



Contradictions, Individualism, and Conformity in the Realm of Social Media

An Ethnographic Approach to the Posting Practices of the
Dutch Foodie Community

Nina Vojnović

(s1784617)

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Supervisor: Dr. Erik Bähre

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INTRODUCTION

Food has an essential place in the human existence - it satisfies our physical and emotional hunger, connects us with other people, evokes memories, and shapes both our culture and identities. It is omnipresent in every domain of our life, from biology and economy to religion; it nourishes our body, it is a commodity and a symbol (Jerome et al. 1980:1). The joy of sharing meals is present in every religion, culture, and family and it helps us to connect with others and to straighten relationships (Raman 2014:972). Foods are a rich source of symbols, because “they are literally taken into the body and have all the associations of life, home, family, health, and embodied being, they are the ultimate ‘natural symbols’” (Douglas in Anderson 2005:160). Linguistic anthropologists explained that certain food is not just good to eat, but also good to think – also known as food for thought (Messer 1984:223). Nowadays it seems that eating is turning more into a synonym for gathering, sharing, trusting, and socializing online than offline. Sharing food photos online started to influence our eating habits and it turned into a modern way of sharing recipes and information about food. Belasco (1999:27) claims that food is significant both for our personal and cultural identity and it is simultaneously pleasure and dread. “Food reveals who we are, where we came from, and what we want to be; as the old saying goes, we are what we eat, and we also are what we do not eat” (ibid.). I believe that the saying “you are what you eat”¹ is relevant now more than ever, which is remarkably seen in the rising trend of various local food movements, sustainability awareness, healthy and organic diets and the foodie culture. The selection of food and the methods of its preparation might identify us as a member of a specific group, and often reflects our overall relationship with the society and ourselves.

Situating the field and theoretical framework

The theoretical part of my thesis could not be written without mentioning Mary Douglas’ (1984) system of classification, Bordieuan (1984) perspective on taste and cultural capital and van Dijck (2011, 2013) critical analysis of social media (photo sharing sites) and online sociality. Their works are seminal for

¹ Quote of Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin in 1826, Source: You are what you eat, URL: <http://www.phrases.org.uk/meanings/you-are-what-you-eat.html> (05-02-2016).

understanding how food preferences and eating habits shape the lifestyle of my respondents, and how self-expression and self-promotion online give them a sense of belonging to specific groups.

What is a foodie? According to the neuroanthropologist John Allen (2012), the term foodie describes “a *category* of eaters that share a cultural identity and integrity” (emphasis added). Hence, his definition suggests that it is impossible to talk about foodies, their eating habits and lifestyle without taking into account the notions of categorization and classification. Classifications help us to organize and understand the world (to put it into categories) and to include or exclude certain things, people, behaviours, phenomena “according to socially pre-established categories” (Eriksen 2010:246). My respondents used a classification system not just to describe and categorize themselves or others as foodies² but also to explain their eating habits, why they choose one diet over another, how they value the quality of food and what their perception of healthy and unhealthy is, etc. They tend to classify all the information they find about food and health on different sources and never follow them blindly; they are always a bit sceptical and use common sense. In this way, they create their own idea of what healthy is and what is good or bad for them. Allen (2012) claims that normally we do not have a name for our old way of eating (the one on which we grew up), but when we change it for another diet (which usually has a specific name: paleo, veganism, vegetarianism, plant-based, etc.) we recognize that “we are changing from an implicit model of eating to an explicitly labelled new way of eating”. Therefore, the fact that the “foodie-style of eating” demands a label on its own, indicates that is a “departure or *deviation* from the implicit cultural norm”, emphasis added (ibid.).

Allen (2012) claims that not everyone identifies as a foodie, although everyone can be one (ibid.), especially if we consider that the Millennials generation has been labelled as the foodie generation because of their big interest in everything regarding food. He said:

What if they were foodies before they knew what a foodie was, or maybe before anyone knew what a foodie was?” In this case, adopting the foodie identity might seem a silly redundancy. Or perhaps more significantly, it might signal to others—incorrectly—that the person has changed status from non-foodie to foodie (ibid.).

I find this quote significant because it sums up how my respondents feel about being a foodie and how some of them perceive the term. While most of them were not sure when their moment of conversion

² According to my respondents and other resources on the Internet, there are different types of foodies and the most popular are: the vegan, the vegetarian, the flexitarian (eats mostly vegetables and occasionally meat), the DIY, the food-intolerant, the organivore (eats just organic food), the food blogger, etc. See: “What Type of Foodie Are You?”. *Best Food Facts*, URL: <https://www.bestfoodfacts.org/what-type-of-foodie-are-you-2/> (accessed 26-10-2016), Brones, A. (2011). “Foodie Underground: The 10 Types of Foodies (And What to Do with Them)”. *Ecosalon*, URL: <http://ecosalon.com/foodie-underground-the-10-types-of-foodies-and-what-to-do-with-them/> (accessed 26-10-2016) and Leggett, T. (2013). “The 7 Different Types of Foodie”. *BuzzFeed*, URL: https://www.buzzfeed.com/tabathaleggett/the-different-types-of-foodie?utm_term=.nqP3K4BGD#.bbzBAOr59 (accessed 26-10-2016).

happened and how to feel about it now³, others claimed that this is just one of the many statuses they have and they do not take it too seriously.

Ingrained belief is that foodie is someone who likes food and likes to eat, e.g. “I think that I am a foodie because I like food and I like to eat” (Jenna) or “I like to eat and to share food” (Willemieke). The respondents who identified as *real* foodies claimed that being a foodie means that you love food, you love to think about it, you educate yourself about it⁴, you like to discover new ingredients, flavours and unknown cuisines, you enjoy to experiment with new cooking techniques etc. Similarly, the food blogger *Amsterdam foodie* claims that “no foodie goes out every night, no matter what it might look like from their Instagram feed. And in fact, I wouldn’t trust a foodie who couldn’t cook”⁵.

How are foodies portrayed in the literature? According to Cairns, Johnston and Baumann (2010:592), they are people “with a passion for eating and learning about food”, but they are “not food professionals”. Ann Barr and Paul Levy coined the term foodie in 1981 and extended its definition in 1984 when they published the book *The Official Foodie Handbook: Be Modern- Worship Food*⁶. The symbolic title of the book explicitly sums up how the role of food changed in the last few decades: it shifted from the sphere of religion and nutrition to lifestyle, fashion, and self-expression. Food has always been (part of) a religion and, according to my respondents, it seems that the trendiness and the obsession with eating clean and healthy turned into a new form of religion, which I will explain later in the thesis.

Following Barr’s and Levy’s definition, a foodie is: “a person who is very very very interested in food. Foodies are the ones talking about food in any gathering – salivating over restaurants, recipes, radicchio. They do not think they are being trivial – Foodies consider food to be an art, on a level with painting or drama” (Barr and Levy 1984:6 in Getz & Robinson 2014:317). In the book, there is a clear distinction between the foodie and the gourmet: “the latter was typically a rich male amateur to whom food was a passion, while foodies are typically an aspiring professional couple to whom food is a fashion. A fashion? *The Fashion*” (Barr and Levy 1984:7 in Ashley et al. 2004:148). However, today things have changed and, in line with what my respondents told me, food turned into a passion for foodies too, although it is always somehow interconnected with fashion, pleasure, health, knowledge, and personal outlooks. Twenty-three years after publishing the book, Paul Levy is still wondering about the meaning of the word foodie and how

³ Is it part of their identity? Is it a status? Is it just their digital life?

⁴ They take online courses, read books about nutrition, visit food related workshops and events, watch documentaries, travel a lot and read other blogs not just to get inspired but also to learn new things.

⁵ Hampton, V. (2015). "How to Be a Foodie (and Not End up Obese)". *Amsterdam foodie* (posted 23-09-2015), URL: <https://www.amsterdamfoodie.nl/2015/how-to-be-a-foodie/> (accessed 12-10-2016)

⁶ Sietsema, R. (2012). "Gems From the Official Foodie Handbook". *Village Voice*, URL: <http://www.villagevoice.com/restaurants/gems-from-the-official-foodie-handbook-6533396> (accessed 06-10-2016)

it is perceived and used today. Is it a compliment of the acquired knowledge about food and the “sensitivity of palate” or it turned in a “value-neutral description, like civil servant, football fan or stamp-collector? Can you be a foodie-nerd?” (Levy 2007).

Although my interviewees did not know each other, they gave me similar definitions of the term foodie and their explanations are akin to the definitions found in the literature and on the Internet. Here are some of their definitions:

GWEN: Foodie would be for me someone who loves food and cooking. (...) I would also call someone a foodie who isn't educated about good food but who bakes the most incredible chocolate cakes and also people who make bad stuff - they can also be very passionate about food. For me a foodie is someone who is just passionate about food whether it is healthy or less healthy or not healthy... just as long as you are passionate about it, I think that you are a foodie.

RITA: It is someone who really enjoys food and for whom food is an important thing of daily life and I think it should be a little bit healthy. If you are a foodie, it's not someone who really, really, really enjoys McDonald's every day. You also try to learn a lot about food and what it makes to your body. I think that the enjoying part is really important. If you as a foodie really like to eat hamburgers once in a while, that's also a part of being a foodie, I think.

ESTHER: just someone who likes food and to eat it, but also the knowledge behind food and what's in it, how to work with food, how to cook it, where it comes from... just everything surrounding food.

MILICA: To me, a foodie is someone who loves food, who loves to think about it, to purchase it and prepare it. Usually a foodie is always looking for new tastes and enjoys discovering new ingredients and unknown cuisines⁷.

ADAM: For me foodie is like... you have to really have interest in food, whether it is food outside in a restaurant or lunch room or food that you cook. If you hashtag everything with foodie, ice cream, lollipop... I don't think that this is a real foodie. A real foodie shows really interest in food, has knowledge about food and how to cook it. That's for me a real foodie.

Padilla (2012) believes that “the term foodie describes a way of thinking rather than a way of acting” and, like Barr and Levy, emphasizes that foodies perceive food as an art that can be created “by ordinary people rather than by a culinary elite”. I must partially disagree with Padilla's statement. Although I agree with her that the term foodie portrays a way of thinking, I also do believe that it is also a way of acting especially in the realm social media. Foodies self-expression and self-promotion on Instagram is an (intentional) performance or, in Ferguson's (1999) terms, a performative style. In his book, *Expectations of Modernity: Myths and Meanings of Urban Life on the Zambian Copperbelt*, Ferguson (1999:20) explores the effects of urbanization and economic decline in Copperbelt, and develops an anti-teleological set of concepts to make sense of the “non- and counterlinearities” that he found there. He elaborates the notion of cultural style to find an alternative theoretical approach to cultural dualism (ibid., 86). Taking the work of

⁷ *Original*: Po meni, foodie je neko ko voli hranu, voli da misli o njoj, da kupuje, isprobava i priprema. Obično je uvijek u potrazi za novim ukusima, uživa u otkrivanju novih namirnica i nepoznatih kuhinja

Judith Butler (*Gender Trouble*, 1990) as an example, Ferguson (1999:94-95) asserts that the notion of styles includes “all modes of action through which people place themselves and are placed into social categories”. Therefore, he uses the term of *cultural styles* to “to refer to practices that signify differences between social categories (ibid., 95). They have a performative nature, “give expression” (ibid., 96) and require knowledge, which I will show in the following chapters when I will discuss the posting practices of my respondents. “Style, in this sense, is not achieved simply by having certain ideas or adhering to certain norms, it is a matter of embodied practices, successfully performed” (ibid., 98).

Although my respondents were a heterogenic group with different cultural⁸ and educational backgrounds, they still perform in a similar way on Instagram⁹, which is particularly noticeable in the way they style their photos, communicate with their followers and use certain hashtags or ‘tricks’ to increase their popularity. The ability to bring the performance off is an “empowering competence acquired *following other food bloggers* and cultivated over a (*life*)time” (Ferguson 1999:221, 96), emphasis added. Troy (2015) claims that sharing food images on blogs, forums and applications “has strengthened the relationship between social media and food” and consequently “the food scene portrayed in social media, *such as Instagram*, has become an embedded part of our culture, and it looks like it’s here to stay”¹⁰, emphasis added. What is hiding behind the “fetishization of food”¹¹ and our urge to share our private meals with strangers in wider online communities? Why do we spend more time photographing our food than eating it? These questions will be answered following a few case studies and van Dijck’s (2011, 2013) articles regarding the culture of connectivity and the performative self in the online sphere. Since food blogs and Instagram have allowed ordinary citizens to reach broad audiences and broaden their relationships and experiences, “small groups of close friends and family have been replaced by large networks of loosely connected acquaintances that place the self rather than the community at the centre” (Falzone 2011:378). Thus, “eating, exchanging food, taking photos of food, uploading photos of food, looking at other people’s photos of food — this is all a way that food brings people together in an urban centre” (Choi 2014). I will argue throughout the following chapters how food bloggers and food lovers reach vast audiences uploading well-styled food photos and using the right hashtags. Their visibility and popularity in the Instagram food(ie) community is a result of their creativity and the significant number of followers, likes and comments.

⁸ Dutch, Moroccan, British, Turkish, Croatian, Serbian.

⁹ They had to learn how the application works to get the most out of it.

¹⁰ See: Troy, J. (2015) “Why ‘Foodstagramming’ Is Here To Stay”, *Socialmediaweek.org*, URL: <http://socialmediaweek.org/chicago/2015/10/13/foodstagramming-is-here-to-stay/> (accessed 09-03-2016)

¹¹ Rosenbaum, R. (2014) “Anthony Bourdain’s Theory on the Foodie Revolution”, *Smithsonian.com*, URL: <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/anthony-bourdains-theory-foodie-revolution-180951848/> (accessed 07-03-2016)

Contradictions

During the fieldwork, I came across various contradictions and discrepancies between how my respondents present themselves in the online and offline sphere, and this is something that recurs throughout the whole thesis, which I find very interesting and intriguing.

Describing contradictions from an anthropological point of view might be very challengeable since our respondents are not always conscious of their actions (Berliner *in* Berliner et al. 2016:2). “How can anthropologists attest to the existence of inconsistencies in people if they are not conscious of them? How to get access to them if they are intrapersonal?” (ibid.). As Berliner (2016:1-2) explains, contradictions are an essential facet of human life since “humans are steeped in contradictory thoughts, feeling, and attitudes”. The author asks himself how can somebody have opposite thoughts and “live with principles, emotions, and behaviours that contradict each other” (ibid., 2). Self-awareness occurs when social actors become conscious of their inconsistencies¹² and during these moments of ‘*reflexivity-in-action*’¹³, “self-knowledge and feeling about the self are being produced” (ibid., 5). Frequently, the gap built by self-awareness “leads to the production of justifications in order to create consistency” (ibid.). According to Berliner, anthropologists have to give more importance to contradictions and conflicting statements in the everyday life and, generally, reflect more on the notion of a unified self. (ibid.).

On the other hand, Lambek (*in* Berliner et al. 2016:6) believes that distinguishing what people say from what they do is not enough and the best approach would be to discern “what they say they do from what they say ‘one’ does or ‘one’ should do”. From his point of view, ideas and opinions can be recounted as contradictory to one another, but practices and commitments might be considered as inconsistencies rather than contradictions (ibid.).

Klara’s quote: “I don’t know the actual meaning of foodie, but I think that I can qualify as one. In my opinion foodie is like someone who really likes food”, made me reflect about the importance of self-presentation online, but also to question why someone would identify herself/himself with *something* they do not know the meaning of. Is it because being a foodie is trendy, appealing or because it attracts attention? Nonetheless, drawing attention and showing off is important in the realm of social media, in particular for those food bloggers who aim to grow and be popular. Therefore, there is no time to be shy and modest.

For instance, when I asked Jasper why he named his blog and Instagram account *Den Haag Foodie* - because of the trendiness of the term or because he felt like one. He replied that, before starting his blog,

¹² "weather it happens alone or in the midst of social interactions" (Berliner *in* Berliner 2016:5)

¹³ As Berliner (2016:5) calls them

he did some research about trendy words and he saw that *foodie* was on the top. Other respondents act in a similar way – they will look at the Instagram page of the food bloggers they admire to see what hashtags they use to get an idea what are the most popular hashtags that bring lots of likes and enhance the visibility on Instagram.

First of all, because it is trendy and I think that when people see this word they are more interested to know what this is about and to read someone's blog because of that... I thought, you have the Amsterdam foodie but you don't have the Den Haag foodie.

During the fieldwork, I spoke with many respondents who were facing the same uncertainties as Klara did because, before me, nobody asked them to define themselves or the word foodie. Undeniably, the term *foodie* embodies both positive and negative connotations and maybe it is easier to declare as one in the online world. For instance, a few interviewees (as Klara did) described themselves as a foodie on Instagram, but while talking with them they were neither sure about the exact meaning of the word nor if they may identify or qualify as one. In this circumstances, they wanted to hear my opinion¹⁴ if they were one or not based on how they described themselves, their lifestyle and eating practices, which I never did and I tried to avoid it as much as I could. To me, their opinions, and explanations about being a foodie or just how they perceive the term were more meaningful than the definitions written in dictionaries or books because their answers gave me an insight into their lifestyle and 'back-stage'¹⁵.

Most of the respondents tended to identify more as food bloggers than foodies, and while at the beginning of the conversation they would deny being a foodie or feeling like one, as the conversation proceed, they would unconsciously call themselves 'the foodie of the family'. On the other hand, some respondents presumed that they are not real foodies because they are not the ones who care more about the photo than the food on their plate. However, they do think that, compared to other ordinary people, they are foodies because they like to experiment with ingredients and new cuisines.

Other inconsistencies that I found were mostly linked with my respondents' self-presentation online. The majority of them are advocating healthy diet and lifestyle and therefore they will not post unhealthy 'stuff' on their Instagram profile so as not to ruin their reputation online, since people are mostly following them because of that. Angela, who is a vegetarian and blogs about healthy food choices, explained that if a meal is not vegan or "super healthy" she believes that it is not worth posting online:

As soon as I eat unhealthy cake I probably wouldn't post it either because this is not what my followers are here for, they want to be inspired to eat healthy. Maybe if it's homemade I will post it

¹⁴ Judgment

¹⁵ Berreman (2014:163-164) said: "if the ethnographer does not get access to back-region information, he will have to content himself with an 'official view' derived from public sources publicly approved, and his research will have to be sharply limited". Goffman (1959:78) observes that everybody has both an informal (or backstage) behaviour and another more formal for occasions "when the performance is being presented".

with the recipe like ‘you don’t have to eat healthy all the time, you can have a cake once in a while, I am doing it too’, but this is how you make it.

Katja is a linguist and a Russian language teacher passionate about nutrition (healthy eating habits), sport, and self-development. That Monday morning when I met her for the interview, she uploaded on her Instagram account a photo of her Converse shoes and a can of Coca-Cola on a sandy beach. During the interview, she revealed that she was struggling that morning if to upload the photo or not. When she posted it online she wrote a caption confessing to her followers that she was uncertain about posting the photo since she is usually advocating a healthy lifestyle. She added in the caption that “a can of Coke here and there will not make you unhealthy or fat but stress will”. A few days later, I realized that she replaced that photo with another one which looked almost the same¹⁶ but this time she added a basket of strawberries. I suppose that she deleted the previous image because the unhealthy content did not fit her overall Instagram feed and adding strawberries to the composition made the picture look healthier. Her behaviour amazed me because during the conversation she stressed a few times that balance is very important and acceptable to enjoy every so often chocolate or other unhealthy things which make you happy. According to one respondent who knows her, a few months ago “she would never ever eat this”. Moreover, she mentioned that she does not like the Instagram group *#fitdutchies*, because they are “completely obsessed in showing their flat bellies”, nevertheless she is frequently using that hashtag on her profile.

Rita is a freelance writer passionate about graphic design, food styling and healthy lifestyle. She believes that being honest is very important and that every now and then it is acceptable to post pictures of unhealthy food if you explain to your followers why you did it. Posting unhealthy content makes food bloggers more honest, reliable, and closer to their followers who are facing the same struggles and temptations. They want to show that they are ‘normal’ and not an exception. She said:

I think that this is even more significant when you are a famous foodie because I think that it is important to show followers that you are like them and not something extraordinary.

Despite what she said, she still believes that she should post only healthy food on her profile to keep a good image of herself. Yet, what she says she does is different from what she says one should do. She said:

You can always post food of hamburgers that is definitively fine but the main thing was to put healthy food, because if you say that you are a writer of healthy food then you have to know what it is. I think that it was also about creating an image about myself.

Therefore, some respondents chose to be honest with their followers from the very beginning of their Instagram account because they wanted to “keep it real”. Klara said:

¹⁶ Sandy beach with two cans of Coke and a small black backpack

I know one girl who is a fit dutchie and that she doesn't eat healthy every day, but her Instagram looks like she is eating healthy every day and for me this is not real because she is, in a way, lying on the internet. Then it is about status because you are a sort of lying about your lifestyle.

I observed that my respondents used the word *real* to distinguish themselves either from people who pretend to be foodies but they are not¹⁷ or from those Instagrammers who lie to their followers about their lifestyle and buy comments, followers and likes¹⁸. Another word frequently used on Instagram is the prefix *super* (e.g. super easy, super healthy, superfoods, etc.) which is adopted to point out the easiness of preparing certain recipes, the availability of ingredients and the beneficial effects of food rich in nutrients.

Methodology

Researching the foodie community on Instagram can be very challenging and sometimes even frustrating since it is constantly growing and expanding. I moved to the Netherlands at the beginning of January and I decided to do research among Dutch foodies and food bloggers who were active on Instagram and posting daily. I found the first food bloggers and food lovers following randomly the hashtags *#dutchfoodie* and *#dutchfoodies* and one of the criterions to follow them was the information they provided in the *bio field*. In the beginning, I was very picky when sending e-mails because I wanted to contact just the 'typical' ones who post food photos on a daily basis and nothing else, but later I realized this approach was wrong because what does it mean to be a *typical* foodie and how to recognize one? Secondly, although people identified with different names – foodies, food bloggers, food lovers – they were essentially doing the same thing: taking photos of their meals and uploading it online, on Instagram.

Although the first food bloggers who replied to my e-mails were too busy for participating in this research, they were still willing to help me and suggested me other people (*snowball method*). However, due to the snowball method, I ended up interviewing mostly 'small' food bloggers¹⁹, the ones who are steadily gaining popularity and followers on Instagram, but not on other social media. Talking to them gave me the opportunity to understand food bloggers' point of view and their daily struggles and challenges, but also to comprehend the process of growth on social media and what does it compromise. What does it look like to be a food blogger *today* and how to stand out from the crowd? I used deliberately the word *today*

¹⁷ For them, it is just a means of showing off and not a lifestyle.

¹⁸ My respondents believe their popularity is not merited since it does not a result of their work.

¹⁹ This is how they called and presented themselves in the e-mails or during interviews.

because I want to stress out that a few years ago it was much easier to become a recognized food blogger in the Netherlands than it is today. According to my respondents, three to four year ago (2012- 2013) there was a boom of food bloggers, and subsequently now it is too late for having a food blog because it is harder to ‘grow up’ due to the big competition. Thus, the ones who opened their account two or three years ago²⁰ were in a better position than the ones today who are facing various difficulties and challenges. To give some examples, because of the big number of food blogs today, one respondent told me that she was struggling for a long period to find a proper name for her blog because almost all of them were already taken. On the other hand, it appears that their Instagram is more visited and popular than their blog and other social media accounts and for this reason, they obligate themselves to post daily to enhance their visibility and activity online²¹. The role of their Instagram account is to redirect their followers to their blog or Facebook page. However, things started to change this March 2016, when Instagram changed its chronological timeline in favour of the one based on algorithms and forcing not just food bloggers but also other users to be more active on the platform if they want to reach a wider public²². To sum up, having the opportunity to interview both ‘big’ and ‘small’ food bloggers gave me the chance to get a bigger picture of the blogging practices and the online food community. Moreover, it allowed me to understand their behaviour, motivation and their obsessive urge to post food photos. Not to mention all the side effects that go with it, such as stress, pressure, and deadlines that are nowadays more evident and common than before.

In the three-month fieldwork, I interviewed twenty-five food bloggers and food lovers²³ (twenty-two women and three men), and another nine (all women) emailed me their answers because they were too busy for meeting me, but they still wanted to participate. My respondents were scattered across the whole Netherlands, but the majority of them lived in the North and South Holland and North Brabant. Moreover, two of them were neither Dutch nor residing in the Netherlands. The age of my respondents (19-38 years old) corresponds with the age of people who mostly use Instagram (20-40 years old) - more women than man²⁴. This generation is also known as Millennials and it includes people born between the 1980s and the early 2000s and they “have been dubbed the *foodie generation*”²⁵.

²⁰ And who in the meantime also had the chance to become ‘Insta famous’

²¹ I will explain it later in the thesis.

²² I will explain the impact of the new algorithm later in the thesis.

²³ I decided purposely to use both words because not all the interviewees identified as a food blogger- some of them uploads photos on Instagram but do not have a blog.

²⁴ According to Kirsten Jassies, a Dutch Instagram specialist, Instagram is a very popular application in the Netherlands with 2 million users out of which 1.2 million are active daily. She had a lecture during the European Food Blogger Convention in Amsterdam (9-10 June 2016).

²⁵ See: UCI Trend Lab, “Millennials: The Foodie Generation”, URL: <http://corporate.univision.com/2014/12/millennials-the-foodie-generation/> (accessed 09-10-2016)

Although I contacted a lot of persons online, I did not have control over who to meet and when – I had to rely on their willingness or unwillingness to participate in this research. Hence, a few times I asked myself if they were truly busy or if this was just a polite excuse for not participating in this research project.

Before my fieldwork, I was convinced that participant observation online/offline, offline unstructured interviews, visual (and discourse) analysis and life histories would be my main research methods²⁶. Indeed, I used all of them but not in the way that I initially planned and wanted. In the end, interviews and life histories proved to be more successful than participant observation offline.

Since my fieldwork was mainly based on interviews, it did not allow me to build deeper relationships with my respondents and to meet them more than once. The problem was not just the distance, but also their ‘crazy’ working hours and their overall busyness in their private life²⁷. Because of that, following them on farmer’s markets, food festivals, food-related workshops or joining them in their kitchen was practically impossible.

Interviews were mostly held in my respondents’ favourite lunchroom or cafe or in a place that has been for a long time on their wish list and they have never had the chance to go there. Meeting them in those places helped me to grasp their food preferences, lifestyle, and spots where they usually ‘hang out’. Interviews would usually take from forty-five minutes to two hours because they would often turn out into informal conversations about everything and they were recorded with the consent of my respondents²⁸. However, since a few respondents met me during their lunch break or before another meeting, I had to use semi-structured interviews instead of unstructured. Although the group was heterogenic and did not always knew each other²⁹, their taste, lifestyle, eating habits and decisions they make regarding their diet were quite similar. I presume that those similarities are influenced on the one hand, by the overall trend of eating clean and healthy and on the other hand, they unconsciously influence one another with their photos and food choices³⁰.

I got a broad range of data mostly dealing with identity, consumption, health, community, sustainability, and social media which helped me to answer almost all my questions. However, identity and

²⁶ For detailed information about the research methodology used in this thesis see: Bernard, H. (2011). *Research methods in anthropology: Qualitative and quantitative approaches* (5th [exp. and upd.] ed.). Lanham, MD, [etc.]: AltaMira Press and Rose, G. (2001). *Visual methodologies: An introduction to the interpretation of visual materials*. London [etc.]: Sage.

²⁷ However, I managed to see one interviewee twice and to hang out with her.

²⁸ I want to highlight that the quotations of my respondents are intentionally not corrected grammatically. Moreover, I decided not to give the URL of their blogs to protect their privacy.

²⁹ Often respondents knew each other from Instagram, but they rarely or never met offline.

³⁰ They mostly follow each other – ‘small’ food bloggers/ Instagrammers like to follow bigger accounts not just to get inspired but also because they hope that they will be followed back which is a big recognition for them.

sociality (connectedness and connectivity) are the two most important topics that emerged after the data analysis and therefore, I will focus more on them.

Structure

The aim of the first part of the thesis is to clarify the term foodie considering both academic literature and public opinion. Because of the diminutive marker ‘-ie’, the word cannot be retrieved “as a term for a serious food advocate”³¹. Contrary to Johnston’s and Baumann’s (2010:204-5) statement that foodies care only about taste, sustainability, and animal welfare, I will show that they pay attention to the social welfare as well. In the first chapter, I scrutinize why people identify as foodies and when they started to be interested in food, or to put it in other words, when their moment of conversion occurred. The chapter aims at answering the question how specific interests in food can construct foodie identity and at which point ordinary people started to consider themselves foodies and how they define themselves. Although my respondents had a “clear idea of what makes someone a food blogger” (Lofgren 2013:39) or a foodie, they were uncertain how to present themselves, not only during my interview but also in situations when they asked restaurant owners for permission to write reviews about their place. Hence, their answers and thought were often contradictory and confusing. Chapter two explores how cultural and economic capital influence foodies’ practices of consumption, their eating habits and enhance their social status. I delved into this topic using Bourdieu’s (1984) notion of taste as a match-maker and de Solier’s (2013) assumption that food consumption diverges from other forms of (material) consumption and that foodies are culturalists rather than materialists. The chapter also illustrates what influences their food choices and how they value the quality of food and justify their consumption. Chapter three is an extension of the previous section, and it highlights how cultural and economic capital shape foodies’ diet, philosophy, and lifestyle. The aim of this chapter is to look at personal and public classifications of food, contemporary food taboos and why the enthusiasm and obsession with eating healthy and the fear of temptations resembles religious fervour and devotedness. These themes will be clarified through the research findings resulting from different case studies.

³¹ See: Clarke, R. (2014). “To the Editor: Rethinking the Word Foodie”. *The New York Times*, URL: <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/01/opinion/beyond-foodie-its-about-our-values.html> (accessed 02-01-2017).

The aim of the second part of the thesis is to elucidate how sharing food photos on Instagram turned into a new culture of connectivity and creates shared experiences, online communities, and a sense of belonging to them. It addresses the question to what extent social media is changing our approach to food and what motivates ‘food lovers’ to share their meals online and how it affects their eating and cooking practices and daily routine. Chapter five gives a concise overview of food photography as a photographic genre and aesthetic practice, its origins, and its main features in promoting and enhancing self-expression on Instagram. The aim of chapter six is to look at the Instagram food(ie) community, how it creates friendships and connects people with the same passion and interests. Despite the belief of my respondents that the community is non-competitive and supportive, my research findings show that friendly competitions, antagonism, and hierarchies between different groups and sub-communities do exist. Besides, I will explain why some food lovers do not feel part of the community and prefer being outsiders. Chapter seven focuses on the motivation for taking and uploading food photos online and how the ‘urge’ for collecting more followers, likes and comments turned into an obsession and ‘competitive sport’. Considering the behaviour and posting practices of my respondents, I suggested that they might be perceived as online collectors. In chapter eight I will discuss the paramount importance of (food) styling in attracting more followers and likes and boosting foodies’ Instagram account. I will show the difference between ordinary and food photography and how editing programs affect the Real, recreates and enhances the captured moments to make the photo more appealing. The aim of the chapter is to look at the classification systems that foodies employ when uploading their photos online and how they structure their taste and styling. What content is Instagram-worthy or unworthy? What does it mean to have a camera in mind and how long does it take to style a photo perfectly? In Chapter nine I will explain the importance of hashtags in broadening the network and intensifying online visibility and how they became a new means of informal classification, categorization, visualisation, and a searching engine for inspiration. I will display the power of hashtags and the fallouts of not using them recounting the experiences of my respondents. The last chapter explores the relation between followers, comments and likes in attaining digital reputation and showing the popularity of a particular post. I will explain why my respondents consider comments and followers to be more meaningful and useful than likes for the improvement of their account, and why they feel obligated to post. Thus, taking ghost followers as an example, I will discuss why friendships and engagement in the Instagram food(ie) community might appear ephemeral, superficial and a bit of a farce. I will conclude the thesis with Alshawaf’s and Wen’s (2015) Self-Promotion Cycle that briefly summarizes the culture of connectivity, the motivation that lies beneath uploading photos on Instagram and the aspiration for becoming *Insta famous*.

PART I: Foodie as an ambiguous term: is it a compliment or an offense?

The aim of this chapter is to give an overview of how the term foodie is portrayed in the academic literature and in the context of everyday discourse. I will illustrate why the term balances between being extremely positive to being severely abhorred even among people who declared to be a foodie. Taking a few cases as an example, I will refute the popular belief that foodies care more about the taste and the provenance of their food than for the social welfare on a national and global scale.

The term foodie has become hard to define since its meaning is extremely vague, ambiguous, confusing and it often resonates very snobbish. The term started to be such hatred to the extent that certain people would like it to disappear from the English lexicon³². Szilagyi (*in* Vidal 2015) explains: “I’ve heard of cooks and chefs, and gourmets and gourmands, but what the heck is a ‘foodie’? A person who likes food? A person who eats food? A person who knows what food is? Sounds like ‘foodie’ is a synonym for ‘everybody’”. This quotation perfectly outlines the thoughts of many of my respondents independently if they identified as foodies or not. For them, the term has a negative undertone because they associate it with people (snobs) who are overly enthusiastic, addicted and obsessed with food, “and they can think about food all day long” (Katja). Although Brenda described herself as a twenty years old foodie from Amsterdam “in love with writing and addicted to health and peanut butter”³³ and a vegetarian since the age of seven; she believes that it is good to be a foodie but not the whole world has to be one. She supposes that people do not know how to be something in-between. She said: “now there is this big hype and when you are a foodie you see a lot of other foodies on Instagram and you get the idea that this is the only thing that exists, you know?”. Thus, those who are proud of being *real* foodies³⁴ are often embarrassed to divulge it. For instance, Klara sometimes wonders if anyone cares about her being a foodie, that she cooked something exceptional or had a smoothie bowl for breakfast. Katja said:

That’s the problem I see on Instagram a lot in the society, like everyone is obsessed either for eating healthy what we still don’t know what it is. Everybody has different opinions what healthy is.

³² In the article "Why It’s Time to Flambé the Word ‘Foodie’", Juan Vidal discloses some reasons why the term foodie was nominated as an abhorred word at the Lake Superior State University. See: Vidal, J. (2015). "Why It’s Time to Flambé the Word ‘Foodie’". *The Daily Beast* (posted 01-11-2015), URL: <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2015/01/11/why-it-s-time-to-flamb-the-word-foodie.html> (accessed 10-10-2016).

³³ Retrieved from her Instagram account

³⁴ When respondents use the adjective ‘real’ they want to stress out their great knowledge about food, compared to those who use the term just because of its popularity.

Everyone is obsessed how much they eat, weight gain/loss and that's why foodie and that obsession... I call it foodsession. That's why I really don't want to call myself that.

Esther defined herself as a science student, foodie, and blogger enthusiast. Although she finds the term foodie extremely positive and she is not ashamed of being one, she still believes that food does not define her. She added joking: "if somebody asks me whether or not I am a foodie I would say yes, but I wouldn't introduce myself like 'Hey! I am Esther, the foodie!'".

It is interesting to mention that restaurant chefs dislike foodies for two reasons: first, because it "empowers their customers to feign knowledge about things they don't actually understand"³⁵ and second because the meals they prepare often get cold as a result of foodies taking pictures.

Why people dislike the term foodie?

In the past the term foodie appeared as a counterpoint to the enclosed world of elite and high-culture food snobs (Johnston & Baumann 2010:3) whereas today it is the reverse: they are recognized as 'snobs' whose great knowledge about food and economic capital distinguish them from ordinary people. Johnston and Baumann (2010) argue that "quality, rarity, locality, organic, hand-made, creativity and simplicity" symbolize high-status food and a source of distinction among people (ibid.).

There are a few reasons why people despises the word foodie and why the term resembles *something* negative. First of all, it has to do with the suffix *-ie* which turns the word from serious to trivial, foolish and childish.

A word with an '-ie' ending usually connotes something small or sweet: doggie, cookie, auntie, bootie, hankie, cutie. The '-ie' suffix makes it seem as if there is something faintly frivolous, even infantile, about being interested in food" (Echlin 2011)³⁶.

Secondly, the word suggests snobbism both in the way how people present themselves and how they perform the knowledge about food. The food blogger Sarah J. Gim (2009) describes foodies as "people who label themselves as members of some caste of society that is superior to the others (...) and look down

³⁵ See: Ferdman, R., A. (n.d.). "Stop calling yourself a 'foodie'". *The Washington Post*, URL: https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2016/03/01/why-the-word-foodie-is-terrible-and-needs-to-go-away/?utm_term=.d32da622d212 (accessed 29-12-2016).

³⁶ maria lorraine's comment on the site Chowhound. See: Echlin, H. (2011). "Is Foodie a Put-Down?". *Chowhound* (posted 22-11-2011), URL: <http://www.chowhound.com/food-news/97864/is-foodie-a-put-down/> (accessed 10-10-2016).

on others with an air of ‘I know more about food than you do’ (...).’ Similarly, Sachs (2015) argues that the term foodie “is designed to divide” people in those who claim that it is a way of “standing above the food-as-fuel fray” from those who perceive the word as degrading since it marks an obsession and fixation with what we digest. Anderson (2005:125) claims that food is a synonym both for solidarity (eating, sharing, participating) and separation (class, ethnicity, religion, etc.).

On the other hand, Ferdman (2016) argues that the word foodie increased in popularity in 2006 and it is growing ever since. He compares the usage of the word foodie with an out-of-date outfit that “was fashionable years before, long enough ago that it's no longer in style but not long enough ago for some to mistake it as still being cool” (ibid.). Although the term may be old-fashioned, some food bloggers believe that the word foodie perfectly describes what they are – food lovers - and they are proud to be one, no matter what others say about it. Vicky stated:

According to Mashable³⁷, I don't exist. Apparently, the word 'foodie' died with Rachel's haircut in Friends. And, if their new-fangled terms are to be believed, I now fall into the 'Roadeater'³⁸ category of food lover – a term which, as some astute Twitter follower pointed out, makes it sound more like I eat roadkill than enjoy tasting the local food on my travels. So screw it. I'm a foodie. And I don't care what Mashable or anyone else says about it. Including chefs, by the way, who seem to hate the term and all who go under it³⁹.

Johnston and Baumann (2010:203) claim that negative connotations, stereotypes and reactions to foodie culture is mainly founded on a perception that “foodies are fussy, pretentious, and snobbish”. The authors focused on the foodie discourse⁴⁰ to understand how food is “framed and socially constructed” and to tease out “the justifications and ideologies underlying the taste preferences and food identities that individuals express” (ibid., 204). Although foodies enjoy to experiment with a wide range of ingredients, tastes and ethnical cuisine, it seems to the authors that they care more about the environmental sustainability and animal welfare than for “social welfare, injustice, and hunger on a national and global scale” (ibid., 204-205).

³⁷ Multi-media platform for digital culture and entertainment. See: Spigelman Richter, S. (2015) "If the term 'foodie' is dead, what do we call you?". *Mashable* (posted 20-09-2015), URL: http://mashable.com/2015/09/20/foodie-is-dead/?utm_cid=mash-com-fb-main-link#dcbbR.AvakqP (accessed 12-10-2016)

³⁸According to Mashable, a roadeater is a person who never eats at McDonald's when travelling abroad and likes "indigenous food". He is an intrepid eater and he stops at "regional fast food restaurants specializing in biscuits and Michelin-starred establishments located in a chef's own home". As expected, the description is quite ironic. See: Spigelman Richter, S. (2015) "If the term 'foodie' is dead, what do we call you?". *Mashable* (posted 20-09-2015), URL: http://mashable.com/2015/09/20/foodie-is-dead/?utm_cid=mash-com-fb-main-link#dcbbR.AvakqP (accessed 12-10-2016).

³⁹ Hampton, V. (2015). "How to Be a Foodie (and Not End up Obese)". *Amsterdam foodie* (posted 23-09-2015), URL: <https://www.amsterdamfoodie.nl/2015/how-to-be-a-foodie/> (accessed 12-10-2016)

⁴⁰ How we think, talk and write about food (Johnston & Baumann 2010:203)

I have to partially disagree with the Johnston's and Baumann's statement mentioned above, since I found out that part of my respondents truly care about the social welfare and are trying to be more proactive⁴¹ in their daily life. Although for Sabina flavour comes always first, she thinks that it is very important to support local and small shops. She said:

They are passionate about what they are doing, because it's their living. They understand the product; they understand the customer and you build a relationship. (...) If that means I can support someone locally I'm more than willing to.

Rita and Nora always check where their food comes from and they prefer Dutch or European products because they are not coming from far away. They want to support Mexican farmers but they also believe that it is very important to buy and eat local, seasonal food and support the local economy. On the other hand, Klara is quite often aware and concerned about the food she buys - she wants to support both local and international farmers:

I know if you buy that [*quinoa*] you sort of make life harder to people in that country so I try not to eat too much quinoa. Sometimes I think about these things; I try to keep track of it, emphasis added.

Both Jasper and Gijs joined the Youth Food Movement (YFM)⁴² because they believe that young people can change the future of food production and consumption. Gijs thinks that buying biological is bad for the environment and this is the reason why he eats less meat. "I really care for the future and the planet and the total system, that's really important". Jasper, on the other hand, has read a lot of books about society, food, and direct action: "I think that food is not just the fuel of life but also the biggest destructor of life in this moment". He joined the YFM and the Slow Food Movement because he believes that these campaigns are good for our society and increase additional food awareness. Yet, he wonders how much are they going to change the gap between people of different social status. He believes that eating good food, buying it in local shops and working on a sustainable environment for the local economy is "almost like making a political statement".

A few respondents claimed that buying biologic and organic has its pros and cons; although it is good for our health, it might be harmful to the environment and the global welfare. For instance, Esther likes to buy local products because she thinks that it is a good way to help and support local farmers and it is better for the environment. She pays a lot of attention to the quality of the food she buys. Albeit she used to eat organic food quite a lot, she is not buying organic anymore because it is expensive and she believes that it is not good for the global welfare. She explained:

⁴¹ E.g. joining the Youth Food Movement in The Netherlands or the Slow Food Movement

⁴² Gijs joined the YFM Academy and was working on some projects with them; Jasper is member of the YFM Den Haag but he told me that the group is not united and coherent. Afterwards he joined the Slow Food Movement because he was too old to be part of the YFM (the age limit is 32 years)

There is a lot of contradicting evidence. On the one hand, organic food is better because no artificial pesticides are used but there are organic, biological pesticides used and those are derived from tree roots and they can be as damaging to your healthy as artificial one used in normal agriculture. On the other hand, it's kind of the problem that organic food tends to need more space and if everyone on the planet would eat organic there wouldn't be enough food.

To sum up, my respondents are generally aware of the food they buy and they are trying to be more sustainable in their everyday life and attentive to social welfare. For instance, they will buy more Fairtrade products in order to help and improve the lives of farmers in the developing world and will avoid those which discriminate them. Hence, buying organic, biological and fair-trade products⁴³ is as important as buying local products and support local farmers and the local economy, although flavour and taste are always on the first place. However, some of them are still suspicious towards biological and organic food because they perceive it as a “weird stamp” (Angela) that says nothing about the amount of space that animals got in factory farms⁴⁴.

⁴³ Especially tea, coffee and chocolate

⁴⁴ They believe that those products have a bad impact on the environment.

1. FOOD LOVERS: AN UNCERTAIN IDENTITY

In this chapter, I explore the contradictions and discrepancies between how my respondents present themselves online and offline and why some of my respondents prefer being called food lovers. I will explain when my respondents got interested into food and when their moment of conversion occurred. In addition, I will provide a brief overview about hierarchies and self-categorizations on Instagram.

MacClancy (2004:63-64) argues that identity is a highly “tricky concept” and that we need to be very careful when talking about it, mostly because it is usually perceived as static, bounded and an unproblematic category. Thus, we need to shift from ideas about identity to *modes of identification*⁴⁵ as they switch attention from the static to the dynamic, from singular to plural and from “pseudoautonomous identity” to “roles, motivations and actions of agents in any identificatory process” (ibid.). MacClancy states that identities are “performed in specific contexts for identificatory purposes” and that we can understand them only by observing the ways our respondents use their own categories, to what end and to what effect (ibid., 64).

My respondents were quite confusing and incoherent in their thoughts when talking about being a foodie or a food blogger, mostly because they are still getting used to be called (or to present themselves) like that⁴⁶. They believe that they are still the same person and that nothing considerably changed in their life, except their eating habits. Brenda explained: “I don’t normally call myself a foodie but I think that if you are busy with food the amount of time that I am busy with food than it’s maybe the proper name”. However, when they make it public on social media, they know that the information they gave online says something about them⁴⁷ and that people will make their opinions about it. Although they seem confident about being a foodie or a food blogger online, in the offline sphere there are relatively hesitant, insecure, and unclear. With the following examples, I aim to show the most common and ambivalent answers that I got during interviews with my respondents when they tried to define themselves and their blogging practices. I found Angela’s explanation very interesting and captivating for opening the discussion about identity and modes of identification. She said:

It’s funny that you said that, identity, because I still don’t eat meat but I wouldn’t say I am a vegetarian, because then it’s something about my personality somehow. Now I am getting more and more vegan but I wouldn’t say that I am a vegan. But I feel if I say that I am a vegetarian/vegan it says something about my personality but I am still the same person I just eat differently. (...) I didn’t

⁴⁵ E.g. what, how, why, for whom; they perform on different levels.

⁴⁶ Especially when they ask restaurants for the permission to write reviews about them or when they contact sponsored companies.

⁴⁷ Identity, personality

have a Facebook page till a month ago because I felt like as long as I am just doing it on Instagram and on my blog it's like, how to say it, like a different person, like your alter ego. It was just my alter ego being a foodie and then starting the Facebook page really felt like coming out like *I am also a foodie, yay!*

On the contrary, Olivia is a twenty-three years old communication student who writes food related posts for the Dutch radio page Funx.nl and she is the owner of the food blog and Instagram account named *lovelyfoodies*. The name of her blog induced me to discuss the meaning of the term foodie and if she would define as one. She claimed:

Yeah, not a real real foodie, but I am a foodie. I want to be a bigger foodie but I don't want to call myself a foodie because I am not always posting stuff. A half year ago, I would say yes I am a foodie. I am still a foodie because I work for Funx food. What do you think?

Although she mentioned that being a foodie has a negative resonance for her, she believes that once she was more foodie than she is now. Yet, when I asked her why she was using the hashtag *#foodie* on Instagram⁴⁸ she answered that she wants to be found by other foodies: "I use *#foodie* because I hope that people are searching for foodies so, actually I am considering myself as foodie, then".

Klara is twenty-one-year-old hotel management student and a food blogger from Breda. When she agreed to be my interviewee she asked me if she could share parts of the interview on her blog. I agreed, although I was not sure what she meant by it and which kind of information she needed. I saw it as a reciprocity: she will help me, but in return I need to help her too. At the beginning of every month she posts, as she calls it, an edition of *Food Talks* where she gives an update on what is going on in her life. I suppose that publishing my story on her blog might have been very appealing to her because it was an interesting and unusual experience to write about. She published the post thirteen days after the interview, here is part of it:

I got this idea from a girl named Nina, who kindly asked me for an interview! How cool is that, that sounds almost like I'm a celebrity. No, it wasn't like that: she is writing her master thesis about foodies and needed to interview some actual foodies about their point of view. I actually planned to write about the foodie culture, but I already wrote so much about the interview and being a foodie that I'll leave that for next time.

Interview: First I'll briefly explain the interview. Here's how it went... I received an e-mail from Nina, explaining to me who she was and how she found me on Instagram because I used the hashtag *#Dutchfoodie*. She explained that she needed people to interview about foodies and Instagram: why is it that we feel the need to share pictures of what we ate? She kindly asked me if I would meet up with her for an interview, and I agreed. (...) Anyway, we met up on the Monday after that and enjoyed our coffees in the sun. It was so nice out! She was very kind and we first had some small talk, as it was easier to have an interview when you are somewhat familiar with the person you are speaking with. Then we spoke about food, Instagram and food choices (biological, vegetarian, fair trade etc) for a very long time. My friends don't seem to be very interested in food you know, so I was very happy to finally have someone to discuss all this with!

⁴⁸ Because she feels like one or because she wants 'real' foodies to visit her page

Being a foodie: So, what does being a foodie mean? I Googled it (Hurray for Google!) and here's what Wikipedia says: "*A foodie is a person who has an ardent or refined interest in food and alcoholic beverages. A foodie seeks new food experiences as a hobby rather than simply eating out of convenience or hunger.*" Hah! That is so me. When Nina asked me if I was a foodie I said yes, but a bit doubtfully because actually I had no idea what being a foodie actually meant. Now that I know, I can say with 100% certainty that yes, I am a foodie. And I love it!

I found this post very intriguing because during the interview she was not sure of the real meaning of the word foodie, even though she has been using it a lot on her Instagram (hashtags) and she unconsciously called herself a foodie a few times during the conversation. Two weeks later, she proudly defined herself a foodie. After reading her post I kept questioning myself if I somehow influenced her decision or it came naturally to her. During the interview, I never called her a foodie, I just explained the meaning⁴⁹ of the word and mentioned that, perhaps, others perceive her as one because of her knowledge and interest in food. I did not want to impose my opinion on her and to make her feel 'more foodie' than she was.

As I have already shown, not all my respondent identified as foodies or even food bloggers and sometimes they were uncertain how to present or define themselves, although they were aware that they are doing *things* that food bloggers do: write recipes and post food photos online. For this reason, many of them called themselves *food lovers*; a 'neutral' term that perfectly outlines what food bloggers and foodies truly are.

Amber is a confectioner who adores baking and sharing her food and recipes with others. She confessed that either being a foodie or a food blogger does not fit her identity. She added that she never wanted to be a food blogger, it just happened, but she does not know where it will lead her and what she will do in the future. She said:

I wouldn't say that I am a food blogger but I do things that food bloggers do. I think I am one, but I don't feel like that. It doesn't fit for me but I do what it is, so I am a food blogger, but...

The majority of my respondents have been interested in food since their childhood and (or) they have been brought up with good food. Food is an important part of their identity and they are thinking about it 24/7 ("Pauline thinks in Food, she wakes up with it and takes it to bed"- A.W.). For instance, while eating one meal they are already thinking about the next one ("my entire day revolves around my next meal. When eating my breakfast, I'm already thinking about what I should make for lunch" - Eva); they have extensive food bucket lists and they rarely run out of ideas. As Gwen told me, it has never happened to her that she has not known what to cook; she always has a thousand ideas. I noticed that my respondents tend often to identify with the food they buy since it reflects their lifestyle and their outlook on life and health (e.g.

⁴⁹ On her demand

healthy eating leads to a healthy way of life). Consequently, the photos they upload show not just what they eat during the day but also what they stand for (vegetarianism, veganism, plant-based and so on).

Many of my interviewees started to consider themselves a foodie after opening their blog and a related Instagram account. Almost all of them are advocating healthy food and lifestyle (e.g. vegetarianism, veganism, paleo, plant-based or just a normal balanced diet) and their *moment of conversion* was usually linked with health issues, motherhood (responsibility to cook healthier for the whole family), curiosity (they would avoid dairy products for a while to see how their body will react to that change) and ethical reasons (sustainability and animal welfare).

According to all that has been said, I observed that I can group my interviewees in three categories:

- a. *Those who have once been foodies but they are not anymore or the ones who are now prouder to be a foodie:*

Sabina is a social media advisor and she says for herself that she is ‘self-confessed foodie’. She stated:

I don’t know, because I don’t like to label myself. People like to call me a food blogger as well, which I don’t like because it puts me in a category with people that I don’t necessary always want to associate myself. This is a term that people understand - you’re a food blogger, a foodie... And these days I am prouder to be a foodie because I turned it into my living and it is what people understand. I kind of use it when I try to explain to people what I do. (...) I think that the minute I think about food or food related things I am happy, my eyes start to tingle. It’s something that I am passionate about, prouder... I don’t go around yelling to people ‘Hey I am a foodie’, but it’s something that I am proud of, it’s a very important part of our life. The term foodie gets used loosely, but that is the same with people these days having the ambition to become a food blogger – why would be that your ambition? Is it your ambition to change the world, do you want to contribute or just to be a food blogger because you get free stuff? (...) Being a foodie for me is also about being an example for the people in my online community, to show them that it doesn’t take a lot of effort and it doesn’t always mean a lot of money to make right choices, but it’s also about balance. I like my Bloody Marys, I like going out, I like my fries every now and then, I like to go to Burger King every now and then, but it’s balancing – if in the weekend we had wine, today we’re going to the gym, you know?! It has to be about balance. If I do this pattern every day, I would never ever go to the gym again. You only live one life, so enjoy it, but be smart.

On the other hand, Katja told me that she was once a foodie but not anymore because she wanted to take distance from all “these crazy, obsessed people”, as she calls them.

- b. *Those who are proud to be a foodie but they must stress out that they are (mostly) a healthy/ creative/ real/ ethical/ modest... foodie etc.:*

Gwen is a twenty-three years old Food Innovation student with a bachelor’s degree in philosophy: She started to cook and bake at a very early age, and she describes herself as “crazy about healthy eating and a

fan of oatmeal”. She is proud to be a foodie, and she calls herself a *healthy foodie* because she believes that everyone should take care of their body since it is “the only thing you have for your whole life”. She said:

I think about food literally 24/7 always and before I got to sleep I just have to scroll through Pinterest to look for new recipes and going to the supermarket is like going out for me. I love to look at all the products. I just think a lot about food so I deserve to call myself foodie.

Nora is a thirty-five years old food blogger and mother of two sons; she believes that being a foodie is a positive thing. “I would not have a blog and an Instagram account if I would not feel like one”. She admits that food has a special meaning and place in her life and she assumes that ‘being a foodie’ is a lifestyle and a way of thinking and living.

c. *The ones who don't like this term and do not consider themselves foodies even though someone can perceive them as one (because of their blog or Instagram food account):*

Greta is a journalist and a travel and food writer/ photographer in her mid-twenties. She revealed that she is more a food photographer than a foodie, and she added whispering, “I hate the word (*foodie*)”, emphasis added. She explained:

For me a foodie is someone who is obsessed with healthy food and keeping in shape and fit girls foodie. I think it's very superficial and I don't like Dutch blogs because I think that photography most of the time is not good enough and they always make the same kind or recipes, always things with granola, sweet potato. (...) I don't see myself as a foodie, then, because I don't like the word. I think that I am conscious about what I am eating and buying.

2. SOCIAL STATUS AND CONSUMPTION

Sometimes you want to put [online] a cake and you bake a cake, but it is for nobody. So yeah, you need money for it (emphasis added).

(Amber)

The aim of this chapter is to explain how cultural capital influences the practices of food consumption and creates foodie self-expression and self-presentation both online and offline. In order to clarify that, I decided to use de Solier's (2013) article "Making the Self in a Material World: Food and Moralities of Consumption" and Bourdieu's (1984) book "Distinction: a social critique of the judgement of taste". Both authors are interested in the relationship between (moralities) of consumption and questions of identity and self-formation. They believe that "consumption is a key realm – or even 'the' realm - through which we create and communicate our sense of self" (de Solier 2013:11). Bourdieu (1984:369) claims that the economic production itself obliquely encourages the moralities of consumption and that the new taste-makers "propose a morality (*or agreeableness*) which boils down to an art of consuming, spending and enjoying" (ibid., 311), emphasis added. However, the main difference between the two authors is that de Solier (2013:9) concentrates on the foodie self-identity (on those people "for whom food is central to their sense of self"), whereas Bourdieu (1984) focuses more on (categories of) social identity.

In her article, de Solier (2013:10-11) explores how foodies construct their identity and lifestyle through consumption practices of dining and shopping. She is interested in the relationship between "moralities of consumption and processes of self-identity formation", which is similar to Bourdieu's (1984:2) opinion that consumption is a process of communication. According to her, 'the foodie' is an expanding global identity found in many cultures and countries and it is a "product of globalisation and transnational flows of food, taste, media, capital and people" (ibid., 13). In popular culture, it is often portrayed as a "fashionable status-seeking consumer" (ibid.). De Solier (2013:16) observes that foodies perceive themselves more as culturalists than materialists because they are involved in "the acquisition of cultural experiences and knowledge". Therefore, food consumption differs from other forms of material consumption because it must continuously be replaced and supplied. Since it does not accumulate⁵⁰, there is no evidence of conspicuous consumption (ibid.). Although too much food might result in obesity, de Solier claims that "over-consumption and obesity are associated with the lower classes, not with middle class discipline and

⁵⁰ We eat/consume food every day.

refinement” (ibid.), which is comparable with Bourdieu’s distinction between quantity and quality. Thus, the moral discourse of foodies indicates that spending money on food is a necessity and a biological need and therefore it is “morally superior” compared to other forms of consumption which are “based on culturally constructed needs and desires” (ibid.). Postrel (2008) suggests that luxury and consumption become “less a tool of public status competition and more a means to private pleasure”. Moreover, he believes that “the shift away from conspicuous consumption—from goods to services and experiences - can also make luxury more exclusive” (ibid.).

My respondents claimed that quality is more important than price and that they are willing to pay more, especially when it comes to biological food or for food marked with *Beter Leven* stars. Thus, their shopping is mainly influenced by the “morality of quality”⁵¹ (de Solier 2013:20). Since few respondents were still students, they agreed that they would like to have good quality food for a reasonable (or cheaper) price. According to de Solier (2013:21), foodies use different criteria for judging the quality of food, but usually the most important are the sensory properties (flavour, appearance, smell) and the mode of production and distribution (fresh, local, seasonal, artisanal food) (ibid., 21). Padilla (2012) points out that foodies’ cultural capital makes them more sceptical towards big supermarket chains and the standardization of food. Before buying certain products, they ask themselves what the source is, what the main ingredients are and who controls the means of production (ibid.). For this reason, my respondents prefer buying food at farmers’ markets and in small ethnic shops (e.g. Turkish, Moroccan, Indian) rather than in supermarkets.

In modern societies food and taste are recognized as “markers of class” (Bourdieu 1984:1-2) and social need; they communicate someone’s prestige, social status, ethnic group, and lifestyle. Since eating habits and taste are socially embedded, Bourdieu, believes that taste acts as a match-maker and it links together “things and people that go together”⁵² (ibid., 241). Bourdieu believes that the opposition between quality and quantity coincide with the opposition between *taste of necessity* (food as fuel; cheap and economical foods; lower class), and the *taste of liberty or luxury* (food as entertainment and leisure; it requires a specific cultural and economic capital; emphasis on style, serving, and eating; upper class) (ibid., 6). It should be highlighted that those distinctions are social constructions and cultural classifications that indicate people’s class position and the socio-economic mobility. For instance, during the interview Hilda, young food blogger and currently unemployed beautician, often compared hers and her boyfriend’s family eating habits.

⁵¹ Personal and social standards for evaluating food as good or bad, healthy or unhealthy, natural or GMO, etc. In de Solier’s (2013:20) words, “quality is of the highest importance in their (*respondents*) ideas about what constitutes ‘good shopping’”, emphasis added. For additional (recent) information about morality in the domain of anthropology see: Cassaniti, J. L., Hickman, J. R. (2014). “New directions in the anthropology of morality”. *Anthropological Theory*, 14(3), 251-262.

⁵² “the taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier” (ibid., 6), which is evident in the online community on Instagram.

His parents are farmers and live in the countryside just twenty minutes by car from her place, but the differences between them are enormous. While his family is used to eat and cook just traditional Dutch food⁵³ and they do not care if their meals are too salty, over or undercooked; her family eats more often in restaurants and experiments with ingredients and flavours. She pointed out a few times that her boyfriend eats because he needs energy (*food as fuel*), while she eats because she wants to (*food as liberty*). She said:

I eat always not just when I am hungry. I eat because I want to eat something and to enjoy it. I really need to teach him that. In my family, we eat because we like generally food and to eat what we cooked. My whole family is like this. If we don't like what we eat, the whole evening will be ruined. His family don't really care about it, but now my mother-in-law started to pay more attention to it and she is asking me for opinions. Dutch people go to supermarkets to buy the cheapest food, but my parents don't do that. They will buy the same brand of pasta that can be found also in Italy because, then it means that it is really good... It should be good. It should be Italian. They know that this brand is maybe a little bit too expensive, but at least they know that it is good. (...) We have a lot of spices at home while my boyfriend has maybe just five, and he doesn't understand that we at home use all the spices, according to the dish that we are preparing.

Hilda's story affirms Bourdieu's belief that eating habits are part of our habitus and lifestyle and that the taste for specific dishes (and the process of cooking) is linked to our cultural and economic capital (*ibid.*, 185). Thus, educating the palate "requires time and capacities" (Bourdieu 1984:281). Similarly, Veblen (1899:22) claims that leisure implies "non-productive consumption of time" and explains that:

Refined tastes, manners, habits of life are a useful evidence of gentility, because good breeding requires time, application, and expense, and can therefore not be compassed by those whose time and energy are taken up with work (*ibid.*, 25).

As stated by Hampton (2016), "eating the right [*healthy, organic, biological, clean*]⁵⁴ foods have become a barometer of social status", since what we eat and where we buy (e.g. Lidl, Albert Heijn, Marqt, Ekoplaza, Biomarkt...) can ascertain our socioeconomic status and class. I believe some of my respondents would agree with this statement, but only up to a point. They are predominantly advocating affordable healthy meals that do not require too much time and money, and they believe that it is more important how creative you can be with the ingredients you have at home. However, they do agree that status is important when you want to eat completely healthy "or at least it depends on the way you wanna eat healthy" (Brenda) and follow food trends. Although they tried to convince me that money is not 'an issue' and that their meals are 'cheap, easy and healthy'⁵⁵ I do notice that certain ingredients they use are not as affordable as they claim and it seems that food blogging is quite a pricey habit. In regards to it, Greta pointed out that changing eating habits and starting to eat healthier can be definitively expensive in the beginning because you miss the main ingredients:

⁵³ "potatoes with meat or pasta with powder sauce" (Hilda).

⁵⁴ Emphasis mine

⁵⁵ Which they sometimes really are.

In the beginning, I had to buy a lot of new products I never heard of before. So, it costs me a lot of money and my boyfriend told me ‘what are you doing, what is going on with you, why are we eating so strange all of a sudden?’. (...) I am happy to pay a lot of money for a good food (...) Since I am paying more attention to food there is not a lot of money for other things, of course.

Explanations from other respondents:

MILICA: However, curiosity usually arises when we are faced with the unknown, in this case, with new dishes, food ... For this reason, it is good to travel to other countries, eating in some interesting or ethnic restaurants, buying "unknown" ingredients in specialized shops, which set high prices for food that is new in the market. All this is not essential, but contributes to the interest. Of course, for all that you need money⁵⁶.

SANDRA: Money is not the most important element. You can eat well and cheap. Most of my meals are not the expensive meals, and still they are delicious ones. Money definitely helps in exploring the food, the ingredients, nice bottles of wine and some world-know delis. But the general answer would be: no, money and the social status is not so important. It is important to know and learn about food in order to appreciate it and become a foodie.

In the context of the foodie culture, consumption has two dimensions: the offline and the online. The former portrays both the amount of money spend on food and the *act* of eating. The latter represents the symbolic consumption of food images with our eyes – food photos invoke taste, smell and texture; we start eating with our eyes first, and food images help us to do so.

Indeed, being vegetarian and buying fruits and vegetables is cheaper than buying good-quality meat, eating out or buying certain food supplements⁵⁷. To quote my respondents, it is all about priorities: they can either choose to spend more money on good-quality food or on other things (e.g. clothes). To give a few examples:

JENNA: I spend more easily on food than clothes. When some cloth is 20 EUR I think should I do it or not but when I am going to eat in the evening for 20 EUR, I am like: I had so much fun this night here. When i know that something is good then it doesn’t matter how much I have to pay. For instance, smoothies are very expensive 5-6 EUR but I know that it’s good for me and I like it so, why not?

GRETA: Since I started buying and I am paying more attention to food, there is not a lot of money for other things, of course’. If before I preferred to buy more clothes, now I prefer to buy good food.

Vicky wrote on her blog⁵⁸:

⁵⁶ Original: *Sa jedne strane, vjerujem da nije, jer ukoliko postoji želja i ljubav, možemo pronaći inspiraciju i u onome što nam je dostupno. Međutim, radoznalost obično nastaje kad smo suočeni sa nepoznatim, u ovom slučaju, sa novim jelima, namirnicama... Za to dobro dođu putovanja u druge zemlje, jelo u nekim zanimljivim ili etničkim restoranima, kupovina “nepoznatih” namirnica, za šta obično moramo otići u neke posebno opremljene i “moderne” radnje, koje postavljaju visoke cijene za hranu koja je nova na tržištu. Sve to nije neophodno, ali doprinosi zainteresovanosti. Naravno, za to sve je potreban novac*

⁵⁷ Mostly known as superfoods (e.g. acai, baobab, matcha, mushroom complex etc.)

⁵⁸ To read the whole blog post see: Hampton, V. (2015). "How to Be a Foodie (and Not End up Obese)". *Amsterdam foodie* (posted 23-09-2015), URL: <https://www.amsterdamfoodie.nl/2015/how-to-be-a-foodie/> (accessed 12-10-2016)

Dinner came to just over €150 for the two of us based on five courses (which were kind of eight, depending on how you look it) plus a bottle of fairly pricey wine. No, it's not cheap – but nor should it be at that level of quality. And besides, when it comes to paying restaurant bills, there's always MasterCard; but this meal was priceless.

In line with de Solier's article (2013:14), these three examples show the difference between food and clothes and their symbolic dimension (distinction): “for where clothing sits on the surface of the self, food goes deep into the self and shapes it from the inside out”. Foodies believe that the consumption of food “in which their self-formation is invested, is of a higher moral value than the consumptions of other material goods” (ibid.). In addition, “food consumption involves the production of meaning and identities” (Ashley et al. 2004:59). Collins observed that:

the language of cooking and the construction of identity through food consumption purchases created imagined foodie communities. The cultural capital of food knowledge allows people to take on a temporary or illusory identity of a member of a higher social class. Thus, thinking about food, or food consciousness, also constructs our identity, as powerfully as what and how we eat (Collins in Helstosky 2015: xxviii).

Klara, Esther, and Angela agreed that there is a difference between people who care about food and healthy diet and foodies who care about status and like to show off eating in expensive restaurants and having the best macarons, beef and champagne in town. “I think that there are a lot of people who shop at Ekoplaza for status, healthy foodie status, definitively” (Esther).

However, other respondents concurred that you can eat healthy and cheap buying at a farmers' markets or in the local supermarkets since most of them has now a bio department and - compared to Marqt or Ekoplaza – they offer healthy food for a cheaper price. They believe that buying in expensive shops like Ekoplaza does not mean that their products are (or taste) better than the one that you buy in another shop – they presume that you are paying more because of the packages' nice design. Jasper explained:

Buying packages in supermarkets means that we are buying a picture, design, not the quality... you are thinking that you are buying products but you aren't.

Esther revealed that, although she is spending a bit more on food, she is not spending as much as those people buying everything in Ekoplaza or Marqt:

Healthy food is important for me personally and I like eating fruits and vegetables, getting fresh herbs and they are pretty expensive if you compare to just dry rice, crisps or fries. In that regards I will probably spend more money on food than other people, but I don't spend as much as people who go shopping in Ekoplaza.

On the other hand, Sabina believes that food is becoming a status symbol and creating a bigger gap between those who can afford certain food and the ones who cannot:

A lot of people say that it's too expensive which is true because a meat from a butcher is more expensive and that is the one thing that does worry me that if you want to buy good, quality stuff you need money, so food also kinds of bridging people who have less money and people who can afford to buy it at the butcher, De Krat, Marqt or whatever. We are going towards food being a status symbol as well: if you have money you can afford good, quality, healthy stuff.

In the context of food blogging, it is also relevant to note that food bloggers and foodies do not spend money just on food, but also on kitchen accessories, props⁵⁹ and good cameras (and objectives) because they contribute all together in making a better composition and appealing photo. They invest money in their blog, but they rarely make a profit out of it. Greta said:

For a long time, I already knew that I like special ceramics and beautiful plates but I was afraid to spend money on that because I didn't earn money with my blog and I was spending money on the blog but never earning money on the blog.

Foodies' healthy eating practices and food choices do not require just economic capital, but cultural capital as well. My respondents put a lot of effort in educating themselves about food (benefits and preparation) taking different online courses, reading books about nutrition and blogs to get inspired, watching documentaries, visiting food related workshops and events, travelling, and trying different cuisines. All these different sources of knowledge help them to shape their perception of what 'healthy' is and to use their common sense so as not to follow all the food trends blindly. Thus, their cultural capital influences their "capacity of consumption" and makes them stand out from the crowd (Bourdieu 1984:281, 310).

GWEN: When I am in the supermarket I always check the added sugars on the product and I do my shopping more consciously I think. I try to buy unprocessed food as much as possible- fruits, veggies and greens, brown rice instead of white rice, whole wheat pasta instead of white pasta.

IRIS: I've been doing a four years study called Wellness & Lifestyle, which is about sports, nutrition and coaching. So, I've learned a lot about food at my study. Moreover, I love to read books about nutrition. For me it's a big passion and I always want to know more about it. If you know more about food it has a big influence on your consumption. Before my study I ate a lot of sugary foods and pre-packed products. Since I know more about it I read every ingredient list and if it contains sugar I don't buy it. Also, when housemates cook something pre-packed I tell them how bad it is for their health. Or when they eat spinach I say: hey well done, this is full of vitamin K and great for your body. For me eating healthy and pure has become a lifestyle which makes me feel happy and I hope more and more people will realise that sooner or later.

As reported by the Food Inspiration Magazine, foodies choices reflect their assumption that "food choices can make a positive difference in the world at large" and help to improve their wellbeing (Steenbergen 2015). They are particularly interested in the story behind their food and how it is prepared (ibid.). Jasper believes that eating good and clean food or food that has a (hi)story - such as traditional food or the Leiden cheese - gives satisfaction to our body: "I think that good food is getting important and is

⁵⁹ i.e. nice bowls, mugs, plates, kitchen towels, backgrounds, flowers, etc.

giving love to yourself". Rozin (2001:5721) claims that the acquisition of good taste is complex and less known, but he believes that even a minor exposure to certain food "often seems sufficient to produce and acquired like". This suggests that food selection and consumption have a moral and social connotation, but also psychological consequences since the "source of food can powerfully influence acceptance" (ibid.).

3. LIFESTYLE

In the previous chapter, I described how cultural and economic capital influence foodies' practices of consumption and how eating particular food reflects social status and class. In this chapter, I explore how cultural and economic capital shape foodies' lifestyle and dietary choices and how food bloggers emerged as new food gurus and dietary experts. The obsession with eating clean and healthy make us rethink contemporary food taboos and classification systems which discipline our bodies and temptations.

De Solier (2013:10-11) claims that dining and grocery shopping are the most important consumption practices for the formation of the foodie lifestyle. Similarly, Scelzi and La Fortuna (2015:130) accentuate that "food today has become a sort of social currency, a way to express people's lifestyle, tastes and attitudes". We have come to understand food as a "social necessity" rather than something that just "satisfies our appetites" (Fromm 2014). Bourdieu (1984:79) claims that food preferences (especially during special occasions) are often indicators "of the mode of self-presentation adopted in showing-off a lifestyle".

Helstosky (2015: xxviii) observes that the popularity and upsurge of the foodie is "perhaps a modern phenomenon in the sense that food's nutritional function (eating to live) has been increasingly subject to the social imperatives of fashion (living to eat) and located within the entertainment industries". The growing prominence of food as entertainment and leisure is pertinent now more than ever: think about all the food magazines, popular cooking shows on TV (e.g. MasterChef, Jamie Oliver), food trends and celebrity cookbooks that we are surrounded by daily. The latter are particularly becoming the 'new food experts' and influencing people's consumption and eating preferences. Taking Jamie Oliver (*The Naked Chef*) as an example, Ashley et al. (2004:183-184) explain how food, cooking and eating practices might be used to construct and exhibit distinct lifestyles: "*The Naked Chef* encourages the viewer to think of cooking and eating as part of a wider art of lifestyle" (ibid., 184). Similarly, Bell (2002 in Ashley et al. 2004:180) notes that TV chefs act as "cultural intermediaries who democratize food knowledges and give us opportunities to acquire culinary cultural capital while also displaying their own distinction". The same can be said for popular (Instagram) food bloggers who are advocating healthy lifestyle(s) and diet and trying to motivate and seduce people to do the same. However, some nutritionists believe that "health bloggers can be unqualified and offer dangerous advice. Not all of them want to impose their lifestyle on others, but lots of them do and they often give advice on clean eating with no scientific backing. (...) these people are now role models whose every word will inspire impressionable young people" (Lambert in Marsh & Campbell 2016). A few respondents confirmed that information found on the Internet and famous (Instagram) food bloggers have a great power on young people and affect their eating habits. The extreme

food restriction in the name of ‘eating healthy’ might lead involuntarily to orthorexia, “an unhealthy obsession with eating *just* healthy food”⁶⁰, emphasis added. Lately, Gwen wrote on her blog that she realized she had gone too far with eating healthy. Since she learnt a lot about healthy food choices while reading books, following other food bloggers on Instagram and Pinterest, she decided to reduce the intake of calories, fat and added sugars and eat just food that was a hundred percent healthy in her eyes. Consequently, after almost a year, she noticed that she is constantly tired and lethargic because she was going too extreme, and what appeared to be good for other food bloggers was not good for her body anymore. Therefore, she had to change her eating habits slightly and include more fats, sugar, and calories to feel better again. The same thing happened to Greta, when she started to eat healthier, gluten-free, and quit sugars, she lost ten kilos in one year, and her family and colleagues were worried for her⁶¹. These two examples demonstrate the consequences of eating extremely healthy and the influence of famous food bloggers on young women and other (‘smaller’) food bloggers, who follow their advice blindly. Brenda said:

When I started this healthy lifestyle, I educated myself a lot about it on the Internet, changing my opinion every day, because there is so much information. At first, it feels like a storm in your head because there are said so many different things that are being said, but now I created my own idea. This is really nice, because it feels like calm after the storm. (...) It’s a lifestyle... it has a certain influence on your life.

For this reason, many believe that eating clean and healthy is turning into a new (form of) religion or cult. Although most of my respondent were trying to eat healthily or, at least, healthier⁶², I can say just for a few of them that they are truly advocating a healthy diet and lifestyle. They are convincing people to follow their lifestyle and to change their eating habits for the goodness of their body and the environment⁶³. Yet, where is the boundary between preaching and educating? Are those people creating a “moral hierarchy of food” (McCann *in* Boesveld 2015)? According to McCann, the rise of food movements (e.g. the Youth Food Movement, the Slow Food Movement, etc.) corresponds with the weakening of religion in society and people search for values of purity and ethics following specific diets or food movements (*ibid.*). “These movements also tend to encourage behaviours that have steered a generation away from religion: judgment,

⁶⁰ and the fear of ingesting something unhealthy. See: Bratman, S. (2014). “What is Orthorexia?”. *Orthorexia.*, URL: <http://www.orthorexia.com/what-is-orthorexia/> (accessed on 17-12-2016). For instance, For King’s Day, Angela posted a recipe for a white chocolate bar with red and blue drops of chocolate flakes (similar to M&M) and after stating on her blog that the snack was not healthy she posted afterwards the same photo on her Instagram and wrote: “My third King’s Day recipe is a lot of fun to make, but it’s not healthy or vegan. So, I gave it all away to my colleagues after I made it”. The fear of eating unhealthy (usually sweets and ‘comfort food’) is often reduced by making/baking a healthy version of traditional foods/sweets and turning them guilt-free (raw, sugar free, gluten free, vegan, without milk and eggs, etc.).

⁶¹ Nevertheless, she said that she felt good and healthy.

⁶² According to their idea of what healthy is.

⁶³ Paleo enthusiasts, for example, firmly believe that to return to the caveman’s pre-agricultural diet is the most natural way of eating” (Dahl 2015).

self-righteousness, an us-versus-them mentality” (ibid.). Alan Levinovitz, a professor of religion at James Madison University, holds the view that the enthusiasm that some people have for their diets is very much alike to the religious fervour, especially when they talk about their moment of conversion and try to persuade others to do the same (Dahl 2015).

A few years ago, I was living with two kinesiology students and every time that I would drink a glass of juice I could hear them saying: “Do you know how much sugar is in it?! Why do not you drink water instead?”. The behaviour of my ex-roommates is similar to what I see on Instagram nowadays or at least, this is the feeling that I get.

During interviews, I would almost always order coffee because it was the first thing that would come to my mind. However, a few times I ordered a Bitter Lemon or a Coke and - since most of my respondents were into healthy food - I was afraid of their reaction(s) and started to question if my choice might influence the course of the interview. In these occasions, I felt that I owe them an explanation. Usually, nothing happened and my respondents would start laughing since they were pleased to find out that we have similar eating habits. When I met Liv⁶⁴ for the interview, I ordered a Coke, and she had tea. She got a small biscuit, and she asked me if I want it because she was not allowed to eat too many sweet things. I could see in her eyes that she was disapproving my Coke and I had to explain that usually I am not drinking it, but that day I wanted something refreshing. She immediately made a parallel with her brother who liked to drink soda till a few months ago, when he learnt how much sugar is in it. Nevertheless, when I ordered on a few occasions the same thing as my respondents (latte with almond milk, cappuccino with coconut milk, fresh juices with watermelon and vegetables, etc.), I could notice a bit of scepticism in their eyes, and they were often afraid that I would not like it.

Levinovitz (*in* Dahl 2015) explains that “religion helps people make sense of a chaotic world and suddenly, there is order (*vegetarianism, veganism, paleo, plant-based*), and there are instructions (*dietary guidelines*). All you have to do is follow them. You have a certainty about the choices you make⁶⁵”, emphasis added. Therefore, when people change their eating habits it indirectly gives them a sense of belonging to a particular group, which is especially apparent if we consider the food(ie) community on Instagram. For this reason, Calefato et al. (2016:383) believe that being a foodist devoted to foodism means to be “religiously involved in a sort of fetishism in the craft of cooking”. Besides, “food tastes are not only social and cultural but these tastes are related to broader aesthetic and moral classifications in which some tastes are seen as more legitimate than others” (ibid.). A blogger said:

⁶⁴ Liv is an 18 years old model; she started to eat healthy at the age of 15-16.

⁶⁵ Douglas (2002:xv) notes that breaking the food rules is equal to a sin.

I am such a strong believer in my ‘healthy eating’ that I am totally convinced it is vital for everyone to do it eating healthy is a choice and requires a commitment. I guess much like a religion. You need to first believe it will make a difference and then you have to commit to doing it, each and every day. It is only once you truly believe and take action that good things will happen to you and your health⁶⁶.

Messer (1984:218) points out that little anthropological attention was given to the sense of taste before the 1980s. Food is judged in different cultural systems by its taste, smell, texture and visual properties and these characteristics classify food as *good* (safe) or *bad* (dangerous) and “edible, preferred and appropriate for a particular ethnic cuisine or lifestyle” (ibid., 218-219). People tend to associate sweet foods with trust, pleasure, comfort, enjoyment, and friendship and therefore they are used to “reward or reinforce desirable behaviours”, while bitter foods are utilized to disgust and punish (ibid., 219). Hence, strong tastes and smells were often linked with uncivilized palates (ibid.).

It is useful to keep this classification in mind when trying to understand foodies’ perception and valorisation of food quality. Food bought at farmers’ markets⁶⁷ is usually perceived as *clean, pure, and healthy* compared to the *polluted, processed and unhealthy* food⁶⁸ found in supermarkets. Do these notions reflect contemporary Western taboos about food and health? Although Douglas (2002:44-45) assumes that food is not dirty in itself and that there is no such thing as dirt; I believe that today food can be literally understood as dirty/ contaminated due to pesticides, germs and pollution. “The only thing scarier than a world full of toxins is a world in which you don’t know what the toxins are. (...)” (Dahl 2015).

Douglas (1966:110) concludes that contagion and purity play “an important role in people’s beliefs” and that those beliefs carry a “symbolic load” (ibid., 3). Moreover, “no particular set of classifying symbols can be understood in isolation, but there can be hope of making sense of them in relation to the total structure of classifications in the culture in question” (Douglas 1966:vii). Messer (1984:221) also supports this idea and emphasizes that food may be “situationally classified as clean (harmless) or tabooed (unhealthy) on the basis of circumstantial evidence (e.g. their origins, handling, processing, ingestion)”. Thus, “this makes one food ‘good’ and ‘bad’, depending on the person who is eating it”⁶⁹. It explains why we often get disgusted and frightened by unknown or strange foods (e.g. insects), that we perceive as unclean⁷⁰. “Pigs, dogs and

⁶⁶ See: Turner, M. (2011). “Is Eating Healthy Like a New Form of Religion? Do We Have to Believe to Get It? Are We Just Strange for Doing It?”. *EndoEmpowered*, URL: <http://www.endoempowered.com/is-eating-healthy-like-a-new-form-of-religion-do-we-have-to-believe-to-get-it-are-we-just-strange-for-doing-it/> (accessed on 12-12-2016).

⁶⁷ Or bio markets/ shops

⁶⁸ Full of additives, toxins, and pesticides; fear of GMO foods and crops.

⁶⁹ Christina, “Good Food vs. Bad Food”, *Health foodie: eating healthy made easy*, blog, URL: <http://www.health-foodie.com/2010/03/good-food-vs-bad-food/> (accessed 20-10-2016)

⁷⁰ To give an example: “American abstention from insects, for instance, is ecologically and economically foolish. Yet this avoidance not only persists; it has been spread by missionaries to areas where it is genuinely dangerous. In

the like are tabooed as food in many cultures; such items are seen as edible, but inedible, and thus strange” (Anderson 2005:115). According to Douglas (2002:40-44), where there is dirt there is a system and, while our⁷¹ practices are based on hygiene and the knowledge of pathogenic organism, in other cultures those practices are symbolic and related to religion. “We denounce it by calling dirty and dangerous; they taboo it” (ibid., xi).

Since food is one of the most fundamental aspects of religion, every religion imposes its rules on “what one is allowed to eat *and in which way* and what one should not even touch or smell” (Raman 2014:968), emphasis added. For instance, Judaism, Hinduism, Islam etc. have complex and strict food rules which are related to the cleanliness of the animal, kindness to them or particular symbolism and logic (Anderson 2005:156). Those food prohibitions often constitute taboos. Taking American Christians as an example, Anderson (2005:156) asserts that there is a distinction between *taboos* as religious laws and *avoidances*. He claims that Christians do not have evident taboos (just some sects), but only many avoidances, e.g. people will refrain from dog, cat and horse meat, insects etc. However, I must partially disagree with his statement and say that one of the most prominent and prevailing Western taboo is the fear towards GMO foods and crops especially in Europe⁷². In Douglas’s terms, GMO food and crops are seen as dirty, polluted and contagious; they are breaking the fixed boundaries between culture and nature due to their altered DNA (Kwieciński 2009). Since they are made against the God’s law and hence unnatural, they are perceived as a deadly sin that might provoke “supernatural sanctions” (ibid.). “Genetic engineering, as mentioned above, certainly breaks many boundaries that are considered natural or even sacred” (ibid.).

Eliot A. Singer (1978 *in* Jerome et al. 1980:3) claims that food taboos have been recognized both as maintainers of cosmic order and indicators of social order. Douglas (2002: xi-xiii) believes that taboos “confront the ambiguous and shunts it into the category of the sacred” and they are “spontaneous coding practices” inspired by fear. Nevertheless, those taboos usually made the utilization of resources more efficient (Raman 2014:968) and they create sharp divisions and boundaries using a strict classification system. “Any given system of classification must give rise to anomalies, and any given culture must confront events which seem to defy its assumptions” (Douglas 2002:48). Classifications are used to simplify reality and to make it more understandable. According to Kant’s principle of aggregation and differentiation, we favour to treat similar things as they were the same and divide those who are different

Central Africa, missionaries often convinced local people that eating insects was disgusting- and thus persuaded them to abandon a valuable source of high-quality protein and mineral nutrition” (Anderson 2005:161).

⁷¹ Western, modern

⁷² E.g. The Monsanto's seed monopoly.

(Anderson 2005:113). People do not classify the word just as food or non-food but also classify food into hierarchies, “much as botanists classify plants” (ibid., 116).

The increasing trend of eating clean (non-processed) and healthy is based on the idea that processed food (high in preservatives, additives, sugars) is harmful for our body, whereas natural, fresh, organic, locally grown and whole food - that our ancestors ate - is rich in nutrients. “Concern over diet and health has become an international phenomenon and ‘health food’ markets have become firmly established throughout the developed world”⁷³. Social media and especially food bloggers and popular TV chefs have turned healthy eating (especially plant based) into a lifestyle to follow. They want to show that healthy food is accessible, tasteful, and easy to prepare. For instance, Tess (who is an English translator and a vegetarian food blogger) explained that twenty or thirty years ago vegetarians were perceived as hippies or people who were trying to lose weight. Nowadays they are not judged because people understand that it is good for the environment and the health. Liv said:

Now everybody wants to eat healthy because it’s good for, for your skin but also because it is a trendy lifestyle and now everybody does it so, why don’t you?!

As I mentioned earlier in the thesis, foodies are apt to identify with the food they buy because it reflects their lifestyle and what they stand for. Changing lifestyle from unhealthy to healthy might be quite hard and challengeable in the beginning. Klara said:

Sometimes is hard to change your diet, but I will try new thing if I read that something is really healthy then I will include it in my diet, like flax seeds or something. I think: *oh that’s interesting* and I try it. But it harder for me to stop with something – it’s easier to try something new than stopping with something that you always used, like milk for example.

Recounting Jasper’s and Angela’s story, I will illustrate the importance that foodies give to food and their principles, no matter their financial and social situation.

Jasper works as a copywriter, and he recently got a sommelier and frommelier certificate. He identified himself as an ethical foodie because he cares about sustainability, local and organic products and he likes to know where his food comes from. Since he wants to increase the food awareness in the society, he decided to join the Youth Food Movement and the Slow Food Movement in the Netherlands. He considers himself a good cooker and when he had a ‘normal kitchen’⁷⁴ he was cooking three times per week something he has never cooked before. He was unemployed in 2010 and 2014 and his income was just 750 EUR a

⁷³ “Upward Trend for Healthy Food”. (1989). Canadian Institute of Food Science and Technology Journal, 22(1), 10, URL: http://ac.els-cdn.com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048/S0315546389702716/1-s2.0-S0315546389702716-main.pdf?_tid=b7f53352-a1ed-11e6-be51-00000aacb361&acdnat=1478195484_9a9fa65c180d59573fc849e57ddf71db (accessed 03-11-2016)

⁷⁴ At the time of the interview he was moving into a new house and he was waiting for his new kitchen to come

month which is, as he said, below the standard. Even though after paying the rent he did not have enough money, he did not want to spend less on food: “You cannot eat very well if you have a low income. You have to make something yourself because it’s cheaper”. During our informal conversation, we agreed that the European working hours, from 9h to 17h, do not permit people to have lunch and dinner at normal times and that our parents had more time for cooking. For this reason, he decided to work just 32 hours a week, so he can work less and cook more: “I think that people can do this choice if they want. The problem is that today everybody is running for money, but you cannot eat money”.

On the other hand, Angela is a drama teacher who likes to travel, eat good [healthy] food and blog about it. She is vegetarian and when she entered in her thirties she started to pay more attention to her diet and health because she wanted to take good care of her body. Meanwhile, she began to educate herself more about food and sustainability and opened her blog in August 2015 because she wanted to inspire people to eat healthily and to make the right choices for their bodies. From March 15 to April 15 she started a vegan challenge and, since eating vegan was quite new for her, she consulted her friends who are dieticians and nutritionists for clarifications. She believes that the Internet is not always a reliable source for seeking information about food. When the vegan challenge was over, she wrote a post about it on her blog describing her meals, struggles and temptations. “A colleague brought cookies to work this week. Normally I find it really difficult not to take one, even when I want to cut down on my sugars, I find them too tempting. But this time I had no problem with ignoring them”⁷⁵.

This quote is noteworthy for two reasons. First, the food intake invokes self-control and monastic discipline⁷⁶ of the will and body to resist temptations to eat unhealthy, which resembles one of the fundamental principles common to almost every religion – “religions remind us not to fall prey to our instinct to indulge in too much” (Raman 2014:967). The second argument is an extension of the first one, when the temptation is yielded, food bloggers start to struggle if to divulge it online or not and how their followers will perceive their weakness. Consequently, the conversion takes place when the weakness is revealed and overcome. Yet, it can also lead to contradictions of self-presentation online and offline, which I already mentioned earlier in the text. To confess one’s (food) weaknesses, cravings and ‘imperfections’ has become lately very popular and common on Instagram, and in doing so, food bloggers and food lovers want to connect with their audience and show that they are not perfect either. “Denying yourself the pleasures of food is the one sure-fire way to make you want to indulge – and probably even more than you

⁷⁵ Retrieved from Angela’s blog.

⁷⁶ E.g. religious fasting, holy anorexia.

would were you not on a diet. Besides, one of my other favourite mottos is: ‘Dieting is self-cannibalism’. Touché” (food blogger *Amsterdam foodie*).

Although throughout history the dominant representations of femininity have been associated with diet restrictions or pathological relationship to food pleasures and indulgence, Cairns et al. (2010:599-600) emphasize that “the foodie culture affords some flexibility in terms of the historically restrictive boundaries surrounding femininity and food”. Moreover, they claim that their female respondents enthusiastically accepted “the pleasurable aspects of eating (...) rather than a dangerous drive in need of containment”, albeit our culture is still “uncomfortable with the female appetite” (ibid., 600). In line with it, the food blogger Vicky said that often people expect (female) foodies to be “the size of a bus”, and she heard countless times things such as: “if you ever decide to internet-date, just make sure you include a full-length photo. Otherwise guys will take one look at your description (about your food obsession, no doubt) and assume you’re obese”⁷⁷.

A few respondents revealed that they are trying to eat healthy from Monday to Friday while on the weekend they have a *cheat meal* or a *cheat day*. For instance, Olivia told me that she can eat healthy for days but after a given period of time she starts craving for junk food or something fat. “If I start my cheat day, I will have a cheat week, but then I get weight and I have to go to the gym again”. Katja claimed that a lot of foodies use the word *cheat* and she, as a linguist, explained it using the Neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) of thinking.

I think that you disapprove the food that you are eating and you are cheating on yourself (...) I saw on Instagram people, foodies who eat clean (*non-processed food*)⁷⁸ and after that they freak out because they crave for unhealthy food. I think that if there is no balance between mind and body that it’s not ok - the body should be healthy, they don’t make their body a trash bin.

Similarly, Levinovitz⁷⁹ (*in Dahl 2015*) observed that when people are thinking and talking about food they tend to classify it as good or bad for them, and have a tendency to use words with “strong undertones of morality”, such as guilt, sinful⁸⁰, cheat days, confession. From his point of view, it is more a matter of redeeming. He explained:

⁷⁷ See: Hampton, V. (2015). "How to Be a Foodie (and Not End up Obese)". *Amsterdam foodie* (posted 23-09-2015), URL: <https://www.amsterdamfoodie.nl/2015/how-to-be-a-foodie/> (accessed 12-10-2016)

⁷⁸ Emphasis added

⁷⁹ professor of religion at James Madison University

⁸⁰ It reflects the story of Adam and Eve who could not restrain themselves to eat the forbidden fruit, which is comparable with the ‘forbidden foods’ in the realm of healthy and clean eating. For instance, pizza, ice-cream, sweets, sugar, chocolate are considered dangerous, unaccepted, and bad for the body (Lynch 2010:327).

It's like, no, your diet is not your spouse - you don't have to confess that you cheated on your diet. But I see people who come to believe that what you eat is so ethically charged, that they are like committing terrible sins if they mess up. It's this idea that if you sin once it's the end.

Katja feels better when she is avoiding, what she calls, *bad food* (processed food). She revealed that one Saturday she had a healthy meal (she called it *normal*) and after that she went to the beach with her boyfriend. They took a bag of sweets - fruits in chocolate which is for her "semi healthy- semi chocolate". She added:

It doesn't mean nothing if you eat a healthy meal and after that you eat a lot of unhealthy, sweet things. Sugar helps just in the moments when you feel lonely, tired, if you are crying... It helps for a second but after that you feel tired because of it. I think that it's all about balance because you cannot eat healthy every day.

Although in the beginning she tried different (healthy) diets and was avoiding sweets, now she believes that being too much restrictive is not good either, and she is trying to have a more balanced diet⁸¹ and advises other to do the same. I observed that after the interview she started to upload more often 'unhealthy content' (cakes, pastry, ice-cream) but always describing the overall atmosphere and justifying her choice.

The argument about temptations might be illustrated again by Katja's early story about the Coca-Cola can on the beach and her struggle to upload, delete and replace 'the unhealthy evidence'. During the informal conversation, she said joking: "I have to eat [*and post*]⁸² greens because I am representing this healthy lifestyle, right?"

Rita was always into healthy food and since she started writing for health magazines, she thinks that due to her job it is not desirable to upload junk food. She said:

When you look at someone's Instagram account, you can figure out the lifestyle of that person and her or his diet, and it is the same with me. All the photos that are seen on my account are my breakfast or midday snacks, and I never post pictures of my dinner because at that time the lighting is bad. Sometimes I get questions like *are you only eating this? Are you always eating so healthy?*

She believes that every now and then it is acceptable to post images of unhealthy food if you have enjoyed it and are honest with yourself and your followers. On the other hand, Jenna (a food blogger in her early twenties who posts on her Instagram account just healthy food) would disagree with Rita. When she is craving for unhealthy food, such as fries or burgers, she would never post that on Instagram, "because it's [*her Instagram account*] more about healthy lifestyle and people are following me because of that", emphasis added.

⁸¹ she eats whatever she wants but in small portions

⁸² Emphasis added

Fox (2003:8) claims that food started to indicate our “trendiness” and the “tremendous bombardment of food books and food programs leads educated and literate middle-class readers to feel guilty if they do not ‘keep up’”. It appears that following up-to-the-minute trends is imperative in the Instagram community and it is not unusual to see in one week or month similar dishes or ingredients (e.g. avocado, kale, matcha powder, asparagus, strawberries) spread on different accounts. Sophie said:

I also read a lot about food trends, example: when I noticed that chickpeas are hot and happening, I dive into the kitchen to make something with chickpeas.

The Food Inspiration Magazine states that the foodie generation is extremely interested in “local, organic, fair trade, vegetarian and vegan foods” and they firmly believe that our food choices do not just impact our health and wellbeing but also the world at large⁸³. This is the reason why they have decided to change their lifestyle and to care more about sustainability, environment issues and the future of our planet⁸⁴. Their choices are transforming the culinary landscape and influencing professional cooking as well – restaurant chefs put more effort in staying their dishes because an appealing plate is more likely to be uploaded on Instagram, making an excellent and free PR for them.

Foodies believe “food is a social need; a way to profile oneself and a method to tell a personal tale⁸⁵”, which I will explain recounting Nora’s story. Following Jasper’s story, we can also add that foodies are interested in the story behind their food (e.g. Leiden cheese), “what is inside and how it is made”⁸⁶. “The concept of ‘good’ food practices here no longer simply refer to nutritional value, but carries with it moral and aesthetic values” (Ashley et al. 2004:62).

⁸³ See: Steenbergen, H. et al. (2015). "Millennials: a food generation". *Food Inspiration Magazine*, URL: http://international.foodinspiration.com/en/magazine/9551/781827/millennials.html?utm_source=fiwebsite&utm_medium=artikel&utm_content=unknown (accessed 22-10-2016)

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

3.1. Nora's story

We decided to meet at ten o'clock at Pluk⁸⁷ and even though I arrived twenty minutes earlier she was already there, sitting on the first floor and drinking her Latte. I recognized her immediately, and I joined her upstairs. She was very radiant and talkative and after getting to know me more, she started instantly to talk about herself, her blog, food, and lifestyle. Before starting 'officially' the interview she asked me if I would like to drink something, and if I have ever tried Latte with almond milk. I said that I would like to try it and she started to laugh and added: "I hope you will like it".

Nora is thirty-five years old, but she looks much younger, and she is a mother of two sons aged three and seven. She started to be more conscious about the food she was buying and eating seven years ago when she became a mother because she wanted to feed her children with healthy and non-processed food. She started to read labels and to buy organic food, and she gradually cut the intake of meat: at first, she was eating it just three times per week, then once and then she cut it out completely. She started to eat more plant-based and organic and avoided soy and processed food. She believes that following a plant-based diet is better for ourselves and for the world we live in. She also explained it on her blog:

I started my blog because I wanted to share how easy and simple it is to create a healthy and tasteful meal with whole-plant foods. When I started my plant-based lifestyle I didn't know where to start. How to drink my lattes in the morning, or what to eat for breakfast, lunch or dinner. Through my journey I learned a lot from other plant-based and vegan blogs and documentaries like Forks over Knives. I believe we never stop learning, so join me on my journey.

When Nora cut dairy products, at first, she did not know how to drink her morning Latte. She started to educate herself more about food and how to replace minerals, vitamins, and proteins from meat, dairy and eggs without endangering her health. "Because when you quit meat you have to be more creative and to learn more about food and how to combine your meals". She has also learnt how to bake cakes without eggs, sugar and dairy and her boys "just love it".

She said that it is normal that sometimes your body craves for unhealthy food and there is nothing wrong with it. She stated that 95% of what she eats comes from plants, but occasionally she will eat fish, but not dairy. She believes that if you are vegan you have to be a "vegan all the way, it means also your lifestyle- the shoes you wear, the bags you wear... This change is just too big for me". She buys organic food but also accessories (items) for her home: she replaced all plastic things with bamboo, and she started to separate and recycle all her garbage. She is aware that she cannot change the world by herself but she

⁸⁷ Heathy take-away bar in Amsterdam

would like people to be more conscious of it and to make the world a better place. “I don’t like to talk and to do nothing about it: I like action”. It started with food and purchasing organic clothes, separating her garbage and when she is buying something she checks where it is made, what kind of product it is and what it is inside, etc. She has not started yet to educate herself about sustainability, but she thinks that food is the easiest way to step into it: “when you become conscious about food, other things will follow”.

Nora started to avoid meat after seeing the documentary *Cowspiracy* and learning how the food industry works:

People are really eating that kind of meat? When you see that the cow is sick and it’s not healthy, how it can be healthy for you? I really don’t believe that! Animals have emotions – I saw that a calf was crying after they killed his mom. This is the same relationship that we have [*children and parents*] and I cannot stand that cows are in cages and milked the whole day – they also have infections because of that. And these infections enters in the milk that we drink. You receive a product that is not good for you (emphasis added).

She became more conscious about clothing as well, and she will not buy leather if it is not necessary, and if she does, she wants to believe that that cow had a “really great life”, she said it laughing. She educated herself about healthy food watching almost all the documentaries about food on Netflix (*Food Matters*, *GMO*, *Milk*, *Cowspiracy*, *Forks over Knives I, II, III* etc.), but also doing some research on the Internet and reading books and magazines.

I like to read different opinions and decide what works for me; I want to make my own choices. (...) Balance is very important and if you feel good about what you eat... I started to feel much better when I started to eat healthy and organic food. (...) I wanted to be part of something positive. I see this as a good thing and I want to inspire people and show them that there are so many possibilities to live a different lifestyle from what you are used to. For this reason, I am writing my blog in English because in this way I can reach a wider public.

She believes that Amsterdam is an excellent city for following a healthy lifestyle because it has plenty of biological, organic and vegan shops, bars and restaurants. She knows that in other Dutch cities the situation is different and if she would move to another town it would be harder for her to find all the products that she is used to.

I was curious if her sons and boyfriend like to eat plant-based. She replied that they do not know for any better and when they go to their friends’ house they are always asking is the food that they are eating is organic and if there is any “junk in it”. Sometimes she has the feeling that she hears herself talking. However, when they go to a kids’ party, she will not prohibit them to eat whatever they want because they are still kids and this is just a couple of times a year. “I see that my boys are really conscious about the food they eat and my lifestyle” A bigger challenge was to change her boyfriend who was a meat eater. “I also made my boyfriend more conscious, and he is really into the lifestyle now... it’s a really family thing now”, and she started to laugh. Nevertheless, when she started with her new diet and lifestyle, her parents and

friends called her crazy. They began to question how she will replace meat, eggs and other sources of proteins: “Nora you don’t know what get into it, you will lose your minerals and vitamins...”. Because of her lifestyle, her parents started to be more conscious about the food they are buying, and they try to eat more organic too. Although they are supporting her, they still keep asking her if she is eating eggs and “things like that”.

Nora buys most of her groceries in Ekoplaza, Biolicious or *Stadhouderskade*⁸⁸ and every Saturday she goes to the farmer’s market in Jordaan. She does not shop in Albert Heijn anymore because in Ekoplaza she finds everything she needs. “I should be honest; I think I doubled my spending in foods. But then I think it’s better to spend on food than on other things... Before this diet, I was eating everything like the most of the people”.

She always pays attention that her food is local and organic: “I will not buy strawberries from Egypt, but I prefer to buy them at the farmer’s market because they are local. I don’t want to buy strawberries that were in a plane, and passed a 1000 km to get on my plate”. The same is with avocados, since they do not grow in The Netherlands, she prefers buying the ones which come from Spain rather than Peru. She said:

I wanted to show people that you can have pancakes without eggs, without milk. You can have pancakes based on chia seeds, almond milk, oat milk. You don’t need to buy all these animals products to have the same dish. There are really alternatives. Exactly for this reason, I decided to call my blog *quirky cooky*: I am thinking out of the box and quirky means somebody who is a little bit crazy and people thought that I was crazy because I started this. I was always thinking out of the box, on my way standing out from the crowd and this is my own quirky thing.

She has never used food delivery companies because they are not always selling organic food:

You know why? Because I want to pick my own tomato. I have to see it if it’s good or not. When it’s delivered somebody else does the choice for you – I wanna make my own choices. I want to buy the best food that I can get... I really wanna see it and choose myself.

At the end of the conversation, she agreed that food is part of her lifestyle and that food probably means more to her than to me. She believes that being a foodie is a lifestyle and a way of living. Besides, she considers her food photos as some kind of self-expression because it says something about her: what she eats, what she stands for, what she thinks and how she feels. “This is my living philosophy”, she said.

⁸⁸ the biggest concept store of Ekoplaza

4. CONCLUSION

In this first part of the thesis, I aimed to explain why foodies are defined as a ‘special’ category of eaters and how their cultural and economic capital shape their eating habits, food preferences, lifestyle, and their overall life philosophy. I aimed to present why the definition of the term foodie is arbitrary and why it has two facets. On the one hand, it describes people with a broad food knowledge who are open to new culinary experiences and want to know the story behind their food⁸⁹ (e.g. traditional food). On the other hand, food turned into an ‘accessory’, a means to express identity, lifestyle, social status, life philosophy, leisure and - using Scelzi and La Fortuna (2015:130) words - “a sort of social currency⁹⁰”. Jasper’s story demonstrates that foodies will not give up on good food even during hard financial times. Albeit not all of my respondents can afford to eat out every day/ week⁹¹, they will still eat good-quality food at home showing that it is possible to be a ‘low budget foodie’; they will seek new culinary experiences at home.

During interviews, I tried to pay more attention to what my respondents say they do from what they say one should do (Lambek *in* Berliner et al. 2016:6). This permitted me to detect many inconsistencies and discrepancies both in the ways how my respondents presented themselves online and offline and in their posting practices.

Foodies claimed to have a big passion for food and they invest a lot of time (and sometimes money) in educating themselves and their palate. It does not always need to be healthy, but it should be always tasty, and look good on the plate. Their interest in food started either at a very young age or due health issues. A respondent emphasized that “this is not something that you become, but something that comes from inside”. The purpose of this first part of the thesis was to show how difficult and complex it is to define somebody’s identity and how uncertain and confused my respondents were in defining themselves. They were struggling if being a foodie is part of their identity, personality or just one of the many statuses they acquired in their lifetime. Since foodies are often portrayed in the popular culture as snobs and people obsessed with food, my respondents were often hesitant to identify as one in the offline sphere. As two respondents noticed,

⁸⁹ “If you post a picture of some awesome kale and goat cheese lasagna that you made, you’re saying something about yourself: You’re saying you have the ability to cook, you’re saying you have the education, you’re saying you have the time, that you have chosen to apply your discretionary income on getting organic kale and non-GMO goat cheese” (Turow *in* Sedacca 2016).

⁹⁰ “Humbly bragging about your trips to niche, hole-in-the wall restaurants or your extensive knowledge of the best whisky dive bars is relevant to show who you are, to distinguish yourself from others, and also to show off your cosmopolitanism - your refinement” (Parasecoli *in* Sedacca 2016).

⁹¹ Because their salary is low or because they are still students

people started recently to respond negatively also on the term food blogger⁹². For this reason, a few respondents preferred being called food lovers.

In the first chapters, I suggested that eating clean and healthy is turning into a new religion and that certain (healthy) food bloggers transformed into new food experts who started to influence people's consumption and eating preferences more than nutritionists. Hence, I found very Douglas' and Messer's system of (food) classification useful for understanding how foodies value the quality of food and create their ideas about healthy diets classifying food as good or bad for their body. Therefore, focusing on the quality rather than quantity has become a new rule to follow (Sedacca 2016).

Many respondents believe that money and social status are not important if you want to be(come) a foodie since you can eat good and fresh food even with a low budget - it is more important how creative you can be with the ingredients you have at home and to do the grocery at farmers' markets. However, some of them revealed that they are lazy to go to farmers' markets and that they prefer doing their shopping in Albert Heijn or smaller ethnic shops on their way home from work. Albeit they told me that "money is not an issue", they did disclose that they tend to spend more money on food than an average person and they doubled their expenses when they started to eat clean and healthy. Indeed, social status and money help them to satiate their curiosity towards new food trends and restaurants⁹³. Often, they compared themselves to other 'ordinary people' and me and claimed that food means obviously more to them than to others. Interestingly, Brenda revealed that she finds it difficult to communicate with people who are not into food (or who does not care about her vegetarian diet). She believes that the gap between them would be so big that their friendship would not work.

On the other hand, one interviewee coined the word *eetcultuur* to describe the ongoing trend (and obsession) in everything related to food and the growing and overwhelming importance that people give to it. My interviewees pointed out that our [the foodie] generation⁹⁴ - compared to our parent's generation - is delaying parenthood and tend to spend more money on themselves and eating out – this is not seen as a luxury but more as a part of their culture. Hence, spending money on food is perceived as an investment in their health and lifestyle. Therefore, the foodie lifestyle is a way of thinking and acting.

⁹²Angela noted that vegan bloggers are predominately female compared to the famous male chefs in popular restaurants. She added: "I think that the foodie think started more from people's own kitchens and then in the households often the woman cooks. So it came from down to up instead of the other way around".

⁹³ I have to point out that not all of my respondents were advocators of eating clean and healthy. However, since they like to follow new food trends (and it is also favourable for the growth of their Instagram account) they will sometimes bake a healthy version of a traditional cake or prepare vegan and 'guilt-free' meals and sweets.

⁹⁴ Since Millennials are recognized as a very well educated generation which is also socially responsible and 'think green', it explains why foodies (as part of this generation) care about their food and where it comes from and why they prefer healthy and organic options instead of the processed food in the supermarkets.

PART II: Sharing food photos on Instagram as new way of connectedness, engagement, and belonging

In this second thematic part of the thesis, I will explain the importance of self-expression and self-promotion in the realm of social media (concretely, Instagram) and how connectedness, connectivity and food photography made “everything social” (van Dijck 2013:206) and viral. I believe that the best way to conclude the thesis and to encompass the different topics mentioned throughout it is through the works of Tyler (2016) and Alshawaf and Wen (2015). Taking into consideration their interpretation of social media and the digital reputation on Instagram, I aim to explain that Instagram impacts and shapes our idea of reality and changes our eating habits (“first camera and then eating”, Adam), behaviour (desire for public recognition), and daily routine.

Barthes (1957 in Calefato et al. 2016:372) emphasizes that food (eating) is always a social act, also when it is extended and shared on social media. Hence, foodies and food lovers “are not only hooked on socializing in communities on the web, they even see eating as a connective activity” (Steenbergen, et al. 2015). For instance, when people eat alone they tend to chat with friends or surf the Web, and taking photos of their meal and immediately uploading it online it is still a social act because “social media lets the solo diner turn a meal for one into a social experience”⁹⁵.

Rainie and Wellman (2012)⁹⁶ claim that digital technologies have integrated into people’s social lives and are changing the ways we communicate, connect and exchange information with each other. They believe that we have become “increasingly networked as individuals” and that our life is oriented “around looser, more fragmented networks that provide on-demand succour” (ibid). The networked individualism gives us infinite opportunities to expand our networking and personal interaction and to learn new social skills and strategies (ibid.). The authors claim that social networking empowers individuals to emancipate from the restraints of smaller groups and communities, and to expand their personal relationships and ties creating and sharing new contents and information on different networks (ibid.).

Social media are turning into popular platforms for self-expression, self-promotion, and communication (van Dijck 2013:199) and they have changed our perception of food, its presentation, and our dining habits.

⁹⁵ “How Social Media Is Changing The Way We Eat”. *Menulog*, posted on 03-09-2014, URL: <https://www.menulog.com.au/blog/social-media-changing-eat/> (accessed 03-12-2016).

⁹⁶ See: Rainie, L., Wellman, B. (2012). “Networked individualism: What in the world is that?”. *Pew Internet.*, URL: <http://networked.pewinternet.org/2012/05/24/networked-individualism-what-in-the-world-is-that-2/> (accessed 05-01-2017)

Photo sharing sites and applications soared in popularity due to their noticeable visual background and thanks to smartphones and the easiness to document and upload every moment of our life. Because of their capability to link together the online and offline world, social media are turning into important research platforms (Golder & Macy 2014:144) especially when it comes to food and eating habits. Since food is becoming a new form of social identity, Calefato et al. (2016:371) assert that “our contemporary postmodern society can be defined as an orthorexic society, in which everybody, everywhere is constantly speaking about food. This phenomenon is called foodism, a practice particularly emphasized in the new media”.

Because of the similarities between Flickr and Instagram, I decided to use van Dijck’s article “Flickr and the culture of connectivity: Sharing views, experiences, memories”, to explain how picture exchange on photo sharing sites develops a space of “communal views and experiences” (van Dijck 2011:401). Moreover, “the powerful structures of social networking sites are gradually penetrating our daily routines and practices” and influencing how we see the world⁹⁷ (ibid.).

Golder and Macy (2014:130-133) emphasize that “digital footprints collected from online communities and networks” help us to understand human behaviour, social interaction and exchanges and therefore online social behaviour has to be seen as real, “the kind that may occur in any field site” (ibid., 132).

In line with it, we can assert that Instagram is also part of the culture of connectivity, which is confirmed every day by the rise of its popularity (and users) and reflected in its slogan “capture and share the worlds moments”. Taking Flickr as an example, van Dijck (2011:401) points out that the word *sharing* suggests the idea of *exchanging* views and building collective experiences, which is particularly true if we think about the food community on Instagram. My respondents upload photos not just because they like it and want to inspire people with their recipes, but also to share knowledge, get feedbacks and exchange ideas and recipes. Moreover, sharing food photos, they shape a collective experience of healthy diets, their lifestyle, and culinary trends. They want to engage with their audience and be active participants in the community⁹⁸. “Individuals articulate their identities as social beings by uploading photographs to document their lives; they appear to become part of a social community through photographic exchanges and this, in turn, shapes how they watch the world” (ibid., 402). Van Dijck (2011:407) believes that sharing photographs is a “community-based social activity” rooted in the practices of analogue photography.

⁹⁷ Brockbank claims that nowadays we experience our life and watch the world more through the lenses of our smartphones than we do with our own eyes. See: Brockbank, J. (n.d.). “How technology is changing the way we see the world”. *Citybase Apartments*, URL: <https://www.citybaseapartments.com/blog/how-technology-is-changing-the-way-we-see-the-world/> (accessed 04-12-2016).

⁹⁸ Liking, commenting, following, and tagging.

Twenty years ago, we were sharing personal photos mostly within the social circles of family and friends; now we are sharing them with the whole world and people who are mostly strangers (ibid., 407).

Modes of self-presentation are an important aspect of social media; how we present ourselves, to whom and for what purposes depends on the platform. The importance of self-expression and self-promotion will be explored more in details in the last chapter through Alshawaf's and Wen's (2015) Self-Promotion Cycle and Tyer's (2016) application of the cultivation and the social cognitive theory to explain the controlling force of social media.

Although Instagram was initially seen as a mobile photo sharing platform for personal self-expression and visual storytelling or portfolio, it steadily turned into a means of self-promotion⁹⁹ (van Dijck 2013:200). The similarities between Instagram and Facebook are not coincidental since the latter bought the former in 2012. The similarities are evident both in the visual appearance¹⁰⁰ of their feeds and the replacement of the chronological timeline in favour of the one based on algorithms, which I will explain in the next few pages.

Adopting Goffman's theory of self-presentation as a performance¹⁰¹, van Dijck (2013:200-201) suggests that the need for a multiple self increased with the popularity of public communication in the realm of social media. Both Instagram and Facebook promote the idea of the idealized self (ibid.). Brenda said: "social media world, where everything seems like a lie and you make everything prettier than it is", and she might be right. How many times we found ourselves retouching or editing our photos to make them more beautiful or outstanding before uploading them online? How many times have we met people who in 'real life' look completely different than on Instagram? For this reason, van Dijck (2013:201) believes that "platform owners use interface technologies to promote unconscious self-expression while also enabling conscious self-promotion". Correspondingly, social media platforms changed their attention from *connectedness* (improving existing relationships with people from 'real' life) to *connectivity* (relationships between people transformed in algorithms):

'Friending' no longer refers to people you know, but people you may or should know according to an algorithm's computation; 'liking' has turned into a provoked automated gesture that yields precious information about people's desires and predilections. 'Following' discloses and connects people's interests and allows for the detection of trends (van Dijck 2013:201-202).

⁹⁹ Especially if we consider the number of companies that are advertising their products/ brands on Instagram but also ordinary people who want to promote their blog or sell their handmade items.

¹⁰⁰ The use of white and blue colours

¹⁰¹ In the book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Goffman (1959, Preface) explores how individuals present themselves and their activities to others "and the ways in which they guide and control the impression they form of them, and the kind of things they may or may not do while sustaining their performance before them". See also: Berreman, G. D. (2014). "Behind Many Masks: Ethnography and Impression Management" in Robben, A., Sluka, J. (2014). *Ethnographic fieldwork: An anthropological reader*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, p. 153-174

5. FOOD PHOTOGRAPHY

The practice of food photography on Instagram is a new means of connectedness and connectivity; a place where creativity, self-expression, and self-promotion meet the online community. According to Calefato et al. (2016:383) food photography is:

a photographic genre in which there are photographs of home-made dishes just ready to be eaten, whose formal composition follows some criteria and whose aim is to provoke a sense of desire in eating the food. This leads to the attitude called “appetizing,” which is the result of techniques and visual devices used in the way of taking those photographs in order to provoke the five senses into reacting, starting from a simple glimpse. (...) Food photography conceived as a technique belongs to the genre of still-life, which is a reproduction of inanimate objects whose composition has fixed characteristics such as composition, light, and details. Translating what in painting is called “*natura morta*,” a typical Italian genre.

The popularity of a food photo on Instagram depends on the synergy between the composition, the light, the details (crops) and the hashtags used. The aim is to display the aesthetics of a recipe, shifting from an exact description of reality to an art expression (ibid., 384).

The interest in the visual aesthetic of food, and the styling and presentation of a dish is rooted in the *nouvelle cuisine* from the 1980s (Ashley et al. 2004:65-66) and it is still influencing our cooking techniques and how we think about food. Its ‘avant-garde’ cooking philosophy fits very well the cooking practices of my respondents who are inspired by traditional and exotic dishes, fresh ingredients and spices, they favour easy and quick meals over the complex one, they experiment with textures and flavours, use interesting cooking techniques, etc. (Rao et al. 2003:807)¹⁰². “Colours, contrast and decoration, and the five senses are important” (ibid.) and a good food photo should recall all those characteristics and pleasures. This phenomenon is known on photo-sharing platforms as *food porn*¹⁰³ which is strongly related to the idea of food pornography coined in 1984 by Rosalind Coward for whom the practice of cooking and styling meals was an act of servitude:

It is a way of expressing affection through a gift... That we should aspire to produce perfectly finished and presented food is a symbol of a willing and enjoyable participation in servicing others. (...) (Coward 1984 in Calefato et al. 2016:385).

¹⁰² See also: “Nouvelle cuisine”. *Wikipedia*. URL: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nouvelle_cuisine (accessed 06-12-2016)

¹⁰³ “It refers to pure external consumption just like what happens with sex addiction. (...) An Internet slang term that is used to describe glamorized photographs or videos of meals with high fat and calorie content or experimental dishes with unusual combinations of ingredients” (Calefato et al. 2016:384). Apart from food porn, another popular hashtag on Instagram is *#foodgasm*.

Hence, the aim of food photography - as a social and aesthetic practice – is to create and promote a new “food media lifestyle” (ibid.) and enhance self-expression on social media platforms. For this reason, Calefato et al. (2016:385) believe that food turned into a simulacrum and has transformed our life into a hyper-reality. Her thesis is not far from the acknowledgement of my respondents who claimed that their Instagram account is their digital life or alter ego.

6. INSTAGRAM FOOD(IE) COMMUNITY

We know each other, but we don't really know each other

(Olivia)

The aim of this chapter is to give a brief overview of the Instagram history and its main features and explain how food lovers create a sense of belonging in the Instagram food(ie) community and how they interact and find each other. Moreover, I will explain why the food community is not unified and how come that antipathy and hierarchy are part of it. The interconnection between followers, likes and comments will be discussed more in detail in chapter ten.

Eating is a synonym for gathering and socializing, and nowadays it seems more online than offline. Sharing food photos became a modern way of sharing recipes and “an important educational tool for sharing information about food”¹⁰⁴. Calefato et al. (2016:385) claims:

today everyone who has a digital photo camera is endowed with a technological empowered potentiality. Food photography is therefore a social and aesthetic practice, the result of an augmented narcissistic condition of our society and above all the result of the consequent democratization and empowerment of photographic technologies increasingly used on mobile phones.

Instagram was launched in October 2010 by Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger, and it was sold to Facebook in April 2012 (Glantz 2014:694). It is the most popular and simplest application for sharing images online, for creating visual diaries (stories) and for connecting people with the same interests and passion (e.g. food)¹⁰⁵. An image uploaded on Instagram can be concurrently shared (disseminated) on different social media platforms and the practice of “reposting, liking, and commentary” makes the “process of Instagramming highly dynamic” (Weilenmann et al. 2013 *in* Becker 2016:110). “In making selections as to what to display and which narrative to tell, Instagrammers act as virtual curators” (Weilenmann et al. 2013). The focus of food blogs on aesthetics, food styling and photography has noticeably influenced Instagram and the way users share their food photos (Lofgren 2013).

¹⁰⁴ "How Social Media Is Changing The Way We Eat". *Menulog*, URL: <https://www.menulog.com.au/blog/social-media-changing-eat/2/> (accessed 09-10-2016)

¹⁰⁵ It has become a new way of microblogging and vlogging (you can upload videos up to one minute).

The food(ie) community on Instagram is formed sharing images and browsing hashtags¹⁰⁶ (*#vegan, #vegetarian, #foodblogger, #dutchfoodie* etc.) for finding, and then following, people who “are posting content with the same hashtags”¹⁰⁷. The interaction and engagement between people is seen through constructive comments, positive feedbacks, likes (♥) and tags (@) which intensify a sense of imagined community which consists of food bloggers and “real food lovers” (Sandra). It is “based on a communicative openness and stranger-sociality” (Steadly 2013:261). Rita said:

I get inspired by other Instagrammers and I always give them credits. Such as, I saw this on XY account and I wanted to try it myself, and it leads to interaction because this XY person (*who is tagged*) will reply back and say that it is nice, emphasis added.

Although blogging might be perceived as a lonely, solitary, and unsociable activity, Lofgren (2013:17) suggests that bloggers “find ways to form and recognise themselves as a community”. They like feel contentment knowing that others share and understand their passion and fervour for food; hence they often create events, meetings, and workshops to meet each other and share their knowledge (ibid., 38, 42). Food blogging community provides “a sense of belonging, shared social identities, shared practices, a sense of space, sociability and interpersonal relationships, shared resources, information and support” (Baym 2010, Wellman 2011 in Lofgren 2013:38).

According to my respondents, the community is very supportive and motivational and helps them to improve their self-esteem, exchange knowledge and build online friendships mostly through positive and nice comments. It is a two-way interaction, Adam – a blogger and food photographer - explained: “they react on my photos and I react back; it’s not just a one-way communication. I noticed their comments on my photos, and then we started commenting each other and at some point we said ‘Hey are we going for coffee, why not?!’ It’s pretty funny how Instagram can connect people”.

Maya said:

I am so happy for being part of the Instagram community, (...) I just hope that it (*the new Instagram algorithm*) will not impact deeply the community that I have grown to love so much. The friendships that have been formed here are amazing and mean the world to me and yes, that’s what I’m most grateful for. (...) I feel so blessed to have an opportunity to meet such amazing and talented humans through this platform... never expected that. It’s the best thing about this wonderful foodie community here¹⁰⁸. (...)

¹⁰⁶ “Hashtags are very important in getting discovered by a wider audience”. See: Saric, M. (2016). “The Blogger’s Guide To Building An Instagram Community”. *HowToMakeMyBlog*, posted 14-10-2016, URL: <http://howtomakemyblog.com/instagram/> (accessed 10-11-2016)

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ emphasis added.

Although they know each other in the online world, they rarely meet in real life, especially if they do not live in the same country. Angela and Esther revealed that recently they get more invitations for food bloggers events (mainly in the Netherlands) where they meet and interact with other Dutch food bloggers or people who are busy with food. Even though Esther's blog is in English because she wanted to reach an international audience, now she decided to focus more on the Dutch community because the chance of meeting bloggers in person is higher.

Angela said:

For her this is really nice, because I meet people with the same interest and passion, it's like colleagues almost. It's really nice to meet more of those people. I met one food blogger last week on an event and we went out for lunch the next day so, it's like you can become friends. (...) It's funny because when you said for example Sabina from Smulpaapje it's like I know her but I've never met her. I just know her because we are in the same world and I follow her and she maybe follows me. It's funny how it works. There are many people that I speak to and I feel like I know she and I connect with her but I have never met.

Even though Greta likes to participate on different workshops and meet new friends through blogging, she decided to share with me an unpleasant experience that occurred during a photography workshop organized for Dutch bloggers.

I was invited on a photography workshop a while ago and there were a lot of Dutch bloggers. All of them told me that they are vegan or they are about to turn vegan or that they eat more vegan now or they would like to become one. I think that this is such a hype because they don't do it because they think it's important but they do it because it's a hype. Then it was my turn to introduce myself and she told them: 'Well I am not a vegan, I eat vegan food sometimes, I also eat every now and then meat not that much, but I love eggs, I love honey, I love cheese and fish and I told them I try to eat healthy but every now and then I also use some butter and sugar because, well... why not?!' A couple of girls started laughing at me, really bad laughing. Inside I had to laugh myself again, because I thought it's kind of sad... I was kind of feeling sorry for them... I think that health is not only about food, it is about so much more.

In line with the story, Olivia explained that Instagram is not a united and coherent food community in the Netherlands for it embraces different smaller sub-communities or groups such as Fit Duchies, Fit Girls, vegans, healthy food lovers, foodies etc. She unveiled that some antagonism might be seen between groups and this is also the reason why a few of my respondents do not feel part of the community or try not to attach themselves to any community (group) because they do not like to be labelled and associated with all "these crazy, obsessed people" (Katja). However, Greta still believes that the Instagram food community is very encouraging and never competitive compared to the community of fashion bloggers or makeup artists where the rivalry is much higher. She started to feel part of this community when almost all the big bloggers she admires started to follow her. She said:

For instance, I am following for the three years the blog Dolly and Oatmeal and when Lindsay started to follow me back a year ago, I wrote her an email 'thank you so much' because I admire her

and I appreciated that she started to follow me. Sometimes I check if she is still following me (*she laughs*) because you are always insecure, I still don't understand why they would follow me.

My respondents believe that sharing food images and “just talking to each other” (Tess) has created a (sense of) community of food bloggers and food lovers and their photos became their identification in that environment and allowed them to connect with people with similar interests. Iris is a food coach and likes the fact that everyone is open to meet or to go together to new healthy restaurants: “you all have the same spirit and it's great that there's such a big community for same-minded people on Instagram”. Nevertheless, a few respondents believe that those friendships are superficial. Dagmar said: “It's like a superficial *you're ok, I'm ok* and we share the love for great food kinda thing” and Rita added: “you kind of make friends not real friends, but there are people being nice to you and you tell them about your day”. My respondents noticed that often the same people like and comment their photos and smaller blogger profit when famous bloggers comment them back, since it helps them to get noticed and obtain more likes and followers. It is not a rule but usually small food bloggers are followed back by other small food bloggers, rarely from the famous one. Gwen told me that once she made a banana bread following lisagoesvegan's¹⁰⁹ recipe. She uploaded the photo on Instagram and tagged Lisa, who liked the photo so much that she reposted it to her Instagram profile. Thanks to this, Gwen got fifty-sixty new followers: “I think that it was also a good PR for me and my blog”.

Klara tried to explain how the community works: food bloggers comment each other's photos and in this way, they form a small community which is then part of a bigger one. Being active, liking, commenting and following more people give them a chance to be noticed in the online world. Klara said that she reads a lot of food blogs and she leaves comments on them since usually those bloggers comment her back. She said:

You kinda get a small community of people, like I follow them, they follow me, so you get a sort of, I wouldn't call it a relationship but you know each other, you know each other's blog and those are usually people who comment, occasionally someone else. There are a couple of food bloggers who doesn't know me personally but who will write a comment to me such as ‘Hello, how are you doing?’. And because of this ‘commenting’ I feel part of the community. (...) It's very important to be active because you get some sort of followers and community. When I respond to someone's big blog than other people see it too and then they can see my comments and see my blog, because people get curious. I use very often the hashtag Breda and a lot of companies from Breda follow me because they hope I will follow them back. The restaurants in Breda all follow me...

Nikki is a twenty-six years old food and lifestyle blogger, and in her case, sharing food photos online is not just a way to promote her blog but also a way to fight loneliness. A year ago, when her father died, she wanted to do something that would make her happy again. Since she cannot work due to an autoimmune disease which causes muscle weakness, Instagram helps her to talk and meet new people online. Although

¹⁰⁹ a popular Dutch vegan instagrammer

she has never met those people in ‘real’ life, she interacts with them daily, and she can “notice the community”. She said:

Yesterdays I posted a picture of a plate of strawberries and this was the first thing that I ate yesterday because I was not feeling well. So, in the caption I posted like *the first thing that I am eating today, I am not feeling well* and then you get responses like *I hope that you will feel better or try to eat some oranges is good for this and that*. Like I said, the community again trying to respond and help. (...) What motivates me to upload more pictures is also the fact that in this way I feel more part of the online (Instagram) community. Because I am home a lot... I can talk with my cat but I can talk to those people too. This kind of interaction in a day motivates me to post a picture.

Nevertheless, not all my respondents feel part of the community, and they mentioned several reasons why it is so. They believe their photos are not good enough, they perceive themselves “as a little fish compared to other famous foodies” (C.R.) and that they have to be more known on Instagram, busier with it (they see it as a small part of the day) and meet other food bloggers.

6.1. Hierarchy

When I discussed with my respondents about identity and their motivation for sharing food photos on Instagram, I noticed that interviewees made a distinction between them, as *small* food bloggers/ foodies¹¹⁰, and those who are *big*, famous and influential in the Instagram food community. When I asked them some specific questions regarding Instagram, hashtags or the ‘formula’ for success, I would repeatedly hear statements such as “I don’t know exactly how it works... you have to ask this to the big foodies” (C.R.). Small are the ones who just started with their blog or Instagram food account; they are aspiring to grow and to have at least a couple of thousand followers¹¹¹. Famous foodies or food bloggers, commonly called *Insta famous*, are those who have more than 20 000 or 30 000 followers¹¹² and are usually admired by the small ones. A few respondents claimed that having around 4000-6000 followers is already a significant achievement today, especially if we take into account that new food blogs increased in number in the past few months. “My Instagram is now 1000+ *followers* but the real big foodies are having 20-30k, but 1000 is also like a milestone” (C.R.), emphasis added. Tess said:

¹¹⁰ It depends on how they call themselves

¹¹¹ Of course, it varies from person to person. Usually, they have less than 1000 followers.

¹¹² At least this is what my respondents told me

I think that I am a small foodie because I do it for fun, I don't want to be stressed about have many times I have to post, because then it's not for fun, because then it becomes a job.

Although some food bloggers had a lot of followers on Instagram (e.g. more than 13 000) and might be perceived as *big* by smaller food bloggers, they still feel small compared to the food bloggers they admire. Another difference between small and big foodies/food bloggers is in the amount of pressure they feel to post daily on Instagram so as not to lose followers. This constraint usually fades away with the growth of the account and when obtaining more readers, which I will explain in the next chapters. "When professional food bloggers share information about how they achieved their success, they are identifying themselves as community leaders" (Lofgren 2013:44).

Even though my respondents never mentioned the word hierarchy to mark the contrast between them and the prominent food bloggers, I did notice that they use some "self-categorizations" unconsciously and "compare themselves to others" (Stets & Burke 2003:30). They categorize their self within those groups of food bloggers or food lovers who are similar to them online and offline (e.g. with other small food bloggers). As stated by my respondents, the online food(ie) community is very supportive and motivational, and I believe that this is the reason why they do not think in terms of competitiveness and hierarchy. Sharing recipes online breaks down barriers between them. Quoting Murray (2008), Becker (*in* Bunce et al. 2016:110) wrote: "the collective nature of the Instagram further emphasis its primary role as communication – a message transferred in visual form that creates a potentially non-hierarchical community".

7. MOTIVATION

I love food, I love to make it, and it is just beautiful, you know?! And I just want to share it.

(Kim)

This chapter aims at answering the question what drives people to upload their meals online and what lies beneath foodies' motivation of documenting and sharing food photographs on Instagram and how it became a new form of self-expression, engagement, and communication. Why are they doing it and for whom? Why taking photos of our meals became more important than the first bite? I will show that the motivation for uploading food photos online can turn into an obsession, addiction, and competition.

Cohen's (2005:894) explanation of the function of the photoblog:

One function of the photoblog is to provide motivation for taking photos. The photoblog provides structure for photographs, gives them something to do, compels their production via the motivating external abstractions of a project.

When I asked my respondents what motivate them to upload food photos online, I did not expect that they would find this question one of the most difficult to answer. As in Cohen's case, often the answer was *I do not know (...it's just good)*, or they were thinking about it for a long time. In some occasions, I reformulated the question from what *motivates you to upload food photos online* to *what motivated you to upload your first photo on Instagram*, and it seemed that the latter functioned better because they could think of a concrete example¹¹³.

Cohen (2005:898) explained that the popularity of the answer *I do not know* is not a sign of an absence of "productive self-reflexivity in the photoblogger, nor really of a shortage of good answers, but of something objectionable in the question". He went more in depth arguing that:

That objectionable something seems to be this: the question 'why do you blog' assumes that the desire to do so is an exterior condition, that desire either precedes and produces the blog, or that the blog simply effects a desired outcome. It assumes that the photoblog is a means to an end, or the end of some means. But the photoblog hardly needs to be explained (away) by something else. Explanation is not its mode of external relation, not the way it links itself to other entities, other temporalities, other technologies, other forms of pleasure and motivation (ibid).

¹¹³ Everybody remembered their first picture because this is not the kind of photo that they would upload now. Even though the photos were bad due to bad lighting, people still liked their pictures. C.R. said: "But this is how I started. I don't know why. Well, I know why. It made me happy so, I was thinking how can I can extend this and how can I do more".

Hobby (sharing beautiful food, gaining more followers, and likes), *education* (sharing knowledge, eating clean and healthy) and *work* (promotion, portfolio, new skills, make a living) are the three basic reasons for uploading food photos on Instagram. Nevertheless, my respondents' primary motivation is to inspire people with their recipes and to motivate (but also educate) them to eat healthier and to make "the right choices for their bodies" (Angela) and the environment. Moreover, they want to shatter the myth that healthy food is expensive, difficult, unaffordable, tasteless, and boring. As Tess said, their blog is partly for them and partially for the world. To put it differently, they try to inspire people to change their eating habits and to eat more vegetarian both for their health and the protection of the environment. For this reason, a few respondents decided to become a food and health coach (personal body nutritionist)¹¹⁴ to inspire their (future) clients with their healthy meals and lifestyle.

On the other hand, Brenda and Jenna gave up the idea to study food and nutrition (dietetics). Although Brenda would like to inspire people to eat healthier, she does not want to spend her whole life educating people who are not going to change. She claimed: "I like to do it this way- from a distance - and people can decide what they can do with it". On the contrary, Jenna was afraid that she would become too obsessed with food because she would know what is inside. For instance, every time that she would buy a muffin she would think about the amount of sugar in it and she would not enjoy it. Therefore, she decided to study pedagogy and to motivate overweight children to eat healthier. She said:

I think that you have to have a good balance and I was scared that this study would change it and I would be more obsessed with what it's healthy/unhealthy. I know what proteins and carbohydrates are and I think that for now this is enough. When I want to explore it more, I just stop, I don't want to know it more, because it scary me.

Jenna was my last interviewee, and her contradictive statement about health and education made me rethink previous interviews and how many other food bloggers¹¹⁵ probably pretend to have a broad knowledge about healthy food, but they do not educate themselves deeper about the topic fooling their followers unwittingly.

Two respondents admitted that they started to upload more food on Instagram to fight laziness after taking a temporary break from the university because they wanted to show people that they are productive and working on themselves even if they are mostly at home. They took advantage of this period to cook, bake, create new recipes, to boost their blog and increase the number of Instagram followers. Klara said:

Because I want to show people that I can cook. I think it's actually true because I didn't go to school for a year so I had the feeling that people would think that I was lazy so if I could show that I was doing something then I am not lazy, so maybe it's to show that I can do something.

¹¹⁴ They have enrolled for an online course.

¹¹⁵ Not necessarily my respondents

There is no doubt that Instagram and its visual properties¹¹⁶ motivate interviewees to upload more photos. They perceive Instagram as the easiest and quicker tool for promoting their blog and sharing their work with a wider community. However, in certain cases the motivation for uploading photos results in:

- a. *Addiction*: “Because it is a very addicting thing: when you upload one picture you want to put it more and more. I have other things to do during the day but it is very addicting to get likes, comments and followers. It sounds so stupid but it is. I think a lot people know what I mean” (Amber).
- b. *Obsession*: “Everyone is obsessed how much they eat, gain weight and that’s why foodie and that obsession, I call it foodsession, that’s why I really don’t want to call myself that. (...) People is going literally crazy today within this fitness community. Fitdutchies and completely obsessed and they are just showing their flat bellies” (Katja).
- c. (a kind of) *sport* or *collecting*: “By now it has become a sport to acquire as many followers as possible so, that is a motivation¹¹⁷” (Emily).

The last statement is a striking example of modern ‘collectors’ which is showing that “the human instinct for collecting” (Osborne 1912:1186) changed its focus from material objects to virtual supporters and enthusiasts. McIntosh and Schmeichel (2004:85) claim that collecting is a common and complex behaviour in our culture and that “collectors are drawn to collecting as a means of bolstering the self by setting up goals that are tangible and attainable and provide the collector with concrete feedback of progress”. This description also reflects the impetus and the logic of acquiring more followers, likes and comments on Instagram. My interviewees do not have a goal have many followers they want to have but they agreed “as many as possible” (Klara); they equalize more followers with more feedbacks and a higher visibility online. According to McIntosh and Schmeichel (2004:87), this motivation and behaviour “reflect self-fulfilling and self-enhancement needs”. Although Pearce (1992 in McIntosh & Schmeichel 2004:87) suggested seventeen¹¹⁸ diverse motivations for collecting, I detected a few which can be correlated with my respondents: leisure, competition, a sense of community, prestige, and extending the self. Esther criticized all those people who are running for more followers and she claimed that she prefers having fewer followers but better photos. “I think a lot of people are kind of Instagram obsessed, they want to get 10.000 followers

¹¹⁶ Focus on photography, not words and long texts

¹¹⁷ *Original*: Inmiddels is het een sport geworden zo veel mogelijk volgers te verwerven, dus dat is een motivatie.

¹¹⁸ leisure, aesthetics, competition, risk, fantasy, a sense of community, prestige, domination, sensual gratification, sexual foreplay, desire to reframe objects, the pleasing rhythm of sameness and difference, ambition to achieve perfection, extending the self, reaffirming the body, producing gender identity, and achieving immortality

and wanna make a lot of money and be sponsored by everyone¹¹⁹, travel all around the world for free or something. That's maybe for twenty people on Instagram it's not for free"¹²⁰.



Figure 1

Even if it is not maybe evident at first, it should be also noted that my respondents upload food photos because they want to interact with people and get their feedback. They want their work to be approved to build their self-esteem and, from my perspective, to have a prominent rank in the (online) food(ie) community. Martin's ID Compensation theory (1999 in McIntosh & Schmeichel 2004:87-88) indicates that people favour frequent feedback "and will seek out situations where frequent feedback is available. Collecting affords an opportunity for people to set out a concrete task, receive feedback as they make progress on that task, and know when it has been completed". Moreover, the interaction between food bloggers/ lovers and their followers motivates them to continue doing what they like. It is not unusual to hear them talking about their photos as a kind of art. Their art. Adam explained:

What motivates me to upload photos online? Wow this is a good question! The first is not necessarily the followers or the likes I get, is more the pictures that I post online... I see them as art almost. The way you capture a photo can be so beautiful and so different of how it looks on table. If I put my cutting board on the table, my food on my plate and flowers and if don't look so pretty, I take a picture and on the phone it looks great- it is some kind of art. I feel proud of that – this is my photo and this is what I make, so it's not only the food, people that I know, they say line: 'hey the way you take photos is really good, is some kind of professionalism in a photo you take' and that motivates

¹¹⁹ "Companies approach those with the highest number of Instagram followers and offer them contracts to promote their products". See: Gonsalves, D. (2016). "The Instagram Obsession", URL: <http://www.bluewiremedia.com.au/blog/2016/01/the-instagram-obsessions> (accessed 18-11-2016).

¹²⁰ She explained that PR agencies treat small food bloggers very badly. They contacted her a few times, but when she accepted their offer, they never replied back.

me to go to the next level to try new things, to try with a dark atmosphere, more plates... Comments from other bloggers, comments from people who like me and people who are actually interested in food, so we can talk about it and share knowledge, that's motivates me more than likes and followers.

8. STYLING

I want to create things. And what can I do know to grow? Well, I am a creative foodie but beside my creative mind and pictures what makes me creative more than other foodies?

(C.R.)

In this chapter, I examine the importance of styling in the Instagram food community and how it contributes to the uniqueness of users' Instagram accounts. Through the work of Cohen (2005) and Barthes' notion of the Real, I will discuss to what extent editing programs are allowed in the realm of food photography and what makes a photo look real and mouth-watering. What does it mean to cook with the camera in mind? Why did become it 'normal' to upload online a photo of our meal before taking the first bite? Additionally, I will show why the classification system is necessary in the realm of Instagram and how it changed people's eating habits. For instance, during the winter, food bloggers will cook their dinner in the morning to be able to have enough daylight to take photos of it. The constant exposition to all those perfectly styled and healthy meals on Instagram, encourage us to replicate them. They stimulate us to think more about styling, colours, and food trends, e.g. instead of eating a boring sandwich for breakfast we will eat oatmeal with a nice topping on it or something made with avocados so, we can also be able to upload it online and feel part of the community. Rita said:

Sometimes I post things that didn't really taste nice but it looked nice on the plate and people like it. (...) It is a wrap with avocado, lime, salmon, cucumber and some asparagus (*she showed me the photo*). All the ingredients looked really nice together on the plate, but the asparagus didn't taste so well. I didn't like it at all. I made a picture, took the asparagus out and then I ate it and it was really nice. The same week someone got inspired with my photo and made the same dish and put it online - also with asparagus - and tagged me. I was like, 'did you really like it? I didn't enjoy it'. I put raw asparagus inside and I knew that it won't taste good, emphasis added.

Styling is one of the most important elements for attracting followers and likes on Instagram, and it is a constant learning process¹²¹. If food bloggers want to succeed, they need to find their own recognizable style, and use their creativity to stand out from the crowd but, because of the huge competition, it can sometimes be quite a challenge. Not all my respondents have found their style yet, and they are still uncertain if they should focus more on the food or the décor and how much props and details they need to add to make the photo look good:

¹²¹ Two respondents revealed that if their photo does not get enough likes they will delete it. Gijs said: "sometimes I put something online and it gets three likes in ten minutes and then I delete it again. I think like 'oh, why should I keep it? I want something that it's boom'".

I have no clue what I am doing but I am thinking about it (...). I've got nice plates and nice props people do appreciate that but, in the end, it is still about the food... the food is the most important thing, I think (Greta).

When respondents looked back at their first photos, they could notice their improvement and how their styling and background have changed in the last year. Amber admitted that sometimes she likes to check the profiles of the people she is following from the beginning to see how their profile grew and their skills improved.

The aim of styling is to make food look more appetizing and mouth-watering because if the photo and the lighting is bad, no matter how tasteful the food is, nobody is going to look for the recipe or like the photo. Therefore, Tess is convinced that styling is noteworthy for the promotion of the blog since it acts as a PR for the social media. In order to create an appealing visual concept for both their blog and Instagram account, my respondents started to educate themselves about food photography by watching online tutorials and looking at other food bloggers' profiles¹²² or attending different food styling workshops and reading e-books. "The standards for amateur food photography have risen sharply in recent years, such that the photography is now just as important as the recipes on many food blogs" (Barclay 2012). Angela said:

It's funny that you mention the style of the picture, because I was never really aware of that. I would just take the photo of the food, either straight from above or this angle but it was always just food. Like a week ago, I had a workshop on food styling with Food Bandits. They really told me like, 'ok you have to have some ingredients here, and this has to be here and there' so, now I am trying to think about it more. Half a year ago it would be just a picture of the plate, but now I am thinking more about 'oh, it would be nice in this jar, or in that bowl, or with this background'.

Sandra, a food blogger in her thirties, said:

For me the food styling and the presentation of the dish is very important. The more inviting the photo is, the more we want to taste that very same, or similar dish. This is why I invest a lot into all supporting and decorative 'equipment' and quite a lot of time in photo shooting. I simply love nicely done food/drink photos. Most of my dishes are taken at my home, close to the window to have as much as possible of the natural daily light.

Hilda drew attention on the differences between ordinary photography and food photography taking her and her father as an example. She said that her father has a big passion for photography and he is happy that she started to take photography more seriously. Her father is using Photoshop a lot and he is trying to persuade her to do the same, but she knows that this is inappropriate in food photography. When he touches her photos up, her food looks completely different, and she does not want to upload "this kind of fake picture". She wants her photos to be as natural as possible and with real colours because if somebody recreates her dish she wants that it looks the same as hers. Sometimes she is using Photoshop just to adjust the contrast and brightness because of the bad lighting. When Hilda takes pictures, she wants to be sure that

¹²² On Instagram or Pinterest

at least the main ingredients are visible: “when there are zucchini in it that you can see zucchini and not that you have to guess what it is”. Many respondents agreed with Hilda’s statements and added that Instagram filters are not good in the context of food because they make the food look less natural and serious, “food has to look as it really is” (Nora). The use of editing programs such as Photoshops and Lightroom makes us rethink Barthes’ notion to what extent “the Real inhabits the photograph” (Cohen 2005:883) and what a real food photo looks like. Even if Hilda and other respondents are against the use of excessive photoshopping of food images, they are still going to edit their photos adjusting the brightness and the contrast enhancing the colours and making it sharper and visual appealing. Therefore, the moment captured “can be expanded and re-created and the world [food] is explored, observed, and remodelled instead of being represented (Calefato et al. 2016:381), emphasis added. Given this, food on Instagram will rarely look as *it really is*.

Cohen (2005:888) notes that photobloggers access the ‘real life’ through digital photography taking photos of life as it happens. He claims that “with photoblogging practices, conversely, the digital prepares the field for the introduction of the Real, for the introduction of ‘real life’ into photography”.

I noticed that sometimes respondents would use the word filter both to refer to Instagram filters and the basic editing of brightness and contrast¹²³. Often it was clear from the context what they meant, in other situations I had to ask for clarifications. Respondents claimed that they are always trying to make the photo visually more appealing, even though not all of them know much about lighting, angles, apertures, etc. While some of them do just small editing and corrections on their phone, others use Photoshop or Lightroom to touch up colours, light and shadows. For instance, Greta firstly uploads the photos taken with her camera on her computer, then she edits them in Lightroom and email them to herself. Next, she saves the photos on her phone and use another filter and finally she uploads them on Instagram. Katja thinks that sometimes this is unnecessary and added: “the beauty of Instagram it’s that it is instant, so why bother? People are getting so serious about the quality of the pictures, but this is not necessary with food”. Yet, it depends on the purpose of the blog- if it is for business or perceived as a portfolio, people indeed want to upload better images and will pay more attention to it. During my fieldwork, I started to be more aware of the new trendiness of classifying food as *Instagram*¹²⁴ *worthy or unworthy*; a play of inclusion and exclusion. Although they will not take a photo or style every meal, they will still have the urge to prepare something worth photographing. In this occasions, they will not upload the photo on Instagram the same day, but just save it in a folder on their phone for those days when they will need to upload something, but they will not

¹²³ On Instagram or Photoshop

¹²⁴ Or blog

have the time to cook. Since styling can occasionally take a lot of time, the interest in food, photography and the ‘thinking in pictures’ have gradually changed the daily routine of my interviewees.

My respondents have a clear idea about what can and what cannot be uploaded on their account¹²⁵, for instance, they will not upload the same dish repeatedly, or a ‘boring’¹²⁶, unattractive and unhealthy meal which does not fit their usual styling. Occasionally, they will post food that does not look nice but tastes good and they will explain it in the caption, e.g. “it’s so nice, it looks like a mess, but try it” (Amber).

Other reasons to upload poor quality (food) photos is when they want to show the atmosphere of a certain place or recommend a restaurant. Katja explained:

I ate in a Bulgarian restaurant and I posted the photo because I wanted to show the restaurant to people and to recommend it but the lighting was very bad, the table cloth was also not so beautiful and I still posted because I wanted to show people you can eat there, it’s a very good place.

It should be highlighted that food bloggers need to pay attention to the overall styling of their account and not only of a few pictures, since people will decide if to follow them or not based on the first six to twelve photos that they initially see. Brenda said:

Styling is very important. It sounds so shallow when I talk about that but it’s your *Instagram* wall, and then is the picture, and the *Instagram* wall has to look as good as the picture itself [emphasis added].



Figure 2: Example of food styling

¹²⁵ which usually depends on their personal preferences.

¹²⁶ Such as a combination of some crackers, cheese, grapes, quark with raisings etc.

The average time needed to style the photo(s) vary from respondent to respondent; usually it is around ten minutes but sometimes it can take a bit longer if the styling is done for the blog: “the problem with food is that you have just one opportunity to make it good” (C.R.). Before opening their blog, they thought it would take much more time but Olivia, who is not posting food every day, said that often it takes her up to one hour to style her dish “because every time is like the first time because you are not into it and you don’t know which way is the best”. On the other hand, Esther sees her blog as a hobby and when she is cooking and styling she likes to take her time for it and usually it is between one to two hours. “I think that the styling and taking pictures takes from half an hour to forty-five minutes. I don’t mind because I like it. I do it as a hobby and I like spending my time working on that”.

The dietician Joyce Haddad emphasizes that “social media is flooded with perfect-looking meals, decorated with colourful fruit, veg and edible flowers. The general public don’t have the time to make all their meals look picture perfect” (Breheny 2016). I was always wondering, while looking at foodies’ different accounts on Instagram, if their meals are always so perfectly styled and how much time does it take. Before opening her blog, Klara thought the same and added: “yeah, I always wonder the same. Some people have always pretty plates, but then I think: is your food cold when you start eating?!”. Surprisingly, a few respondents admitted that they style their food even if they are not going to take a picture of it – they did it before having Instagram, and they are still doing it now. They believe that some meals (e.g. oatmeal porridge) look quite boring without some toppings on it and that food always tastes better if it looks pretty. Gwen said:

Actually I do, even when it’s not on the pictures it still looks like that, but it just takes me a couple of minutes. I love to make my food look pretty and I have always done it just for myself.

Although there is still a tendency in thinking that women’s place is in the kitchen and in the realm of the domestic, DeVault considers that “cooking as caring operates as a form of doing gender in which a woman conducts herself as recognizably womanly” (DeVault 1991 *in* Cairns et al. 2010:592). Yet, for female foodies or food lovers, being in the kitchen, cooking and baking is not making them inferior or submissive to their men. They enjoy spending their free time in the kitchen because preparing food, playing with ingredients, flavours, and new cooking techniques relax them and give them power and control, especially today when fewer people have time to cook. Sometimes they will not let their boyfriends in the kitchen while cooking or they will unwillingly let them cook, because they perceive their kitchen as a place “where the magic happens” (Rita). However, they like to share their meals with others because “that’s one

of the nicest things of cooking”¹²⁷ (C.R.). For instance, Kim is a twenty-three years old social work student and food blogger living with her boyfriend who does not like to cook and is not good at it. She said: “everything is cooked for him, he has just to sit and eat”. However, she did not perceive it as a negative thing or as a typical womanly duty because cooking and baking makes her feel happy and satisfied.

On the other hand, Brenda exercises her power and control in the kitchen in an entirely different way. She is a person who needs to have control over at least one thing in her life and currently her controlling part is satisfied through cooking and uploading photos on Instagram. Her control over food is probably a result of her eating disorders of a few years ago: “food was a negative thing in my life even though I comforted myself with it. It was something negative, but now I feel that when posting pictures and blogging I changed it to something positive”. Sedacca (2016) explained that food offers some millennials “a feeling of control over their lives a psychological utility by consuming better-quality foods”.

8.1. Camera in mind

I think in picture

(Amber)

The lunch room had on its wall small Instagram pictures of people who tagged their meals, and most of the pictures hanging on the wall were Adam’s. Since we are both passionate about photography, we firstly started to talk about that. He showed me some recent photos on his phone and described his shooting style and technique. When the meal arrived, he said: “first camera and then eating”. He stood up, took a few photos of our meals, and added: “now we can eat”.

¹²⁷ Klara's boyfriend said: “As the food bloggers boyfriend, you know the kitchen is off limits. You can look at it from afar, yes, but that’s about it. She doesn’t want you stirring in her pots and pans, and she doesn’t really allow you anywhere near her stove in general. So, when you are allowed into the kitchen, you better make something special. Something delicious, and bonus points if it’s ‘bloggable’”. C. R. said: “My boyfriend once told me that he would like to cook for me but he is not sure if I would like it. I asked him way and he replied ‘because you are so perfect in your dishes, in you taste, I am afraid to cook for you’”.



Figure 3: Lunch with Adam

The aim of this short introduction was meant to give a glimpse of my respondents' daily eating practices. Even though my respondents mainly identified as food bloggers, they could also be perceived as photobloggers due to their photographic practices and their (over)posting of food images on Instagram. Cohen's (2005) article about photobloggers helped me to understand and untie the power that drives my respondents' devotion (or obsession) to take photos. I deduced that photobloggers and food bloggers share almost the same patterns: "photo-making is done with the blog partially in mind, most bloggers have a sense of how they will post a photo as or before they make it and the blog comes to exist within, and enrich, the moment of photography. It makes the picturemaking more enjoyable" (Cohen 2005:895). In comparison with Cohen who states that the blog "exists in the moment of photography, but it is not *why* they take the photo", for my respondents it is the opposite: they explicitly take photos for their blog or, more precisely, for Instagram. As I already mentioned, Instagram is in a way a PR for their blog and motivates them to take and upload more photos to become known and visible online. Cohen (2006:897) explained that four entities are integrated into photoblogs *or food blogs*:

(1) the self of the photoblogger, (2) a potential audience (*followers*) for the self's activities, (3) those activities themselves (taking *food* photos) and (4) the technologies (*camera, Instagram*) that operate in and around these entities¹²⁸.

The majority of my respondents are usually cooking with the camera in mind and thinking how to combine textures, colours, composition and the right amount of available light. The latter is particularly seen as a problem during the winter because it affects their cooking time. They have a clear idea how their dish should look like on the plate because when they did not have time to think about it in advance, the

¹²⁸ Emphasis added

quality of their pictures was lower. They believe that food must taste good and look nice. If they run out of ideas, they will try to find inspiration both on Instagram and Pinterest “to see how other people did it” (Tess). Greta told me that generally she knows what she wants and she is usually inspired by all the photos that she liked on Instagram or saved on her computer: “I want to be inspired by all kinds of photos I like, then I leave them again at the computer and then I am just going to take photos with all the inspiration on mind”. I was stunned to find out how far my respondents would go for a perfect image – sometimes they will put their meal on the floor and stand up on a chair or use a ladder to take a picture from a bit higher whereas in other situations they will not mind lying on the floor either. Often a wonderful picture results in a cold meal.



Figure 4: Photo shooting

Since my respondents learnt a lot about photography looking at other profiles and attending workshops, their styling is, expectedly, very much alike and homogeneous. For instance, using ingredients for decoration¹²⁹ or edible flowers has become almost a mainstream, and it is very common on different Instagram accounts. Rita admitted that she thinks about the camera and how to cook and combine ingredients before going to the supermarket:

When I go to the supermarket I already have an idea what to cook and how to combine it. In the supermarket, I am like ‘if I cut it and open it is yellow so maybe it is nice if there is a little bit of purple’ and then I buy a red cabbage. I think about the camera just before going in the supermarket.

¹²⁹ so, people can already see the main ingredients and guess what is inside

Similarly acts Adam, who said:

I have the picture in my mind before cooking, because is more like 'hey I want to have my picture like that, and I will use these ingredients because of the colours'. The way I am going to style it, the way I am going to cut my vegetables in that kind of shape. So, if I have already this in mind I can I can put the recipe on my plate and after take my photo, and then sometimes is not the same, but most of the time it is. Yes, this is what I want and that's why I upload pictures, because I am satisfied with my own creation otherwise I will not upload it.

On the other hand, some respondents believe that styling gets improved with more practice and experience as it does the 'camera in mind'. They do not think about photographs while cooking because when they try to realize their ideas, they usually fail and get disappointed. They consider their styling to be more spontaneous and "a natural process" (Katja) because they are not thinking too much about it. C. R., a creative foodie and food blogger from Amsterdam, said: "I put it on the plate and I fix the details and sometimes I will shine a tomato a little bit for the picture and that's it. Then I choose an angle, I make a picture and I also do a little with light, but I don't have professional things". Sanne is a finance and HR assistant and, since recently, a personal body coach. She started blogging two years ago, and she admitted that sometimes she sees other food bloggers having nice details in their photos and she thinks that the next time she could do the same, but usually she forgets about it. Katja said that if something is "picture worthy" and if she knows that she will take a picture of it, she will style the plate:

Whenever the food is ready, I don't just throw it on it on the plate. If I think that something is missing to make a better picture I will just added it. We eat for survival, pleasure, for a beautiful picture. If I have to choose between two meals at a restaurant or two cakes, I would go for the beautiful one sometimes. Just for the picture, you know?!

9. HASHTAGS

Hashtags are like a searching engine, and without them is hard to find photos and accounts

(Sanne)

The aim of this chapter is to show the multipurpose of hashtags – they can allow and form particular types of communities, they became new means of classification and categorization of contents on Instagram, and lastly, they are essential for attracting more followers and enhancing the visibility of Instagram accounts. The chapter will explore the power of hashtags and, taking Brenda’s story as an example, the consequences of not using them.

Lewis (2014:617) explains that everyone can invent a hashtag and it is a “symbol used to categorize, highlight, or tag topics and keywords (...) and is signified by the use of the pound sign (#)”. Chris Messina posted the first hashtag on Twitter in 2007, and he proposed the usage of hashtags to help users to search much easier for contents and updates¹³⁰. “It was created organically by Twitter users as a way to categorize messages” (Scott 2015:12). Although hashtags gained popularity on Twitter, their use was extended and adopted by other social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Flickr, etc.¹³¹

Instagram welcomed hashtags in 2011, and four years later it enabled the use of emoji as hashtags (Giannoulakis & Tsapatsoulis 2016:2). Even though hashtags were initially meant for organizing information, in the context of Instagram they “describe the visual content of images”, facilitate the search of photos and boost users’ visibility (ibid., 3). My respondents noticed that many people use hashtags which are not relevant to the photo and they believe that, when it comes to food, it is advisable to use just those hashtags that truly describe the content of the image. “If you post a (*photo of*) a cat, you cannot put the hashtag #cake. This is stupid, but I see that people will do that to get likes or followers” (C.R.), [emphasis added]. Thus, using the right hashtags is imperative. Eva, a food blogger from Utrecht, stated:

I feel like using hashtags attract the right people to a specific picture. But if you don’t stick to a particular style of food (photography), the people who find you through your hashtags will not become a follower. For instance: if I give one picture the hashtag #vegan, but the next picture is of a big steak, chances are the vegan that found my vegan picture, will not become a follower.

¹³⁰ “Hashtag”, *Wikipedia*, URL: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hashtag#In_popular_culture (accessed 24-11-2016)

¹³¹ Ibid.

Bruns and Burgess (2011b *in* Highfield and Leaver 2015:5) indicate that although “hashtags can allow certain types of communities to emerge and form”, not all hashtags are used with that intention in mind. For this reason, Highfield and Leaver (2015:5) point out that hashtags are contextually and platform-specific and that “ascribing intentionality to hashtags cannot be taken as given”. However, we can still perceive them as new means of (informal) classification and visualisation (*ibid.*). Mathes (2004 *in* Highfield and Leaver 2015:5) supports the view that “social tagging leads to a folksonomy (...) which is always in the process of being generated by users and updated with new contributions (...)” In other words, folksonomy reflects the vocabulary and terminology of users (Mathes 2004:7). Marthes argues that folksonomies are not a set of prearranged terms and for this reason they are seen less as classification and more as categorization because of its flexible nature (2004:4).

Highfield and Leaver (2015:5) and Aynsley (2016) emphasize that hashtags help to link people (followers) with similar interests and passion and that they became a (new) way of organizing and categorizing contents on Instagram. “We believe every community needs a hashtag, and every hashtag needs a tagboard”¹³². In the realm of food blogs, hashtags function mainly as a searching engine for inspiration, motivation, and easier self-promotion. Respondents said:

KLARA: So, Instagram is really easy because you just put some hashtags and people find you. It’s way easier to have a promotion. Hashtags are really important on Instagram because you can find people who are interested in your pictures and topic.

JENNA: When I have at home red lentils but I don’t know what to do with them, I will enter on Instagram the hashtag *#redlentils* to see what others have done and find a nice recipe.

KIM: Sometimes I also find inspiration on other blogs and using hashtags. People found my blog because I am using a lot of hashtags but with time I learnt which hashtags works more and attract more people/followers.

Based on their experience, my respondents agreed that in the beginning it is important to use a lot of hashtags because they make you more visible in the online community and help you to attract more followers and subsequently, more likes and comments. The more (popular) hashtags they use, the more likes they will get beneath their photos and everyone has his strategy how to employ them. While someone likes to hashtag every word in the caption, others find it irritating and favour only the hashtagging of specific terms for reaching targeted group of people¹³³ (e.g. *#vegan*, *#wholefoods*, *#glutenfree*, *#plantbased*, etc.). Angela observed that some Instagram profiles have a small number of followers, but they have a lot

¹³² This is the quote of the American company Tagboard which was founded in 2011 and help strengthen online communities

¹³³ Since the competition is huge, some food bloggers (due to their health issues) decided to narrow their target audience and focus just on people with food intolerances.

of likes on every picture because they use the right (or the most popular¹³⁴) hashtags. Nora, who uses a lot of hashtags and sometimes has up to a thousand likes, said:

Thanks to hashtags I started to have more feedbacks and people were asking for my recipes. I use English hashtags, maybe one or two Dutch. I think that hashtags help, because people can find your pictures. For me, hashtags are a way to associate my photo with a topic or word. For me hashtags are a combination of association and searching engine.

When food bloggers gain more followers and popularity, they tend to decrease the number of hashtags in the caption; however, it does not influence the number of likes they get (they will remain steadily high or even increase). “So, if someone has a lot of followers he doesn’t need to put a lot of hashtags” (Angela). This is particularly the case for those food bloggers who opened their account two or three years ago¹³⁵, and who are now Insta famous. For Instance, Esther and Greta (who started blogging a few years ago) will quickly reach more than 200 likes without hashtags, or with just one. Besides, when they become more influential online, they sometimes purposely skip hashtags because they want that content to be primarily seen by their followers. Greta explained:

Sometimes I use zero hashtags and have 2000 likes, I am not very strategic about that actually. Sometimes I just want to post something for my own followers... If I post something personal I don’t need ten hashtags. This is to talk with my own followers and if other people find it it’s fine.

Esther gave an interesting remark saying that “in the beginning hashtags are very important to attract more followers, but it’s also the other way around, find a hashtag, you can find potential followers”. Contrary to popular belief, sometimes it is better to choose hashtags with fewer posts (e.g. *#gezond* instead of *#healthy*) because the uploaded photos will be found much more easily and will not get lost among myriad of others. Esther claims that usually those hashtags have a better quality of pictures. Food bloggers discovered the power of “branded hashtags”¹³⁶ (Aynsley 2016), and they are creating hashtags with the name of their blog, both to promote themselves but also to persuade people who recreated their recipes to use that hashtag to create communities. To give an example:

ESTHER: Usually I put the hashtag *#thehealthykitchen* so that people see that clearly and they can maybe click on the hashtag and use it themselves as well.

AMBER: Now I like it more when people click on her hashtag *#eefsfood* because it’s like a folder of all my pictures and you can find everything there.

¹³⁴ According to my respondents, some of the most popular hashtags are *#vegan*, *#avocado*, *#oatmeal*, *#vegetarian*, *#healthy*, *#gezond*, *#cleaneating* etc.

¹³⁵ During the boom of food bloggers in the Netherlands.

¹³⁶ Used in the domain of Instagram marketing, companies create hashtags using the name of the company, products, and events.

I noticed that my respondents often use the same number of hashtags and the same group of hashtags (with some variations¹³⁷) under different photos. When they want to increase the number of likes and followers, they will use the hashtags they saw on the Instagram page of famous food bloggers. “I guess hashtags give you more reach, more people and companies will see your pictures” (Iris). Nikki mentioned:

You put hashtags under your pictures that you searched for. I do that. I search for foodie or healthy food or motivation or inspiration... I think that you put a hashtag that you search for yourself under your picture. I haven't thought about it, I just post something that comes to my mind.

Since my respondents want to reach a broader audience, they are mainly using a combination of English and Dutch hashtags and are steadily finding out which ones work better to get more likes and followers¹³⁸. Although they are aware that putting too many hashtags does not look nice, they believe that this is a necessary means towards success. Klara noted:

In the morning, it's easy to do a lot of Dutch hashtags because Dutch people are on Instagram, in the afternoon you do English hashtags because then it's more like, international audience.

Klara mentioned that some prominent web pages created their unique hashtags and persuade people to use them and, if they like the tagged photos, they will repost them on their Instagram account¹³⁹. For instance, the Dutch food magazine Foodies encourage readers to use the hashtags *#iamfoodies* every time they recreate recipes from the magazine. Small food bloggers, indeed, take advantage of it. She said:

Popular web pages like Foodgawker have also their hashtags that you can use. Once I uploaded on my Instagram account a picture of my sandwich taken at the food festival in Breda and I put the hashtag *#eater* and the webpage saw my picture and reposted it on their account. For me it was very important because they have a lot of followers so a lot of people could see my photo. That's way a lot of people use popular hashtags as well to hope that somebody will notice them and that one of these accounts repost their picture, because their whole Instagram account just exists of pictures of other people.

Since styling is very important in the realm of food blogging, I have recently noticed a new tendency of hiding hashtags in the comment box to make the caption look less chaotic and more pleasing to the eye. Although hashtags are necessary, Esther does not like seeing them in the caption because they are irritating and hiding her top comments¹⁴⁰. Since she wants all her comments to be visible, she decided to add them in the comment box below the caption because after a few comments they will not be seen. Other food bloggers decided to split their hashtags from the caption hiding them “beneath dots and line breaks” (Aynsley 2016). Other respondents also stated that they find hashtags distracting, annoying “and not nice

¹³⁷ For instance, some bloggers always use the same ten hashtags and will eventually add five more depending on the ingredients they used to prepare the meal.

¹³⁸ Jenna told me that it took her a lot of time to discover which hashtags works better than others, and in the beginning, she was experimenting a lot.

¹³⁹ Remember Gwen's experience when recreating Lisa's recipe and posting it online.

¹⁴⁰ In this way, you can see just the last three comments

to see” (Jenna). Thus, they decided to use just a few of them, although they are conscious that it will have an adverse impact on the visibility of their photo on Instagram. Sanne and Sabina said:

SANNE: I don’t know how much hashtags are important, but too much hashtags irritates me and I don’t want to do this... I understand, but when you look at it (*the photo*), you only see just hashtags and for this reason I am not doing it [emphasis added].

SABINA: I don’t use them much. I think it’s annoying, I don’t read them and I’m not gonna put twenty hashtags just to get a few more likes. I do it for myself; I do it for the website.

Those who do not like using hashtags, struggle with themselves because they are aware of their importance, but they have a deep aversion towards them. When I found out Brenda’s Instagram account, I was stunned by her amazing pictures and I noticed that, despite the nice styling, she had no more than a thousand followers¹⁴¹. Brenda affirmed that she does not have a lot of followers “because she is not really into hashtags”¹⁴². She added that many people contacted her saying that they like her page and they advised her to use more hashtags if she wants to grow and be noticed in the online community. At first, she refused to use hashtags because she perceived them as a way of showing off, but now she is having a hard time going from avoiding hashtags “to making that step”. She said:

People use a lot of hashtags because they want to be seen. I understand that but I find it really hard to make that step, because for me it was already a big step to have Instagram. A few years ago, I was against this thing and I didn’t like Facebook either. I was against it because I was thinking why I needs to have and share my life in the social media world, where everything seems like a lie and you make everything prettier than it is. I would like to explain people that I am not doing this because I want attention but because I like to share what she like. On my personal Instagram, I would never put certain hashtags. I upload there photos that I like and I don’t care about followers or likes, but this is something that I would like people to see. I agree that using hashtags is a good idea but I think how to make it not look so shallow. (...) I don’t want it to be a lie. (...) For instance, I don’t like to use hashtags such as *#healthy* even though I am using them, because my idea of healthy can be totally different from somebody else’s idea. I find it really hard to name and label things. I don’t want to do that, but it needs to be done.

During interviews, I observed that respondents were using quite frequently modal verbs of obligation such as I need to, I have to, I feel obligated to, etc., although they claimed that their blog is just for fun or a hobby¹⁴³. Why do they put so much pressure on them, even though they do not have pretensions to grow¹⁴⁴, became famous or earn money from it? Do they really believe in it or they were just trying to convince themselves and me? How to keep the integrity of the blog when it turns into a chore or ‘homework’?

¹⁴¹ Which is indeed not too much

¹⁴² I noticed that after the interviews she started to use more hashtags and the number of followers slightly increased.

¹⁴³ “We are not using too much hashtags but we have still a lot of likes. In the beginning hashtags were really important but now I don’t know why I am putting hashtags. We don’t need to, but I still feel like I need to do it” (Liv).

¹⁴⁴ “A lot of people now start writing about food which is ok, but I don’t get it why everybody wants to be on the top. I think that sometimes is ok to do it for a small audience” (Sanne).

10. FOLLOWERS, LIKES AND COMMENTS

Because it is a very addicting thing. When you upload one picture you want to put it more and more. I have other things to do during the day but that it is very addicting to get likes, comments and followers. It sounds so stupid but it is. I think a lot people know what I mean.

(Amber)

The aim of this last chapter is to explore the modes of self-presentation and the significance and usefulness of self-expression and self-promotion in the domain of social media, focusing on the Instagram food(ie) community. I will show how my respondents engage with their ‘audience’ and in what ways the interconnection between likes, followers, and comments create Instagram ‘celebrities’.

Tyer (2016:30) claims that photos are often modified and retouched to accumulate more likes from friends and followers. Alshawaf and Wen (2015:2) argue that the significance of a photo uploaded on Instagram depends on the number of likes it gets and it concurrently indicates follower’s admiration and engagement with a particular post or photo. “‘Likability’ and ‘engagement’ are two critical interaction features of Instagram, where ‘likability’ is a quantitative result showing the popularity of a specific post and ‘engagement’ reflects the textual interaction with the post by writing comment(s)” (ibid.). Thus, likes and comments are indicators that the uploaded content “was able to attract attention” (McPartland 2013 *in* Tyer 2016:30) and they are powerful features for building, what Alshawaf and Wen (2015) called digital reputation and fame. Taking into account the stories of my respondents, I will explain how the popularity of food bloggers on Instagram is both the outcome of the “content of the image” and the “social cues (likes, comments, hashtags, followers and tags) that the image provides” (ibid., 3). “Even though the action of ‘liking’ is simple, it carries a great deal of value and meaning, which helps establish relationships between followers and the publishers of posts and online material” (Suler 2008 *in* Alshawaf and Wen 2015:3). For instance, respondents told me that they will always like nice (food) photos because they know how much effort is needed for styling it and taking a good shot. However, Sabina was a bit critical and said:

It’s like getting a plus for something that you do, people get the recognition or at least they think that they get a recognition based on the amount of likes they get, which I find very strange. I don’t post on Instagram or anywhere else to get the likes, I liked it when I got likes, it means that someone appreciate your job or is inspired.

From my point of view, respondents often underestimated the power and impact of likes since they believe that comments and followers are more relevant and useful for the growth of their account. Their assumptions are perhaps linked to the fact that the number of followers is the first thing that people see

when visiting someone's profile and on this basis, they can deduce how famous or influential the person/blogger is. As Olivia said, "everything starts with likes: people like your photo, then start scrolling for other ones and if they like what they see they will start to follow you". She concluded that both likes and followers are indicators of success. A few respondents shared Olivia's point of view and said that they would probably stop uploading photos on Instagram if nobody would like them. Brenda added:

I try not to rely on it... that my mood depends on it. When somebody (*who has a lot of followers*) likes my photo, write a comment about how good is my photo or recipe, I become really motivated. [Emphasis added].

Following this logic, likes are the basic impetus for uploading food photos, while followers and comments are superstructures. Positive feedback acts as a stimulant for personal growth. Adam explained:

Nobody likes negative feedback, it's de-motivating. With positive feedback, you can grow, but it's also nice so, that's very important for me. I want to grow in a way to show more of me, more of my food to the world and with positive feedback you want to go there, strive more for people to see you. Important is to grow, not to stay at the same level, you have to be more satisfying for the people who are following you.

As their accounts grow, their priorities change too: instead of running for more followers and likes they will 'settle down' and be happier when somebody recreates their recipes and tag them in the photo. In this way, they can compare their photo with others who recreated their recipe.

10.1. Followers

During interviews, I would usually ask my respondents what makes them happier- getting more likes, followers, or comments (positive feedback) and I got diverse and intricate answers¹⁴⁵. Although more likes encourage them to keep on doing what they started and to improve their cooking and styling skills, most of them prefer getting more followers and comments because in this way they build their network. When somebody starts following them it means that this person likes their overall account and not just one or two pictures. Here are some examples:

BRENDA: I never really thought about what makes me happier, having more likes or followers. (...) I prefer having more followers, it means that they like the overall pictures, they like your style.

¹⁴⁵ Sometimes they found it difficult to decide what makes them happier since likes, followers and comments are interrelated and one affects the other (more likes might lead to more followers, and the latter forms communities and engagement). Sanne said: "when you are expecting more followers you hope to get more likes in the future".

When they like a picture they just like that one and maybe they watched my wall, and said maah! (she waved her hand).

GWEN: Those people (*followers*) see your pictures every day and likes are just for one picture and they don't see your (*future*) work anymore, emphasis added.

EVA: (...) Generating followers for my blog. Honestly, I get annoyed when a delicious plate of warm food cools down because I'm trying to take an amazing picture. But then seeing the likes and comments on your pictures, and the increase in traffic, it's worthwhile again.

Another reason why my respondents are grateful for all their followers is because they are the ones who make them (Insta) famous and the ones who support them: "you are actually big and famous because of those people" (Olivia). Although not all the respondents perceived them as their audience or 'readers', they agreed that followers have probably some expectations and give/set them deadlines and if they do not post regularly they will be unfollowed. Hence, interviewees confessed that sometimes they will apologize¹⁴⁶ for not being online or they will post a photo of 'something' they (*the followers*) would like to see¹⁴⁷, e.g. "I am not cooking for them but sometimes I think maybe they would love this" (Amber). However, they still want to be autonomous because if they post too often just what their followers expect from them or like, they would not enjoy it anymore. Brenda claimed: "maybe when I make something I don't really wanna make it again just because my followers like it".

On the one hand, Katja who has more than 15000 followers, claimed that she does not believe that her followers expect something from her and when she uploads a photo, after a few days of being idle, she does it because her feed needs to be updated, not because of them. But then, her attitude raises the question, why her feed needs to be updated if it is not for her followers? For whom is she doing it? She mentioned that she needs to upload *something* because this is an obligation to herself, but why she forces herself if she does not have a clear goal? In the beginning, she cared more about her followers and felt the pressure to post "everything every day". According to other followers, this is the proof that famous food bloggers become lazier with time because they achieved their goal and now they are less stressed to post, because even if they lose a few followers, they will still be on the top.

On the other hand, Greta had contradictive thoughts: at first, she said that she is not willing to sacrifice her happiness because of her followers, although she mentioned that she feels "somehow obligated to post" because of them. However, shortly after that she said: "I also try to interact with them and I do feel obligated to post regularly but I don't feel that as pressure because I really want to as well, I really like to. So, it's not for me something I have to do, something I want and like to do".

¹⁴⁶ E.g. "I am sorry for the lack of (foodporn) posts the past few weeks. I am just so busy moving, graduating, working, etc. But I promise I'll be back within a few weeks..." (P.).

¹⁴⁷ Based on previous experience. Emphasis added.

Interviewees told me to pay more attentions to the so-called *ghost followers*¹⁴⁸ and to the fact that a lot of people on Instagram buys followers, likes and even comments. This is a public secret that everybody knows but no one is taking measures against it. Usually, my respondents would recount this anecdote starting with this (or similar) words: “I heard a lot of stories about people who want to buy followers and likes...” or “I have a friend who didn’t have a lot of followers and she wanted to buy some of them...” (Angela). Moreover, they told me that a lot of people are playing dishonestly: they start to follow a lot of people, and when those people start to follow them back they delete them. Kim said:

I think that a lot of people are buying their followers and likes, but you still cannot buy comments. I would never buy followers because those people don’t like your work and what is the point then? I see those people like business and if you click on their name they don’t have anything on their page – they don’t have followers and photos, but they are following a lot of accounts. I think that people who do that they are just doing it because of their name – if they have a lot of followers they will be ranked very high.

As I mentioned earlier in the text, it seems that ‘collecting’ followers has turned into a ‘sport’ where competition, obsession, and business coexist together. This is why my respondents wanted to take distance from *those* people saying that they want to have *real* followers, the ones who are sincerely interested in their work and who will interact with them. Klara explained: “(...) I don’t wanna do it in a fake way, I just wanna have real followers not those tricks when you can have a thousand followers in one day”. They are convinced that big (food) accounts have a lot of ghost followers because there is no balance between the number of followers and the likes they get per picture. Having a big number of followers (e.g. 100.000) but just a few likes (e.g. 800) is a sign that something is wrong and that the account has lots of ghost followers.

10.2. Comments

After getting more followers and broadening their network, respondents are the happiest when they get nice comments and positive feedback, which are always encouraging and makes them confident and proud of their work. Comments are relevant because they help to share knowledge and build up relationships, communities, and interaction. Hence, they make the feed alive and interactive. For instance, Rita failed a few times to do a cucumber rose and followers suggested her how to do that - with a cheese slicer and a bit of salt. She said: “It is really nice to exchange information’ and to help one another”.

¹⁴⁸ The ones who like a lot of profiles but never leave likes or comments.

Respondents revealed that they appreciate that comments and feedbacks from ‘strangers’ more than the ones they get from their family and friends. This is a public recognition of their work, and therefore they find it more motivational because it is a sign that they are on the right path. Kim explained:

The comments and feedbacks that I get, help my self-esteem. When I started to cook, and bake my family and friends liked it and gave me nice comments but I said ‘you are my family so of course that you think that it is nice’. If I get positive feedback from people that I don’t know and when they ask for recipes it makes me feel good and more positive about my work. You get more secure like ‘ok so, I am really good at this’ and this is very nice and that the followers start growing. It is pretty weird how much it can do for me and it gives me such a good and nice feeling.

Brenda added:

You don’t realize from yourself that you are doing something good and when somebody acknowledges it and says ‘I like it’, oh well... I didn’t really know. It helps and the (*number of*) followers too’. [Emphasis added].

From my point of view, comments give them pleasure and satisfaction because this is *something* that their followers *do* for them (usually the other way around); they engage with the content, and they take their time for doing that¹⁴⁹. I believe that this reciprocity plays a key role in the Instagram food(ie) community and it gives to food bloggers power and influence. To give an example, Maya (whose Instagram account was voted as one of the top five Instagram to follow by the French Vogue) was invited as a speaker on the first blogging conference in Croatia (November 2016) and she shared with her followers how anxious she was about it. After getting lots of encouraging comments, she thanked her followers saying:

Your supportive comments on my last two posts really made me feel less nervous and stressed out, and even made me more confident! Thank you so so much for that! For taking time and effort. I wish I could hug you all!!!

What I aimed to show with this quote is the supportiveness of the Instagram (food) community and how much it means for my respondents. However, we have to keep in mind two things: first, since Instagram is turning into a microblogging those replies are usually very short, generic, and superficial. Even my respondents admitted that they mostly get the same comments (e.g. amazing, lovely pic, this is so pretty, looks great, love this, lekker, delicious...) and they give similar replies¹⁵⁰ (e.g. thank you so much, it is lovely to hear, it makes me smile, etc.), which can be annoying for the ‘reader’ too. To give an example, Klara was bothered with one follower who was always posting the same comments below her photos, and she told her: “I don’t want to be mean, but you replied to more of my photos with just the word ‘amazing’...”. I believe her reaction was both courageous and harmful (bad PR) for a small food blogger who aims to grow. I am convinced that other respondents would not react like this.

¹⁴⁹ Liking photos requires less time.

¹⁵⁰ For Instance, in most cases Esther will reply with a ‘thank you’, but if she sees that certain followers always post the same comments on every picture, she will not reply to them anymore.

Second, as with likes and followers, comments can be bought too. During late spring, comments such as “click here if you want to have more followers” invaded the accounts of my respondents. They mentioned that some people buy comments so they do not have to reply because “the robot gives comments” instead of them. Greta said: “Sometimes I wonder if some bloggers do that, because they are always leaving the same comments on my Instagram, such as looks so lovely, looks so amazing, looks so good”.

So, if we take into account these two points and the fact that (as I mentioned before) certain food bloggers leaves comments below other pictures just because they hope those accounts will start to follow or reply them back, how can those comments be motivating and on which basis? Somebody could clearly get a feeling that the whole story about friendships and engagement is a bit of a farce and ephemeral. Nonetheless, I do believe that certain conversations started in the comment box continue and develop in the inbox, or on other social media, but this is something that we do not see - we can just suppose. It is also true that many online friendships are extended offline¹⁵¹, in particular between those food bloggers who frequently meet on different workshops and food bloggers events and meetings.

¹⁵¹ Casual drinks, lunches, meetings...

11. CONCLUSION:

In the second part of the thesis, I aimed to clarify why visual social media became popular platforms for self-expression, self-promotion, and communication in the realm of the culture of connectivity. Gauntlett 2011 claims that “blogs *and Instagram accounts* provides a useful forum for learning, sharing knowledge, and improving practice, and those blogs focused on making things, such as food, forms strong communities, with a strong sense of connection- or belonging- among members” (Gauntlett 2011 *in* Lofgren 2013:39), emphasis added. Moreover, the Instagram food blogging community provides views into the food(ie) culture and became “an archive of food habits of ordinary people” (Lofgren 2013:45).

The case studies presented in the thesis support the belief that (food) photography on Instagram facilitates self-expression, individualism, and expressiveness more than text and (food) blogs. For instance, I showed that in most of the cases the ‘extension’ of the blog on Instagram is more popular and visited than the blog page itself. Although my respondent rarely mentioned it, I observed that the name of their blog reflects well their lifestyle and often says as much about them as the photos they upload. This is how Nora explained why she named her blog *quirky cooky*¹⁵²:

I am thinking out of the box and *quirky* means somebody who is a little bit crazy and people thought that I was crazy because I started this. I was always thinking out of the box, on my way standing out from the crowd and this is my own *quirky* thing.

Van Dijck’s (2011:412) work highlights that the “algorithms of social networking sites (*embedded in the culture of connectivity*) are gradually penetrating the core of our daily routines and practices” because of their constant and unending presence, emphasis added. Rethinking van Dijck (2011) article and the statement of my respondents, it seems that algorithms became the dominant force in our networked society. I explained how severely they impacted the Instagram online community and the blogging and posting practices from March 2016 onwards. Yet, based on the information we provide online, algorithms (in)directly suggest people that we should know and contact with because of the same ‘interests’. According to Beer, the power of the algorithm “could be considered the core of the technological unconscious; algorithms help to connect and interpret users’ metadata to reveal behavioural patterns, which in turn can be used to actually steer users’ behaviour by adjusting the interface” (Beer 2009 *in* van Dijck 2011:403). Respectively, Maya wrote on her account:

I guess you’ve all heard about the new staff being introduced into @instagram. An algorithm that will limit what and when we will see in our feed. Someone else practically will be choosing what

¹⁵² To give a few other examples, Gwen named her blog *miss_havermout* because oats are her favourite product to work with, Brenda adores peanut butter and chose to name her blog *dontforgetthepeanutbutter*, etc.

we see, taking away our freedom to choose and I say authenticity of all of this! I think it can literally ruin this beautiful community we have here. What it means is that fairness and genuity of this platform will be gone. The one that pays for the promotion will be seen. And that's it. Everybody's bound to loose.

I decided to summarize the posting and creative practices of my respondents through the works of Tyer (2016) and Alshawaf and Wen (2015). I believe that their approach to (visual) social media and blogging practices (particularly the Self-Promotion Cycle) perfectly outlines that sharing food photos on Instagram became a new means of connectedness, engagement, belonging, and recognition. These two articles combined explain how the motivation for uploading food photos online (as a way of self-expression, and 'learnt performance') help Instagrammers to promote themselves and their lifestyle to develop a digital reputation. Although it might not be evident at first, the main ideas of the authors indirectly comprise motivation, food photography, styling and the importance of followers, comments and likes in attaining popularity. It will be illustrated by the Self-Promotion Cycle at the end of the text.

Tyer (2016:30) claims that social media platforms (where Instagram has now a predominant place) has become a controlling force in our society and they have an incredible influence on people who are exposed to them. The author finds the cultivation and the social cognitive theory essential for understanding how social media affects its users and their behaviour (ibid., 31-33). If we think of my respondents and the online food(ie) community, the former would help to explain how social media shape people's idea of reality, e.g. the effects of famous food bloggers' lifestyle and eating habits on their followers¹⁵³. "The more people are exposed to the socially constructed realities that they experience in the media, the more likely they are to perceive that as reality" (ibid., 31). This theory might be useful to understand people's preferences in following certain people and dismissing others. On the other hand, the social cognitive theory would clarify the impact of the "social media environment" on people and how they learn to self-present themselves online, often giving prominence to "flattering images and lifestyle". For instance, how food bloggers build their reputation and self-image online, motivate followers¹⁵⁴, influence trends and posting habits¹⁵⁵ (ibid., 32).

Taking the premise that social media helps to enhance self-promotion, Alshawaf and Wen (2015:2) examine the self-promotional behaviour and reputation of the social media mavens and their power on Instagram. According to them, social media mavens are "public figures who emerge from digital platforms

¹⁵³ they represent a model to follow

¹⁵⁴ A year ago, Gwen decided to eat healthier and to reduce her sugar intake. She started both to read more about food and to follow some food bloggers and YouTube channels to get inspired: "I thought, I can do it too".

¹⁵⁵ E.g. Greta said that she reads a lot of food blogs and she gets constantly inspired by them regarding recipes, styling, cooking and photographic techniques: "and I think... maybe I should try that too. For example, photography techniques I didn't use yet and I see how other people are using it and I try to apply it to myself".

and reach a broad level of exposure; as their virtual presence widens over time, they become powerful in their media, influential to their followers, and valuable to companies and brands” (ibid). Although the term is often used to describe influential individuals who use social media for commercial purposes and “brands to promote themselves” (ibid., 4), food bloggers’ behaviour is very much alike. Taking into consideration Goffman’s theory of self-performance, van Dijck (2013:211) claims that users have diverse “socio-discursive needs- expressive, communicative or promotional- reflecting the need for different personas and necessitating different addressees”. Thus, depending on their aims, users will shape different narratives and images of themselves on various social media platforms (ibid.).

Alshawaf and Wen (2015:5) created a self-promotion cycle to explain the development of digital reputation on Instagram. It consists of three categories of promotion: personal, brand and sponsored (ibid.) which can also be found in the realm of food blogging. “While each promotional category defines a specific type of behaviour, all three become vital in constructing social media mavens’ digital reputations” (ibid., 6). For instance, my respondents use Instagram to promote their blog and healthy lifestyle, but they will also write product reviews¹⁵⁶ and upload sponsored products/ brands¹⁵⁷, they announce giveaways, and a few of them will even collaborate with popular food brands¹⁵⁸ or websites. “It has become fairly common for people with large followings to take on brand promotion for products or causes” (van Dijck 2013:203). Given this, famous food bloggers can also be perceived as social media mavens since “personal promotion is of great value in connecting to followers and in representing involvement in personal interests” (Alshawaf and Wen 2015:7). Self-promotion and self-branding are becoming an established and approved phenomenon in everyday people’s life for gaining popularity and reaching recognition and connectedness (van Dijck 2013:203). To give an example, when Amber opened her Instagram account she was mostly posting photos of her layered breakfasts (in a glass) with oats and diverse toppings, and she became known online as the ‘the breakfast layered queen’. She said: “I thought it was nice and I can live with it”, and added that she likes when people recognize her on the street because it makes her feel good and more positive about her work, and somewhat ‘famous’.

¹⁵⁶ Usually for Healthbox.nl. “I started to contact companies and I asked them if I can review their products and do advertisement if I liked the products” (Nikki).

¹⁵⁷ They will mention the brand using hashtags (#organicburst) or tags (@organicburst). Amber said: “On some pages, you can see a lot of commercials and sponsors, sometimes I have to do it also. They ask me to post a picture of their staff and then they send it to me and I get also paid for it, but not too much. I do it only when I think that it works for me. I get most of all sweet things or some new food, they e-mail me if they can get my address and then send a package to me. Usually, they will send it just if I put a photo on Instagram and after that I can do with the package whatever I want”.

¹⁵⁸ Especially regarding superfoods products. They can even become their ‘ambassadors’.



Figure 5: The photo is an example of sponsored content

Alshawaf and Wen (2015:8) conclude that social media mavens are remarkably powerful in spreading information and influencing their followers and to maintain their digital reputation they should constantly use the three promotional categories (ibid.). “Personal promotion reflects on their personal lives and daily activities, whereas brand and sponsored promotion show a new level of sophistication and connectivity. Individuals selectively mention brands they buy or aspire to own” (ibid.). The huge number of followers, likes and comments approve their popularity (ibid.). Besides, van Dijck (2013:62) asserts that “gaining popularity is important to people who want to boost their public reputation; identifying popularity is relevant to companies that want to seek out influential people or recognize prevalent trends”.

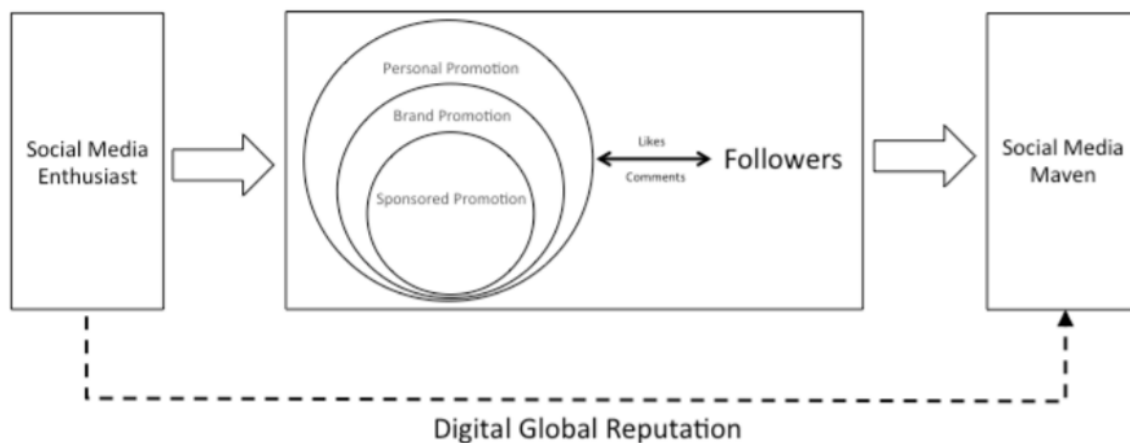


Figure 6: Self-Promotion Cycle

CONCLUSION

Taking the Instagram food(ie) community as an example, the aim of this thesis was to explore how social media platforms, and especially photo sharing sites, turned into a controlling force in our society (Tyer 2016:30) and have become a new means of expressing and enhancing our identity, tastes and values, and creating a sense of belonging to different (imagined) online communities.

As I already mentioned in the introduction, contradictions and classifications reappear around different themes throughout the whole thesis. Contradictions were predominant in the ways my respondents presented themselves online and offline and in the situations when they talked about their blogging practices¹⁵⁹, whereas classifications and categorizations were mostly manifested in the context of food values/ preferences and food photography. Since I previously shed some light on the contradictions in the realm of identity, I need to say a few words how classifications are reflected on Instagram. My respondents classify food as good (healthy) or bad (unhealthy, dangerous) based on the diet they are following and the place where they purchase their food. Afterwards, the meal classified as good and healthy will end up on Instagram provided that the photo is worth sharing online, which means that it should be a high-quality photograph with the right amount of light and a satisfactory composition (styling). According to my respondents, photos that are unworthy posting online are usually those where the amount of light is bad (dark photos) and do not fit their overall styling on Instagram, or the ones with unhealthy content that are contrasting the image of their healthy lifestyle. Thus, in line with what Weilenmann et al. (2013) claimed, the interplay between Instagram worthy and unworthy pictures, my respondents act as “virtual curators” who has the power to choose what to display, to whom and which narrative to tell. Since the practice of taking food photos and uploading them online has become extremely popular and unusually normal, the word *foodfie* was coined to describe a photograph of the food that we are eating and sharing online - “a blend of food and selfie”¹⁶⁰, whereas *foodstagramming* indicates the practice of uploading food photos on

¹⁵⁹ To recall two examples: sometimes my respondents claimed that they are not posting for their followers, but to make their feed alive or that they are not willing to sacrifice their happiness because of their followers, but afterwards they mentioned that they feel obligated to post because of them. On the other hand, while my respondents agreed that food should look natural (as it really is) on photographs, without retouching it too much, they would still edit the image (brightness, contrast, shades etc.) to make to make it more beautiful and appetizing. Adam said: “The way you capture a photo (*of food*) can be so beautiful and so different of how it looks on the table”, emphasis added.

¹⁶⁰ The definition appeared in the Macmillan and Cambridge online dictionary, see: “Foodfie”. *Macmillan Dictionary*, URL: <http://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/foodfie> (accessed 29-12-2016) and “Foodfie”. *Cambridge Dictionary*, URL: <https://dictionaryblog.cambridge.org/2016/06/20/new-words-20-june-2016/> (accessed 29-12-2016).

Instagram¹⁶¹. Ramsdem (2014) made the point when stating that “Instagramming food before eating it has become as commonplace as washing our hands before dinner”¹⁶².

In the first chapters of the thesis I illustrated how difficult it is to conceptualize the (foodie) identity and why part of my respondents do not want to wear this ‘badge of shame’¹⁶³. Albeit the term foodie was coined more than three decades ago in 1984, the debate surrounding it still takes place inside and outside the academia due to its ambiguous nature. It appears that the eighties faced an increasing interest in the understanding of taste, manners, (hedonic) consumption, organoleptic properties and food aesthetic, diets, and sensory perception. For instance, the word food pornography was invented, Bourdieu’s book “Distinction: A social critique of the judgement of taste” was translated into English, more attention was given to the visual appearance of food (nouvelle and haute cuisine), the development of sensory anthropology and the anthropological interest in diets.

In the next chapters, I argued how cultural and economic capital influence my respondents’ practices of consumption and shape their lifestyle and food preferences. For them food is a “social need” (Steenbergen et al. 2015) and a way to express and communicate their life philosophy and, sometimes, persuade others to follow their healthy lifestyle. In line with Dahl’s (2015) article, I suggested that their belief in clean, healthy, and unprocessed food is comparable to religious enthusiasm, particularly when my respondents talked about their moment of conversion from ‘bad’ to ‘good’ food and lifestyle (or from one diet to another) and in their self-control and discipline to overcome temptations and avoid the transgression of the ‘rules’. Taking into account Douglas book “Purity and Danger” and the narrations of my respondents, I revealed some of the contemporary (Western) food taboos and the ways my respondents classify and value the quality of food. Moreover, those taboos and avoidances explore the new meanings of dirt in our society, making Douglas’ book and concepts still up-to-date. Nora’s story at the end of the first part of the thesis was aimed at providing an example of the moment of conversion with all the challenges that most of my respondents faced. It starts with the revelation of their new eating habits and lifestyle and the initial embarrassment of revealing they opened a food blog to their family and friends¹⁶⁴ and lastly, how their ‘new philosophy of life’ positively affects the (future) food choices of the people surrounding them.

¹⁶¹ See: Michail, N. (2015) “The Instagram effect: Are pictures of food fuelling obesity?”, *Foodnavigator.com*, URL: <http://www.foodnavigator.com/Science/The-Instagram-effect-Are-pictures-of-food-fuelling-obesity> (accessed 09-03-2016)

¹⁶² See: Ramsden, T. (2014) “Instagramming Food Just Reached A Whole New Level”, *Marie Claire*, URL: <http://www.marieclaire.co.uk/blogs/546754/instagramming-food-just-reached-a-whole-new-level.html> (accessed 17-03-2016)

¹⁶³ See: Gim, S. J. (2009) "Foodie – I Shall Not Wear a Badge of Shame". *The Delicious Life* (posted 03-02-2009), URL: <http://www.thedeliciouslife.com/foodie-i-shall-not-wear-badge-of-shame/> (accessed 10-10-2016).

¹⁶⁴ Brenda said: “First I didn’t tell my family and friends that I was doing this, I think that for this reason I don’t have a lot of followers. I thought it was an embarrassing hobby... ‘This is my hobby, being alone and eating food

The second part of the thesis was aimed at providing an overview of how Instagram became part of the culture of connectivity and in what ways it promotes the idea of a multiple idealized selves and builds online (food) communities based on shared experiences, knowledge, hashtags, and food photography. The Instagram food community turned to be very heterogeneous since it embraces diverse sub-communities from food lovers to sportspersons who are into healthy food. Although my respondents claimed that the food community is encouraging and never competitive, my research findings showed that this is not entirely accurate. There is an inconspicuous rivalry, especially when we consider the energy that my respondents put in finding their recognizable style and their compulsion to obtain more followers, likes, and comments to grow faster than others and become ‘famous’ or big enough to make it their living. Their behaviour is comparable to sport competitions or ‘obsessive’ collecting. If it were not so, certain Instagrammers would not feel the necessity to buy followers and, subsequently, comments and likes. Moreover, Greta’s experience during a photography workshop in the Netherlands pinpointed that particular eating habits are ‘superior’ to others, e.g. it seems that being vegan¹⁶⁵ is more popular than being vegetarian or following a ‘normal’ diet on Instagram. However, my respondents believe that the community helps to improve their self-esteem, build online friendships with people who share similar interests, broaden their network and knowledge, and fight loneliness. It became particularly evident when a few participants thanked me at the end of the interview for giving them the chance to talk extendedly about what they like the most - food and their blog - since not all their friends and members of the family are interested in it.

Alshawaf’s and Wen’s (2015) concept of the Self-Promotion Cycle perfectly describes the development of the digital reputation on Instagram and summarizes my research findings. For instance, how social media shape my respondents’ ideas of reality and help them to learn how to self-present themselves online and influence others with their lifestyle and choices they make. Since a few of my respondents use all the three categories¹⁶⁶ of promotion mentioned by Alshawaf and Wen (2015), they could be identified as social media mavens. Hence, if ‘small’ food bloggers learn from those with high digital reputation and are influenced by them, then we can expect that some of them they will become future social mavens too, creating a never-ending cycle.

Considering all that has been said, we might conclude that the taste of my respondents is highly structured and that the acceptance and the sense of belonging¹⁶⁷ to the Instagram food(ie) community are

and feel that I am food obsessed’. (...) I didn’t tell him (*boyfriend*) because I was embarrassed, I didn’t want to be seen as food obsessed or weird”, emphasis added.

¹⁶⁵ Posting vegan recipes

¹⁶⁶ personal, brand, and sponsored.

¹⁶⁷ That they perhaps missed in their real lives.

achieved through their individualism¹⁶⁸. Since it is usually the other way around – individuality is sacrificed for conformity – this makes their belonging to a group rather unusual, different, and interesting to research. Taking Anderson’s (1991) concept of imagined communities, Kavoura (2014:494) emphasizes that online communities develop with the use of social media and micro-blogging (e.g. Instagram) - there is a coherence and a sense of belonging between the members, albeit they have never met. Despite self-expression, motivation, support, acceptance, and belonging manifest in the community, not everyone wants to be part of it. The outsiders feel either unskilful and unqualified for being full members of the community or they do not want to be labelled and associated with ‘those category of obsessed people’.

It becomes evident when researching the Instagram food community that group conformity and self-expression are connected and interrelated. Gallozzi (2009) claims that conformity and individuality are two sides of the same coin since they complement each other. He notes:

We cannot have conformity unless there are individuals to conform. And we cannot have individuality unless there is conformity to break free of. (...) Whenever we join a group, we share in the benefits, advantages, and power. And conformity is the price we pay to gain admission to that group (ibid.).

In line with Gallozzi’s (2009) and Klara’s statement in chapter six, we can assert that food lovers spontaneously want and need to belong to smaller or bigger food communities because the support and feedback they get from other like-minded people – with whom they share the same passion and hobby - gives them the strength to keep doing what they like¹⁶⁹ and to increase their self-esteem. Instagram allows them to attain their demands for belonging through communication and food photo sharing and finding people who understand their need for blogging, which is not always the case in the offline sphere where they are often teased because of that, and not taken seriously.

Albeit my respondents will attempt to conform to the ‘rules’ of the Instagram food community to be accepted by others¹⁷⁰, they will also seek to find new ways to be distinct and to stand out of the crowd so as to get a chance to be noticed by big food and media related companies. In other words, the community requires from them at the same time to be unique and to conform to its rules¹⁷¹. On the one hand, food lovers should conform to the to the Instagram rules and the community guidelines and they need to “adapt to behaviours, beliefs, *way of thinking and posting*, and appearances that are similar to those of peer groups”¹⁷², emphasis added. It signifies that food lovers need to employ the right hashtags to get visible to

¹⁶⁸ They express their belonging through self-expression.

¹⁶⁹ Cooking, creating new recipes, writing posts, uploading food photos etc.

¹⁷⁰ famous Instagram food bloggers, followers, companies

¹⁷¹ Although the rules seem quite strict, they are not official.

¹⁷² “Conformity”. (2015). Retrieved from: <http://www.goodtherapy.org/blog/psychpedia/conformity> (accessed 05-01-2016)

a broader audience, upload high-quality photos with a good composition and the right amount of light and colours, follow ongoing food trends¹⁷³, use props, be active online and interact with their followers, post at least once per day and have their recognizable style. Before the algorithm-driven Instagram¹⁷⁴, food blogger had also to pay attention to the posting time, if they wanted to reach a wider audience, especially international. As I previously mentioned in the thesis, small food bloggers learn from the famous ones – they use the same hashtags, recreate their recipes, and post them online tagging them, and often imitate their styling and lifestyle. Therefore, we can assume that their taste, staying blogging and cooking preferences are transmitted¹⁷⁵, learnt, structured¹⁷⁶, scripted and standardized.

On the other hand, I showed that my respondents have the freedom and autonomy to develop and express their individuality and self-expression, create they blogging identity and uniqueness, and find their own signature and recognizable style. C. R. quote summarizes appropriately the struggles and the pressure that also other respondents faced when trying to make their blog/ Instagram account more distinctive and personalized:

Well, I am a creative foodie, but beside my creative mind and pictures, what makes me creative more than other foodies? (...) I made up the name of my blog in the middle of the night at 3 a.m. because I couldn't sleep and I was thinking about my pictures, food, how I want to do it. I like social media and what can I do with it and how you can reach people... I was lying in my bed and thinking, ok I want to have an Instagram account, I want to have a website and I have to post daily, etc.

I put the element of styling in both categories deliberately because it is both a requirement for the enhancement (of the diversity) of the community (at least if food blogger aim to become famous), but also the aspiration of my respondents. From my point of view, they seek to be different, but at the same time similar to the group, which is also a form of contradiction. Lofgren (2013:43) claims that “food bloggers readily share advice on blogging, from basic blogging practice through to attracting more readers and monetising their blog”. I have already explained and gave some examples throughout the thesis how food bloggers on Instagram influence each other (e.g. similarity in their food styling¹⁷⁷, diet preferences, etc.) and considering this, we can deduce that self-expression, self-promotion, creativity, and the blogging practices of the Instagram food(ie) community are becoming progressively more homogeneous. How will

¹⁷³ If needed, they will shift from one food preference to the other. E.g. vegan dishes are more popular on Instagram than vegetarian. Therefore, some of my respondents started to create more often vegan dishes, use avocados, plant-based milk, bake guilt-free sweets etc. to make their profile more attractive and trendy.

¹⁷⁴ See: Hunt, E. (2016). “New algorithm-driven Instagram feed rolled out to the dismay of users”. *The Guardian*, URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2016/jun/07/new-algorithm-driven-instagram-feed-rolled-out-to-the-dismay-of-users> (accessed 05-01-2017).

¹⁷⁵ From family, famous foodies, food trends etc.

¹⁷⁶ See chapter ten and Tyer's (2016:30) implementation of the cultivation and the social cognitive theory in the social media.

¹⁷⁷ The composition of their photos is very much alike; they attend similar (or the same) meetings, events and food photography workshops (e.g. Food Bandits).

this homogeneity impact the community? How to stand out from the crowd and be successful if all the accounts are very much alike? I believe that Mill's¹⁷⁸ statement in Rosenbach's (2014) article fully epitomizes the importance of self-expression in the Instagram community and how homogeneity would affect it:

Society needs individualists to help it maintain a level of growth. Without these individualists, a society full of conformists would plateau. (...) If everyone were the same, then no one would have the opportunity to succeed. Thus, society needs to pave the way for people to be different and express their individuality because social progress becomes stifled when everyone in society practices conformity.

To conclude, foodies' individualism manifested as a self-expression on Instagram is not a rebellion against the online foodie community, but a means of self-development and growth enforced by the community. The personal success of my respondents derives from the knowledge shared between members of the community and their mutual support, and their self-expression did not decrease their conformity to the community.

In the end, it is worth stressing that that many authors mentioned throughout the thesis explore the foodie identity predominantly through (moralities of) food consumption, forgetting and overlooking that foodies' posting practices and self-presentation online and the motivation for doing that (at least from today's perspective) have become as important for the formation of their identity and lifestyle as consumption itself. Nevertheless, there are a few questions that did not have a notable place both in Alshawaf's and Wen's (2015) work and my thesis. For instance, what Instagram fame exactly comprehends and what happens when the goal is achieved, or in other words, how popularity and fame affect future postings and creativity. Can something that started as a hobby turn into a hatred job? Will they continue doing it or they will lose interest in it? Does the quality of their posts decrease once they get a higher number of followers? Are all the *Insta* famous bloggers paid once their reach a wider audience? What is the barometer of success and failure and can we talk after all about digital reputation, recognition fame when we know how superficial sometimes comments and likes are? My respondents were extremely focused on growing bigger and bigger that they were rarely thinking about the 'future' and what happens once they became famous. Therefore, it could be a suggestion for further research.

¹⁷⁸ English philosopher who wrote the book *On Liberty*, published in 1859

LIST OF FIGURES

Cover photo: Copyright © 2017 Jean Jullien, URL: <http://shop.jeanjullien.com/products/before-instagram-1> (accessed 08-01-2017)

Figure 1: “Try the salmon, but make sure your camera flash is on” [CARTOON] (Image credit: ITworld/Phil Johnson), image retrieved from Pinterest, URL: <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/199073246002755656/> (accessed on 08-01-2017)

Figure 2: Example of food styling. Photo retrieved from Maya’s Instagram account, URL: https://www.instagram.com/delicious_and_healthy_by_maya/

Figure 3: Lunch with Adam. Photo: Nina Vojnovic

Figure 4: Photo shooting. Photos retrieved from Angela’s and Kim’s Instagram account

Figure 5: The photo is an example of sponsored content. Photo retrieved from Maya’s Instagram account, URL: https://www.instagram.com/delicious_and_healthy_by_maya/

Figure 6: Self-Promotion Cycle (Alshawaf and Wen 2015:8)

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