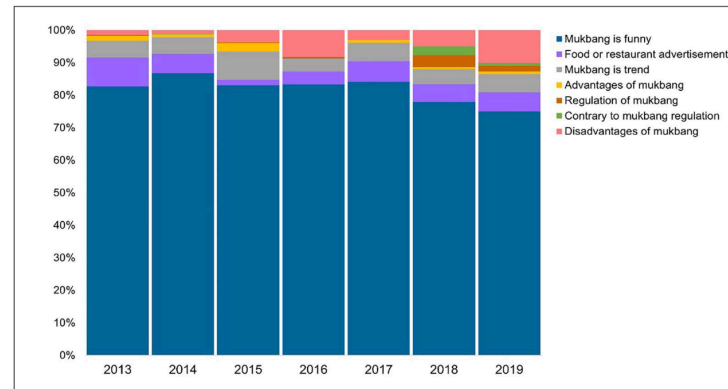


Figure 3. Chronological bar showing the proportion of each topic for each year (the width of the bar is proportional to the number of text segments each year, and the height of the clusters represents the frequency of text segments within the topics).

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Diversity of Mukbangs: Exploring Content Varieties

- The "**Big Food Fighter**" → influencers indulge in consuming large quantities of food in a single sitting.
- The "**Calm Eater**" → the use of ASMR techniques to eat silently, which, induces a sense of tranquility and aesthetic appeal for viewers.
- The "**Weirdo**" → mukbangers who showcase eccentric and unconventional eating practices, which may not resonate well with some viewers and can raise questions of morality.
- The "**Cook**" → lifestyle videos of traditional home cooking and dining experiences. Furthermore, fostering a sense of belonging or virtual friendship with viewers.
- The "**Pretty Boy/Girl**" → influencers prioritize their appearance over food consumption. Moreover, engaging primarily through live chats or post-live comment sections on streaming and social media platform

Understanding Viewership: The Drive to Watch Mukbangs

- 1st Motivation:** viewership of mukbang content is a vicarious pleasure. Individuals often watch others consume large quantities of food to derive satisfaction from their food consumption.
- 2nd Motivation:** escapism. Individuals who watch mukbangs use it as a tool to escape what is happening in reality in their world. This can be tied back to the originality of mukbangs and why they were created because the youth generation or *sampo* generation used mukbangs as a way to cope with the socioeconomic pressure as a way to express themselves
- 3rd Motivation:** sexual nature. From a feminist perspective, researchers have uncovered a motivation for why individuals watch mukbangs: men often fetishize women eating. Moreover, this involves the sexualization of bodies, particularly when women consume large amounts of food deemed "harmful"
- 4th motivation:** the desire for connectedness. These videos have established a virtual space where social interaction can occur without the need for physical interactions. They offer individuals an escape from reality and facilitate a shared eating experience.

Exploring Social Media's Taboo Food Trends

The appeal of mukbangs lies in the spectacle of consuming enormous quantities of food and indulging in exotic dishes, which captivates the interest of the viewers. For mukbangers to gain popularity, they will eat "irritating foods or try new products" on their streaming or social media platforms to gauge the audience's attention

A YouTuber who uses spectacle to attract attention is Sean Kim, with a video of him eating raw beef liver in large quantities. Other exotic foods also include but are not limited to YouTube dog intestines, steamed cats, fried rats, and mouse, etc.