

The Paradigm Shift in Malaysian Commensality: Symbolic Interactionism in *Mukbang* videos

(Perubahan Paradigma dalam Komunaliti Malaysia: Interaksi Simbolik dalam Video Mukbang)

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ABSTRACT

Commensality is integral to communal eating, particularly in Malaysian culture where food preparation, distribution, and consumption hold significant importance. However, cultural globalization and digital integration have transformed commensality into a virtual experience. Factors like single-person households and COVID-19 lockdowns have made solo dining increasingly common, often supplemented by social media platforms to create a sense of connection during meals. The popularity of Mukbang videos, showcasing Korean street and comfort foods, has surged, further blurring the lines between virtual and physical dining experiences. Food serves as a vital communication medium in Malaysian culture, facilitating connections through diverse culinary experiences. Through George H. Mead's Symbolic Interactionism Theory, interactions via food and its cultural context lead to the emergence of new food meanings and shared understandings, initially rooted in family dynamics. Viewers engage in parasocial interactions with Mukbang artists and fellow audience members, forming a virtual marketplace of social interactions that transcends physical distances. Mukbang videos offer escapism and community, particularly for those living in isolation, evolving from a necessity into a lifestyle choice. This study delves into this paradigm shift within the Malaysian community, focusing on the addictive appeal of Mukbang videos among Malaysian youth and the unique symbolic associations forged with the Mukbang community, and their impact on Malaysian culture.

Keywords: *commensality; mukbang; symbolic interactionism; Malaysian cultures; digital food culture*

ABSTRAK

Komunaliti merupakan aspek penting dalam makanan berjemaah, terutamanya dalam budaya Malaysia di mana penyediaan makanan, pengedaran, dan pengambilan makanan memegang kepentingan yang besar. Namun, globalisasi budaya dan integrasi digital telah mengubah komunaliti menjadi pengalaman maya. Faktor seperti rumah tangga satu individu dan kawalan COVID-19 telah menjadikan makan bersendirian semakin biasa, sering kali disokong oleh

platform media sosial untuk mencipta rasa hubungan semasa makan. Populariti video Mukbang, yang memaparkan makanan jalanan dan selesa Korea, telah meningkat, memperkudakan lagi sempadan antara pengalaman makan maya dan fizikal. Makanan berperanan sebagai medium komunikasi penting dalam budaya Malaysia, memudahkan hubungan melalui pengalaman kuliner yang pelbagai. Melalui Teori Interaksi Simbolik George H. Mead, interaksi melalui makanan dan konteks budayanya membawa kepada kemunculan makna makanan baru dan pemahaman bersama, pada awalnya berakar dalam dinamik keluarga. Penonton terlibat dalam interaksi parasosial dengan artis Mukbang dan ahli penonton lain, membentuk pasar maya interaksi sosial yang melampaui jarak fizikal. Video Mukbang menawarkan pelarian dan komuniti, terutamanya bagi mereka yang hidup dalam keterasingan, berkembang dari satu keperluan menjadi pilihan gaya hidup. Kajian ini menggali perubahan paradigma dalam masyarakat Malaysia, dengan menumpukan kepada daya tarik adiktif video Mukbang di kalangan belia Malaysia dan hubungan simbolik unik yang terjalin dengan komuniti Mukbang, serta impaknya terhadap budaya Malaysia.

Kata kunci: komunaliti; mukbang; interaksi simbolik; budaya Malaysia; budaya makanan digital

INTRODUCTION

Mukbang videos are seen to be a rising notable social phenomenon, potentially reshaping conventional communal practices and cultural dynamics. Research conducted by Kircaburun et al. (2020), Strand & Gustaffson (2022), and Sanskriti et al. (2023) indicates that these eating-show videos are increasingly popular among younger demographics, particularly for communal experiences and support. The Malaysian community is not left out as well with the rise of local Malaysians turning to the digital platforms for the experience of commensality and sharing of foodways, especially in the post-COVID period. Therefore, this study looks into the multifaceted aspects of *mukbang* within the Malaysian context, examining its symbolic significance and its transformative impact on communal rituals and cultural identity. In doing so, this will highlight the urgency of understanding the implications of *mukbang* culture for Malaysian communal traditions and cultural values, offering insights that are crucial for navigating the evolving landscape of digital communal practices and fostering a nuanced understanding of contemporary Malaysian culture.

COMMENSALITY

The term 'commensality' is used to describe the beneficial social connections that occur when individuals eat together (Sobal, 2000; Simmel, 1994), especially in the Malaysian context where the family mealtimes actually provide secure social interaction (Koome, Hocking, & Sutton, 2012; Fiese, et al., 2002). These findings show that family rituals, such as shared mealtimes, may help young people feel secure and connected (Crespo, Kielpikowski, Pryor, & Jose, 2011). Family meals are generally the central hub in sustaining the cohesiveness and the transfer of knowledge, as well as shared experiences (Holm, 2001; Murcott, 1982; Charles & Kerr, 1988; Devault, 1991; Counihan, 2004). These meals eaten together have great positive impact on children's and adolescents' nutritional health, as well as provides a better outcome in risky behaviour and overall psychosocial wellbeing (Hammons & Fiese, 2011).

Mealtimes are also seen as a factor in the construction of one's identity. Identities help us understand who we are and can aid in sustaining one's well-being, especially if the identity is significant and valuable to the person. Therefore, food and mealtimes actually play a role in the cultural identity

formation where it can act as a symbol to the society and ethnic groups (Kittler & Sucher, 2004). That being said, a typical activity where a meal is shared amongst friends or family members, or even co-workers can actually influence the food intake, food choice, food consumption habits and even foodways (Oh, Erinoshio, Dunton, Perna, & Berrigan, 2014; Herman, Roth, & Ploivy, 2003; Cruwys, Bevelander, & Hermans, 2015). This is hardly surprising, given that more people enjoy mealtimes with their families than when they eat alone. In a communal setting, parents tend to assist their children's healthy food consumption. These studies also suggest that when we eat with someone who is eating a lot, we are more likely to copy what they are eating and eat more than we would if we were dining alone. This is also reflective when we eat in a group rather than eating alone, as observed by researchers, with evidences from food diaries, observational and experimental studies (Herman, 2015).

In addition to eating action, mealtimes have been revealed to offer collective occasions for the diners to create relationships that reinforce or modify the social order (Ochs & Shohet, 2006). Furthermore, the community production of knowledge and moral attitudes is aided by the conversational activities that characterise these mealtimes. In contrast, mealtimes are already a culturally meaningful experience by themselves. They are a form of social activity that demands specific participant sensitivities, and they are more or less traditional. Within and between social groups, mealtimes differ in terms of participation, atmosphere, duration, food items, meal sequence, and assigned significance (Ochs & Shohet, 2006).

DIGITAL COMMENSALITY

With the understanding of how food and its foodways can affect and shape the cultural identity construction, it is also vital to understand how the digital impact of commensality can also play a part in the formation and edification of that cultural identity. According to Camille Rumani, co-founder of the VizEat site, it should never be forgotten that “*the table is the original social network* (Spence, Gastrophysics: the new science of eating, 2017). Despite this, the use of well-known digital social networks, which are all too often accessed at the dinner table via smart phones, shows how modern technology can impact commensality, whether it is positively or negatively (Moser & Reinecke, 2016; Ferdous, et al., 2017). The general understanding is that technology has a negative impact on people's eating and drinking habits, where individuals eating together at the same table do not communicate with each other, but instead are concentrating on their devices with whatever that is shown there, as shown in studies such as Oldham-Cooper, et.al (2011) and Radeskey, et.al. (2014). However, the positive side of actually having devices at the table to increase communication, and especially to have virtual dining is not really looked into, particularly during this time of pandemic where the rise of solo dining is rising. This is especially helpful when people are in the midst of lockdown and needed companionship, thus resorting to various devices and technology to help ease that loneliness (Phua, Jin, & Kim, 2017; Pandya & Lodha, 2021).

The terms “digital commensality”, “virtual commensality” are used to logically explain a myriad of situations and circumstances, from physically eating together while looking at a device, or an online platform that allows people to choose an authentic eating experience with strangers willing to host and cook (O'Hear, 2016), *Skeating*, which is ‘skyping’ and eating with a loved one or friend located elsewhere (Spence, 2017), interactive tele-dining with remote diners (Wei, et al., 2011), and the most popular one to date, *mukbang* – eating while watching someone else eat in a specially made video about food and eating, complete with eating noises (Donnar, 2017; Kim, 2018; Choe, 2019; Pereira, Sung, & Lee, 2019). While *mukbang* started in Korea, it is interesting to see how quickly the practice has spread throughout Asia.

MUKBANG

Mukbang, a term derived from the Korean words ‘*mukja*’ (eating) and ‘*bangsong*’ (broadcast), translates to ‘eating broadcast.’ It refers to videos where an individual consumes a significant amount of food while engaging with the camera, initially featuring Korean dishes. This genre, popularized globally, was

acknowledged by the Oxford English Dictionary in 2021, defining *mukbang* as “a video, especially one that is livestreamed, that features a person eating a large quantity of food and addressing the audience” (The National News, 2021). Originating in South Korea in 2010 on Afreeca TV platforms, these broadcasts were exclusively live, performed by individuals known as 'broadcast jockeys' or 'BJs.' These BJs could earn substantial income from advertising, donations, and sponsorships, tapping into a cultural zeitgeist and addressing societal loneliness (McCarthy, 2017). The genre gained international viral status when Fine Brothers Entertainment featured it in their REACT series in 2015, where popular YouTube personalities expressed everything from astonishment to disbelief while viewing Korean eating shows; this particular episode has amassed 6.8 million views to date. Over time, the style of *mukbang* videos evolved towards featuring larger quantities of food and including foods with pronounced ASMR qualities such as crunching, slurping, and smacking sounds. According to a study by Seoul National University, the term “*mukbang*” was associated with over 100,000 YouTube videos in a two-year period from April 2017 to April 2019 (Kang, Lee, Kim, & Yun, 2020). This reflects a shift towards a more gregarious presentation in *mukbang* videos, underlining their broad appeal and the captivating nature of their content.

THE RISE OF MUKBANG AND ITS EFFECTS ON COMMENSALITY

It cannot be denied that the consumption of food, its foodways, the preparation of the food and the rituals surrounding it provide an important and vital aspect of social function that is intrinsically intertwined to online media culture. Fischler (2011) has stated that our overall understanding of the social world is shaped to food and the social function of dining together, stating “*Commensality produces bonding. In apparently all cultures, eating the same food is equated with producing the same flesh and blood, thus making commensals more alike and bringing them closer to each other*” (p. 533). The practice of food sharing and preparation has carried on to the online platform, connecting to digital media production and use such as online TV streaming, cooking shows, and diversified into recipe blogs, cooking web series, *mukbang* broadcasts, eating shows and videos, autonomous sensory meridian response (ASMR) eating series and journals among many examples.

When *mukbang* originally started in Korea, the standardised format was a type of live video broadcast in which the host consumes large amounts of food while speaking to their viewers as if they were enjoying a meal together. Viewers were able to write in questions and comments through a chat function, or by using the comment section on YouTube, to which the host(s) will answer live, or on the spot. The formats of these videos have carried on till today, with the addition of some of these videos including instructions as to how the food or dishes are cooked, which will help the viewers to understand the context of the food preparation, and how to obtain these foods in order to enjoy them the same way.

In analysing these videos, it is seen that most of these videos do have some intriguing relevance and connective to the oral tradition of foodways, in terms of how they include personal monologues, expression and sharing of experiences as well as storytelling as part of their affective appeal to their viewers. This actually helps to build up their engagement, as well as the connectivity and bond that the viewers will share with them as the host(s) share food and their life with others online by talking to the audience as though the people are actually sitting at the table with them as well. These videos, with some of them very well-produced and edited, are catered very intimately with the viewers' needs and demands in mind. *Mukbang* videos, unlike other food television shows, place the emphasis on the mechanisms of eating, and the sounds the eating produces using a microphone. Normally, the preferred cuisine of choice is always Korean and/or American fast foods, due to the familiarity and comfort of the Korean foods being found in Korean dramas, and the crunch factor that American fast foods provides.

As the featured *mukbang* foods get more and more recognised, the viewers are able to relate more and more easily. This, therefore, brings about the realisation that there is a huge potential of this *mukbang* phenomenon influencing the socio-cultural aspect of dining. Previously, communication, socialisation, stimulation and engagement are shared, shaped, and evolved through commensality, especially with family and close friends, but with the emergence of the *mukbang* videos, the shift

towards digital commensality with strangers, not with families and friends, will see an impact towards the evolution and change towards the cultural aspect as a whole.

ROLE OF COMMENSALITY

The mealtimes within the Malaysian family has always been the place where standards and norms are set (Raji, Karim, Chelshak, & Arshad, 2017). In all Malaysian ethnic communities, meal times are used as opportunities for socialising and transferring of knowledge, be it as families, or as larger social network groups. Therefore, it can be said that by propagating approved behaviour, food etiquette at the dinner table not only promotes the community's cultural history and value, but also reinforces the community's identity (Raji, Karim, Chelshak, & Arshad, 2017).

Due to the high-power distance on the Hofstede scale (Hofstede Insights, 2021), the Malaysian tradition household will see the man as the head of the family and the household, whereas the woman to be the one who will focus on everyday activities such as cooking, washing and caring for the children. So, the men are seen to be the strength of the family, whereas the women are believed to be the knowledge fountain of the family, and will be the ones who pass down the beliefs, knowledge, practices, taboos, rites and customs of the family to the next generation (Raji, Karim, Chelshak, & Arshad, 2017). This study by Raji, et.al (2017) identified the mothers to be the ones who transfer the culinary knowledge consisting of ingredients, preparation, method of cooking, and even cooking equipment, to their daughters, and this knowledge is further solidified and strengthened during festive occasions, family gatherings and the like when the mothers would prepare food side-by-side with the daughters, and to continue on at the table where the food is consumed by the family. This study found that a mother's role in preserving family and cultural traditions in producing Malay traditional food was critical, and that it had to be maintained in order to encourage their children's participation. This value for commensality for this intergenerational connection and bonding is seen in Niva and Makela's work (2020) where they suggested that "*while all meals are characterised by conviviality and companionship, they continue to serve as a significant area of human sociability and togetherness*" (pg. 495).

However, one of the most noticeable changes to the Malaysian social structure is the rise of the number of women in the labour force, from 6.15 million in the 3rd quarter of 2019 to 6.18 million in the 4th quarter of that same year, as reported by the Department of Statistics, Malaysia (DOSM). (Yuen, 2020). This increase of working mothers has contributed to the drop in traditional commensality as well as single parent households (Halim, Aziz, & Samsudin, 2016; Yunos & Talib, 2009). In addition to this, the recent COVID-19 pandemic has increased the reliance on digital communication for day-to-day activities, as well as to ease stress and clear boredom. The pandemic lockdown implemented to make sure that the virus wave gets flatten have resulted in most everyone turning to their devices for inspiration, communication, and relatability, due to some being in lockdown alone, or in quarantine. This digital transition is significant in the context of the emergence of *mukbang*. When alone, there is no point in preparing food only for themselves to eat along in silence, as this just lacks the warm ambiance of a family gathering. Thus, most people resort to digital devices and network for gratification, connectivity and companionship (Diddi & LaRose, 2006; Ruggiero, 2000; Stafford, Stafford, & Schkade, 2004). This is especially seen during mealtimes when they do not want to eat alone, hence they tend to scroll through social feeds in their social network while eating, watch videos or dramas, or even watching *mukbang* videos as a means of companionship while eating.

SYMBOLISMS OF MUKBANG

In terms of media uses and gratifications, *mukbang* fulfils both the physical, social and emotional hunger of a single-person household (Kircaburun, et al., 2021). Firstly, it fills the needs of a viewer's physical hunger by providing recipes for a simple meal, or give inspiration and ideas as to what foods to consume for their mealtimes. In addition to this, those who love food but have negative experiences with it, such as suffering from eating disorders, health issues, weight watching and more, will resort to watching *mukbang* to fulfil their eating urges and experience indirect eating and satiation (Kircaburun, Harris,

Calado, & Griffiths, 2020). The *mukbang* artists normally eat a wide array of diverse foods in one sitting, therefore, offering its viewers a visual satiation. Most importantly, *mukbang* watching is argued to be a representation of a new form of social eating where it fulfils the social aspect of commensality (McCarthy, 2017; Hong & Park, 2018). Attachments and bonding are formed through the storytelling, sharing of day-to-day experiences and interaction between the *mukbangers* and viewers, which reinforces the ties at the interpersonal and affective level (Wijayanti, 2018). Therefore, it cannot be denied that these *mukbangers* are influencers of sorts whereby they have the power to persuade and influence their viewers to do as they do, and eat as they eat, more so when they are deduced to have that personal connection and relationship with their viewers. In saying that, the viewers have brought these influencers into their personal circle, originally meant for close families and friends.

Many research and studies have looked into the aspects of the addiction of *mukbang* watching (Kircaburun, Yurdagül, Kuss, Emirtekin, & Griffiths, 2020), the various gratifications that these videos bring, among which are, vicarious satiation via visual and audio stimulation (Choe, 2019; Gillespie, 2019), consumption without consequences (Gillespie, 2019; Hakimey & Yazdanifard, 2015; Tu & Fishbach, 2017), sexual fantasies (Donnar, 2017), escapist compensatory strategy (Bruno & Chung, 2017), and of course, companionship and community connection (Hong & Park, 2018; Pereira, Sung, & Lee, 2019; Schwegler-Castaner, 2018; Song, 2018; Spence, Mancini, & Huisman, 2019). However, influence of *mukbang* on ethnicity, especially on the food, food choice, and foodways in terms of commensality is not really looked into.

Through the virtual connection of the established connection and relationship networks where it constitutes a specific semiosphere, the viewers are presented with “*unfamiliar foodways in terms of ingredients, cooking techniques, flavourings, preparations, utensils, meal structure, table manners, distribution of the meals..., and social dynamics*” (Parasecoli, 2011, p. 645). Therefore, when these different culinary semiospheres interrelate with one another as per George H. Mead’s Symbolic Interactionism Theory, it can be seen that these individuals will be more inclined to engage through personified communication via food and its foodways. This will result in the development of new meanings of food, and its shared meanings, originally constructed through the roles of the familial ties. Not only that, the viewers will also form parasocial relationships with the *mukbang* artists where both parties interact and converse with one another (Anjani, et al., 2020). In addition to this, the *mukbang* viewers also establish relationships with other audience members, which then evolve into a marketplace of social interactions, a form of “co-presence” or semiospheres, as mentioned by Parasecoli (2011) that transcends physical distance. In this sense, *mukbang* videos fill a void where they provide and replicate escapism and community for people living in isolation, initially started as a requirement, which soon becomes a choice of life (Kircaburun et al., 2020).

Mead’s Symbolic Interactionism Theory (1934) provides a framework for understanding the symbolisms embedded in *mukbang* and digital commensality, as well as their cultural implications. Within this theoretical framework, symbols play an important role in the formation of meaning, acting as conduits for humans to comprehend and navigate their social environment. Several functions of *mukbang* can be seen as follows:

1. **Symbols and Meanings:** According to Mead’s theory, people construct and interpret meaning via common symbols within a social group. In *mukbang*, eating big quantities of food on camera is a symbolic gesture expressing plenty, luxury, and social connectedness (Sanskriti et al., 2023). Viewers interpret this sign depending on their cultural background, personal experiences, and social environment. For example, someone from a culture that values communal meals may regard *mukbang* as a sort of virtual sharing and connection, but someone who values health and moderation may see it differently, maybe as a show of excess or gluttony.
2. **Social contact:** Mead highlights the impact of social contact on individual behaviour and identity. In the case of *mukbang*, interaction between the presenter and viewers, as well as among viewers themselves, is critical for creating shared meanings and enforcing social norms (Kircaburun, et al., 2021). Viewers interact with the video by leaving comments, likes, and shares, which fosters a feeling of community and engagement in *mukbang* culture. This interaction not only changes how viewers interpret *mukbang*, but it also helps to shape its symbolic importance throughout time.

3. Cultural environment: Mead's theory emphasises how cultural environment influences social behaviour and identity. When we apply this to *mukbang* and digital commensality, we look at how cultural norms, beliefs, and practices shape how these phenomena are seen and received. In societies where communal meals are highly valued, *mukbang* may strike a stronger chord as a virtual extension of traditional community rituals (Aucoin, 2019). In contrast, in cultures with different attitudes towards food, such as those who value health or sustainability, *mukbang* may be seen more critically or as a sort of entertainment rather than a true social event (Kircaburun, et al., 2021).
4. Impact on Culture: Mead's viewpoint highlights how *mukbang* and digital commensality reflect and contribute to cultural norms and values. As these phenomena become more prominent, they affect cultural attitudes towards food, eating, and social contact, impacting behaviours and perceptions on a larger scale. For example, the normalisation of virtual community eating via *mukbang* may alter how individuals see and interact with food, both online and offline, eventually influencing cultural norms around food consumption and socialisation (Choe, 2019; Kircaburun et al., 2020).

Therefore, in understanding these symbolisms of *mukbang*, by investigating how symbols are formed, perceived, and negotiated via social interaction within cultural settings, a holistic overview of how these phenomena influence current culture and social life is acquired.

PARADIGM SHIFT

As *mukbangers* tend to feature Korean cuisine (due to their Korean origins) in their videos, the demand for Korean food has increased since 2016. Malaysians aged 26-35 have contributed an average of 40% of the total Korean food sale every year (Dzul, 2016), with the increase of purchase of *gochujang* (red pepper paste), *kimchi* (fermented spicy cabbage), *ramyeon* (both instant and ready-to-cook noodles), *toppokki* (rice cakes), and more, despite the pandemic situation (Jo, 2021). Korean food has always been an area of interest for Malaysians since the introduction of the popular K-drama *Winter Sonata* in 2002 (Kong, 2017), and the love for the intricacies of Korean heritage cuisine was deeply sowed when *Dae Jang Geum* (also known as *Jewel in the Palace*) aired in Malaysia in 2006. When popular reality show *Running Man* debuted on the screen in 2010, more and more Malaysian youths dreamt of visiting Korea mainly to visit the country as well as try the food featured in the show (Rameli, 2020). Several authentic comfort foods were featured, such as *bibimbap* (hot rice with meat and vegetables), *gimbap* (rice rolled in seaweed), *bulgogi* (stir-fried beef) and *banchan* (various side dishes).

With the arrival of more Korean restaurants, brands and cuisines to Malaysia, the emergence of *mukbang* videos brought the foods into reality when the viewers were able to enjoy them together with the *mukbangers*, creating the symbiosis network that would further bond them even closer (Kircaburun, Harris, Calado, & Griffiths, 2020). It was also found that through these *mukbang* and 'cook-bang' videos (where the *mukbangers* show how the dishes were prepared), more Malaysian youths were able to cook and prepare the meals with little difficulty, and these dishes tend to be the food of choice whenever having meals with friends and family, where they professed it to be nutritious, easy to make and suitable for everyone (Rameli, 2020). This is very much evidenced in some studies that highlight the youth's preference to not learn the complicated preparation of traditional meals, but instead prefer to have take-out foods, fast foods, and convenience foods (Hamzah, Karim, Othman, Hamzah, & Muhammad, 2015; Md Nor, et al., 2012; Mohd Zahari, Kamarudin, Muhammad, & Kutut, 2011; Sharif, Md Nor, Zaharia, & Muhammad, 2015).

The study by Kircaburun, et.al (2020) have shown that youths are turning to *mukbang* mainly to fill their need for companionship and connection. As mentioned earlier, the stories told and the interaction given by the *mukbangers* to their viewers will influence their way of thinking, as well as transfer values. This causes a paradigm shift in terms of commensality where the mealtimes with families are used to transfer the traditional food knowledge to the young generation in order to ensure the continuation and preservation of the food culture and its ways (Md Nor, et al., 2012; Mohd Zahari,

Kamarudin, Muhammad, & Kutut, 2011). With the commensality moving on to a virtual platform with an external network, it cannot be denied that this particular form of modernization through technology and social advancement have influenced the deskilling of cooking knowledge and practices among the young Malaysians (Md Nor, et al., 2012). The danger in the increase of potential loss in the context of traditional food knowledge and traditional food practices among the younger generation is very real. Nowadays, the young people of today are heavily dependent on technology for food preparation where they will resort to social media for inspiration, food ideas and food preparation. In addition to that, they prefer to purchase and consume ready-to-eat foods, and even convenience store foods, especially those featured in the *mukbang* videos. As Md Nor, et al. (2012) have stated, the gap between the young Malay generation during our grandparents' years and the young Malay generation today is widening every day, where it was explained that youths of yesteryears were very skilful and able to master the traditional food preparation and cooking skills, together with all its practices and customs. In contrast, the youths today have very limited skills in traditional Malay food preparation (Mohd Zahari, Kamarudin, Muhammad, & Kutut, 2011), mainly concentrating instead on knowing how to prepare Korean foods and cuisine (Rameli, 2020).

CONCLUSION

A quick check on the internet for *Mukbang* videos today will show that this genre has expanded to include many, many more types of cuisines around the world, such as Indian, Malaysian, Chinese, Punjabi, Thailand, and others, as well as a few extreme ones such as vegan fare, ASMR videos, strange looking items that looked inedible amongst others. The idea of these videos and expansion is mainly to connect, to network and to ease the loneliness in this fast-moving world (The Straits Times, 2016). In connecting people, it cannot be denied that *mukbang* has helped improved the lives of many around the world in a positive manner. This is especially true today, where many are using the videos as a sense of release, eating together, albeit virtually and with a stranger, it is a way of making new friends with no pressure and at their own pace.

Foodways, or the ways in which a culture views, prepares, uses, and consumes food, are considered to represent the values, mindsets, and identities of that culture. As posited by Zahra, Ho-Abdullah and Tan (2014, p. 33), "*investigating what and how a nation eats, as well as the choice of their food ingredients, qualities, production, and the process of ingestion can provide us with a valuable perspective into different aspects of their personal and cultural identities*".

As Malaysia itself is an extraordinary country, rich with myriads of cultures intertwine together, but yet still distinctive in each own legacy, the need for cultural heritage preservation is undeniably essential, due to the many factors which include development, modernization, climate change and assimilation. Therefore, the growing awareness and the promotion of intangible cultural heritage by international organisations such as UNESCO and ICOM (Akagawa & Smith, 2019), in partnership with the growth of a critical heritage discourse that lays a fresh focus on the interrelationships between the tangible and intangible elements (Winter, 2013), as well as the increased attention to food and culinary traditions through the lens of heritage will deliver the additional provision for the cultural heritage dimensions of food.

Heritage and traditional food are, and should be, preserved with considerable care and attention as it is directly associated to the ingredients, preparation process, dishes, and dining etiquette, as posited by Ramli, et. al (2016), due to "*cultural legacy being difficult to conserve and quantify since it is linked to societal values, beliefs, behaviours and norms*" (p. 520). The need to continuing and preserving historical food is considered as a comparative advantage in sustaining local food culture in the face of external homogenising influences (Shariff, Mokhtar, & Zakaria, 2008), as well as in preserving the growth of treasured items, especially traditional cuisines (UNESCO, 2008).

A few studies have identified several major challenges in preserving Malaysian traditional cuisines, where globalisation has encroached on the traditional forms of everyday life (Mardatillah,

Raharja, Hermanto, & Herawaty, 2019). These issues include a lack of awareness about how to preserve and archive traditional cuisines, and a lack of new marketing strategies and innovations in promoting the products (Shariff, Mokhtar, & Zakaria, 2008). Meanwhile, more easily accessible foods such as the 'fast food' such as McDonald's & KFC, as well as the attraction of foods featured and highlighted in various dramas and movies are also taking over, hence diminishing the interest in heritage food further (Yadav, 2020). In addition to this, the appeal of heritage food is also harmed by the disconnect between the feelings of the younger generation, who are unfamiliar with or uninterested in the food when compared to the contemporary options (Sharif, Md Nor, Zaharia, & Muhammad, 2015; Shariff, Mokhtar, & Zakaria, 2008).

Mukbang- and *Cookbang*-watching can actually help to fill in the gap of the knowledge transfer of heritage food and foodways as it was reported by Yun, Kang & Lee (2020) that university students were highly influenced by the foods that was shown in the *mukbang* videos, and were highly motivated to try out the recipes shown in the *cookbang* videos. Furthermore, these videos provide significant, connected social practices and interaction, this can be an alternative towards solving the issues for preserving and archiving, promoting and marketing, as well as instilling interest and appeal of Malaysian heritage foods and its foodways. This way, food knowledge can be transmitted and this will enable the young generation to get connected with the heritage food practices which eventually, ensuring the sustainability of Malaysian heritage foods.

Therefore, it is essential to study further on the impact of *mukbang* and related genre of this nature in order to understand the full effect on the changes in commensality, food and its foodways. As Sharif et.al (2015) have stated, "*the young generation have a small interest and desire to learn about their traditional foods, ... and have started to neglect their culture*" (pg. 158). The importance of transferring traditional food knowledge to the Malaysian youth is crucial in order to preserve and continue the traditional foods, and make it attractive and indispensable for cultural consumption in the midst of urbanisation and globalisation.

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