

# Mukbang's Foodcasting beyond Korea's Borders: A Study Focusing on OTT Platforms

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## Abstract

Mukbang is a type of foodcasting where a host records or streams their eating rituals for audience consumption in live format. With origins in South Korea via the online broadcast genre found on Afreeca TV in the mid-2000s, the phenomenon has since found global popularity. Its development as a full-fledged genre is based on a communication culture that invites people to a meal rather than to talk to one another; viewers watch in silence as a host consumes a copious number of dishes from Korean gastronomy to fast food to other ethnic cuisine on display. An invitation to eat means the beginning of a public relationship that quickly turns to a private shared experience. This study analyzes several Mukbang video postings and makes use of Linden's culture approach model to provide a view toward a number of cross-cultural connections by Koreans and non-Korean audiences. Prior to the study, 10 Korean eating shows were selected and used as standard models. Korean Mukbang mainly consists of eating behavior and ASMR, with very few storytelling or narrative devices utilized by its creators. For this reason, eating shows make a very private connection. In other ways, this paper shows how 28 Mukbang-related YouTube contents selected by Ranker were evolving and examined through notions of acculturation and reception theory.

## Keywords

Acculturation and Reception Theory, ASMR, Global Food Culture, Mukbang

## 1. Introduction

This paper analyzes Mukbang from a Korean cultural studies lens and demonstrates its proliferation, popularity, and transculturation through media globalization. Mukbang's trendiness, one could argue, is also contingent upon its appearance and streaming on the American social media platform YouTube. As an emerging genre, Mukbang is defined as a type of foodcasting where a host records or streams their eating rituals for audience consumption and participation online. With origins in South Korea via the online broadcasts found on Afreeca TV2 in the mid-2000s, the phenomenon has since found global popularity. Since then, the permeation of the Mukbang genre to other parts of the world is worth scholarly attention, especially because it less studied than other vectors in the Hallyu cultural emporium such as Korean television and K-pop. Despite its limited visibility, Mukbang has, nonetheless, created an evolving cross-cultural set of communications, illustrating that this sociable eating in front of a camera.

As a sign of its legitimacy internationally, Mukbang was registered in the Oxford English dictionary

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as camera is practiced outside of Korea. To understand this set of divergent experiences, particularly how hosts mimic, hybridize and/or recruit people to participate in Mukbang, four categories are posited in this study: separation, integration, assimilation, and marginalization.

As a sign of its legitimacy internationally, Mukbang was registered in the Oxford English dictionary as a Korean cultural term of new significance in 2021. Its penetration into the global lexicon like other East Asian terms of decades past is testament to new interest in not only the linguistic power of Korean terms but also the country's rising gastronomic influence worldwide. We can trace this Korean food explosion to megacities where Korean restaurants and food stores were on the rise in London, Berlin, Buenos Aires and beyond. Part of a mega-system of food media from the United States—from the Food Network to Japanese cooking shows—this Korean genre proves that eating at a table has been an important element of communication: that the place where food is presented is as important as eating itself. An important cultural distinction because the presentation of a table for eating is so central to Korean food culture. Sharing multiple food dishes is a gesture of sustenance and a bonding experience; one essentially to indirect communication that occasions, the opening of hearts and minds to local and fusion experiences.

In terms of content formations, Mukbang is composed in videographic form by bringing not only the act of eating to viewers but also how eating becomes the actions of what is available on the food table itself: the host is seen sampling dishes, providing direct audio to chewing and slurping, to the type of utensils used to pick up different food in front of them. Mukbang, when found on single-person broadcasts are part of the act of inviting people to the (digital) food table, which is the beginning of an open-minded, universal act—eating to stave off loneliness—and that this act is practiced in a private space made public via these entertaining eating performances is imperative to think about social cohesion. As a result, this reinforces what Choe [1] calls “eating together multimodally,” emphasizing that these acts of food consumption are nothing without a following and their ability to be “liked” by viewers.

In order to study the changes and evolution in Mukbang, 10 representative Korean Mukbang content videos were selected from Seoul Space [2] and 28 influential YouTube Mukbang content videos, all based around the globe and found on Rankers. These were analyzed below. To substantiate my analysis, I deploy Dr. Gyongwoo Yun's culture approach model [3] and acceptance theory were applied as a tool to aid in the forthcoming analysis.

## 2. Analyze of Mukbang Spread Process on OTT

This paper deploys the “acculturation model” and “acceptance theory” to examine Mukbang video content. Through this approach, it becomes one of many theoretical frameworks to confirm specific Hallyu acceptance processes, particularly how one may interpret Mukbang as a cultural phenomenon, what content to accept, and what to reject, and the results of such pleasurable intimacy as it relates to eating. These cultural encounters mean that there is a kind of “cultural change caused by the interaction between the two cultures.” This form of cross-fertilization occurs through the spread of “cultural elements through the contact between two different cultural systems and transforming them into a new style of culture.”

*Acculturation* means “cultural change caused by the interaction between the two cultures,” while a cultural encounter means “the process or result of spreading cultural elements through the contact

between two different cultural systems and transforming them into a new style of culture or hybrid form.

The acceptance theory is a schema that values the method and process of acceptance from the perspective of adopters which then helps to understand how the internal elements of society influence the interaction between Mukbang and its creator's culture while, in the process, spreading the Korean Wave to the world. The interactions that occur between cultures due to the contact between the two different cultural systems generally go through the process of "selective inclusion," "resistance," "conversion," and "marginality" [3] (Fig. 1).

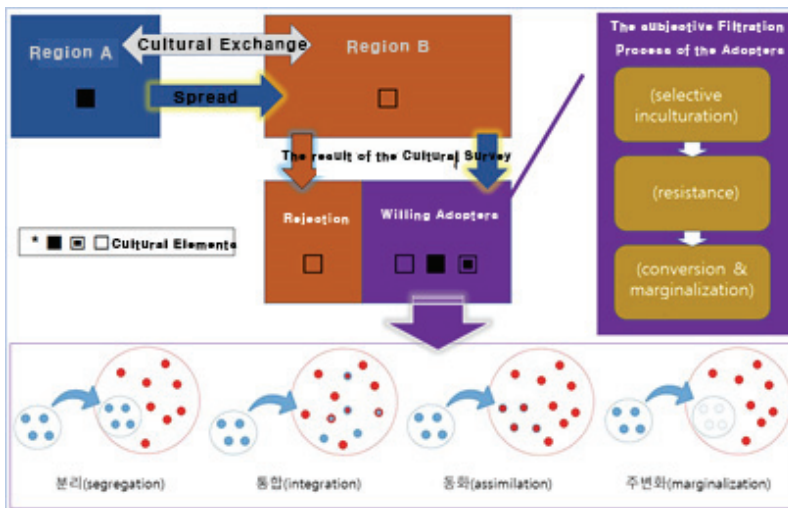


Fig. 1. Approach culture theory frame. Adapted from the Northeast Asian History Foundation [3].

## 2.1 Mukbang Trend 2022: Analysis of Ranking 45th on Mukbang

The list of 10 Korean Mukbang broadcasts based on the number of subscribers is shown in Fig. 2.

Most Korean Mukbang YouTubers understand the potential ASMR (autonomous sensory meridian response) component in the creation of their content. Mukbang brings not only cultural borrowing or what Iwabuchi [4] finds for Japanese media intersecting with a foreign media, a selectivity that brings about "strategic hybridism." Equally, ASMR stands for "autonomous sensory meridian response" and involves pleasant sounds such as whispering or tapping. However, Mukbangs bring a different kind of ASMR experience through the sounds of slurping, crunching, chomping, chewing, and the other sounds associated with consuming food. Many of the Mukbang YouTubers do a great job of exaggerating the sounds which can cause tingles throughout your body. For others, it gives them a deeply relaxing feeling and can even help them fall asleep [2].

As you can see from the quote from Seoul Space, a prominent feature of Korean Mukbang is that it videation captures the act of eating itself rather than rely on storytelling. The way you express taste to elicit a reaction through such videos come from a type of perception that stimulates one's imagination both visually and olfactorily. Therefore, it takes a method of dividing and delivering the sound of ASMR in detail. It can be seen they are trying to pay through the maximum effort on the viewer can feel the eating behavior.

On the Rankers site selected 22 influential Mukbang contents in 2021 from all over the world based on

volume of time, steaming time and variety of contents [5]. Comparing the content with the Korean eating show, it can be seen that the eating behavior itself is used as part of the content and the storytelling of the content is strengthened.

### 3. Transmission and Acceptance of Mukbang from ASMR

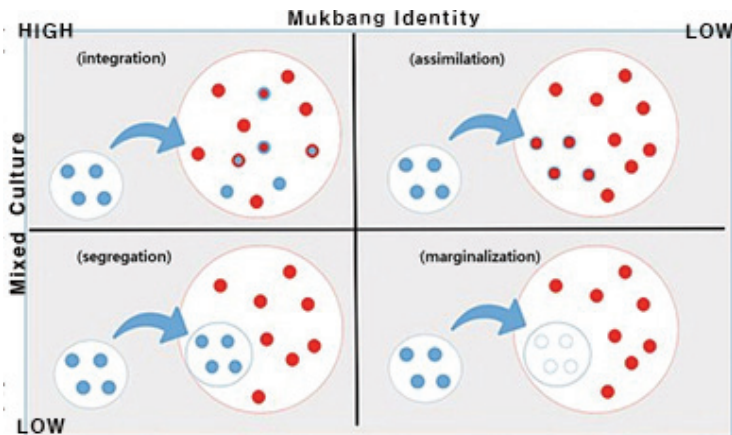
From the point of view of Linden's transmission and acceptance and when applying Dr. Gyongwoo Yun's research method [3] on the identity of the Korean Wave in China, it can be analyzed by dividing it into integrated assimilation separation and marginalization.

	Youtuber	Keyword	Number of subscribers
1	 Jane ASMR	ASMR, "brain tingles," relax or fall asleep.	15,532,281
2	 ZACH CHOI ASMR	With Silence and Whispering	13,340,783
3	 Hongyu ASMR	Whispering and melodic sound	10,966,352
4	 Hamzy	Cooking, talking and eating a lot of different dishes	8,389,367
5	 SULGI	Spicy food and loud ASMR	8,284,601
6	 GONGSAM TABLE	Spicy food and ASMR	7,187,394
7	 Ssoyoung	Live Sea Food, ASMR	7,104,523
8	 Eat wit Boki	Eating and ASMR	7,001,452
9	 SIO ASMR	Hot Cheetos and Squid game Honey candy	6,210,593
10	 DONA	Eating and ASMR with kids.	5,251,078

**Fig. 2.** Top 10 Korean Mukbang YouTubers based on the number of subscribers by Seoul Space.

According to the multidimensional cultural adaptation model proposed by Berry, cultural adaptation propensity can be categorized into four types “integration,” “separation,” “assimilation”, and “margin-alization”, when measured by a two-dimensional model according to cultural adaptation and cultural maintenance.

In China, the tendency of Korean Wave to approach culture is also related to the method of mixing or refusing to mix Korean culture, the origin, and Chinese culture, the acceptance site. Therefore, as shown in Fig. 3, it can be classified into four types according to the degree of “maintaining the cultural identity and characteristics of the Korean Wave” and “absorption of the Korean Wave into Chinese culture” [3].



**Fig. 3.** Annualizing method: the spread and acceptance of the Korean Wave in China. Adapted from the Northeast Asian History Foundation [3].

### 3.1 Integration

The integration type refers to a type that maintains the identity and characteristics of Korean culture and actively accepts new cultures in YouTube.

The integration type distinguished the act of communicating only through eating behavior, that is, constructing content comes to rely on perception. More specifically, the integration type relies solely on eating and ASMR to deliver messages without attempting to communicate in a variety of ways, like using language and gesture, and so on. It is a simple type of content, e.g., YouTube videos that relies on perception/audiovisual appeal for Mukbang to gain global recognition.

### 3.2 Assimilation and Segregation









The types of assimilation and separation occur due to the degree of identity and cultural acceptance. When different eating habits are considered, we find in eating shows if there is a weak degree of acceptance than there is a strong form of separation. Conversely, if the degree of acceptance is stronger for diverse eating shows than the degree of acceptance is much higher and viewers do not actively separate content.

Assimilation is freely converging with other content around it to showcase new configurations. A new session was created and distinguished not by constructing various sequences, but by transforming the sequence including eating broadcasts. Distinctive from this, segregation preserves the unique form of

Mukbang and composes contents by mixing other contents. In order to deliver this method, Mukbang can be understood as a diverse composition that adds to various sequences of images to evince a sense of new digital food consumption.

### 3.3 Marginalization



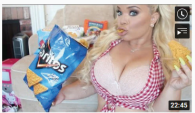



The type of marginalization refers to a type with a low degree of maintenance of the identity and characteristics of Mukbang and the degree of acceptance of creator's culture. Such marginalization includes the case of creating a new trend that distinguishes itself from the unique culture of Mukbang by bringing other elements to the broadcast that constitutes new contents rather than the original eating behavior of Mukbang. In the case of marginalization as one schema, it often develops into a form that relies on the onomatopoeia and emotion rather than the element of perception. In particular, it is creating a new trend of Mukbang by combining a talk show format and is developing into the form of most active communication.

		<b>YouTuber</b>	<b>Approach culture theory</b>	<b>Contents</b>	<b>Number of subscribers</b>
1		Fume	Assimilation	Eating & cooking	4,670,000
2		Dorothy	Assimilation	Eating challenges	4,160,000
3		Stephanie Soo	Integration	makes videos on Mukbang and Storytime	2,160,000
4		SAS-ASMR	Integration	eating, whispering and Mukbang ASMR	9,300,000
5		Nado	Integration	Talking and ASMR Eating	2,660,000
6		Yuka Kimoshita	Integration	Eating	5,470,000
7		Keemi	Marginalization	Camping, cooking, eating	8,960,000
8		SSoyoung	Assimilation	Cooking and eating	7,430,000

**Fig. 4.** Influential Mukbang list by Ranker.

		<b>YouTuber</b>	<b>Approach culture theory</b>	<b>Contents</b>	<b>Number of subscribers</b>
9		Blobeslife	Assimilation	Talking and eating	3,040,000
10		Peggie Neo	Marginalization	draw and the consumption of large meals; no ASMR or talking	1,080,000
11		hyuneeEats	Assimilation	Eating large meals while talking and cooking	1,690,000
12		BenDeen	Assimilation	Dedicated to cooking tutorials, taste tests, challenges talking, and eating	1,110,000
13		Hunnibee	Integration	Whispering SMR	7,590,000
14		D&B Product & Food Review	Marginalization	Information	395,000
15		N.E Let's Eat	Integration	ASMR and eating videos	3,660,000
16		snullASMR	Marginalization	Eating, lifestyle, fashion, and beauty	1,830,000
17		Banzz	Assimilation	Talking, Creation of ASMR Channel	1,830,000
18		MommyTang	Assimilation	Talking, recipe cooking and eating	5,020,000
19		Shukii	Assimilation	Talking, eating Asian foods and spicy food challenges	1,600,000
20		Food Tales	Assimilation	Talking and information, mostly eating	3,790,000
21		Josh Peck	Marginalization	Talking and eating	3,660,000

Fig. 4. Continued.

		<b>YouTuber</b>	<b>Approach culture theory</b>	<b>Contents</b>	<b>Number of subscribers</b>
22		Veronica Wang	Assimilation	Talking and eating	1,880,000
23		Meesh LA	Assimilation	Talking and eating	2,810,000
24		Divine Munchies	Assimilation	Shopping, talking, and eating	3,870,000
25		Blndsundoll4mj	Integration	Whispering and ASMR	4,990,000
26		Wendy's Eating Show	Segregation	Lots of talking ASMR	1,050,000
27		Hungry Cakes	Integration	ASMR eating	6,580,000
28		Nekocado Avocado	Assimilation	Talking cooking, eating	2,950,000

**Fig. 4.** Continued.

## 4. Conclusion

The content that has the most similar format to Korean eating shows is Hugh Cakes. Integration is consisted of ASMR and eating contents. Yet, the separation of eating behavior and ASMR with more activities shows that assimilation to these on-camera eating practices favors talking or other activities and less or few ASMR content.

Methods of integration as they relate to Mukbang videos come to emphasize the sound of eating even during perceptual activities. This is a distinct characteristic of Korean food culture, which remains at the center of many of these eating shows found on YouTube and such media comes to communicate a communitarian act of (digitally captured) eating. It is not to communicate by talking or expressing emotions through actions, but rather the videation of food display, consumption and invitation to watch online. The expression of the emotions you want to express to the other person during the meal is concentrated only through the process of eating, chewing, and falling into the throat.

Integration pays special attention to the microphone system because the act of transmitting sound is important. In order to create an atmosphere, Hunnabee and Blndsundoll4mj chose whispering to focus more on ASMR.



In the case of D&B Product & Food Review and snullASMR, as an example of marginalization, the contents were composed of sound and whispering in daily life by only bringing ASMR idea. By introducing fashion that is not related to most of these eating broadcasts, the original purpose of eating broadcasts is becoming distant by choosing food as props. It's a typical tendency to lead communication to talk show.

In particular, the small ASMRdml nail arrangement ASMR video was interesting in that it created content by choosing a material that is not related to food. In the case of Josh Peck, the act of eating food was not the center, but the table was chosen as a place for talking, creating an integral atmosphere and continuing the story.

In Korea, it was traditionally customary not to talk while sharing food, so emotions were communicated through the act of silent consumption but sharing of dishes and subtle gestures. Through ASMR, guests also expressed their gratitude for the delicious food seen during these live videocasts.

Like Japan and China, though divergent in many ways, Korea's culture of food, particularly the way in which its side dishes have developed thus enable the act of bringing the plate of these foods close to the other people. Such an act of sharing also equates a type of consideration and hospitality. In particular, the act of recommending food first to the elderly or precious guests was an important manner at the table. Among the 28 YouTube Mukbang contents, the results of the analysis with approach culture theory are as follows.

Analyzing YouTube Mukbang content by accumulation and reception theory, segregation contents account for 46.4%.

Applying it as Fig. 4, it can be seen that the identity of the eating show is decreasing, the convergence of culture is actively taking place, and the contents of the eating show are newly created. It's a trend to create content by adding talking instead of ASMR.

Mukbang reflects the cultural trend of global *mélange*: that is, that the foodscape is diverse and hybrid, where traditional Korean food culture is combined to start and develop with ASMR at the center. Creators and viewers who want to share more experiences through the senses through YouTube value and recommend these Korean videos of food consumption.

In particular, Mukbang, which emphasizes ASMR, is evolving in various forms through single-person broadcasting platform that emphasizes private areas outside the vectors of our hyper-public global mediascape. The superiority of notions of assimilation and segregation thus suggests that users/viewers of Mukbang prefer a format that constitutes new content in a form that maintains the format of Mukbang because it is to the benefit of YouTube that private experience is preferred in comparison to commercial media.

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