

# UNDERSTANDING AUTONOMOUS SENSORY MERIDIAN RESPONSE (ASMR) AND A STUDY ON FOOD AS A SENSORY TRIGGER: FOOD FOR SENSES

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**ABSTRACT**--People perceive and appreciate food in a manner that is multisensory, where information from the different senses is integrated at both the perceptual and semantic levels in order to give rise to specific multisensory experiences. There are various factors that play a major role in modulating the diner's overall experience. Visual cues such as color and texture have been shown to exert a significant influence on the perceived flavor and acceptance of foods. Techniques typically belonging to the realm of painting and visual communication design have been theorized to be a useful and resourceful tool when it comes to designing food experiences. The food acts as a meditation for the body and mind. This is where we are introduced to Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response (ASMR). ASMR as a known phenomenon has only been active in the online community, where it is widely popularized by YouTube. The paper tries to demonstrate that food is not just to satisfy hunger but serve as a major part in human psyche by helping in relieving our stress; and also highlights on the misconception of food television sprinkling sexual innuendoes. The culinary ingredients in the food are in the fashion of art and that would transform the diner's presumption and their experience of food. Our senses are vital to our ability to function physically, mentally, spiritually and socially. The connection between aesthetics and our senses is so profound that one could not exist without the other. In this paper, it is our intention to analyze and discuss the cause and effect of portraying food consumption among people who process sensory information in an atypical manner by the application of Aesthetics theory.

**KEY WORDS**-- ASMR, Innuendoes, Culinary elements, Aesthetic Theory.

## I. INTRODUCTION

On a summer evening it starts to drizzle outside, and you feel the rhythm of the raindrops falling on your ears, the chilled breeze brushing your skin and a cold shiver hastening through your entire body. Imagine this same feeling stimulating in our brain which makes the muscles relax and the mind tranquil. It can also be defined as a pleasurable tingling sensation that originates in the head, further travels to the scalp and throughout the limbs of the body inducing tranquility. It is often described as waves of euphoria and calmness. The activities which stimulate this euphoric experiences can be called as 'triggers' that includes watching someone make something, crinkling material sounds, hearing whispers, hand movements etc. It is here where we discuss **ASMR** or *Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response*.

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The term ASMR was neologized in 2010 by Jennifer Allen, who is a significant contributor in this field. It is a relaxing often tranquillizing sensation which is also called as *brain massage*. It is triggered by composed sights and sounds like salmon sizzling on a pan, watching someone folding clothes, or getting a haircut. The trigger is a subliminal response that comprises some complex feelings which is difficult to verbalize. Craig Richard an associate professor, ASMR experiencer and founder of ASMR University blog suggests that ASMR phenomenon maybe something that everyone is born with, but comparatively some are more sensitive to it than others. Only a handful scientific inquiries have been done on ASMR since the name itself appears unscientific or pseudoscientific. It is considered as a perceptual sensory phenomenon rather than a response or a mental disorder. The general convention established by the ASMR community is that there are two types of ASMR. Type One is a thought, which is triggered consciously without relying on external influences. Type Two seeks the aid of an external incentive that gives rise to a trigger through one or more senses. Both of these happens involuntarily. This paper focuses on the Type Two ASMR and this group basically resides on YouTube. Triggers can vary extensively among those who experience ASMR. The most prevalent triggers involve slow soft well enunciated or anomalous speech patterns, calming empathetic attention from another person, music and other pleasurable sounds, careful and deliberate task achievement and touch-based sensation.

“*Autonomous*” attributes to the individualistic way of how the triggers are evolved, and the potential in many to aid or productively generate the sensation at one’s own will. “*Sensory*” and “*response*” are roughly self-evident, and “*Meridian*” is a much more refined term for “orgasm” which in any status would definitely sound official. Ere the terminology of ASMR, there were numerous unauthorized titles for the tingling sensation that were created instinctively by random Internet users. These comprises ‘Attention Induced Head Orgasm’, ‘Attention Induced Euphoria’ (AIE) and ‘Attention Induced Observant Euphoria’ (AIOEU). Membership in these groups has escalated exponentially since 2011 as more people begin to discover ASMR. Congregations of ASMR users are remarkably mobile and dispersed across the Internet. The community has extended firmly into a comprehensive movement. Presently there are two ASMR documentaries being produced; ‘*Braingasm*’, directed by Lindsay Ragone and ‘*Tingly Sensation*’, directed by Kate Mull in Washington DC.

## II. OBJECTIVES

As we have mentioned numerous varieties of ASMR videos, this paper deals exclusively with ASMR based on consuming distinct types of food; after all ASMR sounds are already existing everywhere in the world of food and drink. We cognize food in a multisensory level, where various senses contribute to perspicacity and denotation that pave the way to distinct multisensory reactions. Numerous factors perform an imperative task in modulating the complete experience of consuming food. Texture, coloring, consistency etc. of a food item add to the gusto and acceptance of a diner. Both sound and visual effects are inexplicable factors in the designing of food experiences. The food acts as a meditation for the body and mind. Amongst all other feelings which gives us tingling sensation and triggers our emotions, so does consuming of food for a good section of people. We all consume food for our survival and to satisfy hunger, whereas there are a group of people regardless these factors consider this as enjoyment which triggers their sensation; or rather we can call it the “food for our senses” and here is where ASMR

eating comes in action where it focuses on creating AV contents that present pleasurable sounds of people eating food.

### III. HYPOTHESIS

Each food item we eat, give out a different sound and these sounds produced during the consumption of food provides us with satisfaction, example; sound produced while eating a *chocolate mousse* is different from the sound produced while eating a *crab leg*. Even though ASMR eating videos features various kinds of food, specific types of food have a greater ASMR effect than others. For instance, the sound of someone slurping a coffee could trigger the ASMR in one person but might turn out to be daunting for another person as he might prefer the sounds of biting into crispy and crunchy foods. Therefore the artists of the ASMR eating prefers to use specific food products for their content to produce an ultimate experience in the ASMR videos. Some of the most popular food items used in ASMR eating videos include *Honeycombs, Chicken wings, Nuts and Seeds, Fish, Chocolates and Candy, Noodles* etc.

### IV. RESEARCH METHEDODOLOGY

This can be elaborated with the help of aesthetic theory. Aesthetics can be described as “the branch of philosophy”, highly active with the form and perception of art, beauty, music and good taste. “*The word "aesthetics" has the meaning of "sense perception". It is a "perplexing realm of experience: the realm of the beautiful, the ugly, the sublime, and the elegant; of taste, criticism and fine art; and of contemplation, sensuous enjoyment and charm". The term phenomenon "anything that can be perceived as an occurrence or fact by the senses", "any remarkable occurrence or person" and "the object of perception, experience, etc."*” (Smith, 2018, p. 1). Our senses are indispensable to our ability to function physically, mentally, spiritually and socially. The connection between aesthetics and our senses is so profound that one could not survive without the other.

Antonin Carême, one of the most famous chef in nineteenth century, also a cookbook author stated that “*the fine arts are five in number, namely: painting, sculpture, poetry, music, and architecture, the principal branch of the latter being pastry*”. This is certainly dubious and would be a joke, since one cannot survive in a pastry, but there are subsisting genres of art where a specific food do serve as an artistic medium. So we consider food as a fine art that appeals all the senses. ASMR eating videos concentrates on an individual eating large meals, with various choices of foods closely associating to the sonic textures that are made possible through eating. ASMR videos can make your body tingle and your mouth water at the same time. This experience is so intense that even a lip smacking becomes aesthetically pleasing.

### V. ANALYSIS and MAJOR FINDINGS

ASMR food videos are on the rise in America, following a similar trend in South Korea. People do often confuse ASMR eating for *Mukbang* due to their similarities as *Mukbang* or broadcast eating is a popular genre of videos where performers eat a huge amount of food, to entertain the viewers. Moreover, *Mukbang* videos usually do not focus on the sound effects other than talking with the viewers and are silent, thus not having the desired

effect of ASMR videos. These videos present a great example of a shift in attitudes around the embodied act of eating in contemporary visual culture. This content was created globally by a diverse group of men and women who donate their time and energy to this unorthodox relation technique and their efforts have won them a legion of fans. Surveys suggest that ASMR is also correlated with distinct personality traits, as people who experienced ASMR expressed significantly higher scores on Openness and Neuroticism, and significantly attained more moderate levels of Conscientiousness, Extraversion, and Agreeableness compared to other matched controls. Consequently, if you experience ASMR, you probably tend to be more artistic, have an extensive range of interests, and are perspicuous to experience melancholy, anxiety, and mood fluctuations. Being low in Conscientiousness, Extraversion, and Agreeableness implies that you are tended to abhor a set schedule, feel drained when socializing, and take infinitesimal interest in others.

Just as certain sounds can pacify people into a profound feeling of relaxation, some sounds have the inimical effect on individuals. Misophonia, which means “a loathing of sound”, is a hypersensitivity to auditory triggers that are ignored by others. Misophonia is caused by a condition known as selective sound sensitivity syndrome, and those who undergo this phenomenon are not merely irritated or pestered by seemingly harmless noises such as chewing, nail clipping, or coughing; they become infuriated by them. Like ASMR, misophonia is a relatively latest phenomenon that has been studied only in recent years, but they are antonyms of one another. Experts suggest that misophonia is less of a malady and more of a physiological irregularity. Some of the same triggers that emphatically affect tingle heads, affects negatively to those with misophonia. Some people experience both the conditions with slight variations between the two, depending on the situations. However, both are highly subjective experiences.

However, in this transpiring world of ASMR videos, eating’s unflattering side entices millions of views in online social media. But these frequent misinterpretations regarding ASMR has not stopped popular food and drink brand companies from treating it as a trend in their business development. Knowingly and unknowingly all of us has experienced ASMR food videos from the advertisements of various food and drink industries. Just think of the advertisement of Coca-Cola where it effervesces softly while being poured into a glass of chiming glass of ice cubes; which have seen in television and movie theatres which gives us a tingling sensation and an irresistible desire to drink it immediately. Spotting this potentiality, many companies are now capitalizing on this ASMR method as a way to market their brands. Most of the food items and drinks we see are popularized in front of consumers through the ASMR method of advertising where a strong urge is created through sound for the people to buy that food product. As we see it’s not practically possible to advertise and encourage people to buy food and drink products by tasting; so here is where the use of ASMR is depicted and followed by many companies. Most of the advertisements receive a tremendous number of views and popularity based on their best ASMR effect produced in it. Some of the famous international food brands which we have commonly seen incorporating ASMR in their advertisements are: KFC, REESE, COCA-COLA etc.

## VI. CONCLUSION

There are often feedbacks and comments from the fans of ASMR eating videos that they watch these videos after work while feeling stressed, or while having their meals alone. Thus we see that these videos can act as a

delegate form of sociality and the intimate sonic world that encourages a genre to facilitate the sense of community and friendship. There are diverse views and comments on ASMR videos regarding it to be giving sexual arousals; taking into consideration where journalists have even used inaccurate terms such as ‘brain orgasm’ and ‘whisper porn’. Sexual release is the outcome of the overstimulation of the pleasure senses linked with compounded tension in the sexual organs. This heightened physiological state of excitement during the brief moment of orgasm falsifies what the ASMR experience is. What an individual is experiencing during ASMR is comparable to the sensation that happens after the orgasm, when the person is relaxing. This is known as resolution, and it is a phase that includes euphoria; muscle relaxation; feelings of well-being, satisfaction, and trust; a yearning for closeness and cuddling; and increased sedation—but an overall absence of sexual desire. But as we can see ASMR video experiences are comforting and not arousing. The viewing of ASMR eating videos, where we are allowed to watch others savoring food, possibly highlights the collective privatization of stress. People have espoused ASMR as a way to get away from those intricacies associated with stress and into a relaxed frame of mind to help them relax.

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