



## Use of ASMR Technique in Movies

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### Abstract

The cinema sector has benefited from many innovations, especially in recent years, in terms of technology. The use of some new technology cameras and other equipment has increased in cinema films. In addition, it is known that there are new attempts not only in terms of technology but also in terms of some approaches and techniques. The ASMR technique, which is the subject of this study, has started to be used in cinema films, although it is not widespread. The most used medium outside of cinema films is YouTube videos. The main purpose of videos created on YouTube is to relax people. Another area where the ASMR technique is used after YouTube videos is advertisements. It is known that some brands in our country shoot commercials using the ASMR technique. ASMR is a phenomenon defined as autonomous sensory meridian response. Those who experience the ASMR sensation experience tingling and goosebumps around the head for a short time. This article aims to be a guide for the cinema sector by investigating the effects of the use of ASMR techniques in cinema films on the emotional states of the audience. In this study, a short video shot using ASMR techniques (squeaking, rustling, detailed sound, cutting sound, water sound, cat purring, etc.) was shown to 10 (5 female and 5 male) Communication Faculty students. The participants' opinions on the use of ASMR technique in movies were obtained using an in-depth interview technique. It was observed that the majority of the participants had a positive view on the use of ASMR technique in movies in a proper and appropriate manner.

**Keywords:** cinema; ASMR; new approaches in cinema; triggering; relaxation



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# Use of ASMR Technique in Movies

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## Introduction

The general purpose of mainstream popular movies is to ensure that the viewer identifies and experiences catharsis and leaves the movie happy as a result. In this context, using the ASMR technique can contribute positively to the movie when used effectively in scenes where the viewer is desired to be affected positively or negatively. Videos that include the ASMR technique consist of some sounds that stimulate the viewers and create a tingling sensation in the body. Some of these are; talking in a low voice, making rustling and clicking sounds from some objects.

One of the first professional uses of the ASMR technique was a beer commercial. This commercial was broadcast during the Superbowl final. In Turkey, one of the first commercials to use the ASMR technique was the LCW commercials.

The aim of the ASMR technique is to stimulate and trigger viewers. In cinemas, there is no film created entirely using the ASMR technique yet. However, it is possible to see this technique used in some scenes of the films, consciously or unconsciously. If a detailed definition of ASMR is desired; ASMR is the autonomous response of the sensory meridian to certain auditory and visual stimuli. ASMR is an involuntary sensory experience classified as

related to the scalp. And depending on how strong the response is, it is distinguished by a pleasant tingling experience that spreads from the spine down to the rest of the body (Barratt and Davis, 2015). It is clear that more research is needed to measure the effects of ASMR. When looking at studies on ASMR; the first study was put forward by Emma Barratt and Nick Davis in 2015. 475 participants between the ages of 18-54 participated in this study. No geographical limits were set for the participants. In addition to conducting a quantitative analysis of the stimulants, the study also examined the effects of ASMR on mood and its relationship with the flow state. The results show that ASMR provides temporary relief from mood-related symptoms for people with depression (Barratt and Davis, 2015).

In another published study, it was determined that participants experienced an increase in their levels of calmness and loyalty while experiencing a decrease in their levels of stress and sadness while listening to ASMR audio (Poerio et al. (2018). According to the studies of Chan and Uusiautti (2018), it was observed that participants who listened to/watched ASMR videos that addressed listeners/viewers with some pleasant words that showed politeness increased their levels of affection towards themselves, changed their negative views, and provided them with more opportunities to accept the attention of other people. In Turkey, Özge Delen's study "Whisper diplomacy: The image of Turkish as an international language in the ASMR world" examined Turkish ASMR videos created on Youtube (Delen, 2023).

Ali Karpuz investigated the relationship between ASMR and online sales with his study titled “The relationship between autonomous sensory meridian response (ASMR) and experiential marketing: A study on online shopping sites” (Karpuz, 2022). Esil Sönmez Kence examined the relationship between ASMR advertisements and neurology with the neuropsychophysiological research of the ASMR advertising experience (Sönmez, 2022). When we look at the literature, it is seen that there is no study on cinema films and ASMR.

The basic assumption of this study is that the use of ASMR techniques in cinema films can be useful and effective for films. The importance of the study is that there is no study in the context of the use of the ASMR technique in the field of cinema. This study can be a pioneering study for the field.

### What is ASMR?

ASMR (Autonomous sensory meridian response) is the individual's experience of chills and calmness (Idayati and Sufani, Syahputra 2021, p.733). This feeling of chills also resembles a feeling of tingling or goosebumps. The feeling of chills is a reaction the body shows to some stimuli (Yin and Xiao 2021, p. 321). Apart from this, it is presented as a situation symbolized by a feeling of chills in the scalp or brain caused by the experience or suggestion of external triggers. When we look at the definitions, it is understood that ASMR stimulants generally create a feeling of chills and a sense of relaxation. Young and Blansert explained the ASMR

Concept one by one:

Autonomous: A behavior over which the person has no control.

Sensory: Nerves that send messages to the brain.

Meridian: Life energy flowing through the body, a concept from Chinese medical practice.

Reactivity: How the body responds to a particular trigger or idea” (Young and Blansert, 2015, p. 5).

Although ASMR stimuli vary from person to person, there are also common stimuli that are effective in most people (Fredborg and Clark, Smith 2017, p. 1-2). It is stated that the ASMR feeling can occur in two situations, with or without exposure to an external trigger (Young, Blansert 2015, p. 6). While imagining or remembering something can stimulate the formation of the ASMR feeling when there is no external trigger, a sound or image can serve as a stimulus in a situation that occurs with an external trigger. Content in different media channels and especially ASMR content created for the purpose of being stimulating can be examples of external ASMR stimuli (Janik McErlean and OsborneFord 2020, p. 1). The influence of the media in the development of the ASMR concept cannot be denied.

It is important to look at the triggers that create the ASMR feeling in detail in order to understand the subject. We can first divide ASMR triggers into two as visual and auditory (Barratt and Davis, 2015, p. 1). These ASMR triggers do not need to be long-lasting. They can also be created from short-term and repetitive sounds or images. Apart from this classification, it can also be said that ASMR enthusiasts are divided into viewers, listeners and touchers.

Sounds are important triggers for listeners, visuals for viewers and of course touches for touchers.

The audience consists of people who enjoy watching ASMR followers. These people pay attention to the details in the visuals. It can be said that the visual memory and knowledge of the audience ASMR followers are high. It can be said that the visual arrangements of Asmrists attract their attention and are triggered. Some images or visuals in daily life can also trigger these ASMR followers.

ASMR followers, who are classified as listeners, also like detailed sounds. They are sensitive to sound. It can be said that these followers have well-developed ears. Detailed sounds can trigger these followers (Young and Blansert 2015, p. 90). When looking at ASMR videos published on Youtube, the sound of people talking in a whisper, the sound of objects rubbing against the microphone, etc. can trigger ASMR followers, who are classified as listeners. Again, like viewers, some sounds they hear in daily life can trigger listener ASMR followers.

As previously mentioned, contact-loving ASMR followers can also enjoy caressing certain objects or microphones (Wang, Li 2020, p. 3). These ASMR followers can be triggered by a caressed object or microphone. It is thought that the psychological reasons underlying this relaxation of people who relax with this kind of contact are another subject of research. The

softness, hardness, etc. factors of the structure of the object touched are also seen as an important element for ASMR followers (Young and Blansert 2015, p. 91).

It is known that there are some physical reactions that ASMR causes in the body. One of these is the phenomenon of goosebumps. For example, when we listen to an old song or a memorable song, our hairs stand on end. It is said that there is a difference between this goosebump situation and the goosebumps that occur with ASMR triggering. In the case of ASMR triggering, only the head and the surrounding area are stimulated, while in the other case, the whole body can be affected. The American Psychological Association defines this phenomenon as the temporary lifting of the hairs on the skin due to muscle contraction (Vandenbos 2015, p. 466-799).

Another physical phenomenon is euphoria. Again, the American Psychological Association defines euphoria as an increased state of well-being and high happiness (Vandenbos 2015, p. 388). It is thought that there is a positive relationship between ASMR and euphoria. The happiness of the individual who experiences the feeling of ASMR is also accepted as euphoria. Young and Blansert say that the happiness created by both ASMR and Euphoria is realized thanks to the feeling of trust created by the endorphin hormone (Young and Blansert 2015, p. 9).

Another physical condition associated with ASMR is misophonia. People with misophonia can be affected by the sounds they hear. Misophonia is actually presented as the exact opposite of ASMR. In misophonia, there is a hatred towards the sound heard (McGeoch and Rouw 2020, p. 1). In ASMR, the sound heard generally relaxes the viewer/listener.

Another physical condition in ASMR is sexuality. It is possible to come across ASMR videos with sexual content on some social media platforms. In a study conducted in 2015, 5% of the participants stated that they watched ASMR for sexual content (Barratt and Davis, 2015, p. 5). A participant interviewed in this study stated that he was sexually aroused by the video he watched. Frisson is another physical phenomenon. Frisson also has similarities with ASMR. Frisson is defined as a pleasurable shiver. This phenomenon is also similar to the phenomenon of goosebumps (Colver and El-Alayli, 2015 p. 1). Although it is said that music is the phenomenon that causes Frisson the most, it is thought that other emotions also cause Frisson (Grewe et al. 2009, p. 1). Del Campo and Kahle say that ASMR and Frisson are very close phenomena. However, while the arousal is shorter in Frisson, it lasts a little longer in ASMR. They also showed shivering as an analogy (Del Campo, Kehle 2016, p. 103).

The concept of stress is also associated with ASMR. Today, there are almost no people who do not complain of stress. In this case, it is not surprising that ASMR, which is thought to



reduce stress, is a popular phenomenon. It is possible to try to reduce stress by using ASMR triggers. It is understood that when ASMR triggers are used in the cinema, which is the subject of the study, the stress levels of the viewers can be increased or decreased depending on the purpose. One of the most important reasons for watching ASMR videos is insomnia. Many people who cannot fall asleep watch ASMR videos. When the comments of these videos are examined, it is seen that they are partially successful in falling asleep.

Those who produce content that is expected to create a shiver in people are called ASMRtists (Young and Blansert 2015, p. 12). Videos of people who prepare ASMR content receive a high number of views. An example of this is the person who produces content on the ASMR Darling page. The YouTube content producer named ASMR Darling has 2.5 million subscribers ([www.youtube.com/@theasmrdarling](http://www.youtube.com/@theasmrdarling)). This number of subscribers is important in terms of showing how much interest ASMR content attracts.

Many objects and objects are used to create ASMR techniques. The ASMR feeling is often created through conscious or unnoticed, audio or visual stimuli (Seifzadeh et al. 2021, p. 71). It is possible to use all kinds of materials when creating ASMR content. In addition, very different and effective content can be created depending on the imagination and talent level of the content producer. The equipment that content producers usually use: light, camera,

computer and editing program, decor, microphone, etc. The most important equipment in content production is the microphone. Because the most important aspect of ASMR content is to have a detailed and clear sound recording. Therefore, microphone selection is important. The second most important equipment is, of course, the camera. It must be a camera with good features for a clear and clean image.

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## Methods and Findings

The method used in this study is in-depth interview. In-depth interview, one of the qualitative research methods, is the process of collecting detailed and comprehensive information about a specific topic. In-depth interview is a flexible and exploratory data collection technique in which the researcher tries to examine the topic in as much detail as possible by categorizing the answers received from the interviewee and asking new questions based on these answers. This technique allows the researcher to obtain more information and perspectives to understand the topic in depth (H, H, Tekin and H, Tekin 2006, p. 103). The research data were collected with a semi-structured interview form. This study is also a case

study.

In this study, 5 female and 5 male participants selected from the 3rd and 4th year students of the Faculty of Communication, Department of Radio, Television and Cinema were shown a video shot by the researcher and then in-depth interviews were conducted. The interviews were recorded with a voice recorder and then transcribed. The transcribed texts were entered into the Nvivo12 program and analyzed in the context of the determined categories of meaningful sentences. The determination of meaningful sentences was analyzed by two different coders. In this way, the margin of error that may arise from coding was minimized.

Transcriptions were analyzed using thematic analysis techniques. This analysis helps to reveal the participants' views and experiences regarding the use of ASMR stimuli in movies. This methodology allows the participants to provide valuable information from different perspectives, while allowing the researcher to collect the necessary data to answer specific questions. The questions to be asked of the participants were determined by reviewing a limited number of studies in the literature.

The following questions were asked to the participants and the answers were analyzed:

What are your thoughts on the use of ASMR stimuli in movies?

What ASMR stimuli have you noticed in the movies you have watched? What kind of effect did these stimuli have?

In which type of movies do you think ASMR stimuli can be used most effectively?

How do you think the use of ASMR stimuli in movies affects the viewer experience?

What do you think about the possible effects of ASMR stimuli on people's emotional or physical health?

What are the advantages and disadvantages of using more ASMR stimuli in the cinema?

Which ASMR stimuli would you prefer to see used in movies?

Do you think the use of ASMR stimuli in movies weakens or strengthens the message of the movie?

Did the use of ASMR stimuli in the movies you have watched make you more attached to the movie?

What else would you like to say about the use of ASMR stimuli in movies?

These questions were prepared with an open-ended approach in order to learn the participants' thoughts, experiences and opinions regarding the use of ASMR stimuli in movies.

Some questions were combined with other questions according to the answers given.

For this study, opinions were obtained from 3rd and 4th year students of the Radio, Television and Cinema Department of the Faculty of Communication of Niğde Ömer Halisdemir University using an in-depth interview technique. Documents indicating that they gave permission for the study were obtained from the participants before the interview. In addition, the personal information of the participants was kept confidential and they were coded as participants.

The reason why the participants were selected as cinema students was that they received cinema education and their opinions could be important in film production. The questions asked to the participants were categorized and the answers given were evaluated accordingly. The

demographic information of the participants is shown in the table below.

	Gender	Age	Education
Participant 1	Female	24	4th grade student
Participant 2	Male	22	3rd grade student
Participant 3	Female	21	3rd grade student
Participant 4	Female	22	3rd grade student
Participant 5	Male	22	3rd grade student
Participant 6	Male	22	3rd grade student
Participant 7	Female	23	4th grade student
Participant 8	Female	25	4th grade student
Participant 9	Male	22	4th grade student
Participant 10	Male	22	4th grade student

*Table 1:* Demographic information of the participants.

The questions we prepared about the usability of the ASMR technique in movies were asked after watching the video we shot. Based on the basic problem of the research and the answers given by the participants, 3 main categories were determined and the answers given were examined under these categories. Categories: Opinions about ASMR, ASMR experiences, Use of the ASMR technique in movies.

### Views About ASMR

When asked to the participants in the study, 8 participants knew what the ASMR

technique was, while 2 participants could not define exactly what it was. Participant2: “Yes, I know, generally relaxing or disturbing sounds” was an early statement, Participant4: Various methods are generally used to eliminate people's sleep disorders and help them sleep. Many people, in particular, have difficulty falling asleep at night. However, some methods that affect brain waves allow people to fall asleep more easily and are useful in this sense. However, such methods also have the potential to disturb some people. For example, while some people find the sound of speech relaxing, others prefer only light sounds such as clicking or other types of sounds. Different sounds can cause discomfort in different people” he said.

### ASMR Experiences

Participants were asked whether the ASMR stimuli affected them positively or negatively in the film. All participants said that they felt uncomfortable in some scenes, while others said that they felt relieved. No one felt the same way in every scene of the film. For example, Participant 8 said: “I was disturbed by the sounds other than the cat sound,” while Participant 6 said: “The knife cutting scene disturbed me.” Participant 1: “The sounds of water and brushing teeth are very disturbing, but the cat sound is relaxing.” Participant 2: The sounds of drinking water and tea are disturbing, but the cat sound is relaxing.” Participant 3: “The cat sound is relaxing, but the water sound disturbed me.”

Another question asked about the effect of using the ASMR technique in movies on the

audience. All participants thought that if a negative effect was intended, it could be negative, and if a positive effect was intended, it could be positive. For example, participant 2: “Yes, using this technique can be very useful. For example, in a horror movie, we can scare and disturb the audience by using disturbing sounds. In places where the audience wants to relax, we can use some relaxing sounds and present what the audience wants.”

### Using ASMR Technique in Movies

Regarding the use of the ASMR technique in movies, 9 of the participants thought that it would contribute to movies when used correctly, while 3 participants stated that they did not find the use of the ASMR technique positive in movies. When the participants' opinions on the use of the ASMR technique in movies were asked, participant 1 said: “I think it should be used according to the type of movie and the scene. For example, the cat's growling in the video can relax the audience and we can use this or a similar scene in the movie.” When asked which type of ASMR technique could be used more effectively, 7 participants answered horror, 2 participants answered horror and action, and 1 participant answered horror and erotic movies. In fact, one participant's answer to erotic movies may seem strange at first, but it has been observed that especially in Youtube ASMR videos, shots are made for feelings of eroticism and that there is a high interest in this.



Participants were asked if they would use the ASMR technique if they were to shoot a movie themselves. All participants gave different answers. For example, participant 8 said that he could “use lighter and gas sounds in the movie.” Other participants stated that they could use disturbing sounds to create tension and fear.

## Conclusion

ASMR (Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response) has become a popular phenomenon in recent years. These triggers can help people relax and reduce stress, suggesting that these triggers can benefit a person's emotional and physical health. This study has collected opinions from participants about the use of ASMR techniques in movies. In this context, most of the participants have sufficient knowledge about what the ASMR technique is. The study considered it important to select cinema and television students who are trained in this field and who can use this technique (ASMR) in their own movies.

At the end of the study, according to the answers received from the participants, it was concluded that the desired effect could be achieved by including the ASMR technique in the film in the right place and in the necessary amount. The idea that the use of the ASMR technique, especially in horror films, would benefit the film also came to the fore. This study can also be considered as a case study. It is not possible to expect a group of 10 participants to

represent the cinema sector. At the same time, each person's perception is different and it would not be right to expect the same reaction from every viewer. What is important here is what the common views are in general. If the views that emerged are taken into consideration, this study can be seen as a guide to a more comprehensive research. The cinema sector has always been open to new techniques and approaches. In this context, it is important to consider every new approach.

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