

WELL-BEING  
from FOOD BLOGGING:  
FOOD BLOGGING  
AS AN *Expression of*  
**POSITIVE**  
**AGENCY** AND  
**RELATIONSHIP**  
**WITH food**

RIIKKA PARTANEN

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**WELL-BEING FROM FOOD BLOGGING:  
Food Blogging as an Expression of  
Positive Agency and Relationship with Food**

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## Abstract

Riikka Partanen

WELL-BEING FROM FOOD BLOGGING: Food Blogging as an Expression of Positive Agency and Relationship with Food

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Food blogging is one of today's social media user-oriented forms of sharing everyday life, embodying the bloggers' activities and impacting the blog's followers. In this study, which belongs to the discipline of media education and positive psychology, I examined food bloggers' perspectives on their blogging using a multi-method approach, asking how Finnish food bloggers understand the role of their food blogging in their relationship with food, their agency in social media, and as an expression of well-being more generally.

The theoretical framework examines the connection between food blogging and well-being and agency. Study I analyzed food bloggers' relationship with food expressed in their blogs. Study II explored the dimensions of agency in food blogging from the perspective of Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory. Study III examined the well-being discourses produced by food bloggers using Martin Seligman's PERMA framework, a positive psychology well-being theory.

The research approach was a multi-method qualitative study. The data consisted of the food blog entries of 16 food bloggers for one month, as well as an email survey completed by 19 food bloggers. The research materials were collected in 2018 and 2021. Each study employed different methods to analyze the material: a netnographic approach to examine food bloggers' relationship with food, theory-based content analysis to investigate the dimensions of agency in food blogging, and discourse analysis to analyze the discourses on well-being produced by food bloggers. Ethical considerations surrounding the study of blogs and social media were critically examined.

Based on the results, food bloggers' relationship with food is rooted in values related to food and eating, an innovative and experimental approach to food, positive and multisensory food-related experiences and memories, and social elements related to eating and food. Food bloggers' food-related agency manifested

itself as four characteristics: 1) intentionality aimed at inspiring others, diversifying food culture and sharing food-related values; 2) as anticipation, which was related to expectations about the results of food activities, such as the pleasure produced by food, being happy with food and supporting others' positive relationship with food; 3) as reactivity, which manifested itself as, for example, reliving and dealing with food-related experiences and combining the relationship with food and well-being; 4) as self-reflection, which food bloggers associated with developing a relationship with food and spreading awareness about responsibility related to food activities.

The food bloggers' well-being related to food was manifested in five discourses: 1) as a variety of positive feelings towards food and cooking, 2) as commitment, which was related to the food bloggers' passion for food, 3) as human relationships that were nurtured together by eating, cooking and appreciating the time spent together, 4) as meaningfulness, which was manifested as the alignment of values and decisions about food, and 5) as an achievement, where courage, openness and the pleasure brought by success were emphasized.

The development of food-related well-being expertise can be a significant part of a modern person's lifelong learning process. This study primarily sheds light on the influence of social media, food blogging, and the possibilities of fostering a positive relationship with food and promoting well-being-related learning. Food blog posts could also be used as teaching material in adult education. In conclusion, it is presented that a positive relationship with food and action towards food can contribute to food well-being. This research has produced information that can deepen the understanding of these concepts. Food bloggers were found to be Finnish food well-being experts who have the opportunity to promote a positive attitude towards food and cooking in others.

The research yields interesting new insights into individual activity in social media arenas, using food blogging as an example. The conclusions highlight the role of blogging and life publishing in supporting well-being and promoting positive learning and development.

Keywords: food blog, bloggers, multi-method research, relationship with food, agency, social media, wellbeing, PERMA theory

# Tiivistelmä

Riikka Partanen

**HYVINVOINTIA RUOKABLOGGAAMISESTA: Ruokabloggaaminen myönteisen toimijuuden ja ruokasuhteen ilmaisijana**

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Ruokabloggaaminen on yksi nykyajan sosiaalisen median käyttäjälähtöinen arkielämän jakamisen muoto, joka ilmentää bloggaajien omaa toimintaa mutta jolla on myös vaikutuksia blogien seuraajiin. Tässä mediakasvatuksen ja positiivisen psykologian tieteenalaan kuuluvassa tutkimuksessa tarkastelin ruokabloggaajien näkökulmia omaan bloggaamiseensa monimenetelmällisesti kysyen, miten suomalaiset ruokabloggaajat ymmärtävät ruokabloggaamisensa roolin ruokasuhteessaan, oman toimijuutensa sosiaalisessa mediassa sekä hyvinvoinnin ilmentäjänä yleisemmin.

Teoreettisessa viitekehyksessä tarkastellaan ruokabloggaamisen ja hyvinvoinnin yhteyttä sekä toimijuutta. Osatutkimuksessa I analysoitiin ruokabloggaajien blogeissaan ilmentämää ruokasuhdetta. Osatutkimuksessa II analysoitiin toimijuuden ulottuvuuksia ruokabloggaamisessa Albert Banduran sosiokognitiivisen teorian näkökulmasta. Osatutkimuksessa III tarkasteltiin ruokabloggaajien tuottamia hyvinvointidiskursseja Martin Seligmanin positiivisen psykologiaan lukeutuvaa hyvinvointiteoriaa, nk. PERMA-teoriaa, hyödyntäen.

Tutkimuksen lähestymistapana oli monimenetelmällinen laadullinen tutkimus. Aineiston muodostivat 16 ruokabloggaajan ruokablogikirjoitukset yhdeltä kuukaudelta ja 19 ruokabloggaajan täyttämä sähköpostikysely. Tutkimusaineistot kerättiin vuosina 2018 ja 2021. Kussakin osatutkimuksessa aineistoa analysoitiin eri menetelmin: ruokabloggaajien ruokasuhdetta netnografisella otteella, ruokabloggaajien toimijuutta teoriapohjaisella sisällönanalyysillä ja ruokabloggaajien tuottamia diskursseja diskurssianalyttisesti. Tutkimuksessa käsiteltiin myös eettisiä kysymyksiä liittyen blogien ja sosiaalisen median tutkimiseen.

Tulosten perusteella ruokabloggaajien ruokasuhte rakentuu ruokaan ja syömiseen liittyvistä arvoista, innovatiivisesta ja kokeellisesta lähestymistavasta ruokaan kohtaan, myönteisistä ja moniaistisista ruokaan liittyvistä kokemuksista ja muistoista sekä syömiseen ja ruokaan liittyvistä sosiaalisista elementeistä. Ruokabloggaajien ruokaan liittyvä toimijuus ilmeni neljänä ominaisuutena: 1) aikomuksellisuutena,

joka kohdistui toisten inspiroimiseen, ruokakulttuurin monipuolistamiseen ja ruokaan liittyvien arvojen jakamiseen; 2) ennakointina, joka liittyi odotuksiin ruokatoiminnan tuloksista, kuten ruoan tuottamaan nautintoon, ruoalla ilahduttamiseen ja toisten myönteisen ruokasuhteen tukemiseen; 3) reaktiivisuutena, joka ilmeni esimerkiksi ruokaan liittyvien kokemusten uudelleen elämisenä ja käsittelemisenä sekä ruokasuhteen ja hyvinvoinnin yhdistämisenä; 4) itsereflektiona, jonka ruokabloggaajat liittivät ruokasuhteen kehittämiseen ja tietoisuuden levittämiseen ruokatoimintaan liittyvästä vastuullisuudesta.

Ruokabloggaajien ruokaan liittyvä hyvinvointi ilmeni viidessä diskurssissa: 1) monenlaisina myönteisinä tunteina ruokaa ja ruuanlaittoa kohtaan, 2) sitoutumisena, mikä liittyi ruokabloggaajien ruokaa kohtaan kokemaan intohimoon, 3) ihmissuhteina, joita vaalittiin yhdessä syöden, kokaten ja näihin käytettyä yhteistä aikaa arvostaen, 4) merkityksellisyytenä, mikä ilmeni ruokaa koskevien arvojen ja päätösten linjakkuutena sekä 5) saavuttamisena, missä painottuivat rohkeus, avoimuus ja onnistumisten tuoma mielihyvä.

Ruokaan liittyvä hyvinvointiosaamisen kehittäminen voi olla merkittävä osa nykyajan ihmisen elämänmittaista oppimisprosessia. Tämä tutkimus valotti erityisesti sosiaalisessa mediassa vaikuttamisen, ruokabloggaamisen, mahdollisuuksia toimia myönteisen ruokasuhteen tukijana ja oppimisen edistäjänä. Ruokablogikirjoituksia voitaisiin hyödyntää myös opetusmateriaalina aikuiskasvatuksessa. Johtopäätöksenä esitetään, että myönteinen ruokasuhte ja ruokaan kohdistuva toimijuus voivat osaltaan edistää ruokahyvinvointia. Tässä tutkimuksessa tuotettiin tietoa, joka voi syventää ymmärrystä näiden käsitteiden sisällöstä. Ruokabloggaajat havaittiin suomalaisiksi ruokahyvinvoinnin asiantuntijoiksi, joilla on mahdollisuus edistää muidenkin myönteistä asennoitumista ruokaan ja ruuanlaittoon.

Tutkimus luo kiinnostavaa uutta tietoa yksilön toimijuudesta sosiaalisen median areenoilla käyttäen ruokabloggaamista esimerkkinä. Johtopäätöksissä pohditaan bloggaamisen ja elämäjulkaisemisen roolia ylipäätään osana hyvinvoinnin tukemista ja myönteistä oppimista ja kehitystä.

Asiasanat: ruoka, blogi, bloggaajat, monimenetelmäisyys, toimijuus, sosiaalinen media, hyvinvointi

## Kiitokseni

Kipinä tutkimukseen syntyi, kun pääsin 2000-luvun lopulla tekemään sijaisuuksia luokanopettajakoulutuksessa ja kielikeskuksessa Lapin yliopistolla. Yliopistomaailma urapolkuineen tuli tutuksi ja herätti pohtimaan, voisiko elämä tarjota minulle ammatillisesti muutakin kuin opettamista.

Tutkimusaiheen valinta otti aikansa, mutta selkeni ensimmäisen lapseni odotusaikana vuonna 2017. Ruoan, syömisen ja hyvinvoinnin yhteys tuli selkeäksi perehtyessäni odottavan äidin ja pienen vauvan ruokavalioon. Ruokaa lähestyttiin kirjallisuudessa kuitenkin usein imperatiivien kautta; mitä piti tai ei pitänyt syödä. Samalla uutismedia tarjosi jatkuvasti lukuja siitä, paljonko ylipaino ja sen seuraukset yhteiskunnalle maksavat. Ratkaisuehdotuksina tarjottiin esimerkiksi hinnoittelua ja varoitusmerkkintöjä. Koin yhteiskunnallisen ruokadiskurssin sävyn ikäväksi. Päätin alkaa etsiä vaihtoehtoisia ratkaisuja tutkimuksen keinoin. Haluaisin uskoa, että yksi avain muutokseen on myönteisessä ruokapuheessa, jota tässä tutkimuksessa havainnollistetaan.

Lämmin kiitos kuuluu ohjaajalleni, professori Satu Uusiautille. Tämä tutkimus ei olisi valmistunut ilman kärsivällisyyttäsi, johdonmukaisuuttasi ja laajaa osaamistasi. Kiitokset esitarkastajilleni professori Sirkku Kotilaiselle ja dosentti Maarit Knuutilalle huolellisesta perehtymisestä työhöni. Asiantunteva palautteenne syvensi ymmärrystäni ja vei tutkimustani eteenpäin. Erityinen kiitos Sirkku Kotilaiselle siitä, että otit vastaan vastaväittäjän tehtävän. Olen myös kiitollinen yliopistolehtori Satu-Maarit Kortelle huolellisesta lukemisesta ja arvokkaista kommentteista, jotka ohjasivat tutkimusta oikeaan suuntaan. Kiitos Pauliina Yliniitylle ja Walteri Kärpälle kannen suunnittelusta ja toteutuksesta. Ja suurkiitos ruokabloggaajille – olette olemassaolollanne tämän tutkimuksen ydin.

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Lopuksi painavan kiitoksen ansaitsee perheeni. Tärkeimpänä puolisoni Janne: Olet pitänyt perhearjen käynnissä mahdollistaen tämän tutkimustyön ja unelmieni

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Toivon, että tämä tutkimus on virstanpylväs tiedematalla, joka on vasta alussa. Kiinnostuneena odotan, mitä tulevaisuus tuo tullessaan. Innovoidaan yhdessä!

Rovaniemellä heinäkuussa 2025

Riikka Partanen

## List of Publications

The dissertation is based on the following original articles, which will be referred to in the text by their Roman numerals I–III.

### Publication I

Partanen, R., & Uusiautti, S. (2023). What can be learned about the relationship with food in food blogs? A Netnographic Analysis of Finnish Food Bloggers' Posts on Social Media. *International Journal of Media, Technology and Lifelong Learning* 19(1), Article e5121. <https://doi.org/10.7577/seminar.5121>

### Publication II

Partanen, R., & Uusiautti, S. (2023). Presenting your relationship with food online: An analysis of Finnish food bloggers' agency in social media. *Media Education Research Journal*, 12(1), 1-22. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.8179139>

### Publication III

Partanen, R., & Uusiautti, S. (2024). Food Relationship Discourses Produced By The Finnish Food Bloggers: A PERMA-Based Analysis. *Webology*, 21(2), 142-156. [https://webology.org/datacms/articles/20240413114336amWEBOLOGY%2021%20\(2\)%20-%207.pdf](https://webology.org/datacms/articles/20240413114336amWEBOLOGY%2021%20(2)%20-%207.pdf)

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## Research Contribution

All three studies and the publications based on them were designed to become parts of my doctoral thesis. The research processes were conducted under the guidance of my supervisor, Professor Satu Uusiautti. Here is a more detailed description of our research contribution:

### Publication 1

The research was designed by the dissertation author, Partanen, who also undertook the data collection and processing and was responsible for writing the results. Partanen prepared the initial draft of the manuscript and finalized it. The co-author, Professor Uusiautti, contributed by providing feedback and revisions, particularly concerning the text's structure and content.

### Publication 2

The research was collaboratively designed by the authors, Partanen and Uusiautti. The dissertation author, Partanen, was primarily responsible for acquiring and processing the research data, as well as drafting the results section. As the primary author, Partanen composed and finalized the manuscript's main body. Professor Uusiautti, as co-author, contributed to the development of the introduction, theoretical framework, results, discussion, and limitations sections.

### Publication 3

The research was collaboratively designed by the authors, Partanen and Uusiautti. The dissertation author, Partanen, conducted the data analysis and was primarily responsible for drafting and finalizing the manuscript. Professor Uusiautti, as co-author, contributed to the development of the introduction, theoretical framework, and methodology, and provided feedback on the results section.

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Background of the Research

The context of this study centers on food blogging, where individuals share recipes and information about food (Lofgren, 2013). Trusted online identities, such as bloggers on social media, are viable sources of information in the 2020s (Li, 2021). Among the various types of social media, blogs continue to play a crucial role in promoting social commerce, marketing, education, data analysis, communication development, and contributing to and creating trends, discourses, and other social interactions (Code, 2013; Li, 2021; Lofgren, 2013; Hans et al., 2021). This is due to postmodern citizens, who are social beings, wanting to share their views, experiences, skills, and knowledge with others (Sintonen et al., 2015). In modern society, media and communication technologies are reshaping and becoming integrated into how things are done (Finnemann, 2011; Hepp, 2013; Livingstone, 2019). Hence, it is normal and expected that the relationship with food will be presented using texts and photos on social media, where peers provide social support (Endres, 2016).

This study views food blogging as an example of how media shapes food culture and aims to investigate whether food blogging can contribute to enhancing well-being, similar to gardening (Giraud et al., 2021), food consumption (Mugel et al., 2019), and photography (Machin et al., 2021). In the field of media studies (Palsa, 2016), blogging has been seen as combining technical and participatory agency perspectives. In this study, food bloggers are understood as socially engaged public figures in the media sphere, demonstrating advanced digital and technological competencies. These skills may have a positive impact on their overall well-being (Livingstone et al., 2023). Previous research has also suggested that women's engagement in blogging may be linked to psychological empowerment, a strengthened sense of community, and increased agency (Stavrositu & Sundar, 2012). How does the specific focus on food within blogging contribute to the broader discourse?

This dissertation comprises three studies and aims to present an understanding of well-being from the perspective of social media, particularly food blogging. The study approaches food bloggers' well-being through the concept of their relationship with food (Talvia & Anglé, 2018), Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory, and Martin Seligman's PERMA theory (Chapter 2.3.1). According to Talvia and Anglé (2018), the relationship with food can be seen as a distinct and evolving entity characterized by lifelong experiences and interpretations related to food and eating.

The relationship can be understood as multifaceted and potentially contradictory within today's cultural context (e.g., Jallinoja et al., 2018).

In Study I, I was interested in how the Finnish food bloggers' relationship with food appears in their food blogs. In Study II, I aimed to investigate how Finnish food bloggers perceive their agency when describing their relationship with food in their food blogs. Albert Bandura (2001) describes agentic capacity as a fundamental aspect of being human, emphasizing its significance in shaping one's life. His theory identifies several key characteristics of human agency, including intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness, and self-reflectiveness (Bandura, 2001). In Study III, I investigated how Finnish food bloggers produce discourses about well-being and their relationship with food. Seligman's (2011) well-being theory, PERMA, examines human flourishing through five key elements: positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment (Seligman, 2011). In this study, applying the positive psychology perspective to food bloggers' well-being involves examining their relationship with food and agency related to food as empowering elements that can be developed as part of a lifelong path to a good life and happiness (e.g., Lee, 2016). I introduce theories of agency and well-being in further detail in Chapter 2.

The prior study is situated in the field of educational sciences, specifically within the traditions of positive psychology and media education research. At its core, positive psychology examines the concepts of flourishing and well-being for individuals and communities (Seligman & Csíkszentmihályi, 2000). Recent research has explored its applications in areas such as mental health (Waters et al., 2022), organizational development (van Woerkom, 2021), special education (Drigas et al., 2022), student well-being (Hobbs et al., 2022), happiness (Alam, 2022), and language learning and teaching (Wang et al., 2021; Derakshan, 2022). Promoting a fulfilling life is also a central aim of media education, alongside fostering engagement, empowered participation, and dialogical approaches to learning (Pekala, 2016). My study contributes to the discussions above by analyzing how well-being is portrayed in food blogging activities, how food bloggers share their passion for food-related learning, motivation, and emotions, and how they describe their agency on social media. The media education perspective is also present, as food bloggers communicate their food-related learning, feelings, and thoughts through social media blogging. Media, including blogs, may enhance critical thinking and strategic skills (Poyntz et al., 2020). However, emerging AI technologies may transform teaching and learning (e.g., Alotaibi & Alshehri, 2023; Niemi et al., 2023; Srinivasan, 2022).

In Finnish media education research, this study represents the first of the four tribes (Kotilainen & Suoranta, 2005): the technology tribe, since it aims to present food blog posts as a new learning environment, especially for adult users (e.g., Sintonen et al., 2015). The concept of different tribes holds the idea of the varied nature of media education as a specific research area that can be approached from

various perspectives and sciences with varying emphases on media and education (Pekkala et al., 2013). Given that this study centers on food blogging, it can also be situated within the third paradigm of media education—cultural research—by viewing food blogging as a form of twenty-first-century social media that contributes to modern cultural heritage, reflecting contemporary communication, social networks, and societal change (Fält, 2016). However, recent media education researchers have increasingly focused on emerging topics such as AI literacy, digital skills, playful learning, and participatory media practices (Kangas et al., 2017; Kong et al., 2024; Ollonen & Kangas, 2024; Salonen & Kotilainen, 2024).

This study offers insights into the perspectives of social media content creators (e.g., Carlsson, 2020), in the context preceding the rapid rise of AI. Recent scholarly inquiry has engaged with blogging also with fashion (Pedroni, 2022), parenting (Blum-Ross & Livingstone, 2020), live news dissemination (Matheson & Wahl-Jorgensen, 2020), academic practices (Zou & Hyland, 2020), identity construction (Li, 2021), cultural sustainability (Chen et al., 2023), and pedagogical applications such as academic writing (Sütçü, 2020), reading comprehension (Azizi et al., 2022), and language learning (Villalba, 2022) – examples reflecting also broader media research interests of the 2020s. However, AI is expected to transform the nature of blogging and media education in the future as new technologies and media continue to reshape society and culture. For example, it is already known that the use of AI tools, such as ChatGPT, may increase the productivity of bloggers and enhance the novelty of their posts, but may also decrease their popularity (Kaisen et al., 2024).

## **1.2 Food Blogging as the Research Context**

Food blogging of the 2010s forms the context of my research. Cesiri (2020) categorizes food blogs as niche blogs due to their focus on a specific subject: food preparation and consumption. This genre of food blogging represents a versatile type of computer-mediated communication, enabling both asynchronous and synchronous interactions through the recipes and comments sections (Cesiri, 2020). Blogging broadly involves bloggers expressing their thoughts, insights, experiences, and viewpoints on social media using various formats, including text, images, audio, and video (Thevenot, 2007).

Food blogs can be discovered through search engines and traditional word-of-mouth referrals and thus can be described as more dynamic than cookbooks (Lofgren, 2013). Blum-Ross and Livingstone (2020), who have researched parental blogging, describe blogs as enablers of multimedia and multi-vocal storytelling processes. Fashion blogging has evolved from the 1990s to the 2020s, sharing a history like that of food blogging, with fashion bloggers serving as social media practitioners (Pedroni, 2023). Marco Pedroni (2023) notes that fashion bloggers

have gradually solidified their status, professionalized their approach, and developed a set of recognizable practices under the often-debated label of “influencer.” Initially, they were seen as vague and undefined figures when they entered the online fashion scene in the early 2000s.

Thus, food bloggers can be considered social media influencers. Pedroni (2023) describes the term “influencer” as essential for establishing and accurately defining the presence of a specialized industry known as influencer marketing, which has emerged to leverage relationships formed online. After two decades of development, blogging has evolved into a legitimate occupation, with its practices clearly defined and negotiated within a social context (Pedroni, 2023). In the Finnish context of food blogging in the 2020s, there are amateur and professional food bloggers. However, as noted by Cesiri (2020), although most food bloggers do not treat blogging as their primary professional endeavor, they engage in the activity with a professional mindset. They meticulously craft their online personas and ensure consistency across all aspects of their blogs (Cesiri, 2020).

Additionally, they interact with their readers confidently, further solidifying their position as community leaders (Cesiri, 2020). Blum-Ross and Livingstone (2020) descriptively call blogging “a new iteration of previous creative or professional interests.” Writing blog posts can be described as long-lasting and slow publications, compared to the fast and short content found on platforms like Instagram and Snapchat (Finland SMB, 2022). The average length of recipes with ingredient lists and cooking instructions is about half a page, spread over two columns. However, with some bloggers, the cooking instructions alone can occupy an entire page. In addition, there is a blogger’s diary-like post related to the recipe, possibly with a video.

At the center of food blogging is the ability to create new food recipes, which requires a food blogger to spend time in the kitchen. Additionally, preparing and writing recipes is a type of text that requires practice to learn and master. Web-based food photographs have gained immense popularity on social media, to the point that some studies refer to them as “food porn.” This term suggests that these images are designed to be visually enticing, aiming to evoke a strong desire in consumers to indulge in the food being showcased (Koh, 2017).

In 2024, most bloggers fall within the 25–44 age range, and approximately 54 million bloggers exist worldwide (Gupta, 2024). In Finland, the most popular blogging themes in the 2020s are lifestyle, decoration and design, and food, drinks, and baking, which are tied for third place, along with sports, fitness, fashion, and beauty (Finland SMB, 2022). The job description of food bloggers encompasses creating stories, recipes, photography, styling, participating in customer events and training sessions, delivering lectures, writing articles and books, and engaging in traditional sales and marketing work related to entrepreneurship (Artman, 2018). Cesiri (2020) represents food blogs from a linguistic perspective, describing them

as typically employing food-related terminology and sensory language. Lofgren (2013) portrays food bloggers as passionate food enthusiasts, often referred to as foodies, who are deeply involved in the culinary world. Food blogging can also be seen as a journey of self-discovery and identity exploration (Koh, 2017).

Koh (2017) argues that food bloggers perpetuate and reinforce ideologies that emphasize wealth, sophistication, status, elitism, and capitalist consumerism. Publishing a new recipe demands several days of work from the food blogger. Those days are often used for activities such as shopping trips, refining a recipe, preparing a dish, photography, image processing, writing a blog post (e.g., Artman, 2018), and responding to readers' comments on the post or other social media channels. From a media education perspective, Hobbs (2016) notes that bloggers require specific competencies in media literacy. They include access skills, analysis and evaluation skills, creative skills, and the practice of actions. Food bloggers can be considered to possess excellent media literacy competencies, as they, for example, skillfully utilize technology tools in their blogging and share information with others; work individually and collaboratively to share knowledge; leverage the power of communication and information; and participate as members of a national community.

Being a blogger comes with additional responsibilities, including presenting oneself authentically, adhering to the professional standards established within the blogging community, and creating a business strategy to increase audience engagement and generate revenue from the blog (Blum-Ross & Livingstone, 2020). The earning logic of food blogs is based on advertising revenue and content cooperation with different companies in the food industry. The food blogging industry offers a wide range of salaries. Still, according to the Blog Barometer of Communication Agency Manifesto, the average monthly wage of a blogging entrepreneur who works at least 22.5 hours a week is around 2,500 euros. Cooperation with a food blogger can cost the company several thousand euros, depending on the number of followers the blog has, among other factors. Food bloggers also utilize blog agencies, whose role is to facilitate connections between companies and bloggers, thereby promoting customer cooperation in both directions (Artman, 2018).

With millions of trusting followers, blogs can be seen as great business opportunities to promote, sell, brand, or rebrand products or services (Lepkowska-White & Kortright, 2018). Blog posts are more discoverable than fast-consuming content, for example, Instagram posts (Finland SMB, 2022). Thanks to business partners, the blogging industry has become more professional, and bloggers' sales income has increased. Bloggers typically only cooperate with entities whose products align with their values and blog style (Artman, 2018). On the other hand, companies benefit from reaching the right target group because food bloggers discuss food in an inspiring and personal manner. The voice and style of a food blogger are valuable ways for a company to get advertising, which cannot be achieved with traditional corporate communication (e.g., Artman, 2018).

Despite the prevalence of fast-paced and visually engaging social media platforms in the 2020s, such as Instagram and TikTok (Finland SMB, 2022), Finland has approximately 900,000 regular blog readers (MarkkinointiMaestro, 2024). Lofgren (2013) notes that blogging allows individuals to revisit and refresh posts, even years after publication. Cesiri (2020) describes the interaction between food bloggers and their followers as a dynamic community formed around a shared interest in nutrition, which evolves into a collaborative online experience. The relationship within food blogs is more intricate than a simple exchange between a knowledgeable author and an audience; it includes visitors who range from novices to experienced enthusiasts and even semi-professionals in cooking and food (Cesiri, 2020).

According to Mainolfi et al. (2022), reading food blogs can lead to the intention to follow bloggers' recommendations if the blog is enjoyable and engaging. In blogs, members of the food culture community can express their enthusiasm for food and the joys of cooking (Lofgren, 2013). They can seek advice, provide feedback, and discuss topics like seasonality, local ingredients, and dietary choices (Lofgren, 2013). Koh (2017) also notes that readers typically come from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. Active blog readers are of all ages, but the most prominent target group in Finland is women aged 25-45 (MarkkinointiMaestro, 2024). Figure 1 summarizes the main points of food blogging as an activity.



## Food blogging

- Goal
  - Share information about food, its consumption, and preparation
- Mechanisms of intercommunications
  - Reply to users' comments, and users can communicate with each other in the same way.
  - Specific participatory mechanisms primarily to provide information and feedback, i.e., the bloggers-users interaction in the comments sections
- Genre
  - Posts, recipe pages, videos, and pictures
- Language
  - Sensory language and food-related terminology,
    - Namely, terms on the semantic fields of food, drink, kitchen, tableware, specific appliances, and procedures to process food
- Expertise
  - Range from the novice to the quasi-professional level of the most advanced users and of the food bloggers themselves

Figure 1. Food blogging in a nutshell (adapted from Cesiri, 2020)

In summary, food blogs are digital platforms that blend traditional recipe genres with personal diary entries, facilitating direct and asynchronous communication with readers (Cesiri, 2020). These blogs incorporate static and dynamic visual elements, such as images and videos, which contribute to a multisensory experience for the audience (Cesiri, 2020).

### **1.3 Objectives and Research Questions**

Food affects our emotions and is essential for staying alive (Mugel et al., 2019). Upon reviewing previous studies on human agency in social media, I observed that research on food blogs is not as comprehensive as one might expect (Cesiri, 2020), and the existing research also lacks a focus on well-being. Mugel et al. (2019) also argue that research perspectives should broaden to include personal, economic, social, cultural, and religious factors rather than focusing solely on nutrition-related health issues.

Talvia et al. (2022) encourage research to consider how food and eating are approached in different environments and what kind of messages about food and eating are conveyed. Hence, the contemporary media-related cultural heritage (Fält, 2016), specifically in the form of food, also warrants further scholarly investigation. From a media education perspective, social media content creators (Carlsson, 2020) require additional research, particularly insights into how bloggers' agency and participation in social media are implemented and whether it is related to a good life (Pekkala, 2016). Research is also needed to explore and shape future conceptualizations of media literacy and learning (Palsa, 2016; Kupiainen & Sintonen, 2010).

To address the research gap, this study aims to present a new perspective on the discussion by highlighting the role of positive food relationships and human agency in social media-related research, with a particular focus on a specific group of individuals: food bloggers. Since this study adopts a positive psychology approach, it prioritizes supporting individuals' ability to make healthy food decisions, rather than the health-focused approaches that aim to change behavior by imposing rules and regulations on dietary choices (Pettigrew, 2016). This positive approach to people's food-related behaviors is relatively new (Block et al., 2011; Pettigrew, 2016) and, therefore, not as well-studied as the negative food paradigm, such as obesity (James, 2004; Sanderson et al., 2011). Multidisciplinary research has the potential to offer new insights; thus, to the best of my knowledge, no earlier studies have combined the perspectives from educational psychology, media education, and nutrition science.

This dissertation comprises three studies (I–III) that were published as articles in international, peer-reviewed journals (see List of Publications). Table 1 presents the research design, theoretical framework, data, and analyses of this study.

The research task of this prior study is to present well-being from the perspective of social media, especially food blogging. The overarching research question was: How do Finnish food bloggers act and perceive the role of their blogging activities in their relationship with food, agency, and well-being?

The objective of the prior study was addressed through three distinct studies, outlined as follows:

#### Study I

The first study described how Finnish food bloggers depict their relationship with food in their blogs. The study asked:

- How does the relationship with food appear in Finnish food blogs?

#### Study II

The second study examined the meanings Finnish food bloggers attributed to their blog activities. The following research question was set for this study:

- How do Finnish food bloggers perceive their agency when describing their relationship with food in their food blogs?

#### Study III

The third study described the discourses on well-being produced by Finnish food bloggers. The study had the following research question:

- How do Finnish food bloggers produce discourses about well-being and their relationship with food?

The Studies mentioned above are needed because there is still limited knowledge about the experiences of adult network users who produce content. According to Eriksson (2013), the web is a means of informal learning, where one can, for example, offer positive advice and instructions or provide support to those in emotionally challenging situations. Media can provide lifelong learning opportunities and dialogical approaches to learning that have yet to be fully recognized (Pekkala, 2016). Ultimately, this study may have other educational outcomes beyond a deep understanding of agency and well-being in food blogging activities. Based on the findings, it can be possible to conclude whether food blogs can be regarded as new food wellbeing-related learning material that enables inattentive or attentive learning facilitated by social media (e.g., also Joosten, 2012).

*Table 1. Summary of Publications*

Publication	Article name and publication channel	Research questions	Theoretical framework	Research approach	Research data and analysis method
Publication I	What can be learned about the relationship with food in food blogs? A netnographic analysis of Finnish food bloggers' posts on social media. <i>Media, Technology &amp; Lifelong Learning</i> , 19(1).	How does the relationship with food appear in Finnish food blogs?	Earlier research about relationship with food	Netnography	Blog posts analyzed with 6 steps of netnographic research process
Publication II	Presenting your relationship with food online: An analysis of Finnish food bloggers' agency in social media. <i>Media Education Research Journal</i> , 12(1).	How do Finnish food bloggers perceive their agency when describing their relationship with food in their food blogs?	Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory	Qualitative survey study	Email survey analyzed with theory-based content analysis
Publication III	Food Relationship Discourses Produced By The Finnish Food Bloggers – A PERMA-Based Analysis. <i>Webology</i> , 21 (2).	How do the Finnish food bloggers produce discourses about well-being and their relationship with food?	Martin Seligman's PERMA-theory	Discourse analysis	Blog posts and email survey analyzed with theory-based discourse analysis

## 2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### 2.1 Food Blogs as a Forum to Construct the Relationship With Food

In study I, the relationship with food is seen as one factor that can increase food bloggers' well-being. Block et al. (2011) state that the relationship with food might promote or decrease well-being. The concept of a relationship with food is defined in nutritional sciences; it is personal and encompasses various perspectives, including behavior, thoughts and insights, emotions, body and senses, and values and norms (Talvia et al., 2022). The foundation of an individual's relationship with food is established in early childhood and is influenced by the diverse discussions and narratives surrounding food (Bjornsen, 2018; Coates et al., 2019; Rask et al., 2013; Simunaniemi et al., 2012). Talvia and Anglé (2018) describe the relationship with food as a distinct and evolving phenomenon shaped by a lifetime of experiences and interpretations related to food and eating. This study addresses the concept on the individual level, concentrating on how the relationship with food manifests a human being's agency from an educational and psychological perspective.

Food bloggers actively express their opinions and share their experiences about food and dining online, inviting others to engage by following, reflecting on, and commenting on their content. Hence, food blogs present one forum for expressing and constructing one's relationship with food. Thus, food bloggers can be seen as postmodern-day food educators and influencers to thousands of online followers (de Jesus Oliveira Mota et al., 2019; Lofgren, 2013). Food blogs can also be considered part of postmodern food literacy, and adequate food literacy enhances individual psycho-physical well-being through appropriate food choices (e.g., Palumbo et al., 2017; Palumbo, 2016). Food literacy examines the various intricate ways individuals understand and practice healthy eating (Bisogni et al., 2012). Therefore, food bloggers' knowledge of food could be referred to as "procedural knowledge," which involves applying their food knowledge to food decision-making, including food shopping and preparation skills (Block et al., 2011). Procedural knowledge involves creating food scripts, sequences of events, actions, or routines associated with food in a specific context (Block et al., 2011).

The relationship with food can be examined from multiple perspectives, including aspects of healthy development and disorders, as well as cultural, aesthetic, environmental, societal, material-economic, functional, bodily, historical, cognitive, emotional, normative-moral, health-related, and related to self-concept and identity. (Talvia et al., 2022; Boulos et al., 2012; Dingemans et al., 2009; Han & Kahn, 2017;

Ng et al., 2014; Torres & Nowson, 2007; Van der Veen, 2003). Talvia et al. (2022) believe that the relationship with food is formed and shaped as a conscious, bodily, and situational process, resulting uniquely and individually from experiencing, and that the relationship with food becomes visible in dialogic encounters. Food bloggers share their food-related experiences online, and thus the dialogic encounter to observe their relationship with food is timeless and placeless. The social contexts and social roles that take place in them influence which aspects of the food relationship emerge (Talvia et al., 2022). Talvia et al. (2021) have developed the pedagogical framework of diverse food relationships into a pedagogical model suitable for food education.

According to Bublitz et al. (2013), cultivating a positive relationship with food can lead to an improved sense of well-being. For instance, striking a balance between healthy choices and enjoyable eating experiences is crucial to this positive relationship (Bublitz et al., 2013). Conversely, an unhealthy relationship with food can develop when individuals focus excessively on diet-related thoughts (Bublitz et al., 2011) and engage in frequent dieting, which can have adverse effects on their health (Bublitz et al., 2010). Although the conditions for establishing a healthy relationship with food are present in the Western world, not all postmodern eating contexts and discourses, types of food, food quality, or beauty standards facilitate this development (e.g., Brug, 2008; Macht et al., 2005; Dodds & Chamberlain, 2017; Tischner & Malson, 2012). According to Bublitz et al. (2010), one of the most pressing health concerns is excessive eating, often accompanied by unhealthy food choices, facing much of the developed world (e.g., Bublitz et al., 2012). Brug (2008) states that lower household income is associated with less healthy diets among adults.

Additionally, according to Bublitz et al. (2011), the five core areas influencing the relationship with food in the postmodern era are economic issues, social factors, food literacy, emotional knowledge, and other physical and psychological traits. Individual food well-being experiences have been understood to result in complex, composite, and sometimes ambivalent moods and emotions such as joy, relaxation, pride, nostalgia, gratitude, and emotion-induced changes in eating (Macht, 2008; Mugel et al., 2019). In the 2010s, the media, with its visual nature and multi-channel capabilities, may have an impact on the relationship with food (e.g., Skatrud-Mickelson et al., 2011). The development trajectory of visual media has strengthened in the 2020s (Finland SMB, 2022).

However, when considering food bloggers' relationship with food, a fundamental notion is that healthy and positive are not synonymous. While one's relationship with food can be positive, it does not directly mean that it is healthy. In this sense, food blogging can also manifest a twisted relationship with food and, thus, not necessarily a positive phenomenon. However, my study's purpose is not to assess food bloggers' relationship with food but to present how they describe the relationship and what elements they connect to their relationship with food.

## 2.2 Agency in Food Blogging

In Study II, the blogger's agency was considered essential to their well-being (also Alkire, 2005). The agency can be related to well-being through autonomy or self-direction, characterized by independent thought and action (Schwartz, 1994; Seligman et al., 2016). The agency is often associated with forward-looking plans and activities that yield visible results (Vanhalakka-Ruoho, 2014). It may mean that well-being, as outlined in Seligman's theory's blocks of meaningfulness and positive emotions, can be intentionally cultivated by the person through their actions, such as blogging, and thus might eventually impact the well-being of others. For instance, prior studies indicate that readers' perceptions of enjoyment and similarity to the blogger significantly impact their engagement with the blog (Mainolfi et al., 2022). This engagement, in turn, positively affects their intentions to try the food and visit places recommended by the blogger (Mainolfi et al., 2022). I will present Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory to better understand the connection between agency and well-being.

This study describes the agencies that food bloggers have connected with for food and eating. Additionally, agencies can leverage influencers' ability to become agents capable of monetizing products and services (e.g., Pedroni, 2023). In the 2020s, social media influencers are considered a source of advice for others and opinion leaders who affect others' decision-making processes (Gholamhosseinzadeh et al., 2021). For instance, the attributes of social media influencers serve as a significant force that can shape consumers' attitudes toward a brand or product, particularly when these influencers are viewed as honest and credible sources of information (Kurdi et al., 2022). Quantitative parameters, such as the number of followers, posts, likes, and comments, typically measure the power of digital influencers (Gholamhosseinzadeh et al., 2021; Li et al., 2011). Influencers who regularly produce more engaging content and maintain consistent interaction with their audience are typically viewed as more influential (Li et al., 2011).

This study defines the concept of agency in the context of Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory. Bandura (2006) believes people are contributors or agents to their life circumstances, not just products of them, meaning a person's influence is a part of the causal structure. Theory's core is the agentic perspective of human development, adaptation, and change. It characterizes human agency by four core properties: *intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness, and self-reflectiveness* (Bandura, 2006). Weibell (2011) emphasizes that beliefs in personal and collective efficacy are the most fundamental and widespread mechanisms driving human agency. People exercise their influence through three forms of agency: individual, proxy, and collective (Bandura, 2001). In this study, regarding the case of food bloggers, the form of agency is individual.

Intentionality refers to the plans and intentions regarding future actions (Bandura, 2001). It encompasses the actions themselves and the individual's active involvement in those actions (Bandura, 2001). In hospitality research, social media influencers, such as bloggers, have been found to affect food value and customer purchase intentions (Aisha et al., 2024). However, actions do not always result in the intended outcomes. As such, "the achievement of future plans necessitates more than just an intentional mindset, as it alone is not enough to cause the desired results" (Bandura, 2001, p. 7). This indicates that the agency requires additional characteristics.

Forethought refers to the process of anticipatory self-guidance, where individuals motivate themselves by developing action plans, setting goals, and visualizing the potential outcomes of their actions (Bandura, 2001; 2018). This ability to anticipate can add meaning to life by steering individuals toward their desired future (Seligman et al., 2016). In blogging and marketing, influential bloggers can enhance an organization's ability to target its audience effectively, offering a unique opportunity to boost sales and reduce advertising costs (Kurdi et al., 2022).

Self-reactiveness is essential for managing one's behavior because simply having intentions and engaging in forethought does not fully capture the essence of human agency (Bandura, 2001; 2018). This implies that individuals evaluate their actions in relation to their goals and plans. Such evaluations are conducted through self-monitoring, guiding performance based on personal standards, and implementing corrective self-responses (Bandura, 2001). This process encompasses self-management, self-motivation, and emotional states that may hinder effective self-regulation (Weibell, 2011).

Self-reflectiveness is distinct from self-reactiveness; while self-reactiveness emphasizes self-regulation, self-reflectiveness is centered on self-examination (Bandura, 2001; 2018). Self-reflectiveness encourages individuals to contemplate the meaning and purpose behind their actions and values. Consequently, it is a metacognitive ability and, according to Bandura (2018), represents the most uniquely human aspect of agency. For bloggers, blogging often becomes an integral part of their identity. The impact of identity affirmation on the intention to continue blogging is influenced by satisfaction and habit, underscoring the importance of bloggers' past experiences in connecting their initial motivation for identity construction with their ongoing blogging intentions (Li, 2021).

According to Bandura (2018), human agency is based on three determinants that are (1) personal determinants (human functioning is a product of intrapersonal influences), (2) behavioral determinants (the behavior individuals engage in), and (3) environmental determinants (the environmental forces that impinge on people). To be called an agent, an individual must intentionally influence and contribute to their functioning and life circumstances (Bandura, 2006). Additionally, the agency is closely linked to self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977; Pajares, 2005). Without believing

in one's ability to achieve desired outcomes, agency cannot be expressed through intentional actions (Bandura, 2000).

To summarize, Bandura's agency helps to explore how Finnish food bloggers perceive their agency when describing their relationship with food in their food blogs by emphasizing the importance of self-efficacy, empowerment, and resilience. For example, by believing in their abilities, food bloggers can inspire others, take ownership of their creative processes, and adapt to challenges, ultimately enhancing their blogging experience and impact on their readers. To better understand the connection between food blogging and well-being, I will present two theories about well-being.

## **2.3 The Connection Between Food Blogging and Well-Being**

Well-being has at least medical, philosophical, cultural, psychological, and social dimensions (Mugel et al., 2019). At a macro level, well-being can be assessed through various indicators, including equality, wealth, security, and access to services (Diener & Tov, 2012). In this study, it is approached on a subjective level. Subjective well-being (SWB) is a concept formulated by Diener (1984) and further elaborated by Diener et al. (1999). It encompasses an individual's emotional responses, satisfaction in various life domains, and overall judgments of life satisfaction. According to the SWB framework, an individual's reported well-being level must be flexible, ever-changing, and dependent on contextual factors (Gillett-Swan et al., 2014).

To gain a deeper understanding of SWB, I first present a prominent and widely used theory of well-being, PERMA. The PERMA theory was first introduced by Martin Seligman (2011) as a framework to explore optimal human functioning and happiness in positive psychology. Second, I introduce Block et al.'s (2011) Food Well-Being Theory (FWB) as a positive approach that helps to understand food as a critical contributor to individual and societal well-being.

### **2.3.1 PERMA Theory**

In PERMA theory, well-being is a construct of five blocks: Positive emotion (P), Engagement (E), Relationships (R), Meaning (M), and Accomplishment (A) (Seligman, 2011). Next, I describe PERMA blocks with the help of Seligman (2011), Khaw and Kern (2014), who have created a Cross-Cultural Comparison of the PERMA with Malaysian and US samples, and Kovich et al. (2023), who made an Application of the PERMA Model of Well-being in Undergraduate Students in the US.

Seligman (2011) states that PERMA blocks are better defined and more measurable than "happiness." The first block, *positive emotions*, refers to an individual's hedonic

feelings, such as pleasure, warmth, hope, joy, and similar emotions. If one's life is successfully guided around this block, Seligman (2011) refers to it as a “pleasant life.”

The second component of PERMA, *engagement*, pertains to a profound psychological connection to a specific activity, organization, or cause (Khaw & Kern, 2014). According to Seligman (2011), individuals typically do not experience any emotions during engagement. Another difference between positive emotions and engagement is that there is a shortcut for positive emotions, like shopping, but no shortcuts for engagement. Engagement is related to a flow state, for example, being one with music. Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi (2009) define the flow state as the optimal experience of complete and intense absorption in the present moment, characterized by an intrinsically motivating task. In a flow state, time seems to stand still, and one loses self-consciousness. Kovich et al. (2023) define engagement as being focused, interested, or fully absorbed in an activity. Seligman (2011) refers to life with engaging activities as “engaged life.”

The third block of PERMA is *relationships* (Seligman, 2011). Relationships encompass feelings of belonging within a society or community, closeness and connection with family, friends, or colleagues, and satisfaction derived from these interactions (Khaw & Kern, 2014; Kovich et al., 2023). Most human experience revolves around other individuals (Khaw & Kern, 2014). Relationships are crucial throughout an individual's lifespan and contribute to overall well-being in numerous ways (Kovich et al., 2023).

The fourth component of PERMA is *meaning*, which pertains to having a sense of purpose and direction in life (Khaw & Kern, 2014; Seligman, 2011). Seligman (2011) defines a meaningful life as one that contributes to something greater than oneself. Kovich et al. (2023) describe meaning as the belief or affiliation with a cause or entity that transcends individual existence, which can arise from sources such as religion, spirituality, or advocacy. Seligman (2011) notes that humanity has established positive institutions—like religion, political parties, and families—to foster a sense of meaning. Additionally, belonging is crucial to a meaningful life (Seligman, 2011).

The fifth component of PERMA is *accomplishment* or *achievement*. Seligman (2011) describes accomplishment as the pursuits undertaken throughout life for their intrinsic value. Achievements often require persistence and resilience and can include successes in academics, sports, or careers (Kovich et al., 2023). For instance, athletes may experience a sense of accomplishment in their performance, even if they do not win a game (Seligman, 2011). According to Khaw and Kern (2014), making progress toward personal goals and achieving notable results is universally recognized, leading to both external acknowledgment and an individual sense of fulfillment. Accomplishments are often subjective; for example, successfully raising well-behaved children or receiving a job promotion can be considered significant

achievements (Butler & Kern, 2016). Seligman (2011) refers to a life focused on achievement for its own sake as an “achieving life.”

To summarize, the PERMA theory provides a comprehensive framework for understanding and describing how Finnish food bloggers produce discourses about well-being and their relationship with food, emphasizing the interplay of positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment.

### 2.3.2 Food Well-Being Theory

Block et al. (2011) define Food Well-Being (FWB) as a favorable psychological, physical, emotional, and social relationship with food at both individual and societal levels. Block et al.’s (2011) Food Well-Being Theory (Figure 2) comprises five primary wheels: socialization, literacy, marketing, availability, and policy, which are examined at both individual and societal levels (Block et al., 2011). Block et al. (2011) argue that integrating both societal and individual viewpoints can highlight the benefits of a systems perspective and contribute to improving food well-being.

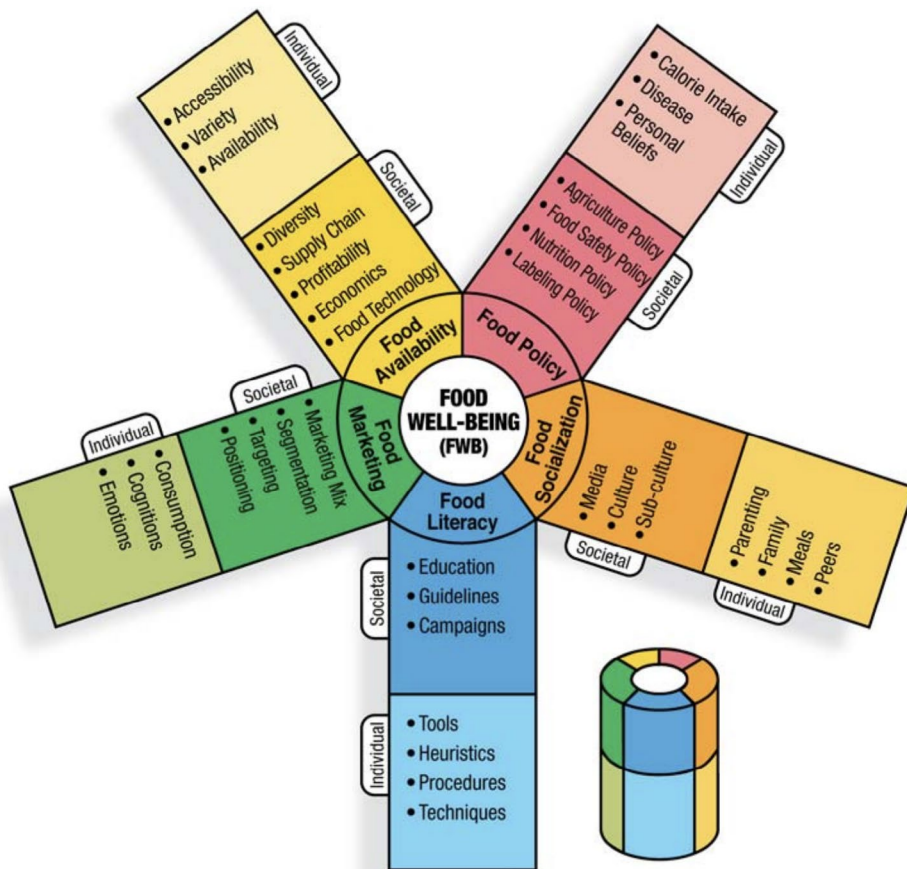


Figure 2. Food Well-Being Theory by Block et al. (Block et al., 2011, p. 6).

With the first wheel, *food socialization*, Block et al. (2011) link food, culture, and consumption as part of the socialization processes through which individuals acquire knowledge about food, its significance, and Food Well-Being (FWB) within their cultural context. For example, parents can restrict the consumption of particular foods. From a societal perspective, for instance, Gartaula et al. (2018) have concentrated on food and nutrition security and food sovereignty. Gartaula et al. (2018) highlight the relational issues related to food access, explicitly examining how gender and social disparities influence decision-making and food choices. Furthermore, it is widely recognized that media and marketing are influential agents of socialization (e.g., Harris et al., 2009).

With the second wheel, *food literacy*, Block et al. (2011) emphasize the importance of comprehending nutrition information and utilizing that knowledge to take actions that align with promoting nutrition goals and Food Well-Being (FWB). However, Truman et al. (2017) enlarged the definition in their scoping review. They assert that food literacy is a dynamic combination of functional, relational, and critical skills that empower individuals to make healthy food choices and effectively navigate the food system. Palumbo et al. (2017) indicate that inadequate food literacy at the individual level is a significant factor contributing to negative consumer behaviors within the food system. It is linked to a reluctance to foster positive changes in attitudes and perceptions about food (Bublitz et al., 2013), a limited ability to process food-related information (Scrinis & Parker, 2016), confusion when selecting and consuming food (Cornish & Moraes, 2015), and increased food waste (Farr-Wharton et al., 2014). Furthermore, Vidgen and Gallegos (2014) have identified four key food-related competencies that reflect the multidimensional nature of food literacy: the ability to plan, manage, select, prepare, and consume food.

With the third wheel of *marketing*, Block et al. (2011) refer to products, promotion, place, and price as influencing consumers' attitudes and behavior towards food, which is why food marketing plays a vital role in FWB. Food marketing is often cited as a contributing factor to the obesity epidemic (Chandon & Wansink, 2012). Food marketing employs various persuasive strategies to shape children's attitudes toward food, as well as their preferences and consumption habits (Smith et al., 2019). With the fourth wheel, *food availability*, Block et al. (2011) examine how the distribution and accessibility of food impact consumption behaviors within the community. This includes food produced globally and locally, as well as homegrown produce (Block et al., 2011). Krukowski et al. (2010) state that the accessibility and pricing of healthy foods in grocery stores can significantly affect consumers' purchasing habits, dietary choices, and weight status.

With the fifth wheel, *food policy*, Block et al. (2011) connect food policies to the food system, food production, and pricing, mentioning that favorable food policies can foster FWB. Food policies can be discussed at various levels, including national, European, and international. It can be designed for specific environments and areas,

such as school settings, economic instruments, and nutrition labeling (e.g., Hawkes et al. 2015). For example, the national nutrition policy guides the public on the types and quantities of nutrients and foods necessary for maintaining a healthy diet (Block et al., 2011). According to Moragues-Faus et al. (2015), urban postmodern food systems are highly contested spaces where issues of sustainability and justice can mobilize progressive movements and create new political opportunities.

In addition, according to Bublitz et al. (2013), individuals can set conscious goals for their food well-being. The goals of food well-being can be functional, hedonic, or symbolic (Bublitz et al., 2013). Functional goals focus on attaining health-related objectives and minimizing health risks (Mugel et al., 2019). In contrast, hedonic goals pertain to the enjoyment of taste and the sense of well-being derived from the experience of eating (Mugel et al., 2019). Symbolic goals involve using food to express and affirm one's identity, such as following a specific diet to fit in with or belong to a particular social group (Mugel et al., 2019). When assessing an individual's food well-being or setting goals, it is vital to view their cultural environment within the family setting (Block et al., 2011). Within the macro environment, culture, subcultures, and the media influence how individuals socialize and engage in food consumption patterns (Bublitz et al., 2011).

## **2.4 Summary: Food Blogging as the Manifestation of Well-Being**

I relate this study to an approach in which individuals are encouraged to adopt a healthy relationship with food that develops throughout a person's lifespan through various food-related experiences and expectations (Block et al., 2011). This study also leans on PERMA theory, which aims to increase the flourishing of individuals' lives. Food well-being can be considered one aspect of this overall well-being (Gartaula et al., 2018; Mugel et al., 2019).

In my research, I found it relevant to broaden Block et al.'s (2011) FWB theory by using Seligman's (2011) well-being theory (PERMA) about the foundations of human flourishing and Bandura's theory of human agency when analyzing the food-related well-being and activities among food bloggers. Block et al.'s FWB theory (2011) appeared too narrow for my study, as it focused too much on extrinsic food-related factors. This study aims to provide more in-depth information, particularly on the individual components of food well-being theory, including Food Socialization and Food Literacy, as it focuses on the personal experiences and conceptions of a group of individuals: food bloggers. As a theoretical framework, agency and well-being, as described in PERMA, also have much of the same ground: eventually, human well-being can be considered to manifest itself as a positive agency (Seligman et al., 2016)

## 3 IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STUDY

### 3.1 Ontology and Epistemology of the Research

In this chapter, I present the research methodology, grounded in ontology and epistemology. In research, ontological questions are closely related to epistemological questions (Koskenniemi-Sivonen, 2007). Epistemology refers to the set of beliefs about knowing, encompassing the nature of knowledge, its creation, and the methods for approaching it (Avis, 2005). Kim (2001) defines ontology as the researcher's beliefs about what exists or is real. As a linguist and a teacher, I lean on the worldview that reality can be socially and individually constructed. According to Kim (2001), what one believes about knowledge often determines one's thoughts about learning. This study adopts *social constructionism* and *constructivism* (Young & Colling, 2004) as key theoretical foundations, emphasizing that reality and knowledge are co-constructed through interaction—an approach relevant to educational psychology and media education (Woolfolk, 1999; Hepp, 2013).

Social constructionism emphasizes the contextuality of knowledge as a human product that is socially and culturally constructed (Brion, 2021; Kim, 2001). According to Ababneh (2020), constructionism supports the idea that subject and object emerge as partners in the generation of meaning. In socio-constructionism, individuals are assumed to want to understand the world around them and attribute subjective, changing, and multiple meanings to things in their environment (e.g., Creswell, 2009). The researcher aims to gather the views of other individuals. In socio-constructionism-oriented studies, researchers are viewed as integral to the research process, and it is acknowledged that their backgrounds and perspectives shape the interpretation of the research phenomenon (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Cresswell (2009) and Borrego et al. (2009) refer to the philosophy of science as a theoretical lens through which researchers examine the research process and its results. According to Crotty (1998), the essential elements of the research process are epistemology, theoretical perspective, methodology, and methods. Crotty (1998) contends that epistemology shapes the theoretical perspectives that guide research. These perspectives, in turn, influence the choice of research methodology, which subsequently dictates the specific research methods employed (Crotty, 1998). Hence, every researcher will need to discuss which views or traditions they adopt as a researcher (Al-Saadi, 2014).

The selection of the research design is influenced by the study's objectives (Al-Ababneh, 2020). In this research, I aim to describe and understand how Finnish food bloggers act and perceive their blogging activities' role in their relationship with food, agency, and well-being, to produce a possible interpretation. Therefore, the research object is the relationship with food and agency as perceived by food bloggers. Food is both a material and an immaterial phenomenon. It exists in tangible form, as well as in speech, writing, and actions (Knuuttila, 2010), and nowadays also in audio-visual form in media. The main concepts of this study, the relationship with food and agency, are immaterial but can be reflected in an individual's well-being.

Nowadays, food relationships and agencies are formed, primarily through social media writing. However, the content of social media writings is often constructed through food-related actions, such as cooking and eating together. Constructivism appreciates the existence of multiple realities as perceived by individuals (Golafshani, 2003). Consequently, this study employs various data collection methods to capture valid and reliable representations of these diverse realities (Golafshani, 2003). Hence, I believe I can receive information about the research objects by studying food blog posts written by food bloggers and email surveys. Thus, this research employs a qualitative methodology, with an interpretivist theoretical perspective closely associated with constructivism. Hay (2015) even raises the question of whether all constructivists can be considered interpretivists.

### **3.2 Sequential Multi-method Research Design**

At the beginning of the study, I noted that it could be challenging to create a versatile picture of the research phenomenon using a single research data and method (Brewer & Hunter, 2006). One method can only reveal a part of reality (Morse & Chung, 2003). The worldview of social constructionism supports the choice of a multi-method research approach because it offers a deeper understanding of the phenomenon being studied, more diverse perspectives, and more reliable results than single methods (Creswell, 2009). This was essential because, with the help of more research data collected using various data collection methods, it seemed possible to create a more structured description of the constantly changing reality and, thus, obtain reliable and credible new information about the research phenomenon, as well as well-being from the perspective of social media, especially food blogging.

Furthermore, the multi-method approach could increase the reliability and validity of this study (e.g., Vivek & Nanthagopan, 2021). Hence, combining methods could also improve the quality of the study (e.g., Vivek & Nanthagopan, 2021). Knowing these facts, I chose a multi-method research approach to fulfill my research aim.

The term “mixed methods” in the research literature on multimethodology typically refers to research that combines quantitative and qualitative approaches. In contrast, “multi-method” refers to combining methods from the same paradigm (e.g., Borrego et al., 2009). In this study, all three studies represent a qualitative research paradigm, which was considered reasonable given the quality of the research problem. As a multi-method researcher, I wanted to combine analytical approaches, theoretical frameworks, and research settings (Vivek & Nanthagopan, 2021). The challenge of multimethodology is often considered to be selecting suitable and appropriate research methods to create a holistic overview and gain insightful perspectives on the research phenomenon (e.g., Morse & Chung, 2003; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2012). In simpler terms, multi-method research can overlook the fact that it requires more time, financial resources, and the researcher’s skills compared to single-method approaches (Vivek & Nanthagopan, 2021).

In this study, the multi-method approach refers to the use of two qualitative research data sources — blog posts and email surveys — and three different analytical methods (e.g., also Brewer & Hunter, 2006): netnography, discourse analysis, and qualitative content analysis. The online blog post data were used in Study I and Study III, and the email survey data were used in Study II and Study III. In a multi-method approach, research data can be collected simultaneously or in stages (e.g., Cresswell, 2009).

This study employs a sequential research design, where the first set of data informs the collection of the second. By collecting data in stages, the researcher’s understanding of the research topic and the need and quality of other research data will likely develop during the research process. It is also known that the research problem often evolves, or even new ones emerge, during the research process due to new findings (Brewer & Hunter, 2006). The preceding study typically guides the subsequent one (Morse & Chung, 2003), and this study follows the same pattern. In addition, the studies I-III adopted different approaches to the data.

In Study I, the research approach employed netnography, and the data consisted of online blog posts selected for the study using carefully planned criteria specific to netnography. Netnography was chosen as the research method because it examines online social communications and interactions from a human perspective (Kozinets, 2002) and acts as downloadable secondary data available on the internet (Gholamhosseinzadeh et al., 2021). The approach was found to be suitable for studying a social media-related dataset, specifically blog posts, to identify aspects of food bloggers’ relationships with food.

In Study II, I analyzed the data using a theory-based content analysis method, which resembles a qualitative survey study. The second research data consists of survey data collected via email from food bloggers chosen using the same criteria as those in the first research data, specifically the blog posts. In this data collection, food bloggers were asked to answer an email questionnaire (e.g., Michaelidou &

Dibbs, 2006). This qualitative survey study was based on the results of Study I and aimed to deepen the understanding gained through Study I, expanding it with a perspective on the agency of food bloggers.

Study III used both data sets, blog posts, and an email survey, to describe how Finnish food bloggers produce discourses about well-being. Following the results of Studies I and II, it seemed meaningful to examine the well-being of food bloggers using PERMA to gain a deeper understanding of the factors affecting food bloggers' relationship with food. Study III complemented the multi-method design with the discursive psychological branch of discourse analysis (e.g., Edwards, 1999). Its purpose was to study how social reality is constructed with language by food bloggers.

According to Cresswell (2007), combining information can occur in data collection, analysis, or interpretation of research results in the multi-method approach. The methods can also be used separately or integrated (e.g., Cresswell, 2009). This study utilized and collected two different types of research data at various times. It also used three different analysis methods. The choice of a multi-method approach also reflects the current time, as it is gaining popularity, according to Teddlie and Tashakkori (2012) and Vivek and Nanthagopan (2021). Vivek and Nanthagopan (2021) state that while the multi-method approach can incorporate various techniques, it remains focused on a single objective.

### **3.3 Data Collection Procedures and Participants**

#### **3.3.1 Blog posts**

In studies I and III, the research data consisted of posts on food blogs in November 2017. The natural research data, as presented in the blog posts, was selected and collected during the spring of 2018. All the selected blog posts in the data are from November. The month was chosen based on neutrality: it can appropriately represent everyday life and celebration. November is one of the so-called bare months, lacking long holidays (in comparison to, for example, December). Furthermore, there are no high holidays in November in Finland, unlike in the USA, where there is a Thanksgiving holiday. In Finland, Father's Day is celebrated in November, but it is a one-day event, not a several-day-long holiday season like Christmas.

When selecting the blogs included in the netnographic data collection, I aimed to establish a criterion that was free from researcher bias. Therefore, I decided to lean on Finnish food blogs, which have been noted as exciting and representative of a widespread genre. The ten women-written blogs have been selected from the 2017 Ruokablogi TOP10 list. In choosing men's food blogs, the blog is defined according to the same criteria as in Cision's listing: 1) the blog is presumably Finnish, 2) the content of the blog is in reverse chronological order, 3) the blog is

updated regularly; at least three times a month, 4) users can comment on its content, and 5) the content of the blog is created by recognizable a group of individuals or an individual. Additionally, the selection was based on the fact that the blogs were updated regularly, more often than three times per month. Altogether, 16 blogs were considered to provide sufficient and rich research data. The blogs are introduced in Publication 1.

Writing a food blog post typically consists of a title, text, images, recipe, and reader comments. The blog post data is exciting and extensive, comprising 257 Microsoft Word pages. The number of pages and post material does not include readers' comments, images, or videos related to blog posts. One blog post is approximately two A4 pages long without accompanying pictures, videos, and comments. I limited the data to blog posts only because I wanted to focus on the bloggers' perspectives.

In this dataset, each blogger writes on average, 6–12 times per month. It is possible to roll back all blog posts, in which case the posts belonging to the month in question can be picked up from the blog. Some bloggers engage in visible commercial cooperation with various companies, which can influence the content of their blogs. Since bloggers support themselves through various commercial collaborations, blog posts written for advertising purposes are included in the data.

The purpose of this data was to understand food bloggers' relationship with food and to explore how this relationship is portrayed in food blogs (Study I). In this study, I laid the groundwork for examining the nature of food bloggers' relationships with food in more detail and collecting additional research data through an email survey. In a multi-method approach, the second research data collection can subordinate the first research data and its analysis (e.g., Borrego et al., 2009; Cresswell, 2009).

### **3.3.2 Email Survey**

In the second phase of data collection, I collected the research data for Studies II and III through an email survey. It was chosen to effectively reach many bloggers (Best & Harrison, 2009) because it was assumed that food bloggers primarily communicate in writing, based on their blogging practices (e.g., Bjerke, 2012; Amri et al., 2021). A well-designed survey is an effective research method (e.g., Boynton, 2004). After carefully studying food blogging as an activity, I understood that email surveys were the best way to reach food blog authors across Finland.

The survey (in Appendices 1 and 2) was based on the analysis of the food blog posts of Study I. Thus, the survey's questions (N = 12) about food bloggers and their relationship with food were formed around positive relationships with food, values, experiences, innovativeness, and well-being. In addition, the survey consisted of statements and open-ended questions that focused on the various forms of agency (forethought, intentionality, self-reactiveness, and self-reflection) (e.g., Bandura 2001; Chapter 2.2 in this study).

The bloggers were asked to evaluate the following statements with a sliding scale between 1 and 10 (1 = Not at all. 10 = Describes me very well) and then explain their choices in their own words:

1. In my food blog, I bring up how food influences my mental and physical health.
2. I get inspiration for my recipes and food blogging from the media and around the world.
3. My relationship with food is based on the values that are important to me.
4. My food blogging emerged from my positive relationship with food and eating.
5. My positive relationship with food is an outcome of my passion for food and eating.
6. A multisensory pleasure typifies my relationship with food.
7. I hope that my food blog inspires readers to develop their relationship with food in a more multicultural direction.
8. In my food blog, I want to promote my readers' understanding of the connection between well-being and the relationship with food.
9. With food blogging, I want to promote my readers' positive relationship with food and eating.
10. My food blog transmits my food-related experiences to the readers.
11. I want to share the food-related values that I find important to my readers.
12. With food blogging, I can inspire readers to prepare food by themselves.

Then, the survey included four open-ended questions: (1) How has your food blog influenced the development of your relationship with food? Describe with practical examples. (2) How does your food blog influence your readers' relationship with food? Describe with practical examples.; (3) How would you like to see your blog influence your readers' relationship with food? 4) What does the joy of food and eating mean to you? Together, the statements and open-ended questions encouraged food bloggers to consider their social media actions from different perspectives, so that their answers would reveal their perceptions of their agency.

Online surveys often face limitations in generalizability, which requires a clearly defined and representative sample (Singh & Sagar, 2021). In this study, the target group was explicitly specified as follows. When searching for suitable food bloggers to participate in this study, I used the [parhaatruokablogit.fi](http://parhaatruokablogit.fi) website, which has listed food and baking blogs in Finnish since 2018. Additionally, food bloggers can submit their food blogs through this platform. I was looking for food and baking blogs on the site that would meet the criteria selected in the first study phase and set by Cision: 1) the blog is presumably Finnish, 2) the content of the blog is in reverse chronological order, 3) the blog is updated regularly; at least three times a month,

4) users can comment on its content, and 5) the content of the blog is created by recognizable a group of individuals or an individual. The fifth criterion was clarified during this data collection phase: the blogger has openly declared their email address on their blog. I began data collection at the end of May 2021 by approaching 32 food bloggers, some of whom had already participated in the initial research data collection.

I approached the food bloggers who met the criteria above via email, informing them of the study's purpose (see the Covering Letter in Appendices 3 and 4). In the email, I informed them about the purpose and expectations of the data collection, which was intended to motivate them to respond to the email survey (e.g., also Hamilton & Bowers, 2006). In designing the survey, I focused on the wording of the questions, the survey's context, and its length, as these factors influence the reliability of the results (e.g., Bjerke, 2012; Dale, 2006). I paid particular attention to the choice of words and the clarity and tone of the questions and statements (e.g., Amri et al., 2021; Cozby et al., 2012). I shared a link to the survey with Webropol in the same study invitation message. In the email, I expressed appreciation for food bloggers and their work and invited them to participate in a vital survey (e.g., Petrovic, 2016). I allowed the bloggers to ask the researcher for more information about the study, and a few food bloggers inquired about where they could view the results in the future. The survey could be completed via phone, tablet, or computer, with a response time of two weeks.

In the middle of the two weeks and a few days before the end of the two-week response period, I sent a reminder message to the food bloggers to encourage them to complete the survey. The reminders were sent to all the food bloggers who were invited as respondents, as I was unable to determine which of the group's food bloggers had already completed the survey due to its anonymity. I continued data collection by approaching 16 new food bloggers every week in June 2021, until I reached the goal of 15 respondents by midsummer. I used the same invitation message and survey link every time.

Ultimately, 19 food bloggers responded to the email survey. In studies II and III, I identified the answers of different food bloggers with codes FB1–FB19 so that the answers of the same blogger could be combined. However, the responses cannot be linked to the food bloggers' personal information. Thus, the food bloggers who answered the survey were not identified because the survey did not ask for the respondents' personal information.

The purpose of this set of data, the email survey, was to deepen the netnographic data and expand the understanding of the research phenomenon (e.g., also Golafshani, 2003), providing new insights into how Finnish food bloggers perceive their agency when describing their relationship with food in their food blogs. The purpose of the second data was also to examine the food bloggers' perceptions of the meaning of their food blogs.

## 3.4 Data analyses

### 3.4.1 Study I: Qualitative Analysis of Netnographic Blog Post Data

Netnography was chosen as the research approach for Study I. Netnography is an ethnographic research approach applied to online communities and social media applications (e.g., Kozinets, 2010). Netnography, also known as digital ethnography, network ethnography, online ethnography, cyber-ethnography, or virtual ethnography, is a new research method with roots in anthropology and marketing-related research (e.g., Morais et al., 2020). Netnography can be considered a response to the shift in human interaction in postmodern times, characterized by online social interaction and the blurring of private and public spheres (e.g., Morais et al., 2020). In it, research participants can be observed in their natural operating environments (e.g., Isomäki et al., 2013).

I collected data by compiling and observing the online blog data in Study I. I was not involved in the interaction of the blogging community, which is not typical in traditional ethnographic research (e.g., Rastas, 2007; cf. Madden, 2010). This method is also referred to as passive analysis (e.g., Eysenbach & Till, 2001) or a non-participatory approach, in which the netnographer observes users' communication activities to address the research questions by extracting pertinent information (Gholamhosseinzadeh et al., 2021).

There are six steps in the netnographic research process, just like in the traditional ethnographic research process. The netnographic analysis progresses through immersion to data categorization, category comparisons, category naming, and final definitions of categories (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012; Vaismoradi et al., 2013). Gholamhosseinzadeh et al. (2021) refer to the steps as *entrée*, data collection, analysis, research ethics, and member check, which is not often included in the netnographic research process due to its observational nature. In netnography, the stages of data analysis frequently overlap as the researcher continually revisits the data and categories. Typically, the initial steps involve planning the research and immersing oneself in the online community. In Study I, we started the first phase by reviewing the chosen blog post data.

The third and fourth steps involve data collection and analysis. In Study I, the blog post data was divided into four large parts, each containing the articles of four bloggers. Second, data examples representing the cornerstones of the food relationship were identified. Then, data examples representing the cornerstones of the food relationship were found. In the categorization phase, I focused on how food bloggers describe their relationship with food through their expressions of values, food choices, and other food-related activities. Eventually, the chosen theme needed to appear in 7 to 8 food bloggers' blog posts to qualify as research findings. These themes established the framework for categorizing and defining the findings (e.g., Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). This stage resulted in the identification of the primary

categories of findings. The fifth step involves considering ethical perspectives, and the final step entails presenting and evaluating the research results (e.g., Isomäki et al., 2013; Kozinets, 2010), which I present in Publication I.

### **3.4.2 Study II: Bandura's Theory-based Qualitative Content Analysis of the Survey Data**

In Study II, the analysis followed the basic structure of theory-based qualitative content analysis, beginning with the identification of meaningful units and proceeding to themes and categorizations (Mayring, 2000). The method used can also be referred to as *abductive content analysis* or a *directed approach* (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). In a directed approach, the analysis begins with a theoretical framework or pertinent research findings that guide the development of initial codes (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Additionally, the theory can assist in forecasting intriguing variables or the relationships among different variables (Borhani et al., 2015). By selecting this analysis method, I wanted to ensure that the study would not remain at the level of simply describing perspectives and structuring based on everyday understanding. Abduction is a continuous process in which accessible alternatives are suspected, and an attempt is made to heuristically map all possible explanatory models (e.g., Timmermans & Tavory, 2012).

In Study II, the research data analysis consisted of five parts: *immersion, classification of the material, comparison of classifications, naming of categories, and definition of categories*. These steps are typical of any content analysis method. In reality, the stages of analysis were not distinguishable from one another and were not precisely defined (e.g., Vaismoradi et al., 2013). The similarities and differences in food bloggers' perceptions were combined and organized, resulting in 11 categories based on the data. Subsequently, a reflection on Bandura's theory of human agency (2001) was conducted, with the themes that emerged from the analysis being organized according to the key elements of agency. The analysis concentrated on the perceptions and meanings that food bloggers attributed to their actions on social media (Harris, 2011; Roller, 2019), which were classified into the four categories outlined in Bandura's theory of human agency.

### **3.4.3 Study III: PERMA-Based Discourse Analysis of Two Data Sets**

In Study III, both research data sets were analyzed using discourse analysis. Discourse analysis seeks to uncover the underlying power structures, social norms, ideologies, and identities that shape language use. The method can be applied to examine political speeches, media discourses, organizational communication, or social media discussions (Taylor, 2001; Vásquez & Liska, 2023). According to Jones (2023), when studying social media, discourse analysts primarily focus on the semiotic aspects, such as examining how discursive resources and the social meanings and norms of interaction evolve within various online social networks.

In Study III, analytic discourse analysis was employed to investigate how everyday language and communication styles related to food are significant within the social media contexts in which food bloggers engage. The discourse research approach was chosen because, according to previous research on social media, the theoretical and analytical flexibility of discourse analysis is well-suited to analyzing communication in an ever-changing online environment (Koteyko & Hunt, 2018). Jones and Alony (2008) also recommend blogs for discourse analysis because bloggers often have highly developed writing skills. Consequently, the words and language they choose can offer valuable insights into the significance and complexity of a specific topic (Jones & Alony, 2008). Discourse analysis provides valuable insights into digital health communication (Koteyko & Hunt, 2018), and thus presumably also into well-being communication.

Discourse analysis can be both a qualitative and a quantitative research method, depending on the research objectives and the nature of the research data (Taylor, 2001). In this study, a qualitative research method was employed. It can include, for example, text analysis, conversation analysis, rhetorical analysis, and discursive psychology (Taylor, 2001; Parker, 2013). In their blog posts and survey answers, food bloggers reveal their attitudes, emotions, and intentions, which my analysis represents within the discursive psychological branch of discourse analysis (e.g., Edwards, 1999). The core idea was to study how social reality is constructed with language by food bloggers. Wodak and Meyer (2009) connect discourse analysis to a multi-methodological endeavor, which aligns with this study. The worldview in discourse analysis leans toward *social constructionism* (Creswell, 2009). Thus, discourse analysis aims to uncover how reality is produced (Hardy et al., 2004).

I conducted a PERMA-based discourse analysis of two data sets in Study III. The five categories outlined by the PERMA theory were utilized to identify language related to well-being, serving as the framework for this study. The analysis unfolded in three phases to explore how bloggers discuss their relationship with food within the PERMA categories: positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishments. The first phase involved a content review of the two data sets and a comparison of the findings to five categories outlined in the PERMA theory. The second phase examined these categories at the textual level and deepened them by drawing on previous literature and research. As a result, the discourses about well-being and relationship with food were formed and introduced as research results in Study III.

### **3.5 Researcher's Position**

In this chapter, I describe my background and its impact on the design of this study. Berger (2015) states that reflexivity is a significant strategy for quality control in qualitative research. Self-reflexivity is linked to social constructionism, which posits

that knowledge is context-dependent (Burck, 2005). As a result, researchers are called to take responsibility for their positionality in the research process (Burck, 2005). Additionally, in ethnographic research, the researcher's subjectivity is always present (e.g., Peltokorpi et al., 2012), especially in netnographic research, where the researcher serves as the research instrument of their study (e.g., Kozinets, 2002). Therefore, I describe the characteristics and experiences of the researcher. I am a university-educated linguist, a foreign language teacher in higher education, and a mother in my late 30s. When choosing a research topic, I was interested in the intersection of food trends and the dominant social media landscape of 2020, and I found this research's layout exciting due to its novelty. Before the study, I had no experience with blogging, nor was I actively following any of them.

Adopting an outsider perspective provides a more objective view of the realities (Xu, 2016). Concerning my focus group, food bloggers, I was an outsider. Additionally, Finn-ARMA (2025) suggests that the researcher's position concerning the research subjects should play a central role in ethical reflection, especially in situations where the researcher examines social media as a social media user (Finn-ARMA, 2025). I do not have any social media profiles, and not participating in social media may impact the conclusions of my study. If I were an active social media user, I might have experience and understanding concerning social media that I currently lack. However, everyone has a special and lifelong relationship with food, including the researcher, which may have influenced the study design and its conclusions as well.

Mohler and Rudman (2022) state that the subjectivity of a qualitative researcher can contribute to the research, but it requires a commitment to ongoing critical reflexivity regarding one's positionality. Berger (2015) categorizes the benefits and challenges of reflexivity into three types based on the researcher's position: (1) reflexivity when the researcher shares experiences with the study participants, (2) reflexivity when the researcher transitions from an outsider to an insider during the study, and (3) reflexivity when the researcher lacks personal familiarity or experience with the topic being investigated. Considering my background as a researcher, I am an independent researcher with novice status and no prior knowledge of food well-being, which aligns with Berger's (2015) third reflexivity. However, I was conducting studies I-III for my dissertation research under the supervision of my PhD advisor.

Although a doctoral thesis is usually the writer's first and one-of-a-kind experience in an academic field, I had already published some scientific articles concerning my other fields of interest, such as language learning and game design. To deepen my understanding of the research phenomenon in this study and to improve the study, I studied nutritional science during the research process. Timmermans and Tavory (2012) emphasize that the researcher's perceptiveness is insufficient to capture the research phenomenon, as it exceeds the researcher's observational capabilities. The structure of the entire study, including its design, implementation, analysis,

results, and interpretation, has been influenced by my understanding of the research phenomenon and my perspective on it. The study might look very different if another researcher with another background had implemented it. However, I have tried to describe the research data collection and analysis in detail to improve the study's reproducibility.

### **3.6 Risks and benefits of the research data**

Scientific practices are continually evolving, with openness, transparency, and accountability becoming central goals of modern research (Haapanen & Rydenfelt, 2025). Social media poses unique challenges due to its dynamic and rapidly changing nature (Terkamo-Moisio et al., 2016). To address this, the Finnish expert network Finn-ARMA (2025) developed a draft framework of ten ethical and methodological milestones for researching social media data: research question, platform terms, content providers, personal data, consent, publicity, risks, ethical review, data retention, and transparency/publication.

This study approaches the milestones as research ethics checkpoints. In this chapter, I reflect on these milestones, aiming to strengthen the credibility of the study and clarify how social media content was handled as research data. It is essential to understand that this study utilized two different datasets, one from social media and the other from an online questionnaire, each with distinct ethical concerns.

Regarding Milestone (1), the research question, this study focuses on the phenomenon of food blogging, rather than individuals, analyzing food blog posts and survey responses to explore the effects of food blogging on well-being. However, it is essential to discuss the impacts and consequences of using social media data in research, and food bloggers must be considered as information producers for this study. Some scholars argue that when individuals are treated as research subjects, a higher level of confidentiality is required. However, if they are regarded as authors, the expectation of privacy is reduced (e.g., Madge, 2007; Warrell & Jacobsen, 2014). In this study, food bloggers are considered more as producers or informants than as research subjects, suggesting that the expectation of privacy is relatively low.

For Milestone 2, the study assessed the terms of use of blog platforms, which serve as the archive of the information and data of this research. The platforms can limit data access to protect the privacy of the users or the commercial interests of the platform (Kosonen et al., 2018). Rapid changes in platform policies pose challenges for researchers and ethics committees (Fält, 2016; Zimmer & Kinder-Kurlanda, 2017). For example, this study was conducted over almost 10 years. It raises the question: Should the researcher consider those terms of use that were valid when the data were collected or those terms that are valid when the study is published? Because *General Data Protection Regulation* was launched in 2018, after the data

was collected, the researcher chose to review the terms of use that were valid at the time of publishing the research. Often, food blog platforms were unidentified or the terms of use lacked clear research guidelines; in such cases, the absence of restrictions was taken as permission for research use.

For Milestone 3, which focuses on social media content creators, the study utilizes only textual material; therefore, image and video copyrights are not applicable. The text content adheres to standard copyright rules and requires proper citation (Kontkanen, 2016; STT, 2025). Although the study respects citation rights, ethical concerns about participants' privacy remain (Mustola & Kiili, 2019). Since the research focuses on positive well-being effects of food blogging and does not involve high-risk personal data, a formal data protection impact assessment is deemed unnecessary (Finnish Data Protection Commissioner, 2025), however, food bloggers may hold different views on authorship and confidentiality (Kuula, 2005), as well as privacy and publicity (Pienimäki & Kotilainen, 2018), as the researcher.

Regarding Milestone 4, personal data was not collected or presented in this study. While some quoted blog excerpts can be traced back to their sources via search engines, the quotes themselves contain no sensitive or identifying information. In a related survey, no personal data was requested, ensuring that responses cannot be linked to individual bloggers. Although some blogs may contain self-published personal information, the study itself does not process such data. As a result, neither a preliminary assessment nor a data protection impact assessment is required, and the anonymized approach also supports the generalizability of the findings (Schwandt & Gates, 2018).

Regarding Milestone 5, consent, this study addresses the ethical considerations of using publicly available blog content. In an academic context, there is no distinct agreement on what is public and private on the Internet (Pienimäki & Kotilainen, 2018), and scholars disagree on when consent is required for online material, as public availability does not imply unrestricted use (McKee & Porter, 2009; Kontkanen, 2016). In social media research, the researcher bears ethical responsibility, especially when there is no direct interaction with content creators (Finn-ARMA, 2025). The study utilized blog posts from 16 adult food bloggers and survey responses from 19 participants, all of whom were informed via email. No objections were raised, and platform terms did not prohibit research use. Survey participation was voluntary. While consent is considered good ethical practice (Matzner & Ochs, 2017), it may also create a perceived sense of control and privacy.

Regarding Milestone 6, publicity, it is reasonable to assume that food bloggers intentionally made their blog posts public and do not view them as private, given the content and accessibility (Kosonen et al., 2018). Similarly, survey responses were submitted voluntarily, while also informing the bloggers about the use of their blogs for research, thereby indicating their awareness of the contribution they made.

Bloggers also retain control over the visibility of their blog posts, which are accessible without requiring a login.

Researchers may avoid ethically sensitive topics due to potential conflicts (Mustola & Kiili, 2019). In this study, Milestone 7 assesses the risks to food bloggers, audiences, and the researcher, concluding that the risk is low, as subjects are not vulnerable and the data are mostly publicly available (Kosonen et al., 2018; Finn-ARMA, 2025). Risks are weighed against societal benefits, with harm to the community unlikely but not impossible (Mäkelä, 2010). The study does not require ethical review (Milestone 8) because it adheres to informed consent principles and avoids potential physical harm (TENK, 2021). Key ethical concerns, such as vulnerability or stigma, do not apply (Ahteensuu, 2019). Since participants were informed and the data are predominantly public, no further ethical approval is required.

Milestone 9 concerns the storage of research data (Finn-ARMA, 2025), including food blog posts and survey responses. Online survey tools, such as Webropol, offer secure and real-time data storage (Nayak & Narayan, 2019). While survey data handling is straightforward, the storage of large volumes of social media content, such as blog posts, lacks clear ethical guidelines (Fält, 2016). In this study, publicly available blogs and anonymous survey responses were stored on the researcher's personal computer. Archiving social media content is not considered a copyright violation, although platform terms may evolve (Fält, 2016). Because blog availability depends on platform and author discretion, archiving the data supports research. The survey could be re-implemented. This study meets reproducibility standards (Reito et al., 2020). In this study, data was copied to a Word file and will be securely deleted after use using methods like overwriting or magnetizing (University of Turku, 2025). As only one researcher was involved in storing the data, data security risks were minimal (Nayak & Narayan, 2019).

The final milestone, Milestone 10, Openness and Publication (Finn-ARMA, 2025), involves publishing this doctoral dissertation in the University of Lapland's Acta Electronica series. To protect the privacy of food bloggers, their blog names have been omitted. The publication uses a respectful writing style toward both the bloggers and the food blogging community (TENK, 2018). Since part of the research material comes from online content, the original blog posts cannot be altered or deleted by the researcher. They may remain permanently accessible online (Tietoarkisto, 2024). Within the publication of this study, some quotes from the data are included in the dissertation report, even though the original blog with its content might be deleted.

## 4 RESULTS

### 4.1 Study I: Food Blogging Representing the Relationship with Food

Study I: “*What can be learned about the relationship with food in food blogs?*” *A netnographic analysis of Finnish food bloggers’ posts on social media* was published in the International Journal of Media, Technology and Lifelong Learning in 2023. It aimed to describe how Finnish food bloggers depict their relationship with food in their food blogs. The research question was: How does the relationship with food appear in Finnish food blogs? The data was from blog posts, and the research method was netnography. The study resulted in four categories: 1) Food- and eating-related values, 2) Innovativeness and experimental approach, 3) Positive eating-related multi-sensory experiences and memories, and 4) Social elements of eating.

In the first category, *food- and eating-related values*, the relationship with food was presented through the values and ethical choices the food bloggers revealed in their texts. Values such as healthy, natural, economic, ecological, and local availability were mentioned. The bloggers also seemed to associate these values with the quality of food. Additionally, well-being trends could be identified as the values bloggers wanted to express in their posts.

The availability of ingredients was also a popular topic in blog posts. While the bloggers valued seasonal products, they regretted that some ingredients or spices were unavailable. However, the latter often led to innovative experiments that served as new recipes. In addition to appreciating quality and local ingredients, the bloggers also considered that readers wanted to read about their choices and new recipes.

The bloggers paid attention to ecological choices and food waste. This value was also evident in how they encouraged their readers to lessen food waste and offered tips for concrete actions. Some bloggers also mentioned their vegan recipes as ecological choices.

The relationship between health and well-being with food was evident in blog posts reporting actions that enhanced health, such as having one vegetarian day a week or choosing a specific diet. Some ingredients were selected for their use in recipes or recommended to readers for their health benefits. The health-based relationship with food was also evident with healthy recipes and an emphasis on balanced meals. Many bloggers were aware of nutrition recommendations and wanted to incorporate them into everyday dining. They could, for example, write about how much they eat fish, the significance of protein for health, and adding vegetables to meals, as well

as how to decrease their consumption of sugars and sweets. Yet, they did not say it was easy to follow dietary recommendations. However, the bloggers spared certain ingredients and used them to freeze meals for quick everyday dining, ensuring they had meals when they were too busy to prepare.

“The chaos with small children is a little bit more organized if you have the freezer arranged so that it has sections for snacks and ready meals. You do not have to go to the store more than once a week. - - So you will not be doing panic shopping for expensive snack bars or yogurts. P.S. And if you sometimes use processed meals, I suppose that won't harm anyone. Even we have fish sticks, dumplings, and frozen pizza!” (FB10)

The second category, *innovativeness and experimental approach*, represents the food bloggers' relationships with food and is concerned with the innovative and experimental approaches they express. It appeared through a strong interest in international cuisine. Recipes from around the world inspired the bloggers, who participated in various food projects and tastings, and took food and tasting excursions abroad. They sought to expand their knowledge of international cuisine, develop new recipes, and share their expertise on their blogs. The bloggers sought to enrich traditional Finnish cuisine with new flavors and ingredients.

“In our Christmas dinner, we have often had meals inspired by Middle Eastern cuisine. Spices and ingredients typical to the Middle East slid into the Finnish Christmas table perfectly!” (FB2)

The innovative and experimental approach was also described by calling preparing food an important hobby. This also explains the nature of the relationship with food. The blog posts' descriptions were enthusiastic, and this enthusiasm was evident in daily activities. The food bloggers also experimented with new ways of preparing meals, such as with household appliances. Some bloggers also got new appliances or other tools from their sponsors. Regardless of where the new appliance came from, the joy of trying something new was something the bloggers wanted to share with their readers.

Innovation and experimentation emerged, particularly in blog posts, featuring weekend and festive cooking. The bloggers spared plenty of time to prepare meals, which could have been done in several phases. Thus, preparation also requires planning; sometimes, it starts days before serving the weekend meal. The bloggers seemed to enjoy the challenges presented by new ingredients or complex, multi-phased recipes in the kitchen.

The third category, *positive eating-related multi-sensory experiences and memories* revealed a new perspective on the food bloggers' relationship with food. The bloggers expressed multiple expectations toward food and eating. For example, eating at a

restaurant was expected to provide a holistic food experience that was unusual and different from everyday cooking. These experiences were mentioned not only as gustatory but also visual and social.

“In my opinion, the table setting is like half the meal, and a beautiful table is a joy to the eye. Pentik’s dinner set has been on our table since my childhood. The set has varied from the 1970s Halla series to the modern ones. This year I tried mixing colors and various patterns more boldly.” (FB1)

The experience was based on the food, its context, and how it was served. Food bloggers sought tips from cookbooks, for example, and evaluated others’ servings when dining at restaurants. Many bloggers wanted to share essential activities, such as preparing the table setting and the meal, and sharing traditions with their children or followers.

Food and eating-related experiences were also memories and expressions of food identity, thus forming an essential part of the relationship with food. Bloggers often described their memories as positive and memorable. Present-day dining is expected to create food-related memories, thereby fostering a lasting relationship with food.

The bloggers described feasting on food or having snacks. Their descriptions of eating were positive, and eating was expected to bring pleasure primarily. The bloggers were also aware of their preferences and often described them. They wrote how they loved certain foods and expressed their feelings toward food and eating with numerous positive feelings.

The fourth category, *social elements of eating*, was so significant in food blogs that it could be defined as an essential part of the relationship with food. The social elements were discussed in various ways. For example, alongside introducing recipes, the bloggers constantly mentioned, either directly or implicitly, that they had company or prepared food for a larger group of eaters. Serving and table-setting tips were often described from a social viewpoint. The bloggers also met each other occasionally, and some of them became friends with their readers. Food and eating brought people together.

“The chocolate house became a train station, and the children could decorate the roof with little sugar stars and Non-Stop chocolate drops. The house did not turn into the world’s most stylish one, but it looks like we and the children had fun building it. The funniest phase was probably the last one, which was the powdered sugar rain that covered the train station and the conductors as well as the nearby spruce forest.” (FB9)

In addition, preparing food with children, other family members, or friends was mentioned often, which also required some planning. Sharing an enthusiasm for trying new recipes or methods was described as an essential part of the relationship

with food. The social element was apparent, especially among those bloggers who had children. They seemed to prepare meals their children liked, but they also highlighted their role in providing food memories. They wanted to share their childhood traditions and educate them about maintaining a healthy relationship with food. Eating with children gave the bloggers a new viewpoint and a turning point in their relationship with food.

## Evaluation of Study I

The use of a netnographic approach and blog data in this study may raise questions about its reliability and credibility (e.g., Rageh & Melewar, 2013). As ethnographic research has moved online, the traditional understanding of data collection as a participatory and interactive process has shifted (Kotilainen, 2018). Morais et al. (2020) identify key challenges in netnography, including the difficulty of applying traditional ethical standards—especially obtaining informed consent (Chapter 5)—and the complexity of distinguishing public from private content, as well as verifying the authenticity of information and user profiles. Consequently, the data collection in Study I did not follow conventional ethnographic data collection steps (Chapter 3.3.1).

The informed consent concerning the food bloggers is discussed in Chapter 5. However, I emphasize that in netnographic research, the researcher typically remains a passive observer, refraining from interacting with the online community and concealing their research purpose (Mkono & Markwell, 2014). The use of netnography can thus be seen as limiting opportunities to verify interpretations directly with bloggers (e.g., Kananen, 2017; Eskola & Suoranta, 1998). Researchers have also criticized netnography for its limited control over the composition of the study sample, as well as the absence of predefined tools such as questionnaires, interview protocols, observation frameworks, or systematic data collection strategies (Prior & Miller, 2012).

These limitations may introduce potential biases into the findings, which can be particularly problematic when attempting to generalize the results to a broader population (Prior & Miller, 2012). This study addresses the challenges by stating that such non-interaction with participants aligns with the method's emphasis on discretion and objectivity (e.g., Thanh & Kirova, 2018) and stating that the technique does not initially seek common understanding but one possible interpretation (Kozinets, 2010) and clearly articulating the sample selection criteria (Chapter 3.3.1).

The use of blog data may raise concerns about reliability, including the authenticity and sincerity of blog posts, given potential influences from sponsors, audience expectations (Jones, 2023; Wildemuth, 2009), or, more recently, the incorporation of AI technologies (Kaisen et al., 2024). This study addresses the concerns by noting that the data collected is from 2017, before the advent of AI tools. This study also

argues that because social interactions often overlap with real life, blogs tend to reflect honest opinions valued within the blogosphere (Jones & Alony, 2008; Cesiri, 2020). This study examines food blogs as a means of life publication (Östman, 2015; Östman & Turtiainen, 2016).

Wildemith (2009) supports the argument by noting that individuals tend to behave naturally and without self-censorship when unaware that their actions may later become subjects of study, thereby enhancing the authenticity of their behavior. Hence, the blog data is often considered free from researcher influence (Jones & Alony, 2008). I promote these arguments by stating that the method aligns with the characteristics of the current digital era and social media, where narrative content, especially in food blogs, reflects lived experiences (Morais et al., 2020; Niiniluoto, 1994; Niskanen, 1994).

To still confirm the successful choice of netnography, analysis of the data revealed no inconsistencies between sponsored content (e.g., product presentation) and the bloggers' typical style or insights, suggesting alignment between the two (Artman, 2018). Additionally, this data demonstrates quality by including only blogs with a high number of readers. For example, Lovink (2013) ranks blogs without comments as the lowest rung of the new Internet hierarchy. The specific criteria in blog selection offer a level of reliability for the data blogs as a source of information in this study (Jones & Alony, 2008). In summary, Study I employed netnography due to its effectiveness in capturing authentic and diverse perspectives on the research phenomenon, as bloggers voluntarily share their views online without being aware of being observed (Mkono et al., 2013).

## 4.2 Study II: Agency in Food Blogs

Study II: "*Presenting your relationship with food online: An analysis of Finnish food bloggers' agency in social media*" was published in Media Education Research Journal in 2024. It aimed to analyze the meanings Finnish food bloggers give to their blog activities. The research question was: How do Finnish food bloggers perceive their agency when describing their relationship with food in their food blogs? Bandura's theory of human agency was used in the analysis process. The data used in the analysis were the results of the email survey, and the research method employed was qualitative content analysis. This study resulted in four categories: 1) Intentionality, 2) Forethought, 3) Self-Reactiveness, and 4) Self-Reflectiveness.

The first category, *intentionality*, was evident in the descriptions of the meaning behind the food bloggers' actions. It was divided into three themes: Inspiration to others, Diversifying the food culture, and Sharing food-related values.

Inspiring the readers to cook made food blogging meaningful to the bloggers. Food bloggers can be divided into two groups: those motivated by readers' feedback

and those who trust themselves as a model for home cooks. Readers' feedback was found to be important as readers shared successful cooking experiences with the recipes published by the bloggers. However, not all bloggers explicitly mentioned their intentions. For some food bloggers, one reason for blogging was to share their food experiences and passion for cooking and eating. For this group, the blog was considered a diary for the food bloggers, while the reader was seen as a passive recipient. Food bloggers were seen as active participants, and writing about their experiences in the blog was one way to relive and enjoy them. Most of these food bloggers did not intentionally consider the influence of their blog posts on readers regarding their food experiences.

“The log in my blog shows that people return to the old posts because of the good recipe. I have been blogging for 8 years already, and many classics are the most read weekly according to Analytics.” (FB19)

Foreign food cultures, trends, discussions, and social media have influenced and inspired food bloggers. Most bloggers appreciate multicultural food relationships and say they intentionally encourage readers to learn about dishes from other food cultures. However, some bloggers are unfamiliar with the concept of embracing a multicultural relationship with food. Still, they vary in their contemplations of multicultural content in their blogging.

Food bloggers wanted to share their food-related values in their blogs. They valued local food and food hygiene. However, it seemed possible that not all food bloggers saw the connection between their values and their food activities. When cooking and blogging, they just felt they were doing things they enjoyed.

The second category, *forethought*, appeared more like thoughts about the outcomes of specific actions. It was divided into three themes: A Delight for Food, Pleasing with Food, and Supporting Others' Positive Relationship with Food.

Food delights consisted of tastes, aesthetics, and a creative process. The pleasure was derived from high-quality ingredients and cooking with them on the correct scale. Good food was considered to be healthy, diverse, and reasonable. Bloggers described how much they enjoyed eating food and wished the readers could enjoy it as much as they did. It was essential to use all the senses while eating for maximum pleasure. The aesthetically arranged meal joyed bloggers, and it was mentioned when discussing senses. Aesthetics was one of the most essential parts of the so-called 'joy of food.' Food bloggers found it incredibly joyful to prepare good food for others—the cooking process itself—and to share it with others, making them enjoy it. The positive feedback supported their enthusiasm to cook. The feeling of know-how was considered like a 'crown of creativity' and activeness in the kitchen.

Pleasing others meant offering joy to others with self-made dinners. It showed how much one cared for the family; serving a self-made meal was considered a gift

(Sidenvall et al., 2000). Making readers serve self-made food to others was seen as one of the most critical objectives of food blogging. In this social media era, giving food as a gift can also be virtual; bloggers publish tasty yet straightforward recipes and share food photos, and readers send messages or pictures of meals prepared using the blogger's recipe.

The food bloggers agreed that food blogging is one way to support readers' positive relationships with food, as it can add diversity and innovation to their experiences. For bloggers, innovation meant exploring new ingredients, food preparation styles, recipes, and decorative techniques. Food bloggers believed reading food blogs could bring diversity to their relationships with food. Additionally, desirable and possible effects included positive changes in diet, increased enthusiasm for food, and a shift in one's attitude towards food.

"I hope that my food blog transmits the joy and easiness of cooking [...] - I believe that the positive circle influences positively the relationship with food as well." (FB7)

One desirable positive effect of food blogging is promoting readers' understanding of their relationship to food and the connection between eating and well-being. Some bloggers thought the ideal effect of food blogging was that readers would be brave enough to be themselves with food. They seemed to connect food and food choices with identity and self-esteem. However, some bloggers mentioned that this kind of action in blogging was unintentional because they did not consider readers' thoughts when sharing their recipes and stories.

The third category, *self-reactiveness*, was evident in answers where food bloggers analyzed their food memories and activities and reported changes in their behaviors based on these analyses. It was divided into two themes: Reliving and Reconstructing Food-Related Experiences and The Connection between Wellbeing and the Relationship with Food.

Food blogging allows bloggers to relive positive food-related experiences, supporting a positive relationship with food. Previous research (e.g., Marty et al., 2018) indicates that childhood may have a positive impact on one's relationship with food. For food bloggers, the positive relationship with food and a passion for eating, cooking, and food formed an interactive process. However, when discussing well-being and the relationship with food, the bloggers perceived health as a theme that many did not want to discuss in their blogs. Most bloggers, however, believe that food and cooking have a positive impact on their mental well-being. Additionally, the joy of food, connected to cooking, eating, and social gatherings, was also mentioned in the data. Most bloggers mentioned that simple recipes were more important and meaningful than the potential health consequences of the recipes for their readers.

“Baking means mental well-being to me. During the years, my baking and cooking have taken a healthier direction, and thus physical well-being becomes noticed nowadays.” (FB18)

The fourth category, *self-reflectiveness*, emerged in the food bloggers’ answers as descriptions of their relationship with food, particularly in the development of this relationship, including the desire to create and act innovatively, as well as an emerging awareness of responsibility. The category was divided into two themes: Analyzing the Development of the Relationship with Food and Emerging Awareness of Responsibility.

The food bloggers did not directly recognize the connection between their blogging activities and their relationship with food. However, they said their food blog still reflected their relationship to food and its changes. In their case, it seemed possible that food blogging was more akin to one-way diary keeping, so-called life publishing, and advice giving (Heyd, 2017; Östman, 2008, 2015).

“My relationship with food has always been good and diverse. Perhaps, it has increased awareness: appreciation of the origin of food and impact on climate change.” (FB14)

If the food bloggers had analyzed the changes in their relationship with food, that, according to our interpretation, appeared as an emerging awareness of responsibility. Awareness of responsibility meant, for example, an interest in the origin of ingredients and sharing healthier choices on blogs. When the food bloggers described their responsibility, they highlighted how their behavior in the blogs had also changed.

## Evaluation of Study II

Study II employed email surveys, but despite its aim for thoroughness, it faced limitations, particularly a low participation rate, which is common in online surveys (Nayak & Narayan, 2019; Roberts & Allen, 2015). The small sample of 19 food bloggers limits generalizability but was intended to offer in-depth insights into the phenomenon (e.g., Shenton, 2004).

In qualitative research, the decision regarding sample size is context-specific and partly influenced by the scientific paradigm guiding the study (Boddy, 2016). However, regarding the research data criteria, the research data can be considered qualified since, at the time of study II, in the early 2020s, the number of regular food or baking bloggers in Finland was around 100, i.e., small enough that most bloggers know or know each other. The research data used in Study II has reached about one in five food bloggers. Hence, it can be considered a relatively good sample, especially for in-depth qualitative research (Boddy, 2016). Additionally, Study II employed

clear selection criteria, making the data a reliable representation of the target group (Singh & Sagar, 2021).

The survey was meticulously designed, drawing on established principles regarding the characteristics of effective survey instruments (Amri et al., 2021; Boynton, 2004; Bjerke, 2012; Cozby et al., 2012; Dale, 2006; Hamilton & Bowers, 2006; Petrovic, 2016). Nonetheless, the format and structure of the survey may have shaped both the content of the bloggers' responses and how they reflected on the topics addressed. An alternative data collection method might have yielded different findings or offered additional insights. However, the survey responses were consistent and began to show saturation within the relatively homogenous group (e.g., Boddy, 2016; Malterud, 2001), indicating good data quality (e.g., Golafshani, 2003; Shenton, 2004).

The study applied theory-based qualitative content analysis following established practices (e.g., Mayring, 2000; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). While the method is often used to assess or extend theoretical frameworks (Kibisha, 2019), this study found no reason to challenge Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory (2001); instead, the data aligned well with it (also Mayring, 2019; Potter & Levine-Donnerstein, 1999). However, it is possible the researcher misunderstood the theory (Elo et al., 2014). In any case, data excerpts are included to allow readers to assess the analysis. Although the data may potentially support other well-being-related theories, further research is required (Mayring, 2019). Overall, the dataset is rich and versatile, though the researcher acknowledges its limitations and cautions against overly flexible theoretical interpretations.

### **4.3 Study III: Discourses on Well-Being in Food Blogs**

Study III, "*Food Relationship Discourses Produced By The Finnish Food Bloggers – A PERMA-Based Analysis*," was published in Webology in 2024. It aimed to describe the discourses on food relationships produced by Finnish food bloggers. The research question was how Finnish food bloggers produce discourses about well-being and their relationship with food. The basis for identifying well-being-related speech in the data was PERMA theory. The data were collected from blog posts and email surveys, and the research method employed was theory-based discourse analysis. The study resulted in five discourses: 1) Food relationship discourse of positive emotions, 2) Food relationship discourse of engagement, 3) Food relationship discourse of reciprocal social relationships, 4) Food relationship discourse of meaning, and 5) Food relationship discourse of successes and achievements.

The first discourse, *the food relationship discourse of positive emotions*, was based on the joy food bloggers described when discussing food-related values, cooking, taste sensations, company, aesthetics, and doing things for others that created joy and

delight in them. A critical part of the relationship with food was enjoying food, which appeared as a passive, one-sided activity in which the food blogger emphasized the pure pleasure of enjoying good food. In connection with joy, food bloggers often mention aesthetics and visuals. Aesthetics were also related to multi-sensory experiences. In the food bloggers' perceptions, visuality seemed synonymous with beauty, pleasing the eye with a portion of food. According to this perspective, the food relationship discourse was also constructed visually, bringing positive emotions to bloggers.

The relationship between food and well-being also involves sociability as one aspect of the joy of eating. The pleasure of food, the joy of eating, as it were, doubled if it was possible to share it with others in an instant. Food bloggers prepare food alone and together, but the physical closeness that comes with serving food was also mentioned as a vital source of well-being for them. Food bloggers often prepare food for their loved ones and family, but the peculiarity of food blogging lies in the third party: readers. The food bloggers believed that readers could relate to the positive emotions experienced by the blogger when they read about them on the food blog, and that they might be empowered by doing so.

“[Joy of food] is spending time together in the kitchen with loved ones, food planned and prepared together and also enjoying it together.” (FB11)

The joy that food bloggers described in their discourses about their relationship with food was also accompanied by other positive emotions, such as feelings of enthusiasm and pleasure. They were part of the food bloggers' strong sense of affection for cooking, which in turn conveyed the well-being and positive relationships that food bloggers experienced through food.

The second discourse, *the food relationship discourse of engagement*, was based on food bloggers' passion for food. Food bloggers described themselves as adventurous when it came to food and got excited when learning new things. They explained how it deepened their positive relationship with food and strengthened their enthusiasm and passion, thereby increasing their overall sense of well-being.

“My passion only deepens, I know more and more, and I have learned a lot about responsible and sustainable food, for example, through writing the blog.” (FB6)

Food bloggers engaged when focusing on the cooking process and being intensely present in the cooking moment. The quality of the ingredients often made them want to engage themselves in the food preparation process, as it created enjoyable expectations among food bloggers. The unique feature of food blogging was that the absorption continued even after the cooking situation, when the food bloggers described their experiences through writing in their blogs. The engagement discourses could ignite similar feelings among readers or a desire to experience

cooking in a similar way. The engagement element appeared in the food bloggers' speech as descriptions of total concentration and absorption of their doing. In addition, they discussed their enthusiasm and anticipation, as well as their desire to work with food and share their experiences.

The third discourse, *the food relationship discourse of reciprocal social relationships*, was based on food bloggers' descriptions of eating and cooking together, as well as spending quality time with their families and friends. They also learned this from childhood and wanted to pass it on as a social tradition to their children.

“In my family, everyone has always cooked. I have also baked and cooked myself since I was a child. We had regular mealtimes together. We always served good food, whether it was a weekday or a party. Dad always invested in special ingredients and photographed dishes in the 70s and 80s.” (FB4)

Descriptions of changes in eating habits appeared primarily in the blog posts of food bloggers with children. The food was prepared mainly according to the children's preferences. Many food bloggers acknowledged their responsibilities as parents, as they were now creating lasting food memories and fostering relationships with food for their children. The food blog posts showed that eating with children brought a new perspective on well-being related to food and eating.

The discourse on social relationships and food culture depicted the social interactions surrounding food in the bloggers' lives. Describing food memories in the blog post data, positive emotions evoked by food, and changes in food preferences after having children were interpreted on the one hand as signs of food bloggers' positive, change-prone relationship with food, and on the other hand, as the very social nature of the relationship with food as a part of bloggers' well-being.

The third discourse showed that cooking can be a social hobby and provide opportunities to nurture reciprocal relationships. Bloggers' discussions of social relationships alongside their blogging activities offered several options for social well-being.

The fourth discourse, *the food relationship discourse of meaning*, was connected to their values and came from choices that aligned with them. Food bloggers understood that their relationship with food was rooted in their values and wanted to convey these values to readers through their food blogging. They found blogging meaningful not only to themselves but also to their readers. Although the bloggers expressed that they wanted to avoid pushing their readers to make confident choices, they wanted to share their values that made food and cooking meaningful. Some bloggers explained the meaning more directly through their diets.

“In my blog, I don't put health first, but ease and deliciousness. I'm inspired to 'turn' foods that are considered difficult into quick everyday meals without compromising

on taste, which, of course, in a way, increases at least mental well-being and leaves more time for physical activities. Certain values do not dictate my relationship with food; I try to favor and highlight, for example, my food preferences. local food, fish, game, etc.” (FB3)

Meaning experiences emerged from a sense of purposeful action that was also connected to previous elements of well-being. When preparing food for others or sharing ideas in blogs, food bloggers described how meaning materialized from these social activities after their engaged action, leading to pure joy. Thus, the discourse of meaning included the food bloggers’ ways of justifying confident choices and actions regarding their relationship with food.

The fifth discourse, *the food relationship discourse of successes and achievements*, emphasized courage, open-mindedness, and actual success in cooking. The feeling of success and competence emerged after the cooking process as a reward for one’s activity and creativity. The food bloggers received praise and encouragement, especially from their families and readers, which motivated them to learn more about food.

“I started baking as a hobby. My blog became so popular, and baking took me completely away that I also learned a profession for myself. Now I work as a pastry chef in a large event house.” (FB15)

One of the unique features of food blogging was that the food bloggers themselves had the opportunity to observe the development of their skills and competence when reading their old food blog posts. A sense of accomplishment could emerge from realizing how much one has learned and achieved in the blog. In the fifth discourse, food hobbies appeared as a positive resource in the discourses of food bloggers. The accomplishments varied from minor successes, such as discovering a new ingredient or acquiring new skills, to larger, life-changing achievements, including finding a new profession in the food hobby or becoming a famous blogger. From the well-being perspective, accomplishments appeared versatily in the food bloggers’ discourses.

### Evaluation of Study III

The selection of discourse analysis is justified by the premise that food bloggers are viewed as intrinsically embedded within the social and relational contexts in which they operate—a view aligned with the discursive psychological tradition of discourse analysis (Taylor, 2013). Additionally, discursive psychological approaches typically view individuals as active participants who exercise a degree of autonomy or agency (Taylor, 2013); hence, the choice of discursive analysis can be interpreted as aligning with the other key concept of this study, agency.

In evaluating Study III, the key is how effectively the researcher makes the discourses understandable. Formal reliability is less relevant, as multiple interpretations are expected and considered valuable (Hardy et al., 2004). Discourse analysis involves creative interpretation to uncover how texts shape perceptions of reality (Hardy et al., 2004). To form the interpretation, it is typical for discourse researchers to gather supplementary material to gain a deeper understanding of the context (Taylor, 2013). To implement this, Study III employed two datasets.

When evaluating discourse analysis, two important concepts to consider are *coherence* (Wang & Quo, 2014) and the *fruitfulness of the study's conclusions* (Wildemuth & Perryman, 2009). Coherence refers to the idea that the analysis results should enhance the clarity and focus of the discourse being studied (Wildemuth & Perryman, 2009). Coherence in discourse arises from a dynamic interaction between the producer and receiver, grounded in mutual understanding (Wang & Quo, 2014). The value of the findings lies in the understanding they offer, which may prove helpful when examining a new kind of discourse (Wildemuth & Perryman, 2009). According to Nonhof (2017), discourse analysis benefits from methodological rigor, transparency, and critical self-awareness, which hence should be assessed.

However, multiple perspectives could be considered when evaluating this study. The researcher inherently shapes discourse analysis, as it involves interpreting someone else's discourse for a specific audience (Nonhof, 2017). Therefore, it would also be possible to draw attention to the researcher's competence in discourse analysis, her understanding of food bloggers, the bloggers' and their readers' perspectives, and the dissertation readers' interpretations of both food blogging and discourse analysis. Additionally, the dissertation report itself will be evaluated, as it should have analytical observations firmly anchored in the data, be rhetorically persuasive (Nikander, 2008), and convey the integrity, character, and quality of the study (Gill, 2000). It is essential to recognize that each reader may uniquely assess any of the earlier-mentioned.

Nevertheless, I will now primarily focus on arguing with the notions of Wang & Quo (2014) and Wildemuth & Perryman (2009). In this study, coherence was not enhanced through participant engagement in discussing the findings, despite recommendations by some critical discourse analysts to do so (Nonhof, 2017). This methodological choice is justified by preserving the study I's focus on discretion (e.g., Alasuutari, 2011; Thanh & Kirova, 2018) and advancing a novel understanding of food bloggers' discourses about well-being and their relationship with food with PERMA theory. From the researcher's perspective, the collaboration between the two researchers involved, Partanen and Uusiautti, was deemed sufficient to achieve the earlier-mentioned aims. Nonhof (2017) supports the decision by noting that individuals with a critical mindset frequently engage in discourse analysis. The researcher's background is presented in Chapter 3.5 to further assess this critical capability and understanding.

Taylor (2013) states that there is no right way to analyse discourse. Still, each study builds its framework by aligning theory, topic, definition of discourse, data, and its relevance to the research focus (Taylor, 2013). The PERMA theory, together with the researcher's understanding, guided the discourse analysis. However, the discourses identified would be different, if another well-being theory was applied. The identified discourses were predominantly positive, as anticipated, reinforcing the notion that framing discourse analysis as a discursive formation is valuable (Nonhof, 2017). This is particularly relevant given that positive narratives surrounding food and eating are widely regarded as beneficial in the context of contemporary society. In addition, discourse analyses not only examine their subjects but also shape and sustain the evolving discourse around the practice of discourse analysis itself (Nonhof, 2017). Hence, this study with its choices, results, and discussions can also be viewed as contributing to the development of heterogeneous discourse analysis practice (Nonhof, 2017; Taylor, 2013).

I evaluate the two datasets as a rich source of material for discourse analysis (Jones & Alony, 2008). Additionally, a socio-constructivist approach favored analyzing social media for capturing relevant insights of the time. However, study III data sets were not gathered using traditional interviews typically used in discourse analysis (Kananen, 2014b; Sumiala & Tikka, 2013). While interviews can offer deeper insights into the well-being of food bloggers and their relationship with food, future research could also utilize them, engaging bloggers in discussing the findings, which is recommended by some critical discourse analysts (Nonhof, 2017). Additionally, the study could have explored the topic through narrative research or different forms of triangulation (Flick, 2018).

#### **4.4 Summary of the findings**

The study's primary objective was to examine well-being from the perspective of social media, particularly food blogging. The overarching research question was: How do Finnish food bloggers act and perceive the role of their blogging activities in their relationship with food, agency, and well-being? The results of the three studies provided insight into how Finnish food bloggers act and perceive the role of their blogging activities in their relationship with food and well-being. First, I will present summaries of Studies I-III, after which I will address the study's main research question by synthesizing the key findings.

In study I, I sought to answer the research question: How does the relationship with food appear in Finnish food blogs? Study I showed how the bloggers constructed, maintained, and presented their relationship with food in multiple ways, illustrating their food well-being. The main findings of study I were eating and food-related values, innovativeness, experimental approach, positive eating-related multi-sensory

experiences and memories, and social elements of eating. To summarize, food bloggers' relationship with food appeared multidimensional and developing. To stress, food bloggers' blogs strongly present the social dimension of the relationship with food. The blog posts about their choices and multi-sensory experiences revealed that they wanted to share their experiences and to support others, like their family members, with positive relationships with food. The social element was also evident in the way the bloggers highlighted the values they appreciated, such as local food and healthy choices.

Study II provided further insights into the positive agency of food bloggers by examining how Finnish food bloggers perceive their agency when describing their relationship with food in their blogs. Study II showed that the agency of food bloggers appears versatile. The bloggers' intentionality and forethought were more emphasized as they reflected on the outcomes and the influence of their blogging activities. They set goals for enriching their readers' relationship with food by sharing their inspiration, new ideas, and values. From the perspective of self-reactiveness and self-reflectiveness, the positive food memories, experiences, and changes in their food relationship during their lives were highlighted, and their passion and inspiration were recognized as the most significant motivations.

According to study II, the bloggers did not consciously highlight the development of their relationship with food in their blog posts. Still, they could identify some situations that had made them react or reflect on their agency and food blogging activities from this perspective. Thus, food blogging can be seen as an activity that may influence bloggers' and blog readers' relationships with food. According to Study II, food blogging primarily concerns inspiring others, conveying food-related values, and enriching food culture. Many bloggers believe that their relationship with food influences the content of their blogs and is thus reflected in the blog, whether intentionally or unintentionally.

In Study III, I examined well-being through food blogging by asking: How does well-being appear in the discourses of food bloggers' relationships with food? According to the findings, food bloggers foster a robust discourse on positive emotions, sharing their motivation through joy, delight, enthusiasm, and pleasure related to cooking and eating. Food bloggers feel engaged when focusing on cooking and are intensely present in the moment, and it reminds them of a flow state. Additionally, the discourse on the relationship between success and achievement related to food was closely tied to positive emotional discourse. Achieving goals related to food and cooking seemed essential to the well-being of food bloggers, not only because of the sense of success and associated positive emotions, but also because it allowed them to feel productive and capable in a context meaningful to them.

The discourse on reciprocal social relationships in food and eating has brought a new perspective on the well-being of food bloggers, particularly concerning children

and parenthood. This discourse highlighted the positive, change-prone social relationship that food bloggers have with food as part of their blogging and overall well-being. Additionally, the food relationship discourse of meaning revealed that food was perceived as a significant element contributing to well-being among food bloggers.

When synthesizing the main results, the essential result is that the social dimension appeared to the bloggers as a vital part of the positive relationship with food and well-being. For example, in their posts, they shared stories in which they emphasized how food brings people of different ages people together, for instance, in the action of preparing food together or preparing food for a bigger group of eaters, meeting people at food-related events, sharing information, traditions, and inspiration to readers, and in the time spent together next to food also creating new food-related memories together. Social sharing on multiple levels provided bloggers with a new perspective and a turning point in their relationship with food, fostering a positive, change-prone social relationship with food as an integral part of bloggers' well-being.

The study utilized Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory, which revealed food bloggers' food-related agentic dimensions, such as recognizing the meaningfulness of one's food actions, types of pleasure that food and eating can bring, as well as changes in their eating-related behavior and responsibilities related to food and eating.

Factors recognized in this study, such as eating according to one's values, playfulness and innovativeness with food, cooking, and eating; present-moment multisensory experiences concerning food; respect for one's food history, and sharing actions related to food, might be relevant in encouraging a positive relationship with food and in future studies concerning food well-being. When focusing on food bloggers, it is essential to remember they possess two kinds of agency: one related to food blogging and another related to food. When blogging, food bloggers relive their memories related to their food experiences to write about them. Through their various food-related actions, food bloggers gain agency in the food space that they reflect in their blog posts. These versatile agencies, which are connected to food and food blogging, also seem to strengthen food bloggers' positive relationship with food.

Although this study focused on analyzing well-being in the context of food blogging and discourses produced by bloggers, the viewpoint also provided insights into the analysis of food-related well-being. According to this study, when examining food-related well-being, it is reasonable to focus on questions concerning recognizing one's cognitive and emotional well-being, especially the PERMA dimensions related to food and eating. Based on the results, this can be done by further discussing, for example, what sort of engagement is needed for food well-being, how family and close ones affect food well-being, how the relationship with food has been developed

in one's life cycle, and what one's purposeful actions concerning food and eating are. It appears that strengthening the PERMA dimensions related to food can support the development of a positive relationship with food. Based on this study, it seems that food bloggers' positive agency on food is related to their positive relationship with food, and they may help and strengthen each other.

To summarize, this study approached food blogging from the perspective of positive psychology. The perspective is a new and exciting way of viewing food and eating as a well-being-related phenomenon in a person's life path and lifelong education. It produces in-depth information about concepts, relationships with food, and agency, connecting them to Seligman's idea of well-being, PERMA.

## 5 ETHICAL ASPECTS WITHIN SOCIAL MEDIA AND BLOG RESEARCH

### 5.1 On the nature of social media and blog research

In this chapter, I examine the ethical and legal aspects of conducting academic research utilizing social media content, particularly food blogs. This chapter outlines how such research can adhere to ethical standards and legal requirements while explaining the methodological choices involved.

The moral and legal dimensions of social media research are characterized by varying interpretations and guidelines, making it essential for researchers to develop a thorough contextual understanding of their specific research environment (Kosonen et al., 2018; Finn-ARMA, 2025). The emerging nature of these issues was exemplified by the University of Lapland's introduction of institutional training on data protection and information security in 2024 and 2025 (Halmkrona, 2024). Training was particularly needed because copyright considerations in academic research necessitate a careful balancing of accessibility, intellectual property rights, and legal accountability (Kautio et al., 2025).

Research on blogs and social media can be perceived as applied observational research in nature, where interaction and activity are monitored (Finn-ARMA, 2025). The blog post research data is referred to as natural or primary (Jones & Alony, 2008) and is classified as a nonreactive method (Wildemuth, 2009). Blogs can be considered informal and semi-private research documents, making them challenging for researchers to access, yet they are also attractive (e.g., Wildemuth, 2009). Blog data is often referred to as “dead data” because it is pre-existing and cannot be modified by researchers (Wildemuth, 2009); however, in modern platforms, the creator can edit the material after publishing the post. This type of web-based research can also be classified as non-intrusive or unobtrusive, as it does not involve any interaction between participants and researchers, relying solely on the analysis of existing data (Stainton & Iardanova, 2017; Wildemuth, 2009). Therefore, the primary ethical question to consider is how the researcher will utilize the data in the study (Wildemuth, 2009).

Thus, as a social media researcher, I did not need to deeply consider preserving research data and related research ethics issues, because the blog posts remain online and are searchable without the researcher's intervention (Jones & Alony, 2008), if the original blogger so decides. Therefore, for a researcher using social media, being in the field is no longer a physical or temporal space or situation, and the interaction between the researcher and the research data is asynchronous. My role

as a researcher was thus passive (Eysenbach & Till, 2001). It can also be considered a research ethical choice because the collection of research data took place discreetly, and the bloggers or other readers of the blogs were neither aware of nor disturbed by the research conduct (e.g., Alasuutari, 2011). I also justify my choice by the fact that I wanted to achieve authentic descriptions of the relationship with food (see blog as a means of life publication, Östman, 2015; Östman & Turtiainen, 2016), and self-sponsoredness in producing research data can promote its reliability (e.g., also Hakala & Vesa, 2013; Järvinen-Tassopoulos, 2011).

Nonetheless, an ongoing and unresolved ethical debate persists regarding how to adequately recognize bloggers and others who have cultivated unique and potentially highly identifiable identities across various online platforms, as these individuals can be fully appreciated in a study (e.g., Kurtz et al., 2017). When researchers rely solely on blogs as their data source, they must differentiate between the public and private dimensions inherent in blogs to ensure the proper protection of bloggers' identities (Eastham, 2011). Ahteensuu (2019) reminds that regardless of the platform user's perspective - in this study, the blogger's perspective - some of the material produced may also contain private information about others, which the researcher should carefully consider how to handle.

According to Kosonen et al. (2018), researchers familiar with the ethics of social media research must carefully consider whether it is necessary to know the identities of research participants. Additionally, Camilla Vásquez and Dacota Liska (2023) view the representation of social media users' identities in publications as a crucial ethical issue that specifically discourse researchers need to address. Another question is whether bloggers are considered authors of their blog post data and, in that sense, also deserving of respect when citing blogs, such as online articles, including names and online locations, without seeking consent (e.g., Ross, 2020). The third ethical issue is reproducing blog post data for an academic audience without the authors' permission (e.g., Ross, 2020).

## 5.2 Informed consent

According to Finn-ARMA (2025), the main ethical concerns in social media research involve safeguarding individuals' rights to *self-determination, privacy, and protection from harm*. Informed consent is a key mechanism for ensuring self-determination, requiring voluntary participation, the right to withdraw without penalty, and adequate information about the research and its potential risks and benefits (Ahteensuu, 2019). Finn-ARMA (2025) emphasizes that the requirement for informed consent is not consistent across academic disciplines, and Järvelä (2016) continues that it is typically enforced when research involves identifiable data.

Nonetheless, tensions may arise concerning the General Data Protection Regulation (European Parliament and Council of the European Union, 2016), which mandates that participants in both research and media contexts must be informed and have the opportunity to influence the collection, storage, and dissemination of their data. This applies to both data gathered directly through research and data processed via artificial intelligence applications. As ethical frameworks for social media research continue to develop (Kautio et al., 2025; Järvelä, 2016), such considerations must be evaluated within their specific contexts and addressed on a case-by-case basis (Tietoarkisto, 2025).

Therefore, in this study, the researcher needed to address the primary moral question of whether bloggers should be consulted and whether their approval should be sought when their blog posts are used as data in a study. One approach considers it dishonest and unfair to analyze the blogs' diary-like reflections without permission. At the same time, another view holds that blogs, as part of the public domain, are freely available on the internet and, therefore, license-free (Jones & Alony, 2008; Stainton & Iardanova, 2017). Researchers experting in ethics concerning travel blogging data, Stainton and Iardanova (2017), refer to *informed consent* as the principle that bloggers should have the autonomy to choose whether to participate in research. For consent to be considered "informed," it is essential to clearly explain the study's purpose, the requirements for participants, and any potential risks or harms associated with the research (Seale, 2012).

Some researchers have decided not to seek to obtain informed consent but use the blog post data unless there are no warning messages in blogs, where the blogger clearly states they did not want their content reproduced elsewhere, and, thus, do not use them as research data (Kurtz et al., 2017). None of the food blogs I have seen have a notification, probably due to their positive nature (compare, for example, health-centered blogs, such as those focusing on weight loss as a topic). However, if a researcher decides to seek the participants' approval, it might be challenging to contact and gain acceptance from a large proportion of the sample (Jones & Alony, 2008; Järvelä, 2016; Ahteensuu, 2019). Sometimes, the challenge to obtaining informed consent is the author's intentional or unintentional lack of traces (Stainton & Iardanova, 2017).

Ahteensuu (2019) suggests that when fully informed consent is not feasible, researchers can still uphold certain ethical obligations by maintaining up-to-date information about the study on a project website. This practice supports participants' autonomy by partially fulfilling the duty to inform and allowing individuals the option to withdraw. In this study, however, I was not affiliated with a university research team and therefore lacked the means to establish such a website.

However, the blog post data bloggers from Study I and other food bloggers were invited to participate in the survey. They were informed about the study design and data collection in the email invitation letter for the survey (Appendice 3, 4). None

of the participants commented or asked questions about the study. I interpreted that they have given their informal consent in a manner Ahteensuu (2019) describes. Therefore, I based my decision on the second approach introduced by Jones and Alony (2008). Thus, I considered a formal research permit unnecessary as the bloggers had voluntarily published the blog posts online. This study was regarded as non-intrusive based research (Stainton & Iardanova, 2017). Thus, I have used the web in this study as if it were an archive, from which I extracted the research data based on well-founded criteria. For the second question introduced by Ross (2020), I answered dichotomously by deliberately removing the detailed personal information of the bloggers from the research data in studies I-III. This dissertation report does not mention the names of the blogs used as data either.

In this study, the research data were limited to blog texts and bloggers' survey responses. Cutting off comments from readers who are integral to the blog was an intentional ethical choice made by the researcher. It was a choice related to the delimitation of the research topic but can also be considered from a moral perspective; it is a question of *informal consent* or seeking the approval of thousands of readers using pseudonyms who have commented on posts (Järvelä, 2016). This study did not need to answer the question since the readers' comments were not included in the data.

### **5.3 Potential harm of the study**

Terkamo-Moisio et al. (2016) encourage researchers to utilize social media while minimizing its harms, such as social stigma or emotional distress. Consent is crucial to minimize potential harm (Finn-ARMA, 2025), as citing blog posts may unintentionally reveal bloggers' identities and attract versatile, unpredictable public attention. Hence, according to Kosonen et al. (2018), the most critical part of a researcher's ethical professionalism is considering the possible disadvantages of using the data and understanding the context. For instance, Ross (2020) suggests addressing the possibility of harm if blog authors unexpectedly revisit their reflections on food, mainly if they are interpreted differently from their expectations regarding academic outputs. As I did not consider food bloggers to be research participants but rather information producers, I did not provide them with the opportunity to review the research findings before they were published (e.g., Buchanan & Ess, 2008).

The survey may have influenced food bloggers' reflections, potentially shaping future blog content. In a comparable study, Smith et al. (2018) found that participants who completed an online survey on trauma and grief reported positive effects, including new insights, shifts in perspective, and a desire to support others. It is plausible that food bloggers may have similar reflections. Additionally, the

dissertation report could guide bloggers' attitudes and actions on social media. Overall, this impact was viewed as positive, encouraging bloggers and potential readers to approach food blogging in new ways.

While this study may bring food blogs to new audiences, the data used has been publicly available for nearly a decade. Since increased visibility is often welcomed in the blogging community, republishing the citations of old posts in this report aligns with bloggers' communicative goals. Although the blog posts remained accessible independently, academic interest in them is likely to arise primarily through the context provided by this research. Given the study's positive framing (Kosonen et al., 2018; Mäkelä, 2010), this possible renewed visibility was seen as beneficial, with minimal risk of harm, stigmatization, or security concerns for bloggers or the broader community (Ahteensuu, 2019).

## **5.4 Legal and ethical considerations**

The primary legal starting points in social media research are contract law, copyright law, and data protection legislation (Finn-ARMA, 2025). Due to the well-being-related theme of this study, the emphasis was on data protection, privacy, copyright law, and, lastly, contract law. I therefore discuss these topics in the order of their importance in relation to my study.

### **5.4.1 Data protection**

The General Data Protection Regulation (2016) does not prohibit the use of social media in research. However, researchers are obligated to protect the data of research participants, which often includes identifiers such as pseudonyms and images within the context of social media research (Fält, 2016). Finn-ARMA (2025) defines personal data as any information about an identified or identifiable individual. The ethical handling of such data necessitates that participants be adequately informed—commonly through a *data protection statement*—thereby enabling them to exercise their right to object to the processing of their data (Finn-ARMA, 2025). Nonetheless, the inherent characteristics of social media research often render direct communication with participants impractical (Järvelä, 2016).

In this study, food bloggers received an email invitation for the survey, which explained the study's purpose and design, thereby implying informed consent through their participation. Ethical considerations, including informed consent, privacy, confidentiality, and voluntary participation, were addressed in accordance with established online research practices (Regmi et al., 2016; Shenton, 2004). However, no incentives were provided to participants (Roberts & Allen, 2015), and there was no indication of survey fraud (Singh & Sagar, 2021). As neither the survey nor the analyzed blog posts collected identifiable data, a separate data protection

statement was not required (Järvelä, 2016). More specifically, answering the email survey was anonymous and voluntary, as identifying the bloggers did not add value to the research results in any of the studies (I-III) or the dissertation report. However, some bloggers publicly shared personal details on their blogs, making it possible for readers to trace quoted material back to them using search engines (Vásquez & Liska, 2023).

Hence, Kosonen et al. (2018) and Ahteensuu (2019) acknowledge that anonymizing social media data is mainly ineffective, as data collected from the public network can be easily identified by anyone based solely on the text content. However, one of the key features of discourse analytic research is its dependence on verbatim quotations. Given that online discourse can be easily searched, this implies that any source whose content was included in a research publication can potentially be traced back to its original author, regardless of the measures the researcher had implemented to anonymize the data (Vásquez & Liska, 2023; Ahteensuu, 2019).

The personal data shared in food blogs was voluntarily disclosed by bloggers who were aware of its public accessibility. Many bloggers explicitly used their real names and provided contact information. The typical age of adult bloggers and the assumed level of digital literacy among food bloggers suggested a conscious understanding of the implications of public online self-presentation (Pienimäki & Kotilainen, 2018). By initiating and maintaining a blog, the bloggers actively choose to make their voices heard in the public sphere—an act aligned with the concept of blogging as a form of life publication (Östman, 2015; Östman & Turtiainen, 2016). Given the study's constructive focus, the potential risk of harm resulting from blogger identification was assessed as minimal.

The decision not to use a data protection statement was also based on the classification of the food blog posts as open personal data. At the University of Lapland, research data was categorized into five levels of sensitivity, with Category 5W denoting openly accessible personal data that has been made public by the individual or organization (Halmkrona, 2024). In this study, food blogs were classified under the 5W framework, which encompassed publicly available content, including websites, press releases, and social media posts (Halmkrona, 2024). According to institutional guidelines, no specific protection measures were required for data in this category.

#### **5.4.2 Safeguarding privacy**

Privacy is a complex and subjective concept whose interpretation varies across cultural contexts, historical periods, and situational settings (Terkamo-Moisio et al., 2016). Social media blurs the line between private and public, making the concept of privacy difficult to define (Pienimäki & Kotilainen, 2018). In this study, I needed to primarily consider how to interpret privacy when republishing quotes from

food bloggers' posts in the dissertation report, despite the research topic not being sensitive and the group not being vulnerable (Terkamo-Moisio et al., 2016).

The original publications included in this dissertation report mention the names of the blogs. Additionally, the invitation email for the survey, informing bloggers about the study, was sent years before the research was published. The media education researchers Salonen and Kotilainen (2024) recommend that commitment to the research may need to be reaffirmed at different stages of the research process, especially within action research and among vulnerable participants. Therefore, it might have been appropriate to ask the bloggers about their preferred level of privacy (e.g., Kurtz et al., 2017) at the end of this research process. For instance, Ross (2020) contacted his focus group of bloggers via email, utilizing the contact information found on their blogs or linked Twitter accounts to request permission to reproduce content from their blogs in his published research. Most bloggers responded positively, and the blog content was paraphrased rather than quoted verbatim for those who did not reply.

On the other hand, Hewson et al. (2003) see sending permission requests to bloggers as spam, intrusive, or an invasion of the bloggers' privacy. However, in this study, the bloggers were not directly asked about reproducing their blog post content, merely because I did not consider food blogs' content to be intimately connected to highly private, sensitive, or vulnerable experiences by bloggers, compared to, for example, cancer blogs. I consider food blogs to be a specific blog type whose nature is not psychologically private (e.g., also Stainton & Iardanova, 2017). Vice versa, their blog content, such as recipes, was intentionally created and openly invited public conversation on social media, potentially reaching a broad audience, including researchers (Stainton & Iardanova, 2017).

#### **5.4.3 Copyright and Contract Law Perspectives**

The public accessibility of social media content does not mean it can be freely used for research purposes (Kontkanen, 2016). Under Finnish copyright legislation (404/1961), authors retain both economic rights (the right to profit from their work) and moral rights (the right to be recognized as the author and to protect the integrity of their work), even for content shared on social media (Kopioisto, 2025).

The study respected bloggers' economic and moral rights. It did not involve financial gain, so no terms of use were required between the parties. Blog content was cited with the corresponding blog names in studies I-III to maintain attribution and integrity. In this report, some quotes were partially anonymized—translated into English and words deleted to reduce traceability. Although search engines might still locate sources (Ahteensuu, 2019), translation minimized this risk. Survey responses were initially collected anonymously to protect participant confidentiality.

The researcher decides whether to include direct quotations to support analysis (Kosonen et al., 2018). While collecting social media data typically doesn't violate copyright, publishing it might (Fält, 2016). However, Finnish food blogs were generally considered openly accessible (Kautio et al., 2025). According to the Finnish Copyright Act (Section 22), quotations are allowed if necessary for the purpose, though the acceptable extent is interpreted on a case-by-case basis. Therefore, this study justified the use of quotations based on the open-access nature of blogs, Section 22 of the Finnish Copyright Act, and the non-sensitive, positive research topic. Quotations were used respectfully and were unlikely to harm bloggers (TENK, 2018; TENK, 2021). However, naming the blogs could have been empowering, as some authors view a lack of citation as a potential copyright issue (Barnes, 2004; Clegg & Smith, 2004; Madge, 2007).

Using social media content in research is legally complex due to the presence of multiple potential rights holders, including platforms and content creators (Ahteensuu, 2019; Fält, 2016; Finn-ARMA, 2025). From a contract law perspective, blog platform terms of use—subject to change—govern research permissions and may limit the use of anonymization (Ahteensuu, 2019; Fält, 2016). Researchers must also evaluate copyright ownership and authorship. In this study, the material was sourced from individual bloggers, and platform terms were reviewed to ensure that research use was appropriate.

Independent researchers, without the support of a research team or legal counsel, face challenges in accessing platform-specific information and understanding bloggers' views on the research use of their content (Kautio et al., 2025). In Finland, bloggers were not required to disclose platform details or their stance on academic use. Identifying platforms was difficult without explicit mention. Even when the platform was identified, the platform's terms of service rarely addressed research use directly. When neither the blog nor the platform provided guidance, it was reasonable to interpret that using such content for research was permissible. However, more transparent communication of terms, such as those outlined in Creative Commons licenses, would benefit users (Kontkanen, 2016), especially researchers.

## **5.5 Discussion of ethics in blog and social media research**

This study examined key ethical challenges in social media research, highlighting that even research framed in a positive light—such as a study on wellbeing from food blogging—involved legal and moral considerations. A central ethical tension arose between copyright and data protection obligations (Pienimäki & Kotilainen, 2018).

From a copyright perspective, food bloggers, as content creators, were entitled to recognition and respect for their work. Conversely, data protection principles

necessitated safeguarding the bloggers' identities, which, in this study, was addressed by omitting the names of their blogs from the dissertation. Should the researcher have considered engaging food bloggers to elicit their views on this matter? Perhaps, but the chosen research abstract was neither inclusive nor activating. Therefore, I prioritized participant privacy, as the research aims to investigate the broader phenomenon of food blogging rather than focusing on individual bloggers. In this study, I believe the rights of food bloggers were appropriately balanced against the potential societal benefits of the research (Terkamo-Moisio et al., 2016).

Pienimäki and Kotilainen (2018) argue that the primary ethical challenge lies not in balancing the protection and participation of research participants but rather in delineating the concept of research ethics itself. This is especially true within social media research. A crucial aspect is the researcher's recognition and acceptance that the processes of informing participants, safeguarding privacy, ensuring anonymity, and protecting participants may vary throughout the study. Consequently, ethical decisions should be continually revisited and adjusted as social media research progresses.

Mustola and Kiili (2019) call for broad ethical reflection in social media research, considering not only participant protection but also the epistemological and societal impacts of research decisions. They stress the importance of critically evaluating what is included or excluded in research. Despite ethical complexities, they advocate for continued exploration of social media, particularly on underrepresented topics. To support future researchers, up-to-date training and practical assistance with copyright issues (Kautio et al., 2025) and other legal questions (Finn-ARMA, 2025) are essential, minimizing reliance on individual judgment (Ahteensuu, 2019) and hence hesitation in conducting social media research.

This study presented a case example that illustrates the discussion on understanding social media research ethics as a process (Pienimäki & Kotilainen, 2018; Roberts & Allen, 2015). It was conducted over nearly ten years, with data consisting of survey and blog post material, which dated back to 2017. During this period, bloggers' perceptions of privacy may have evolved, their permission for the study may have changed, and the terms of service governing their blogging platforms may have undergone multiple revisions, potentially altering the permissibility of using such content for research purposes. Hence, it is essential to acknowledge that social media content and its platforms are dynamic; users as well as the platforms may retroactively modify their terms of use, privacy settings, or delete posts altogether (Finn-ARMA, 2025).

Consequently, future researchers are advised to securely archive the social media data used in their studies (Fält, 2016) and to critically consider how future alterations or deletions might affect the reliability of their findings and the integrity of subsequent publications. In the present study, due to the non-sensitive nature of the research topic, it was considered unnecessary to verify whether food bloggers

had later edited or removed their content after data collection. Nevertheless, the development of nationally coordinated principles and guidelines for the use of diverse social media content in research is strongly recommended (Kautio et al., 2025; Kontkanen, 2016). The key feature of them, according to Kosonen et al. (2018), is the protection of research participants' privacy, as well as the respect and rights of research participants (Salonen & Kotilainen, 2018).

To support future social media research, especially involving blogs, this study offers several recommendations. Complex materials containing links or metadata require alternative archiving methods to ensure they remain accessible and understandable. Additionally, preserving metadata—essential for interpreting social media data—is crucial and should be planned for the research process before it starts (Fält, 2016).

According to the General Data Protection Regulation (2016), professional blogs usually include privacy statements, but these focus on user data and administration rather than research use. In food blogs, such statements were directed at readers, not researchers. In social media research, the researcher functions as a third party, since platforms are not designed for research purposes (Ahteensuu, 2019). Legally, the researcher is not a party to the platform's user agreement. Instead, two contractual relationships exist: one between the platform and the user, and another between the platform and the researcher (Ahteensuu, 2019).

To clarify the future use of social media content in research, it would be helpful if platforms or content creators included explicit statements in their privacy policies, copyright licenses, or terms of service regarding permission for research purposes. Food bloggers, as content creators, would benefit from standardized guidelines outlining how their content can be collected, organized, and analyzed for research purposes, thereby increasing transparency and user awareness (Fält, 2016). Additionally, incorporating a legal principle of justification into Finnish law—similar to that in the United States—would help ensure that scientific research on social media materials can proceed despite the potential copyright limitations (Järvelä, 2016).

This chapter emphasized that using social media in academic research is still a developing practice. I align with scholars such as Ross (2020) and Kurtz et al. (2017), who advocate for more structured discussions on the ethical and replicable use of blogs and online content, while respecting the dignity of content creators. Eastham (2011), Regmi et al. (2016), and Roberts and Allen (2015) note that ethical safeguards were more feasible when there was a sole data source, only blogs, or only surveys. However, this is no longer often the case in the 2020s; ambitious, high-quality, and innovative research now requires the use of versatile social media data, making the ethical questions of study more complex (Terkamo-Moisio et al., 2016). The study aims to contribute to the broader dialogue on ethical social media research.

## 6 CONCLUSIONS

### 6.1 Main results

This chapter presents the key research findings and discusses their relevance concerning the existing body of knowledge.

In the theoretical framework, I presented the Food Wellbeing Theory by Block et al. (2011) and the PERMA theory by Martin Seligman (2011) together with Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory. This study aimed to provide more information on the theories from the perspectives of food blogging. The study results emphasize that food-related social elements are crucial for the well-being of food bloggers and their relationship with food, aligning with earlier research (Sidenvall et al., 2000; Cox & Blake, 2011; Hackel et al., 2018). Hence, food bloggers' relationship with food is inherently situational, reflecting a meaningful connection to external reality and social contexts. This relationship, along with their food-related agency, is continuously shaped and reconstructed through interaction (Talvia et al. 2021; Talvia et al. 2022). Hence, this study reinforces, especially the findings of Mugel et al. (2019), who suggest that food well-being can be enhanced for example by sharing meals with others and taking more time to eat or prepare food.

The study confirmed its initial assumption that food bloggers express a positive relationship with food. This study provided more profound insights into two key dimensions of the relationship with food: *cognitive and emotional* (Talvia et al., 2022; Boulos et al., 2012; Dingemans et al., 2009; Han & Kahn, 2017; Ng et al., 2014; Torres & Nowson, 2007; Van der Veen, 2003). Sub-study I highlighted both the cognitive and emotional aspects rooted in values, e.g., healthiness, creativity, such as using new ingredients, multisensory experiences, such as serving, and social interaction, such as sharing tips. Sub-study II concentrated on the cognitive dimension, showing how blogging fosters agency and supports a positive relationship with food. Agency can be encouraged with intentionality, such as inspiring others, forethought, such as pleasing with food, self-reactiveness, for example, reliving and reconstructing food-related experiences, and self-reflectiveness, such as emerging awareness of responsibility.

Sub-study III explored the emotional dimension, identifying themes such as positive emotions, like joy, and social reciprocity, for example, spending quality time with their friends and family. However, Study III also noted cognitive dimensions related to PERMA's engagement, including learning new things, PERMA's

meaning, like blogging as a meaningful action, and PERMA's accomplishment, such as developing new skills.

The study shows that cognitive and emotional dimensions, together with social interactions, are intertwined and central in food bloggers' relationship with food. This might be due to their social role as a food blogger (Talvia et al., 2022). Food bloggers' relationship with food is positive, indicating that when fostering a positive relationship with food, one should concentrate primarily on the cognitive and emotional dimensions, together with social interactions. The results suggest that, for bloggers, a positive relationship with food as portrayed on social media serves as a resource that enhances their well-being and sense of agency (e.g., Stavrositu & Sundar, 2012). The findings suggest that bloggers' empowering food-related activities, for example, those described in *the food relationship discourse of successes and achievements*, are intertwined with broader life contexts and well-being, and should not be addressed in isolation (Talvia et al., 2022; Gartaula et al., 2018; Mugel et al., 2019; Seligman et al., 2016; Seligman, 2011). Food bloggers also have advanced competencies in media literacy (Hobbs, 2016), and this study identifies them as critical in supporting the well-being of food bloggers (Livingstone et al., 2023). Hence, the findings further support that, in general, advanced media literacy skills may be associated with broader forms of agency and participation in various life domains (Palsa, 2016; Kupiainen & Sintonen, 2010), as well as with well-being (Livingstone et al., 2023).

Overall, the study contributes to Block et al. (2011)'s Food Wellbeing Theory. The study highlights that food bloggers demonstrate competencies consistent with Truman et al.'s (2017) conceptualization of food literacy, which includes functional, relational, and critical skills. As such, the results may offer novel insights into the second dimension of the Food Well-Being (FWB) theory—*food literacy*—particularly by illustrating how this knowledge is actively applied to support actions that promote food-related well-being on social media. Furthermore, the study contributes culturally specific examples of these competencies within the context of Finnish food culture. The study may also enrich the first dimension of the Food Well-Being (FWB) theory—*food socialization*—by offering culturally grounded and contemporary examples of how food is perceived and experienced within the social media landscape (Skatrud-Mickelson et al., 2011; Code, 2013; Li, 2021; Lofgren, 2013; Hans et al., 2021; Sintonen et al., 2015), such as the emergence of virtual food gifts (cf. Sidenvall et al., 2000), and by identifying the lasting impact of childhood food experiences on adult food relationships presented online (Marty et al., 2018; Bjornsen, 2018; Coates et al., 2019; Rask et al., 2013; Simunaniemi et al., 2012).

The perspective provided by PERMA illustrates how food bloggers highlight the joy of food and cooking over following norms, supporting Pettigrew's (2016) findings. The results connected to Bandura's sociocognitive theory's perspective facilitate understanding of how their social media activity — sharing and participating (e.g., Palsa, 2016; Kupiainen & Sintonen, 2010) — may also positively

impact their readers' well-being, for example by encouraging readers' to learn other food cultures (intentionality) and changing the readers' attitude towards food (forethought). By integrating insights from both the PERMA and Food Well-being (FWB) theories, this study deepens the understanding of food literacy, also from a *learning perspective*. The PERMA framework also expands the traditional view of food blogging (Cesiri, 2020; Lofgren, 2013), situating it within the broader context of overall well-being and linking it to lifelong learning. In line with Block et al.'s (2011) definition of food literacy as involving tools, heuristics, and techniques, the study shows that food bloggers engage in informal, self-directed learning connected to their positive relationship with food and solid agency. Notably, they share the outcomes of this learning publicly, enabling their readers to learn through their content as well (Sintonen et al., 2015; Livingstone, 2019).

Food bloggers' communal sharing mirrors the concept of "sharenting" (Blum-Ross & Livingstone, 2020), where parents share personal parenting experiences online. Similarly, food bloggers contribute to cultural and social narratives surrounding food and eating, shaping and reflecting the norms of the current digital era and food culture (e.g., Block et al., 2011; Bublitz et al., 2011; Fält, 2016; Lofgren, 2013). This study draws a parallel between *sharenting*—the online sharing of parenting experiences and reflecting norms (Blum-Ross & Livingstone, 2020)—and food blogging, suggesting that food bloggers similarly share their narratives about food and eating as a form of digital self-representation (Cesiri, 2020; Koh, 2017; Östman, 2008, 2015). By doing so, food bloggers shape and influence current food-related discourse on social media – just as parent bloggers in sharenting – and have the potential to promote and shape positive dialogue and learning among consumers, researchers, practitioners, and policymakers (e.g., Bublitz, 2013).

The study proposes the term *sfooding* (from "sharing" and "fooding") to describe this phenomenon. Such food-related media phenomena can either support or undermine modern well-being by affecting individuals' overall functioning, sense of agency, and participation (e.g., Talvia et al., 2022; Seligman et al., 2016; Seligman, 2011; Bandura, 2006; Kupiainen & Sintonen, 2010; Palsa, 2016). Viewing with a media research lens (Hepp, 2013; Livingstone, 2019), the results present how life and practices such as cooking and baking are turned into media (e.g., Couldry & Hepp, 2013), but also confirm that media and digital technologies actively shape how food and eating are practiced and understood.

## **6.2 Evaluation of the Study**

In this chapter, I discuss the overall reliability of the study, noting that while the analysis focused solely on surveys and food bloggers' written content, excluding images and reader comments, these multimodal elements could offer valuable

insights in future research. Social media has transformed the way people communicate and perceive the world (Jones, 2023). Hence, incorporating visuals can deepen understanding and add new and interesting perspectives to bloggers' relationships with food and agency, as well as discourses on food well-being. The decision to exclude multimodality was partly due to the researcher's early-stage expertise (e.g., Määttä, 2011). I initially did not consider myself sufficiently expert to interpret food photos and other elements of multimodality for research purposes (e.g., Elo et al., 2014). As a language teacher, concentrating the analysis of the studies solely on words and language (e.g., Taylor, 2013) was natural. Future studies could build on this by exploring multimodal content of food blogs (e.g., Cesiri, 2020) to complement this study's findings.

The study employed specific criteria to select the top Finnish food blogs and survey participants, thereby enhancing relevance (e.g., Singh & Sagar, 2021), but limiting transferability (e.g., Nassaji, 2020). The blog data consisted of only 16 blog posts from one month, with varying-quality blogs excluded. This resulted in a situation where some perspectives on the research phenomenon may not have been detected, thereby affecting the results. However, the criteria for blog selection were reasonable and given to the reader's knowledge. In addition, one aspect of this study is intentionally purely cultural (e.g., Knuuttila, 2011; Fält, 2016).

This study's cultural context—Finland's wealth, education, and unique food culture—shapes the bloggers' values and content, but makes it difficult to generalize the results. For example, it has been noted that food well-being may be affected by local culture (e.g., also Mugel et al., 2019). Since all blogs were written in Finnish, cross-cultural comparisons are limited; however, Cesiri (2020) suggests that analyzing multilingual blogs or blogs in versatile languages would enable broader insights. Still, as a pilot in a wealthy Nordic country, the study offers original contributions to understanding food well-being in a specific Northern European context (e.g., Palumbo et al., 2017). In any case, generalization was not the study's objective (e.g., Kananen, 2014a; Weijo et al., 2014; Kozinets, 2010). However, if the research were conducted in a different context, food blogging could be perceived in a significantly different light (Byrd & Byrd, 2017).

Next, I concentrate on the study's credibility, transferability, repeatability, and confirmability (e.g., Golafshani, 2003; Shenton, 2004). Nassaji (2020) defines transferability as the degree to which a researcher's interpretations or conclusions can be applied to other similar contexts. Therefore, the transferability of this study may be limited, as it focused exclusively on a single topic within a single country. However, a detailed description of the research process could bolster the transferability of the findings. I aimed to ensure rigor in the study by thoroughly documenting the data collection and analysis methods, thereby enhancing the potential for applying the study's design to other contexts and topics. Burchett et al. (2013) connect research transferability and applicability, and if they

are considered one, this study's applicability can be positively interpreted as prominent.

In this study, I aimed to produce authentic and credible information, rather than merely objective and universal, based on the study's epistemological foundation, social constructionism. In this context, it is essential to recognize that qualitative research does not seek to generalize; rather, its goal is to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon by immersing oneself in the experiences of the research participants to obtain a rich and comprehensive insight (e.g., Kananen, 2014a; Weijo et al., 2014). In other words, the researcher must get inside the research phenomenon (e.g., Denzin & Lincoln, 2018) to experience, present, and interpret it in depth.

Roberts and Priest (2006) argue that the trustworthiness of the study should be evaluated based on several factors related to the initial research question, including the timing and sources of data collection, the methods of analysis employed, and the conclusions drawn. To provide a more specific example, reliability refers to the extent to which a particular instrument, such as an online survey, yields consistent results across different situations, provided that no other variables have changed (Roberts & Priest, 2006). In this study, I describe the implementation of studies I-III in detail to increase the study's repeatability. Additionally, the transparency of the study is considered better when it is easy for the reader to piece together a clear picture of how the author arrived at her conclusions (Elman & Kapiszewski, 2013; e.g., also Malterud, 2001). With that in mind, I have sought to provide a solid evidentiary foundation and clarify the reasoning behind the conclusions drawn in each study. Patton (1999) also mentions the researcher's credibility, which depends, for example, on factors such as training, experience, status, and self-presentation. In this report, I have aimed to discuss the researcher's position in depth (Chapter 3.5). High confirmability indicates that readers can validate the researcher's interpretations and conclusions (Nassaji, 2020) after understanding how the study was conducted.

Using a multimethodology was intentional in adding credibility to the study. Patton (1999) advises enhancing research credibility by, for example, using rigorous techniques and methods to gather high-quality data. Therefore, by employing a multi-method research approach, an effort has been made to generate a more thorough and nuanced understanding of the research phenomenon and provide additional perspectives (e.g., Darbyshire et al., 2005). This approach aims to enhance the overall credibility of the study. Additionally, Wildemuth (2009) confirms that data from multiple sources, analyzed with several methods, can minimize the weaknesses of a single data material and method, such as text data from social media analyzed using content analysis.

Additionally, Singh and Sagar (2021) note that using only survey data may lead to unreliable results due to differences in participants' levels of engagement, understanding of questions, and potential bias. If multiple data sources are integrated,

the research process may yield more valid conclusions because the findings can be, for example, cross-checked (Wildemuth, 2009). However, the research material of this study has considerable potential for further studies. For instance, food blog posts can also serve as research material, providing an opportunity to study the Finnish food landscape or, for example, the socioeconomic situation of food bloggers as an interesting focus group in contemporary Finnish culture (Knuuttila, 2006).

Qualitative research highlights the active involvement and engagement of the researcher in the study, which relates to the concept of replicability and the degree to which a study can be reproduced (Nassaji, 2020). I have aimed for high confirmability by describing the data and findings in detail, so that readers can confirm their accuracy and possibly replicate the study. Despite my novice researcher status, I would like to point out that Wildemuth (2009) notes that a nonreactive approach to data collection, like the one used in this study, may enable the researcher to observe certain aspects of the research phenomenon that could go unnoticed with more intrusive methods, such as interviews.

Additionally, qualitative research acknowledges subjectivity (Haven & Grootel, 2019), so I hope my original background has enabled me to approach the research phenomenon from a fresh perspective. Additionally, it is crucial that the reader recognizes the research phenomenon as needing further attention after reading this thesis report and sees a reason to study it in more detail or pursue it as a topic of investigation. Food well-being, a crucial concept of agency and the relationship with food, among other essential concepts, should be examined further. I hope this study provides the seed for new knowledge that will be questioned, challenged, and refined by different researchers and serves as an attractive foundation for implementing new studies on the topic.

Thus, when evaluating this study, it is essential to understand it as a whole within its specific social and temporal context (Niiniluoto, 1994; Niskanen, 1994), as the researcher, food blogging, the nature of the relationship with food, agency, and well-being, as well as the study methods are shaped by the current time and culture. While food blogging is a relatively new phenomenon, the relationship with food is deeply rooted in human history. The study's originality—linking food blogging, well-being, agency, and food relationships—may complicate comparisons with previous research, potentially affecting its credibility (Shenton, 2004; Malterud, 2001). Therefore, readers are encouraged to critically assess the trustworthiness of the researcher's interpretations and the depth of understanding presented in this report (e.g., Fossey et al., 2002).

### 6.3 Theoretical and Practical Contribution

Next, I describe the contributions of this study on three levels: 1) the food bloggers' level, 2) the blog readers' level, and 3) the societal level.

At the level of food bloggers, this study suggests that not all have yet grasped the full potential of their influencer role. According to this study, it appears that food bloggers were less interested in influencing their readers' physical health and well-being than health and lifestyle bloggers are generally believed to be (e.g., Toikkanen & Kananen, 2014). Instead, food bloggers emphasize the positive emotions, self-fulfillment, and social encounters that can be achieved through preparing and enjoying meals and sharing these experiences with others. It appears that their food well-being goals (Bublitz et al., 2013) are hedonic and symbolic, meaning they aim for pleasure and display their identity through their relationship with food. Based on the study, food bloggers might need support in understanding their influencer role and reflecting on the intentionality of their actions. For example, this study can provide information and help them understand their power in a media-mediated society. However, it is also justified to discuss whether bloggers need to understand their influence, or if the core of blogging is lost when they intentionally analyze the effect of their blogging, and whether this changes their original goals. If it does, is it a good thing?

An exciting part of the 2020s interaction is that social media is an open platform that enables the uncritical publication of one's thoughts to anyone. However, Pedroni (2023) also cautions against overlooking the shifting power dynamics between platforms and influencers. The purpose of this study was not to assess the dynamics between the platform and the blogger, nor whether food bloggers' relationship with food is healthy or, for example, perverted, nor to question why food bloggers want to share their thoughts. Food blogging may be a manifestation of a twisted relationship with food, rather than a purely positive phenomenon.

There has been critical public discussion about the ethical perspective of blogs (e.g., Koh, 2017; Lynch, 2010); for example, should bloggers consider the influence of their blog content on their readers? Koh (2017) asserts that bloggers should be held responsible for disseminating information that is often treated as factual. Lynch (2010) also emphasizes the importance of educating the public about the inconsistencies in health information on social media. According to her research, some food blogs promote highly questionable behaviors and attitudes (Lynch, 2010). At the same time, social media is a source of health and nutritional information for young adults (Lynch, 2010) and women, primarily through food blogs (Cox & Blake, 2011).

As a result, social media diminishes the influence and authority of traditional general-interest intermediaries, such as newspapers, magazines, and broadcasters (e.g., Jones, 2023). It is worth noting that, although the blog content may be perceived

as a potential threat to public health, on a societal level, it also has the potential to provide applicable educational content. However, considering this study, it is also helpful to consider whether it is essential for food bloggers to be cautious with their blog content, or whether blogs lose their authenticity if bloggers start to analyze their content more closely and no longer focus on expressing themselves and their enthusiasm for food (e.g., also Kaisen et al., 2024 on effects of AI tools on blogging). However, to compare the condition to the research context, Livingstone (2019) argues that concerns about audience susceptibility, lack of knowledge, and potential exploitation hinder media studies from adequately addressing the urgent challenges emerging from the expanding influence of social media platforms and their novel practices of datafication.

At the readers' level, this study suggests presenting reading food blogs as a possibility for developing a positive relationship with food and agency. Laal (2011) states that lifelong learning occurs in the context of each place throughout one's life. According to Johnson and Majewska (2022), informal learning arises from everyday activities related to family, work, or leisure. This type of learning is often termed experiential learning and can be considered accidental learning to some extent. Additionally, non-formal learning encompasses learning within structured activities that are not explicitly identified as educational, yet still contain significant learning components, such as vocational skills acquired in the workplace (Johnson & Majewska, 2022). According to Collins (2009), lifelong learning is one of an individual's most vital competencies. Suppose social media and blogs are considered postmodern-day formal, non-formal, or informal learning environments. In that case, blog readers can utilize food blog content in their subjective intervention processes to enhance well-being related to food, whether intentionally or unintentionally. Thus, bloggers' positive food blog content could potentially enable a change in the reader's food-related well-being, even if the bloggers themselves do not yet fully recognize this potential of their blogs.

Sintonen, Vesterinen and Kynäslahti (2015) consider the Internet an entertaining learning arena, a cultural and civilizing forum of our time. This is particularly noteworthy in adult education, where Kupiainen and Sintonen (2010) identify participation and sharing as key characteristics of media literacy. In the digital age, media literacy has become more collaborative, productive, and distributive than in the past. Food blog posts are social media content that adult bloggers create, and their positive food-related topics are often related to everyday life and well-being, which food bloggers find essential in the postmodern era. Thus, they could be sufficient for learning material in adult education, formally or informally (Bisogni et al., 2012). Media education should be lifelong (Poyntz et al., 2020). Embracing a life course perspective enables the exploration of media literacy competencies that develop over time in response to evolving historical contexts, social institutions, and policies (Rasi et al., 2019).

Pääjärvi and Palsa (2015) call for the Finnish adult population to develop their media skills, and soon there is an evolving need to learn AI skills as well (Alotaibi & Alshehri, 2023; Niemi et al., 2023; Srinivasan, 2022). The goal should be to provide adults with equal opportunities for self-development, participation in society, and its renewal, rather than focusing on children and youth through media education in schools. The food blogs used as learning materials could provide an answer to this call. Sintonen et al. (2015) state that emphasizing proper social media use and understanding its potential is essential in adult media education. Viewing blogs from a new perspective can potentially change the understanding of the world. There is power in wanting to teach others, share, and interact (e.g., also Sintonen et al., 2015).

Hence, on the societal level, this study helps to direct attention to factors that may have a positive impact on food well-being, such as social relationships built around food and their nurturing through food-related activities, including food blogging. This study argues that food blogs can be utilized in food education as part of a broader societal intervention to enhance collective well-being related to food (Palumbo et al., 2017; Palumbo, 2016). This argument also aligns with the media education perspective, in which mediafication can refer to the increasing integration of digital media tools and platforms into educational practices and learning environments (Finnemann, 2011; Hepp, 2013; Livingston, 2019). This study suggests that food blogs could be intentionally used as educational content.

Support can be found from Bublitz et al. (2010), who suggest that focusing on a more positive and holistic role of food in an individual's life could potentially enhance health outcomes for both consumers and society. This means that consumers must be actively allowed to take control of their relationship with food (Mugel et al., 2019), and food blogs could be seen as a new possibility for enabling it. According to Brug (2008), to encourage healthy eating, individuals need to be motivated, confident in their abilities, and ideally, have access to environments that provide them with readily available opportunities. This study suggests that social media and blogs can be seen as informal learning platforms that may hold the key to this with their positive food and eating-related content and tone. Brug (2008) noted that accessible opportunities and the positive content, tips, insights, and stories found in food blogs can support readers' positive agency toward food, as observed in this study's data on food bloggers' pleasure-centered posts (e.g., also Pettigrew, 2016). Mugel et al. (2019) recommended framing communication that focuses less on health-centered information and more on individuals' autonomy and competence, avoiding adverse effects, and aiming for a more positive discourse (Mugel et al., 2019).

This study suggests that food blogs can serve as a valuable resource for promoting positive food education, particularly since the official health-centered tone (e.g., Jallinoja et al., 2018) and permissive dialogue about food-related choices typical of food education contexts are prevalent in food blogs. Instead, food blogs address

food well-being issues in a more appealing and empowering manner, focusing on the social aspects of food well-being, such as family dinners and social eating (e.g., Cox & Blake, 2011; Hackel et al., 2018). Lepkowska-White and Kortright (2018) state that bloggers do not typically count calories or check the nutritional content of food, instead focusing on the holistic experience of food, which can be viewed as a positive educational perspective on food and eating. In practice, the Finnish educational system could consider adding the concept of Food Sense (Janhonen et al. 2016) to curricula as part of health information in primary and secondary education to encompass aspects of agency, empowerment, joy, pleasure, curiosity, and a shared sense of responsibility, including sustainability, in the context of lifelong learning about food. This awareness could complement this study's comprehensive conception of food-related well-being.

Game education as a branch of media education could be harnessed to serve the food education purposes in both formal and informal learning settings. A decade ago, Bublitz et al. (2013) called for tools like mobile apps to support food-related well-being, and Palumbo et al. (2017) later piloted a self-assessment tool for measuring food-related competencies in Italy. This study provides a perspective for developing gamified AI-based food well-being tools in Finland by integrating insights from food bloggers on agency and well-being, thereby helping to avoid the paternalistic tone often found in traditional health apps. Building on Bublitz et al. (2013), who identified five key areas for food well-being—social influences, economic factors, food literacy, emotional knowledge, and physical and psychological traits—the study suggests that an app could in addition to Bublitz et al. themes, guide users in recognizing elements of Food Well-Being and the PERMA model in their daily lives, such as positive emotions, flow in cooking, a sense of succeeding, and meaningful social connections. By tracking small lifestyle changes, the app or game could support users in cultivating a more positive relationship with food.

Furthermore, food bloggers' content could serve as a model for AI-based immersive features, such as chatbots or avatars developed from real food bloggers, to help users understand what the blocks mean in real life or quickly respond to or inform them (e.g., also Albayrak et al., 2018). Bublitz et al. (2011) also assert that recognizing and celebrating achievements along the Food Well-Being (FWB) continuum is essential for encouraging consumers to foster a positive relationship with food. Food blogger avatars as personalized agents and experience experts could serve these purposes well. Lehikko et al.'s (2024) results also support the use of virtual reality, as a high level of interactivity enhances learners' sense of agency by encouraging greater engagement and participation and may be crucial for achieving emotional or affective learning outcomes. In their systematic literature review, Sun et al. (2024) also noted that in intelligent game-based learning environments, game-like features influence students' learning by enhancing engagement, sustaining motivation and attention, increasing enjoyment, and supporting learning outcomes. However, Rasi et al. (2019) remind

that the difficulty lies in designing age-inclusive media literacy education that effectively addresses the varying needs of people at different stages of life. This study suggests that the development of gamified applications holds potential to make food well-being and education more accessible and widely supported.

In summary, the principal practical value of this study lies in highlighting the potential of food bloggers to promote food-related well-being at a societal level. It positions social media, especially food blogs, as a powerful informal learning environment that can intentionally influence others. Traditionally, public health strategies have relied on formal tools, such as education, marketing, or legislation, rather than informal platforms like social media (Brug, 2008). This study challenges that norm by demonstrating social media's effectiveness in supporting food well-being, potentially offering more lasting impact than conventional nutrition education (Brug, 2008), prescriptive norms (Mugel et al., 2019), or information-based nutrition interventions (Talvia & Anglé, 2018), which often yield only short-term or inconsistent results (e.g., also Kotro et al., 2011). It also calls for further research into the short- and long-term effects of engaging with food blogs on readers' well-being and behavior, and additional studies on the effects of social media on well-being.

## **6.4 Further Research Needs**

Next, I present how this study recommends further exploring well-being, food blogging, and food-related pedagogy. This study examined food bloggers' well-being using a multi-method approach, including netnography and blog posts, email survey, theory-based content analysis, and discourse analysis, with frameworks such as the PERMA model, Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory, and Food Wellbeing (FWB) theory.

To deepen the understanding of contemporary food-related well-being, future research could employ qualitative approaches such as interviews (Lavelle et al., 2016) and investigate multimedia and multimodal forms of expression (Cesiri, 2020). Drawing on recent media education research (Kong et al., 2024; Ollonen & Kangas, 2024; Pekkala, 2016; Salonen & Kotilainen, 2024), the use of participatory approaches, gamification, and playfulness, such as a playful learning environment (e.g., Kangas et al., 2017), could broaden the perspectives related to food-centered studies. For example, Kangas and Siklander (2023) emphasize the reciprocal relationship between play and well-being. Additionally, exploring alternative theoretical frameworks and diverse food-related advocacy discourses (e.g., Koteyko & Hunt, 2018; Cox & Blake, 2011) would further enrich the field. Cross-cultural studies of food-related discourses are recommended to increase global relevance (Cesiri, 2020; Knuuttila, 2011). Quantitative research could complement these

efforts by testing hypotheses and identifying causal links, thus supporting evidence-based public health policy (e.g., Orton et al., 2011).

This study underscores the importance of future research on the impact of social media and AI from different perspectives on well-being and learning (Cramarenco et al., 2023; Pataranutaporn et al., 2021; Stray, 2020). Media studies are recommended to further align with other academic fields in addressing the increasingly data-driven nature of society to analyze mediatization and datafication (Livingstone, 2019). For example, examining the impact of artificial intelligence (Kaisen et al., 2024) on food blogging and the well-being of bloggers, other social media creators, and their audiences is recommended. The future research could examine how emerging forms of agency and participation are characterized and promoted by the current AI shift, and whether it is possible to utilize them as a resource for media education and well-being. AI and other modern technologies are expected to transform teaching and learning methodologies (e.g., Alotaibi & Alshehri, 2023; Niemi et al., 2023; Srinivasan, 2022). Primarily, research on lifelong learning is needed in the context of an ever-evolving media and well-being (Pekkala, 2016).

From a media education standpoint, sharing content on social media exemplifies individual agency and active engagement in societal discourse. To participate in the debate related to the study of media audiences (e.g., Livingstone, 2015), future studies should also investigate the perspectives of blog readers and the influence of blogs on their food well-being (Magno, 2017; Livingstone, 2019). This would be valuable also because bloggers often lack precise knowledge about their audiences (Brake, 2012; Litt & Hargittai, 2016), and thus it would be worthwhile to investigate who the readers are and whether they identify with the food well-being expressed by bloggers in this study. Bloggers may underestimate their influence, and readers might not be fully aware of how reading food blogs shapes their food-related behaviors and well-being – or does it? For example, previous research (Mainolfi et al., 2022) has demonstrated that perceived enjoyment, credibility, and similarity significantly influence engagement with food blogs, which in turn impact readers' behavioral intentions. Future studies could investigate whether these intentions translate into real-life food choices, thereby providing food-related agency, the timeframes of these changes, and their impact on readers' food-related well-being. However, concerning the ethics within the media audience research is essential (Kautio et al., 2025; Kontkanen, 2016).

This study proposes rethinking nutritional counseling (Kahan & Manson, 2017) by emphasizing the importance of fostering a positive relationship with food (Bublitz et al., 2013) — especially its cognitive and emotional dimensions together with social interactions — which this study noted as central in food bloggers' positive relationship with food, as a foundation for food well-being and possibly for a healthy relationship with food (Bisogni et al., 2012; Brug, 2008; Pettigrew, 2016). It critiques dominant food discourses (e.g., focused on health or body ideals)

for not always supporting food well-being (Brug, 2008; Macht et al., 2005; Dodds & Chamberlain, 2017; Tischner & Malson, 2012), and highlights food blogs as an example of an alternative, more empowering narrative to be studied further. This study encourages future research to investigate whether a positive relationship with food can enhance motivation for lifestyle changes and strengthen food-related agency (e.g., Bublitz et al., 2013; Nor et al., 2019). However, structural barriers (e.g., economic limitations) may hinder healthy choices even in the presence of such a relationship (Talvia et al., 2022; Brug, 2008; Bublitz et al., 2010; Bublitz et al., 2011).

Hence, the study calls for further research on agency and participation (Bandura, 2001; 2006; 2018; Code, 2013; Stavrositu & Sundar, 2012; Pienimäki & Kotilainen, 2018) to promote well-being. For example, it suggests researching whether food-related literacy should be taught as part of a broader intertwined well-being literacies—including also, for example, media and AI literacy and physical education—rather than in isolation (e.g., Talvia et al., 2022; Gartaula et al., 2018; Mugel et al., 2019; Seligman et al., 2016; Seligman, 2011), given that agencies in different areas of life may be interconnected and hence their intertwining related to well-being as well.

This study suggests developing pedagogical food frameworks through principles of positive psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihályi, 2000), such as strengths-based pedagogy (e.g., Nair, 2025), and researching them. This study highlights food blogs as culturally positive portrayals of contemporary food and eating and recommends integrating such positive discourses into pedagogical food frameworks and future food-related services to enhance public well-being regarding food (Talvia et al., 2022). Food blogs offer encouraging narratives that can help readers reflect on their food behaviors, identify examples of empowering food-related activities, and understand different dimensions of their food relationships (Gholamhosseinzadeh et al., 2021; Li et al., 2011). The study encourages future research to explore further and apply these insights in educational and service development contexts. In addition, this study recommends exploring whether technologies such as robotics (e.g., Airola & Rasi, 2020; Coco et al., 2018; Rasi-Heikkinen et al., 2025), VR (e.g., Lehikko et al., 2024), and other game-based features (e.g., Sun et al., 2024) can enhance food education and potentially increase positive agency and participation related to food and eating.

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# APPENDICES

## **Appendix 1. Original Email Survey in Finnish**

Ruokasuhde ja ruokablogit

Täyttämällä kyselyn annat suostumuksesi osallistua tutkimukseen.

Aineisto kerätään ja käsitellään täysin anonymisti, eikä henkilötietoja kysytä missään vaiheessa.

Aineistoa käytetään vain tutkimustarkoitukseen.

Saat lisätietoja tutkija Riikka Partaselta, sposti: riikka.ilona.partanen@gmail.com

1. Tuon ruokablogissani esiin ruoan vaikutuksia henkiseen ja fyysiseen hyvinvointiini.

Liukukytkin-asteikko 0-10, 0 = en lainkaan, 10 = todella paljon

2. Saan inspiraatiota resepteihini ja ruokabloggaamiseeni mediasta ja maailmalta.

Liukukytkin-asteikko 0-10, 0 = en lainkaan, 10 = todella paljon

3. Ruokasuhteeni perustana ovat minulle tärkeät arvot.

Liukukytkin-asteikko 0-10, 0 = ei lainkaan, 10 = todella paljon

4. Perustele vastauksia 1-3: (avoin kysymys)

5. Ruokabloggaaminen juontaa juurensa omasta myönteisestä suhteestani ruokaan ja syömiseen.

Liukukytkin-asteikko 0-10, 0 = ei lainkaan, 10 = todella paljon

6. Myönteinen ruokasuhteeni on seurausta intohimostani ruokaan ja syömiseen.

Liukukytkin-asteikko 0-10, 0 = ei lainkaan, 10 = todella paljon

7. Ruokasuhteessani painottuu moniaistinen mielihyvä.  
Liukukytkin-asteikko 0-10, 0 = ei lainkaan, 10 = todella paljon
8. Perustele vastauksia 5-7: (avoin kysymys)
9. Toivon ruokablogini innostavan lukijoita kehittämään ruokasuhdettaan monikulttuurisemmaksi.  
Liukukytkin-asteikko 0-10, 0 = ei lainkaan, 10 = todella paljon
10. Haluan ruokablogissani edistää lukijoitteni ymmärrystä ruokasuhteen ja hyvinvoinnin yhteyksistä.  
Liukukytkin-asteikko 0-10, 0 = ei lainkaan, 10 = todella paljon
11. Haluan edistää ruokabloggaamisella lukijoiden myönteistä suhdetta ruokaan ja syömiseen.  
Liukukytkin-asteikko 0-10, 0 = ei lainkaan, 10 = todella paljon
12. Perustele vastauksia 9-11: (avoin kysymys)
13. Ruokablogini välittää lukijoille kokemiani ruokaelämyksiä.  
Liukukytkin-asteikko 0-10, 0 = ei lainkaan, 10 = todella paljon
14. Haluan välittää ruokablogini lukijoille minulle tärkeitä ruokaan liittyviä arvoja.  
Liukukytkin-asteikko 0-10, 0 = ei lainkaan, 10 = todella paljon
15. Voin ruokabloggaamisellani innostaa blogin lukijoita valmistamaan itse ruokaa.  
Liukukytkin-asteikko 0-10, 0 = ei lainkaan, 10 = todella paljon
16. Perustele vastauksia 13-15: (avoin kysymys)
17. Miten ruokablogisi on vaikuttanut ruokasuhteesi kehittämiseen? Kerro käytännön esimerkein. (avoin kysymys)
18. Miten ruokablogisi vaikuttaa lukijoiden ruokasuhteeseen? Kerro käytännön esimerkein. (avoin kysymys)
19. Miten toivoisit ruokablogisi vaikuttavan lukijoiden ruokasuhteeseen? (avoin kysymys)

20. Mitä ruokailo merkitsee sinulle?

Kiitos vastauksistasi! Ne ovat arvokkaita.

Jos haluat lisätietoja tutkimuksesta, ota yhteyttä tutkija Riikka Partaseen sähköpostitse: X

## **Appendix 2. The Content of the Email Survey in English**

Relationship with food and food blogging

By completing the survey, you give your consent to participate in the study.

The data is collected and processed entirely anonymously, and no personal information is asked at any point.

The material is used only for research purposes.

You can get more information from researcher Riikka Partanen, e-mail: riikka.ilona.partanen@gmail.com

1. In my food blog, I bring up how food influences my mental and physical health.

On the slider scale from 1-10, 1 = not at all, 10 = very much

2. I get inspiration for my recipes and food blogging from the media and worldwide.

On the slider scale from 1-10, 1 = not at all, 10 = very much

3. My relationship with food is based on the values that are important to me.

On the slider scale from 1-10, 1 = not at all, 10 = very much

4. Justify answers 1-3 (open question)

5. My food blogging emerged from my positive relationship with food and eating.

On the slider scale from 1-10, 1 = not at all, 10 = very much

6. My positive relationship with food is an outcome from my passion for food and eating.

On the slider scale from 1-10, 1 = not at all, 10 = very much

7. A multisensory pleasure typifies my relationship with food.

On the slider scale from 1-10, 1 = not at all, 10 = very much

8. Justify answers 5-7 (open question)

9. I hope that my food blog inspires readers to develop their relationship with food in a more multicultural direction.

On the slider scale from 1-10, 1 = not at all, 10 = very much

10. In my food blog, I want to promote my readers' understanding of the connection between well-being and the relationship with food.

On the slider scale from 1-10, 1 = not at all, 10 = very much

11. With food blogging, I want to promote my readers' positive relationship with food and eating.

On the slider scale from 1-10, 1 = not at all, 10 = very much

12. Justify answers 8-11 (open question)

13. My food blog transmits my food-related experiences to the readers.

On the slider scale from 1-10, 1 = not at all, 10 = very much

14. I want to share the food-related values that I find important to my readers.

On the slider scale from 1-10, 1 = not at all, 10 = very much

15. With food blogging, I can inspire readers to prepare food by themselves.

On the slider scale from 1-10, 1 = not at all, 10 = very much

16. Justify answers 12-15 (open question)

17. How has your food blog influenced the development of your relationship with food? Describe with practical examples. (open question)

18. How does your food blog influence your readers' relationship with food? Describe with practical examples. (open question)

19. How would you like to see your blog influence your readers' relationship with food? (open question)

20. What does the joy of food and eating mean to you? (open question)

Thanks for your answers! They are valuable.

For more information about the study, contact researcher Riikka Partanen by email: X

### **Appendix 3. Original Cover Letter in Finnish**

Arvoisa ruoka- ja/tai leivontabloggaaja

Teen kaksivaiheista tutkimusta, jossa tutkin ruokabloggaajien ruokasuhdetta ja ruokablogien merkitystä. Tutkimukseni ensimmäisessä vaiheessa analysoin ruokablogikirjoituksia tehdäkseni päätelmiä ruokabloggaajien ruokasuhteesta. Nyt jatkan tutkimustani tutkimalla ruokabloggaajien käsityksiä ruokasuhteestaan ja ruokabloggaamisen merkityksestä.

Siksi lähestyn Sinua. Haluaisin kuulla, mitä mieltä olet ruokabloggaamisesta ja sen merkityksestä sekä vaikutuksesta omaan ja lukijoiden ruokasuhteeseen.

Ohessa on linkki lyhyeen kyselyyn, jonka toivoisin Sinun täyttävän X.X. mennessä. Täyttämällä kyselyn annat suostumuksesi osallistua tutkimukseen. Aineisto kerätään ja käsitellään täysin anonyymisti, eikä henkilötietoja kysytä missään vaiheessa. Aineistoa käytetään vain tutkimustarkoitukseen. Tutkimusta tehdään Lapin yliopiston Kasvatustieteiden tiedekuntaan ja sen arvioitu valmistumisaika on vuonna 2023.

Toivottavasti innostuit aiheesta ja kerrot ajatuksistasi! Kyselyn täyttäminen vie vain muutaman minuutin. Pääset täyttämään sen kännykällä, tietokoneella tai tabletilla tästä linkistä: <https://link.webropolsurveys.com/S/2623A338461E36F5>

Kyselyssä on sekä liukuvalitsin-kysymyksiä että avoimia kysymyksiä.

Olen kiitollinen kaikesta, mitä kirjoitat kyselyyn. Vastauksesi on minulle hyvin arvokas.

Vastaan mielelläni mahdollisiin lisäkysymyksiin.

Ruokailoa toivottaen  
Riikka Partanen, tutkija

#### **Appendix 4. Covering Letter in English**

Dear food and/or baking blogger

I am conducting a two-phase study on food bloggers' relationships with food and the importance of food blogs. In the first phase, I analyzed food blog entries to conclude food bloggers' relationships with food. I am continuing my study by examining food bloggers' perceptions of their relationship with food and the meaning of food blogging.

That's why I'm approaching You. I would like to hear what you think about food blogging and its meaning and effect on your and your readers' relationships with food.

I have attached a link to a short survey that I would like you to complete by X.X. By filling out the survey, you will be giving your consent to participate in the study. The data is collected and processed entirely anonymously, and no personal information is collected at any point. The material is used only for research purposes. The study is conducted at the Faculty of Educational Sciences of the University of Lapland, with an estimated completion date of 2023.

I hope you got excited about the topic. Let me know your thoughts! It only takes a few minutes to complete the survey. You can fill it out with a mobile phone, computer, or tablet from this link: <https://link.webropolsurveys.com/S/2623A338461E36F5>

The survey has both slider questions and open questions.

I appreciate everything you write in the survey. Your answer is precious to me.

I will be happy to answer any additional questions.

Wishing you the joy of food  
Riikka Partanen, researcher

## Publication I

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# What can be learned about the relationship with food in food blogs?: A netnographic analysis of Finnish food bloggers' posts on social media

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## Abstract

Social media provide numerous platforms to build relationships with food. In this research, we focus on Finnish food bloggers with the purpose to analyze how the relationship with food appears in food blogs. To answer this question, we conducted a netnographic research by visiting food blogs. The analysis followed qualitative content analysis. The main categories of findings were food- and eating-related values, innovativeness and experimental approach, positive eating-related multi-sensory experiences and memories, and social elements of eating. The role of social media, for example in the form of food blogs, can have a meaningful role in the socialization into the modern eating culture.

**Keywords:** food blog, netnography, relationship with food, social media

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## Introduction

The new media provides numerous platforms to build relationships with food, find meanings for it, publish one's own food choices, and interact with various audiences. Food is strongly present in the media in many ways. Sometimes, this phenomenon is referred to as foodism, which means a growing enthusiasm toward food and eating cultures (Jallinoja et al., 2018). One concrete example is that in Finnish TV, the main channels broadcast over 70 food programs a week in 2015, and of them, 25 were at the best showtime (Tervonen, 2015).

In this research, we focused on blogging. A blog is a web page or website on which a blogger writes blog articles (Lukkarila, 2018). Blogs have been characterized as an online diary or homepage, where the blogger writes her or his thoughts on the topic she or he has chosen as the subject of her or his blogging (Kortesuo, 2014). Blogs are characterized by regular blog articles, i.e. posts, reverse chronological order of posts, and dominant use of the first person in the text (Tremayne, 2007).

Blogs as a form of social media arena and blogging as a social activity of sharing thoughts and doings have become popular (Bjornsen, 2018; Skalski et al., 2017). Furthermore, in social media platforms, individuals can influence others (Code, 2013). Social media content can be divided into, for example, content created or chosen by the user or interactive products (Skalski et al., 2017). Traditionally, blogs belong to the former (Skalski et al., 2017). To sum up, blogs have become an established part of media quickly, because starting from the 2010s, blogging could become one's main way of earning living.

Of blogging activities, our specific interest is in food blogging. Food bloggers make an interesting group because, on one hand, they represent active influencers in social media, and on the other hand, they also illustrate their own relationship with food through their blogs. Blogs represent one form of a social media arena that has become an essential part of today's adults' lives (Bjornsen, 2018). Research on food blogging has showed its many faces all the way from sharing and distributing information about healthy relationship with food to unhealthy choices (Coates et al., 2019; Khalid et al., 2018; O'Neal & Cocco, 2021).

Food bloggers can be described as self-educated food experts who publish recipes that readers can try at home. Food bloggers also write about topics that the readers can relate to and that they find worth sharing with others. One aspect of publishing opinions on food is that according to research, social acceptance of food choices is important to people so that they can feel pride and satisfaction about their choices (Ivanic, 2016). Furthermore, Wei (2009) points out that the social power of a blog can be defined as the blogger's ability to influence as many audiences as possible. This is interesting because food bloggers could also be regarded as modern-day educators about a healthy relationship with food. Thus, it is not irrelevant how they depict their relationship with food as their social media behaviors may have a potentially huge impact on many people (Rousenfell et al., 2020).

This research took place in Finland where food blogging has increased its popularity. Our research can be located within the fields of educational psychology and media education, and we are especially interested in how the relationship with food is expressed in the social media. The

research question set for this research is: How is the relationship with food described in Finnish food blogs?

## Theory

The core concept of this research is the relationship with food. According to Talvia and Anglé (2018), the relationship is a unique entity that is dynamic and developing and consists of life-long food and eating experiences and interpretations. The relationship can be seen as multidimensional, even contradictory in the present culture and time (see e.g., Jallinoja et al., 2018). The relationship with food can be viewed from a variety of perspectives all the way from healthy development and disorders, to cultural, social, aesthetic, or environmental dimensions (e.g., Boulos et al., 2012; Dingemans et al., 2009; Han & Kahn 2017; Ng et al., 2014; Torres & Nowson, 2007; Van der Veen, 2003). In the western world, the preconditions to build a healthy relationship with food exist but not all eating environments, forms of food, quality of food, or beauty ideals support its development (see e.g., Macht et al., 2005). In the Finnish discourse, topical themes seem to be health, enjoyment, responsibility, and the balance between meat and vegetables in the diet (Jallinoja et al., 2018). Instead, social perspectives on food and its relationship with it have drawn less attention in research (Schubert et al., 2012).

Block et al. (2011) refer to a new concept of food well-being (FWB) proposing a more positive, holistic understanding of the role of food in overall well-being. Their idea includes five primary domains that are food socialization, food literacy, food marketing, food availability, and food policy. The viewpoint is relevant for this research because food bloggers act in the social media arenas, and thus also have a special social role as a part of their food-related activities (Colliander & Dahlén, 2011). For example, they have the opportunity to convince a wide audience that healthy food can taste good (Story et al., 2002) or that a healthy diet can become a part of pleasurable life (Freeland-Graves & Nitzke, 2013). Thus, their social role may be the one of an influencer but they also set an example of food-related social behaviors and habits, such as family dinners and social eating (e.g., Cox & Blake, 2011; Hackel et al., 2018).

In the modern culture, the relationship with food can be molded or constructed also with food-related education, food experiments, encouragement, focusing on the availability of certain food products, guidance, food brands, and new packaging—just to name a few (see e.g., DeCosta et al., 2017; Vandeweghe et al., 2016). Furthermore, customer segmentation and advertising happen increasingly through social media (Pettigrew, 2016; see also Hanks et al., 2012; Rekhy & McConchie, 2014). Therefore, the relationship with food can be seen as visual and multi-channeled because today's people see and watch food more than ever before (Skatrud-Mickelson et al., 2011; Saariketo, 2018); our compulsive need to be present in social media is one element in the picture (Seymour, 2019). Food is a timeless topic, and therefore, food-related multi-channeled and -sensory communication has become a natural viral phenomenon of contemporary social media (Suominen et al., 2013).

The purpose of this research is to analyze how the relationship with food appears in one of the social media arenas, namely food blogs. Despite the interest in the phenomena caused by and appearing in social media, research on food bloggers is still somewhat scarce. Our purpose is to open discussion to how a relationship with food can be represented in food blogs—by analyzing

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food bloggers' blog posts we can discover new ways of perceiving relationships with food that could also reflect the modern lifestyles within the networks of social media.

## Method

The purpose of this research is to analyze how the relationship with food appears in Finnish food blogs. To answer this question, we conducted a netnographic research by visiting food blogs. Netnography (also known as digital ethnography, cyber-ethnography, virtual ethnography, online ethnography) is a research approach that has developed from ethnography and has anthropological roots (Morais et al., 2020; Weijo et al., 2014). According to Mkono and Markwell (2014), the researchers are typically passive observers outside the community they are studying in netnographic studies. They do not reveal their research purpose to the online community members and participate in community discussions or activities (Thanh & Kirova, 2018). In this research, we considered ourselves as outside observers who did not participate in the interaction of the blog community, because the research object is the representation of food bloggers' relationship with food in food blog articles.

In this research, the research data comprised 16 bloggers' (10 women and 6 men) food blog articles written in November 2017. When choosing the blogs for this research, we wanted to include both women and men's blogs although in this research, the blogger's gender was not considered as the main factor for the blogging activity. The women's food blogs were chosen based on the year 2017 Food Blog TOP10 listing in Finland by Cision. The men's blogs were chosen with the same criteria. In addition, in order to be included in the data, the blogs had to be updated regularly (more often than three times a month). Altogether, the data comprised 257 pages, excluding photos and videos, and the readers' comments. All bloggers were aged between 20-50 years representing quite well the average age of food bloggers in Finland and in Europe (Blogibarometri 2014). Many female bloggers mentioned that they were mothers and entrepreneurs. Some were professional chefs, and many bloggers did food blogging as their day job. The blogs were started between 2006-2016. The blogs are described in the Table 1 in more detail.

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Name	Code	Listing in Cision	The Blogger	Focus
Peggyn pieni punainen keittiö [Peggy's Little Red Kitchen]	FB1	1	a mother of three children	homely everyday dishes suitable for children, and its specialty is British dishes.
Chocochili	FB2	2	a gardener-florist and entrepreneur	vegan food and vegetarian food.
Terveelliset herkut [Healthy Treats]	FB3	3	over 30-year-old mother of a little boy	sweet and savory healthy recipes and coping with everyday life.
Viimeistä murua myöten [Till the Last Crumble]	FB4	4	a young medical student and entrepreneur	vegetarian and vegan food recipes and recipes inspired by Southeast Asian cuisine.
Jotain maukasta [Something Tasteful]	FB5	5	a wine expert and an author	processed products as little as possible and prefer instead, for example, brown sugars and vegetables
Liemessä [Sauced]	FB6	6	a food artist, a content producer and entrepreneur	simple tasty food and evaluating travel destinations and restaurants
52 Weeks of Deliciousness	FB7	7	a mother and a foodie	recipes for everyday delicacies, restaurant tips and descriptions of taste trips around the world
Hellan ja viinilasin välissä [Between the Stove and a Glass of Wine]	FB8	8	an entrepreneur, photographer and recipe developer and mother	versatile food, wine and travel focused lifestyle blog
Hannan soppa [Hanna's Soup]	FB9	9	a food professional, content producer, entrepreneur, photographer and a mother	Asian flavors, food trends and traditional and seasonal food
Beach House Finland	FB10	10	a mother and traveler	food quality, ethics and versatility, and seeking ideas and flavors from around the world

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Name	Code	Listing in Cision	The Blogger	Focus
Perinneruokaa prkl [Traditional Food Fck]	FB11	n/a	a professional cook and an author	trying new things, combining flavors and fresh ingredients and wine
Kulinaari [Culinary]	FB12	n/a	a young foodie and a home cook	the star moments and failures of his home cooking
Aitoa arkiruokaa [Genuine Everyday Food]	FB13	n/a	a professional cook and author	whole food recipes, restaurants, travel, wines, home and videos.
Ukot kokkaa [Dudes Cook]	FB14	n/a	a Lappish father and son	food recipes created from cooking local food and self-caught animal and fish.
Aromipaja [Aroma Factory]	FB15	n/a	an entrepreneur	good food and wine
Jannen keittiössä [In Janne's Kitchen]	FB16	n/a	a young male baker pastry chef	sweet and savory baking and cooking

*Note:* The blogs included in this research

The analysis focused progressed through immersion to data categorization, comparisons of categories, naming of categories, and final definitions of categories (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012; Vaismoradi et al., 2013). In netnography, the phases of data analysis usually overlap because the researcher returns to the data and categories constantly. In this research, we started the first phase by making an overview of the data after selecting the blogs for the research. We divided the material into four large parts, each of which contained the articles of four bloggers. In the second phase, data examples were discovered that represented the cornerstones of the food relationship. The categorization focused on how food bloggers describe their relationship with food through their expressions of values, food choices, and other food-related activities. Eventually, what was chosen to be reported as a research finding had to appear at least in 7-8 food bloggers' articles. These appearing themes formed the categorization and definitions of findings (see also Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). This phase lead to the main categories of findings which were food- and eating-related values, innovativeness and experimental approach, positive eating-related multi-sensory experiences and memories, and social elements of eating.

## Results

### Food- and eating-related values

The relationship with food among the food bloggers appeared through the values and ethical choices they revealed in their texts. Values, such as healthy, natural, economic, ecological, and

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local availability, were mentioned. The bloggers also seemed to associate these values with the quality of food.

Especially, local and organic food was valued highly: six bloggers actively choose self- or locally grown or picked ingredients, and five used the local food circle. Others mentioned local stores and farms as their favorite places to buy ingredients. All these activities were described from the perspective of preparing and enjoying food and eating.

“--I found moose from a nearby farm store. Heat nachos for a little while in the oven and put pickled pumpkin and lingonberry on top with sour cream - Finnish and very well matching flavors.” (FB10)

“I managed to get quality Dingley Bell farm meat from PNM. Well-marbled and juicy steaks downright called for proper food preparing. This was a perfect occasion.” (FB13)

The availability of ingredients was also a popular topic in blog articles. On the one hand, the bloggers valued seasonal products, and on the other hand, they regretted if some ingredients or spices were not available. However, the latter often led to innovative experiments that were served to readers as new recipes. In addition to the appreciation of quality and local ingredients, the bloggers seemed to consider that readers too wanted to read about their choices and their new recipes. In many articles, it became evident that the bloggers would prefer also publishing quality recipes, but could also publish quick and cheap recipes every now and then:

“Starting from the beginning of this blog, readers have given feedback that they would appreciate cheaper meals. Indeed, we do plenty of reasonably priced and quick meals but these have not been published in the blog. -- One really cheap and one of our favorites is sausage sauce. So, there you are; a recipe of how it is made, and the price is only about a couple of euros.” (FB14)

The bloggers paid attention to ecological choices and food waste. This value appeared also in the way bloggers encouraged their readers to lessen food waste and offered tips for concrete actions. The bloggers appeared skillful in using the food items they had at home in a flexible and thrifty manner. Some bloggers mentioned their vegan recipes as ecological choices, too.

“The advantage of this pie is that all yolks from the eggs used for meringue are used in the pie dough. Thus, you will not be storing excess yolks in the fridge that you often get when preparing meringue.” (FB11)

“When digging my kitchen cabinets I found yellow, dried peas, and started thinking how to use them. -- At the same time, I was able to use yesterday’s cooked potatoes.” (FB13)

In addition, well-being trends could be identified as values the bloggers wanted to express in their articles. They described how food and food blogging had healthy effects on the mind and body. The health and well-being related relationship with food was evident in blog articles reporting actions that were to enhance health by, for example, having one vegetarian day a week or choosing a certain diet. Some ingredients were chosen for recipes or recommended to readers for their health effects. The positive health effects were brought up actively in blogs:

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“I have been thinking about the significance of food to health, and the sentence ‘you are what you eat’ have gotten a new meaning. - - You can influence the imbalance in your human organism with food and thus prevent the imbalance to develop into a disease. - - What if the option to medicine was a diet that is suitable to you: which one would you choose?” (FB11)

The health-based relationship with food was also evident through healthy recipes and attention to balanced meals. Many bloggers were well aware of nutrition recommendations and explicitly wanted to notice those in everyday dining. They could, for example, write about how much they eat fish, the significance of proteins for health and adding vegetables in meals, and how to decrease the consumption of sugars and sweets. Yet, they did not say that it was easy to follow dietary recommendations. However, the bloggers spared certain ingredients and used to freeze meals for quick everyday dining to ensure healthy meals also when too busy to prepare meals.

“The chaos with small children is a little bit more organized if you have the freezer arranged so that it has sections for snacks and ready meals. You do not have to go to the store more than once a week. - - so you will not be doing panic shopping for expensive snack bars or yogurts. P.S. And if you sometimes use processed meals, I guess that will not harm anyone. Even we have fish sticks, dumplings, and frozen pizza!” (FB10)

“--I usually prepare a huge dough at a time, and I freeze it into separate boxes. The frozen falafel dough melts really fast, so falafels serve often as a quick meal.” (FB4)

In all, the relationship with food among bloggers appeared in this category through the healthy choices and well-being-related notions that they brought up in blog articles. Also, other values, such as ecology and locality, were apparent in articles either in the bloggers’ own experiences or choices of recipes and ingredients they wanted to share with their readers.

## **Innovativeness and experimental approach**

The second category representing the food bloggers’ relationships with food concerned the innovative and experimental approach they expressed. First of all, this appeared through a strong interest in international cuisine. Based on the blogs, the bloggers were inspired by recipes from all over the world, participated in various food projects and tastings, and did food and tasting excursions abroad. They wanted to increase their knowledge about international cuisine but also produce new recipes and share their knowledge in blogs. The bloggers wanted to enrich the familiar Finnish cuisine with new flavors and ingredients.

“In our Christmas dinner, we have often had meals inspired with the Middle Eastern cuisine. Spices and ingredients typical to the Middle East slid into the Finnish Christmas table perfectly!” (FB2)

The innovative and experimental approach was described also by calling preparing food an important hobby. This also explains the nature of the relationship with food. The descriptions were enthusiastic and the enthusiasm appeared in daily activities.

“I have always been interested in Asian kitchen, food, cultures, and habits. I do eat quite a

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lot Asian food and for example, our little chef [referring to a child] loves Thai food.” (FB7)

“Presenting the series 1000+1 Ways to Prepare Meatballs! Mr. Clam wants to eat his favorite food meatballs if not daily but weekly. At this time, we will have Asian meatballs that are those familiar and safe meatballs but with a little Asian twist.” (FB6)

The food bloggers were not only interested in testing various ingredients, but they also experimented with new ways of preparing meals, for example with household appliances. Some bloggers also got new appliances or other tools from their sponsors. Regardless of where the new appliance came from, the joy of wanting to try new was something that the bloggers wanted to share with their readers.

“Where do these potatoes Parisienne come from? From the supermarket freezer? NO NO NO!! Although we have gotten from there until now but already a couple of years ago I decided that we will prepare those by ourselves as well. Thus, I ordered a melon baller and finally, after two years, we started to use it.” (FB14)

Innovation and experimentation appeared especially in blog articles that introduced weekend and festive cooking. They spared plenty of time for preparing meals, which could include several phases. Thus, preparing also required planning and sometimes starting the preparing already days before the weekend meal serving. In general, the bloggers seemed to enjoy challenges in the kitchen provided by new ingredients or difficult, multiple-phased recipes.

“I have not ever before baked bun for 1.5 days! But I will reveal it already that it was worth it.” (FB7)

## **Positive eating-related multi-sensory experiences and memories**

The relationship with food appeared also as a positive multi-sensory experience. In the data, the bloggers expressed multiple expectations toward food and eating. For example, eating at a restaurant was expected to provide holistic food experiences that were unusual and different from everyday cooking. These experiences were mentioned not only as gustatory but also visual and social.

“I have visited Grön [a restaurant] once and it was again a sort of uplifting experience that I can recommend to everyone. We enjoyed a five-course menu and here are little examples from the menu. Our colleagues were speechless, these portions and that sourdough bread - - perfect!” (FB10)

The experience was based on the food but also on the context and how the food was served. The food bloggers sought tips from for example cook books and evaluated others’ servings when visiting restaurants. Many bloggers wanted to share those activities that they considered important, such as preparing the table setting, preparing the meal itself, and transmitting the traditions forward to their children or followers.

“In my opinion, the table setting is like half the meal, and a beautiful table is a joy to the

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eye. Pentik's dinner set has belonged on our table already from my childhood. The set has varied from the 1970s Halla series to the modern ones. This year I tried mixing colors and various patterns more boldly." (FB1)

Food and eating-related experiences were also memories and expressions of food identity, thus forming an important part of the relationship with food. The bloggers often described memories positively and as memorable. Present-day dining was expected to create food-related memories and thus build a relationship with food constantly.

"Do you remember the 1990s' favorite garlic potatoes? I had moved from home and did garlic potatoes in the oven every weekend. I did not spare garlic and it smelled accordingly. - - I made garlic potatoes so often that it took almost 20 years until I remembered those again. Oh, how insanely good they were, and what a lovely smell came out from the oven, but I am not referring to how we smelled afterward." (FB11)

The bloggers described how they were feasting on food or having snacks. Sometimes a good meal was gulped down. In all, descriptions of eating were positive without exception and eating was expected to bring pleasure primarily. The bloggers were also aware of their preferences and often described them. They told how they loved certain food and expressed their feelings toward food and eating with numerous positive feelings.

"Anyways, we eat (finally!) awfully good bread every week. I mean awfully good bread. The week before last week I based two pieces of bread because one will last only one day. Well, those two did not last long and on Sunday evening there was nothing left." (FB7)

## Social elements of eating

The social nature of eating was so significant in food blogs that it could be defined as an important part of the relationship with food. The social elements were brought up in many ways: alongside introducing recipes the bloggers constantly mentioned either directly or implicitly that they had company or that they prepared food for a bigger group of eaters. Serving and table-setting tips were often described from a social viewpoint. It also seemed that the bloggers met each other occasionally and some bloggers had also become friends with their readers. Food and eating seemed to bring people together.

"Tortilla evening has already become a tradition to our crew, and you cannot get bored with this tradition because of the numerous options for stuffing. This time tortillas were filled with colorful jollity and a festive feeling with a fruit cocktail, which turned out excellent. Corn tortillas, spicy chicken, and fruit salsa made us rub our hands in delight, mmmmm...." (FB1)

In addition, preparing food with children, other family members, or friends was mentioned often, which required some planning as well. Sharing the enthusiasm of trying new recipes or methods was described as an essential part of the relationship with food.

"The chocolate house became a train station and the children could decorate the roof with little sugar stars and Non Stop chocolate drops. The house did not turn into the world's

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most stylish one but it looks like us and the children had fun building it. The funniest phase was probably the last one which was the powder sugar rain that covered the train station and the conductors as well as the nearby spruce forest.” (FB9)

The social element was apparent, especially among those bloggers who had children. They seemed to prepare meals that their children liked, but they also highlighted their role as providing food memories to their children. They wanted to teach about their childhood traditions and educate them about a healthy relationship with food. Eating with children presented the bloggers with a new viewpoint and a turning point in their relationship with food.

“In October, I prepared pumpkin crepes that our toddler liked too. That is why I have dared to put more spices in food because it seems that my breast milk has provided chili to the child’s taste buds already, and the child does not dislike exotic flavors.” (FB10)

## Discussion

The findings showed how the bloggers constructed, maintained, and presented their relationship with food in many ways illustrating also their FWB (Block et al., 2011). Food offered several opportunities for hobbyism, such as collecting various appliances, artistic meals, social media posts, food tourism, and food-specific groups and interests. The relationship with food appeared multidimensional and developing. It also seemed that the bloggers wanted to act actively as the preservers of traditions and, on the other hand, as trailblazers of the new culture. Their innovativeness and willingness to experiment and create new recipes revealed this side of their relationship with food. Furthermore, the social dimension that was strongly present in their blogs showed that they wanted to share their experiences and build also others’ (e.g., children) relationships with food by introducing their own choices and multi-sensory experiences. The pursuit of creating “wow” experiences with food appears similar to the idea of food as a gift: taking the trouble of preparing multi-phased meals, serving food beautifully, and sharing the positive experience is a part of the modern eating culture (Michel et al., 2014; Sidenvall et al., 2000). The social element was also evident in the way the bloggers brought up the values they appreciated (e.g., local food, and healthy choices). The values of sustainable consumption have been noticed typically by Nordic consumers in general (Niva et al., 2014).

When considering the results on the point of view of blogging, food blogs can be seen as an informal means of food politics. With the positive food communication practiced by food bloggers, the approach of national Finnish recommendations to eating and nutrition could change from an official tone (see e.g. Jallinoja et al., 2018) to an empowering one and be considered more appealing for the consumers, concentrating to social perspective such as family dinners and social eating (e.g., Cox & Blake, 2011; Hackel et al., 2018).

As a blog focus, FWB (see also Block et al. 2011) would serve the increase in the public need for guidance and counseling related to nutrition, i.e. for an individual to make nutrition-related choices. Since the relationship with food is dynamic and developing (Talvia & Anglé, 2018), food bloggers could play a key role in the efforts to improve people’s relationship with food. Eventually, the food bloggers represent a special group of today’s influencers, whose relationship with food

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develops through continuous interaction mediated by social media and who can influence the food relationships of others.

## Limitations

In this research, the data was natural because it existed without the research. The researcher entered the world of social media to obtain the netnographic data (Hakala & Vesa, 2013; Östman, 2015). However, at the same time, it limited the ability to ask bloggers about their relationship with food and check whether the interpretations made from blogs were correct. However, according to the nature of netnography, the observer researcher tries to stay in the back and analyze the events and phenomena from the chosen viewpoint, in this case how the relationship with food appeared in the food bloggers' activities at the given period (see also Malterud, 2021).

Although this research included quite a wide scope of blogs from the Finnish food blogging field, the generalizability of the findings can be questioned. Being selected as “top food blogs” these blogs represent a special group of blogs, which also has an impact on transferability because blogs of various quality is left outside. In addition, the Finnish food culture has its own special features that differ from other countries. It is also worth remembering that netnography does not aim at generalizations, but providing a deeper understanding about the phenomenon under investigation, which was the purpose of this research too.

Another limitation is that some food bloggers had sponsors. As they were also making their living by writing blogs, the contents of articles may have been influenced by the sponsorship. Since the articles comprised rich and wide data, and the bloggers' descriptions included so many personal experiences and opinions, it was considered that the data was suitable for the research. Those sections that seemed more advertisement than personal descriptions were not included in the analysis (Morais et al., 2020; Skalski et al., 2017). Similarly, the food pictures and readers' comments were excluded from the analysis as it was considered that they would not bring much to the analysis of the bloggers' relationship with food.

## Conclusion

While some earlier research claims that modern eating has become asynchronous and narrowed (McBride, 2010; Spence et al., 2016), this research shows that the way food bloggers express their relationship with food could have an important role as a positive role model to the modern eaters. In their blogs, they represented the opportunity to build a positive relationship with food in social encounters during planning, preparing, and eating the food as well as when sharing the experience also with the wider audience through social media. Food bloggers are always in the swim of time, because they blog about the new food experiments, encouragement, focusing on the availability of certain food products, guidance, food brands, and new packaging—just to name a few (DeCosta et al., 2017; Vandeweghe et al., 2016).

Bloggers' wide audience can be contrasted also to the concept of commensality which refers specially to eating together and sharing values (Ochs & Shovet, 2006; Sidenvall et al., 2000). When it comes to food bloggers, a concept that would also connect the commensality activities mediated by the social media (blogs in this case). This would be important because the food

bloggers expressed their relationship with food as a source of well-being in multiple levels of human action (see also Pettigrew, 2016; see also Lautenschlager & Smith, 2007; Marty et al., 2018). Block et al.'s (2011) concept of food well-being seemed to describe well food bloggers' relationship with food. In addition, earlier research about the significance of food-related memories to the nature of one's relationship with food got support from the findings of this research as well (Everett, 2008; Holtzman, 2006; Waxman, 2008; Willander & Larsson, 2007).

People become socialized into certain eating cultures and habits already starting from childhood (Joki et al., 2019; Nicklaus, 2009; Lautenschlager & Smith, 2007). In the western world, the preconditions to build a healthy relationship with food exist but not all eating environments support its development (Macht et al., 2005). The role of social media, for example in the form of food blogs, can have a meaningful role in the socialization into the modern eating culture. The modern eating culture effects the relationship with food making it more visual and multi-channeled (see also Skatrud-Mickelson et al., 2011; Saariketo, 2018).

Our research data was collected already a few years ago after which blogging activities have only increased and become more varied. Still, the potential of blogging is not yet fully recognized, for example their potential educational role in nutritional politics is not yet tested. Based on the findings of this research we would like to highlight the need for further examination of social media and cultural learning when it comes to new ways of enhancing healthy relationships with food and spreading the joy of food that the food bloggers illustrated in the blog articles.

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## **Publication II**

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# Presenting Your Relationship with Food Online: An Analysis of Finnish Food Bloggers' Agency in Social Media

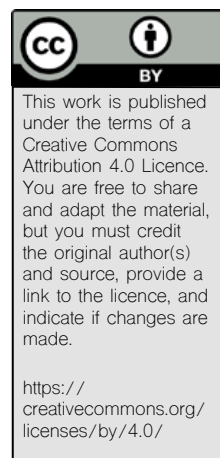
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## Abstract

This research aimed to investigate how Finnish food bloggers perceive their agency when describing their relationship with food in their food blogs. This was studied by analyzing the meanings the food bloggers give to their activities in the blogs. Bandura's theory of agency and its elements (intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness, and self-reflectiveness) were used as the framework for this research. The research data were collected among 19 Finnish food bloggers. The analysis followed the basic structure of inductive qualitative content analysis. From the perspective of agency, food bloggers did not fully perceive the influence of their blogs, nor did they consider influencing others to be the main motivation for their blogs. This research increased knowledge about human behaviors and their influence on each other in the various arenas of social media. The bloggers and readers' relationship appeared reciprocal, and the analysis of agency revealed how multidimensional the influence that happens in social media can be - at the intentional and unintentional levels.

Keywords: social media, food blog, qualitative content analysis, agency



## Introduction

Food bloggers present an active group of adults on social media. Blogs as a form of social media arena have become increasingly popular (Bjornsen, 2018): people read and write blogs all the time. Sharing one's thoughts and activities has become a normal part of our lives due to the possibilities inherent within online social media (Skalski et al., 2017). Similarly, research on social media has interested numerous researchers in various fields. Activities on social media platforms can be analyzed as a form of significant trends in

sociology, history, education, and psychology (Lenhart et al., 2010). Especially, behavioral sciences have found the forms of human agency and behaviors interesting from the perspectives of public agency, governmental influence and marketing (e.g., Brubaker & Wilson, 2018; Chen et al., 2020; Felix et al., 2017).

The influence people have on each other in social networks and how they leverage their connections to powerful others within it is an expression of agency. With the proliferation of social networks enabled by the Internet, understanding the influence of powerful others in the expression of human agency is of critical importance (Rounsefell et al., 2019). According to Lövheim et al. (2013), identity, agency, and power are the outcome of interactions and negotiations within a network of actors in social media. On the other hand, social media platforms provide the expression of agency where individuals can influence others (Code, 2013). Code (2013) emphasized a decade ago that understanding the influence perspective in the expression of human agency is extremely important.

At a time of abundant information mediated in social media platforms, the way people engage with certain contents and forums explains some of the influence. Opportunities for dialogue and a sense of sharing ideas and thoughts provide a new way of self-expression and at the same time influence (Bradshaw & Howard, 2018). While fake news and propaganda are expressions of agency that can harm democracy (Bradshaw & Howard, 2018), social media blogging activities around everyday issues such as food and eating can become a useful medium for influencing healthy habits and sharing useful information (Khalid et al., 2018; O'Neal & Cocco, 2021) - while currently, they have stayed less healthy as Coates et al.'s (2019) study on YouTube videos and food cues showed.

The way social media affects people has been widely studied through the concepts of social media influencers (SMI) and micro-celebrities who consciously advertise certain products and get paid for their work (Kay et al., 2020). To some extent, food bloggers are these kinds of influencers because often they become sponsored by food or kitchen utensil brands (Liljander et al., 2015). However, in this research we are not interested in how being sponsored may impact the bloggers' activities - being or not being sponsored is not the key here. We focus on food bloggers as our interest is not only in how these bloggers perceive their actions on social media but also in how consciously they view their relationship with food and how their food blogging activities may impact their readers' relationships with food. Based on our analysis of the food blog articles, the relationship with food was depicted in a multi-dimensional manner that varied from food-related values to social elements of eating. The analysis left us pondering how conscious this action was, and therefore,

we continued the research by asking the food bloggers about their perceptions. As earlier research shows, the impact of social media on followers has been widely studied, but research on the social aspect, such as bloggers and other social media influencers themselves, has been scarce (Schubert et al., 2012). By analyzing the human agency perspective from food bloggers' perceptions, we looked to fill a gap in research that can provide useful information to educators about how to approach and use social media platforms positively.

### The Concept of Human Agency

Albert Bandura (2001), who developed the social cognitive theory, underpinned by the idea of human agency, defined agentic capacity as being able to exercise control over the nature and quality of one's life as the essence of humanness. According to the theory, human agency is characterized by core features that are "intentionality and forethought, self-regulation by self-reactive influence, and self-reflectiveness about one's capabilities, quality of functioning, and the meaning and purpose of one's life pursuits" (Bandura, 2001, p. 1).

*Intentionality* tells about one's intentions about the future course of action to be performed (Bandura, 2001). Intentionality is not just about actions per se, but also about the person's engagement with those actions. However, actions do not always lead to desired outcomes and therefore, "realization of forward-looking plans requires more than an intentional state because it is not causally sufficient by itself" (Bandura, 2001, p. 7). This means that the other features of the agency are needed.

*Forethought* refers to the form of anticipatory self-guidance in which people motivate themselves by creating action plans, adopting goals, and visualizing the likely outcomes of their actions (Bandura, 2001; 2018). Forethought can provide meaning to life because it directs the person toward their desired future (Seligman et al., 2016).

*Self-reactiveness* is needed for managing one's behavior because intending and forethinking do not sufficiently describe human agency (Bandura, 2001; 2018). This means that people evaluate their behaviors against their goals and plans. These evaluations happen through self-monitoring, performance self-guidance via personal standards, and corrective self-reactions (Bandura, 2001).

*Self-reflectiveness* differs from self-reactiveness as self-reactiveness focuses more on self-regulation while self-reflectiveness is about self-examination (Bandura, 2001; 2018). Self-reflectiveness makes people reflect on the meaning and purpose of their actions and values. Thus, it is a metacognitive capability, and according to Bandura (2018) also the most distinctly human core property of agency.

When we think about food bloggers' agency, it is interesting to analyze how intentional their actions in the blogs are (intentionality); how consciously they forethink their actions to gain something such as changing their readers' relationships with food (forethought); how they motivate themselves and change their actions (self-reactiveness); and how much they evaluate their purposes, behaviors, and values (self-reflectiveness). The theory of human agency thus provides a framework to analyze food blogging as an example of human agency and food bloggers' perceptions of the dimensions of their actions and behaviors.

Later, Bandura (2018) explained that the theory of human agency is based on three determinants that are (1) personal determinants (human functioning is a product of intrapersonal influences), (2) behavioral determinants (the behavior individuals engage in); and (3) environmental determinants (the environmental forces that impinge on people) (Bandura, 2018). To call one an agent, the theory emphasizes that people can have an influential role in the way their lives turn out to be. Furthermore, the agency is also connected to the concept of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977; Pajares, 2005). Without a belief that one can achieve what one desires, the agency does not materialize through intentional actions (Bandura, 2000).

Human agency has a connection with human well-being. Alkire (2005) summarizes that agency is a part of one's well-being and can also cause positive changes in it, but also conflict with other dimensions of one's well-being. According to Alkire, empowerment is a subset of agency that focuses on the instrumental value of the agency. From another perspective, the agency connects with well-being through the sense of autonomy or self-direction, independent thought, and action (Schwartz, 1994; Seligman et al., 2016). Indeed, Wetzell and Inglehart (2010) argued that as people have opportunities to emphasize emancipative values, they also put more weight on the feelings of agency as a form of life satisfaction - that is often also measured as a part of well-being (e.g., Diener et al., 1999; Seligman, 2011). This perspective is interesting because food blogs are assumed to focus on well-being in one way or another. Either the food blogs aim to help readers enjoy food and eating or live healthier by helping them prepare food themselves, or the blogs serve as an arena of self-fulfillment for the bloggers. This underlying assumption about the relation with well-being sheds light on the exploration of what kind of agency can be found among food bloggers through the self-evaluation of their motives and actions.

## Method

This research aimed to investigate how Finnish food bloggers perceive their agency when describing their relationship with food in their food blogs. This was studied by analyzing the meanings the

food bloggers give to their activities in the blogs.

The data collection took the form of an email survey. This was chosen because writing was considered a familiar way of expressing thoughts to food bloggers (Bjerke, 2012). The bloggers were contacted by email, which included a link to an online survey created with the Webropol application. Based on our analysis of the food blog articles, questions (N=12) about the food bloggers themselves and about their relationship with food were formed around topics such as positive relationship with food, values, experiences, innovativeness, and well-being. In addition, the survey consisted of statements and open-ended questions that focused on the various forms of agency (forethought, intentionality, self-reactiveness, and self-reflection) as described in the human agency theory section. The bloggers were asked to evaluate the following statements with a sliding choice between 1 to 10 (1 = Not at all. 10 = Describes me very well) and then explain their choices with their own words:

1. In my food blog, I bring up how food influences my mental and physical health.
2. I get inspiration for my recipes and food blogging from the media and around the world.
3. My relationship with food is based on the values that are important to me.
4. My food blogging emerged from my positive relationship with food and eating.
5. My positive relationship with food is an outcome of my passion for food and eating.
6. A multisensory pleasure typifies my relationship with food.
7. I hope that my food blog inspires readers to develop their relationship with food in a more multicultural direction.
8. In my food blog, I want to promote my readers' understanding of the connection between well-being and the relationship with food.
9. With food blogging, I want to promote my readers' positive relationship with food and eating.
10. My food blog transmits my food-related experiences to the readers.
11. I want to share the food-related values that I find important to my readers.
12. With food blogging, I can inspire readers to prepare food by themselves.

Then, the survey included four open-ended questions: (1) How has your food blog influenced the development of your relationship with food? Describe with practical examples; (2) How does your food blog influence your readers' relationship with food? Describe

with practical examples; (3) How would you like to see your blog influence your readers' relationship with food?; and (4) What does the joy of food and eating mean to you? Together the statements and open-ended questions were to encourage the food bloggers to think about their social media actions from different viewpoints so that their answers would reveal their perceptions of their agency.

The data collection started in May 2021 by contacting Finnish food bloggers listed on [www.parhaatruokablogit.fi](http://www.parhaatruokablogit.fi) pages. Blogs that met the criteria of (1) being a Finnish blog; (2) having chronological content; (3) being updated regularly (at least three times a month); (4) having a commenting function for readers; and (5) being created and held by an individual person or community that could be identified. First, 32 bloggers were contacted, and the data collection progressed on a weekly basis so that every week 16 new bloggers were contacted until in mid-summer 2021 15 bloggers had answered the survey. Eventually, 19 bloggers participated in the research. They have been coded as FB1–FB19.

The analysis followed the basic structure of a qualitative content analysis starting with the identification of meaningful units and proceeding into themes and categorizations (Mayring, 2000). The similarities and differences in food bloggers' perceptions were combined and organized so that eventually 11 categories were formed based on the data. Next, reflection on the theory of human agency (Bandura, 2001) was conducted, and the themes that emerged from the analysis were organized within the main elements of agency as illustrated in Table 1. The analysis focused on the perceptions and meanings the food bloggers gave their actions on social media (Harris, 2011; Roller, 2019), which were categorized according to the four categories in Bandura's theory of human agency.

<i>Data-based results category</i>	<i>The element of agency as the main category</i>
Inspiration to others Diversifying the food culture Sharing food-related values	Intentionality
Delight for food Pleasing with food Supporting others' positive relationship with food	Forethought
Re-living and reconstructing the food-related experiences Connection between well-being and relationship with food	Self-reactiveness
Analyzing the development of the relationship with food Emerging awareness of responsibility	Self-reflectiveness

Table 1: Research categories

## Findings

### Intentionality

Intentionality appeared in the descriptions of the meaning of the food bloggers' actions. They talked about inspiring others, consciously trying new ingredients and recipes in order to diversify the food culture, and deliberately sharing their food-related values in blogs.

### *Inspiration to Others*

Food bloggers found it meaningful to inspire their readers to cook food by themselves. It seemed that inspiring the readers to cook made food blogging meaningful to the bloggers.

“The log in my blog shows that people return to the old posts because of the good recipe. I have been blogging for 8 years already and many classics are the most read weekly according to Analytics.” (FB19)

“I want to encourage people to prepare meals by themselves but also to enjoy food prepared by others, and get new experiences and possibly inspiration to their own cooking.” (FB3)

Food bloggers could be divided into two groups; bloggers motivated by the readers' feedback and bloggers trusting themselves as a model of home cooks. Readers' feedback was found to be important

as readers shared successful cooking experiences with the recipes published by the bloggers. Food bloggers were delighted to hear their recipes were easy to use and the food cooked using them was enjoyable. One of the food bloggers mentioned intentionally collecting feedback on recipes using an analyzing tool in the blog. Seeing the readers' preferences motivated the bloggers to continue their food experiments and blogging. Positive feedback was seen as a sign of success in blogging.

“The best feedback is always the one having tried and liked a recipe.” (FB2)

“I have received feedback that at least some of my readers ended up trying new things in the kitchen, due to my blog.” (FB12)

The food bloggers identifying as model home cooks believed that they could share simple and nice recipes for other home cooks, mothers, and fathers just like them. They did not mention readers' feedback but instead they “wanted” or “hoped” that their food blog would inspire readers to cook. They described themselves as normal and as busy as any other mother or father, and thought that sharing their good actions would convince the reader, possibly in the same position as the blogger, to try new foods in the kitchen in everyday life. These bloggers did not consider themselves food experts but wanted to be seen as ordinary as possible to influence the reader.

“My goal is to have a majority of recipes so easy that everyone can prepare meals by following them.” (FB9)

“The great thing about food blogs is exactly the fact that people share ideas that are tested in ordinary kitchens and that are found working.” (FB8)

Not all bloggers mentioned their intentions directly. For some of the food bloggers, one reason for blogging was to share their food experiences and passion for cooking and eating. The blog was considered to be a diary for the food bloggers, while the reader was seen as a passive recipient. Food bloggers themselves were seen as active experiencers, and writing about their experiences in the blog was one way to relive the experiences and enjoy more. It seemed that most of these food bloggers did not intentionally think about the influence of blog posts concerning their own food experiences on the readers.

### *Diversifying the Food Culture*

Food bloggers were influenced by foreign food cultures. Three of the bloggers said they get inspiration from their trips abroad and new

food cultures, four mentioned Finnish and international media, and one nature and family. Food bloggers shared their philosophies of recreating a dish, making it taste like the blogger's style or brand for example by changing the material or seasoning, and so intentionally making the recipe differ from the original one. Trends, discussions, and social media applications, such as Instagram and Pinterest, also brought inspiration for bloggers. In the data, it seemed intentional that bloggers published internationally inspired-recipes to make the Finnish food culture more diverse.

“I follow actively and versatily food media around the world both for recipes and food photo styles. I also order foreign food magazines that give me a lot of inspiration.” (FB4)

“I have gotten inspiration from abroad and that's why I am blogging so that everyone could enjoy the recipes I have gathered in my backpack around the world.” (FB17)

Most of the bloggers appreciated multicultural food relationships and told they intentionally encourage the readers to get to know dishes from other food cultures. However, some of the bloggers were not familiar with the idea of having a multicultural relationship with food, but they contemplated the nature of multicultural content in their blogging in varied ways.

“In my blog, I often tell about the history of the recipe, and try to combine cultural and other general information with it.” (FB17)

“I often use recipes from different cultures and combine ideas with Finnish ingredients. That enriches our food culture.” (FB4)

### *Sharing Food-related Values*

Food bloggers wanted to share their food-related values in their blogs. They valued local food and food hygiene. Two food bloggers mentioned that their values were reflected in all their activities concerning food, for example, food blogging and their relationship with food. One food blogger thought the values were not related to the relationship with food. It seemed possible that not all the food bloggers saw the connection between their values and their food activities, but simply felt they were doing things they enjoy. Only a few food bloggers believed their values were related to the choices they make. For example, writing mostly about vegetarian dishes could represent a value choice.

“To me, the most important values in food are local, clean, and ethical food. I make meat and vegetarian food, sometimes

even vegan food. The taste is the most important thing.” (FB4)

“My values appear in my blog only as not having meals with meat in my recipes. I haven’t eaten meat in twenty years.” (FB12)

Many bloggers reported that sharing their values was an important and meaningful part of food blogging. Many bloggers had noticed that it was a part of food blogging even though it was not always intentional.

“Values are there in the background and appear in my choices.” (FB7)

“At times, I transmit my values to my readers. So, e.g. local food, potatoes instead of pasta and rice, etc.” (FB2)

### Forethought

While intentionality appeared as descriptions of one’s intentions when blogging, forethought appeared more as thoughts about the outcomes of certain actions. Forethought was evident, especially in those answers where the food bloggers described the outcomes of preparing food, which was mostly positive: delights for food and pleasing with food. Food delights consisted of tastes, aesthetics, and creative process. Pleasing with food meant cooking meals for others and sharing a meal. In addition, the bloggers perceived that they wanted to support their readers’ positive relationship with food and eating.

### A Delight for Food

Enjoying the food was mentioned frequently in the data, especially the taste and texture. The pleasure was based on qualified ingredients and using them on the right scale in the cooking process. Good food was considered to be healthy, diverse, and reasonable. Bloggers described how much they enjoyed eating food and wished that the readers could enjoy it as much as the bloggers. For maximum pleasure, it was important to use all the senses while eating.

“Food is one of the greatest pleasures in life.” (FB17)

“I don’t eat to live but live to eat.” (FB19)

The aesthetically arranged meal gave bloggers joy and it was mentioned when discussing senses. Visuality was considered to be a synonym for beauty, and it was a crucial part of a good meal, the so-called “eye-catcher” or pleasing to the eye. Visual beauty of a meal

included for example place setting and colors: it was considered important not just for the bloggers, but also for the reader to get inspired about the cooking and meals. Aesthetics was considered to be one of the most important parts of the so-called 'joy of food'.

“We don't eat food just to stay alive but food should also be beautiful. Or beautifully served.” (FB18)

The creative process in the kitchen produced joy for the bloggers. Trying new things inspired the bloggers, and eight of the bloggers mentioned getting pleasure from successes in the kitchen. Bloggers found it especially joyful to prepare good food for others - the cooking process itself - and to make others enjoy good food. The positive feedback supported the enthusiasm to cook. The feeling of know-how was considered to be like a 'crown of creativity' and activeness in the kitchen.

“Joy of food is the pleasure of creating, doing, and succeeding.” (FB4)

### *Pleasing with Food*

With their enthusiasm food bloggers wanted to offer joy to others. It was a way to show how much one cared for the family; serving a self-made meal has been considered a gift (Sidenvall et al., 2000). To make the readers serve self-made food for others was seen as one of the most important objectives of food blogging. In this social media decade giving food as a gift could be also virtual; bloggers publish simple but tasteful recipes and food photos, and the readers send them messages or photos of a meal prepared with the blogger's recipe.

“The multisensory side of it is the thing: tastes, aesthetics, company, etc. Pleasing others and oneself.” (FB10)

“Dining together, taste sensations, and that you can care for others through preparing food.” (FB3)

For the bloggers, food offered the possibility to be together with their loved ones physically in the same location. The joy of food was considered to be physical and social, and the joy grew bigger when there were more people involved in the dining moment for example. By food blogging, they tried to encourage their readers to enjoy the same food-related things they enjoyed themselves.

“I don't directly try to influence anyone. If my posts inspire someone, that's nice. I want to share good things always, including ideas with food.” (FB10)

“I hope that my blog is a source of joy and positive cooking

experiences to my readers. And the courage to try new tastes, techniques, and ideas, e.g. vegan food.” (FB6)

#### *Supporting Others’ Positive Relationship with Food*

The food bloggers agreed that food blogging is one way to support readers’ positive relationships with food, because blogging could add diversity and innovation to readers’ relationship with food. For the bloggers, innovation meant checking out new ingredients, food preparation styles, recipes, and decoration techniques. Food bloggers believed reading food blogs could bring diversity to the relationship with food. When reading the blogs, the intended reader was excited about cooking (not just eating). Food bloggers also appreciated the positive experiences the readers had gained by trying out the blog recipes. Food bloggers believed that the reader constantly trying out a blog’s recipes could grow into a cooking hobby.

“I hope that my food blog transmits the joy and easiness of cooking [...] - I believe that the positive circle influences positively the relationship with food as well.” (FB7)

“Many have given me feedback that they have found totally new tastes and because of easy recipes, become encouraged to try and inspired about cooking.” (FB3)

Four of the bloggers believed they could not know if their food blog had had an effect on readers’ relationship with food. One blogger thought the bloggers could not evaluate it, but it was something to be asked of the readers directly. Even though some food bloggers could not say if the blog had any effect on readers, they still mentioned that after reading their blogs, readers’ diets could be more diverse and cooking, and the use of new ingredients, easier because of reading the blog. One of the bloggers believed food blogging might have a positive effect on the reader, and the relationship with food was probably healthier.

“I don’t know about the influence. Perhaps the thought that it does not have to be anything fancy or complicated to be good.” (FB13)

“I can’t tell. Hopefully my readers also find new ingredients to use.” (FB2)

Food bloggers mentioned some effects they hoped their blog would have on readers’ relationship with food. All the food bloggers shared a thought that food blogging could intentionally or unintentionally affect the readers’ relationship with food. The desirable and possible effects were positive changes in diet, getting excited about the food, and changing one’s attitude towards food. Changes in readers’ diets

were seen to be more vegetables, local food, healthy and seasonal ingredients, and more home food. Food bloggers thought blogging could be a way to affect readers' everyday life food choices positively.

“They would discover the joy of baking and would not have to buy everything ready.” (FB18)

Promoting the readers' understanding of their relationship to food and the connection between eating and well-being can be considered one desirable positive effect of food blogging. Some bloggers thought that the ideal effect of food blogging was that readers would bravely be themselves with food. They seemed to connect food and food choices with identity and self-esteem. Some bloggers mentioned this kind of action in blogging was unintentional because they did not think of readers' thoughts when they were sharing their recipes and stories in their blogs. Only one blogger wanted to intentionally promote readers' physical well-being by giving information in her blog about vegetables and seasonal products.

“I hope that food would be seen more as a multisensory entity and not just fuel and daily mandatory thing. You can always enjoy food in your own way. I don't have to like what others like.” (FB4)

“To widen the repertoire and accept themselves as they are.” (FB13)

“The reader is wise and understands certainly. I don't highlight the connection between well-being and relationship with food, but I set an example.” (FB7)

### Self-Reactiveness

Self-reactiveness appeared in answers in which the food bloggers analyzed their food memories and activities and reported changes in their behaviors based on their analyses.

#### *Reliving and Reconstructing Food-related Experiences*

Based on previous research (Marty et al., 2018) childhood may have a positive effect on one's relationship with food. Also, food blogging seems to offer bloggers the possibility to relive positive food-related experiences and so it supports the positive relationship with food.

“My blogging comes from my mom who had the skills to prepare from the very little something new and delicious.” (FB3)

One blogger commented it was hard to know if the positive relationship with food was an outcome of a passion for food, or whether

the positive relationship caused a passion for the food. For the food bloggers, the positive relationship to food and passion for food, eating, and cooking seemed to form an interactive process.

#### *The Connection between Well-being and the Relationship with Food*

When talking about well-being and the relationship with food, the bloggers seemed to perceive health as a theme that many bloggers did not want to discuss in their blogs. Most bloggers, however, did consider food and cooking to have a positive effect on their mental well-being. Also, the joy of food connected to cooking, eating, and social meetings were mentioned in the data.

“I am not talking about the health effects of food in my blog but I emphasize that food and cooking brings pleasure and joy in my life.” (FB6)

“I emphasize more the mental and social side of doing and eating together.” (FB4)

However, four of the bloggers underlined the healthiness of the recipes, and it is possible, using them could then have an effect on physical well-being. Most of the bloggers mentioned that simple recipes were more important and meaningful than the possible health consequences of the recipes for the readers.

“For example, I have dealt in my blog my lifestyle change during which I lost over 50 kilos in three years and recovered from sleep apnea [...] - Healthy food and nutrition are built in my recipes.” (FB19)

“Baking means mental well-being to me. During the years, my baking and cooking have taken a healthier direction and thus physical well-being becomes noticed nowadays.” (FB18)

#### Self-Reflectiveness

Self-reflectiveness appeared in the food bloggers' answers as the descriptions of their relationship with food through the development of the relationship, especially the desire to develop and act innovatively, and emerging awareness of responsibility. They also analyzed the role of food blogging in their lives. Seven of the bloggers believed food blogging did not affect their relationship with food while twelve of them felt it did.

#### *Analysing the Development of the Relationship with Food*

Although the food bloggers did not directly recognize the connection between their blogging activities and their relationship with food, they described that their food blog still reflected their relationship to food and the changes in it. In their case, it seemed possible to think

that food blogging was more one-way diary keeping, so-called life publishing, and advice giving (Heyd, 2017; Östman, 2008, 2015).

“My blog might not have influenced my relationship with food. But when my relationship has changed for example into a more vegetarian direction, it has shown in my blog.” (FB18)

“It is difficult to say what is the outcome of simple living, what of being a food blogger.” (FB10)

“It is a little bit another way around: the development of my own relationship with food has influenced the contents of the blog.” (FB9)

Seven of the bloggers felt food blogging had developed their food relationship which was visible in the growth of bloggers’ know-how and creativity. Prejudices towards diverse food had decreased and enthusiasm towards everything new, like new food cultures, new recipes, and curiosity, had grown.

“I have met more and more people who find food a pleasure and passion. People who have entered my life through the food blog have developed my relationship with food for their part.” (FB7)

“It has made the tastes selection versatile and wider, made me try new things, and inspired to experiment.” (FB13)

#### *Emerging Awareness of Responsibility*

Another interesting finding related to self-reflectiveness was that the food bloggers had analyzed the changes in their relationship with food that according to our interpretation, appeared as emerging awareness of responsibility. Awareness of responsibility meant, for example, interest in the origin of the ingredients and sharing healthier choices in blogs. When the food bloggers described their responsibility, they highlighted how their behavior in the blogs had also changed.

“My meals have become more versatile and healthier.” (FB1)

“My relationship with food has always been good and diverse. Perhaps, it has increased awareness: appreciation of the origin of food and impact to climate change.” (FB14)

#### Discussion

In all, the findings showed that the food bloggers’ agency in social media appeared in versatile ways. In their answers, the bloggers’ intentionality and forethought were more emphasized as they

reflected on the outcomes and influence their blogging activities had. They brought up some goals for enriching their readers' relationship with food by sharing their own inspiration, new ideas, and values. However, when the bloggers were asked to describe their own relationship with food and their connection with blogging, it seemed that the most important finding concerned the expression of the joy of food and eating they experienced. Next, we will sum up the main contribution of this research.

When analyzing bloggers self-reactiveness and self-reflectiveness, the positive food memories and experiences, as well as changes in the food relationship during their lives, were mainly brought up, and their passion and inspiration were the greatest motivation to them. The answers revealed that the bloggers did not - at least consciously - highlight the development of their relationship with food in their blogs but they could identify some situations that had made them react or reflect on their agency and food blogging activities from this perspective.

Based on the research findings, food blogging can be seen as an activity that may influence the bloggers' and blog readers' relationship with food. Mainly, food blogging intentions are concerned with inspiring others, transmitting food-related values, and enriching the food culture. Many bloggers perceived that their relationship with food influenced the contents of their blogs and thus was expressed in the blog, intentionally or unintentionally. It is worth remembering that the bloggers in this research are from Finland, which is a wealthy country with plenty of resources and education about food and health. Certainly, their background has an impact to their blogging contents, and values and attitudes toward food and eating, and if the study took place in a different context, food blogging might appear quite differently (Byrd & Byrd, 2017). However, in this research we were more interested in human agency and how the bloggers perceived their own action.

The permissive dialogue about food-related choices, the "sense of food" (Janhonen et al., 2016, p. 99), is prevailing in the food blogs, and well-being and health issues could be dealt with in a more appealing way among various audiences. This kind of education includes the idea of empowerment, joy, curiosity, shared responsibility, and life-long learning. On the other hand, if the food bloggers were more intentional agents toward the "common good", would the blogs then be as popular and appealing as they are now? Would ordinary readers be interested in reading food and health experts' food blogs (Kosonen et al., 2018)?

From the perspective of agency, it seemed based on this research, food bloggers did not fully perceive the influence of their blogs.

This finding is similar to Heyd's (2017) perception of blogging as merely diary keeping, ego-blogging, identity work, and advice-giving. Östman (2008) calls this one-way life-publishing. This kind of agency in social media does not consider the reader as an active participant but merely a passive target who the bloggers did not seem to deliberately influence (Papacharissi, 2007). While the bloggers were able to name how their blogging might influence the readers and what they would hope to have as the main impact of their blogs, they did not consider this influence to be the main motivation for their blogs. Instead, the motivation for the action was mainly based on their own interest and passion. As such, this finding is interesting to the behavioral and educational sciences, and those working with people who may be influenced by the contents of social media (Code, 2013; Lövheim et al., 2013).

From the perspective of education, two viewpoints arise from this research. First, intentional positive experiences and connotations, and positive food-related communication in general, could become an efficient informal source of food education (Janhonen et al., 2016). The intentional and deliberate positive development of a relationship with food could connect the elements that were brought up in this research: the multisensory joy of food (social, creative, and other sensory pleasures) with well-being-related goals (see also Block et al., 2011). Social media provides a platform and source for an independent and lifelong food education for those that recognize the influence of food blogs and use the forum deliberately.

Educators and others could use social media in versatile, positive ways. Early childhood educators and parents may find innovative ideas on how to create multisensory joy for children and in that sense enhance their own field of expertise, but may also deliberately enable the agency of children in the perspective of food and eating. Using tips and insights given by the food bloggers can enhance adults' feeling of agency in everyday life as they learn about various food cultures and choices. Elderly people may find food blogs educative in the sense of understanding the importance of food and eating as a valuable part of their health and wellbeing, and for example the sense of belonging, as the blogs also revealed numerous examples of food and eating as a social event.

The second viewpoint is more connected with the potential to understand social media activities (such as food blogging) better as a part of human agency and as an example of how people behave in the arenas of social media and how intentional are their activities in general. For elementary school, high school, and upper secondary school teachers, understanding social media as a forum to impact on others, and blogging as a profession, can provide various new perspectives to school subjects and be used in teaching when

discussing topics, such as using power, influencing, making a difference, career planning, professionalizing, gathering know-how, enhancing health and wellbeing, and learning about society and culture. After school, young adults can intentionally create their identities through social media. For adults, social media can offer positive platforms to find motivation and tools to how to make small everyday life choices which are in line with the values they want to cherish. The agentic perspective is interesting also from the perspective of food political aspirations (see Sarlio-Lähteenkorva & Prättälä, 2012) or marketing and food tourism (Thanh & Kirova, 2018).

To sum up, we believe social media could become an option for normative, health- and information-based education and a tool for the agency- and participation-based positive constructivist food education (as sketched by Janhonen et al., 2016). This research has increased the knowledge about human behaviors and their influence on each other in the various arenas of social media from its specific perspective, highlighting the fact that active content producers and their followers' relationship is reciprocal, and the analysis of agency can reveal the multiple layers of influence that happen in social media.

### Limitations

The transparency of the blog criteria affects positively the research's credibility. However, one factor to evaluate is the sample size. Regards to the criteria, the research material can be considered qualified (Mills, 2007), as it includes one-fifth of the Finnish food bloggers.

When analyzing and evaluating the data it should be kept in mind that food bloggers have sponsors, whose effect might be seen in the posts by the bloggers. However, the experiences and thoughts they shared in the survey appeared genuine reflections about their own agency in social media. For transparency, we have discussed the details of the study carefully to provide the reader with enough information about the research process. The usability of this research lies in the new ideas of how to engage food bloggers as informal social media food experts or food educators to guide the public conversation concerning food and eating in the healthy direction.

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## **Publication III**

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# Food Relationship Discourses Produced By The Finnish Food Bloggers – A PERMA-Based Analysis

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## Abstract

This research investigated how food bloggers produce discourses about well-being and their relationship with food. The research question set for this research is: How does well-being appear in the food bloggers' discourses of their relationship with food? Two data sets were obtained: The first data collection comprised 16 bloggers (10 women and six men), who had written food blog articles in November 2017. The second data set included an email survey among the food bloggers (N=19). The data were analyzed using the discourse analysis method based on the PERMA theory. The findings showed how multidimensional a picture of well-being can be achieved when analyzing food-related discourses. More research is needed to understand further the educational uses of well-being-related discourses in social media.

**Key Words:** discourse analysis; social media; food blogging; bloggers; relationship with food; well-being; PERMA theory.

## Introduction

In the 21st century, the relationship with food has become visible in many arenas of food- and eating-related discourses, especially on the internet (Endres, 2016). Social media communication about food can take many forms and depict power relationships (de Jesus Oliveira Mota et al., 2019). For example, Endres (2016) found that dietary experts maintain strict and formal discourses about healthy eating behaviors, while peers merely provide social support, such as for attempts to lose weight, making peer interaction more meaningful and effective. Furthermore, social media influencers can be seen to train their followers' food-related thoughts and behaviors (de Jesus Oliveira Mota et al., 2019). If communication aims to convert actual, evidence-based knowledge into dietary change, nutrition communication is a relevant concept to describe discourses in social media (Ghosh, 2023). However, not all social media communication is this type of communication.

Instead of purposeful communication, in this research, we are interested in discourses that can be identified from social media and located in food-related communication. One particular group of those contributing and creating discourses is the food bloggers (Code, 2013). They share their thoughts and activities on food and eating online and encourage others to join, follow, reflect, and comment on their blogs. Food bloggers represent a particular type of modern people whose identity is intertwined and presented in relation to food. They prepare food, develop new recipes, write about food, try fresh ingredients, educate themselves and sometimes others about food, and participate in various food-related events (Jones & Taylor, 2001; Salvio, 2012). Based on earlier research (Partanen & Uusiautti, 2023a; 2023b), bloggers are not yet fully aware of their potential power in

their followers, nor are blogs used widely for educational purposes. Therefore, it is essential to learn more about the types of discourses the bloggers produce.

The relationship with food is constructed from early childhood, and this process is colored by the variety of ongoing discourse and ways of speaking about food (Bjornsen, 2018; Coates et al., 2019; Rask et al., 2013; Simunaniemi et al., 2012). One example of discourse analysis in food blogs is Simunaniemi et al.'s (2012) analysis of fruit and vegetable-related discourses. Their research showed that the bloggers maintained discourses of normative consumption with a focus on single nutrients and physiological mechanisms, authentic consumption with a desire for naturalness, and altruistic consumption with an emphasis on ethical responsibility (Simunaniemi et al., 2012). Another study focused on how competitive eaters produced discourses of controlled ingestion to find support for their opinions and used social media as a political tool for counter-discursive practices (Abbots & Attala, 2017). Mapes (2021), on the other hand, researched how food discourses can represent and reproduce the elite and privileged life and contribute their part to the cultural production of inequality (see also Frye & Bruner, 2012). Social media discourses have also been studied to determine how the public understands and thinks about specific politically sensitive food-related issues, such as genetically modified organisms (GMOs) (Wirz et al., 2021).

The examples mentioned earlier show recent studies' various viewpoints on social media discourses on food. Still, research on well-being has been limited. This is the case even though today's social media can enhance the good by generating well-being-focused discourses about food and eating that resonate with a broad audience (Hamadeh & Estepan, 2018).

Our research is located in educational psychology, and therefore, we are especially interested in the educational possibilities of well-being-focused food discourses in social media. In their blog posts, food bloggers constantly produce discourses on how well-being is part of their relationship with food. In this research, we focus on the different aspects of well-being in these discourses delivered by food bloggers. The analysis is based on the PERMA theory (Seligman, 2011).

### Theoretical viewpoints on food well-being and the PERMA theory

The concept of well-being has been studied from numerous perspectives. From a subjective level, well-being is about a perception of finding one's life good and satisfying or subjective well-being (SWB), as introduced by Diener (1984). It is about agency and social connection (Vella-Brodrick et al., 2022) in a situation where the primary basic psychological needs of competence, autonomy, and relatedness have been met (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Wehmeyer et al., 2009). At a macro level, well-being can be defined through various indicators of equality, wealth, security, and services, to name a few (Diener & Tov, 2012). However, SWB and multiple behaviors related to it seem to be widespread across cultures (Choi et al., 2022).

Our research focuses on well-being discourses produced by an extraordinary group of people, the food bloggers. They act in the social media arenas, and thus, their views on well-being and perceptions of their well-being have an impact more widely, too, among people the food bloggers do not even know, namely their followers (Colliander & Dahlén, 2011). In addition, their well-being-related discourses are connected with food and eating (Hackel et al., 2018).

An interesting concept related to our research topic is food well-being (FWB) (Block et al., 2011). It is a typical example of a concept that provides a specific viewpoint of a person's general well-

being. According to the definition provided by Block et al. (2011), FWB consists of food socialization, food literacy, food marketing, food availability, and food policy. The concept emphasizes the pleasure produced by consuming food and taking care of oneself with the help of food as a positive thing (Block et al. 2011; Pettigrew 2016). For our research, this concept appears too narrow and focuses too much on extrinsic food-related factors, such as food availability or policy. We are more interested in how well-being manifests in the food bloggers' speech in general. Therefore, we wanted to base our research on a multi-dimensional well-being viewpoint that combines the personal emotional state, activities, and relationships.

Therefore, we leaned on Seligman's (2011) well-being theory about the foundations of human flourishing. The approach is widely used in research on various areas of life but not much in the context of social media or food blogging. According to the theory, well-being is a construct of five elements: positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment (Seligman, 2011).

Positive emotions support the generally positive perception of one's life and positive development (Cohn & Fredrickson, 2009). In a recent longitudinal study by Vella-Brodrick et al. (2022), early emotional well-being predicted the outcome of positive agency and social connection. Engagement appears as dedication, concentration, and the opportunity to use and develop one's strengths (Seligman, 2011) and even experience the flow state (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008). When it comes to relationships, people who can build and maintain reciprocal relationships have been reported to have high levels of well-being (Diener & Seligman, 2002; Törrönen, 2018). People have various reasons for engaging in food blogging, but for some, it may become an arena of self-fulfillment (Niemiec, 2018). The sense of meaning in the PERMA theory is based on using one's signature strengths (Peterson & Seligman, 2004) and the opportunity to find joy and a sense of purpose in life through them (see also Uusiautti et al., 2022). Finally, the PERMA theory includes the element of accomplishments. Achieving goals is essential to human beings' well-being not only because of the sense of succeeding and related positive emotions but also because of the sense of being able to complete smaller and more significant tasks and duties and finding oneself productive and capable (Seligman, 2011; Uusiautti & Määttä, 2015).

## Method

This research investigated how food bloggers produce discourses about well-being and their relationship with food. The research question set for this research is: How does well-being appear in the food bloggers' discourses of their relationship with food?

In this research, we assume that how the food bloggers bring out their relationship with food would reveal something about well-being. Thus, the discourses of the relationship with food make visible the multiple ways food blogging is connected to the well-being of bloggers and their social networks online and offline. By learning the broad conception of well-being as proposed in the PERMA theory (Seligman, 2011), the aim is to provide a deep understanding of the importance of how bloggers talk about food and how they experience their relationship with food.

We analyzed the sets of research data using discourse analysis (Vásquez & Liska, 2023). The analytic discourse analysis allowed us to explore how the everyday language and ways of speaking about food are relevant in the social media contexts in which food bloggers operate. Their speech and descriptions of their attitudes, emotions, and intentions represent the discursive psychological branch of analysis (Edwards, 1999). The core idea was to study how—through the way the food

bloggers use language and speak—the social reality is constructed. Discourses are understood widely, ranging from spoken and written materials that illustrate the experienced fact (Remes, 2014). Discourses are, therefore, ways of constructing meanings that influence our social existence (Vásquez & Liska, 2023). The worldview in discourse analysis leans toward social constructivism (Creswell, 2009).

We used two different sets of research materials to conduct this research. The data collection happened in two phases. First, we visited Finnish food blogs to collect data. The first data collection comprised 16 bloggers' (10 women and six men) food blog articles written in November 2017. The women's food blogs were chosen based on Cision's 2017 Food Blog TOP10 listing in Finland. The men's blogs were selected with the same criteria. In addition, to be included in the data, the blogs had to be updated regularly (more often than three times a month). The data comprised 257 pages, excluding photos, videos, and the readers' comments. In this research, the blogs have been coded using their original Finnish blog names translated into English.

Second, we conducted an email survey among the food bloggers. The bloggers were contacted by email, which included a link to an online survey created with the Webropol application. Based on our previous analysis of the food blog articles (see Partanen & Uusiautti, 2023b), questions (N=12) about the food bloggers and their relationship with food were formed around positive relationships with food, values, experiences, innovativeness, and well-being. In addition, the survey consisted of statements and open-ended questions that focused on how the food bloggers describe their behaviors in the social media by food blogging activities. This second data collection started in May 2021 by contacting Finnish food bloggers listed on [www.parhaatruokablogit.fi](http://www.parhaatruokablogit.fi) pages. Blogs that met the criteria of (1) being a Finnish blog, (2) having chronological content, (3) being updated regularly (at least three times a month), (4) having a commenting function for readers, and (5) being created and held by a person or community that could be identified. First, 32 bloggers were contacted, and the data collection progressed every week so that 16 new bloggers were contacted every week until, in mid-summer 2021, 15 bloggers had answered the survey. Eventually, 19 bloggers participated in the research. In this research, they have been coded as FB1–FB19.

We employed a theory-based discourse analysis of two sets of data. In practice, we used the five categories provided by the PERMA theory as the basis for identifying well-being-related speech in the data and thus regarded as the framework. The analysis progressed with three phases. The purpose of the phases was to analyze how the bloggers talk about their relationship with food within the PERMA categories: positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishments. The first phase was a content review of the different data sets and a comparison of the findings to five categories provided by the PERMA theory. In the second phase, we examined meaning categories at the text level and deepened them with our understanding and previous literature and research. As a result of the examination, the discourses of the relationship with food were formed and introduced as research results.

## Research results

### Food relationship discourse of positive emotions

The food bloggers described their relationship with food as joyful. They specified that food-related values, cooking, taste sensations, company, aesthetics, and doing things for others created joy and delight in them. A critical part of the relationship with food was enjoying food, which appeared in the research data as a passive, one-sided activity in which the food blogger emphasized the pure pleasure of enjoying good food.

“A positive relationship with food is probably partly a childhood legacy. In my childhood home, ingredients and food were appreciated. Part of the positive relationship with food has grown throughout my life through wonderful taste sensations and the joy of cooking.” (FB7)

“I relax while baking; I enjoy doing things with my hands, the house is filled with good smells, good food - better mood.” (FB18)

In connection with joy, food bloggers often mentioned aesthetics and visuals. Aesthetics were also related to multi-sensory experiences. In the food bloggers' perceptions, visuality seemed synonymous with beauty, pleasing the eye with a portion of food. Regarding visualization, the food bloggers highlighted the importance of layout, presentation, and table setting. The matter of aesthetics was mentioned, especially in contexts where it was hoped that the reader would be able to get excited about food. Some food bloggers also noted that the beautiful dishes inspired them. Aesthetics were also related to food blogging through photography, as blog posts always consist of food photos, which bloggers have usually styled and taken themselves. According to this perspective, the food relationship discourse was also constructed visually, bringing positive emotions to bloggers.

“I often emphasize the union of food and drink and pair quality ingredients with quality wines and other beverages. Beautiful presentation, table setting, and company are a big part of the enjoyment of food.” (FB4)

The relationship between food and well-being also involves sociability as one aspect of the joy of eating. From the research data, it could be interpreted that the pleasure of food, the joy of eating, as it were, doubled if it was possible to share it with others in an instant. Food bloggers prepare food alone and together, but the physical closeness produced by serving food was also mentioned as a vital source of well-being for them. Food bloggers often prepare food for their loved ones and family, but the peculiarity of food blogging is the third party, readers. The food bloggers believed that the readers can relate to the positive emotions experienced by the blogger when they read them on the food blog and that they may be empowered by them themselves.

“[Joy of food] is spending time together in the kitchen with loved ones, food planned and prepared together, and also enjoying it together.” (FB11)

In previous research, offering food is compared to giving a gift (e.g., Sidenvall et al., 2000). The fact that the reader would also prepare their food appeared in this study, producing well-being. In today's social media, offering food as a gift could also mean that a blogger gave a reader a virtual food gift by posting a recipe and food photos on their food blog. A reader could also offer a blogger a virtual gift of return food by sending them a message or publishing a picture of their work based on a recipe published by the blogger as proof that the food blog had made the reader express themselves in the kitchen.

“Food blogging definitely starts with a love of food.” (FB8)

“That’s why I regularly surprise myself that blogging is still my dearest hobby after all these years. I feel so lucky that this job can be both a hobby and a living. Now, nine years later, I’d rather do nothing but cook, photograph, and write about food. And my readers are thankful that I can now fill more and more of my weeks with what I really love to do. I’m already looking forward to what the next nine years will bring!” (Chocochili)

“I love stews that have been brewing for a long time; they belong on dark winter evenings – preferably served by candlelight with a glass of red wine. As a fan of hearty stews, I wanted to develop a vegetarian version that wouldn’t pale compared to meat stews.” (Hanna’s Soup)

In conclusion, the joy that food bloggers described in the discourses of their relationship with food was also generated with other positive emotions, such as feelings of enthusiasm and pleasure. They were part of the food bloggers’ strong sense of affection for cooking, which in turn communicated the well-being and positive relationship that food bloggers experienced over food.

### **Food relationship discourse of engagement**

From the perspective of engagement and presence, the food bloggers talked about food as their passion. They open-mindedly tried new ingredients and recipes in their kitchens. Based on the blog posts, they were adventurous around food and got excited when learning new things. In the survey data, they explained how it deepened their positive relationship with food and strengthened their enthusiasm and passion, thus increasing their experience of well-being.

“My passion only deepens, I know more and more, and I have learned a lot about responsible and sustainable food, for example, through writing the blog.” (FB6)

“Food and eating are really one passion in life. What’s better than a good meal in good company.” (FB2)

Based on the blog posts, food bloggers engaged when focusing on the cooking process and being intensely present in the cooking moment. They described these kinds of moments of absorption as highly pleasurable.

The quality of the ingredients often made them want to engage themselves in the food preparation process, as it created enjoyable expectations among food bloggers. The unique feature of food blogging was that the absorption continued even after the cooking situation when the food bloggers described their experiences through writing in their blogs. The engagement discourses could ignite similar feelings among readers or a wish to experience cooking similarly.

“The pear-and-chocolate cake has been a food dream of mine ever since I sat at an autumn table in the French countryside at a workshop in September at the Our Foodstories blog. I almost started crying because of the beauty surrounding us, but I tasted pumpkin cake that hides pears at the latest. I made my own Christmas and chocolate version of the cake.” (Sauced)

“It’s not every day that you eat a meal like the pictures in this post, steak with side dishes and a glass of wine. Well, sometimes you can treat yourself to a higher quality meal, and so what, even if it’s a weekday? 🥰 The juicy steak shown in the pictures is a pork chop from a Dingley Dell farm that I got from PNM. What makes this chop special is the good marble of the meat and excellent raw ripeness. So, what would you eat with a steak? High-quality meat deserves high-quality side dishes, so I made green beans, cherry tomatoes, mushrooms, and SuperPotty with fresh thyme this time.” (Genuine everyday food)

The engagement element appeared in the food bloggers' speech as descriptions of total concentration and absorption of their doing. In addition, they talked about the enthusiasm and anticipation, desire to work with food and share their experiences.

### **Food relationship discourse of reciprocal social relationships**

From the perspective of the food relationship discourse of reciprocal social relationships, the food bloggers constantly posted and talked about eating and cooking together and spending quality time with their families and friends. This was also something that they had learned from their childhood, and they wanted to pass as a social tradition to their children.

“In my family, everyone has always cooked. I have also baked and cooked myself since I was a child. We had regular meal times together. We always made good food, whether it was a weekday or for partying. Dad always invested in special ingredients and photographed dishes in the 70s and 80s.” (FB4)

Descriptions of changes in eating habits appeared primarily in the blog posts of food bloggers with children. The food was prepared mainly according to the children's preferences. Many food bloggers said they were aware of their responsibilities as parents: they were now creating food memories and relationships with food for their children. Taste preferences can also be consciously refined, as many food blogger parents seemed to do with their offspring. The food blog posts showed that eating with children brought a new perspective on well-being related to food and eating.

“I've always liked different tacos and tortillas; we often eat them. At first, I chopped the ingredients into finger-edible pieces on a plate for the children. Hugo already likes to roll the fillings inside the pudding, but Olga still prefers to eat the different components individually. The jack fruit tacos were more to the taste of the omnivorous Hugo anyway; Olga focused on dipping corn tortillas into lime-flavored oat fraiche. For us adults, tacos stuffed with smoky jackfruit and persimmon salsa did their trade particularly well.” (Hanna's Soup)

The discourse of the social relationships and the food culture depicted the social interaction around food in the bloggers' lives. Describing food memories in the blog material, positive emotions evoked by food, and changes in food preferences after having children were interpreted on the one hand as signs of food bloggers' positive, change-prone relationship with food, and on the other hand, as the very social nature of the relationship with food as a part of bloggers' well-being.

“Halloween time is back! We don't really celebrate this celebration this year, yet I was inspired to go with my child and bustle these creepy chocolate bugs in the kitchen! And even if you don't care about the party, I still recommend trying these cocoa balls that are ready in no time. I did these with the child, and my 4.5-year-old son Jooa was responsible for the overall result, including decorations. So these creepy and delicious bug balls are quick and easy to prepare with your child!” (Healthy Treats)

In conclusion, the food blog posts showed that cooking can be a social hobby and provide opportunities to nurture reciprocal relationships. Based on how bloggers talked about social relationships alongside their blogging activities, it offered bloggers several options for social well-being.

### Food relationship discourse of meaning

According to the food bloggers' speeches, meaning in life came from choices that were in line with their values, also when it came to food and food blogging. Based on blog posts, food bloggers live their own lives in which food is a significant element that generates well-being. Values such as economy, locality, and ecology appeared in the food bloggers' descriptions of their food-related choices.

"I constantly highlight values that I feel are important: responsibility, ethics, local food, small producers, a plant-based diet. Passing on these values is important to me!" (FB6)

"With the food renovation, the importance of food for mental and physical well-being has opened up more, and since then, I have occasionally mentioned the importance in blog posts as well. But mainly, I focus on telling you about the recipe." (FB2)

Based on the research data, the food bloggers understood that their relationship with food was based on their values and wanted to convey their food-related values to readers through food blogging. They found blogging meaningful not only to themselves but also to their readers. Although the bloggers expressed that they wanted to avoid pushing their readers to make confident choices, they wanted to share their values that made food and cooking meaningful.

"I bake for my pleasure. I started the blog mainly as my recipe book, but it has become more than that. It's also a bit like a diary; others have gotten recipes and ideas from it. Baking is for my mental well-being for me. Over the years, baking and cooking have become healthier, so that's where physical well-being comes in." (FB18)

"In my blog, I don't put health first, but ease and deliciousness. I'm inspired to 'turn' foods that are considered difficult into quick everyday meals without compromising on taste, which, of course, in a way, increases at least mental well-being and leaves more time for physical activities. Certain values do not dictate my relationship with food; I try to favor and highlight, e.g., food preferences. local food, fish, game, etc." (FB3)

Some bloggers explained the meaning more directly through their diets. By describing their values and opinions in detail in blogs and the survey data, the food bloggers created food relationship discourses that illustrate the idea of a bigger goal in life, similar to the definition of meaning in the PERMA theory.

"I became interested in cooking out of necessity: I became vegan at 15; at that time, no vegan convenience foods were available in Finland, and restaurants did not offer vegan food. If you were going to eat something good, you had to do it yourself. As a result, I became interested in cooking, and my photography hobby turned into a hobby of food photography." (Chocochili)

"I'm such a mixed eater who finds it harder every day to find reasons for my meat consumption. On the other hand, it's very scarce these days, and I only eat meat (and cheese and eggs) because I like it. You see, I could do well without it – after all, a vegetarian diet is healthy and complete when properly composed. And delicious! Our entire family's diet has shifted to plant-based diets for ecological and ethical reasons, and I suspect that meat consumption in this economy will only continue to decline." (Hanna's Soup)

The experiences of meaning emerged from the sense of purposeful action that was also connected to previous elements of well-being. When preparing food for others or sharing ideas in blogs, the food bloggers described how the meaning materialized from these social activities after their engaged action, leading to pure joy. It was also remarkable to notice that the intention was closely

connected to the values and fundamental ideas about food and eating. The discourse of meaning thus included the food bloggers' ways of justifying confident choices and actions regarding their relationship with food.

### **Food relationship discourse of successes and achievements**

The fifth element of well-being is accomplishments and achievements. In the food bloggers' speeches, this appeared as courage, open-mindedness, and actual success in cooking. The feeling of success and competence was described to emerge after the cooking process as a kind of reward for one's activity and creativity. The food bloggers received praise and encouragement, especially from their families and readers, which motivated them to learn more about food.

"A homemade dinner in good company brings the joy of dining. The ability to offer self-made food." (FB4)

"The positive aspects (of blogging) also include a more open-minded and bold approach to different raw materials. Before the blog, I used to cook at least as much as I do today, but I stuck to other people's recipes and chose only the ones I knew were good. I would never have tried anything with beets, broccoli, or mushrooms." (Till the Last Crumble)

"One of my blog's most popular and praised recipes were falafels. About a year ago; I published a recipe for perfectly successful falafels that taste and texture the best falafel restaurants." (Till the Last Crumble)

In addition to direct food and food preparation-related accomplishments, food blogging has opened new doors for bloggers, taught them new skills, taken them to new places, and introduced new people. It has given food bloggers experiences of success and faith in themselves and their abilities. For some, it has also given them a new profession.

"The blog has also allowed me to participate in events where new products and manufacturing techniques are presented. I've gotten to know people I wouldn't necessarily have gotten to know otherwise. I have learned new ingredients and become familiar with food production and the restaurant industry." (FB4)

"I started baking as a hobby. My blog became so popular, and baking took me completely away that I also learned a profession for myself. Now I work as a pastry chef in a large event house." (FB15)

One of the unique features of food blogging was that the food bloggers themselves had the opportunity to observe the development of their skills and competence when reading their old food blog posts. A sense of accomplishment could emerge from realizing how much one has learned and achieved in the blog.

"It may sound funny, but I didn't really think about how much effort you have to put into the spelling of recipes, the dimensions of the ingredients, and fine-tuning the recipes to make sure they work in other people's kitchens as well. You can also see how my recipe writing skills have improved when reading old recipes. Many of my old recipes are too general and open to interpretation, but I've also practiced that over the years. Now, 9 years later, Chocochili is one of the most-read food blogs in Finland. Two thousand monthly readers are suddenly 70,000. The blog has also spawned three cookbooks and, best of all, thousands of comments and emails from you, readers. I could never have imagined that a blog following the diet of a marginalized group would one day climb into the top of the most popular food blogs." (Chocochili)

“As I have said, I have tasted proper sourdough bread this year, especially this autumn. Although I have been quite satisfied with the success of the latest baking, I have developed my root bread even further in my baking interests.” (Genuine Everyday Food)

In conclusion, food hobbies appeared as a positive resource in the discourses of food bloggers. The accomplishments varied from minor successes of finding a new ingredient or learning new skills to larger, life-wide achievements such as finding a new profession from the food hobby or becoming a famous blogger. From the well-being perspective, accomplishments appeared versatily in the food bloggers’ discourses.

## Discussion

Food bloggers’ discourses representing different aspects of well-being and PERMA create a multidimensional and fascinating well-being discourse based on both sets of research data. However, it is worth noting that food blogging differs from the wellness blog genre, which focuses on influencing physical well-being and health from different perspectives, which also affects the research discourses. Next, we will discuss and evaluate the aspects of PERMA theory in food bloggers’ food relationship discourses.

The food relationship discourse on positive emotions was the most solid and transparent research result. Food bloggers create a robust discourse on positive emotions where they share their motivation through joy, delight, enthusiasm, and pleasure related to cooking and eating. Food bloggers share a strong affection for cooking, which communicates the well-being and positive relationship that food bloggers experience over food. This discourse is connected with the engagement in PERMA theory because food bloggers find food as their passion and concentrate and absorb their food actions intensively. In the PERMA theory, engagement is based on strengths, dedication, and concentration (Seligman, 2011) and achieving a flow state (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008). According to this research, food bloggers feel engaged and pleasure as a strong positive feeling when focusing on cooking and being intensely present in the moment. The research data descriptions of cooking reminded the researchers of the definitions of flow state.

Also, the food relationship discourse of success and achievement was closely related to the discourse of positive emotions. In general, positive emotions support positive development and positive thoughts about life (Cohn & Fredrickson, 2009). Food bloggers’ feelings of success and competence emerged as a reward for activity and creativity in cooking, and naturally, the positive praise motivated the bloggers to learn more. Achieving goals related to food and cooking seemed to be essential to food bloggers’ well-being not only because of the sense of succeeding and related positive emotions but also because of finding oneself productive and capable in the context meaningful for them (see also Seligman, 2011; Uusiautti & Määttä, 2015).

For food bloggers, blogging is an arena of self-fulfillment (see also Niemiec, 2018) because it allows re-living the positive emotions related to cooking and eating. In the PERMA theory, the sense of meaning is connected to utilizing one's strengths in the best possible way (Peterson & Seligman, 2004) and to the possibility of finding purpose and joy in life through it (see also Uusiautti et al., 2022). One of the exciting characteristics of blogging is that reading old posts allows the bloggers to observe the development the food bloggers have gone through in the past years, and a sense of accomplishment could emerge from realizing how much one has learned and achieved. For bloggers, cooking and reviving the activity while writing about it in a blog appeared optimistic in

bloggers' perceptions, especially from the perspectives of food bloggers' mental well-being and relationship with food.

The food relationship discourse of reciprocal social relationships brought a new perspective on well-being related to food and eating, concentrating on children and parenthood. It is connected to PERMA theory, and it has been previously researched that people with high well-being can usually build and maintain reciprocal relationships (Diener & Seligman, 2002). Interestingly, it can also be seen as connected to the food well-being concept by Block et al. (2011), which has a section for food socialization. For example, the parenting food bloggers considered what they have learned about food and eating from their childhood and what they want to pass on as social traditions and food memories to their children, family, and friends. This discourse emphasized food bloggers' positive, change-prone social relationship with food as part of blogging and wellbeing.

The food relationship discourse of a meaning showed food as a significant element that generated well-being. Blog posts about the values of food bloggers, such as reducing meat consumption, reducing white flour, and the importance of protein, also reflect the food trends and politics of the current time (Fogelhom & Erkkola, 2019). In the discourses of food bloggers, the meaning manifested itself, especially from the point of view of the values attached to the diet, but also more generally through the activities and self-realization related to food and cooking. In this discourse, preparing food for others and sharing ideas in blogs were connected to values and fundamental beliefs about food and eating. For bloggers, sharing meaningful values in their blogs is a bigger goal in life, similar to the meaning in PERMA theory.

When discussing the reliability of this research, it is essential to note that discourses are always researchers' interpretations of research data and, in this particular research, also PERMA theory. When evaluating discourse analytical research, the focus is usually on how well the researchers have succeeded in making the discourses understandable. However, two different research data were used in the study, none of which were the interview material traditionally used in discourse analysis. However, the blog and survey material formed a multi-voiced, ambiguous, and exciting whole, which the researchers enjoyed interpreting.

## Conclusion

Food blogs' potential to build positive and educative food-related discourses should be considered because food blogs may have hundreds of thousands of weekly readers. The bloggers are essential influencers and producers of variable positive food discourses. In this research, the food bloggers highlighted the connection between food and well-being and a balanced lifestyle, and they also discussed the healthiness of their recipes. The survey data revealed they were somewhat aware of the discourses they produced and wanted to help their readers find new ways of enjoying food.

However, the interpretation was that the food bloggers were not as interested in influencing the readers' physical health and well-being as health and lifestyle bloggers, in general, are (see also e.g. Toikkanen & Kananen, 2014). Instead, food bloggers emphasize the positive emotions, self-fulfillment, and social encounters that can be achieved through preparing and enjoying meals and telling others about these experiences. Thus, the food relationship discourses on well-being consisted mainly of psychological and social well-being notions that can be considered meaningful when evaluating well-being.

This research about the discourses produced by the Finnish food bloggers revealed a topical and exciting path to increase awareness of food choices and positive, constructivist education about

food (Janhonen et al., 2016). This kind of education is focused on food-related knowledge and skills, experiences, and dialogue on how to make sustainable decisions. Janhonen et al. (2016) use the concept of food sense to describe agency, empowerment, joy, pleasure, curiosity, and shared responsibility, such as sustainability, for food-related life-long learning. This awareness is complemented by the comprehensive conception of well-being used in this research, as the food relationship discourses were analyzed from the PERMA perspective. Likewise, the concept of food well-being appeared beneficial from an educational standpoint to bring versatile well-being and meaning to readers' lives. For example, Talvia and Anglé (2018) pointed out that nutrition interventions are usually based on information sharing and marketing strategies. However, their impact on food and eating-related behaviors is inconsistent (see also Kotro et al., 2011). Enhancing positive discourses (DeCosta et al., 2017) and showing positive, daily examples (Sarlio-Lähteenkorva & Prättälä, 2012) in forums that reach a broad audience can become an excellent add to the modern education about food and eating (Pettigrew, 2016).

In this research, we focused on how the food bloggers described their relationship with food and the role of their blogging. It showed how multidimensional a picture of well-being can be achieved when analyzing food-related discourses. More research would be needed, especially from the readers' perspectives. How do they perceive the discourses of food and well-being? What is the blogs' importance to their choices and relationship with food? Could they consider blogs as positive and educative forums?

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