

## ***Mukbang Culture: Can Digital Consumption Satisfy Physical Cravings?***

### **-Abstract**

This research focuses on the regular pattern between watching online food broadcasts known as mukbang and restrained diet due to geographical relocation. This study adopts the scientific random sampling method to select 50 Chinese students studying at the School of the Art Institute as recipients for a short Google Form questionnaire. The result indicates a definite correlation between physical access caused by geographic location and the amount of mukbang consumed online.

### **-Background**

Mukbang, originated from two Korean words: “mukja, or ‘eating,’ and bang-song, meaning ‘broadcasting’.” (Matthews), has become one of the most viewed video categories among many platforms. In a typical mukbang video, the person sits in front of the camera and films what they are eating, filling the audiences’ ears with slurping, crunching, grinding, and swallowing sound. The hosts often consume larger portions of food that are high in calories which brings drooling visuals to feast the viewers’ eyes. This is a new phenomenon of ASMR: “Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response”, which is the tingling sensation triggered from certain visual and aural scenarios such as by peeking into a personal routine vlog or listening to the sound of unwrapping a chocolate bar.

There are several other reasons for people to be so obsessed with mukbang videos. According to a popular study: “Lonely, homesick viewers might now set a plate in front of their screens and pretend to eat in company” (Orange). Solo eating resulted from isolated living is one of the top reasons in forming a societal habit of watching mukbang. People who have been geographically relocated also find themselves watching others eat food from their hometown as a way of finding ease and comfort when feeling homesick...

### **-Research Question**

This specific study focuses on the Chinese student community at the School of the Art Institute and examines the mental and physical effect of watching mukbang. This research proposes two main questions:

1. What are their purposes when choosing to watch mukbang (What do they wish to get out from watching mukbang)?
2. How mukbang videos can mentally or physically affect them?

### **-Research Crowd**

Chinese students at SAIC.

### **-Research Method**

The 50 recipients were drawn randomly from the school’s official Chinese student email list obtained from the school’s Chinese liaison. There are 637 students on the list, one out of each

twelve students was picked until the number of 50 was reached. Eventually 19 people got back to me and finished the survey.

### **-Research Format**

Google form questionnaire.

### **-Significance of the Study**

In a globalized era, billions of people are being geographically separated from their hometown due to various reasons. Fortunately, with the development of internet technology, long-distance communication becomes much more accessible to all crowd through platforms such as FaceTime and Youtube. How does the brain react and function while watching mukbang? Does video platform have the potential to go 4D? Being a person relocated at the other end of the globe herself, this study presents a new possibility for me and people like me to experience home in a new sensory way.

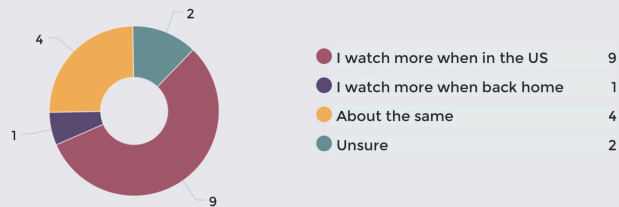
### **-Hypothesis**

Mukbang becomes a contemporary way of accessing certain food associated with homeness among the young generation who are being geographically relocated.

### **-General Findings**

1. 15 out of 18 responses said they have watched mukbang before.

### Do you watch the same amount of mukbang when in the US and when back home?



2. 9 out of 17 responses said they watch mukbang at least once a week, 2 people even said they watch it everyday.
3. There is an equal spread for them to watch on Chinese video platforms and western ones.
4. 23 out of 30 responses said they watch mukbang hosts either from China, Japan or Korea.
5. Most watched cuisines are: Chinese food (11 out of 34), Korean food (10 out of 34), and Japanese food (7 out of 34).

When it comes to people's reason for watching mukbang, the top two are "I can't get access to certain food in reality, so I watch others consume those food" and "I'm on diet". Both of those derived from restrained diet either based on personal choice or physical and regional limitation. In the case of this study, the majority of people participated have moved away from home for at least one year, so geographical restriction plays an essential role in the digital consumption of mukbang among this specific crowd.

### -Key Findings

The questionnaire constructs a section comparing people's pattern of watching mukbang when they are in the US and when they are back home, specifically focuses on the frequency of

watching mukbang and the content watched. Here are three charts showing the results based on the answers provided from participants.

Chart A-01

Chart B-01

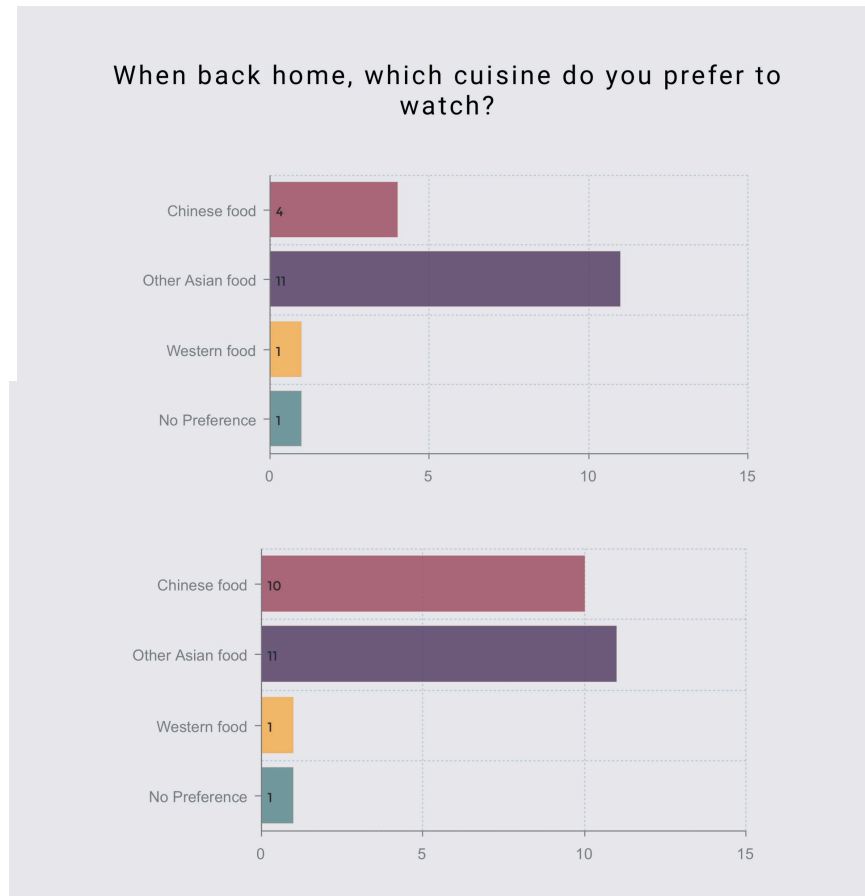


Chart B-02

According to the data collected in Chart A-01, 9 out of 16 people said they watch more mukbang when in the US, whereas only 1 person said they watch more when back home.

Scientifically, the amount of mukbang watched increases as people move away from their homes and indigenous food, meaning the need for watching mukbang increases with the need for eating traditional food.

Content wise, by comparing Chart B-01 and B-02, people's need for watching Chinese food mukbang drops dramatically (60%) when they return home, as the need for Other Asian food mukbang remains the same. Having physical access to authentic Chinese food reduces the demand tremendously for online consumption. Observing this pattern, there is a direct co-relationship between geographical location (physical access) and the amount of mukbang consumption online.

Later in the questionnaire, aspects related to cooking pattern and physical vs. digital consumption are discussed. 16 out of 18 people claim they cook at least once a week, with 6 participants saying they even cook every single day. This means they already have a certain level of access to food that are indigenous to their hometowns. In reality, about half of the participants say they are interested in cooking famous mukbang dishes and majority of them show preference on actual eating experience over watching someone else consume. The participants' main interest being the physicality of food indicates the reason for this researched crowd to watch mukbang is not solely for ASMR sensory stimulation and digital experience, but as a contemporary way to access food and homeness.

## **-Conclusion**

The result indicates a correlation between physical access caused by geographic location and the amount of mukbang consumed online. Majority of the participants claim they watch mukbang to gain certain level of access to food they can't have in reality. In this digitalized and planetary era, the rise of mukbang has its inevitability, reflecting on common features and

patterns of how human beings live. Thanks to mukbang, people like me are able to experience home in a new sensory way.

Work Cited Page

1. Matthews, Mellisa. "Why Mukbang Is HUUUUUUUGE." *Men's Health*, vol. 34, no. 3, Apr. 2019, p. 28.
2. Orange, Michelle. "Screening the World: Entertainment Unboxed." *Virginia Quarterly Review*, University of Virginia, 18 Jan. 2019