

The Complexities of Mukbang: Implications for Disordered Eating Behaviors and Sociocultural Influences

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ABSTRACT

Mukbang is becoming an increasingly popular type of content on social media platforms such as youtube. It began in South Korea as a trend to display a creator eating food to diminish feelings of loneliness and enhance the sense of communal eating. Literature has identified the psychological benefits of watching mukbang, such as counteracting loneliness. However, there are growing concerns regarding the promotion of disordered behaviors in the media, as watching others eat in excessive amounts can trigger maladaptive behaviors. The present study aims to answer the question: how and to what extent do pre-existing eating factors of sociocultural demographics as well as previous eating behaviors impact one's perception of mukbang content on youtube? An experiment of a voluntary sample of 40 people was conducted where the impacts of factors such as age, gender, race, and history of disordered eating were analyzed to determine the nuanced relationship between these predisposed factors and one's perception of mukbang. A multivariate logistic regression was performed to determine the relationship between existing eating behaviors and the attitude towards mukbang. The results revealed that males, those under the age of 18, and Asians had a more positive perception of mukbang than their female, over 18, and non-Asian counterparts, respectively. Binge eating appeared to have a more nuanced impact on perceptions held by the participants, driving behaviors such as jealousy and vicarious eating while discouraging discomfort. Overall, an expansive extent of perspectives exist within an individual's personalized experiences how they contribute to one's attitude towards mukbang media.

Introduction

Mukbang is a type of video or live stream in which creators, known as BJs (Broadcasting Jockeys), display and enjoy a wide variety of foods, and in many cases, it is an unusually large amount of food. It is described as a "digital dinner table" and it is a virtual means for sociable eating where the host and the viewers can interact while enjoying a meal (Choe, 2019). Mukbang originated on a platform called Afreeca TV, which is the biggest multi-channel network in Korea, and has since grown exponentially in numbers and types. Now, 10-15 percent of all channels on Afreeca TV are of the mukbang genre, with a large variety of BJs with their own styles of videos (Hong & Park, 2017). Furthermore, mukbang has spread on an international scale and can now be found on platforms such as Youtube (Strand & Gutafsson, 2020).

There are a number of explanations as to how and why mukbang has gained so much popularity, but diminishing feelings of loneliness appears to be a key factor. In Korea, it is tradition to eat together, especially with family. People not only eat at the same table but also share the same foods. However, this tradition is slowly disappearing as time and the generational landscape progresses. To compensate, many Koreans view mukbang as a way to duplicate the sense of communal eating (Kang et al., 2020). Though there is a lack of research surrounding the psychological effects of watching mukbang videos, they have the potential to foster a sense of commensality and feelings of emotional connection. They can counteract isolation by allowing interactions with a community based on similar interests

(Pereira et al., 2019). However, there is also a growing concern about the effects that mukbang can have on viewers' perceptions of food and their eating habits.

Strand and Gustafsson (2020) conducted a qualitative study on Youtube comments and Reddit posts about mukbang in order to find a potential correlation to disordered eating. They found that mukbang could be perceived as both beneficial and hurtful, depending on the person and the context. In some cases, it helped restrictive eaters become more comfortable with eating and improved food intake. In others, it caused viewers to lose their appetite and therefore reinforced restrictive eating, as mukbang provides the vicarious pleasure of eating so that they can avoid actually doing so (Kircaburun et al., 2020). Similarly, watching mukbang has prevented binge eating by portraying the act of eating large amounts of food as "disgusting" for some people, while for others it was clearly a driving force for binge relapses (Strand and Gustafsson, 2020). More specifically, this is because mukbang content often portrayed thin content creators constantly eating large amounts of food, which has been shown to distort the viewer's perception of food consumption and its relation to health. For instance, there are videos of people eating up to 50,000 or more calories in a day, which is 25 times the daily recommended amount of 2,000 calories. As a result, watching mukbang enforced the idea that binge-eating was acceptable and therefore promoted binge-eating disorder as well as other maladaptive behaviors such as purging and restricting to cope with binging (Kircaburun et al., 2020).

There are a variety of phenomena associated with disordered eating that may have a relationship with mukbang watching. For instance, feelings of shame and pride have a complex relationship with the behaviors of restricting, binging, and purging (Skårderud, 2007). Many patients of anorexia specifically experience extreme levels of guilt when eating, which may be relieved by vicariously eating through mukbang as many viewers do (Pereira et al., 2019). Furthermore, forcing oneself to restrict while others do not can bring a sense of pride to an individual, which is why those who restrict often experience those feelings. This may contribute to one's perception of the content creators in mukbang videos and their overall attitudes toward the content in general. In addition, the focus on oneself compared to another person while eating may contribute to the negative or positive emotions one may feel when eating (Pollatos et al., 2016; Gillespie, 2019). Depending on the preconceived attitudes one has towards eating and their relationship with food, watching somebody else eat may evoke feelings of disgust, comfort, and many more (Strand and Gustafsson, 2020), which implies a very nuanced connection between one's pre-existing eating behaviors and their perceptions of mukbang.

Disordered eating in general is deep-rooted in society's views of beauty as well as how diet and cosmetic industries and mass media enforce the thin ideal. According to Nasser (2006), the cultivation of beauty standards and the promotion of unhealthy levels of thinness in industries involving diet culture, fashion, and beauty have been historically proven to be a trigger for the development of body dissatisfaction and eating disorders. Furthermore, problematic usage of the internet, which is the maladaptive or excessive engagement with various online activities, has been statistically proven to have a strong correlation to eating disorder psychopathology, restrictive eating, and desire for thinness (Nasser, 2006). The thin ideal and its presence in mass media and the beauty industry are significant elements in capitalist societies, and it teaches young women to internalize the idea that they must be at an unhealthy weight to be desirable (Hesse-Biber, 2006). Clark and Tiggemann (2006) further emphasize that beauty standards in today's society glorify the desirability of an unattainable level of thinness but are still accepted by many. This discrepancy between the portrayed ideal and actual self leads to the development of body dissatisfaction (Clark and Tiggemann, 2006).

Specifically in Asian countries, where mukbang content originates, beauty standards are culturally very prevalence and deep-rooted in societal norms. The combination of the historical impacts of Western culture's thin ideals and the effects of industrialization in Asia have caused many countries in the continent to place a high value on appearance (Pike and Dunne, 2015). Evidence presents that Asian women often compare themselves to Western women, and the fluctuations in beauty standards began to change as a result. Asian women often wished to be taller, smaller, and lighter, which contributed to the high rates of body dissatisfaction in Asian countries (Hall, 1995) and consequently the normalization of and rising rates of disordered eating as well (Cummins et al., 2005). The relationship

between Asian culture and negative attitudes towards food or one's body appears to be strong and complex, which brings into question the association between disordered eating and the creation of the mukbang trend.

The present study aims to analyze the relationship between predetermining factors of race, gender, age, and pre-existing eating behaviors that affect one's attitude toward the mukbang trend. Currently, there is little regarding the specific implications of predisposed disordered behaviors or lack thereof on the perspectives that people may hold on such a controversial form of content. This review of literature has led to the question: how and to what extent do pre-existing factors of sociocultural demographics as well as previous eating behaviors impact one's perception of mukbang content on youtube?

Methodology

Experimental Design

This experiment consisted of four sections. The first section consisted of various questions about the demographic characteristics of the participants, including age, gender identity, ethnicity, and height/weight. The purpose of these questions was to get a perspective on what exactly the sample looked like, as well as gain an understanding of how these characteristics may have an effect on one's response and perception of mukbang. The second section consisted of a combination of open-ended and scaled questions, using the Likert scale, about participants' current eating habits. These questions covered topics such as body image, the nutritional value of participants' diets, and history of dieting. The purpose of these questions was to establish the initial characteristics of participants' body image and eating habits to compare them to the final characteristics upon watching the mukbang videos. The third section asked participants to watch three clips from a total of three different mukbang videos that were approximately two minutes long each. Videos were chosen from the top three "mukbangers" with the most subscribers while meeting the criteria of being South Korean, female, and those whose content surrounds the consumption of unusually large amounts of food. The channels chosen were Hamzy, SULGI, and Eat wit Boki. The most viewed video from each channel was used for the study. The clips were chosen by looking for the point in each video where the creator ate the most amount of food in the shortest amount of time. These criteria were created in an attempt to provoke the most significant reaction possible from viewers. After the videos, a series of general questions were asked about the previous experience that participants may have had with mukbang watching as well as the participants' reactions and perceptions to the clips shown. The fourth section consisted of various questions using the agree disagree continuum of a Likert scale that asked about the effects that mukbang may or may not have had on participants' eating habits. The purpose of this section was to further establish an understanding of the effects of mukbang watching. The experiment was relayed to the public and gained a total of 40 voluntary respondents.

Data Analysis

Demographic Factors and T-Test

The influence that one's demographic situation has on a participant's attitude towards mukbang was determined by comparing the data sets of gender, age, and race with the ratings that the participants gave when asked to what extent watching mukbang positively/negatively affected their relationship with food. The ratings for the female participants were compared with that of male participants, under 18 with over 18, and Asian with non-Asian. These data sets were all compared using a t-test.

Regression Analysis of Existing Eating Behavior and Attitude Towards Disordered Eating and Mukbang

The influence that one’s predisposed eating behaviors have on a participant’s perception towards mukbang was determined by doing a content analysis of the responses to the open-ended questions following the mukbang video clips. The open-ended responses were content analyzed and coded for different themes that were determined to be generally present in mukbang attitudes.

Table 1 - The operationalized definitions of the codes

Code	Explanation
Jealousy/Admiration	Indicating jealousy or admiration, such as commenting on the amount of food the mukbanger can eat without gaining weight or, the fact that the mukbanger can eat and earn money simultaneously
Enjoyment	Showing behaviors of satisfaction and enjoyment of the content present, using positive words and emotions to describe their reaction to sounds, images, or food in the video.
Vicarious Eating	Discussing how one vicariously eats through the creator, often referencing their personal disordered behaviors and using mukbang videos as a coping mechanism to not eat.
Concern for Health	Expressing concern for the health of the content creator, such as commenting on the different health implications of eating such large quantities of food or the exercise/purging/restriction behaviors the creator may engage in to compensate.
Assumptions	Making assumptions about the creator’s exercise and diet habits behind the camera, expressing their disbelief in the discrepancy between how much the creator consumes and the size of their body.
Curiosity	Showing curiosity for the food, the creator’s lifestyle, or the reason that people watch the videos out of a lack of understanding of the appeal.
Discomfort/Repulse	Showing behaviors of discomfort, repulse, and dissatisfaction with the content present, using negative words and emotions to describe their reaction to sounds, images, or food in the behavior.
Commenting on the creator’s body	Making any comment about the creator’s body, usually expressing concern or curiosity regarding the amount that they eat in the videos while still maintaining a relatively healthy figure.
Eating Disorder Behaviors	Referencing eating disorder behaviors that the participant personally engages in and how they affect the participant’s perception of

the content, including restricting, purging, and binging.

Commenting about the food in the videos Expressing appeal towards the food in the video

These codes were used to determine the general attitudes the participants held towards the content they watched as well as the different behaviors that they claimed were present after doing so. The codes were recorded wherever they were present as a binary response variable. For each code binary as a response, a logistic regression with the independent variables listed below was performed.

Table 2 - The questions associated with independent variables.

Independent Variable	Survey Question
BMI: Body Mass Index	What is your height? (in inches) What is your weight? (in lbs)
Rating of dissatisfaction with body image	How often do you feel unsatisfied with your body image?
Rating of anxiety level around food	How often do you feel anxious about what you eat?
Intentional eating	How intentional are you about eating healthy?
Nutritional value of current diet	How would you rate the nutritional value of your current diet?
Fad Diet Binary	Have you ever participated in fad diets?
Binge Eating Binary	Have you ever engaged in binge eating?
Restriction Binary	Have you ever engaged in restricting? (i.e. preventing yourself from eating a certain type of food unrelated to health issues or allergies) ex: one food diet, cutting carbs out of your life etc.
Purging Binary	Have you ever engaged in purging (self-induced vomiting)?
Personal History of Eating Disorder	Do you have a history of a diagnosed eating disorder?
Family History of Eating Disorder	Does anyone in your family have a history of a diagnosed eating disorder?
Mukbang Watch History	Have you watched mukbang in the past?

All of these factors are related to the preconceived attitudes one may have about food, eating, diet culture, disordered eating, and finally their attitude and approach to mukbangs. The results were mainly looked at depending on the statistical significance of each data point, where statistically insignificant results were less considered.

Results

Demographic factors

Gender influence

It appeared that female participants generally had a more negative perception of the content. When asked to rate the positive impact mukbang had on the participants' relationship with food, female participants' ratings had a mean of 2, while male participants' ratings had a mean of 2.286. The difference between these means was statistically insignificant, however, $p=0.413$. When asked to rate the negative impact mukbang had on the participants' relationship with food, female participants' ratings had a mean of 3.14, while the male participants' ratings had a mean of 2.86. This mean difference was also statistically insignificant, $p=0.544$.

Table 3 - Comparison of ratings by female and male participants of mukbang content's perceived positive impact on relationship food

	n	Mean	Variance	df	t Stat	P one tail	P two tail
F	21	2	1	33	-0.830	0.206	0.413
M	14	2.286	0.989				

Table 4 - Comparison of ratings by female and male participants of mukbang content's perceived negative impact on relationship food

	n	Mean	Variance	df	t Stat	P one tail	P two tail
F	21	3.143	2.029	33	0.613	0.272	0.544
M	14	2.857	1.516				

Age influence

Overall, the participants under the age of 18 seemed to view mukbang more positively. When asked to rate the positive impact mukbang had on the participants' relationship with food, under 18 participants' rating had a mean of 2.4, while over 18 participants' rating had a mean of 1.8. This mean difference was not statistically significant, $p=0.104$. When asked to rate the negative impact mukbang had on the participants' relationship with food, under 18 participants' rating had a mean of 2.95, while the male participants' rating had a mean of 3.2. This mean difference was statistically insignificant, however, $p=0.540$.

Table 5 - Comparison of ratings by participants under and over 18 of mukbang content's perceived positive impact on relationship food

	n	Mean	Variance	df	t Stat	P one tail	P two tail
<18	20	2.4	0.779	19	1.710	0.052	0.104
>18	20	1.8	0.905				

Table 6 - Comparison of ratings by participants under and over 18 of mukbang content's perceived negative impact on relationship food

	n	Mean	Variance	df	t Stat	P one tail	P two tail
<18	20	2.95	1.313	38	-0.618	0.270	0.540
>18	20	3.2	1.958				

Race influence

When Asian and non-Asian participants were compared, Asian participants appeared to view mukbang more positively. Asian participants had a mean rating of 2.368 when asked to rate the positive impact mukbang had on their relationship with food, while non-Asian participants had a mean rating of 1.857 for this question. This mean difference showed to be statistically insignificant, $p=0.091$. When asked to rate the negative impact mukbang had on the participants' relationship with food, Asian participants' ratings had a mean of 2.474, while non-Asian participants' ratings had a mean of 3.619. This mean difference was extremely statistically significant, $p=0.0031$.

Table 7 - Comparison of ratings by Asian and non-Asian participants of mukbang content's perceived positive impact on relationship food

	n	Mean	Variance	df	t Stat	P one tail	P two tail
A	19	2.368	0.801	38	1.733	0.046	0.091
NA	21	1.857	0.929				

Table 8 - Comparison of ratings by Asian and non-Asian participants of mukbang content’s perceived negative impact on relationship food

	n	Mean	Variance	df	t Stat	P one tail	P two tail
A	20	2.474	1.041	38	-3.163	0.0015	0.0031
NA	20	3.619	1.548				

Regression Analysis of Existing Eating Behavior and Attitude Towards Disordered Eating and Mukbang

The code jealousy/admiration had a positive correlation with rating of body dissatisfaction, binge eating binary, and restriction binary, but a negative correlation with rating of anxiety around food and purging binary. This code had an adjusted R-squared value of 0.1365 and a p-value of 0.1729, indicating low statistical significance. The code enjoyment had a positive correlation with restriction binary, and a negative correlation with binge eating binary and purging binary. This code had an adjusted R-squared value of 0.8419 and a p-value of 0.0001, which shows a high statistical significance. The code vicarious eating had a positive correlation with rating of anxiety around food, binge eating binary, and restriction binary, while it had a negative correlation with rating of body dissatisfaction and purging binary. This code had an adjusted R-squared value of 0.7051 and a p-value of 0.0004, which reveals that the results relating to vicarious eating are very statistically significant. The code assumptions had a positive correlation with binge eating binary and a negative correlation with restriction binary and purging binary. These results were statistically significant with an adjusted R-squared value of 0.7727 and a p-value of 0.00000003. The code discomfort/repulse had a negative correlation with body dissatisfaction rating, level of anxiety around food, binge eating binary, and restriction binary, but a positive correlation with purging binary. This code had an adjusted R-squared value of 0.7546 and a p-value of 0.00000009, indicating high statistical significance of the results. The code comment on body had a positive correlation with body dissatisfaction rating, level of anxiety around food, and purging binary, but a negative correlation with binge eating binary and restriction binary. This code had an R-squared value of 0.4299, which means that the pre-existing eating behaviors may not have had a strong influence on the presence of codes, but the results were statistically significant with a p-value of 0.003.

Table 9 - Coefficients of each logistic regression model evaluating effect of existing eating behaviors on prevalence of codes on mukbang related perceptions

	Jealousy/ Admiration	Enjoy- ment	Vicarious eating	Concern for health	Assumptions	Curiosity	Discom- fort/Repulse	Comme nt on body	ED behav- iors	Comment about food
BMI	0.0033	0.0112	-0.0050	-0.0189	0.0133	-0.0025	0.0294	0.0151	-0.0187	-0.0038
Rating of Dissatis- faction With Body Image	0.0732	0.0171	-0.0452	-0.0680	-0.1260	-0.0169	-0.0274	0.0268	0.0606	0.1026
Rating of Anxiety of Food	-0.0787	0.0495	0.0393	0.2478	0.0849	-0.0023	-0.0116	0.1219	0.0209	-0.0724
Healthy Eating	0.0660	0.01450	0.0149	-0.1482	0.1234	-0.0001	0.0613	-0.0706	-0.0133	0.1059

Nutritional Value of Diet	-0.0822	0.0284	0.0876	0.1390	0.1456	0.0336	0.0989	-0.0543	0.1655	0.0522
Fad Diet Binary	0.2867	-0.2049	0.1784	-0.3372	-0.0321	0.1860	0.0943	-0.1226	0.1268	-0.0704
Binge Eating Binary	0.1225	-0.1383	0.2268	0.0680	0.0738	0.0323	-0.0159	-0.1800	-0.0001	0.1084
Restriction Binary	0.2023	0.0569	0.2172	0.1956	-0.2746	0.0164	-0.1517	-0.1053	0.0335	0.0376
Purging Binary	-0.4249	-0.1753	-0.3802	0.0373	-0.1890	0.0769	0.1604	0.2294	0.0268	-0.2609
Personal History of ED	-0.0892	0.1974	0.4032	-0.0658	-0.0809	-0.0704	0.2503	-0.3176	0.2354	-0.1322
Family History of ED	-0.0925	0.0279	0.0595	-0.2696	0.4419	-0.1473	-0.3199	0.6984	-0.0300	-0.1894
Mukbang Watch History	-0.0179	0.2865	0.1782	0.3387	-0.1450	0.0347	-0.3217	-0.0496	0.0771	-0.1269

Table 10 - Logistic Regression Summary and Significance

	Test Accuracy	Adjusted R-Squared	F-Statistics	F Stat P-Value
Jealousy/Admiration	0.875	0.1365	1.5268	0.1729
Enjoyment	0.7	0.8419	6.9751	0.0001
Vicarious eating	0.725	0.7051	6.1080	0.0004
Concern for health	0.85	0.7780	3.0254	0.0077
Assumptions	0.875	0.7727	12.3316	0.0000003
Curiosity	0.95	0.0724	1.2603	0.2946
Discomfort/Repulse	0.85	0.7546	11.2483	0.0000009
Comment on body	0.825	0.4299	3.5135	0.0030
ED behaviors	0.7	0.4077	3.2945	0.0046
Comments about food	0.675	0.2507	2.1153	0.0503

Discussion

Demographic factors

When looking at the effects of demographic factors on one's perception of mukbang, the results revealed that females viewed mukbangs more negatively than men. On average, female participants rated the positive impact of mukbang 0.286 lower than male participants, while they rated negative impact 0.28 higher. From the literature review, beauty standards are enforced strongly onto women more than men in society, specifically regarding the portrayal of the thin ideal in media (Grabe and Ward, 2008), this finding aligns with the idea that women are more likely to be aware of

disordered eating behaviors and consequently be more inclined to believe that mukbang can hold potential harm. Furthermore, participants under the age of 18 seemed to view mukbang more positively. The average rating of participants under 18 on the positive impact of mukbang was 0.6 higher than that of participants over 18, while the average rating of the negative impact was 0.25 lower. This may be because younger people generally spend more time on social media than adults (Padín et al., 2021), and therefore potentially hold less traditional views on food in this setting. There are existing generational differences between how younger and older people perceive media due to the normalization of potentially harmful content that young people often internalize due to excessive exposure (Abi-Jaoude et al., 2020). However, younger people are generally more impacted by the relationship between social media use and eating disorder pathology, as they more often place importance on their appearance due to the pressure that arises from spending excessive time on the internet (Morris and Katzman, 2003). The positive perceptions that minors reported after watching mukbang are a cause for concern, as they may not be as aware of the negative influence that the content may have. The study results also revealed that Asian participants held more positive perceptions of mukbang than did non-Asian participants. The average rating of Asian participants of the positive impact of mukbang was 0.511 higher than that of non-Asian participants, while the average rating for negative impact was 1.145 lower. This difference may be partly due to cultural pride tied to the spread of Asian culture throughout Western countries (Lee, 2011). Though, this does raise concern as eating disorder pathology in the context of Asia is a very nuanced topic. The culture surrounding beauty standards and the thin ideal is very extreme (Pike and Dunne, 2015).

While the demographic factors of gender, age, and race all show to have an impact on one's perception of mukbang media, only the results relating to race revealed statistically significant results. This indicated that race may play the strongest role in determining whether one has a positive or negative perception of the content. Taking into consideration that the mukbang trend originated in an Asian country (Hong & Park, 2017), the implications that the content has on participants may contribute to the cultural norms and ideals relating to body and food in the context of Asia.

Pre-existing eating behaviors

The responses to questions on the experiment relating to mukbang were coded for different behaviors, including jealousy/admiration, enjoyment, vicarious eating, assumptions, discomfort/repulse, and commenting on the creator's body.

The code jealousy/admiration had a positive correlation with the pre-existing factors of body dissatisfaction, binge eating binary, and restriction binary. Due to the potential promotion of maladaptive behaviors that is associated with mukbang (Kircaburun et al., 2020), body dissatisfaction can be common in viewers. The prevalence of the code jealousy/admiration in relation to body dissatisfaction aligns with the idealized images that people see in media and the jealousy that they feel due to the lack of attainability of said images (Roberts and Good, 2010). When seeing a content creator that appears relatively small, compared to the amounts of food that they eat on camera, a viewer may feel jealousy towards the lifestyle and appearance of the creator especially when they had an extent of body dissatisfaction to begin with. Binge eating is often associated with shame for both their appearance and their behaviors (Duarte et al., 2014), and exposure to images such as people eating large amounts of food on camera may trigger feelings of envy towards the creator's lifestyle. Specifically for people with binge eating disorder, mukbang can be especially harmful to their self-esteem due to feelings of guilt associated with their eating behaviors (Strand and Gustafsson, 2020). Restriction and anorexia are also strongly associated with feelings of guilt and shame for eating (Skårderud, 2007), which consequently revokes the same feelings of jealousy when watching mukbang for those who engage in restriction.

The code jealousy/admiration had a negative correlation with the level of anxiety around food and purging binary. Stress and anxiety surrounding food are often linked to disordered eating (Bennett et al., 1999). Consequently, perceiving food in a way that does not induce negative feelings will cause one to be able to watch mukbang without feeling jealous, holding an understanding that one can eat without repercussions. This is similar to purging binary,

where often people who engage in purging hold a sense of pride and achievement that they can eat without gaining weight (Gillespie, 2019).

Vicarious eating had a positive correlation with level of anxiety around food, binge eating binary, and restriction binary. Feelings of anxiety around food implied an extent of the presence of disordered eating behaviors, which are often associated with vicarious eating and experiencing the pleasure of eating through others (Kircaburun et al., 2021). More specifically, many viewers of mukbang simultaneously enjoy the feeling of watching another person eat so much while personally staying thin and watching the content to avoid actually eating (Donnar, 2017). Restriction often implies anorexia, which is characterized by a fear of gaining weight. This is likely correlated with vicarious eating due to the negative feelings of shame and guilt that are associated with eating for people who restrict (Long et al., 2016). The relationship between mukbang and binge eating is especially nuanced, as there are a variety of existing perspectives on the effect that watching the content can have on an individual who regularly engages in the behaviors that are portrayed (Kircaburun et al., 2021; Strand and Gustafsson, 2020). The fact that vicarious eating was positively correlated with binge eating binary was potentially linked to the binging-restricting cycle (Walsh, 2011), and those who engaged in binging also engaged in restricting. This may explain the vicarious eating behaviors, despite other literature that stated that watching mukbang often triggered bingeing for participants who had a history of the behavior (Strand and Gustafsson, 2020).

The code vicarious eating also had a negative correlation with purging binary. This result appears likely for a similar reason as the negative correlation between jealousy/admiration and purging binary. Those who purge are aware of their ability to eat as much as they would like without gaining weight (Gillespie, 2019), so they have no need to vicariously eat.

The code assumptions had a positive correlation with binge eating binary. Many of the assumptions appeared to relate to the creator's eating and exercising behaviors behind the camera. However, the code commenting on body had a negative correlation to binge eating binary. Binge eaters are often more shameful and insecure about their behaviors than are any of those who engage in other behaviors (Strand and Gustafsson, 2020), which causes them to potentially have a more heightened sense of skepticism about what happens behind the screen of those who make mukbang videos. Binge eating is also associated with body image issues, as is any other eating disorder (Nicoli and Junior, 2011), which may explain why binge eating pathology had a positive correlation with commenting on body. This may be related to viewers projecting their own body dissatisfaction and insecurities onto the creators in the videos, as the discrepancy between their desired and actual weight appears to be different than that of those in the videos.

Binge eating binary also had a negative correlation with the code discomfort/repulse. Watching mukbang may be used as a coping mechanism for those who attempt to seek comfort and reconciliation for their behaviors, as binge eaters often feel shame for eating (Kircaburun et al., 2021). Despite the concern that mukbang may trigger relapses and promote negative binging behaviors, some may use the content as a means of affirmation that they are not alone and therefore not feel discomfort towards it. This idea that mukbang may be triggering is present differently in the positive correlation between purging binary and discomfort/repulse. Watching mukbang may trigger negative memories (Kircaburun et al., 2021), and cause feelings of discomfort to arise. Discomfort/repulse also had a negative correlation with restriction, but perhaps for another reason. Those who restrict often feel a sense of pride in the fact that they do not eat (Skårderud, 2007), as well as focus on others who do eat as a consequence (Pollatos et al., 2016). By watching another person eat in such large quantities, those who engage in restricting behaviors are able to enhance their own sense of pride and satisfaction in not eating.

Conclusion

Ultimately, there is a complex relationship between the factors that may affect one's perceptions of

mukbang. The content itself appears to be very controversial, evoking a variety of emotions within viewers depending on their preconceived attitudes about food and the sociocultural aspects of eating. Preexisting behaviors such as restricting, purging, and bingeing appeared to have strong influences on one's perception of the mukbang content as well as their overall attitudes towards it. Some results were contradictory of others, such as binge eating binary having a positive correlation with assumptions, but a negative correlation with commenting on body even while the two codes coexisted most of the time. This exemplifies that the findings reveal the nuanced perspectives that exist within a person's individual experiences and the intersectionality of the factors that contribute. There were also codes that did not present any significant results, including curiosity, the presence of ED behaviors, and comments about food.

Limitations

There are a number of limitations that exist within the study design. Many of the findings involved results from content analysis, and due to the personal biases that may have existed during the coding process, bias may have influenced the results to some extent. Only one person was conducting the analysis, meaning there was no way to ensure subjectivity while coding. In relation to the currently existing literature and perspectives existing regarding mukbang, the results may have been skewed due to the potential existing biases of the coder. Furthermore, a considerable portion of the results were statistically insignificant, due to the lack of participants that responded to the experiment's survey. There were 40 participants in total, and while it was sufficient to collect data and draw conclusions, generalizability is difficult considering the many insignificant p-values.

Furthermore, only a few mukbang videos were shown to the participants. Because many of the respondents had never been exposed to mukbang in the past, the few videos that were shown do not provide a completely accurate representation of all the mukbang content that exists online and therefore may not provide the most generalizable conclusion. The results of this study are not completely sufficient in understanding the holistic variety of perspectives people have on mukbang and the effects it can have on viewers. Rather, it aids in the continuation of understanding the complex relationship that controversial content such as mukbang has with its viewers.

Future Directions

Future research should aim to analyze the content itself as well as the viewers' opinions. This would help to gain a more generalizable perspective on mukbang content and its effects. For instance, the mukbang videos themselves can be coded and then compared to the themes that exist in the viewers' comments or survey responses. This will fill the gap in the literature that exists regarding the lack of understanding of the relationship between aspects of the content itself and the viewer's perceptions. Furthermore, this study can be repeated with more coders and more participants in the study to ensure both a lack of bias in the coding process as well as more statistically significant, or more generalizable, conclusions.

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