COGNITIVE SCIENCES AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Mukbang and Me: Implications on Cognition and Physical Well-Being among Undergraduates

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ABSTRACT

Mukbang has become a global eating trend, especially among youths. Mukbang is mainly prevalent on social media platforms and has become addictive content for many who follow such videos. This study explores the effects of watching mukbang on cognitive functions, health problems and social interaction patterns. The study uses neurofeedback to analyse the brainwaves of selected participants who are university-going youths and have a regular habit of watching Mukbang every day. Two situations were recorded using neurofeedback; the first is only watching Mukbang passively, while the other is where the participant watched Mukbang and ate something simultaneously. A beta and alpha brainwave data were chosen to be analysed. Findings showed that the beta brainwave was recorded the highest in watching mukbang passively while the alpha was the highest during watching and eating mukbang. The result shows that anxiety, excitement, and focus were associated with the highest beta waves, while optimal cognitive performance was related to the activation of the upper alpha wave. The analysis provides a perspective to understand the effect of Mukbang on youths, specifically those currently studying at the tertiary level. The study links how idle interest in Mukbang affects cognitive activities and potentially triggers bingeing, worsening the relationship with food. Future research should examine how Mukbang encourages the diet *Mukbangers* would be tempted to adopt as daily food intake and how it affects long-term cognitive development among university-going youths.

Keywords: Mukbang, cognition, well-being

1   INTRODUCTION

Mukbang is an Internet phenomenon about hosts taking video recordings of them eating a large number of unhealthy foods and posting them on media online video platforms. This trend originated in South Korea approximately around 2010 and has since become a global trend. The word "Mukbang" originates from the Korean words "meokneun" (eating) and "bangsong" (broadcast). Many mukbang hosts do not necessarily pay any attention to the ingredients of the food they consume, whether the foods are high in calories, fat or cholesterol-laden, because their main contention is to have followers (known as *mukbanger*s) feel satisfied when they watch their videos and interacting with the hosts. Today, a large part of society imitated this action of consuming food in large portions and an unbalanced diet (McCarthy, 2017) and watching mukbang will generate many nutrient and health problems because they mimic the host and take food more than it should be. Aside from that, some people make mukbang an autonomous sensory meridian response (ASMR) because the hosts produce some sounds when they eat, such as crunching, drinking, and slurping. According to Loy and Mohamad (2021), some people find listening to these sounds very calming. They enjoy hearing it, plus ASMR is about a tingling sensation induced in response to audio-visual stimulations. While some studies suggest Mukbang helps to reduce loneliness for some people (Strand and Gustaffson, 2020), it has also been criticised as a problematic watching habit associated with mental health conditions such as addictive disorders and eating disorders (Kircaburun et al., 2021).

Nowadays, the development of the internet and other technology is undeniable rapid. We have been experiencing the era where mobile phones and the internet have continuously advanced and changed the social and psychological landscape. Many people have become internet-addicted, making mukbang trending (Kircaburun & Griffiths, 2019). Mukbang is a live broadcast or recorded video of hosts posting on social media such as YouTube, Tik Tok, Instagram, and Facebook. Mukbang refers to the act of individuals, at times in groups, that consume a large portion of food and eat all of it in front of the camera. The mukbang videos are approximately 15 minutes and above because they need to finish all the food. Aside from that, the hosts are called *mukbangers,* and there have been many self-claimed *mukbangers* worldwide. Mukbang videos and live Mukbang broadcasts have received a steady positive response from many people, especially young adults (Kang et al., 2020).

Eating in front of the camera or during live shows is a growing trend, primarily performed by food bloggers called *mukbangers*. There is a problem in the mukbang phenomenon that impacts young people's cognition and physical well-being. According to Kircaburun et al. (2020a, 2020b), the minority of the mukbang viewer may engage in the behaviour excessively, problematically, or addictively. They will also develop severe adverse consequences such as disordered eating, internet addiction, eating distortion, table manners, and obesity (Kircaburun et al., 2020b, 2020c). The viewer may also experience hunger because the hypothalamus in the brain's right hemisphere will produce a hunger sensation even though we just ate a few minutes ago (Stellar,1984). According to Edholm et al. (1955), we are stimulated by the food smell, watching the food, and thinking about it. Starting from here, the viewer may engage in disordered eating and take a large portion of food at once. This behaviour will lead them to develop anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, and binge eating disorder, a severe health problem, including obesity. This binge eating