Mukbang in Turkey as a Virtual Community. Socialization and Parasocial Interaction: A Netnographic Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: It is well known that social media networks have led to changes in many traditional phenomena and events. The changes and transformations of these networks on traditional food culture have been particularly strong. In recent years, videos featuring food and sounds in the foreground and involving excessive food consumption in live broadcasts or pre-prepared videos have gained rapid popularity. This form of eating, which emerged in South Korea and is called mukbang, has quickly spread all over the world. Although numerous studies have been conducted in the rest of the world and mukbang videos have become widespread in Turkey in terms of both broadcasters and viewers, there is no study

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on this subject in the country. The aim of this study is to analyze digital socialization and parasocial interaction as practices of virtual community within the Turkish context. **Methodology:** In the present study, 7,139 comments on three mukbang videos published on YouTube in Turkey were analyzed using a netnographic methodology. Coding was conducted in NVivo. The unit of analysis was the individual comment; emoji-only entries were excluded. The initial codebook was developed from literature and exploratory reads. Two coders independently coded a stratified subset, and disagreements were resolved by consensus. An audit trail was maintained and constant comparison was used to stabilize categories. **Results:** Based on user comments, it was observed that viewers developed positive and negative attitudes towards the content. As a result of the study, it was determined that mukbang videos contribute to socialization and body control as well as cultural interaction. Viewers co-construct a sense of belonging to online communities, and parasocial interactions with content creators (e.g., terms of intimacy such as "sister") are evident. However, users also attribute negative outcomes such as overconsumption, addiction, digital loneliness, and transformations in food culture. **Discussion:** According to the findings, socialization is the primary motivation for watching mukbang videos on social media. These videos give users a sense of belonging to a specific online community. Parasocial relationships emerge as an important driver of engagement, indicating that users not only consume content but also develop one-sided relational patterns. This duality reveals both community-building potential and critical risks linked to consumerism and isolation. Theoretical connections can be drawn to critical theory and digital activism, which frame mukbang as both a space of participation and a site of power relations. **Conclusions:** As a result of the study, findings in line with previous studies conducted in the rest of the world were obtained, as well as findings that will expand the research on mukbang videos. It was determined that mukbang videos also serve as a tool for cultural interaction. Limitations include the focus on YouTube only, the use of public self-reported comments (without objective measures of psychological states), and temporal/channel constraints.

Keywords: Food, eating behaviors, online eating, YouTube, mukbang.

1. INTRODUCTION

As many traditional phenomena have changed in today's society, significant changes have also occurred in the phenomenon of food, which is a cultural narrative (Demir & Öztürk, 2023). In the modern world, many individuals are forced to eat alone due to reasons such as isolation and the increase in the number of single-person households. Particularly the lifestyles of young people, which are detached from family relationships, have led to the popularization of the act of consuming food on live broadcast, called mukbang (Anjani et al., 2020; Choe, 2019). In South Korean, mukbang is a term derived from the words "eating" (meokneun) and "broadcasting" (bangsong) (Donnar, 2017). Mukbang refers to the consumption of instant and frozen foods while chatting on live broadcast, which has been popularized on online networks in South Korea since 2010. This action also involves the transmission of the sounds of eating to the audience, particularly with the help of a lapel microphone.

Thus, the act of eating is conveyed to the viewers both visually and audibly and an indirect form of satisfaction is created (E. Kang et al., 2020). Through this mediated fulfillment, viewers are attracted to watch the videos and become addicted to them.

With the worldwide popularity of Mukbang videos, there has been an intensification of research on why these videos are watched. Mukbang videos primarily attract attention as a source of motivation, particularly for individuals who follow a diet to lose weight, as they provide an indirect source of consumption (Donnar, 2017). Indirect consumption can enable viewers to satisfy their eating behaviors and cravings vicariously by watching these mukbang videos. The excessive consumption-oriented nature of mukbang videos also leads to a suppression of individuals' desire to consume the food in these videos. Especially since this type of overeating culture is not very common, it does not generate interest in the food consumed at the very least (Xu, 2019). Furthermore, the fact that this content involves instant and frozen foods, which are considered unhealthy, also affects viewer behavior. Because these foods consist of unhealthy ingredients, viewers may prefer to consume healthier foods as a reaction to this situation (McCarthy, 2017).

Although mukbang videos have positive aspects towards eating behaviors, negative features seem to be more intense. Especially due to factors such as encouraging irregular eating and causing gluttony (H. Kang et al., 2021; Yeon, 2022; Yun et al., 2020), ideas have emerged to take various steps towards this video content. It has been found that watching mukbang videos frequently can increase addiction (Kircaburun et al., 2020; Kircaburun, Balta et al., 2021), which can lead to problems such as obesity (Strand & Gustafsson, 2020; Xu, 2019). This shows that the effects of this form of content can extend to obesity and, as a result, to illness and even death. It is even thought that individuals' loss of body control will disrupt the fulfillment of their social duties, which will cause economic losses. For this reason, especially in South Korean society, there are efforts to regulate mukbang videos and inform the society (Yeon, 2022).

The fact that mukbang videos are watched by millions of people has led to the act of eating being presented as a show. When live chat was integrated into this show, the interest in the videos increased. Through the comments made on these videos, online communities have been established and these have become important spaces for communication (Choe, 2019). Just like the professionalization and commercialization of internet culture, mukbang videos ceased to be produced by amateurs and became professionalized over time (Kim, 2018). In fact, mukbang video content is categorized into two as mukbang and cookbang. While mukbang videos focus on broadcasters' exaggerated consumption of instant and frozen foods, in cookbang, broadcasters consume food after cooking it, and the process from cooking to consumption is shared with viewers (H. Kang et al., 2021).

The professionalization of mukbang content over time has also resulted in commercialization. This commercialization is realized particularly through the demonstration of the purchasing behavior towards the foods featured in mukbang videos. Moreover, mukbang videos shot in restaurants are also aimed towards

consumption. Thanks to the parasocial interaction between broadcasters and viewers, viewers visit the venues featured on the videos, thus leading to the use of mukbang videos as a marketing tool. At the same time, the fact that mukbang video broadcasters have their own restaurants also affects this commercialization process (Lewis & Yu, 2022).

The effects of mukbang videos on viewers have positive and negative aspects. On the one hand, it encourages people to overeat, but on the other hand, it can also prevent people from consuming unhealthy products. Additionally, it draws attention as a positive feature that indirect consumption is achieved by watching these videos while on a diet. It can cause socialization on the one hand and asocialization on the other (Nielsen & Petersen, 2021). Although there are numerous studies on mukbang, there is no study that examines this issue in detail in Turkey. The present study examines the mukbang videos produced in Turkey and the comments made by users on these videos. The results of this study can contribute to future studies in the field of psychology based on the reactions of users watching mukbang videos, and it also has the potential to contribute to future studies between various disciplines in terms of physiological needs. Based on this, the present study analyzed user comments on mukbang videos produced in Turkey through the netnographic method. The study will include findings on the emergence and popularization of the mukbang movement in the historical process and the previous studies conducted in this field. In the application phase of the study, the comments made by users to the mukbang videos on YouTube in Turkey, which were analyzed within the scope of the population and sample of this study, will be categorized and explained.

2. LISTEN TO THE SOUND: MUKBANG

It has become a common daily phenomenon on the Internet for individuals to share private thoughts and emotions through "micro-celebrities" (Senft, 2008). Given that their popularity depends on what they do rather than who they are, the appeal of micro-celebrities lies in the content they create by offering a variety of strategies, including the outrageous and subversive, the bizarre and familiar, the fabulous and vulnerable, and the authentic and ambiguous (Kim, 2021). Today, the most popular and current micro-celebrities are those who produce mukbang videos (Lewis & Yu, 2022). Although significant research has been conducted on the numerous activities and applications offered by the Internet, little is known about online eating shows, also known as "mukbang" (Kircaburun, Harris et al., 2021; McCarthy, 2017).

Mukbang originated in South Korea in 2008 (Hong & Park, 2018) and has since become a phenomenon in which flamboyant food is prepared and consumed live or showcased in pre-prepared videos while chatting with viewers. In these videos, eating sounds are emphasized and the camera is positioned close to the viewers to create a behavior pattern (E. Kang et al., 2020). This connection with the audience has made watching mukbang events very popular among users, particularly in recent years (McCarthy, 2017; Wang, 2020). A multidimensional interaction arises from the development of emotional solidarity and community among mukbang viewers, despite the hierarchical structure existing among them (Anjani et al., 2020; Bruno &

Chung, 2017). The environment in which this interaction occurs must not prioritize the taste of the food being consumed; rather, the motivation for participation centers on factors beyond the taste or type of food. It is crucial to provide psychological and emotional stimuli during viewing behavior.

With eating taking priority over the taste of food, the hegemonic evaluation of cooking and food has shifted from world-class chefs/gourmets to regular diners (Hong & Park, 2018). The primary focus of mukbang videos is to satisfy viewers' food cravings through visual and auditory stimuli (E. Kang et al., 2020; Lawrenson, 2023). This vicarious satisfaction of food cravings is achieved through various means. Primarily, viewers establish an emotional connection with the individuals who create mukbang videos and experience a sense of fulfilling their own need to eat as if in the company of friends (Choe, 2019; Kircaburun, Harris et al., 2021).

Mukbang videos demonstrate the ways in which selfhood and consumption are acquired, gendered performances are displayed, cultural eating rituals are upheld, and eating acts are professionalized and mediated (Donnar, 2017). Through mukbang videos, creators and viewers showcase themselves on social media platforms. Although there is no evidence of overconsumption in society as portrayed in these videos, video producers perform in this manner in their content. Moreover, mukbang videos challenge societal expectations of gender roles and norms, thus transcending idealized body image and eating behaviors. Although there are no cultural eating rituals in Turkey like those depicted in these videos, their widespread availability on platforms such as YouTube facilitates the dissemination of cultural products. The professionalization of food consumption, which is the topmost among individuals' basic needs, through self-presentation and commercial activities depicted in these videos mediates the eating behavior of the audience through a "vicarious" elimination of eating behavior.

Figure 1.

An image from one of the most viewed mukbang videos on YouTube, with 196 million views

Source: 설기양SULGI, 2020.

Users can participate in discussions only as "viewers" without any personal involvement in the mukbang. In addition, by commenting on mukbang videos, they can also display a participatory point of view, expressing their own feelings and behaviors. Watching mukbang can both limit and increase eating. Moreover, it may decrease loneliness and guilt, but it may also lead to an increase in self-harming behaviors. In a study conducted by Strand and Gustafsson (2020), it was determined that mukbang video viewers used the content as a constructive tool to increase food intake, prevent overeating or reduce loneliness, as well as it directing them to restrictive eating behaviors or increasing the tendency to harm their body by starting to overeat again (Strand & Gustafsson, 2020). The fact that mukbang videos consist of instant, frozen and high-calorie foods can cause loss of control over the body (Hong & Park, 2018). Yeon (2022) found that watching mukbang videos frequently increases obesity. In addition, based on the basic principles of mukbang (the sound of eating or cooking), viewers' need for various forms of relaxation is also met. Previous studies have shown that such sounds give pleasure to the viewers and that they experience a sense of happiness and relaxation as a result (Woo, 2018). This shows that individuals achieve indirect consumption through mukbang videos, and psychological needs such as happiness and relaxation are met through the sounds predominant in the content of the videos, such as satisfying the desire for food by proxy with the food displayed.

Furthermore, mukbang video viewing behaviors show that viewers watch mukbang for social reasons, sexual reasons, entertainment, and social escape. There are two main outcomes of viewing mukbang: beneficial and harmful. Among the beneficial consequences, there are positive effects in terms of socialization such as reducing feelings of loneliness and social isolation and belonging to a virtual community. There are also harmful consequences such as changing food preferences, eating habits, traditional table manners, encouraging irregular eating and turning video watching into an addiction (Kircaburun, Stavropoulos et al., 2021).

Mukbang videos have a direct or indirect relationship not only with the viewer but also with the mukbanger, that is, the person who shoots the video. In a previous study, viewers stated that they watch these videos depending on the attractiveness of the people who shoot the videos (Pereira et al., 2019). In addition, as a result of the emotional bond formed by this attractiveness and loneliness, parasocial interaction can also be established with these individuals (Stein & Yeo, 2021). On the other hand, viewers of mukbang videos may also insult the content of the video or the broadcasters who produced it. Viewers may also develop negative attitudes towards the people who made the video and express this in the comments. In a study conducted by Sultana and Das (2022), it was found that mukbang viewers developed anxious, positive and negative attitudes towards the video makers. In addition, the viewers made derogatory and guilt-inducing comments towards the video makers, particularly in terms of their bodies (Sultana & Das, 2022).

Although mukbang videos have both beneficial and harmful points, it is not likely to be a trend that will decline. This is because the lonelier individuals of modern life

adopt a more solitary lifestyle. This leads lonelier individuals to establish addictive relationships on the internet and mukbang videos on the internet, and it is predicted that they will continue to be further interested in videos that offer social connection activities in online networks, such as mukbang (Sultana & Das, 2022).

3. METHODOLOGY

The mukbang trend, which started in South Korea, has spread all over the world over time and has evolved into content that millions of people follow regularly on YouTube. The emergence of a similar trend in Turkey occurred in 2018. As a result of the preliminary analysis, it was determined that videos with mukbang content started to become popular on YouTube in Turkey in 2018. In the present study, user comments on mukbang videos produced in Turkey will be analyzed. In order to explore the interactional world of online communities that gather under these videos, data were collected through netnographic analysis through unattended observation (Varnalı, 2012). This study employs a netnographic approach. User comments were collected from selected mukbang videos uploaded on YouTube. The data was coded in NVivo and thematically categorized. To ensure reliability, intercoder agreement and thematic validation were applied.

The study will seek answers to the following research questions:

- RQ1. How do viewers co-construct digital socialization and belonging in mukbang comment communities?
- RQ2. What forms of parasocial interaction toward creators are observable, and how do they relate to engagement?
- RQ3. Which positive/negative effects do viewers attribute to mukbang consumption in their own words?

Mukbang viewers consciously or unconsciously form online communities among themselves. The emergence of online communities has created new dimensions of cultural issues that have a high impact on the decisions of different stakeholders. Analyzing these new dimensions and the emerging cyberculture has become more important and many approaches have emerged to gain a better understanding about online cultures (Tavakoli & Wijesinghe, 2019). The most significant of these approaches is netnography, which was developed by Kozinets (Kozinets & Gambetti, 2021) in the early 1990s to apply the basic principles of ethnography with the aim of understanding online communities (Sandlin, 2007). Netnography examines the behavior of online communities through ethnographic research conducted on the Internet (Bartl et al., 2016).

Within the scope of the present study, a total of 7,139 comments on the 3 most viewed videos shared by mukbang video content producers on YouTube Turkey were analyzed. In the study, the videos of the YouTube channel named "MunchieS Asmr Turkish", which carries the highest resemblance to the visual-auditory interactive basis of mukbang videos, were analyzed. The titles of the videos analyzed are as follows:

1) ASMR | Most Popular TURKISH Traditional Foods Asmr Mukbang *Part 1 (Original URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p67-E90ay6w, available during data collection[4]. This video has a total of 1,683,180 views. It was added on February 12, 2020. Viewers have made 3,867 comments on the video).

2) BROWN FOOD | Magnum, Nutella, Biscolata, Maltesers, Bubble Tea, Donut | ASMR TURKISH https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=65P-DVfPlUU (This video has a total of 1.001.492 views. It was added on November 8, 2019. Viewers have made 2,915 comments on the video).

3) MOST POPULAR FAST FOODS ASMR | Burger King, Dominos Pizza, Crispy Chicken, Onion Rings ASMR Turkish https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HKCLbysbnyA (This video has a total of 655,358 views. It was added on May 31, 2020. Viewers have made 1,912 comments on the video).

A total of 8,694 comments were posted on these 3 videos and 7,139 of these comments were analyzed. Comments consisting of only emojis were not included in the analysis due to the sample size and the high volume of posts. The findings were divided into various categories. In the netnographic approach, categories are groups created to increase the quality and clarity of the study and include similar items in accordance with the purpose (Demir & Ayhan, 2022). In this context, the categories of socialization, parasocial interaction, cultural interaction, eating habits and insult were created. There are 1,753 comments in the socialization category, and these include comments expressing loneliness and stating enjoyment in watching these videos. In the cultural interaction category, there are 864 comments involving those posted on videos where traditional Turkish food is consumed, expressing that the food is promoted. In the insult category, there are 429 comments with insulting content aimed at the broadcasters. Although parasocial interaction is similar to the socialization category, the main point difference is that in the former, users watch the videos of a single person and believe that they have a mutual interaction with them and express a desire to follow them. There are 714 comments in the parasocial interaction category. Finally, there are 3,379 comments in the eating habits category and comments in which users talk about positive or negative situations that occur in their eating habits are coded in this category.

4. FINDINGS

The analysis reveals three overarching themes that capture the dynamics of Turkish mukbang communities on YouTube. First, viewers use mukbang videos as spaces of digital socialization, where they share emotions such as loneliness or enjoyment and co-construct a sense of belonging. Second, patterns of parasocial intimacy toward mukbang creators are evident, with users addressing them through terms of closeness (e.g., "sister") and engaging in one-sided relational practices. Third,

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[4] At the final review stage, the video was no longer accessible on YouTube. Evidence of metadata is preserved through an archived snapshot of the page on the Internet Archive/Wayback Machine (https://web.archive.org/web/20230505170039/https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p67-E90ay6w), although the video file itself was not archived.

comments reflect cultural and critical dimensions, where mukbang is framed both as a site of cultural exchange and as a potential risk factor for consumerism, overconsumption, and digital loneliness. These themes emerged through NVivo-based coding and constant comparison, providing a structured lens before presenting the detailed categories below.

4.1. Socialization

Individuals who become isolated in the modern world prefer to meet their socialization needs through online communities. It is known that individuals' psychological well-being increases thanks to increased interpersonal connections and online communities established through social media networks (Pittman & Reich, 2016). Looking at the comments posted by users watching Mukbang videos, it was determined that 1,753 of the 7,139 comments were related to socialization. Socialization in the comment sections of these videos is realized in various ways. The first of these consists of content expressing that the user is there to read the comments and feel like they belong there (Cho, 2020). For example, users' statements such as "I watch and read the comments at the same time" or "I like thinking the same thing as everyone else here... I'm hungry too!" have been interpreted as users having a sense of belonging to online communities in this field and that reading the comments gives them happiness (Niu et al., 2022; Stein & Yeo, 2021). It is also seen in these comments that sharing the same feelings with other people makes users even happier and this contributes to socialization. These comments on Mukbang videos also show that some individuals use it as a tool to escape from problems and negative emotions in daily life in addition to socializing and that it has a positive effect on psychological well-being (Bruno & Chung, 2017).

On the other hand, findings have also been obtained that individuals who are not very active in their social lives socialize through these videos. Isolated individuals watch mukbang videos of people they feel close to and thus alleviate the feeling of loneliness (Anjani et al., 2020; Strand & Gustafsson, 2020; Styawan & Buwana, 2023). In particular, comments were made about users being alone while eating and eating while watching these videos. For example, statements such as "I satisfy my craving by watching her while eating lentil soup on my own" or "I don't like eating alone, I turn on your video and watch you" show that users watch these videos to alleviate their loneliness (Niu et al., 2022; Strand & Gustafsson, 2020). This shows that, as in previous studies demonstrating that social media plays an important role as a means of socialization (Altunay, 2015; Karaboğa, 2018; Karagülle & Çaycı, 2014; Vatandaş, 2020), mukbang videos meet the socialization needs of lonely individuals.

4.2. Parasocial Interaction

Individuals who use mass communication tools can establish a bond with figures such as presenters and actors who have a certain level of visibility in the media. Parasocial relationships emerge as a result of users behaving as if they are receiving reactions from the other party. Parasocial interaction is a concept used to describe the social interaction between consumers of mass media and media figures (Horton &

Wohl, 1956). This type of interaction has expanded over time to include social media networks. Here, the criteria of being a celebrity has also changed, and every user can have parasocial interaction with people whom they see as celebrities. Especially in these networks, parasocial interaction is realized by thinking that the other party may react. Since these networks allow for interaction, users may think that the more comments they make, the more visibility and response they will receive. This leads to frequent comments and attempts to attract attention. 714 comments included in the parasocial interaction category were analyzed.

Mukbang videos involve not only eating but also talking while doing so. In other words, the individuals who are eating talk as if they are chatting with a friend. This may cause users to exhibit parasocial behaviors (Niu et al., 2022; Stein & Yeo, 2021). In the present study, it was observed that users who watch mukbang videos posted comments showing signs of parasocial interaction with the people making the videos. When these comments were analyzed, it was determined that the video makers did not respond to most of these comments. Moreover, the majority of the users used the expression "sister" in their comments, and this draws attention as a form of interaction.

In the comments on Mukbang videos, users also show expressions such as "Sister, I normally do not like to watch ASMR, but your videos are so magical that I cannot turn them off, you are great, bless you" or "I watch you day and night", and establish a bond with these individuals. In fact, expressions such as "I eat what you eat a day later" in the comments show that the dimensions of parasocial interaction have progressed. Expressions such as "Sister, even after years, I still watch you, you have excellent videos" show that users turn to old content in order not to interrupt the bond established. This shows that with this connection, the audience directs themselves to watch the video.

4.3. Cultural Interaction

Food is one of the most important cultural values of a society. Food is very important for defining a society and understanding its way of life. In addition, the transmission of food culture as a cultural element from generation to generation shows the importance of food as a significant cultural asset (Axelson, 1986). In the networked world of today, food culture is transmitted through social media tools. Especially the fact that social media networks eliminate time and space limitations has played an important role in the promotion of cultural dishes (Ranteallo & Andilolo, 2017). There are 864 comments in the cultural interaction category.

Through Mukbang videos, ideas can be obtained regarding the food culture of a society (Donnar, 2017). In the present study, expressions were made in user comments to indicate that there was a common opinion that Turkish culture and food were introduced to the world. The statements of the users such as "You are introducing Turkish food to the world" and "Now let them watch our food" show that mukbang videos play an important role in promoting cultural food (Rutsaert et al., 2013). Furthermore, comments made by nationals of other countries also verify

this cultural interaction. Comments such as "Turkish food looks so good. I want to try it!" and "I will definitely try the one with grape leaves" show that cultural interaction is provided through these videos (Donnar, 2017).

On the other hand, users' comments on these videos such as "have döner next" and "we also want çiğköfte asmr" show both users' requests and desire to see the dishes of their own culture. The source of motivation here is accessibility. This is because products that do not belong to the culture and are difficult to find (in South Korea, where Mukbang originated, products such as crab and octopus are consumed) contain emotions that users cannot access even if they want to. Therefore, they may prefer to see more foods that belong to their own culture.

4.4. Eating Behaviors

Mukbang videos provide various motivations, the most important of which is undoubtedly their impact on eating behaviors in relation to the content of the videos. Mukbang has emerged with the demonstration of the consumption of ready-made meals, especially fast food. Much more than the amount of food that a person can eat under normal conditions is consumed. When the comments on these videos were analyzed, it was determined that various processes caused changes in the act of eating. This category contains the highest number of comments from the viewers. There are a total of 3,379 comments in this category.

4.5. Irregular Eating

Primarily, the content of such videos encourages excessive and irregular eating. This is also characterized as a rebellion against the social ideal body perception (Kim, 2018). With the introduction of sound in addition to the appetizing image, such videos can direct users to the behavior of eating. As in the expression "Very good sound quality, sister, I loved the video, it made me crave", users reveal that they exhibit eating behavior with the influence of sound (E. Kang et al., 2020; Lawrenson, 2023; Woo, 2018). In Mukbang videos, eating sounds and images are exaggerated in close-up and create a sense of gluttony reflected in users (Anjani et al., 2020).

Moreover, video content directs users to eating behavior, as seen in the statements "I'm going out to get a wrap thanks to you sister" or "It doesn't matter if I'm watching a woman eating crab, I still crave crab". Such comments show that mukbang users challenge the notion of the ideal body and societal perceptions of the ideal body and watch such videos for pleasure and substitute satisfaction (Kim, 2018).

Such videos are also addictive (Kircaburun et al., 2020), and through enhanced socialization processes and parasocial interaction, users' eating behaviors may be disrupted (Strand & Gustafsson, 2020). As seen in the statement "I eat day and night because of you", some of the individuals who watch these videos state that they constantly eat. Additionally, in the comments on these videos, there are also direct statements expressing that users lose body control (Yeon, 2022). These comments specifically state that users gain weight by watching these videos. As seen in the statement "I have been watching and eating for a week and gained 5 kilos:d", users

lose body control and may be exposed to negative health consequences (Hong & Park, 2018; Strand & Gustafsson, 2020).

4.6. Indirect Consumption

Mukbang videos provide some viewers with the vicarious pleasure of eating the food they desire and fantasize about, enabling them to avoid actual eating. This suggests that mukbang videos are watched as a dieting tool (Donnar, 2017). Expressions such as "I've been on a diet for days, I've been starving... at night, I torture myself by watching such videos" or "I watch you while fasting..." were also frequently used. This shows that users draw a boundary between body control and food videos and that mukbang videos indirectly contribute to dieting (Song, 2021; Strand & Gustafsson, 2020; Styawan & Buwana, 2023; Wang, 2020). It is also observed that watching these videos while fasting provides satisfaction with the feeling that users indirectly realize the act of eating, thus suppressing their desire to eat. Again, based on this finding, it was determined that cultural factors (such as fasting) are effective in watching mukbang videos.

4.7. Insult

While Mukbang videos target a certain audience, some viewers might comment on this content in an insulting manner. Such comments are primarily related to the context of the videos, and secondly, they are directed towards the creator of the video. This category, consisting of viewers' comments on the publisher or their content, contains 429 comments.

Mukbang videos do not appeal to the general audience. It has been observed that those who watch such videos do so for various motivational reasons (such as loneliness, the inability to socialize or eating behaviors). Due to these circumstances, those who are unable to find the satisfaction they seek might post insulting comments. For instance, expressions such as "How can you relax with these videos, the sound this woman is making is gross" are directed against the content.

On the other hand, insulting comments can sometimes be directed at the individuals who produce the video. Expressions such as "Why do you eat like that?" or "You are good for nothing but eating" are statements that are targeted directly towards the content creator (Sultana & Das, 2022). Social media users can also make physical insults (Gillespie, 2020). In their comments on videos, users make insults through an effort to establish a certain perception of beauty by using expressions such as "You are unnecessarily thin" or "Gain some weight" (Gillespie, 2020; Wang, 2020). Interactive structures have replaced passivized structures such as viewers, listeners or readers in social media networks, eliminating the concepts of time and place. This has resulted in social media platforms exposing individuals or groups to expressions such as profanity, insults, and hate speech (Biricik, 2022). As the extent of profanity and insults on social media increases, women in particular may prefer to isolate themselves and even withdraw themselves from such platforms (Demir & Ayhan, 2022). However, this is not common among creators of mukbang videos. This is because individuals who produce such videos often read these comments made

against them in their next video. They may also prefer not to respond to the comments on the videos and remain silent.

5. CONCLUSION

The direct or indirect connection with the viewers in mukbang videos has greatly increased the popularity of the videos. The close-up display of food in the videos and the sounds made while eating (E. Kang et al., 2020; McCarthy, 2017; Wang, 2020;) have led to increased interaction by developing an emotional bond with the viewers (Anjani et al., 2020; Bruno & Chung, 2017). The global popularity of mukbang videos has led to this trend becoming popular in Turkey over time. Although not as successful as the other examples around the world (in terms of the number of views), it is understood from the videos and the number of comments that this trend also has significant followers in Turkey. In the present study, viewer comments on mukbang videos in Turkey were analyzed using the netnographic analysis method. The geography of Turkey has a unique food culture and there is an indicator of culinary respect called "table manners". However, it is important to examine the comments on mukbang videos, especially since these videos consist of content for the exaggerated consumption of instant and frozen products.

As a result of the study, findings in line with previous studies conducted in the rest of the world were obtained, as well as findings that will expand the research on mukbang videos. It was determined that mukbang videos also serve as a tool for cultural interaction. First, previous studies (Cho, 2020; Niu et al., 2022; Pittman & Reich, 2016; Stein & Yeo, 2021) have found that the most significant motivation for watching mukbang videos is socialization. Watching these videos and participating in online communities fulfills the need for socialization, particularly for individuals who have limited social activity in daily life and are lonely. In this study, based on the comments made by the users, it was determined that the most important points were socialization and loneliness. In the comments made on mukbang videos, it was stated that users were happy to watch the videos (especially those of the related content creator) and to be in the same environment with other viewers. With this sense of belonging, it has been determined that watching such videos has positive effects on psychological well-being (Bruno & Chung, 2017), as it fulfills the need for socialization (Niu et al., 2022; Stein & Yeo, 2021). In addition, it has been determined that users in Turkey relieve their feelings of loneliness by watching mukbang videos (Anjani et al., 2020; Niu et al., 2022; Strand & Gustafsson, 2020; Styawan & Buwana, 2023) (RQ1).

As can be seen from the findings, socialization is a very important factor in watching mukbang videos. Being a member of online communities and having the sense of belonging are the most important factors of socialization. In addition to being a member of online communities, the interaction with the content creators in particular leads to the development of certain behavioral patterns. It is understood that the parasocial behaviors that emerge as a result of the social interaction of the viewers with the content creators are effective on watching the videos. Looking at the user comments examined within the scope of the study, it was determined that the users

adopted expressions showing signs of parasocial interaction with the content creators and a one-sided interaction was dominant. It is seen that users develop a first-degree sense of intimacy with expressions such as "sister" and exhibit a desire to follow them constantly, and as a result, they unilaterally talk about their actions in their daily lives (Niu, et al., 2022; Stein & Yeo, 2021) (RQ2).

Among the striking and noteworthy results of the present study are the comments expressing that users see mukbang videos as a cultural tool. This category, in addition to previous studies on mukbang videos, suggests that such videos also serve as cultural tools. Through mukbang videos, insights can be gained into the food culture in a society (Donnar, 2017) and this food culture can spread to other societies. Comments on mukbang videos featuring Turkish food also draw attention to this issue. Viewers argued that cultural interaction would be achieved through the food displayed in the video and Turkish food would start to be recognized around the world. In addition, comments made by users from other nationalities also confirm this situation. When the comments on these videos are analyzed, it is seen that people living in other countries are curious about these dishes and want to try them (Donnar, 2017).

The findings obtained in the section of the study focusing on the effects on eating behaviors are in line with previous studies and expand the effect of mukbang videos on eating behaviors. In the results obtained, it was determined that mukbang videos encourage irregular eating habits (E. Kang et al., 2020; Lawrenson, 2023; Woo, 2018; Xu, 2019). This assessment, which includes going beyond the ideas about the ideal body perception in society, shows that users do not behave in accordance with the ideals of society and are dominant in making decisions about their own bodies (Kim, 2018). However, as a result of the addictive nature of such videos (Kircaburun et al., 2020), users also blame content creators when they gain weight and lose body control (Hong & Park, 2018; Strand & Gustafsson, 2020; Yeon, 2022). One of the striking results on eating behaviors is the link between dieting and watching mukbang videos. In previous studies (Donnar, 2017; Song, 2021; Strand & Gustafsson, 2020; Styawan & Buwana, 2023; Wang, 2020), it has been determined that dieters gain satisfaction through "vicarious pleasure" by watching mukbang videos and thus facilitate their diet. In the present study, it was determined that users watched these videos while dieting and fasting and thus achieved satisfaction through the indirect act of eating and the act of eating by proxy (Kang et al., 2021). Finally, as a result of the study, it was determined that some people made insulting comments to the video publishers for various reasons. These comments appeared as a result of viewing the content creators as the culprit of weight gain and loss of body control, and insulting general expressions were used in the comments made by individuals who stated that they did not like watching mukbang videos (Gillespie, 2020; Sultana & Das, 2022; Wang, 2020) (RQ3).

Overall, this study on mukbang videos, a social media phenomenon originating from South Korea, reveals significant insights into how this trend has impacted Turkish audiences. By analyzing 7,139 comments from three YouTube videos, it was found

that mukbang videos have both positive and negative effects on viewers. On the positive side, these videos foster socialization, cultural interaction, and even promote body control by allowing viewers to engage with food content in a communal way. However, the study also highlights several negative consequences, such as promoting overconsumption, fostering addiction, and contributing to shifts in traditional food culture. The ambivalence in viewer attitudes underscores the complexity of mukbang's influence in Turkey, where it simultaneously bridges cultural gaps while also potentially encouraging unhealthy behaviors. These findings emphasize the dual nature of mukbang videos, suggesting that while they serve as a platform for cultural exchange and social connection, they also pose risks that should be carefully considered by both creators and consumers. The study calls for further research to explore these dynamics in more detail, particularly within the Turkish context, where this phenomenon continues to evolve.

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