The average individual consumes 2,000–2,500 calories per day. A mukbang content creator may consume 10,000 calories in one meal. This excessive eating trend has gained immense popularity on YouTube and other social platforms, where creators binge on enormous amounts of food while being recorded, often interacting with their viewers and chatting about daily life.

Whilst entertaining for some, the spectacle of epic feasts may present a less appetizing reality. This article explores the potential downsides of mukbang, shedding light on what might be hiding behind the camera.

Understanding mukbang: a closer look at the phenomenon

Mukbang is a portmanteau of two Korean words: 'meokneun' and 'bangsong,' which translate into eating and broadcast, respectively. As the name implies, mukbang is an **eating show broadcasting a host eating large quantities of food**, watched by many for entertainment purposes.

Although it originated in South Korea, the mukbang trend has found its way into Western culture and has even been embraced as a career. In fact, one of the leading mukbangers is the American Nicholas Perry, known by his online name Nikocado Avocado.

Mukbangers, aka broadcast jockeys (BJs), create eating shows on platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok. Picture a buffet of fast foods, tons of seafood, a week's worth of ramen, and boxes of donuts. These are some of the meals live streamers indulge in on their **binge-eating videos**. Regardless of the food type consumed, mukbang videos are consistently food-themed and involve the host consuming large amounts of unhealthy food.

A Mukbang video often also features the broadcast jockey aiming to elicit **autonomous sensory meridian response (ASMR)** noises like crunching, slurping, and chewing. These noises, when heard, enhance the viewing experience and offer sensory delight that some viewers find hard to look away from. Research analyzing the emergence of mukbang highlighted that sensory enjoyment is actually a primary motivator for watching such videos.

The psychology behind mukbang videos

A trend doesn't make waves in today's world if it doesn't have a certain appeal that resonates with a diverse audience. A review paper discussed the psychology of mukbang watching and offered some valuable insights.

Aside from entertainment, those who watch mukbang videos find meaning in what they perceive as collaborative or social eating, a valuable tradition in Korean culture. Basically, mukbang's ability to offer a **sense of belonging** and **social connection** becomes prominent when BJs talk to their viewers and engage with the community watching them. This is particularly impactful for viewers who are socially isolated or suffer from an intense feeling of loneliness, according to a 2021 survey distributed to 217 mukbang viewers.

"Some of the motivations for mukbang use can include fulfilling the need to eat with company and feeling emotionally connected to mukbang content creators and other viewers. It has been shown to help individuals overcome loneliness by creating a sense of community."

Dr. Andrew Harris, psychology lecturer, School of Social Sciences

Most of us watch social media content to distract ourselves from the troubles and annoyances of our daily lives, and mukbang viewers are no different. They find pleasure in this form of escapism, allowing them to de-stress and briefly forget their possible struggles.

Some people have the false idea that when watching mukbangers eat this significant amount of food, they can psychologically mimic the feeling of having eaten themselves and induce satiety. Yet, a *Cornell* thesis proposed a contrary view. Across three conducted studies, findings were consistent that mukbang videos actually increased the desire to eat and decreased satiation levels.

Mukbang and body image: a potential connection

The importance of having a positive view of oneself cannot be overstated, which is why there are rising concerns regarding the potential dangers of mukbang in distorting body image.

Watching a thin mukbanger eat an absurd amount of food creates **false perceptions about normal, healthy eating**. It also **falsely glorifies and normalizes overeating**, promoting unrealistic standards for food consumption and unhealthy eating habits. This can have long-term adverse health effects on those influenced by this controversial content.

Seeing BJs eat without apparent consequences can also result in body image dissatisfaction, as it sets up spectators with unreasonable expectations about food intake and body weight. This may contribute to leaving viewers with feelings of inadequacy and discontent with their own bodies, considerably impacting their mental well-being.

Mukbang videos and eating disorders

While apprehensions about its various impacts make mukbang dangerous for all, it's especially harmful for individuals struggling with eating disorders.

It's also vital to acknowledge that mukbang videos can particularly appeal to vulnerable viewers who have existing eating disorders or tendencies to develop one. This significantly applies to binge-eating disorder, which is the most common phenotype in the United States.

Solid evidence supporting these claims is yet to be presented, but preliminary research is increasingly highlighting a link between mukbang videos and exacerbated behaviors of disordered eating.
Eating disorder support

Potential risks and side effects

Mukbang is a form of entertainment that comes with a cost, specifically, the health risks implicated for the observers and the content creators themselves.

Here are some of the hazards associated with this notorious trend:

- **Digestive issues.** Consuming large unhealthy meals in one setting can be detrimental to your digestive health and cause long-term gastrointestinal problems like bloating and stomach pain.
- **Weight gain.** Excessive eating of high-caloric food can contribute to unhealthy weight gain and becoming overweight or obese, leading to health issues like diabetes and cardiovascular disease.
- **Financial implications.** Purchasing ample amounts of food for a mukbang video or by spectators trying to replicate these habits can be financially straining. This is marked for creators who rely on ad revenues but may be unsuccessful in their content creation.
- **Psychological impacts.** In addition to the promotion of unhealthy eating and possibly encouraging eating disorders, studies have exposed a link between mukbang and amplified internet addiction.

Mukbang alternatives for promoting healthy eating habits

In our digital age, where vast knowledge and various content can be easily found and leveraged, we have access to abundant sources of entertainment that are equally beneficial, devoid of the adverse effects that may accompany mukbangs.

Here are some healthy alternatives that could be of use:

- **Cooking shows.** Tune into cooking programs that offer healthy recipes with nutritious value. You can enjoy a good meal with the perk of learning how to make it.

- **Fitness and wellness.** Explore channels and videos that encourage physical activity and holistic wellness, and enjoy a healthier lifestyle.

- **Mindfulness and relaxation.** De-stress and focus on improving your mental health and well-being through content that teaches meditation and relaxation techniques.

Since content creators and influencers are constantly on the rise, caution is non-negotiable when it comes to the content shared and watched due to the momentous influence it carries. Albeit entertaining for reasons now better understood, the possible negative consequence of mukbangs cannot be neglected.

It’s now more important than ever to make our physical and mental health a priority and engage in positive, self-loving behavior. Remember, if you struggle with an eating disorder or body image issues, you are not fighting alone, and seeking help is the best approach. Don't wait to invest in your health, and make this knowledge work for you, not against you.

FAQ

Is mukbang only popular in South Korea?

While its origins go back to South Korea, its rise to popularity through global trends and YouTube no longer confines it to Asian culture.

How do mukbangers stay thin despite unhealthy eating habits?

A mukbang host can maintain their weight through a combination of techniques they carry out off-camera. These include regular exercise, strict dieting when not filming, intermittent fasting, and caloric tracking. Video editing tricks may also make it appear as if they're eating more than they really are. Nonetheless, it's important to emphasize that most mukbang creators are actually far from thin or healthy. In fact, several BJs suffer from numerous health issues because of their practices, including obesity, sleep apnea, hypertension, and heart disease.

Resources:

1. The spectrum of motivations behind watching mukbang videos and its health effects on its viewers: a review.
2. The popularity of eating broadcast: content analysis of "mukbang" YouTube videos, media coverage, and the health impact of "mukbang" on public.
3. The psychology of mukbang watching: a scoping review of the academic and non-academic literature.
4. Eating together multimodally: collaborative eating in mukbang, a korean livestream of eating.
5. Compensatory usage of the internet: the case of mukbang watching on YouTube.
6. Does watching mukbangs help you diet? The effect of the mukbang on the desire to eat.
7. Digital hazards for feeding and eating: what we know and what we don't.
8. The social epidemiology of binge-eating disorder and behaviors in early adolescents.
9. Mukbang and disordered eating: a netnographic analysis of online eating broadcasts.
10. Problematic mukbang watching and its relationship to disordered eating and internet addiction: a pilot study among emerging adult mukbang watchers.