Original Article

The decision to watch Mukbang – Impact on eating habits and mental health: A study of Gen Z

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Abstract: Mukbang is an interesting form of entertainment. It has been attracting millions of viewers around the world. With wide coverage, Mukbang videos have a strong influence on viewers. Unlike previous studies, which only focused on the motivations to watch Mukbang videos or considered the negative consequences of excessive use, the present study is conducted to explore the positive impact of watching Mukbang videos on viewers' mental health and eating habits. After conducting a literature review, we propose the relationship among variables based on the source attractiveness model, the compensatory Internet model, and the uses and gratification theory. The research uses both qualitative and quantitative methods. Research data was collected based on survey questionnaires from 192 Gen Z in Vietnam. The findings show that there are two factors that positively affect "Decision to watch Mukbang" in ascending order: "Entertainment" and "Indirect satisfaction". Furthermore, the study results also indicate that the factor "Decision to watch Mukbang" has a positive relationship with both "Eating habits" and "Mental health". Proposing solutions based on research results has contributed to helping Mukbang viewers explore the positives of this type of entertainment. Simultaneously, it helps a Broadcast Jockey know what factors viewers are interested in, thereby creating attractive videos.

Keywords: Mukbang, mental health, eating habits, Gen Z, Vietnam.

1. Introduction

Under the great development of the digital technology platform, social network users have many opportunities to interact with attractive types of entertainment, and new trends. In this "fertile social media land", people can connect and create positive values for each other. They create new trends with unique content to satisfy their needs, including a prominent trend originating from Korea – Mukbang.

Mukbang – the trend of watching people eat, has taken the Internet by storm in recent years and quickly become a craze in Vietnam. A Broadcast Jockey (BJ) is known as the creator of Mukbang videos, who eats a variety of foods in front of the camera while interacting with viewers (McCarthy, 2017). This trend has flourished and received great support from viewers (Song, 2021). According to Koen van Gelder's statistics on Statista published in June 2022, approximately 32% of young people surveyed said they enjoyed watching Mukbang videos. This is a significant number. This strong development is also evident in search data from Google, which displays about 15,500,000 results in only 0.47 seconds.

Mukbang attracts millions of viewers thanks to the familiar sounds of eating (slurping, chewing) and the imagery of Mukbang videos that trigger ASMR (autonomous sensory-motor response), thereby creating a feeling of relaxation. In addition, Mukbang is gradually considered as a useful tool that positively affects the mental health of viewers, because it helps them reduce loneliness. Furthermore, Mukbang "compensates" for young people who lack co-eaters and satisfies viewers' virtual eating (Choe, 2019).

While some people consider it a kind of fetish and a place that provides a social outlet, others are concerned about the health implications for Mukbang viewers such as eating disorders, Internet addiction and mental health (Kircaburun et al., 2022). Despite controversies, Mukbang is still popular and attracts a large number of viewers.

However, it can be seen that previous studies only focused on answering what are the motives leading to Mukbang's viewer behavior or considering the negative consequences of excessive use. In fact, very few studies have taken a positive stance to acknowledge and explore the impact of watching Mukbang videos on viewers' mental health or positive eating habits. Based on these gaps, a more in-depth study on this topic has been conducted in order to provide solutions that can help viewers derive positive values from Mukbang videos. Additionally, this research will contribute to the theoretical aspect by reaffirming the accuracy and relevance of the source attractiveness model

and the compensatory internet model in studies on social behavior.

Research questions:

1. What factors influence Gen Z's decision to watch Mukbang and to what extent?

2. Does watching Mukbang have a positive effect on the eating habits of Gen Z?

3. Does watching Mukbang have a positive effect on the mental health of Gen Z?

Specific objectives:

1. Examine the factors that affect Gen Z's decision to watch Mukbang and the level of their impact.

2. Determine whether Mukbang affects the eating habits of Gen Z.

3. Investigate whether watching Mukbang has a positive effect on the mental health of Gen Z.

4. Provide practical recommendations to help viewers make reasonable use of Mukbang videos.

2. Literature review and theoretical basis

2.1. Literature review

The rapid rise and widespread popularity of Mukbang videos have made Mukbang a highly sought-after research topic among scholars.

Notably, prominent studies have focused on the potential of Mukbang to reduce loneliness and social isolation in viewers (Donnar, 2017; Schwegler-Castañer, 2018; Hong & Park, 2018; Woo, 2018; Spence et al., 2019; Choe, 2019). Researchers argue that Mukbang allows users to feel connected to society through a virtual community, enabling them to interact with thousands of people while watching a BJ eat (Hakimey & Yazdanifard, 2015). However, most of the previous studies have only analyzed the impact of the "loneliness" motive on the decision to watch Mukbang, without demonstrating how that decision positively affects users' mental health.

Additionally, many researchers suggest that the behavior of watching Mukbang videos stems from the indirect eating desire, the attractiveness of the BJs, novelty, and social norms (Tu & Fishbach, 2017; Pereira et al., 2019).

From a different perspective on the consequences, there have also been numerous studies concerned with the negative outcomes

associated with this trend, such as physical, behavioral, and psychological implications (Kircaburun et al., 2022), as well as harmful changes in dietary preferences, eating habits, and addiction (Bruno & Chung, 2017; Donnar, 2017; Spence et al., 2019; Kircaburun et al., 2021).

In summary, previous studies have primarily focused on addressing the motives that lead to online consumers' engagement in Mukbang and examining the negative consequences of excessive usage leading to "addiction". In reality, very few studies have taken a positive perspective to explore the impact of watching Mukbang videos on viewers' mental health or positive eating habits.

2.2. Theoretical basis

2.2.1. The source attractiveness model

The source attractiveness model (McGuire, 1985) is used to measure the effectiveness of messages sent to a particular object through 4 factors: The likeability, the familiarity, the similarity, the attraction (Yoon et al., 2016). This measurement is the premise affecting people's intentions and behaviors in social activities (McGuire, 1985).

This model has been widely applied in various research fields. Almost all the results have shown that the appearance of the representative plays a significant role in users' intention. This is why marketers focus on celebrities (Raven et al., 1998) or key opinion leaders (KOLs) with prominent appearances to represent their brands and attract more customers (Amos et al., 2008).

In our study on the decision to watch Mukbang, we examine the factor "Attractiveness of BJ", specifically focusing on the appearance of the BJ. This is to evaluate its impact on the intention of viewers to watch Mukbang content.

2.2.2. The compensatory internet model

The compensatory internet model assumes that individuals' motivation for using the Internet regularly is to satisfy their needs for entertainment that are not met in reality (Kardefelt-Winther, 2014; Wang et al., 2018; Wolniewicz et al., 2018). Scientists believe that this is a way to help people reduce stress (Kardefelt-Winther, 2014; Elhai et al. 2018).

Applying the compensatory internet model to the research context allows us to better explain why people tend to choose online activities as a means to reduce loneliness, including the behavior of watching Mukbang videos (Kircaburun et al., 2021). Moreover, the novelty and high entertainment value of "watching others eat" are also two additional factors that attract viewers to such videos (Pereira et al., 2019; Kircaburun et al., 2021).

Furthermore, within the scope of this study, the compensatory internet model is also applied to explain how individuals who are obsessed with their appearance and experience weight-related pressures find satisfaction in "indirect eating" through watching Mukbang. Thus, individuals who enjoy food but do not want to face the negative consequences of overeating can fulfill their cravings by watching Mukbang, compensating for their desire to eat excessively (Kircaburun et al., 2021). This means that viewers do not have to consume a large amount of food directly but still experience a virtual sense of fullness and pleasure through the auditory and visual stimulation they receive. Therefore, in this study, the research team utilizes the compensatory internet model to support the assertion that the satisfaction derived from indirect eating satisfaction is one of the factors influencing the decision to watch Mukbang.

3. Hypothesis and research model

The attractiveness of the Master of Ceremonies is considered to be one of the most important factors leading to the popularity of the program (Lis & Post, 2013). The research conducted by Weibel et al. (2008) indicated that if a broadcaster lacks this element, viewers may switch channels or watch news from other channels. Similar effects have also been observed for other entertainment programs, including Mukbang. The attractiveness from the appearance, to the way BJ behaves and talks, has a great influence on the viewer's attitude (Pradhan et al., 2016). This is a motivational source to stimulate viewers to watch their channels. Based on the source attractiveness model, we form the hypothesis:

H1: Attractiveness of the BJ positively affects the decision to watch Mukbang.

Previous researchers have argued a lot about how novelty affects viewers' attitude toward

reality TV shows (Pereira et al., 2019). However, the authors found that the results were not consistent in the direction of impact. On the one hand, some researchers suggested that viewers might be attracted by the novelty (Hall, 2006). On the other hand, other authors showed that viewers preferred familiar stimuli (Song & Schwarz, 2009).

Compared to other forms of entertainment, Mukbang videos especially contain novel elements. These can range from the BJ's eating techniques, such as consuming entire large portions or combining various unique sauces and condiments, to the diversity of dishes originating from different countries and cultural regions.

Therefore, in the context of the study about Mukbang, we propose a hypothesis to examine whether novel factors have a positive impact on the viewers' attitude and motivate them to watch Mukbang videos.

H2: Novelty positively affects the decision to watch Mukbang.

Loneliness is defined as a sense of social isolation, being cut off and separated from others (VanderWeele et al., 2012). In addition, it is also a feeling of disgust as people are not satisfied with their social relationships, both about quantity and quality (Perlman & Peplap, 1981). According to research conducted by Kircaburun et al. (2022), watching online videos, including Mukbang videos, has been found to help reduce feelings of loneliness. This is because this kind of entertainment can satisfy viewer's social satisfaction by facilitating communication between Mukbang Youtubers and their viewers (Hong & Park, 2018; Choe, 2019). Watching Mukbang videos serves as a virtual substitute for in-person communication while the audience is eating (Jackson, 2018). Research by Hakimey and Yazdanifard (2015) and Pereira et al. (2019) has indicated that loneliness is one of the primary motivators attracting viewers to Mukbang. Therefore, based on the results of the above studies and the support of the compensatory Internet model, we propose the following hypothesis:

H3: Loneliness positively affects the decision to watch Mukbang.

Indirect satisfaction refers to the sensory compensation of real-life eating through visual and auditory stimuli (Kircaburun et al., 2022). Dieters will tend to watch Mukbang more to compensate for their cravings (Kim, 2022). By watching Mukbang, they can satisfy their cravings and experience the sensation of indulging in high-calorie meals, but they actually don't need to suffer the negative consequences of overeating (De Backer & Hudders, 2016; Kircaburun et al., 2020). It can be seen that this is one of the prominent joys and fascinations derived from watching Mukbang. Therefore, we believe that the satisfaction of indirect dining is one of the motivators driving viewers towards the decision to watch Mukbang.

H4: Indirect satisfaction positively affects the decision to watch Mukbang.

Entertainment is considered to be one of the outstanding reasons for long-term Internet use (Gogan et al., 2018). The studies of Demetrovics et al. (2011), Horzum (2016) have also identified one of the users' motivations for them to use social media is their entertainment needs. Mukbang is known to be a "tool" containing so many entertainment elements for both viewers and BJs (Hong & Park, 2018). For instance, entertainment factors may arise from sounds like ASMR – mouth movements (chewing, slurping, etc.), and sounds emitted by food (Schwegler-Castañer, 2018). Additionally, content creators can further enhance the entertainment value of their videos by introducing challenges such as eating super spicy noodles, eating according to icons, and so on. Combining the results from the above studies and the compensatory Internet model, we propose the hypothesis:

H5: Entertainment positively affects the decision to watch Mukbang.

A lot of studies suggested that watching Mukbang can cause eating disorders, obesity and negative changes in eating habits (Kircaburun et al., 2021). Mukbang can be harmful, negatively affecting adolescents and young children when they imitate unhealthy eating behavior. Meanwhile, some other reports indicated that Mukbang offers viewers many benefits by satisfying their cravings and allowing them to experience eating indirectly through visual and auditory stimuli (Choe, 2019; Gillespie, 2019). Furthermore, Mukbang videos can have a positive impact on building healthy eating habits of viewers by limiting the eating of a lot of spicy, hot, greasy foods through the negative health consequences that the BJs have had to face such as stomach ulcers, weight loss control, etc. With

a sample of Gen Z – a smart and responsive generation, we expect that they will use Mukbang as a useful "tool" to build healthy eating habits. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H6: Decision to watch Mukbang positively affects eating habits.

Mukbang is a positive means of entertainment for both physical and mental health as it not only helps viewers relieve stress (Hakimey & Yazdanifard, 2015) but also reduces loneliness and helps viewers satisfy their cravings (Strand et al., 2020). Specifically, watching Mukbang videos is an efficient solution for the viewers to reduce their loneliness and emptiness because they can communicate with thousands of people while staying at home. Thus, Mukbang is often likened to a virtual substitute for social interaction (Jackson, 2018). Mukbang videos can help the viewers to relieve stress of daily life; they will feel more comfortable in eating because they can fight their cravings and limit the problem of overeating (Quartz, 2016; Kim, 2017). However, the impact of Mukbang on mental health remains highly debated, as some scholars argue that watching Mukbang could lead to mental symptoms such as eating disorders and addiction. Through this study, we will clarify whether watching Mukbang videos have a positive effect on the mental health of Gen Z viewers. Therefore, we would like to propose the following hypothesis:

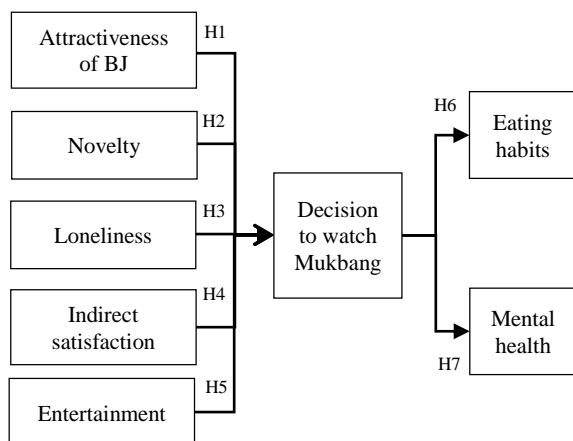*H7: Decision to watch Mukbang positively affects mental health.*

Figure 1: The proposed research model
Source: Author's proposal.

4. Methodology and data
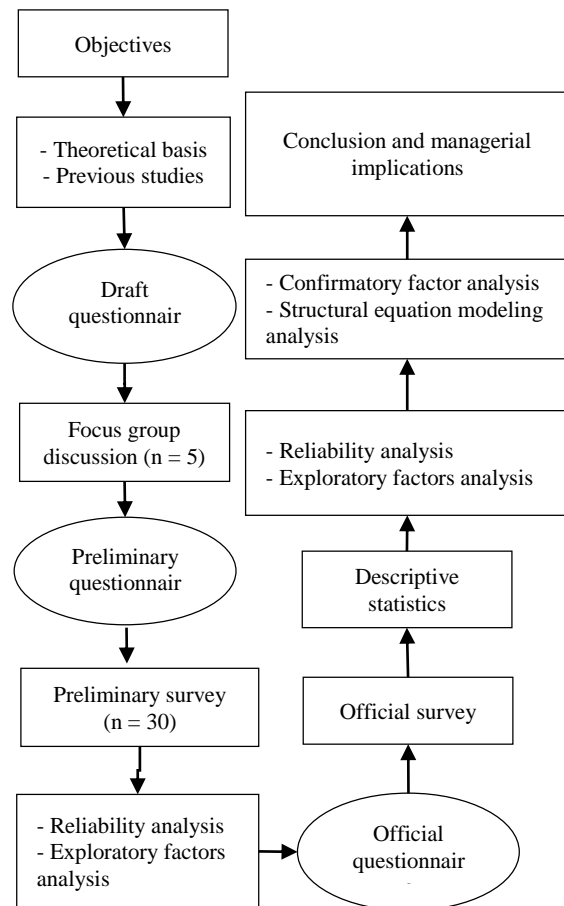
4.1. Types of research

Figure 2: Research process
Source: Author's proposal.

The study uses a combination of several methods, including: qualitative and quantitative methods. In qualitative research, we consult high-quality sources and previous research papers to develop ideas. Then, we conduct group discussions to design the research model. Quantitative research is used to process primary data and draw conclusions based on the results of the analysis.

4.2. Measure

The draft questionnaire includes 8 variables with 36 questions. Before using the scale in the context of Vietnam with the Gen Z sample, we conducted group discussions (02 Gen Z who watch Mukbang and 03 Mukbangers) and preliminary quantitative research (30 Gen Z) to assess the overall relevance and suitability of the

questionnaire for the context of this study. Finally, the official questionnaire was developed. The official questionnaire includes 8 variables with 27 questions: "Attractiveness of BJ" (3 items) – Kim, M. (2022); "Novelty" (3 items) – Kircaburun et al. (2023); "Loneliness" (4 items)- Kircaburun et al. (2021), "Indirect satisfaction" (4 items) and "Entertainment" (3 items) – Kircaburun et al. (2023); "Decision to watch Mukbang" (3 items) – Pereira et al. (2019); "Eating habits" (3 items) – Conner et al. (2002); "Mental health" (4 items) – Roberts et al. (2019).

4.3. Sampling and data collection

We used a simple random sampling method to randomly select the Gen Z respondents at schools and shopping malls. To ensure that the respondents align with our target demographic, we asked those surveyed to provide their age before commencing the survey. We explained in detail about the survey to the eligible respondents If they had any questions, we gave them answers. We got their informed consent and acknowledged that participation in the study would be voluntary and anonymous. The number of participants in the initial survey was 238 people. After checking to eliminate errors as well as inconsistencies in the answer sheets, the dataset has 236 valid answers, of which 192 respondents had seen Mukbang.

4.4. Data analysis technique

The first analysis is a data description to find out about the description of the respondent's profile, which is presented in the form of tables or graphs.

The next analyses are Reliability Analysis (Cronbach's Alpha) and Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA). Two methods are carried out on SPSS 20.0 so as to remove some observed variables that are not closely related to the same factor. It also helps check the consistency of these statements for the same factor.

The final analyses are Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and Structural equation modeling analysis (SEM) (carried out by AMOS 24.0) to verify the adequacy of the collected data. The results of the analysis are used to test the research hypotheses.

5. Research results

5.1. Sample description

- Gender: The results show that the number of female respondents is more than that of male respondents. Specifically, 69.3% of the respondents were female and 30.7%. were male.

- Age: Based on age the group of respondents can be divided into three age categories – namely Between 10 and 17 years old (31.8%), between 18 and 22 years old (50%) and between 23 and 26 years old (18.2%).

5.2. Data analysis

5.2.1. Cronbach's Alpha test

The results suggest that the variables in the model are reliable, with Cronbach's Alpha of 0.824, 0.768, 0.849, 0.824, 0.879, 0.847, 0.918 and 0.859 for AT, NO, LO, IS, EN, DE, EH and ME, respectively.

5.2.2. Exploratory Factoring Analysis (EFA)

KMO's coefficient of the independent variables, mediating variable, and dependent variables are respectively 0.800, 0.730, and 0.757 > 0.5 (good). The Sig. Bartlett's Test is 0.000 < 0.05, so EFA for independent variables is appropriate.

Table 1: Rotated component matrix for independent variables

	Component			
	1	2	3	4
AT2	.813			
AT1	.737			
NO2	.731			
NO1	.716			
NO3	.631			
LO3		.890		
LO2		.828		
LO4		.805		
LO1		.790		
EN1			.875	
EN2			.831	
EN3			.806	
IS2				.849
IS3				.822
IS1				.794

Source: Author's proposal.

The results of the EFA test for the independent variables showed the "Novelty" and "Attractiveness of BJ" variables are combined into a group of factors. Therefore, we re-examined the theoretical foundation and the survey questionnaire, and referred to relevant sources regarding these two factors. We realized that both "Novelty" and "Attractiveness of BJ" are characteristic aspects that Mukbang provides to users during their experience. So, we decided to readjust the original measurement structure to align it with the empirical data for further analysis. Specifically, we replaced the new variable labeled "Attractiveness of Mukbang subjects" (AT) to cover the observed variables, including: AT1, AT2, NO1, NO2 and NO3.

Through the EFA test, 25 observed variables are also divided into 7 factors, including: Factor 1: "Attractiveness of Mukbang subjects" (AT1 – AT5); Factor 2: "Loneliness" (LO1 – LO4); Factor 3: "Indirect satisfaction" (IS1 – IS3); Factor 4: "Entertainment" (EN1 – EN3); Factor 5: "Decision to watch Mukbang" (DE1 – DE3); Factor 6: "Eating habits" (EH1 – EH3); Factor 7: "Mental health" (ME1 – ME4).

5.2.3. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) – The first time

All indicators meet the standard: Chi-square/df = 1.769 (≤ 3.000), GFI = 0.837 (>0.800), CFI = 0.928 (≥ 0.900), TLI = 0.915 (≥ 0.900), RMSEA = 0.063 (≤ 0.08), PCLOSE = 0.012 (≥ 0.010) (reaching 6/6 – from acceptable level and up).

After analyzing the CFA, we analyzed convergent validity and discriminant validity by AMOS 24.0. The results show that the values of CR are greater than 0.7 (qualified). However, AT0's value of AVE is less than 0.5 (0.472), so we remove AT5 to improve it. Then, we performed Confirmatory Factor Analysis for the second time.

5.2.4. CFA – The second time

Most indicators meet the standard: Chi-square/df = 1.803 (≤ 3.000), GFI = 0.838 (>0.800), CFI = 0.930 (≥ 0.900), TLI = 0.916 (≥ 0.900), RMSEA = 0.065 (≤ 0.08), PCLOSE = 0.009 (unqualified) (reaching 5/6 – from acceptable level and up). So the model achieves compatibility with market data.

Table 2: Aggregate reliability and extracted variance results – The second time

	AT	LO	EN	IS	DE	EH	ME
AT	0.720						
LO	0.053	0.771					
EN	0.582***	0.145†	0.841				
IS	0.499***	0.083	0.509***	0.783			
DE	0.421***	0.090	0.647***	0.476***	0.806		
EH	0.393***	-0.010	0.447***	0.231**	0.148†	0.892	
ME	0.483***	0.080	0.669***	0.539***	0.777***	0.224**	0.784
CR	0.811	0.853	0.878	0.826	0.847	0.921	0.864
AVE	0.518	0.594	0.707	0.613	0.649	0.795	0.615
MSV	0.339	0.021	0.447	0.291	0.603	0.199	0.603
MaxR (H)	0.817	0.885	0.891	0.836	0.848	0.934	0.873

Notes: † p < 0.100, * p < 0.050, ** p < 0.010, *** p < 0.001. Validity concerns: No validity concerns here.
Source: Author's proposal.

- Convergent validity: All the Composite Reliability (CR) of these factors have CR values which are greater than 0.7. Besides, the values of Average Variance Extracted (AVE) are also greater than 0.5. Therefore, Convergent Validity is guaranteed.

- Discriminant validity: Through Table 2, all the Maximum Shared Variance (MSV) are less than Average Variance Extracted (AVE), and all the values of Square Root of AVE (SQRT AVE) are greater than Inter – Construct Correlations. Therefore, Discriminant Validity is guaranteed.

Thus, a scale of 7 factors and 24 observed variables are qualified.

5.2.5. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM)

The results show that most indicators meet the standard: Chi-square/df = 1.951 (≤ 3.000),

GFI = 0.819 (> 0.800), CFI = 0.913 (≥ 0.900), TLI = 0.901 (≥ 0.900), RMSEA = 0.0071 (≤ 0.08), PCLOSE = 0.000 (unqualified) (reaching 5/6 – from acceptable level and up). So, the model achieves compatibility with market data.

5.2.6. Bootstrap test

The results of the Bootstrap test with the number of repeated samples are 1000, showing that the standard errors of Bias columns (SE-Bias) are not statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). Besides, most of the values of C.R are qualified (C.R < 1.96) and not statistically significant at 95% confidence level. Therefore, the estimates in the model are guaranteed. Thus, the research model fits in the data.

5.2.7. Squared Multiple Correlations

DE0's value of Squared Multiple Correlations is 0.539, so the independent variables explain about 53.9% of the variation of "Decision to watch Mukbang".

Besides, EH0's value of Squared Multiple Correlations is 0.056, so the independent variables explain about 5.60% of the variation of "Eating habits".

Finally, ME0's value of Squared Multiple Correlations is 0.662, so the independent variables explain about 66.2% of the variation of "Mental health".

Table 3: Summary of hypotheses testing results and standardized regression weights

H1	Unsupported	0.039
H2	Unsupported	-0.010
H3	Supported	0.577
H4	Supported	0.215
H5	Supported	0.236
H6	Supported	0.814

Source: Author's proposal.

5.3. Discussing research results

5.3.1. The factor "Entertainment"

"Entertainment" is the factor that has the strongest positive impact on "Decision to watch Mukbang" (H4). This result is consistent with previous studies of Hong and Park (2018), Pettit (2019), Song (2021) and the compensatory Internet model. Today, Mukbang is one of the most popular entertainment programs. The ASMR sounds in Mukbang videos are the core factors that bring great entertainment to the viewers (Kircaburun et al., 2021).

5.3.2. The factor "Indirect satisfaction"

"Indirect satisfaction" is the next factor that has a positive influence on the viewer's "Decision to watch Mukbang" (H3). This result further supports the uses and gratifications theory, the compensatory Internet model and the studies of Anjani et al. (2020). It is thanks to the attractive sounds and visuals from the Mukbang videos that through them, viewers will be immersed in a virtual feeling, stimulating their imagination and visualization. Thus, it also makes them feel like they are BJs and they are enjoying the food. Therefore, if people are in a state of craving but are not allowed to eat the food they want for some reason, watching Mukbang videos will satisfy them.

5.3.3. The factor "Attractiveness of Mukbang subjects"

After analyzing the data, there is no positive relationship between the "Attractiveness of Mukbang subjects" and "Decision to watch Mukbang" (H1). This result supports the conclusion of Kim, M. (2022). With our conclusion, we think: Firstly, it is possible that respondents are not interested in the perception of formal elements, specifically the attractiveness of BJs. Instead, viewers pay more attention to talking style, the BJ's humor and grace, or facial expressions, and the BJ's familiarity, etc. Secondly, maybe our respondents have watched Mukbang to be entertained, not to admire or discover a certain subject. In addition, we think that the small sample size can also lead to the negation of our hypothesis as well as the previous research results. Besides, our conclusion also contributes new perspectives to the source attractiveness model theory of McGuire (1985) and the uses and gratifications theory.

5.3.4. The factor "Loneliness"

Contrary to the hypothesis proposed by our team, the results show that "Loneliness" does not positively impact on "Decision to watch Mukbang" (H2). This conclusion coincides with the study of Pereira et al. (2019). It is quite surprising, because most previous studies have proven that "Loneliness" is one of the most

important factors that people decide to watch Mukbang, for example, the study of Kang et al. (2020) and Kircaburun et al. (2021). However, these articles only study general subjects of Mukbang without any particular discrimination about age or generation. Therefore, with the sample of Gen Z, our study gives readers a specific look at the relationship between Loneliness and the Decision to watch Mukbang.

5.3.5. The factor "Mental health"

"Decision to watch Mukbang" has a positive effect on "Mental health" (H6). Watching Mukbang has contributed significantly to the increase of positive emotions of the viewers. This result is consistent with the previous studies, typically Hakimey and Yazdanifard (2015).

5.3.6. The factor "Eating habits"

Research results show that "Decision to watch Mukbang" positively affects "Eating habits", meaning that if they watch Mukbang, they will be motivated to build healthier eating habits in the future (H5). In previous studies, most authors said that watching Mukbang too much would lead to negative eating habits. In this article, we find that Mukbang will promote positive eating habits if we view it appropriately. Thus, it can be seen that Mukbang is a useful tool to help Gen Z – who are very interested in physical beauty – to satisfy their appetites (Choe, 2019), especially those who are on diet to maintain body shape (Palladino, 2016). So, for viewers, Mukbang is a useful tool for them to adjust their diet. It gives them a feeling of mental comfort instead of the uncomfortable feeling of not being able to eat what they like. Concurrently, it helps viewers recognize the negative health consequences that BJs have to face such as weight loss, being overweight, diabetes, etc. because of eating a lot of spicy food. And this conclusion is also completely consistent with the theoretical basis – the compensatory Internet use model of McGuire (1985) and the theory of use and satisfaction of Katz et al. (1974) that we have stated before.

6. Conclusion

The findings reveal that "Decision to watch Mukbang" has a strong influence on the "Mental Health" and "Eating habits" of Gen Z. These are striking findings of the study, which prove that besides the negative effects, Mukbang also has a positive aspect. Mukbang can make Gen Zs feel more relaxed, happy, less lonely and more conscious of their physical health. For example, they will adjust to a healthier diet in the future. Simultaneously, this research contributes both theoretical and practical aspects. It not only helps to elucidate the cause-and-effect relationship among the proposed variables but also affirms the fit of the source attractiveness model, the compensatory Internet model and the uses and gratifications theory. In practical terms, the study has also proposed solutions and management implications to help viewers get positive values.

This study still has some limitations, such as: (i) it is not possible to assess all the factors that influence the decision to watch Mukbang; (ii) not considering the negative aspects; (iii) small sample size. Thus, there is much more room for further research on this topic in Vietnam.

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