

# The Development of "Mukbang" Phenomenon in China and Thoughts on the Future Development of the Industry

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**Abstract:** With the rapid development of the current Internet technology, webcast has begun to rise in various Internet platforms. "Mukbang", as a type of live broadcast, has set off a boom in China. However, the rise of "mukbang fever" has also brought problems such as the vulgarization of content entertainment, the loss of the role of the media, and the audience's addiction to exacerbate the alienation of interpersonal communication, which has caused media practitioners to think about the online live broadcast industry. Based on the current "mukbang fever" phenomenon, this paper analyzes the current development situation of the industry, and puts forward some strategies conducive to the development of the industry, aiming to provide new ideas for the standardization of the current mukbang industry development.

**Keywords:** Mukbang; Webcast; Industry Development

## 1. Introduction

Today, with the accelerating pace of social life, people begin to look for various ways to transfer life pressure. In all kinds of leisure activities, webcast is a new but rapidly developing type. In particular, the popularity of the Internet also provides technical conditions for the development of webcast. "Mukbang" is a new thing in the Internet environment, which has been highly valued and welcomed in recent years. This makes the "mukbang fever" phenomenon have a wide audience in webcast. Some people make fun of it as a "national mukbang". It came out in 2014, and has a history of nearly 8 years. Now, the major network platforms have recognized this content label, and the user content output continues. Due to the low threshold of mukbang's anchors and easier platform operation, the short videos uploaded are also diversified. This has catered to the audience's psychology and brought them physical and mental satisfaction. However, with the continuous expansion of the industry, mukbang video has also gradually brought problems such as vulgarization and no bottom line, which has brought bad diet guidance to the audience. Therefore, how to standardize the development of the mukbang industry has become an important issue that the industry needs to consider<sup>[1]</sup>.

Based on the current development of mukbang, this paper reflects on the current behavior bias in the industry. And it puts forward some suggestions for the future development of mukbang industry in combination with the current development direction of new media platform, hoping to provide a new direction for the development of domestic new media platform webcast in the future.

## 2. Development of "Mukbang Fever" and the Analysis of Its Program Types

### 2.1. Development of "Mukbang Fever"

The word "mukbang" first appeared in the Korean "food reality show" in 2014, which belongs to the mode of "I eat, you have a look". This means that the blogger will broadcast live or release videos on the network platform to demonstrate his activities of eating food. During the live broadcast, the host will communicate with the audience in the form of chat, and the audience can express their opinions by giving gifts. Or the audience can immediately express and comment on the action or food of the anchor. "Mukbang" has become the second high ratings live broadcast type in South Korea after the live broadcast of games<sup>[2]</sup>.

"Mukbang" is a type of webcast. Compared with the live broadcast of games and entertainment, it belongs to a relatively small group. It entered the vision of the Chinese public in 2016. The earliest

research on "mukbang" program in China originated in 2016. A group of netizens who like "mukbang" program downloaded their favorite "mukbang" videos from foreign websites for editing and translation, and then shared them on domestic social platforms. Most of the early "mukbang" video resources in China came from the website Bilibili. Bilibili in the eyes of many young people as a "peer entertainment community", which gathers many small hobby groups. No matter which hobby you like, you can find partners here. Another group of young people used various social networks to buy a large number of food for mukbang display, and shared the daily food with the netizens behind the camera. Since then, "mukbang" has spread with the help of Internet social networking, and soon formed a wave in China, and gradually took root.

## **2.2. Analysis of Mukbang Program Types**

Network technology has developed in recent years, and user generated content (UGC) has gradually become an important productivity on various platforms. The "mukbang" program has gradually changed from live broadcast to short video. Taking the food area of Bilibili as a sample, the author divides the "mukbang" program types into four categories: the big eaters series, the shop exploration and evaluation series, the daily food series and the ASMR series.

### **2.2.1. Big Eaters Series**

Generally speaking, the big eater is the anchor who eats more than the average person. They exaggerate their food intake as a selling point to attract the audience. The food they eat in live broadcast or short video is not only large in quantity, but also diverse in type. Because of this, they not only attract people who love food, but also have a preference for "novelty hunters". The audience likes to watch the anchors eat what they have not eaten, or what they usually can not eat or do not want to eat. This kind of "mukbang" program is the most popular and controversial among the four types of programs. Many people think that the anchors will "vomit" out of the camera, or use post editing to become "big eaters". Despite the controversy, this type of short video has always maintained high traffic and popularity. The reason is not only the topic degree problem caused by the anchor's "large appetite", but also the audience will feel that they have tasted delicious food when watching such programs.

### **2.2.2. Shop Exploration and Evaluation Series**

This type is that the anchor plays the role of "food detective". Their job is to find food on the street or on the Internet, and then after tasting, give the food to the audience for praise or demining. The owner of Bilibili, "Food Encounters of the Stealing Moon Club", is a typical "food detective". They have gained a large number of fans by virtue of the objective evaluation of the food in the detective shop and the humorous video style. This kind of program is different from other series in that they need to prepare in advance for the shooting location or shooting materials. In this process, you may encounter some interesting people or things, but you need to record them through the camera. However, the store exploration video needs to be shot outside, so there are certain regional restrictions<sup>[3]</sup>.

### **2.2.3. Daily Food Series**

Such programs do not seek stimulation in terms of food consumption, nor do they require the specificity of diet. Most of them have a fixed update time, so that the audience can have a feeling of companionship. The image of the anchor is mainly affinity. This kind of "mukbang" program is relatively mild, and the anchors share the things around them with the audience. The appeal of video to users is more reflected in the personality of the anchor, so the user stickiness is relatively poor.

### **2.2.4. ASMR Series**

Compared with the first three programs, this kind of "mukbang" program has a smaller audience. ASMR refers to the spontaneous perceptual meridian reaction, which mainly refers to the audio-visual and tactile sensation that the human body passes through. There will be a unique and pleasant sense in the brain or other parts of the body. In the videos of the ASMR series, the anchors use their chewing sounds as materials, and then post edit and make videos to be delivered to video websites. This kind of video emphasizes the enjoyment of hearing more than vision, so that the audience can have a relaxed atmosphere, and also has a certain role in helping sleep. ASMR is a popular program in South Korea, of which the Korean anchor "boki" is a good example. She ranks at the top of the food video rankings on YouTube for many years because of her beauty and eating habits, and the food broadcast in her videos will also increase sales due to the release of live broadcasts.

### **3. Behavior Deviation in Mukbang Industry**

#### **3.1. Content becomes Entertaining and Vulgar**

The "mukbang" program focuses on food, and food culture permeates it. This is also the difference between "mukbang" program and other entertainment broadcast. The "mukbang" program combines short videos and food to meet the needs of the public. While spreading happiness, it also shoulders the responsibility of spreading food culture. However, in the current traffic oriented market, anchors will try their best to attract a large number of audiences in a short time. This often leads to homogeneous competition. The anchors often choose some popular food as materials on the Internet. These delicacies themselves carry the "halo" of the network and can attract the attention of some audiences. After that, however, whether the audience can pay attention to the anchor depends more on whether the anchor has his own characteristics, or whether he can stand out from a large number of similar videos and catch the audience's attention<sup>[4]</sup>.

Because the anchor's video follows the trend blindly in production, many homogeneous content has been produced, so some anchors spread rare and curious content to grab the audience's attention. For example, the anchor attracts audiences by setting the title of "the most expensive barbecue shop with 7 million yuan". Homogenization is an incorrect phenomenon, but it can be accepted as long as it is improved. Another part of the anchors used incorrect means to make the industry show the characteristics of excessive entertainment and vulgarization, which is where the "heinous crime" lies. Some of them eat strange things, including leather shoes, live lizards, etc. Their eating patterns and ways are also very impolite and aesthetic. For example, this year's online celebrity "Tizi" ate man-eater. In July this year, an online celebrity blogger named "Tizi" shot videos of boiled sharks and barbecued sharks and became popular on the Internet, although she claimed that sharks were artificially bred and edible. However, some viewers confirmed that it was a man-eater shark through the video. There is no artificial breeding in China, and it is the same crime to buy and sell. Such a curious video was once played by millions on platforms such as Tiktok and Kwai, but it challenged the red line of the law. *People's Daily* also emphasized afterwards that behind the morbid "mukbang" culture is a distorted value orientation, indicating that the current mukbang content is seriously entertaining and vulgar<sup>[5]</sup>.

#### **3.2. Loss of the Role of Media**

The media always bear the responsibility of the gatekeeper. They decide what can flow to the market and the audience. The spread of "mukbang" on the network platform is not only a process of information dissemination, but also an advocacy of behavior. However, in many communication contents, it conveys the idea of "hedonism", advocates high-level consumption and other behavior patterns. The video platform did not strictly review the content, and lost the role of gatekeeper, which easily led to the audience, especially young people, consumer alienation and other adverse consequences. In addition, the major video platforms also use big data algorithms, accurate push and other technologies to continuously recommend products with similar content for the audience, continuously enhance their influence on the audience, and further induce the guiding role of wrong content. Therefore, the video platform lacks correct value judgment and ignores the sense of responsibility when checking, which has led to the growing phenomenon of ethical anomie.

#### **3.3. Audience's Addiction Aggravates the Alienation of Interpersonal Communication**

The satisfaction of the audience after watching the "mukbang" column has been mentioned above and is reflected through the lens. The "mukbang" anchors can share the other side of their unwillingness to expose to reality with their network friends, effectively avoiding the tension and boredom that may be caused by real exchanges, and can also be recognized and supported by the same hobby group. Network communication gives people a sense of safe distance. When saying a sentence, you can think it over and over again, and the other party will not know this process. Therefore, it can show its wonderful side and hide all its shortcomings off the screen. In the common space of "mukbang", audiences share information, communicate feelings, and find common fans, thus forming a group culture. This promotes the self identification and group identification of group members, so that the audience can enhance their sense of belonging in the virtual world and indulge in it<sup>[6]</sup>.

Behind the national "mukbang" carnival, there is a lonely mentality of modern young people. The "mukbang" of sharing food and communicating feelings seems to make up for the emptiness in people's hearts, but it cannot completely dissipate the loneliness in people's hearts. It can only make people get

away from the boring real life temporarily, but it can never replace the real life. At the same time, it will weaken the relationship among people, life and learning, and aggravate the alienation of the relationship between people in real life.

#### **4. Strategic Thinking on the Future Development of Mukbang Industry**

##### ***4.1. Integrating Organically into Chinese Traditional Food, and Strengthening the Empowerment of Food Culture***

The "mukbang" program can occupy a place soon after it is introduced into the Chinese market from abroad. The important fundamental reason is that China has been a big food country since ancient times, and the potential audience has a great foundation. As the saying goes, "Food is the life of the people." "Eating" is not only to meet the basic needs of our national physical function, but also the carrier and concentrated embodiment of our thousands of years of history and culture. The food culture of a region can reflect the geographical environment, customs and other aspects of the region. Whether it is traditional food, home-made food, or regional food with special significance, it can be displayed to the public in the form of "mukbang".

The blogger wants to really go out of the circle by "mukbang" program, which requires that the blogger not only stay at the level of "eating" when doing the program. They should not only pursue large appetite and novel food, but also combine food with the sense of identity of traditional culture, and use it as a special symbol to make the audience feel belonging and identity. Take Li Ziqi, the short video blogger, for example, who demonstrated the baking method of Chinese food by making an ancient "oven" with the short video of *Bread Kiln*, and introduced the bread kiln, a food making tool that will soon be forgotten, to young people. According to the video shot by Li Ziqi, the flowers in the mountains can be used to make petal wine, flower cake and pure dew. Wild chestnuts in the mountains can be used to make chestnut jam, chestnut cake, etc. She selected ingredients from nature, which not only kept the original taste of food, but also tried many methods of the same raw material. This not only reflects the crystallization of the wisdom of Li Zichai and our working people, but more importantly, our traditional food culture has also been spread and promoted, and is recognized and valued by more people [7]. The appearance of Li Ziqi's short food video provides an opportunity for the audience to have a deeper understanding of the traditional Chinese food culture. Among Li Ziqi's more than 20 million fans, students and white-collar workers account for a larger proportion. These people are oppressed by the tense rhythm of the prosperous city, so they prefer and like the landscape and countryside in Li Ziqi's short videos, as well as the pleasant and quiet farm life. Therefore, they hope to find the beauty of life and experience the charm of food in such short videos.

It can be seen from Li Ziqi's case that in order to truly rely on mukbang to succeed, food bloggers need to organically integrate their learning of traditional Chinese food culture and present the essence of Chinese food through videos. Then the food can really enrich the spiritual world of the audience, so that people can better understand the traditional Chinese food and enhance their sense of pride and responsibility from the traditional culture.

##### ***4.2. Strengthening the Role of Media Gatekeepers and Raising the Threshold for Industry Access***

There are a large number of "mukbang" on the media platform, and the published videos also need to be checked in time to reduce the spread of their adverse effects. At the same time, some seriously vulgarized works need to be deleted. The media platform should not lower the quality requirements of the works in order to obtain traffic, nor recommend some eye-catching videos to users for grabbing traffic. For unpublished works, the platform shall establish a sound data processing system and a sound self inspection mechanism. In this way, the video uploaded by the anchor will be strictly reviewed in multiple directions, and bad operations will be stifled [8].

In the era of we media, everyone is a host, which is a realistic representation of the current era. Now it only needs one mobile phone and only takes three minutes from registration to live broadcast. Isn't this the result of the brutal growth of the live broadcast industry? The entry threshold of China's network platform is not high, and the intensity of user identity review is not strong. Even the fraudulent use of other people's information and forged identity information can be quickly registered. In this regard, the platform needs to conduct real name authentication and use facial information for real identity matching. In addition, while encouraging user supervision, a reward and punishment system can be established, as well as a screening mechanism for big data. When the platform finds that the blogger has repeatedly

made homogeneous works or vulgar content, it can reduce their exposure, or prohibit them from participating in the list display. Only when multiple parties work together can the entire industry environment become better.

#### **4.3. Strengthening the Media Literacy of the Audience and Cultivating the Rational Thinking of the Public**

Chinese audiences have strong ability to accept media information, but they are not very good analysts and critics. First of all, the audience should understand that this world is the "pseudo environment" constructed by the media. Its content does not reflect the objective world completely and truly, but is deliberately discriminated by the media. In the "mukbang" video, the anchor will transmit the information he wants to present to the audience through the network, so that the real and virtual are integrated, making the content of the program more difficult to distinguish between the true and the false [9].

Secondly, the audience should learn to reasonably distinguish between the true and false information, and think rationally about the information presented by the media, which can neither be blindly followed nor credulous. When the audience puts forward their own views, they should also analyze the information from multiple sources. For new emerging things like "mukbang" videos, the audience should convey their own wishes and correct their use motives. At the same time, the content of the anchor video production is also expected to promote the excellent Chinese food culture through their videos.

### **5. Conclusion**

The phenomenon of "mukbang fever" has been mapped and appeared in modern society, and its development is the product of many factors such as superstructure and economic foundation. There is capital power in this, but behind this upsurge, there are many unsatisfied demands of the public. Most people begin to seek spiritual satisfaction when the material conditions are basically available. Some people choose to express themselves in the form of mukbang. Some people enjoy watching videos while they are obsessed with the dream of not getting fat and immersed in a false "companionship". They shut themselves in the inner world and closed the door of interpersonal communication.

In this environment, the value system of China's traditional culture is gradually eroded by today's consumerism. The appearance of mukbang has satisfied the spiritual needs of the audience, but at the same time, it is disintegrating the obligations of the media. When the audience is enjoying themselves, they should be alert, and don't let entertainment take the place of proper thinking. Therefore, maintaining the sound development of "mukbang" is a major task in the future. Under the new media technology, the key to sustainable development is how "mukbang" can maintain public praise and at the same time have a sense of identity.

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