

ASMR Videos Are the Biggest YouTube Trend You've Never Heard Of

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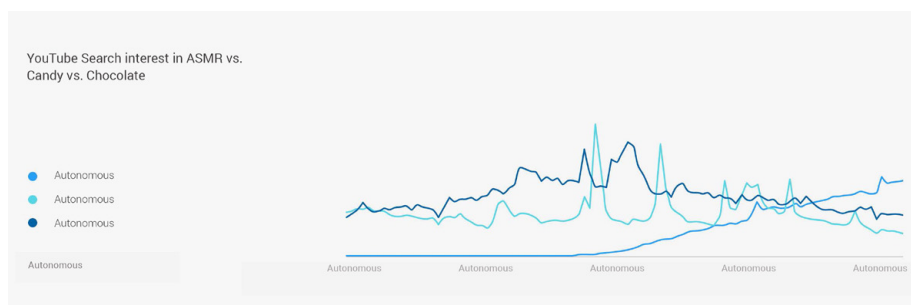
Though YouTube is most commonly associated with visual content, sound-oriented videos are resonating with millions of users. Learn how some brands are raising their online profiles by lowering the volume.

think with **Google**

Alert notifications, pings – the sounds send an anxious shiver down our spines. But many consumers are actually using technology, especially video, as a way to relax. There’s an entire universe of sound creation on YouTube designed to make you feel good. Sound a bit niche? It’s not. ASMR is the biggest trend you’ve never heard of.

What’s in a name?

ASMR is a massive and growing trend. In fact, there’s more search interest on YouTube for ASMR than for “sweets” or “chocolate.”¹ Odds are, however, you’ve never heard of it. In fact, the top-searched question about ASMR on Google is, “What is ASMR?”²



Coined in 2010, ASMR (autonomous sensory meridian response) is a relaxing, often sedative sensation that begins on the scalp and moves down the body. Also known as “brain massage”, it’s triggered by placid sights and sounds such as whispers, accents and crackles.

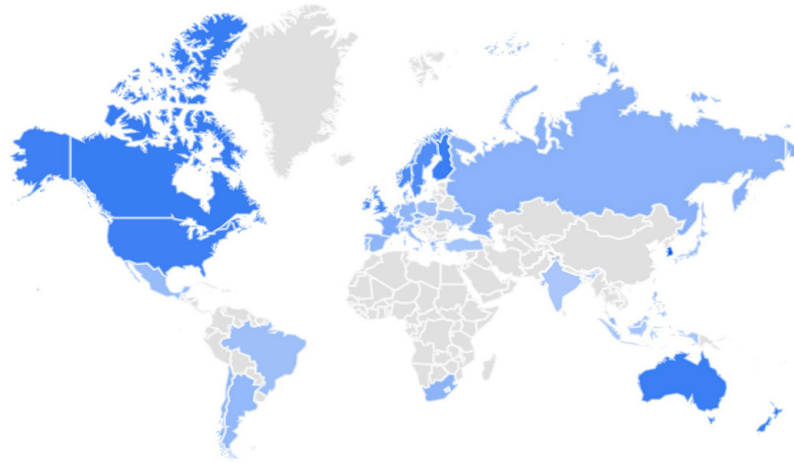
“Basically, it feels like the amazing chills you get when someone plays with your hair or traces your back with their fingertips,” says Heather Feather, a popular “ASMRtist” with nearly 400,000 YouTube subscribers. The dulcet tones of famed soft-spoken painter Bob Ross are among the most common ASMR triggers. Indeed, “Bob Ross” is among the terms most frequently associated with ASMR – and so are “Heather Feather” and “GentleWhispering”, another top ASMRtist on YouTube.

Creators like Heather Feather are making videos that create the tingly ASMR effect. In fact, there are currently about 5.2 million ASMR videos on YouTube, and there is interest coming from all corners of the globe

(see chart below). YouTube searches for ASMR grew over 200% YoY in 2015 and are consistently growing.³ On its own, a top ASMR video can garner over 16 million views.

Interest in ASMR by Region

Source: Google Trends,
Worldwide



Well over half of the searches are on mobile as people seek out this content in I-want-to-relax moments.⁴ Indeed, searches on Google tend to peak around 10.30 p.m., regardless of time zone, when people are winding down for the evening.⁵ “ASMR sleep” is one of the top related terms.⁶

Listen up, brands

At Google BrandLab, we help brands tap into the full potential of YouTube. Many sounds can trigger the calming sensation of ASMR, and brands should listen up. We are not just talking about an enormous engaged audience to tap; we are talking about an enormous engaged audience that is *already using your brand*. ASMRtists often employ objects, especially food products, to create the tingly effect: crinkling wrappers, chewing sweets, opening cans. (A search for “beer ASMR” on YouTube returns over 81,000 video results.) Tic Tac, Swedish Fish and Taco Bell are all brands that make cameos in YouTube creator videos.

KFC has embraced the trend. In this recent YouTube video, the actor George Hamilton, portraying Colonel Sanders, whispers sweet nothings about pocket squares and enjoys the sounds of KFC's new crispy fried chicken. "This is a community that is absolutely infatuated and enthusiastic about the sensorial experience of sound," KFC CMO Kevin Hochman said in The Washington Post. "There's a lot of comfort that's associated with ASMR, and that's what our food delivers."

In 2015, BBDO created ASMR video ads in China for Dove chocolates that were designed to evoke the "tingling of silky smooth pleasure" consumers felt when eating the confections. The films were even put to scientific testing, and the results are being studied by neuroscientists.

COLONEL SANDERS ASMR
VIDEO 03: POCKET SQUARES



From beauty mavens to technophiles

Brands don't have to create their own ASMR videos to capitalise on the trend; interested audiences can still be reached. Who in particular? Both men and women are interested in ASMR content, with viewers skewing young – 18- to 24-year-olds comprise around half of the interested audience. Most (77%) are also looking at beauty and fitness content.⁷

Beauty products, in fact, play a starring role in the trend. Make-up tutorials have long been popular on YouTube, but after viewers realised how relaxing they were, many tutorials now double as ASMR videos.

Some creators take the role-play approach, simulating the feeling of being in a make-up artist's chair, while others use make-up brushes to create soothing noises. Search for "ASMR nails" and you'll see many creators showing off their manicures as they make tapping and scratching sounds. Even Michelle Phan – the queen of beauty herself, with 8.6 million subscribers and counting – has created an ASMR video.

Perhaps less obvious, a large majority of the ASMR audience also skews technophile and gamer. People interested in ASMR across the web are more than twice as likely to be in the market for consumer tech products like laptops, mobile phones and game consoles.⁸ There's even an ASMR gamer YouTube channel. ASMR may be an antidote to fast-paced video games; research has shown that your brain on video games can heighten your senses.

Regardless of how ASMR works, there is clearly a huge, engaged and growing audience that responds to it. And as a brand, you don't have to "get it" to benefit from it. You just have to engage this unique and largely untapped community in any number of creative ways. Now how does that sound?

Sources

¹ Google Trends, Worldwide, Jan. 2008 - Aug. 2016.

² Google Internal Data, Aug. 2015 - Aug. 2016.

³ Google Internal Data, 2015 vs. 2016.

⁴ Google Internal Data, Apr. 2015 - Apr. 2016.

^{5,6} Google Trends, Worldwide.

^{7,8} Google Internal Data, as of 19 August 2016. Google defined lifestyle, psychographic and behavioural audiences based on anonymised, aggregated user browsing behaviour on the Google Display Network. Audience defined as US, interested in ASMR, as compared to the US general population.