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

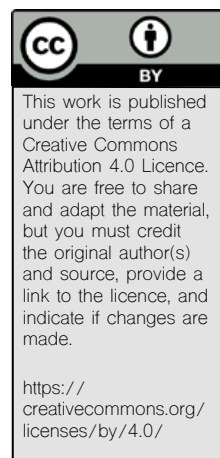
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## Abstract

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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