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**In search for totemic foods: Exploring discursive foodscapes
online in Finnish, English and French**

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**In search for totemic foods – Exploring
discursive foodscapes online in Finnish,
English and French**

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requirements of the University of Westminster for the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

This interdisciplinary research investigates how chilli and chocolate emerge as totemic foods in online foodie discourse. The corpus is compiled from Social Networking Services (blogs, community websites, recipe sharing sites, and conversation fora) in Finnish, English and French.

The theoretical framework is construed with post-Bourdieuian taste and distinction studies on discourse, complemented by a feminist positioning. A netnographically inspired inquiry in an observer's position enhances the methodology of critical discourse studies. The study introduces a theoretical concept: *discursive foodscapes*, contributing on two dimensions to extant theorising. It focuses the observation on multivocal online communities and extends foodscape analysis towards non-concrete consumption, on a discursive level. Moreover, the study suggests new practices for *taste engineering*, relevant in online consumption contexts.

Three research questions draw on chilli and chocolate as totemic substances, interpreted in a framework of contemporary tribalism within the paradigmatic viewpoint of Consumer Culture Theory: emergence of chocolate and chilli as totemic foods; taste and distinction performance; and representations of gender and power. They are studied separately, although perceiving the triad as entwined. The discursive foodscape related to each research question reflects findings: it is described with the combination of discursive themes, frames and strategies identified in the empirical analysis.

Findings reveal a more diversified vista on chocolate and chilli as discursive foci than extant research mostly claims: they are ascribed with a variety of totemic significations, shifting contextually from highly indulgent to environmentally concerned. Knowledge-intensive foodie discourse emerges as relatively gender-neutral. However, across embodied, experiential elements in consumption the discourse becomes more gender-flagged, and contextual changes are highly significant. This variation generates discursively interesting constellations where stylistic categories reflect areas of culinary and discursive competence.

Cross-linguistic variation is detected with all research questions, introducing a pioneer-type endeavor in terms of discourse analysis of foodie sites online, across three languages.

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Author's declaration

I declare that all the material contained in this thesis is my own work.

24th August, 2020

Marjaana Mäkelä

Definitions of key terms

In alphabetical order. NB: abbreviations related to Computer Mediated Discourse are presented in Table 3.

| Term | Definition |
|------------------------------|---|
| avatar | identity adopted in online contexts, to conceal one's real identity and/or personal traits |
| carnal singularity | parallel imbuelement of value for a substance or a product and for the human being conveying it |
| commensality | sharing of food and meals |
| consociality | context-specific and fluid form of social cohesion in digital realms (Kozinets, 2015) |
| Consumer Culture Theory, CCT | interdisciplinary field of consumer research where this study is positioned |
| digital | (<i>here</i>) adjective referring to concepts and contexts that exist in online environments |
| discoursal | adjective referring to "discourse" primarily in linguistic study |
| discourse | actualisation of language in a social setting |
| discursive (approach) | approach enabling study of meanings and their construction in human interaction |
| distinction | display of one's cultural and social capital in order to distinguish oneself from the others (Bourdieu, 1979) |
| embodiment | process where substances or ideas are transferred to and by the human body |
| epicurean | refined consumption style seeking for sensual pleasure |
| flavour | combination of odor, texture and taste in food |
| foodie | consumer with a lifestyle where food has a prominent role |
| foodscape | combination of product, place and people in the framework of food consumption |
| foodways | common habits of eating, e.g. within a community |
| gastrography | construction of identity with food memories |
| geeking | demonstrating deep and often technically oriented interest in a topic, mostly in online contexts |
| gender | (<i>here</i>) perception of social and cultural dimensions of gender (female, male or other) and its embodiment |
| heteroglossia | existence of a plurality of voices in discourse |
| influencer | online contributor with a strong influence on opinions of peers either contextually or more broadly |
| intersectionality | presence of multiple dimensions in one's life situation |

| | |
|-------------------------|--|
| lingua franca | language used to facilitate communication amongst people from different linguistic backgrounds |
| linking value | unificatory power for a consumer group, conveyed by a product or an artifact |
| multimodality | use of a variety of media in discourse, and/or use of visually and auditively supported elements in (online) discourse |
| netnography | marketing-oriented ethnographic study of online environments |
| online community | group of people united by a shared interest, exhibited and performed online |
| remixing | (<i>here</i>) creative, qualitative approach in compilation and analysis of digital data and corpora |
| ritualistic consumption | consumption of substances and artifacts that imbues them with symbolic value, with a context-specific type of behavior; often related to festivities |
| superdiversity | richness and variation of languages and linguistic practices online |
| symbol | character, word or concept representing an idea, another concept or an object |
| totem | emblematic figure associated with the identity of a group and representing this relationship; an artifact imbued with symbolic value for a community |
| totemic food | food ascribed with totemic value |
| virtual ethnography | study of digital environments with applied ethnographic methods |
| Web 2.0 | the development stage of the World Wide Web facilitating participatory cultures and use of social media |

Table 1. Definitions of key terms.

1. Introduction to the research

1.1 *Hors d'oeuvre*: personal motivation

From my childhood, I remember watching my grandmother, almost blind at that time, baking traditional Karelian pasties for our family. The simple rye crust combined with a soft rice filling and melting butter represented something more than a savoury snack: a skillful tradition, perpetuated by Granny. Above all, it was her love that enveloped us children in this ritual baking session of early morning hours. Karelian pasties constitute a core element of the Finnish foodways, but no other pasties have ever had the same taste for me. Granny's pasties bound our family together, forming an invisible shelter of warmth around us. Her morning baking was a family celebration where small pies transformed into ritual artifacts, taking the form of totemic emblems (Solomon & Anand, 1985). Today, I interpret this experience as a fundamental part of my identity as a Finn with roots in our Eastern culinary tradition.

Another key experience related to food as an element of identity building was my year as an au pair househelp in an aristocratic family in Paris. In the beginning of 1980s, it was a profound personal clash of cultures triggering the choice of my studies and career. Moreover, it initiated a mystery solving, undergone ever since, about the significance of food and the entanglement of food and language that both determine human existence so profoundly (Riley & Cavanaugh, 2017).

My work in culinary and restaurant management education has led to interesting discoveries of both fascinating food and passionate food people. This continuum unfolds as *gastrography*, defined by Abarca and Colby (2016) as a process where food memories as constituents of narratives contribute to construction of self- and cultural identity. Therein, language and food talk have a very important role to play. After those initial reflections based on personal experience, I have had the opportunity to combine studies

in linguistics, social sciences and business administration with my professional career. With the avenue of social media, a multitude of new ways to express one's passion for food has mushroomed, which has increased my interest in this phenomenon even more.

Those threads have led to this dissertation, drawing from a desire to understand interrelations of language and food: how ubiquitous food discourse reflects our society of consumption that currently emphasises more the experiential than the accumulation of goods. Eating is an experience repeated every day, offering myriads of variation and opportunities, at least in wealthy societies. Some foods become more symbolic than others for consumers seeking for tasty experiences, for ways of identity building, and for affording the gathering around something significant, online.

The research is a quest on two foodstuffs, chilli and chocolate, imbued with special meanings for an ever-increasing number of consumers, and on their passionate discourse, unfolding as a dimension of the large existential project of postmodern consumers (Thompson & Hirschman, 1998). Moreover, this discursive richness online opens up perspectives on language as food (Riley & Cavanaugh, 2017).

“De gustibus non est disputandum” – one shouldn't argue on matters of taste – yet there is an abundance of online food talk where taste preferences are questioned, criticised or revered. By approaching web-generated food discourse on chilli and chocolate in Finnish, English and French, the objective is to analyse (1) totemic meanings ascribed to them, (2) the performance of taste and distinction embedded in this discourse, and (3) how constructs of gender and power emerge therein.

Discourse construing the corpus is generated and shared by a passionate consumer tribe denominated as *foodies* who display their taste, food experiences and consumption practices whilst depicting themselves and seeking for appreciation. Online, this orientation has led to a culinary cyberworld of blogs, consumption communities, restaurant and product

reviewing, prosuming and recipe sharing. The process reflects current consumption and food cultures in an intriguing way: we all need to eat, but for many, food is more than just nutrition.

Notwithstanding my interest in food cultures professionally and in private, I would however not dare to characterise myself as a foodie, if the concept is defined as eminent foodie culture scholars Johnston and Baumann (2015, pX) do: “[...] *a person who devotes considerable time and energy to eating and learning about good food, however ‘good food’ is defined.*” This intimidation is linked to the research process with online content generated by zealous foodie consumers. Their meticulous expertise, knowhow and commitment make my own culinary attempts seem somewhat uninteresting, and it is hard to imagine that I would publish any of them online. As a researcher of the rich culture of food passions in different languages, I practise therefore an outsider’s gaze, one of an admirer.

If I am not a foodie, I embrace another identity dimension that construes a complementary approach: that of a feminist, entwined with a long-lasting sociolinguistic interest in the divergent ways that women and men talk and write, and in the variation of these orientations across languages. Since my undergraduate studies in French language and sociology, I have been interested in interconnections of gender and discourse, and therefore the study stems from a situated, feminist standpoint. In this respect, I am an insider.

Granny’s Karelian pasties were a childhood ritual where materiality of food was combined with an immaterial, almost spiritual experience, linking the uniqueness of this heritage to our family. Nowadays, I characterise it as a totemic experience, drawing on the definition of a totem by Lévi-Strauss: an emblematic figure that contributes to the development of a distinctive identity of a clan. (Cited in Cayla, 2013, p93). This dissertation explores discourse based on similar experiences: when elements of nutrition are uplifted to a symbolic and ritualistic level, expressing various dimensions of belonging to the large tribe of online foodies. In this process, totemic foods carrying deeply

symbolical meanings also communicate themselves, unfolding a fascinating vista of meaningful foodscapes.

The tribal metaphor is widely used when studying postmodern consumers. Foodies online express admiration, even devotion, to their culinary benchmarks, and establish tribal communities with contemporary ritualistic behavior: preparing a dish made famous by a celebrity chef, visiting iconic outlets or tasting cult products, describing this process verbally and sharing pictures online, while other tribe members contribute with comments.

For the Ojibwa tribe studied by Lévi-Strauss, *totem* signified “He or she is a relative of mine.” (Insoll, 2011). If we apply a contemporary, relatively broad interpretation of totemism as a process providing a framework for different cultural contexts and their classificatory systems (*op. cit.*), the metaphor is also pertinent in consumption studies. It sheds light on artifacts generating unificatory power within consumer groups (Cova, 1997). Granny’s pasties, the totemic food of my kin, are an emotional starting point for this research journey. The story about them is served as an *hors d’oeuvre* opening a meal.

1.2 Research context and problem setting: “Not just food”

The objective is to analyse totemic meanings ascribed to chilli and chocolate in online Finnish, English and French; the performance of taste and distinction embedded in this discourse; and the emergence of gender and power therein. Three research questions are articulated with these themes (1.5). Data constituting the corpus are derived from online food discourse in the above-mentioned languages.

Since the topic is broad, a valid conceptual framework necessitates delineation. The main concept to investigate foodie discourse is *taste*. In terms of significant foods, data are collected on *chocolate* and *chilli*. Foodie culture is transnational, and gathering data in three languages sheds a comparative light not only on social variation, but on cross-linguistic and

sociolinguistic variation. A discursive approach embraces the epistemological stance that phenomena are ascribed with different meanings for different people in different contexts.

The overarching concept to study these practices is taste, since developing and displaying one's taste is a key element in distinction (Chapter 3). Here, the focus is on culinary taste. Distinction processes reflect power, since foodie consumption includes capital-intensive dimensions and is linked to status exhibition and broader societal constructs. Discourse on food is moreover connected to gendered discursive practices, themselves entwined with power (Parsons, 2015a; Jovanovski, 2017a, 2017b; Mäkelä, Bettany & Stevens, 2018; Maclaran & Stevens, 2019).

Comparing discourse in three languages unpacks underpinning ideologies and assumptions that connect discourse on food to taste, gendered phenomena, and power: how does one determine quality and prestige of foods, and appropriate ways to consume them? What is good taste, when referring to foodie-type consumption? How do totemic significations of chilli and chocolate reflect gendered elements in discourse, and what kind of variation emerges in a cross-linguistic comparison?

The topic is delineated with two ingredients emerging as highly symbolic, recognised upon large-scale online observation¹: chocolate and chilli. The choice is guided by the richness of online discourse on both foods and by the diversity that they represent as symbolic and often gender-flagged foods. They do not carry nationally laden value that could affect a cross-linguistic analysis, but are neutral and moreover, transnationally cherished. This would not have been the case of foods with significant culinary traditions on a national scale. An eloquent example is rye bread, voted as the most precious food to Finns and inherently totemic in Finland, although it may have only marginal significations to consumers from French- and English-speaking areas.

¹ This preliminary phase consisted of active following of foodie discourse online, as well as of an extensive pilot study during 2014-2016 (Mäkelä, 2016).

Chilli and chocolate have conveyed value-laden symbolic meanings already prior to the avenue of foodie culture and social media. Their qualities were recognised by ancient civilisations, in terms of medicinal, aphrodisiac, or ritual use (Chapter 4). Chocolate and chilli are common ingredients globally, with a wide array of derived products, recipes, prosumption activities and related online communities. Their flavours are distinctive and valued, due to a large variety of nuances available. Furthermore, they generate online food talk from both women and men, and gendered variation in their consumption is identified by prior research. Throughout study of these foodstuffs, a broad understanding of totemic reproductions in online foodie discourse is sought after.

Social media does not depend on geographic boundaries, and the empirical analysis draws on cross-linguistic variation, with three languages chosen for a number of reasons. In culinary discourse, French holds a keynote position worldwide and has contributed widely with loan words and terminology to gastronomic cultures. The author is also a lecturer in culinary French, whilst Finnish is her native tongue and the language of her emotions. English is included in comparison, since at present it is the *lingua franca* of the Internet (WTech, 2017), with most interesting foodie content. Comparing Finnish, English and French is an opportunity offered by working contexts and the academic background of the author.

During the research process, investigating an abundance of food discourse online has confirmed productivity and creativity of all three languages in terms of “foodie talk”. Finkelstein (1999) refers to the ubiquity of this discourse as *foodatainment*: food is everywhere and has become a constituent of fashion and entertainment. With the substantial increase of food-related media content during the last 20–30 years, more cross-disciplinary attention has emerged towards patterns of social and cultural nature related to eating, and on its impact on identity work of consumers. A natural repercussion of this development is that new words and expressions proliferate in foodie contexts in all languages, and extant words may be used in innovative ways.

Consumer culture is becoming more and more global (Firat and Venkatesh, 1995), and transnational foodieism exists alongside national food cultures (Johnston & Baumann, 2009, 2015; Watson & Morgan & Hemmington, 2008; Miller, 2013; de Solier, 2013). According to de Solier (2013), the consumptive orientation of foodieism has been essentially nurtured by the impact of and the opportunities provided by globalisation. Here, “local” refers to (online) community levels, with occasional national influence stemming from three languages, whereas “global” is more challenging to position: online communication is global, notwithstanding language barriers.

Since eating is a mixture of biology and culture amongst humans (Lévi-Strauss, 1968; Falk, 1994; Coleman, 2007), these dimensions are intertwined. Cultural differences are detected wherever food is consumed, and hybrid food cultures evolve on national and transnational levels like any other forms of culture (Counihan & van Esterik, 1997). It is noteworthy however that the study does not aim at *intercultural* analysis as such, since foodie culture is ontologically perceived as transnational, and boundaries in online contexts are opaque and shifting. The comparative aspect draws on discursive, cross-linguistic phenomena online. Since language and discourse are irrevocably entwined with culture, exploration of online foodie culture is nevertheless one dimension of the inquiry, present through its discourses.

Meanings of food are approached throughout analysing online discourse of foodie consumers who enjoy sharing their experiences and knowledge of culinary culture(s) in the real world and in the “virtual” world, i.e. online (Johnston & Baumann, 2009, 2015; Koh, 2017). For foodies, food is not “just food”, and in their identity construction this leads to constantly developing interpretations. Foodies have diversified food discourse with a shift from gourmet contexts towards an omnivorous orientation (Lizardo & Skiles, 2012; Lindblom & Mustonen, 2015). Here, they are perceived as a broad consumer tribe (Maffesoli, 1996, 2007).

For the purpose of studying the foodie tribe and its innumerable subgroups such as chilli prosumers, passionate chocolate lovers, superfood enthusiasts,

local food movement pioneers or gourmet-oriented high-end foodies, the Internet provides an almost unlimited source of data. It is a space of “cultural clashes” of distinctive and translocal foodie cultures, instead of a unified global one (Canniford, 2005, 2011). By consequent, Social Networking Services constitute the context and source of data for this comparative study.

A fundamental inspiration is provided by Johnston and Baumann (2009, 2015), under the title *“Foodies – democracy and distinction in the gourmet foodscape”* (Routledge). Johnston’s studies of gendered patterns in foodie discourse (Cairns, Johnston & Baumann, 2010; Cairns & Johnston, 2015) have signposted a wider scope on literature dealing with gendered dimensions of food consumption (Coleman, 2007; Cappellini & Parsons, 2012; Turner, Ferguson, Craig, Jeffries & Beaton, 2013; Ulver, 2015; Cairns & Johnston, 2015; Parsons 2015a, b; Jovanovski, 2017a, 2017b). Moreover, Johnston and Baumann’s studies triggered a desire to implement foodie theorising in contexts of food discourse in other languages than English, and in the European foodie contexts.

When analysing discourse on foods like chocolate and chilli, concepts of materiality, corporeality and sensuality become entwined with a more general discourse on consumption. Food is something that we consume with our physical body, which evokes broader narratives of corporeality and embodiment. Notions of body and materiality are connected to that of carnality, which is often associated with feminine features in the context of food, with long-established expectations of self-control towards women, displaying constructs of power and dominance (Coleman, 2007; Stevens, Cappellini & Smith, 2015; Mäkelä, Bettany & Stevens, 2018). Hence, the analysis of totemic chocolate and chilli proceeds to this direction. Bonding through consumption, distinctive practices and gendered discursive patterns, with chilli and chocolate as protagonist foods, are the dimensions that construe the discursive foodscapes studied in online foodie talk in Finnish, English and French.

Embedded in the scholarly background of the author², the study is interdisciplinary, combining a sociological and a linguistic analysis in the context of consumption studies. Principal methodological choices are inspired by critical discourse studies (Fairclough, 2012, 2015; Wodak & Meyer, 2016) and by netnography (Kozinets 2002, 2007, 2010, 2015). Moreover, feminist approaches suggested by Haraway (1988), Oakley (1998), Maclaran and Stevens (2019) as well as Kendall and Tannen (2015) have strengthened gender-conscious observation. This disciplinary and methodological combination is articulated with the concept of *remixing* a context- and problem-specific methodology (Markham, 2013a, b), facilitating the approach of digital realms (Chapter 6).

The notion of *foodscape* is used to dissect vistas construed by heterogenic and rich online data. Surman and Hamilton (2018, p2) define foodscape as “*a discursive and embodied space where human–food relationships are brokered*”. This view entwines dimensions of discourse, embodiment, relationships and interaction; all constituent of the present approach where the core phenomenon of foodscape construction is unpacked with a cross-linguistic comparative aspect.

1.3 Research positioning: Consumer Culture Theory

The study is positioned contextually and theoretically within the broad conceptual field of Consumer Culture Theory, abbreviated commonly as CCT and developed on the foundations laid by interpretivist consumer research (Thompson, Arnould & Giesler, 2013). Askegaard and Linnet (2011, p382) characterise it as “*a market-attuned hybrid of social science, situated in business schools*.” Consumer Culture Theory conceptualises culture as a combination of experience, meaning and action, and emphasises the fragmentary, the plurality and the fluidity within present consumption traditions (Arnould & Thompson, 2005, p869; Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2016, 2017).

² This includes French philology, general and anthropological linguistics and sociology, as well as studies in business administration, gender and education.

CCT draws fundamentally on the Bourdieusian paradigm (Chapter 3), nurtured by a broad transdisciplinary stream (Venkatesh, 1995; Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Sherry, 2008; Goulding, 2008; Askegaard & Linnet, 2011). This results in “heteroglossia”, co-existence of parallel voices and discourses, where significations are drawn from “*intersectional discursive systems or language games*” (Thompson, Arnould & Giesler, 2013, p150), which enhances relevance of CCT to study foodie discourse. Listening to a plurality of voices is empowering also to the researcher: personal experience, literature, theories, prior data collection and networking with colleagues all provide elements for *bricolage* (literally “crafting”) to gather symptoms and ideas (Bettany, 2015).

Deuze (2006) broadens the concept of bricolage to define digital cultures in general, as a logical approach to study online contexts. Arnould, Price and Moisio (2006) emphasise contextual sensitivity of the researcher, to avoid “over-absorption”, and although the context of computer-mediated foodie discourse is highlighted constantly here, the researcher remains as an outsider observer of it.

Firat and Venkatesh pointed out in 1995 the evolving contexts of multiculturalism and globalisation shaping consumer culture(s), which motivates investigation of a consumer phenomenon that is perceived as global. Moreover, they accentuate the postmodern vision of consumers as communicative and symbolic beings, with constant variation of identities, especially when analysing the “emancipatory” function of consumption. This aligns with the view of online foodie culture as an empowering process.

CCT investigates theoretical questions related to personal and collective identities of consumers (Arnould & Thompson, 2005, p870; Goulding, 2008; Belk, Fischer & Kozinets, 2013). These entwine: online identity work of foodies is construed by both individual and collective dimensions and resonates with broader constructs such as performance of gender. In positioning and analysis, this study draws on major streams of feminist research presented by CCT scholars Maclaran and Stevens (2019), on

embodiment (Bettany *et al.*, 2010), on food (Pirani, Cappellini & Harman, 2018) and on gender-oriented linguistics (Tannen, 2015).

In the CCT paradigm, contextual, symbolic and experiential aspects as parts of a consumption cycle including acquisition, consumption and possession are emphasised (Arnould & Thompson, 2005, p871; Belk, Fischer & Kozinets, 2013; Kozinets, 2015). Hence, a CCT approach matches with contemporary foodie practices that are getting more and more personalised via various online consumption opportunities, highlighting the experiential dimension (Belk, Ger & Askegaard, 2003; Sitz, 2008; Close, 2012; Moisio *et al.*, 2013; Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2016, 2017). The experiential becomes increasingly predominant, as consumption acts shift from solid (i.e. material) towards a more dematerialised, “liquid” type of consumption (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2016, 2017). The nature of food as a substance that can be acquired and consumed, but not “possessed” aligns with this orientation. In their study on symbolic meanings ascribed to food consumption, Kniazeva and Venkatesh (2007, p420) define indeed food as a “cultural category representative of postmodernism”.

The positioning within CCT is justified for three reasons that lead to potential theoretical contributions. Primo, relevant literature provides evidence of solid interconnections between strategies of distinction, discourse and meanings ascribed to food (Bourdieu, 1979; Johnston & Baumann, 2009, 2015; de Solier, 2013; Cappellini, 2014; Cappellini & Parsons, 2014, 2016; Maciel & Wallendorf, 2016; Emontspool & Georgi, 2017). Moreover, the conceptual tools of the Bourdieusian stream such as *practice* and *habitus* are particularly valuable for CCT-oriented studies (Askegaard & Linnet, 2011), and Bourdieu’s theories constitute fundamental frameworks of CCT. Moreover, they foreground the paradigmatic cluster of critical discourse studies (Threadgold, 2013; Lin, 2014; Fairclough, 2015; Forchnert & Schneickert, 2016).

Secundo, CCT scholars perceive online identity construction as emergent, across a variety of self-identity projects in contemporary consumption culture:

from selfies (Rokka & Canniford, 2016; Walsh & Baker, 2017) to food blogs (Koh, 2017) and image sharing (Kozinets, Patterson & Ashman, 2017). All are pertinent here.

Tertio, the material-semiotic stream in CCT provides a theoretical framework where questions of materiality, meanings of commodities and non-commodities and concepts like “taste” can be reflected towards our constructed reality (Belk, 1985; Canniford, 2005; Epp & Price, 2010; Bettany & Kerrane, 2011; Bettany & Belk, 2011; Arsel & Bean, 2013; Canniford & Bajden, 2015; Skandalis, Banister & Byrom, 2015; Maciel & Wallendorf, 2016). A concise definition of a material-semiotic approach is that it connects the study of material dimensions (objects, substances) to that of semiotic dimensions (concepts).

A paradigm consists of an established model of research approaches and of the philosophical assumptions underpinning them. In spite of this fluidity, it provides a useful conceptual tool to delineate a field of research and appropriate methodology (Shannon-Baker, 2015; Wray, 2011). Here, the notion of a paradigm englobes a philosophical stance (interpretivism) and a research orientation (Consumer Culture Theory). The definition is therefore broad: a field of study with a set of relatively established guidelines, and a commonly assumed understanding amongst scholars involved, on how to proceed within those guidelines. Allowing creative input from the researcher, a paradigm does not restrict what can be done and what can't. It functions as a template-like tool for problem-solving (Wray, 2011, p389). The study is positioned in the wide paradigmatic field of CCT, yet it does not claim to contribute to its philosophical debates.

1.3.1 Bourdieusian lens in CCT

The inherently interdisciplinary stream of Consumer Culture Theory does not provide a theory to be applied, since CCT-oriented research adopts a wide array of approaches. Here, the “theoretical shelter” amidst a multitude of possible orientations (Bettany, 2015) constituting the main theoretical lens is

distinction theory (Bourdieu, 1979). It is complemented by a feminist theoretical framework stemming from gender-consciousness (Maclaran & Stevens, 2019) and situated knowledge (Haraway, 1988).

The focus is on foodie consumption as it emerges in online discourse across the concept of taste. Methodologically, it means that the conceptual tools are derived from Bourdieu's theory: taste, distinction, habitus and capital. Embedded in the enabling grand theory of distinction, they foreground theoretical contributions in consumption studies. Taste, one of the key concepts of distinction theory, is widely applied in the context of food consumption. Moreover, Bourdieu's theorising enables convergences with feminist research, in particular with interpretation of habitus and cultural capital in the framework of social inequalities embodied in everyday life, as Baghdasaryan (2018, p58) observes.

The Bourdieusian theory is presented in detail in Chapter 3. Moreover, a methodological tool of taste engineering presented by CCT scholars (Maciel & Wallendorf, 2016) is applied and developed further, to facilitate the adaptation of the Bourdieusian paradigmatic lens to empirical data.

1.3.2 The lenses of discourse theory and situatedness

Complementary methodological depth is provided by the framework of *discourse theory* (Fairclough, 2015; van Dijk, 2016), presented in Chapter 5. The concept of discourse is fundamental: as a constituent of the theoretical framework, as a research method embedded in critical discourse studies, and as the source of data. Shedding new light on how to apply discourse theory to online foodie culture, avid self-depiction and exhibition of identity work, links the concept of taste of the Bourdieusian paradigm to the view of an individual constructing her habitus on various fields of consumption shaped by discourse.

Discourse has a fundamental role in self-identity construction (Siles, 2012; de Solier, 2013; Alexandra & Pichon, 2014; Burton, 2016) and in distinctive

practices related to food consumption (Bourdieu, 1979; Johnston & Baumann, 2009, 2015). Moreover, discourse theory guides the methodological choice of critical discourse studies, to analyse a corpus consisting of online discourse (Fairclough, 2015; Wodak & Meyer). Sitz (2008) defines strategies of discourse analysis as a lens to investigate socio-discursive phenomena, particularly appropriate in the field of consumption, where sense-making and consumers' experiences are under scrutiny (Sitz, 2008, p178). Fitchett and Caruana (2014) align, emphasising the value of discourse-based approaches to marketing research, since "the discursive lens" provides valuable support for disciplinary reflexivity and criticality.

In the present methodology, online foodie discourse is analysed as a forum to perform one's foodie identity and taste, and to exchange views with like-minded consumers. Iqani (2018) observes that consumer culture discourse(s) need to be analysed with consideration of the media entangled with consumption actions, since hegemonies and power constructs conveyed by different media deeply affect consumption narratives. Here, the analysis focuses on Social Networking Services.

Standpoints from feminist paradigms complement the main lenses of analysis in the study. They articulate the approach across disciplines: equality of genders is still under construction; the main reason for inequality resides in patriarchal dominance structures; and the biological sex and the socio-cultural gender need to be distinguished (Maclaran & Stevens, 2019). This ontological framework is highlighted by the stance of "situated knowledge" (Haraway, 1988, 2010; Grebowicz, & Merrick & Haraway, 2013). The paradigmatic lenses are interconnected: distinction through taste emerges on a discursive level and is construed by discourses, themselves interpreted throughout a consciously situated position.

1.4 Identified research gaps

Significant gaps identified in extant literatures have encouraged this endeavor. They are related to CCT-positioned studies on foodie-oriented

consumption; to the online components of these cultures, and to the analysis of foodie discourse, especially with a cross-linguistic, comparative aspect. Theoretical and managerial contributions generating from the study are discussed in section 10.2.

1.4.1 Consumer Culture Theory

In CCT, there is a need for studies in contextual, symbolic and experiential aspects of consumption (Canniford, 2005, 2011; Rokka & Canniford, 2016; Kozinets, Patterson & Ashman, 2017). Moreover, the field of ritualistic consumption practices of food is under-researched in CCT (Ratcliffe, Lyle Baxter & Martin, 2019), and the authors claim for research on the affective and cognitive-behavioural mechanisms preceding ritualistic food consumption. The affective component is addressed here.

Paddock (2018) observes that qualitative studies on culinary taste remain scarce, and Björk and Kauppinen-Räsänen (2019) argue for more research on emotional, experiential and symbolic aspects of foodscapes. Studies combining physiological and social components of taste in CCT are not as recurrent as research of the social dimension, and Arsel and Bean (2013) claim for “*studies on democratization of tastemaking through collaborative marketplace communities*” (*op. cit.*, p914), targeted here. Moreover, the CCT-based theory of taste engineering lacks a comparative aspect with gender (Maciel & Wallendorf, 2016, p730), which this study seeks to address.

Theorisation on the meaning of context (Earley, 2014), dissecting extant hegemonies of discourses in mediated consumer culture (Iqani, 2018) is needed. Moreover, micro- and macro-social levels delineating consumption cultures increase in importance, and the analysis of gendered discourse is a particularly rich area in foodie studies (Cairns, Johnston & Baumann, 2010; Ulver, 2015; Parsons, 2015a, b).

Whilst the Bourdieusian stream on taste, class and food is rich (e.g. Cappellini, 2010, 2017; Cappellini, Parsons & Harman, 2016), foodie culture

has gained attention only recently (Kahma *et al.*, 2015; Gad Mohsen, 2017). Lacunae exist in comparative research on tribal foodie discourse (Burton, 2016), and despite recent CCT-based attempts of typologisation of foodies, they are still an “unconceptualised consumer group” (Canniford, 2005) that merits increased attention, with a marketing viewpoint (Gad Mohsen, 2017).

Food and cooking are entwined with the narratives – and roles – of women as care providers (de Vault, 1996; Ulver, 2015; Parsons, 2015a; Jovanovski, 2017a, 2017b). Pirani, Cappellini and Harman (2018, p325) claim for more feminist studies on three constitutive elements of food discourse: the collectives, the practices and the gaze, of which the first two are addressed here. Although the authors’ focus is on food advertising, there are many intersections with online foodie culture discourse of non- or semi-commercial nature.

Despite copious research on tribal consumption in CCT, more detailed analysis on resonances between a neo-Maffesolian conception of tribalism and its interpretation in CCT is recently claimed for (Cova & Dalli, 2018), particularly on three dimensions: local territory as a prevalent factor, sharing of taste, and playfulness (*op. cit.*, pp.238-239, citing Maffesoli, 2010). Study of taste in the tribal context of defined territories (here, online marketplaces) amongst playful foodie consumers is a relevant and timely topic.

1.4.2 Online foodie cultures

Secondly, research on food consumption in online communities has lacunae. Cronin and McCarthy (2011) state that the majority of consumer research on food is survey-based and targets attitudes based on ethnicity, class or region. Online communities have not generated much research on how food conveys self- and community-level identity (*op. cit.*). Furthermore, MacKendrick (2014) claims for more attention to digital components of foodscapes.

Närvänen, Kartastenpää and Kuusela (2013) and Jacobsen, Tudoran and Lähteenmäki (2017) argue for more research on food-oriented lifestyle

communities online. All digital environments necessitate analysis in consumption research (Rokka, 2010; Weiho, Hietanen & Mattila, 2014; Rokka & Canniford, 2016; Kozinets, Patterson & Ashman, 2017). De Valck (2010) observes that online community studies focus mostly on factors affecting joining and participation, with less interest in their functions and dynamics. Moreover, Kozinets argues for more research on consumer-generated ratings and reviews (2016), which is a field necessitating interdisciplinary collaboration. Here, consumer reviews are addressed in the context of product and outlet ratings, abundant online in all three languages studied. Lupton and Feldman (2020, p3) detect a significant lack in study of digital contexts of food altogether: “...the popular and ever-expanding streams of digital content concerning food production, preparation and consumption has not received a high level of attention until recently.”

1.4.3 Foodie discourse and its cross-linguistic study

Thirdly, discourse and language merit in-depth research within consumption studies. Iqani (2018) observes a need to inquire consumer culture discourses with an interdisciplinary approach, since it is “impossible” (*op. cit.*, p275) to study consumption without consideration of the media, and vice versa. From the viewpoint of language, most research on foodie discourse is based on English language and targets primarily foodies in the United States or Canada (Johnston & Baumann, 2015). Moreover, gaps persist regarding intercultural dimensions of foodie discourse, in particular with a gendered, critical orientation (Jovanovski, 2017a, 2017b).

Research on computer-mediated communication is dominated by English (Johnstone, 2016; Coats 2016), and online Finnish is under-represented (Kytölä, 2013). Furthermore, sociologists Purhonen and Heikkilä note that “*studies analyzing culinary taste [of Finnish consumers] as a status marker have been relatively scarce*”, (2017, p75). A comparative aspect is lacking in studies on food discourse in all three languages constituent of the data here. Despite an increase in CCT-oriented approaches of food consumption, since

the early 2010s, it is noteworthy that cross-linguistic studies remain utterly scarce.

All these viewpoints have inspired the research questions, presented in 1.5. A final note is needed on delineation: fields of dietary and nutritional research are excluded from the study, as they would expand the theory too much, and since they would require expertise beyond that of the author.³

1.5 Research questions

Gummesson (2003, p484) defines preunderstanding of the field in interpretive research as things that “[...]we know about the phenomenon of study when we start out on a research expedition[...]”. Whilst preunderstanding constructs the foundation for interpretive research and frames the research approach and questions, understanding of the phenomenon is the outcome of the process (*op. cit.*, p486).

The present research questions are positioned in a framework of solid prior knowledge, stemming from a long career in hospitality education, from academic studies in related disciplines and from a broad interest in foodie cultures in many languages. The most important source for this accumulation of prior contextual knowledge is however the pilot study of the present research (Mäkelä, 2016), where an extensive dataset of online foodie discourse was collected and analysed, to study distinction practices and to test the adaptability of the concept of foodscapes (see Chapter 6 for a more detailed presentation). Hence, research questions are derived from the researcher’s preunderstanding construed by prior knowledge, literature and practice. They support the adopted constructive ontology, with foodies considered as a large consumptive tribe where emerging online communities exhibit sub-tribal consumption patterns.

³ Some references stem, however, from scholarly contributions of these fields.

Preunderstanding of the field and an extensive study of food-related, CCT-oriented literature in sociology, marketing and linguistics for the literature review (Chapters 2-5) oriented the inquiry towards the totemic nature of chilli and chocolate in online spheres where distinction is performed in various ways and where gender and power are negotiated continuously. This preunderstanding resulted in three viewpoints: (1) emergence of chilli and chocolate as totemic foods in online foodie discourse (2) performance of taste and distinction observed therein and, (3) gender and power as broader societal constructs entangled in and regulating this discourse. The dimensions of study lead to unfolding of *discursive foodscapes* where people, products and places involved in the research context entwine. The interaction provides a starting point for a critical discourse analysis, proceeding from a micro-level of consumer communities to a more macroscopic approach: how do distinction, gender and power emerge in taste-oriented online foodie discourse, on totemic chilli and chocolate, in a broader view?

Research questions contribute to a functional methodological and conceptual framework (Myers, 2013), whilst keeping in mind that their focus shifts in the process (Flick, von Kardorff & Steinke, 2004, p149), and that they are interconnected. Research questions reflect a relatively broad approach to the topic, hence interpreting its exploratory nature (Myers, 2013) and encapsulating contextual preunderstanding (Gummesson, 2003):

RQ1 How do chilli and chocolate emerge as totemic foods in online discourse in Finnish, English and French?

RQ2: How do consumers perform taste and distinction across discursive productions on chilli and chocolate online?

RQ3: How do discursive foodscapes relate to broader constructions of gender and power?

As these questions permit reformulation of problem setting and enable incremental discoveries, they can also be characterised as generative

questions (Flick, von Kardorff & Steinke, 2004, pp149–150). RQ1 being the broadest, it englobes the core phenomenon of observation: how are discursive foodscapes of chilli and chocolate construed online by foodies in three languages, whilst RQ2 and RQ3 bring additional insights into this investigation.

1.6 Thesis structure

The thesis consists of ten chapters. In this introductory chapter, the positioning, motivation and objectives are outlined. They are elaborated conceptually, with the analysis of prior research in Chapters 2–4: Chapter 2 discusses literature on consumption of food essentially in the framework of Consumer Culture Studies, whereas Chapter 3 presents distinction theory and taste studies across CCT-oriented literature. Chapter 4 signposts chilli and chocolate as focal foods of the study. Chapter 5 unpacks literature on computer-mediated discourse, with an introductory section on discourse and its gender-conscious study, and a section on complexity of determining mother tongues of online contributors. The topic is multi-faceted, hence its interconnectedness with food, discourse, language, distinction, taste, foodways, online environments and consumer studies needs to be established with an interdisciplinary literature review.

Chapter 6 consists of methodology, linking together research philosophy, approach and methods that are presented and justified with consideration of research ethics. Moreover, in this chapter are described data collection, sources in the corpus, its categorisation and eventually, processes of coding and analysis.

Chapters 7–9 unpack the findings of the empirical study, and the final tenth chapter presents a discussion section where contribution to knowledge and further implications are presented. An exhaustive list of data fragments in corpus is provided as Appendix 1, a testimonial on translations of quotations

from Finnish and French into English features as Appendix 2, and a detailed list of outcomes and findings as Appendix 3.

1.7 Conclusion

In this introductory chapter, personal as well as scholarly motivations to conduct the study are outlined. Furthermore, the introduction locates the study within a broad theoretical paradigm of consumer culture studies.

The interdisciplinary nature of the study is considered in terms of the approach, opening horizons to a variety of disciplines and to a multi-faceted understanding of the complex phenomena of consumer culture *vis à vis* online foodscapes. The aim to understand and theorise distinction, gender and power constructions across disparate spaces justifies their use. This has led to formulation of three research questions: the first RQ opens up a broad cross-linguistic investigation, to which two other RQs contribute with specific insights, being thematically complementary to the first one.

Chapter 2: Food in consumption culture

2.1 Introduction

“In-depth studies of food systems remind us of the pervasive role of food in human life.” (Mintz & Du Bois, 2002, p102)

Whilst being an inseparable part of everyday life, food has transformed itself from a simple necessity for human subsistence to a constantly evolving context of conspicuous consumption (Veblen, 1899). Therefore, food constitutes an extraordinary topic to study consuming actions. Trentmann (2012, pp1-3) draws a metaphor of consumption as a *“mirror of human condition”*, arguing that definitions of such a multi-faceted phenomenon, in the interface of a variety of disciplines, depend on the position of the observer. Here, consumption culture related to food is observed through an interdisciplinary lens of sociological, cultural and marketing studies, complemented by linguistically oriented inquiry.

“Consumption” has a manifold and inspiring signification in English: the act of eating or drinking, the act of using something (as a fuel), and the use of something by a particular group of people (Merriam-Webster, 2016). Hence, the consumption of food is both procuring and eating. Turner, Ferguson, Craig, Jeffries and Beaton (2013) highlight that consumption of food is a field combining all four metaphors of consumption in general: experience, play, classification and integration. In this process, the integrative dimension is most tightly linked to identity construction: consumers attempt to become the person they wish to become, by consumption of foods that they associate with this idealised self-identity (*op. cit.* p281), and by discursive reproductions of this consumption.

2.2. Key concepts

The key concepts of the study, unpacked in this section, are developed further in the literature review. Although *online discourse*, *online communities* and *gender* do not relate directly to studies on food in consumption culture,

they are defined briefly here, to facilitate conceptualising of the research context.

2.2.1 Foodies

Originally, the term *foodie* was introduced in the magazine *Harpers & Queen* (Watson, 2008), and as early as 1984 Barr and Levy had detected this nascent trend of food passion, with their provocative book title “*The official handbook of foodies (Be modern - worship food)*.” (Mapes, 2015). The continuum from interest to worship adds to the difficulty of finding an adequate definition. Broadly defined, “foodie” signifies a person very interested in various cuisines and in the quality of the ingredients. In Finnish discourse, a foodie can also be a food professional, since the term is used with a somewhat wider meaning than in English or French (Mäkelä, 2016).

Cairns *et al.* (2010) describe however a foodie as a passionate, non-professional person, interested in learning about food. Leal and Arellano (2012) draw on this approach and claim that foodies manifest status by exhibiting knowledge on food and trends in consumption, cooking skills, and understanding of “*food marketing tactics*.” (Leal & Arellano, 2012, p3). Pioneering foodie scholars Johnston and Baumann (2009; 2015) refer to a heterogeneous group of people who love food and talking about it as an essential part of their consumptive lifestyle. Gad Mohsen (2017, p1) observes that the foodie consumption style encapsulates five domains of action: “*learning and discovery; pleasure and enjoyment; inspirational influences; quality; and experiencing food as an individual and in connection with others.*”

Foodies are postmodern consumers who use food when constructing their status in social contexts, as part of their self-identification, even though they do not necessarily identify themselves with this denomination. Rejection of stereotypic categorisations is detected moreover in a number of consumer studies and food (Johnston & Baumann, 2009, 2015; Leal & Arellano, 2012; Vásquez & Chic, 2015; Mäkelä, 2016; Vojnovic, 2017).

Furthermore, “foodie” is not a neutral word, as words seldom are. Ferdman (2016) characterises the term as inflated by ubiquitous commercial use, which has transformed it into an insult-like epithet for people who proclaim themselves specialists in something that they do not understand. Moreover, he reminds us of the pejorative term “foodies”, suggested by *The Observer* in 2009. Vojnovic (2017) supports this, referring to the suffix *-ie* as a pejoratively marked one, which may lead to negative connotations. A tendency to distinguish traditional, sophisticated and capital-intensive *gourmet* orientation from the omnivorous and democratising (Johnston & Baumann, 2009, 2015) foodie consumption is obvious.

Foodies tend to differ from an epicurean orientation based on sensual pleasure seeking and several researchers define foodie culture as a part of the postmodern omnivorous consumption style (Peterson, 2005; Johnston & Baumann 2007, 2009, 2015; Leal & Arellano, 2012; Lizardo & Skiles, 2012; Allen, 2012; Arsel & Bean, 2013; Caldwell, 2014; Lindblom & Mustonen, 2015; Oleschuk, 2016; Maciel & Wallendorf, 2016). Omnivorous consumers appreciate food in a manifold and flexible way, and tasty street food as well as fine dining or exotic cuisines are all facets of the rapidly changing consumption prism, appreciated by culinary omnivores cherishing taste and style (Lizardo & Skiles, 2012; Mapes, 2015; Fitzmaurice, 2017). Moreover, de Solier emphasises the impact of globalisation and transnational cultural flows across “food, tastes, media, capital and people” (de Solier, 2013, p13) for the emergence of foodie identity.

“Foodie” may be compared to another broad denomination within the cosmopolitan consumption culture framework, “hipster”: challenging to define but broadly outlined as an authenticity-seeking, translocal micro-population of consumers, constantly reproducing itself through discourse (Maly & Varis, 2016). Instead of being established identity descriptors, both terms are pragmatic and relate to a wide stream of contemporary consumptive cultures. Moreover, they tend to be rejected by individuals who are defined as foodies or hipsters by others (Cronin & MacCarthy & Collins, 2014; Vásquez & Chik, 2015; Maly & Varis, 2016).

Other terms in English for food-oriented consumers are e.g. *epicure*, *gourmet*, *food lover* or *food amateur*. However, their meanings do not fully meet with the dimensions of *foodie*, as described above. In French, *gourmet* traditionally stands for an amateur who accentuates exclusive elements of food culture, such as fine dining restaurants. Interestingly, the Larousse dictionary attaches the dimension of distinction to the notion: *gourmet* is defined with the capacity of distinguishing and appreciating fine cuisine and fine wines (Larousse, 2018). The word *épicurien* has similar connotations, whilst it carries a strong dimension of seeking sensual pleasure from food and drink (*op. cit.*).

In contemporary French, the loan word *foodista* co-occurs with *foodie*, in online contexts. The term emulates *fashionista*, signifying a consumer mostly of female gender, with great interest to fashion. It conveys hence the dimension of trend-following without the elitist connotations of *gourmet* or *gastronome*. With the expansion of cosmopolitan and omnivorous food consumption in France and in French – where “la food” occasionally supplements “la cuisine” – the signification of *foodista* has shifted to both men and women, to complement traditional high-brow cuisine enthusiasts (Food Geek and Love, 2016b).

In French-speaking Canada in 2015, the efforts of avoiding use of loan words from English inspired a neologism, *cuisinomane*, to replace *foodie* (Saint, 2016). The definition is very similar to Johnston and Baumann’s: “A person passionate about food [also nutrition] and culinary art.” (Office Québécois de la langue française, 2017). However, *cuisinomane* is seldom encountered in media platforms established outside Canada.

Vásquez and Chik (2015) argue that “foodie” as a classifying term is more appropriate for research purposes than as an instrument of identity construction for consumers. Aligning with this view, Gad Mohsen (2017) suggests the level of involvement in food culture as the primary criterium of foodieism where learning and enhancing quality are salient, whilst seeking for pleasure, inspiration and experiences. In this vein, the term is used here to

englobe consumers who represent a wide array of food passion orientations, although these may not be fully compatible. Nevertheless, “foodie” is appropriate as a generic concept, to distinguish between average consumers and consumers who are particularly attached to consumption where food is ascribed with deep and special meanings, and who perform distinctive practices across this process.

2.2.2 Foodscape

Food studies encapsulate approaches from a variety of disciplines: nutrition, marketing, sociology, cultural studies, philosophy, aesthetics, literature, linguistics; with their paradigmatic traditions. Yet, they constitute a fertile field for an interdisciplinary approach (Beardsworth & Keil, 1996; Mintz, 2002; Adema, 2007; Wilk, 2012; Abarca & Colby, 2016). A key concept for facilitating an interdisciplinary approach is *foodscape*, coined to shed light on the complex phenomena of food in social settings and applied here as a framework-type theoretical tool (Alasuutari, 1990). It entwines the dimensions of people, place and product: what kind of food is consumed, where, when, how, and by whom. Foodscape is a tool to describe our food environments (Mikkelsen, 2011), “weaving together” the individual and the surrounding environment, culture and society (Björk & Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2019, p468). Surman and Hamilton (2018) emphasise moreover its nature as an embodied and discursive space.

Foodscape is a concept inspired by the “-scapes” reflecting modern society, introduced originally by Appadurai (1990). It is widely used in studies of urban cultures (MacKendrick, 2014), in particular in contexts of experiential consumption catering for pleasure-seeking contemporary consumers (Björk & Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2019). Taking foodscape as a nexus of observation deepens the linkage of the study to other fields of business research, e.g. with analogy to “servicescape”, a marketing concept created to emphasise the impact of the physical environment on the customer’s experience (Sherry, 1998). Being a flexible suffix, -scape has been attached to several other concepts: *brandscape*, *mediascape* or *kitchenscape*, which speaks for its

productivity and usefulness. Foodscapes analysed here can be divided moreover in *chocolatescapes* and *chilliscapes*.

Foodscape is a dynamic social construction combining products, places and people in embodied acts of consumption. National, regional, local and context-specific consumption practices of food are often referred to as *foodways*, itself used parallelly with *food culture(s)* (Gatley, 2012). Foodways represent traditions and practices of social, cultural and economic nature relating to food, to the ways of preparing and consuming it (Peres, 2017). The term is preferred by food scholars, whereas sociologists and consumer culture researchers tend to employ “food culture” or “culinary culture”. When the dimension of place is added, the concept is close to foodscape.

Johnston and Baumann (2009, p3) define foodscape by its capacity to link food to specific places, people and meanings. These can be either geographic, social or conceptual, and therefore it is possible to speak of foodscapes with epithets such as French (British or Finnish), foodie, slow food, gourmet, vegetarian, masculine or feminine, amongst others. Hedegaard (2013) emphasises the pertinence of foodscape as a core concept for exploring interactions between food and people in the globalising world: it is flexible and offers multiple interpretations.

The material level is the most common field of foodscape study, unfolding concrete dimensions such as availability, quality, price and contextual consumption of food (Sobal & Wansink, 2007; Mikkelsen, 2011; Hedegaard, 2013; Filomena, Scanlin & Moorland, 2013; Goodman, 2015; Surman & Hamilton, 2018). However, it may be applied to less tangible dimensions: in sociology, the concept is extended by encompassing institutional arrangements, cultural spaces and discourses mediating our relationship with food (MacKendrick, 2014, p16). It provides possibilities to study interconnections of food production and consumption (Adema, 2007; Mikkelsen, 2011; Hedegaard, 2013, 2016; MacKendrick, 2014; Hinricks, 2015, Björk & Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2019), or even educational opportunities

(Surman & Hamilton, 2018). These are relevant in the context of foodies, who often practice a presumptive⁴ orientation with food (Leal & Arellano, 2012).

Björk and Kauppinen-Räsänen (2019) investigate destination foodscapes and define self, place, food context, and time as the essential constituents of experiential food memories (*op. cit.*, p470). Their findings resonate with the perception of food as an integral dimension of experiential consumption, and emphasise its fluid and yet embodied nature.

Foodscapes can be researched from a wide field of viewpoints, with evolving degrees of concreteness. Surman and Hamilton (2018, p4) observe the shifting nature of foodscape constituents that may emerge from “*geographical, temporal, discursive, material or intellectual interactions and meetings*”. Here, the target is discourse on food, which has resulted in a necessity to introduce a concept delineating the study: *discursive foodscape* (Mäkelä, 2016). It locates the study with discourse on food consumption, instead of studying concrete presence and physical dimensions. It is noteworthy that the “place” in this context is not a geographical, but a conceptual place, or a web of interconnected conceptual places on the Internet. Similar approaches are found in the study of conceptual or “spaceless foodscapes” (Hinricks, 2015), and in “relational foodscapes” (Goodman, 2015). Moreover, convergences exist with semiotic analysis of language and food representing communication as nourishment (Riley & Cavanaugh, 2017).

A discursive foodscape consists of a web of representations, interpretations and significations ascribed to food across discourse on personal, collective, shared, exhibited, and online dimensions. This process is tied to a network of social and discursive interrelations, constantly modified by the backgrounds of counterparts, and in a dynamic movement in online platforms (Mäkelä,

⁴ *Presumption* signifies consumption that is combined to production and may have commercial implications. An example is provided by chilli enthusiasts who grow rare varieties for their personal use, alongside selling seeds to other consumers. Crafting raw or artisanal chocolate is another foodie-type presumptive activity.

2016; McDonnell, 2016; Koh, 2017; Jones & Nash, 2017). It facilitates the study of digital environments where concrete foodscapes are challenging to detect, unless a visual dimension is included in the study⁵.

A discursive foodscape conceptualises the combination of discursive features and chilli and chocolate as the context of study. It is used as a framework to analyse the way of using language, when referring to foodie consumption. It is not a term of established use, but suggested here as a methodological tool in approaching the “foodtalk” of different consumer groups, studied across online discourse. With the concept, the interdisciplinary orientation of the study is strengthened which contributes to scholarly conversations of sociolinguistically oriented food studies with a new application of a theoretical instrument.

2.2.3 Totemic foods

“Totemism occurs when food becomes a symbol of group identities.” (Brunori, 2007).

The third significant concept of the dissertation is *totemic foods*. In common discourse, a totem is a symbol for a family or a tribe, representing in various ways an idea of belonging (Merriam-Webster, 2017). For Lévi-Strauss, a key scholar in totemistic theorising in anthropology, totems were emblematic figures that help clans in the integration and development of distinctive identities (Cayla, 2013, p93). The original, tribal signification of the word is linked to kinship (Insoll, 2011) and can be extended from indigenous contexts to a contemporary, broad interpretation. Therein, the metaphor can be expanded, when referring to myths or totemism (Insoll, 2011, p2008).

Totems are an eloquent metaphor, widely used within the paradigm of tribal consumption (Maffesoli, 1996; Cova, Kozinets & Shankar, 2007; Mitchell, 2011; Pinheiro-Machado & Scalco, 2012; Goulding, Shankar & Canniford,

⁵ For copyright and methodological reasons, visual representations of food are left out of this study, although they constitute an essential element of online foodie culture. They merit however research in their own right, such as Mejova, Haddar & Addadi (2016).

2013). A product, a brand or a service may act like a totem for postmodern tribes, sustaining connection (Cova, 1997, p307). Totem as a metaphor draws moreover from semiotics where the concepts of sign, symbol and metaphor are applied (Greimas, 1990).

Interestingly, metaphoric references to the totemic nature of consumption phenomena or substances occur in several studies analysed for the present literature review, as a way to approach a complex phenomenon and to highlight its symbolism in sustaining bonds (Barthes, 1957; Cova, 1997; Ferguson, 2006; de Valck, 2007; Brunori, 2007; de Valck *et al.* 2009; Pinheiro-Machado & Scalco, 2012; Stratton & Northcote, 2014).

Stratton and Northcote (2014, p2, p8) develop the metaphor by referring to brands as totems of modern clans, offering powerful experiences and a culture rich with rituals. Furthermore, a shared concept such as healthiness or authenticity of food can become a unifying totem for like-minded consumers (de Valck *et al.*, 2009). Thus, the idea of a totemic effect of an artifact is transferred from the domain of cultural anthropology towards consumption studies, embracing food as a potential totemic substance. Totemic value can be attributed either to a foodstuff or to a characteristic of food, as well as to its contextual consumption in ancient or contemporary rituals. The author identified *good taste* as a unifying totem for foodie bloggers in Finnish and French (Mäkelä, 2016), and Brunori (2007) highlights the Italian Slow Food movement as a totemic consumption stream, embracing quality of food as the community totem.

Food with totemic meanings is associated primarily with primitive societies (Durkheim, 1990; Lévi-Strauss, 1963, 1968). Moreover, it has an important role in contemporary ritualistic consumption, as Wallendorf and Arnould observe on Thanksgiving meal rituals (1991). Unpacking ritualistic consumption of food, performed and described by foodie consumers, entwines this research to the study of more general commensality practices (Fischler, 2011; Danesi, 2014). By *commensality*, one refers broadly to various practices of sharing food and eating together. Commensality online is

less significant than in offline reality, and it is salient mostly across description of practices.

An important trigger for the present research was the anecdote by Roland Barthes (1957) on wine as the “totemic drink of the Frenchness”. Rowley (2000) complements this argument, drawing on Lévi-Straussian theorising and asserting that the McDonald’s flag on the roof of the fast-food outlet can be interpreted as a sign of belonging to the American clan, like frog eating marks the belonging to the French clan (Rowley, 2000, p168). The connection between food and an emblematic or a totemic power ascribed to it is not new (Durkheim, 1910; Brunori, 2007), and this study seeks to contribute to this discussion by deciphering how contemporary totemic significations of two transnationally cherished foodstuffs, chilli and chocolate, are developed across three languages, whilst they remain embedded in the global foodie consumption phenomenon online. Both chilli and chocolate generate emotional attachment and value-laden discourse, to the extent of a totemic function.

2.2.4 Online community

The fourth fundamental concept is *online community*. The digital world is a cultural and a social world, as real as the “real world”, but different (Kozinets, 2012, p39). Consumers constantly construct their self-image and relations to other people, on- and offline, throughout consumption acts. Online communities are formed by interests, goals, beliefs, ideologies, brands and lifestyles. For foodie consumers, rituals and traditions of communities related to food reinforce bonds that are enhanced further by common discourse (Counihan, 2008; Fieldhouse, 2017).

Kozinets (1999, p254) defines online collectives with activities stemming from knowledge and enthusiastic sharing of defined consumption practices. They evoke interest among researchers in consumption and cultural studies, communication, marketing and sociology, which adds to the terminological

diversity and justifies an interdisciplinary approach, particularly appropriate for studies related to food (Mintz, 2002; Wilk, 2012; Abarca & Colby, 2016).

In the vein of the neo-tribal metaphors drawing from anthropology, online communities can be characterised as “virtual tribes” (Cova, 1997; Canniford, 2005; Maffesoli, 2007, 2010). Tribe-related discourses express member identity and interpret significations to make sense of the “connected collectivity world” (Goulding *et al.*, 2013, p814, p817). When studying consumption and online discourse related to it, the Internet is both the market and the medium. (Hamilton & Hewer, 2010, p272).

In the participatory cultures of Web 2.0, social practices are evolving towards context-specific interaction and consumption, defined by Kozinets (2015) as *consociality*; a type of cohesion that is sustained by dynamic community-building and technological affordances of social networking services. It can become established (as in communities of practice, see Chapter 5), or remain ephemeral or even incidental. Belk and Costa (1998) referred, prior to the advent of the social web, to the fragmentary and episodic nature of consumer identities which foregrounded consumer cultures in digital realms.

Here, online communities are defined pragmatically as groups of people who use Internet-based forums, in particular Social Network Services (SNS), to interact, communicate and have fun. The phenomenon of SNS dates from the early 2010s and it is linked to the development and affordances of Web 2.0. (Hamilton & Hewer, 2010; Evans, Pearce, Vitak & Treem, 2017). Social networking dominates consumer time spent online (Campbell *et al.* 2014); in December 2019, Facebook had more than 2,5 billion users in the world (Statista, 2020).

Navigation between different sites for various purposes and adoption of changing avatars — to disguise occasionally or permanently one’s real identity — in this online reality nomadism may appear an effort-consuming process, but the “virtual world” also provides for its inhabitants

(Androutsopoulos & Juffermans, 2014; Wu & Li, 2016). Online existence may be empowering: *“the site supports the self”* (Turkle, 2015, p195).

Denominations for collectivities of consumption in online environments vary from *online* or *e-groups* to *e-communities*, *virtual groups of interest* and *virtual tribes*, depending on their forum, volume and structure, and on the paradigm of the observer. This study contributes, with a transnational perspective, to the scholarly conversations on discourse of food-oriented online communities. Within Consumer Culture Theory, it is positioned in the field of consumption cultures characterised as neo-tribal.

2.2.5 Online discourse

“Discourse” refers to actualisations of language, which is an abstraction and hence subject to purely linguistic approaches. Since the Internet is the context of the study and the source of data collection, *online discourse* is one of the most essential concepts, and used throughout the study as a generic term. However, with the literature stemming from research on digital communication (Chapter 5), a more specific notion, Computer-Mediated Discourse (CMD), is employed.

Discourse fragments collected originate from Social Networking Services. They encourage joining groups based on shared interests and provide a variety of fora to interact and communicate (boyd & Ellison, 2008), as presented in the previous section. Discourse in SNS gets shaped by the unpredictable behavior of users. However, the need to identify with communities through consumption, and to share these experiences, is a key characteristic in SNS communication (Canniford, 2005; Maffesoli, 2007; Cova & Cova, 2007; Watson, Morgan & Hemmington, 2008; Hamilton & Hower, 2010; de Valck, 2010; Goulding, Shankar & Canniford, 2013; Kytölä, 2013; Jones & Nash, 2017).

A more in-depth presentation of Computer-Mediated Discourse is provided in Chapter 5.

2.2.6 Taste and distinction

To approach totemic significations ascribed to food, the concept of *taste* is essential. It is fundamental also as a primary sense for the survival of human beings. The definition of taste is twofold: the physiological – or gustatory – taste (Falk, 1994), experienced by tasting a food or an ingredient, and the socially constructed taste (Bourdieu, 1979) that is used in processes of identity building and social distinction (Warde, Wright & Gayo-Cal, 2007; Virtanen, 2007; Arsel & Bean, 2013; Johnston & Baumann, 2015; Lindblom & Mustonen, 2015; Maciel & Wallendorf, 2016; Cappellini, Parsons & Harman, 2016; Purhonen & Heikkilä, 2017).

The physiological dimension of taste is linked to the notion of *flavour* which signifies complex combinations of odour, texture and taste. For chilli and chocolate, flavours can be characterised — albeit in a very generalising manner — respectively as pungent, and bitter or sweet. Their other qualities are developed more in detail in section 4.2.

Chapter 3 unpacks taste as a social construct, drawing on Bourdieu's seminal contribution (1979): across consumption choices, individuals perform taste by constructing a lifestyle referred to as *habitus*. This process unfolds as *distinction*: the motivation to perform one's uniqueness and to display assets in social interaction. In the empirical part, the conceptual notion of *taste engineering* (Maciel & Wallendorf, 2016) is applied and adapted, to seek answers to the Research Question 2 on how consumers perform taste in online settings.

2.2.7 Gender

The notion of *gender* facilitates the construction of a lens abiding with the feminist epistemology, establishing a foundation for the researcher's situatedness (Haraway, 1988). Moreover, cross-linguistic variation in discourse is studied from a critical (Wodak & Meyer, 2016), gender-

conscious aspect, where divergences across positions and power relations of people of different genders are observed.

Drawing on the biological distinction in males and females, the concept of gender englobes by extension an understanding of the cultural and social aspects that are bound to the biological gender, one's perception of it, and the reproductions of this embeddedness, its embodiment. Gender-conscious research challenges extant views of the "malestream" (Oakley, 1998) of research dominated by male scholars, in order to shed light on hidden phenomena that stem from inequality positions amongst people, or that observe variation in behavior across sexes without assumptions of inequality, but difference.

In sociolinguistics, gender is perceived as a category that is constructed, maintained and also disrupted by linguistic practices that in turn shape language itself. Contextual changes in discourse generate variation in emergence of gender and its reproductions (Bamman, Eisenstein & Schnoebelen, 2014).

Social studies that target questions of inequality and power are tagged as "critical". Critical discourse studies (Chapter 6) are a rich arena for gender-conscious research, whilst power constructs are revealed through and in discourse (Fairclough, 2015). In this vein, the study draws on the poststructural stream of feminism that perceives discourse as a key constituent of social structures, including their inequalities (Maclaran & Stevens, 2019). Seeking answers to Research Question 3 targets discursive reproductions, i.e. the ways how gender is referred to in online discourse of foodies, and how it emerges in discourse of online contributors of different genders. Problematisation of contemporary gender discussions such as transgender identities remains however outside the present scope.

2.3 Delineating prior research of the field

This study contributes to the scholarly conversations (Fischer, Gopaldas & Scaraboto, 2017) on consumption of food in the interpretive field of CCT, by analysing discursive practices of foodie-oriented consumption across Social Networking Services. This orientation has guided the delineation of literature.

Byrd and Byrd (2017) divide food studies broadly into two main fields: cultural and structural, the first prevailing in extant literature stemming from social sciences (*op. cit.* p423). Here, the dimensions of consumption culture and food culture entwine. According to Mintz and Du Bois (2002), classic food ethnographies are dominated by the following orientations: commodities and substances, food and social change, food insecurity, eating and ritual, eating and identities, and instructional materials. The authors argue that food insecurity and eating, combined to rituals and identities, are the most extensively targeted.

Embracing the division by Mintz and Du Bois (2002), this review focuses on the multi-faceted dimensions of (1) eating and identity, and (2) eating and ritual. To complement these streams, the adopted research design inspires a contextual constituent: (3) significations ascribed to food in online environments. This compilation of prior research provides a relevant background, presenting contemporary and classic studies on tribal consumption patterns, online environments and consumption collectivities attached to them, in food contexts.

The studies presented inspired the formulation of the research questions: how totemic significations are displayed in chocolate and chilli discourse in tribe-like online communities, how taste and distinction emerge in their discourse, and how they resonate with gender and power constructs. Consequently, the emphasis is on consumptive acts of groups of people, although individual dimensions have relevance for identity building and taste performance.

2.4 Structure of the review

The review opens up with food as a constituent of identity (2.5), to continue towards a broader view on social dimensions across tribal and ritual consumption contexts and materiality of food (2.6). In order to support theorising according to the research questions, a more detailed analysis on food consumption in relation to gender is provided therein.

In literature, these themes interconnect: foodie identities reveal themselves also in tribal consumption patterns of food, whilst totemic features of food are tightly connected to the social component of foodie identity. Most of the literature presented in sections 2.5–2.7 unpacks food in general, although it can be applied to consumption contexts of chilli and chocolate as well. The particularities of these foodstuffs are presented moreover in section 4.2.

2.5 Food as a constituent of identity

“Dites-moi ce que vous mangez et je vous dirai ce que vous êtes.” (Anthelme Brillat-Savarin, 1825)

The famous quotation from Brillat-Savarin’s *“La physiologie du goût”* (The Physiology of Taste), freely translated as “Tell me what you eat and I will tell you what you are” – sometimes also as “who you are” – brilliantly unfolds the profound interrelations of eating habits and identity. The book is one of the most eminent contributions on taste in gastronomy, aptly defined as a “totemic culinary text” (Ferguson, 2006, p2). Moreover, Ferguson extends Brillat-Savarin’s observation: in addition to the signification of what we eat, we are also formed by how, where, when, and why we eat.

Abarca and Colby (2016) pursue Ferguson’s (2006) theorising, linking the identification process by food to discourse with the claim that not only food determines our *“social and cultural subjectivities”*, but also the stories that we tell about our food practices (*op. cit.* p7). This insight, defined as *gastrography*, is one of the key elements to analyse discourse stemming

from a deeply emotional relationship with food, where it becomes a focal constituent of identity on individual and community levels, and leads to processes of performing this relationship in online behavior. Coleman (2007, p175, drawing on Lupton) argues moreover that food is essential for the entire construction of the self and the social experience. This embeddedness of the consumer's identity and her performance of consumptive acts, whilst displaying distinction across taste issues, justifies an overview of the foodie identity here.

In the postmodern world, consumption is a substantial element of identification processes where food items stand out as culturally sensitive products (Theocarous, 2015). Firat and Venkatesh (1995) refer to "liberatory postmodernism", where consumption has become a context for emancipation, but also of spectacularisation and drama (Moisio & Arnould, 2005), since the individual consumer has acquired a preponderant role in the process. One's life and its consumptive choices are formed into a spectacle which is often shared online. In the context of computer-mediated discourse (Chapter 5), this process is characterised as self-fashioning (Uski & Lampinen, 2016; Siles, 2012). Postmodern consumer identities emerge, however, often as episodic and fractionated (Belk & Costa, 1998), which in the present context entails proliferation of entangling sub-cultural performances online.

Alongside its emancipatory value, consumption is a field of manifold cultural and social distinction: through their daily practices, foodie consumers negotiate cultural spaces that constitute their lifestyle (Bourdieu, 1979; Johnston & Baumann, 2009, 2015; Gad Mohsen, 2017). These distinction practices are closely entwined to construction and display of identities. Notwithstanding the challenges of defining a "foodie identity" that may include a large array of possible food consumption orientations, food is an undeniable constituent of identity, and the process emerges moreover on several dimensions. An example from a national level are the cherished national foodways of Frenchmen (Barthes, 2008 [1961]). This may lead to national stereotypes; one example is the pejorative denomination "les

Frogs” used by the British for the French, due to their traditional consumption of frogs, considered as disagreeable.⁶

Furthermore, identity representation with food unfolds on a narrower, community level, pertinent here across ubiquitous food-related social media sites (Xin & Arsel, 2011; Vásquez & Chik, 2015; Wang, Kirilleva & Lehto, 2017; Jacobsen, Tudoran & Lähteenmäki, 2017), and on an individual level, when evaluating and making choices amongst various eating orientations (Mäkelä, 2016; Koh, 2017; Cappellini, 2017; Greenebaum & Dexter, 2017). Enthusiast consumers seeking for culinary experiences, defined broadly as foodies, construct their lifestyles with food as the key component of identity (Johnston & Baumann, 2009, 2015; Cairns, Johnston & Baumann, 2010; de Solier, 2013; Vásquez & Chic, 2015; Gad Mohsen, 2017).

Riley and Cavanaugh (2017) dissect an iconic, indexical and symbolical function that food ideologies, like language ideologies, have in connecting individuals to social categories, when foods that are salient indexically and/or symbolically transform into cultural icons. Organic bean-to-bar chocolate or rare Espelette chilli are examples of iconic products with social value in the present context.

The notion of “lifestyle” is solidly linked to post-Bourdieuian theorising on postmodern distinctive processes, where displaying one’s culinary experiences has become a fundamental constituent of identity (Johnston & Baumann, 2009, 2015; Katz-Gerro, 2011; Zukin, Lindeman & Hurson, 2015; Cappellini, Parsons & Harman, 2016; Maciel & Wallendorf, 2016; Jovanovski, 2017a, 2017b).

To complement Johnston and Baumann’s definition of foodies in the context of identity construction and display, Gad Mohsen (2017) claims for a more

⁶ However, this assumption is somewhat simplified. Claude Duneton derives the denomination from a place called La Grenouillère (*grenouille*=frog) in Paris which gradually became synonymic of unsophisticated language. By extension, the word was adopted to signify French emigrants in Great Britain. (*Le Figaro*, 2016).

elaborate typology. She distinguishes between five emerging themes in the contemporary foodie movement: learning and discovery, inspirational influences, quality, pleasure and enjoyment, and the experiential function of food. Being a foodie reveals itself as a fundamentally consumptive lifestyle, when these themes are juxtaposed with the general metaphors of consumption (Turner *et al.*, 2013): experience, play, classification and integration. Spectacularisation (Appadurai, 1990; Firat & Venkatesh, 1995) of one's food choices and of making them explicit online are tightly linked to these categories.

Experience, play, classification and integration emerge differently depending on various SNS – blogs, community websites, recipe sharing sites, restaurant reviewing or conversation fora – that unfold parallel dimensions of foodie identities. Various affordances of Web 2.0 platforms accentuate further the desire to make public one's consumptive choices that reflect different facets of the assumed foodie identity, as Kozinets, Patterson and Ashman (2017) reveal in their study on online restaurant reviews. Borderlines between private and public identity work are not easy to detect in online environments where strengthening group identity relates to self-enhancement (Siles, 2012; Grewal, 2015; Georgalou, 2016; Hogg, Abrams & Brewer, 2017).

Barthes observes a deep interconnection between food and humanity by interpreting food itself as a form of human communication: “[...] *substances, techniques of preparation, habits, all become part of a system of differences in signification; and as soon as this happens, we have communication by way of food*”. (Barthes, 2008 [1961], p25). In this system of significations, all food can be interpreted as signs in a given society, like clothing (Barthes, 2008 [1961]). This viewpoint is functional, whilst the framework of tribal consumption leads the observation towards the social identity of foodies: belonging to communities and expression of these memberships across consumptive acts and preferences.

Hogg, Abrams and Brewer (2017) distinguish between four fundamental manifestations of identity where the social dimension is incorporated: person-based social identities, relational social identities, group-based social identities and collective identities (*op. cit.* 2017, p571). The first one is particularly interesting, when it emerges as a manifestation of self-identity in a public context such as social networking services. In the Bourdieusian vein, this process signifies displaying one's consumer habitus.

Incontestably, self- and social identity are entwined, and here, theorising by Hall (1997) on fluid and processual identities is pertinent. In salient group contexts in particular, personal and collective identities may “fuse” (Hogg *et al.*, 2017, p572). This development is typical of consumption with tribal attributes, both on- and offline. Without further deepening the study of identity theories hereinafter, one can summarise that in the present study, “identity” refers to a Hallian understanding of constantly constructed identities, with individual and collective dimensions. The fundamental, epistemological stance adopted perceives identity performance as a partly public act, when in online platforms, whilst a foodie identity can be assumed also as a solitary process. However, when this identity is reflected and performed across various online contributions related to food, it becomes public.

The foods consumed and stories told about them have become one of the most important elements in identity construction, defining who postmodern consumers are and want to be (Lupton, 1996; Kittler & Sucher, 2006; Coleman, 2008; Counihan, 2008; Johnston & Baumann, 2009, 2015; Fischler, 2011; Rousseau, 2012; Kahma, Niva, Helakorpi & Jallinoja, 2015; Lindblom & Mustonen, 2015; Maciel & Wallendorf, 2016; Abarca & Colby, 2016; Vojnovic, 2017; Lupton & Feldman, 2020). However, eating orientations include also the level of *not* eating some foods or ingredients. In the identity work, abstinence for purposes of health, appearance, religion, ethical concerns or status seeking may become as important as preferences for other foods (Stommel, 2008; Arppe, Mäkelä & Väänänen, 2011; Greenebaum & Dexter, 2017).

Food and eating rituals such as family meals and home-made dishes are a key element in construction of identity on family level (Moisio, Arnould & Price, 2004; Cappellini, 2010). “*Food and drink are the lifeblood of social cohesion, integration and differentiation.*” (Wilson, 2006, p15). In all, consumption patterns of food delineate group membership and values affecting individual, local, regional, national or supranational identities and the representations of this identity work.

2.5.1 Food consumption and gender

Food abstinence behavior reflecting divergences between male and female eating orientations provides an insightful starting point for a gender-related analysis (Coleman, 2007). Turner, Ferguson, Craig, Jeffries and Beaton (2013) analysed selection and omission of foods, as well as the regulation of ration sizes reflecting gendered identity negotiations: a female identity, assumed as attractive, was characterised rather by the omission of food, whereas an espoused (heteromasculine) male identity was associated with consumption, especially of meat.

Abstinence is linked to sustainability and identity construction, as well as to iconic stereotypes of an ideal body. Feminist religion scholar Michelle Lelwica (2011) refers to pervasive weight control practices of women, encouraged by women’s magazines and media, as a “religion of thinness” that ritualises the female body to meet patriarchally dictated expectations towards women and their appearance. However, this trend is also identified amongst male consumers, and the “cult of looking good” whilst satisfying indulgent desires is pertinent in the present context, with discourse on chocolate in particular.

The dichotomy of a robust and meat-intensive diet of (working-class) men and the eating orientations characterised by vegetables and fish amongst women and middle-class men was emphasised also by Bourdieu (1979). Although his studies drew on French societal phenomena, Bourdieu’s work has significantly influenced subsequent theorising (Santoro, 2014) and

contributed to polarisation of gendered foodway stereotypes. A common trope is the inclination of women towards sweet foods and desserts, evoking sexual connotations, as developed e.g. by Coleman (2007) with women's magazines in the USA.

An interesting counterpoint related to abstinence is provided by Greenebaum and Dexter (2017), on vegan men who challenge extant stereotypes of meat-devouring male consumers. These men, abstaining from eating meat and all animal-derived ingredients, perform a "hybridized masculinity" that englobes both masculine and feminine elements, whilst embracing a traditional male identity without compromising their veganism that is mostly interpreted as a feminine eating orientation.

Turner *et al.* (2013) researched consumers in general and Greenebaum and Dexter (2017) vegan men, whilst Cairns, Johnston and Baumann (2010) draw attention to the gendered dimensions amongst foodie consumers, including men and women. The authors observe long-established borderlines, drawing on the seminal feminist contribution on female caring work by de Vault (1994; also Harman & Cappellini, 2014): food provision and cooking are defined as a traditionally feminine area; a field of daily chores and duties, whereas for men they represent hobby-type occupations, or are performed by skilled professionals such as chefs de cuisine.

Parsons (2015a) embraces this view, in a study on food narratives of British foodies. She beautifully weaves together the individual, interactional and institutional dimensions of everyday foodways and describes them as deeply affective practices: "[...] *because they are on-going emotional, socially constructed, embodied, situated performances infused with sedimental social and personal history.*" (*op. cit.*, p36). Food represents a primordial constituent of self-identity for these consumers, and its consumption is performed and exhibited in public, to support individual and social components of identity construction.

Parsons' informants mostly enjoyed food in a playful, pleasure-seeking way. Moreover, their discourse on these acts was marked with "*hegemonic forms of masculinities*" (*op. cit.*, p36): traditionally male, heterosexual cues such as meat-eating, bravery, beer-drinking and adventure. Activities like barbecue cooking were common and drew from narratives of male carnivorousness. Moreover, gendered territoriality – the physical distance between the barbecue area and the kitchen considered as a female domain and reserved to obligatory food performance – marked a mental separation of chores.

An overarching orientation for men in Parsons' study (2015a) was to consume food playfully, in search for sensual bliss and fulfilment. Parsons opposes these "epicureans" to "gourmets", "foodies" or "gourmands". However, an epicurean can also be a gourmet, when foodieism has omnivorous tendencies. Extant research does not fully endorse categorisation in epicureans and foodies as opposite groups. Identities are fluid and evolving (Hall, 1997). Moreover, food identities may be experienced differently by consumers themselves, when compared to a researchers' view. Also, foodies seek for sensual pleasure and display it, hence an epicurean consumption of food can be identified as one dimension of the broader foodie orientation. This constantly ongoing debate on denominations remains somewhat controversial amongst food scholars.

Parsons (2015a) observes interconnections between everyday foodways, gender and class in the framework of *intersectionality*: gender needs to be understood as entwined with other hierarchic positions such as ethnicity, social class or sexuality (Jäntti, Saresma, Leppänen, Järvinen, & Varis, 2018). One can add categories such as age, religion, attractiveness or health condition, to apply the potential of the concept in broader contexts (Maclaran & Stevens, 2019).

A female foodie of a lower income sector does not have the same pecuniary possibilities as an executive foodie woman, although they are equal in gender; the same applies for male foodies. Intersectional deviations need to

be taken into account. The emergence of what Parsons (2015a) defines as “the gourmet food adventurer” nevertheless links this type of gendered consumption to class hierarchies, since in her view the epicurean food consumption, coded as elitist, is associated with capital-intensive consumption that is accessible only for middle or upper-class consumers. Hence, epicurean foodways assumed by male respondents reflect elite cultural capital, characteristic of male consumers with high income, and embedded in larger societal power structures. Parsons defines their leisure-oriented food practices as *food play*, in order to mark a distinction with traditional, female *food work*.

In Parsons’ study (2015a), cooking adventures of male informants mostly did not resonate with domestic, daily kitchen duties. Parsons derives a conclusive claim: taste, class, status, pleasure, and distinction, as well as the gourmet identity, are primarily connected to masculinity and to “*high levels of economic, social, symbolic and cultural capital that includes elements of high adventure and risk taking*” (*op. cit.*, p16). This is a view that can be developed further, if not challenged in part, by the present research: interconnections across gender, taste, class and pleasure are more complex in online contexts. Food blogs and food porn, abundantly produced by female contributors (Dejmanee, 2016), are eloquent examples of this: also women seek pleasure by exhibiting their food experiences online, and all online activities do not necessarily require important financial resources.

Moreover, the use of social media is not bound to a particular place or hour which increases women’s potential of self-enhancement by online foodie performances, when their other duties are accomplished. Lofgren (2013), Veile (2014) and Rodney, Cappeliez, Oleschuk and Johnston (2017) support this view: Social Networking Services attract female contributors and fulfill their distinction needs in an accessible way.

In consumption orientations typically embraced by foodies, new constellations of gender roles arise, reflecting a broader reconfiguration of

stereotypical masculinities (Brownlie & Hewer, 2007) and femininities. Furthermore, increasing participation of men to domestic chores starts to erode strict labor divisions. This development may partly challenge traditional gender stereotypes in the kitchen and moreover, in the entire domestic context, as Ulver (2015) and Ulver and Klasson (2015) claim: in daily food practices, “feminized masculinities” evolve towards “hegemonic masculinities”, when men enter the traditionally female-occupied areas of food work. In this view, foodie culture has an emancipating effect, whilst radicalising extant hierarchies and labor division, instead of perpetuating them.⁷

Yet, gender stereotypes constitute a fundamental function for food play and foodie performance, when deliberately played upon. The image of Nigella Lawson, a “domestic goddess” and an overtly eroticised foodie character, is consciously developed towards a unique embodiment of female glamour (Stevens, Cappellini & Smith, 2015). A strikingly similar Finnish counterpart is found in the Nigella-emulating media presence of a former Great Finnish Bake-Off contestant (Mäkelä, Bettany & Stevens, 2018), who plays on visual narratives of food porn related to the personal identity work in her online self-branding.

Foodie culture enables a broad variety of gender performances from traditionally established towards emancipated and radicalising, thus reflecting the fragmentation of contemporary consumption cultures and gender roles in general.

2.5.2 Foodways defining consumers

Identity construction by food is embodied concretely across adopted foodways. Vojnovic (2017) analyses the proliferation of contemporary eating orientations, denominated in detail. She claims that when one embraces a

⁷ It is noteworthy however that both studies are conducted amongst Swedish consumers. Sweden is generally considered as one of the leading societies in terms of gender equality.

new way of eating, this signifies deviation from the foodways adopted when growing up, which is an action that necessitates a “label”. Terms like *paleo*, *lacto-ovo-vegetarian*, *vegan*, *organivore* or *locavore*⁸ appear commonly in food discourse, with many other concepts serving as markers of identity construction attached to an eating orientation. These terms delineate personal boundary work and reflect abstinence (*vegan*, *low-carb*) as well as preference (*locavore*, *organic*).

Moving across eating orientations can be understood also as a ritual act that makes former identity work public and establishes a visible consumptive framework to it, thus embodying a dimension of social change related to ritualistic food consumption (see section 2.6.2). Descriptive words define crossing these boundaries: a French neologism signifies a person abstaining from any foodstuffs with an animal origin, *végétalien*, to mark a distinction with a “traditional” *végétarien*. In addition, *végan* signifies a person who rejects all animal derived products, also non-foods, such as leather. In English, *vegan* or *dietary vegan* and *vegetarian* are used, and in Finnish, respective words correspond to the use in English (*vegaani*, *vegetaristi*⁹).

The abundance of contemporary foodways is sustained by the multitude of nutritional choices catered for the (wealthy or middle-class) consumers, and by the affordances provided by Social Networking Services. Online, one finds likeminded consumers, however small or marginal the eating orientation might be. Moreover, engaging in online platform activities that embrace assumed eating orientations supports consumers in their ethical and moral reasoning, which is rendered challenging by the complexity of current foodscapes and often leads to anxiety. Consumers opting for foodways coded as ethical and non-conventional are likely to engage in

⁸ *paleo*: a diet emulating foodways of Paleolithic men (Chang & Nowell, 2016); *lacto-ovo-vegetarian*: a vegetarian diet where eggs and dairy products are tolerated; *vegan*: a lifestyle where all ingredients of animal origin are prohibited; *organivore*: a diet where organic products are preferred; *locavore*: foodways prioritising local produce and local outlets.

⁹ *vegetaristi* is a loan word in Finnish, and is often substituted by *kasvissyöjä* (literally ‘one who eats vegetables’).

online groups where these choices are embraced, as research on the Alternative Food Network¹⁰ (AFN) and on consumers with niche diets shows (Barnett, Dripps & Blomquist, 2016).

Furthermore, consumers investing in AFN activities often express food anxiety and declare eating disorders more than consumers with conventional foodways (Barnett *et al.*, 2016.) In this respect, the existence of online reference groups and moral support for various eating-related identities is emancipatory. Finding a “label” for one’s foodways is the first step in this process. It is noteworthy however that pleasure-seeking foodieism and moral- or health-driven diets with abstinence protocols are distinct orientations, although convergences occur. Barnett, Dripps and Blomquist (2016) conclude that consumers with eating disorders delineate their foodways by abstinence, with declared orthorexic behavior, rather than by preference.

Semioticians Scelzi and da Fortuna (2015, p129) suggest a most radical definition of the value of food for postmodern food lovers, however with a different formulation of the term: *“Being a foodist dedicated to foodism means to be religiously involved in a sort of fetishism in the craft of cooking and communicating its language.”* This theorising, drawing partly on Barthes, and food as a system of significations, brings the interrelation of food and identity towards a more symbolic level, where tribal consumption patterns are detected and totemic functions for foods emerge.

2.6 Social components of consumption of significant foods

In this section, dimensions of community-level and emotional meaning-making with food are outlined. Section 2.6.1 unpacks commensality, a key phenomenon for the analysis of shared food consumption. In 2.6.2, online foodie orientations defined as tribal or neo-tribal are presented, in the vein of

¹⁰ Alternative Food Network: connections between consumers, producers and sellers of food that is not produced by the conventional food chain. (Barnett, Dripps & Blomquist, 2016).

Consumer Culture Theory, foodies being perceived as a consumer tribe with shifting sub-tribes. Section 2.6.3 analyses symbolic, ritualistic and totemic meanings ascribed to food, and 2.6.4 unpacks materiality of food.

2.6.1 Commensality

Commensality, sharing a meal, is an ingrained tradition in most communities and considered as one of the most effective forms of human social bonding (Fischler, 1988, 2011; Hegarty & O'mahony, 1999; Calhoun, 2002; Danesi, 2014; Means, MacKenzie Davey & Dewe, 2015; Bouvier, 2018). The concept provides a deeper insight into how totemic significations of food are nurtured across consumption acts and discourse on them. Tightly linked to ritualistic food consumption, the concept deepens the theorising of group identity in relation to food (Fischler, 2011; Danesi, 2014; Fieldhouse, 2017).

Sharing bread is one of the most ancient and most symbolic forms of commensality, sustained also metaphorically as a sacral ritual in the Christian Eucharist. When considering the etymology of words *company* in English or *compagnon* in French¹¹, connections are obvious with concepts of 'with' and 'bread', *cum* and *panis* in Latin (Thomas, 1931). Bouvier analyses insightfully the contemporary dimensions of this age-old tradition in "Breaking bread online" (2018), claiming that individual food experiences become genuinely social, when they are shared online e.g. in photographs.

Although eating rituals are performed also as solitary acts, most food sociologists agree on the importance of food and eating in the process of socialisation to a community (Lévi-Strauss, 1968; Douglas, 1977; Beardsworth & Keil, 1997; Cappellini, 2010; Fischler, 1990, 2011; Cappellini & Parsons, 2012; Vignolles & Pichon, 2014; Means et al., 2015; Goodman, 2015). Cronin and McCarthy (2011) link the food-related sense of community with joint consumption that often results in common rituals, since food is something that can be easily consumed in a social setting, unlike many other

¹¹ Also in Finnish, the etymology is apparent in the word *kumppani*, "partner".

goods. Food is connected to inclusion, expressing internalised identities in a community (*op. cit.*). Rozin (2006) develops further the function of food as a social marker, particularly powerful in symbolic contexts.

Socialisation does not occur solely across ritual acts. Yet, here the emphasis is on ritualistic consumption of food, where a substance is imbued with non-conventional value. Commensality nurtures socialisation from its simplest forms, like bread sharing, to the most sophisticated ritualistic settings, such as the annual Nobel Prize dinner. Studying functions of meal sharing brings the focus towards totemic dimensions of food.

Commensality is primarily emphasised in Latin cultures (Fischler, 2011; Cova, 1997), to an extent where in French culture and language, one seldom considers eating alone as a “meal” (Fischler, 1988, 2011). This is a somewhat strict definition, compared with those of northern scholars like Falk (1994) who argues that commensality exists amongst all people sharing the same food culture. One does not share only food, but the action of consuming it, a meal (Douglas, 1977; Meiselman, 2008; Cappellini, 2010).

Here, it is necessary to distinguish between the concepts of *food* and *meal*. The latter is even more tightly connected to the social context of eating. Cappellini interprets materialisation of food to a meal as a gift from its providers to the people sharing the table, hence reflecting the consumptive identities and emotional bonds (Cappellini, 2010; Cappellini & Parsons, 2012; Cappellini, Marshall & Parsons, 2016). In the same vein, Douglas argues that intimacy and distance mark the line between “drinks and meals”: meals are for family and close friends (Douglas, 1977, p41; Sobal & Nelson, 2003). In this respect, a meal is not defined by the number of dishes but by the nature of the occasion and its counterparts. One dish can constitute a meal. Danesi (2014) accentuates the institutional role of a meal, while its representation throughout commensality acts displays social distinctions and hierarchies. When transmitting social norms or values within a community, sharing food has a preponderant function.

Meiselman (2008) defines a “meal” as a product and an event, which accentuates its social function. Although current theorising is dominated by the strictly social nature of meals, it is possible to have a meal also without the commensal element. This applies in particular to many foodie consumers who take the effort of organising a proper setting for a meal taken alone, instead of snacking or eating in haste, when in no company. Moreover, a dimension of *virtual commensality* may be attained when the eating experience is shared online via Social Networking Services (Watson, Morgan & Hemmington, 2008; Pantelidis, 2010; Vásquez & Chic, 2015; Bouvier, 2018). Across them, an individual experience becomes part of the distinctive practice exhibited and performed online, and its performer joins the commensal circle, albeit virtually.

Whilst dimensions of food sharing traditionally perceived as sacral may be shrinking to religious rituals like the Jewish Shabbath meal, the importance of profane ritualistic meals persists and gains in importance amongst foodies. Furthermore, a highly appreciated and meticulously prepared eating experience may attain sacral dimensions, since it is the individual’s personal judgment that distinguishes these events out of the ordinary – one cannot claim that only religious events can uplift the culinary experience to a spiritual or sacral level. Celebration of rituals with cherished and rare seasonal foods such as the Finnish crayfish parties in August is one example of this orientation, and many others thrive worldwide.

The emergence of ritual, spiritual and sacral meanings of food is evocative of secularising postmodern consumer culture where individuals are inclined to find novel expressions for their spiritual needs outside traditional religious behaviour (Lelwica, 2011; Scelzi & da Fortuna, 2015).

2.6.2 Foodies as tribal consumers online

Eating habits and food consumption practices are thoroughly affected by social factors, and the neo-tribal research stream, drawing on the metaphoric interpretation of tribes, is co-constitutive of current theorising on consumption

communities (Cova, Kozinets & Shankar, 2007; Maffesoli, 2007; Adams & Smith, 2008; Goulding, Shankar & Canniford, 2013; Stratton & Northcote, 2014, 2016; Ruane & Wallace, 2015; Skandalis, Byrom & Bannister, 2016; Cova & Dalli, 2018). Postmodern tribes have rituals and shared beliefs and they function as clans, conveying kinship and lineage (Cova & Cova, 2002, p597). Here, literature on tribal and neo-tribal consumption analyses primarily tribal consumption behavior in contexts of social media use.

Cova, Kozinets and Shankar (2007, p4) characterise “consumer tribes” by shared consumption behavior, activities and value-based social interaction, and Maffesoli (1996) emphasises togetherness as a key characteristic within tribes. Moreover, he ascribes postmodern consumer tribes with aspects of fluidity and dispersal (2007), whereas Kozinets emphasises virtuality and the importance of a consumer perspective. He perceives “E-tribes” as forums of bonding, for purposes of consumption (Kozinets, 2007). Virtual tribes reflect sense of community and desire for communication (Adams & Smith, 2008, p18), and this makes their online discourse so insightful to study.

Tribal consumers want to be creative and innovative, and they change tribes or join new ones without hesitation (Canniford, 2011, p600). Products and services merge in this continuum, where consumers get actively acculturated to the marketplace culture (Canniford, 2011, p592-593). Here, marketplaces are understood as online platforms, and engagement, imagination and alignment are fundamental when “learning to be tribal” (Goulding *et al.*, 2013, p813). To get involved in a tribe expresses self-identity, since a consumer tribe shares consumption values and preferences, amongst other practices. Eventually, dimensions of self- and social identity merge in tribal consumption (Hogg *et al.*, 2017).

One can distinguish between at least three levels –albeit overlapping –of ideal types of consumer communities: consumer tribes, subcultures of consumption and brand communities (Goulding *et al.*, 2013, p814; Stratton & Northcote, 2014, p15), of which the first one is the most appropriate for the present context, whilst the last one is not targeted. Foodies are a large tribal

constellation, with a multitude of subtribes or clans: traditional gourmet enthusiasts, locavore or slow food movement pioneers, prosumers, restaurant bloggers, foragers, wine or craft beer aficionados, adepts of various diets for nutritional reasons, vegans as partisans for animal rights, bakers, food porn photographers, chocolate artists, “chilliheads”¹²... Some of these are embedded in others, whereas some exclude other inclinations (Johnston & Baumann, 2015). New combinations and groups arise constantly (Lindblom & Mustonen, 2015; Maciel & Wallendorf, 2016). It also creates friction, which is an interesting feature when investigating questions of taste and distaste (de Valck, 2007).

Cova and Dalli (2018) emphasise the fluidity of tribal consumer groups, and define the ephemeral nature of consuming actions therein as lack of engagement which erodes the community, in the sociological sense: “*Online communities, [...] are then hard to find*” (op. cit. 2018, p240). However, it is argued here that one needs to be more specific in defining “fluidity”: the abundance of online marketplaces and affordances they provide indeed enable versatile and shifting consumption opportunities for foodies. This may be perceived as fluid from the viewpoint of one platform, yet it does not necessarily diminish the engagement to the core activity, foodieism online, that can be perceived as tribal consumption, given that the definition of a tribe is wider than a brand community or the use of a single marketplace. Actions may be ephemeral in one platform, however their continuity is often of an extended, engaged and committed nature. Foodies swiftly use a large array of SNS platforms, in order to practice their bespoke orientations.

Here, the research setting considers online foodie communities with a broad scope. Tribe-like communities with long-time dedicated and enthusiastic membership and contribution are observed, as well as communities where participation may be more erratic. Rapid evolution in social media use necessitates new ontologies, and Kozinets (2015) refers to changing online

¹² *Chillihead* is the denomination that a number of chilli-related SNS users have adopted. Examples of both Finnish and English data occur in the corpus, as described in Chapters 7-9.

community constellations as consociality, a form of social practice where conventional assumptions on consumer collaboration stability erode.

The social aspect of value creation in tribal consumption, characterised as *linking value* by Cova (1997) emerges as the power of a product or a service to create and sustain rituals, and the connection between an individual and a community (Cova, 1997, p307.) In twenty years since the concept was launched, proliferation of online components enhancing the social dimension in consumption has been dramatic. Individual identity products such as food blogs (Koh, 2017) are linked to more social consumption platforms, e.g. communities of practice (de Valck, 2006; Vojnovic, 2017), enhancing embeddedness of self- and relational identities (Hogg *et al.*, 2017). The Internet as a marketplace caters almost infinitely for postmodern consumers, keen on displaying online the ongoing spectacle of food in their lives. Situational and lifestyle factors influence deeply social identities of consumers and their choices, as well as their loyalty (Mitchell & Imrie, 2010), which aligns with the view on fluidity: first, that of identities (Hall, 1997), and secondly, that of tribe-like communities themselves (Maffesoli, 2007; Kozinets, 2015).

Community of practice (Stommel, 2008) or *community of interest* are key concepts to study tribal consumption. They can be defined as groups of informally bound people who share a passion, concerns or problems and want to increase their knowledge in these areas throughout interaction (Wenger & Snyder, 2000). Whilst “SNS” primarily signifies technical platforms where community-type interaction may occur, “communities of interest and of practice” refer to constellations formed by groups of users of these platforms. The perspective is two-dimensional: on outlets (including the aspect of relevant affordances) and on their users and content generators.

In their study on craft beer communities, Maciel and Wallendorf (2016, p728) define a community of practice as a group of people interacting, in order to learn how to perform a practice and share its discourses, individual identities and social relations. Practice accentuates authenticity, which is a key

element of status construction through food consumption (Johnston & Baumann, 2009, 2015). In online contexts, *virtual communities of interest*, or *virtual communities of practice* (Hine, 2015) are a salient sub-category.

In the field of online consumption groups, Kozinets (1999; 2016) suggests the concept of “virtual communities of consumption” or “consumption-based virtual communities”, to mark a distinction from online groups that are articulated with other orientations. Jacobsen, Tudoran and Lähteenmäki (2017) bring the focus even closer to the present context with the concept “virtual food community” in their study on interaction intentions in food-related online communities. Jacobsen *et al.* signposts the scarcity of research on these communities, which is a lacuna that the present research endeavors to address. In their view, the level of food involvement, i.e. the importance of food related activities for consumers, as well as their general online interaction propensity, influence this interaction (*op. cit.*, p9).

Kristine de Valck analysed a Dutch online foodie community with more than 160 000 members, SmulWeb (de Valck, 2007, de Valck *et al.*, 2009, Kozinets *et al.*, 2010), which has inspired the present research significantly. SmulWeb is defined as a virtual community of interest, since communication amongst members is organised on the Internet, and secondly, since members share a topic of interest. One of the key findings by de Valck *et al.* (2009) was that the information flow between consumers is determined by the strength of the cohesion to the community, regardless of the environment (real-life or virtual). In SmulWeb, the impact on consumption acts was most important for members who were keen on searching information in the community, whereas for members who concentrated on exhibiting their knowledge and skills in cooking, the community impact was minor. Experts do not expect the same outcomes of interaction as novices do. Gad Mohsen (2017) aligns with this view, emphasising the level of commitment to foodie activities as a fundamental criterion of “foodieism”.

Food-related virtual communities of interest or practice constitute a productive platform for entanglement of commercial and non-commercial

input, and when an amateur site gains in popularity, it also attracts commercial activity. Occasionally, this caters for recruitment, as in the case of a French community (Food Geek and Love, 2016) where an Instagram specialist for a food documentary series was searched, with the profile of being a *“fan of gastronomy, addicted to Instagram”*.

Prosumption signifies co-occurrence of producing and consuming, which is common online (Kozinets, 1999). The orientation is denominated also as *productive consumption* (Moisio, Arnould & Gentry, 2013). Leal and Arellano (2012, p8) claim that all foodies share a presumptive orientation. This is somewhat generalising, however many food bloggers in particular share their production or cultivation experiences, alongside cooking and tasting. A presumptive experience online may unfold as a narrative of ordering chilli pepper seeds, sharing the cultivation process with online peers, and summing up with the culinary experience with pictures of home grown produce and of dishes prepared with them.

Johnston and Baumann (2009, XVII) argue that in online food communities, satisfaction often derives from prosumption activities instead of just consumption. Engaging in a practice is considered as more rewarding than consuming a product (also Kozinets, 2007; Moisio, Arnould & Gentry, 2013), and it contributes to business operations, as in the case of online restaurant reviews that are interpreted as a presumptive practice by Zukin, Lindeman and Hurson (2015). Amongst online foodies, preparing one's own doughs or growing organic vegetables create a substantial part of the consumption experience and derived distinctive practices (Mäkelä, 2016). These are keenly shared online with likeminded members. This phenomenon confirms Cova's assertion (1997) on “the link” as more important than “the thing”, and resonates with the interpretivist view on consumption as a deeply collective phenomenon (Cova & Dalli, 2018). The presumptive process is connected to the nature of the activity and the profile of the community.

Drawing on challenges of determining when a community or a tribe becomes virtual – most neo-tribes of “real life” also communicate online – Rokka

investigates “translocal sites” of the digital (2010), shedding light on how fluid and mobile communities shift activities from the actual world to the online realm, and vice versa. The largest foodie community in France, *Marmiton*, which started as a food-related website (www.marmiton.org), has generated several offline activities. Bonding amongst “marmitonautes” occurs primarily online, and yet it is accentuated by real-life encounters. Appreciating good food and sharing this experience is enhanced, when actual tasting and smelling are included in community actions.

The motivation to share experiences in tribal communities can be both intrinsic and extrinsic (Wang, Kirilleva & Lehto, 2017), i.e. driven by desire for recognition such as achieved status or by the sense of belonging to a community. Wang, Kirilleva and Lehto emphasise the psychological ownership (2017, p3), embedding the aspirations of having a “home” (sense of belonging), of effectance (when having control of the environment around) and of self-identity. In their study on food experiences shared online while travelling – travel postings being one of the main fora of online food discourse – they categorise food posts as a [...] *platform to show off, to manage self-image and to represent oneself* (2017, p7). Self-identity construction becomes one of the key processes when consumers write about their food experiences in SNS that become arenas for distinction. In online communities, boundaries between genres are easily crossed: a popular food blog can evolve into a small community, itself a part of larger communities of the foodie tribe. This leads often to real-life encounters, decontextualising the consumptive experience (Weijo *et al.*, 2014),

Kozinets distinguishes four types of online consumer interaction: *cruising*, *bonding*, *geeking* and *building* (Kozinets, 2010, p35). Adding *status building* to this typology establishes a link with the Bourdieusian theory. He points out, moreover, the creative and prosuming nature of “inno-tribes”, typical for online communities (Kozinets, 2007, pp204-206). Kozinets’ typology was applied by Mäkelä (2016) in a study of French and Finnish food blogs attached to online communities. Bonding and building prevailed in interaction, which is understandable since data were gathered from blogs and

conversation fora. Bonding refers to establishment and maintenance of social relations within community actions, and building is a parallel activity, with the dimension of actively contributing to structures enabling bonding of individuals (Kozinets, 2007). Communities articulated around activities such as recipe sharing or restaurant reviewing would be less prone to bonding, and rather appear as arenas for “cruising”: spontaneous meandering across sites for information seeking, or for recreational purposes.

Here, tribal foodie culture online is analysed throughout its discursive dimensions. Johnston and Baumann define the key frames –or components– of foodieism (2009, 2015) as authenticity, exoticism and expertise¹³, reflected in culinary practices and in discourse. The same discursive orientations were identified amongst French and Finnish bloggers (Mäkelä, 2016). The components may emerge one at a time or entwined: foodies seek for authentic and exotic experiences, whilst constructing status, and exhibit them alongside their expertise e.g. in discussions where experts give advice to novices, enhancing tribal practices.

Tribal consumption communities function as human groups in general: harmony and friction coexist. Consequently, de Valck (2007) refers to “tribal wars” amongst online foodies, e.g. in the context of making use of convenience food or when discussing proper ways to prepare a dish. The author observed similar processes emerging in Finnish online discourse, when culinary traditions are compromised or questioned (Mäkelä, 2016). The online foodie tribe generates discourse reflecting all these situations and interactions that are entwined with underlying power constructs in the community. Hence, analysing this discourse sheds light on overt and covert hegemonies within foodie communities, which is investigated with Research Question 3.

According to de Valck *et al.* (2009, p270), totems such as healthism or tradition provide shelter for “online warriors”. Here, an additional dimension of

¹³ In Johnston & Baumann’s study, data were gathered from face-to-face interviews and not online. This trifold categorisation is functional however also for online data.

the unifying power of food emerges: not only a foodstuff in itself but its characteristics, or an eating orientation, may be imbued with totemic qualities. A similar pattern is detected in a conversation analysed by Mäkelä, Bettany and Stevens (2018), where a foodie celebrity challenged online the Finnish narrative of baking as a non-sexual practice, which created considerable friction in the comments. The totem of tradition was revered by online contributors, to strengthen the narrative of innocence in national baking heritage, when opposed to food-porn type of imagery.

Alongside status building and friction, foodie tribes thrive online with empowering and enculturating effects (see Chapters 5 and 9). Moreover, shifting boundaries in online contexts contribute to the hybridisation of genres. Communities of practice need to be understood as a continuum in terms of the participation and content sharing they trigger.

Foodies online are a group as challenging to determine as foodies in the offline, actual world. In the literature referenced in this section, characteristics of their tribe-like online consumption dispositions are presented with a deliberately broad approach, with the objective to provide an overview of the most salient features: generating online content on mutual interests, enhancing the sense of belonging to communities, enabling construction of various and shifting identities, cherishing selected foods and ingredients, and providing arenas for social interaction, celebratory entertainment and display of habitus.

2.6.3 Symbolic, ritualistic and totemic consumption of food

The distinction between symbolic and totemic meanings is based on definitions: a symbol merely represents, whereas a totem signifies relations of belonging and unifying. Both occur in ritualistic settings. Hence, totemic consumption of food is a panoply of phenomena where symbolic meanings of food are developed into profound interconnections in various ritualistic, social contexts, and the food itself embodies a dimension of togetherness and engagement which may attain levels of spirituality.

Borderlines across sacred and secular are all but clear-cut (Lelwica, 2011), and in contemporary foodieism, dimensions of sacrality entwine with secular performances, reflecting ingrained human aspirations towards experiences beyond our everyday reality. In ritualised consumption contexts, embodiment of substances and their meanings pervades dynamically novel spheres.

Heilbrunn (2018) draws on Barthes (1957) and Kopytoff (1986), analysing imbuelement of value to substances as a process where consumption creates meaning across a “set of signifying practices” that transforms a physical substance into a meaningful substance, hence semanticising it. Therein, this object or substance¹⁴ gains in imaginary dimensions, in addition to its physical dimensions, and becomes a sign that may signify something beyond its “use-value” (*op. cit.*, pp405-406.) This process unfolds as metaphorically totemistic, when the object-sign or substance-sign has moreover the capacity of unifying a group of people.

According to Heilbrunn (2018), the meanings assigned to commodities are linked to the multi-dimensional spaces they occupy in consumers’ lives: physical, sensorial, pragmatic and symbolic dimensions, as well as a temporal dimension, can be distinguished. Here, all are relevant, food being a commodity imbued with values that may represent all these dimensions, on distinct levels, out of which the situational and interactional levels of use (*op. cit.*, p414) are the most relevant. Moreover, a cultural artifact such as cuisine, with its meanings, can be interpreted as a language (*op. cit.*), and hence become a discursive resource for distinction purposes (Riley & Cavanaugh, 2017).

¹⁴ Heilbrunn refers mainly to objects, yet the same shift can be analysed with imbuelement of value to substances such as food.

2.6.3.1 Symbolic dimension

Modell (2009, p7) defines symbols broadly as cultural artifacts; impersonal metaphors with a shared meaning. A visible symbol is a representation of something else that is often invisible. Kniazeva and Venkatesh (2007, p421) discern three principal functions of food "*as a carrier of symbols*" amongst postmodern consumers: foodstuffs themselves may be perceived as symbolic, or the symbolism resides within preparation or eating patterns.

In the study (*op. cit.*), informants without a particular attachment to food accentuated most the social dimension, i.e. the bonding capacity of food as a symbolic factor, whereas taste was symbolically less significant for them than for foodie consumers. Categorisation of symbolic dimensions of food by Kniazeva and Venkatesh (2007) is, however, pertinent here: they present sixteen symbolic categories for food (*op. cit.*, p430), of which the most pertinent here are *home-made*, *sin*, *power*, *romance*, *tradition*, *bonding*, *solace*, *comfort* and *fun*. All are representative of chilli and chocolate consumption of foodies and can become totemic in a community, with variation: e.g. chocolate may be perceived as a conveyor of sensual bliss, or represent authenticity and comfort in home-made baking. In the empirical part of this study, these thematic keywords contribute as potential markers for consumption attaining totemic features.

Furthermore, Kniazeva and Venkatesh (2007) observe that the experiential nature of food consumption, stemming from consumers' feelings and lifestyles, may evoke both positive and negative feelings, as in the context of over-indulgence. Symbols are fundamental conveyors of ritual behavior, and shared rituals of a community have connections with specific foods (Burton, 2016).

2.6.3.2 Ritualistic dimension

“Serious leisure activities also tend to be ritualistic.” (Belk & Costa, 1998, p219)

A ritual is defined as a sequence of action that is fixed, formal and repetitive by nature, and conveys symbolic meaning (Ratcliffe, Lyle Baxter & Martin, 2019, p87). Rituals provide a sphere where body and mind are brought together across deeply embodied processes (Lelwica, 2011). Ritual meanings of meals appear in most cultures worldwide: spiritual as in the Christian Eucharist, or when consuming parts of a revered animal in totemistic communities, and moreover as profane rituals. Often, the dimensions of profane and sacred entwine, which reflects the phenomenon defined as “cultural religion” by Lelwica (2011, citing Catherine Albanese), where contemporary consumption cultures fulfil deeply human needs such as sense of purpose, security, love, well-being and inspiration (*op. cit.*, p257), colonising hence spheres traditionally perceived as religiously spiritual. Online foodie cultures have manifold links with this consumptive orientation.

Ratcliffe *et al.* (2019) emphasise that food rituals, rather than the act of eating itself, convey the contextual meaning of the consumption ritual, as in the case of birthday cakes and candle blowing with a song. Moreover, celebrations with traditional foods such as the American Thanksgiving meal (Wallendorf & Arnould, 1991) are powerful contexts for ritualistic consumption, perpetuating culturally laden meanings. A meal as a deeply social institution is linked to the idea of the ‘commensal circle’ (Sobal *et al.*, 2002). In this circle, borderlines between identity and otherness are drawn (Danesi, 2014), and the meal ritual is imbued with significant emotional value, especially in family contexts (Cappellini, 2010; Cappellini & Harman, 2014).

Ratcliffe *et al.* (2019) dissects four key components in ritualistic consumption: an artifact or an object, a script, a defined place and an audience. Moreover, the authors emphasise the change that rituals generate either on cognitive,

social or affective dimensions. Change relates to meanings ascribed to food, as in the case of mindfulness in eating that may change the meaning of a simple ingredient to an insightful substance: the same chocolate bar represents a transition to a meditative mindset, rather than a calorie-laden everyday snack, if it is consumed with a focused mind, melting in the mouth and appreciated¹⁵. The affective dimension of change is embedded in a social component, if the act of consumption is performed together, in a meaningful context. Thereby, one approaches the dimension of totemic consumption.

Ratcliffe *et al.* (2019) distinguishes furthermore between emergent and designed rituals; the first “emerge” inherently within a community, whereas the second group is triggered and monitored by conscious marketing efforts, often related to a brand.

Contemporary examples on symbolic and ritualistic food consumption are abundant online. Visiting Michelin-starred restaurants and blogging on these experiences is ritualistic foodie behavior, as well as taking photographs in a restaurant and tagging them in Instagram or blogs. Commensality in these cases is not concrete but virtual; it is performed entirely online, and occasionally by repeating the performance.

Barthes emphasised the binary nature of food in his theory of food as a language-like system of signs: it is nutrition and protocol simultaneously (Barthes, 1957, 1997, 2008 [1961]). Barthes was also interested in the contextual dimension of eating, when food has a tendency of transforming itself into situations (Belasco & Scranton, 2002). This constitutes a valuable perspective for studying commensal, ritual consumption of food, where materiality meets the immaterial: choosing ingredients and preparing them, eating habits, table manners, appreciation and disapproval, taboos... in a word, foodscapes. Abiding with Lévi-Strauss and Barthes, Finnish sociologist Falk analyses symbolic and ritualistic meaning in food consumption. In “*The*

¹⁵ The example of chocolate is suggested by the author, to illustrate the theory of Ratcliffe *et al.* (2019).

Consuming Body” (1994), Falk dissects acts of eating through an anthropological lens, combining the concepts of taste and body, the dimensions of sensorial and corporeal. According to Falk, development of human communities has been deeply affected by the act of sharing meals and rituals, since preparing food reflects its transformation from nature to culture.

Chocolate and chilli provide manifold contexts for symbolic and ritualistic consumption: chocolate has a protagonist role in gift-giving and courtship (Minowa, Khomenko & Belk, 2011; Mäkelä, Bettany & Stevens, 2018), as a conveyor of affection and occasionally, of sensuality cues. In baking, chocolate represents lovingly prepared treats as gifts for one’s nearest. Another type of symbolism is found in excessive chilli consumption where a ritualistic dimension is attained in eating competitions, when a maximum of pungency is sought after, to display one’s endurance leading sometimes to dramatic effects (*The Telegraph*, 2016). In these contexts, chocolate and chilli surpass the limits of their ordinary use and represent dimensions that ritually bond – either two individuals romantically together or a self-enhancing competitor to the restricted tribe of fire-eaters. Moreover, both occur frequently across ritualistic contexts online.

2.6.3.3 Totemic dimension

Pioneering with theories on totemism and food studies, Lévi-Strauss argued that relations to food have been the most dominating feature of human cultures (1968). Lévi-Strauss discerned between symbolic and concrete acts of eating, and the most famous interpretation of this approach is his “culinary triangle” (1968, 1997) articulated with raw, cooked and rotten food. This led to a detailed analysis on three basic methods of preparation; boiling, roasting and smoking, and on their social and cultural meanings. In Lévi-Straussian thinking, all consumption of food is connected to these methods and their combinations.

In order to understand symbolic meanings of food reaching degrees of a totemic signification, one needs to discern the essence of a totemic act (Durkheim, 1912). Since a totem is a revered entity representing kinship and belonging, binding together members of a group and enabling their identification with this group, a totemic act is a manifestation of this relationship. Its core function is the unifying power for the members of a clan or a tribe, whether these are understood in the context of traditional anthropology or in the paradigm of neo-tribal studies (Maffesoli, 1991), drawing on consumer communities (Goulding, Shankar & Canniford, 2013). Acknowledging the subjective nature of this theorising is important: “[...] *totemistic theories proceed from an arbitrary carving out of the objective facts.*” (Lévi-Strauss, 1963). The arbitrary nature of totemic thinking is articulated with the highly contextual boundaries of reality and the imaginary, and befits fluidity of digital realms as a research context.

Defining totemic acts in contemporary consumption is challenging, since they are manifested in various ways. However, the metaphor of totemic attachment to a food or a foodway enables the study of meanings which is sought after here. By analogy, in neo-tribal marketing research the concept of totem can be applied with a modernised interpretation (Maffesoli, 1991; Kozinets, 2001; Cova & Cova, 2002; Cova, Kozinets & Shankar, 2007; de Valck *et al.*, 2009; Goulding, Shankar & Canniford, 2013). The postmodern consumer is on an interminable quest of identity and values, and the most valued products and services are the ones that support social interaction, to the extent of a totemic function (Cova, 1997, p307).¹⁶

The structuralist grand theory of Lévi-Strauss is somewhat rigid, combining all consumptive acts of food under the same trifold umbrella, but it is widely appreciated as a seminal contribution to study transformation of food into culture. One of the main arguments is the “omnivore’s dilemma” (Lévi-Strauss, 1968, Fischler, 1988; Beardsworth & Keil, 1997) which stands for

¹⁶ In marketing studies of the neo-tribal orientation however, prior research has primarily targeted other goods than food, which is one of the research gaps addressed here.

the simultaneous liking of new foods (neophilia) and the fear or disliking of them (neophobia). It is noteworthy that for Lévi-Strauss, the concept of omnivorousness signified concrete actions of eating “everything”, whereas in contemporary food studies it is interpreted in the Bourdieusian sense of appreciating all kinds of food culture (Bourdieu, 1979; Peterson, 1992; Peterson & Kern, 1996; Johnston & Baumann, 2010, 2015; Cappeliez & Johnston, 2013; Zukin, Lindeman & Hurson, 2014; Purhonen & Gronow, 2014; Lindblom & Mustonen, 2015; Vásquez & Chic, 2015).

Notwithstanding certain anachronisms in Lévi-Straussian theorising, he has inspired generations of food scholars, and his original culinary triangle has been reinterpreted by food historian Warren Belasco who suggests a modern version for the needs of a globalising world, consisting of “responsibility, identity, convenience” (Julier, 2009). In contemporary foodie culture, the totem of responsibility is especially salient, whilst it resonates with the identity of consumers having adopted corresponding foodways. Concerns for sustainable food production and responsibility of food chains also emerge in online discourse (Mäkelä, Bettany & Stevens, 2018; Food from Finland, 2018) and reflect deep commitment that unfolds as totemic attachment to foods and eating practices, which unifies consumers. In contemporary chocolate discourse, claims for more ethical and sustainable production are utterly powerful, alongside indulgence-seeking epicurean orientations.

Drawing on Lévi-Strauss means abiding to a tradition of food studies as a fundamentally social phenomenon which is perpetuated by an eminent stream of anthropologists and sociologists (Alexander, 2017; Beardsworth & Keil, 1997; Cappelini, 2010, 2017; Counihan & Van Esterik, 1997; Cramer, Greene & Walters, 2011; Douglas, 1966, 1975; Goody, 1984; Fischler, 1988, 2011; Johnston & Baumann, 2009, 2015; Lupton, 1996; Mintz & Du Bois, 2002) psychologists (Rozin, 1999, 2003), philosophers (Barthes, 1975, 1997) or even geographers (Goodman, 2015).

To attain a totemic power, a food substance or a product needs to fulfil a unifying function for a community. Anthropologist Kelly Alexander describes

brisket¹⁷ as a totemic food for the Jewish community in the USA: “[...] *this is a collection of dishes prepared with the express purpose of unifying communities by reifying kin, social and cultural ties through food.*”

(Alexander, 2017, p4). Eating brisket becomes, for her Ashkenazi Jewish community, a shared gastrographic experience of embodied memories, binding generations and traditions together.

Alexander draws on Lupton’s theory (1996) on food as a liminal substance between human and nature, bridging the outside and the inside. This leads to the understanding of food as a co-constituent of memory, in the vein of the evocative power of Marcel Proust’s (1913) famous madeleine, dipped in linden tisane in *Du côté de chez Swann* and emerging *a posteriori* in an array of literary reproductions. Abarca and Colby (2016) develop further this gastrography theory, with the claim that food memories “*season the narratives of our lives*” (*op. cit.*, p1). In these narratives, the unifying aspect of food consumption is fundamentally important.

In the anthropological tradition, when a totem is a substance that can be consumed by eating, its consumption is often restricted to ritualistic use. Moreover, the consumption of a totemic substance may be either prohibited or authorised only during the most significant rituals of the community (Durkheim, 1912; Belk, Wallendorf & Sherry, 1989; Counihan, 2008). A Freudian interpretation of the prohibition to consume the totemic substance is that eating the totem (animal) is associated with patricide and to consuming one’s father, in order to attain his power and strength (Lorne, 2009). This view opens interesting perspectives towards gendered practices, reflected across totemic food consumption in postmodern foodie culture: chilli-eating contests and empowering chocolate rituals perpetuate the tradition of displaying power and stamina as well as gaining strength, health or spiritual growth by consuming the totemic substance.

¹⁷ *Brisket*: a cut of beef or veal from the lower chest or breast of the animal.

Although dimensions of symbolic, ritualistic and totemic consumption of foods intertwine, it is possible to discern a continuum of increased intensity and significance in them. Chilli is symbolic for a number of cuisines in the world, yet its use may reach a ritualistic level when it is consumed in a competitive way, with rules and protocol. When consumers enjoying this type of chilli consumption gather online and share their ritualistic experiences, developing the bond further by identifying themselves to the online community that caters for their culinary, social and emotional needs, the context of consumption reaches totemic dimensions. Chilli is the focal point in their interaction, and represents a totem-like unifying power for their consumptive kin.

Similar patterns are found for chocolate: for most consumers, it is an established symbol for self-indulgence, amongst other confectionaries (Lupton, 1996; Belk, Ger & Askegaard, 1996; Mäkelä, Bettany & Stevens 2018). For a more restricted group of people, chocolate channels ritualistic behavior when consumed e.g. as a traditional Friday-evening, self-indulgent and occasionally “sinful” treat. When adepts of addictive-type chocolate consumption confess and share their eating online in a “chocoholic” community, the substance is ascribed with a totemic significance for this virtually united group of excessive consumers: it becomes a product that brings them together with its power. A more positive totemic context is found in epicurean, detailed tasting ceremonies of quality chocolates that are shared online to be commented on, by other tribe members.

Hence, symbolic dimensions of food may be perceived by large consumer groups, whilst ritualistic and totemic significations are restricted to contextual use by a smaller number of consumers, and relate to their specific needs and identity projects, expressed across food consumption acts.

2.6.4 Materiality of food

Food substances are material, however they may become so significant that they shift the embodied, material act of consumption towards an emotional,

even spiritual level (Falk, 1994; Fieldhouse, 2017), representing a powerful linking capacity (Cova, 1997) and contributing to the singularity of the substance. Singularisation is defined as the attribution of personal meanings to material objects, whilst de-commodifying them, and throughout a complex process and eventual re-commodification, by discarding the object or substance. This unfolds as well as an appropriation process, when objects are personalised and brought into one's life and are co-constitutive of it (Kopytoff, 1986; Epp & Price, 2010; Heilbrunn, 2018; Bettany, 2018).

Although food is not an object *per se*, it is material and tangible, and despite its ephemeral nature it is subject to singularisation processes (Kniazeva & Venkatesh, 2007; Lotti, 2010). Moreover, food is a potential element, when singularisation is studied as related to materialisation of the human body and the boundaries of the duality mind – body (Csordas, 1990; Belk & Coon, 1993; Falk, 1994; Mäkelä, Bettany & Stevens, 2018). For foodie consumers, the embodiment process of significant foods represents singularisation on both dimensions: the flavour resonates with the body, and the social dimension of taste with the mind.

Language and food are both material and semiotic substances (Riley & Cavanaugh, 2017). Within Consumer Culture Theory, the stream of material-semiotics analyses materiality of objects (or non-objects) and meanings ascribed to them, with the conceptual aid of semiotics (Bettany, 2018). Material-semiotics studies entanglement and emergence of relations between human and nonhuman entities and objects, with their boundaries (Bettany & Kerrane, 2011). The material dimension investigates relations between objects and the semiotic dimension between concepts. The duality of the approach establishes a relevant viewpoint for food, with its materiality and meanings. Moreover, materiality of food is seen here as a discursive resource, generating value-laden discourse by foodie consumers, and providing rich opportunities for analysis focusing on symbolic and actual capitals (Riley & Cavanaugh, 2017).

Materiality of food is nevertheless incommensurate with the materiality of more durable commodities (Epp & Price, 2010). De Solier (2013) emphasises specific materiality of food: since it cannot be accumulated like many other consumer goods, foodie consumers can enjoy the pleasures of material culture, however without feeling the guilt of materialism (de Solier, 2013, p16). Her foodie informants characterise themselves as “culturalists” rather than “materialists”. Orientations of sustainability in food consumption embrace this view: waste avoidance and locavore eating are salient in contemporary foodie culture, alongside pleasure-seeking and indulgent distinctive practices. In postmodern, environmentally conscious foodieism, these are compatible.

Here, materiality of food and its agency are seen through the lens of taste, which is bound to Bourdieusian theories. Benedetta Cappellini provides a solid framework of food, materiality and class theorising (2010, 2017; Harman & Cappellini, 2014; Cappellini, Marshall & Parsons, 2016; Cappellini & Parsons, 2012, 2014; Cappellini, Parsons & Harman, 2016; Pirani, Cappellini & Harman, 2018). She investigates how food consumption reproduces social class, linking the study of materiality and significations ascribed to food to an analysis of distinction in the Bourdieusian vein. Moreover, the notion of the meal as a gift (Cappellini & Parsons, 2012) is pertinent in the framework of symbolic meanings and bonding connected with food consumption: the preparation and serving of a meal is a complex emotional and social process where dimensions of caring and indulgence entwine with dimensions of distinction and enhancement of bonds.

Material-semiotics constitutes a productive viewpoint when combined with a gendered analysis of consumption of totemic foods: the process of imbuelement of value, singularity (Kopytoff, 1986), is interpreted here in a novel way, whilst chocolate or chilli replace tangible objects and are attributed with agency in the consumptive, commensal process. This theoretical contribution draws from studies on female carnality (Stevens & MacLaran, 2012; Stevens, Cappellini & Smith, 2015) and singularity (Kopytoff, 1986; Epp & Price, 2010; Heilbrunn, 2018). An embodied,

individual and material consumption act of chilli or chocolate shifts to an act displaying commensal singularity, when the foodstuff is so meaningful that it is imbued with agency and the experience is shared discursively with co-consumers who embrace the significance of the process. Eventually, this may entail processes of ascribing agency simultaneously for the substance (chocolate/chilli) and the human actor conveying it (baker/gifter/cook), across an embodied performance. This complex interplay is conceptualised as *carnal singularity* (Mäkelä, Bettany & Stevens, 2018) and has repercussions in material-semiotic study of food in consumer research.

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter analyses broad interdisciplinary literature in order to dissect food consumption theories in the framework of consumer culture. The analysis discerns two main dimensions of food: as a component of lifestyles and an element of identity construction amongst foodies; and as a field of community building and a conveyor of symbolic, ritualistic and totemic behavior.

The literature has triggered in particular the formulation of RQ1, signposting two components of totemic foods that are applied in the empirical study: community and bonding, and symbolic and ritualistic consumption of food. Moreover, it provides scholarly founding to empirical study of RQ3 on gender and power constructs related to chilli and chocolate discourse.

3 Taste and distinction

3.1 Introduction: the Bourdieusian framework

Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002), a French sociologist and philosopher, developed his grand theory on taste in the strictly hierarchic French society of the 1960s and 70s. In Bourdieu's France, substantial differences prevailed between the tastes of the bourgeois and the working class (Bourdieu, 1979, English translation in 1984). Whilst the theory stemmed from the French post-war era, its contemporary interpretations are a transnational paradigm in social sciences (Santoro, 2014).

Bourdieu's key concepts are unpacked briefly hereinafter: *taste*-based consumption choices of an individual reflect her *habitus* which relates to her behavior on different *fields* of existence. The habitus is bound to the *status* of the individual, which in turn requires accumulation and exhibition of various *capitals*. This process is tightly linked to a socio-economic *class*, although class hierarchies are in evolution, when compared to Bourdieu's era. The status can be interpreted as a frame of life that enables individual choices and their interpretation (Purhonen *et al.*, 2014). This multitude of entwined processes is often described as the *lifestyle* of an individual, a declaration of one's symbolic and economic capital (Bourdieu, Wacquant & Kovala, 2013). It establishes a core target for sociological inquiry on consumption.

Vis-à-vis lifestyle, as in the context of one's food choices, the key component is *distinction*: how the individual constructs, delineates and displays her uniqueness and capacities in comparison to others (Warde, Martens & Olsen, 1999; de Solier, 2005; Rössel & Pape, 2006; McCarthy & Collins, 2014; Johnston & Baumann, 2015; Kahma *et al.*, 2015; Cappellini, Parsons & Harman, 2016; Emontspool & Georgi, 2017; Mullins, 2018). Bourdieu defined distinctive practices as a social construct where individuals exhibit their social, cultural and economic capitals – their material and immaterial assets

– when seeking to distinguish themselves from others. Taste acts as the turning point, when distinction is practised (Warde, 2008, 2014).

Taste is an acquired social construct where one's various capitals melt together (Bourdieu, 1979; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2013; Purhonen & Gronow, 2013; Purhonen & Wright, 2014; Grenfell, 2014). Moreover, it enables deeply individual interpretations, as in practices of taste across consumptive acts that CCT scholars Arsel and Bean (2013) conceptualise as “taste regimes”, and Maciel and Wallendorf (2016) as “taste engineering”.

Notwithstanding some archaisms of the theory, of ongoing globalisation processes and of the social reconstruction of Western societies including France, Bourdieusian concepts are established in the methodological toolbox in social sciences worldwide (Warde-Wright, Gayo & Gal, 2007; Thorpe, 2009; Santoro, 2011; Grenfell, 2012, 2014; Purhonen & Gronow, 2013; Purhonen & Wright, 2014; Maciel & Wallendorf, 2016; Cappellini, Parsons & Harman, 2016; Baghdasaryan, 2018). The adaptability of the theory is exceptional, which leads constantly to new interpretations through the “Bourdieuian lens”, and not least in CCT-oriented research (see 1.3.1).

Taste as a social construct reflects diverse capitals acquired by the individual. The focus here is on cultural capital in terms of food culture; also referred to as *culinary capital* (Naccarato & LeBesco, 2013; Kahma *et al.*, 2013; Lindblom & Mustonen, 2015; de Solier, 2015; Parsons 2015a). The physiological dimension of taste, i.e. foods that are appetising and appreciated, or sensed as distasteful for various reasons, is entwined to the exhibition of the social dimension of taste in culinary consumption (Maehle, Iversen, Hem & Otnes, 2015; Parsons, 2015a; Maciel & Wallendorf, 2016). Moreover, bodily skills are co-constituent of the consumptive habitus, as Cappellini, Parsons and Harman observe (2016).

A Bourdieusian positioning implies ontologically and epistemologically a view on consumption as a socially constructed phenomenon, occurring on various fields of one's existence. Baghdasaryan (2018), when resuming CCT-

oriented taste studies, concludes that the consumption field is a forum reproducing identity projects and agencies, and that these are moulded by the stratification effects of class and gender. Hence, the paradigm resonates strongly with the present research approach.

Wodak and Meyer (2016) connect critical discourse studies and the Bourdieusian theory by emphasising that habitus deeply regulates discourses practiced by the actor. The “linguistic habitus” or linguistic competencies acquired by the individual is displayed in a number of *“discursive games that are relevant in a social field”* (op. cit., p7). This means that discourse appears as natural in a given field, when a sufficient degree of linguistic capital is acquired. The discursive capital of highly specialised foodie talk indeed necessitates an important amount of culinary and social capitals. In democratising online realms, economic capital required for this can vary, which enables individuals with more meagre financial assets to contribute to the foodie culture. This post-Bourdieusian emancipatory development is discussed further in Chapters 5 and 9.

3.2 Doing taste: distinction by consumption of foods

“...taste, participation and knowledge of ‘good’ food are considered indicators of high cultural capital.” (Parsons, 2015b)

Taste overarches the present research design: it binds together theory, data collection and analysis. Its fecundity as a conceptual tool is demonstrated by abundant scholarly work, analysed in this section.

Theorising of taste draws primarily on its twofoldness, with physiological and social dimensions. This duality links together the material and the theoretical dimensions of the study: from the concrete taste of food as a physiological, gustatory process (Chapter 2) towards taste in the sociological sense: an acquired context-specific characteristic which is partly individual and partly social, contributing to reproduction of class hierarchies, and shaped by and shaping further their discourses (Bourdieu, 1979; Beardsworth & Keil, 1996; Johnston & Baumann, 2009; 2015; de Solier, 2013; Cappellini & Parsons,

2014; Virtanen, 2015; Parsons, 2015a; Cappellini, Parsons & Harman, 2016). Moreover, taste permeates mutations of these hierarchies (Arsel & Bean, 2013; Parsons, 2015a, 2015b; Cappellini *et al.*, 2016; Paddock, 2018). *“[T]aste not only exists on the tongue but is a dynamic social process that encompasses production, consumption and reproduction.”* (Leong-Salobir, Ley & Roheng, 2016, drawing on Mann *et al.*, 2011).

Bourdieuian food studies represent a wide stream: taste as a constituent of the accumulated culinary capital, while performing one's consumptive orientation (Warde, Wright & Gayo-Cal, 2007; Virtanen, 2007; Johnston & Baumann, 2009, 2015; Lindblom & Mustonen, 2015; Maciel & Wallendorf, 2016; Cappellini, Parsons & Harman, 2016; Purhonen & Heikkilä, 2017; Cappellini, 2017; Paddock, 2018). Moreover, studies on consumers' preferences emphasise on taste as an essential factor guiding food choices in general (Mäkelä, 2002; Leipämaa-Leskinen, 2007; Maehle, Iversen, Hem & Otnes, 2015). Research has applied distinction theory e.g. on consumption of vegetables in France (Plessz & Gojard, 2015), on reproducing class distinctions through perpetuation of national food cultures (Cappellini, 2010) or throughout cookbooks (Cappellini & Parsons, 2014), on legitimate food choices versus food practices (Lindblom & Mustonen, 2015) and on accumulation of skills conceptualised as “taste engineering” amongst craft beer aficionados in the USA (Maciel & Wallendorf, 2016). A rich research stream draws on Warde's (1997, 2008) theorising on antinomies of taste that conceptualises consumers' choices on a bipolar scale, such as health versus indulgence or convenience versus care (Arppe, Mäkelä & Väänänen, 2011).

Renaissance of omnivorous consumption research (see 3.3) links distinction performance to food studies solidly. The extensiveness of food studies through the Bourdieusian lens, with its quality, justify investigation of distinction with totemic foods. Distinction practices in foodie discourse are a key aspect in the analysis of their foodscapes, since prior research shows that foodies are particularly keen on showing their expertise and culinary capital online (de Valck *et al.*, 2009; Lofgren, 2013; Purhonen *et al.*, 2014;

Johnston & Baumann, 2009, 2015). Here, the focus is on performance of taste as a disposition of distinctive consumption practices.

Rozin (2015) describes the development of human food preferences and taste with biological, psychological and cultural factors. In foodie contexts, their combination deploys as an overarching aspiration towards “good taste” (Johnston & Baumann, 2015; Mäkelä, 2016). The sensory, corporeal dimension prevails in individual consumptive practices, whereas the social dimension is more tightly linked to performance of taste as a distinctive process of foodies (Johnston & Baumann, 2009, 2015; Parsons, 2015a; Maehle, Iversen, Hem & Otnes, 2015; Cappellini, Parsons & Harman, 2016; Maciel & Wallendorf, 2016).

Rozin (2015) distinguishes between four main positive categories in gustatory qualities of taste. The first is “good taste”, accepted for its sensory properties, i.e. flavour, and the second “beneficial”, preferred for its consequences. These are complemented by an “appropriate” category (for cultural acceptance) and a “transvalued” one, which is accepted for prior history. (Rozin, 2015, p297).

The negative qualities of taste are linked to four main categories: “distaste” (negative sensory properties), “danger” (believed or proved harmfulness), “inappropriateness” (inedibility for cultural reasons) and “disgust” (ideational reasons, but in a more powerful way than in inappropriateness). Rozin claims that inappropriateness is the largest category, whilst disgust is the most powerful (2015, p297). In foodie contexts, all are relevant.

Exhibiting one’s disapproval for sensed untastefulness is a complementary dimension of the complex process of distinction. Bourdieu highlighted this with extremities: the “bourgeois” and the “working class” tastes (1979). A hamburger from a fast-food outlet may taste too greasy, hence distasteful, which links it to high cholesterol and obesity, and eventually to danger. For some people, it appears as inappropriate with the assumed identity of a foodie, thus leading to sentiments of disgust. However, processes of

devalorisation and stigmatisation of food are both social and individual, and in the large foodie tribe there are consumers happily eating chain restaurant hamburgers, although this might not be made public on- or offline. This fluctuating orientation resonates with omnivorous consumption, as Lindblom and Mustonen argue (2015). Moreover, stigmatisation and preference are highly contextual: a hamburger cannot be perceived as a stigmatised food in itself, since a vivid trend of gourmet hamburgers flourishes globally, but the food is judged for the banality of the chain outlet and the low quality of ingredients.

Foodies seek for new gustatory sensations which they transform into culinary capital by sharing them on- and offline, focusing in their discourse on positive taste qualities. In the context of aestheticisation of food consumption, the function of senses is significant for the construction of consumer habitus. Aesthetic dimensions are valued by foodies, alongside culinary taste: a beautiful setting and décor, as well as the capacity and knowledge to appreciate culinary sophistication. Selecting high-quality ingredients and mastering diverse techniques of preparation are one part of this broad field of culinary competences and capital. Distinction by the aesthetic component of taste is hence a key constituent of a foodie consumer habitus.

The aestheticising element of foodieism is characterised by a number of scholars as capital-intensive, sustaining inegalitarian social structures (Johnston & Baumann, 2009, 2015; Parsons, 2015a, 2015b; Cappellini, Parsons & Harman, 2016). However, foodie culture and an epicurean, elitist consumption style may merge with new configurations, especially in online contexts.¹⁸ Since definition of both orientations is challenging, argumentation is likely to go on.

¹⁸ Parsons (2015a) distinguishes however *epicurean* and *gourmet* orientations in her study on British male foodies who embrace a consumptive orientation seeking for sensory gratification and adventure, alongside good taste. In her view, this type of consumption is highly gender-marked as masculine and sustains capital-intensive class hierarchies.

In the contemporary, democratising consumer culture, eroding class hierarchies contribute to diversified distinction patterns (Paddock, 2018). In postmodern societies, status is displayed by both conspicuous and inconspicuous consumption (Eckhardt, Belk & Wilson, 2014; McDonnell, 2016). Conspicuous consumption (Veblen, 1899) signifies the acquisition of goods and services aiming at displaying one's status or pecuniary strength (Leal & Arellano, 2012, p15). Eckhardt, Belk and Wilson (2014) claim that *inconspicuous* consumption is on the rise, redefining the concept of luxury, which befits the orientation of sustainable, yet distinction-oriented consumption. Foodie cultures include inconspicuous dimensions, given that food is ephemeral and resonates with non-tangible, experiential fields. However, conspicuous elements, such as expensive restaurants and exclusive food tourism, cannot be denied in capital-intensive foodieism.

The notion of intersectionality, presented in Chapter 2 (Jäntti, Saesma, Leppänen, Järvinen, & Varis, 2018) is relevant in the context of social structures supporting foodie culture: one is a foodie with a certain social status, gender, age, self- and social identity, and individual foodways that connect the consumer habitus to a broader consumption culture. Intersectionalities result in an array of consumption opportunities that constitute facets of the foodie culture prism.

Insights from this study into the intersectionalities of contemporary foodie culture, and especially discourses reflecting it, may challenge some extant assumptions of social structures, gendered practices and boundaries between them. Cesiri (2019) observes that “virtual foodscapes” such as celebrity chefs’ websites indeed challenge extant hegemonies and gendered viewpoints, by enhancing online participation of consumers that is not possible with traditional outlets, and contributes to increased democratisation of marketplaces. Reconfiguration of elitist practices renders enjoyment of food accessible to more consumers, engendering ways of experiencing and displaying it in ways that were not possible before Web 2.0. (Cesiri, 2019). These affordances are developed further in Chapter 5.

3.3 Omnivorous foodie taste

Postmodern studies on food and taste draw widely on *omnivorousness*. The concept in its contemporary signification is coined by Peterson (1992) and developed further in the Bourdieusian tradition of taste and diverse capitals (Lizardo & Skiles, 2012). Omnivorous foodie culture emerges as a backlash to traditional, epicurean food consumption styles (Lindblom & Mustonen, 2015). Moreover, it embraces the consumptive trend where experiences are the nexus of “new luxury”, which befits the ethos of foodie cultures (Atwal & Williams, 2017).

Cappeliez and Johnston (2013) argue for embeddedness of omnivorousness and cosmopolitanism, and define cosmopolitanism as one component of larger cultural repertoires (*op. cit.* p436). Lindblom and Mustonen (2015) support this view, interestingly developing the bias between expressed legitimate tastes and actual food choices amongst young cosmopolitan consumers in Helsinki: “*Omnivorous taste expects boundaries between legitimate and illegitimate to be crossed.*” (2015, p660).

Globalisation processes and cosmopolitanism are interconnected and together, they nurture development of foodie cultures (de Solier, 2013). A concrete example of this interaction is the huge increase in produce, ingredients and restaurants available, with the growth of awareness of food cultures, made possible by modern communication and especially Social Networking Services (Cappeliez & Johnston, 2013). Young, urban cosmopolitans are active and visible in various online environments, and their contribution to online discourse on food consumption outnumbers that of traditional highbrow gourmets. Adopting new foodways across omnivorous orientations is typical for these consumers who act as role models and influencers in online platforms.

Whilst for Lévi-Strauss (1965) omnivorousness signified concrete consumption of all kinds of food – and also constituted a dilemma – it is understood in today’s context as openness to a large selection of

consumption goods and services. Finnish consumption scholars Kahma, Niva, Helakorpi and Jallinoja refer to “everyday distinction” related to omnivorousness (2015) and highlight in this respect usefulness of the concept of “culinary capital” as a sub-category. It is pertinent, since foodie consumption styles embrace a broader scale of food choices than foods traditionally valued as distinguished by gourmet consumers, whilst this postmodern behavior trend appreciates all good food (Lindblom & Mustonen, 2015; Johnston & Baumann, 2009, 2015) and also drink (Maciel & Wallendorf, 2016). Moreover, omnivorous foodies are more open-minded when selecting food outlets than “gourmets”, which adds a democratising dimension to foodie contexts. This is a fundamental viewpoint when challenging extant, somewhat categorising assumptions on foodie culture as part of an elitist lifestyle, dependent on and sustaining rigid class hierarchies.

However, omnivorous consumption is not uniform either, and “highbrow snobbery” may be replaced by “highbrow omnivorousness”, as contemporary taste scholars aptly observe (Paddock, 2018, p69, citing Peterson 2005). Apparent omnivorousness may still conceal hidden elitist structures, as Johnston and Baumann (2009, 2015) claim, and omnivorous foodieism needs to be considered as a continuum rather than a distinct performance style.

Warde, Wright and Gayo-Cal (2007) distinguish between *volume* and *composition* in matters of taste. Further, they argue for openness and tolerance, instead of defining omnivorous consumption as liking everything in an indiscriminate manner. However, volume and broadness of consumptive choices seem to be dominant features when defining omnivorousness (*op. cit.* p145). The definition remains nevertheless problematic: who can be characterised as “an omnivore”? The concept itself is a useful tool, but must be applied with precaution, like “foodie”. It is possible to detect consumptive and cultural patterns, but not to inarguably label a person. Moreover, postmodern consumers tend to be reluctant towards categorisation, which also applies to foodies (Lindblom & Mustonen, 2015; Vásquez & Chik, 2015). This leads to a compromising solution: it is pertinent to refer to omnivorous

orientation(s) in food consumption, yet rather not to characterise individual consumers as “omnivores”.

3.4 Recent post-Bourdieuian taste studies and critique

As unfolded above, Bourdieu’s theory is widely commented on and complemented by subsequent scholarly work. Despite its paradigm-creating status, there are innovating and even critical voices in contemporary taste research. New fields of culture may erode established borderlines and give access to more stratification in cultural realms, which necessitates new ways of conceptualising categories such as class, high-brow, or elite. In cultural sociology, the notion of emerging cultural capital is gaining visibility (Friedman, Savage, Hanquinet & Miles, 2015), and it is adequate in the present context where e.g. foodie celebrities may stem from layman projects, such as blogs or YouTube videos, generating new forms of cultural stratification.

Skandalis, Banister and Byrom (2015, p404) distinguish four main streams in taste studies: the first one conceptualises taste as a mechanism for distinction practices, operational mainly on a macro-social level, and in the second, taste is studied as a marker of community-level affiliation within consumer groups, whilst drawing primarily on tribal theories. Moreover, taste is viewed as an element of aesthetic discrimination. These three are complemented by a range focusing on sensory output in taste formation.

Skandalis *et al.* (2015) claim that in this wide field, the spatial dimension is neglected. They suggest a new, spatial theorising of taste, in order to analyse taste formation across marketplaces, instead of interpreting solely taste performance. It needs to be linked to consumers’ spatial and aesthetic experiences. The relevance of the contribution by Skandalis *et al.* is primarily in this contextual emphasis: taste performance is targeted in a defined marketplace context, online communication. Drawing on Kozinets (2002, 2010) and Hine (2010), the adopted ontology perceives virtual environments

as any other (market) places in the “real” – or actual – world, although different. Consumers perform taste in online environments which intertwine with their offline existence (Rokka, 2010).

Moreover, Skandalis *et al.* (2015) link reading of taste formation to the claim of considering the “context of context” (Askegaard & Linnet, 2011; Earley, 2014) in consumer studies. The view is highly pertinent: online context(s) contribute to both volume and nature of taste performance. It would be irrelevant to compare e.g. discourse of amateur foodie bloggers to that of exclusive fine dining magazines, if the objective is to understand how consumers perform taste, although both represent foodie-generated discourse. Contextuality is a key variable in critical discourse studies (Wodak & Meyer, 2016), diversifying understanding of extant societal structures.

Paddock (2018) unpacks post-Bourdieuian, CCT-oriented research with a critical stance. Her views relate to the boundary work between social classes, neglected by Bourdieu: abandonment of ethnicity in the theory, as well as non-consideration of commodities that are valued across class hierarchies. Moreover, the concept of habitus is criticised as overly deterministic (also Croce, 2015).

Arsel and Bean (2013) claim that Bourdieusian theorising neglects how taste evolves into practices in “doing taste”. In their view, taste unfolds as a continuum of understandings, procedures and engagements (*op. cit.*, p901). It is not a weapon in inter-consumer fights of distinction, as rigidly Bourdieusian interpretations argue. Arsel and Bean distinguish between dispersed, abstract-like, practices and integrative practices such as cooking; the latter require specific skills but also contextual knowledge, and both are regulated by discursive regimes. This brings their focus more on action, the consumptive practices, from constitution of habitus as one’s consumptive identity.

Drawing on Arsel and Bean’s theory of taste regimes (2013), Maciel and Wallendorf (2016, p728) observe that distinctive practices interpreted in a pure Bourdieusian vein unfold a competitive “zero-sum” play between

individuals, whilst interconsumer collaborative practices have gained less attention. Since their theory on taste engineering (*op. cit.*) reveals itself as utterly relevant to the present study, the empirical approach of RQ2 is built on their conceptual developments. Furthermore, the authors detect neglect of senses in taste theorising, which targets mainly the social dimensions of taste and overlooks corporeality.

Mullins (2018, p351) aligns, claiming that material and sensory dimensions often remain “shallow” in current consumer research. He highlights mutual subjectivity between material culture and people as consumers. This brings the perspective closer to a material-semiotic view, with culinary taste as a complex interplay of corporeal and social dimensions.

3.5. Towards an empirical study of taste performance

Taste regimes (Arsel & Bean, 2013) and taste engineering (Maciel & Wallendorf, 2016), located in Consumer Culture Theory, reinforce the positioning of the study in this interdisciplinary stream.

The simplified locution “doing taste” is suggested here for reproductions of taste performance. It conveys the practices of achieving taste and performing it, and emulates the categorisation of discursive strategies of foodies (Johnston and Baumann, 2009, 2015), where “doing gender” in foodie discourse is applied (also Cairns, Johnston and Baumann, 2010; Parsons 2015a).

To understand taste performance, it is necessary to briefly unpack theoretical underpinnings of performativity. Various dimensions of “performances” take place in everyday life (or in performative arts which are not in focus here). In this study, performativity is defined as a combination of performative acts that reflect enactments of consumers’ identity. A performance is not an entity as such, but a relationship across actions, their performers and the audiences for whom it is meant. It is entwined with discursive formations enabling it:

performativity constitutes reality through language and linguistic practices (von Wallpach, Hemetsberger & Espersen, 2017).

Traditionally, drawing on linguistic origins of the performativity paradigm (e.g. Austin, 1975), dimensions of intentional (illocutionary) force and unintentional (perlocutionary) force are distinguished. In this interaction, positioned in changing social and discursive contexts, consumers' identity work is performed, whilst reality is constituted through language and its practice (von Wallpach *et al.*, 2017). Rather than taking language "for granted" (Lash, 2015), it should be seen as an essential constituent of institutional reality construction. In this process, Lash (2015) refers to *Background*: a vast set of practices, ways of behaving, dispositions and capacities that is indispensable in a given context of action. In this respect, performativity theory draws on Bourdieu, since the Background may be perceived as a combination of capitals, to be able to perform in a given field. It embraces one's identity as an individual and as a consumer. Interpretations of Background in present context are Social Networking Services and foodie culture, and their respective discourses as codes of action and conduct.

3.5.1 Taste regimes

The theory on taste regimes (Arsel & Bean, 2013) provides additional understanding on taste engineering, applied in the empirical part. A taste regime is defined as a discursive, normative system linking aesthetics and practice: articulating taste in daily practice, perpetuating regimes by marketplace mechanisms, and regulating taste practices by continuous engagement. When considering online communities of practice, this last dimension is particularly pertinent.

The authors articulate how consumers interpret and share understanding of an aesthetic order which consequently modifies the ways of ascribing meanings to the material (Kopytoff, 1986; Mullins, 2018). Transformation of taste patterns into practices is regulated by a set of acceptable ends, orders, uses and emotions. It governs the practice and embeds it into a context. A

performance in a community, such as foodies, consists of specific values, meanings and myths that are created and experienced by users-members, when “doing taste”.

Arsel and Bean (2013, p900) suggest three fundamental elements in formation of a taste regime within a consumer community: problematisation, ritualisation and instrumentalisation. Whilst a taste regime is perceived as a relatively stable disposition, these practices bring the theory close to taste engineering, particularly pertinent for the present context.

3.5.2. Taste engineering

Maciel and Wallendorf (2016) suggest the framework of *taste engineering* for studying taste performance in the field of sensory and discursive dimensions of social consumption practices. The authors apply the concept of communities of practice (Wenger, 1998; Stommel, 2008) to study craft beer “aficionados”, the consumptive sphere of mainly male adepts of micro-brewed beer in the United States. This links their theorising to the present study in three respects. Ontologically, since online foodie communities are perceived here as (virtual) communities of practice. The second convergence is methodological: how do consumers in these communities “engineer” or form and perform taste, once their consumptive orientation is established? The third link is conceptual, since craft beer aficionados learn the skills, accumulating their cultural competence, by practices that contain also a ritualistic dimension (tasting and documenting experiences in particular).

Taste engineering is conceptualised as an action strategy for acquiring cultural competence within a domain of consumption. It deploys by performance of taste in fields of consumption; however not during, but *after* the development of one’s consumptive habitus. Once the habitus has been embodied as a set of dispositions, norms, values and preferences, it explains the engagements of an individual in various practices (Maciel & Wallendorf, 2016, p727). In this view, it is perfectly normal for a “chillihead” to have hundreds of plant pots in the apartment, and to share this cultivation in

communities of practice, for self-enhancement, co-creational learning and display of subcultural competence.

Maciel and Wallendorf (2016) define taste engineering as a continuum of knowledge, speculation and experimentation that is used for problem solving and goal setting, which aligns with the Lévi-Straussian theory (1962) of human mindset construction. It befits the present research positioning where foodie discourse online is defined as a set of discursive reproductions of consumers who already have assumed a foodie habitus and perform it in their online behavior, to gain and display competences, as well as for recreational purposes.

Maciel and Wallendorf (2016) define institutional learning as accumulation of cultural *competence* – instead of capital – and distinguish three main components therein: “*benchmarking, autodidactics and scaffolding*” (2016, p726). They establish links between discursive and sensory dimensions of social practices. In other words, passionate craft beer people socialise to, and learn the norms and discourse of, this community of practice by learning from experienced peers (benchmarking), by themselves (autodidactics) and by developing their competence by intersubjective practices (scaffolding). This strategy was detected also in studies on the SmulWeb online community (de Valck, 2006), and across interaction by Finnish and French foodies online (Mäkelä, 2016, 2017). The processual nature on becoming an expert in taste performance is highlighted moreover by Latour and Deighton (2018).

This study applies the taste engineering framework and follows one of the suggestions of further research by Maciel and Wallendorf: to inquire how language becomes institutionalised within a social domain (2016, p743). Foodie discourse is a fruitful domain to study neologism (Mäkelä, 2016; Burton, 2016; Saint, 2016), and the word “foodie” itself is a good example on the institutionalisation of a concept within a domain of social practice (Johnston & Baumann, 2009, 2015).

3.6 Conclusion

Performance of taste as a category of distinction is a key process in foodie culture, essentially across its online marketplaces. Taste literatures analysed above suggest a wide research stream on culinary taste. Gaps remaining give impetus to Research Question 2: “How do consumers perform taste and distinction across discursive productions on chilli and chocolate online?”

Doing taste lacks an analysis combining social and corporeal viewpoints, with a comparative aspect across languages. Given the importance of discursive practices in taste performance of foodie culture online, it is, moreover, obvious that an interdisciplinary approach based on consumer culture theory and critical discourse studies brings insights into the complex phenomena of taste performance and distinction practices of foodie consumers. Contextual analysis of SNS affordances and gratifications increases understanding of empowering dimensions in online foodie culture, which contributes to post-Bourdieuian taste research.

Empirical data gathered are analysed with an approach constructed with elements from taste engineering (Maciel & Wallendorf, 2016), to embed the study solidly in a CCT-oriented, post-Bourdieuian paradigm.

4 Chilli and chocolate: meanings and mysteries

“You can feel the depths of the surrounding forests in the rich earth as the chocolate melts in your mouth and it leaves you with a hint of mystery – as if there is something more on your palette just out of reach that is pleasant but hard to grasp.” (Mostly from chocolate, 28.8.2019)

4.1 Introduction

This chapter unfolds chilli and chocolate as totemic foods, shedding light on their significance for foodie consumers. Moreover, their international status is emphasised, which links them to the transnational foodie consumption trend. Neither of them is a nationally flagged ingredient, which adds to the relevance of a comparative study across discourse in three languages: chilli and chocolate are nationally unbiased, yet they are ascribed with shifting significance in different languages. They are versatile and easy to adapt to a variety of dishes and confectionary.

4.2 Chilli – the burning pleasure

“Eating of chili, riding on roller coasters, taking very hot baths, and many other human activities can be considered instances of thrill seeking or enjoyment of “constrained risks”. (Rozin & Schiller, 1980, p77)

Only few foods are consumed in a competitive manner, to exhibit one's braveness or capacity to tolerate discomfort. Burning chilli pepper, the most popular spice of the world (Bosland, 1996) is one of these, alongside its uses as a spicy condiment and an ornamental and edible plant. Amongst cuisines of the world, Indian and Sichuan foodways have the reputation of favouring chilli pepper heat the most. A common narrative, salient in online contexts, entangles the spice with an imagery of masculinity, strength, competitiveness, and risk. Seeking for extreme experiences is an orientation found in adventuring, sports, media consumption, and foodways. The

“endorphin hit” (Spence, 2018) provoked by chilli resembles those obtained by physical exercise and becomes occasionally addictive, like sports.

Spence (2018) suggests four hypotheses for abundant chilli consumption: (1) thrill-seeking, with dimensions of masochism, (2) anti-microbial faculties that are functional especially in hot climates, (3) thermo-regulative and salivating effects that facilitate adaptation to hot climates and eating dry foods, and (4) medicinal and dietary benefits. When analysing consumption however, these need to be observed with profound understanding of context and culture, in order to distinguish between motivation factors that are (food) culturally regulated, or more personal (Spence, 2018).

Rozin and Schiller (1980, Abstract) observe that the taste pleasure associated with chilli use develops with experience. Positive effects stem from the evident fact that chilli enhances taste in foods otherwise “bland”, yet its consumption results also in social rewards. Moreover, punginess is tolerated and sought after for its bodily effects. This array of motivation factors represents physiological, culinary and social triggers, which contributes to the popularity of the ingredient. Eating chilli is a “constrained risk” (*op. cit.*, p77), where demonstration of one’s courage is embedded in a culinary adventure, enhancing one’s (masculine) identity (Spence, 2018).

Versatility of chilli enables its use in savoury and sweet dishes, as a condiment and in beverages. Chilli pods may be used entire, dried, reduced in puree, fried, cooked, pickled, smoked or fermented, with preparation methods reflecting distinct foodways. Moreover, the medicinal value of chilli substances is recognised: chilli is commonly used for analgetic and antimicrobial products, internally or externally, and suggested for treatment of several other illnesses including obesity, diabetes and cancer (Fattori *et al.*, 2016).

The clinical value is based on obtaining a balance between the sensation of pain and its cure. This duality is highly noteworthy – the mystic faculty to provoke and to cure physical suffering was presumably already discovered by ancient civilisations, which may have contributed to the reputation of chilli

as something more than just a food, and uplifted its use towards ritualistic and totemic levels (Powis *et al.*, 2013).

4.2.1 From Mesoamerica to the tables of the world

The spicy fruit of the botanical genus *Capsicum*, the chilli pepper, is cultivated and consumed all over the world in surprising volumes, given the pungency of the crop. It is estimated that approximately one fourth of the human population consumes chilli pepper products daily (Spence, 2018). Originating from the cultural area of Mesoamerica and from Latin American foodways, chilli pepper has found its way to tables worldwide as a key ingredient for piquant flavours (Guzman & Bosland, 2017).

Chilli pepper was cultivated already in Mesoamerican cultures in 7000-6000 BC, which makes it one of the oldest crops known (Bosland, 1996). It was exported to Europe during the exploits of Christopher Columbus (Spence, 2018) and rapidly invaded the rest of the world, due to the facility of cultivation (Lo, Kadetz, Matiles & Heinrich, 2015). Given the penetration breadth, linguistic variation occurs: in English *chili*, *chile*, *chilli*, *aji*, *paprika*, or simply *pepper* occur, depending of the culinary heritage context. Throughout this study, the spelling *chilli* is used, aligning with the recommendation of the Oxford Dictionary online (Oxford, 2017). Nevertheless, the original spelling is maintained in quotations.

The etymology of *chilli* is in the Nahuatl language of ancient Aztecs, whereas the variant *aji* has its origin in a Caribbean dialect (Bosland, 1996). In Finnish, both the plant and the crop are referred to with the loan word *chili* or *chilipaprika* ('chilli pepper'), and in French the most common noun is *piment*, although *chili* – *chiles* from Spanish origin is also used in French (Larousse, 2018). Moreover, in English the variant *chili* is common to design a popular dish: *chili con carne*, literally 'chilli with meat'. It is one of the focal foods of the very popular cuisine adapting Mexican foodways to more global tastes, known as Tex-Mex.

Chilli pepper is a perennial shrub plant, despite the Latin epithet *annuum*, annual, of one of its species. It belongs botanically to the family of *Solanaceae* (nightshades) with tomato, potato and tobacco. Chilli plants have culinary, medicinal and ornamental functions. Five species exist: *C. annum*, *C. baccatum*, *C. chinense*, *C. frutescens*, and *C. pubescens*, with approximately twenty wild varieties (Bosland, 1996; Powis *et al.*, 2013). From these, hundreds of chilli cultivars¹⁹ have been bred, and they are mainly distinguished by the type of pod, such as bell or jalapeño. During Conquistador times, Mexican indigens had already bred a large quantity of pod-types for distinct culinary and medicinal purposes. Moreover, there is evidence on ritualistic chilli consumption from the era before the arrival of the Europeans, and also from ancient China (Lo *et al.*, 2015).

There is archeological evidence on regulated use of chilli in ancient cultures: in culinary, medicinal or ritual contexts, the substance would have been reserved to social, military or religious elites (Powis *et al.* 2013). Residues of capsaicin are found on vessels excavated from ritual areas such as burial sites, reserved for the elite. Maya and Aztec documents also refer to ritualistic consumption of a beverage where chilli and cocoa would have been combined, establishing convergences with ancient uses of cocoa bean derived products in Mesoamerican cultures (see 4.3). The association of chilli and chocolate, stemming from these cultures, is commonly found in folklore, consequently interpreted in fiction and embraced by online communities with culinary, esoteric and therapeutic orientations.

It is noteworthy that boundaries between medicinal, pharmaceutical and culinary use of foodstuffs are not clear-cut even today, and less they were at the time when chilli started to migrate from Central America (Lo *et al.*, 2015). This versatility adds to the mystery, enhancing the totemic potential of the plant.

¹⁹ *Cultivar* is a plant variety obtained by breeding. The noun is a portmanteau word from *cultivate* and *variety* (Oxford, 2018).

4.2.2 The heat

The burning sensation of chilli is recognised in all cuisines, and according to Guzman and Bosland (2017), heat is acknowledged in Asian cuisines as the sixth main taste sensation, alongside sweet, bitter, salty, sour and umami. However, not all food scholars embrace this view (Spence, 2018).

Different varieties are prepared in distinct ways, either to highlight the heat or to keep it moderate. The powerful sensory effect of Capsicum consumption is based on capsaicin²⁰, a substance based on capsaicinoids, alkaloids that vary in degree from a sensation of very mild – as in bell peppers – to extremely hot and stinging. Cultivars, growing conditions and the age of the fruit influence the effect, whilst the sensation of heat fluctuates depending on each capsaicinoid (Bosland, 1996; Guzman & Bosland, 2017). According to folklore and pharmaceutical research, capsaicin has pain-relieving properties (Bosland, 1996; Fattori *et al.*, 2016).

Documented records of burning effects may be subjective estimations, yet it is incontestable that a group of chilli cultivars can attain a level of punginess considered as dangerous to consumers who have not developed tolerance by repetitive consumption.

Pungency is measured with the scale of Scoville Heat Units (SHU), developed by Wilbur Scoville in 1912 (Smithsonian, 2013). The number of units of the scale equals the volume in cups of water where the substance is diluted, until it is no longer sensed as pungent by human tasters in an organoleptic test. At present, there are more precise laboratory-based methods of measuring the heat, such as high-performance liquid chromatography where the variation between human tastebuds is not significant (Guzman & Bosland, 2017; Chile Pepper Institute, 2018). However, the Scoville scale subsists as a popular sub-tribal reference of

²⁰ The description of capsaicin in chemistry: 8-methyl-N-vanillyl-6-nonenamide (Fattori *et al.*, 2016)

spiciness, and varieties above one million SHU are considered as the hottest group (Chile Pepper Institute, 2018).

Although the evolving list of “the hottest” varieties is not incontestable, some examples are provided here. Pepperhead.com (2018) presents record holders in pungency: *Carolina Reaper* (2.2 million SHU), *Trinidad Moruga Scorpion* (2 009 231 SHU), *7 Pot Doughlagh* (1 853 926 SHU), *7 Pot Primo* (1 469 000 SHU), *Trinidad Scorpion “Butch T”* (1 463 700 SHU) and *Naga Viper* (1 439 000 SHU). An alternative way of indicating long digits may be adopted: kSHU or KSHU, with k/K standing for one thousand (Chiliyhdistys, 2018). Seeking for new records of heat and measuring them as precisely as possible is a particularity of “chillihead” consumers (Chapter 7).

A more sophisticated set of descriptors than sheer heat measurement provides relevant guidance in selection of appropriate varieties. Guzman and Bosland (2017) suggest a lexicon to describe the heat of chilli with five sensorial attributes: Development, Duration, Location, Feeling and Intensity (*op. cit.*, p188). As an example, the heat of a jalapeño can be described as rapid and flat, sensed on the tip of the tongue in front of the mouth, gradually losing its heat and intensity. Most Asian cuisines prefer a sharp flavour in chilli, whereas e.g. Hungarian and New Mexico foodways tend to opt for a milder sensation (*op. cit.*)

4.2.3 Gendered variation in chilli consumption

A quick scan of chilli-related sites displays an imagery of masculinity, heat and competition. This observation was one of the triggers of a comparative study on chilli and chocolate, although it is not a novelty in itself: common discourse often connects chilli with masculine attributes. Moreover, participants in chilli eating challenges tend to be predominantly masculine. A Finnish eating contest is aptly called “The Last Man Standing” (Chiliyhdistys, 2018). In this context, it is interesting to note that in imperial China, chilli powder was used for its analgesic qualities in castration of eunuchs, as Lo *et al.* (2015) observe. Hence, chilli has contributed to both emasculation and enhancement of masculinity.

Byrnes and Hayes (2015) observe gendered differences in spicy food intake: amongst female informants, liking of very hot food prepared with chilli correlated mostly with intrinsic motivation. The spicy flavour triggered, and was triggered by, seeking of sensations, whereas for male consumers the sense of reward was more significant. This is a possible explanation for the male dominance in chilli-related eating challenges. Nevertheless, Spence (2018) states that for both women and men, preference of spicy food is linked to exposure: experience and habits. However, most scholars agree that abundant consumption of chilli is mostly associated with male behavior, in particular in food cultures where chilli is not a basic component of daily foodways, such as North America. (Byrnes & Hayes, 2015; Spence, 2018). Reasons for excessive chilli consumption stem from culture, local and individual foodways and genetic variation (Spence, 2018).

There is evidence on interdependence between endogenous testosterone levels and enjoyment of spicy food (Bègue *et al.*, 2015): in a laboratory test, men with measured higher testosterone levels spiced their mashed potatoes with more Tabasco sauce than other men. Testosterone is a hormone associated with stereotypical masculinity, daring behaviour and social dominance (*op. cit.*). Researchers are, however, not unanimous on whether similar culinary behavior is triggered by physiology or by social variables. Cause and effect may be reversed and, at the least, they are entangled.

An additional observation of competitive, male dominance is pertinent in the context of gendered consumption. A particularity of chilli-oriented consumers, considered as a sub-tribe of foodies here, is sophisticated domestic cultivation. The hottest varieties are not easy to find, which results in a blossoming prosumption scene with online seed commerce and bartering. Outcomes of this leisure activity are exhibited mostly in blog format, to post one's personal achievements that can be followed and commented on by likeminded tribe members.

A list of popular Finnish chilli blogs (Chiliblogit, 2018) presents nineteen blogs demonstrating domestic cultivation and breeding of chilli peppers²¹. Out of these, only three are kept by women. Male “chilliheads” display a highly interesting array of advanced horticultural engineering, which necessitates specific gear, especially in the harsh Finnish climate. An edge of competitiveness is observable, as well as references to technological savoir-faire and knowledge. Greenhouses with expensive, automatised irrigation systems figure in this field, with detailed pictures and videos on cultivation tricks. However, original home-made arrangements, invading bathrooms and porches, are present as well.

In all, domestic cultivation of chilli represents a prosuming activity that thrives amongst most online tribe members, as Kozinets observes (1999, 2007). Displaying one’s achievements and receiving comments on them accentuates the community dimension in prosumption, where “the link” may be as important as “the thing” (Cova, 1997). This deeply social phenomenon is representative of a virtual community of practice.

4.2.4 The totemic chilli

From ancient Mexican cultures, chilli peppers migrated to the tables across almost all contemporary foodways. Excessive use, competitive consumption and conspicuous elements in cultivation are parts in distinction strategies where consumers establish a habitus of a “chillihead” or of another type of adventurer (Spence, 2018). The taste of chilli is either mild or burningly pungent, it contains an element of risk and provides an opportunity to display one’s individual attributes in a way that is rarely found in foodstuffs.

For adept consumers, chilli has the capacity of rallying a tribe:

“These people – both sauce makers and devoted fans – made up a family-like, tight-knit community called “chileheads.” (Scott Roberts, 25.3.2017)

²¹ Dating from before 2017.

Chilli may uplift an ordinary eating experience towards adventurous dimensions. It was already attributed as a “quasi-magical” substance thousands of years ago (Lo *et al.* 2015, p3) and merits being investigated as a food with totemic significations.

4.3 Chocolate – the pleasure of sweet indulgence

“Chocolate has given occasion to profound dissertations.”
(Brillat-Savarin, 1825, p145).

“Chocolate, cake, and other heavy foods dominate the #foodporn conversation.” (Mejova, Abbar & Haddadi, 2016, p250)

The quotations above illustrate the versatility of chocolate as an ingredient and the multi-faceted creativity it has contributed to, throughout centuries. Chocolate enhances dissertation writing²² and contributes to vivid online playfulness in contemporary consumption cultures – the ingredient has generated a cornucopia of representations since its introduction in human foodways. The Latin name, *Theobroma cacao*, forged by the botanist Carl Linnaeus, signifies “food of the gods” and gives an insight into the particularity of this food (Sethi, 2015). Beliefs in divine origins stem from the Mayan myth of gods finding cacao and making a gift of it to humans (Dillinger, Barriga, Escárcega, Jimenez, Lowe & Grivetti, 2000). Consequently, cacao was a highly appreciated ingredient in civilisations of the Mexico and used to cure an array of ailments and diseases (*op. cit.*). The narrative of mystery is widely exploited by commercial ventures even today: e.g. the promise of the largest Finnish chocolate manufacturer reads as “Northern Magic. Made Real.” (Fazer Group, 2020).

The European Directive 2000/36/EC defines “chocolate” as consisting of cocoa butter, dry cocoa and sugars (Brillo & DiRenzo, 2015, p160).²³ Morris and Taren (2005) define the fruit of the cacao tree and its derived substances

²² Chocolate has also contributed to the advancement of the present study, although its seriousness is to be judged by others.

²³ In the directive, exact percentages required and allowed are defined for abovementioned substances.

as an ingredient that is not exactly food, nor a drug.²⁴ However, it has served for both purposes, and the medicinal qualities of chocolate were appreciated as particularly valuable in the 17th – 19th centuries (Grivetti, 2005; Dillinger *et al.*, 2000). Today, beneficial effects e.g. on LDL cholesterol, blood vessel functions and even mental health are proved (Sethi, 2015; Brillo & DiRenzo, 2015). Still, chocolate remains an apparently controversial ingredient: stimulating and calming at the same time, providing a wide repertoire of desired effects (Sethi, 2015). Across this dualism, chocolate resonates with diverging effects of chilli, presented above, which strengthens the argument that both are foodstuffs with more than nutritional potential, reaching symbolic significations.

Phenylethylamine in chocolate may cause an effect resembling to amphetamine intake, with pulse-quickenening and sensorial bliss (Sethi, 2015), which has contributed to the aphrodisiac reputation, widely exploited in fiction (Mäkelä, Bettany & Stevens, 2018). Brillo and DiRenzo (2015) highlight moreover that sensorial qualities of chocolate affect both mind and body, which increases gratifications of chocolate consumption also in physical relationships. Interestingly, Coppin *et al.* (2016) claim that Swiss consumers with a primed Swiss identity reported a higher intensity of chocolate odour than Swiss consumers with a lower degree of national identity, or the non-Swiss. This is evocative of the power of chocolate, entangled in construction of social identity and its performance: Switzerland is world-famous for the quality and breadth of its chocolate produce choice.

4.3.1 Chocolate as a totemic substance

"Especially when used in a ceremonial and intentional way, cacao gives you an opportunity to move towards the fullest expression of who you truly are..." (Warrington, 2018).

Chocolate was introduced to Europe from South America by the Spanish conquistadors with exciting stories of intoxicating effects: Aztec and Mayan

²⁴ Cocoa refers to products obtained by heating substances derived from *cacao* plant.

royals, nobility and high-ranked warriors had enjoyed these qualities in rituals and, moreover, to intensify carnal adventures. In these civilizations, the fruit of the cacao tree was mostly consumed as a beverage, *xocolatl*. It was prohibited for women and children however, due to aforementioned arousing effects (Dillinger *et al.* 2000; Grivetti, 2005). Furthermore, Aztecs consumed chocolate in rituals enhancing male bonding, combined to tobacco smoking (Civitello, 2008).

Thereafter, the ever-persisting reputation of chocolate as an aphrodisiac was rapidly established in the West, through the gateway of local courts and noblemen (Grivetti, 2005; Sethi, 2015). Use of chocolate across sacred Aztec and Mayan rites of fertility, birth, matrimony and death had intensified the mystery; chocolate has the totemic quality of unifying people and adding a dimension of sacrality, when combined with ritualistic consumption (Dillinger *et al.* 2000; Civitello, 2008; Sethi, 2015).

Chocolate gained popularity amongst the consuming masses and soon became a very popular gift. This was due to its sensorial qualities as an indulgent treat, but also to its nature as an affordable luxury and an appropriate tool in seductive play (Belk & Costa, 1998; Askegaard & Bengtsson, 2005). In Mayan cultures, offering of cacao was part of sacral rituals (Dillinger *et al.* 2000). Interestingly, Barthel (1989) investigates the bartering of chocolate gifts from men and the erotic response of women, where chocolate features as a prerequisite of the conquest, melting away the female resistance.

Sethi (2015) observes that during the “democratisation” of chocolate, when sugar-sweetened and introduced in the West for its medicinal and culinary attributes, chocolate lost an important part of its sacral and godly aura. Nevertheless, the aphrodisiac reputation has been maintained and enhanced by folklore, the entertainment industry, advertising and science (Sethi, 2015; Mäkelä *et al.*, 2018). As a marginal phenomenon, niche consumer groups concentrating on the spiritual and ritualistic dimensions of chocolate perform both on- and offline; raw chocolate especially is used in these rituals aiming

at self-discovery, inner healing and empowerment that emulate Mesoamerican traditions and indeed ascribe chocolate with a totemic value. Warrington (2018) describes a contemporary cacao ceremony held in Guatemala: *“the sheer ecstasy felt from the cacao can be described as nothing other than a divine experience”*.

For the majority of consumers however, chocolate is primarily related to general festivities such as Easter²⁵ and Christmas, celebrated with both religious and secular traditions. They allow a large array of chocolate gift-giving occasions, whereas the purely profane Saint Valentine’s Day tends to be reserved for chocolate gifts intended for romantic or seductive purposes. Moreover, chocolate is a common gift in friendly relations, as well as a perfect self-gift (Minowa, Khomenko & Belk, 2011; Mäkelä *et al.*, 2018).

Chocolate is characterised as an “in-between” substance between food and non-food (Beardsworth & Keil, 1997), adding to its social meanings and functionality as a gift. Few foods or ingredients have this quality. Furthermore, chocolate has 800 flavour compounds developing during the complex fermentation process of the cacao pods, which is more than in any other food (Sethi, 2015), generating versatility for culinary and sensual adventures. The sweetness of chocolate is however one of its most fundamental qualities and has been researched widely, with emotional and physiological implications (Rozin, Levine & Stoess, 1991; Luomala & Laaksonen, 1999; 2005; Fahim, 2010; Zarantonello & Luomala, 2011; Meier, Noll & Molokwu, 2017; Mejova, Abbar & Haddadi, 2016; Mäkelä, Bettany & Stevens, 2018). The sweetness brings observation towards gendered preferences with chocolate.

²⁵ Greek Catholic tradition sustains a religious context however: Easter eggs may be brought to church on Easter Sunday, to be consecrated by the priest. Eggs may be real, in chocolate or made of other substances.

4.3.2 Gendered consumption of chocolate

Whilst in ancient Mexica civilisations chocolate was mostly prohibited from women, at present it is often coded as a highly “feminine” food (Barthel, 1989; Coleman, 2007; Brillo & DiRenzo, 2015; Mäkelä *et al.*, 2018).

Feminisation of chocolate may be interpreted as a side-effect of the colonial era, when bitter substances of cocoa were sweetened to fit the Western tastebuds (Martin & Sampeck, 2015). Interestingly, although stereotypical narratives and part of scholarly research associate chocolate with female consumers, the majority of distinguished artisan chocolatiers have traditionally been male, as are most pastry chefs in general (*L'Express*, 2018; *Simply Chocolate*, 2020).

Websites offering uplifting, New Age nuanced experiences with chocolate cater for a predominantly female audience, and the imagery of chocolate advertising is often kitschy, feminine, or “chocolate-boxy” (Barthel, 1989). This stereotype draws on ancient associations of femininity and corporeality, as opposed to masculinity, itself connected to rationality (Schiebinger, 2000; Stevens & Maclaran, 2007; Mäkelä, Bettany & Stevens, 2018). Cross-national research sustains the theory of the arousing effects of chocolate: Brillo and DiRenzo (2015) present findings where women declare more gratifications from eating chocolate than from having sex (*op. cit.* p167). The notion of craving, linked with both carnal pleasures and culinary appetite, is particularly common in the context of chocolate consumption by women (Coleman, 2007; Fahim, 2010).

Zarantonello and Luomala (2011) identify seven distinct – albeit interconnected – categories of contextual chocolate consumption: it fulfils physiological needs and contributes to sensorial gratification, acts as a constituent of memories and nostalgia, relates to escapism as well as materialism, may be consumed in an addictive mode and has versatile potential as a gift. Chocolate consumption is an embodied practice where material and immaterial dimensions entangle in a way that appeals especially to female consumers (Mäkelä *et al.*, 2018).

Belk and Costa (1998) and Belk (1998) draw attention to the emotionally charged consumption environment of chocolate that they claim to be characteristic of female consumers. Indulgence and sensory pleasure entwine with feelings of lacking self-control, which charges chocolate consumption with ambivalence. This contextual dualism, when eating chocolate and thinking about it whilst diverse emotions are intertwined, is also developed by Lupton (1996), Coleman (2007) and Pirani, Cappellini and Harman (2018) who emphasise the ambivalence of female chocolate consumption: women are inclined to characterise themselves as chocolate eaters, despite the risk of being judged upon this behaviour (Pirani, Cappellini & Harman, 2018, p318).

Negative qualities of chocolate as a substance rich in calories are mainly linked with overuse and thereby contribute to obesity, decline in self-esteem and regret. Brillo and DiRenzo (2015) explain this with biochemistry and the female reproductive system, however not without pointing out that chocolate may provide an even greater pleasure to women than to men, due to biological differences. Brillo and DiRenzo pursue that the overeating behaviour, denominated “chocoholism”, is more likely amongst women than men (also Paglia, 1996; Belk, Ger & Askegaard, 1996).

An interesting feature in gendered analysis of chocolate consumption is that upon retrieval of related literature, research on male chocolate consumption unfolds as predominantly medical, e.g. with the beneficial effects of moderate use of dark chocolate on the cardio-vascular organism (Fahey, 2017). Psychological or social components of chocolate consumption of men do not seem to attract researchers as much as these dimensions studied amongst female consumers.

4.3.3 The forbidden fruit

Addictive use of any substance resonates with emotions of prohibition, restriction and even sin. References to sin – of flesh and mind – occur often in chocolate discourse, in particular with online data (Mäkelä, Bettany &

Stevens, 2018)²⁶. This is somewhat surprising, as the concept resonates mostly with religious rhetorics, whereas in the contemporary consumption cultures religions do not play a very significant role²⁷. Nevertheless, religious restrictions on eating are an important constituent of ethnic and culturally moulded foodways all over the world.

Associations with sin may stem from the deeply corporeal and self-indulgent dimension of chocolate consumption. Coleman (2007) refers to common tropes of the sinfulness of desserts in advertising, with chocolate in particular, and emphasises that the age-old requirements of restraint for women foreground the ambivalence between indulgence and guilt. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, carnality represents behavior to be monitored, restricted or banned, and the female body itself is linked with temptation and danger. Maclaran and Stevens (2005, 2007) develop this by investigating the notion of the “carnal feminine” detected in contexts of irresistible temptations of women, constituting a threat to the masculine hegemony (also Pirani, Cappellini & Harman, 2018). Mäkelä, Bettany and Stevens (2018) diversify the notion towards “carnal singularity”, pertinent in emotionally charged gifting contexts where the gifter and the chocolaty gift coalesce in an embodied consumptive act. Baking with chocolate is a fruitful arena for carnal singularity, given the sensually laden values ascribed to chocolate, which contributes to its gendered occurrence.

However, in foodie discourse “sin” is embedded in a wider context of prohibition than only in the religious sense. “Sin” is a powerful word, when compared e.g. to “weakness”, also used in this respect. In French and Finnish foodie blogs (Mäkelä, 2016), discourse on sin in chocolate contexts was most often found in online content generated by Finnish consumers, where it was metaphorical and mainly concerned the calorie intake. In Mäkelä, Bettany and Stevens (2018), associations of sin with chocolate were

²⁶ Conducted with data included from non-foodie sources also.

²⁷ In fact, amongst foodies, restrictions on eating seem to stem more from internalised foodways or ethical concerns than from religion as such. Interconnectedness of these dimensions is nevertheless an area to be studied in another context.

found in English and Finnish, yet in slightly diverging contexts: the contributors in English used the word playfully, when seduction was discussed, and the Finnish with more reference to the sin of flesh, a sexually laden use of chocolate that made allusion to physical interaction.

Moreover, in Mäkelä *et al.* (2018), Finns referred to real ethical and ecological concerns of chocolate production, such as child labor or climate change. These acute and unjust challenges were, however, not spoken of with notions of “sin”. Using sin as an image connected with chocolate may hence reflect a broader narrative of prohibition where a powerful word reflects the embodied, heavily laden totemic signification of the substance. In this vein, Kniazeva and Venkatesh (2007, p432) identify dualities in their study on symbolic foods: *“In postmodern hyperreality, joy coexists with drama, and virtue co-resides along with sin.”*

Allusions to sin are found in the phenomenon of “food porn” (Dejmanee, 2016; Mejova, Abbar & Haddadi, 2016; Koh, 2017; Lupton & Feldman, 2020) where chocolate is one of the key protagonists (Mejova *et al.*, 2016). Chocolate can be moulded and carved almost infinitely, thus it provides a visually interesting element in food-related creation. It is noteworthy however that various orientations are embedded in the concept: “porn” can be associated with pornography where food has an arousing function for body and mind, or with visual representations of food that are so luscious that they remind us of erotic imagery; however, without visual cues of human bodies. The latter orientation corresponds to the colloquial use of “food porn”. Lupton and Feldman (2020, p8) defines this type of online content as *“[...] images of food that represent it in highly aestheticised ways to provoke desire and longing.”*

4.3.4 Ubiquitous chocolate endangered

Upon extensive data gathering online, chocolate emerged as one of the most popular items in foodie online discourse in all the target languages of the study. Although online outlets are impossible to count, production and consumption figures of chocolate can be unfolded in detail.

The United States lead the global consumption, with 1.8 billion dollars spent annually (Statista, 2018b, statistics from 2015). Great Britain holds the second position, France the fifth, whilst Russia and Germany are the third and the fourth in ranking. An interesting feature is that amongst new chocolates launched, ethical and environmentally friendly products have increased by more than 840% in 2012–2015 (Statista, 2018c), which shows a global tendency towards more sustainable products even in confectionary. Martin and Sampeck (2015) identify an intensifying trend of craft and fair-trade chocolates in a broader stream of ethical consumption and emphasis on quality, where “bean-to-bar” chocolates proliferate. The somewhat loosely defined concept means that the manufacturer leads the process from purchase of the beans to the final product; this can result either in artisanal, high quality and fair-trade chocolate or in a mass product.

Concerns are raised with raw ingredients of chocolate becoming scarce and starting to lose in flavour versatility. Cacao trees grow in a limited geographic area close to the Equator, which contributes to risks in farming. Climate change and attempts to increase production have introduced use of hybrid cacao plant varieties such as CCN-51, easy to grow and resistant to disease, hence yielding voluminous crops, but of a poor quality. Shrinking variety choice and other perils endanger production of high-quality chocolate and contribute to raise of costs (Sethi, 2015; *Confectionary News*, 2016). At the same time, consumers are beginning to take interest in ethically produced, flavourful craft chocolate (Statista, 2018c; Martin & Sampeck, 2015), which leads to increase in prices.

Eventually, quality chocolate may become so valuable that it might regain its ancient role as a precious and rare ingredient. Today however, chocolate is an utterly versatile food that fulfils an extremely wide scale of needs, from banal to totemic gratifications, according to the circumstances of its use and the significations ascribed to it by consumers. In online foodie realms, chocolate is a key protagonist that provides elements for analysis on taste, emotions, community building and humour:

“In the beginning, the Lord created the chocolate, and he saw that it was good. Then he separated the light from the dark, and it was better.” (Anonymous)

4.4 Conclusion

Dualities are an element of totemic thinking, when belonging and representativity between humans and objects or substances are connected (Lévi-Strauss, 1963, 1968). Unlike most foodstuffs, both chocolate and chilli are foods imbued with dual functions. Chilli is used for provoking pain and for curing it, and from its ancient use as a painkiller in male castration, it has developed into a substance to demonstrate masculine potency and virility. Chocolate is a stimulant and a relaxant at the same time. It resonates with innocent familial baking and with pornographically stimulating imagery, where the phallic shape of the cacao pod entwines with the humid and mythical growing conditions (Mäkelä *et al.*, 2018). For consumers, it is a nexus for profound entanglement of euphoric pleasure and self-deprecatative sin, hence enacting one of the fundamental culinary antinomies (Warde, 1997): health versus indulgence.

Chocolate and chilli date from prehistoric times when they were reserved to the uppermost strata of society. Their ritualistic use has shifted from fertility rites or funeral occasions towards contemporary consumption rituals: gift-giving, culinary adventures and embodiment of femininity and masculinity. In online realms, chilli and chocolate sustain tribal constellations where their totemic value is ascribed according to contexts, the consumer habitus and

the degree of commitment. Yet, the fundamental dimension foregrounding ritualistic and totemic consumption potential is the profoundly sensorial embodiment that chocolate and chilli facilitate with pungency, sweetness and a panoply of flavours.

In this chapter, the focal foods of the study are depicted, to add contextual depth to the literature presented in Chapters 2 and 3. This analysis contributed to definition of research questions. Salience of totemic chilli and chocolate across data in three languages (RQ1) and performance of taste and distinction amongst foodies online (RQ2) merit further study, in particular with a gendered viewpoint (RQ3). These entwine, as it often occurs with chocolate and chilli:

“First you get the luscious dark chocolate, then comes the sweetness of the cherry filling, and as you’re finishing your mouthful, the chilli element creeps out onto your palate for a gentle, warming finish.” (Chocablog, 8.7.2007)

Chapter 5: Computer-Mediated Discourse as a context for communication

5.1 Introduction

Online discourse is presented here as the context of research and source of data. The introduction includes a section on discourse as a fundamental concept and a section on gender-oriented observations where links to Computer-Mediated Discourse (CMD) are already established. Delimitations of scrutiny and justification of literature follow (5.2). Thereinafter, interrelated attempts to categorise this large field of discursive practices are analysed (5.3).

The most voluminous section (5.4) is allocated to discourse varieties in the “social web” (Taddicken, 2014), with emphasis on User-Generated Content (UGC). Within sub-categories of social media, blogs and Social Network Sites or Services (SNS)²⁸ construe the contextual framework of the study. Furthermore, they provide the diverse fora where empirical data are retrieved. Section 5.5 unpacks observations on interconnections across language and online contributions, with challenges of analysis located therein, and 5.6 provides a conclusion of this part of literature review.

5.1.1 Defining discourse

Within linguistic studies, *discourse* is one of the least defined fields (Maingueneau, 2005). Whilst a dictionary-level definition is concise: “[a] *connected series of utterances; a text or conversation*” (Oxford, 2017), the concept is interpreted differently, depending on adopted approaches and philosophies. Definitions within social studies emphasise the socially constructed nature of discourse as an integral part of social processes; a typical way of referring to a phenomenon by a group of people or a person,

²⁸ To some extent, competing terminology exists for SNS (boyd & Ellison 2008; Beer 2008).

discourse being irrevocably connected to power and knowledge (Fairclough, 2015). This stream analyses discourses of a field of social reality where a functional definition is provided by van Leeuwen (2016, p138), as a system of making sense of things within context-specific frameworks.

Johnstone (2002, p2) outlines discourse broadly as an “*instance of communication in the medium of language*”. In online contexts, also pictures, signs, smileys, emojis, graphs and other chunks of information constitute discourse. The analysis may be articulated around utterances, sentences, phrases, words, pauses, silence, thematic entities, paragraphs, schemes or narratives, as well as the internal and external cohesion of the text or its intertextuality (Johnstone, 2002, p9). Furthermore, concepts like denotation (when terms seem to refer directly to extra-linguistic reality) and connotation (meaning the network of associations that words and terms evoke) are useful (Flick, von Kardorff and Steinke, 2004, p310).

Interpretations proliferate: one refers by discourse to actualisation of language as forms of social practices, conveying meanings and power relations (van Dijk, 1997; Johnstone, 2002; Wodak & Meyer, 2016; Thurlow, 2018). Norman Fairclough (2015, p7), one of the founders of critical discourse studies, defines discourse as language constituent of social processes, viewed in a special way and related to other parts. Wodak and Meyer (2016) add complexity to the notion, articulating discourse as a cluster-like entity of semiotic practices that are situated within fields of social action (*op. cit.*, p27).

Discourse does not exist without a social dimension, whereas language is an abstraction and can be studied without reference to its users, the context of use, or this use as such. Glynos, Howarth, Norval and Speed (2009, p5) observe, moreover, that discourse can be defined to englobe “almost anything that acts as a carrier of signification, including social and political practice”.

The core constituent of discourse is *text*. These are analysed systematically, in order to decipher meaning and always taking into consideration the context (Pietikäinen & Mäntynen, 2014). Critical discourse analysts sometimes prefer the term “fragment of discourse” (van Dijk, 2016) to “text”, which allows a broader insight into the concept. Meanings of both terms are nevertheless very close in the present context that does not theorise discourse analysis methodically.

The distinction between language as a system and speech acts as its actualisations stems from the dichotomy *langue* – *parole* presented originally by de Saussure (1916). Language (*langue*) constitutes the universal code shared by its users, whereas language use (*parole*) is marked by individual variation. This view is fundamental to subsequent studies of language and discourse, although challenged by development of sociolinguistics emphasising the impact of social determination on the level of discourse. A sociolinguistic, interdisciplinary approach is particularly pertinent when studying the “new media” (Androutsopoulos & Juffermans 2014; Wu & Li, 2016; Thurlow, 2018).

By using the term *discourse*, one acknowledges the ontology of the dominance of social constructs on individual variation in language use (Fairclough, 2015; Kendall & Tannen, 2015; van Leeuwen, 2016; Thurlow, 2018). Gender constitutes a focal construct for this inquiry.

5.1.2 Gender-oriented research of discourse

“Women and men tend to speak in gender-associated ways not because of their biological sex but to express stances associated with culturally recognizable roles.” (Kendall & Tannen, 2015, p654).

Gender-conscious and -oriented research can be characterised with overarching principles of feminism, defined by Maclaran and Stevens (2019) as inequality of men and women based on fundamental patriarchal dominance, which leads to an objective to first unravel and then change this state of things. Language and discourse reside in the very core of structures

resonating with social relations, hence their study is foremost when unpacking gender roles and inequality; gender itself being all but stable. It is constantly constructed by and in discourse (*op. cit.*). “Doing gender” in discourse is a locution reflecting adequately this process.

Kendall and Tannen (2015, p640) attribute the avenue of gender-oriented linguistics to the publication of Robin Lakoff’s seminal study “Language and Women’s Place” (1975, Harper & Row). Lakoff identified diverging ways of speaking for women and men, stemming from different socialisation and acculturation processes of girls and boys. In her view, actualisations of language adoption resonate amongst women with a nonforceful style that is substantially weaker than masculine discourse. For instance, mitigated requests (where a request and a modifying question are embedded)²⁹ are a common “womanly” way to address interlocutors, without compromising one’s assumed female identity entailing a weaker position. Mann and Stewart (2000) define this strategy as “powerless”, stemming from divergent acculturation processes: boys are brought up to articulate the world according to hierarchies, whereas girls are encouraged to see it as a set of networks (*op. cit.*, 166).

Post-Lakoffian studies continue to describe female discursive features as “tentative”: e.g. expressions of uncertainty, use of qualifiers, intensifiers and modifiers as well as tag questions are revelatory. This is determined by a set of norms that “an idealized middle-class European American woman” should identify with (Kendall & Tannen, 2015, pp640-641). Whilst pioneering research targeted female speech of this limited group, many findings can be applied to women in general. In this context, conversation between men and women is seen as cross-cultural communication where male participants tend to dominate, perpetuating extant hierarchies of patriarchy of the surrounding society. Recent gender-oriented discourse studies are articulated around two entwined key foci: difference and dominance (*op. cit.*).

²⁹ An example of this type is: “Would you please close the door?” instead of “Close the door”. (Kendall & Tannen 1975, 640, citing Lakoff, 1975).

Gender-oriented linguists, e.g. Herring, have pioneered in CMD studies as well (Kendall & Tannen, 2015).

A somewhat extremist view on gendered variation in discourse claims that women use conversation to establish relations and men to display hierarchy and criticise (Mann & Stewart, 2000, 166). Tannen (1990) defines typically female discourse as “rapport talk”, whilst male discourse would unfold as “report talk.” Further, Tannen (1990) emphasises gender-related discursive patterns resulting from different interactional goals: women tend to maintain a connective dimension in discourse, whereas men prefer exhibition of status. Moreover, women are prone to maintain symmetry which emerges as use of similar words and syntactic structures, or by referring to same type of experiences as one’s interlocutor. This sustains bonding and remediates to stressful or negative circumstances. However, bonding across male interlocutors actualises e.g. with agonistic structures such as “wars of words” that are a ritualised male discursive strategy (Kendall & Tannen, 2015, 644).

Kendall and Tannen (2015, citing Herring and Stoerger, 2014) observe furthermore a tendency to replicate gender-related patterns from physical interaction to online discourse: shorter messages, apologising and increased justification, and supportive discourse are common for women, whereas men are prone to post longer messages, assert opinions strongly, emphasise one’s personality and challenge other interlocutors online. Hence, “supportiveness” and “attenuation” crystallise typically female online discourse (Mann & Stewart, 2000).

Herring & Stoerger (2014) argue that women are more keen contributors in social media, whilst men are more active with communities such as music sharing, or professionally oriented networking. However, the authors aptly emphasise contextuality of gendered indexes in CMD; there is not only one type of “online discourse” but a wide array of discourses inherent to different online platforms. Contextuality of gendered discourse in CMD is highlighted also by Palomares and Lee (2010) and Mann and Stewart (2000), hence

resonating with fluctuation of gender representations in society in general (Maclaran & Stevens, 2019).

Gender-related orientations in discourse should be perceived as indexes of gender, rather than as explicit expressions of it. In addition to contextuality, they are culturally embedded, reflecting the language-gender dyad mostly in an indirect way. A woman may adopt a subordinate role at work and still address her child, parent, friend or partner with discourse of dominance, and vice versa. Instead of generalising gender roles in discourse, one needs to be attentive to discursive indexes and their use, with strategies adapted to each research context.

In this field, research of communities of practice is particularly pertinent. Common interests, mutual goals and negotiation of social meanings sustain shared linguistic practices, which is a salient feature in online communities (e.g. Kytölä, 2013; see 5.4). In the present study, RQ3 draws on broader social constructs behind online foodie discourse, and dissects foodies performing gender online (Chapter 9).

With the avenue of CMD, expectations emerged of increased gender neutrality, in comparison to offline discourse. Early developments included hopes of democratisation of communication in helpful, equal and supporting communities. Online realms reflect, however, offline reality where constructs of power and hierarchy persist. Indexes of gendered discourse remain, despite attempts of neutralising gender differences in online interaction. Gender is a prominent dimension in all types of communication (Mann & Stewart, 2000). Bamman, Eisenstein and Schnoebelen (2013) link e.g. use of pronouns and emotion terms, emoticons (5.2), kinship terms, abbreviations and hesitation terms with female contributors in tweeting (*op. cit.*, 14), whilst swear and taboo words are most often used by male tweeters (also Herring & Stoerger, 2014). Anonymity does not automatically lead to equality in discourse: an opposite phenomenon, *nonimity*, is due to emphasised personalisation in particular in SNS (Kendall & Tannen, 2015).

Palomares and Levin claim, on discourse with avatars³⁰ (2010), that it is possible to identify linguistically with a virtual identity. Feminine discursive indexes are used more often by female contributors, when they adopt a distinctively female avatar, whilst their discourse is indexed in a more masculine way with a male avatar. Hence, a gendered avatar can “heighten the salience of gender.” (Palomares & Levin, 2010, 8).

Table 2 displays characteristics of female and male discourse, resuming the literature analysed above. It provides methodological aid to conduct an interdisciplinary analysis combining a linguistic inquiry to that of a CCT-based approach.

| Female discourse | Examples | Male discourse | Examples |
|-------------------------|---|---------------------------------------|--|
| weak | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> mitigated requests, use of qualifiers, intensifiers and modifiers | dominant in interaction | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> agonistic structures, long messages, strong assertions, challenging, swear and taboo words |
| tentative | | perpetuating and displaying hierarchy | |
| apologetic | | criticising | |
| uncertain | | exhibiting status | |
| supportive | | emphasising self | |
| attenuating | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> tag questions pronouns hesitation terms short messages | | |
| establishes relations | symmetry in interaction | | |
| justifying | | | |

Table 2. Overview of gendered variation indexes in discourse.

Prior to unpacking characteristics of CMD, a complementary connecting element between gender-oriented studies and online foodie contexts is

³⁰ An avatar is an imaginary personality created by the online contributor, to be used in various types of SNS. The word is derived from Hinduism where incarnations of deities on earth are called avatars.

provided. Research drawing on gendered indexes of discourse and the broad constructions they entwine with provides a framework for a situated approach in the empirical part.

In her study on computer-mediated food narratives of women and men, Parsons (2015a) observes that individual foodways resonate with constructs of gender, class, culture and family, reproducing and reinforcing values and tastes. She identifies five major themes: family, maternal, embodiment, health and epicurean (Parsons 2015a, 7). The last is coded as masculine, whilst family and maternal are feminine markers of foodways.³¹

Female respondents position their individual food stories mainly in domestic spheres, with caretaking as a traditionally feminine chore, whereas male online biographers emphasise an outward-bound, epicurean lifestyle in foodways, often with adventure and risk-taking. This setting confirms an ingrained model of domestic labour division and gender roles where men associate their foodie identity with performance of culinary capital and moreover, to hegemonic masculinity (Parsons 2015a).

5.2 Characteristics of Computer-Mediated Discourse

This section unpacks relevant literature on Computer-Mediated Discourse for foodie research. Due to the amount of abbreviations commonly employed, explanations are provided in Table 3. Furthermore, specific linguistic terms employed in this chapter are defined in footnotes, for the ease of potential readers across disciplines.

| | |
|------|--------------------------------------|
| CMC | Computer-Mediated Communication |
| CMD | Computer-Mediated Discourse |
| CMDA | Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis |
| CMI | Computer-Mediated Interaction |

³¹ Mäkelä, Bettany and Stevens observe (2018) that e.g. in the case of online chocolate talk, embodiment is a shifting category that can be linked with both females and males.

| | |
|---------|---|
| COP,CoP | Community of Practice |
| DCOE | Discourse-Centered Online Ethnography |
| e-WOM | electronical Word-of-Mouth (also “word-of-mouse”) |
| OCR | Online Consumer Review |
| SNS | Social Network/Networking Sites OR Services |
| TPC | Textual Paralanguage Cues |
| UCC | User-Created Content |
| UDC | User-Distributed Content |
| UGC | User-Generated Content |
| VCI | Virtual Community of Interest |
| VCoP | Virtual Community of Practice |

Table 3. Abbreviations in the field of Computer-Mediated Discourse.

The generic notion *online discourse* is used for simplicity. However, when analysing academic literature, a more discipline-specific term *Computer-Mediated Discourse* (hereinafter abbreviated as CMD) refers to acts and results of communication mediated with the technological possibilities of computerised devices and/or occurring in virtual realms (Bergs, 2006; Kozinets, 2010; Caliendo, 2014; Hopkins, 2017). This literature is mainly located within communication studies and applied linguistics which justifies the use of a field-endemic term.

With the generic concept of *Computer-Mediated Discourse*, two parallel terms, *Computer-Mediated Communication* (CMC) and *Computer-Mediated Interaction* (CMI) are commonly employed in research (Welser, Smith, Fisher & Gleave, 2010). Herring, Stein and Virtanen (2013) observe that technological developments result in a terminological shift from “computer-mediated communication” towards a term encompassing platforms outside computers and mobile devices. Yet, CMC is widely accepted in pragmatic linguistics and across disciplines. Ontologically, it is interchangeable here with CMD, and a broader scope than purely linguistic analysis entails that

notions of online discourse, CMD and CMC are synonymic. Divergence in their use, stemming from disciplinary traditions and respective references, is not significant, and this text follows the terminology in the original publications. Quotations and referencing therefore include variation, although the overarching concept does not change.

Shifting borderlines between *interaction*, *communication* and *discourse* are epistemological and anchored in scholarly traditions. Notions of interaction and communication do not however encompass all dimensions of discourse as the result of language use (Johnstone, 2002; Pietikäinen & Mäntynen, 2009) and as a larger, socially constructed phenomenon entangled with socio-economical entities (Fairclough, 2009, 2015; van Leeuwen, 2016). This broad interpretation, adopted in social sciences, is the scope of investigation.

The focus is on discourse as actualisations of language mediated by technological possibilities of Web 2.0, known as its *affordances* (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Kytölä 2013; Taddicken, 2014; Wu & Li, 2016; Leppänen & Kytölä, 2016; Lee, 2016; Hopkins, 2017; Evan, Peirce, Vitak & Treem, 2017) and analysed in the dynamic discursive context of the social media. The fact that people can generate discourse in languages used in online communities regardless of their geographic location or mother tongue contributes to linguistic diversity of the community. Moreover, online communication should be perceived as a hybridised realm of environments, with their socio-linguistic styles, rather than a unified discursive context (Mann & Stewart, 2000; Henning & Stoerger, 2014). In online communities, technology and culture are intertwined, shaping each other (Kozinets, 2010).

Scelzi and La Fortuna (2014) characterise unpacking “foodism and the new media”, the very nature of online discourse as a proof of the irrevocably mutated essence of humankind. The authors consider food discourse as a particularly fecund arena for mushrooming of new genres and discourse types, since ubiquitous food talk adopts swiftly new technological opportunities provided by the social media. This view of the profoundly changed, online-performing humanity is somewhat extremist, if not dystopic:

“These new forms of cyber digital languages with the new discourse genres they generate, express the evolution or the mutation of humans” [...] (Scelzi & La Fortuna, 2014, p134). However, a number of scholars researching recent digital evolution recognise a significant shift in human communication and consumption in online contexts (e.g. Kozinets, 2015; Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2015, 2016).

In personal, professional and commercial spheres, textually transmitted CMD has become the medium of communication replacing face-to-face interaction, telephone or traditional mail (Mann & Stewart, 2000; Herring, 2011). One needs to take into account moreover that pictures, graphs, emoticons³², emojis³³ and signs as well as audio-transmitted chunks of information are all possible constituents of CMD (Johnstone, 2002; Herring *et al.*, 2013; Kytölä, 2013). This dynamic feature, combining various sign systems, contributes to *multimodality* in CMD. It necessitates specific methodological approaches, such as parallel displays of visualisation for textual and non-textual communication (Herring, 2013).

The present methodology is nevertheless construed upon analysis of textual communication, and log data are retrieved with this purpose.³⁴ Emoticons, emojis and graphs that can be interpreted without additional applications are included in analysis, since they constitute an essential element of CMD (Riordan, 2017) and merit to be taken into account, although textual elements prevail in the approach. However, pictures and audio-transmitted discourse are omitted from data.

Discourse in online communities such as virtual groups of interests is often multilingual (Kytölä, 2013). In a Bakhtinian vein, this translates as *heteroglossia*: existence and active production of several languages and of

³² *Emoticon*: a construction coined with “emotion” and “icon”, used for the first time in 1982 to emulate facial expressions. Also referred to as “smiley” (Skovholt, Grønning & Kankaanranta, 2014).

³³ *Emoji*: a pictorial representation of human or non-human entities and concepts (Riordan, 2017).

³⁴ Herring (2004, p339) uses the terms “log data” and “logs” to signify “*characters, words, utterances, messages, exchanges, threads, archives, etc.*”

their varieties simultaneously in discourse (Androutsopoulos, 2011, pp282-283; Bakhtin, 1934). Differences between a language and a variety (also referred to as *code*; Kytölä, 2013) are a largely debated and partly controversial issue which does not have its place here. In sociolinguistics however, one is particularly interested in varieties, registers and codes of the language(s) in question (Wolfram, 2017). According to Kytölä, a Bakhtinian viewpoint is particularly fecund, since it “*captures the hybrid nature of contemporary communication*” (Kytölä, 2013, p92).

In addition to its multimodality and multilingualism, CMD is characterised by its *superdiversity*. Virtual communities of interest and practice employ a large array of linguistic strategies contributing to the diversity in the given context and the meaning-making of the community. Androutsopoulos and Juffermans (2014) define this concept as richness of languages and varieties, and the diversity of linguistic practices online. Lee (2017, p53) defines it aptly as “*fluid digital practices*”. SNS have become a hub of creative discourses in continuous evolution and this process reflects developments of both the actual (off-line) and the virtual (online) worlds. Consequently, discourse includes also hybridised elements such as novel multilingual constructions, lexical and semantic polysemy³⁵ and morphological innovations (Kytölä, 2013). The hybrid nature of CMD was emphasised already by early studies (e.g. Mann & Stewart, 2000), with claims that hybridity generates both positive and negative repercussions to linguistic research.

Leppänen *et al.* (2015) defines superdiversity more broadly than Androutsopoulos and Juffermans, as social consequences of human mobility combined to various possibilities of communication, facilitated by technological development. Superdiversity can be applied to the contemporary society as well as to linguistic phenomena. In all, it is a predominant factor of social media, generating unpredictability in interaction (*op. cit.*). Superdiversity leads into discursive constructions that communities such as online foodies can engage with, by offering semiotic resources

³⁵ *Polysemy* is a linguistic term referring to multiple significations, defined as “[t]he coexistence of many possible meanings for a word or phrase.” (Oxford, 2017).

facilitating their sense-making in a reflexive way. Moreover, it contributes to mobility and recontextualisation of linguistic resources. Culinary loan words and neologisms (new lexical or semantic constructions), cherished by foodies (Diemer, Brunner & Schmidt 2014; Mäkelä, 2016; Saint, 2016; Vojnovic, 2017) reflect mobility and recontextualisation resulting from creative superdiversity.

An eloquent example on the evolving foodie lexicon is “foodfie”, a combination³⁶ of “food” and the neologism “selfie”. It was introduced as “the word of the month” by the MacMillan Dictionary Blog in 2015 (MacMillan, 2017). A parallel portmanteau word is suggested by Middha (2018): “selfoodie” depicts foodies actively photographing themselves with food. Portmanteau words are a typical phenomenon in the new ways of writing in the digital era (Rasch, 2018).

Superdiversity of transnational groups online caters for minority languages (Leppänen *et al.*, 2015; Lee, 2017). However, the dominance of English in online discourse (WebCite, 2017) may endanger this development. Vessey (2015) provides an example from bilingual Canada where controversial interests of English and French foodies are performed in online local press. This process contributes to linguistic friction that is accentuated by food preferences and eating orientations, abundant online.

Computer-Mediated Discourse is generated with technological possibilities of Web 2.0. It is multimodal, hybridised, superdiverse and often carries multilingual elements. It is in constant evolution, which entails proliferation of linguistic codes and adoption of neological elements (Rossi, 2017). It reflects the linguistic and discursive diversity of its context(s) and therefore necessitates understanding of both social and linguistic variables (Carr & Hayes, 2014) preferably with an interdisciplinary approach (Herring, Stein & Virtanen, 2013; Kozinets, 2016; Wu & Li, 2016). The definition of CMD hence remains broad: drawing on Bolander and Locher (2014), there is no such phenomenon as a “monolithic internet language”. Leppänen *et al.* (2015)

³⁶ This type of linguistic creation, combining elements of two or more extant words, is referred to as a *portmanteau* word. The French translation *mot-valise* signifies literally a “suitcase-word”. Both languages convey the linguistic process adequately.

characterise linguistic practices of Social Network Sites as “rhizomatic”, as they evolve according to other prevailing socio-cultural conditions, illustrating their digital mobility.

5.3 CMD: An interdisciplinary field

5.3.1 Diversity of literature

In literature on Computer-Mediated Discourse, an interdisciplinary orientation implies navigation across a variety of scholarly traditions and terminologies. The overarching theme is to study discourse of people interacting with technology. In the field of Internet use, disciplinary and paradigmatic backgrounds of authors affect both their approach and their lexicon. This enriches theorising, although one needs to be attentive in order to avoid methodological confusion.

CMD is a relatively recent field of research and linked to a broader orientation of human-computer interaction. It is a profoundly interdisciplinary field (Herring, Stein & Virtanen, 2013), with heterogenic and cross-disciplinary academic endeavours. Evans, Pearce, Vitak and Treem (2017) suggest a list of relevant academic publications (in English) on CMD, and e.g. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication; Information, Communication & Society* and *New Media & Society* have given insight here, with the online journal *language@internet* from the field of linguistics.

CMC merits interdisciplinary analysis moreover from a marketing viewpoint (Kozinets, 2016). According to Guergalou (2016), it employs theories and argumentation of media, information and cultural studies and sociology, whereas linguistics has a marginal role. Yet, literatures analysed here do not fully endorse this view; the majority of scholars cited emphasise trans- and interdisciplinary approaches, rather than a discipline-specific study (e.g. Kozinets, 2016). Viewpoints on under- and over-representation vary: Chik and Vásquez (2017) claim for more multimodal studies of SNS, due to

linguistic dominance in research³⁷. Androutsopoulos and Juffermans (2014) argue for a sociolinguistic perspective when analysing social media, which is sustained by Wu and Li (2016). This study adopts a (socio) linguistic view on discourse, whilst admitting necessity of a broad understanding of the phenomenon.

Rasch (2018, p7) refers to ubiquitous “digital” and “post-digital”, affecting all types of writing: *“Let’s say there are many spaces where we write in post-digital times. And in these spaces, we are writing through the digital.”* Recent developments of social media affordances have inevitably changed the ways of writing, and Rasch encourages a quest on what these affordances do to language itself. This highly pertinent question inspires researchers with versatile backgrounds, and it overarches the literature analysed in this section.

Chik and Vásquez (2017, drawing on Barton & Lee, 2013) dissect three dominant research categories: a linguistic analysis describes and identifies CMD throughout its structural variation, whilst study of social variation addresses specific genres and their online contexts. This study analyses structural and social variation, since the third, metalanguage³⁸ and language ideologies, would necessitate another type of corpus.

In the domain of CMD, the main focus is on Social Networking Services, colloquially referred to as “social media”. Campbell, Ferraro and Sands (2014, p1) define SNS broadly as Internet-based applications that allow creation and exchange of content generated by users. The complex term has a wide signification: applications facilitating user interaction; blogs, content communities, discussion boards and chat rooms, photo and video sharing sites, product and/or service review sites and virtual worlds or games.

³⁷ Alice Chik and Camilla Vásquez are linguists.

³⁸ Metalanguage: *“A form of language or set of terms used for the description or analysis of another language”*. (Oxford, 2017).

The literature analysed stems from three broad fields linked to SNS discourse: (1) pragmatically oriented linguistics in the subfield of sociolinguistics³⁹, (2) computational approaches in social studies to study the Internet, and (3) as an additional and less voluminous part, marketing studies with emphasis on discursive elements.

Pragmatic linguistics is the most relevant: it encompasses linguistic behavior including actions, functions, inferences, communication and discourse principles, attitudes and knowledge frames (Bublitz, Jucker & Schneider, 2013, v). Herring, Stein and Virtanen (2013) define computer-mediated communication as a “dramatically” expanded sub-field of pragmatic linguistics (*op. cit.* p3) where contextualised studies of online discourse figure since the early 1990s, leading to more detailed categorisation of computer-mediated communication (*op. cit.*, p4).

The second stream of literature unfolds motivation factors to use social media. These studies are located within a broad, trans- or even interdisciplinary field: multilingual ethnography (Herring, 2007; Androutsopoulos, 2008; Gibb & Danero Iglesias, 2017), communication studies (Sundar & Limperos, 2013; Villi & Matikainen, 2015), technologically oriented research on Internet use (boyd & Ellison, 2008; Bolander & Locher, 2014; Gibb & Danero Iglesias, 2017; Hopkins, 2017) and philosophically oriented research of this use (Paveau, 2015).

The third field of research stems from managerial studies and enhances paradigmatic positioning of the study within Consumer Culture Theory (Kozinets, 1999, 2007, 2010, 2016; de Valck, 2007), itself of an interdisciplinary orientation (Belk, Fischer & Kozinets, 2013). The three, partly overlapping fields are embedded in the analysis that is articulated according to the logic unfolded above: categorisation of CMD (5.3.2-3) and its actualisations in online platforms (5.4). Moreover, literature aligns with the research questions: it primarily analyses discourses on food consumption in

³⁹ Sociolinguistics is a sub-field of linguistics that approaches language as a social activity (Wolfram, 2017).

online environments, with occasional examples from other fields, when judged revelatory of the present inquiry.

5.3.2 Classification models

Susan Herring's (2007) "faceted classification scheme for Computer-Mediated Discourse" contains two open-ended clusters of features: medium and social factors. The model articulates the aspects of the social and the technical context influencing CMD, hence it does not aim at constituting a new theory but remains on a pragmatic dimension (Herring, 2007, Abstract). Admitting the contextual, challenging nature of classification attempts, Herring's classificatory system enables a functional approach. She defines it (*op. cit.*) as a faceted "lens" through which CMD data can be analysed, which befits the overarching metaphor of lenses. A "facet" is defined as a category or a concept of a same type.

Traditional attempts for categorisation of discourse are driven by other motives than classification and they use categories such as modality, number of participants, discourse (text) type, register and genre, setting and instrumentalities, which become vague in the CMD context. Herring's view is endorsed by a number of scholars e.g. when defining genre boundaries in online discourse (Kytölä, 2013; Pietikäinen & Mäntynen, 2014; Lehti & Laippala, 2014). The facets are not tied to specific genres and they cross the delimitations set by sociotechnical variables of CMD (Herring, 2007, p4).

The leading principle is that CMD is influenced by two main variables: the *medium* as the technological, and the *situation* as the social variable. (Herring, 2007, p10). The contextual dimension is accentuated, linking contexts to technological possibilities of discourse, commonly referred to as *affordances*. Developed for the purposes of pragmatic study of online discourse, the faceted classification scheme is a constituent of Herring's larger approach entitled "Computer Mediated Discourse Analysis", CMDA (Herring, 2001) that combines methods of studying both spoken and written communication across CMD generated data.

The medium factors of CMD are its synchronicity, message transmission, persistence of transcript, message buffer size, communication channels, possibility of anonymous and private messaging, filtering, quoting and message format (Herring, 2007). In the analysis, values are assigned for a set of facets that are relevant to the data sample, which is enhanced by collecting contextual, additional information (Herring, 2007, p11). This proceeds towards a discourse analysis, as in research on non-computer-mediated discourse. Herring recognises the technical nature as well as the “verbosity” – focus on written communication – as limitations of the scheme. Consequently, she suggests (2001, 2007) a complementary ethnographic analysis that would ideally be endorsed by the participants of the communities studied, to obtain the richest analysis possible.

Paveau (2015) suggests a more philosophically oriented categorisation for CMD, referring to possibilities of self-enhancement and identity construction across online discourse. In the analysis, one should abandon “logocentric” scrutiny and understand the technical complexity of online environments. The model has convergences with Herring’s scheme: it is indispensable to consider the technological affordances provided by online platforms and the frame of reference for the discursive acts. In Paveau’s approach, the entire discursive context, from linguistic to extra-linguistic, is targeted.

Paveau (2015) highlights digitalisation of text as the fundamental criterion, with three categories: *numérisé* (digitalised), *numérique* (digital) and *numérique* (web-native). (Paveau, 2015; English translations by the present author). The first signifies text produced for off-line purposes and modified in a digitalised format, such as a form to be filled in. The second one encompasses texts using technological opportunities provided by digital devices, although not necessarily written for online purposes, e.g. electronic versions of journals. Finally, the web-native CMD makes use of new modalities of producing text. It is created online, for example in a blog or an online group, and enhanced by multimodality made possible by Web 2.0. The corpus of this study is located in this category.

Although construed with divergent orientations, Herring's and Paveau's classifications are not contradictory, but complementary. Computer-Mediated Discourse is a relatively new phenomenon and merits being investigated with ontological and epistemological toolkits of a broad stream of scholarly work. Both theoretical frameworks signpost empirical analysis by emphasising multifacetedness, contextuality and technological affordances of data.

5.4 User-generated content in social media

Kytölä (2013, p88) defines the aim of a sociolinguistic study in online platforms: "Who writes in which varieties and styles to whom and how, under what circumstances and on what topics?" This combination of viewpoints aligns with the methodology suggested for critical discourse studies (Fairclough, 2015) and with the present objective: to study diversity of discourse written in and for online fora. To understand these dimensions, the nature of this environment and the motivations of users must be defined, since SNS are particularly valued by foodie consumers (Burton, 2016).

Hopkins (2017) summarises a thread of vivid discussions on definition of social media, stemming from the website of AoIR (Association of Internet Researchers, 2017) and suggests a categorisation with two main dimensions: self-presentation versus self-disclosure and social presence versus media richness. On this two-dimensional scale, e.g. blogs are located on a high level of self-presentation, but low depending on social presence and media richness.⁴⁰

The sub-categories are however not incontestable. Views diverge regarding types of activity and performance, and a practical example of entanglement across evolving genres is found in data studied for this research: discursive constructions on chilli and chocolate sites are hybrid-like, since they include fragments from chatrooms, individual and editorial blogs, articles,

⁴⁰ The other types of social media in this taxonomy are virtual social worlds (e.g. Second Life), collaborative projects (Wikipedia), content communities (YouTube) and virtual game worlds (World of Warcraft). (Hopkins, 2017).

advertisements, recipes and moreover. In social media, sub-categories indeed overlap and shift. The essential dimension is however *sharing*, which is the nexus of user-generatedness.

User-Generated Content (UGC, also User-Created Content, UCC and by extension User-Distributed Content, UDC) is a fundamental dimension of social media. The concepts signify discursive action where online content is created and distributed by users. Since they are colloquially used, thus comparable to “social media”, it is challenging to find explicit definitions, although the following characterises UGC: content that requires some “creative effort”, is made available publicly in the Internet and does not relate to professional practices (OECD, 2007, p4). Most often, no financial profit is expected either. This broad definition, without linkage to any specific discipline, is appropriate also here.

Although content sharing had already been introduced in the pre-Internet era (Villi & Matikainen, 2016), the possibility of creating and sharing content of all kinds is the essence of Web 2.0. Matikainen (2015) outlines essential features of UGC: it refers to original content production online, to modifying or creatively “remixing” existing content and moreover, involves sharing outcomes with others (also Markham 2013a). Furthermore, Matikainen (2015) observes that both content creation and its distribution must be considered.

A fundamental dimension of social media is that the established boundaries of “traditional” media roles erode and are constantly re-negotiated; “the author” and “the audience” are not necessarily explicit, and the concept of “texts” is moreover blurred (Cover, 2016). Communities of practice such as recipe exchanging sites are good examples of fora where everyone can be an author and part of the audience at the same time, whilst in most blogs the status of an author is evident, as well as on community sites.

Georgalou (2016) divides the communities of online content creation and distribution into three categories: *intended*, *expected* and *unknown*. An

individual may know who will be reading and possibly commenting on her text, or not, and the relevance of this information depends on the type of discourse. Bolander and Locher (2014) argue that with developments of CMD, the understanding of the public–private dimension of discourse has evolved, and both content and access must be considered, in order to evaluate privacy. A blog may be private for its content, but most often intended for public, whereas a community discussion list may be restricted for both access and content. Multiple options of combinations exist, which entails challenges for corpus collection and analysis. Furthermore, accuracy and concern for ethics are required from the researcher (Bolander & Locher, 2014; Kytölä *et al.*, 2015; Markham; 2018). All categories are constituent of foodie discourse here.

Motivations to share content online are topics of active scholarly investigation, since the field encompasses not only methodological and theoretical challenges, but also important financial implications. Matikainen (2015) summarises the main motivation of SNS content creation as “enhancement of social identity”. This aligns with the above-mentioned dimension of online activity as a self-enhancing process (Siles, 2012; Paveau, 2015; Burton, 2016; Jones & Nash, 2017). Identity construction is in the focus of most approaches investigating performance and discourse online. Uski and Lampinen (2016) studied profile work of SNS users and define the “pursuit of authenticity” as the main driver. Authors pinpoint the importance of social norms of the community to self-presentation and sharing, whilst claiming for further research on “interplay of culture and technology” (*op. cit.* p462), in order to analyse entanglement of SNS and individual self-fashioning. Analysing foodie discourse online addresses this topic.

Whiting and Williams (2013) apply the theory of Uses and Gratifications, identifying ten uses that provide “ultimate gratifications” (*op. cit.* p8) and consecutively lead to UGC: social interaction, seeking for information, passing time, entertaining, relaxation, utility for communicatory and

convenience purposes, expressing opinions, sharing information about others, or surveillance.

Sundar and Limperos (2013) argue that the gratifications of social media use require a more detailed categorisation, triggered by inherent opportunities of Web 2.0, such as the possibility to create content. In Herring's (2007) typology, drawing mainly on linguistics, these opportunities are denominated "facets", whereas in the technologically oriented stream of CMD studies they are defined as "affordances", i.e. possibilities for action (Evans *et al.*, 2017).

Interactivity enhances engagement to construct meaning actively (Sundar & Limperos, 2013, p505). A difference with uses and gratifications related to the "old" media is that interactive use of social media is not necessarily goal-oriented, and it gets shaped by the action itself (*op. cit.* p510). Use generates new needs, across creating and sharing content. By consequent, the traditional distinction between content and action gratifications gains an additional dimension of social gratifications, which leads into new constellations of motivation.

Drawing on Sundar and Limperos (2013), Matikainen (2015) delineates five key motivation areas for UGC: "identity, sharing, social interaction and community, benefit and need, and society and social order" (*op. cit.* p54). Evans *et al.* (2017) contests however functionality of detailed lists in affordances theorising, and prefers to operate on a broader scale. The authors suggest a typology with only three key affordances in the dyad user versus technology: anonymity, persistence (durability) and visibility of communication.

Influencing, a phenomenon debated especially in blog contexts, relates to sharing, interaction, identity display and, occasionally, benefit. An influencer is an online contributor who has obtained a position of power on users' opinions, and consequently influences their consumption – or other – practices, depending on the nature of the forum. Rosenthal and Mckeown (2017, 12:2) divide influencing in *situational* and *global* categories, with

“Opinion, Claims, Argumentation, Persuasion, Agreement, Author Traits, Dialog Patterns, and Credibility” as components of situational influencing. They feature, moreover, as discursive strategies – although credibility is rather an acquired position than a strategy – which brings their analysis into the domain of critical discourse studies. Situational influencing is more relevant in foodie contexts, yet the recommendations of an international foodie celebrity can reach more global dimensions, with impacts on consumption patterns regardless of geographical or language barriers.

Foodie cultures are articulated around the material, in a cornucopia of online affordances and culinary treasures that are linked to products and services. Searching for novel products or interesting consumption outlets and reading benchmarks’ narratives are a fundamental part of practices, which increases online influence of contributors ascribed with an expert’s status. This status is assumed on an emic dimension with distinctive practices (Chapter 8), and reaches an etic dimension by external recognition: scoring in social media channels, visibility, and corporate collaboration (Chapter 9).

In their study on sustainability behavior via influencers, Johnstone and Lindh (2017) claim that these online forerunners exert a significant impact on young, millennial consumers, and Jallinoja, Vinnari and Niva (2018) identify their power in particular across politically engaged food discourses, such as veganism.

The motivation to operate in social media stems from a complex and fluid combination of gratifications and affordances. When analysing discourse as the outcome of this action, there are technological solutions that merit attention, but are not widely used in offline contexts. One of the most visible features enhancing interactivity and social gratifications is the possibility to use *textual paralinguistic cues* (TPC), to accentuate message content (Rodríguez-Hidalgo, Tan & Verlegh, 2017). The most common TPC in online discourse are *emoticons* (smileys) and *emojis* (pictorial representations).

Riordan (2017) describes the avenue of TPC as conveyors of affection in CMD. Emoticons were introduced as simple sequences of keyboard symbols and soon gained popularity, although their use was at first awkward for complicated expressions. With recent evolution of devices and the launch of the Unicode standard in computing, emojis were introduced. Their volume increased from facial expressions to other symbols, gaining popularity: in 2015, nearly half of Instagram messages included emojis. Commercially, the phenomenon has led to new opportunities for consumers, e.g. Apple started to attach an emoji menu in the 2011 version of iPhones. (Riordan, 2017).

Although using TPC may be disapproved in more formal discursive contexts, in social media they are widely employed. Rodríguez-Hidalgo *et al.* (2017) observe that TPC are more common in affective than in cognitive discursive contexts, and agree with Riordan (2017) on efficiency of TPC in transmission of emotions. An earlier study on emoticons in corporate use by Skovholt, Grønning and Kankaanranta (2014) highlights that emoticons organise social relations as markers of positive attitudes, irony or jokes, and provide a valuable semiotic resource. Moreover, they contribute to contextualisation of discourse and substitute non-verbal elements in communication. These features are found accordingly in emojis: Riordan (2017) argues that both facial and non-facial emojis can disambiguate text messages. Occasionally, an emoji performs this function more efficiently than additional words (*op. cit.* p85). Popularity and acceptance of emojis in contemporary discourse unfolds in the declaration of emoji as the word of the year of Oxford Dictionaries for the first time in 2015 (Miller, Thebault-Spieker, Chang, Johnson, Terveen & Hecht, 2016).

5.4.1 Discourse in blogs

Within the categories of social media, “weblogs” or blogs are one of the biggest groups. Wakeford and Cohen (2010, p308) define a blog broadly as a set of postings with hyperlinks on the Internet, often with reader comments. Whether blogs are a genre of their own is an ongoing debate (Herring *et al.*,

2005; Lehti & Laippala, 2014), and, for example, their diary-type dimension is not shared by all scholars (McNeill, 2005; Wakeford & Cohen, 2010). For the avenue of new discursive genres however, fusion and entanglement of the old ones is a prerequisite (Fairclough, 2003; Lehti & Laippala, 2014).

The diversity of blogs as a category of contemporary popular culture entails research challenges. Wakeford and Cohen (2010, p310) refer to the salient “blogness” which distinguishes blogs from other categories of CMD, and Heyd (2017) signposts their established position as an archetypical, yet hybrid genre of Web 2.0. Drawing on multifacetedness and complexity of the blogosphere⁴¹, Couleau and Hellégouarc’h (2010) claim for an interdisciplinary approach of blogs, combining the “literary, intimate, mediatic and artistic” dimensions in blog writing that contribute to its hybrid nature. Here, blogs are approached as a category of online content generated by foodies with diversified technical and discursive orientations, hence distinguishable from other categories presented under 5.4.2 and 5.4.3. Theorising of genres within foodie blogs is however not the aim.

Siles (2012) emphasises identity construction in blogging and claims for more theorisation on blogger identity. Early online diaries that developed into contemporary blogging culture revealed introspection processes shared with the online audience. This somewhat paradoxal combination of intimacy and self-disclosure establishes an original discursive orientation, when compared to other social media practices (Leppälä *et al.*, 2015). It constitutes an interesting dimension in the empirical analysis (Chapters 7-9), evocative of online genres other than blogs.

In online foodie discourse, blogs are a particularly abundant sub-category (Xin & Arsel, 2011; Lofgren, 2013; Diemer, Brunner & Schmidt, 2014; Rodney *et al.*, 2014; Dejmanee, 2016; Koh, 2017; Rodney, Cappeliez,

⁴¹ “Blogosphere” is a colloquial notion referring to the combination of blogs, the discourse and practices in them.

Oleschuk & Johnston, 2017). Diemer, Brunner and Schmidt (2014) define food blogs as asynchronous, written online forums located in a broad lifestyle context, aiming at unfolding preparation and evaluation of food for more entertaining than instructive purposes. They are particularly rich in multimodal elements and often feature spoken and colloquial language, with an important amount of regional, temporal and personal references (Diemer *et al.*, 2014).

As an outlet for sharing recipes, restaurant reviews, culinary experiences, appetising visual elements, practical advice such as cooking hints or dietary recommendations as well as travel narratives, foodie blogs have contributed to democratisation of culinary discourse (Johnston & Baumann, 2009, 2015; Lofgren, 2013; Koh, 2017; Wang, Kirilleva & Lehto, 2017). They provide an arena for laymen and – especially – women to make public their culinary achievements, and to receive feedback. Rousseau (2012, p7) describes food blogs as “virtual camaraderie” by accentuating their function as a forum of mutual recognition in a tribal consumption orientation, despite their origin as primarily individual endeavours (Lofgren, 2013). Moreover, the blog genre also empowers readers of epicurean, celebrity-generated blogs (Mapes, 2018).

In the democratising process of ordinary consumers transformed into “gatekeepers” of the gourmet scene (Koh, 2017), hybridisation of the food blog as a category has led to a high degree of multimodality (Herring *et al.*, 2013) and superdiversity (Androutsopoulos, 2008). Food blogs have evolved rapidly from a relatively marginal phenomenon to an established form of food culture providing a practical and accessible way to share knowledge (Zhao & Zeynep, 2011; Rousseau, 2012; Lofgren, 2013; Watson, 2013; Vasquez & Chic, 2015; Mapes, 2018). Moreover, they are arenas for displaying culinary capital online, currently recognised also by food media and the hospitality industry for their large audiences and an influencing, trend-setting function (Lofgren, 2013; Mapes, 2018). Successful bloggers gain offline celebrity and prestige and shifting practices between on- and offline realities confirm

postulations on translocality of postmodern marketplaces (Rokka, 2010; Hietanen & Rokka, 2015).

Lofgren (2013) defines food blogs as a “cottage industry” and observes the broad approach of foodways that blogs unfold, when compared to traditional, often high-brow culinary media. She highlights the democratising effect as the main advantage. Liberating and empowering repercussions of blogging are a feature predominantly relevant for female foodies, as Dejmanee (2016) and Rodney, Cappeliez, Oleschuk and Johnston (2017) observe. The latter discern evolving femininities across foodie blogs, with a number of tensions, and define female food bloggers as “skilled homecooks who are charmingly human.” (Rodney *et al.* 2017, 700). Hence, female food blogging is linked to the notion of “domestic goddesses” (*op. cit.*, also Stevens, Cappellini & Smith, 2015), which perpetuates the situatedness of women who cook in caring and home contexts, although with distinctive culinary aspirations.

Koh (2017) adopts a more critical view and emphasises the dimension of conspicuous consumption of food blogs, abundant with elaborate photographic narratives. This leads to potential overuse or addiction, especially in the context of highly visual food porn. As Mejova, Abbar and Haddadi (2016) claim, use of pornographic cues can be divided into sub-categories: first, blogs with lush and appetite-evoking pictures that play on materiality and deliciousness of ingredients. Secondly, a more sub-cultural stream displays food with overtly erotic connotations, particularly abundant with chocolate (Mejova, Abbar & Haddadi 2016; Mäkelä, Bettany and Stevens, 2018).

In Koh’s (2017) view, food blogging with hints of pornography contributes to reinforcement of class-consciousness which is related to voyeurism of blog followers who do not have the same financial opportunities as the blogger showcasing her culinary consumption, often related to travelling. This links

Koh's analysis of blog discourse tightly to the discussion on class, in the footsteps of Bourdieu.⁴²

It is argued here that food blogging needs to be interpreted from a dual perspective, in the framework of distinction theory and taste performance: it has emancipatory effects, whilst providing a forum of self-fashioning where real identities and one's actual life circumstances can be concealed. At the same time however, blogging perpetuates extant class hierarchies, if blog followers desire but cannot reach the same degree of consumption as bloggers themselves. Given the abundance of foodie blogs created by consumers from different social and income classes, the blog culture needs to be analysed as a continuum rather than a category with stable genre boundaries.

The development from introspective reflections to highly skilled and even pornographic artifacts, avid for outsiders' comments, illustrates multimodality of foodie blog discourse. Xin and Arsel (2011) draw attention to the active role of bloggers as food performers, which has mobilising and even therapeutic qualities. Hence, they foreground conversations on performativity and embodiment in consumer discourse (Kozinets, Patterson & Ashman, 2017).

Culinary blogs are creative and playful, and the author (Mäkelä, 2016) observes common discursive features in a corpus of French and Finnish foodie blogs. Culinary distinction and display of one's capitals are significant, since foodie blogs tend to be individualistic projects when compared to the discourse in other SNS. A blogger is constantly creating a personal discursive artefact, which means that one's self-identity as a foodie foregrounds also social and cultural distinction. A blog showcases various

⁴² For an insight into fully visual CMD in the context on food porn: Mejova, Abbar and Haddadi (2016) conducted research on Instagram accounts with the hashtag #foodporn. They define "foodporn" as a conveyor of possibly health-promoting effects, alongside its incontestable frequency in the context of sweets and desserts, chocolate in particular.

capitals, including the culinary capital (Kahma *et al.*, 2015) and the discursive capital. It is created to be read and commented on.

Amongst the foodie frames identified by Johnston and Baumann (2009, 2015), Finnish bloggers cherish in particular the simplicity and personal connections within the frame of authenticity, whereas the French accentuate historical and geographical authenticity (Mäkelä, 2016). Opportunities to comment and exchange ideas, recipes, hints and experience online reinforce sentiments of “e-solidarity”⁴³ (also de Valck, 2007 and Vojnovic, 2017). Furthermore, these processes tighten the links between the blogger and the audience. A popular food blog can evolve into a small community, itself a part of a broader foodie tribe.

For French foodies, the most important aspect is pleasure: planning, preparing, consuming and sharing the culinary experience. Discursively, this is conveyed with sensual, even erotic metaphors (also Mäkelä, Bettany & Stevens, 2018). Finnish bloggers express caring and sharing in their discourse, but these features remain on a less metaphysical level, anchored to everyday expertise, which characterises Finnish discourse, moreover, in other fields of life. The French are deeply attached to the internationally renowned *cuisine française*, although this heritage may be interpreted in modern ways. Even when it is denied, French bloggers express discursive references to it, positioning themselves in relation to the French culinary tradition. Finnish bloggers are less bound to the national food heritage. These findings gave impetus to the approach of present research.

5.4.2 Discourse in online communities of interest and practice

Within sub-categories of social media (Hopkins, 2017), online communities constitute an important field to study shared meaning-making. In prior research, “virtual community of interest”, VCI (de Valck, Bruggen &

⁴³ In the study, blogs were attached to a platform-like online food community although they were individual projects.

Wierenga, 2009) and “virtual community of practice” or VCoP are employed (Wenger, 1988; Stommel, 2008; Wenger & Snyder, 2000). Their characteristics in tribal foodie contexts are outlined in 2.6.2, and in this section, they are studied in the framework of CMD.

Jacobsen *et al.* (2017) endorse prior theorising on online communities in terms of the involvement level as a decisive factor to share knowledge, learn, and display oneself. These practices are mediated by discourse (Siles, 2012; Uski & Lampinen, 2016; Koh, 2017). Occasionally, this discourse relies on mainly visual input, as in photo sharing sites. For foodies, these have become an increasingly popular outlet, enhancing self-fashioning and sense of belonging to a community. Visual extensions such as Instagram or Pinterest accounts are often attached to blogs and may gain an even larger audience than the original blog, as Vojnovic (2017) observes.

Stommel (2008) applies the concept of *discursive identity*, adopted from pragmatic linguistics and distinguishable in virtual communities of interest. In his study on an online community of consumers with eating disorders (2008), he detects categorical and situational identities that vary depending on the discourse context and topic, and act as interactional tools. This enhances focality of identity in all activities related to social media use, and strengthens its ontology as fundamental in self-depiction.

Leppänen *et al.* 2015 develop themes of reflexivity, normativity and authenticity in SNS discourse. These meta-discursive⁴⁴ activities require that certain ways of writing and speaking be ascribed contextually with social meaning: participants need to return to discursive ways in authenticating their roles in interaction and in maintaining them. In the social media, this necessitates an effort which contributes to uninterrupted engagement in meaning-making within the community. A prerequisite is that the community

⁴⁴ Metadiscourse: “Any discourse which is concerned with or alludes to other discourses.” (Oxford, 2017).

has adopted an explicit set of regulative norms, in the form of a “netiquette”⁴⁵ and moderation. This view is endorsed by Uski and Leppänen (2016) who accentuate interconnectedness of SNS community norms, and the self-presentation performed by its users, driven primarily by pursuit of authenticity.

De Valck’s research on Smulweb, a virtual food community in Dutch (de Valck, 2007), presented in 2.6.2, highlights the importance of understanding, consensus and language to a community. A common language, community rituals and norms establish an environment where discourse is created and shared, contributing to gratifications experienced.

SmulWeb revealed four discourse constructs: *sharing knowledge*, *negotiating norms*, *opposing values* and *celebrating similarities*. The first and the last are particularly salient in totemic consumption contexts, and all resonate with distinction practices. An example of opposing values are discussion threads on acceptability of canned products in home cooking, whereas celebrating similarities occurs when happy memories of learning to cook are shared. Communication is not only constructive and supportive: norm negotiation can lead to overt conflict, either between core members or between core members and others (de Valck, 2007, p263). In her study on Instagram use, Vojnovic (2017) develops interestingly the themes of Dutch foodies online and pinpoints the capacity of SNS to enhance tastes and identities, by consolidating engagement (Vojnovic, 2017, p86).

Compared with blogs that are mostly individual discursive constructs, representing one voice and viewpoint, communities of interest are substantially different. Where people gather, be it on- or offline, opinions irrevocably diverge. Embracing Kozinets’ views (1999, 2015) on the fluidity and tribe-like nature of online consumer communities that also generate friction, de Valck (2007) analyses conflicts in Smulweb. Since online communities highly depend on textual – or visual, which is not the principal

⁴⁵ A colloquial expression for an established code of conduct in an online platform or community.

focus here however – input of their members, intensive debates and conflicts are construed with discursive elements.

De Valck detected three discursive clusters triggering tension: (1) one's expertise is challenged by other members (2) practices and norms are negotiated across members with different levels of commitment and (3) different lifestyles and consumption practices are debated (de Valck, 2007, p263). Uski and Lampinen (2016) observe that tensions in SNS contexts often result often from conflicting goals between contextual social norms (the code of conduct in the community) and the process of self-presentation. Moreover, intensive debates are found in contexts not tightly bound to a community but open to all interested users. Their discursive practices are presented in the following section.

5.4.3 Discourse in other online platforms

“Reviews and ratings offer consumers a social conversation, a communications environment that they use not only to talk about the objective and subjective characteristics of products and services, but also to socialize and communicate about themselves.” (Kozinets, 2016, p835)

This section sheds light on practices in foodie contexts localised outside established communities: online restaurant reviews (Jurafsky, Chahuneau, Routledge & Smith, 2014; Vásquez & Chik, 2015; Beuscart, Mellet & Trespeuch, 2016; Chik & Vásquez, 2017) and commercial actions of restaurant industry online (Kwok & Yu, 2013). A variety of these occur in SNS: restaurant reviews generated across online communities, or performance within Facebook groups related to commercial Facebook accounts (Kwok & Yu, 2013). The categories do not fully overlap, however. Social media use is challenging to determine contextually, which is deeply influenced by its translocality (Rokka, 2010 a, 2010b; Rokka & Canniford, 2016).

Restaurant reviews such as the eminent Michelin Guide are an old phenomenon in hospitality industry (Chik & Vásquez, 2017), yet before the advent of the Internet and its democratising effects on culinary fields (Johnston & Baumann, 2009, 2015; Koh, 2017), ordinary consumers did not have many opportunities to disseminate their opinions. With the proliferation of SNS, the traditional word-of-mouth recommendation was complemented by the electronic word-of-mouth, e-WOM (Kozinets, 2002, 2016), which is defined as the conceptual location of online restaurant reviews by Chik and Vásquez (2017). The latter observe that e-WOM is a media genre of its own, and when studied in the context of restaurant reviews, there is need for more multimodal study to deepen the extant, mainly linguistic approach. It is noteworthy that foodie-generated e-WOM can be located in the field of communities of practice, as well as in the more precisely delineated field of outlet and product reviewing.

Kozinets *et al.* (2010) approach CMD from the paradigmatic standpoint of marketing studies, taking e-WOM as an example. The authors claim that both altruistic and self-interested motivation factors influence this phenomenon. Authors distinguish four communicative strategies in UGC: evaluation, embracing, endorsement and explanation, all linked to a specific type of narrative and subject to a set of communicative norms.

In their study on e-WOM and company defence in online communities, Colliander and Hauge Wien (2013) employ a different lexicon for the same theme, adding elements. They detect six salient themes as discursive strategies: “*advocating, justifying, trivializing, stalling, vouching and doubting*”. In e-WOM, diverging opinions lead to different discursive solutions: a negative remark and an appraisal exploit different lexical, semantic and contextual cues. In anonymous reviewing, the context may enhance inclination to negativity (Colliander & Hauge Wien, 2013; Jurafsky, Chahuneau, Routledge & Smith, 2014). The process of reviewing needs to be studied as a subjective, highly contextual process, as Kozinets (2016) observes.

Chik and Vásquez (2017) focus on two online reviewing systems, Yelp and OpenRice, the first in English and the second in Chinese, with background organisations located in New York and Hong Kong respectively. Both suggest a two-dimensional rating system, based on *connoisseurial* and *procedural* factors of rating, with affordances facilitating the practice of multimodality in form of photographs and TPC. Connoisseurial reviewing signifies comments on quality of food, whereas procedural reviewing includes overall rating, as well as comments on décor of the restaurant and service, with perceived value for money (Chik & Vásquez, 2017, p11).

Chik and Vásquez (2017) collected corresponding datasets from both reviewing sites and included only average or negative reviews in their data, since in their view, positive reviews are too homogenous (*op. cit.*, p8). This is somewhat surprising when compared with other studies analysed in the field of CMD. In the two categories of online reviews, the authors observed – embracing prior research – that multimodal resources available amplified functionally the emotional dimensions of the review. Multimodality options provided by the two reviewing platforms were used depending on the affordances available, which is logical, but they did not vary depending on cultural contexts. Moreover, the authors argue that the SNS architecture and especially the norms assigned by the site administration and partly agreed upon by users affect the outcome of reviewing processes considerably. This aligns with views by Uski and Lampinen (2016), in the context of self-presentation across SNS platforms.

Jurafsky, Chahuneau, Routledge and Smith (2014) studied narrative framing in online restaurant reviews, concentrating on linguistic expression of sentiments with a quantitative approach. The authors use large sets of data retrieved from Yelp reviews and draw on prior linguistic study on effects conveyed by discourse (Rozin *et al.*, 1991). Their standpoint is based on the hypothesis that online reviews fulfil a more complex function than just opinion display: they are complex discursive constructions where reviewers' social and psychological characteristics are also at stake. Narrative framing was studied across three discourse clusters: negative and positive reviews, and

reviews on expensive restaurants, with a diversified set of technological tools to reveal the discursive characteristics of the online rating phenomenon.

Findings confirm extant views on the embeddedness of emotions in social media use and moreover, the fundamental function of self-fashioning performed in online activity (Siles, 2012; Lofgren, 2013; Koh, 2017).

Discourse in negative reviews reveals a trauma-type experience, often associated with outlets rated with one star. Reviewers cope with this trauma discursively, while expecting to experience solace within the online community. Positive reviews are often associated with food craving, for example with chocolate, or related to comfort-type foods that are sugar-rich or otherwise non-normative and unhealthy, thus generally stigmatised and guilt-evoking. This creates interesting tensions across positive and negative emotions associated with food.

Furthermore, Jurafsky *et al.* (2014) confirms the interconnectedness of sweetness and sensuality in discourse, as revealed across prior research on chocolate (Chapter 4) and on desserts in general (Coleman, 2007). A novel observation (*op. cit.*) is, however, to distinguish two parallel categories of words related to sensuality: one with allusions to “dessert” (e.g. *chocolate, cake, dessert, truffle, pastry, pistachio, cheesecake*), and another with description of a romantic ambiance (*dark, romantic, lighting, vibe, ambiance, décor*). In all, reviews are more positive when desserts figure in reviews, and the authors highlight dessert as a particularly important marker of social and psychological dimensions in discourse. These findings entail significant implications for the restaurant industry.

In a Bourdieusian view on class relations conveyed in discourse, Jurafsky *et al.* (2014) observes that when rating expensive restaurants, online reviewers employ more complex discursive constructions and longer words than in other reviews, thus demonstrating their high social – and linguistic – capital, endemic in habitus-conscious self-fashioning online. Moreover, reviews of high-end restaurants have more connotations to sensuality than ratings of other restaurant types, whereas references to addictions were more common

with less costly restaurants. The connection with social stratification and discursive capital is solidly outlined. This stream is also developed by Vázquez and Chik (2015) on online ratings of Michelin-starred restaurants, where reviewers display considerable culinary and social capital, notwithstanding an apparent denial of a foodie status.

Admitting relevance of findings by Jurafsky *et al.* (2014), it is noteworthy that the study solely analysed reviews in English from the United States, which the authors pinpoint themselves as a limitation. This observation re-evokes the gap in terms of research on foodie discourse in other languages than English, detected in previous chapters and motivating the present research.

Beuscart, Mellet and Trespeuch (2016) offer a different viewpoint to evaluate how online rating affects service providers in the restaurant industry. Although drawing on a non-discursive topic, their main finding is pertinent here: most restaurant owners and chefs perceive OCR (online consumer reviews) as a “*brutal and hypocritical mode of judgment*” (*op. cit.*), enhanced by the anonymity affordance and the volume of easily accessible online ratings. Hence, an SNS practice that reveals itself as a functional tool of self-depiction, and a positive constituent of distinction online, may establish a hostile element in interaction between consumers and service providers. This development manifests the power of discourse in the era of uninterrupted and ubiquitous online communication, and merits being investigated from a variety of perspectives.

Kozinets claims for research on online reviews that strives to find the “sweet spot” between overly descriptive and overly abstract understanding of phenomena (Kozinets, 2016, p839), with a pertinent combination of theory and context. This, preferably interdisciplinary orientation would need to be attentive to all social and cultural realities of rating creation and sharing.

A final, complementing contribution to investigate CMD in contexts attached to foodie consumers and hospitality industry, although not linked to a specific online community, is provided by Kwok & Yu (2013). It analyses the

effectiveness of social media messages distributed by restaurants, adding a more positive dimension to the negative effects of online rating perceived by Beuscart *et al.* (2016). The analysis covered “Like” clicks and comments triggered by messages on Facebook accounts of restaurants.

Distinct patterns were detected, the most popular keywords being the ones that conveyed menu descriptions and other types of conversational information, whereas messages that gained fewer clicks were more overtly marketing-oriented, e.g. with words like *winner* or *check*. The most positive performance was triggered e.g. with words referring to special days or events, expressing action (*celebrate*) or commitment of the company to various communities (*donate*). (*Op. cit.*, pp88–89). *Chocolate* and *melly* generated very positive reactions, confirming the power of chocolate discourse as an emotionally laden sphere.

Furthermore, message chunks containing visual cues gained more attention than messages with only textual elements. This aligns with findings on fundamental importance of multimodality in CMD (Herring, 2007, 2011; Androutsopoulos, 2008, 2011; Kytölä, 2013; Leppänen *et al.*, 2015) and moreover, reinforce prior research on attachment of SNS users to express affections (Taddicken, 2014; Bolander & Locher, 2014).

An additional contribution of Kwok and Yu’s study (2013) stems from the observation that a rather simple research strategy, analysing feedback in the form of a click or a comment to a discursive item, may result in interesting implications. Online discourse can be investigated with a variety of disciplinary and methodological approaches that convey, as facets of an investigative prism, distinct elements for a rich description of the phenomenon.

5.5 On interconnections of food cultures and language online

In a cross-linguistic study, it is noteworthy that affiliations with national food culture(s) do not necessarily coincide with online writing in any language. English is the lingua franca: 51.8 % of websites ⁴⁶ were in English in 2017 (W3 Techs, 2017). Moreover, 26.3 % of Internet users contributed in English, while Chinese ranked as the second with 20.8 % of users (Internet World Stats, 2017). Mother tongues of users of all content in English are not known, however figures confirm that English remains the most recurrent language of the Internet (also Lee, 2016), and particularly frequent in foodie contexts (Vessey, 2015).

The website Ethnologue reports more than 370 million speakers of English as the first language in 106 countries, and the use of English as a second, third or as a lingua franca⁴⁷ is global (Simons & Fennig, 2018). The development of English as the dominant lingua franca renders impossible to establish correlations between language, nationality and identity amongst users of English (Fang & Baker, 2017). Moreover, it is beyond possible to provide a presentation of national food cultures that would include those of potential foodies who write online in English.

The situation of French has convergences with English. Due to colonial history and territorial developments, French is currently used in more than 50 countries, and approximately 76 million people have French as their first language (Simons & Fennig, 2018), whereas the *Organisation Internationale de la francophonie* states that 274 million “speak French” (OIF, 2017, statistics from 2014). “La francophonie” is a matter of great concern for the French and supported by governmental efforts.

Despite a recent decline in other spheres, in culinary discourse French remains the language of reference, particularly in fine dining contexts. The

⁴⁶ for which the language was known

⁴⁷ *Lingua franca* is the denomination for a language used to facilitate communication across people from different linguistic backgrounds (Fang & Baker, 2017).

heritage of the French cuisine is moreover observable in lexical influences in other languages, including English and Finnish, from culinary traditions to ingredients and kitchen techniques (Schultz, 2016). Diemer, Brunner and Schmidt (2014) pay attention to the volume of French-originating lexical references in the Food Blog Corpus, consisting of more than 800 000 words from food blogs in English⁴⁸. It highlights the importance of French as a lexical source in contexts of all types of cuisine.

Online foodie discourse in English and French is not bound to geography, nationality or national foodways. However, foodies writing online in Finnish can be attached to and knowledgeable of the national culinary culture, since the Finnish language is spoken by approximately five million people only, of whom the majority live in Finland (SVT, 2017). Finnish is not widely studied outside the country; conversely, Finnish speakers are often fluent in two or more foreign languages. This creates an additional challenge in determining languages of online contributions: many Finns actively follow foodie-related social media and contribute to foodie SNS in English and even French. Moreover, Finland is officially a bilingual country and many native Swedish speakers of the 5.3 % minority (SVT, 2017) are bilingual themselves. One can assume that foodie consumers in this minority use online environments in both languages fluently.

Online contributions cannot be directly linked to nationalities or mother tongues, especially in English and French, although there are divergences: bloggers reveal their nationality more often than occasional contributors in chat rooms or conversation sites. However, no assumptions on these dimensions are made in this study, unless they are made implicit in the SNS in question.

Within the abundant sub-groups of the foodie tribe, national, transnational, local and tribal food consumption preferences entangle (Johnston & Baumann, 2015; Lindblom & Mustonen, 2016; Mäkelä, 2016; Koh, 2017). In contemporary consumption cultures, foodie trends evolve regardless of boundaries, which is observable in the adoption of culinary loan words.

⁴⁸ Collected at Saarland University.

Lexical items migrate as translations and in their original form, reflecting superdiversity of online discourse, as unfolded above (Leppänen & Kytölä, 2016).

5.6 Conclusion

Online discourse is approached in this chapter with a broad scope from gendered phenomena towards nebulous linguistic backgrounds in digital realms. Moreover, characteristics of computer-mediated discourse are outlined with three genre-type categories, in order to provide an understanding of specificity of CMD when compared to offline discourse.

CMD is multimodal, contains superdiverse elements and is prone to linguistic creativity, interaction and playfulness. Active participation in online communication on food-related topics provides an evolving and eventful continuum of discourses where foodie consumers share content by means of language and paralinguistic cues. Affordances available online cater abundantly for generating content and constantly remixing it (Markham, 2018). Methodological approaches of this discoursal and discursive diversity constitute the topic of the following chapter.

Chapter 6: Methodology and data

6.1 Introduction

6.1.1 The structure of the chapter

An introductory section (6.1) outlines research structure and methodological choices. Thereinafter are presented the ontology and epistemology of the study (6.2). The research design is unpacked in 6.3, with emphasis on the adopted interdisciplinary approach (6.3.1), aligning with the qualitative stream of Consumer Culture Theory. Practices of ethnographic research online that have inspired the approach are presented in 6.3.2. Unfolding Critical Discourse Studies in the present context (6.3.3) foregrounds the empirical analysis.

A description of data collection and analysis (6.4) is provided, prior to ethical questions arising from the nature of the online research context and data (6.5). Section 6.6 summarises the methodological choices.

6.1.2 Qualitative research orientation and justification for methodological choices

“...the process of research is, among other things, exploratory and creative, a mix of passion and curiosity.” (Markham, 2013a, p66)

Alasuutari defines the nature and mission of qualitative research as “finding solutions to puzzles” (Alasuutari, 1996, 2010). The metaphor clarifies the iterative, incremental and creative journey of a researcher with a qualitative orientation: it is a holistic and dynamic process aiming at finding meanings attributed to phenomena (Silverman, 2012). Ellingson (2017, p1) describes qualitative research as an “embodied communicative process” which befits the present endeavor investigating discourse entwined with deeply embodied consumption processes.

Qualitative study requires holistic cognition of the processual relationship between ontology, epistemology, theory and methods that overlap with shifting boundaries. A simplified definition of methodology facilitates the process: *methodology* combines research design, theory, research questions and analysis (*op. cit.*, p4). Therein, theories can be defined as “unified explanations of observations” that explain relationships between actions. (Patten & Newhart, 2017, p8).

Alasuutari (1996) formulates embeddedness of theory and methods in cultural studies with the notion of *framework*. Here, the theoretical framework within consumer culture research is presented in Chapters 1 (CCT), 3 (distinction theory and the concept of taste), and 5 (discourse theory and a gender-conscious approach), and the methodology based on their combination is developed further in this chapter.

Qualitative research purposes can be divided into three main categories: (1) exploratory (2) descriptive and (3) explanatory. An exploratory orientation targets under-researched areas and outlines future orientations, whereas descriptive research aims at dissecting aspects of social life: a description as profound as possible of the phenomenon is sought after, from several viewpoints (de Valck, 2007; de Valck *et al.*, 2009, Kozinets, 2007, 2010). Drawing on this delimitation, where boundaries are, however, not clear-cut, this study is situated in the crossroads of exploratory and descriptive research. This choice is justified by under-representation of discursive practices in foodie culture, as unfolded across research gaps in 1.4.1. The CCT-based dimension caters for exploratory purposes, whilst the linguistic study is more descriptive. Explanations to phenomena studied do not figure as a primary objective.

A researcher adopting a qualitative approach seeks for meanings and needs to start with questions *Why?*, *How?* and *What?*. In order to conceptualise them in each context, a theoretical foundation is needed. For Alasuutari (1996), this means a framework to grasp meanings and structures behind a given culture, to provide different viewpoints to social reality. The social

reality construing the context here is *foodie culture*, emerging in the transnational online marketplaces of foodie consumers, across three languages. The aim of the study is to describe and explore the online discourse that reflects this culture. This exploration introduces a comparative analysis of the discursive foodscapes related to two transnationally totemic foods, chilli and chocolate. With this approach, answers are sought to three research questions (Chapter 1). Justification behind a qualitative research approach resides in contextuality: an interpretive analysis is capable of shedding light on all constituents of the adopted framework (distinction, discourse, feminist, digital, critical) that calls for situatedness.

A qualitative approach is justified by the motivation to describe the complexity of online foodie culture, rather than to quantify it and establish correlations. In consumer research, a qualitative approach facilitates identifying cultural discourses and “marketplace mythologies” (Thompson 2004; Belk, Fischer & Kozinets, 2013). A quantitative inquiry would not yield answers to research questions on how chilli and chocolate emerge as totemic foods online, how foodies perform taste discursively and how this resonates with discursive constructs of power and gender. Whilst admitting controversiality of a strict and obsolete division in “feminine” qualitative study and “masculine” quantitative research (Oakley, 1998), seeking exact figures in this type of quest is deemed impossible and moreover, beyond the researcher’s personal interests and scholarly orientation.

6.1.3 Remixing of methods and data

Markham (2013a) observes that application of the puzzle metaphor implies that there are distinguishable boundaries to the puzzle, which is not always possible in digital realms. Markham brings in the conceptual tool of *remixing* where the researcher engages with “everyday practices of sense-making” (Markham, 2013a, p65). This process is of particular value in the interpretive study of digital contexts: practices that often remain unnoticed in the final text enhance qualitative inquiry.

Remixing is defined as a “generative tool” for creative methodological thinking (*op. cit.*, p66), rather than a method in itself. Metaphorically, it owes to the original concept of remixing music, to create something new, and to the mashup Internet memes (*op. cit.*, p69). When transformed into the setting of qualitative research, a remix is a process of sense-making and persuasion in a constant flow of stimuli and relationship negotiation. In the digital world, the lens of remixing enables the researcher to shift the focus from individuals towards networks and media ecosystems. In this perspective, it is a counterpart for *assemblages*, widely applied from philosophy to CCT-oriented studies, providing a toolkit “*about the social world as messy and ongoing interrelations between diverse kinds of things at various scales of life*”. (Canniford & Bajde, 2015, Abstract.) Here, remixing is a methodological solution, deliberately compiled and processed by the researcher: a remix of methods, to analyse a remix of data fragments constituting the corpus.

Remixing emphasises results in iterative processes rather than in finalised outcomes, and invites the research community to contribute and interact. A PhD dissertation is an individual endeavour, however the outcome is to be shared with the scholarly community. A remixing approach enables the researcher to delineate the field of study and to outline an explicit target to the inquiry (Markham, Lanzeni & Tiidenberg, 2018). Section 6.4 on data collection and analysis unpacks this process.

Markham signposts the complexity of digital⁴⁹ environments for methodological practices of ethnographically oriented research, which entails ongoing critical, contextual interrogations (Markham 2013b, p436). Defining the “field” in digital environments is more complicated than in traditional ethnographic settings, and Markham suggests that the field should be thought of processually, as a flow of emerging phenomena. In ephemeral contexts of online discourse, this is a pertinent observation.

⁴⁹ The notions of *digital*, *virtual* and *online* are used here according to the original choice of the author in cited literature. In the present context, they are synonymic.

Remixing is crucial for the fundamentally qualitative notion of meaning-making in digital communication where signs, symbols and metaphors merge towards new constellations (Markham, 2013a). Study on chilli and chocolate as totemic foods online unfolds as an exploratory research journey guided by three research questions: how foodie consumers ascribe totemic values and meaning to chilli and chocolate on a discursive level across three languages, how taste is performed therein and how it reflects constructs of gender and power.

6.2 Research philosophy

In managerial studies, a variety of terminologies describes research philosophy, approaches and techniques. Here, the terminology complies with Myers (2013), Belk, Fischer and Kozinets (2013) and Arnould, Price and Moisio (in Belk, 2006), anchored in the marketing and consumer research tradition of Consumer Culture Theory.

Positions in ontology and epistemology construct the philosophical basis of each research project, and this qualitative study is positioned with an interpretivist methodological approach. To be able to analyse social phenomena such as online foodie discourse, it is essential to understand what kind of social reality these phenomena exist in, and how they interact within this reality (ontology). Moreover, adopted understanding of the nature of knowledge and justification of beliefs (epistemology) need to be agreed upon.

6.2.1 Ontology

Understanding of reality, and of being, modifies our understanding of what constitutes reality (Myers, 2013; Scotland, 2012). Choosing constructivism as the guiding philosophical orientation implies the ontological stance that reality is constructed and that experiences on it are shaped by discourse, consciousness and meanings (Sitz, 2008; Myers, 2013; Fairclough, 2015). In

a constructivist viewpoint, knowledge is formed within social settings, in relationship with other people. This leads to an understanding of marketplaces as one part of constructed reality: moulded by consumers, service providers and producers as well as their respective discourses (Sitz, 2008; Silva, Warde & Wright, 2009; Fitchett & Caruana, 2015).

Constructivism is anchored in the philosophy of interpretivism, itself emphasising importance of meaning and subjectivity of reality and knowledge (Bunniss & Kelly, 2010; Goulding, 2006). In social studies, the majority of research is positioned under an interpretivist ontology, opposing it to a positivist, natural science-oriented philosophy (Belk, Fischer & Kozinets, 2013). Constructivist approaches aim at particularising understanding of social phenomena, and not necessarily at generalising them (Alasuutari, 1996; Bunniss & Kelly, 2010). Reasoning proceeds inductively from observations towards patterns and eventually towards theory.

The reasoning phase is parallel to *bricolage* (Kincheloe, 2001; Deuze, 2006; Bettany, 2015), which is a deeply interdisciplinary technique, calling for multivocality (Kincheloe, 2010) and acknowledgment of the embodied nature of this sense-making (Ellingson, 2017). A researcher positioning herself as a *bricoleur* expresses a sensitive need to “listen” to the research topic by applying a large variety of methods, by changing viewpoints and recognising that knowledge is always in progress, culturally specific, and linked to power constructions (Kincheloe, 2010; Markham, 2013a; Fairclough, 2015). Moreover, it is performed by contextual embodied processes of the researcher working with her mind and body (Ellingson, 2017).

Underpinning philosophies of constructivism and interpretivism delineate definition of foodies adopted here: a group of consumers constructing their identity and exhibiting their cultural, social, culinary and discursive capital online in tribe-like constellations (Bourdieu, 1979; Watson *et al.* 2008; Johnston & Baumann, 2009, 2015; Mäkelä, 2016, 2017). Moreover, foodies construct and perform gender in online discourse which resonates with the claim of gender performativity that explores relations between discourse and

the materiality of the body (Maclaran & Stevens, 2019, referring to Butler's theory of gender performativity).

When data are derived from the Internet and the context of study is shifted from "real-life" environments to the "virtual" world (Kozinets 2002; Rokka, 2010), implications of this ontology need to be investigated: online and offline realities are distinct, although inter-relational. Online communities function like communities in general, and they are "virtual" only in the sense that there are no spatial limitations to their activity, and they facilitate non-disclosure of the actual life identities of users-members. Caliandro (2014) argues for unraveling further the opposition between on- and offline realities, given that experiences in "virtual worlds" may have such a deep impact in users' real life. Furthermore, Caliandro prefers the notion "*actual world*" instead of "real world" which tends to be opposed to "virtual world" in the context of online ethnographic studies.

A constructivist ontology enables an analysis of social processes behind consumption practices, including performance of taste and gender. The viewpoint of the researcher as "a bricoleur" encompasses the idea that the research process is thoroughly marked by the researcher and the people who form the research context. (Bettany & Woodruffe-Burton, 2006; Markham, 2013a, 2013b).

The adopted ontological position is interpreted by an active researcher who provides one possible view of consumers' reality as they express it online, mediated by discourse. This lived experience of consumers is real, but not similar to offline reality: it has global dimensions online and in the transnational foodie culture. However, it emerges on the level of discourse which is bound to the actual life of foodie consumers online: their language and their embodied existence across intersections of gender, socio-economic situation and identity construction, and occasionally of their national or otherwise contextual food culture.

As developed in Chapter 2, food is considered as an essential element to construct consumer identity (Wilson, 2006; Leal & Arellano, 2012; de Solier 2013; Johnston & Baumann 2009, 2015; Cappellini, 2014; Vásquez & Chic, 2015; Mäkelä, 2017). Ontologically, this means that eating habits and self-identification are perceived as interdependent. Moreover, within online foodie communities, meanings ascribed to food reflect identification of foodie consumers to the community itself (de Valck *et al.*, 2006; Watson, Morgan & Hemmington, 2008; Mäkelä, 2016) and the ways this identification is construed across shifting networks (Kozinets, Patterson & Ashman, 2017).

6.2.2 Epistemology

A researcher's system of beliefs and topic-related knowledge claims, defined as epistemology, determines the relationship between the researcher and her topic. It delineates justification of beliefs (Steup, 2016), thus setting boundaries to argumentation. Furthermore, epistemological positioning guides methodological decisions (Creswell, 2003). Together, ontology and epistemology set a philosophical standpoint and guidelines for topic selection, research questions formulation, and method definition (Myers, 2013).

In the interpretivist tradition, the ontological assumption of a constructed reality implies that our understanding of it is always subjective. This results in the epistemological claim that knowledge is constructed and does not exist but in relation to other social constructs, themselves constantly evolving and shaped by discourse. Furthermore, an important dimension of the present research positioning is the stance that knowledge itself is *situated*, hence subjective (Haraway, 1988). Sometimes felt as an “epistemological electroshock therapy” (*op. cit.*, p578), this claim unfolds a feminist vision of knowledge: only a partial perspective can guarantee an objective vision. It is an element of a counter-movement to “unrealistic” assumptions of objectivism in research, however by sustaining requirements of constant rigour. Here, Haraway's parameters of heteroglossia – existence of several parallel voices and discourses – and of local knowledges (*op. cit.*, p588) are

particularly relevant. In order to obtain a larger vision, one needs to be “somewhere in particular” (*op. cit.*, p590), and to embrace this position.

Here, situatedness is performed by a transparent although subjective positioning of the researcher, resulting from her personal situation: a Finnish, middle-aged, female knowledge worker who explores online foodie discourse occurring in French, English, and her mother tongue. The setting needs to be made explicit, since it modifies interpretation of discourse in her context and intersections in the “actual world” (Caliandro, 2014; Wherry, 2017; Jäntti *et al.*, 2018).

Situated positioning does not overrule objectivism, since the methodology is transparent and follows the ethical and structural guidelines of qualitative research (Goulding, 2006; Arnould, Price & Moisio, 2006; Silverman, 2013; Myers, 2013; Belk, Fischer & Kozinets, 2013). This leads further to a broader study of research ethics, presented in section 6.5.

6.3 Research design

The study investigates online foodie discourse, which anchors the context in the wide stream of cultural studies (Alasuutari, 1996; Hall, 1997). Discourse studies often deal with a canvas of relatively small items leading to larger entities, forming a description of phenomena in the way of a jigsaw puzzle (Johnstone, 2002; Fairclough, 2015; Wherry 2017).

Proliferation of online realms has increased the potential of approaches within virtual ethnography that seek for rich understanding (Langer & Beckman, 2005). The methodology adopted by ethnographers and netnographers striving for rich descriptions (Kozinets, 2002, 2010; Freeman, 2014) is partly emulated here, although it is evident that analysing foodie discourse in three languages and on two foodstuffs does not lead to full understanding of the global foodie culture. Foodie discourse is not a culture or a group of people, but one layer of cultural representation stemming from these, with a variety of evolving characteristics. Yet, its study enhances

understanding of dimensions of this culture, as defined in the Research Questions.

As a conclusion: the adopted research design targets discursive reproductions of foodie consumption culture online, across three languages, with two key foods and the phenomenon of taste performance as the focal topic. Moreover, situatedness of the research enhances a view with a feminist stance, with analysis of gendered phenomena in discourse that anchor it in the wide stream of discourse-conscious, poststructuralist feminist research (Maclaran & Stevens, 2019). The focus is narrowed down to two foods that emerge with totemic significations in online discourse in English, French and Finnish: chocolate and chilli. For this facet of the foodie culture prism, the endeavor is to provide a description as rich as possible, with approaches and analytical frames applied across disciplines.

6.3.1 Interdisciplinarity

“So understanding food cultures requires studying them up, down and sideways [...]” (Miller 2013, p140).

Whilst discipline-based academic cultures display strong tribalistic features (Krishnan, 2009, p25), qualitative research resonates with an interdisciplinary framework. Although this claim may not be sustained by all discipline-engaged scholars with a qualitative orientation, it unfolds qualitative research as a field enabling approaches with versatile paradigms. Amongst metaphors used for interdisciplinarity, “boundary crossing” and “bridge building” are appropriate here (Repko, 2008, pp22-24).

Terminological fluctuation is obvious: *cross-disciplinary*, *transdisciplinary*, *multidisciplinary* and *interdisciplinary* are all employed. “Cross-disciplinary” refers primarily to efforts joining counterparts representing several disciplines, whereas trans- and multidisciplinary stand for research where theories and methods are combined from more than one discipline (Repko, 2008). An *interdisciplinary* inquiry can be defined as an attempt critically drawing on two or more disciplines and leading to integration of disciplinary

insights (Newell & Gagnon, 2013, p24). This is valuable when there is a gap in attention to a problem beyond one domain (Repko 2008, p11, p142.) The research problem is complex and may be at the interface of several disciplines, which requires tolerance for ambiguity, even for paradox (*op. cit.*, pp151–152, p278). Consequently, digital realms such as the Internet are a fruitful field for interdisciplinary endeavours (Krishnan, 2009).

The iterative and heuristic nature of the research process leaves room for intuitive reflection and creative imagination (*op. cit.*, p297). Despite apparent challenges (Kincheloe, 2001), there are several arguments for an interdisciplinary approach here: food and taste studies, critical discourse studies and Consumer Culture Theory are all profoundly interdisciplinary fields. Furthermore, study of meanings ascribed to foodstuffs, with performance of taste, is entwined with understanding of the embodied nature of this process that can be investigated with qualitative inquiry, itself an embodied communicative process (Ellingson, 2017).

In foodie consumption studies, comparative approaches combining elements of various disciplines are an emerging potential stream (Mintz, 2002; Bildtgård, 2011; Lane 2011; Wilk, 2012; Gatley, 2012; Hedegaard, 2013; Means, Mackenzie & Dewe, 2015). They are particularly fruitful in the field of omnivorous consumption, tightly connected to foodies (Lindblom & Mustonen, 2015). Wilk (2012) argues for “true interdisciplinarity” in terms of food studies, instead of plain multidisciplinary teamwork.

Bourdieu’s contribution is particularly valuable for an interdisciplinary approach, since it provides elements for a common conceptual language between disciplines (Santoro, 2011, p14). Methodologically, drawing on taste literature leads to a research design combines the Bourdieusian with a feminist view. The Consumer Culture Theory paradigm tolerates a variety of research orientations, aiming at a better understanding of “*why consumer culture takes the forms that it does.*” (CCTWeb, 2018).

Gatley (2012, p5) applies an interdisciplinary approach on transiting food cultures and justifies the choice with a citation of Counihan and van Esterik (1997, p1): "[F]ood crosses so many conceptual boundaries, it must be interpreted from a wide range of disciplinary perspectives". Creation of a holistic framework drawing from various disciplines enables a view on food consumption that is both multi-faceted and trustworthy.

Interdisciplinarity does not provide established frameworks for any research project, and potentially relevant disciplines need to be identified before literature search (Repko, 2008, p161). Interdisciplinarity acts as a background canvas and research methods need to be identified as threads on it. Extant literature on sociology of food, consumption, computer-mediated discourse and marketing-oriented studies complement each other, as argued in the presentation of relevant literature in Chapters 2–5.

Frodeman, Klein and Pacheco (2017, p6) define interdisciplinarity as "*a totem of academic innovation*". This scholarly *clin d'oeil* aligns with the overarching metaphor of contemporary totemic behavior and refers to emotional attachment (Obadia, 2012), rather than to a method. In the author's scholarly background, linguistics, social and business studies, food research and a feminist orientation coalesce in a way that personal attachment to an interdisciplinary approach is natural. Adventuring beyond boundaries of "academic tribes" of disciplines (Krishnan, 2009) is both challenging and rewarding.

Interdisciplinarity provides an insightful perspective to study foodscapes, conceptually located in the crossroads of a variety of consumptive acts (Hedegaard, 2013, 2016; MacKendrick, 2014). With the conceptual nexus of foodscapes, it is possible to approach, across disciplinary boundaries, the foods consumed, the ways consumers talk and write about them, and the online communities building around food preferences.

6.3.2 The Internet as a site for research

The Association of Internet Researchers defines the Internet as a social phenomenon, as a tool, and as a site for research (AoIR, 2016), which reveals the challenges constituted by its nature and modes of operation. One can study the contents, contexts, connections, confrontations and the constitution of the Internet, without forgetting its complexity. Shaw (2013, p98, citing Lather) refers to this complexity as a “methodology of getting lost”: listening to the plurality of voices and remaining open to even contradictory findings. According to Lee, Fielding and Blank (2010, p6), empirical work requires the ability to deal with unexpected problems, which thoroughly affects online research, modified by the constantly changing nature of digital realms. Accordingly, online research methods are versatile and need to be adjusted depending on the complex research problems (Hine, 2010; Markham, 2013a, b).

Lee *et al.* (2010, p22) divide online research to three predominant approaches: (1) use of online methods to gather data directly from individuals, (2) analysis of online interaction within virtual environments and (3) large-scale analysis of online domains. The present study deals with approaches 1 and 2 that are, moreover, interconnected. The analysis focuses on online fora where data are retrieved and where discursive representations of tribal interaction are analysed.

The Internet and the entire virtual worlds are created and operated by humans; they are unpredictable, volatile and as interesting as the actual world and its inhabitants. They can be studied with ethnographic methods like the offline reality (Kozinets, 2010; Venkatesh, Crockett, Cross & Chen, 2017). Here, the focus is on the Internet as a research site and source for data gathering, but also on its nature as a social construct. “Online” refers in this study to activities and locations that occur with and in the Internet. Online ethnography practices have diverging denominations depending on the background, methods, data and aspirations of researchers. Caliendo distinguishes (2014, pp1–2) six types of web-based ethnographic streams:

(1) virtual ethnography, (2) Internet ethnography, (3) netnography, (4) cyber-ethnography, (5) digital ethnography and (6) ethnography of the virtual worlds. The thread in common is “the rethinking” of ethnographic principles and methods, applied from conventional research to the context of online environments (Ranfagni *et al.*, 2014).

Markham, Lanzeni and Tiidenberg (2018) refer to the “ethnography with and into the digital”, where the “field” needs to be revisited, negotiated and moreover, actively constructed by the researcher. Admitting that the variety of denominations is confusing⁵⁰, Caliandro claims (2014) that web-based ethnography is the most appropriate method to approach and understand culture(s) produced by the consumers’ use of social media.

After the first ethnographically oriented studies of online environments in the middle of the 1990s, the stream has become more abundant, resulting in a terminological heteroglossia (Hine, 2010; Markham, Lanzeni & Tiidenberg, 2018). “Virtual ethnography” is commonly adopted amongst scholars in computer-mediated communication, whilst “netnography” is established in marketing and consumption studies. CCT–positioned research applies widely netnographic inquiry (Canniford, 2005, 2010; Kozinets, 2002, 2010; Elliott, Shankar, Langer & Beckman, 2005; Rokka, 2010a, 2010b; Weijo, Hietanen & Mattila, 2014).

Hine (2010) perceives virtual ethnography as an innovative *interpretation* of the traditional ethnography, with the researcher acting as “an embodied research instrument” (Hine, 2010, p257) who travels to the research site virtually and not physically. The researcher becomes a participant, since she uses technical devices and computer mediation. In her view, virtual ethnography is always somewhat partial. By stressing the evolution of online communities towards their eventual embeddedness in offline reality, Hine questions however the justification of virtual ethnography as a category of its

⁵⁰ An example of the diverging views: Isomäki and MacPherson (2014) suggest a more detailed categorisation with fourteen online ethnography approaches, depending on their contexts either on- or offline, and their underpinning philosophies.

own (Hine, 2010, p258). Markham embraces this view (2013 a, 2013b, 2018; Markham, Lanzeni & Tiidenberg, 2018), nevertheless preferring the concept of *digital ethnography*.

Netnography (Kozinets, 2002, 2010) is positioned on the foundations of Consumer Culture Theory (Belk, Fischer & Kozinets, 2013) and tribal marketing (Caliandro, 2014). The developer R. V. Kozinets does not adopt Hine's partialist view (2010) regarding the researcher's position: the objective is the ethnographic understanding of a community or a culture, with a processual qualitative methodology allowing an adaptation of ethnographic techniques for the study of cultures emerging through computer-mediated communications (Kozinets, 2002, p62). The natural targets are related to marketing and consumer studies.

Whether one deals with "pure" netnography or netnography with elements of ethnography is a domain with blurred borderlines, especially if data from the actual life are added to online data. In marketing research, these concepts are sometimes used in a parallel way (Tikkanen, Hietanen, Henttonen & Rokka, 2009), and the notion of "netnographically inspired" is also applied in prior research (Ranfagni *et al.*, 2014).

Caliandro distinguishes netnography from virtual and digital ethnography by the use of methods which are unobtrusive and immersive in netnography (2014, p9). The author has found rewarding the methodological flexibility encouraged by Kozinets (2002, 2010) in terms of the wide use of complementary methods, to gain understanding of online communities. Here, the participation is completely non-intrusive: the researcher has not interfered with any of the conversations. This method of a fully non-intrusive approach is called *lurking* e.g. by Bruckman (2006), Hine (2010) and Markham (2013b), and it divides researchers ethically to some extent, whilst various interpretations of web-based ethnography have entailed more complex methodologies. Hine (2010) admits however that lurking is an efficient method to understand the practices of a community, and it is adopted widely in consumer studies. Markham states that lurking is a

“common and socially acceptable form of non-active participation” for researching social media (2013b, p440). Furthermore, Kozinets calls netnographers “professional lurkers.” (Kozinets, 2002 p65).

Since intrusive participation would not necessarily lead to a better understanding of discourses of the communities targeted, a non-intrusive approach is justified. Moreover, the focus is on the discourse of online communities of foodies, and less on their social interaction. This modifies the scope and methods; it has not been possible, nor functional to join all the communities studied. The corpus also features blogs that do not require adhering to.

Here, a netnographic inspiration provides a lens-like paradigm to study online communities, although the outcome of the research process is not “a netnography” of the foodie community online, but an analysis on its discourses. The target group consists of the nebulous foodie tribe which is a multi-faceted and complex setting of smaller communities. Hence, a netnography of only one community cannot be the objective, and the netnographic approach is consequently supported by discourse-centred online ethnography. The adopted approach is therefore defined as *netnographically inspired* rather than purely netnographical.

Online ethnography and linguistic research have significant convergences. Leppänen, Westinen and Kytölä (2016) refer broadly to “discourse-ethnographic approaches” stemming from sociolinguistics, whilst Androutsopoulos (2008) suggests *Discourse-oriented* or *Discourse-centered online ethnography* (DCOE), in order to relate ethnographic research functionally to pragmatic linguistics, sociolinguistics and discourse analysis (Androutsopoulos & Beisswenger, 2008; Thurlow, 2018). It sheds light onto the relations across log data collected online and the production and reception practices of this data, hence implementing ethnographical insights into the processes of traditional linguistics. From this orientation, the present approach adopts the notion of *discourse-centred*.

Successful discourse-centred research of multimodal virtual communities of practice requires language-specific skills. Gibb and Danero Iglesias (2017) observe that ethnographically oriented scholars do not always fully disclose their linguistic competence, although it affects research. The present study targets hybridised online discourse in three languages, which is a challenge despite the author's extensive linguistic background. Therefore, the recommendations by Gibb and Danero Iglesias (2017) reinforced the motivation to disclose all the multilingual dimension elements (as unfolded in Chapter 1), and to describe as accurately as possible the research process (Chapter 6 and onwards), with translations when relevant, to enhance transparency.

All the above-mentioned approaches are interdisciplinary and have contributed to the research design. However, none of them provides an explicit toolkit, but the methodology needs to be adjusted depending on the research problem, data and context. This methodological remixing (Markham 2013a)⁵¹ reflects the iterative nature in a qualitative research process of complex digital environments. Therefore, the adopted approach is a remix of extant methods. It is solidly based on prior studies, yet designed for the purpose of the present inquiry. The full methodological orientation of the research is formulated as *a netnographically inspired, discourse-centred comparative and critical analysis*. The component drawing from critical discourse studies is presented in the following section.

6.3.3 Discourse analysis and Critical Discourse Studies

6.3.3.1 Background of discourse analysis

Discourses and practices are the key components of our social world realities (Fairclough, 1992, 2015; Johnstone, 2002; Sitz, 2008; Fitchett & Caruana 2015; Wodak & Meyer, 2016). In the beginning of this section, definitions of discourse analysis as an interdisciplinary approach are provided, to be

⁵¹ Ellingson (2017, p1) refers to this type of complex positioning moreover as “theoretical fence-sitting”.

followed by the adopted methodology within critical discourse studies. The core concept of discourse and the field of computer-mediated discourse are unpacked in Chapter 5.

An extensive literature on discourse analysis draws on an interdisciplinary orientation combining linguistics, sociology, philosophy, psychology and cognitive sciences (Sitz, 2008), as well as managerial research (Fitchett & Caruana, 2015). An interdisciplinary signpost is found in the crossroads of linguistics and discourse analysis: *linguistically oriented discourse analysis* emphasises the context of discursive acts, social functions of language and the accomplishment of meaning resulting from interaction (Herring, 2001; Thurlow, 2018).

Language is the medium of interaction, hence the analysis of discourse as the actualisation of language becomes an analysis of what people do (Silverman, 2013, p110; Johnstone, 2002). Discourse analysis, commonly abbreviated as DA, is a useful lens through which to study personal identity and social identification (Maingueneau, 2005; Sitz, 2008; Silverman, 2013; Fitchett & Caruana, 2015). The fundamental principle is to analyse language, its context and social action as a continuum, rather than as distinct entities, since language and its actualisations are localised actions in our social reality (Pietikäinen & Mäntynen, 2009; Thurlow, 2018). Sense-making and the agency of subjects in this process constitute the nexus for various paradigm-specific approaches of discourse analysis (Glynos, Howarth, Norval & Speed, 2009). Here, the use of discourse analysis (DA) as a method is based on the interpretive research philosophy and constructive ontology.

Interpretations of DA depend on the context and paradigms of practitioners. DA may be understood as a discipline or as a set of approaches, or as their combination (Boutet & Maingueneau, 2005). Methodologically, DA is defined here as a part of the stream of discourse analysis within social sciences, and not in the strictest practice of DA as a sub-field of applied linguistics (Boutet & Maingueneau, 2005). This research adopts a broad, paradigm-remixing

view, since DA is methodologically appropriate to study consumptive behaviour reflected in foodie discourse online.

The analysis of performances (see 3.5) is particularly appropriate when trying to understand the aspects of identification connected to discourse (Johnstone, 2002, p223). It is relevant in the context of online food discourse where performances such as cooking or baking are often described, alongside broader performative processes of “doing taste” and “doing gender”. Moreover, self-fashioning practices (MacNeill, 2005; Siles, 2012) emerging discursively across identity performances are analysed.

DA is widely used to analyse consumer experiences. It is anchored in a phenomenological approach of consumptive behaviour: the narratives of individuals expressing their emotions and activities. DA is appropriate for a phenomenological perspective on consumptive acts where processes of “sensemaking and sensegiving” link an individual to markets and their institutions, and assemble one’s consumer identity (Sitz, 2008, p178). DA provides a lens through which to unravel the management of consumer experiences discursively (*op. cit.*, p188). Online discourse of foodies consists of heterogenic textual items where personal narratives are represented across various self-fashioning practices (Siles, 2012).

Watson *et al.* (2008) apply DA when studying extraordinary restaurant experiences shared online. The article encouraged a netnographically inspired approach with discourse analysis: it reveals food as a symbol for the quest for self-expression and identity (Watson *et al.*, 2008, p299), and the authors claim for further research with a broader setting, attempted here. Furthermore, a wide range of studies confirms the functionality of discourse analysis in contexts with foodies, foodscapes and foodways (de Valck 2007; de Valck *et al.* 2009; Ruane & Wallace, 2013; Diemer, Brunner & Schmidt, 2014; Johnston & Baumann, 2015; Burton, 2016; Jovanovski 2017a, 2017b).

In the vein of consumer empowerment and disempowerment studies (Fitchett & Caruana, 2015; Shankar *et al.*, 2006), discourse analysis needs to be

understood as breaking out from the analysis of text towards larger scales of embodied cultural patterns. Issues of a social nature such as sustainability, power, gender, ethics, conflicts, hegemony and consumer culture in general are particularly prone to this type of analysis.

Fitchett and Caruana (2015) signpost an epistemological hindrance for the use of discourse analysis in marketing, based on the ontological assumption that marketing is not socially constructed, and on the denial of the active role of language as a producer of market subjectivity and relations (Fitchett & Caruana, 2015, p1; also Arnould & Thompson, 2005). The authors recommend (2015, p2) discourse analysis, therefore, as a “critical mirror and methodological lens” for marketing-based studies on consumption. It is particularly fruitful for the study of consumer identities, in the social media.

A somewhat revolutionary conception of reality is offered by discourse analysts (e.g. Norman Fairclough) who claim that there are no distinct “markets”, “consumers” or “marketing”, but these are constructed constantly in a variety of different discourses. This leads to a more critical, situated type of analysis.

6.3.3.2 Towards Critical Discourse Studies

In discourse studies, borderlines are not clear-cut, although it is possible to distinguish between a descriptive orientation (Johnstone, 2002) and a critical approach (Fairclough, 2015; van Dijk, 2016; Lazar, 2007) that is more problem-oriented than discipline-oriented (Wodak & Meyer, 2016). The latter is an established stream, denominated as Critical Discourse Analysis and abbreviated commonly as CDA. Adopting a “critical” position means that underlying societal structures emerging on the level of discourse are detected and analysed throughout a contrastive approach. The ultimate goal of critical research, changing society by revealing its inequalities is, however, beyond the present scope.

Johnstone defines CDA as a paradigmatic method, claiming that all discursive choices are strategic and each utterance and speech act has an epistemological agenda (Johnstone, 2002, p45). In this view, discourse and social reality are irrevocably interconnected. Fairclough claims that processes of description and interpretation are interconnected: an analyst is inevitably interpreting while describing. This leads to a situation where the analysis is always shaped by one's interpretation, the relationship between a context of social processes and the discourse itself (Fairclough, 1992, cited by Sitz, 2008, p181).

Lin (2014, p214) defines CDA as a "cluster of interdisciplinary approaches" rather than a discipline in its own right, and emphasises strongly its social commitment. Wodak and Meyer (2016, p7) highlight that this social embeddedness is also a fundamental part of the Bourdieusian theory of social fields where the researcher operates. This supports the situated epistemological orientation suggested by Haraway (1988) and makes the analysis process more explicit.

Johnston and Baumann implemented critical DA in their seminal foodie studies, which can be seen in the polarising title "Foodies – Democracy and Distinction in the Gourmet Foodscape" (Johnston & Baumann, 2009, 2015). The critical dimension in their contribution is construed by sensibility to socially controversial issues such as elitism in the consumptive orientation of foodies and the class hierarchies that are reproduced by this type of capital-intensive consumption.⁵² Moreover, gender-related phenomena in the food culture, typical for a critical social view, are dealt with. However, the critical positioning of Johnston and Baumann's study remains ontologically on the level of existence of social constructs and does not dissect phenomena that could be detected and analysed throughout a more detailed, socio-linguistically oriented analysis of discourse. This can be obtained by an analysis that also operates on the micro-level of linguistic resources. It is attempted here.

⁵² Johnston and Baumann recognise, however, the contextual bias in their research and claim for more foodie-oriented studies outside North America.

In contributions stemming primarily from the field of linguistics (Fairclough, 2015; Wodak & Meyer, 2016; Thurlow, 2016, 2018), it is recommended to apply the concept of Critical Discourse *Studies* (CDS), rather than the more technically nuanced term Critical Discourse *Analysis*, since a critical view on reality does not lead to a particular type of methodology. CDS analyse power constructs and relations emerging and sustained in discourse, yet with a broader conceptual vision than a mere application of CDA (Fairclough, 2015; Wodak & Meyer, 2016). This distinction accentuates the social embeddedness of the phenomena studied: complex discursive issues necessitate a multi-disciplinary and multi-methodical approach (Wodak & Meyer, 2016, p2), instead of a methodological toolkit labelled “CDA”. Hence, CDS are a research orientation entwining theorising of discourse and power (Fairclough, 2015).

Teun van Dijk (2013, cited in Wodak & Meyer 2016) claims for a critical mindset, rather than an application of a critical “method”. Scholars should therefore practice “a critical approach” whilst studying discourse, and emphasise the social embeddedness of the discursive constructs under scrutiny. In this vein, CDS are a stream of interdisciplinary studies drawing from linguistics, psychology and social sciences and applying a multitude of research methods that need to be adapted to each research problem and context. At present, the terminological and philosophical conversation on dissimilarities between critical discourse analysis and critical discourse studies is mostly characteristic of discourse analysts with backgrounds in linguistics, rather than in social sciences or business (van Dijk, 2013). Therefore, in marketing literature that applies a critically oriented view on discourse, analysed for this research, one finds most often the concept of CDA, or more broadly, DA (Sitz, 2008; Fitchett & Caruana, 2015).

Fairclough (2015, pp58-59) suggests three main dimensions for CDA: description of texts (formal properties); interpretation (relationship between text and interaction), and explanation (relationship between interaction and social context). The first two are practiced in this study, whereas the explanatory dimension is beyond the present scope. It would necessitate a

broader view on societal constructs behind the foodie phenomenon and a more strictly defined contextual field, preferably with data in one language.

The researcher should start the analysis with the question “Why is discourse as it is?” This inquiry is articulated around meaning-making in discourse and its resources where production and interpretation of discourse entwine. In the analysis moreover, one needs to include their context providing the social conditions for both production and interpretation, which broadens the observation beyond pure linguistic inquiry. (Fairclough 2015, p58, p163).

This research aligns with Fairclough (2015) where the initial question “Why?” provides a foundation for the empirical analysis, unfolding the relations of language with the other elements in the social process (*op. cit.*, pp7–8). After this first approach follows a more specific, yet pragmatic, inquiry with “What is going on in discourse and in what relations?” and eventually, “What is the role of language in this process?” (*op. cit.*, pp160–161). In Table 6, these questions are articulated according to the research questions.

After the application of this broad perspective, a narrower scope complements the analysis, aligning with the concept of discursive strategies suggested by Wodak and Meyer (2016) where specific discursive tools of online contributors are observed (section 6.4.3). The approach is described in the section on data analysis where two main components of the empirical study are unfolded: frames and discursive strategies, construed by the themes observed in discourse and by the linguistic resources of their emergence.

By naming oneself a critical researcher, one adopts specific ethical standards (Wodak & Meyer, 2016, p7). Actions must be made explicit, whilst keeping the research criteria transparent. This is one part of the holistic research process, implying an ongoing evaluation of transparency, validity and reliability (Myers, 2013; Markham, Lanzeni & Tiidenberg, 2018).

6.4 Data

Online data gathered for this study are naturally occurring, collected from sources where individuals having generated the data are not aware of the research process. The type of data collection may be called unobtrusive, non-disruptive or non-reactive (Androutsopoulos & Beisswenger, 2008; Wodak & Meyer, 2016). Janetzko (2010, pp162-163) distinguishes between two main categories of non-reactive data in online settings: simple observations and archival records. Here, the focus is on observations made on data gathered in online records.

Janetzko (2010) characterises non-reactive online data collection as a means of collecting large amounts of information and emphasises that a rich description of an online social phenomenon can be achieved by data combination and data exploitation together. However, ethical concerns are raised: when data collection is non-reactive, it is inherently hidden (Janetzko, 2010, p170). Ethical questions are discussed in section 6.5.

Versatile Internet-mediated data requires thorough categorisation. Welser, Smith, Fisher and Gleaves (2010, p121) distinguish on a general level between *threaded conversations* (messages sent to people from other people on diverse online fora, mostly organised in groups), *blogs and social networking systems* and *distributed collaborative systems* such as Wikipedia or YouTube. All imply different roles for users and content providers and require an interdisciplinary approach from researchers (Wodak & Meyer, 2016). Of these, all but the last category are relevant here.

Computer Mediated Discourse (Chapter 5) enables a variety of interpersonal communication types: messaging, chatrooms, comparison and evaluation sites or services, interactive affordances of corporate sites, communities of practice, and personal and/or public blogs. Therein, commercial and non-commercial content often entangle. This heterogeneity is taken into account in the corpus by including fragments of discourse from the most prominent

foodie-generated categories: blogs, conversation fora and community websites.

6.4.1 Data collection and categorisation: from a pilot study to the final delineation of topic

The data collection, initiated in 2014, was preceded by an extensive period of less articulated online observation related to the researcher's professional activity. This phase consisted of scouting interesting blogs, discussion fora and other foodie-generated websites in all three languages. Links found on the sites snowballed towards others, providing discoveries, and gradually the process became more systematic. This rewarding phase served as preliminary contextual learning, unfolding as a broad and flexible bricolage (Kincheloe, 2001; Deuze, 2006; Bettany, 2015) and contributed to thorough preunderstanding of the field (Gummesson, 2003).

The next phase consisted of a pilot study for the PhD dissertation, conducted in 2014–2016 (Mäkelä, 2016). The corpus was compiled from foodie blogs in French and Finnish and the research drew on discursive constructs in foodie blogs annexed to two commercial platforms (*Maku* [Taste] in Finland and *Marmiton*⁵³ in France). The blogs were selected with the criteria of their richness in expression, the width in topics discussed and the distinguishable foodie profiles of their creators. To complement this foodie-generated data, samples of blogs written by the journalists of *Maku* and *Marmiton* were included in the corpus:

| Category | Language | Pages |
|--|-----------------|--------------|
| Posts from four <i>Maku</i> blogs | Finnish | 51 |
| Posts from four <i>Marmiton</i> blogs | French | 47 |
| Posts from <i>Maku</i> journalists' blog | Finnish | 15 |
| Posts from <i>Marmiton</i> journalists' blog | French | 15 |
| | | 128 |

Table 4. Data categories of the pilot study.

⁵³ <https://www.maku.fi> (no longer functional in 2020) and <https://www.marmiton.org>

The extensive exploration of the field of online foodie discourse in all three languages and the pilot study significantly oriented the researcher's thinking and foregrounded the present study, providing a solid framework to define research questions. They yielded an initial understanding of the field and of the patterns of emergence of imbue ment of value to foodstuffs amongst foodies online, where the dimensions of distinction, gender and power could be discerned as significant discursive frames. This knowledge oriented the formulation of three research questions, entwined with prior experience from a corresponding although different dataset.

The pilot study tested the applicability of discursive foodscape as a conceptual tool in the framework of distinction theory. Furthermore, it was a valuable exploratory phase to discern significant foods that would be promising from the totemic point of view, without a national bias. The selected protagonists are chocolate and chilli, generating discourse with symbolic connotations and value-laden comments and described in creative styles.

Important characteristics of blog discourse were revealed, which strengthened the objective to gather a more versatile dataset. To study totemic significations ascribed to food, it was obvious that adding conversation fora and other outlet types to the corpus would yield a more profound understanding than blogs alone. However, blog discourse was, from the beginning, an essential category, given its prominent role in online foodie culture and the tight connections across distinction strategies, identity construction and food, discernable in blogs.

With the findings of the pilot study, data collection was narrowed down towards online discourse on chilli and chocolate, instead of foodie discourse in general. Moreover, sources in English were included, to delve deeper into a cross-linguistic comparison. This constituted another extensive data gathering process.

Due to the almost unlimited amount of foodie-generated data available online, the principle of remixing (Markham, 2013a) was applied, embracing an epistemology where passion and curiosity entangle resulting in a creative process of exploratory online research (*op.cit.*). As Wodak and Meyer (2016) observe, data collection was an evolving and dynamic iteration yielding an extensive dataset from which a final selection of 366 pages was compiled. This entity is hereinafter referred to as *corpus*, since the term is widely adopted for a compilation of written texts, amongst larger sets of collected data.

Defining a “field” for digital environments is a situated process that requires deliberate boundary work, and the discourse fragments constituting the final corpus need to be representative of that field. This work proceeded on three tiers. First, foodies online were defined as a broad consumptive tribe that constitutes the research context. This delineated data collection towards consumer discourse where food is ascribed with deep significations (Chapter 2). Secondly, from various sites were selected those where chilli or chocolate represent an important part of the content with themes enhancing foodie identity and distinctive purposes. Eventually, amongst these potential sources were chosen threads of conversation, articles and blog posts that intrigued the researcher as evocative of totemic significations ascribed to chilli or chocolate.

Hence, the data collection remix was a creative process where items have been selected and occasionally discarded, to be replaced by others, to keep a balance between the three languages and the two foods, relevant to depending on the potential of selected discourse chunks to shed light on the research problem. Embracing the ideal of a situated researcher (Haraway, 1988; Markham, 2013b), the process yielded an assemblage-type of deliberately and subjectively collected – remixed – corpus. Yet, it is remixed with a concern to maintain this process explicit and transparent, and to justify it with prior research.

The corpus collection was iterated for all three languages. It was partly parallel to writing the literature review, from 2015 until the end of the empirical research process, in late 2019. Alongside, a book chapter was written on chocolate discourse as a contextual space for carnal singularity (Mäkelä, Bettany & Stevens, 2018). It was inspired by the streams of embodiment and gendered discourse and gave valuable insights into significations of chocolate.

Discourse fragments on chilli and chocolate were categorised according to the genres of sources (blog, conversation forum, website, recipe sharing site), and language (Table 5). However, due to the hybrid nature of online environments and the shifting genres therein, some sources are more heterogenic than others: a website includes a blog (Made from Chocolate) and/or detailed evaluations on products (Fiery Foods, Suklaayhdistys, Club des Croqueurs de Chocolat), a blog triggers reader comments in the style of a conversation forum (Kinuskikissa, Mostly about chocolate), or a conversation forum suddenly becomes a recipe exchange platform (Jatkoaika, Chilifoorumi). Sources are nevertheless labelled according to their most salient genre.

Prior to proceeding to analysis, permission to study the SNS was sought from intellectual property holders by email, explaining the objective and context of the research. Occasionally, two messages were needed, however all requests led to a positive outcome, and a thank you message was sent afterwards. The permissions granted either a full disclosure of names of contributors or required their non-disclosure, which is respected accordingly.

Fragments of discourse (Fairclough, 2015) constituting the corpus were typographically stylised to the same font size, with pictures left off, in order to have comparable data in terms of volume. Smileys and emojis embedded in the text chunks were kept, since their non-inclusion would have affected conveying of emotional information (Skovholt, Grønning, Kankaanranta, 2014). Data were saved as Word document files, with fragments from each

source constituting one file. Table 5 displays the sources constituting the corpus.

| Language | Totemic food | Provenance or nature of online source | Name in original language | Page volume | Total |
|----------|--------------|--|---|-------------|------------|
| Finnish | Chilli | Conversation forum | Chilifoorumi | 26 | 120 |
| | | Conversation forum | Jatkoaika | 15 | |
| Finnish | Chocolate | Website, reviewing and conversation forum | Suklaayhdistys | 22 | |
| | | Blog-type community website | Kinuskikissa | 29 | |
| | | Blog with comments | Suklaapossu leipoo | 28 | |
| English | Chilli | Blog and website | The Chilli Temple (UK) | 7 | 133 |
| | | Website with an online magazine | Clifton Chilli Club (UK) | 24 | |
| | | Blog with comments | Scott Roberts (US) | 22 | |
| | | Website with two blogs including comments | Fiery Foods (US), featuring Burn Blog and Dave de Witt's blog | 22 | |
| English | Chocolate | Website with a blog including comments | Made from chocolate | 18 | |
| | | Blog with comments | Mostly about chocolate | 17 | |
| | | Blog with comments | Chocablog | 23 | |
| French | Chilli | Recipe sharing site | Les Foodies | 7 | 113 |
| | | Conversation forum and recipe sharing site | Marmiton | 25 | |
| French | Chocolate | Website | Club des Croqueurs de Chocolat | 13 | |
| | | Blog | Le chocolat dans tous nos états | 14 | |
| | | Blog with comments | Made from Chocolate (French) | 9 | |
| | | Recipe sharing site | Les Foodies | 27 | |
| | | Conversation forum and recipe sharing site | Marmiton | 18 | |
| | | | | | 366 |

Table 5. SNS sources in the corpus.

6.4.2 Presentation of sources

Finnish data on chilli discourse are derived from two sources: the conversation forum of the largest Finnish chilli association, *Chilifoorumi*, and the conversation forum of an ice-hockey-themed platform *Jatkoaika* where chilli knowledge is also displayed with expertise.

Suklaayhdistys, an association founded by Finnish chocolate enthusiasts, evaluates and disseminates knowledge on good chocolate. *Kinuskikissa* [Caramel Cat] is a layman blog developed into a professionally run community where domestic bakers display their creations, exchange hints and socialise. Moreover, a webshop with utensils and materials is annexed to the site, nowadays the most popular baking community in Finland (2019). *Suklaapossu leipoo* [Chocolate Pig bakes] is created by a non-professional baking devotee and features amongst the best Finnish baking blogs. During the research process (2017), it was annexed to a commercial platform of a women's magazine Kotiliesi.⁵⁴

Marmiton is the largest foodie community in France, with both commercial and non-commercial content. Corpus fragments stem from the impressively rich and versatile conversation forum, *Coin salon*, which serves as a community platform for users, without commercial input, and from the recipe exchange section. *Marmiton* has provided examples for both chocolate and chilli. The same applies for *Les Foodies*, an extensive recipe sharing site with possibility to post questions and to comment and evaluate recipes.

Made from Chocolate features in the corpus in two language versions (English and French), including recipes, conversations and articles. Two more sites have yielded data on chocolate in French: an exclusive⁵⁵ association of chocolate lovers, *Club des Croqueurs de Chocolat* [Chocolate

⁵⁴ <https://www.kotiliesi.fi>

⁵⁵ Exclusivity applies to the high quality of produce evaluated, to the standard of outlets visited and mostly, to the restricted number of members (only 150 memberships are accepted, on recommendation only).

Crunchers' Club], and a sophisticated blog created by two chocolate-loving sisters "born in a cocoa pod", *Le chocolat dans tous nos états* [Chocolate in all our states].⁵⁶

The chilli section in English consists of both British and North American originated discourse, however the linguistic variation of English used in the USA and Great Britain, or English as lingua franca, is not analysed. UK discourse is collected from two sources: *The Chilli Temple* blog, with more than 1100 members on Facebook⁵⁷, and *Clifton Chilli Club*, a community with extensive on- and offline presence: it provides content in various SNS channels, publishes a free online magazine *Hot Sauce with Everything*, engages in charity,⁵⁸ has corporate cooperation and organises eating competitions. American data stem from the forum *Fiery Foods* that features also *Burn Blog* and *Dave de Witt* (blog). Food historian Dave de Witt is also the editor of the site and contributes to all sections. The second North-American source is the blog by *Scott Roberts* who characterises himself as "one of the biggest authorities in the fiery foods industry."

Chocablog, one of the most popular chocolate blogs in the UK, has a similar vocation as *Made from chocolate*, however with a more formal style. Contributors represent several English-speaking countries. *Mostly about chocolate* is created by a Canadian journalist based in Great Britain, and scores high in food and gastronomy related rankings of online content.

An exhaustive list of discourse fragments features as Appendix 1.⁵⁹ Altogether, the corpus consists of 366 pages of typographically standardised data. Whilst non-commercial content is targeted, it is not possible to absolutely avoid input generated with a commercial objective, given the

⁵⁶ The name is a wordplay, referring to chocolate that gets one constantly agitated.

⁵⁷ Memberships listed on the Facebook page on October 2nd, 2018 (https://www.facebook.com/groups/155248991711884/?ref=group_header). Most of the content of the blog was moved to the closed Facebook account during the research process.

⁵⁸ Cooperation is organised with the charity *It's in the Bag!* that raises awareness on testicular cancer.

⁵⁹ Http addresses are not disclosed in the public version of the dissertation, since some of them reveal identities of contributors on sites prohibiting this.

superdiversity of digital foodie outlets (Chapter 5) and the changes in affiliations with business ventures. This was a matter of continuous scrutiny in data collection and in the empirical part, the nature of the texts is taken into account, to avoid misinterpretation. Moreover, SNS contributors actively disclose promotional cooperation, and emphasise on objectivity of product reviews that are not linked to commercial cooperation.

Data collection and analysis revealed intriguing phenomena, especially with SNS related to chilli: *Jatkoaika*, an ice hockey community with a broad range of discussion topics, featured highly interesting chilli conversations. The degree of chilli expertise of contributors justified the categorisation of this discourse as foodie-generated data, regardless of the outlet. Furthermore, the site contained frequent references to sites targeted for chilli aficionados. This feature strengthened the view on postmodern consumers sharing interests in many fields and moreover, on the ubiquity of food-related topics online.

6.4.3 Data analysis

6.4.3.1 Frames

The analysis proceeded in two phases of coding, alongside close observation rounds of the corpus. The main conceptual tool enabling a thematic analysis is *frame*: a representation of topics, subject matters and referents within an activity (Fairclough 2015, p169). Fairclough's model of CDS is construed with three key concepts: schema, frame, and script. Since these are partly overlapping (*op. cit.*), frame is chosen as the most functional tool for the present approach.

"Frame" is an overarching concept articulating how chilli and chocolate emerge in discourse; how these emergences constitute frames for discourse and, eventually, discursive foodscapes. Johnston and Baumann (2009, 2015) applied a similar approach, identifying authenticity, exoticism and expertise as the main frames for foodie identity. Aligning with this methodological approach, frames are presented as broad, "umbrella-type"

conceptual entities. Frames are supported by a range of smaller-scale *themes* (presented in Table 6, e.g. healthism, commensality or materiality). They are based on extant literature, to strengthen links with prior research.

The first coding was conducted with a reflection suggested by Fairclough (2015), shedding light on embeddedness of discourse and its context: “Why is discourse as it is?”, “What is going on in discourse and in what relations?”, and “What is the role of language in this process?” This coding constitutes pragmatic, semantic and content aspects of the text, and yields answers to Research Question 1: *How do chilli and chocolate emerge as totemic foods in online discourse in Finnish, English and French?* In accordance with the overarching comparative aspect across languages, the findings are presented separately for Finnish, English and French (Chapter 7).

The second coding drew on Research Question 2: *How do consumers perform taste and distinction across discursive productions on chilli and chocolate online?* It continues to align with the thematic questions suggested by Fairclough (2015, 129–130)⁶⁰: “What experiential value do words have?”, “What metaphors are used?”, and “What types of process and participants predominate?” To conduct the empirical analysis, the methodology is moreover based on theorising by Maciel and Wallendorf (2016) on taste engineering, with modifications. These findings are presented in Chapter 8.

Eventually, one of Fairclough’s (2015) broad thematic questions closes the loop of analysis: “What larger-scale structures does the text have?” It sheds light on Research Question 3: *How do discursive foodscapes relate to broader constructions of gender and power?* Findings of this inquiry are presented in chapter 9. For Research Questions 2 and 3, primarily the transnational consumptive tribe of foodies is observed, without a detailed cross-linguistic analysis. Yet, a comparative aspect across languages

⁶⁰ Fairclough (2015) suggests ten questions that include the observation of grammatical phenomena. Applying them all would have concentrated the analysis technically too much on linguistics and narrowed down the social component. Therefore, the most relevant questions were selected for this research.

provides complementary depth, whenever it adds to understanding of Research Questions.

Findings led to the identification of discursive frames evocative of the corpus. They represent online discourse in three languages on two focal foods, which constitutes a substantial divergence with extant foodie research that has applied dissimilar perspectives. Therefore, the frames of discourse occasionally diverge from those suggested by prior research, providing contribution to knowledge on foodie-oriented consumption. With each research question, the compilation of frames constitutes the discursive foodscape related to the RQ.

6.4.3.2 Discursive strategies

Fairclough's questions being a general set of guidelines, they are not directly adaptable to specific research problems. This adaptation is to be finalised by each researcher, for each context and type of data (Markham, 2018; Wodak & Meyer, 2016; Fairclough, 2015; Ellingson, 2017). Therefore, scrutiny of *discursive strategies* complements the identification of discursive frames.

Discursive strategies are intentional practices adopted, in order to achieve a social, psychological or linguistic goal (Wodak & Meyer, 2016). Amongst the discursive strategies described by Wodak and Meyer (2016, p33), the most relevant in this context are *argumentation*, *intensification* and *perspectivisation*. These are used to shed light on how discourse supports discursive intentions of online writers. Moreover, observations based on interaction types in online consumer communication (bonding, lurking, geeking and building; Kozinets, 2010) and on constructs of communication in foodie discourse (celebration of similarities, sharing knowledge, negotiating norms and opposing values; de Valck *et al.*, 2009), add a complementary, CCT-based layer to the analysis.

Whilst frames enable a contextual articulation of the corpus, discursive strategies reveal how language is used as a tool in these contexts. For example, how different languages provide strategies for discourse, or how perspectivisation is practiced. In online contexts, verbal resources are the most pertinent category.⁶¹

The entire corpus was read altogether four times: the first reading generated free associations, establishing sub-conscious links with theory and yielding fragmentary notes. The second reading enabled the first coding (seeking answers for RQ1), by identifying leading themes and, eventually, frames. Since a full cross-linguistic analysis was introduced at this point, it was the most labour-intensive phase.

The third reading enabled the second coding (RQ2 and 3) that provided in-depth connections across theory and data. Discursive frames and strategies were re-assessed after the completion of the full analysis. A fourth close reading, alongside writing of conclusive remarks, filled in possible gaps in the analysis, for a rich understanding of the corpus.

In Table 6, themes derived from prior research are enlisted depending on the Research Questions and the dimension of analysis that they relate to, in the form of a research methodology matrix. Author names⁶² and evocative themes strengthen the link between prior and present research and consolidate the approach in the contextual fields of CCT and CMD. Key themes facilitated crystallisation of frames in all phases.

Furthermore, the framework aligns with the adopted interdisciplinary approach, since it entwines CCT-derived literature with linguistically oriented inquiry (CMD), and methodologically, with critical discourse studies (CDS).

⁶¹ Three groups of discursive resources can be identified: verbal, interactional and non-verbal. (Language Learning, 2008).

⁶² All possible references to literature in Chapters 2-5 are not listed here with author names, however.

This approach enhances the theoretical contribution described in section 1.4.2.

| Analysis framework derived from literature and applied in empirical study | | | |
|--|--|--|---|
| Themes and key words based on literature (chapters 2-5) | Fairclough's discourse analysis model (2015) | Discursive strategies Modified from Wodak & Meyer (2016) | First coding |
| RQ 1: <i>How do chilli and chocolate emerge as totemic foods in online discourse in Finnish, English and French?</i> | | | |
| 1. A Community, bonding (Kniazeva & Venkatesh, 2007; Kozinets, 1999; Canniford, 2005). Contemporary totems in foodways (de Valck, 2007; Julier 2009; Vojnovic, 2017): Key themes: <i>Home-made, sin, solace, comfort, romance, tradition, fun, indulgence; responsibility, identity, healthism; conflict, presumption; common language.</i> | “Why is discourse as it is?” “What is going on in discourse and in what relations?” | <i>argumentation</i> (justification and questioning of claims) <i>intensification</i> (modifying the force of utterances) | RESULT: frames and discursive strategies for RQ1 (Chapter 7) |
| 1. B Symbolic and ritualistic consumption of food (Wallendorf & Arnould, 1991; Kniazeva & Venkatesh, 2007; de Solier, 2013; Cappellini, 2010; Cappellini & Parsons, 2012, 2014; Jurafsky <i>et al.</i> , 2014; Heilbrunn, 2018; Ratcliffe, Lyle Baxter & Martin, 2019). Key themes: <i>Emergent vs. designed food ritual; commensality; materiality; symbol; meaning; meal, gift; sensuality, addiction.</i> | “What is the role of language in this process?” | <i>perspectivisation</i> (positioning one’s point of view to express involvement or distance) | |
| Interaction modes in online consumption (Kozinets, 2010): bonding, lurking, geeking and building Constructs of foodie communication (de Valck <i>et al.</i> , 2009): sharing knowledge, negotiating norms, opposing values and celebrating similarities | | | |
| RQ 2: <i>How do consumers perform taste and distinction across discursive productions on chilli and chocolate online?</i> | | | Second coding |
| 2. A Taste engineering (Maciel & Wallendorf, 2016; Bourdieu, 1979). Key words: <i>Benchmarking, autodidactics, scaffolding; taste, distinction, capital.</i> | “What types of process and participants predominate?” | <i>argumentation</i> <i>intensification</i> | RESULT: frames and discursive strategies for RQ2 (Chapter 8) |
| 2. B Online foodie discourse in relation to CMD: (Androutsopoulos & Juffermans, 2006; Kytölä, 2013; Siles, 2012; Dejmanee, 2017; Kozinets 2010, 2017). Key themes: <i>Creativity, semantic and stylistic fluidity, anonymity; user-generatedness; hybridity; superdiversity; self-enhancement; presumption; knowledge sharing, learning, self-fashioning; evaluation, embracing, endorsement, explanation.</i> | “What experiential value do words have?” “What metaphors are used?” | <i>perspectivisation</i> | |
| Interaction modes in online consumption Constructs of foodie communication | | | |

| RQ 3: How do discursive foodscapes relate to broader constructions of gender and power? | | | Second coding |
|---|--|--|---|
| 3. A Gender (Holt & Thompson, 2004; Cairns, Johnston & Baumann, 2010; Parsons, 2015a, b; Mäkelä, Bettany & Stevens, 2018; Oakley, 1998; Kendall & Tannen, 2015). Key themes: <i>Corporeality, masculinity, femininity; carnality, carnal-singularity; gendered discourse.</i> | “What larger-scale structures does the text have?” | <i>argumentation</i> <i>intensification</i> <i>perspectivisation</i> | RESULT: frames and discursive strategies for RQ3 (Chapter 9) |
| 3. B Power relations in discourse (Kozinets, 2010; Fairclough, 2015; Kendall & Tannen, 2015; Dejmanee, 2016; Rosenthal & Mckeown, 2017) Key themes: <i>Power, empowerment; emancipation; influencing.</i> | | | |
| Interaction modes in online consumption Constructs of foodie communication | | | |

Table 6. Research methodology matrix: Analysis framework applied in the empirical study.

This relatively complex framework takes both theory and methods into account, without compromising interdisciplinarity. In sections unfolding findings, the frames of discourse construed with the adopted approach are presented with the discursive strategies supporting them. The elaboration of Table 6 provided an aide-mémoire to facilitate coding, to be followed by inductive categorisation.

Aligning with Kozinets (2002, 2010), the analysis was conducted manually, relying on the intuition of the researcher to avoid disparition of information, whilst software use may jeopardise symbolic richness for the sake of clarity (Kozinets 2002, p64). Alongside manual coding, selected resources of NVivo 12 software were nevertheless applied, to facilitate categorisation of fragments, to tag them with themes and to run simple queries in the corpus. However, the somewhat complex process of coding data in three languages could only be conducted manually.

In Chapters 7–9, quotations figure in their original language, with translations (where necessary) by the researcher, fluent in all three languages on a CEFL

level C2⁶³. For increased transparency, a sample of quotations in French and Finnish, with their translations into English, was scrutinised by two external assessors (Appendix 2).

6.4.4 Delimitations of the corpus

The corpus consists of data fragments collected from a large number of online sources, originally created in three languages over a long period of time (2001-2019). They are retrieved from the archives of the outlets in question, in relation to their relevance to the Research Questions. Subjective choices of the researcher are justified and made explicit in section 6.4.2., as a part of the situatedness that needs to be made transparent. The corpus is construed for the study of totemic emergences of chilli and chocolate in Finnish, English and French foodie discourse online, and does not seek to be representative of all foodie discourse in these languages.

The construction of the corpus resonates with the heterogenic, playful and constantly evolving nature of online realms (Chapter 5), resulting methodologically in a remix of data (Markham, 2018). Digital contexts are ephemeral, which entails that some fragments may not be found online at the moment of publication of this research. Therefore, they have been saved and categorised, in order to keep track of the contributor, the CMD platform and the date.

Whilst balance across three languages is sought, the numbers in pages of data in English, French and Finnish are not exactly equal. Given the total volume however, this is not considered as compromising.

6.5 Ethics in online research

“Methods is ethics and ethics is methods.” (Markham, Tiidenberg & Herman, 2018)

⁶³ Level C2 in the Common European Framework for Languages corresponds to the language skills of a proficient user that enable conducting higher education studies in the respective language. (Common European Framework of Languages, 2019).

When working with web-generated data, ethical issues need to be adjusted to the modes of the research design (Kozinets, 2002, 2010; Hine, 2005; Whiteman, 2007; Ranfagni *et al.*, 2014; Caliandro, 2014; Buchanan & Markham, 2014; Markham, Lanzeni, Tiidenberg, 2018). However, the process emulates ethical conduct guidelines of offline research where standards such as confidentiality and anonymity must be met, whereas the full standard of informed consent cannot be obtained when non-reactive data are gathered (Eynon, Fry & Schroeder, 2010).

Ethical issues raise a lot of discussion and concern especially in the contexts of web-based ethnography. Whilst the research aim and the methods chosen are considered, one needs to bear in mind that “online research” can be conducted in diverging ways, engendering that the ethical considerations must include the research topic, the possible informants and the level of concealment adopted.

Eynon, Fry and Schroeder (2010, p24) distinguish three ethical concepts as a basis for online research: confidentiality, anonymity, and informed consent. They are adopted from the general human subject research model, although their interpretation may diverge from offline contexts. Madge (cited by Kantanen & Manninen, 2016, p87) adds privacy, debriefing and netiquette as ethical guidelines. These principles align e.g. with the Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity (2009) that defines the ethical principles of research in humanities and social and behavioural sciences in three regards: “(1) *respecting the autonomy of research subjects*; (2) *avoiding harm*; and (3) *privacy and data protection*.” (Kantanen & Manninen, 2016, p87).

Despite similarities with offline research ethics, some points merit reconsideration, such as the changing nature of informed consent and disclosure of findings (Eynon *et al.*, 2010, p26). Consent issues divide scholars to some extent: when discourse – and not people – is in the focus of research, it is possible to conceal the identity of the people who have entered the original text chunks online, and informed consent is not mandatory (Kozinets, 2010). Moreover, with large amounts of archived data it is

unrealistic to consider that all contributors could be contacted or even found, if their conversation streams or other feeds date from bygone years. In online discussions, it is moreover customary to use avatars and pseudonyms for identity concealment.

Hine (2010) emphasises ethical conduct in observation and presence: whether the researcher makes herself visible or not, the decision needs to abide with the general research design, and to be justified ethically. The “*spectrum between a full participant and a full observer*” (Hine, 2010, p261) is wide. The question remains whether informed consent is regarded as mandatory to all online related research, or whether it may be reserved to contexts where disclosing identity of the informants might cause some harm (Langer & Beckman, 2005). Since research with online data has undergone a spectacular increase with the social media, it is not possible to define one policy, but one needs context-specific evaluation, although with a common framework and a transparent mode of action. Understanding of research ethics as a process (Buchanan & Markham, 2012) supports this orientation.

The body with a mission to set guidelines to online research globally is the Association of Internet Researchers, or AoIR (www.aoir.org). *Internet Research Ethics* (Buchanan & Markham, 2012; AoIR, 2014, 2019) is a combination of guidelines constantly developed by internationally recognised authorities. During the final phase of writing this dissertation, in 2019, the organisation introduced a revised version of the guidelines (AoIR, 2019). AoIR emphasises context-specific guidelines that are not static, but “*dynamic and heterogeneous*.” (Buchanan & Markham, 2012, p26). The statement draws from an intensive collaboration across researchers worldwide (AoIR, 2014, 2019). At the time of designing the first guidelines, there were no official “answers” in what comes to Internet research ethics that would have been adopted at national or international levels.

Eynon, Fry and Schroeder (2010, p25) observe the blurring boundaries between ethical and legal considerations, with differences regarding institutional regulations between countries. Individual ethics of online

researchers have a primary role when assessing the validity, reliability and ethics of a study and its reporting. For more structure, Kantanen and Manninen (2016) aptly argue for a more institution-regulated and context-specific set of ethical guidelines for social studies. In the framework of feminist research, Landman (2006, p432) crystallises the guiding ethical principle: “[...] *the audit trail through research question, methods, data collection, analysis and interpretation need to be clear, systematic and explicit*”.

Eynon *et al.* (2010, p23) pinpoint the interrelation of ethics and methods, as well as Markham, Tiidenberg and Herman (2018). In social sciences, one needs to pay attention to the shift from reactive ethical regulation towards a more proactive one. Naturally, one needs bespoke rules to specific online settings such as blogs, chatrooms, or games (Lee, Fielding & Blank, 2010, p26). There are views supporting tailor-made ethical decision-making, depending on research contexts, with tight institutional surveillance (Kantanen & Manninen, 2016). Some scholars are in favor of covert observation in netnography (Langer & Beckman, 2005), when dealing with delicate or sensitive topics.

In ethical considerations of the present methodology, the AoIR protocol is followed. Non-obtrusive data gathering is endorsed by the permission that was obtained for the use of all sources, with anonymity or pseudonymity of discourse respected upon request. Online contributors are cited with credit, when the permission to publish their names or avatars has been granted. In the report, quotations stemming from SNS prohibiting disclosure of contributors are edited with “X”, to replace names or aliases. Naturally, the research process may not cause any harm to communities observed. Regulations concerning ethical research and non-plagiarism of the University of Westminster are respected. An initial ethical application was submitted and accepted in 2015. This study falls into the category 1 within the University of Westminster Code of Practice Governing the Ethical Conduct of Research 2015/16 (Westminster, 2017).

6.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, methodology and data of the research are described and justified. The applied research philosophy embeds the study in the field of interpretive consumer culture studies, whilst the study context, online consumer marketplaces, is perceived ontologically as a reality comparable with, albeit different from, our actual world.

The research design is unpacked as an inquiry anchored in Consumer Culture Theory, with the empirical analysis based on Critical Discourse Studies entwining taste-related consumer studies with applied linguistics. Sections on data collection and analysis present when, how, and with which principles the corpus is construed, categorised and analysed. A reflection on ethics in online study contexts is included, in order to highlight the complexity of discourse studies in and through the digital (Markham, Lanzeni & Tiidenberg 2018).

Chapter 7: Chilli and chocolate as totemic foods in online Finnish, English and French – a cross-linguistic approach

7.1. Introduction

This chapter investigates construction of discursive foodscapes in the context of RQ1: *How do chilli and chocolate emerge as totemic foods in online discourse in Finnish, English and French?* Findings on each RQ resonate with a particular dimension of the core phenomenon, and the analysis is conducted on small scale and large scale items. RQ1 being the broadest of the Research Questions, this chapter presents the most extensive part of the findings with an elaborate cross-linguistic comparative analysis.

The overarching principle of discourse analysis is that individual fragments also represent the integrality of discourse, like facets of a prism. In the context of RQ1, the corpus constituents are presented separately, prior to proceeding to an overview. This choice takes into consideration multivocality (heteroglossia), superdiversity and contextuality of computer-mediated discourse, and highlights the richness of online foodtalk: perception of broader discursive foodscapes is possible, when distinct facets are studied. Moreover, this strategy facilitates the analysis of small-scale linguistic items, as a dimension of an interdisciplinary approach.

The analysis illustrates how discursive processes construct, and are construed by, totemic foods: how they create bonds and provide opportunities for ritualistic consumption for foodies in various SNS contexts. “Totemic” is understood here in its contemporary interpretation, as a product or an emblem enhancing sentiments of togetherness in a consumer community, reaching symbolic and ritual dimensions. This is a profoundly social process, since totems bring together groups of people, rather than represent a spiritual emblem for an individual consumer. Contemporary totems in foodways are reflected upon the ones suggested by prior research.

“Emergence” signifies here representations of the core phenomenon in discourse. The chapter has two main standpoints based on literature: community building and bonding, and symbolic and ritualistic consumption (items 1A and 1B in Table 6). Findings in all three languages are presented separately, prior to conclusive sections where identified discursive themes, frames and strategies are unpacked. They become constituents of the discursive foodscape related to the research question.

The analysis proceeds and the sections are headlined according to the framework presented in Table 6. An overview of themes in discourse is provided first, with brief summarising tables, to be followed by a more detailed analysis. In quotations, the real names or pseudonyms are occasionally not mentioned, according to requests of intellectual property holders. In addition to the direct quotations, illustrative examples are reproduced without the original post. To facilitate reading, SNS names are in italics, whenever not in brackets.

7.2 Chilli and chocolate as totemic foods in Finnish

Finnish foodies are active bloggers and contributors on sites related to chilli and chocolate. Finns, a linguistic community described in the national folklore as taciturn, embrace with voluminous input however, the affordances of social networking services, when exchanging experiences on shared food interests.

7.2.1 Chilli

Although gendered discourse is analysed in its own chapter (9), it is noteworthy to highlight in this section that the Finnish chilli talk stems almost exclusively from male contributors.

7.2.1.1 Community building and bonding

Themes of community-building and bonding stand out in Finnish SNS dedicated to chilli. Extant literature suggests *home-made, sin, solace, comfort, romance, tradition, fun, indulgence, responsibility, identity, convenience, healthism, conflict, common language* and *prosumption* as key themes for community building and bonding. They serve as indexes of contemporary totemic behavior in food consumption (item 1A in Table 6). In Finnish chilli discourse, there is variation in their occurrence, and some do not appear at all.

Table 7 presents the themes sustaining community building and bonding most intensely, with the order of columns illustrating their degree of salience from the strongest (left-hand column) towards less powerful (right-hand) in discourse. The rightmost column in italics displays the discursive frames where those themes coalesce, identified in the present analysis, to complement extant research. The same logic of presentation is applied in all tables displaying discursive themes and frames in Chapter 7.

| SNS | Salient discursive themes identified in prior research | | | | Identified frames of discourse |
|--------------|--|----------|-------------|-----------|--|
| Chilifoorumi | identity | fun | prosumption | home-made | <i>crafting, heteronormative masculinity</i> |
| Jatkoaika | identity | conflict | prosumption | fun | |

Table 7. Community building and bonding in Finnish chilli discourse.

Chilli consumption and cultivation construe a solid sub-tribal identity for Finnish online contributors: the totemic ingredient provides a playground for crafting, endurance games, and culinary endeavors where simple convenience is an underpinning aspiration. This generates a lot of fun that is shared with the other members and shows in an easy-going, colloquial language where emoticons accentuate humour:

“Viimeaikaiset aurinkoiset päivät ovat saaneet vipinää myös jallupuskiin joten eiköhän tässä pian päästä taas tositoimiin

:D” [Recent sunny days have woken up the jala bushes so we’ll be back in business in no time. :D] (Chilifoorumi, 6.9.2005)

Chilifoorumi is an active conversation forum where presumptive cultivation constructs a consolidating theme. Hints are exchanged mutually when experts and novices share their experiences. Conversation topics are mostly launched with a question, inviting members to contribute:

“Mitenköhän paljon tarvitaan chiliä jotta saisi vaikka tuollaisen tavallisen kokoisen lasisen maustepurkillisen savuchilijauhetta?”
[How much chillies would one need to get like the amount of a regular glass spice jar of smoked chilli powder?]

This question triggered almost immediately the first reply, with practical advice:

“[...]Jettä jos normaalissa savustuspöntössä teet niin esim. habaneroja sen verran kuin saat yhteen kerrokseen pakattua.” [...if you use a regular smoking device, e.g. as much habaneros as you can pack on one tier.] (Both quotations from Chilifoorumi, 28.6.2006)

The most interesting fragments are constituted by two conversation threads: on tandoori oven building for chilli based cooking (47 posts), and on smoking techniques (74 posts). Both are eloquent examples on how chilli as a substance and as a cooking ingredient becomes a nexus of a technically advanced, craft-like occupation that requires knowledge on cultivars, as well as experience in technical arrangements needed for chilli-spiced cooking.

Themes of presumption and home-made entangle in Finnish chillitalk. This provides opportunities for displaying one’s male identity as a chilli aficionado and moreover, opens up affordances of competitive content generation and brings in a lot of fun. All this enhances community bonds. Craftsmanship, cherished amongst Finnish men, appears often with a presumptive dimension:

“Savustus onkin todellinen Tee-Se-ltse -miehen unelmakohde. Niin paljon osatekijöitä jotka vaikuttavat lopputulokseen.”
[Smoking is a real dream occupation for a DIY man. So many details that affect the final result.] (Chilifoorumi, 20.5.2006)

Technically detailed posts proliferate, providing exact dimensions of devices, explanations on construction procedures, optimal temperatures and wood varieties, as well as cooking methods. Smoking is an ancient culinary technique in Finland, and with barbeque, it represents a traditionally male arena of preparing food. Smoking devices display a creative tribe: ancient sauna ovens, juice extractors, electric ovens or fridges and self-made constructions are exhibited, all providing optimal results for their developers. The crafting process unfolds as the main distraction, rather than the culinary result, which aligns with the theory of a presumptive orientation of chilli aficionados as a foodie subtribe.

Moreover, recipes and hints are exchanged. A key word is “project”: something to keep one occupied for a long time, to display expertise and creativity, and to maintain one’s personal space at home. “Projects” of Finnish men traditionally refer to old cars, whilst chilli aficionados develop this scene by various home-made devices. In this respect, the theme of tradition is also present, with a novel interpretation, however.

The tandoori oven, a traditional Indian cooking method, is welcomed by Finnish “chilliheads” as an interesting opportunity to engineer one’s own cooking appliances, in extension to old-school barbecue systems. Most unconventional solutions for tandooris occur:

“Tässä ohje aika yksinkertaisesta uunista peltisestä roskiksesta ja isosta kukkaruukusta tehtynä. :)” [Here are instructions for a quite simple oven made from a plate garbage bin and a big flower pot :)] (Chilifoorumi, 5.4.2011)

Yet, the emoticon :) subtly conveys a cue about the humour in the suggestion. Inside humour is a part of common language, sustaining bonding. In Finnish chilli communities, it is tightly linked to male writers, emphasising their virility and dominance, in a heterosexual relationship that appears as a standard amongst contributors. One writer suggests the use of small moulds dedicated for petits-fours⁶⁴, when preparing chilli-spiced

⁶⁴ *Petit-four* in French signifies a tiny delicacy issued from baking or confectionary.

chocolate. He tags this remark with **homolöyhytys** [**gay alert wave**], which serves generally as a humorous discursive code for suspected non-heterosexual activities, clearly separated in the text by asterisks.

A heteronormative underpinning is found also in *Jatkoaika* where it is challenged only with irony:

“Totta kai. Olisi todella gay suhtautua erilaisiin mielipiteisiin avoimesti. Shish. Huumorintaju. Missä pelaa?” [Of course. It would be really gay to take an open attitude towards different opinions. Hush. Sense of humour. Where does it play?” (Jatkoaika 1.7.2008).

In most of the posts of *Chilifoorumi*, the discourse remains on a community-enhancing tone and avoids sheer conflict. A contributor, with a pseudonym evoking his apparent role in the forum that translates as “Bully”, however regularly attempts to lighten up confrontation with different degrees of insult:

“Voin kertoa, että hukkaan meni niin raaka-aineet kuin käytetty aikakin, pakastimessasi on kipollinen paskaa.” [I can tell you that both your ingredients and time were wasted, you have a bowl of shit in your freezer.] (Chilifoorumi, 16.7.2013)

Those comments are mostly not sustained by fellow members. “Bully’s” role appears as one of a jester who is tolerated since he makes the others laugh (“vegetarian pea soup is a global punishment of our sins”), although his behaviour is not emulated by other members. This is noteworthy in the framework of a community of practice: shared discourse unites the members, and the SNS forum actively contributes to maintaining this balance, when the community is articulated around a commonly cherished item such as chilli. Minor verbal battles are tolerated, as long as they do not jeopardise the feeling of togetherness.

A contrasting example is found in *Jatkoaika* that mainly features ice hockey topics. A competence-laden thread on chilli (“Pleasure from the burn”), spanning nine years of posts, displays the same degree of expertise as *Chilifoorumi*, and references are made to similar online outlets. Manifestly,

there are contributors who are active on both sites. *Jatkoaika*, moreover, accommodates aggressive verbal conflicts that are not found in *Chilifoorumi*:

“Älä viitsi. Sinä olet vakiovieras jeesustelemassa ketjuissa, minkä aiheista et ole kiinnostunut/omaa kokemusta tai [...] Toiset tykkäävät tulisesta ruuasta, toiset kaljan juonnista, toiset pitkistä juoksulenkeistä.” [Oh give up. You are a priggish regular in threads where you have no interest/experience or [...] Some like fiery food, others like drinking beer or long runs.] (*Jatkoaika*, 14.1.2008)

The post igniting the conflict proclaims that chilli has become a cultural phenomenon, a fad that can be compared to poker playing or to other fashionable male occupations, especially online. This assumption is vigorously compromised by online contributors who argue for individualism in chilli-related activities, instead of sheer trend-following. Contrasting viewpoints are emphasised more vehemently than on a “genuine” chilli site such as *Chilifoorumi*.

It is noteworthy that in the Finnish corpus, *sin*, *solace*, *comfort*, *romance*, or *indulgence* – identified as powerful totemic themes in prior research – do not stand out, and *healthism* and *responsibility* appear only in one thread on chilli and superfoods. Public discourse on emotions is traditionally somewhat atypical for Finnish men, which is a national stereotype commonly referred to. This finding strikes a chord with Holt and Thompson (2004, p17), who observe “heightened consumer pleasures”, paradoxically produced by “an emotionally inhibited masculine identity”.

The public, online context accentuates the intimidation with emotional revelations even more; writing about one’s favorite occupation does not need to involve comments on how it feels. Rare posts on sensations are mostly connected to embodied experiences:

“Itsellä nämä rauhoittaa oloa, saa semmoisen euforisen hyvän olon tunteen.” [For myself, these [chillies] calm down and make me feel like euphorically good.] (*Jatkoaika*, 1.7.2008)

7.2.1.2 Symbolic and ritualistic consumption

The literature presented in chapters 2-4 suggests a list of themes for symbolic and ritualistic consumption: *commensality, materiality, symbol, meaning, meal, gift, sensuality, emergent versus designed rituals*⁶⁵, and *addiction*. Table 8 displays how these emerge in Finnish chilli discourse, with the identified, leading frames in the right-hand column:

| SNS | Salient discursive themes identified in prior research | | | | Identified frames of discourse |
|---------------|--|-------------|-----------------|-----------------|---|
| Chillifoorumi | materiality | addiction | emergent ritual | symbol | <i>simplicity, embeddedness of solitary and displayed foodieism</i> |
| Jatkoaika | addiction | materiality | symbol | emergent ritual | |

Table 8. Symbolic and ritualistic consumption in Finnish chilli discourse.

In this context, materiality and addiction prevail. Materiality is an overarching theme, since crafting, engineering devices and growing chilli stand out as being as important, if not more, than the product itself. Materiality is tightly connected to prosumption, presented in 7.2.1.1, with construction of gadgets. Materiality of the substance itself is less present, and the embodied experiences of chilli consumption are described most depending on the heat it provokes, whilst flavour dimensions are rarely discussed. When they are, the range of expressions is mostly limited to *good, bad, tasty, juicy* or *burning*.

Chilli consumption is addictive and symbolises the masculine stamina, with a foodie-type devotion. Chilli is constantly referred to as an acquired taste necessitating initiation which generates an addictive desire of more heat. This process unfolds as a symbol of endurance and provides occasions for displaying one's sub-cultural capital (see Chapter 8):

“Mutta tulisen ruoan syöminen on asia, jota ei voi opettaa. Se vaan pitää oppia. Jos ei tykkää, ei ole pakko syödä. Toki voi tulla

⁶⁵ Emergent rituals are inherent in the community, whereas designed rituals are triggered mostly by outside marketing efforts. (Ratcliffe *et al.*, 2019).

tänne aukomaan päätään, jos tietää olevansa muita ylempänä. ”
[But eating fiery food is something that cannot be taught. It just has to be learned. If you don't like it, don't eat it. Sure you can come here and yell if you think you're above everyone else.]
(Jatkoaika 2.7.2008)

Commensality or meals are not salient features, and eating is simple: more chilli in the dish, and the next level of heat is attained. It is mostly a solitary act: “If I experience a fiery inferno in the evening, I sleep bloody well the whole night.” (Jatkoaika, 3.7.2008). Barbecue and smoking activities represent a more commensal dimension, although the discourse highlights the crafting processes of devices and the cultivar experimentations rather than a shared meal experience as the climax.

Simplicity is a salient discursive frame, less identified by prior foodie research (except e.g. Mäkelä, 2016). This very Finnish way of acting and talking embeds in a nationally cherished pattern of keeping things uncomplicated when there is no need to complicate them. It creates interesting friction with foodie-type dedication and unfolds as a Finnish version of revering a totemic ingredient:

“Itse väänsin juuri niin yksinkertaisella systeemillä chilisuklaata kuin on mahdollista. Eli fazerin sinistä vesihauteeseen ja markettiannuumia pilkottuna sekaan.” [I crafted chilli chocolate myself with just as simple a system as possible. Meaning fazer blue in a water bath, mixed with some chopped supermarket annuum.] (Chilifoorumi, 6.6.2012)⁶⁶

Simplicity connects with contemporary, omnivorous foodieism and construes one of the main frames of Finnish chilli discourse, with crafting and heteronormative masculinity. The importance of highly technical prosumption activities befits Cova's (1997) theory on the “link” being more important than the “thing”, which is typical in presumptive communities.

The people sharing meals prepared by Finnish chilliheads are somewhat irrelevant in discourse, and the ritualistic dimension is most intensive in the preparation phase where emergent rituals stem from shared activities of the

⁶⁶ For “fazer blue”, see 7.2.3.

community of practice. In this sense, the preparation can be compared to the ritualistic national tradition of heating a sauna oven, which is also a measure for one's (male) competence and a deeply symbolic act in Finnish culture. Like crafting alone in one's garage, it is also a solitary activity and translates an ingrained narrative of individualism, conveying, moreover, the ideal of being alone, preferably in the woods.

Ritualistic and totemic dimensions unfold an intriguing interplay between solitude and online disclosure of one's consumptive occupations. Their embeddedness constitutes a fourth significant discursive frame. This finding reveals an interesting dimension on how established male culture in Finland is eroding, due to the advent of social media that incontestably transforms communication culture (also Hopkins, 2017):

“Tottakai tämä tieto löytyisi googlettamalla alta viiden minuutin, mutta kysyminen täällä on jollain tavoin sosiaalisempaa.” [Of course I could google this information in less than five minutes, but asking here is somehow more social.] (Jatkoaika, 1.7.2008)

7.2.1.3 Frames and discursive strategies

Fairclough's (2015) orienting questions enable dissection of the functions in discourse: “Why is discourse as it is?”, and “What is going on in discourse and in what relations?” Judging by this corpus, Finnish chilliheads nurture a vivid and resourceful network of virtual relations online. This is made possible by online affordances, since despite its popularity, chilli growing and consumption do not feature in every man's repertory of occupations.

The main streams of discourse are constructed on sharing advice and experience on growing chilli, and on constructing home-made appliances that create bonds across this crafting sub-tribe. The entangling frames of discourse (Fairclough, 2015), as analysed in 7.2.1–2, are *crafting*, *heteronormative masculinity*, *simplicity*, and *embeddedness of solitary and displayed foodieism*. Their mutual hierarchy unfolds with heteronormative masculinity and simplicity as underpinning modes of behaviour, from where

crafting and foodieism with solitary and displayed dimensions emerge as actions. These frames are conveyed and constructed by discourse, and supported by a set of discursive strategies.

Common language is identified by prior research as a key contributor to community building, and Fairclough's third orienting question "What is the role of language in this process?" sheds light to this analysis, since language sustains the Finnish chilliscape in a number of ways. Chilli varieties are given nicknames and abbreviated⁶⁷, to enhance a discursive code that necessitates sub-cultural capital from readers, and strengthens sentiments of fellowship amongst members. The unifying humorous denomination *chilipää*, "chillihead", is borrowed from SNS in English that are often referred to, sustaining the claim of transnationality of the chilli tribe(s). References to *infernal*, *devilish* or *heavenly* taste intensify the shared imagery of heat, without other religious connotations, however.

The strong narrative of rugged, wildish masculinity (Belk & Costa, 1998) is fuelled by verbal conflicts and occasional vulgarities (Tannen, 1990). Community humour is an important player in sustaining an insiders' forum: mostly warm, yet occasionally poignant, smoothing verbal feuds.

Wodak and Meyer (2016) suggest argumentation (justification and questioning of claims) and perspectivisation (positioning one's point of view to express involvement or distance) as key discursive strategies in critical discourse studies. In Finnish chilli discourse, argumentation is practiced with technical facts, engineering vocabulary and contextual knowledge. Perspectivisation, a form of providing more than one viewpoint, appears often with a humorous nuance:

"On muuten ihan kiva kääntää toisten ruokavammaisuuksia voitoksi pähkäilemällä näitä. Laajentuu samalla omat ajatukset laatikon ulkopuolelle. Samaa teki tuo minun 'siperianleiri' kasvisruokien parissa :P" [BTW, it's nice to transform other people's eating disabilities into a victory, by pondering these.

⁶⁷ For example: *naga* (Naga Morich), *hapsu*, *habsu* or *haba* (Habanero), *jalppari* or *jala* (Jalapeño).

Alongside, one's own thoughts are broadened outside the box.
That's what my "Siberian camp" with veggie food did :P].
(Chilifoorumi, 30.8.2013)

Assuming that the nature of the forum considerably affects the discursive strategies applied, sustains the overarching theme of foods that are perceived as totemic: they strengthen a community that gathers around them, regardless of deviating aspects in their use. Moreover, on both Finnish chilli sites, discursive strategies vary depending on the topic, and mutual assistance remains a context where online solidarity is more prominently polite than in other types of discussion threads.

A discursive strategy that is rarely identified in prior literature and yet occurring throughout the Finnish corpus is *unpretentiousness*. Stemming from the cherished frame of simplicity, it stands out amongst Finnish foodie consumers online.

"Mausteeksi yrttejä ja pippuria, ja vähän muutakin mitä sattuu käteen osumaan (sweet chili sauce toimii myös hyvin)." [Season with herbs and pepper and other stuff you might have on hand (sweet chilli sauce works also well.)] (Jatkoaika, 30.8.2013)

This contrasts with prior research that has mainly concentrated on foodie discourse in English, highlighting foodie consumers' desire for expertise, culinary details and high quality (e.g. Johnston & Baumann, 2009, 2015): discourses of sub-tribal foodie consumption such as "chilliheadism" may deviate significantly from the discursive frames and strategies identified for all foodies. Moreover, Finnish chilli discourse seeks to highlight the totemic ingredient more than the contributors, which befits the national ideal of not trying to appear as too important, or to stand out too much. If one does, there must be a solid reason, and technical savoir-faire or heat endurance emerge as discursive codes that justify discursive self-enhancement.

Two final observations are made in consideration of prior research on CMD interaction. Kozinets (2007, 2010) distinguishes four main types of online interaction in consumption: cruising, bonding, "geeking" and building. In Finnish chillitalk, (male) community bonding is the most salient interaction

type, supported by geeking-type of interaction where eccentric, specialised knowledge is displayed.

When using concepts defined by de Valck *et al.* (2009) on communication constructs of online foodies (sharing knowledge, negotiating norms, opposing values and celebrating similarities), Finnish chilli discourse is articulated mainly by sharing knowledge, with occasional opposition of values across ignition of controversial topic discussions.

7.2.2 Chocolate

The Finnish chocolatescape represents a more balanced gender presence than the sites on chilli, however, with women posting more comments than men. Topics are quite dissimilar, when chilli and chocolate are compared. Hence, their totemic functions as a substance rallying a group of online consumers diverge.

Finnish chocolate-themed SNS are of an informative and pragmatic nature. Chocolate as a totemic food emerges as an object of tasting, to accumulate culinary capital, and as a nexus for cherishing the beloved ones with treats. Moreover, chocolate appears typically in a larger context of home baking with ritualistic, warm sessions of planning, preparing and sharing chocolate treats with one's nearest. They have an altruistic, gift-giving dimension where emotional capital flourishes.

7.2.2.1 Community building and bonding

Finnish chocolate lovers are a joyful, and above all, a pragmatic consumer tribe. Feelings of community and bonding are sustained in SNS where the passion for chocolate can be shared across joint consumption styles. Table 9 displays the emergence of focal themes suggested by prior research, complemented with broader frames identified here:

| SNS | Salient discursive themes identified in prior research | | | | Identified frames of discourse |
|--------------------|--|-------------|-----------------|----------------|---|
| Suklaayhdistys | indulgence | identity | common language | responsibility | <i>learning</i> |
| Kinuskikissa | home-made | indulgence | comfort | convenience | <i>learning, emotional capital, unpretentiousness, simplicity</i> |
| Suklaapossu leipoo | home-made | convenience | tradition | indulgence | |

Table 9. Community building and bonding in Finnish chocolate discourse.

Chocolate baking communities nurture bonding by a shared interest for home-made treats: *Kinuskikissa* and *Suklaapossu leipoo*⁶⁸. The fact that chocolate is the main baking ingredient brings in an indulgence-seeking dimension, whilst a foodie identity is less salient and entwined to a desire of providing comfort and warmth with self-made delicacies. *Suklaayhdistys*, the Finnish Chocolate Association, differs from those two by a distinct orientation of sophisticated tasting experiences and by emphasising the skills and the culinary capital needed, to become a real connoisseur.

Suklaayhdistys is a community of practice for appreciative learners where an espoused foodie identity is construed by indulgence in chocolate, by sharing knowledge and by growing concerns of responsibility. The approach is straightforward, in a typically Finnish way:

“Suklaa on herkkua, sehän tiedetään. Kuinka moni kuitenkin tietää miten ja mistä suklaata tehdään ja missä ovat tämän herkun juuret?” [Chocolate is a treat, we know that. But how many know how and from what chocolate is produced and where it originates from?] (*Suklaayhdistys*, no date)

The main activity is tasting with taste panels and respective reports. The condition for joining the association is to provide evidence of one's proficiency in chocolate evaluation. Moreover, a candidate is expected to be able to describe flavours with a more elaborate linguistic repertoire than “just good or bad”, which establishes a requirement of substantial discursive

⁶⁸ Hereinafter abbreviated as *Suklaapossu*.

capital in community activities. Furthermore, reinforcing discursive resources of readers is an objective, and the site provides an interesting vista on functions of discourse in enhancement of consumer bonding, across joint learning experiences.

Learning and sharing skills are key actions in *Suklaayhdistys*, with common language conveying totemic qualities. The site provides a lot of detailed information on cacao varieties, on benefits of chocolate as an ingredient and on elaborate production processes. A large section features taste panels of chocolate and derived products. The excerpts in the corpus include glossaries, terminology and explanations that provide a solid set of resources for anyone interested, since the documents are accessible without membership.

Discourse in panels reveals a very Finnish ethos of chocolate consumption. Panel posts on the most popular and iconic chocolate brand in Finland, *Fazerin*⁶⁹ *Sininen* [Fazer Blue], produced with real milk, display almost poetic comments on a taste that is estimated to unite not just foodies but the entire nation: despite its simplicity, the taste is inimitable and “recognised by every Finn”. However, the language describing the Blue is not very evocative in terms of flavour, since the adjectives used are relatively general: *good, smooth, traditional, pure, not too sweet, classic*. In this respect, the requirement of an elaborate discursive code in flavours is not fully respected, which leads to the observation that the position of the Blue as a national symbol also gives it a specific position discursively.

“Ah, tämän maku on jäänyt mieleen jo lapsuudesta. Tiedän jo etukäteen mille tämä maistuu, mutta silti se on aina yhtä nautintoa.” [Oh, this taste is familiar already from childhood. I know beforehand how it tastes, but still it is always pure indulgence.] (*Suklaayhdistys*, 19.6.2008)

⁶⁹ Fazer Group is the largest confectionary manufacturer in Finland and the owner of many nationally cherished brands.

Fazer Blue is highly indulgent, a comfort food *par excellence*. According to the panelists, a moment with the Blue provides for a Finn a short break from everyday activities, with the well-known treat melting in the mouth, not accentuating any particular taste but the “chocolateness”.⁷⁰ Online evaluators consider its bonding capacity as surpassing the established borderlines of good taste.

Contributors suggest that the Blue also unites Finns on a more general level: one doesn’t need to be a chocolate aficionado to appreciate this chocolate. On the contrary, it is a chocolaty totem of the Finnish taste. When a nationally cherished treat is in question, regular taste issues such as the degree in cocoa or the experienced oiliness become less significant than with other products.

Moreover, the consensus on the “Finnishness” of the Blue reflects an inclination for simple, uncomplicated tastes that is characteristic of Finns with chocolate and in more general foodie discourse. Occasionally, it takes tones of culinary modesty:

“Me suomalaiset elämme maassa, jossa tummien laatusuklaiden arvostus vasta nostaa päätään [...] Onneksi meillä on Internet.”
[We Finns live in a country where dark quality chocolates have just started to gain appreciation. [...] Luckily, we have the Internet.] (Suklaayhdistys homepage, no date).

Even critical comments give credit to the classic that has become a synonym for Finnish chocolate. “It never lets you down”. This is a somewhat rare feature in SNS discourse where confronting viewpoints proliferate even in settings where like-minded consumers are gathered, especially on matters of food taste (de Valck, 2007).

Linguistically, there is deviation between the comments on the Blue and on other chocolates. Panel posts on a Hungarian chocolate that keeps the

⁷⁰ Advertising for the Blue has played on this feature for a long time, and launched a new interpretation for a “blue moment”; referring to the concept as “a Blue moment”. Nostalgia, romance and memories are strongly embedded in this narrative.

leading position of the top 100 chocolates reveals a much more versatile vocabulary than Fazer Blue. The winner is appreciated with adjectives like *peppery, sharp, toasted, fruity, plum-like* or *silky*, and with elaborate sentence structures, whereas the Blue, holding the second position, is characterised less with adjectives describing the flavour and more with references to eating contexts: childhood memories, tradition, comforting, easiness of consumption – and because it is recognised as the National Chocolate. Interestingly, the requirements of an elaborate linguistic code are applied differently with an exotic product than with the national heritage. Discourse on the Blue reinforces the bonding capacity of chocolate with allusions to its comfort-abiding character, whilst other chocolates are appreciated for their quality and flavours that require more knowledge and initiation to the matter.

The most popular baking blog and community in Finland, *Kinuskikissa* [Caramel Cat], gathers followers cherishing home-made goods that provide comfort and a sense of belonging, alongside accumulating baking skills. This is ideal when too heavy an effort is not required. Most chocolate foodies cannot spend their entire leisure time with baking, however much this occupation may satisfy them, which entwines the themes of convenience and practicality with indulgence and home-made in discourse. *Kinuskikissa* members are skillful bakers and display expertise in comparing chocolate types, origins and consistencies depending on their qualities in baking:

“Hauraissa koristeissa, joiden tulee pysyä jäämäkästi muodossaan, on Brunberg ykkönen.” [In delicate ornaments that need to keep solidly their shape, Brunberg is nr 1.] (*Kinuskikissa*, 18.1.2011).

Chocolate is a leading theme in the community, with 429 recipes (in early 2020). Good taste is the most appreciated characteristic, however ethical concerns also arise: a contributor reminds members of a TV documentary on unethical production conditions of cacao that should also affect Finnish consumers. The posts evoke only vague sympathy however, since the quality of chocolate remains the main concern, in order to obtain optimal technical results with an ingredient demanding skills and know-how:

“Jos eroa ei mausta löydy niin silloin tietysti valitsen eettisemmän tai lähellä tuotetun tuotteen.” [If there is no difference in taste, then of course I choose a more ethical or a local product.]
(Kinuskikissa, 31.1.2011)

A search with the word “ethical” yields a recipe of a chocolate cake including a baking challenge, to increase consumption of ethically produced, fair-trade and organic ingredients (Kinuskikissa, 26.10.2010). Altogether 42 comments express a positive attitude to the challenge and generate suggestions on alternatives to traditional produce. Since 2010, an evolution of consumption practices has been enabled by the increased variety of ingredients available via fair trade: consecutively, in 2019, a search with “fair” results in 219 recipes on the site, with recommended products.

In *Suklaayhdistys*, the theme of responsibility is more present than on baking sites, across fair-trade and organic chocolates that are evaluated with other chocolate types. The preferences of most panelists reveal that good taste is often sacrificed for the sake of healthism or ethics in production:

“[...] levy, joka on sekä luomua että reilua kauppaa. Sinällään positiivista, mutta miksi ei voisi taas laatu olla yhtä hyvää kuin tuote on eettisesti?” [...a bar that is both organic and fair trade. Positive in itself, but again, why couldn't the quality be as good as the product is ethically?] (Suklaayhdistys 27.11.2016)

For bakers, the good taste is naturally important, yet the baking qualities of chocolate matter the most. *Suklaapossu* displays a passionate home baker developed into a popular blogger, with the motto “The quest for a perfect baking product never ends.” Chocolate baking unites the community of *Suklaapossu* followers around the totemic ingredient, interpreted by a blogger who is easy to approach and eager to share her expertise. Readers actively comment on posts, with only positive and empowering messages. Smileys accentuate the feelings of community:

“Oot kyllä niin mahtava tyyppi että ei ole suosiosi yhtään yllätys ? Ihania herkkuja nämäkin kaikki! Aina olet tarkka resepteissäsi ja autat kaikkia ystävällisesti!” [You're such a great person so your success comes as no surprise? Wonderful treats all these again!]

You are so precise in your recipes and always ready to help!
(Suklaapossu, a reader's post on 31.12.2017)

"Voi kiitos X kauniista sanoistasi! <3 Tuo oli niin ihana kuulla 😊"
[Oh thank you X for your kind words <3 That was so wonderful to hear 😊] (The blogger's reply, 31.12.2017)

The secret of this family-like warmth is the engagement: rapid replies to technical questions, congratulations for readers' achievements and mutual compliments for development ideas, with the same discursive strategies as in *Kinuskikissa*. Readers are brought to the same level as the blogger, which enhances solidarity and attachment that are characteristic of a community of practice. The blog sustains a comfort-seeking community feeling that envelops both the blogger and her followers.

Bonding is encouraged by chocolate treats to be shared with family and friends. The comments on solitary indulgement with chocolate are tagged with humour, which conveys awareness of dangers of overeating:

"Ja nuo ylimääräiset palat joita jäi leikkausvaiheessa yli. Niitä oli niin ihana napostella samalla kun leikkeli sydänpaloja. Pitäähän laadunvarmistus suorittaa 😊". [And those extra bites that remain after cutting. They are so lovely to chunk when cutting the hearts. One must surely take care of quality assurance 😊].
(Suklaapossu 1.8.2018)

Recipes suggest luscious treats that are nevertheless relatively simple to achieve. The theme of convenience is indeed strong in discourse on chocolate baking where simplicity and speed are emphasised, without compromising foodie-type commitment. As observed for chilli, simplicity is a frequent theme in Finnish foodie discourse. This brings an additional dimension to extant foodie research based mainly on English-speaking consumers.

In contemporary Finnish foodways, various options for cooking and baking "without everything" are common: diets without animal products, sugar, fat or gluten are extremely popular and consumers seek for technical hints online. Obtaining beautiful home-made products without basic ingredients,

nevertheless without compromising good taste, is not an easy task. Both *Kinuskikissa* and *Suklaapossu* succeed in bringing in their knowhow, which increases the fidelity of blog followers. A nationwide favourite amongst home baked treats, mocca-flavoured brownies, is reinterpreted for the joy of readers-bakers in many versions:

“Niissä otin huomioon sekä munattoman että maidottoman ruokavalion ja voi että kun tuli niin pehmoisia, ettei kukaan meistä syöjistä olisi uskonut niissä olevan mitään erikoista.”
[With those, I considered diets without both eggs and dairy products and my, did they become so fluffy that no one could guess that there was anything special in them.] (Suklaapossu, 15.2.2018)

7.2.2.2 Symbolic and ritualistic consumption

Table 10 presents discursive themes sustaining symbolic and ritual consumption of chocolate online in Finnish. *Sensuality* is in brackets: although senses and embodiment are salient themes, the findings do not sustain this dimension as topical in Finnish, but *sensoriality* is suggested in turn.

| SNS | Salient discursive themes identified in prior research | | | | Identified frames of discourse |
|----------------|--|--------------|--------------|--------------|--|
| Suklaayhdistys | emergent ritual | commensality | addiction | (sensuality) | <i>sensoriality, innocent embodiment</i> |
| Kinuskikissa | commensality, gift | materiality | (sensuality) | addiction | |
| Suklaapossu | commensality, gift | (sensuality) | addiction | materiality | |

Table 10. Symbolic and ritualistic consumption in Finnish chocolate discourse.

Symbolic and ritualistic consumption are mostly expressed with themes of commensality, gifts and addiction. In *Suklaayhdistys*, the main ritual is shared tasting that becomes a virtual commensal experience, when documented online:

“Luen jälkikäteen muiden arvioita ja näen kuinka arvostettu suklaa on asiantuntijoiden mielestä. Vähän huono omatunto

iskee kun annan tälle vain 3 pistettä...” [I read comments from others afterwards and I see how appreciated this chocolate is by experts. Bad conscience hits me a bit when I award only 3 points...] (Suklaayhdistys, 2.5.2014)

In taste panel postings, one can indeed sense how an ingredient is ascribed with contemporary totemic qualities, as it is tasted, described, revered or sometimes discarded by consumers sharing the same passion.

Foodies consider the intoxicating bittersweetness and extremely rich flavours of chocolate as addictive. This is expressed by locutions of constantly wanting more, needing chocolate, thinking of it, or having pleasure in baking with it. However, the word *addiction* does not occur at all in the Finnish corpus on chocolate although the loan word *addiktio* is relatively common in Finnish. It includes a nuance of danger and prohibition which results in the use of euphemisms: “this is what I eat for my passion” (Suklaayhdistys, 3.7.2005).

Moreover, chocolate is a totemic ingredient for commensality. It brings the community together to celebrate and to provide comfort and pleasure, across acts of baking in particular. Chocolate is a symbol for caring and sharing, and its addictive qualities are constituted by sensorial, embodied pleasures provided by the ingredient and the baking process together:

“Olisin voinut lusikoida tuota suklaamoussemaista kuorrutetta pelkiltään kulhosta vaikka kuinka paljon, nams!” [I could have spooned loads of that chocolate mousse-like glazing straight out of the bowl, yummy!] (Suklaapossu 10.4.2018).

Chocolate baking is a symbolic act where emotional capital is cherished, and creations with chocolate constitute gifts to express love and caring.

Moreover, baking simple treats such as mocca brownies is very common in various forms of fund-raising for the children’s sports and leisure clubs.⁷¹ The

⁷¹ *Suklaapossu* refers to this tradition and provides several recipes for brownies, for the ease of busy parents.

same tendency is identified by Cappellini (2010), across family meals emerging as a gift of devotional love.

Experiences are keenly shared, to display one's expertise, which strengthens the dimension of foodieism with a national interpretation. Finnish food culture tends to prefer home bakings to ready-made treats. In foodie contexts, home-made refers moreover to dedicated amateurism where food has a considerable role in leisure time, and preparing elaborate confections reflects a quest for unique flavours and high quality.

Materiality is an important theme in baking where a variety of utensils, gadgets and ingredients are needed and generate manifold consumption occasions. Another dimension of materiality accentuates the sensorial effects that baking, tasting and eating provide. The baking process is an embodied ritual, providing pleasure for the baker and the guests. With the overarching goal of simplicity, it is convenient that the two can be combined:

"Mutakakkumaisen tahmeat, kosteat, mehevät, pehmeät, supersuklaiset browniespalat ovat ihanan helppoja ja nopeita tehdä." [Sticky, moist, juicy, soft and super-chocolaty mud cake-type brownies are wonderfully easy and quick to prepare.] (Suklaapossu, 8.2.2019)

Hence, baking as an occupation is addictive in its own right: smoothness of doughs, tasting, and sweet smell invite repeated accomplishments. Yet, in Finnish, senses appear in expressions of embodiment in general, rather than across allusions to eroticism or sex. They merit to be defined as *sensoriality*. Performance of embodiment in Finnish chocolate discourse can therefore be defined as *innocent*, when compared with English and French data. Interestingly, themes of sin and romance, often linked with chocolate (Mäkelä, Bettany & Stevens, 2018) do not appear in Finnish as much as in English and French. Moreover, sin is perceived, indirectly, as the sin of

overeating, although the word itself appears only in a derived adjective “sinful”, with few occurrences of “sinfully good”.⁷²

The “sin of flesh”, with allusions to erotic connotations of chocolate use that are common in social media or advertising (Chapter 4) is also absent. In this respect, even the most totemic meanings of chocolate remain innocent, which especially befits the national narratives of non-eroticised baking (Mäkelä, Bettany & Stevens, 2018) and foodie contexts where ingredients are taken very seriously. Subtribal consumption found on chocolate porn sites does not feature in this corpus.

In more capital-intensive contexts – referring to culinary and discursive capitals – totemic consumption emerges in ritualistic sessions of tasting and detailed reviewing. This consumptive field is found in *Suklaayhdistys* where the tasting process unfolds as an emergent ritual of the community. Precise instructions are given and members are expected to respect them, to be able to enjoy the genuine taste experience of chocolate varieties: visual, olfactory and flavour aspects are all considered, and even the sound of the breaking chocolate bar becomes a part of the manifold, embodied ritual:

“Tumma, kuiva tuoksu. Kova pala, napsahtaa äänekkäästi haukatessa.” [A dark, dry smell. A hard bit, snaps loudly when crunched.] (*Suklaayhdistys*, 20.1.2010)

The scoring system is very complicated, which enhances the impression of a serious activity, emulating wine reviewing. It strengthens, moreover, the credibility of the site and the foodie identity of members. For “aficionados” (*cf.* Maciel & Wallendorf, 2016), knowledge and experience are constituents of culinary capital, which aligns with the frames identified by Johnston and Baumann (2009, 2015). The most elaborate discursive reproductions of the entire Finnish corpus are found on *Suklaayhdistys* taste panels.

⁷² In Mäkelä, Bettany and Stevens (2018), the corpus is not entirely foodie-generated, as it is in the present study. This results in discursive deviation.

For the chocolate sub-tribe of foodies, tasting and reviewing are an emergent ritual that stems from the online community and its non-commercial objectives, and not from outside contributors such as brands. In chocolate baking, the ritualistic experience is bound to the commensal circle it provides, which may become addictive for members. However, the theme of *meal* is not particularly present in Finnish. Although eating appears as the final act, a full meal as a commensal ritual is not prominent here, whilst commensality occurs across sharing of chocolate delicacies.

Finnish discourse reflects offline reality where Finns are not as attached to meal traditions in terms of time and setting as e.g. the French. A totemic, commensal experience can be achieved by a tasting panel or by consuming a home-made product, and the notion of a meal does not stand out as a ritualistic prerequisite.

7.2.2.3 Frames and discursive strategies

Discourse always reflects the phenomena considered as important by its contributors, and the elements that form their contextual reality. The Finnish foodie identity is constantly construed and negotiated, in online interaction, in settings where pleasurable experiences are mostly connected to domestic activities.

Online chocolate discourse is shaped by the overarching objectives to share knowledge and sentiments of togetherness, and to display emotional attachment. The cultural context of Finnish foodieism pertains to discursive reproductions where practical insights often overrule linguistic sophistication.

Foodies are avid learners and online fora provide excellent arenas to keep learning: chocolate as well as chilli provide almost endless opportunities to enhance one's knowledge and skills. *Learning* stands out as a significant frame of chocolate discourse, which is typical of foodie behavior also in non-totemic contexts. It takes various shapes: display of what one has learned; desire to learn more; community learning across shared information and

comments; or actively seeking advice (discussed in Chapter 8). In terms of de Valck *et al.* (2009), the principal discursive construct is sharing knowledge, whilst this function is supported by celebrating similarities throughout shared experiences.

Typically Finnish features are frames of *unpretentiousness* and *simplicity* that convey similar discursive aspirations as in the chilli corpus. In chocolate baking, unpretentiousness shows in preparing delicious treats in a simple and time-saving way, with respect for all kinds of diets. Even the most skillful bloggers or chocolate connoisseurs display their expertise without self-enhancement, and focus on pragmatic aspects. A nationally cherished discursive strategy unfolds in the modesty of online contributors, with frequent self-effacement of one's achievements and distinctive humour that encourages novices to undertake similar efforts with their culinary benchmarks.

In contextual knowledge, an underpinning orientation is observed: despite recent advancements, Finnish chocolate culture lags slightly behind its international counterparts. It is noteworthy that some corpus fragments date from early 2010s, and local chocolate culture has undergone considerable progress since that era. Yet, the strategy of keeping an unpretentious tone in online discourse is distinguishable even in recent sources.

Display of *emotional capital* across gifts of chocolate is a salient frame and contributes powerfully to totemic experiences where attachment is paramount. Caring and showing love with chocolate occurs mostly in family contexts where it has functions of celebration, coping with daily routines, and soothing in times of distress. Whilst practicality is valued, this dimension reflects the interplay of convenience and care, enacting one of the principal antinomies of taste (Warde, 1997). It results in bonding and building of the community activities as the most salient interaction types (Kozinets, 2010). Moreover, bonding occurs on two dimensions: in the online community and in the family sphere where the material results of online interaction are consumed.

Embodied experiences are conveyed neutrally and with an innocent ethos. Embodiment by sensoriality brings an additional dimension to current chocolate theorising: not all chocolate talk is gender-regulated or sensually laden. Chocolate is manifold and foodie consumers in the Finnish corpus take a neutral, albeit respectful attitude towards it.

Discursive strategies reflect the context, the communicating people and the topics in the corpus. With chocolate, the argumentation is mostly based on pragmatic aspects such as technical facts in contexts of product reviewing. Intensification by use of qualifying adjectives is not very frequent, and views are expressed in a straightforward, declarative manner. The discursive strategy of perspectivisation is somewhat camouflaged, and posts with a different viewpoint are rare. They are mainly found where questions of good taste are opposed to ethicality. Diverging views are, moreover, encouraged by bloggers, which generate long discussion threads on product qualities and different eating orientations. Yet, the discourse remains polite and respectful, and there is no such argumentation on claims as on chilli sites.

Judging by this corpus, the more specialised the foodie community is, the more elaborate linguistic resources are used to convey meanings.

Suklaayhdistys requires discursive competences from its members and enhances them which results in that elaborate culinary capital also includes a dimension of discursive capital. This befits the presupposition that the Finnish foodie discourse employs a more limited register than French or English, and that creating convincing culinary discourse in Finnish would require an extra effort. In French and English data, there is no evidence on matching expectations.

7.3 Chilli and chocolate as totemic foods in English

Data fragments in English stem from SNS based in Great Britain and in the United States, whilst comments from online readers and members may originate from any geographical origin. Therefore, this study does not include

linguistic consideration of regional varieties, although the provenance of sites in English is mentioned.

7.3.1 Chilli

“Chili, chili con carne, Texas red—whatever you call that savory concoction of meat, grease, and fire—is the natural child of the arguing state of mind.” (Dave de Witt, 6.8.2008, citing John Thorne)

Chilli and its derived products⁷³ bring together foodie-oriented consumers online, and not only in food feasts and eating competitions in the actual world. The sub-tribe of chillihead (or “chilehead”)⁷⁴ foodies concentrates on promoting burning food and on growing chilli cultivars that maximise the sensation. Heat provokes ardent feelings, and English chillitalk unfolds as a highly interesting discursive foodscape where argumentation and conflict cohabit with warm brotherhood. In English as in Finnish, chilli is an arena with masculine dominance (see Chapter 9).

7.3.1.1 Community building and bonding

“I have just one group of people to thank; the one million people in Chilehead Nation.” (Burn Blog, 26.4.2015)

Themes of identity, conflict and home-made or tradition emerge as main components supporting community building and bonding in English chilli discourse. Chilli eating is an ingrained tradition, and it enhances one’s identity in geographical (locality) and emotional terms. Eating chilli, especially in the totemic dish of chili con carne, also enhances sentiments of comfort and perpetuates cherished traditions. The conflict dimension is entangled with competitiveness that emerges across eating challenges, extreme heat resistance and cooking contests. Conflicts erupt in forms of taste arguments

⁷³ In the corpus in English, *chilli*, *chile* or *chili/chile/chilli pepper* describes the fruit of the Capsicum plant, whilst *chili* refers mostly to a spicy dish commonly prepared in the United States (abbreviated from *chili con carne*), which is one of the most salient topics on chilli sites in US English.

⁷⁴ “Chilehead” and “chilihead” are both found in data.

and cooking styles, although in the blog genre, these are less salient than in conversation fora, such as the Finnish chilli sites.

Table 11 displays the discursive themes and frames with the same protocol as in previous sections:

| SNS | Salient discursive themes identified in prior research | | | | Identified frames of discourse |
|--|--|-------------|-----------|------------|--------------------------------|
| Burn Blog (including Fiery Foods and Dave de Witt) | identity | conflict | home-made | tradition | <i>endurance, challenge</i> |
| Scott Roberts | identity | tradition | conflict | indulgence | |
| Chilli Temple | home-made | conflict | identity | fun | |
| Clifton Chilli Club | fun | prosumption | identity | tradition | |

Table 11. Community building and bonding in English chilli discourse.

A “chillihead” foodie identity emerges as the leitmotiv for this discourse permeated by masculinity. Community-level bonding is enhanced by distinguishing true chilli aficionados from non-initiated consumers, upon the evaluation of their heat resistance (US), or because they do not share the same affection for chilli (UK).

An espoused identity makes the community more coherent when it is constantly referred to. Scott Roberts’ blog-type website (US) is an outstanding herald for heat and masculinity sustaining this identity building. The home page of the blog, dedicated to “hot sauce, BBQ and spicy food”, showcases fieriness, with a picture of the blogger in front of flames and the slogan “Where you turn for the burn!” Here, the burning effects of chilli pepper have the protagonist role, and heroic stories of astonishing consumption capacities are revealed in the section “Firetalkers”.

In an interview with the World Record holder of eating extremely hot Carolina Reaper chillies displays a daredevil champion who admits his suffering in the

effort and still seeks additional opportunities to outshine in the chilli community.

“Don’t get me wrong. I feel the burn. I feel the heat. But the feeling and the flavor and the joy I get from consumption is great. The heat really doesn’t bother me. My brain and my body kind of know what to expect.” (Scott Roberts, 5.12.2015)

The capability of consuming the hottest varieties is an identity-enhancing factor, which also appears in evaluative reviews on chilli products. In June 2019, the site displays 1240 reviews where pungency serves as a distinctive factor between average consumers and chilli aficionados:

“This stuff has healthy doses of naga (AKA bhut jolokia) fire present. It’s almost a sneaky and residual heat. Bliss is for chileheads and for the most daring of mild mouths only.” (Scott Roberts, 16.5.2011)

The US-originated corpus speaks of the totemic, unificatory power of chilli, which is present in local foodways across many cooking contests and traditional serving outlets and, consequently, in online fora describing these activities. The totemic nature resides as much in the presence of chilli pepper in the nationally cherished dish as in the ingredient itself. Chili con carne is a relatively simple dish prepared with greasy meat, chilli peppers, varying vegetables and condiments, which enables debates on right and wrong culinary traditions. “One man’s chili is another man’s axle grease.” (A citation in Dave de Witt). Consequently, there are established borderlines in preparation, and a key theme in discourse is vehement argumentation on cooking styles:

“There’s no recipe for it, only disputation, and almost anyone’s first thought after a taste of someone else’s version, no matter how much it pleases the throat, is that they could make it better.” (Dave de Witt, citing John Thorne, 6.7.2008)

The same post cites writers claiming the conflict-provoking character of chili that “starts fights and feuds.” (Dave de Witt, 6.7.2008)

De Witt's blog emphasises knowledge in cultivation and preparation of chilli, since the chilehead community is constantly asking for more heat, and this competitive dimension may become risky for non-initiated consumers. Eventually, competing by Scoville units can compromise culinary purposes:

"These home growers, of course, get to brag to their friends that they are growing the hottest chile pepper in the world, but once that fun is over, they are struck with the realization that they now have all these pods that are so hot they are nearly inedible."
(Dave de Witt, 19.10.2008)

With identity, competitive challenges emerge as a key theme: rivalry in expertise in chilli cultivation and cooking, and endurance in consumption. Moreover, "bragging" about one's achievements is considered as an ingrained element amongst aficionados, which contrasts with the Finnish data.

Embodiment unfolds in a very concrete way in fragments on painful consumption challenges where the extreme heat can eventually provoke an "out-of-body-experience", as in this competition:

"Yeah, the level of cramping and pain I was in for a half an hour after I stopped consuming, until I was able to purge...Scott, it was an out-of-body experience. The profuse sweating, the doubling over...you know, your body kind of goes into shock. My arms started shaking uncontrollably and my hands were cramping up. It was definitely not a pleasant experience." (Scott Roberts, 5.12.2016)

Notwithstanding the general tendency of chilliheads to compete, English chilli discourse does not emphasise competition across crafting of chilli-related devices, or sharing this type of expertise, as in Finnish. Rivalry emerges predominantly throughout heat endurance where Scoville Heat Units are the principal measure of success.

Where competition prevails, conflicts arise easily. *The Chilli Temple* is a British site including a closed Facebook community as well as recipes, a blog

and related commercial content.⁷⁵ Discourse in the blog section evokes community friction:

“[...]me and my good friend [...] continued to help new growers who had found the site and we slowly developed our small community. No bullshit, no bravado, no egos, no financial gain. Its amazing how the art of chilli growing is now in full throttle and these idiots who think they are expert chilli growers actually only know what it is today.” (The Chilli Temple, 24.7.2017)

Scott Roberts (10.7.2017) describes a similar development in US chilehead camaraderie from where the “sense of family” has disappeared. This rise-and-fall discourse on community erosion aligns with findings on Dutch foodie communities by de Valck (2007) who evokes tribal wars online. Roberts elicits a backlash in the online community, since in his opinion, “the overall camaraderie” of the sites have made a “turn to the worse”, eroding the family feeling. Emotional acknowledgments follow the statement of closing down his popular fiery food podcast; comrades and colleagues who have supported sentiments of togetherness get credit. This post can be read as the farewells of a tired warrior; however, it closes in an uplifting scene of hope:

“Thank you, everyone. God bless you, Jesus saves, and until next time, KEEP IT BURNIN’!!!” (Scott Roberts, 24.7.2017)

Moreover, Dave de Witt (6.7.2008, a quotation) states that “the chilidom” has been irrevocably divided in two parts like the Baptist church, evoking the religious metaphor to describe the chilli community.

Interestingly, even conflicts can have a community-enhancing function when they emerge as strengthening the membership and highlight differences with “the others”. Moreover, internal conflicts can make the community stronger if controversial topics are thoroughly discussed and closed (also de Valck, 2007). Conflicts may remain on a verbal level, or entail disruption of the entire SNS community, eventually leading to a cathartic renewal.

⁷⁵ Discourse from the Facebook section is not included here, since closed communities requiring registration are left out of the corpus.

Discourse in *The Chilli Temple* is less self-enhancing than on the US sites. The blogger does not consider himself in an absolute expert's position; on the contrary: he even shares unsuccessful experiences, "for a bit of a laugh" which brings the text closer to Finnish chilli discourse than to the American. It strengthens belongingness with the ones who are still on the same side:

"So if your looking for some inspiration or passion to get you going this season, i hope this gives you a bit, and a laugh at the same time. Old school chilli grower, man and boy." (The Chilli Temple, 22.4.2017)

A presumptive orientation is strong: experience of growing tips is exchanged, and seeds and seedlings are traded. *The Chilli Temple* maintains a non-self-enhancing tone with presumptive occupations as well:

"[...] I know there are many other growers out there on my level of culinary interest and cultural intrigue, so anybody who is interested in a seedling for any of the varieties can just get in touch with me either here or through facebook." (The Chilli Temple, 12.1.2018)

Clifton Chilli Club was founded in 2009 by four chilli enthusiasts, "as a means of meeting like-minded individuals and having fun" (Clifton Chilli Club, 2019). Online followers are actively invited to contribute with stories, reviews and videos, which makes the site a genuine community of practice. A salient feature in *Clifton Chilli Club* is that the taste is highlighted more than the burning effects:

"Subject to percentage, we know that sauces with these peppers will carry heat (which is something we love) but it's the flavour we want more than the heat." (Has the extreme sauce had its day? Clifton Chilli Club, 2019)

Online readers are invited to reconsider marketing efforts for extremely hot chilli products, with compromising examples from eating contests where violently pungent products are commercialised. In this respect, *Clifton Chilli Club* emerges as a community where the very origin of chilli in all its versatility is praised, rather than as an arena for extremists seeking for fire. Contest experiences are described from the viewpoint of sharing and

learning (quotation 1), which marks a difference from the US-originating discourse highlighting individual endurance (2):

(1) *“From the outset, before the first pepper had landed in the willing hands of the participants, all onlookers were cheering and excited for the test of endurance to come.”* (Hot sauce with everything magazine by Clifton Chilli Club, summer 2019)

(2) *“Yeah. Even within the chilehead ranks, there are a few people who are seemingly superhuman with their super-hot chile pepper heat tolerance.”* (Scott Roberts, 5.12.2016)

Themes of responsibility or romance, identified in prior research as conveyors of community-type bonding, are not significant in this part of the corpus. Moreover, with the exact word “health”, there is one single occurrence:

“ [Chilli] offers up so many good things for a person's health and well being.” (Clifton Chilli Club, 27.9.2019)

Chillihead identity, conflict and heat tolerance emerge as leitmotifs of bonding and community building with chilli. They are however strongly entwined with unifying dimensions provided by presumptive sharing and cultivation of inside humour.

7.3.1.2 Symbolic and ritualistic consumption

Chilli sustains consumption behavior where spheres of traditional masculinity are embraced and nurtured, and frequent religious or spiritual metaphors enhance symbolic and ritualistic elements in discourse.

Addiction, commensality and symbol stand out as key themes for symbolic and ritualistic food consumption, with materiality. Table 12 displays the discursive themes and the frames conveying these dimensions:

| SNS | Salient discursive themes identified in prior research | | | | Identified frames of discourse |
|--|--|--------------|-----------------|-----------------|---|
| Burn Blog (including Fiery Foods and Dave de Witt) | Addiction | Commensality | Symbol | Emergent ritual | <i>protection of masculine spheres</i> <i>secular spirituality</i> |
| Scott Roberts | Symbol | Addiction | Materiality | Emergent ritual | |
| Chilli Temple | Materiality | Commensality | Symbol | Emergent ritual | |
| Clifton Chilli Club | Symbol | Addiction | Emergent ritual | Materiality | |

Table 12. Symbolic and ritualistic consumption in English chilli discourse.

Competition is a key process in addictive consumption where consuming the hottest varieties is an emergent, deeply embodied ritual that distinguishes genuine chilliheads from the “average guy”:

“The heat really doesn’t bother me. My brain and my body kind of know what to expect. It’s not as much of a ‘shock’ to my system anymore.” (Scott Roberts, 5.12.2016)

Prosumption is a prerequisite for chilli-inclined foodies, since acquisition of the hottest varieties can be best ensured by one’s own cultivation and community-level seed-trading. Connotations to ritualistic dimensions emerge also in discourse on prosumption, as in an article of *Hot Sauce with Everything* (2019) on pest control, where attacks of green fly are described as “a rite of passage” for chilliheads. Emergent rituals are inherent to the community and not prescribed from outside: traditional cooking, hot sauce tasting and scoring, or competitions.

The power of chilli as a totemic ingredient is reflected in vocabulary. Words and expressions in English are very descriptive and tightly connected to the bodily sensations provoked by chilli. Allusions to heat, burn, fire and flames are abundant: e.g. the excerpt from *Scott Roberts* has 94 entries of “hot” and 36 of “heat”. Moreover, expressions of danger, sin, temptation and hell occur often: *sinfully hot, wicked, devilish, hell* or *infernal* accentuate the totemic,

spiritual narrative around chilli. The same imagery is widely found in the names of products reviewed.

English chilli discourse uses more religious and even biblical metaphors than Finnish chillitalk, which needs to be interpreted in the offline context of the discourse and the general presence of (Christian) religiosity especially in North-American society. However, in foodie contexts, these tendencies become more secular and readable in a wider foodie trend of perceiving food as a fulfilment of spiritual needs, embedded in the orientation of “cultural religions” (Lelwica, 2011). *Scott Roberts* nevertheless openly displays his Christian faith in posts, contrasting with most discourse where sacral dimensions of chilli remain metaphorical.⁷⁶

There are numerous allusions to commensality, and the popularity of chili dishes is shown in the use of euphemistic expressions such as *bowl of red* or *Texas red*. The most eloquent nickname found is “Bowl of Blessedness”, given by the “Dedicated Crusaders for Texas Chili” (Dave de Witt, 6.7.2008). Expressions of this type glorify the dish as a totemic food for communities in southern United States, and cherish its unifying power that may reach spiritual dimensions:

“Chili has become more a religion than a comestible.” (Fiery Foods, July 2008, quoting Thom Marshall.)

The metaphor of religion is the most salient in *Fiery Foods*, to which *Burn Blog* and *Dave de Witt* are also attached. The latter is proclaimed as the “Pope of Peppers”, and sites of the forum are referred to as his “churches” (Fiery Foods, 19.7.2015), which reinforces the mystified, spiritual dimension amongst initiated consumers. However, the reference is humorous, which befits the contemporary foodie ethos of playfulness: chilli may be perceived as totemic, and chilli connoisseurs can be ascribed with a preacher’s status, yet with a pinch of salt. *Clifton Chilli Club* (2019) states that “our word is not gospel, but we hope it carries some weight and credibility.”

⁷⁶ In 2017, Scott Roberts started to concentrate on posts on his personal faith, rather than on chilli topics, opening a new site: www.scottroberts.org.

Although bodily sensations are frequently described, chilli discourse does not convey cues of erotic sensuality. Addictive, burning components of chilli consumption are sought, and the rituals of competitive eating and chilli preparation are cherished. This brings in dimensions of materiality which are particularly salient in abundant reviews of hot sauces and derived chilli products. This discourse requires community-type contextual knowledge of readers, as in a review fragment on “Sinful Sauces Bliss Sweet BBQ Chipotle Hot Sauce” by Scott Roberts (16.11.2011):

“3 out of 5. Don’t let the “Chipotle” verbiage in the title fool you into believing this will only deliver moderate amounts of burn. This stuff has healthy doses of naga (AKA bhut jolokia) fire present.”

Here, chilli is perceived as a symbol for the values it represents and the sensations it triggers, rather than a food that would be consumed for its taste, with the exception of *Clifton Chilli Club* where flavour is also highlighted constantly.

The underpinning ethos in English discourse remains strongly masculine, with an imagery of carnivorism and male-dominated cooking styles such as barbeque that are to be developed further in Chapter 9. Spiritual connotations enhance the discursive stream of totemic qualities, and whilst omnivorous foodie orientations are embraced, the playfully displayed source of spirituality may flexibly come from heaven or hell:

“I’ll put my name on the register, but I’ll be praying to the holy gods up above, or the chile pepper demons, or whatever, that no one will be able to topple that 120 grams record.” (Dave de Witt, 5.12.2016)

The discovery of chilli may also become an internal journey, reflecting an individual quest for purpose and fulfilment. An American chillihead with the world’s largest collection of hot sauces is interviewed in *Hot Sauce with Everything* magazine⁷⁷ and testifies on his identity construction, linked with

⁷⁷ Names of contributors or interviewees are undisclosed for confidentiality.

the conversion experiences. In this journey, “hard work has become a blessing”:

“That small flame then ignited into fire, a drive to seek out these sauces I was seeing and reading about.” (Clifton Chilli Club, 2019)

7.3.1.3 Frames and discursive strategies

“Yeah, I think you’re just about dead-on; a lot of chileheads feel that way. We can still very much ‘taste’ the heat or ‘feel’ the heat. It’s not like we’re immune to that sensation. But we just like that extra added dimension of spiciness that chile peppers give to food.” (Scott Roberts, 5.12.2016)

The frames identified in the English chilli corpus, according to Tables 11 and 12 displaying findings, are *endurance, challenge, protection of masculine spheres, and secular spirituality*. They entangle with the ones identified in prior studies, categorised as “themes”.

When reflecting upon Fairclough’s (2015) orienting questions on nature and functions of discourse in this context, it is observable that a continuous emphasis on competitive endurance, in terms of heat resistance and appetite for chilli challenges, establishes a protected masculine sphere where one doesn’t need to be concerned by controversial topics such as sustainability of food or its health effects.

Sentiments of togetherness enhance a chillihead or an aficionado identity, as sub-categories of foodieism. The main components are a strongly situated, masculine ethos of stamina and heat-seeking, and conflict-prone contextual consumption at competitions, cook-offs, reviews, Scoville scoring and rankings. Moreover, the status of chili con carne as a totemic food in its own right in English-speaking contexts, and the southern United States in particular, brings in a rich narrative of tradition.

Alongside identity, competition and conflicts, the theme of home-made is salient. Interestingly, the competitive topics of home-made devices cherished

by the Finnish chilliheads do not emerge at all, and conflict and competition occur mostly in cooking, tasting or growing chilli. The theme of fun is present, yet in a somewhat dissimulated way: the fun resides in the sense of togetherness, in competitive use, in eating contests and across testing one's limits. This is insiders' fun that the "faint-of-hearth" – a subtle humorous reference to the non-endurance of outsiders – do not either understand or appreciate. Playfulness of contemporary, omnivorous foodieism dominates and takes shape where the non-initiated are left out.

The narrative of initiation entwines interestingly with secular spirituality where chilli is revered in ritualistic ways, with an imagery reminiscent of churchly discourse. It enhances meanings and the symbolic strength of chilli, without compromising one's individual religious orientations and practices. For many foodies, food or a single ingredient fulfil spiritual needs, which is a manifest dimension in contemporary chillitalk in English.

Abundant and powerful spiritual connotations in English mark a clear distinction with Finnish chilli discourse, which reflects the traditions of displaying spirituality publicly, or not, in the respective societies. Consequently, it establishes a rich stream of emotional discourse in contexts where spirituality and religion are not kept to oneself.

However, as in most online genres, humour attenuates soul-stirring comments: "Not Socially Correct Chili Prayer" (Dave de Witt, 6.7.2008) cheerfully reminisces that chili eaters are God's chosen people; a group which excludes e.g. Frenchmen and the "heathen" Chinese. This excerpt reflects the connecting dimension of chilli the ingredient and chili the dish that may turn into chauvinism, albeit the message is disguised with humour. The same strategy to camouflage controversial topics by joking is also found in Finnish chilli discourse.

Discursive strategies are predominantly masculine (see Chapters 4, 9): structures are agonistic and posts challenge readers to meet the same standards as the writers, to become part of the chilli community. *Clifton Chilli*

Club, however, displays a less competition-prone tone, stemming from an ethos where contributors and readers are considered as more equal. Variation is however detected across the geographical origins of contributors. Most articles on *Clifton Chilli Club* and in the online magazine attached to it are written with the pronoun “we” referring to the author, rather than “I” or “the writer”, which enhances the community feeling and solidarity amongst online contributors. The writing style of core team members – who have obtained considerable culinary capital in terms of chilli – nevertheless highlights the cherished ingredient more than the supremacy or know-how of online writers:

“We aim to provide sound and clear information about chillies. Whether it’s about varieties, flavour notes, growing, advanced growing techniques, cooking, biology or almost anything else, we want to provide a resource of information for the user.” (Our aims, Clifton Chilli Club, 2019)

Justification of claims (Wodak & Meyer, 2016) is practiced with research-based facts, but also by referring to community-level beliefs; “as every chilehead knows”, or “according to prior reviews”. Shared meanings of chilli are consciously embraced, as symbols of a foodie identity. Consequently, the English chilli talk does not feature much heteroglossia: most contributors share similar discursive strategies and use corresponding vocabulary resources.

Speaking with a limited register of voices also reflects the contents of discourse, and not only its form, since intense feelings of togetherness do not sustain perspectivisation of arguments. The very mission of online foodie communities is however to bring together people who are attached to the same foods, with similar consumption styles. Observation of facts from a divergent standpoint therefore remains scant. In North-American discourse, perspectivisation occurs almost solely from the contributor’s and his community’s point of view, whilst British discourse brings in more diversified standpoints. Intensification occurs with a frequent use of powerful, especially spiritual metaphors and a strong narrative of heat. All these elements

enhance feelings of togetherness in an occasionally belligerent although similarly oriented consumption subtribe.

A distinctive factor, compared with the Finnish data, is that sites in English refer more often to the other totemic ingredient: with recipes of chilli dishes enhanced with dark chocolate, and of chocolate spiced with chilli. There are hints of knowledge on the Mesoamerican origins and ritualistic traditions of both, which accentuates the narrative of belonging to a long tradition that reveres these mysterious ingredients:

“Into a pot went chiles, tomatoes, nuts, sugar, tortillas, bananas, raisins, garlic, avocados, and dozens of herbs and spices. The final ingredient was the magic one: chocolate.” (Fiery Foods, 6.7.2008)

Chilliheads writing in English practice mostly bonding and geeking as their community interaction types (Kozinets, 2010), where bonding is an overarching practice and geeking relates to the extremities sought in excessive consumption. The main constructs in discourse are sharing knowledge, opposing values and celebrating similarities (de Valck *et al.* 2009), which renders English chillitalk constructs more diversified than their Finnish counterparts.

7.3.2 Chocolate

It is not difficult to find eloquent examples on the consolidating power of chocolate. Whilst chilli discourse in English displays mostly dimensions of competition and danger, chocolate emerges as a totemic substance that soothes, comforts, alleviates craving and altogether brings together foodies with a sweet tooth:

“Calling all chocolate lovers, we need your attention! Welcome to the first ever, especially created, chocolate community, created by chocolate lovers ourselves! We want to come together to celebrate the greatest flavour known to earth. [...] We want you to get involved and become part of our amazing chocolate community.” (Made from Chocolate, no date)

7.3.2.1 Community building and bonding

“Chocolate is a social mediator. No matter where you are or who you’re with, you can start a conversation about chocolate with anyone and immediately find common ground.” (Mostly about chocolate, 5.1.2015).

The cheerful chocolate lovers’ tribe gathering around its totemic ingredient displays a discursive chocolatescape where themes of indulgence meet growing concerns of responsibility and health. The message is conveyed with a lot of humour and fun, emphasising all the positive things that chocolate consumption can generate.

Discursive themes of community building and bonding are displayed in Table 13, with the main frame identified:

| SNS | Salient discursive themes identified in prior research | | | | Identified frames of discourse |
|------------------------|--|----------------|-----------|----------------|--------------------------------|
| Made from chocolate | healthism | indulgence | comfort | fun | <i>freedom from guilt</i> |
| Chocablog | identity | responsibility | healthism | indulgence | |
| Mostly about chocolate | indulgence | comfort | healthism | responsibility | |

Table 13. Community building and bonding in English chocolate discourse.

The overarching frame is omnipresent especially in *Made from chocolate*. It addresses a community of chocolate lovers that reveres the “amazingness” of the totemic ingredient with expressions of indulgence, happiness and encouragement. Healthy qualities of chocolate are highlighted with scientific arguments and repeated expressions on the right to be guilt-free, and to consume chocolate daily. Chocolate is incontestably, sweetly indulgent, but consuming it with a health- and body-conscious orientation is permitted and provides comfort and joy:

“That’s right, we have gone ahead and put ‘healthy’ and ‘chocolate’ in the same sentence. (Made from chocolate, 29.4.2015)

There are 35 mentions of healthiness or unhealthiness to convince the reader that chocolate truly is an ingredient that can be consumed without fear of health risks. Statements tend to start with an affirmative clause:

*“Yes, you read it correctly. It has been proven that **chocolate is beneficial** for you. No need for excuses to splurge out on **chocolate brownies** or other chocolate desserts because now it has been justified.” (Made from chocolate, 29.4.2015)*

Interestingly, occurrences of “taste” are less frequent (20) than references to health. The health-enhancing effects of chocolate emerge as one of the contemporary orientations of foodie-type consumption with totemic dimensions (Vojnovic, 2017).

However, moderation is recommended, and everyday consumption of chocolate needs to be adjusted to a healthy general diet. In this respect, *Made from chocolate* conveys the contemporary tendency of foodieism as mirroring one’s consumptive identity: customising a personal, identifiable way of eating. The site suggests even a chocolate diet based on presumed scientific proof of the benefits of dark chocolate. Questions of health and good physical condition co-occur alongside joyful indulgence, and the site displays an interesting mix of a tailor-made, omnivore consumption style, liberating chocolate lovers from prohibitions to a more delightful, yet still healthy life.

In *Made from chocolate*, fine-tuned nuances of flavours are not present, and consequently the use of adjectives is less rich than on sites where high quality of chocolate dominates. Brand names or words like *ganache*, *gianduja* or *praline* that are common on more knowledge-intensive sites such as *Chocablog* or *Mostly about chocolate* do not appear, which strengthens the perception of chocolate as an ingredient, rather than as a distinguished product. Distinction is made between dark, milk and white chocolate, but without further details. Another missing topic in *Made from chocolate* is sustainability: chocolate is a source of happiness and health, and issues related to its origin and production do not appear. Indulgence seeking and

identity work, as a combination of fulfilling one's cravings in a healthy way, is the main narrative. It is solidly positioned in a broader, foodie-type consumer movement, very present online, that can also be perceived as egocentric and embedded in a body-conscious trend.

Simple, healthy recipes provide comfort and pleasure for modern consumers, whilst connoisseur-type dimensions are not found. Readers actively comment on the posts. The blogger does not adopt the stance of an absolute expert. *Made from chocolate* reads as a self-disclosing narrative, a testimonial of a believer who wishes to spread the good chocolaty news.

A different approach is found on *Chocablog* that ranks among the most popular UK-based food blogs. It is comparable to the Finnish *Suklaayhdistys*: both include a prominent section of fact-filled reviews. Furthermore, popularity has generated offline activity. *Chocablog* is a good example on the democratising effects of foodieism, enhanced by publicity obtained online, whilst the blogger is proudly presenting his home experiments that have been given awards by authorities, here the Academy of Chocolates:

"To have my kitchen-made bars ranked amongst some of the best chocolate in the world is incredibly exciting, and I hope it will serve to encourage more people to have a go at bean-to-bar chocolate making." (Chocablog 24.4.2015)

Chocablog reveals dimensions of totemic consumption that are essentially entangled with foodie identity and materiality, in the sense of preferring high-quality products that are tasted and reviewed with a sense of detail, and also where price indications and purchasing outlets are often mentioned, for the ease of consumers.

Richness of chocolate flavours retains the leading role in *Chocablog* discourse, and the site has a very informative mission. Health topics are occasionally dealt with, e.g. when research arguments are presented for banning the recommendation of a chocolate strike, instigated by the British Heart Foundation:

“Except giving up chocolate is categorically not beneficial for your heart. Many, many scientific studies have conclusively proven that chocolate is beneficial to your heart, and can help prevent a whole range of other ailments. You’ll find links to just a few articles on the subject below. The message doesn’t seem to have got through to the experts at the BHF though.” (Chocablog, 23.2.2016)

When health issues are debated, all sites refer to medical research, yet with only general references where exact sources are mostly not provided. Contributors appear to be confident that readers share the same beliefs and do not require more precision. *Mostly about chocolate* disseminates scientific facts with humour that entwines medical information with the fun-filled community feeling:

*“According to an article in European journal Nutrition and Metabolism those top smarty-pants at Harvard University checked 136 actual scientific publications and discovered that chocolate may actually **reduce the risk of heart attacks**. Those funky flavanols aren’t just rocking the antioxidants but they have other health benefits like reducing blood pressure and reducing inflammation. Chocolate certainly is a superfood!”* (Mostly about chocolate, 5.1.2015)

Despite a generally cheerful style, sustainability concerns are also salient in *Mostly about chocolate*. When topics such as ethical brands or responsible resourcing are strongly highlighted, the discourse becomes more concerned, and there is no disguising of unethical production conditions:

“[b]ut the history and current situation of cocoa farms is less sweet. With slaves purchased to work on cocoa plantations in the Ivory Coast [...] our favourite indulgence is tinged with hardship and unethical practices like child slave labour.” (Mostly about chocolate, 15.8.2018)

Sustainability themes generate discourse on contemporary chocolate trends such as “bean-to-bar” types of high quality, craft brands. The origin of cocoa beans gets a lot of attention on *Mostly about chocolate* and *Chocablog*, with recommendations of the most distinguished flavours that are produced in a sustainable way. Inevitably, this intensifies the foodie ethos of initiated

connoisseurs who are capable of discerning between brands, beans and qualities, and can afford to purchase them.

Consequently, a foodie identity emerges across its sub-category of high quality chocolate lovers. *Bean-to-bar*, *single-bean*, *single-origin*, or *tree-to-bar* stand out as linguistic codes for distinguished products, on the condition that they are issued from sustainable trade and preferably crafted in small ventures. Both blogs praise craft chocolate originating from Grenada for its flavours and the sustainability of production chains.

“Despite its small size, the Grenada Chocolate Company has consistently produced some of the best chocolate in the world. It’s farmer-owned model has helped create a whole new ‘tree to bar’ category that helps keep the profits in the country of origin where they are needed most.” (Chocablog, 18.5.2015)

“Given the complexity of chocolate, this is why we are paying too little for our chocolate and why everyone on Grenada, as well as elsewhere, is trying to change this.” (Mostly about chocolate, 15.7.2018)

Readers, as members of the quality chocolate tribe, are given information on raw ingredients, production conditions, traceability and commercialisation, so that they will be able to navigate across the ever-growing array of produce and avoid unethical and bulk products. Blog followers appreciate, as comments from several countries show, confirming the transnationality in foodie communities and the predominance of English as the lingua franca, with readers everywhere in the world.

To belong to this tribe and to fully immerse in its actions, one needs to hold a certain level of expertise that relates to discursive and cultural capital, alongside financial resources:

“The front tells me it’s made with 2013 harvest beans from the Mekong Delta & Dong Nai. It’s roasted for 25 minutes at 125C and conched for 40 hours by Senior Chocolatier Kiri Kalenko.” (Chocablog, 26.8.2014)

Chocablog and *Mostly about chocolate* are solid examples of the power of social media affordances for foodies to bring together like-minded consumers, enhancing their sentiment of belonging to the tribe. Although spiritual references are less frequent than in chilli discourse, chocolate is occasionally glorified with vaguely corresponding expressions, as in references to “heavenly taste”, or in the reader’s post where a hand-crafted chocolate treat is described as “what heaven would be like – if it existed” (Chocablog, 29.10.2008).

7.3.2.2 Symbolic and ritualistic consumption of chocolate

“Oh chocolate – how do we love thee? Let us count the ways...”
(*Mostly about chocolate*, 5.1.2015)

Symbolic and ritualistic themes occurring in the English chocolate corpus are presented in Table 14. Whilst addiction emerges as the most powerful theme, it needs to be interpreted in a positive sense: loving chocolate and consuming it daily may be a strong consumptive orientation, but in foodie contexts it doesn’t mean irresponsibility of one’s health or submission to overwhelming urges. It is entwined with a general frame of consciousness: of good tastes, of health issues, of ethical production and of the environment. On a personal level, consumption provides rich embodied experiences and intensifies meanings ascribed to food substances.

| SNS | Salient discursive themes identified in prior research | | | | Identified frames of discourse |
|------------------------|--|-------------|-----------------|-----------------|--|
| Made from chocolate | Addiction | Sensuality | Materiality | Meaning | <i>consciousness, rich nuances of embodiment</i> |
| Chocablog | Addiction | Meaning | Emergent ritual | Sensuality | |
| Mostly about chocolate | Addiction | Materiality | Sensuality | Emergent ritual | |

Table 14. Symbolic and ritualistic consumption in English chocolate discourse

Themes of materiality and sensuality often entwine across ritualistic scenes that draw on origins of chocolate, enhancing sensations and anchoring the experience in a deeply embodied, totemic consumption mode:

“The sharp snap sings the praise of the chocolate tempering and the scent you get as you smell the chocolate before tasting it fills your nose with the smell of ripening beans, fruit and sun. The flavours are intensely chocolaty with a slightly floral fruity flavour wrapping itself around the mouth like a lover. The chocolate scent tickles its way into the nose, infusing every area with this intensely fruity floral sweet chocolate.” (Mostly about chocolate, 28.8.2019)

Expressions referring to addictive sensuality and embodiment are abundant: *smooth, tender in mouth, warm, sensual, crunch, tickle, texture, chunks hitting your lips, sending your tastebuds into overdrive*. They are embedded in a foodie-oriented quest of self-indulgence, highlighting the materiality of chocolate and the versatile experiences it provides, in various forms: chocolate bars, pralinés, beverages, confections, savoury dishes and desserts. Chocolate emerges as a perfect self-gift too.

Craving for chocolate is an established fact on *Made from chocolate* where sensual and embodied effects of chocolate are emphasised with numerous references to warmth, moisture, melting and sweetness. Addiction is presented as a condition that can, and even should, be cured with the beneficial effects of chocolate and without bad conscience. The community feeling is enhanced by frequent expressions of *all, not one, everyone, aren't we all*: readers love chocolate and experience cravings, and should not be afraid of it. The taste is important, however the effects of chocolate for body and mind have a crucial role, across ritualistic consumption acts.

Chocablog content requires most contextual knowledge to perform taste rituals in the community. Flavour sensations are described with rich language and with references to rarity of the best varieties. Differences in bean harvests and geographical origins are discussed as in wine reviews, which accentuates the narrative of exclusivity, and anchors this stream in a larger context of capital-intensive foodieism. A dimension of omnivorousness is

nevertheless apparent, transforming even common flavours to a distinguished taste experience, provided that they are hand-picked:

“You might not think a vanilla flavour chocolate would be very interesting, but Melt use the whole vanilla pod in these chocolates for an intense, fresh vanilla flavour. Vanilla is often added to chocolate to hide bad flavours, so we sometimes forget what a wonderful flavour it can be when it’s the star of the show.”
(Chocablog, 10.9.2012)

Nevertheless, on the topic of Cadbury Chocolate Buttons, one of the most common British chocolates, the post is characterised as “the most simple of all chocolate reviews” (6.4.2006). One could assume that a description of such a banal taste experience would not have its place in this type of blog, however it efficiently accentuates the qualities of other reviewed brands. A humorous reference is made to the quality that best suits children, and perhaps other non-initiated:

“You all love them, but maybe you feel embarrassed about buying them for yourself? Simple; have a child.” (Chocablog, 6.4.2006)

Juxtaposition of a traditional and commonly known product with the finest brands is a subtle way to emphasise the quality of the latter, and their value for connoisseurs. In this respect, the Cadbury Buttons review can be compared with the fragment on Fazer Blue in *Suklaayhdistys*: they show the tendency to treat nationally cherished, themselves totemic, brands with a more understanding approach than other products. Discursively, the strategy is similar: a nationally recognised chocolate is described in a simpler language than more exclusive products. The value of both chocolates is totemic for a larger consumer community than just connoisseurs, and discursive choices strengthen this value.

Mostly about chocolate describes a wide scale of chocolate pleasures in contexts of travel and sensorial discovery. The blogger identifies herself with “A consuming passion for chocolate, wine & life.” Embodied experiences are

indeed expressed with such creative depiction that it entangles discursive foodscapes with geographical landscapes:

“this dark chocolate bar brings the sun, soil and seasons of the Philippines to our mouths.” (Mostly about chocolate, 28.8.2019)

“You can taste the dark soil of Mexico in this bar with tobacco, earth and if you can detect it a light fruity finish. You can feel the depths of the surrounding forests in the rich earth as the chocolate melts in your mouth and it leaves you with a hint of mystery – as if there is something more on your palette just out of reach that is pleasant but hard to grasp.” (Mostly about chocolate, 28.8.2019)

For communities constituent of the corpus in English, chocolate provides opportunities for foodie-oriented consumption that is contemporarily totemic in the sense that consumption does not always require accumulation, but concentrates on a quest of shared experiences of a jointly revered ingredient. The more initiated and knowledgeable the community member is, the more pleasure the substance will bring, and the more eagerly these experiences are shared online:

“After the infamous Lindt explosion, it is definitely my new year resolution to stick to chocolate with higher cocoa percentage and experiment with some single bean bars. I’ll be after recommendations!” (A reader’s comment in Mostly about chocolate, 8.1.2015)

7.3.2.3 Frames and discursive strategies

Chocolate discourse in different SNS diverges thematically, and the frames of discourse reflect this diversity. In addition to the themes of totemic consumption presented by prior studies, three main frames of discourse are identified for chocolate talk in English: *freedom from guilt, consciousness, and rich nuances of embodiment*.

The three entwine in a discursive foodscape where consciousness of chocolate as a quality product and as a beneficial source of embodied

experiences gives rise to a consumptive style liberated from self-deprecating guilt factors often connected to the substance. An entanglement is identified: themes of *embodiment* and *consciousness* are found more often together in English discourse than in Finnish (or French): sensorial pleasure does not necessarily erode an underpinning ethos of consciousness, stemming from growing concerns of sustainability.

Consciousness of sustainability issues does not need to increase negative feelings of consumers either, since discourse contributes to accrued knowledge on fair production and trade, to promote responsibility of the entire chocolate scene.

“It’s always a good thing to know where your food comes from, but chocolate has particular ethical and sustainability issues that make it important to know the origin of what you’re eating.”
(Chocablog, Cocoa bean origin map, no date)

The “discursive chocolatescape” in English appears as a welcoming, warm and joyful playground (*Made from chocolate*), as an arena for rich embodied experiences (*Mostly about chocolate*), and as an experience-focused and knowledgeable domain embedded in a solid foodie identity (*Chocablog*). The latter two are, moreover, nuanced with concerns for sustainability, to promote responsible consumption and safeguard the vulnerable areas of cocoa cultivation.

On the first site, blog followers don’t encounter expectations of mastering elaborate vocabulary or tasting techniques, whereas the other two intensify the culinary, cultural and discursive capitals of members. Chocolate talk in English displays a flexible linguistic repertoire that stems from the culinary curiosity of omnivorous foodieism and the thorough contextual knowledge of contributors.

Fairclough’s fundamental questions (2015) on the nature and function of discourse can be addressed in the English chocolate context with an ecclesiastical metaphor. Whilst *Made from chocolate* is a happy, convincing

and easy-to-read blog that invites all people to celebrate the wonderfulness of chocolate like a layman preacher, *Chocablog* evokes a more serious, profoundly educated pastor who is able to guide blog followers with detailed knowledge and sense of discernment. *Mostly about chocolate* contributes with a joyful and yet discreet tone of evangelisation where environmental concerns are apparent, although without accusations for consumers.

In the vein of the metaphor: all three bring chocolate worshippers together, since in the contemporary foodie church online, there is room for a variety of confessions. The glorified taste unifies the congregation:

“[i]t’s more intense and... heavenly, as only chocolate can be.”
(Chocablog, 26.11.2008)

As in English chilli discourse, this secular, culturally religious narrative aligns with the dimension of foodieism where food also fulfils spiritual needs. “Food as religion” is present on various levels: in lexical choices, metaphors, references to religious myths and moreover, in meanings ascribed to both ingredients. It is totemically revered. Significant foods and foodieism as a consumptive orientation can pervade spheres where religion has traditionally fulfilled needs of belonging to a community and of finding purpose (Lelwica, 2011). Joyful worship of food totems, either in chocolate- or chilliscapes, are most typical of discourse in English.

Distinct discursive strategies (Wodak & Meyer, 2016) convey these frames. *Made from chocolate* employs an argumentative and intensifying style, which is based on an abundant use of qualifiers and superlative adjectives: *extremely healthy, the most unprocessed forms, all-time favourite, the perfect snack, a must to taste*. A salient feature is the overly abundant use of exclamation marks which adds humorous and positive notes in discourse:

“It is a dish that you have to try out, and you won’t regret it!”
(Made from chocolate, 28.5.2015)

Chocablog is written by experts who share their knowledge with specialised vocabulary, cacao percentages and technical terms. Moreover, there are references to the input of the contributors as reviewers, consultants and guest speakers in quality chocolate business. Emphasising one's expertise is a strategy of argumentation where status and cultural capital stand out. It also enables tones of criticism, e.g. towards bulk products or disrespectful use of ingredients.

Mostly about chocolate practices a different discursive strategy. Despite the recognised quality of her creation amongst the most popular chocolate blogs, the blogger prefers to keep product evaluations on a simple scale, by using only "bad, OK, good, great and top notch" as categories. This approach, stemming from her expressed desire of "not sounding pretentious", marks a difference with more epicurean, detailed evaluations, and highlights chocolate as an everyday treat. In an easy-going style, the author manages to provide a lot of information without spotlights on her own expertise, which unfolds as a reader-friendly approach.

In chocolate-themed online communities in English, bonding is the strongest communication pattern (Kozinets, 2010), which enhances the unificatory power of chocolate as a totemic ingredient. Celebrating similarities stands out as the principal discourse construct (de Valck *et al.*, 2009), and it is supported by a solid stream of sharing knowledge.

7.4 Chilli and chocolate as totemic foods in French

7.4.1 Chilli

"Alors à quand l'essor des blogs de sauces piquantes et sauces barbecue en France?" [So, when will start the boom of blogs on fiery and barbecue sauces in France?] (<https://www.sauce-piquante.fr/blog/2011/07/19/les-meilleurs-blogs-de-sauces-piquantes-us/>)

A quotation from an online chilli shop, *Sauces Piquantes* [Fiery Sauces], aligns with the researcher's experience during the entire data collection phase: amongst foodie subtribes writing online in French, chilli does not gain as wide a group of adepts as in other languages.

Consequently, SNS stemming from a passion for chilli in its own right are not as abundant or diversified as in English and Finnish. Chilli sites are rare, aside from purely commercial marketplaces such as webshops: retrievals conducted throughout the entire data collection period⁷⁸ yielded mostly posts published in general foodie-generated contexts such as recipe sites or culinary travel blogs. This was intriguing from the very beginning: chilli emerges with significantly different meanings for French foodies, when compared with the English and the Finnish data. It is not a protagonist, but plays an auxiliary, yet important, role. It becomes a part of totemic food experiences only in the context of cooking.

The corpus is therefore compiled from posts on the largest foodie site in French, *Marmiton* (www.marmiton.org), and from an extensive recipe sharing site, *Les Foodies* (www.lesfoodies.com). Comment threads on recipes unfold interesting foodie-generated discourse, especially with development suggestions of other members' recipes. Data fragments are written by users who do or do not have French as their first language, and in several posts, hints are found on diversified ethnic origins and habitats of contributors, where chilli is a common ingredient in local cuisines.

Marmiton discussions can be accessed only with a member status. Aligning with the adopted research position of a non-participant observer, the author registered to *Marmiton* as a member, however only with the aim of observation, and not commenting the discussions. The same applied for *Les Foodies*.

⁷⁸ Google searches were conducted with key words such as *blog piment*; *les meilleurs blogs piment*, *piment blog*, *piment cuisine*, to mention a few. Searches included spelling as *blog* and *blogue*, both used in French, and with *piment/chilli/chili* connected to *cuisine* or another French lexical item.

The noun *piment* [chilli] refers to Capsicum cultivars as a spice, condiment, vegetable or plant. Interestingly, the adjective *pimenté* [with chilli] also has metaphoric connotations. It refers to things that add interest or adventure in life, including sensual contexts, which is a typically French strategy of broadening culinary imagery towards other domains in life.

All orthographic errors feature unmodified in quotations, with an endeavour to reproduce them in translation. In French, skills in orthography are a noteworthy aspect of discursive competence and occasionally trigger comments from the online audience.

7.4.1.1 Community building and bonding

“Ici, on échange, on propose, on essaye, on invente, et le but n'est pas le ‘moi je sais’. [Here, one exchanges, suggests, tries, invents, and the objective is not the ‘I know’.] (Marmiton, 4.4.2005)

For French consumers, the art of cooking is a precious phenomenon in its integrality, and this national narrative is embraced by online foodies. *La cuisine française* is a key trope in the collective identity construction (Ferguson, 2006) and a matter of national pride. French foodie sites are significant arenas for learning, as the quotation above highlights. Alongside the “I know”, French foodies share experiences on “I create and discover”, displaying versatile and dynamic culinary adventures.

Hence, chilli does not stand out with the same meanings, nor is it described with similar discursive strategies as in English and Finnish. Yet, one has to take into account the nature of the sites: *Marmiton* and *Les Foodies* target foodie consumers who are passionate about all food and share a high degree of culinary capital, but as communities, they do not represent a subtribe of “chilliheads”. Indeed, in the voluminous raw data collected between 2014 and 2019 from which the corpus is compiled, the category of chilli enthusiasts appears as barely observable in French, when non-commercial sites are considered.

Table 15 aligns with the protocol in previous sections:

| SNS | Salient discursive themes identified in prior research | | | | Identified frames of discourse |
|----------------------|--|-----------|------------|----------|---|
| Marmiton (chilli) | Tradition | Home-made | Indulgence | Conflict | <i>Frenchness, creativity, authenticity</i> |
| Les Foodies (chilli) | Home-made | Fun | Tradition | Identity | |

Table 15. Community building and bonding in French chilli discourse.

One dimension is more salient than any other, contrasting with extant chilli research (Chapter 4): the unique taste that chilli enhances in the dish is the most important characteristic, not the heat or the flavour of the substance itself. Chilli, like other spices and condiments, emerges as just one instrument in the great and complex orchestration of French cooking. This discourse is rich in expressions of tradition and home-made, where references to heirloom recipes are frequent:

“Parfait! Je retrouve le goût des piments de ma belle mère tunisienne! Merci.” [Perfect! I recognise the taste of chillies prepared by my Tunisian mother-in-law! Thank you. (Les Foodies, 30.6.2013)]

Despite the inclinations for home-made food with chilli, presumption does not occur at all as a foodie trend. Foodies writing in French are manifestly content with purchased chillies. However, the offer in markets and ethnic supermarkets is so rich⁷⁹ that culinary sophistication in spicing can be obtained without home cultivation, since extreme heat sensations are not sought after.

Conversation threads unfold how to master various techniques of conservation so that the spiciness is not lost, how to subtly enhance the aromas of precious ingredients in a dish with chilli, or how to find the most authentic produce. Furthermore, amongst contributors there are members with a particular attachment to cooking with chilli that results from their heirloom dishes, stemming from colonial history. The quest for authenticity confirms the significance of this discursive frame, cherished by foodies in general (Johnston & Baumann, 2009, 2015):

⁷⁹ in France, Belgium, Switzerland, Canada or francophone Africa and Asia.

“Même au Congo on laissait à T° ambiante sans jamais avoir aucun problème, dans l'alcool, ça conserve plusieurs années mais en principe, on fait sécher les piments avant de les mettre à mariner.” [Even in Congo, one left them in room temperature without any problem ever, in alcohol they keep for several years but as a rule, you dry the chillies before marinating them.] (Marmiton, 18.5.2017)

Although chilli loses something of its mysterious nature in French, the discourse is comparable to chilli sites in English and Finnish, in terms of displaying and enhancing one's culinary capital across creative spicing and chilli knowledge. Yet, most experimentations are made with the classic French cuisine as a reference, extended with colonial contributions. Display of identity as a foodie thus solidly entwines with the identification with French culinary traditions:

“J'ai aussi mon pilon et mon mortier ;))) sinon comment veux tu que je fasse l'aïoli hein ? “ [I also have my pestle and my mortar;))) otherwise how do you think I can make my aioli, eh?] (Marmiton, 25.4.2015)

Conflicts emerge in contexts where those national traditions are challenged, and negotiating in conflicts is a constituent of the community feeling. Regular members take sides against intruders such as the user X who launched a thread, resulting in 58 comments in one day, on the presumed lack of expertise in the French to use spices:

“tout ce que les français connaites c sel poivre et HERBES DE provences et un peu curry mais sa s'arrete la” [all that the french know is salt pepper and provence's HERBS and bit curry but there it stop] (Marmiton, 4.4.2005)

The thread is rich in wordplays and irony, commonly cherished by francophones, and there is a nuance of hostility towards a contributor who dares to compromise the harmony and mutual help on the site. Other members immediately establish a front of discursive objections, and this thread is the only one where truly pejorative comments are made on the lacking orthography skills of another contributor, although there is an abundance of posts where the complicated French orthography is as poor as

in the quotation above. As a general rule, those errors are disregarded by other users. However, politeness is dissipated, if a non-competent contributor takes the chance of compromising the discursive netiquette of the forum, disrupts the mutual engagement and moreover, does it in a post that questions the French savoir-faire in culinary matters. (S)he is immediately exposed to belligerent remarks on both spelling mistakes and on the message itself.

The dissident is accused of being a troll, and the thread becomes a long, carnevalesque exchange of jokes and wordplays on what one could cook of the troll:

“un cari de troll! hum ça doit être bon...” [a troll cari!⁸⁰ hmmm it must be good...] (Marmiton, 4.4.2005)

Another, typically French way to demonstrate discursive superiority is found in the same thread where one writer exhibits competence in a solemn style⁸¹:

“Donne nous donc tes conseils épicés, toi ô grand connaisseur du bipède français et de toutes les épices du monde...” [Provide us therefore with your spicy advice, oh you the great arbiter of taste in matters of the biped Frenchmen and of all the spices of the world...] (Marmiton, 4.4.2005)

“Cocorico”, referring to the sound of a Gallic rooster, is an ancient French expression for all behavior that glorifies the greatness of French culture, language, history and “patrimoine”, the national heritage. The culinary heritage is a core component in this narrative, sustained by perceptions of the “mythicality” of French cuisine (Ferguson, 2006). Discourse on *Marmiton* gains in *cocorico* when elements of French supremacy in cooking are being compromised, in the same conversation:

*“- les belges connaissent que les moules-frites
- les allemands mangent de la choucroute et boivent de la bière
- les chinois mangent que du riz
- les italiens mangent des pâtes au petit déjeuner*

⁸⁰ *cari* is an alternative way to spell *curry*.

⁸¹ The competent writer has committed one orthographic mistake though, since a hyphen is missing: *Donne-nous* being the correct spelling.

- *les anglais ne savent pas ce que c'est que la cuisine (quoi que, ça c'est vrai ! lol!!)*”

[the belgians know only mussels and fries, the german eat sauerkraut and drink beer, the chinese eat only rice, the italians eat pasta for breakfast, the english don't know what cuisine is (even though that's true! lol!!] (Marmiton, 4.4.2005)

Joking about the non-tastiness of British food is a common temptation for foodies in French culinary contexts. Here, the occurrence of national stereotypes is noteworthy, since previous posts in the conversation thread vehemently judge the stereotypical assumptions of the intruding “troll”. As in English and Finnish chilli discourse, fun and inside humour are important conveyors of community feelings, enhanced with abundant use of abbreviations shared by insiders, or of paralinguistic cues such as emojis and emoticons that help readers to grasp humorous notes.

Authenticity and tradition signify that the provenance of produce is highlighted, since in the French culinary culture, great emphasis is put on the geographical origin: Bresse poultry, Brittany seafood or dairy from Normandy are iconic and embraced. Hence, the Frenchness of chillis is a guarantee of their quality, and the chillis d'Espelette from the French Basque country stand out as the most distinguished variety. The city of Espelette is famous for this produce labelled with an AOP⁸², a guarantee of the highest quality and excellence in French cuisine (Piment d'Espelette, 2019). In discourse in other languages of this study, Espelette chilli is mentioned only scarcely, although it is used and exported widely. It is an exclusive ingredient, with only 217 tons of annual crops (*ibid.*), which explains why French foodies are keen on mentioning it as a token of high culinary capital.

A search in the recipe repertory of *Marmiton* yields 55 recipes where “Espelette” is mentioned in the name of the dish and more are found in other recipes where it is used. In *Les Foodies*⁸³, there are 5000 recipes with the

⁸² AOP, Appellation d'Origine Protégée = Protected Designation of Origin.

⁸³ Searches on both sites conducted in September 2019.

word *piment* in the name, out of which 1547 with a mention of Espelette/espelette.

Alongside the use of authentic ingredients, it is important to prepare the spices and eventually, the dish, in the right, traditional way:

“Quand ils commencent a avoir une bonne couleur rouge foncé, tu peux les hacher!... c'est comme ça qu'on fait ici, au pays basque!!!” [When they start to have a nice dark red colour, you can crush them!.. that's how it's done here, in the basque country!!!] (Marmiton, 6.1.2006)

In this chillitalk, two salient frames of foodieism identified by Johnston and Baumann (2009, 2015), authenticity and exoticism, emerge entwined. Authenticity is emphasised by references made to traditional ways of cooking in the French Antilles, in the Caribbean and in Africa, or in regional cuisines of France. Online members may originate from a number of geographical locations and display it in their posts.

The most important dimension sustaining bonding and community building is the inimitable enhancement of flavour that high-quality chilli brings to the dishes, since the quest for unique and creative good tastes unites foodie consumers from French culinary and linguistic contexts (Mäkelä, 2016). The indulgence and the deliciousness of achievements stem from the creativity of the cook, from the authenticity of chilli, and from the respect of the national culinary heritage. Interestingly, responsibility or healthism do not occur as topics at all – this can be explained by the overarching dominance of “good taste” that overrules other themes.

7.4.1.2 Symbolic and ritualistic consumption

Given its auxiliary role, chilli does not emerge with competitiveness across consumption rituals. Symbolic and ritualistic consumption patterns are found elsewhere: in commensality of shared preparation and enjoyment of meals, in sensuality and materiality. Table 16 suggests two frames of discourse sustaining symbolic and ritualistic consumption:

| SNS | Salient discursive themes identified in prior research | | | | Identified frames of discourse |
|-------------|--|------------|------------------|------------------|--------------------------------|
| Marmiton | Commensality | Sensuality | Emergent rituals | Materiality | <i>Precision, skillfulness</i> |
| Les Foodies | Commensality | Sensuality | Materiality | Emergent rituals | |

Table 16. Symbolic and ritualistic consumption in French chilli discourse.

A fundamental dimension in French foodways is commensality where the profoundly established ritual of shared meals stands out as a totem on national and family levels (Fischler, 2011; Chapter 2). Online, commensality can be highlighted by the shared meal as the final goal of culinary endeavours, rather than any totemic ingredient. This is salient in discourse on chilli ascribed with substantially divergent meanings, when comparing French, Finnish and English. In the context of online discourse in French, commensality is also pertinent amongst foodies inhabiting countries other than France.

Culinary challenges aim for perfection, and dedicated home cooks are especially awaiting appreciative comments from guests and family:

“Je suis super fière et les compliments ont fusé voilà, à bientôt sûrement.” [I am super proud and compliments were pouring in, so see you soon for sure.] (Marmiton, 31.10.2011)

Whilst commensality stems from nationally established, totemic foodways, the emergent and inherent rituals of online foodie communities relate to the exploration of personalised ways of cooking. These are keenly presented in the community, which interestingly, entwines the dimensions of individuality and collectivity.

In French, materiality is more diversified than in English and Finnish where materiality of chilli appears mainly throughout its power to generate heat and powerful embodied experiences. French discourse highlights chilli for its qualities in cooking: names of varieties are rarely mentioned, with the

exception of the Espelette provenance as a brand. Yet, one refers regularly to consistency. Chillies are used in dishes as entire pods, in powder, in flakes, in purée or as an infusion, with diversified ways of preparation:

“Pardon, confondu avec les piments lyophilisés en flocons que l'on voit des chefs US utiliser à la télé.” [Sorry, I confused with freeze-dried flakes that one sees the US chefs use on the telly]. (Marmiton, 25.4.2015)

Precision and expertise stand out as cooking rituals, whilst skills and conceptual knowledge are both displayed and enhanced on foodie sites. How these elements contribute to the final flavour of the dish is, however, the most significant feature, which emphasises the importance of cooking as an ingrained ritual. This results in proliferation of recipe discourse where the sense of detail and debates on ingredients are salient topics. In this corpus, their sustainability is irrelevant, as shown in the previous section.

Contrasting with discourse in Finnish and English on chilli, sensuality is a powerful conveyor of totemic dimensions. Chilli is appreciated because of the nuanced embodied experiences it provides, alongside its flavour-enhancing qualities. Moreover, sensuality of chilli emerges with references to carnal relationships, and not only across (innocent) embodied sensations. Two quotations unpack these aspirations, with a common French strategy to use ellipsis⁸⁴ to indicate a sense of mystery, of things left unpronounced:

“L' 'adorateur du piment' que je suis voudrait les humer, goûter, tester en macération MG ou alcoolique...” [The chilli worshipper that I am would like to smell, taste and try them macerated in grease or alcohol...] (Marmiton, 25.4.2015)

“Ton poulet donne trop envie bravo” [Your chicken is too tempting...bravo] (Les Foodies, 9.7.2014)

The expression *“donne trop envie”* can also be translated with a more straightforwardly erotic “turns me on too much”. Use of ellipsis often highlights this type of double-entendre, cherished in French, where cues

⁸⁴ An ellipsis (...) indicates the omission of one or several linguistic items.

interpreted either as innocent or nuanced by sensuality are frequent. A comment on a rabbit recipe spiced with chilli illustrates this:

“Hummmmmm tu me gardes une cuisse X j'arrive !!!”
[Mmmm, keep a thigh for me X..... I'll be there!!!] (Les Foodies, 17.4.2014)

“Thigh” can refer either to the rabbit or to the online contributor. *Les Foodies* displays typically uncomplicated sensual dimensions, with cheerfulness of tone:

“j aime le piment c est un de mes peches mignons avec le choco !!!” [i love chilli its one of my innocent sins with choco !!!] (Les Foodies, 3.6.2011)

The expression *péché mignon* [sweet, innocent sin], a sin that originally was not considered as mortal by the Catholic Church, is noteworthy, since it also appears in other contexts. The concept of sin is important in cultures with strong Catholic influence, and yet there is a continuum of graveness in it: gluttony is a more innocent sin than e.g. the sin of flesh leading to adultery. The former can be characterised as a mere weakness. The word *mignon* itself translates as “sweet, charming, amiable” (Larousse, 2018)⁸⁵. Hence, the expression is appropriate in culinary contexts, since it ingeniously entwines sweetness with sin. It appears often with chocolate and only in French with chilli; in the quotation above it is connected with chocolate as another sweet sin. Broader religious imagery, comparable to chilli discourse in English, is not found in the French chilli corpus, however. Neither does the theme of addiction, with this word or its synonymic expressions, occur in French chilli discourse. This can be explained by the nature of both sites as generalist foodie outlets rather than as arenas of pure “chillidom”, although chilli discourse is occasionally vehement, acquiring totemic functions.

Sensuality and direct eroticism also appear, somewhat surprisingly, in commensality contexts, as in a post where a traditional Basque dish with Espelette chillis is commented upon:

⁸⁵ Fazer in Finland manufactures highly popular *Mignon* Easter eggs: real eggshells are filled with sweet gianduja-type ganache.

“Excellente recette. Elle fait l'unanimité auprès de tous mes invités. D'ailleurs il y en a même un qui m'a dit avoir ‘joui’ de la bouche après avoir goûté ce plat. A faire sans hésiter.” [An excellent recipe. It gets unanimity amongst all my guests. By the way, one of them even told me that he ‘had come’ in the mouth after having tasted this dish. To be prepared without hesitation.” (Marmiton, 3.8.2008)]

In French communication culture, flirtation is tolerated and even encouraged, and the anonymity strengthens this tendency in social media. In English and Finnish, it is not common to find sensual or erotic cues of this type, and for the least in contexts with domestic commensality. Sensuality is kept more disguised, whilst in French it is an accepted part of the social play, since the counterparts are expected to understand the delicate nuances in communication, without being offended. In the corpus, there is no eroticised discourse with infraction of communication codes in any way to which contributors of the conversation, site moderators or other site members would have reacted.

In *Les Foodies*, where posts are relatively brief, words like *bise* or *bisou*, or their SNS abbreviation *biz/bizz* [kiss], or a slightly more intimate *bisette* are often found in posts with positive evaluations on recipes.⁸⁶ Dishes spiced with chilli, considered as hot, generate abundant comments of this type, which resonates with the notion of carnal singularity (Mäkelä *et al.*, 2018), introduced in a study on non-foodie discourse and drawing primarily on women as conveyors of carnality.

Flirtation is occasionally somewhat undisguised:

“superbe et bravo pour la présentation !! tu m'invites quand ??? lol !! bisette mon petit X!” [super and bravo for the display!! when will you invite me over??? lol !! a warm kiss, my little X]

The reply of the recipe designer:

⁸⁶ In data on chilli retrieved from *Les Foodies*, there are 32 posts where one of these expressions is employed, most often to conclude the post.

“mais tu viens quand tu veux, je t’attends, bisous” [but you can come whenever you want, I’m waiting for you, kisses] (both in Les Foodies, 3.5.2013)

Despite frequent emergences of highly sensually laden discourse, the underpinning ethos on both sites reflects the ultimate goal of French cooking: to accomplish a delicious meal that can be shared together, with family and friends who are capable of discerning delicate flavours and appreciate the commitment of the cook, as well as the precious ingredients. The totemic culinary experience resides in this complex process. Instead of re-evoking a spiritual metaphor, French chilli discourse is reminiscent of an opera where the Meal sings the leading role and Chilli appears as a flirtatious soubrette.

7.4.1.3 Frames and discursive strategies

Embracing Fairclough’s (2015) questions on the nature and functions of discourse, it is indispensable to accentuate the French context to understand this playful and creative subtribe: the tendency to cherish both culinary and linguistic creativity fundamentally shapes all communication. Phenomena are constantly reflected towards national traditions, and meanings are ascribed depending on this established culinary framework. In online contexts, discursive orientations are intensified by anonymity and superdiversity of outlets: playfulness and flirtation cohabit with serious, foodie-oriented culinary learning.

Themes stemming from extant research and identified in the corpus are presented in sections above. The broader frames for totemic emergences of chilli, suggested here, are *Frenchness*, *creativity*, *authenticity*, *precision*, and *skillfulness*. A national ethos is overarching, whilst creativity and authenticity emerge as typical foodie leitmotifs. To perform brilliantly, precision and skillfulness are required, which contrasts with Finnish and English chillitalk. Moreover, these frames confirm the similarity of chilli discourse with more general foodie discourse in French (Mäkelä, 2016).

French supports these discursive frames structurally with its adaptability and various registers of expression, the most salient discursive strategy being

politeness. Despite distinctive sensuality, politeness is sustained, which creates an interesting break with, and a striking difference from, the other languages of the study. Especially in *Marmiton*, posts are often initiated and closed with a salutation: *Bonjour*, *Bonsoir*, and occasionally with a less formal *Salut*. Use of idioms such as “I wish you a pleasant afternoon/evening” is common at the end, with a “thank you” in cases where help is found.⁸⁷ Dealing with occasional conflicts depends on the status of counterparts: established members have more freedom than random users. Using the second person plural as the politeness address, *vous/Vous*, is more common than the familiar *tu* that can be perceived as uncomplicated and modern or as insulting, depending on the context.

Considering politeness, online discourse evokes linguistic codes stemming from the very formal and complex system of French correspondence where subtle nuances express degrees of esteem, hierarchy and contextual knowledge. Although discourse in online discussion fora does not require expertise of the complicated stylistic features of traditional correspondence, these may be used to display one’s discursive capital, which is a valuable asset in French social structures.

Marmiton stands out as a genuine community of practice. Members, *marmitonautes* have a high degree of “e-solidarity”, with their adopted strategy of politeness and good manners. These emerge in content, word choice, address forms, punctuation and other discursive cues. In *Les Foodies*, discussions are brief and chat-like, whilst *Marmiton* features more elaborate posts. However, both sites consistently elaborate on the taste of the dish, uplifted by chilli.

Argumentation is based on flavour dimensions, and no arguments from research or other media are used to sustain comments. Punctuation and abundant textual paralinguistic cues are used for intensification. Although French foodies do not practice as much self-enhancement as chilliheads in English, perspectivisation is surprisingly scant, which can be read as a

⁸⁷ Scaffolding and autodidactics, as processes of taste engineering by mutual assistance and self-help, are presented in Chapter 8.

dimension of individualism, reflecting absence of controversial topics such as sustainability.

Firstly, discourse is articulated around sharing knowledge and celebrating similarities, although negotiation of norms occurs as well (de Valck *et al.*, 2009). Bonding as the main interaction type, which is naturally at the core of totemic consumption patterns (Kozinets, 2010).

7.4.2 Chocolate

“Comment vous dire, comment vous décrire le bonheur que procure cette bouchée quand elle vient fondre en bouche ?”
[How to tell you, how to describe you the happiness provided by this mouthful, when it comes to melt in your mouth?] (Le chocolat dans tous nos états, 15.4.2019)

French SNS on chocolate are a cornucopia of emotionally laden discourse where an abundance of adjectives and expressions of embodiment conveys sensuality, hidden meanings and above all, the inimitable taste of chocolate.

The French corpus is compiled from two outstanding chocolate sites, the blog *Le chocolat dans tous nos états* (literally “Chocolate in all our states”, a playful name abbreviated hereinafter as *Etats*) and the site of an exclusive chocolate association: *Le Club des Croqueurs de Chocolat* (“Chocolate Crunchers’ Club”, hereinafter *Club*). In addition, excerpts from the French version of *Made from chocolate* are included, to increase cross-linguistic comparison aspects. Discussion threads on chocolate from *Marmiton* and *Les Foodies* diversify the analysis of content sharing.

7.4.2.1 Community building and bonding

Indulgence and comfort – for French foodies, the totemic chocolate is, above all, a feast for all senses. Indulgence emerges across embodied pleasures of variating, creating and consuming chocolate treats, or throughout adventurous *dégustations*, tastings, in epicurean settings. They contribute to the identity construction as a contemporary foodie, although with a very French nuance: home-made, traditional, delicious meals provide comfort, and foodie consumers engage in preparing them with passion.

An uncompromising quest for quality embeds in capital-intensive epicurean foodieism which is more apparent in French discourse than in Finnish or English. There are more references to extra-linguistic variables such as wealth, leading to distinction practices discussed further in Chapter 8. This is most salient in chocolate sites concentrating on product reviews and tasting, with *Etats* and *Club* as the most exclusive outlets, whilst *Made from chocolate* complies with the original version in English, although with discreet differences in style.⁸⁸ *Marmiton* and *Les Foodies* are more modest in approach and their members highlight culinary creativity, aiming at succeeding in hosting guests.

Table 17 presents the discursive themes observed, with dominating frames:

| SNS | Salient discursive themes identified in prior research | | | | Identified frames of discourse |
|-----------------------------------|--|----------|-----------------|-----------------|---|
| Le chocolat dans tous nos états | Indulgence | Comfort | Identity | Common language | <i>Frenchness, adventure, passion, sophistication</i> |
| Le Club des Croqueurs de Chocolat | Indulgence | Identity | Common language | Healthism | |
| Marmiton (chocolat) | Indulgence | Comfort | Tradition | Fun | |
| Les Foodies (chocolat) | Home-made | Comfort | Fun | Tradition | |

Table 17. Community building and bonding in French chocolate discourse.

Frenchness overarches chocolate discourse even in the era of globally embraced food trends in social media (see also Tebben, 2015). Alongside cherishing national heritage, a powerful narrative of individualism emerges: foodies want to customise, vary and develop recipes and ideas further. Adventuring is a national hobby, and it unfolds in individual culinary creativity, as well as in sensorial adventures, while discovering continuously new tastes, products and consumption outlets.

⁸⁸ *Made from chocolate* is not included in Tables 17 and 18, since it features similar content with the original version. It is analysed at the end of this section for the structural and stylistic deviation, compared with the original text.

Common language contributes to full enjoyment, in order to savour the richness describing shared delicacies. Community building and bonding are, however, primarily sustained by elements of indulgence and comfort. Aesthetics is highly valued in all aspects of cuisine, and the success of a humble pudding is measured on its appearance, as much as on its taste.

Passion and flirtation cohabit within the culinary content, conveying concealed and undisguised erotic cues. The degree of sophistication varies depending on genre and outlet of discourse, and yet the dimension of sensuality is omnipresent. Most delicate hints are found in use of punctuation and metaphors, whilst specifically conversation fora feature straightforward suggestions.

Club has been founded as an offline association, to celebrate the best of chocolates and to collaborate with stakeholders of the luxury chocolate market. Tasting sessions and an annual guidebook on distinguished produce and outlets feature as activities, whilst online content aligns with these missions and opens the luxury chocolate universe to consumers who do not have the opportunity to become members, but desire to learn more. This educational and promotional mission is showcased in all *Club* discourse, and it contributes to a certain democratisation of consumption that has traditionally been perceived as exclusively epicurean.

Members belong to “all types of milieus”, with conditions for membership stating that a candidate needs to educate his/her tastebuds, in order to be “elevated from a simple gourmand” to the “condition of a gourmet”. Here, two apparently similar, yet diverging words emerge: a *gourmand* is avid for good food, without a sense of discernment, whilst a *gourmet* is trained to distinguish the most delicate flavours, and appreciates and expects the highest quality. This brings in a dimension of distinction (Chapter 8), however, in a context where class boundaries have started to erode, and culinary capital can be accessible by joining an online community.

Etats declares itself as a “sensorial blog”, where the principal action is to *déguster*, to savour chocolate and derived products in an appreciative way.

Language becomes an impressive resource and enhances community bonding: it hints, suggests, underlines, enhances, and fascinates, evoking the richness of multisensorial culinary pleasures:

“Tout en rondeur et en épice, c’est une mousse au chocolat parfumée à la fève de Tonka, à la texture étonnement aérienne, sur fond de biscuit croquant et de glace onctueuse.” [All round and spicy, it is a chocolate mousse perfumed with Tonka beans, with astonishingly airy texture, on a layer of crunchy bisquit and of smooth ice cream.] (Etats, 14.8.2019)

Aligning with Riley and Cavanaugh (2017), this language can be perceived not just about food, but in its tastiness as food. Discursive choices evoke metaphors of tasting, as in a quotation about a book on chocolate:

“Sept chapitres à dévorer ou plutôt à déguster avec passion.” [Seven chapters to be devoured, or savoured with passion.] (Etats, 30.6.2016)

The title of the book is the bloggers’ “fetish sentence”: *Le chocolat qui me fait craquer* [The chocolate that makes me surrender], where the verb *craquer* has multiple layers of meanings: to give in to sweet temptation, to melt emotionally, or to crack as in the sound of breaking chocolate. It ingeniously translates the multidimensionality of chocolate indulgence, in a sophisticated way, and suggests a discursive nexus for culinary adventures that may be read as carnal ones.

Solidarity within the community of practice is a common feature on recipe sharing sites and it results in positive comments, sustaining community bonding. Nevertheless, the French inclination for creativity in culinary experiments continuously generates posts where individuality emerges in novel suggestions for recipes. Since this is performed in a positive mood, it reinforces the community discursively, and provides opportunity for humour and fun:

“Vraiment LA bonne recette pour des coulants au chocolat ! Ils sont délicieux et coulants à souhait ! J’ai mis légèrement moins de sucre, une tuerie ! “[Really THE good recipe for soft chocolate cakes ! They are delicious and just perfectly liquid ! I put slightly less sugar, it’s just a killer !] (Les Foodies, 11.6.2015)

Tuning is encouraged on recipe sites: in *Marmiton*, recipes can be tagged with a function *J'ajoute mon grain de sel*⁸⁹ [I add my personal comments] that the other members can't see. An overarching tendency amongst French foodies is to add their little something to recipes, for a personal twist.

Healthism primarily appears entangled with creativity, as in a post on a tasting séance around chocolate and wellness:

“Une initiative de développement durable également destinée à être une source d’inspiration pour des chefs soucieux de créer des recettes inédites.” [A sustainable initiative that is moreover suggested as a source of inspiration for chefs interested in creation of inedited recipes.] (*Club*, 23.7.2018)

Sustainability, healthism and good taste are all but compromising, since the highest quality strikes a chord with carefully selected, natural ingredients and small-scale manufacturing. Sustainability issues are not prominent; however, there is a salient concern for the protection of consumers, related to products with low quality or even suspicious ingredients. *Club* discourse highlights the importance of labels such as *pur beurre de cacao* [pure cocoa butter], dismissing the use of other vegetal fat substances. Education and guidance of consumers entwine with the promotion of artisanal, committed producers: defending high quality, artisanal chocolate is the stated mission of the club (*Club*, 25.6.2018).

Artisanal and *artisan* are code-type expressions in French for hand-made, exclusive production mode and products, embedded in narratives of individuality and creativity. They occur frequently in *Club* where detailed descriptions of products are abundant, whilst *Etats* has only two references to artisanal production (*Les Foodies* and *Marmiton* have none). *Etats* is concentrated on experiences and sensations related to chocolate discoveries, hence production conditions are less relevant. While reading *Etats*, it is, however, self-evident that the manufacturers are artisanal and the products exclusive and most often hand-made with the best possible ingredients. Assumptions of artisanal production may therefore unfold as

⁸⁹ Again, this is a culinary wordplay, since *grain de sel* translates literally as “a pinch of salt”.

either underlying or apparent, and this stream constitutes a broader sustainability concern, although it stems from rigour in quality and taste.

7.4.2.2 Symbolic and ritualistic consumption

A compilation of observed themes sustaining symbolic and ritualistic consumption of chocolate features in Table 18, with the discursive frames identified:

| SNS | Salient discursive themes identified in prior research | | | | Identified frames of discourse |
|-----------------------------------|--|-------------|------------------|------------------|---|
| Marmiton (chocolat) | Commensality | Addiction | Sensuality | Emergent rituals | <i>Value of aesthetics, multisensoriality of experience</i> |
| Les Foodies (chocolat) | Commensality | Sensuality | Emergent rituals | Addiction | |
| Le chocolat dans tous nos états | Sensuality | Addiction | Commensality | Emergent rituals | |
| Le Club des Croqueurs de Chocolat | Emergent rituals | Materiality | Addiction | Commensality | |

Table 18. Symbolic and ritualistic consumption in French chocolate discourse.

Sensuality and embodied, addictive chocolate experiences constitute the most salient theme:

“Nous avons découvert le panettone gianduja, totalement addictif, irrésistible, exquis, en d’autres termes du bon, du beau et du vrai pour un Panettone simplement FABULEUX !” [We discovered the gianduja panettone, totally addictive, irresistible, exquisite, in other words tasty, beautiful and real as a simply FABULOUS Panettone! (Etats, 15.4.2019)]

In *Etats*, “passion” is a key word for discourse where chocolate is revered, like a totem. In a brief fragment from the introduction page, several expressions can be found to conduct the reader to a delightful journey for all senses (underlining by the researcher):

“Amoureuses du chocolat depuis toujours, nous voulons partager notre passion en vous décrivant nos coups de cœur pour vous donner envie de vous laisser emporter par ce doux plaisir!” [In love with chocolate since always, we want to share our passion by describing to you our infatuations, to make you desire to get carried away by this sweet pleasure!] (Etats, “Edito”, no date)

Embodiment appears in diversified ways, and in *Etats* sensuality, related indeed to all senses, is uplifted by the beauty of the language to a degree of sophistication where cues of sensuality are without banality, yet unveiled:

“Enfin la poire, sensuelle, dodue et fraîche sur laquelle vient glisser un chocolat chaud de Sao Tomé et quelques graines craquantes de sarrasin. Le plaisir touche à l’extase, tout est séduction, le chocolat chaud, le fumet du soufflé, la douceur de la poire qui cache un cœur de ganache au chocolat.” [Finally, the sensual, plump and fresh pear on which comes gliding hot Sao Tome chocolate and a few crunchy buckwheat seeds. The pleasure touches to ecstasy, everything is seduction, the hot chocolate, the perfume of the soufflé, the softness of the pear where a chocolate ganache heart is hiding.] (Etats, 1.3.2019)

Words like *ecstasy*, *desire*, *seduction*, *temptation* and *passion* are embedded in the narratives of carnal pleasures, traditionally cherished by the French culture and highlighted in their most distinguished form in the corpus by this blog. This discourse embeds in the contemporary foodie trend where food also fulfils embodied needs other than eating, and complements them. Chocolate is a source of joy and pleasure, hence notions of sin appear only with *péché mignon* or *péché de gourmandise* [sweet sin; sin of gluttony].

Sensually described experiences may also arise from seemingly more mundane foods, as in the case of a chocolate bread that provides a corporeal fulfilment:

“Quant au pain tout choco croustillant à souhait, sa morphologie voluptueuse nous incite à le saisir à pleines mains pour le savourer dans un moment purement extatique.” [And the chocolate bread, as crunchy as one can desire, its voluptuous morphology tempts us to grab it in handfuls, to savour it in a purely ecstatic moment.] (Etats, 29.6.2019)

Made from chocolate aligns with the original English version and celebrates multisensorial experiences with images of temptation and surrender:

“Ne résistez plus à la tentation. Vous mourrez d’envie de manger un fondant au chocolat rien que d’imaginer sa texture toucher vos lèvres !” [Don’t resist any more to the temptation. You are about to die of desire to eat a chocolate fondant, if only of imagining its texture touching your lips!] (*Made from chocolate*, French, 25.10.2017)

Recipe sharing and commenting in *Les Foodies* and *Marmiton* reveal communities where commensality is the centre of culinary efforts, and cooking with chocolate is an emerging commensal ritual. Comments on recipes constantly report on the successfulness of chocolate recipes, either with family or with friends. *“Mes convives ont apprécié”* [My guests appreciated], or its negative formulation are common expressions where personal satisfaction as a host depends on the guests’ appreciation. Chocolate treats are a gift. Solitary, indulgent moments of self-gifting chocolate pleasures are not referred to, however. They most probably occur among members, yet the shared moments of delicacies prevail.

Recipe sharing sites fulfil divergent, pragmatic functions. Yet, their discourse reveals aspirations for embodied experiences where the cook may display skill and passion in a typically French, individualised way, where *“recettes fétiches”* [fetish recipes] are constantly sought after. *Les Foodies* features a highly interesting thread of 1760 comments, from which ten first pages are included in corpus (96 posts). They are members’ short posts on a recipe that in itself can be characterised as totemic amongst French chocolate treats: *Moelleux chocolat coeur fondant*, a soft chocolate cake, literally with “a melting heart”. This iconic pudding is one of the most beloved French desserts, and its manifold significance as revelatory of eroticism is discussed e.g. by Mäkelä, Bettany and Stevens (2018). It is not surprising that it inspires so much interest.

Comments span nine years, which speaks for the popularity of the recipe. Posts are very appreciative, with “delicious” as the most common adjective. However, a salient characteristic of the French emerges again: individuality

and taste for a personal touch in cooking. There were 29 comments, almost a third of all analysed posts, suggesting an alteration to the recipe despite a positive overall evaluation, of the type “*Délicieux, mais...*” [Delicious, but...]. Eventually, the recipe is modified to a different version:

“Je double les doses, sauf pour le sucre, j'ajoute un peu de cacao en poudre à la fin et je mets huit carrés de chocolat au cœur du gâteau avant de l'enfourner. Bien sûr, j'utilise un moule à manqué à la place des ramequins.” [I double the doses, except for sugar, I add a little cocoa powder at the end and I put eight chunks of chocolate in the middle before it goes in the oven. Of course, I use a cake pan instead of individual molds.” (Les Foodies, 30.10.2014)]

A corresponding case with *fondant au chocolat* cake is found in *Marmiton* where 691 posts comment the original recipe. Of these, the first 120 are analysed and more than half of them (71) suggest a minor or even a major modification to the original. A typical post reads as “*Excellent avec moitié moins de sucre*” [Excellent, with half of the sugar], and suggested modifications include additional ingredients or spices, omission of the original ones, as well as changes in preparation, utensils or cooking time. The same strategies are observed in another iconic dessert, chocolate mousse.

Materiality of chocolate, throughout its qualities in relation to other ingredients, is most significant in baking contexts, whilst materiality in other SNS is expressed with subtler variation.

Tasting is a truly ritualistic practice and in French, it resembles wine tasting sessions. *Club* provides practical guidelines:

“Au-delà de la gourmandise, le chocolat, comme tout mets délicat, impose une découverte par étapes, charmant tour à tour la vue, le nez et les papilles. Tel le vin, il nécessite beaucoup de soins à l'achat et durant sa conservation.” [More than gourmandise, chocolate, as any delicate dish, imposes discovery in steps, where alternately vision, nose and tastebuds are charmed. Alike wine, it deserves a lot of care at purchase and during conservation.] (Club, 18.3.2013)]

Furthermore, blind tasting sessions are precisely documented, to enhance their ritual value in the community.

7.4.2.3 Frames and discursive strategies

The most significant feature of French discourse is that nationally cherished culinary traditions entwine constantly with more global contemporary foodie trends. In all parts of the corpus, however different they are from each other, cooking styles and quality of ingredients stem from and are reflected towards the French *cuisine*. It serves as a starting point to individualised culinary adventures, as the researcher claims, with the observation that the aspirations for aesthetic and multisensorial experiences of the national tradition set a standard to French foodies, to an extent that is uncommon in other food cultures analysed in foodie research (Mäkelä, 2016; Unesco, 2017). However, this heritage is interpreted in individualistic ways which creates interesting friction across online community building, and individual identity construction as a foodie.

Chocolate is described with much more variation than chilli: in home cooking, it provides opportunities for indulgence, gifting and individual creativity. These are mostly described as commensal experiences, and chocolate does not stand out as a treat for solitary moments. In more capital-intensive contexts, chocolate conveys a panoply of embodied, sensorial and sensual experiences where rituals and addiction entwine: tasting, evaluating, appreciating, sharing, discovering, feeling. A rich tapestry of emotions is conveyed in a language that becomes food in itself.

Discursive themes identified in prior literature on totemic foods emerge with shifting degrees, contributing to multivocality. Thus, six broad frames are suggested as findings: *Frenchness*, *adventure*, *passion*, *sophistication*, *value of aesthetics*, and *multisensoriality of experience*. They overarch chocolate discourse in French, and align with the more general frames of foodieism defined by Johnston and Baumann (2009, 2015), i.e. authenticity, exotism and expertise.

The observations above address Fairclough's (2015) questions on why discourse is as it is, and what are the actions it describes. Regarding the role of language in this process, one needs to analyse the discursive strategies

supporting these frames. They deviate significantly from English and Finnish. One phenomenon stands out in this comparison: discursive variation in French is more nuanced and highly dependent on the genre (website, blog or recipe sharing site). Vocabulary and the stylistic and grammatical phenomena closely align with the positioning of the SNS in the foodie consumption sphere. In *Etats* and *Club*, chocolate is celebrated with extremely rich linguistic resources, reflecting the passion of the French for sophisticated language and meticulously prepared delicacies.

In *Etats* and *Club*, one finds no orthographic flaws or uncertainties of expression, but a discursive realm where cultivated use of the French language is expected. This discourse reveals authors – and assumed readers – who are at ease in a communication context that also requires high capitals in a discursive sense. Expressions carry many cultural and literary connotations, and authors are not afraid to occasionally employ archaic grammatical structures. A reader savours the elegance of French, emulating a sensorial experience of relishing high-quality chocolate products. The President of *Club* signs his posts with “Chocolatement vôtre” [Chocolately Yours], which stands out as a linguistic code to enhance the community feeling, respecting the traditions of elegant written communication.

Discursive strategies gain in resourcefulness, when the topic is perceived as totemically meaningful, as examples on iconic desserts reveal. *Les Foodies* and *Marmiton* use diverging resources, when compared with the other French SNS: they are mostly displayed in brief posts that are rich with abbreviations typical to online discourse (e.g. *c tres bon* for *c’est très bon*), and vernacular and slang expressions. The discourse displays a body of members who do not all possess the same degree of discursive capital as contributors – and assumedly, readers – in *Club* and especially in *Etats*. The small fragment below has six orthographic faults, with additional errors in punctuation, that the translation endeavours to convey:

*“je lai déjà fait sublime super bon moi j'ai pas mit de poudre
d'amande et pas de chocolat noir a la place j'ai mit du chocolat
au lait en carraux”* [I alredy made it delicious super good me i

didt put almond powder and no dark chocolat insted i put milk chocolate in chuks] (Les Foodies, 28.11.2015)

However, there are several contributors who make the effort and are capable of using correct French, and variation in this competence shows that cooking is a national adventure: especially recipe sharing sites that are outlets where French foodies with different levels of education gather together, since writing skills are a significant variable reflecting one's education in French-speaking contexts. To what extent the genre of discourse affects this variation is a topic for another study, yet it is noteworthy that a discussion forum is obviously not able to require similar discursive strategies with a sophisticated blog, or a website of an exclusive association. In French however, this variation is stronger and more nuanced than in English or Finnish.

Discourse in *Les Foodies* and *Made from chocolate* unfolds as the most unconventional, whilst *Marmiton* features more characteristics of standard French. *Club* and *Etats* are positioned at the other extremity of the continuum of discursive competence, with *Etats* as a benchmark for elegance and complexity.

Adhering to a community may require displays of competence. To become a member of *Club*, a chocolate lover must extend the pleasure of tasting towards intellectual satisfaction of knowledge (Club, Devenir membre). Again, a very French discursive phenomenon emerges: emphasising intellectual capital and using factual knowledge as a strategy of argumentation. Mastery of proper orthography and possession of a cultivated vocabulary constitute an outstanding discursive capital, or “linguistic habitus” of the interlocutor (Wodak & Meyer, 2016). It is an asset that clearly distinguishes online contributors in French, and when combined with economic and culinary capital, it creates elements for distinction that are discussed in Chapter 8.

Made from chocolate in its French version features similar content with the English site, however with slightly different discursive strategies. The blog highlights chocolate as a truly totemic ingredient, with the aim of uniting chocolate lovers to “honour the best that can exist”. For “lovers”, two

expressions are used: “amateurs de chocolat” and the more sensual “amoureux de chocolat”. This is noteworthy since in French, “aimer” translates as “like” and “love”, whilst “amoureux de” refers to be profoundly in love with something or someone. Moreover, “un amateur” does not only refer to non-professionalism, but to dedication and deep affection towards an occupation.

Differences occur in strategies such as word choice and punctuation which confirms sensuality as a salient feature in French:

*“Qu’il s’agisse d’un **gâteau au chocolat**, d’une **mousse**, ou bien d’un **brownie**, nous avons tous vécu cette expérience incroyable qui nous donne des frissons.”* [The direct translation: Whether it concerns a chocolate cake, a mousse or a brownie, we have all lived this incredible experience that makes us shiver.”] (Made from chocolate, no date)

The English version reads however:

*“Whether its a **chocolate cake**, a **chocolate mousse** or a **chocolate brownie**, we have all been there and experienced that first bite that sends your tingling taste buds into heaven.”*

“Donne des frissons” is a broader sensual metaphor than “send tingling taste buds into heaven”. The first provides a concealed erotic cue, as the sensation is described to fulfill the whole body, and the second refers to a “bite” and the physiological taste only, although powerfully.

More discursive deviation occurs in word choice and punctuation, with the French version featuring a slightly more specific chocolate terminology: e.g. it refers to *ganache*, which is not found in the English site at all. With the recipe of chocolate fondue (Made from chocolate, no date), the French version uses an ellipsis to highlight the sense of discovery, even mystery, whilst the English version has a simple full stop:

“Sa texture, son odeur, sa douceur...”
“Its texture, its smell, its softness.”

Fun and flirtation are important constituents of all French discourse, and SNS display internally negotiated discursive conduct norms which are, moreover, sustained together. Politeness is never forgotten unless there is any infraction towards the community. Hence, bonding as well as building cohesion in the community (Kozinets, 2010) constitute the principal types of online interaction, and occasional “cruisers” are not common in conversation sites. Dominating constructs of discourse (de Valck *et al.*, 2009) are sharing knowledge and celebrating similarities.

7.5 Conclusion

The broad, cross-linguistic comparative analysis on Research Question 1 is summarised here. It leads to the identification of processes that are partly common for the languages and that partly deviate from each other. All themes identified in the contemporary foodie movement by Gad Mohsen (2017) are present in discourse on totemic chilli and chocolate: learning and discovery, inspirational influences, quality, pleasure and enjoyment, and the experiential function of food.

Two main types of findings are observed. The first contribute to extant research with additional insights: totemic food behaviour emerges across identity construction connected to indulgence, fun, addiction, and presumptive activities. It posits commensal activity as a nexus for symbolic and ritualistic consumption that relates mainly to addiction, meaning and materiality. When adhering to an online tribe, one ascribes meaning to significant foodstuffs in a consumption cycle that requires a lot of material substances, to provide a full foodie experience. This generates embodied pleasure, learning and fun. A common language shapes and sustains community cohesion and provides new ways to communicate. A comparative analysis of these linguistic features diversifies knowledge on multivocality and superdiversity of online foodie discourse.

The second cluster of findings contributes to knowledge with novel insights on language-specific dimensions. They stem from the identification of

significant differences demonstrated by a small-scale analysis, with methods of pragmatic linguistics, alongside a broader sociological scrutiny. Findings strengthen the initial problem setting, justifying an elaborate comparison across three languages: frames of foodie discourse shift in matters of language, contextually, and according to the genre of discourse and the discursive resources of contributors.

Furthermore, the focal foods reveal deviating discursive foodscapes. One does not revere chilli and chocolate in the same ways in three languages, and not even in the same language. Findings display how contextuality in online communication affects sub-tribal discourse on consumption, and shapes in turn the extralinguistic reality of communicating people. Chilli is most totemic when it represents something else than the substance: heat, masculinity, a magic element in a dish... whilst chocolate is mostly revered for the refined flavours, offering opportunities for diverse distinctions, and the emotional contexts of its consumption.

Identified frames of totemic consumption are compiled in Table 18, with a concluding definition for each section:

| Chilli | | | Chocolate | |
|---------|--|--|----------------------------|--|
| Finnish | crafting | Solitary and displayed, crafting consumption of men in a heteronormative ethos | learning | Emotionally charged and innocently embodied consumption focusing on unpretentious learning |
| | heteronormative masculinity | | emotional capital | |
| | simplicity | | unpretentiousness | |
| | embeddedness of solitary and displayed foodieism | | simplicity | |
| | | | sensoriality | |
| | | | innocent embodiment | |
| | | | | |
| English | endurance | Competitive male consumption reaching secularly spiritual functions | freedom from guilt | Guilt-free but conscious consumption articulated around embodied experiences |
| | challenge | | consciousness | |
| | protection of masculine spheres | | rich nuances of embodiment | |
| | secular spirituality | | | |
| | | | | |
| French | precision | Skillful and creative | Frenchness | Passionate, multisensorially |
| | skillfulness | | adventure | |

| | | | | |
|--|--------------|---|---------------------------------|---|
| | Frenchness | consumption dominated by quest of authenticity but reflected towards national heritage | passion | embodied and aesthetic consumption in French contexts, seeking for adventure |
| | creativity | | sophistication | |
| | authenticity | | value of aesthetics | |
| | | | multisensoriality of experience | |
| Good versus Evil – Right versus Wrong – Accepted versus Rejected | | | | |

Table 19. Compilation of discursive frames of totemic consumption in the corpus.

As in computer-mediated communication in general, a constantly evolving combination of multivocal discourses emerges. The process is fashioned by SNS affordances; competences of users; genres, and contextual differences such as language, and the outlet types (Mann & Stewart, 2000). In this kaleidoscopic discursive richness, predominant frames can be identified, however.

A narrative overarching the entire corpus, in shifting degrees of salience, is juxtaposition of Good and Evil, Right and Wrong, or Accepted and Rejected: in locutions drawing from biblical imagery of heaven and hell, in terms of positive and negative health effects, in accepted or rejected ways of consumption, and in environmentally concerned debates on sustainability, challenged by indulgent desires. These dyads align with the dualities identified in chilli and chocolate (Chapter 4), and confirm their significance as totemic substances for contemporary foodie consumers. Moreover, they enact the juxtaposition of health and indulgence, as one of the four antinomies of taste analysed by Warde (1997), and embrace theorising by Lupton and Feldman (2020) on binary oppositions underpinning digital food cultures, such as female-male or clean-dirty that entwine with affective dimensions of pleasure, community feelings, or shame.

Gratifications and guilt cohabit in this discourse, shedding light on growing problematisation in contemporary food consumption where negotiation of

individual comfort zones and ethical boundary work are an ongoing engagement.

This rich tapestry eventually unfolds as discursive foodscapes where chilli and chocolate are the protagonists in a play with changing plots, décors and lightning. The frames identified above merge in the discursive foodscape discovered in relation to Research Question 1, described here. Chilli and chocolate are imbued with totemic significance in online consumption spheres where secularly oriented spirituality enmeshes with creativity emerging in culinary exploration, as well as in presumptive activities.

Underlying dualities, inherent with chilli and chocolate, foreground discursive tensions, whilst emotionally laden sharing and learning stand out as the dominant outcomes of consumptive and discursive processes. They are channeled by generating and distributing CMD content, stemming from individual and co-creational practices. The dynamic nexus of the discursive foodscape is construed by embodied consumptive experiences that fuel all other dimensions, however displaying two salient contextual orientations: masculine competitiveness and more gender-neutral indulgence.

Chapter 8: Performance of taste and distinction across discursive productions of chilli and chocolate online

8.1 Introduction

“Just because I love and enjoy high quality chocolate does not mean I now hate what I used to eat. A good Curly Wurly is always welcome in my tummy!” (Mostly about chocolate, no date)

From capital-intensive sophistication towards cultural omnivorousness – Chapter 8 shifts the scope to Research Question 2: *How do consumers perform taste and distinction across discursive productions on chilli and chocolate online?* Contributing to post-Bourdieuian debates on taste performance, this inquiry is embedded in the core research problem on emergence of totemic foods online, where RQ2 and RQ3 construe sub-questions to RQ1.

Processes of cultivating and exhibiting taste in Social Networking Services are designated here as “doing taste” in discourse. They reflect users’ strategies of displaying culinary distinction, in order to highlight social distinction. In online foodie contexts, the two are irrevocably entwined, and the focus here is on their variation.

The chapter does not include an overarching cross-linguistic analysis, since it primarily targets transnational dimensions of foodieism, with their multivocal representations in CMD (Kytölä, 2013). Significant variation across languages is observed, however, when it facilitates the deciphering of RQ2.

Section 8.2 extends the theorisation of CCT-oriented research on social and physiological components of taste to a cross-linguistic corpus, articulated with *taste engineering* (Maciel & Wallendorf, 2016). Thereinafter, the observation of culinary capital and formality deepens the understanding of how resources of language are used to convey distinctive purposes, aligning with categories of culinary capital (8.3).

The chapter seeks, moreover, for answers for the guiding questions by Fairclough (2015), in Table 6: “*What types of processes and participants predominate?*”, “*What experiential value do words have?*”, and “*What metaphors are used?*”.

In sections 8.2–8.3, concepts of critical discourse studies enhance the interdisciplinary perusal on doing taste, according to the framework of analysis (Table 6). Whenever pertinent, characteristics of CMD as a unique discursive realm are observed, according to item 2B in Table 6. A concluding section (8.4) binds together the findings.

8.2 Taste engineering: when habitus turns into action

Taste engineering is a set of practices enhancing cultural competence to move “towards connoisseurship” where multisensorial cultivation and discursive resources entangle (Maciel & Wallendorf, 2016, p734). The authors conceptualise it as discursive practices drawing on interconsumer collaboration (*op. cit.*, p278).

Binding bodily senses to community-level discourses requires and generates expertise in a diverse, creative, and exploratory process. Maciel and Wallendorf’s (2016) study on beer aficionados has a similar positioning with Research Question 2, focusing on *how* taste dispositions become practices after the consumptive habitus has been construed (here: the habitus of a foodie, with sub-tribal categories displayed in Table 21), yet being continuously shaped by institutional discourses. The theory identifies *institutional benchmarking*, *autodidactics* and *cooperative scaffolding* as key processes in taste engineering. These collaborative practices highlight the importance of co-creation in accumulation and display of cultural competences.⁹⁰

⁹⁰ Authors prefer this term to “(sub)cultural capital” of the Bourdieusian tradition, judging it as focusing too much on the competitive dimension in taste performance.

However, Maciel and Wallendorf's (2016) study does not fully correspond to the present research design with exclusively online data. Co-creation in a single craft beer community signifies enhanced opportunities for exchanging information and learning experiences, and intensifies Bourdieusian status games. In the hybrid, multivocal and multimodal context of CMD, dissection of taste engineering practices gains in relevance, when the theory is adjusted to a corpus with several sources and different sub-tribal consumption practices, which is suggested below. The concept of *engineering* one's taste is nevertheless highly pertinent and offers perspectives of contextual adaptation.

Institutional benchmarking and cooperative scaffolding remain relevant in the present research context, however the practice of autodidactics does not, since the present methodology involves only (netnographically inspired) discourse analysis on archived data and no ethnographic tools such as interviews where autodidactic practices could be observed better. Two alternative, significant practices, explanatory of processes inherent in totemic foodie contexts, are therefore suggested: *manifold highlighting* and *secular preaching*. Both are identified here as distinct strategies and, moreover, applied in conjunction with scaffolding that can be defined as a more technical practice, whilst highlighting and preaching draw on styles and accentuated topics in discourse.

Institutional benchmarking and cooperative scaffolding are presented first and the novel practices thereafter. The interpretation of benchmarking and scaffolding is broader here than in the original study (*op.cit.*): they are analysed from the viewpoint of all contributors of the SNS, due to the discursive dissimilarity between digital and ethnographic data. This approach is justified by the encouragement to methodological creativity in digital contexts (Kozinets, 2002, 2010; Markham, 2013a, 2013b).

Taste engineering related to culinary taste and social taste involves interplay of sensorial experiences and discourses stemming therefrom. Active deeds and learning contribute to an embodied discovery journey:

*“Open your mind to all the amazing things that can be done with it! From **chocolate and beauty** to eating **chocolate during pregnancy**, there is so much to learn about this milky, heavenly delight. [...] Join us as we discover all the ins and outs of chocolate.”* (Made from chocolate: Fun with chocolate, no date).

For foodies, the physiological taste is a core component of gratifying food experiences. When these are described in the context of displaying culinary and social distinction, multivocality in the corpus generates colourful vistas of celebrating flavour where all positive gustatory qualities analysed by Rozin (2015) are present: good, beneficial, appropriate and transvalued taste (see Chapter 2).

Thematically, co-occurrence of physiological taste and distinction objectives is diversified, yet the overarching strategy is to emphasise capability to assess and appreciate physiological taste as an integral constituent of one's culinary and social competences as a foodie. Table 20 presents the most frequent contexts for both totemic ingredients. The items in bold italics reveal five areas in common for chilli and chocolate – although with a different standing – where distinction emerges most often connected with physiological taste:

| Chilli | Chocolate |
|--|--|
| Burning heat sensation | <i>Nuances of flavour</i> |
| <i>Deeply embodied experience</i> | <i>Perceived quality in tasting</i> |
| Enhancement of masculinity | <i>Deeply embodied experience</i> |
| <i>Perceived quality in tasting</i> | Sensuality and sensoriality |
| <i>Nuances of flavour</i> | Health effects with good taste |
| Potential for crafting | Prestige |
| <i>Appropriateness in cooking</i> | Tastiness with sustainability |
| Potential for prosumption | <i>Appropriateness in baking</i> |
| Challenge in cultivation | <i>National and regional significance</i> |
| <i>National and regional significance</i> | Reminiscent of fond memories |
| Rarity of cultivars | Suitability as a gift |

Table 20. Physiological taste as a component of distinction.

“Deeply embodied experiences” relate to sweet indulgence with chocolate, and to overwhelming bodily sensations with chilli.

The knowledge-enhancing nature of foodie sites signifies that taste engineering is a key domain of accumulating competences. Table 21 provides an overview of its practices in the corpus, ascribing discursive roles for contributors. Rather than attempting to categorise the corpus absolutely, the table seeks to illustrate discursive flexibility in taste engineering. Each SNS is made bold in the category which corresponds the most to its taste engineering practices, whilst a site may feature several of them. It is noteworthy that “secular preaching” is suggested here with positive connotations: to advocate and instil, and not in the sense of “sermonising” a person or the foodie congregation.

| <i>Displayed discursive role</i> | Institutional benchmarking | Cooperative scaffolding | Manifold highlighting | Secular preaching |
|---|--|--|---|--|
| chocolate connoisseur | Club des Croqueurs de chocolat Le chocolat dans tous nos états Suklaayhdistys Chocablog | Chocablog Suklaayhdistys | Chocablog Club des Croqueurs de chocolat Le chocolat dans tous nos états | Chocablog Club des Croqueurs de chocolat Le chocolat dans tous nos états |
| chocolate lover and baker | Suklaapossu Kinuskikissa Made from chocolate (En, Fr) Mostly about chocolate | Suklaapossu Kinuskikissa Marmiton (chocolate) Les Foodies (chocolate) Made from chocolate (En, Fr) Mostly about chocolate | Suklaapossu Kinuskikissa Made from chocolate Mostly about chocolate | Made from chocolate (En, Fr) Mostly about chocolate |
| creative cook | Marmiton (chilli) Les Foodies (chilli) | Marmiton (chilli) Les Foodies (chilli) Marmiton (chocolate) Les Foodies (chocolate) | | |
| playful chillihead | Chilifoorumi Clifton Chilli Club The Chilli Temple | Chilifoorumi Jatkoaika Clifton Chilli Club The Chilli Temple | Clifton Chilli Club The Chilli Temple Chilifoorumi Jatkoaika | Chilifoorumi Jatkoaika |

| | | | | |
|--------------------------|--|--|--|---|
| chilli aficionado | Fiery Foods with BurnBlog and Dave de Witt Scott Roberts | | Fiery Foods with BurnBlog and Dave de Witt Scott Roberts | Fiery Foods with BurnBlog and Dave de Witt Scott Roberts |
|--------------------------|--|--|--|---|

Table 21. Taste engineering practices and discursive roles.

Taste engineering is a continuum of processes where the foodie habitus takes action in discourse. “Habitus” is a highly individual, internalised entity, hence challenging to be determined and categorised from an outsider researcher’s position. Therefore, it is presented in this context as a “discursive role”, a corresponding concept like an ideal type. It is defined as the discursive performance of the foodie habitus in a social setting. Tendencies are discernible, despite superdiversity and multimodality of CMD. Self-evidently, the status of the online contributor affects communication: site owners, bloggers, community members and commenting readers do practice diversified roles, and these may also shift (Cover, 2016).

Although all discourse on chilli evokes playful, easy-going consumption and communication styles, “aficionados” and “playful chilliheads” are articulated as divergent groups, since the first are more prone to practice secular preaching tones. However, the discursive role of contributors in *Marmiton* and *Les Foodies* is labelled as a “creative cook” also for the chilli content where chilli has mostly a supporting role; in the French corpus, the category of a dedicated chilli sub-tribe is missing. For chocolate in *Marmiton* and *Les Foodies*, the role of a chocolate lover and baker is nevertheless identified as well.

8.2.1 Institutional benchmarking

Institutional benchmarking is defined by Maciel and Wallendorf (2016) as the first level in acquisition of culinary competence, mostly enhanced by other engineering practices. It supports the social component of distinction, construed by the consumptive orientation reflecting the habitus: from heat-

emphasising chilliheadism towards omnivorous and epicurean tastes (see also section 8.3). A foodie habitus is dynamic in digital contexts: when sub-tribal engagement to a community of practice is strong, the habitus is more shared, whilst in other consumption contexts it gains in individuality. This reflects fragmentarity of postmodern consumer identities, observed by Belk and Costa (1998).

Benchmarking discourse reflecting one's habitus generates opinions on consumption styles, which occurs most often in blogs:

"I think this is the perfect Christmas gift for the slightly conservative Notting Hill locals who form the bulk of Melt's customers. They want beautiful, quality Christmas gifts, but are less interested in experimental flavours." (Chocablog, 10.12.2012)

The concept of benchmarking can be interpreted in reverse in SNS contexts: authorities with recognised knowledge disseminate their expertise, whilst the process of reception is less salient and remains as an individual practice, also occurring offline.⁹¹

"Nous rendrons hommage aux « meilleurs des meilleurs » en ajoutant des textes destinés à permettre, au grand public, de connaître un peu mieux encore, votre univers." [We pay tribute to the "best of the best" by adding texts allowing for the general public to know even better your universe.] (Club, 9.5.2019)

Institutional benchmarking is frequent where authority in matters of taste is ascribed to the leading personalities in the community: founders, content providers, interviewees or celebrities of the subtribe. This is particularly prominent in chilli discourse in Finnish and English, and interestingly, in the other extremity of social distinction: on connoisseurial chocolate sites. In blogs, authority has been internalised and ascribed *a priori*, and it is displayed with contextual knowledge.

⁹¹ This individual learning in offline contexts was emphasised in Maciel & Wallendorf (2016).

Recognition also stems from benchmarks from domains beyond the sub-tribe:

“We've worked with TV personalities such as Paul Hollywood, James Wong, Evil Jared Hasselhoff (Bloodhound Gang) Dr Michael Mosley and Alan Titchmarsh. We've even given chilli growing advice to bands including Hayseed Dixie & Deer Tick!” (Clifton Chilli Club, no date)

A high degree of institutional benchmarking is an ingrained dimension in a foodie habitus: seeking for the highest quality, the most nuanced flavours and the hottest chilli sensations is discursively more efficient, when names and institutions are mentioned and endorsed (Kozinets *et al.*, 2010). The only category where this practice is less salient is that of the pragmatically oriented, French recipe sharing sites.

Mentioning culinary benchmarks in terms of people, products and institutions establishes a frame of reference for followers aiming at the same degree of sensorial knowledge:

“We are honoured to have industry titans Johan Hard (aka CaJohn) and Vic Clinco as regular contributors. Both are passionate chilli-heads with strong writing experience.” (Hot Sauce with Everything magazine by Clifton Chilli Club, Summer 2019).

*“Tuotteen **Valrhona manjari 64%** valmistusmaa on Ranska. Se on saanut jäseniltä pistekeskiarvon 3,82 ja löytyy top 100 -listan sijalta 53. Katso lisäksi vierailijoiden arviot tuotteesta ja kaikki Valrhona –tuotteet.”* [**Valrhona manjari 64%** is produced in France. It has obtained an average score of 3,82 from members and features as number 53 on the top100 list. Check also guests' evaluations and all Valrhona products.] (Suklaayhdistys, 11.6.2019).

8.2.2 Cooperative scaffolding

In foodies' online fora, exploratory taste accumulation processes are shared and documented. Therefore, systematic and individual learning in matters of taste, defined as autodidactics, mostly entangles with community-level shared learning. Internalisation of learning is hence less displayed than the

process of seeking and providing guidance, *cooperative scaffolding*, presented in this section. It reduces uncertainty since convergence in sensory experiences of aficionados “intelligibly marks their progress in a mastery of practice.” (Maciel & Wallendorf, 2016, p740).

Cooperative scaffolding provides social cohesion and establishes hierarchy (*op. cit.*), although hierarchic constructs remain opaque in all-digital community contexts. Again, the present position is extended from Maciel and Wallendorf’s (2016) study: the concept of scaffolding is adapted here not only to tasting skills, but it also pervades spheres of contextual knowledge and culinary techniques. This aligns with the superdiversity and multivocality in the corpus.

The diverging contexts of cooperative scaffolding identified in the corpus are denominated and displayed in Figure 1: seeking encouragement, asking for advice, exhibiting learning, disseminating knowledge, reviewing, and assessing achievements. Moreover, they are considered in relation to the changing discursive status of contributors: a reader or a commenting member in a learner’s position; and a blogger, an outstanding community member or a site owner in an expert’s position. The shifts in status reflect the continuum from learning towards sharing expertise (the uppermost row), as modes of accumulation and display of competences in different contexts.

The arrows in the second row signify how contributors with different statuses relate to and make use of various scaffolding contexts. “Member” here refers only to discursive activity on the site, and not to an officially ascribed status of membership, which would be impossible to verify.

The coloured rows visualise variation of cooperative scaffolding in corpus, a coloured cell standing for active emergence of the context in question.

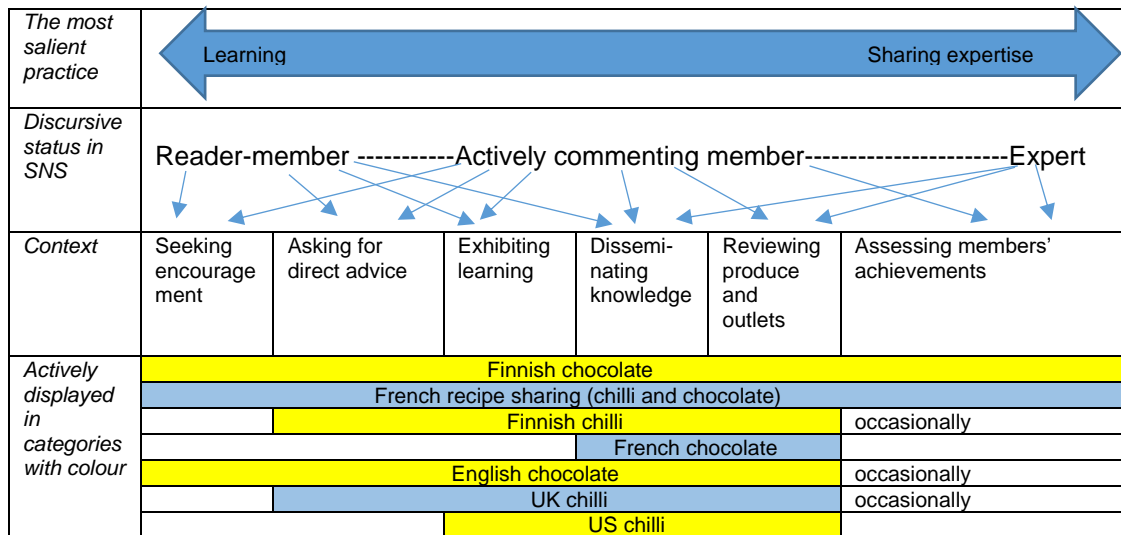


Figure 1. Contexts of cooperative scaffolding.

Contextually, there is significant variation across outlet genres and languages, and moreover, differences between UK- and US-originated chilli discourse. Finnish chocolate lovers (in all three SNS) and French creative cooks (Marmiton and Les Foodies) emerge as the most versatile scaffolders, whilst the epicurean French chocolate scene and North-American chilliheadism represent more restricted arenas for co-creational learning. This aligns with the findings displayed in Table 21: taste engineering is mostly practiced on those sites with secular preaching. Hence, it is possible to discursively distinguish sites where engineering is primarily reversed, with the strategy to display expertise and provide occasions for learning, rather than to generate co-creational learning in matters of taste.

The status of an actively commenting member is the most diversified, contributing to all types of cooperative scaffolding. It is also the most frequent in the corpus, which is natural in contexts articulated around taste competence accumulation. Seeking for encouragement only emerges in chocolate discourse (and on French recipe sites with chilli), which is compatible with the masculine, even tough, ethos on “chillihead” sites.

When co-creational learning is intensive and motivated by internal (self-development) and external (an empowering community) gratifications, a

novice can develop into an expert, and the community supports these processes with positive feedback. This phenomenon is analysed in section 9.3.

In blogs, comment sections are a fertile arena to solicitate the expert's mastery to be conveyed to readers/members:

"Congratulations for winning. I make chocolate and chocolate natural colors I do not really know how to pass it on to the development and knowledge ... I would love to hear from you how to do it:-) Thanks." (A reader's comment in Chocablog, 26.4.2015)

"Kaapista löytyisi ranskankermää, mutta ei piimää – mitä luulet onnistuisiko kakku ranskankermalla vai jääkö tuo kakulle ominainen mehevyys pois silloin?" [I would have crème fraîche in my cupboard, but no buttermilk – what do you think, would the cake be good with crème or would it make it less moist?] (A reader's comment in Suklaapossu, 19.12.2016)

SNS affordances allowing, technically, learning becomes a recreational practice shared in the entire community and not just a process between the expert(s) and the reader(s). Often, replies to one's question come rapidly from other members and enable moving on in culinary attempts:

"Tu peux peut être t'inspirer de cette façon de faire...sans le sucre bien sûr. Moi, je mettrai des piments frais et pas de sel. Le plus simple quoi!" [You could perhaps get inspired by this preparation style...without sugar of course. I would use fresh chillies and no salt. Easy as anything!] (Marmiton, 16.5. 2017)

Seeking and providing advice is frequent in baking blogs, recipe sharing sites and conversation fora that provide a swift and discursively flexible arena for these exchanges. Cooperative scaffolding provides fast gratifications and unfolds as a core activity in the entire online foodscape.

8.2.3 Manifold highlighting

"That's why it is not only important to reclaim farm but highlight more Grenada chocolate." (Mostly about chocolate, 15.8.2018)

This quotation oriented the verbal definition of a frequent discursive taste engineering practice, suggested to complement the theory. *Manifold highlighting* puts the emphasis flexibly on products and experiences that the contributor finds significant and wants to share, mostly tagging them positively. Yet, negative highlighting occurs whenever poor quality, unsustainable production or compromising practices are evoked.

Contributors focus their attention on topics that are significant for their consumptive habitus. Highlighting is a typical feature of user-generated CMD, emerging in all three languages and in most SNS types in the corpus, although it is most abundant in blogs. Evaluations (1), recommendations, scoring (2) and descriptions of taste experiences entwine with broader contextual posts (3):

(1) *“And, the fire! No, this won’t compare to some of the ghost pepper, trinidad scorpion and carolina reaper BBQ products out there in the market, but this is a formidable spicy sauce that would be too hot for non-chileheads.”* (Scott Roberts, 16.5.2011)

(2) *“‘L’excellence’ pour le chocolat ou le dessert qui nous a le plus touché gustativement, morphologiquement et en terme de créativité.”* [Prize of “Excellence” for the chocolate that has touched us the most in a gustatory, morphologic and creative sense.”] (Etats, 13.12.2015)

(3) *“Tällä viikolla vietetään Reilun kaupan viikkoa. Reilun kaupan yhteydessä voisi puhua myös lähiruoasta ja luomusta – ja yleisemmin eettisestä ja vastuullisesta kuluttamisesta.”* [This week is dedicated to Fair Trade. In this context, one could discuss also locavorism and organic products – and more generally, ethical and responsible consumption.] (Kinuskikissa, 20.1.2011)

Positive highlighting occurs in most domains of discourse, although there are topical areas. These correspond to the contextual co-occurrence of physiological taste and distinction, displayed in Table 20, the most highlighted topics being: nuances in flavour; perceived quality in tasting (and of consumption outlet or context); deeply embodied experiences; appropriateness in cooking and baking; and national and regional significance (with significance for the assumed consumptive habitus).

Moreover, healthiness and enhancement of masculinity are frequently highlighted.

Manifold highlighting in discourse draws attention like a spotlight on a scene, showing features that are judged interesting, important and meaningful, or their opposite. Being linguistically flexible, it emerges as the most common discursive practice of taste engineering, depending on the SNS type and the discursive competence of the contributor. In this practice, multisensorial cultivation entangles with discursive resources (Maciel & Wallendorf, 2016).

Six stylistically dissimilar quotations illustrate this broadness, with a continuum from informal discourse towards sophisticated expression by highlighting each in a context of physiological taste:


| | | |
|-----------------------------------|---|--|
| Jatkoaika, 2.7.2008 | <i>"Scovillemittari huutaa hoosiannaa, kun nuggetteja dippaa currykastikkeeseen...."</i> [The scovillemeter screams hosianna, when you dip nuggets in curry sauce...] |  <p>Informal</p> <p>Sophisticated</p> |
| Made from chocolate, 29.4.2015 | <i>"So, not only does chocolate pasta seriously exist (we were dying of excitement too) but there are many pasta recipes that include chocolate for an extra special taste."</i> | |
| The Chilli Temple, 29.7.2017 | <i>"Then you will have a nice cultured, right out of chilli nature yoghurt. Try it, it quite possibly will be the best probiotic yoghurt you've ever tasted, so easy, and no denying ultra cool."</i> | |
| Clifton Chilli Club, 27.9.2019 | <i>"We're quite partial to the citrus & stone fruit notes of the Habanero as well as the intense fruitiness of the Naga Jolokia."</i> | |
| Kinuskikissa, 20.1.2011 | <i>"Emme taida oikein ymmärtää hyvän päälle, sillä allekirjoittaneen ja raatilaisten suuhun nämä 70 % kaakaota sisältävät suklaat maistuivat kitkeriltä."</i> [We probably don't understand that much about quality, since yours truly and the jury found these 70 % cocoa chocolates very bitter in taste.] | |
| Etats, 1.3.2019 | <i>"Un soufflé comme nous n'en avions pas mangé depuis des lustres, juste craquant à l'extérieur et très coulant à cœur. Très peu sucré, le chocolat est à son apogée c'est une merveille !" [A soufflé like nothing we had tasted for ages, just crunchy outside and very liquid inside. Not sweet at all, the chocolate touches perfection, it's a miracle !]</i> | |

Table 22. Stylistic examples of manifold highlighting.

When topics or products are negatively highlighted, taste judgments abide with the stylistic tools of the SNS; either colourful, with overt deprecation (1), or more moderate (2):

(1) *“On this bar thhe label proudly boasted ‘Vintage chocolate making in the French tradition’ which apparently means bitter, overroasted, gritty texture with an odd flavour which I’m not sure what it is. It was overwhelmingly bitter, dry, woody but overall burnt.”* (Mostly about chocolate, 25.4.2011)

(2) *“The heat is very low and some chilli connoisseurs might struggle to detect both heat and flavour from the peppers used.”* (Hot Sauce with Everything magazine by Clifton Chilli Club, Summer 2019)

Fragments with criticism are found typically in the following scenarios:

- the quality of the produce or outlets reviewed is found low (the most frequent case, present in all parts of the corpus)
- the empowering community feeling is compromised (Marmiton on chilli: the intruding “troll”; Jatkoaika: chilli being a fad or not)
- the totemic food does not get the respect it deserves (Chocablog: a marketing event with waste of chocolate)
- sustainability and taste are juxtaposed with friction (found e.g. in Kinuskikissa, Suklaayhdistys, Chilifoorumi, Jatkoaika).

Positive highlighting dominates however, since foodie sites are articulated around activities that are found agreeable, and here, in particular, around ingredients that have a deep significance.

Positive highlighting does not challenge other members of the community, but reaches out to them, for constructive exchange of thoughts and experiences. In conversation fora, highlighting unfolds as polite “dissemination of good practices”:

”Tosi kiva, että otat kantaa luomuun, lähiruokaan ja reiluun kauppaan. Olen itse ’herännyt’ myös niihin, ja pyrin aina kuin mahdollista käyttämään niitä!” [Really nice that you comment on organic, local food and fair trade. I have “awaken” to them myself, and I try to use them whenever possible!] (Suklaayhdistys, 27.10.2010)

The style often draws on advertising discourse:

“Whether you’re a chocolate lover, or you’re simply looking for the ultimate tropical holiday, I wouldn’t hesitate to recommend Grenada. The island is beautiful, the people are wonderful and the chocolate is out of this world. So what are you waiting for?”
(Chocablog, 18.5.2017)

Given the superdiversity of SNS that also generates commercial content in non-commercial outlets, which the contributors embrace with changing strategies of disclosure, the categories of highlighting and preaching are a grey area. Most often, bloggers and site owners mention overtly, when activities or products are sponsored. A common strategy is to disclose all commercial incentives, and to proclaim recommendations and product reviews as the objective. Foodie consumption is a material and materialistic domain, and denying all input from commercial ventures would be unrealistic. Comments from readers sustain this approach, since obtaining recommendations is an important gratification, while following foodie SNS. This is a part of the boundary work of the digital realms, where conventional spaces of consumption are eroding, and which is discussed further in section 9.3.2.

“We much prefer to be a paying customer than a recipient of a free product as this allows us to reduce disappointment should we not get the opportunity to review, film or try the product.”
(Clifton Chilli Club, About, no date)

8.2.4 Secular preaching

When discourse gets shaped by emotions and opinions, converges in mutual reverence of the totemic food, or diverges as sides are taken, taste engineering is practiced discursively by *preaching*, suggested here with a *secular* connotation despite the emergence of spiritual themes in the corpus.

In this type of discourse, the foodie habitus transforms into actions of displaying embodied knowledge and above all, of sharing highly significant

taste experiences. It differs from highlighting in use in discursive strategies: argumentation is stronger, utterances are more intense, and perspectivisation of one's standpoints is more clear-cut. When preaching is positive, a celebratory dimension is more tangible than with highlighting. One's position is made explicit in both positive and negative contexts. The topics generating most preaching correspond to those where highlighting is frequent: flavour nuances; perceived quality; embodied experience; cooking and baking qualities; and ascribed significance. However, health and sustainability emerge as the sixth topical area where preaching tones are apparent.

With chocolate, secular preaching is primarily positive and emphasises pleasant consumption experiences:

"The saltiness of the peanut butter compliments the sweet gooeyness of the white chocolate fudge creating a perfect taste of pure bliss in your mouth." (Made from chocolate, 7.9.2016)

"The sharp snap sings the praise of the chocolate tempering and the scent you get as you smell the chocolate before tasting it fills your nose with the smell of ripening beans, fruit and sun. The flavours are intensely chocolaty with a slightly floral fruity flavour wrapping itself around the mouth like a lover. The chocolate scent tickles its way into the nose, infusing every area with this intensely fruity floral sweet chocolate." (Mostly about chocolate, 28.8.2019)

Secular preaching with chilli is either positively laden and cheerful (1), or nuanced by negative dimensions such as judgment or verbal feuds (2):

(1) *"I poured heavy quantities of XXXTra Hot Private Reserve on a pair of meat and bean hard-shelled beauties. Oh God, was it fantastic. It added a rib-pleasing sweetness and a mouth-and-throat-scalding heat to the food."* (Scott Roberts, 6.8.2009)

(2) *"Aika monta vuotta on tullut juttujasi luettuja: sarkasmia ja tylytystä omaa maailmankuvaasi vastaan sotivia juttuja kohtaan."* [Quite a few years I've been reading your stuff: sarcasm and being rude with things that are opposed to your perspective of the world.] (Jatkoaika, 1.7.2008)

Fragments with a preaching tone are frequently entwined with embodiment; deeply embodied taste experiences are capable of reaching corporeal and emotional spheres where chilli and chocolate are ascribed with totemic qualities, as readers are invited to share the experiences. The more developed the discursive competence of the contributor is, the more powerfully these fragments sustain narratives of profound pleasure, extreme heat, meaningful community interaction – or sensed complexities.

“My hands and feet vibrated with what felt like electric current. I floated in the air, arms and legs numbed. The crowd grew larger, now in awe and pity for my sweaty, veined temples, runny nose and tearful cheeks. It was strangely cathartic to hurt like that in public. A hand lay on my shoulder, and someone asked if they could get me anything. I said no, and tried to describe it on camera. It was excruciating.” (Fiery Foods, 26.4.2015)

Preaching is not as frequent as highlighting and entails risks of exaggeration which can be sensed as overblowing by other contributors. *Made from chocolate* conveys stylistically an almost childlike tone which accentuates the message of happiness and pleasure:

*“Our **chocolate recipes** will go down as the best in the history of chocolate because we just can’t get enough of it! Some may say we have a chocolate addiction, but stay assured that it’s a healthy one. We don’t mind what type of chocolate we use, because to us they are all great.” (Made from chocolate, 29.4.2015)*

Secular preaching occurs most often in blogs, since taking a powerful stand is more natural in a context that is discursively under the full control of contributors. Preaching is found as the dominating practice of taste engineering in *Club*, *Etats*, *Made from chocolate* (both language versions), *Fiery Foods* (with *BurnBlog* and *Dave de Witt*), and *Scott Roberts*. Fragments with a secularly preaching tone are identified in *Chocablog*, *Mostly about chocolate*, *Chilifoorum*, and *Jatkoaika*. Only the last two and *Fiery Foods* are community sites, whilst all others belong to the blog category, with one or several bloggers.

Secular preaching is a practice occurring with both totemic ingredients and detected in all three languages. Yet, the most eloquent examples are found in epicurean French chocolate sites and US-originated chilli discourse. In these categories, embodiment is accentuated: e.g. *Etats* declares itself a blog on “sensorial discovery”, and the slogan for *Scott Roberts* is “Where you turn for the burn”. Intensity of embodied sensations generates enthusiastic discourse, for both ingredients.

Dual narratives of heavenly sweetness and infernal heat are present in this practice, and across metaphors drawing on ritualistic behaviour in non-sacral ways, such as tasting.

“Impossible de s’arrêter, elle est quasi extatique.” [Impossible to stop, it is almost ecstatic.] (*Etats*, 15.4.2019)

“A powerfully complex burst of fire and flavor. You get loads of the mild and sweet taste of pimentos, and then the habs and pepper extract hit your tongue like a sledgehammer.” (*Scott Roberts*, 6.8.2009)

Since secular preaching gets fuelled by embodiment, contributors strive for conveying extreme bodily sensations with expressive words and metaphors. This results in chilli- and chocolate talk reminiscent of testimonials of faith, where writers sincerely describe their journeys or searching and finding. In particular, chilli enthusiasts express their consumption style as “a calling” that must be practiced across continuous engagement.

In addition to appreciative discourse on products and sensations, secular preaching is frequent with topics of healthism and sustainability that emerge as contemporary foodie totems. With these themes, chilli and chocolate again emerge as secular foodie substitutes for spirituality. They also generate frequent highlighting; however, fragments with a preaching style stand out with their richness in description, where dimensions of exploration and celebration entwine:

“Divine is delighted to have created this tempting new rich dark range bursting with a host of natural feelgood flavours in our first organic chocolate, made with specially sourced cocoa from tropical São Tomé. With cocoa sourced from the CECAQ-11 farmers’ co-operative in São Tomé, and purchased via Fairtrade partner GEPA, Divine’s delicious new range is an exploration in rich and intriguing flavour combinations.” (Mostly about chocolate, 20.9.2018)

Occurrences of secular preaching stand out as linguistically creative, rich with adjectives and qualifiers. Furthermore, they feature abundant metaphors for embodiment that draw on phenomena of nature, or on an erotic imagery: a breeze, a scent, a landscape, a fire, a flame, a tickle, a caress, a kiss. As in religious preaching, simplified juxtapositions facilitate conveying the message: healthy – unhealthy, fair – unfair, sinfully hot – bluntly watery, rich in nuances – dull in flavour. Even profane ingredients gain sacral dimensions in the consumptive ethos of preaching the Taste in the postmodern foodie religion.

8.3 Capitals displayed from sophistication to vulgarity

This section unpacks the emergence of diverse capitals in the corpus, for increased synergy of investigation of competence accumulation, unfolded above, and of “capital” as a core component in Bourdieusian taste theorising.

“[I]es artisans font parvenir à ces « palais d’exception » quatre bonbons de chocolat qu’ils choisissent parmi ceux qu’ils considèrent comme leurs spécialités.” [Artisanal manufacturers bring to these “exceptional palates” four chocolates chosen among the ones judged as their specialities.] (Club, no date).

To be qualified for tasting sessions of *Club des Croqueurs de Chocolat*, one has to possess an “exceptional palate”: a remarkably rare, trained ability to distinguish most delicate flavours of the best chocolates. The palates belong to a restricted group of unnamed connoisseurs who fulfil selective criteria of membership. In descriptions of these blind sessions, qualities of presentation, texture, flavour, balance and length in mouth are evaluated and

scored with precision, reminiscent of the protocols of wine tasting and encapsulating the ritualistic dimensions described by Ratcliffe *et al.* (2019): an artifact, a script, a defined place and an audience that in this context exists online.

The *Club* quotation reveals the performance of culinary capital in distinct processes where physiological and social dimensions of taste entwine with identity work. French epicurian chocolate discourse of *Etats* and *Club* represents the sophistication extremity in the continuum of taste-related foodietalk in the corpus. It displays capitals that are obtained by continuous culinary training, by expert positions in specialised communities, and by embodied processes where a foodstuff constitutes an element of ritualistic behaviour. Taste competence generating culinary capital is accumulated and displayed in a continuum of discursive processes.

Etats elegantly highlights the most capital-intensive contexts of consumption, although some diversity occurs in the outlets presented. References to lavish consumption contexts are nevertheless frequent:

“Luxe, calme et volupté... Un parenthèse enchantée à deux pas des Champs Elysées dans la fabuleuse avenue Montaigne, bienvenue au Plaza Athénée, à la découverte du brunch féérique du week-end.” [Luxury, serenity, sensual pleasure...An enchanted break at two steps of Champs Elysées, on the fabulous Avenue Montaigne, welcome to Plaza Athénée to discover a fairytale weekend brunch.] (*Etats*, 29.6.2019)

Etats discourse confirms the findings by Jurafsky *et al.* (2014) on increasing complexity of discursive constructions, when expensive outlets are reviewed online. Across the corpus, mentioning consumption outlets and contexts is an overarching strategy to convey cues on prestige or affordability of the products, without direct reference to their price:

“The bars would be at home in the Ritz as well as Harrods and are currently at home in Selfridges in London where I recommend visiting and picking up some.” (Mostly about chocolate, 28.8.2019)

The other discursive extremity of doing taste is perceived in colloquial, relaxed chillitalk where it is also deliberately informal, and occasionally vulgar styles occur. This is frequent in Finnish, e.g. in contexts of irritation towards contributors who accentuate small details, considered insignificant, such as denominations of chilli cultivars. Displaying oneself as a chillihead without passion for botanics is one way to exhibit consumer identity:

“Se pilkunnus... viilaamisesta. Kyllä minun puolestani kaikkia tulisia paprikoita saa ihan rauhassa sanoa chileiksi.” [That much about being f---g pernickety. I am totally ok if all hot peppers are called chillies.] (Jatkoaika, 1.7.2008)

Between those discursive extremities are positioned most of the excerpts where chocolate and chilli emerge with shifting degrees of formality and objectivity. High quality prevails thematically, however. Discursive variation occurs with evolving amounts of capitals emerging in and behind the discourse: culinary capital in terms of knowledge and skills; financial capital across pecuniary possibilities to access precious ingredients and consumption outlets; technological capital in use of SNS affordances; cultural capital as knowledge on food cultures, and discursive capital required to display and share one's taste preferences online. Moreover, an interpersonal, emotional capital, as presented in Chapter 7, facilitates the interaction between community members, which manifests in successful, interactive blogs.

Here, the focus is on *discursive* and *culinary capitals*, since the corpus reveals how content tends to align with the form in multimodal and hybrid CMD contexts. Discursively, the notion of formality includes strategies such as word choice and style, objectivity versus subjectivity, degree of correct orthography, avoidance of ambiguity or use of TPC (Heylighen & Dewaele, 1999; Fairclough, 2015). They are determined by internal communication variables: how contributors wish to be seen in foodie contexts, and in which SNS they promote their message online. Performance of taste and distinction in discourse is regulated externally, by SNS affordances: technological variables of the medium, i.e. the outlet, and contextual variables of the situation (Herring, 2007).

Table 23 displays co-occurrence of distinct culinary capitals and degrees of formality. Drawing from the multivocality in the corpus that reflects social variation (Kytölä, 2013; Chik & Vasquez, 2017), culinary capital is articulated in three orientations: contextual and pragmatic; knowledge-intensive; and epicurean. The first row displays those categories: knowledge-intensive capital is connected with two categories of formality, whilst contextual and epicurean relate to one dominating category. Each SNS features in the column that corresponds most accurately to the degree of formality in its discourse. When the degree of formality shifts across formality categories in the SNS in question, the cell with the site name is extended under two columns. Although categories of formality in discourse are challenging to define (Heylighen & Dewaele, 1999), their analysis also helps to dissect how categories of culinary capital emerge.

| <i>Dimension of culinary capital</i> | Contextual, pragmatic culinary capital | Knowledge-intensive culinary capital | | Epicurean culinary capital |
|---|---|--|--|--|
| <i>Degree of formality in discourse</i> | Informal / Colloquial: light, flexible, subjective, frequent use of TPC | Semi-formal: informative, with shifting degrees of involvement | Formal: detached, precise, objective, avoiding ambiguity | Elegant: formal in structure and creative in expression, with variation of objective and subjective stance |
| SNS | Chilifoorumi | The Chilli Temple | Suklaayhdistys | Le chocolat dans tous nos états |
| | Jatkoaika | Chocablog | | Club des Croqueurs de Chocolat |
| | Scott Roberts | Kinuskikissa | | |
| | Fiery Foods with Burn Blog and Dave de Witt | Clifton Chilli Club | | |
| | Suklaapossu leipoo | Mostly about chocolate | | |
| | Les Foodies (chilli and chocolate) | | | |
| | Marmiton (chilli and chocolate) | | | |
| | Made from chocolate (both versions) | | | |

Table 23. Culinary capital and degrees of formality in the corpus.

Semantic and stylistic fluidity is a salient characteristic of CMD (Lee, 2017), which results in broad discursive repertoires and use of more than one

category of formality. Interestingly, sites in (UK) English include more diversity, whilst all Finnish and most French sources only represent one homogenic category. Epicurean capital only occurs in contexts of elegant formality, stemming from distinction contexts with extremely developed discursive capital. It is found in the French corpus on chocolate.⁹² These two are the only ones in the corpus that do not feature any readers' comments, which facilitates maintenance of a high degree of formality. A contextual dimension is most frequent with chilli and recipe sharing sites, with only one source related to chocolate.

Informality relates to a variety of discursive tools, of which indecent expressions are only one. Hence, use of informal discourse does not necessarily entail use of vulgarities, when these are defined as swear words, insults and colourful references to bodily repercussions from excessive chilli use. However, informality is the only category where these occur.

Display of capitals, when doing taste, serves purposes of self-identity and community-level identity, as it also provides occasions for readers to interact, or to indirectly enjoy some of the experiences described. Self-identity enhancement is strong in informal or semi-formal blogs and conversation fora (Scott Roberts, Fiery Foods with Burn Blog and Dave de Witt, Jatkoaika, The Chilli Temple, Mostly about chocolate, Made from chocolate). The most significant self-fashioning identity enhancement is, however, found in epicurean discourse, void of heteroglossia (Club, Etats). Community-level identity emerges most naturally in communities of practice where content is generated by owners and members (Chilifoorumi, Suklaayhdistys, Kinuskikissa, Suklaapossu, Marmiton, Les Foodies, Clifton Chilli Club).

Financial (or economic) capital is less salient than culinary or social capital in foodie discourse and it often remains disguised under apparently omnivorous

⁹² The category of *elegant formality* is suggested by the author to complement the conventional categorisation in informal, semi-formal and formal registers, due to the specificity of epicurean content that combines linguistic creativity to an otherwise formal register.

taste practices. Direct references to prices or affordability decrease, as formality increases: in *Etats* fragments, there are no references to the price of products, to the verb “pay” or to the adjective “expensive”. “Price” occurs once in *Club*. As a brief comparison: in *Chocablog* there are seven occurrences of “price”, and several others of the same context (cost, pay, cheap, sums mentioned), and in *Jatkoaika* one finds twelve cases of “reasonable” or “price” (in Finnish).

Even without more quantitative approaches, it is obvious that discourse drawing on the most expensive consumption modes suppresses dimensions of costliness. *Deletion* of a topic is a context-specific discursive strategy (van Leeuwen, 2016, p134), and here it conveys a consumptive sphere where a certain financial status is self-evident. Readers following SNS with a manifestly epicurean flair might not even expect considerations on affordability. High-end foodie blogs provide occasions for breaking out from one’s regular consumption spheres, like glossy fashion magazines with no connection to an average consumer’s existence. Whether a reader has access to the same opportunities is less relevant than the enjoyment of luscious chocolate treats and sophisticated language. Shifting emergence of financial capital, moreover, reflects broader constructs of power and democratising effects of online foodieism that will be developed in detail in Chapter 9.

The blog format, an abundant genre of foodie culture online, is appropriate for displaying one’s various assets, being an artifact created by a limited number of contributors. In SNS with types of culinary capital other than epicurianism, even common retail outlet brands are praised, in case they rise above expectations. This speaks for democratising consumption trends and increases possibilities of satisfying consumption for the average consumer, or the less privileged:

“The packaging is well designed and has an air of luxury about it, and the chocolate is deeply dark and looks very inviting. It may not be hand made, or sourced from rare cacao beans, but aside

from a discreet Aldi logo on the back, most people would be none the wiser if you told them this was top notch Euro-choc.”
(Chocablog, 21.12.2011).

8.4 Conclusion

In the analysis of taste performance with totemic chilli and chocolate, two CCT-generated viewpoints address RQ2, with protocols of critical discourse studies. The first dissects how taste is performed across engineering practices in discourse. Two novel practices are suggested: *manifold highlighting* and *secular preaching*. These complement institutional benchmarking and cooperative scaffolding, however emphasising more the discursive than the interactional dimensions in the theory, which is pertinent with a digital corpus.

Furthermore, competence categories of cooperative scaffolding are introduced: *seeking for encouragement, asking for direct advice, exhibiting learning, disseminating knowledge, reviewing produce and outlets, and assessing members’ achievements*. These are practised differently, depending on the contributor’s status in online scaffolding (*reader/member, actively commenting member or expert*), with variation across languages and SNS types.

A categorisation is suggested for roles in taste engineering, for a more diversified understanding on how taste competence is accumulated in different positions that shift across discursive processes online. Five roles are ascribed to contributors in the corpus: *chocolate connoisseurs, chocolate lovers and bakers, creative cooks, playful chilliheads and chilli aficionados*. Identification of roles brings insights into different functions of contributors in various SNS, whilst online taste engineering is not perceived as a homogenic discursive entity. Significant cross-linguistic variation justifies the initial problem setting, with a comparative aspect.

Five contextual spheres are identified where physiological taste and distinctive processes co-occur most, in discourse on both chilli and

chocolate. These spheres correspond to contexts where manifold highlighting and secular preaching as taste engineering categories are the most prolific, and establish the dominant discursive frames identified for Research Question 2:

| |
|---|
| Description of nuances in flavour |
| Perceived quality in tasting and of consumption outlet or context |
| Testimonials on deeply embodied experiences |
| Appropriateness of the produce in cooking and baking |
| Significance nationally, regionally, and for the assumed consumptive habitus. |

Table 24. Identified discursive frames in performance of taste.

These frames are tightly entwined with corporeality, which sheds light on the importance of this often neglected dimension in current taste theorising and its contextuality.

The second viewpoint analyses the emergence of diverse forms of capital, with a specific focus on how content aligns with form, when doing taste. Bourdieusian capitals are analysed with sociological concepts and linguistic resources, which emphasises the embeddedness of culinary and discursive capitals in digital foodie contexts. This enhances the interdisciplinary orientation. Rather than referring only to the “culinary capital” however, three dimensions are identified therein: *contextual*, *knowledge-intensive* and *epicurean*. Four stylistic categories align with their use, with variation depending on SNS types and of the three languages: *informal*, *semi-formal*, *formal* and *formal elegant*, where the fourth one adds to current formality theorising. These categories reflect competences and practices stemming from the linguistic habitus of contributors (Wodak & Meyer, 2016).

Financial capital emerges mostly with a strategy of concealment. This feature inspires reflections on the seemingly democratising dimensions of online foodieism, developed further in Chapter 9.

Doing taste develops in dynamic discursive foodscapes where co-creational accumulation and display of culinary capital stems from various and creative embodied experiences, described with evolving degrees of discursive capital. In this scenario, chilli generates masculine narratives of visceral, powerful sensations, whilst chocolate encapsulates discursive dimensions from banal and straightforward to most sophisticated and capital-intensive. These findings align with Jurafsky *et al.* (2014) and Vásquez and Chik (2015) on interdependence of high culinary and discursive capitals across consumption experiences of prestigious outlets.

The discursive foodscape of doing taste can be summarised with three salient dimensions: exploration, recreation and celebration that are articulated around the core activity of embodiment with taste and connected with display of culinary, financial and cultural distinction. *Exploration* reveals active accumulation of taste competence, with various engineering practices combining social and physiological dimensions of taste. It reflects discoveries of one's physical capacities, from chilli endurance to discerned chocolate appreciation.

Recreation brings in an unconcealed dimension of joyful consumption, with like-minded consumers, and displays one's foodieism to generate various gratifications online. *Celebration* is an ingrained dimension where totemic chilli and chocolate are explored and revered. It takes evolving shapes depending on the acquired consumptive habitus, yet the underpinning narrative is to gather together virtually, to celebrate the totemic ingredients in all forms possible.

Chapter 9: Emergence of totemic chilli and chocolate in relation to gender and power

9.1. Introduction

Foodie-generated discourse reflects the emergence of gender and power in digital contexts where “gender” is not as explicit as in offline reality, and the capitals linked to power may be redistributed. Complementing the vista presented in Chapters 7 and 8, chilli and chocolate discourse is analysed here from a viewpoint that embeds RQ3 in the epistemologies of critical discourse studies: *How do discursive foodscapes relate to broader constructions of gender and power?*

According to CCT scholars Brownlie and Hewer (2007), gender is “accomplished”: constructed and displayed in a continuous process of adaptation to, and reconfiguration of, social structures, and shaped by their discourses. Therefore, gendered practices merit attention in culturally and discursively manifold contexts of sub-tribal performances that are part of the transnational consumptive orientation of foodieism. Study of “doing gender” as a performative action with chilli and chocolate provides an additional lens to investigate these totemic substances, as the observed masculinity of chilli discourse and references to femininely gendered consumption of chocolate have already revealed above.

Representations of femininity and masculinity⁹³ constitute the principal lens of observation, whilst a section on power dimensions in online contexts complements this inquiry. Section 9.2 investigates how gender is discursively referred to, what kind of discursive indexes resonate with gender in the corpus, and how this may reshape gender performances. Sub-sections analyse the phenomenon from two viewpoints: gender disclosure and concealment across contributors’ displayed names and aliases (9.2.1), and other references to gender in discourse: salient topics amongst masculine

⁹³ The analysis does not seek to investigate other gendered identities.

and feminine contributors, and their connections with discursive indexes and strategies (with chilli in 9.2.2 and with chocolate in 9.2.3).

Configurations of power are analysed from two perspectives: empowerment in social media discourse in 9.3.1, and influencing as a characteristic practice in online outlets, in 9.3.2. Given the heteroglossia in the corpus and the anonymity of many of the contributors, the notion of “power” is perceived here as “web-native” (Paveau, 2015) representations of power in discourse. Power dimensions are targeted with emphasis on two discursive phenomena inherent in digital contexts: (1) empowerment of contributors and (2) social media influencing where practices of engineering discussed above are efficient. The aim is not to dissect power hierarchies in offline reality, which would be too challenging with this type of remixed online corpus. The focus is on power *in* discourse, rather than *behind* it (Fairclough, 2015, p73). Moreover, participation of online contributors may be erratic, occasional or established (Cova & Dalli, 2018; Kozinets, 2010), which affects their relationships on- and offline and posits a detailed analysis of power performance and extant constructs beyond the present scope.

A brief concluding section (9.4) collates the findings on RQ3.

9.2 Gender performances reshaped by digital foodieism?

Aligning with the interdisciplinary approach, gender emergence is analysed across indexes of gender in discourse as a sociolinguistic phenomenon and with gender performance as a broader social construct. Consumption orientations adopted by foodies, entailing erosion in “doing gender” such as division of domestic cooking chores (Parsons, 2015; Ulver, 2015; Ulver & Klasson, 2015) or “feminising” spheres such as food blogging (Dejmanee, 2016), emerge in the corpus with variation across languages and the two totemic foods. The real gender of contributors may remain a secret, which is one of the gratifications identified for the use of social media (Sundar & Limperos, 2013).

Since contextuality of discourse is of utmost importance, the notion of an *index* of gender is relevant: gender may emerge across different discursive indexes, either consciously or unconsciously. Emotion and kinship terms, emoticons, abbreviations and hesitation are identified as female indexes, whilst self-enhancement, challenging, status display and criticising are typically male indexes in discourse (Bamman, Eisenstein & Schnoebelen, 2013; Herring & Stoerger, 2014). These sociolinguistic features are analysed separately for chilli and chocolate.

9.2.1 Names and aliases

A digital corpus does not enable a full analysis drawing on real genders of contributors: aliases are adopted, alongside real names, and these carry either feminine, masculine or neutral cues. Deliberate use of a name, a profile picture or an alias referring to another gender than one's embodied one is also possible, which reveals self-disclosure practices that may contrast with the situation in the actual world, with its intersections, or is employed for mere amusement. Below, "neutral" is employed to signify an alias without any gendered cues. These are found on most SNS where posting comments is possible.

Excerpts from the corpus categories representing more than one contributor⁹⁴ are analysed: conversation fora and recipe sharing sites, or readers' comment threads in blogs. Not all parts of the corpus feature these affordances, and the volume of fragments varies in this respect. This section is nevertheless justified by the complementary insights it brings into the investigation of gender, whilst its emergence across topics and indexes (9.2.2-3) constitutes the core analysis. To illustrate variation across female, neutral and male contributions, a simple quantitative approach in terms of percentage count is performed, diverging from the general modes of analysis. It focuses on the neutrality affordance.

⁹⁴ Or featuring writers who do not belong to the core contributing team of community sites or blogs. E.g. *Etats* has two bloggers and *Clifton Chilli Club* several regular writers, and *Dave de Witt* also features regular female contributors.

In a taste panel of the Finnish *Suklaayhdistys* (from 2005 onwards), 28 members contribute with an evaluation tagged with a name. Out of these, 21 are female and seven male. The site also allows contributions with an alias, when commenting with a guest status, and 215 guest comments⁹⁵ on the same product feature 44 comments with female aliases or names, and 27 male, the remaining 144 being neutral (67 %). Anonymity and neutrality manifestly attract contributors with a non-established status.

Kinuskikissa and *Suklaapossu* both allow use of aliases in comments. The first has a thread of 34 comments on the quality of dark chocolates (2011), of which seventeen with neutral aliases (50%) and two with male names, whilst fifteen are tagged with a female name or alias. Also, *Suklaapossu* features mostly comments from women: e.g. a conversation with 37 comments has one male name, 24 comments with female names or aliases and twelve with neutral aliases (28%). *Suklaapossu* attracts home bakers with emphasis on the emotional and indulgent dimensions in baking, whilst *Kinuskikissa* features technically more advanced recipes and hints, which may result in deviation in womens' apparent activity in comments. In an assumedly feminine sphere, disclosure of gender may feel more secure than in contexts with more mixing of genders.

An interesting case is found with a male baker revealing his name when posting a technical question in *Kinuskikissa*: he receives detailed guidelines with links, and encouragement not found with women's comments:

"Jos kysyttävää herää, palaa rohkeasti asiaan 😊" [Would this raise any questions, please return bravely to the matter 😊].
(*Kinuskikissa*, 19.9.2017)

In *Jatkoaika*, the thread of 100 comments on burning effects of chilli (2008) features only masculine (13%) or neutral aliases (87%), which is the most

⁹⁵ This thread of guests' comments stems from *Suklaayhdistys* conversations in the voluminous set of raw data from where the corpus was compiled. To enhance the comparative analysis, it was judged pertinent to extend the corpus for the needs of the quantitative observations in this section.

striking example of gendered differentiation in the conversation threads. *Chilifoorumi* has a conversation with only two comments from a female writer who prefers to use a neutral alias, however referring to herself in text as “*neito*” [an archaic expression for a young woman]. She posts a request on how to prepare chilli-spiced chocolate, hence introducing a “feminine” topic to a masculine forum and generating a thread of 54 comments with hints. Of these, 19 stem from neutral aliases (35%), whilst the rest are posted with a male cue.

These examples unfold relatively wide variation in Finnish strategies of gender display, where the outlet profile (chocolate club, baking site and chillihead forum) and its affordances increase divergence. A knowledge-intensive community or blog context emerges as more gender-neutral than a homey baking site where most contributors are presumably women. Moreover, the absence of aliases with a cue of the female gender of the writer on a chillihead forum evokes the probability of adopting an alias with a faked gender, or keeping it neutral on significantly male arenas, in order to avoid attention. Overtly female outlets may engender similar behaviour, in fear of discursive segregation. In all, the possibility to remain anonymous increases neutrality.

In French, concealment of gender and seeking for anonymity are also frequent. In *Marmiton* on chocolate, 111 comments on the recipe of “fondant au chocolat” were analysed (out of 760 in the raw data in total) and 54 carry a female cue, whilst only nine are tagged as masculine, leaving 48 comments as anonymous or deliberately gender-neutral (43%). In the thread on a similar type of cake, “moelleux au chocolat” in *Les Foodies*, there are 90 comments, of which 29 are tagged with a female first name or alias, whilst six carry a hint of the writer’s male gender. The remaining 55 are either signed with a neutral alias (18), or as “guests” (37), resulting in non-disclosure of gender in the majority of comments (61%). On both sites, writing comments requires the status of a member, and there is no significant deviation between gender display on conversations on chilli and chocolate.

Marmiton features more affordances of a community of practice than *Les Foodies*. *Marmiton* communication strategies also favour display of gender, whilst a recipe sharing site like *Les Foodies* is used for a narrower set of culinary practices, and remaining anonymous and neutral unfolds as a functional mode of communication.

English parts of the corpus feature less conversational discourse since readers' contributions are not frequent in all SNS. *Chocablog* reveals a slight female dominance across commenting readers: 22 comments on a Lindt chilli chocolate (2007) display three male names, 13 female names and six neutral aliases (27%). *Mostly about chocolate* generates a lot of comments, and one of the most gender-dominated threads stems from a post unfolding reasons to love chocolate (2015), where all 19 posts are written by women, moreover with profile pictures. The topic and the style of the blog post manifestly attract a mainly female audience who are not intimidated by making it public. A more "neutral" thread (London attractions) has 215 comments, of which 25 display a male name or alias, and 17 a neutral one (altogether 19%). In *Made from chocolate*, there are very few readers' comments visible.

The British and North-American chilli blogs and communities are almost monopolised by male contributors, although technically, commenting is open to all people interested. Yet, comments from readers are scarce in general, and female contributors are either absent or prefer to conceal their real gender while writing. Allusions to women are rare, and occur mostly in fragments on cooking traditional chili dishes.

Concealment of gender is identified as an emancipating feature in CMD (see Chapter 5). The observation of gender salience in discourse on chilli and chocolate evokes contrasting views, especially regarding strong feminine predominance in all types of chocolate consumption: when judged upon contributors' displayed gender, in this corpus female dominance is mostly connected to emotionally laden, indulgent contexts, and sites with knowledge-intensive content display a more balanced gender representation.

Regarding chilli discourse, findings confirm male writers' hegemony in discourse as contributors.

This type of observation naturally only generates hints of gender display, due to diverging SNS affordances, anonymity, variation in volume of posts and various site protocols that do not facilitate full coverage. With the precaution of not overly generalising, it is pertinent, however, to observe that concealment of gender is tempting amongst writers in all three languages, and that affordances of anonymity and of a guest status of an SNS contribute to increased neutrality in aliases. The high percentage (87%) of neutral aliases in one of the most masculine-dominated outlets in the corpus, *Jatkoaika*, inspires reflections on neutrality as a neglected gratification in outlets with a particularly strong gendered ethos.

9.2.2 The virtual mancaves of chillidoms

Parsons (2015a) connects the "gourmet identity" with masculinity that is performed across risk taking and adventure as enactments of economic, symbolic and social capitals. Whilst foodies are perceived here as a broad transnational consumption tribe where a gourmet orientation constitutes only a sub-tribe, Parsons' views are pertinent in another sub-tribe: the dedicated chillimen. This category is the most homogenic in terms of gender emergence in the corpus, therefore observations on its online discourse draw on representations of masculinity rather than on gender performance in general.

Utterly masculine, contemporary consumption modes referred to as "compensatory consumption" (Holt & Thompson, 2004) encompass remediating practices amongst growing pressures and anxieties of the modern man. They are embodied e.g. in fantasy-driven consumption spheres such as the Mountain Men gatherings analysed by Belk and Costa (1998), in narratives on action heros, or in chilli challenges and festivals of the present data. Holt and Thompson (2004, p425) expand the somewhat generalising trope of compensatory practices and suggest the notion of "heroic

masculinity”, drawing on a binary constellation of male consumer roles: “breadwinner” and “rebel”, leading to the ideal of a “man-of action” consumer habitus. Although this categorisation is deeply embedded in North-American imagery and discourses, it provides a functional viewpoint to analyse “chillihead” masculinity.

Parsons (2015, p36a) refers to “hegemonic forms of masculinities” identified in male representations of enthusiast food consumption. The present corpus does not fully sustain this stance: chilli discourse is not entirely colonised by male hegemony, but unfolds discursive foodscapes where gender-equal tendencies are also found. A Finnish contributor takes it as a natural scenario that he will introduce culinary tastes to his future children:

”Minua hirvittää jo valmiiksi että mitähän siitähän tulee jos opetan joskus lapsia ruoan makuun jotka sitten menevät syömään suurtalouskeittiöiden tuotoksia esim. kouluun. ???” [I am already terrified how it will turn out if I some day teach food tastes to my kids who then would go to eat food from industrial kitchens e.g. at school ???] (Chilifoorumi, 13.1.2014)

As observed in Chapters 7 and 8, chilli is a powerful symbol for masculinity and endurance, however with contextually shifting meanings in communities gathered around it. Above, two sub-tribal categories are suggested according to the consumptive orientations emerging in their discourse: *chilli aficionados* and *playful chilliheads*. The division is not implicit, since the nickname “*chillihead/chilehead*” is found on all chilli sites in English and Finnish (“*chilipää*”) and adopted in all communities articulated around chilli. Yet, the dimension of laddish playfulness (Brownlie & Hower, 2007) is stronger in discourse in Finnish and UK English (quotation 1 below) than on aficionado-tuned US sites where discourse frequently adopts secular preaching tones (2) and heavily emphasises the competitive aspects of consumption (3):

(1) “*Heres a bit of a laugh for you all, just flicking through a bunch of pics from years ago, after being stitched up on a building development for a lot of money and left really on my arse.*” (The Chilli Temple, 22.4.2017)

(2) *“Without chili I believe I would wither and die. I stand without peer as a maker of chili, and as a judge of chili made by other people. No living man, and let us not even think of woman in this connection, no living man, I repeat, can put together a pot of chili as ambrosial, as delicately and zestfully flavorful, as the chili I make.”* (H. Allen Smith cited in Dave de Witt, no date)

(3) *“For example, when [N.N.] did his record in New York, he did 22 pods at a total of 119 grams. I did 16 pods at 120 grams. You can see the variation, which is why they do it in weight instead of pod count.”* (Scott Roberts, 5.12.2016)

French chilli discourse is knowledge-intensive, however this knowledge is exclusively bound to the domestic cooking sphere and therefore the consumptive category identified for chilli is denominated as “*creative cooks*”. The observation in this section, therefore, draws primarily on English and Finnish discourse, and the French corpus sheds only additional light on the topic.

9.2.2.1 Finnish

“Jesus loves you but only as a friend.” (A quotation tagged to an alias in *Jatkoaika*).

Spiritual themes are not found in Finnish chilli discourse, yet this brief quotation illustrates the boyish inside humour of the sites. It is embedded in an underpinning ethos of heterosexuality where masculinity is performed across practices of crafting, prosuming, evaluating and cooking with fire and smoke.

Although contributions with a female name or alias are scarce, as observed in 9.2.1, women are not absent from this discourse that enacts dimensions of a man-of-action: women have background roles as care-takers, as partners ensuring one’s displayed heterosexual identity, and as bystanders of the consumption drama:

”Innostuin tuosta supersafkasta siihen malliin, ettei vaimo kestänyt enään mesoamistani vaan tarkisti mihin asti lähin

luonteistuotekauppa on auki ja löi autonavaimet kouraan.” [I got so excited about that superfood stuff that the wife couldn’t stand my messing around any more but checked the opening hours of the nearest organic store and stuck the car keys in my hand.] (Chilifoorumi, 2.2.2010)

Variety in expressions referring to women illustrates versatility in women’s roles. In *Chilifoorumi* and *Jatkoaika*, the neutral “wife”, “girl” and “woman” appear regularly, with rare occurrences of the appreciating noun “*daami*” [female partner of any status]. Moreover, “*muija*” and “*eukko*” are used as slightly devalorising addresses for wife, partner or girlfriend, drawing etymologically from “an elderly woman”. Interestingly, although women have mere background roles in Finnish chilli discourse, they are present across a richer vocabulary than men themselves.

“Wife” emerges most often, and allusions are frequently made to consolidate the display of one’s partnership type. Her role is either to wait patiently for the culinary experimentations or to provide a helping hand, when needed. Objectifying practices appear, however, not in the context of one’s relationship, but to embrace stereotypical narratives of male behaviour:

“[p]itäisi näyttää tältä, vieressä silikonivuoka johon annos sopii hyvin. (kaikki silikonihan on miesten mielestä kivaa, eikun?)” [it should look like this, beside there is a silicon mould where the portion fits nicely. (all silicon is nice for men, isn’t it?)] (Jatkoaika, 16.4.2013)

The most frequent noun referring to men is “*äijä*” [lad, dude, guy], whilst also “man” appears occasionally. Other denominations for a man are not employed. Rugged and laddish male culture is often labelled with the word “*äijä*” in Finnish, hence its frequency in community discourse aligns with the perception of chillihead consumption as an enactment of extant Finnish male culture, yet with reinterpretations across the introduction of culinary and even horticultural dimensions. These emerge mostly with straightforwardness and simplicity, identified as discursive frames:

”Vesiviljelyäkin on tullut hupimielessä kokeiltua, muttei kunnollisilla välineillä ja lannoitteilla.” [I have tried even hydroponic cultivation just for fun, but not with any decent equipment or fertilisers.] (Jatkoaika, 6.7.2008)

Fragments referring to women confirm the theorisation on gendered territoriality (Hirschman, Ruvio & Belk, 2012): whilst the kitchen is primarily a feminine sphere, the spaces reserved for barbecue and smoking, cherished by Finnish men, emerge as highly masculinised areas, physically and mentally (also Parsons, 2015a). For the crafting Finnish chilli tribe, a home-made BBQ or smoking device is a symbol of a man’s capability, yet the food prepared with these instruments is merely mentioned, and rarely described for other characteristics than its chilli-generated heat, its originality stemming from different wood types in smoking, or of game or venison on the barbecue.

Game and venison necessitate hunting, emerging as a capital-intensive occupation that entwines the national narrative of being close to nature with a transnational imagery of male carnivorism and men-of-action. The local elk features as a trophy food in these contexts:

”Viime viikonloppu menikin taas savustelujen säestämänä. Pari hirvipaistia laitoin edelliseen tapaan.” [Last weekend got tuned again by smoking sessions. I prepared a couple of elk steaks, as previously.] (Chilifoorumi, 6.9.2005).

Cooking with fire and chilli, when close to nature, represents the ideal consumptive sphere of a Finnish chillihead:

”Chili con Carne on kyllä parasta, kun sen mökillä tekee jättikokoisessa muurikassa avotulen päällä.” [Chili con carne is at its best when you cook it at the cottage, in a gigantic wok on an open fire.] (Jatkoaika, 1.8.2008)

Competitiveness appears in posts with references to device crafting; with the volume of online orders; or with Scoville rankings. Eating challenges are not

a very common topic; however, video links to chilli events with eating contests are exchanged, with appreciation.

As Kendall and Tannen (2015) claim, deliberate discursive conflicts feature as common patterns in male-dominated discourse, and the CMD context enhances opportunities for verbal fights. It is remarkable, however, that in threads where assistance is asked for and provided in technical matters, e.g. in chilli cultivation, the tone of the discourse is more polite than when matters of taste or proper techniques are discussed. Hence, solidarity amongst members unfolds in different degrees depending on the topic.

Whilst male and chillihead identity prevails on both Finnish chilli sites, the dimension of conflict marks a distinction between them. A purely community-type site (*Chilifoorumi*) is less prone to discourse provoking conflict than the one where chilli is a sub-topic (*Jatkoaika*), although contributors display the same degree of expertise and interest. Spicy comments in *Chilifoorumi* are tolerated by common acknowledgement, whereas in *Jatkoaika*, originally created around another masculine interest, conversation on chilli does not have the same protection embraced by the community. Contributors are equally knowledgeable on both sites, however.

Finnish chilliscape online is framed by “Solitary and displayed, crafting consumption of men in a heteronormative ethos” (Chapter 7). A solid breadwinner identity dominates; however, it is nuanced by occasional adventurous aspiration towards a more heroic rebel habitus (Holt & Thompson, 2004). Garages, sheds and cottages are traditional sanctuaries for Finnish men, crafting with their projects outside the female gaze. These spheres combining materiality and tacit, secular spirituality are commonly denominated “mancaves”, and they appear as significant forums for male consumption worldwide. Finnish chilli communities emerge as *virtual mancaves* where public and private spaces are negotiated in a way that may heighten consumer pleasures (*op. cit.*) of men, confronted with expectations of strength, stamina and performance, and yet willing to perpetuate them.

Aligning with Holt and Thompson's viewpoints (2004) on "quest of patriarchal identities", those expectations stem widely from masculine consumption spheres themselves, rather than from cultural and social norms dictated in society in general. Gratifications from the online camaraderie of chillidoms nevertheless facilitate coping with these inherent challenges. In the Finnish discourse in particular, an overarching dimension of unwinding with humour and play softens the edges of competitive masculinity.

9.2.2.2 English

"[m]y heat tolerance for the last couple of years has been down because I got to the point where I said, 'well, I don't know what else to do as far as "proving" my machismo and my heat tolerance to other people, so I'll focus more on flavor now'."
(Scott Roberts, 5.12.2016)

Scott Roberts' interviewee reflects on moving on towards flavour experiences as a step after one's heat endurance has been proved. The quotation weaves together the leading chilli narratives: masculinity, competition and taste. They are ascribed with shifting values depending on the context and the language of discourse. However, the overarching frame is manhood: men growing, tasting, evaluating, cooking and competing with chilli, alongside boyish camaraderie. These topics emerge powerfully in the English corpus.

Sites represent either the playful chilliheadism corresponding to its Finnish counterparts (UK sites), or more serious, aficionado-type SNS outlets (US sites). The latter are not without humour or playfulness either, however the ethos of competition and evaluation is so strong that it generates deeply emotional, conflict-prone performances.

The imagery of heroic, rebellion-prone masculinity (Holt & Thompson, 2004) dominates in aficionado discourse, whilst playful chilliheads display a masculine identity where breadwinning is also a constituent of a satisfying life and does not compromise with adventure-seeking. This is more salient in British discourse: composting tips with vacuum cleaner lint or teabags, as well as fighting insects without pesticides (*Hot Sauce with Everything*

Magazine, summer 2019) resonate with a male consumer ethos where an established household and regular lifestyles predominate.

Discursively, contributors refer to themselves with a slightly wider vocabulary than in Finnish. “Man” and “boy” are found altogether sixteen times in the entire corpus. “Lad” occurs six times, however only in *Fiery Foods*.⁹⁶ The most frequent word is “guy”: 13 occurrences in *Scott Roberts*, three in *Clifton Chilli Club* and four in *Fiery Foods*. Women are more absent from English SNS than from the Finnish ones, since *Fiery Foods* is the only site where “woman/women” (three and four times) or “girl” (four) occur. However, women appear occasionally with their names, without a qualifying noun. “Wife” is found seven times. In all contexts, women are described in a positive, appreciating mode, and no deprecating remarks are found:

“Yeah. And my wife, she looks at me every afternoon and she rolls her eyes when I start playing with a bottle of sauce. [laughs].” (Scott Roberts, 5.12.2016)

The discursive foodscape identified in English chilli sites is described above as “Competitive male consumption reaching secularly spiritual functions”. Totemic meanings of chilli, with dimensions of competition enhancing masculine and chillihead identity, therefore occasionally appear even more precious than the substance itself. Frequent scorings, panels and evaluations enhance this consumptive orientation which is most salient in English: all SNS feature flavour and heat evaluations of produce, and give a lot of space to competition narratives.

Scott Roberts (12.7.2018) declares tasting experiences of over 4000 “sauces and spice mixes”, with an official review written on more than five hundred, and the interviewee of *Hot Sauce with Everything* magazine (summer 2019) holds a collection of 9000 different hot sauce bottles. The abundance of derived chilli products, the “fiery foods industry”, unfolds as a key constituent

⁹⁶ Occurrences counted in the excerpt combining fragments from *Fiery Foods*, *Burn Blog* and *Dave de Witt*.

of chilli discourse where male adventures are also made possible on a material level, across thousands of products available. It can be defined as a *domesticated adventure*: leisure time filled with new discoveries, exciting heat and a competitive edge that one can experience even without leaving home. Online realms cater lavishly for this type of experiential consumption, and chilli events with eating challenges are brought close with frequent videoclips online, to be admired and forwarded to other chilliheads. These events are meaningful as appealing sub-tribal retreats and material consumption spheres colonised by corporate ventures and prosumption-type offers.

Acknowledging and embodying a true chillihead identity – that from a researcher’s viewpoint may also reach an aficionado status – is an adventure where challenges are frequent, endurance is tested, and gratifications reside in the brotherhood with like-minded consumers. An interview with a hot sauce collector testifies on his initiation journey that leads into dissemination of experiences:

“[m]y intention is to promote this industry as a whole and to open up the world to veteran and new chilliheads alike. I cannot be more excited to have this opportunity to not only share who I am but why I am.” (Clifton Chilli Club, Hot Sauce with Everything, summer 2019).

Whilst spirituality is more a human than a masculine aspiration in itself, it is readable in English chilli discourse with a unique combination of male heroism and humble reverence for the gifts of Mother Nature:

“While researching chili for this exclusive report, I found a treasure trove of controversial opinions and observations. It is my pleasure to share them with readers with a literary bent—or those who are just bent, period. But first, all of you bow your heads.” (Dave de Witt, 6.7.2008)

English chillitalk features male indexes abundantly: perpetuation of hierarchies is important, and the contexts of male gatherings are cherished

(Tannen, 1990; Kendall & Tannen, 2015). The story on the origins of *Clifton Chilli Club* testifies on how chilli communities combine utility and male fun:

“Like many great things, Clifton Chilli Club was formed whilst enjoying pint (cider!). In 2009, four guys with an interest in chillies went to an open day at a specialist nursery in Dorset called Sea Spring Seeds.” (Clifton Chilli Club, home page)

The Chilli Temple is an exception to the competitive ethos, with only marginal comments on taste evaluation or eating challenges. The site evokes a more contemplatory chilli scene, with reflections on good (and not so good) practices, and the growth story of a chillihead. Posts display personal experiences and tested recipes, with an edge of introvert masculinity that is paralleled in Finnish discourse.

Despite numerous references to male endurance, heat and embodied experiences in a deeply masculine discursive context, there is not a single occurrence of the word “sex” in the English corpus, although euphemisms such as “sleep with” occur. The discourse remains chaste, and wives are mentioned, although the heteronormative ideal is not as much emphasised as in Finnish. Omission of the topic can be interpreted as avoidance, or as taking the stance that heterosexual relationships are a self-evidence. Scott Roberts flags clearly his orientation:

*“As a few of you chilleheads know, I was a huge **Van Halen** fan in a past life. I won’t bore you with how much I ate, breathed and slept the band (thankfully, not slept with the band) during my younger and leaner days.”* (14.8.2017)

Playful and funny discourse consolidates the dimension of food play identified by Parsons (2015a) as the predominant practice amongst “epicurean” men, although the present contexts reach spheres beyond gourmet and epicurean orientations, towards more omnivorous consumption. Moreover, in particular with aficionados taking their chilli consumption very seriously, the notion of “food play” does not fully correspond to the practices of these male consumers. *Adventurous but domesticated foodieism* corresponds more aptly to consumption styles embraced in chilli discourse,

and aligns with representations defined as heroic masculinity by Holt and Thompson (2014). Moreover, it encapsulates the sub-category of “creative cooks” found in French data.

9.2.2.3 French

Selected comments on the French corpus fragments are presented below, in order to focus on contrasting consumptive habituses, when compared with chilliheadism in English and Finnish. Glorifying chilli as a totem does not stand out as a gratification in French.

The “creative cooks” discovering flavour qualities to enhance their home cooking display a gender-neutral discursive foodscape. Comments signed with masculine aliases employ similar discursive strategies with the female and “neutral” contributors, and e.g., the use of ellipsis to indicate a sense of mystery is frequent amongst male contributors as well, as in the quotation where a man replies to a woman (X):

“X, ceux que moi j'achète ne sont pas fumé du tout...” [X, the ones that I buy are not smoked at all...] (Marmiton, 25.4.2015)

Sensual cues and flirtation are employed by both male and female online contributors, which resonates with the French on- and offline communication strategies where innocent or more serious flirtation is considered as an accepted amusement for all. In the same thread of 25 April 2015, “X” gets humorously invited by another male member, with discursive elements that are mostly defined as female (e.g. use of emoticons and abbreviations; Kendall & Tannen, 2015):

“Hi hi :-))) bon on va en Tunisie X ? Mdr !” [He he :-))) ok we go to Tunisia X? Thx for replying!] (Marmiton, 25.4.2015)

In a chilli recipe thread on *Les Foodies*, a comment with a neutral alias refers with an erotic, low-key expression to the arousal felt with the chilli purée recipe (1), and the male recipe designer replies in the same tone (2):

- (1) “*Chaud devant ! Hihahaha Bisous*” [Hot in front! Hehehaha Kisses]
- (2) “*tu as raison,hihihi bisous*” [you’re right, hehehe kisses] (Les Foodies, 25.4.2015)

The discursively creative flirtation across genders, whether they are displayed or not, is a genuinely French characteristic that is not equalled in other languages in the corpus. It is embedded in the aspiration of culinary creativity with chilli, and brings in an adventurous dimension that does not draw on heroic or any other type of masculinity, but on shared embodiment of heat. “Light the fire!” replies a female contributor to the exchange of comments above, perpetuating the narrative of culinary – and erotic – adventures of the French as an agreeable spice in everyday life for men and women alike.

There are no discursive indexes of typically male (or female) dimensions of consumption, and in this respect, the discursive chilliscape in French appears as surprisingly gender-neutral. This neutrality stems at least partly from the nature of the SNS studied: recipe sharing sites are frequently consulted by foodies of all genders, and the topics on them are mostly limited to posting one’s own recipes, and to comments on other members’ achievement. Moreover, in the French chilli corpus representing mainstream foodieism rather than a chillihead-type of consumption, these observations need to be considered merely as complementary to the analysis of masculinity in the corpus.

9.2.2.4 Indexes of masculinity in chilli discourse

Salient gendered topics in chilli discourse having been analysed in 9.2.2.1–3, this section dissects the discursive strategies, drawing sociolinguistically on indexes of masculinity and taking in consideration all three languages. Due to the deeply masculine ethos of chilli sites, the discursive features characterised as feminine are not discussed in this section.

Table 25 is articulated with typically male discursive indexes (Kendall & Tannen, 2015) and displays three degrees of salience: weak, intermediate

and strong. Blank cells signify that the index is not salient in the SNS in question.

| Index SNS | Self- enhancement | Status display and hierarchies | Challenge | Critique | Swear words and taboos |
|--|----------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------|--------------|------------------------------|
| Chilifoorumi | intermediate | strong | strong | intermediate | weak |
| Jatkoaika | strong | intermediate | strong | strong | intermediate |
| The Chilli Temple | weak | weak | strong | intermediate | weak |
| Clifton Chilli Club | intermediate | intermediate | strong | weak | |
| Fiery Foods with Burn Blog and Dave de Witt | intermediate | strong | strong | intermediate | |
| Scott Roberts | strong | strong | strong | intermediate | weak |
| Marmiton (chilli) | weak | | weak | intermediate | |
| Les Foodies (chilli) | weak | | weak | weak | |

Table 25. Male indexes in chilli discourse.

The table demonstrates the three most significant indexes of masculinity in chilli discourse: *challenge* (four mentions) and *status display and hierarchies* (three). *Self-enhancement* is strong in two outlets, on an intermediate level in three and identified in all outlets studied. When observing which sites most frequently display strong masculine indexes, the Finnish *Jatkoaika* and the US English *Scott Roberts* share the first position. Numerous quotations from both in the previous sections illustrate this. The French sites are primarily gender-neutral, and *The Chilli Temple* emerges as the least indexed with masculinity, amongst the chillihead sites.

Gendered indexes do not function in isolation, but their contextuality needs to be considered (Herring & Stoerger, 2014). The most significant contexts of discourse for each of the three leading indexes are compiled in Table 26, where all languages are observed together:

| | |
|--------------------------------|---|
| Challenge | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • descriptions of competitive consumption events • expertise in cultivation • knowledge in chilli varieties and trivia • volume of domestic consumption |
| Status display and hierarchies | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reputation in the SNS community • volume and heat of products tasted or reviewed • expert's status in broader networks ("chillidom") • years of experience |
| Self-enhancement | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • physiological endurance in consumption at home and in events • uniqueness of experiences as a chillihead ("testimonials") • savviness in crafting and cooking • search for adventure |

Table 26. Contextuality of male discursive indexes with chilli.

9.2.3 Gender diversity of chocolate sub-tribes

"Mitä nainen voi enempää toivoa kuin suklaaherkkua joka räjäyttää tajunnan, oo la laa!" [What more can a woman wish for than a chocolaty treat to blow one's mind, oh la la !] (Suklaayhdistys, 28.3.2009)

The first quotation reflects a stereotypical assumption on chocolate as a sweet and tempting substance that women consume to alleviate their corporeal and emotional cravings. Inclination of women towards sweet foods and desserts, evoking sexual connotations, is broadly developed in research (Coleman 2007; Mäkelä, Bettany & Stevens, 2018), referenced in Chapters 2, 4 and 5. It is based primarily on data outside foodie contexts where connoisseurial and distinction-driven consumption spheres are also significant. Therefore, the analysis of gender emergence indexes is initiated with a recapitulation of predominant discursive frames with chocolate.

9.2.3.1 Contextual categories of gendered chocolate discourse

Somewhat contrasting with the mainstream of scholarly work dating from the pre-social media era and drawing on non-tribal consumption, discourse on chocolate in the present corpus also reveals masculine and neutral orientations. The variety of significantly gendered contexts is broader than

the self-indulgent and craving-prone, female-flagged consumption which is only one dimension of contemporary foodies’ chocolatescapes.

To analyse discursive frames with a sociolinguistic perspective, Table 27 recapitulates gendered discursive indexes suggested by prior research, applied here (see 5.1.2 for references):

| Female | Male |
|-----------------------|------------------------------------|
| rich in qualifiers | dominant in interaction |
| emphasises kinship | perpetuates and displays hierarchy |
| apologetic | criticising |
| justifying | exhibits status |
| supportive | emphasises self |
| attenuating | features swear words and taboos |
| establishes relations | |

Table 27. Gendered discursive indexes.

Table 28 displays the themes and frames identified with Research Question 1, articulated for the purpose of gender emergence observation in RQ3.

“Sustainability and health” are added as a frame since they are thematically present in chocolate discourse, although not in chilli contexts.⁹⁷ Chocolate sites are categorised depending on their most salient discursive frames and as predominantly female or male, or neutral, with these indexes. “Neutral” signifies here discourse where none of the above-mentioned indexes stand out as characteristic.

Most sites appear in several contextual categories. Moreover, they are discursively flexible and may represent mixed orientations, due to online heteroglossia, to contextual changes and the richness and beauty in style that enhance feminine indexes. Each SNS is in bold in the category of the discursive frame corresponding to its most evocative consumption contexts. “Competition” refers here to evaluating, scoring, and testing of products.

⁹⁷ The frames identified for RQ 1 in Chapter 7 encompass discourse on both substances.

| Gender indexes Frame | Female | Neutral | Male |
|---------------------------|---|---|------|
| Emotional sharing | Suklaapossu Kinuskikissa | Marmiton (chocolat) Les Foodies (chocolat) | |
| Emotional learning | Suklaapossu Kinuskikissa Made from chocolate (En, Fr) Mostly about chocolate | Marmiton (chocolat) Les Foodies (chocolat) Suklaayhdistys | |
| Embodiment by competition | Mostly about chocolate | | |
| | | Club des Croqueurs de Chocolat Suklaayhdistys | |
| | Le chocolat dans tous nos états | | |
| Embodiment by indulgence | Made from chocolate (En, Fr) Mostly about chocolate Suklaapossu Kinuskikissa | Chocablog Club des Croqueurs de Chocolat | |
| | Le chocolat dans tous nos états | | |
| | Mostly about chocolate Made from chocolate (En, Fr) | | |
| Sustainability and health | Kinuskikissa | Chocablog Club des Croqueurs de Chocolat | |
| | Made from chocolate (En, Fr) Mostly about chocolate Le chocolat dans tous nos états | | |
| Culinary creativity | Suklaapossu Kinuskikissa | | |
| | | Marmiton (chocolat) Les Foodies (chocolat) | |
| Prosumptive creativity | | Chocablog | |

Table 28. Gender emergence across chocolate sites.

Manifestly, chocolate discourse is dominated by female indexes, which also reflects genders of the SNS contributors. All chocolate bloggers are women, except in *Chocablog* (having a mixed body of contributors with the male blogger). Women are also more active in commenting on chocolate sites than men, including general chocolate sites and baking blogs.

With chocolate, there are no sites with exclusively male-flagged discourse. Contexts where neutral or neutral-male indexes are most observable are found in knowledge-intensive discourse (chocolate clubs) and sites where co-

creational taste engineering is the key practice (recipe sharing). Findings reveal, moreover, that foodie discourse is flexible in terms of gendered indexes, which is observable in sites displaying mixed dimensions.

Of eleven sites analysed, only three⁹⁸ are discursively predominated by female indexes in contexts of indulgent embodiment, which is the category highlighted in research as the core arena of chocolate consumption. These sites correspond to the sub-tribe of “chocolate lovers and bakers” (see Chapter 8), permeated by contextual culinary capital and low or medium degrees of formality. Furthermore, this contextual category is most characteristic of the male-generated, connoisseurial *Chocablog*, and it is observable also in *Club* (and in *Suklaapossu* and *Kinuskikissa* baking blogs). Foodie-oriented consumption of chocolate emerges with more gender variation than extant chocolate research has claimed. Alongside the multitude of flavour aspects and mystery embedded in its long consumption history, chocolate is also technically challenging and intellectually inspiring for foodies of all genders. A significant proportion of online chocolate discourse in all the languages studied stems from sites where aspects other than mere indulgence are salient.

Knowledge-intensive sites discursively sustain an ethos of evaluating, reviewing, scoring and critique that posits them in the male or neutral-male category, whilst in contexts of description of embodied taste experiences, male indexes are less salient than neutrality:

“Tuoksu, ulkonäkö, muoto, maku, kaikki on kohdallaan muttei herätä kolmea pistettä enempää tunteita.” [Odour, appearance, form, flavour, everything is as it should be but doesn’t inspire more emotions than worth of three points.] (Suklaayhdistys, 1.5.2007)

After cross-linguistic observations, a language-specific brief analysis on gender in chocolate discourse is provided.

⁹⁸ The two language versions of *Made from chocolate* counted as one SNS.

9.2.3.2 Finnish

Baking sites evoke a domestic sphere where chocolate indulgence entwines with emotionally charged caring. This is typical for the Finnish corpus fragments where chocolate treats bring joy for family and friends, with the baking process providing pleasure:

“Sen jälkeen annoin mieliteolla vallan ja lusikoin edelleen pehmeää suklaaganachea suoraan kulhosta suuhuni.” [After that, I succumbed to my urge and spooned the still soft chocolate ganache directly from the bowl to my mouth.] (Suklaapossu, 16.3.2018)

Kinuskikissa has developed a discursively and visually unique, femininely flavoured outlet, with shades of pink, where feline metaphors enhance the community feeling: a “paw” expresses approval, members are referred to as “cats” and the blogger signs her comments with “Mother Cat”. The blogger replies to comments, shares her knowledge and provides additional advice, without adopting an absolute expert’s stance. This creates an emotionally laden, encouraging and homey feeling, reminiscent of a mother teaching her children how to bake, which befits the Finnish narrative on baking as a domestic, feminine domain. Yet, a contemporary foodie phenomenon is that baking men also appear, which reshapes traditional gender roles.

With the long-term tradition of Finnish women working outside the home, it has been an important factor that home cooking and baking are not too burdensome, and still enable emotional caring. Finnish women cherish the ideal of a woman treating her loved ones with delicacies to share, and chocolate gifts can be modified to most occasions (Mäkelä, Bettany & Stevens, 2018). It is not surprising to also find this tendency in foodie-generated data. *Kinuskikissa* and also *Suklaapossu* perpetuate this tradition in a warm and modern way.

A very Finnish feature and a feminine discursive strategy (Tannen, 2015) is to report small failures in posts, maintaining the image of an expert who is not

above her followers. This reflects the general objective of modesty and unpretentiousness. It applies to baking results as well as to the technical execution of *Suklaapossu*:

“[...]ja nyt kun pääsit lukemisessa tänne asti, niin pahoittelen samaan syssyyn kuvien laatua.” [...and now that you managed to read this far, I apologise on the spot the bad quality of the pictures.] (Suklaapossu, 30.1.2018)

Suklaapossu is written in an informal style and it displays many female discursive indexes (Tannen, 1990). Kinship terms, smileys and emojis are frequent, and warm relations between the blogger and her readers are sustained by positive cues, encouraging messages and “thank you” posts. There is no friction, and attempts to evoke potentially difficult topics are made politely. Symmetry in discourse is obvious: posts refer to previous ones and similar words are used, to support solidarity in community. The same features are present in *Kinuskikissa*.

In *Suklaayhdistys*, symmetry is less salient, although the site also unfolds a coherent community that sustains sentiments of togetherness with offline gatherings. Websites with a discussion forum as a genre, however, appear as less prone to enhance discursive e-solidarity than blogs. In a knowledge-intensive outlet, feminine indexes are altogether less frequent than in emotionally laden and less formal contexts.

Maintaining a pragmatic underpinning, Finnish discourse does not sustain the femininely mythical and the mysterious as chocolate consumption narratives. Finnish foodies performing in chocolate outlets can be defined as “domestic jugglers” (Kravets, Maclaran, Miles & Venkatesh, 2018): whether they are men or women, baking-lovers or connoisseurs, the spheres of chocolate consumption are predominantly at home, and the consumptive habitus is primarily pragmatic. This does not erode indulgence and emotion however they are enacted across straightforward practices. The innocent sensoriality in embodiment (Chapter 7) enhances gender-neutral tendencies.

9.2.3.3 English

English chocolate discourse is multivocal and flexible. It is prominent in the category of embodiment with indulgence across contexts that stand out as typically female, consolidating theories on women's indulgence-seeking. Two language-specific contexts emerge: multitasking across burdens of domestic and professional chores (1 below), and discomfort related to physical experiences in a woman's body (2), the second one being less frequent.

Descriptions of corporeality foregrounding women's indulgent consumption are found primarily in *Made from chocolate* and *Mostly about chocolate*:

(1) "*Looking at this list it's no wonder that most women are addicts considering what we have to put up with.*" (Mostly about chocolate, 8.1.2015, reader's comment)

(2) "*Sometimes cravings are **emotional**, caused by feeling down or PMS, so deal with the real reason first before grabbing that chocolate bar...*" (Made from chocolate, 5.5.2015)

Examples in these categories evoke hints of the "carnal feminine" (Maclaran & Stevens, 2005, 2007) where embodiment is ubiquitous and genuinely performed:

"Get inspired, get excited, get cooking!" (Made from chocolate, 29.1.2015)

This consumptive ethos brings chocolate into focus with a deeply totemic function where two layers of community feeling entwine: a food-loving consumer tribe and the mythical dimension of physiological and emotional womanhood. It parallels the chilli contexts where adventure-seeking, heroic masculinity and chilliheadism coalesce. These instances provide an intriguing vista for a material-semiotic gaze: materiality of the totemic substance is imbued with meanings that are simultaneously personal and shared with the tribe:

"Whether you are an aficionado who refuses anything below 70%, a milk chocolate lover or someone who indulges in a bit of Milky Bar the one thing that binds us all together is the thing we

love all comes from the same place: the cocoa bean.” (Mostly about chocolate, 5.1.2015)

Deep pleasure provided by home baking and cooking is also frequently evoked on English sites, and this is enhanced by the guilt-free tone (Chapter 7) that sustains an ethos of happy, fulfilling consumption, catering mainly for female consumers:

“With the soft, doughy texture of the churro, mixed with the smoothness of the melted chocolate and the crunch from the cinnamon and sugar topping, how could you go wrong?” (Made from chocolate, 25.9.2017)

The ideal type of “domestic goddess” (Stevens, Cappellini & Smith, 2015) is closest to the English chocolate discourse, and mainly enacted in *Made from chocolate* and *Mostly about chocolate*. *Chocablog* displays more neutral and male indexes: an appreciative post on a female chocolate manufacturer’s novelties with a stereotypical assumption is one of the rare instances where gender as a topic is brought up in this outlet:

“I did rather like the choice of colour for the foil, I might add. I wonder if Holly’s customers are primarily female, or whether she just chose this rather lovely pink as a continuation of the colour scheme for the packaging?” (Chocablog, 17.9.2009)

As a rule, discursive strategies for chocolate are less gendered than for chilli, which also speaks for more gender balance in English: there are no verbal conflicts, and comments obtain mostly positive feedback. Playfulness and fun appear where less expertise is displayed, whilst connoisseurship in chocolate emerges as a more serious occupation, flagged with male discursive indexes of evaluation, critique and status.

9.2.3.4 French

“Nous plongeons à corps perdu dans ce soufflé au chocolat et sa crème glacée [...]” [We dive recklessly in this chocolate soufflé and its ice cream [...]] (Etats, 1.3.2019)

Sensuality and wildly embodied experiences, described in a profoundly feminine style, construe the leading tone in *Etats*, written by two sisters. Respecting the vocation of “a sensorial blog”, it is a good example of the versatility of gendered indexes in French: in reviews of prestigious consumption outlets, male indexes of status display and evaluation entwine with female-indexed discourse rich in emotions, qualifiers and justifications:

“Tout est juste, le va-et-vient des saveurs, les arômes, les textures, la légèreté époustouflante de ce dessert de très haute gastronomie.” [Everything is right: comings and goings of flavours, the aromas, the textures, the stunning lightness of this dessert of very high gastronomy.] (*Etats*, 11.8.2019)

However, femininity does not only stand out across discursive strategies, but it appears in glorification of sensorial experiences as magical instances. In *Etats*, as the degree of espoused femininity in taste sensations increases, the more diversified they become. A perfect combination of flavour, odour and texture, found in a chocolate dessert with notes of ginger and green cardamom is described as “magical”, with a metaphor reminiscent of a female body, covered with fine lace:

“Sous une dentelle craquante, presque transparente, se révèle, un mi-cuit au chocolat au cœur coulant de cacao liquide.[...] Une association tout à la fois puissante et féminine où tout est arômes et parfums.” [Beneath crisp lace, almost transparent, a barely baked chocolate cake reveals itself, with a heart of melting, liquid cocoa [...].] A simultaneously powerful and feminine association, where everything is aromas and scents.] (*Etats*, 25.8.2019)

The words “feminine” and “powerful” form a nexus that is evocative of the entire site, through an image with a Woolfian flair: a discursive “room of one’s own” where pleasure and imagination have no limits, enacted in a profoundly sensual French ethos of culinary exploration.

Whilst *Club* displays an equally exclusive and distinction-prone consumption sphere, it is more diversified in terms of contexts: alongside competitive and

serious evaluation, sensorial qualities and sustainability are discussed. Male indexes are discernable across description of status hierarchies in the French chocolatescape, and with rituals of proper tasting:

“Avant d’être goûtés, les chocolats conditionnés à la température de 20° C, sont placés sur des assiettes numérotées.” [Prior to tasting, the chocolates tempered to 20 °C are positioned on numbered plates.] (Club, no date)

French recipe sites display mainly gender-neutral discourse, and seeking for guidance, for example, is frequent for men and women alike. Traditions and evocative culinary memories of childhood being important constituents of pleasurable chocolate moments, recipes with the “right taste” gain in favour. Mothers and grandmothers feature as culinary benchmarks of gastrography stemming from domestic spheres:

“Très bon, délicieux. Comme la mousse au chocolat de Maman!” [Very tasty, delicious. Like Mum’s chocolate mousse!] (Marmiton, 27.4.2019).

When considering politeness and symmetry as female strategies in discourse, these are sustained equally by writers of all genders, and unfold as French rather than as gender-flagged characteristics. In the context of emotional sharing, French foodies also cater abundantly for guests outside one’s family. For these occasions, recipes tested with success become cherished:

“[m]a recette fétiche merci, j’ai épaté mes invites.” [my fetish recipe thank you, I amazed my guests.] (Les Foodies, 25.6.2010)

A fetish recipe is imbued with totemic qualities: deliciousness of chocolate shared, and personal savoir-faire displayed. Accomplishment in culinary creativity is sought after by women and men, in an encouraging and cheerful discursive chocolatescape.

General and language-specific scrutiny reveal *anonymity and neutrality* as the first salient frame for RQ3, predominating knowledge-intensive discourse. Its counterpart is found in *gender-revealing embodiment*.

9.3 Power emerging in chilli- and chocolatescapes

This section brings in a final dimension to study discursive foodscaapes, with an analysis of power emergence. It is anchored in web-native contexts of digital communication (Paveau, 2015) and analyses how power relations become diversified outside the realities, identities and intersections of the actual world and result in empowerment of consumers. This leads thematically to the analysis of foodie discourse as an arena for online influencing.

9.3.1 Empowering social media

“Chocolate makes us smarter!” (Mostly about chocolate, 5.1.2015)

Prior research discusses empowerment in online foodieism primarily as an emancipating arena for women, e.g. with women’s increased self-enhancement potential (Lofgren, 2013), with porn-type food blogging as a liberating female arena (Dejmanee, 2016), and with fulfilment of women’s distinction needs (Vejle, 2014; Rodney *et al.*, 2017). Whilst acknowledging this stream, the present corpus provides elements for a more diversified vista.

Communities of practice online have empowering effects for consumers in terms of sharing experiences, increasing knowledge and accumulating competences, as discussed above. Online outlets facilitate learning in creative cooking, spicing, tasting and baking. They enable prosuming cultivation and obtention of material such as rare seeds or baking gadgets; moreover taste engineering online enhances one’s foodie identity across knowledge accumulation and emotionally laden, sub-tribal sharing of experiences. Online activities are not limited to geographical boundaries or working hours, which democratises everyday realities for foodies living far from outlets in the actual world, or with restricted leisure time. All this

enhances pleasure from digital consumption (Kozinets, Patterson & Ashman, 2017).

Another empowering dimension is linked to financial capitals. Despite notes of elitism in capital-intensive contents, consumers with more meagre financial assets have an opportunity to participate in these consumptive performances as online spectators. This empowering effect can be perceived as recreational even if one's own situation doesn't allow similar consumption opportunities. Emulating is possible, in the limits of the individual consumptive habitus, and lavish sites may function as benchmarks. Connoisseurial sites are actively followed for this purpose.

One of the objectives of *Club* is to disseminate knowledge on high quality chocolate to all consumers:

“Nous avons donc décidé d'établir des ponts afin de ne pas manquer une occasion de nous unir pour mieux défendre un chocolat apprécié en France, mais aussi de plus en plus dans beaucoup d'autres pays.” [We have therefore decided to build bridges, for not to miss a single opportunity to unite ourselves to defend better chocolate appreciated in France, but also in other countries.] (Club, 23.8.2018)

Sites drawing on less costly consumption have a different, yet a significant role for consumers, e.g. across taste engineering practices.

In development of online empowerment, three categories are defined (Table 29), depending on the most significant level of emergence: individual, community level or public. The third one may reach spheres outside the community. These dimensions reflect the most significant empowerment practices: encouragement on individual level, endorsement on community level and expansion of one's role on public level.

The empowerment process is shaped by various contexts and user groups, and the displayed intensity of the experience (see also Kozinets *et al.*, 2010). In Table 29, the cells with SNS names in corpus are connected to one or several dimensions, depending on the broadness of empowerment practices

emerging therein. Sites can be identified with one dimension or span two or even all of them (*Chilifoorumi, Jatkoaika*):

| Online empowerment dimensions | | |
|--|--|--|
| Individual | Community | Public |
| Encouragement as a home baker, cook and prosumer | Endorsement from community members | Expansion of roles |
| Kinuskikissa (members) Suklaapossu (members) | Made from chocolate (Fr, En) | Le chocolat dans tous nos états Club des Croqueurs de Chocolat Kinuskikissa (blogger) Suklaapossu (blogger) |
| Les Foodies (chilli and chocolate) Marmiton (chilli and chocolate) The Chilli Temple | | |
| | Chocablog Mostly about chocolate Clifton Chilli Club Burn Blog with Fiery Foods and Dave de Witt Scott Roberts | |
| Chilifoorumi Jatkoaika | | |

Table 29. Development of empowering effects.

“Encouragement” is the most frequent category from the user/members’ viewpoint. It is salient in recipe sharing sites and baking blogs when users seek for tested recipes and technical hints for their own kitchens. Results are happily displayed, which enhances the celebratory dimension of this discourse:

“Première fois que je réussis un dessert, merci!” [The first time for me to succeed with a pudding, thank you!] (Les Foodies, 8.6.2015)

Although encouragement is discernable primarily on an individual level without the active participation of other members, it is linked to cooperative scaffolding as a taste engineering practice, when advice or hints are sought after. The outcomes do not lead to further co-creational development, but

they unfold as satisfying for users/members. Appreciative comments naturally enhance fulfilment engendered by one's achievements.

Several posts on trial, occasional error and eventual success reveal a profoundly empowering process that is constituent of foodie identity and taste engineering. Whilst recipe sharing and baking sites are the richest arenas for individual-level empowerment, display of felt encouragement is also frequent with narratives on chilli cultivation, endurance training, and prosumption activities:

“Tässä hiukan isompi purkki täynnä Lemon Drop jauhetta, lopputulokseen meni reilusti päälle puolitoista sataa marjaa.”
[Here is a slightly bigger jar full of Lemon Drop powder that took a good 150 berries:] (Chilifoorumi, 29.6.2006)

The more challenging a cake, a dish or a chilli variety is, the more rewarding are the success stories:

“[y]ou simply wouldn't believe the lengths I have gone through to get some of these.” (The Chilli Temple, 12.1.2018)

Another context of empowerment remaining mostly on an individual level are the affordances of social media that facilitate the exploration and embracing of one's culinary identity, especially if this is construed with foodways such as veganism or vegetarianism. Foodie sites may become online reference groups, providing moral support (Barnett *et al.*, 2016). *Kinuskikissa* has posts of this orientation, with vegan options for ingredients. However, they are rare in general, which aligns with the observation in Chapter 2 on foodie communities being mostly articulated around preferences, rather than abstinence.

“Endorsement” on the community level signifies that contributions gain increasing appreciation from readers, other users/members, or from the site owners, depending on the outlet type. Therefore, it is functional for all contributor statuses in online content generation: reader/member, actively

commenting member and expert (Figure 1). *Made from chocolate* (in both languages) is the only site where endorsement predominates, without the elements of the other two dimensions. Posts draw on general matters with chocolate, rather than on individual experience, with a style reminiscent of advertisements or articles in women's magazines. The individual level is not apparent; however, the blog content is endorsed by readers: although the Internet version doesn't feature their comments, the displayed number of reads may reach several thousands of views for the fragments analysed.

The Chilli Temple, *Marmiton* and *Les Foodies* feature dimensions of encouragement and endorsement, although the first one does not display much community-level interaction but refers to it⁹⁹. In the last two, star recipes are acclaimed by hundreds of other members, and their developers obtain the status of an expert who is also addressed directly, instead of scaffolding in the community in general.

“[c]'est un agréable piment que j'utilise dans la cuisine et aussi dans beaucoup de tes recettes X!” [It's a nice chilli that I use in cooking and in many of your recipes X!] (Les Foodies, 25.9.2015)

Clifton Chilli Club has an established status, yet only limited display of community support on the website, since online presence in various social media channels affects participation in the original site. Among chilliheads, one's reputation can be enhanced by frequent posts, by the degree of expertise in them, or by activities in offline chilli contexts that have a lot of converging points with online communities.

In Finnish discourse, achievements in cultivation are especially appreciated, and contributors promote them actively with “word-of-mouse”:

“Pariinkin kertaan ketjussa esillä ollut X:n sivusto on äärimmäisen kattava antamaan tietoutta chileistä ja niiden kasvatuksesta.” [The site by X, mentioned in this thread for a

⁹⁹ In 2019, the researcher found out that *The Chilli Temple* content had been transferred to Facebook, resulting in non-accessibility of content via the original http address.

couple of times already, is extremely helpful in questions of chillies and their cultivation.]
(Jatkoaika, 1.7.2008)

Chocablog and *Mostly about chocolate* are good examples of empowering endorsement in the category of blogs. A typical reader's post is a brief, appreciating comment:

"Oh man, the photos on this post are amazing. And the brandied cherries look down right delicious. Keep up the good work and tasty photos. Mmmmm....." (Chocablog, 28.6.20016)

Both blogs have developed from small-scale leisure activity into ventures with substantial crowds of followers and significant social media presence that generate offline responsibilities in chocolate communities. Their presence also in the category of expanding roles in empowerment is thus justified. The public dimension of empowerment is linked to situations where the site owner(s) reach a status of a recognised expert in the domain, which is a common growth story in online foodie contexts: a contributor starts to obtain more followers, becomes famous in the community and gradually in broader contexts, which results in commercial cooperation projects and offline celebrity. This self-fashioning process is linked to display of capitals and of the adopted foodie habitus. Commercial ventures such as presumption and site-generated online shops stem frequently from this development (Clifton Chilli Club, Burn Blog, Chocablog, Kinuskikissa, to mention but a few in the present corpus).

The *Made from chocolate* blogger presents her offline participation on the homepage:

"I have judged the 2011, 2013 and 2015 Academy of Chocolate Awards and was honoured to be one of the Grand Jury judges on the 2015 AoC awards. I have also judged every year of the International Chocolate Awards. I have judged a rum dessert competition in Toronto and a cake baking award at Chocolate Unwrapped among other foodie competitions." (no date)

Prosumption has grown from home-based crafting into a serious business of raw chocolate bars in the case of *Chocablog*, where “kitchen experiments have evolved into a proper business” (24.4.2015). This type of role expansion is more typical for prosuming chilli site owners however, as in the US-originated chilli outlets.

The category of “Expansion of roles” as a culminating point in empowerment includes two sites that do not feature in other categories, displaying no readers’ comments (*Etats*, *Club*). The support these outlets obtain from the communities nevertheless underpins the discourse, since contributors are established experts in their fields either as a larger body (*Club*) or as a duo of siblings creating the blog (*Etats*). Although direct expressions of support are not found in discourse fragments, professional networks are referred to: e.g. the prestigious *Confédération des Chocolatiers et Confiseurs de France* collaborates with the *Club*, and *Etats* describes distinguished restaurants and pastry shops where the bloggers are invited for a review.

Whilst empowerment emerges primarily as an individual dimension amongst readers of *Suklaapossu* and *Kinuskikissa*, for their bloggers expansion of roles is obvious, demonstrating a status shift described e.g. in Lofgren (2013) from “ordinary people” towards micro-celebrities in the foodie scene. For *Suklaapossu*, the publication platform has changed into a commercial one, opening a wider audience and contacts of an editor of a large women’s magazine in Finland. *Kinuskikissa* has kept the original site architecture, whilst an extensive online shop for baking products has been annexed to it. Both participate in a variety of commercial collaboration projects and have online presence in many platforms such as Instagram, Facebook and Pinterest.

It is noteworthy that empowerment develops as a continuum in multivocal online contexts, rather than remains in distinct categories. Depending on its intensity, overtly commercial content starts to pervade the outlets. In all parts of the corpus, contributors are very accurate about signposting modes of commercial cooperation, corporate sponsoring or commissioned reviews.

Objectivity is highlighted; however, it is practiced in a consumptive sphere that is profoundly and irrevocably materialistic. Negotiation of discursive boundaries is an ongoing challenge where both credibility and visibility are at stake. This leads to the final phase of analysis where power in discourse is observed from the viewpoint of social media influencing.

9.3.2 Influencing

“We’re honoured that our opinion is valued and we have been fortunate to try thousands of interesting and exciting products over the years.” (Clifton Chilli Club, 26.9.2019)

Online content generators with strong visibility and credibility are defined as “influencers” (Chapter 5; Lupton & Feldman, 2020), and the expansion of roles described above corresponds to this orientation. The denomination is as vague as “foodie” itself: impossible to delineate and utterly context-specific, and yet social media influencing constantly pervades new consumption spheres. The online magazine “*Wired*” (2019) refers to it as “an insult and an aspiration”, simultaneously. To analyse the phenomenon of micro-celebrities promoting products and services, the concept is functional, however. Influencing that is systematically remunerated by companies is not discussed here, although several SNS in the corpus display corporate collaboration projects.

A key concept in theorising, and a ubiquitous practice in digital contexts is word-of-mouth (“word-of-mouse”, e-wom) where Kozinets *et al.* (2010) refers to four constructs: *evaluation*, *embracing*, *endorsement* and *explanation*, aligning with the empowerment theorising above. Colliander and Hauge Wien (2013) observe the phenomenon from the viewpoint of relevant discursive strategies: advocating, justifying and vouching are relevant with positive e-wom, and all are used in the present corpus. Evaluation and explanation are linked mostly with vouching, whilst embracing and endorsement are conveyed with advocating and justifying. Referring to Chik and Vásquez

(2017), the factors of rating in this corpus are more connoisseurial than procedural.

Sources vary significantly regarding the intensity in discursive strategies that can generate influence on readers as consumers. Whether this occurs and to what extent is beyond the present scope, since discursive representations connected to totemic chilli and chocolate are studied here for their nature, rather than for their efficiency. Eventually, power as an influencer can be justified only with evidence from online audiences. Yet, an observation of influence-prone discourse is pertinent in the framework of the emancipating effects of online foodieism.

Influencing power can be ascribed to blogs and community websites, whilst recipe-sharing and conversation fora provide fewer opportunities for widely impactful content generation. Obtaining an influencer status is primarily linked to regular contributions with an established alias or one's real name(s), within the self-fashioning frame of content generation.

Rosenthal and Mckeown (2017, 12:2) distinguish two main domains of social media influencing: situational and global. This analysis draws on the first one, since a study of broader impacts would necessitate a different type of methodology and corpus. Below, three persuasive quotations reflect the dimensions of situational influencing observed: they vary from general, ideology-based recommendations (1) to statement-type informative remarks (2a) and reviews 2b), and to active highlighting and preaching (3):

(1) *“Eettinen kuluttaminen on kuitenkin yhteinen talkoo, joten kutsun teidät mukaan ideoimaan fiksumpaa arkea.”* [Ethical consumption is after all a joint effort, so I invite you all to ideate more clever everyday practices.] (Kinuskikissa, 26.10.2010)

(2a) *“We like to plant our seeds in Jiffy Pellets and place them in a heated propagator such as a Vitpod.”* (Clifton Chilli Club, no date)

(2b) “*Mad Anthony Original Hot Sauce is a complex, peppery and spicy product that would be a good ‘table sauce’ for most heat fans.*” (Scott Roberts, 12.1.2018)

(3) “*Courez l’acheter, il est entre le livre d’art et le coffret de chocolats!*” [Run and grab, it is between an art book and a chocolate box!] (Etats, 19.9.2015]

Quotations 2-3 demonstrate how influencing practices are connected to taste engineering in a community, when emerging with commercial underpinnings. Shifting spheres of commercial, non-commercial and semi-commercial content are detected: each source features brand and product names, service providers, destinations and events that are presented and/or reviewed, although with variation in intensity. The claim of objectivity is displayed visibly; however, the reader cannot be absolutely sure about all the linkages behind the posts. In Fairclough’s words (2015): the discourse is colonised by consumerism.

The first fragment draws on ethical influencing where consumption orientations are highlighted without product or outlet names. It is discernable in some fragments of *Kinuskikissa* and *The Chilli Temple*. Sustainability and health concerns embed in non-commercial or semi-commercial practices, and the latter is frequent in *Made from chocolate*, *Mostly about chocolate* and *Chocablog* where products and outlets are very present. *Club* raises topics with ethical chocolate consumption in this category as well. With chilli, the US sites have the most brand presence in discourse.

The shift to the most overtly commercial influencing is gradual. It emerges primarily in brand collaboration projects:

“*En voi muuta olla kuin iloinen, että pääsin mukaan kaupalliseen yhteistyöhön Hellmann’sin kanssa kehittämään jotain herkullista Real majoneesista.*” [I can only be happy to be involved in commercial cooperation with Hellmann’s, to develop something delicious from Real mayonnaise.] (Suklaapossu, 31.5.2017)

Table 30 displays influencing-prone discourse observed across the corpus. It depends on the contextual categories constituting discursive frames for taste performance (Chapter 8), recapped here:

- Description of nuances in flavour
- Perceived quality in tasting and consumption outlet or context
- Appropriateness in cooking and baking
- Significance nationally, regionally, and for the assumed foodie habitus

“Testimonials on deeply embodied experiences” is left out in this context, being highly individual and therefore challenging for comparison of influencing potential. The categorisation draws on salient topics and use of persuasive practices (justification, argumentation, vouching). All categories of taste engineering are pertinent in influencing, whilst manifold highlighting and secular preaching stand out discursively as the most powerful. The category of “Significance” includes dimensions of health and sustainability, widely present in the corpus.

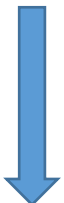
| <i>Dominating context of influencing</i> | | <i>SNS where the context emerges actively</i> |
|--|---|---|
| Flavour nuances |  | Chocablog, Club, Etats, Suklaayhdistys, Made from chocolate, Mostly about chocolate, Clifton Chilli Club |
| Perceived quality | | Etats, Club, Suklaayhdistys, Clifton Chilli Club |
| Appropriateness | | Kinuskikissa, Suklaapossu |
| Significance | | Made from chocolate, Mostly about chocolate, Scott Roberts, Burin Blog with Fiery Foods and Dave de Witt, The Chilli Temple |

Table 30. Influencing across categories of taste performance.

The arrow from flavour nuances towards significance stands for the emphasis that moves gradually: most chocolate sites and *Clifton Chilli Club* highlight flavour nuances as the most significant dimension. Flavour leads to perceived quality which is equally prominent across four of those sites. Flavour and quality are important when considering appropriateness of products for culinary purposes, whilst this quality has most importance only in the two Finnish baking blogs. Significance for the assumed identity is salient in all US chilli sites:

“Heartbreaking Dawns makes sweet, fruity blends of Ghost, Scorpion and Reaper hot sauce, the holy trinity of superhots”.
(Burn Blog, 26.4.2015)

Outlets highlighting the foodie identity with uplifting tones (Made from chocolate, Mostly about chocolate) or in a contemplative mood (The Chilli Temple) are more versatile, displaying influencing throughout significance for health, sustainability and identity. Whilst all French outlets emphasise supremacy of local ingredients and products, national and regional significance is less salient in influencing. It occurs as an overarching discursive dimension (Chapter 7), rather than with promotion.

An additional element in influencing are the negative features raised, when striving for more sustainability or quality. In chocolate discourse, endangered production zones and aspirations for healthy options are present.

Juxtaposition of products from large multinational companies and those of craft producers increases consumer awareness e.g. on unethical production conditions:

*“Too often chocolate is sourced from the Ivory Coast which is known for its farmers kidnapping children and forcing them into slavery ON COCOA FARMS. Yes, your ‘Fairtrade’ chocolate might be the result of child slave labour. I always choose **Rainforest Alliance** as they work with farmers to improve farming and practices directly in country whether it is tea, chocolate or coffee.”* (Mostly, 12.11.2014)

This trend is embedded in a broader orientation of ethical consumption where sustainable tourism is also involved in the frames of authenticity and exoticism, cherished by foodies. Influential online content may engender positive consequences to industries involved in chocolatescapes, in turn empowering these ventures:

“There is also a push to increase chocolate-focused tourism to the island – it’s a grass-roots effort and it is working. In fact places like Crayfish Bay are not only making organic chocolate, they also offer eco-tourism on their farm.” (Chocablog, 15.7.2018)

Johnston and Goodman (2015) refer to “food celebrity paradoxes” with expectations of authenticity and aspirations, conveying a responsible and yet empowering message. Remaining unbiased in a credible way in a profoundly material consumption sphere requires constant efforts of transparency from contributors. Succeeding reflects a high degree of discursive capital which can be considered as powerful in itself.

9.4 Conclusion

Chapter 9 seeks answers to Research Question 3 on gender and power performance with chilli and chocolate, embedding this observation in the core research problem on their emergence as totemic foods. Gender and power emergence online is highly contextual (Palomares & Lee, 2010), which is emphasised with a detailed cross-linguistic and source-specific study. Perceiving gender and power as intertwined constructs, it addresses Fairclough’s final question on discursive frames: “What larger-scale structures does the text have?” This leads to the identification of the discursive foodscape connected with Research Question 3.

Confirming extant argumentation (Chapters 2, 4 and 5) on that chilli reinforces masculine narratives and chocolate is evocative of a mainly feminine consumptive sphere is not presented here as a revelatory finding in itself, but as a starting point where compromising claims also emerge. Those are due to the multivocality of the consumer groups the corpus represents: foodieism online is a panoply of enmeshed orientations where contemporary consumption also takes new shapes in terms of intersectional gender roles and discourses, reflecting power constructs in and beyond consumers’ everyday reality.

The discursive foodscape related to Research Question 3 provides a redefinition of gender and power emergence in foodie discourse. Shifting degrees of gender equality and predominantly masculine discourse are frequently observed, whilst significantly feminine discourse is less salient. Acknowledging extant claims on highly gendered discursive constructs on

food, the findings reveal also more heterogenic gender emergence, drawing on the discursive frames identified above (anonymity, neutrality and self-fashioning). Affordances of anonymity and neutrality online generate foodie discourse where gender roles become less significant than in offline reality, whilst the totemic substances feature as protagonists, and contexts requiring expertise, skills and knowledge are frequent.

Contexts of ascribing value for chocolate and chilli amongst foodies being more complex than in non-tribal consumption, it is pertinent to conclude that online foodie discourse unfolds as more gender-neutral than food discourse outside sub-tribal communities. Chilli may generate joyfully erotic flirtation amongst women and men, and chocolate pleasures are more versatile than what has been claimed by Cartesian assumptions on women driven by their carnal urges. Distinction needs to be made however between deeply embodied experiences, where gender is flagged most clearly, and knowledge-intensive discourse that emerges – outside “chillidoms” – as predominantly neutral.

Whilst anonymity, neutrality and knowledge-intensive contexts are main drivers for gradually increasing gender equality in discourse, the situation is different in power emergence. Influencing power, the culmination phase of online empowerment, is fueled with somewhat reversed affordances: discursive self-fashioning leading to micro-celebrity in the consumptive subtribe. Most influential contributors rely on their discursive capital displayed with their real identity and networks. Empowerment in community performance, such as taste engineering, leads to contextually changing influencing, which in turn generates more empowerment.

An analysis of power emergence challenges assumptions on social media as an arena providing emancipation primarily to women as consumers in foodie culture. Findings reflect how various social media outlets generate empowering gratifications for all users, and how these develop in intensity according to activities and status in the community, and may eventually lead to performance as an influencer.

10. Discussion

Extending current knowledge is a focal outcome from a doctoral dissertation. The totemic emergence of chilli and chocolate with taste, gender and power dimensions is analysed in the contextually intriguing sphere of Social Networking Services in three languages, which is a pioneering research setting: the adoption of a discourse-centred, cross-linguistic approach breaks out from the conventions of foodscape research, positioning the concept in broader contexts than concrete foodscapes only. The research provides a new definition of totemic foods in the framework of contemporary consumer studies, highlighting the specificity of online communication contexts (10.1.1).

The research contributes to knowledge in the fields of Consumer Culture Theory, food studies and sociolinguistically inspired research. The theoretical and managerial implications of the study are discussed in the first section (10.1), according to the theoretical framework presented in the literature review for the main themes: totemic foods (10.1.1), taste performance (10.1.2) and gender performance (10.1.3). Furthermore, contributions for the field of discourse studies are outlined in 10.1.4. Confirming the added value of an interdisciplinary and cross-linguistic approach in the study of consumption, the findings provide practical contributions for the interest of marketers and service providers (10.1.5). The limitations of the study and promising topics for future research are discussed in 10.2, and section 10.3 binds together the conclusive reflections.

Joining ongoing scholarly conversations of CCT (Thompson, Arnould & Giesler, 2015; Cappellini, Parsons & Harman, 2016; Fischer, Gopaldas & Scaraboto, 2017; Kozinets, Patterson & Ashman, 2017; Iqani, 2018), the research design and findings add to the interdisciplinary theory construction in consumption research across frameworks of distinction, discourse and gender-conscious studies. The study reinforces a discourse-centred approach in the Consumer Culture Theory paradigm, introducing a remixed methodology (Markham, 2013a) that applies tools of pragmatic linguistics (Fairclough, 2015; Wodak & Meyer, 2016), alongside sociological and

marketing-based CCT theorising (Table 6). Furthermore, the study strengthens the intersectional analysis of “context of contexts” claimed by Askegaard and Linnet (2011) and Earley (2014), throughout an examination of external, internal and mental contexts in foodie consumption discourse.

The objective is to justify that an interdisciplinary, cross-linguistic analysis in the paradigmatic framework of Consumer Culture Theory reveals rich and dynamic aspects of sub-tribal foodie discourse and sheds new light on totemic significations ascribed to chilli and chocolate in the complex discursive realm of online foodie outlets (RQ1), with dimensions of taste performance and distinction (RQ2,) and of gender and power emergence (RQ3).

Identification of discursive frames and strategies in three languages and on two transnationally totemic foods provides new insights into the discursive representations of foodie consumption in an international perspective, pertinent in multimodal and superdiverse online realms. Given the broadness of the research topic, a detailed compilation of findings and outcomes is provided in Appendix 3, whilst this chapter concentrates on the relevance of the findings for the study of consumption.

10.1 Theoretical and methodological implications

10.1.1 A new definition of totemic foods

Findings permeate a contemporary redefinition of totemic foods in the context of tribal and sub-tribal consumption online: they constitute a key aspect in foodie-type consumption, articulated around significant experiences.

Moreover, they evolve contextually and dynamically across online communities. They are shaped by embodiment and emotions, by emerging disruption of established perceptions on gender and power, and by entanglement of distinction practices and discursive competence of consumers online. More than a substance representing kinship and

belonging in an established way (e.g. Lévi-Strauss, 1997, 2013), the totemic chocolate and chilli identified in this study refer to the capacity of bringing a community together on- and offline, with changing constellations of consumptive experiences and linguistic creativity that are inherent in online discourse of foodies. The assumed foodie habitus determines dispositions towards food totems, just as the group where the discourse is located. Nevertheless, kinship and belonging are construed differently online, when compared to communities in the actual world.

Foodie consumers cherish the embodied involvement in an experiential consumption mode that uplifts a food substance to a totemic dimension. However, the present findings reveal that in online realms the totemic status of chilli and chocolate is more dynamic than static and reflects the evolving consumption contexts, the development of consumer identity (Cayla, 2013) and the significance of stories told about the substance, weaving a tapestry of gastrographic memories (Abarca & Colby, 2016) where both self-depiction and taste performance are reflected.

The analysis reveals how foodie consumers ascribe totemic significations for chilli and chocolate with deeply embodied discourse where *consumption contexts* are highly meaningful, which is manifest e.g. in laddish chillihead gatherings, knowledge-intensive chocolate tasting and emotionally charged domestic baking, and in the outlets where they constitute the main topics. In all, foodie consumers embrace totemic chilli and chocolate with profound respect, even love, which is never compromised although the substances may appear with diversified nuances of playfulness, intense sensuality, self-enhancement, or competition.

Totemic foods remain symbols for group identity (Brunori, 2007), however the notion of a group needs to be adjusted to the evolving dynamics of volatile online communities (Kozinets, Patterson & Ashman, 2017; Cova & Dallı, 2018). Furthermore, the study identifies how online affordances such as product tasting and reviewing affect modes of ritualistic consumption of food (Wallendorf & Arnould, 1991), contributing to emergence of new food totems.

These may be substances or consumption modes (Julier, 2009), as the growing significance of sustainability concerns clearly indicates.

The discursive foodscape identified with Research Question 1 highlights the richness of dimensions that dedicated foodie consumers enact in their discourse on totemically significant chilli and chocolate: learning, caring, creativity, competition and indulgence. Showing the complexity of this discursive foodscape enriches current understanding of sub-tribal, foodie-type consumption (Johnston & Baumann, 2009, 2015) and enlarges the notion of totemic value ascribed to food.

A redefinition of totemic foods acknowledges the importance of a common discourse for online community cohesion, however with detected variation due to outlet types, online genres and contexts, and to the discursive resources of contributors (de Valck *et al.*, 2009). The study is a pioneering endeavor in terms of analysing how use of different languages results in divergence of discursive strategies of online contributors, despite their shared enthusiasm towards a jointly revered ingredient.

Straightforwardness and simplicity overarch Finnish discourse, whilst English and French feature more diversified discursive strategies and stylistic variation. They are also more linked with the discursive habitus of the contributor and the consumption context than Finnish discourse. Hence, the study shows how discourse related to totemic consumption modes of chilli and chocolate – and, by extension, of all foods – must be interpreted with consideration of not only social and cultural contexts of online contributors, but also of the linguistic variables of consumption discourse.

The research focuses on two foods that are significant to a totemic dimension, which links the study ontologically to a material-semiotic view of consumption where both human and non-human participants “[...] *are treated equally as participants, offering a different concept of the agency.*” (Bettany & Kerr, 2011, p1747). Aligning with the material-semiotic stream of CCT, the study reinforces understanding of how “objects” – here, food – may be

imbued with value (Kopytoff, 1986; Mäkelä, Bettany & Stevens, 2018) and become attributed with deep agency in a consumptive act. This type of disruption of traditional views is an established stream in CCT (Bettany, 2018). However, prior applications in the context of food are scarce, and studying foods ascribed with totemic significations in sub-tribal constellations introduces a novel perspective in the study of contextually shifting agency, across the evolving marketplaces of online foodieism.

10.1.2 Taste performance

The study contributes to theorising of taste and distinction in food consumption with two key aspects. Redefining totemic foods as a dynamic and contextually changing domain enables an analysis of sub-tribal distinction in entwining frameworks of self-enhancement, learning, competition, caring and indulgence. This viewpoint entails a more complex understanding of embodied taste performance, stemming from consumer identity work in online contexts, than studies focusing on conventional interpretations of Bourdieusian capitals only.

Methodologically, the study is the first cross-linguistic analysis of taste performance and emergence of distinctive practices online. It extends conceptualisation of CCT-based taste engineering (Maciel & Wallendorf, 2016) to online foodie communities with two new practices relevant in digital realms and developed in this study, *manifold highlighting* and *secular preaching*, and deepens understanding of food as a constituent of sub-tribal consumer identity, connected to co-creational taste performance. This dimension strikes a chord with the identification of *secular spirituality* (Lelwica, 2011) as an intensifying trend of taste performance in engaged foodie discourse, in English in particular. Recognising underpinning aspirations for meaningfulness, fulfilment and spirituality alongside embodied taste experiences in discourse on chilli and chocolate reinforces the age-old totemic status of the two substances, however with a contemporary interpretation.

Taste performance research based on consumer types as established and solid identities such as epicureans opposed to foodies (Parsons, 2015) is partly challenged with a more diversified approach: *foodie* is perceived as a generic term, whilst a number of consumption orientations are distinguished in this group. In online communication, it is appropriate to denominate them according to the context of discourse, to the outlet type and to the consumer identity: e.g chillihead, creative cook and baker, or chocolate connoisseur are suggested here as more elaborate categories than “foodies” or “epicureans”.

The study provides a more detailed categorisation of contributor roles and contexts in foodie-generated content online than extant research suggests, and, moreover, connects these roles to specific SNS types and genres in foodie-related social media outlets which is innovative in taste performance studies. *Seeking for encouragement, asking for direct advice, exhibiting learning, disseminating knowledge, reviewing produce and outlets, and assessing members’ achievements* are the most salient contexts where *readers/members, actively commenting members* or *experts* perform taste. The discursive foodscape reflecting Research Question 2 is crystallised in a tri-dimensional process combining *recreation, exploration* and *celebration* that confirms the appropriateness of taste engineering in the study of foodie-type consumption and moreover positions it in the context of digital communication, with suggestions of extensions of the concept.

Findings introduce the identification of contextual categories where physiological and social components of taste performance coalesce most powerfully, across languages: *description of flavour nuances, perceived quality, testimonials of embodiment, appropriateness in cooking/baking* and *significance of the product*. This innovative opening addresses a substantial gap in food-related taste theorising and confirms the significance of embodied and sensorial experiences in this field.

In the Bourdieusian vein, the dimensions of culinary and discursive capital analysed together shed new light on the complexity of taste performance as a phenomenon that is profoundly regulated by and through discourse, and on

the cross-linguistic and contextual variation in these performances. Whilst culinary capital is conceptualised in extant research as a relatively homogenic entity, it is articulated in this study in categories (*contextual*, *knowledge-intensive* and *epicurean*) which contributes to theorising of interdependence of diverse capitals and consumption contexts, across discursive reproductions.

10.1.3 Gender and power performance

Eventually, findings on Research Question 3 address gaps in study of gender performance in foodie discourse, and contribute to theorising in web-native power emergence (Paveau, 2015). The research challenges a cluster of extant assumptions on gendered consumptive practices on food, with evidence of increasing neutrality and anonymity as online affordances, even in chilli outlets dominated by masculinity. Findings confirm that gender equality is an intensifying trend across the large array of gratifications online. Furthermore, the unique and respectful relationship that both female and male foodie consumers have towards chilli and chocolate in online communities results in divergences, when compared with discourse stemming from non-foodie contexts (*cf.* Mäkelä, Bettany & Stevens, 2018). This is a revelatory finding, in particular with chocolate.

The study diversifies prior CCT-oriented research on carnal feminine (Maclaran & Stevens, 2005, 2007) and carnal singularity (Mäkelä *et al.*, 2018) with a foodie-generated corpus where gender roles gain in heterogeneity: both men and women imbue food substances with carnal significations in discourse, especially in French, and in a macroscopic observation, emerging trends of gender neutrality and equality are detected. Moreover, empowering effects of online foodieism are found to be more gender-neutral in a foodie-generated corpus than research drawing on non-foodie data has claimed.

The main finding related to gender performance is that consumption contexts are shown to regulate considerably gendered indexes, and contextual variety

generates more diversified chocolate discourse than prior literature has acknowledged: not only (female) indulgence, but also gender-neutral, technically challenging baking mastery and refined tasting expertise are constituent of foodie-type consumption of chocolate. Embodiment with chocolate can be linked with intellectually inspiring, co-creational learning, where gender roles do not necessarily stand out as significant. Whilst competitiveness remains a mainly masculine domain in foodie discourse online and pervades especially chilli consumption, indulgence emerges as an increasingly gender-neutral contextual sphere.

Findings reveal the significance of *embodied practices* to the constitution of a foodie habitus, and to the enactment of performing that habitus on various fields of consumption. The study dissects this process with a language-specific, context-specific and gender-oriented analysis. Articulated findings enhance knowledge on performativity and embodiment in consumer discourse (Kozinets, Patterson & Ashman, 2017), as well as on the acute debates on experiential consumption, perceived as fluidity (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2016, 2017).

The present findings unfold diversified emergences of embodiment that reflect multivocality online: the overarching respect and love of foodie consumers towards chocolate and chilli as unifying totems generates empowering and emancipating discourse where gender is not necessarily a contrasting dimension. This is observed especially in recipe sharing, knowledge-intensive contexts and connoisseurial chocolate discourse.

The study articulates consumer empowerment in three categories: *individual (encouragement)*, *community-level (endorsement)* and *public (expansion of roles)*. They are more tightly connected to the SNS type than to the gender of contributors, which highlights the function of foodie-type involvement online as an empowering factor for all genders alike.

Challenging dominating views on stereotypically gendered chocolate consumption and exclusively capital-intensive foodieism diversifies

understanding of this versatile consumer tribe. Furthermore, increased knowledge on gendered and distinctive practices emerging in food discourse facilitates targeting of consumers of all genders and with diversifying eating orientations in the online era. Foodies are here to stay, they are avid consumers, and their online performances unfold a fascinating postmodern drama (Holt & Thompson, 2004).

10.1.4 Discourse studies

Contributions to the field of discourse studies stem from the interdisciplinary notion of *discursive foodscapes*, introduced by the researcher and pertinent for food consumption studies and for sociolinguistic theorising. Discursive reproductions are under-represented in extant studies of foodie-type consumption (see 1.4). The theoretical and methodological concept of discursive foodscapes strengthens an interdisciplinary viewpoint on discursive dimensions of food consumption, which is a timely endeavour in the constantly increasing digital contexts.

In addition to the introduction of a novel theoretical concept, the study addresses a substantial gap of comparative approaches in foodie-generated discourse, where most extant studies refer to the English language (Kytölä, 2013; Lee, 2016), and findings show how users of Finnish, English and French embrace different discursive strategies to convey totemic meanings of chilli and chocolate (see 10.1.1.) For the field of pragmatic linguistics, the study suggests a rearticulation of formality theorising, stemming from genre-specific features and adapted to the digital discursive contexts where new styles of writing emerge constantly (Rasch, 2018): *informal*, *semi-formal*, *formal* and *formal elegant*.

10.1.5 Practical contributions

Understanding of mechanisms related to significations ascribed to food, of emotions attached to them, and of performance of culinary taste online

enhances successful commercialisation of totemically significant products. The study contributes to managerial practices with findings that enable more efficient marketing efforts, in order to target foodie consumers who constitute a more heterogenic consumptive tribe than extant research has recognised. Products with an established, iconic status such as chocolates would benefit of advertising that accentuates significantly consumption contexts, which strengthens their totemic, unifying value.

Identification of discursive roles such as *chocolate connoisseur*, *chocolate lover and baker*, *creative cook*, *playful chillihead*, and *chilli aficionado* in respective outlet types foregrounds marketing efforts that are able to captivate the mindset of volatile tribal consumers for more efficient service providing and product development in hospitality, leisure and food ventures. Chocolate connoisseurs and chilli aficionados appreciate detailed knowledge and expertise, creative cooks search for new ideas, playful chilliheads enjoy sharing their discoveries together and chocolate bakers wish to make their entourage happy. Recognising the SNS types that these consumer groups engage with caters for more successful segmentation, where the erosion of stereotypical assumptions should also be taken into account: chilliheads may look for adventures without leaving home, and chocolate bakers may represent all genders.

Detailed study of foodscapes provides profound knowledge on how people negotiate their relationship with products and places. Language-specific variation detected in the study diversifies this knowledge further and also orients marketing choices discursively: consumers navigating across SNS in English, Finnish and French language are inclined to appreciate divergent discursive strategies that can be emulated in advertising. A unifying dimension is however the power of embodied experiences in conveying consumption gratifications, with the gastrographic dimension (Abarca & Colby, 2016): food memories are significant triggers of consumption decisions, which generates interesting openings for marketing efforts.

The study adds to the scholarly work on food trends that take new directions with omnivorous and experiential consumption styles and postmodern eating orientations. Individual foodways are an important constituent of the foodie habitus. However, with totemically ascribed ingredients, personalised foodways are performed in parallel with aspirations of virtual commensality. Marketers may benefit from highlighting the commensality aspects and the totemic qualities, with bespoke interpretations of consumers. Therein, brand loyalty is not necessarily the principal trigger for consumption when direct product evaluations are not considered. Moreover, brand endorsement is culturally sensitive: brand mentions are more frequent in English and in particular in US-generated discourse than in French and especially in Finnish.

The study also provides market-specific implications. The corpus consists of data fragments from 2001 to 2019, illustrating a visibly increasing trend in discourse on sustainability, fair trade, organic products, locavorism and artisanal production. However, in the corpus fragments originating from the USA, these dimensions are less significant than in the British sites and the SNS in French and Finnish. Conversely, US contributors are more inclined to ascribe food with secularly spiritual meanings than foodies from other areas, although deep fulfilment by foodieism is a gratification found in all data sources.

As a rule, sustainability and ethical issues are more significant in chocolate contexts than in the “chillidoms”, however companies should be mindful of the growing concerns of consumers regarding sustainability in all sectors. The affordability of products and services does not stand out as a very significant factor for foodie consumers online, whilst originality, unique flavours, creativity and the capacity to convey emotions and to reminisce about fond memories are highly valued.

The French contributors are particularly attached to small-scale production and the quality of raw ingredients, whilst the Finnish consumers value practicality and simplicity. Moreover, in terms of discursive strategies to be

adapted in marketing, the contributors in English enjoy joyfulness and humour and the French appreciate subtle references to sensuality.

Online empowerment affects consumptive spheres by enhancing the engagement of consumers to social media outlets: recognition of categories of individual, community-level and public empowerment, leading to an influencer status, orient practical implications. Successful SNS can be scouted and their creators engaged with commercial ventures on these dimensions, depending on the online audiences targeted. Social media influencers detected in the corpus are very mindful of transparency and ethical conduct, which is an element that companies should take in consideration when contacting the site owners for collaboration suggestions.

10.2. Limitations of the study and suggestions for further research

The study is a pioneering effort in its research context, and therefore the delineation of the methodology and the data is deliberately broad. It does not seek to scrutinise all diversity across communities of practice, community websites, hybridising blogs, or conversation fora. Reflections stemming from pertinent literature orient the analysis of data generated in a rapidly evolving consumption field, whilst the notion of “community” is sufficiently fluid to represent a rich and multivocal corpus of sub-tribal consumption spheres. However, it is not possible to transfer all findings to other types of consumer groups, in offline settings or related to food in general.

The difficulty of providing precise definitions to the applied concepts is evident: e.g *foodie*, *online community*, *taste* and *totemic* have diverging and even shifting interpretations in scholarly endeavours of different paradigms. This challenge, often encountered in interpretive research, is addressed with a broad literature review from which stem the foundations of context-appropriate definitions. A transparent positioning of the study, with the background of the researcher and her aspirations made explicit (sections 1.1 and 6.1–6.4), enhances reliability. Challenges stemming from a corpus in

three languages are addressed with a transparent process of data gathering, categorisation, analysis and eventually, translation of quotations that are checked by external professionals (Appendix 2).

Methodological choices, justified in Chapter 6, affect the generalisability of the findings for four main reasons: (1) They draw on two totemic substances, chilli and chocolate, (2) in SNS of foodie consumers and (3) in a compilation of data fragments in three languages, (4) spanning a timeframe from 2001 to 2019. The delineations, however, enable a synchronic analysis of those dimensions of foodie discourse online, aligning with the Research Questions.

A study with an exploratory objective generates promising topics for future research. Dualities identified in emergence of chilli and chocolate discourse orient towards further investigations of antinomies of taste (Warde, 1997), in particular in contexts of indulgence contrasted with health and the growing interest in sustainability, or across debates on “good” and “bad” foodways. Taste engineering practices in digital outlets provide broad opportunities for a gender-oriented research and would benefit from narrowing down the context in future studies, to enable more specific analyses. Carnal singularity (Mäkelä *et al.*, 2018) merits investigation as a discursive practice of all genders, in particular in sub-tribal consumption contexts online where anonymity and neutrality affordances affect intersectionalities.

A sociolinguistically oriented inquiry on sub-cultural neologisms and on metaphors drawing on embodied food experiences is expected to be fruitful in all three languages of the study. Discourse analysis of nationally significant foods would yield interesting perspectives, in both off- and online contexts, whilst chilli events merit to be studied with a gendered positioning, for a better understanding on how material and semiotic dimensions coalesce in prosuming communities. Secular spirituality as a form of cultural religion (Lelwica, 2011) in foodie communities reveals itself as extremely interesting, especially with an interdisciplinary approach where a broad understanding of contemporary spirituality is applied.

In a post-Bourdieuian vein, two future viewpoints stand out: diversifying representations of gender in knowledge-intensive food contexts, and display of emotional capital in foodie consumption and its cross-cultural variation.

10.3 Conclusive reflections: towards discursive foodiescapes

“The recognition of ethical veganism as a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010 will have potentially significant effects on employment and the workplace, education, transport and the provision of goods and services.” (The Guardian, 3.1.2020)

In January 2020, a British tribunal ruled that ethical veganism is protected by law as a belief (*The Guardian*, 2020), which resonates interestingly with the observations on individual food orientations pervading spheres of spiritual performance, evoked in this study, and resulting in wider implications in society. Whilst veganism is only one orientation amongst the sub-tribal communities articulated around foodways, the decision signposts an official recognition of foodways as a fundamental element of one’s lifestyle that merits protection.

The existence and dynamics of online foodie communities are inarguably in evolution, as diverse forms of culture have always been. Computer-mediated discourse transfigures established borderlines across contributors (Cover, 2016) and various consociality practices erode communication modes, compromising assumptions on stability of consumer collaboration (Kozinets, 2015). These aspects have encouraged modification of methodology in the vein of remixing, for enhanced pertinence in multivocal and multimodal digital contexts.

Study of foodscapes online reinforces claims on their discursive and embodied nature (Surman & Hamilton, 2018), and on heteroglossia and superdiversity of digital communication in general (Chapter 5). The core motivation areas for user-generated online content (Matikainen, 2015) are all

found in foodie discourse: identity; sharing; social order, interaction and community; and benefit.

Insights contribute to extant theorisation on embodiment and food in everyday foodieism where occupations such as baking become arenas of taste display and identity work that partly challenge iconic presuppositions of sensually laden foods, or on food blogging as an arena pervaded by significantly feminine endeavours.

Furthermore, “food play” does not reveal itself in this corpus as an exclusively male arena (*cf.* Parsons, 2015). It may be a part of female foodies’ daily or weekly foodways, even though these women might continue to assume the identity of and perform the tasks expected from food providers and caretakers in the family context (de Vault, 1994; Harman & Cappellini, 2014). The affordances of the virtual world emancipate foodie women to enjoy food play alongside their male counterparts, without compromising emotionally laden food work and care-taking. Moreover, online foodies are a playful tribe that also includes women without domestic responsibilities as family food providers. These findings do not overrule the existence of highly gendered spheres such as online chillidoms, but trigger curiosity on how eroding gender roles in increasingly anonymous communication contexts may generate diversity e.g. in virtual mancaves or still feminised baking communities.

Certain power constructs amongst online foodies are also undergoing reconfiguration. The empowering, knowledge-accumulating and self-fashioning practices of doing taste constitute significant affordances. Digital contexts cater for consumers in an observer’s position, without an imperative to possess the same financial capital as the culinary benchmarks followed. Considering (food) cultural diversity represented in the corpus across omnivorous practices, it is noteworthy that pleasures of palate are not only reserved for the financially privileged, and despite apparent capital-intensive contexts and products displayed in the most epicurean sites, they may be highly significant for publics from diverse social strata. This development is

readable in the broader context of emerging cultural capitals (Friedman, Savage, Hanquinet & Miles, 2015).

Views on capital-intensive food blogging diverge: the process can be read as increasing inequality (e.g. Koh, 2017), or as promoting emancipation of consumers (Mapes, 2018). In this corpus, both interpretations are possible, depending on how actively readers embrace the experiences exhibited online and aspire to emulate them. Nevertheless, online foodies should not be underestimated for their capacity of discernment; a luxurious post on a palace hotel may offer evasion, yet it does not need to entail more jealousy than reading an old novel on aristocracy. The social media do not necessarily provoke more inequality than the conventional media, amongst consumers who are capable of interpreting their ontologies.

Display of connoisseurship is salient in SNS drawing on developed culinary and linguistic capitals; however, a user may find it even more gratifying for her habitus to be active in a less formal outlet. This flexibility, where multivocality reflects multimodality, is not only segregating: it highlights the empowering effects of social media in foodie contexts, whilst users-contributors navigate depending on needs, accumulated competences and expected gratifications. The richness and originality of foodscapes displayed online by foodie consumers inspires a context-specific neologism: they can be approached as discursive *foodiescapes*, due to divergences perceived with research based on non-foodie data.

Chilli and chocolate are transnational food culture icons (Riley & Cavanaugh, 2017) that consolidate manifold and creative tribes online. Their significations ascribed by sub-tribal communities evoke a variety of gratifications in contemporary foodie culture: co-creational learning, identity construction, capital display, postmodern playfulness, secularly spiritual aspirations and above all, a cornucopia for embodied culinary exploration.

Pervaded by deep dualities, they perpetuate mysteries that intrigue consumers with constantly new interpretations. Yet, the most powerful of their totemic features is their age-old capacity to bring people together.

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Appendices

Appendix 1.

Fragments from Social Networking Services constituting the corpus, presented in the order of compilation date.

| SNS | Fragment or name and discourse type | Date (if available) |
|--------------------|---|-----------------------|
| Chilifoorumi | Chocolate with chilli (conversation thread) | 30.8.2011-15.8.2012 |
| | Tandoori ovens for chilli cooking (conversation thread) | 4.4.2011-11.3.2015 |
| | Smoking devices and chilli cooking (conversation thread) | 25.7.2005-3.4.2014 |
| | Vegetarianism (conversation thread) | 29.8.2013-30.8.2013 |
| Jatkoaika | Pleasure from the burn (several conversations under one topic headline) | 1.7.2008-13.6.2019 |
| Suklaayhdistys | General information (article) | no date |
| | Tips for chocolate tasting (article) | no date |
| | Flavours (article) | no date |
| | Chocolate vocabulary (article) | no date |
| | Panel presentation (article) | no date |
| | FAQ of the community (article) | no date |
| | Fazer Blue (panel comments) | 3.7.2005-30.11.2017 |
| | Rózsavölgyi Csokoládé Porcelana (panel comments) | 15.4.2013-19.5.2014 |
| Kinuskikissa | Dark chocolate panel (blog post with panel comments) | 20.1.2011-28.4.2012 |
| | Fair trade chocolate cake (blog post, recipe and comments) | 26.10.2010-2.2.2012 |
| | Mocca brownies (47 comments out of the total of 208 on the recipe) | 1.4.2008-7.12.2018 |
| | Pralinés with Bailey's (blog post, recipe and comments) | 29.11.2019-26.12.2019 |
| | White chocolate croquant with liquorice (blog post, recipe and comments) | 6.12.2018-23.12.2019 |
| Suklaapossu leipoo | Mocca brownies without eggs and milk (blog post, recipe and comments) | 13.6.2018 |
| | Chocolate muffins without eggs and milk (blog post, recipe and comments) | 10.4.2018 |
| | Chocolate cake with orange (blog post, recipe and comments) | 16.3.2018 |
| | Year 2017 (blog post with comments) | 31.12.2017 |
| | Chocolate fudge for St. Valentine's (blog post, recipe and comments) | 10.2.2017 |
| | Mocca brownies with mint chocolate (blog post, recipe and comments) | 15.2.2018 |
| | Peanut butter and chocolate treats (blog post, recipe and comments) | 22.5.2017 |
| | Marbled mocca brownies without eggs and milk (blog post, recipe and comments) | 22.2.2018 |

| | | |
|-------------------------------|--|------------|
| | Chocolate cake with Hellman's mayonnaise (recipe and comments in commercial cooperation) | 31.5.2017 |
| Chocablog | Z Chocolat Valentine's Day Ruby Box (blog post) | 23.1.2015 |
| | Hotel Chocolat Rabot 1745 Vietnam 80% (blog post) | 26.8.2014 |
| | Cadbury Chocolate Buttons (blog post) | 6.4.2006 |
| | Chocolate dipped fruits (blog post with comments) | 11.7.2006 |
| | Grenada chocolate festival (blog post) | 18.5.2015 |
| | Why you shouldn't "dechox" this Easter (blog post) | 23.2.2016 |
| | Bean-to-bar chocolate making (blog post with comments) | 24.4.2015 |
| | Godiva Christmas launch (blog post) | 8.12.2012 |
| | Magnum chocolate waste (blog post) | 4.5.2011 |
| | Melt fresh chocolates (blog post) | 10.9.2012 |
| | Sainsbury's Mexican chipotle soup (blog post with comments) | 19.9.2013 |
| | Moser Roth Mousse (blog post with comments) | 21.12.2011 |
| | Chocoholly chocolate review (blog post with comments) | 17.9.2009 |
| | Chilli chocolate by Lindt (blog post with comments) | 8.7.2007 |
| | Cocoa bean origin map (blog post with map) | no date |
| | Chocablog is 10 years old (blog post with comments) | 3.3.2016 |
| Made from chocolate (English) | Chocolate (home page text) | no date |
| | History of chocolate (blog post) | 29.4.2015 |
| | What is chocolate? (blog post) | 29.4.2015 |
| | Types of chocolate (blog post) | 29.4.2015 |
| | Chocolate addiction (blog post) | 5.5.2015 |
| | The chocolate diet (blog post) | 19.5.2015 |
| | Chocolate benefits (blog post) | 29.4.2015 |
| | Chocolate recipe presentations (blog posts introducing recipes) | no date |
| | Smoky chocolate chicken (recipe) | 28.5.2015 |
| | Healthy chocolate cookies (recipe) | 21.5.2015 |
| | Chocolate rum kiss drink (recipe) | 21.5.2015 |
| | Chocolate chilli (recipe) | 5.5.2015 |
| | Chocolate and chia seed smoothie (recipe) | 27.5.2015 |
| Mostly about chocolate | home page text | no date |
| | Spring Tea by Sophie Faldo (blog post) | 21.2.2019 |
| | E Guittard Quetzalcoatl Chocolate Bar (review and blog post) | 25.4.2011 |
| | Coffee Crisp Easter Egg (review and blog post) | 8.4.2011 |
| | Nine Reasons Why We Love Chocolate (blog post with comments) | 5.1.2015 |
| | Divine Chocolate Gin & Tonic Flavoured Chocolate Bar (blog post and review) | 19.9.2019 |
| | Introduction of a new Divine chocolate (blog post and review) | 20.9.2018 |
| | Cutter & Squidge Launch (blog post and review) | 26.2.2019 |
| | Askinosie Chocolate Bars Review (blog post and review) | 28.8.2019 |
| | House of Dorchester Chocolates (blog post and review) | 6.9.2013 |

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| | A new tasting menu for Chocolate Week (blog post and review) | 16.10.2018 |
| | How Grenada is Reinventing Our Indulgent Sweet Treat (blog post) | 15.7.2018 |
| | Shrewsbury Chocolate Festival (blog post) | 12.11.2014 |
| Fiery Foods with Burn Blog and Dave de Witt | Cooking with superhot chiles (blog post with recipes and comments) | 19.10.2008 |
| | Chilli philosophy and humor (blog post) | 18.10.2017 |
| | Dining with the Aztecs (article/ blog post) | 31.10.2010 |
| | Chile pepper history (article/blog post with recipes) | 9.6.2017 |
| | Chiles and chocolate (article/blog post with recipes) | 7.6.2008 |
| | Sweet heat for your Valentine (blog post with recipes) | 6.8.2008 |
| | Launching Burn Blog 2.0 (blog post) | 19.7.2015 |
| | New York Hot Sauce expo (blog post) | 26.4.2015 |
| Scott Roberts | home page text | 12.1.2018 |
| | Mad Anthony's hot sauces (an extensive set of reviews) | 12.1.2018 |
| | Farewell of the Firecast podcast (blog post) | 10.7.2017 |
| | Firetalkers (interview/blog post) | 5.12.2016 |
| | Sinful Sauces Bliss Sweet BBQ Chipotle Hot Sauce (a set of reviews) | 16.5.2011 |
| The Chilli Temple | Jimbo's tin-pot kebab (blog post and recipe) | 12.1.2018 |
| | Home page (blog post) | 29.7.2017 |
| | Honey fermented garlic and chilli (blog post and recipe) | |
| | Chilli yoghurt (blog post and recipe) | 29.7.2017 |
| | Smoked chilli cheese (blog post and recipe) | 23.4.2017 |
| | Old school grower (blog post) | 22.4.2017 |
| | Authentic chilli collection (blog post with seeds offer) | 12.1.2018 |
| Clifton Chilli Club | home page text | no date |
| | Has the extreme sauce had its day? (blog post) | no date |
| | Foods that burn (blog post) | no date |
| | Chilli growing tips (blog post) | no date |
| | Our aims (blog post) | no date |
| | Sending your products (blog post) | no date |
| | Hot Sauce with Everything (online magazine) | Summer 2019 edition |
| Made from chocolate (French) | L'addiction au chocolat (blog post) | 3.10.2017 |
| | Le régime chocolat (blog post) | 16.10.2017 |
| | Recettes au chocolat (blog posts with recipes) | no date |
| | Description of chocolate recipes | no date |
| Marmiton (chocolate) | Fondant au chocolat (recipe and comments) | 12.6.2007-13.9.2019 |
| | Coulant tiède (recipe and comments) | 2.5.2001-25.6.2018 |
| | Chocolate mousse (recipe and comments) | 11.5.2019-27.5.2019 |
| Les Foodies (chocolat) | Moelleux chocolat Coeur fondant (recipe and comments) | 9.7.2007-9.2.2016 |
| | Chocolate fudge cake (recipe and comments) | 10.8.2009-17.10.2014 |

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| | Mon coulant au chocolat (recipe and comments) | 9.10.2010-19.6.2016 |
| | Questions posted on chocolate mousse | started on 18.10.2019 |
| Marmiton (chilli) | Chilli in alcohol (conversation thread) | 14.5.2017-3.6.2017 |
| | Chilli flakes (conversation thread) | 31.10.2011-25.4.2015 |
| | Green chillies (conversation thread) | 31.7.2009-27.8.2009 |
| | It burns! (conversation thread) | 6.8.2006 |
| | Fiery sauces (conversation thread) | 6.1.2006-8.1.2006 |
| | The French as spice users (conversation thread) | 4.4.2005 |
| | Axoa d'Espelette (recipe and comments) | 8.5.2016-18.6.2016 |
| Les Foodies (chilli) | Tunisian deep-fried chillies (recipe and comments) | 3.6.2011-18.10.2014 |
| | Pork with chilli (recipe and comments) | 23.1.2015-23.9.2016 |
| | Chocolate mousse with chilli (recipe and comments) | 23.3.2017-10.4.2017 |
| | Croquettes (recipe and comments) | 14.5.2015-26.7.2018 |
| | Roast chicken with chilli (recipe and comments) | |
| Le chocolat dans tous nos états | Home page text | no date |
| | Review of a chocolate book (blog post) | 30.6.2016 |
| | Review of a chocolate cooking book (blog post) | 22.5.2016 |
| | Nos palmés du mois (blog post on best chocolate awards) | 13.12.2015 |
| | Le marbré du Lutétia (blog post with review) | 9.12.2018 |
| | Atelier sensoriel du Valrhôna (blog post with review) | 5.9.2017 |
| | Chocolat Damien Vidal (blog post with review) | 18.9.2015 |
| | Christophe Michalak's chocolate book (blog post with review) | 29.9.2015 |
| | Le petit Larousse chocolat (blog post with book review) | 19.9.2015 |
| | Le Bristol Paris (blog post with review) | 14.8.2019 |
| | Bellanger chocolates (blog post with review) | 4.11.2018 |
| | Substance Paris (blog post with review) | 1.3.2019 |
| | François Daubinet (blog post with review) | 30.9.2015 |
| | Brunch at Plaza Athénée (blog post with review) | 29.6.2019 |
| | Maison Sève Lyon (blog post with review) | 15.4.2019 |
| | L'Epicure (blog post with review) | 25.8.2019 |
| Le Club des Croqueurs de Chocolat | Funding of the Club (blog post) | no date |
| | Comments on the 2003 decree on chocolate (blog post) | 20.4.2004 |
| | Regulations of the Club (statement) | no date |
| | Becoming a member (statement) | no date |
| | Forthcoming Guide 2020 (blog post) | 9.5.2019 |
| | Wellness and chocolate (blog post and review) | 23.7.2018 |
| | Raw chocolate (blog post and review) | 6.11.2017 |
| | New English chocolates (blog post and review) | 22.2.2016 |

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| | At the backstage of the Guide (blog post) | no date |
| | Quality of chocolate (blog post) | no date |
| | Tasting guidelines (blog post) | no date |
| | Chocolate retailers (blog post) | no date |
| | Annual gala dinner (blog post) | 11.6.2017 |

Appendix 2. Certificate on translations.



Certificate on translated material

1 (1)

3 March 2020

Translation of quotes in Marjaana Mäkelä's PhD thesis "In search for totemic foods – Exploring discursive foodscapes online in Finnish, English and French".

To Whom It May Concern

We have checked a sample of 29 quotes and their translations in English and French in Ms Mäkelä's thesis. The study draws on discourse compiled from social networking services of foodie consumers in Finnish, English and French. 16 of the quotes are in French and 13 in Finnish. The purpose of this language checking is to ensure that the content and the style of the translations in English comply with the original quotes.

Having Finnish as our mother tongue and being qualified lecturers in English and French in higher education, we assure that the translations meet these requirements.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Teija Schalin".

Teija Schalin

Master's degree in English

Senior Lecturer at Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Pia Mattila".

Pia Mattila

Master's degree in French and Spanish

Senior Lecturer at Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences

Appendix 3. Findings and outcomes of the study.

| Approach | Introduction of the theoretical concept of discursive foodscapes |
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| Research question 1 | |
| 1.1 Discursive frames identified for totemic chilli and chocolate in three languages | <p><i>Finnish on chilli</i>: Solitary and displayed, crafting consumption of men in a heteronormative ethos</p> <p><i>Finnish on chocolate</i>: Emotionally charged and innocently embodied consumption focusing on unpretentious learning</p> <p><i>English on chilli</i>: Competitive male consumption reaching secularly spiritual functions</p> <p><i>English on chocolate</i>: Guilt-free but conscious consumption articulated around embodied experiences</p> <p><i>French on chilli</i>: Skillful and creative consumption dominated by quest of authenticity but reflected towards national heritage</p> <p><i>French on chocolate</i>: Passionate, multisensorially embodied and aesthetic consumption in French contexts, seeking for adventure.</p> |
| 1.2 Discursive strategies and perceived trends | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nationally significant foods are described with a less diversified vocabulary than less famous ones • Politeness is dissipated when the discursive etiquette is compromised, and established members have more freedom than random contributors • The more specialised the community is, the more elaborate linguistic resources are used to convey meanings • Discursive strategies gain in resourcefulness, when the topic is perceived as meaningful • Intensity of embodiment increases emotionality in discourse • Underpinning dualities shape all discourse. |
| 1.3.1 Language-specific strategies: Finnish | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Straightforwardness and unpretentiousness stand out • Simplicity is cherished in expression • Emotional components are most meaningful in domestic spheres • Linguistic variation across genres is more stylistic than structural • Sub-tribal humour is valued. |
| 1.3.2 Language-specific strategies: English | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secular spirituality affects vocabulary, style and topics • <i>Embodiment</i> and <i>consciousness</i> occur together, to enhance argumentation • Joyfulness in discourse unfolds with both totemic substances • A more flexible linguistic repertoire identified than in Finnish and French |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Argumentation is mostly based on experts' opinions. |
| 1.3.3 Language-specific strategies: French | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chocolate is perceived with more variation than chilli • Nationally cherished culinary traditions entwine with global foodie trends • Individual interpretations of national heritage create friction across community building and individual identity construction • Discursive variation is nuanced and highly genre- and context-dependent • The "linguistic habitus" clearly distinguishes online contributors • Politeness, fun and flirt are valued • SNS display internally negotiated discursive norms, sustained together. |
| 1.4 Discursive foodscape related to RQ1 | Embodied consumptive experiences construe the discursive nexus, displaying significant contextual variation. Secular spirituality, culinary creativity and presumptive activities are identified as most salient characteristics. |
| Research question 2 | Findings and outcomes |
| 2.1 Contributions to the theory of taste engineering | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification of the most appropriate engineering practices in online foodie contexts • Introduction of two novel significant practices: <i>manifold highlighting</i> and <i>secular preaching</i> • Adaptation of the theory to a cross-linguistic online corpus. |
| 2.2 Key outcomes and findings | Identification of significant categories of physiological taste, to display social components of taste for distinction purposes: <i>nuances of flavour, perceived quality, deeply embodied experience, appropriateness in cooking/baking, significance</i> (national, regional, identity levels). |
| | Identification of predominant discursive roles: <i>chocolate connoisseur, chocolate lover and baker, creative cook, playful chillihead, chilli aficionado</i> . Analysis of their emergence in the corpus. |
| | Analysis of statuses of content generation in cooperative scaffolding (<i>reader-member, actively commenting member, expert</i>) and of salient contexts for their emergence (<i>seeking encouragement, asking for direct advice, exhibiting learning, disseminating knowledge, reviewing products and outlets, assessing members' achievements</i>). |
| | Analysis of the continuum from <i>informality</i> to <i>sophistication</i> in manifold highlighting. |
| | Display of capitals reflects both self-identity and community-level identity. |
| | Omnivorous trends dissipate display of financial capital, whilst culinary and discursive capital are most significant in foodie discourse. |

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| | <p>Articulation of culinary capital depending on its emergence: <i>contextual, knowledge-intensive</i> and <i>epicurean</i>.</p> <p>Correlation demonstrated between categories of culinary capital and degrees of formality.</p> |
| | Stylistical variation does not overrule taste engineering as a pertinent practice, but provides different discursive representations for it. |
| 2.3 Discursive foodscape related to RQ2 | The embodied taste experiences generate discourse in three significant categories related to taste engineering and distinction: <i>recreation, exploration</i> and <i>celebration</i> . |
| Research question 3 | Findings and outcomes |
| 3.1 Gender display | <p>Neutrality and anonymity are recognised as important gratifications especially in outlets with strong gender dominance.</p> <p>Finnish chilli discourse has the most diversified repertoire of denominations for women, whilst English discourse depicts them with more courtesy.</p> <p>Foodie discourse is flexible in terms of gendered indexes, which is observable in sites displaying mixed gender presence: contributors' genders are challenging to identify.</p> |
| 3.1.1 Indexes of masculinity with chilli | <p>The most significant indexes of masculinity identified in chilli discourse are <i>challenge, status display and hierarchies</i>, and <i>self-enhancement</i>. They emerge significantly in the following contexts:</p> <p>Challenge</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • descriptions of competitive consumption events • expertise in cultivation • knowledge in chilli varieties and trivia • volume of domestic consumption <p>Status display and hierarchies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reputation in the SNS community • volume and heat of products tasted or reviewed • expert's status in broader networks ("chillidom") • years of experience <p>Self-enhancement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • physiological endurance in consumption at home and in events • uniqueness of experiences as a chillihead ("testimonials") • savviness in crafting and cooking • search for adventure. |
| 3.1.2 | Chilli discourse is not entirely colonised by male hegemony, but also gender-equal tendencies are found. |

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| Doing gender with chilli | <i>Adventurous but domesticated foodieism</i> is identified as the dominant consumption style for all chilliheads and creative cooks. |
| | Gendered territoriality in cooking unfolds most powerfully in Finnish and English. |
| | Finnish chilli sites emerge as “virtual mancaves”, cherished for the solitude they provide. |
| | In English, dimensions of competition enhancing masculine and chillihead identity appear occasionally more precious than the substance itself. |
| | Despite its masculinity, chilli discourse in English is chaste. |
| | The “creative cooks” discovering flavour qualities to enhance their home cooking display a gender-neutral discursive foodscape. |
| | The discursive chilliscape in French is adventurous and gender-neutral: culinary creativity with chilli draws on shared embodiment of heat. |
| | Discursively creative flirtation across genders is frequent in French with both chilli and chocolate. |
| 3.1.3 Doing gender with chocolate | Gender emergence with chocolate is analysed in contextual categories: <i>Emotional sharing, Emotional learning, Embodiment by competition, Embodiment by indulgence, Sustainability and health, Secular spirituality, Culinary creativity, Prosumptive creativity.</i> |
| | Finnish foodies perform in chocolate outlets as “domestic jugglers”. |
| | English discourse coalesces a food-loving consumer tribe and the mythical dimension of womanhood, leading to an ideal type of “domestic goddesses”. |
| | French discourse reveals a deeply embodied mix of female and male indexes, and culinary and erotic adventures are an agreeable spice in everyday life for men and women alike. |
| | Discourse on chocolate reveals also masculine and neutral orientations. |
| | Contexts where neutral or neutral-male indexes are most observable: knowledge-intensive discourse (chocolate clubs) and sites where co-creational taste engineering is the key practice (recipe sharing). |
| | A more diversified consumptive sphere than mere indulgence seeking is identified: foodie-oriented consumption has more gender variation than extant research claims. |
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| 3.1.4 Discursive frames for gender display | <i>Anonymity and neutrality</i> predominate in knowledge-intensive discourse, with <i>gender-revealing embodiment</i> found across deeply embodied experiences. |
| | Discursive strategies for chocolate are less gendered than for chilli. |

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| 3.2 Power emergence | Identification of online empowerment and social media influencing as “web-native” power constructs. |
| 3.2.1 Empowerment | Categorisation of online empowerment dimensions: <i>individual (encouragement)</i> , <i>community-level (endorsement)</i> and <i>public (expansion of roles)</i> . Analysis of the corpus for these dimensions. |
| 3.2.2 Influencing | Contextual categorisation of influencing depending on taste engineering: <i>flavour nuances</i> , <i>perceived quality</i> , <i>appropriateness</i> , and <i>significance</i> . |
| | The continuum in influencing analysed: ideology-based recommendations – statement-type remarks and reviews – active highlighting and preaching. |
| | Despite consumerism pervading online consumption contexts, contributors manage transparency with high degree of discursive capital. |
| 3.3 Discursive foodscape related to RQ3. | Knowledge-intensive neutrality and gender-flagged embodiment discourse vary contextually, whilst an emerging trend of gender equality is detected. Affordances of anonymity and neutrality fuel online empowerment that leads to those of self-fashioning and micro-celebrity, eventually unfolding as influencing. |