Beyond the Digital Foodscape: Scottish-based Foodies' use of social media influencers to explore and choose food

Kristen Nichole Marshall

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis, titled *'Beyond the Digital Foodscape: Scottish-based Foodies' use of social media influencers to explore and choose food'* has been undertaken solely by myself. Thus, the presented work is the result of my own original research. This work has not been submitted, in whole or in part, in any previous application for a degree.

Except where stated otherwise by reference or acknowledgment, and with the exception of this standard statement, the work presented is entirely my own.

Signed:

Kristen Marshall

Abstract

The aim of this research is to investigate the effect of social media influencers (SMI) on Scottish-based consumers' food choices and food-based identity. Social media influencers (SMIs) are prominent opinion leaders of digital foodscape whose influence extends offline. Furst et al.'s (1996) complex food choice model was used to examine the strength and limits of the influence of SMIs on Foodie food choice against other factors. The research design employed semi-structured interviews situated in the homes of ten respondents who subsequently kept a diary to capture their food choices and use of social media over two weeks. While this research found SMIs popularise ingredients, cooking methods and restaurants they were less effective brand advocates for food products. Two Foodie archetypes – healthy Foodies and curious Foodies – were identified and refined against existing literature. Furst et al.'s complex food choice model was adapted for Foodies, with variety and learning as prominent food values and monetary considerations less prominent. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of SMI influence on consumer attitudes and behaviour from the perspective of consumers. The conclusions call for a more nuanced understanding of social media followership and proposes a scale of user engagement with influencers. Recommendations are made to influencers, Scottish food stakeholders and those wishing to partner with SMIs to promote food and drink.

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CHAPTER 1: Introduction, context and overview of thesis

This chapter presents a background to the research context. A justification for this work explains this research against existing published contributions to knowledge around social media influencers and food choice. The research aim and objectives are clearly and succinctly set out. A brief overview of the research methods is provided. Finally, this chapter concludes with an overview of the remaining chapters.

1.1 Background

> ... if you want to understand the workings of a society, “follow the food”.
>
> Julier (2013) quoting Barbara Haber

This research explores the role of social media influencers in impacting food choice of Scotland-based food enthusiasts who self-identify as Foodies. Social media influencers are those who develop and maintain relationships with followers online and this gives them the ability to influence the thoughts, attitudes and behaviours of those who consume their content (Dhanesh & Duthler, 2019). A Foodie is an individual who has a sustained interest in food that is tied to their sense of self (De Solier, 2013). Food is central to society and is one of the few universal constants of human experience as it is both critical to human life and can be the ultimate indulgence. The consumption of food and identity making around food has developed into a consumer culture. Consumer cultures are deeply imbued with social norms and cultural meanings (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). Social media is popular for food-

based discussions as communities form around common interests which reflect and reproduce complex knowledge and awareness of food which is both deeply personal and tied to wider social and political networks (Goodman, Johnston, & Cairns, 2017; Steils & Obaidalahe, 2020). This research draws on Consumer Culture Theory as it advocates for a critical approach that does not look at individual phenomenon, but embarks on consumer research that explores the impact of contemporary culture on consumer experience and identity (Askegaard & Linnet, 2011). Food culture has proliferated online. In addition to an interest in restaurants reviews and food based businesses, there are a range of influencers who create food-centred content related to daily food preparation, choices, and lifestyles (Charry & Tessitore, 2021; Doub, Small, & Birch, 2016; Smith, 2020; Walsh & Baker, 2020). Understanding how a social media-based interest in food may affect food choice offline is important to understanding the wider context of food, and contributes to a better understanding society itself.

Food is firmly established as a popular topic both online and offline, and an interest in eating well has risen since the global pandemic. Throughout the pandemic, food became a way to share with others what was happening in homes, to pass time productively and to embrace a slower pace to daily life (Easterbrook-Smith, 2021). Research revealed a global shift in food preparation and consumption habits, with more people learning new skills and cooking at home (Euromonitor, 2021b). This has further widened the number of food-interested consumers who may embrace the social media food content and take part in established trend of taking pictures of food, using food related hashtags and displaying food-related identities

online (De Solier, 2018). Due to the global pandemic, food as a key area of interest has become more firmly established, making this research both timely and relevant to wider consumer interests.

Influencers have emerged as online opinion leaders who are at the forefront of consumer trends and who have an impact on consumers' purchase intention, behaviour and loyalty (Fakhreddin & Foroudi, 2021). As individuals whose influence over other consumers is recognised (Childers & Boatwright, 2020; Sánchez-Fernández & Jiménez-Castillo, 2021), influencers are in a prime position to market foods to consumers. Influencers gather audiences of varying sizes and are effective at leverage these for profit while also sharing their personal lives and engaging their audiences (Abidin, 2015; Enke & Borchers, 2019). They are highly focused on sharing a sense of normalcy or relatability with followers, and research suggests that this sense of normalcy is helpful in promoting products and creating a sense of community for their audience (Abidin & Ots, 2016; Leite & Baptista, 2021). Much of the literature around influencers focuses on their value in promoting brands and explores how influencers act as effective brand advocates (Costa Do Nascimento, Dias Campos, & Suarez, 2020; De Veirman, Cauberghe, & Hudders, 2017; Holiday, Densley, & Norman, 2021; Lou & Yuan, 2019; Shan, Chen, & Lin, 2020; Trivedi & Sama, 2020). The value of influencers in reaching consumers has been firmly established in literature to date.

Foodies are themselves opinion leaders and this means they are a niche consumer group. Foodies who are recognised by others as being very experienced with food are asked for their opinions and are therefore involved in a wider social capacity as establishing what is considered 'good food'

(Josée Johnston & Bauman, 2015). Foodies are deeply interested in food, and this can translate to a desire to learn about foods and a desire to feel more connected to food production (Declercq, Tulkens, & Leuven, 2019; Phillipov, 2016b). The Foodies in this research put great value on home cooking and traditional family meals made from scratch. This suggests a desire to embrace and value production over conspicuous consumption. Both among Foodies and globally there is an emerging trend for wellness and ethical consumption (De Solier, 2013; Euromonitor, 2021b). While the Foodies in this research enjoyed the act of cooking special foods and valued family meals, they were less concerned with ethical consumption outside of meat reduction – which was more often driven by health concerns. Media is acknowledged in literature as playing a key role in disseminating food knowledge and displaying food-related identity (De Solier, 2018; Lewis, 2020; Rousseau, 2012; Walsh & Baker, 2020). Food is firmly established as a form of leisure and enjoyment of good food is a widely accepted pastime in the UK (Cleave, 2020; Fattorini, 1994). This research is therefore highly relevant to consumer interests in the UK.

1.2 Justification

There is a developing body of research into social media influencers, that has provided a good foundation for this research. Research on bloggers has been around for quite some time (Dale, 2008; Pedersen & MacAfee, 2007; Thelwall & Hasler, 2007), but the research focus on social media influencers as an all-encompassing and broader label is relatively new, and can therefore be considered an emerging field (Borchers, 2019). There is precedent in literature to categorise bloggers, YouTubers and Instagrammers

under the same label of influencer (Abidin, 2015; Enke & Borchers, 2019; Reinikainen, Munnukka, Maity, & Luoma-aho, 2020), and this research takes that approach. Given the relatively small life cycles of social media platforms and the tools that allow content creators to post across multiple platforms simultaneously, it is not necessarily helpful to differentiate influencer type (Vlogger, blogger, influencer, etc.) based on which platforms they use particularly as the popularity and effectiveness of platforms in reaching consumers changes (Hootsuite, 2022). While platforms do differ in terms of content type, the focus of this research was on how Foodies are making use of influencers, making the platforms on which they post and the characteristics of the influencer less of a focus. Previous research has highlighted that Foodies are less likely to turn to bloggers for food information because these sources are seen as non-expert (De Solier, 2013), but the Foodies in this research do make use of influencers, including bloggers.

Despite the growing body of research into social media influencers, there is still a lack of clarity on some aspects of this now well-established media personality/communication channel. Enke and Borchers (2019) recognize influencers as a growing topic of interest in strategic communications and call for a definition of SMIs that is more firmly situated to better understand how influencers work in different contexts (Enke & Borchers, 2019). This research is focused on how influencers impact food choice, so it more narrowly defines the context of influence. Other researchers have highlighted a lack of research into influencer marketing from the perspective of their audience (Abidin, 2015; Lou, 2021). The experiences and perspectives of the Foodies who consume influencer

content is situated at the centre of this research. Finally, a recent publication highlighted that few studies focus on how influencers can affect public opinion or behavioural change (Hudders, Jans, & Veirman, 2021). This research attempts to do exactly that by focusing on how Foodies are changing Foodie attitudes and behaviours based on their interactions with influencers.

While there is a wider body of literature focused on social media and food, there is less published research about food and social media influencers. There is some research into social cues of influencers and healthy eating. In a study using mock influencer content, children who viewed content featuring unhealthy foods significantly increased their intake of unhealthy snacks, but viewing influencers with healthy snacks did not have a significant impact on the food choices of the children (Coates, Hardman, Halford, Christiansen, & Boyland, 2019b). The authors have published another article about food and beverage cues featured in YouTube content popular with children (Coates, Hardman, Halford, Christiansen, & Boyland, 2019a). Coates and Boyland (2021) have also published an article about child social media influencers and their effect on children's eating behaviours and diet. It cannot be assumed that adults will respond to content in the same way that children do, and so this research provides an important contribution to how influencers impact adult food choice. Walsh and Baker (2020) explored Instagram influencers' clean eating posts and how these contributed to framing particular foods as moral consumption. Goodman and Jaworska (2020) covered the framing of 'good' food more widely in their study which mapped the digital foodscape of the UK. Both of these recent

publications were focused on the posts of the influencers themselves with less focus on the consumer response. This research will provide a unique contribution by looking at a specific local food context within Scotland from the perspective of Foodies who are consumers of influencer content.

1.3 Research Aim and Objectives

The aim of this research is to explore the influence of social media influencers on consumers' food choices with a focus on consumer's who identify as Foodies.

The following research objectives will be met:

1. To apply Furst et al.'s (1996) comprehensive food choice model to Foodies to understand how and why Foodies use social media influencers to inform their food choice and develop their Foodie identities.
2. To discuss the significance of food and food-based identity in contemporary consumer culture, to understand Foodie-ism as an evolving interest and Foodie as consumption-based identity.
3. To examine how the digital foodscape of influencers affects the dietary attitudes, behaviours and identities of people who identify as Foodies.
4. To critically explore the extent and limits of influencer influence on consumers with a high subject knowledge within the context-specific consumption category of Foodies in and around Edinburgh.

5. To understand the meanings and values Foodies ascribe to influencers, the values they espouse, the content they produce and the tools they offer to help consumers manage food choice.

1.4 Research Methodology

The research was designed to make the experiences and daily realities of the Foodies the focus of the study. It is grounded in sociology and acknowledges the wider context of food choices while focusing on the individual influences (ideals, personal factors, resources, etc.) and values (quality, convenience, health, etc.) that guide food choice (Furst et al., 1996). The philosophy that guides the research methodology is interpretivism – focusing on the subject meanings of food choices and influencer influence as expressed by the Foodies themselves (O'Donoghue, 2019). The role of influencers in impacting the Foodie's attitudes, behaviours and identity is considered as only one part of a wider landscape – or 'foodscape' – and thus acknowledges that influencers are only part of a wider food choice context (Josée Johnston & Goodman, 2015), and only one part of a wider media phenomenon around food (De Solier, 2013; Goodman et al., 2017).

The data collection included interviews and diaries and was situated in the homes of the ten Foodie respondents. This immersion in the homes of respondents surrounded by the foods they had bought in the context where they make food choice, prepare foods and consume them ensured situatedness and an accurate account of the daily lives of respondents (Cavanaugh, Riley, Jaffe, Karrebæk, & Paugh, 2014; Given, 2008b). This was critical to fully address the aim and objectives of the research while

contributing to existing literature by providing research from the perspective of consumers themselves. Thematic analysis was employed to explore the influence of social media influencers on consumers' food choices with a focus on consumer's who identify as Foodies.

1.5 Organisation of the Thesis

This thesis is arranged into eight chapters. This first chapter introduced the research, presented the context, highlighed the body of literature explored, outlined the research aim and presented the research methodology. The next two chapters more fully address the existing literature around food choice and influencers. The second chapter sets out an overview of the scholarship of food, introduces Foodie-ism, the local food context, and explores theoretical constructs around food choice with Furst et al.'s (1996) complex model of individual food choice introduced and justified as a comprehensive base on which to explore the food choices of the Foodies in this research. The third chapter reviews the literature around influencers to explore how influencers work and why they are so appealing to consumers.

The research itself is described across three chapters. The research methodology and underlying assumptions of the research are presented in the fourth chapter in detail. Chapter 5 presents the findings and discussion of the findings, the contents of which are organised around the themes that were interpreted from the data. Furst et al.'s (1996) values are redefined for Foodies and proposed Foodie archetypes are presented. The conclusions, contributions to knowledge and recommendations are outlined in Chapter 6

to clearly demonstrate the fulfilment of the aim and objectives of the research. The limitations of this work and potential future research directions are set out.

The thesis is concluded with a complete reference list and appendices which add supplemental information to further contextualise this work.

CHAPTER 2: A review of the literature around individual food choice

This first chapter of the literature review sets out the significance of food in contemporary consumer culture and defines the “Foodie” identity. The study of how individuals relate to food and make food choices is very complex as it involves “psychological, social, cultural, economic and biological forces” (Bisogni, Connors, Devine, & Sobal, 2002, p. 128). The complexity of the topic of food can make it difficult to narrow the focus of any research. Furst et al.’s (1996) complex food choice model is introduced as a means to bound this research whilst recognising wider influences involved in individual food choice. Recognising the role of social media influencers as only one element of a tapestry of influence is critical to understanding the extent and limits of their influence. There are brief overviews of the individual and social factors involved in individual food choice. The rise of food-based identities is explored to fully introduce the ‘Foodie’ as the subject of study in this research. Foodie-ism is explored as a contemporary consumer culture. Next the Scottish food scene is set out to provide context for the local nature of this work. Finally, the concept of a “Digital Foodscape” is introduced (Johnston & Goodman, 2015) as a means to explore the impact of the digital world on the actual food landscape.

2.1 The complexity of food choice

Furst et al.’s (1996) complex food choice model considers all factors which influence food choice. It was chosen for this research as the framework to aid in exploring Foodie’s food choices as they are shaped by

influencers because it recognises wider influences and systems but allows for a focus on value negotiations made at an individual level. The model is as follows:

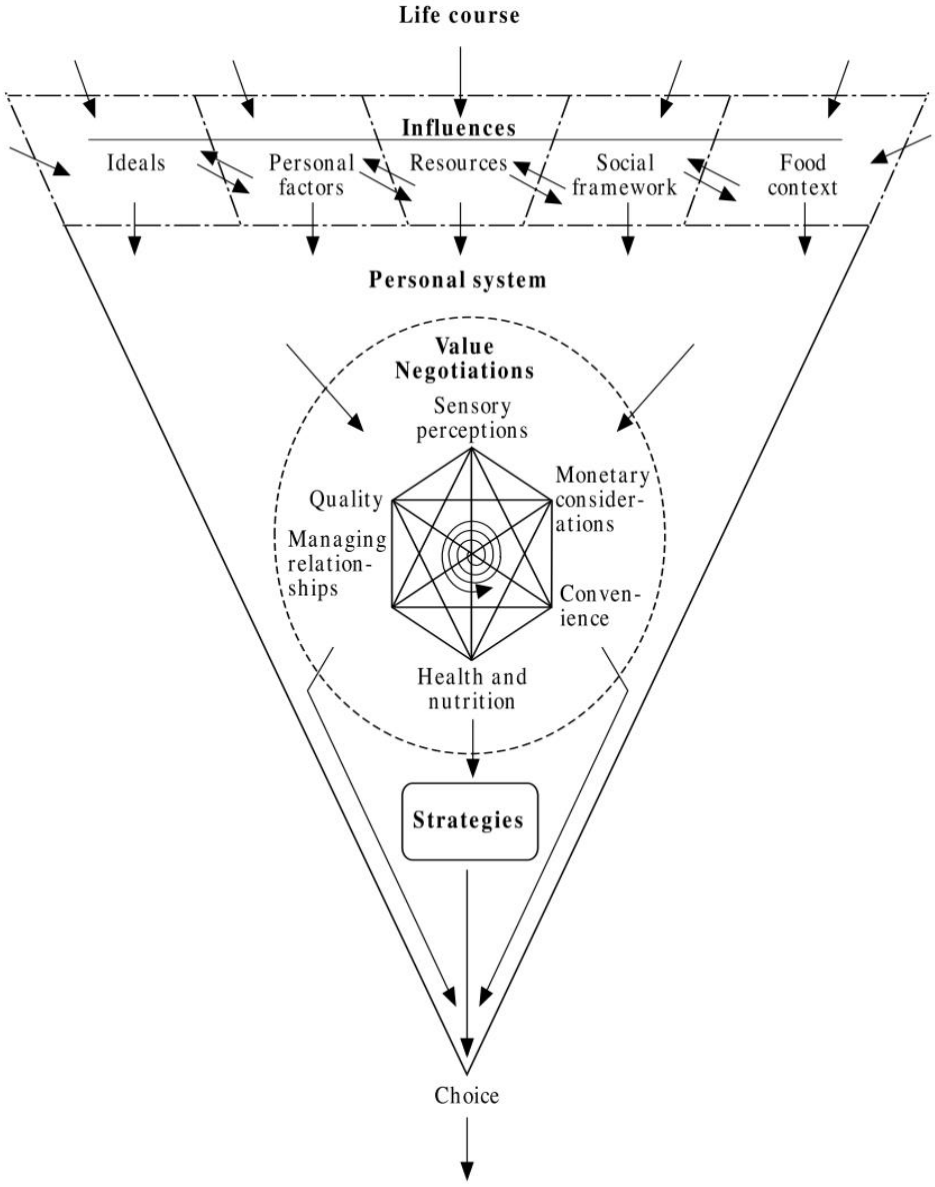

Figure 1: Furst et al.'s (1996) *conceptual model of complex food choice*

Food choice and food-related attitudes and behaviours are influenced by shared values and beliefs, which are related to cultural factors (Chen & Antonelli, 2020). The way in which the food choice model frames this influence is implied as wider influences and is not given equal evaluation with

the value negotiations of the Foodies. This approach is highly relevant to Foodies who do not share a set cultural identity, but rather their internal personal values are informed by more widely held Foodie values. This model is a good fit for a consumer culture perspective of Foodies – explored in a later section – which does not assume culture is a homogenous whole and is therefore held within the individual meanings of Foodies (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). The Furst et al. model allows for different food values and diets when explaining food choice without tying these to a particular cultural identity. More specific variable-based food choice lists used by other authors look at specific preferred food items using the attributes and categories of the foods such as preference for local fish or texture of foods (Simeone & Scarpato, 2020). The comprehensive food choice models consider the properties of the foods as valued by the individual making the food choice, and alludes to wider socio-economic contexts as informing the food values of Foodies (Shepherd, 2005). A strength of Furst et al.'s model is that it recognises food choice as dynamic in nature and situation-specific (Connors, Bisogni, Sobal, & Devine, 2001), which allows value negotiations such as the disparity in ideal food choice and actual food choice to be explored as these are understood individually and not as pre-set choices defined by the researcher. As this research is concerned with individual influence, a food choice model from an individual perspective was considered most appropriate, and in this regard Furst et al.'s (1996) model is both suitable and flexible. Although it should be noted that the uni-directional nature of the model does not allow for the influence of individual food choice on influences (such as socially held ideals or wider food context), the influence of the

Foodies on those factors was out-with the scope of this research. So whilst some Foodies did provide insight into how they influence others, the methods did not allow for confirmation of a two-way or reciprocal influence from the Foodies.

At the same time the complex food choice model was published, other authors introduced other lists of personal value negotiations. For instance, Steptoe et al. (1995) developed The Food Choice Questionnaire with a wide set of personal motivations from which nine distinct factors of influence were identified: health, mood (food choice helps moderate mood), convenience, sensory appeal (look, smell, touch, taste), natural content (no additives, natural ingredients), price, weight control, familiarity, ethical concern. These factors were akin to Furst et al.'s (1996) values. Some were situationally specific with price being less important to those with more money and familiarity being more important to those with less disposable income (Steptoe et al., 1995). Ethics are another food value identified by food researchers who have studied vegetarian and vegan diets (Jabs, Devine, & Sobal, 1998; Malek & Umberger, 2021) as well as those who have researched sustainability and environmental concerns (Beverland, Dobele, & Farrelly, 2015; Malek & Umberger, 2021; Rosenfeld, Rothgerber, & Tomiyama, 2020). Connors et al. (2001) made slight alterations to Furst's model (e.g. substituted 'sensory perceptions' for 'taste'), but also identified less prominent values of variety and symbolism. As the Foodie respondents in this research are all middle class, and as the Foodies are generally adventurous with food, it is expected neither price nor familiarity will be as important to them, but variety might be more prominent a factor in their food

choice. Wadolowsak et al. (2008) summarise several authors with further values, influences and other considerations – satiety, gender, social position, knowledge of eating behaviour and social networks – as their work is focused on social variables to identity different consumer groups in Poland. All of the values and wider influences (e.g. social factors, etc.) identified here were considered in the research as they were identified and evidenced in the individual food choices of Foodies, but only those choices informed by social media influencers were examined and included in the analysis.

While more recent and fuller food choice models exist – for instance Chen and Antonelli's (2020) review of more recent models and proposed framework – these incorporate factors out-with the scope of this study such as societal or biological. As food choice in this research is focused on a particular identity that is not bound to a specific culture, and as the biological features of respondents would require specialist knowledge to properly evaluate, a simpler model was chosen. Furst et al.'s model is therefore suitable for research into individual food choice as influenced by others and is not specific to a single domain or social space. In models reviewed and proposed by Chen & Antonelli's (2020) more recent work, the influence of media is listed under food-external factors with the wider social environment, but this fails to consider social media as a collaborative space where participants actively shape and edit content rather than passively consume it. As Furst et al.'s model does not consider food media as a particular influence, it can be applied to social media without needing to be altered and can be explored without constraints or pre-set assumptions. Instead, social media has been treated in this research as a general influence that has the

potential to influence all factors in the model. It is therefore a good model to apply to understand how and why Foodies use social media influencers to inform their food choice and their Foodie identities.

2.2 Social Influences on food choice

Food is not merely something that fulfils a utilitarian purpose: fuelling the body. It helps us to connect to others, to form social groups and ethnic identities, it can be used as a means to differentiate groups, but also to bring them together (Alatorre, 2015). Culturally held values around foods influence food choice in particular groups and regions (Cleave, 2020). From the perspective of social anthropologists shared meals become a site where social groups gather, they initiate young children and new members into families and communities, and meals are where roles are performed and self-image is constructed and enacted (Cavanaugh et al., 2014; Murcott, 1988; Wood, 1995). Beyond individual households and communities, humans use food and meals to actively share, care and build relationship because we all need to eat and because it offers an opportunity to communicate, exchange and reciprocate in a more casual way than trading and bartering (Neely, Walton, & Stephens, 2014). Choosing foods when in wider social settings involves negotiation values internally across a number of factors and in collaboration with others across different cultural, social and personal contexts (Sobal, Bisogni, Devine, & Jastran, 2006). Food is a cornerstone for social identity-building, integration and relationship-building in the home and beyond.

Food is a central force around which many social systems and social meanings are constructed:

> ... “such as kinship systems (who belongs with whom; which people eat together), language (for discussing food past, present, and future, for planning the acquisition of food, and deciding how to divide it out while preventing fights), technology (how to kill, cut, keep, and carry), and morality (what is a just slice?)” (Visser, 1992, pp. 1–2).

We build and display our social roles around food and this creates shared understandings and expectations. For instance, there are social expectations around who does what in the household for meal preparation and planning and studies around family food choices tend to focus on mothers as primary influencers (Doub et al., 2016; Johnson et al., 2011; Leak et al., 2014). But these social expectations are also tied up with moral values, such as the value of a home-cooked meal and the virtue of the individuals that take the time and effort to prepare these foods (De Solier, 2013). These expectations around food, care and social roles feed into wider social understandings and become frames of reference for socially understood identities.

Food within the home is an important site of social influence. Food is linked to identities as it used to differentiate groups and form groups through sharing food and food-based practices (Alatorre, 2015). We build and display our social roles within our households based around food, and there are social expectations around who does what in the household for meal preparation and planning based on social roles – i.e. baby food commercials are almost exclusively targeted to mothers, and studies around family food choices tend to focus on mothers as primary influencers (Johnson et al., 2011). Research suggests mothers and other women in the home can serve

as powerful change agents in wider society by taking control of food and crafting new identities in a realm which has traditionally been considered feminine domains (Daya, 2016). Food is enveloped in wider social discourse. For instance, the competition between homemade food and other food options gives insight into values, dynamics and the market (Moisio et al., 2004).

Individual food choice is both informed by and informs wider social and cultural changes. Authors who explore the sociology of food seek to understand the relationships, ideas and social behaviours that exist around food, to lay them bare so they are open for interpretation and criticism (Murcott, 2020; Wood, 1995). Food choice is highly informed by wider preferences such as the desire for high sugar and calorie foods with low nutritional value, and how these preferences have evolved is not always in the wider public interest as when it has a negative impact on health (Food Standards Scotland, 2020. Harris (1998) asserted that the foods we as a society consume are those which are preferred because they best balance practical benefits – nutritional value, convenience, etc. – and social benefits – enjoyed by others, edible with others, etc. – and so what is considered edible and ‘good’ food is established socially. By extension, food distribution networks and systems that support individual food choice would also be considered rational, despite their high complexity and interdependence (Ambrosi, 2018; Shattuck, 2013). Douglas (1984) offered a conflicting approach, conceptualising food as rich in moral and social meanings that could not be explained rationally because human beings do not make purely rational decisions. Similarly, Warde (1990) writes about the sociology of

consumption around food choices and advocates for an understanding of food consumption as a practice rather than discrete behaviours. Collective food choices are complex and difficult to untangle, but an understanding of collective choices, or consumer cultures, is critical to provide meaningful theoretical insights.

2.2.1 Taste, class and distinction

Access to food is one way in which those with the means can demonstrate their good taste and distinguish themselves from others. A seminal source in the discussion of food and culture is Bourdieu. In his work on distinction, Bourdieu (1984) argues that judgements of taste are socially understood and shaped. Good taste is dictated by those with cultural capital who tend to be at a 'higher' end of society with socio-economic advantages.

> Cultural capital is usually defined as set of social features that provide individuals with social mobility and the possibility of changing their hierarchical position in systems such as wealth, power, prestige, education, and health… An individual's cultural capital includes his or her social origin, education, taste, lifestyle, style of speech, and dress.
>
> (Klimczuk, 2015, p. 209)

'The Theory of the Leisure Class', first published in 1899, linked consumption to status in an era when the upper classes where increasingly using their wealth and leisure time for conspicuous consumption as a means to differentiate themselves from lower classes (Veblen, 2007). Increasingly in our post-industrialised and post-modern societies people "structure their lives around their tastes as consumers" (Delamont, 2006, pp. 137–138), and this is true across classic boundaries such as social class.

While the modern consumer may not be as concerned with class differentiation, consumption as a means to differentiate oneself as well as to craft and display an identity persists as both a subject of study and modern reality (Deleuze, 1988; Foucault, 1974; Gergen, 2011). Bourdieu theorised that consumers used their consumption choices to display their taste, and that superior taste is a form of power that can be used to build social capital and by extension, social mobility (Bourdieu, 1984). Access to good food and information about food has expanded and the swell of food-based media has democratised good taste and made this less exclusive (Richards, 2015). More recently, Johnston and Bauman (2015) wrote about a definition of good food as both democratic and as a means to display status and distinction. They consider food culture to be pervasive in Western culture and widely accessible to the middle class (Johnston & Bauman, 2015).

2.2.2 Norms, compliance, conformity and social modelling

Food choice is impacted by social influences such as norms, compliance and conformity. Social norms are “implicit codes of conduct that provide a guide to appropriate action” (Higgs, 2014, p. 38). The role of norms in influencing choice differ among consumers who have varying needs to differentiate themselves through their consumption choices. Some consumers respond to social cues around food choice – as evidenced through research which has proven that people will change their eating habits to meet norms linked to reference groups with which they identify (Liu, Thomas, & Higgs, 2019). Social modelling of food occurs when individuals change their food intake based on others and research has proven this influence occurs both in person and across media such as television and the

internet (Bevelander et al., 2013). Failing to meet social norms can also lead to feelings of failure – as when parents fail to meet perceived expecations of serving home-made foods to their families (Epp & Price, 2018). But social norms around eating are not universally embraced by all consumers. Consumers who identify as opinion leaders or market mavens, are more likely to express their individuality and knowledge by making choices that are different from established norms (Clark & Goldsmith, 2005). Gaining knowledge, competence and confidence around food may also lead to different choices as norms are more likely to be followed when there is uncertainty around choices (Higgs, 2014).

Compliance is a positive response to a request for action and social influence does not always lead to compliance. For instance, although social modeling heavily influences food decisions (Cruwys et al., 2015), those with strong eating habits are less likely to comply with social norms – either in their immediate physical environments, or from other social cues (Mazar, Itzchakov, Lieberman, & Wood, 2022). Research has found that people are more likely to respond positively by complying with requests or aligning themselves to others who are deemed to be attractive, successful or otherwise desireable (Burger, 2015). Furthermore, social modeling is increased when individuals consider themselves similar on contextually relevant dimensions, when they feel close to or identify with the model (Cruwys et al., 2015, Perez-Vega et al., 2016). Research also suggests that social modeling occurs more often in pre-existing groups and relationships, suggesting social networks may play a role in transmitting food choice (Garcia et al., 2021). Compliance professionals (e.g. advertisers,

salespeople) have historically employed tactics to increase compliance, such as providing positive responses of referent others or using a foot-in-the-door technique which starts with a small compliance request which will most likely have a positive response then building on this history of compliance to make larger requests (Cialdini, Wosinska, Barrett, & Gornik-Durose, 1999). Compliance to social influence requires persuasion in some form. Research highlights a consumer preference for messages that come from other consumers over branded messages (Deloitte, 2014; Koo, 2015). However it is worth noting that social modelling of food intake – amount of food eaten – is more prominent than food choice – foods selected in the existing research around food choice (Cruwys et al., 2015).

Although social norms provide a model on which to base food choice and compliance is prompted and re-enforced through daily stimulus, adhering to social influence is not always a sign of conformity to norms – particularly as norms are emerging or changing. Social influence is not always easy to detect. Similar eating patterns among eating companions can be a result of shared values rather than adhering to social modelling (Cruwys, Bevelander, & Hermans, 2015). Within online lifestyle groups, individuals negotiate and challenge group norms as part of community development and negotiation of their lifestyle-related identity (Närvänen, Kartastenpää, & Kuusela, 2013). However, as identities and framing of food choices become more set within online communities and identity-based groups, non-conformity to expressed norms can lead to anxiety around food (Sikka, 2019). Normative social influence, where established standards of behaviour impact on consumer decision making, is under-detected by

consumers who do not always acknowledge the role of others in influencing their decisions (Nolan, Schultz, Cialdini, & Goldstein, 2008). Specific concepts such as social norms and social modeling tend to be examined in laboratory settings with more recent research taking place in an observational experiment (Garcia et al., 2021). Social influence is complicated, and it is often not enough to ask consumers about this influence in a single context. Which is why this research explores the influence of influencers while looking at food, while reflecting on the influence of the past, others and influencers and by using food diaries.

2.3 Individual Influences on Food Choice

Food choice signifies different social values and can be a means to display different values to others, such as when Foodies choose foods that are close to nature (e.g. foraged) as a morally weighted decision (Emontspool & Georgi, 2017). Food values are negotiated individually and as a family within the home as different household members value the same food items differently (Furst et al., 1996). Within each of these layers are responsibilities to self and others as social and cultural expectations are negotiated and norms are either rejected, enacted or internalised.

2.3.1 Personal System: Values, Autonomy and Strategies

Unlike wider influences, value negotiations happened in the context of particular food choice and are highly dynamic (Furst et al., 1996). The family unit is often the first encounter individuals have with food, and within young families mothers take on a primary role of influence over what children eat and defining the family's food-related identity (Johnson et al., 2011). Further

interactions between children and caregivers around meal times teach children a number of culturally specific skills and norms including how to negotiate, impulse control, how to interact politely, values around food and also how to take care of themselves by eating (Cavanaugh et al., 2014; Hansen & Kristensen, 2017). As children grow towards adolescents, engaging in communal meals and/or sharing food practices helps to establish relationships through interaction with others (Neely et al., 2014). Simultaneously, food plays a significant role in shaping an autonomous self as eating is one of the earliest ways in which children exercise agency over themselves (Abbots, 2017). Throughout adolescence and adulthood, food practices and attributes continue to build a self-image over time that is influenced and refined through reference groups, social categories and the wider environment (Bisogni et al., 2002). A complex self-image emerges around food which is both an expression of original individualism and a social belonging (Beverland et al., 2015).

Exerting control over food choice at an individual level is a means by which to shape identity while caring for oneself and others. Many researchers have focused on the meal and home as a central axis for the familial unit, equating home cooked food with emotional, social and physical well-being (Epp & Price, 2018; Fruh, Fulkerson, Mulekar, Kendrick, & Clanton, 2011; Murcott, 2013). This focus on eating well often puts an emphasis on meals that are consumed with others in the home. For instance, Fruh et al. (2011) link frequent family meals with many positive outcomes in children including academic success and positive mental health outcomes. Murcott's body of work has a similar focus on the family meal as a site for social and individual

well-being, but is far more balanced in considering the wider socio-economic factors and social constructs (such as gender and class) that impact the family meal (Murcott, 1988, 2013, 2020). Gender and class continue to impact food accessibility and how food is conceptualised by individuals – for instance linking the preparation of healthy food with the role of a ‘good’ middle-class mother who has the time and means to cook (Parsons, 2016). Food choice is individual and can be a means to exert autonomy and explore self-hood, but it is only available to those with freedom and means to do so.

Strategies in the Furst et al. (1996) model encompass routines, patterns and rules for food selection and these often develop into heuristics, or mental short-cuts for making food choice. Engaging in routine food work is monotonous, hard work that often goes unnoticed and under-appreciated and is predominantly feminine (Epp & Price, 2018). However, “Foodies” are among those who are more likely to diverge from gender norms, with females reporting pleasure and creativity in the kitchen and male Foodies being more likely to share and enjoy cooking responsibilities in the home (Neuman & Fjellström, 2014). Cooking becomes more complex when feeding a family as it requires more resources and work to plan and prepare regular meals that accommodate the tastes and nutritional needs of more individuals (Oleschuk, 2020). Strategies help make food choice more manageable by creating routines and patterns of cooking while alleviating the mental load of regular food work. Foodies are those with a special interest in food, and so their food values and strategies may be slightly different from the average consumer.

2.3.2 Shaping identity over time

Food choices inform our identity in a process over time. As can be seen in the model overleaf, food choices are informed by the past and life course of individuals (Furst et al., 1996). It is common for people to experience links between their food choice and identity (Bisogni et al., 2002; Fox & Ward, 2008). For instance, the range of food eaten (e.g., adventurous), classification of foods (e.g., healthy, vegan, etc.), meal patterns (e.g., grazer), quantity of food (e.g., big eater). From very early ages, children are labelled by the foods they eat, from breastfed and bottle fed to picky eaters (Doub et al., 2016; Fixsen, Cheshire, & Berry, 2020). Over time, as children grow and integrate with other people, shared food practices among young people in communal settings shapes relationships which has a presumed impact on identity (Neely et al., 2014). As children mature into adults, they practice agency in food choices to varying degrees (Neely et al., 2014), and some embrace food as part of their identity.

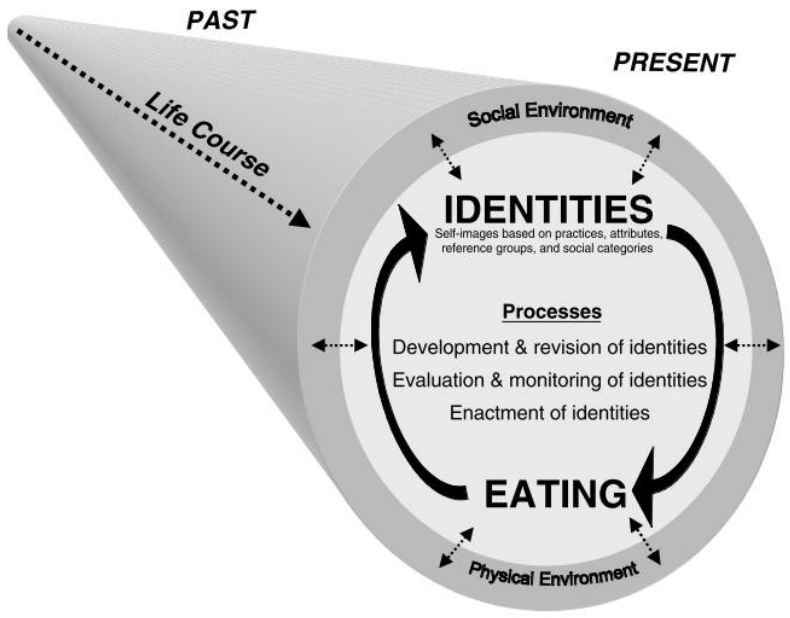

Figure 2: Food choice and identities over time (Furst et al., 1996, p. 132)

As preparing food is a necessary daily chore for most adults, it is a natural outlet to fulfil our basic psychological need for competence (Schösler & Boer, 2018). Behaviours around food are a form of cultural knowledge socially constructed and passed on through shared meals (Cavanaugh et al., 2014). It can also be a means to elevate our status in the culture "where the ability to cook complicated cuisines that are not of one's native ethnic or regional background is itself the most important demonstration of socioeconomic success" (Julier, 2013, p. 88). Visser (1992) had already established that modern access to variety and choice in food has made trying new foods freely available across most classes, and so we now develop 'conspicuous competence' for cooking more complex dishes and being able to demonstrate this ability to others. What individuals choose to eat and how they choose to prepare food is highly imbued with meaning. Food is part of how individuals enact and communicate who they are (Archambeault, 2013). Furst et al.'s model acknowledges the significance of food choice and eating to identities, and this is highly apt for this study of individuals who self-identity as Foodies.

This is linked to **RO1:** *To apply Furst et al.'s (1996) comprehensive food choice model to Foodies to understand how and why Foodies use social media influencers to inform their food choice and develop their Foodie identities.*

2.4 Foodie-ism

This section of the literature review introduces the 'Foodie' identity within the context of Consumer Culture Theory. It explores shifts in Foodie-

sim and the Foodie identify as it has moved from a focus on elevated and snobbish sophistication to wholesome care and humble ingredients. Simply put, a Foodie is an individual who has a sustained interest in food (De Solier, 2013). The self-identified Foodie is an individual with an active interest in food that is tied to their sense of self. Barr and Levy (1984) have been widely credited within academic circles with devoting the term Foodie to the written word and explaining the context through which the term emerged:

> Foodies consider food to be an art, on a level with painting or drama… Foodies are from the ambitious classes, who know about exercise and bran… Food talk is the staple diet of social intercourse now. Foodie-ism crosses all boundaries and is understood in all languages. Food is the new frontier to be on.
>
> (Barr & Levy, 1984, p. 6)

For Barr and Levy, Foodie-ism becomes an immersive experience with a devotion akin to religious fervour and a means to display cultural capital. This romanticism has led to the original concept of Foodie-ism being criticised as elitist and divorced from conventional connections with food – such as local culture and local food chains (Johnston & Bauman, 2015). Here modern Foodie culture and Foodie identities are explored as they have evolved since Barr and Levy first defined the Foodie.

2.4.1 Foodie-ism as a Consumer Culture

Consumer culture theory provides a rich and useful body of theory to explain and frame the study of Foodies and Foodie-ism. Consumer culture theory seeks to understand how consumption practices and experiences shape and are shaped across a number of social spaces (online, in the home, in restaurants) and how this intersection of the social and commercial in turn shapes cultures and identities (Arnould & Thomspons, 2005).

> "CCT is not a unified, grand theory… it refers to a family of theoretical perspectives that address the dynamic relationships between consumer actions, the marketplace, and cultural meanings… CCT researchers nonetheless share a common theoretical orientation toward the study of cultural complexity that programmatically links their respective research efforts."
>
> (Arnould & Thompson, 2005, p. 868)

Consumers are recognised as individual actors who are influenced by cultural and social structures, but the study of individual consumers needs to be tied to the social constraints and consumer practices which these individuals adopt as the practice of consumption is worthy of study (Askegaard & Linnet, 2011). In this way, Consumer Culture Theory advocates for a critical approach that does not look at individual phenomenon, but embarks on consumer research that explores the impact of contemporary culture on consumer experience and identity (Askegaard & Linnet, 2011).

Consumer culture theory explores culture, which is in it's very nature nebulous – difficult to definitively define and created and understood among collections of individuals. This means that consumer cultures and identities such as Foodie-ism and Foodies are not a homogenous whole, diversity of meanings and groups must be recognised as they are mediated through markets which are themselves cross-national and complex (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). Anthropology as a field of study describes culture as webs of significance which humans both inhabit and create, and these webs are extended through internet which create new realms of study (Kozinets, 2010). This research looks at "Foodie" as the unifying socially constructed

and understood label which is applied as the cultural object of study of this research, but does not assume ‘Foodie’ to be a singular identity that is universally defined. Individual selves are functions of social constructs, and consumer identities can be aptly described as a new form of tribe with which consumers identify (Askegaard & Linnet, 2011). Within this context, the study of individual Foodies becomes the study of a classification or collection because the identity of the Foodie is blurred by their interest in food and their relationship with the collectively understood label of ‘Foodie’ (Hietanen et al., 2022). In this way, the practices and interests of Foodies are cultural in nature in that food trends, interests, practices and knowledge tend to be replicated across individual Foodies without direct involvement in specific community groups (Hollebeek & Belk, 2021). All this without clearly defined rules or codes of conduct, but expressed as what Bourdieu’s termed *habitus* – the norms, values, attitudes and behaviours which stem from the shared identity which themselves become the focus of study (Askegaard & Linnet, 2011).

Consumer culture theory helps to study how consumption-based identities form and are shared. But these consumption-based identities are also involved in production, as in Foodies who embrace home cooking (de Solier, 2013). “I define Foodies as amateur enthusiasts who strive to form a moral self not only through the consumption of material cultures of food… but also their production” (de Solier, 2013, p.9). In this way, Foodies are not simply operating as individuals, but share their interests and passion with others and the mediating channels through which they do this shape the identities and practices. Foodies are a significant identity in contemporary

consumer culture. So while food-based influencers are involved in shaping Foodie-ism and are themselves networks, the non-human channels through which they express their Foodie-ism are also relevant to study. Actor-network theory recognises that there are both social actors but also non-human elements which are involved with creating and perpetuating social phenomenon and within this theory, consumers can be both actors and networks – as in the case of influencers (Bajde, 2013). Furthermore, the intersection of users and networks leads to the creation of artefacts which become part of the wider culture to which they belong. Technocultures are actions, content, profiles, forms – anything that exists online with which humans interact and create – and these consumed and co-created digital artifacts are imbued with consumer meaning (Kozinets, 2010).

2.4.2 Foodie as a powerful identity

The subject of this study is the self-professed Foodie, which is both a distinctive and fluid socially understood label. The Foodie can be critically observed and viewed from a purely internal focus, as Foucault identified, individuals can view their 'selves' with a degree of detachment (Probyn, 2011). However the label of Foodie is one which is used to communicate distinction and meaning to others as one who has, and is enthusiastic about, food knowledge (Johnston & Bauman, 2015). And so the Foodie label is at once a thing to be signified and a thing to be understood. As the Foodies' food choices are negotiated with the influence of others, it was expected that their sense of self and values would also be challenged and shaped through this process and this research presents data which supports this assumption. The inter-dependence of the individual, their wider social and cultural context

and the wider Foodie discourse online is consistent with an ontology rooted in the social sciences (Kaufmann, 2011). This research seeks to understand the socially constructed and understood identity of Foodies (Poulain, 2017) and the influence social media influencers have on their food choices and identity formation. To do this effectively, the Foodie must be considered as an active agent in the construction of their choices and identity.

While food bloggers develop a readership and some communities may be formed around influencers, not all readers take an active part in the communities and discussions and these 'lurkers' may even represent the majority of users (Hsu et al., 2013; Reinikainen et al., 2020). When we discuss Foodies, it should not be assumed that this group is either interconnected or disconnected. The focus of the research was not on Foodies as a collective group, although they do wield collective power as they impact foodscapes as individual agents en-mass. A similar stance was assumed in Richards (2015) who acknowledged Foodie-ism as a growing phenomenon which was individually experienced but exerted collective power on local markets. Foodies' motivations for engaging with social media around food choice and the shaping of their identities is individualistic (James & Busher, 2009). The power of the individual Foodie and popularity of individualistic Foodie-ism does not appear to be waning as more consumers have taken up learning new food-based skills in the home while spending time, effort and money on treating themselves through food (Euromonitor, 2021b). In this context, the importance of Foodies as an individual, but powerful consumer segment will likely continue.

The self is not only what the individual considers it to be, but is also daily constructed and performed in varying situated contexts (Elliott, 2008). One such context is in the home when making food decisions while allowing for the needs of others, another is when browsing the internet for food related information and yet another when making purchase decisions within a local food context. The influence of social media does not occur in a sterile environment on isolated individuals, and food choices are rarely made by individuals without the input of others – whether the input is actual or normative (Furst et al., 1996). Different food choices are made in different contexts, and so it is anticipated that the Foodie identity is not consistent or singular but rather it is situational, dependent on others (friends, family, influencers) and material restrictions (time, money, effort, food availability). As Goffman stated, identity is not homogenous (Elliott, 2008). With a recognition that the self is subjective and multiple, there is a rejection of any absolute concept of the self as an individual, and by extension, the self as an absolutely defined part of society (Lawlor, 2011). A situated understanding of context allows for such an understanding of the self, as within any given context, there are multiple roles with which an individual can identify and multiple ways of being (Given, 2008b). Furst et al.'s (1996) comprehensive food choice model allows for contextual elements to be considered, and by situating the research in the homes of respondents, we narrow the context to a workable scope.

2.4.3 The accessibility of Modern Foodie Culture

The Foodie is recognised by others as being someone who is very experienced with food and is therefore involved in a wider social capacity as

establishing what is considered ‘good food’ (Johnston & Bauman, 2015). There is little agreement as to what makes for ‘good food’, as the contents of discussions around this concept often reflect the values and virtues that individuals hold (Baggini, 2014), and there are a plethora of different perspectives on what qualifies as ‘good’. Modern Foodies must weigh ‘good’ as a pleasure and indulgence against ‘good’ as nourishing and sustaining (Bradford & Grier, 2019), and this goes beyond simply the physical properties of foods and sensual experiences of eating. Because there are so many different perspectives on food, the Foodie identity is an increasingly popular and evolving consumption-based identity which encompass several different meanings.

More recently, an increased interest in social issues has re-framed ‘good food’ as being that which is accessible to all. Johnston & Bauman (2015) present a moral dilemma of Foodie-ism: while a sustained ethical or moral interest in food will attempt to democratize by presenting ‘good’ food as being available to all, the special interest of the Foodie imbues a status of distinction which can enforce inequality (Johnston & Bauman, 2015). A criticism of Foodie culture is that it hijacks local food systems which will often shift focus to cater to upper middle class consumers who can afford to eat as they like at the expense of lower income consumers who are food insecure (Clendenning et al., 2016). Labels, such as ‘Foodie’ are often class coded as there is an inherent privilege that comes with having the time and resource available to be selective with foods (Julier, 2013). But this selectivity can drive up demand, cost and restrict accessibility to foods (D. A. Harris & Phillips, 2021). Towards the end of the 20th century, and shortly after Barr

and Levy (1984) introduced the term “Foodie”, the ability to devote resources to an interest in food was becoming the norm for the middle class in modern wealthy societies such as the United Kingdom (Fattorini, 1994). Foodie-ism has become less precious as it has become more widely popular (Schösler & Boer, 2018). Access to good food is still a privilege and not a right – even in the Scottish context (which is explored later in this chapter).

Where Barr and Levy’s (Barr & Levy, 1984) original Foodie was highly involved in eating out, the modern Foodie identity is also a producer of good food. Foodie culture is not simply a material culture focused on evaluating food itself, it is focused on food and lifestyle as a form of virtuous leisure, entertainment, and education. Successfully producing food at home is an increasingly popular and prevalent form of leisure which can be demonstrated to others through foods that are produced and posted to social media (Easterbrook-Smith, 2021). Food is a means to demonstrate competence in the domestic sphere to others (Klasson & Ulver, 2015; Rodney et al., 2017), but it goes beyond simply being recognised as domestically inclined.

> Production has historically held a higher moral value than consumption, and it continues to do so in the new forms of self-making through material culture in post-industrial society... in forms of productive leisure that relate to both material production and knowledge – that is, in acquiring the knowledge and skills required to produce things (such as a culinary education) and deploying these skills in forms of material production (such as cooking).
>
> (De Solier, 2013, p. 115)

While the original concept of the Foodie was tied heavily to consumption (Barr & Levy, 1984), modern Foodie culture embraces home cooking as an

elevated form of culture: The modern Foodie does not only know about good food, but also strives to be able to prepare good food.

2.4.4 Three paradigms for framing the modern Foodie Identity

Since the term “Foodie” was originally introduced, there has been some debate as to what qualifies a Foodie. In the broadest sense of the word, the term Foodie is applied liberally. Neal & Harper (2006) reported that as early as 2005, the majority of UK shoppers were labelled as Foodies by consumer research groups. There are three core approaches to the Foodie identity explored in literature (see table below for a list of authors). The first is the original or classic Foodie as defined by Barr and Levy (1984) – one who is snobbish in their devotion to new trends and fashionable food items. Because of them, other food enthusiasts reject the Foodie label as snobbish and elitist (Vásquez & Chik, 2015), leading to a more democratic approach to Foodie-ism. Several published authors (see table following this paragraph) use the term “Foodie” to describe the second group – the market segment Foodie – who spend a proportionally high amount of their income on food and drink. Finally, there is a new type of Foodie which has been labelled as the democratic or curious Foodie – less concerned about status, but passionate about food and learning about it. The curious Foodie does not necessarily follow trends. They choose foods that they have been convinced are good according to their own values and spend time pursuing food through exploration and learning.

Foodie Type	Key Authors	Foodie-ism
Original / Classic Foodie	(Barr & Levy, 1984)	Food becomes a means to differentiate oneself by demonstrating superior knowledge and awareness of food and food trends
	(de Solier, 2013)	Food knowledge is found via media, but only through trusted and authoritative sources
	(Mctavish, 2015)	Interested in consuming foods which are trendy, interesting and high status
	(Walsh & Baker, 2020)	Food as part of identity through sophisticated food choice – authors differentiate between Foodie-ism as a trend and clean eating as a trend
	(Harris & Phillips, 2021)	Chasing food trends to explore new and exciting foods and sharing their participation in these is a means to cultivate a Foodie identity
Market segment Foodie	(Fattorini, 1994)	Enjoyment of good food and wine is a widely accepted pastime in the UK
	(Neal & Harper, 2006)	Food and drink are a proportionally high part of household spending
	(Hayes & Finney, 2014)	Foodie is a label applied to those who have the ability and desire to spend more on food
	(Cleave, 2020)	Food as leisure which evolves beyond a hobby and becomes a lifestyle
	(Easterbrook-Smith, 2021)	“Foodie” culture is opted into and this enthusiasm is selectively shared with others
Democratic / Curious Foodie	(Coffey & Atkinson, 1996)	Quality, authenticity and novelty are what make for ‘good’ food
	(Cox & Blake, 2011)	Appreciating the aesthetic and sensual aspects of food and pursuing this as serious leisure
	(Johnston & Bauman, 2015)	Food is a passion which is indulged and knowledge is shared with others enthusiastically
	(Phillipov, 2016b)	Rise in Foodie-ism has led to interest in food producers to learn about food / how it grows
	(Williams et al., 2019)	Foodies love to learn about food and want to learn skills and a deeper knowledge
	(Vila, Costa, & Ellinger, 2021)	Food is consumed primarily through a camera lens by those who express their identity and passion for food online

Table 1: Foodie type identified in literature

The original Foodie label and market segment label approach Foodie-ism from different perspectives. The authors who treat the label Foodie as a market segment are not as careful with the application of that label and use it as a means to label groups of consumers. Many of these authors did not explore the Foodie identity in depth, but rather treated it as indicative of spending habits (Fattorini, 1994; Hayes & Finney, 2014; Neal & Harper, 2006). Other authors discuss Foodie culture, but treat this as a lifestyle indicator which can be used to understand consumer demand and desire to discuss and purchase good foods (Cleave, 2020; Easterbrook-Smith, 2021). The original concept of the Foodie would agree that Foodies spend their money on good food, but the definition was far more detailed than this and there were more qualifiers for the Foodie label. For instance, Barr and Levy's (1984) original book made it clear that "Foodie" was an emerging identity that was closely related to class through both the means to explore food, but also the cultivation and display of superior taste. Mctavish (2015) defines the Foodie as one who follows trends and is interested in consuming foods which are high status - re-enforcing the Foodie as one who is purposefully engaging in a form of social distinction. The original Foodie identity was very much in line with Bourdieu (1984), whose view that the development of 'superior taste' is linked to structures of class. These original Foodies are selective in where they get their information (De Solier, 2013) and are keen to show off their Foodie-ism to others (D. A. Harris & Phillips, 2021). The original Foodie takes great care in choosing their food and relates this to their self-concept as superior in their food choices.

The curious Foodie retains the interest in good food and the close ties between a love of good food and their identity, but the qualifiers for what makes a Foodie change slightly for some of the authors. The association with distinction and good taste is still present, but there is more focus on foods being less exclusive and more widely accessible (Johnston & Bauman, 2015). The authors focus less on a snobbish display of class, and more on authenticity and exploration (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Cox & Blake, 2011). Embracing local producers and learning about the process of making food and where it comes from becomes more valued than learning about food from qualified experts (Phillipov, 2016b; Williams et al., 2019). Foodies enjoy learning, they enjoy being able to cook and want to learn not only what to do, but also why particular methods, flavour combinations and techniques work (Williams et al., 2019). By building food knowledge to confidently make independent decisions food becomes a personalised experience – one which is still very much part of identity-making, but one which is not rooted in elevated status (Vila et al., 2021). The curious Foodie still has the means to enjoy good food, to value quality and be selective in their food choices, but unlike the original Foodie, there is less of a need to buy exclusively or spend a lot of money on fine dining and chasing trends to warrant the label of Foodie. This research will better explore Foodie as an evolving consumer-based identity.

This is linked to **RO2:** *To discuss the significance of food and food-based identity in contemporary consumer culture, to understand Foodie-ism as an evolving interest and Foodie as consumption-based identity*.

2.5 Scottish Food Context

Scotland is fast becoming a food and drink nation, moving beyond haggis and whisky into new produce and dishes. The Scottish government has set a national food and drink policy which aims to make Scotland a "Good Food Nation" by 2025 (*Good Food Nation Policy*, 2022). Within Scotland, access to food retailers is considered high (Devlin, 2015), and the quality of the food produced in Scotland is internationally recognised (Food Standards Scotland, 2020). The food system in Scotland represents a large proportion of the economy. The food and drink industry is the largest manufacturing sector in Scotland contributing £1.9 billion to the economy and employing 119,000 plus people (Clark-Hutchison, 2017). Highly populated cities such as Edinburgh serve wider Scotland as a food aficionado paradise offering restaurants, bars, other eateries, and hosting a food festival over the summer months. Several media outlets have hailed Edinburgh in top ten lists of destinations for food and drink (Guide, 2021; Travel, 2019), with a *'Which'* (McFaul, 2019) survey rating Edinburgh at the top of their list as both a tourist destination and for the quality of food and drink .

Edinburgh is an affluent and international city with a number of universities. It hosts many young and wealthy consumers. Young consumers are identified as those who are more willing to experiment with new foods and non-traditional food trends (Newman, Henchion, & Matthews, 2003). Because Edinburgh has a number of universities there is a reasonably large number of international students, and this may be one of the reasons the food sector is growing – as local and foreign students share cultures and develop tastes for one another's cuisines. Trying new and 'exotic' foods can

be a status symbol and appropriating new foods can be a form of culinary colonialism (Julier, 2013). Despite the modern proclivity for adventurous eating, it has been suggested that Scottish consumers are concerned about international food and drink supply chains due to Brexit and buying locally produced food and drink is seen as one way in which consumers are taking steps to eat more sustainably (Food Standards Scotland, 2021).

Since the referendum vote, the biggest concern of Scottish firms in the F&D industry in recent years had been Brexit with half of all firms importing less material and expressing a willingness to pay more to local producers to mitigate risk and protect the provenance of their goods (Clark-Hutchison, 2017). More recently, the global pandemic had a huge impact with the Scotland Food & Drink Partnership (2021) reporting up to £3 billion in lost revenue. Euromonitor (2021a) reported a decrease in global trade through the Covid-19 pandemic and an increase in nationalism and protectionism globally. The recovery plan for the Scottish Food & Drink sector involves focusing on local producers, including farming and fishing, to promote local produce within Scotland, to promote Scotland as a food tourism destination, and to increase exports to the rest of the UK and further afield (Ewing, 2021).

2.5.1 Scotland's ambition to be a Good Food Nation

According to Food Standards Scotland (2020), data from the population indicates that diets in Scotland are not changing in line with health-related guidance. Perceptions of the population show a disconnection between the indicators used and public opinion – 2 out of three people in Scotland are considered either overweight or obese but 77% of those surveyed about their diets described these as either fairly or very healthy

(Food Standards Scotland, 2020). The measures used are questionable as BMI is referred to in other reports as the indicator used by the Scottish government to measure obesity (Devlin, 2015). However, the BMI has been widely criticised as a flawed measure because it does not distinguish between muscle mass or fat, meaning an athlete with large muscle mass could be classified as obese (Buss, 2014). However, respondent bias may be a very large factor in that respondents will over-estimate how healthy their diet is. As there are moral judgements attached to 'unhealthy', any question about the health of a diet will be leading.

Adding complexity to diagnosing the health of the nation's diets is a lack of agreement around what qualifies as 'healthy'. There is a great deal of contention in and around what constitutes a healthy diet – for instance a report by Food Standards Scotland classed diet soft drinks as healthy options alongside fruit and vegetables (Food Standards Scotland, 2020). However, all soft drinks have little to no nutritional value (Tahmassebi & BaniHani, 2020), so diet soft drinks should be included with other discretionary foods much like standard soft drinks. The advice around what constitutes a healthy diet is not consistent and it is most likely based on what changes the wider population are likely to make. Furthermore, there has been a documented decline in the influence of credentialed expertise in dietary advice and a rise in the influence of non-expertise and personal narrative as compelling sources of food-based information (Guthman, 2014). While the official guidance goes into frustratingly little detail about what is necessary for a healthy diet, the Scottish Government's original vision for

Scotland as a ‘Good Food Nation’ sounds well-aligned to the democratic/curious Foodie archetype:

> Our aspiration is that Scotland is a Good Food Nation, a country where people from every walk of life take pride and pleasure in, and benefit from, the food they buy, serve, and eat day by day. This will require a step-change and mean that: It is the norm for Scots to take a keen interest in their food, knowing what constitutes good food, valuing it and seeking it out whenever they can…
>
> (Devlin, 2015, p. 3)

Within Scotland, there are confirmed links between deprived pockets of the population and poor diets – defined as those not meeting the suggested requirement of five fruit and vegetable per day, lower fibre and higher sugar levels being consumed (Food Standards Scotland, 2020). One highly effective way to encourage healthy changes in diet is through sharing the healthy eating habits of others (Higgs et al., 2017). And this is where social media has the potential to make an impact. There is a degree of interaction online that is unprecedented in other communication channels, and so the online world mirrors offline social interactions in ways which other mass communication channels cannot replicate (Simmons, Thomas, & Truong, 2010). These interactions are documented and available publicly, meaning that anyone can find them (Fullwood, Nicholls, & Makichi, 2014). Because there is an unprecedented amount of self-published information freely available (E. Edwards, 2004), experiences and normative attitudes can be quickly shaped and shared via social media. Social media is a potentially powerful ally in delivering Scotland’s vision to become a good food nation.

2.6 The digital foodscape

This research draws on the construct of a ‘foodscape’ to conceptualise the broader environment of food and frame the influence of food influencers against a wider context:

> ... a foodscape is a crucial way of capturing the cultural spaces and practices of food, as well as the material realities that underpin but also create food culture. In this way, if we think of a foodscape as akin to a landscape, then, like a landscape, a foodscape is a socially-constructed view of the field of food.
> (Johnston & Goodman, 2015, p. 207)

Users use social media to find restaurants, to read and contribute reviews, to have food delivered and to find recipes – using their smartphones in the kitchen during meal preparation (Lewis, 2020). Use of the internet as a source of information about nutrition has also increased (Pollard et al., 2015). There is every indication this trend will continue as food and personal care was the ecommerce category that saw the largest growth (up 41%) worldwide in 2020 (Hootsuite, 2021). The link between online sources and physical foodscapes is particularly important to study as the virtual foodscape becomes more influential.

2.6.1 Official food sources online

For stakeholders involved in officially communicating about food (e.g. food regulators, food industry representatives and food-based businesses), social media presents an important communication medium. It provides the opportunity to distribute information quickly and accessibly while allowing opportunities for two-way communication and interaction (Rutsaert et al., 2014). Social media as a realm to disperse food information is approached

with care as there is a lack of control over the quality of information shared online, food knowledge is co-constructed with some extreme bias and knowledge is distorted and sensationalised online (Henderson et al., 2016; Steils & Obaidalahe, 2020). A further risk of using social media is that there may be low trust of sources and due to the wealth of food-related information online, there is potential for information overload (Rutsaert et al., 2014). However, social media can also be an effective social site to understand public opinion and measure the impact of policy (Henderson et al., 2016; Steils & Obaidalahe, 2020).

The strengths of social media – collaboration, content creation, networking, etc. – are providing interesting opportunities for food information online. Social media allows consumers to become producers of food and health related claims as they consume food media and reproduce it online with their own opinions (Declercq et al., 2019). While this is unquestionably problematic for information integrity, engaging with food-based discourse is one way in which consumers deeply engage with food and negotiate food-based identities (Leggatt-Cook & Chamberlain, 2012; Smith, 2020). This makes it a valuable channel. It is accessible for large official bodies, but can also be very effective for food SMEs (small and medium-sized enterprises) to share images of their products and foster personal connections and engagement with interested users (de Vries, Veer, & de Vries, 2018). Social media has significant potential to carry important messages as well. For instance much has been written about how social media can be used to address food waste. Data from social media can be used to understand the food supply chain and better anticipate consumer demand (Singh, Shukla, &

Mishra, 2018); to raise consumer awareness and promote changes to behaviour (Aschemann-Witzel, 2018; Phillipov, 2016a; Young, Russell, Robinson, & Barkemeyer, 2017); to facilitate food sharing initiatives to redistribute excess food (Ambrosi, 2018); to collect data to measure the success and spread of initiatives (Choudhary, Nayak, Kumari, & Choudhury, 2019). Social media is a well-adapted space which provides ample opportunities for food-interests to be explored and to grow.

Social media may also be harming our relationship to food by allowing misinformation to spread and for sensationalised information to dominate discourse. The interaction between social media and traditional news sources is partly responsible for the sensationalism of food stories. Discussions about controversies – such as animal farming and food production – ebb and wane in the waves created by news media cycles, but social media amplifies and extends these waves with sensationalised stories staying in the spotlight longer because of user engagement (Stevens, Aarts, Termeer, & Dewulf, 2018). There is also concern around health-related implications of such a focus on food. Social media has been identified as one source that contributes to disordered eating including widely recognised disorders such as anorexia, but also with subtler disorders such as orthorexia nervosa – an extreme pre-occupation with healthy eating (Fixsen et al., 2020). Too much of a focus on online food can be dangerous, but the consequences of passive consumption of food-related content have also been highlighted. Researchers have expressed concern that the prevalence of virtual food is contributing to food-related health issues such as obesity and diabetes by triggering hunger, leading to over-eating (Spence, Okajima,

David, Petit, & Michel, 2016). Our pre-occupation with food online matters and the digital foodscape has a real-world impact on how we interact with food.

2.6.2 Online discourse of 'good' food and pressure to eat healthy

Health is a primary focus of contemporary discussions around food and it has been explored across demographics, ethnicities and geographic locations with credibility of health advice being highly important to food choices (Luomala, 2005). While many different 'virtues' guide our decisions and behaviours around food such as good manners and our culture, "health" is a simpler one to market because it is perceived to be linked to science (Visser, 1992). The irony of this modern obsession with health is that whilst we buy into food trends and popular diets based on very little scientific evidence, the masses tend to ignore official health guidance (Guthman, 2014). Part of the reason we distrust the official guidance is that it changes so often – e.g. margarine being widely endorsed decades ago and now actively denounced – and contradicts itself (Baggini, 2014). Official channels have lost credibility and the danger is that food producers, marketers and consumers are making up new guidelines on healthy eating based on what sells. Recent research has highlighted that social media is a prominent site for the emergence of grammars of good food and that influencers are part of a significant digital foodscape which is having influence on the wider UK consumer culture around food (Johnston & Goodman, 2015; Smith, 2020).

Across literature, social influence online has been found to have varying effects on the food choice of others. Multiple studies have found that among all ages – adults, youth and children – consumption of snack foods

and unhealthy foods increases when influenced by others (Bevelander, Meiselman, Anschutz, & Engels, 2013; Coates et al., 2019b; Cruwys et al., 2012; Florack, Palcu, & Friese, 2013; Hermans, Larsen, Herman, & Engels, 2008; Leone, Pliner, & Herman, 2007). Social influence has been found to be highly effective in prompting users to consume high energy dense (HED) foods, but the effect of social influence on healthy food choice, such as fruit and vegetable consumption, was less consistently reported. For instance, Hawkins, Farrow and Thomas (2020) found norms related to social approval were more likely to guide consumption of HED snack foods and beverages, while behavioural norms were more likely to guide fruit and vegetable consumption. Indicating that social modelling is key to make fruit and vegetable consumption appealing. In their review of literature on the topic, Cruwys et al. (2015) found that across several studies multiple exposure to peer models was needed to maintain an influential effect on fruit and vegetable consumption whereas the social influence of choice on snack food was immediate. This may be linked to subsequent findings that healthy food suffers from lower social value to unhealthy foods (Charry & Tessitore, 2021).

The impact of social media on consumer knowledge about food has also been explored. Simeone and Russo (2017) found consumers on social media were, on average, better informed than consumers of mass media about environmental issues and food quality. This suggests that involvement in food networks online does better educate consumers about food related issues and attributes. However, there is also the potential for misinformation and the perpetuation of negative food related attitudes and behaviours.

Participation in alternative food networks (including co-operatives, local and organic grocery suppliers and forums) was linked to high concerns about healthy eating and purity of food (Barnett, Dripps, & Blomquist, 2016). This study also reported links between high engagement with these networks and high levels of orthorexia nervosa (ibid). Orthorexia nervosa is a disordered and extreme fixation with the health values of food and exclusion of edible foods on the grounds of purity (Fixsen et al., 2020). Studies have linked social media influencers to the perpetuation of narratives around food linked to “clean eating” – which promotes certain foods as ‘healhty’, ‘pure’ and ‘clean’ – with obvious links to orthorexia nervosa (Simeone & Scarpato, 2020; Walsh & Baker, 2020). Also perpetuating concepts around the moral and beneficial characteristics of foods is the labelling of ‘superfoods’ online – foods promoted for exceptional health benefits (Sikka, 2019). Social media is rife with value-loaded narratives around what constitutes a healthy diet, and the promotion of certain foods over others.

2.6.3 Foodporn and the normalisation of Foodie-ism online

Social media contributes to food as spectacle – a phenomenon where foods are framed in particular ways to communicate clear strong messages about the value and desirability of foods (D. A. Harris & Phillips, 2021). This desireability ranges from practical considerations of choosing a food item to satisfy hunger or choose a routine meal, to more hedonistic conceptualisations of food. Food porn proliferates online and is a significant global trend and widespread practice that frames food as desireable (Kozinets, Patterson, & Ashman, 2017; Mejova, Abbar, & Haddadi, 2016).

In its contemporary understanding, food porn is a set of visual

> aesthetics that emphasises the pleasurable, sensual dimensions of food, derived from (but not actually employed in) human sexuality.
>
> (McDonnell, 2016, p. 239)

Sharing food online can be a means to share memorable experiences - extension of sharing postcards or pictures from meals or foods from memorable trips (Cleave, 2020). For others, sharing food online is a means to derive social pleasure (Mendini, Pizzetti, & Peter, 2019), however excessive posting of images of food online has been reported as an undesireable behaviour where the motivation to post is perceived to be boastful and linked to envy-inducing behaviours (Pham, Shancer, & Nelson, 2019). Posting of desireable food imagery is not just reserved for professional photographers as ordinary individuals are participants in creating digital food culture posting and circulating amateur images of food online (Lewis, 2018).

Social networks online have an impact on consumer behaviour offline across demographic boundaries. As with television chefs and celebrities, influence on food culture is not bound by geographic location, and it is important to study this influence as it moves across boundaries via the internet (Johnston & Goodman, 2015). Food discourse online has an impact on food ideals and (for good or ill) broadens the context of food choice, but can also paradoxically narrow it. A study of social media users found that information about food on social media had an impact on consumption and that food choice across networks became homogenised – popularising particular ingredients and often doing so out-with local contexts (Simeone & Scarpato, 2020). Posts on social media help to introduce new foods, to

contribute to public discussions of taste and influence what foods become popular among consumers (De Solier, 2013). In addition to popularising particular foods, social media also influences how people think and feel about food and helps set standards for what is good food and what is acceptable to eat. Social nudges – interventions that rely on social factors to change an individual's choice without limiting options – have a large impact on food choice both offline and on social media. Users respond to cues from other users as to what to eat and avoid eating (Charry & Tessitore, 2021). The internet is fast become a medium that not only shares recipes, but also creates demand for particular food products and feeds into social norms around food and more research is needed to understand how this digital foodscape is influencing offline consumer attitudes and behaviours.

2.7 Chapter summary and research gap

This chapter has presented literature which provides a base for the theoretical underpinnings of food studies. Furst et al.'s (1996) comprehensive food choice model has been introduced and justified as an apt model to apply to Foodies to understand and identify the influences and values that guide food choice and inform food-based identities. Furthermore, Furst et al. (1996) consider several different influences on the values that inform individual food choice, and while influencers are only one kind of social influence, they are part of a wider range of social influences. While research has been conducted into the wider foodscape (Johnston & Goodman, 2015; Goodman & Jaworska, 2020) and into influencing food choices online (Rodney et al., 2017; Coates et al., 2019; Coates & Boyland, 2021; Charry & Tessitore, 2021), there is less research into how online influencers impact

the daily food choices of content consumers – in this case Foodies. While previous research found foodies were less likely to turn to food blogs and other online sources (De Solier, 2013), the push back of Foodies against snobbishness (Johnston & Bauman, 2015) and the rise of influencers as prominent opinion leaders in the discussion around what makes good food (Goodman & Jaworksa, 2020), make this finding worth revisiting. This research will extend existing knowledge around how and why influencers are used by consumers to explore and shape their attitudes and behaviours around food and to inform daily food choices.

The significance of food and food-based identities in contemporary consumer culture have been set out, and the Scottish food context has been introduced. Seminal sources have been presented alongside contemporary food authors and this establishes the theoretical background around Foodie-ism which will support this research. While different authors have explored Foodie-ism as an evolving interest, researchers have identified sub-interests and food trends online – such as clean eating (Walsh & Baker, 2020; Smith, 2020) or democratic and ethical food choices (Johnston & Bauman, 2015; Mendini et al., 2019). This research will critically evaluate the food values Foodies prioritise to determine if there is one cohesive Foodie identity or if Foodie sub-identities have formed and how connected these are to wider food trends on social media.

These gaps in the literature will be addressed through the following research objectives:

RO1 To apply Furst et al.'s (1996) comprehensive food choice model to Foodies to understand how and why Foodies use social media

influencers to inform their food choice and develop their Foodie identities.

RO2 To discuss the significance of food and food-based identity in contemporary consumer culture, to understand Foodie-ism as an evolving interest and Foodie as consumption-based identity.

CHAPTER 3: A review of the literature around social media influencers

Social media influencers have become an established phenomenon. Like celebrities, influencers are aspirational figures, but they are more relatable because they are perceived to be less socially distant (Shan et al., 2020). Recent research has explored the influence of social media influencers as it relates to number of followers and different categories have been defined: macro-influencers, mid-level influencers and micro-influencers (Childers & Boatwright, 2020; Ki, Cuevas, Man, & Lim, 2020). Social media is not only a networking space but is increasingly becoming a realm turned to for entertainment and profit. The marketing industry expects social entertainment and digital commerce to become increasingly important, and content creators are expected to be even more important for reaching consumers in the coming years (Euromonitor, 2021b; WARC, 2021). In order to be effective at marketing products and services, influencers must be perceived to be authentic (Childers & Boatwright, 2020; Pöyry, Pelkonen, Naumanen, & Laaksonen, 2019) and relatable (Childers & Boatwright, 2020; Ouvrein, Pabian, Giles, Hudders, & De Backer, 2021). Emotional engagement is also important for consumers to accept brand recommendations from influencers (Sánchez-Fernández & Jiménez-Castillo, 2021) and for messages to spread online (Lou, Tan, & Chen, 2019; Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2016). This section reviews literature about who influencers are, how they reach consumers and how influencers affect consumer opinions, attitudes and behaviours.

3.1 Social media as a social realm

> The study of the Internet has reinforced some ultimately simple truths and expanded their impact... People sometimes relate as groups rather than as individuals; people relate to one another even in the dark of no FtF [face to face] contact; people help each other with their problems, and sometimes it's better to ask a stranger than a friend; a picture is worth a thousand words; like a backscratcher or a hammer, a tool is what people make of it. Rather than to help us understand our new technology-enabled behaviours, research using the Internet helps us understand the human condition the way we were and always will be, as message-exchanging and meaning-creating creatures.
>
> (Walther, Gay, & Hancock, 2005, p. 652)

Social media are social spaces within which communities develop with accepted behavioural and social norms (Dennen, 2014). There are several authors who have questioned the influence social media has on users, often describing this influence as negative (Hinsch & Sheldon, 2013; Logan, Bright, & Grau, 2018; Wang et al., 2020). Some authors view social media as a coercive force and something external that exerts pressure on users (Bryman, 2012). This stance is not appropriate to a study of social media use unless it is assumed that the use of the internet is disordered – as in cases of social media addiction. While some aspects of social media may be imposed on users (i.e., tools available and platforms used) social media is shaped and informed by users who opt to use it, with platforms adapting to meet user needs and preferences. If social media as a social space exerts influence on individuals, the influence exists only to the extent that there is an individually understood and meaningful societal framework (Kaufmann, 2011). This research aims to identify to what degree social media influencers have influence over food choice and how this influence works in the day-to-day lives of Scotland-based Foodies.

When approaching social phenomena, the way in which the phenomenon is considered will affect the research. Social media has become a populous social space where people share views, display representation of selves via profiles, control and create groups, agree and disagree on values, and ultimately develop social meanings and practices (Laurell, 2017). Rather than viewing social media as a force for good or ill, the researcher approached this work considering social media as another social space where critical judgements are applied by individuals and the agentive power of those involved in the space is considered more of an influence than the underlying structure or social rules of that social space. "We shape technology with our intentions: We can use it to support our goals or we can let it distract us from what we hope to achieve" (Epps, 2014, p. 138). The reality of how most users engage with social media is likely somewhere in between Epps' two extremes – where they both make use of technology productively, but also use it as a distraction and willingly engage with both positive and negative behaviours. This research will provide insight into what social media-based functions and tools help consumer manage food choices.

This is linked to **RO3:** *To develop an in-depth understanding of how Foodies ascribe meaning and value to influencers, the food values they espouse and the content they produce and to provide insight into what social media-based functions and tools help consumers manage food choices.*

3.2 What and who is an influencer?

A social media influencer is someone who “builds and maintains relationships with multiple followers on social media, and has the ability ot inform, entertain, and potentially influencer followers’ thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors” (Dhanesh & Duthler, 2019, p. 3). Dhanesh & Dutheler (2019) specify that influencers achieve this through self-branding, as this is not a necessary criteria and not all influencers may be actively managing their self-brand, this part of the definition has been excluded. Perceived influence is critical to this definition and has been defined as “the tendency to accept information from an individual and consider it to be true” (Sánchez-Fernández & Jiménez-Castillo, 2021, pp. 1127–1128). Influencers build a digital audience by maintaining an active presence with editorialised content about their life and this sharing of their lifestyle helps them actively engage their audiences (Abidin, 2015; McCorquodale, 2020). Some authors include a further defining feature – an ability to earn income through their social media activities (Abidin, 2015; Enke & Borchers, 2019). The research around influencers has increased in recent years and this has led to literature reviews of the emerging body of work being published (Taylor, 2020). In their review Srivastava and Srivastava (2021) defined five clusters of research related to influencer marketing including; mechanisms of influencer marketing; measuring impact of influencer marketing; persuasive cues in influencer marketing; likeability factors of influencer marketing; and authenticity of influencers. It is very difficult to uniformly describe influencers apart from their attribute of socially influential. They can operate in different ways: creating personal networks or becoming public figures; embracing

commercial ventures, or distancing themselves from them; openly co-operating with brands and corporations or retaining a critical distance (Borchers, 2019).

Researchers have investigated motivations and characteristics of influencers. Vrontis at al. (2021) differentiate between source characteristics and content attributes in their comprehensive literature review of influencers. This research did not review influencer content characteristics, and so influencer characteristics and motivations are considered more relevant. In a study of student bloggers, it was found that personality predicted blogging and those who displayed the trait of openness were more likely to blog (Guadagno, Okdie, & Eno, 2008). The same study found a gender difference, the trait of neuroticism being a bigger predictor of blogging behaviour in women than men (Guadagno et al., 2008), but neuroticism is also a personality trait that predicts social media use (Blackwell, Leaman, Tramposch, Osborne, & Liss, 2017). The motivations to maintain an influential presence are legion. The following overview has been compiled:

Author, Date	**Influencer Motivation**
(Duffy, 2016; Munar & Jacobsen, 2014)	Aspirational Labour – to earn an income / personal gain while pursuing a passion
(Sepp, Liljander, & Gummerus, 2017; Wu & Pearce, 2016)	Networking for self-enhancement, image-management, pursuing fame
(Liao, To, & Chuang-Chun, 2013; Wu & Pearce, 2016)	Enjoyment
(Brinkman, Gabriel, & Paravati, 2020; Leggatt-Cook & Chamberlain, 2012; Sepp et al., 2017; Vila et al., 2021; Wu & Pearce, 2016)	Self-documentation, documentation of experiences, accountability for a goal, self-improvement
(Brinkman et al., 2020; Leggatt-Cook & Chamberlain, 2012; Liao et al., 2013; Lopez, 2009; Sepp	Sharing of self for social status, to be known by a community, to seek support, to process emotions

et al., 2017; Vila et al., 2021; Wu & Pearce, 2016)	
(Archer & Kao, 2018; Munar & Jacobsen, 2014; Wu & Pearce, 2016)	To serve a community, create a community for others
(Harju & Huovinen, 2017; Leggatt-Cook & Chamberlain, 2012; Lopez, 2009)	Stance-taking: to create a counter-cultural space, to push back against social norms, to express a position or opinion

Table 2: Influencer motivations

While some authors define motivation by type – process, content, social (Sepp et al., 2017) – others applied far simpler categorisation – self-centred or altruistic (Munar & Jacobsen, 2014). This makes it very difficult to compare and contrast motivations to become an influencer as categories are not always easy to differentiate or clearly define and not all authors apply easily comparable labels. As this study is focused not on influencer motivations, but on the consumers of this content a brief overview of literature was deemed sufficient.

For this study, the term influencer is used as a catch-all term and includes those who host their own personal websites (bloggers) and those who post via social media platforms (micro-bloggers, i.e., Instagrammers, YouTubers, etc.). The term blog came from the amalgamation of the terms ‘web’ and ‘log’ and was originally used as an online diary, with micro-blogs originally referring to very short regular content being published to sites such as Twitter (Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2016; Thakur, Summey, & John, 2013). The application of these labels is increasingly fluid as platforms evolve. It is standard practice for bloggers and micro-bloggers to share content over multiple platforms, and as the platforms change, they blur the lines between the regular and macro labels (Zantal-Wiener, 2020). For instance, micro-

blogging might refer to users who use micro-sites, such as Twitter or Snapchat, but it might also refer to users who make use of micro-functions such as the status update function on Facebook (Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2016). There is precedent for applying the label of influencer to YouTubers, Instagrammers and bloggers (Abidin, 2015), and this research continues to apply that label regardless of platform of origin or number of platforms used.

3.3 Marketers engage consumers via influencers

Social media influencers are valuable communication channels and partners for marketers. Social media influencers are a new third-party actor who have established a relationship with an audience, and use this relationship to shape attitudes through content they produce via social media (Enke & Borchers, 2019; Freberg, Graham, McGaughey, & Freberg, 2011). Their status as third-party and independent is an important aspect of their endorsements as followers see influencers as trusted sources having their own independent reputation to maintain and not wanting to be associated with something they do not actually like (Lou, 2021). There is increasing distrust around traditional brand communications and a rise in the use of new online communications by brands to help mitigate for this loss of trust (Capozzi & Zipfel, 2012). Research suggests that influencers are perceived to have less manipulative intent than other marketing messages such as celebrity endorsements and advertisements (Gräve & Bartsch, 2021). Influencers have been found to help consumers build trust at all stages of decision making (desire, information search, evaluating alternatives, purchase decisions, satisfaction and experience sharing) when evaluating

travel experiences (Pop, Săplăcan, Dabija, & Alt, 2022). Influencers can be leveraged to effectively bridge the gap between consumers and brands.

Influencers are valuable promotional channels in the digital landscape. In addition to creating content, influencers are also used to host events, to moderate discussions with other users, to disperse messages created by the organisation, and even become embedded in organisations through partnerships (Costa Do Nascimento et al., 2020; Enke & Borchers, 2019). In this way, they can serve as communication channels to brands. Communication channels are defined in literature as: “any category of information provider from whom a prospective customer receives a marketing communication” (Herriott, 1997, p. 142). Many social media users hold influence within their networks, but “influencers” are recognised in literature as being a special class of user. Achieving and maintaining a large presence online requires skill, specifically the knowledge and ability to manage search algorithms, to achieve visibility and attract users and to optimise upload frequencies so they can track users and monitor their success (Gaenssle & Budzinski, 2020). Influencers excel at creating engaging content and managing their communities, and because of this they are increasingly being sought by marketers to help advertise online (Campbell & Farrell, 2020). Influencers are valuable to brands and marketers because they possess highly marketable skills.

How marketers reach consumers has evolved hugely since social media has become more popular. Morgan (2009) argues that traditional marketing terms such as segmentation and categories no longer apply.

> Social media transfer content to a more diverse range of people compared to the mass media. They create a “small-world” network (Newman, 2003) where content is easily distributed to a large number of people, as the network is formed through voluntary connection and requires fewer steps for sharing information.
> (Tsimonis & Dimitriadis, 2014, p. 331)

Unlike traditional market groupings or segments, online networks are voluntarily formed, arranged around self-selected criteria, are often actively engaged, diverse and dispersed (Bolton et al., 2013; Patino, Pitta, & Quinones, 2012; Tsimonis & Dimitriadis, 2014). While many authors agree that the best way for brands to engage with consumers online is through genuine dialogue and collaborative spaces (Chen, Lin, Choi, & Hahm, 2015; Cova & White, 2017; Helme-Guizon & Magnoni, 2019; Hootsuite, 2022), the emphasis for most corporate content online is on knowledge dissemination rather than interaction (Ashley & Tuten, 2015; Cho & Huh, 2010). Research has found that influencer generated content enjoys significantly higher engagement than brand generated content in terms of likes and comments so marketing managers are increasingly turning to influencers to generate content (Campbell & Farrell, 2020; Lou & Yuan, 2019).

Influencers make matching between brands and consumers easier because they often present themselves using a core concept and are thus able to selectively present a simplified version of themselves (Kim, Park, & Kim, 2022). Influencers with a niche focus are easier for users to find as they search for what interests them. A close fit between the influencer and product type is essential to ensure promotional messages are relevant and to engage followers of influencers with product placement (Rutter, Barnes, Nadeau, & Lettice, 2021). It is even recommended that brands partnering with

influencers tailor their messages to the influencers so advertisements are not perceived to be intrusive or inauthentic (Gräve & Bartsch, 2021). Many users – particularly those classed as digitally native - do not appreciate content from advertisers or influencers that they themselves have not actively sought or curated (Childers & Boatwright, 2020). Marketers use influencers because they have valuable, engaged audiences organised around easily identified and exploited points of interest. This makes influencers effective at influencing consumer opinions, attitudes and behaviours. Despite their popularity among marketers, there are questions among marketing associations as to how effective influencers are (Taylor, 2020), and so they warrant ongoing study.

This is linked to **RO4:** *To review current research into how influencers influence consumers and to critically assess how the digital foodscape of influencers with which Foodies engage is impacting Foodie attitudes and behaviours to inform daily food choices and develop Foodie identities.*

3.4 Social Influence and Consumer Engagement

Social influence has been studied as it applies to social media influencers. Social influence is the process whereby the attitudes, beliefs and/or behaviours of individuals are modified by the presence (real or parasocial), of others (Kelman, 1958). The impact of social influence can be evaluated based on the kind of social force exerted by the influencer on any given follower. Social forces have been defined as they apply to social media influencers by Perez-Vega et al. (2016):

Social force	Explanation	Illustration
Strength	Salience, importance or intensity of the influencing source Can be related to the source itself (trans-situational strength) or related to the context-specific roles that the influence and the influenced occupy (situational strength)	Trans-situational strength: age, gender, physical characteristics, and perceived intelligence, physical appearance, food-related identity Situation-specific strength: influencer and follower, online social reference group
Immediacy	The proximity of influencing source and the individual who is the target of the influence Can be physical, temporal or social	Physical immediacy: geographic location, crowding Temporal immediacy: time between posts, duration of post Social immediacy: perceptions that others are 'like us'
Number	The number of influencing sources directed towards the individual	Numbers of followers or likes, numbers in an online community

Table 3: Three social forces adapted from (Perez-Vega et al., 2016, p. 304)

Perez-Vega et al. (2016) assert that social influence is strong when consumers lack information or where there are unclear standards of conduct. As this study explores consumers who have a good understanding of food, it will be interesting to see what the Foodies report in terms of the influence of social media influencers for a subject which is a passion for them.

Social influence cannot happen without consumers paying attention to influencers. With a near-limitless potential for information online, engagement is a gold standard for online content with engagement metrics (such as likes and shares) being common measures of online success. When consumers are engaged, they move beyond simply receiving information, and become active in ascribing meaning to and participating in interactions (Ashley & Tuten, 2015). Engagement is social and interactive in nature and has three

dimensions with which consumers become involved: behavioural, cognitive and emotional (Dessart, Veloutsou, & Morgan-Thomas, 2016). Consumers who are involved are processing the relevance of the focus of their attention based on their needs, values and interests (Solomon, Askegaard, Hogg, & Bamossy, 2019). Engagement is a powerful tool to not only attract attention online but to move consumers into more meaningful interactions that hold their attention. Engaged consumers relate messages to their own experiences and values. In this way, messages make a more lasting impression because consumers are more highly involved in processing them. The power of influencers as marketing communications channels is dependent on their ability to engage with audiences and maintain social influence over consumers (Barry & Gironda, 2018).

3.4.1 Authentic Opinion Leaders

Authenticity plays a role in how people are perceived, but also in how relatable they are and influencers' followers – and influencers themselves – have been widely reported to value this trait (Abidin & Ots, 2016; Duffy, 2016; Sánchez-Fernández & Jiménez-Castillo, 2021). In a postmodern society, based on remote communications, the ultimate test of an ethical existence is authenticity (Grad & Frunză, 2016). Postmodernism dissolves the structural forms that formerly governed society as human hierarchies and universal truths are challenged (Bauman, 2000). Jacobsen & Poder (2008) posit that morality, or wider social norms of what is right or wrong, are more universally applied in postmodernism because they become situational and therefore more flexible. In pursuit of a modern identity, the concept of authenticity becomes critically important – to know that the consumption choices

(whether related to food, culture, experiences or products) are authentic lends credibility to these choices (Lindholm, 2007). Authenticity has become a modern-day virtue and is primarily linked to personal identity and narrative devoid from formal or institutional expertise or authority (Schallehn, Burmann, & Riley, 2014).

Authenticity as a quality is loosely defined real, true and genuine (Arnould & Price, 2001). Lee and Eastin (2021, p. 833) found that for influencers, authenticity consists of “having a warm personality, engaging in genuine endorsement activities, revealing personal life matters, being talented in their area of expertise, and being distinct from others”. Studies repeatedly highlight that influencers rely heavily on their position as independent, non-expert but knowledgeable to convey authenticity (Childers & Boatwright, 2020; Hudders et al., 2021). They have a high level of control over their communications with no meaningful oversight and this contributes to their perceived authenticity (Sundermann & Thorsten, 2019). Where influencers can frame stories to which users relate – particularly if they have experienced something similar – they are perceived as authentic (Ouvrein et al., 2021). For example, fitness bloggers have been found to rely less on education or formal credentials and more on ‘body capital’, using their physical changes and aesthetic attributes as proof of knowledge and experience (Morais, Hemme, & Reyes, 2022). Bodies are seen as central to identity and selfhood (Belk, 2014). Influencer bodies can be used to help promote an authentic self image.

Influencers leverage their authenticity to occupy a position of opinion leadership (Valsesia et al., 2020). Opinion leaders are the most influential

individuals within a social setting as they can influence the thoughts, attitudes and this impacts the behaviour of others (Nunes et al., 2018). Multiple studies have found that followers consider authenticity to be important to how they perceive influencers and to how influential these sources are (Marroncelli & Braithwaite, 2020; Ouvrein et al., 2021; Pöyry et al., 2019; Sundermann & Thorsten, 2019). Childers and Boatwright (2020) assert that the audience-influencer relationship maps directly onto Katz's (1957) dimensions of opinion leadership:

- the personification of shared values;
- competence demonstrated through what is known by the opinion leader and what is of interest to the follower;
- strategic social location as knowing the right people or being in a socially prominent position.

Where opinion leaders can be aligned with their audiences and recognised along the three dimensions, they can be perceived as relatable and authentic (Childers & Boatwright, 2020). The strategies of perceived intimacy – often through intimate self-disclosure - and authenticity are the predominant means by which influencers establish their positions as opinion leaders (Abidin & Ots, 2016; Leite & Baptista, 2021). When social media influencers are trusted they are followed more closely and exert more influence over their followers (Han, Liu, Xie, & Zhang, 2022).

Influencers who are perceived to be reliable and knowledgeable in niche areas are perceived by consumers to be more credible sources of information than other sources – such as celebrity endorsements, brands, and even experts (Lankes, 2008; Sánchez-Fernández & Jiménez-Castillo, 2021; Trivedi & Sama, 2020). Influencers offer value because those who

follow them accept the information they provide as dependable (Sánchez-Fernández & Jiménez-Castillo, 2021). The digital selves are not just what information they present in their narratives, but the artefacts they create – videos, posts, photos – become a kind of extension of self that represents who they are to content consumers (Belk, 2014). Their credibility is evaluated across both their profile information and content and is tied to factors such as their physical attractiveness, social attractiveness, trustworthiness and perceived expertise (Bhattacharya, 2022). These labels have emerged from source credibility subdimensions applied to influencers (Weismueller, Harrigan, Wang, & Soutar, 2020). Alternative labels tied to social impact theory include personal (e.g. similarity), technical (e.g. immediate responsiveness) and size of network (H. S. Lee & Lee, 2014). Authenticity is critically important for influencer relatability, to communicate around a consumption-based identity and for perceived intimacy with followers/consumers (Abidin & Ots, 2016; Lindholm, 2007; Ouvrein et al., 2021; Parish, 2009). Authenticity leads to feelings of intimacy and influencers are very good at revealing aspects of themselves and experiences to which consumers can relate.

3.4.2 Homophily and emotional resonance

An authentic fit between social media influencers and brands seeking to engage with these individuals is critically important, especially as consumers are more values-driven and seeking to make connections through shared values (Euromonitor, 2021b; WARC, 2021). Through homophily – the high degree of contact that occurs between similar people and conversely the high degree of similarity between people in close contact –

communication is made more effective (Manchanda, Arora, & Sethi, 2022). Attitudinal and behavioural homophily are particularly important for mediated communication (such as influencer endorsements) and the perceived authenticity of influencers has been proven to mediate perceived homophily (Shoenberger & Kim, 2022). The perception of a similar social standing, personality or personal factors (e.g. age, gender, etc) are important for users to feel influencer recommendations are relevant to them (D. Y. Kim et al., 2022; H. S. Lee & Lee, 2014). A degree of homophily is important to the social influence of influencers.

The way in which consumers relate to influencers, or share perceived similarities, may be linked to influencers' promotional ability. Recent research found that perceived status homophily and attractiveness are important components that drive consumers to follow influencers who are trendy, while perceived value and moral homophily was linked to following influencers because they are unique and inspirational (Shoenberger & Kim, 2022). Furthermore, where a consumer followed an influencer for outward appearance cues (attractiveness and status), they were more likely to do so because influencers stayed on trends and were therefore more likely to use influencers as advertisements for products (Shoenberger & Kim, 2022). Schoenberger and Kim (2022) found that consumers who experienced value homophily were not likely to be inspired to purchase via the influencers. But this study was for fashion influencers, and this may work differently for Foodies.

Far from focusing purely on status or attractiveness, users respond to deeper connections online. Consumers have been found to continue using

social media when they feel both connectedness and enjoyment (Hussein & Hassan, 2017). Emotional connection is also important in spreading messages – Tweets expressing sentiment or emotion have been found to be more widely and quickly shared than non-emotional content (Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2016). Often, consumers form links with influencers before they use them for recommendations, and popular posts are often those with positive stories which create emotional resonance with fellow social media users (Ko, 2012). Where influencers provide value to followers, the goodwill this creates has been found to develop into emotional attachment toward influencers, and this positive association can extend to brands those influencers endorse (Ki et al., 2020).

The ability of influencers to attract users based on perceived similarity makes them particularly well suited to distributing brand-related information. Influencer profiles are often presented as a story with elements of societal narrative (mother as a role and relation to others, for instance) repeated throughout (M. a. Hawkins & Saleem, 2012; Schechtman, 2011). Readers might then relate to this shared identity/social role and understand the communications on a deeper level which they can relate to their own personal experience. If there is emotional resonance between an influencer, their sponsored content and their followers, this can create a powerful marketing communication, but brands should only partner with influencers who can add additional value in their communications by providing information that is useful, novel or interesting (Sánchez-Fernández & Jiménez-Castillo, 2021) By aligning with social media influencers, companies widen their reach with engaged audiences, but only if the

influencer and their endorsement is perceived as authentically matched to the brand in the minds of the readers (Pöyry et al., 2019; Spry, Pappu, & Bettina Cornwell, 2011).

3.4.3 Intimacy and parasocial relationships

Influencer authenticity is established through intimacy and self-presentation as ordinary but desirable. Just as celebrity lifestyles become commodified and consumers can then purchase items that help them adopt the desired lifestyle (Marroncelli & Braithwaite, 2020), influencers are similarly viewed as aspirational figures (Shan et al., 2020). However, unlike celebrities, influencers are keen to be perceived as ordinary and similar to readers and share both their personal lives and lifestyles with followers (Abidin, 2015; Sánchez-Fernández & Jiménez-Castillo, 2021). Because of this, psychological ownership, where a consumer feels as though something is “theirs” without actual possession or affiliation, is facilitated by influencers (Pick, 2021). Social media is site of conspicuous consumption, where individuals consume content related to actual consumables, and this virtual consumption perpetuates a desire to consume (Kozinets et al., 2017). Parasocial interactions unlike social interactions are one-sided interactions which create the illusion of intimacy and can lead to parasocial relationships which are one-sided relationships (Yuksel & Labrecque, 2016). Where consumers feel they have a connection with the influencer, either through sharing similar characteristics, through parasocial interactions or through actual relationships, they are more likely to experience psychological ownership which is linked positively to purchase intention (Pick, 2021).

Unlike celebrities or experts, influencers are close to their audiences and this perceived closeness is important to their value as communication channels. This closeness can be in the form of a perceived relatedness, parasocial relationships and actual relationships. Influencers foster the perception of relationship with their followers by responding quickly to followers, by personalising thoughtful responses, altering their content and through self-disclosure, which encourages feelings of intimacy or familiarity with followers (Abidin, 2013). By aligning with existing human brands in the form of celebrities or influencers, companies appeal to consumers' who know of these human brands emotionally because the consumer feels they know the individual (Chae & Lee, 2013). Further extending the reach of influencers, consumers become more willing to share information and content with those in their own social network when it is produced by a source that is not only identifiable, but also known (Chiu et al., 2014). This can extend influencer influence as research suggests endorsements from known people are still more effective than influencers or celebrities – particularly among millennials (Cooley & Parks-Yancy, 2019). Being 'known' is therefore an important component in influencer marketing.

Dedicated parasocial relationships are not always present between influencers and consumers, but elements of this kind of relationship do lead to feelings of relatedness and closeness. Leite and Baptista (2021) differentiate between parasocial interactions (PSI) as a perception of reciprocal interaction whereas parasocial relationships (PSR) requires involvement over time in the form of a social bond. Both of these kinds of interaction enhance the influencer value to marketers because they facilitate

consumer's subjective evaluation of the worth of promotional content to their own needs (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Influencer-consumer relationships vary from interpersonal to distant and that even though parasocial relationships have been shown to increase social closeness, other factors – such as perceived trustworthiness – can make influencer messages persuasive even for consumers who are distant (Kim & Kim, 2022). More important than parasocial relationship is that consumers feel influencers can be "known".

The influence of consumers on influencers is also explored in literature. Influencers post about what interests them, but as they acknowledge a need to provide followers with content they want, they also calibrate the content they create to suit their audience (Jacobsen & Poder, 2008). In this way, influencers crowdsource ideas from followers and so there is an element of co-creation that can extend to co-creation of values, ideas, motives, or aims (Lou, 2021). Research has also found that audience comments on influencer content can have a positive impact on the parasocial relationships of other content consumers with the influencer who feel part of (Reinikainen et al., 2020). Without loyal readers, social media influencers have no power, and so keeping an audience interested and involved is a large component of influencer success (Hsu, Huang, Ko, & Wang, 2013). Influencers are not immune from negative consequences of perceived social pressure. Intimate self-disclosure can provide influencers with therapeutic benefits, but a focus on professional presentation when it is so inter-linked with the personal can lead to negative comparison and even negative body image (Dargie, 2021). Influencers appear to be aware that how they present themselves is relevant to their success and put pressure on themselves to

meet standards they perceive to be important – e.g. fashion influencers maintaining a body shape, food influencers presenting dishes to professional photography standards. Proving influencers also feel beholden to followers.

3.4.4 Popularity and number of followers

Recent research has investigated changes in consumers' attitudinal and behavioural response dependent on how many followers an influencer has. Users evaluate influencers based on a number of superficial cues including popularity, physical attraction, perceived similarity, and through repeated exposure to their content (Tukachinsky & Stever, 2019). de Veirman et al. (2017) found that a high number of followers could lead to influencers being perceived as more likeable, popular, and in a smaller number of cases, to be perceived as opinion leaders. Campbell and Farrell (2020) created a diagram to explore how the number of followers impacted perceived expertise versus perceived authenticity.

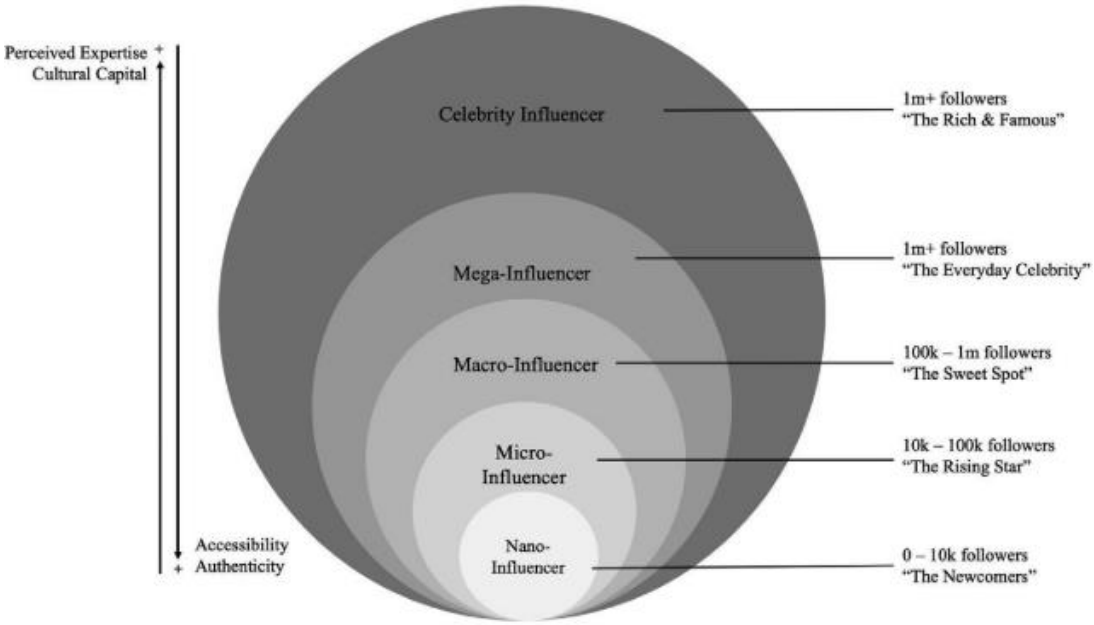

Figure 3: Influencer size (Campbell & Farrell, 2020, p. 471)

They found that while celebrity influencers have a greater reach, they are not necessarily the best brand advocates – particularly for consumption goods with a niche focus. In further support of less popular influencers, industry sources have reported that as followers increase, engagement decreases, and so influencers with smaller numbers of followers are in the best position to engage with followers (Y. Chen, 2016). When it comes to food choice and influencers, one study found a larger number of followers acted as a social cue that helped nudge followers into healthier eating intentions (Charry & Tessitore, 2021). In this research, perceived popularity of the influencer as expressed through the number of followers made healthier eating choices more appealing and therefore was more likely to be replicated. The impact of number of followers on influencer engagement is debatable and it is not yet clear what, if any, value Foodies will place on number of followers.

Adding further nuance to the impact of smaller versus larger follower numbers is the potential impact on influencer type and audience motivations. Celebrity influencers and those seeking to monetise their platforms and content use platforms strategically, while influencers who are simply passionate about particular topics lack interest in strategy, but are admired online for their passions rather than their social status (Ouvrein et al., 2021). Marketers and brands are increasingly turning to topic-specific creators of niche content who focus on creating intimacy with followers for collaborations (DMI, 2021; Hootsuite, 2022). Influencers with smaller followings are less like celebrities – perceived as being reflective of real-life and therefore more able to express views and opinions that are perceived as authentic and relatable (Marroncelli & Braithwaite, 2020). The difference in how followers respond

may also be linked to why followers seek out particular influencer types. Those who follow micro-influencers (50 – 100,000 followers) have been found to have more product knowledge and respond more positively to influencer endorsements than followers of macro-influencers (Kay, Mulcahy, & Parkinson, 2020). This suggests a possible connection between follower characteristics and preferred influencer characteristics. As this research will explore how influencers influence followers with high topic-specific knowledge in the area of food, it will be interesting to see what influencer characteristics the Foodies notice – whether this is influencer popularity, passion or other attributes – as this might differ from previous literature.

3.5 Influencers used against information overload

Consumers make use of information online in different ways. To supplement our information searches and processing of online content, users often rely on their social networks to help filter and judge information (He et al., 2016). Social media participants are inter-practicing contributors in a wider conversation that allows for rapid dispersion of information and ideas (Küpers, 2013). When discussing consumers of online media, literature around social media originally identified two different key roles under the label of follower: engaged audience members and lurkers (Langer & Beckman, 2005). Lurkers being those who do not actively contribute, but simply consume content. Previous discussions around these individuals did tend to cast them in a negative light as not being productive members of the social networks they follow. Those who do not actively participate with others in social media are often labelled with negative labels in literature. When studying online groups, Zygmunt et al. (2020) differentiated between social

users and selfish users, the latter being those who only contribute to discussions in the context of their own posts. Carlson and Lee (2015) highlighted that while users often find content online they perceive to be relevant to them, actually engaging with this content and actively following content or individuals beyond their known social circles is rare. And so the majority of social media users are not active and engaged followers, but part of an often inattentive audience.

There are different kinds of followers and those who are generally classified as lurkers may be under-valued. Trier and Richter (2015) assert that there are a class of followers who do not actively contribute to discussions, yet act as nodes in social networks - key individuals within networks who tie together a significant number of connections. In their study on networks within organisations, Trier and Richter (2015) identified two interrelated roles that are critical to the formation of network nodes. There are ‘drivers’, those who are more easily recognized as being nodes for communication as they establish topics and actively communicate these (Trier & Richter, 2015). ‘Retrievers’ are the concurrent role which selectively use the information put out by drivers, they are often passive, but this passivity is often due to their efficiency in using information from a broad range of sources selectively (Trier & Richter, 2015). This role can appear passive online, but a defining attribute of followership is an interwoven relationship between leaders and followers to perform functions towards a common goal (Malak, 2016), in this case exploring and defining what is good food. In this context, a small number of contributors will have a wider network of retrievers whose role in promoting blogs is likely an under-appreciated

aspect of followership. This is particularly true if the promotion of online content occurs offline among friends and family. In fact, the non-visible role of retriever might help explain how smaller bloggers can grow their audience effectively without joining in with a wider network of similar blogs.

Influencers may be uniquely positioned, as recognisable and relatable but relatively unknown figures, to help consumers make decisions. Influencer profiles are often presented as a story with elements of societal narrative (mother as a role and relation to others, for instance) repeated throughout (Hawkins & Saleem, 2012; Schechtman, 2011). Readers might then relate to this shared identity/social role and understand the communications on a deeper level which they can relate to their own personal experience. In this way, influencers may be particularly adept at engaging others more fully in imaginative consumption – where influencers produce a lifestyle or consumption decisions that can be more easily replicated or desired (Cowan & Dai, 2014, p. 1008). Consumer involvement with influencer communication has been found to have a favourable impact on a consumer's attitude towards content which features a brand (Trivedi & Sama, 2020). Accordingly, influencers showing how brands are used by themselves in their everyday lives might help consumers better understand how they themselves might use those items and do so without requiring too much information. This research will develop an in-depth understanding of how Foodies ascribe meaning and value to influencers, and the limits of their influence foor Foodies.

This is linked to **RO5:** *To critically explore the extent and limits of influencer influence on consumers with a high subject knowledge within the context-specific consumption category of Foodies in and around Edinburgh.*

3.6 The virtual foodscape: food and food Influencers

Cooking and food are quickly growing across social media and users are turning to social media to find information online (Lewis, 2018). Food online has implications beyond simply the food items shared:

> For what is food media but a multitude of circulating texts and images teaching us what 'good food' is and where it comes from, what we should be eating, how to prepare it and how to share it? (Goodman et al., 2017, p. 161).

Research has suggested face-to-face interventions are more powerful to change food-related behaviours than social media (Young et al., 2017), but the draw of social media as a site for food related information is significant. Another study found that social media users as consumers of information were better informed about food quality and attributes than mass media consumers (Simeone & Russo, 2017). Within the UK, food influencers are a significant voice, potentially more influential than celebrity chefs, who construct and share 'good' food (Goodman & Jaworska, 2020).

Social media influencers have been found to have an influence on individual food choice in some circumstances. People, particularly young adults, turn to social media as a site to learn about new foods and this can expand an awareness of available foods images and recipes (Vaterlaus, Patten, Roche, & Young, 2015). More widely, consumers turn to social media to learn about cooking, acquire skills and enable them to make healthier food choices (Pollard et al., 2015). Social media identified as a site for learning

about food particularly around times of transition such as motherhood – where individuals need to learn how to feed young children who have specific dietary requirements (Doub et al., 2016). Influencers make these skills and information accessible because they are non-celebrities and scrolling pages or watching (and pausing) YouTube videos is a highly accessible and flexible medium through which to learn. Seeing influencers making food choices has an impact on food choices offline. Children have been identified as particularly prone to influence of unhealthy snacks and less likely to be influenced to consume healthy options when seeing influencers make these choices on YouTube (Coates & Boyland, 2021). Influencers have also been found to promote restricted food choices through food trends, such as the popularisation of clean eating. Clean eating is “a dietary practice adhering to consuming “healthy” foods deemed to be “pure” [and] is presented as a form of moral food consumption that embraces particular foods while eschewing others” (Walsh & Baker, 2020, p. 570). Clean eating has been predominantly associated with social media influencers but is becoming increasingly mainstream (Smith, 2020).

More research supports the use of social media influencers to learn about lifestyle than individual food choice. Good food can be connected with living a ‘right’ life which is aware of and concerned with addressing social issues such as equal access to healthy food, food poverty and female empowerment (Goodman & Jaworska, 2020). Food influencers are therefore not only involved in helping individuals decide what to eat, but also in finding an ideal lifestyle. Having influence over the food choices of others is complex and food influencers must be “authentic and aspirational, accessible yet

exclusive, responsibilizing but also empowering" (Johnston & Goodman, 2015, p. 205). Nowhere are these tensions as evident as in food bloggers who present themselves as grounded in the domestic sphere. Food blogs have been found to include evidence of a mediation between an idealised domestic goddess who prepares and produces seductive home-cooking, and postfeminist contradictory ideals of femininity whereby women embrace domestic success, but avoid negative stereotypes of perfectionism or excessive control (Rodney et al., 2017). By presenting food while being rooted in a lifestyle, food influencers are presenting social norms and these are powerful for food choice. A survey conducted to determine the impact of perceived social norms around eating presented on Facebook and food choice of users found that actual frequency of fruit and vegetable consumption presented on Facebook by other users did increase consumption of those foods for viewers of that content (L. K. Hawkins et al., 2020). This lends strength to the claims of other researchers that social modeling is a significant determinant of eating behaviour and is particularly strong where the model is perceived to be similar to the individual or represents an ideal to which the individual aspires (Cruwys et al., 2015). This research will critically asses how the online foodscape (which includes influencers) impacts Foodie attitudes, behaviours and identities offline.

This is also linked to **RO4:** *To review current research into how influencers influence consumers and to critically assess how the digital foodscape of influencers with which Foodies engage is impacting Foodie attitudes and behaviours to inform daily food choices and develop Foodie identities.*

3.7 Chapter summary and research gap

There is not always agreement among authors as to what makes influencers effective in influencing consumer attitudes, but the literature review has explored existing research into how influencers influence consumer opinions, attitudes and behaviours (RO5). The research focus on social media influencers is relatively new, and can therefore be considered an emerging field (Borchers, 2019). While influencers are seen as opinion leaders that have an impact on attitudes, few studies focus on how influencers can affect public opinion or behavioural change (Hudders et al., 2021). There is also a lack of research, particularly qualitative, into influencer marketing from the perspective of followers (Abidin, 2015; Lou, 2021). Furthermore, a recent publication highlighted how few studies focus on how influencers can affect public opinion and behaviour change (Hudders et al., 2021). This research seeks provide insight into what social media-based functions and tools help consumers manage food choice (RO4). Much of the research reviewed in this section which featured respondents who were audiences of influencer content focused not on how the content impacted the user's behaviour offline, nor on how using an influencer affected their consumption choices offline.

This literature review has explored what influencer characteristics influence consumers and how consumers relate to influencers. As Foodies are highly knowledgeable consumers, how they are influenced likely differs from other consumer types. Previous research identified that for fashion consumers sharing values with influencers was not likely to lead to purchase (Shoenerger & Kim, 2022), but as food choice is heavily linked to values

(Furst et al., 1996), sharing values with influencers is more likely to impact the Foodies. Current research into influencers suggests that parasocial relationships are important to influencer influence (Breves et al., 2021; Reinikainen et al., 2020; Leite & Baptista, 2021), but this can vary across consumer type and is influenced by the influencer's interactions with other users as well (Bhattacharya, 2022; Lou, 2021). The number of followers has been shown to have an impact on influencer credibility and influence on behaviour (Campbell & Farrell, 2020; Charry & Tessitore, 2021), but Foodies like to be ahead of trends or value foods based on their values, so popularity of influencers may not be a measure of credibility for these consumers.

These gaps in the literature will be addressed through the following research objectives:

RO3: To examine how the digital foodscape of influencers affects the dietary attitudes, behaviours and identities of people who identify as Foodies.

RO4: To critically explore the extent and limits of influencer influence on consumers with a high subject knowledge within the context-specific consumption category of Foodies in and around Edinburgh.

RO5: To understand the meanings and values Foodies ascribe to influencers, the values they espouse, the content they produce and the tools they offer to help consumers manage food choice.

CHAPTER 4: Research methodology

This chapter presents the research methodology, how it aligns to existing practices in research methods and the guiding philosophical assumptions and methodological traditions from which the methods employed in this research are designed. The aim of this research is to explore the effect of social media influencers on consumers' food choices with a focus on consumer's who identify as Foodies. Social media is conceptualised as a social space, the wider food context as a virtual foodscape and the Foodie as a modern and self-selected identity. The research approach is presented while sampling, recruitment, ethical processes and considerations are outlined. The data collected was analysed using thematic analysis, and this is thoroughly explained following a discussion of the justification of claims through the chosen methods. Finally, the limitations of the approach are presented.

4.1 Research Philosophy

The underlying philosophy of this research is interpretivism. Interpretivism develops knowledge through the exploration of meaning imposed and expressed by people on particular circumstances and behaviours (O'Donoghue, 2019). The subjective meaning around the social phenomenon of social media influencers must be primarily sought from those they are influencing (Sahay, 2016), in this case, the Foodies. As the researcher interprets the data, the reported results are ultimately the interpretation of the Foodie perspective by the researcher (Martin, 2019), so it is critical to present compelling data to support analysis and conclusions

using participants own words to support the axiological value of this work. The subsequent conclusions provide an interpretation of the Foodies' experiences with influencers, which presents an explanation for how social media influencers impact individual Foodie attitudes and behaviours (Kaufmann, 2011).This ontological position considers the reality of social media influencers' influence on Foodies to be subjective and the nature of this relationship cannot be expressed as an absolute truth or reduced to absolute theoretical rules or laws (Lewis-Beck, Bryman, & Futing Liao, 2004). Subjectivism considers the meaning imbued in social phenomena by those experiencing it (Sahay, 2016). Thus, it is an entirely appropriate paradigm to apply to this research**.**

The aim of this research is to explore the effect of social media influencers on consumers' food choices with a focus on consumers who identify as Foodies. This research is rooted in social science and does not consider the social reality of Foodie consumers to be an undisputed fact, nor a universal or uniform experience. Reality is socially constructed by individuals through their experience of social interaction with others (Given, 2008a). The research does not assume the subjectively experienced realities of Foodies is universal, nor are the interactions with influencers or others who have influence on food choice within the homes of respondents. Social reality is the interpretation of the social itself (Lewis-Beck et al., 2004), and is dependent on the perspectives, values and circumstances of individuals. The epistemological perspective of this research is therefore social constructivism as it considers that knowledge is socially constructed and understood.

In order to understand how the influence of social media influencers works on Scotland-based Foodies, it is important to also understand how it connects to a wider framework which acknowledges the wider influences on food choice.

> Like sexuality, attitudes and behaviours surrounding food and eating are shaped by available cultural meanings as well as economic and social configurations. Both involve material and physical processes that must be translated, explained, and analysed through a social lens in order to be comprehensible as a source of collective and individual identification.
>
> (Julier, 2013, p. 15)

There are no possible absolute generalisations that could account for any human activity or behaviour as several conditions and contingencies will always provide far too many possible explanations for any singular decision (Lincoln & Guba, 2009). Several values and influences (ideals, personal factors, resources, etc.) are involved in food choice (Furst et al., 1996) and therefore social media influence should not be considered without also understanding the existing personal structures in place – this research uses Furst et al.'s model for complex food choice to put the individual at the centre of focus, considering the wider inter-play between food and identity against wider factors from the perspective of individual Foodies.

4.2 A naturalist research approach

The research design tends towards naturalism, seeking to understand the everyday lives of respondents and employing methods that put respondents at ease. Naturalism as a methodological orientation seeks to understand what is happening naturally and interpret social meaning from the everyday (Given, 2008b).

> The social world is not reducible to that which can be externally observed, but is something created or recreated, perceived and interpreted by people themselves. Knowledge of the social world must give access to actors' own accounts of it, among other things, at least as a starting point, and sometimes as the sole point. People live in a bounded social context, and are best studied in, and their meanings are best revealed in, the natural settings of the real world in which they live.
>
> (Given, 2008b)

A purist naturalist might advocate for purely observational research without interference of the subject to avoid influencing responses (Alaszewski, 2011). However, unlike pure naturalism, which is often exploratory in nature, the research seeks to build on and challenge established research. The impact of social media on consumer has an emerging body of research, and the habits of Foodies and the Foodie identity have been studied, but both the nature of social media and the Foodie identity are ever changing and evolving. Social media, users and influencers evolve and change over time (Ouvrein et al., 2021; Zainuddin, Dent, & Tam, 2017), and so established knowledge about the nature of this medium and how it impacts those who use it cannot be taken for granted and assumptions should be regularly challenged. Additionally, this research seeks to determine how social media influencers impact food choice, so it was important to use a model which includes a variety of influences on the individual so the influence of social media influencers is not over-stated. Therefore this research tends towards naturalism, but rather than building theory from scratch, it makes use of an existing comprehensive model of food choice (Furst et al., 1996) to better understand the influence of social media influencers on food choice and identity, and the limits of that influence.

In order to fulfil the aim of the research and explore how social media influencers influence the food choices of Foodies, a qualitative method was chosen. Qualitative data collection is best suited towards research that explores a social problem or phenomenon holistically (Bryman, 2012). The strength of a qualitative research design is both to explore and explain (Attride-Stirling, 2001) - to gather a detailed account of Foodies food choices to better understand and explain consumer behaviour holistically. People and their social behaviours cannot be explained neatly, quantified, or reduced to variables, but must be understood through the processes they find meaningful, such as referring to influencers for food based knowledge, and their associated significance (Goldbart & Hustler, 2005). A qualitative approach using personal accounts of Foodies as illustrative of a particular instance of social influence provides rich descriptive data (Sultan, 2019). The research focuses on the cross section between two identifying consumer characteristics– self identified Foodies, and those who make use of social media influencers to explore, purchase and prepare food in and around Edinburgh Scotland. In-depth exploration of the meanings Foodies ascribe to social media interactions is necessary as both their interpretations and the contents of influencers posts are rich in meaning. The link between any media output and consumers – such as influencer content and Foodie attitudes and behaviours – is difficult to establish without rich data (Gunter, 2000), thus necessitating a qualitative approach to appropriately address the aim of this research.

4.2.1 Situating data collection in the kitchen

The term sociology is applied in recognition of the subject focus of this research whilst also indicating the range of academic literature and methodological traditions which have influenced the methodology of this work (Wood, 1995). The methods were informed in no small part by cultural anthropology as food is hugely influenced by cultural and social dimensions (Wood, 1995). However, as this research is most interested in the food choices and identity of Foodies as individuals and not as a well-defined group, the methods are removed from a strict anthropological tradition. The choice of data collection method and site were determined by the situated nature of food influence, focusing on the Foodies in their homes. Ensuring situatedness in qualitative research allows the physical, contextual reality with its associated meanings and the impact of their co-habitual relationships to remain front of mind for respondents (Given, 2008b). Because most food choices are negotiated and made within the home (Kendall, Brennan, Seal, Ladha, & Kuznesof, 2016), it was important to situate the research in this context. This helped ensure that respondents were able to reflect on responses while considering others in the home and other social influences, resources, physical space and actual food choice – in other words all of the elements of Furst et al.'s (1996) food choice model. Being in the home allowed for more accurate reflection.

Cultural anthropology examines the material and non-material products of human ingenuity by exploring and often by contrasting against different people groups (Dash, 2004). While this research is not a work of anthropology, the method employed in this work has been informed by the

ethnographies of yesteryears' anthropologists conducting field work. It is of importance to note that anthropologists despair of the appropriation of their field and its terms – including 'culture' itself – by other disciplines (Marcus, 2008). However, the impact of anthropology on other disciplines such as marketing, media studies, consumer studies and beyond is important to recognise. The ethnographic tradition seeks to represent a distinct social world in text, studying and communicating a particular group of people in particular circumstances (Harrison, 2018). Foodies who use social media influencers is certainly a distinct social world and represents a distinct consumer culture – which is an area of theory that often employs ethnographic methods (Hollebeek & Belk, 2021). While this research seeks to represent and communicate, the other hallmarks of ethnographic study, such as identifying a particular group, are less easily applied because of the nature of the Foodies as those who seek distinction through their food choices and knowledge, how they interact with influencers and shop as individuals, and their opinion leadership as those who are involved in determining what is good food.

Ethnographic methods immerse the researcher in a social setting over a period of time, focusing on a specific group of people (Bryman, 2012). Online methods, such as netnography, see the researcher immersed in a particular online community (Kozinets, 2002). It had been the intention of the researcher to choose followers of particular bloggers for this study, but when recruiting respondents, it became clear that following particular individuals via particular channels is not how Foodies engage with influencers – a point further explained in the analysis chapter. To engage with a particular

community would have been to study that community, and not Foodies. Other authors have recognised the limitations of collecting data in a single community online, as the focus on a particular environment yields results particular to that space (Scaraboto, Rossi, & Costa, 2012). While there are food blogs situated in Edinburgh, the focus of the study was not on a singular blog because the emphasis was not on perceived influence of a particular social media influencer. When recruiting participants for the study, Foodies did not have networks of Foodie friends, unless they took part in a particular online community (e.g., vegan sites online). Although, a true ethnography based on a set group was not suitable, the principles of representing the online social worlds of Foodies and conducting data collection in the homes of Foodies were important to this work and so the work followed an ethnographic approach.

4.2.2 Positionality and Reflexivity

Reflexivity is important to qualitative research as it allows the researcher to consider their impact on the data, or how what is noticed in the data reflects the researcher's own interests, experiences and identity (Terry et al., 2021). Furthermore, researcher reflexivity aids others in assessing the quality of qualitative research by providing insight into the thinking and process of the researcher or detail of "what happened along the way" (Braun et al., 2019, p. 10). This research embraces the subjective experiences of Foodies as they engage with influencers, and it is processed and presented through the perspective of the researcher. In this way the identities of both the participants and the researcher shape the process and the product of research (Bourke, 2014). This research was very centrally located on the

Foodie identity, and while the Foodies differed in gender, age, experience and the food values they prioritised, they were similar in that they were all white and firmly middle-class. Within Scotland, 96% of the population is white and 93% of the population were born in Scotland (Scotland's Census, 2021). While the class system in the UK is complex and nuanced, for the purposes of this research, middle class is loosely defined as a social group of employed and well-educated people who are neither poor nor very rich (Cambridge Dictionary, 2023). Foodies tend to be middle class, as being able to afford good food and explore new foods is not attainable for those who have a tight food budget (Johnston & Bauman, 2015). The researcher is also middle class and this research is therefore positioned within the context of white, middle class Scotland.

Whilst positionality reveals the context of the researcher, it should not be reduced to stereotypes as this can obscure the personal experiences of the researcher (Robertson, 2002). To this end, the experiences of the researcher are relevant. The researcher is first generation Canadian whose father immigrated to Canada from Scotland as a child. The researcher is therefore familiar with Scottish culture and when reviewing articles about British food, there were several similarities of experience food in Britain. While the grandparents of the researcher's family are classic British cooks – over-cooking meat and making very plain, meat and two-veg meals – the researcher's father was an avid foodie who not only took an active interest in cooking meals for special occasions, but was also responsible for cooking and procuring food in his home. The researcher's mother was more focused

on the nutritional benefits of food and within her home was the primary cook and procurer of food.

When discussing their food-based identities, many of the foodies referred to their childhoods and upbringings before even being asked about their histories. While it is important to not reduce positionality to a list of similarities and differences between the researcher and participants, discussing the experiences of data gathering with others can help the researcher reflect and develop a better awareness of their own positionality (Kohl, & McCutcheon, 2014). By discussing the research with supervisors, friends and family, the researcher's perspectives on food identities and choices were expanded and it was very clear that there was a wider range of influences on food choice for other respondents – such as friends and being exposed to new options when engaging in Higher Education. Qualitative research embraces subjectivity and the individual experiences of respondents, and recognises the researcher's subjective influence on this process is critical for the openness and transparency of this research (Jamieson et al., 2023). A reflexive researcher reflects on and explains the underlying assumptions associated with the research questions and this reveals the researcher as a subjective influence on the research itself (Robertson, 2002). Throughout the entire research process, the researcher engaged with food choices and food-based identities from multiple perspectives reflexively – through literature, while developing the research methods, by engaging with participants, through the process of analysis and when organising the thesis and drawing conclusions.

4.3 Research design

Food choice is influenced by a wider variety of variables – including wider supply chains – while this research does not discount wider influences, it focuses very specifically on the influence of social media influencers. Gunter (2000) called for research into media effects that study audience involvement with media through qualitative methods, calling for behavioural effects to be linked to media exposure convincingly. Social sciences are not adept at creating concrete generalisable knowledge, but are invaluable – and even necessary – in being able to provide new knowledge about human behaviours which cannot be fully or unfailingly explained by theoretical 'laws' (D. T. Campbell, 1975; Flyvbjerg, 2006; Yin, 2014). The tight banding of this work to Foodies who use social media influencers narrowed the focus of this work and allowed for in-depth exploration.

Data was collected from respondents within a very small time frame with interviews taking place within a two week time period and research diaries taking place during a subsequent two-week period (Bryman, 2012). The data corpus collected for this research includes two data sets, or subsets of data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Holding the interviews and diaries in a short time frame provided data that represented the experiences, attitudes and behaviours of Foodies at a single point in time (Mills, Durepos, & Wiebe, 2010a). This allowed for a tightly bound and workable set of data to be collected.

4.3.1 Interview

The interviews took place in the kitchens and dining rooms of respondents over a two-week period during the summer of 2017. First, respondents were asked to show where food was stored in their homes and for each location (i.e., fridge, cupboards, pantry), respondents were asked: what food they regularly used; if any food was bought based on recommendation; if there was any food they did not like or had negative feelings about; if there was any food respondents were particularly excited about. Pictures were taken for each location and these were used to help remind the researcher about any specific items that were being referred to during the interviews. Following the initial questions about the food currently in their homes, in-depth interviews took place (see full interview guide in Appendix 3).

To ensure a well-balanced understanding of the influences on the food choices of respondents, three banks of questions were asked following the review of foods in the home. The first related to everyday food choices and routines, these gave a sense of who respondents regularly ate with, revealed if they followed any particular guidance or dietary advice, if there were any barriers to food choice and prompted them to remember their regular patterns around food choice. The second set of questions focused on influences that had shaped food choice over time, including what influenced food choice growing up, how their food choice changed and the single largest influence on Foodies' current food choice. Only once the respondents had thoroughly explored their food choices, did the final set of questions ask about food choice and social media. Foodies were asked if they themselves

posted about food to social media and if they regularly followed food bloggers – which generally gave an indication of what they did regularly read. Finally, several questions about social media influencers were asked. At the end of the interviews, respondents were given the chance to add any other thoughts. There is an excerpt from one of the interviews in Appendix 4.

Food-situated interviews prompt rich and multi-layered responses as food is highly sensory and being surrounded by it tends to prompt information about food-centered life histories (Cavanaugh et al., 2014). While the life histories of respondents were not the focus of this investigation, they were important to understand in context of food choice as life course is a key component of Furst et al.'s food choice model (Furst et al., 1996). The interviews confirmed that asking respondents about food choice growing up and changes over time was an apt choice of questions as many respondents tied current food choice to past experience. Without an understanding of that personal history, the influence of influencers may have been interpreted as being more important than it was. Furthermore, understanding Foodies formative narratives around their food values helped identify where influencers fit in with values Foodies already held. At the end of the interviews, respondents were left with a food diary.

4.3.2 Diaries

Diaries with pre-dated pages for the two-week period immediately following interviews were left in the homes of respondents. In the back of the diaries, there were additional, lined and undated pages for respondents to use if they ran out of space on a particular day. The first two pages of the diary contained brief instructions, asking participants to write about daily food

choices and social media activity as it pertained to influencers and their food choices every day over the specified two-week period (see Appendix 5). Whilst interviews prompt retrospection, diaries minimise this by being a daily practice – shortening the time between the action and reporting of the action and becoming a daily practice (Bolger, Davis, & Rafealli, 2003). Using diaries enables the participants to lend their own voices, free of the structure of a formal interview, to the research (Alaszewski, 2006). Brief instruction and the interviews ensured respondents had an idea of what was being sought so relevant information was recorded without being overly prescriptive (Alaszewski, 2011). Allowing respondents to report their food choices and use of influencers in their own words allowed motivations behind these choices and influencer use to be described as they happened (Hamilton, Kaltcheva, & Rohm, 2016). For an excerpt from a diary, please see Appendix 6.

When conducting diary-interview methods, Zimmerman and Wieder (1977) recommend giving respondents diaries first, doing analysis and then holding an interview. The diary-interview method was developed to allow absent researchers to get as close to participant observation as possible where it was difficult to directly observe a setting (Zimmerman & Wieder, 1977). As this research sought to understand daily food choice from a variety of Foodie respondents, it was not feasible to directly observe this in situ. First because the presence of the researcher would have been an interference, second because the influence of influencers over food choice took place over fairly long periods of time and this research did not have the resources to allow for such immersion. Naturalist researchers prefer the authenticity of

unsolicited diaries, but acknowledge that even solicited diaries have authenticity in that they are developed by the individual and only subsequently shared with the researcher, but this can lead to issues around content relevance (Alaszewski, 2006). By reversing the prescribed order of the diary-interview method, a rapport was built with respondents and allowed the researcher to guide the conversation of the Foodies in a structured way leading to data collection with better relevance to the research aim and objectives (Alaszewski, 2011). The interviews helped prime the respondents for the diaries as they already had an idea of what areas were of interest to the researcher.

There is support for this reversing the order of the diary-interview method among researchers. Hiller (2010) conducted a two-pronged approach involving accompanied shopping followed by interviews, and reported that the observational research yielded data that was not well-linked to the research objectives. To overcome this weakness, Hiller (2010) recommended an intervention take place before any respondent-led methods be employed, suggesting a pantry audit followed by an in-depth interview. This research began interviews with a review of the foods in the kitchens of respondents where respondents were asked to show the food they had in their home. While this was not an actual audit, it served the same function of acting as an intervention to both ground the interviews in the context of the food that was actually bought and used in the home and build rapport that led into in-depth interviews. While participants did share a lot of information about their food choices and use of social media that were not directly related to influencers, most of the information not related to influencers was

related to Furst et al.'s (1996) food choice model which was used to inform the interview questions by looking at wider influences, exploring the values that foodies had and food choice as it developed over time. In most cases, additional insight was provided to help the researcher better understand the motivations of respondents for using social media influencers to explore food choice (Ryan & Deci, 2000). This additional information helped define the limits of the influence of social media influencers whilst providing the greater contextual insights necessary to strengthen the quality of the research. The strength of the diary as a self-reporting instrument is that it captures 'little experiences' – those the respondents might not think to mention during the course of an interview as they may be dismissed as insignificant (Bolger et al., 2003). These everyday insights provided rich data as to how influencers were used - and even not used as expected – to influence food choice.

4.4 Sample and recruitment

Foodies are the focus of the research, and therefore the sampling unit consists of individual Foodies. Individuals are the most common units of study, although groups, events, places, etc. can also be studied (Guest, Namey, & Mitchell, 2013). Guest et al. (2013) recommends including multiple perspectives in the sample including recruiting differences in gender, age, experiences. The respondents in this study were selected from several demographics. For this research a wide range of respondents were purposefully recruited to provide differing perspectives on how Foodies use influencers to influence food choice (Creswell, 2007). Non-probability sampling was used in this research as a means to identify a particular respondent type: self-described Foodies who were active social media users

and followed influencers who post about food. Non-probability sampling is commonly used to find respondents with particular interests or characteristics (Mcintyre & Schwanke, 2010; Sánchez-Fernández & Jiménez-Castillo, 2021).

Many authors agree that a small sample size is appropriate for qualitative research, with some recommending a sample size as low as six where experiences can be assumed to be shared and reasonably standardised within a community (Guest et al., 2013). While this research did not focus on a particular community, the geographic location, socially understood label of Foodie, and limited means of engagement with influencers via social media was defined enough to assume a reasonable degree of similarity. Authors disagree on the best way to determine a sample size. Marshall et al. (2013) suggest that too large a sample size for qualitative studies makes analysis overly burdensome. Data saturation, a typically prescribed method for ensuring quality in qualitative studies is also not feasible for a smaller and time bound study, and so citing precedent and recommendations by qualitative methodologists for sample size is a recommended alternative (Marshall et al., 2013). For studies using thematic analysis at professional doctoral level, Terry et al. (2017) recommend 6-15 interviews, while PhD and larger projects recommend 15-20 – note the author's prescribing number of interviews, not number of respondents. Marshall et al. (2013) pointed out that studies using multiple points of data per respondent may prove unwieldly for analysis if using too many respondents. As respondents in this study provided both interviews and

diaries, 20 sources of data were deemed to be sufficient, and so recruitment was deemed sufficient after 10 participants were found.

The researcher asked friends, acquaintances and colleagues for suggested contacts who might be interested in the research. Three criteria were identified to be included in the study:

1. That the person be a self-professed Foodie, or be recommended as a Foodie by contacts;
2. That the person follows* social media influencers with an interest in food;
3. That the person be available for an interview during a two-week time-period during the summer of 2017 and be willing to keep a diary for the second two-week window.

** While recruiting participants, it became apparent that followership was difficult to define and not universally understood. For the purposes of participant recruitment, a follower was loosely defined as someone who regularly consumes influencer content – whether they take action to actually 'follow' the influencer (for instance by 'following' on platforms) or engage in their content (for instance by 'liking' posts).*

By setting criteria, only those who fit the parameters of the research and were available to contribute to the research were recruited (Emmel, 2013). Contacts of the researcher who fit the criteria were recruited to take part in the study, and second and sometimes third tier contacts were also identified. Chain sampling is an effective means to supplement a purposeful sampling approach by recruiting from wider contacts (Emmel, 2013). Snowball or chain sampling involves selecting a few information-rich interviewees and using them to identify others who can provide different perspectives (Patton, 2015). Several potential respondents were identified from this process and the

researcher was able to learn more about potential participants before inviting them to take part in the study.

There were several recommended participants who were not considered for the research. Reasons to exclude suggested participants included:

- Being an active Foodie but not cooking at home;
- Being an active Foodie but not using social media influencers around food;
- Being too close in characteristics (e.g. mother of similar-aged children living in a traditional/nuclear family unit) to other identified respondents already taking part in the study.

The sampling process did not apply a maximum variation sampling –which would have required identifying variations in how theory applies and recruiting participants to match those variations (Patton, 2015). Had there been existing studies exploring Foodies who follow influencers in more depth, and were there published theory to match this phenomenon more closely at the time of the research, this may have been a feasible approach.

Two weaknesses of the chain sampling approach – that respondents are likely to come from similar geographic areas and socioeconomic backgrounds (Emerson, 2015) – worked to the benefit of this research by constructing a tightly bound sample. In addition, the Foodie lifestyle is unattainable for those living on the breadline, but for the middle class, good food becomes the ultimate affordable luxury (Johnston & Bauman, 2015). Using purposeful sampling to recruit participants in and around Edinburgh

and from a middle-class background allowed the focus of the research to remain narrow enough to apply the theory without too many large differences in how Foodies approached food. By seeking out variation in respondents by age, gender and family profile, the context of food choice was explored comparatively among a diverse sample.

4.4.1 Self-interview and pilot study

Before the research began, a self-interview and pilot study were conducted to prepare and pre-test the interviews and diaries (Lewis-Beck et al., 2004). The self-internview was very informal and involved a self-interview of the researcher. This allowed some reflection on what informed the food choices of the researcher – who is a self-identified Foodie living near Edinburgh, Scotland. By conducting an interview in the kitchen and by going through the steps that would be taken, the interview protocol was developed in greater detail and this was provided an opportunity for the researcher to reflect on the experiences that have shaped their own food choices (Olmos-Vega et al., 2022). Surprisingly, it was discovered on reflection that quite a few of the researcher's own food choices were informed by past experiences and had unexpected influences that would not have been considered had the food items not been in view while questions were considered. This self-interview confirmed the pantry review was a useful method. It also embedded reflexivity in the methods and provided a chance for the researcher to critically reflect on their own experiences, thoughts and feelings whilst considering how the methods would work in practice (Corlett & Mavin, 2018).

A pilot study was conducted with a single respondent before participants were recruited. Following the pilot study, the interview was

transcribed, and notes were made by the researcher to reflect on the process. As part of this a few changes were made to the data collection, namely:

- The respondent revealed they were nervous for the review of the food in their kitchens – they were anxious to have their food "judged" and were intimidated by this process as they were not familiar with it and were not sure of what it would entail. For the primary data collection, the order was reversed from the pilot study, so interviews followed the review of their food. Using the unfamiliar process helped develop a rapport with respondents and put them at ease before asking the interview questions.
- Feedback from the respondent of the pilot study was that they were unsure of the purpose of the diary. To overcome this, the aim of the research was added to the beginning of the diary and at all contact points respondents were asked if they had any questions or needed additional instructions.
- When reviewing the contents of the diary from the pilot study, there was a lot of description of what food was being prepared and eaten without much discussion as to why these food choices were being made or what guided them. One possible solution was to conduct a second, follow-up interview to review the diary with participants. This would have asked more time of the respondents. Furthermore, it would have been difficult to estimate how long it would take to review interviews and diaries in sufficient depth to identify appropriate follow-up questions. Instead, more questions

were added to the interview to help prime respondents for what kind of information was particularly relevant to fulfil the aim of the study. Specifically, more questions about what influenced food choice were added to the interview.

- In the pilot study, the respondent was asked specifically if they posted about food to social media. The respondent focused on the channel of social media and interpreted the question as very function focused. For the interviews, more detail around different types of sharing of food choices (recommendations, reviews, posting links, liking reviews, and sharing content) were provided as prompts to respondents.

The changes were very successful in the primary data collection and most respondents provided much fuller diary entries with more relevant information than the pilot yielded.

To avoid contaminating the sample by pre-exposing a respondent to the research, the participant from the pilot study was not used in the actual research (Lewis-Beck et al., 2004). The feedback from respondent from the pilot study proved helpful to develop the interviews and diaries, and so the pilot study fulfilled its intended function. The primary goal of the pilot study was to identify any problems or potential improvements to the research process so these could be corrected prior to data collection beginning in earnest (Salkind, 2010). Another potential method to conduct a pilot study involves experts to refine the questions to ensure good fit to theory (Salkind, 2010). As this research was conducted under doctoral supervision, the input from the supervision team provided this invaluable function. Pilot studies

have an additional benefit to the researcher as they allow the actions and process of data gathering to be practiced (Given, 2008b), and this was very helpful for the researcher who was relatively inexperienced.

4.4.2 Respondent profiles

The table on the following page features respondent profiles.

Respondent	Age	Gender	Household	Occupation	Food Philosophy	Motivation to use follow influencers
Colby	21-30	Female	Father Brother Father's Partner	University student	*"I buy mostly vegetarian food... but if I'm out with friends, who are all eating meat, I'm more likely to go for meat… would argue that eating meat isn't the best thing for the planet, and for people's health, and for, just, morally."* *"when I moved out, started just to find what I really liked to make. Which would have been based off what I've been eating [at home]. But just doing it my own way... Finding recipes I liked of soups and things, and just trying it out, and now I just sort of have my own style and way of finding things to eat."* The respondent discussed not wanting to miss out on food options and being adventurous in trying new things. Enjoys looking for recipes online.	"*I follow accounts on my **Instagram**, that come up, but I don't pay a lot of attention to it... In terms of what I actually seek out, it's more on **Youtube**."* *"I just like watching things... Jamie Oliver's videos and stuff like that... but then also quite a lot of smaller accounts... so many people do this – what I eat in a day. And it's just someone filming, like vlogging essentially what they've had to eat... I guess I'm just really interested in what people eat."* The respondent also has her own Instagram food account where she posts content.
Dill	31-40	Male	Wife	Administrator	When describing how he was a picky eater: *"a lot of it was, that I didn't have time to eat when I was younger... also I'm realizing that food – some textures that I don't like. That I still don't like."* *"... at school meeting more friends was a big influence in trying types of food... more recently, certainly the food choices that I've made are influenced a lot by what I've seen on tv."*	Mentioned that he was not interested in the personal lives of those he follows. Uses social media, including influencer accounts to *"get ideas and thoughts."* Mentioned using Instagram and Twitter.

					Now, this respondent is highly influenced by foods had when growing up and really enjoys *"good British food. And doing it well. All of the kind of, I guess, classics, roast beef, and Yorkshires. Everything that's simple and good."*	
Olive	31-40	Female	Husband Son (Pre-school) Son (Infant)	Doctor	*"I think strict diets tend to be a bit alienating in social contexts... I'm never going to go vegetarian, but my preference is always going to be for vegetables... I also just really believe that vegetables are really good for you."* The respondent also reported consuming *"very little processed food... we don't buy a lot of bread because none of us like it very much... I am a little anti-sugar, but I also can't really fully subscribe to it because I like my chocolate and I just try to eat it in small amounts."* *"I can get quite into things and quite faddy... I know, that I can't get faddy over the kid's food. I have to be sensible, healthy, and not faddy – because I don't want them to get any weird hang ups over it, or any weird power struggles over it. Like I had with my mum."*	Does not like influencers she considers too *"in your face".* Uses influencers to find inspiration and likes those who are aligned with her values: *"a lot of their stuff is family friend, and it's just – they've just got a really balanced attitude to food, which I like. There's not too much of anything and they give options. So if you wanted to make it vegan, you could. If you wanted it to be gluten free, you could make it that way, but you don't have to. And their photography's phenomenal."* Uses Facebook and an app downloaded from a blog.
Brie	41-50	Female	Husband Daughter (Primary School)	Marketer and food blogger	Described food as growing up as *"beige"*, but is now very adventurous. Inspired by the foods she is exposed to as a food blogger who reviews local businesses.	Uses many platforms in addition to her two blogs (one food, one personal) - Instagram, Twitter - but

					"I come home and I recreate different things that I've had when I'm out and experiment a lot more."	*"the FaceBook page is becoming a bit of a hub"* Spends a lot of time on social media for her blog, which has become her main income source. Rarely follows food bloggers, but enjoys reading about minimalism, personal development and financial management and blogs of friends, and these inform her food choices.
Clementine	31-40	Female	Partner Daughter (Pre-school)	Administrator	Enjoys variety and *"will never eat the same meal two nights in a row"* Credits her father with his adventurous food choices and love of cooking. *"I love cooking, I always want to try new recipes... I'll sit and read a cookbook like a book."* The respondent really enjoys having people around to dinner, particularly enjoys hosting people who enjoy good food, and gets a lot of pride from being someone who is recognised as a good cook/baker and who has good knowledge of recipes.	Feels she should write positive reviews online *"... you only tend to hear people that grumble, and not people that really enjoyed it."* Prefers food bloggers *"Because they're tried and tested."* She follows bloggers with whom she identifies *"... she is kind of who I am? She's a young mum, loves cooking, loves adapting recipes, has a busy lifestyle, and has a grumpy other half who's really fussy with his food."* Uses Facebook and blogger sites
Quince	31-40	Female	Husband Daughter (Primary School)	Piano Teacher	Respondent has very fixed ideas about food and avoids processed foods *"… we do a lot of things from scratch… We eat pretty simply."* *"So we're vegetarian... I'm trying to get a bit more diverse with the cooking,*	Follows influencers to get new ideas of what to cook. She also started following an influencer *"because of the Therma mix. And she's really good because um, I also got her cook book… she's into*

			Son (Primary School)		*because it's so easy to just do the same meals, you know with the kids, and nutritiously you just regurgitate the same stuff."* Describes herself as "fussy" with food. She is very conscious that her children are learning from her food choices and likes to talk to them about what they eat and why. She enjoys food, but prioritises family time over cooking, so looks for quick recipes.	*whole foods… it fits into our food choices. She fits into ours…"* Sees recipes on her Facebook newsfeed where she follows some bloggers. Uses blog sites.
Rosemary	41-50	Female	Daughter (University) Daughter (Adult)	Teacher	Was vegetarian as a child in a meat-eating household, but her mother was very supportive. Turned vegan after trying it for a month but found it *"really easy. And I feel much better"*. Spends a lot of time learning about food and after not having much money for food when she and her husband were younger, *"I love being able to afford good food now."* Eats very healthily after loosing her husband to bowel cancer.	Reads blogs, sees content on Facebook, uses vegan online forums. Follows influencers who are healthy, such as Deliciously Ella, who *"made choices that made a marked difference to her health. And the recipes are quite good, accessible, easy. And she's doing the same stuff as I'm interested in... maximising the nutritional value."*
Reuben	41-50	Male	Wife Daughter (High School)	Trucker	Is happy with his diet despite mentioning he is *"... never going to have a six pack... life's for living... if you enjoy something then why deny yourself."* Described eating healthy during the week in order to eat more indulgently at weekends.	Follows recipe pages (a sort of microblog), but not to follow recipes, "*I'll maybe read up on techniques for what I enjoy doing".* Sees influencer content on Facebook.

					Considers food *"a massive part of our social [lives]",* posts about food to social media often and is recognised as someone who knows about food.	
Pepper	31-40	Female	Partner	Buyer	Does not limit her food, does not deny herself anything *"I've seen this, I want to try this, I'm going to get that and cook it."* Is an amateur athlete and runs a blog about this. Eats to fuel her physical fitness *"I've got to eat to my needs"* but also really loves food and trying new foods.	Enjoys following influencers where "*everything's always quite straight-forward, there's no kind of complicated processes".* Watches buzzfeed's food channel, follows food accounts on Instagram, follows a few bloggers on their blogs. Follows influencers food accounts for entertainment, information, ideas. Reaches out to influencers.
Bran	41-50	Male	Partner Son (school aged)	Librarian	Enjoys learning about food, spending time in the kitchen and improving skills. *"I think as you enter adulthood, you… You meet people, you do things, you probably – you probably want to think you're quite urbane and sort of, ehm… not insular. And open to things."* Considers food *"not just fuel... it's one part of a relaxing evening.. you sit down [and] want it to be nice."*	Likes influencers whose recipes are *"easy to make, but they're all balanced"* Does not follow particular influencers, likes variety, and likes foods that look delicious, while being healthy. Reported enjoying using Pinterest as it makes suggestions and *"has constant feeds of ever-refreshing stuff."* Also uses Facebook.

Table 4: Respondent profiles

4.5 Ethics and informed consent

Informed consent is a concept founded on having respect for, and recognising the autonomy of participants (Mathison, 2005b). Although it is mainly used in medical contexts, the principles are transferable across disciplines and represent the highest standard for treating participants with care and respect. Before agreeing to participate, participants were informed of the purpose of the research including what their participation would involve (please see participant information in Appendix 2). This included a brief description of the methods, an estimate of how long this would take, how their information would be used, were informed that their data would be collected confidentially and told what the likely research outputs would be (namely this thesis and further publications). Once they had agreed to take part, participants were provided with a brief summary of the research, their role in it, and a description of the process for storing their data anonymously. This was done just before the interview took place and afforded the chance to clarify anything the participants may have wanted to know and address any questions. Finally, the first page of the diaries outlined the purpose of the study and once again reminded them they were free to withdraw their participation at any time. Thus, participants fully understood the purposes of the research, that their participation had no apparent risks or benefits to themselves, that their information was collected confidentially and that they had the right to withdraw their participation at any time without explanation (Mathison, 2005b).

Of particular importance to this small scale research project is the protection of confidentiality and eventual destruction of the data collected

(Tight, 2017). Where data is gathered from individuals, participants are entitled to privacy and so the data must not be used in any way which could identify them (Byrne, 2017). These principles are in line with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) designed to protect consumers, which is appropriate as the research was focused on participants as consumers. The GDPR also dictates how marketers use information in commercial context, although some of the guidelines published by the Information Commissioner's Office (ico, 2021) are similar to informed consent, whose application to this work is summarised as follows:

- Right to be informed of how data will be used: participants were fully informed about how their data would be collected and used.
- Right to be forgotten: participants were informed that interviews and diaries would be transcribed and their contribution to the research anonymised and that after the project was complete (marked as the point after thesis has been accepted and research papers published) the transcribed files would be destroyed.
- Right to restrict processing: participants were assured the data would only be used for the stated purposes as they relate to this research and would not be used further.

It was also important to ensure this research was conducted according to Edinburgh Napier's ethical procedures and principles (Byrne, 2017). In line with Edinburgh Napier University's Code of Practice on Research Integrity ('Res. Integr.', 2021), ethical approval was sought from the University through the submission of a Business School Research Integrity Approval

Form. The form was submitted in April 2017, featuring consideration of the following ethical concerns:

- As there is an expectation to publish from doctoral work, participants were made aware that the work might be disseminated more widely but were assured they would remain anonymous.
- The research did require a large time commitment from respondents (an hour-long pantry interview plus two-week food diary), but this was made clear from the outset.
- There was no anticipated harm to the respondents and as participants were recruited from among contact of the researcher, there was no anticipated risk to the researcher in conducting research in the homes of respondents.

Ethical approval was granted, and data collection began in July 2017. Paperwork for this is included in the appendix.

4.6 Data and data analysis

The full data collected represented just over ten hours of interviews and 140 pages of diaries (not all of these pages were full). Most respondents returned diaries with hand-written notes, with only two respondents returning diaries electronically, stating a preference for recording in this fashion. The electronic diaries were very easy to review and format into a standard template, while the hand-written diaries required more time to be typed. One of the electronic diaries had an unexpected added benefit of containing hyperlinks to contents the respondent had seen, but the other typed diary did

not. Future research using similar methods might consider making use of commonly pre-loaded App (such as the Notes application on iPhone and iPad) with user instructions to help record not only notes but also hyperlinks. The interviews were transcribed and checked for accuracy within two months of being conducted and this helped ensure any obscured words could be clarified from memory (one respondent mumbled quite a bit which was more difficult to interpret on the recording). Following transcription, the researcher added a personal reflection to each interview to incorporate interpersonal reflexivity and reflect on the unique perspective offered by each participant (Olmos-Vega et al., 2022). Pictures taken during the review of food in the home were included with the word-processed file. The pantry review was a tool to help situate food in the home of respondents and while the images were helpful to remind the researcher of what items were referred to in the discussions during data analysis, that was the extent of their contribution to the analysis. After transcriptions were made of interviews and diaries where typed, all names of respondents and those they mentioned by name were removed. The files were all entered into NVivo and were then analysed.

Codes were developed from Furst et al.'s (1996) complex food choice model with additional food values and influences added from additional sources that were deemed relevant. In addition, Foodie-specific codes were developed based on literature. Variety, exclusivity, sophistication and trendy were added as codes to reflect Foodie-specific values (Barr & Levy, 1984; Mctavish, 2015). As what qualifies as "good food" is a major concern of Foodies (Johnston & Bauman, 2015), a code was used to identify how foodies qualified foods as either 'good' or 'bad' in their own words. Many of

the qualifiers of ‘good’ food from the democratic foodies archetype were expressed by the Foodies, such as aesthetically pleasing, simple food, novel ingredients and recipes and leisurely foods (Johnston & Bauman, 2015; Cox & Blake, 2011; Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). The following codes were applied to the data:

Influences on food choice

• Ideals and food “philosophy”
• Personal factors
• Resources
• Social framework
  ○ Wider social influences related to Foodie attributes (gender, social position, knowledge of eating behaviours)
  ○ Social modelling
  ○ Social norms
• Food context

Personal System and Values
• Sensory perceptions • Monetary considerations • Convenience • Health and nutrition • Managing relationships • Quality • Satiety • Symbolism • Ethical • Variety • Exclusivity • Sophistication • Trendy • Satiety • Familiarity • Weight control • Mood • Natural content
Strategies
Defining food as ‘good’ (or otherwise)

Table 5: Codes used in analysis

The analytic approach taken in this research was thematic analysis. Thematic analysis seeks to identify themes or patterns in lived experiences and behaviours across participants (Aronson, 1995). Thematic analysis involves making meaning across a data set by identifying what is common across the data and relevant to the topic or focus of the research (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Through thematic analysis, the Foodie's understanding of the influence of social media influencers and the significance of this influence is described and presented as themes and these do at times provide conflicting points of view. This is to be expected in this study as it is not the task of subjective research to provide concrete definitions or reconcile conflicting accounts of respondents' experiences (Attride-Stirling, 2001). Thematic analysis of the diaries involved thorough exploration of each of the diaries and interviews and used significant passages to identify the realities of how influencers exerted influence on the Foodies. This created a summary account of how Foodies were influenced by influencers based on the Foodie's own interpretations of this influence. The analysis is not a rich description of the entire data set, rather it is a detailed account of influencer influence on Foodies.

This research builds on the work of others, specifically Furst et al.'s (1996) food choice model which summarises the influencers on individual food choice in any context and applies this to food choice as it is influenced by social media. In this way the research is more inductive than deductive in that it takes a specific theory and moves to identifying themes in the data. However, there were key questions identified as the research progressed that were not covered by the theory – such as what is followership and what

specific functionality of social media influencers was valued by Foodies. Thus the coding and thematic analysis used a combination of both deductive and inductive approaches and this is recognised as a legitimate approach (Braun & Clarke, 2012). In fact, an approach involving both deductive coding of data derived from a literature-informed framework and inductive coding which seeks to identify emerging themes from the data itself is balanced and allows for a rigorous analysis when exploring a specific context (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). For this research, codes were developed and applied first, then themes developed subsequently. The analysis chapter presents data that supports the most significant themes crafted through the analysis and relates these back to the literature and original aim of the research to present a cohesive story (Attride-Stirling, 2001).

In his thorough book, ‘Using Diaries for Social Research’, Alaszewski (2011), recommends identifying themes through content analysis for researchers using diaries with a naturalistic approach, as was the case with this research. When Braun and Clarke (2006) wrote their seminal paper on thematic analysis, they recommended 6 steps which were loosely followed: immersion and familiarization with the data; labelling data for initial codes; identifying meaning across codes and organizing into themes; reviewing themes for significance and boundaries; clearly defining themes and naming them; writing the analysis. This research employed these steps, but rather than being used prescriptively and without flexibility, they were applied in an iterative process using various steps at various times. The data was initially labelled with codes from the food choice model and from this initial coding themes were developed. Braun and Clark themselves later advocated their

work on thematic analysis not be taken as canon, but that researchers employ reflexivity and transparency in their methods (Braun, Clarke, & Hayfield, 2019). While developing the themes for this analysis, the process began as simple immersion in the data as coding was conducted but became more complex as the themes were developed through a process of writing, relating themes to other authors and clarifying the theoretical significance of the themes simultaneously. In this way, the codes were developed from Furst et al.'s (1996) model of influences, values and strategies, to the codes seen in Table 5. The simultaneous nature of organising, coding, writing, theorising and reading in thematic analysis has been reported by other authors who advocate for this method (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Tuckett, 2005).

The experiences of individual participants and the meanings they relate to these experiences are collected and investigated through thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As the data set was fairly significant, it was difficult to fully and accurately summarise the findings into themes in one attempt without writing. An initial set of themes was developed, and it took careful review of data to gather evidence in support of the themes and ensure that the themes developed were properly bounded and significant (these themes are presented in the introduction to the analysis). Some themes had to be changed as supporting data was gathered because some themes which seemed significant because of the insight they provided were not as strong when gathering data across respondents. Even after taking time to ensure themes were well-structured, there were further changes at the writing stage because once literature was added to provide insight into the data, some themes were found not to be as strong as initially thought. An

additional sub-theme was also developed about potentially disordered food choices promoted by influencers as it became apparent while writing that this merited an independent discussion. Clarke and Braun (Braun et al., 2019) advocate for analysis that both tells a story through the data and makes an argument for why that story is important to theory. The analysis needs to be rooted in theory because the assumptions of the researcher must be made clear throughout. The process of writing the analysis and developing the themes whilst consistently referring back to the data was challenging and required constant evaluation.

4.7 Justification of claims

As this research addresses a specific context with a set group of people, the results will not be widely generalisable to the wider population (Mathison, 2005a). However, generalisability of social sciences is neither necessary nor desirable as the reseaerch does not suit this kind of knowledge. The validity of the analysis was helped through the cross-checking of data across two sources of data – namely the diaries and interviews – a method of triangulating sources with literature adding a third strand to the analysis and providing further theoretical input (Alaszewski, 2006).

In qualitative research, knowledge “accumulates through lots of small-scale studies, addressing the same topic area, and through that you can start to tell a bigger broader story” (Braun et al., 2019, p. 12). For this study, it was critically important to relate the analysis of the data to the work of other researchers who have published work with transferable similarities to this

research – such as de Solier's (2013) work on Foodies, identity and their engagement with traditional media. Though literature may not fit the circumstances exactly, there were several studies with findings that were relevant and had what Given (2008b) describes as good 'fit' with the data. As the writing progressed, more research on social media influencers has been published and this has strengthened the analaysis. By referring back to literature during analysis, the data was able to shed light on existing preconceptions and assumptions inherent in the body of research around social media influence and food choice and provide evidence around as to when and how these assumptions do not hold true within the particular context of Foodies who use influencers. The research also provided insight into how Foodie food choice differed from existing models and therefore was able to build upon and extend theory by proposing new elements to Furst et al.'s (1996) food choice model which is relevant to Foodies in particular, presented in the analytical framework.

4.7.1 Transferability and fittingness

Lincoln and Guba (2009) suggest generalisability is a flawed and out-dated concept to apply to any research because:

- The world is not a perfect machine and so there is no singular programme or code to describe the world or any phenomenon in it;
- Any attempt to succinctly explain any phenomenon or part of the world will be subject to various explanations relative to where focus is placed;
- Changes to time and context change any generalisation as nothing in this world is free from change or decay;

- Most laws used to describe the natural world will have exceptions (with very few exceptions such as gravity) which make a universal application impossible.

Naturalistic generalisations were introduced by Lincoln and Guba (1985) as an alternative to positivist's favouring of 'rules'. All generalisations attempt to deepen understanding by allowing knowledge to be transferred from one population of interest to another, but naturalistic generalisations require the researcher to clearly set out the study in such a way that others can easily understand the full setting of the research while also making 'priority points', which conclusions are most important for the context and population, clear (Mills, Durepos, & Wiebe, 2010b). Naturalistic generalisations consider the exception to the rule as seriously as the rule itself, and consider context and personal characteristics as important as propositions (Lincoln & Guba, 2009). Under this paradigm, universal rules are not assumed. Instead, transferability must be determined by how well the context fits other contexts through a thick description of both by the researcher (Hellström, 2008). This is important when communicating results so that fittingness of conclusions to other contexts can be judged by readers. In order for transferability and fittingness to be valid, it follows that good understanding of the context of studies used as sources in the analysis also be demonstrated in order to lead to valid conclusions, and so where important, context of literature applied to analysis is presented.

Lincoln and Gruba (2009) later dismissed naturalistic generalisation as too far divorced from the established canon of generalisation as a scientific concept. Hellström (2008) advocates for the position that naturalistic generalisation and the concepts of transferability and fittingness are well

rooted in the scientific traditions from Aristotle and Hume's epistemological principles, and are therefore valid science. Aristotle differentiated between essential properties which is key to defining everything of a type and essential to its classification of that type and universal properties which everything of a certain kind might not necessarily have, thus undermining the concept of absolute generalisability (Hellström, 2008). Meanwhile, Hellström (2008) holds up Hume's assertion that generalisations are not necessarily present in nature to undermine a positivist and absolutist understanding of knowledge.

> "It is said that a Chinese philosopher, upon being asked whether it is possible to cross the same river twice, replied that it is not possible to cross the same river even once! Constant flux militates against conclusions that are always and forever true; they can only be said to be true under such and such conditions and circumstances."
>
> (Lincoln & Guba, 2009)

If, as Hume asserts, generalisations are actually in the minds of humans as part of a tendency to impose rules upon nature whilst seeking to understand the natural world, then fittingness and transferability are in fact far more rational means to assess knowledge.

4.8 Limitations of the approach

Much research into social media influencers and influence takes place within online environments with this approach having been established through digital ethnographic methods (Kozinets, 2002; Ranfagni, Guercini, & Camiciottoli, 2014). By choosing to study Foodies in their homes, this study sacrificed a closer look at how Foodies behaved online for how their online habits affect their offline habits. A mixed methods study that was able to link

both the offline habits and online habits of respondents over a longer time period would better link the insights offered on how consumers use influencer content with how they consume and interact with that content.

As a cross-sectional study, data was collected for this research in a short timeframe. This ruled out the possibility of gathering data until saturation was achieved. Other methods were employed to determine appropriate sample size, and these were discussed and justified earlier in this chapter, but data saturation is a very popular and commonly prescribed means to justify sample size in qualitative research (Bryman, 2012; Marshall et al., 2013). Given the ever changing nature of technology and the dynamic social worlds created online, the motivations for how users make use of online spaces is arguably more important than technological changes (Kapoor et al., 2018). While the ways in which Foodies are influenced by social media influencers may be infinite, particularly as online platforms and how people interact with and within them continue to change, the motivations for engaging with these influencers for food choice are arguably less subject to frequent change. The strengths of the chosen approach can also be perceived as its weakness – choosing a cross-sectional interpretivist method allowed for a rich understanding from multiple perspectives, but these are limited to a particular time, location and cultural context (Abma & Stake, 2014).

CHAPTER 5: Findings and Discussion

This chapter presents the collected data about the influence of social media influencers and food choice. Following coding of the data from participant interviews and diaries, thematic analysis was applied. The following themes were generated from the data:

Theme	Subthemes
5.1 The magnificent mundane: making food choice easier and more enjoyable	5.1.1 My online cookbook: food-spiration from new sources
	5.1.2 Helping with the weekly shop and creative meal planning
	5.1.3 Lust-worthy: satisfying boredom and prolonging enjoyment
	5.1.4 Accessible skills: inspiring confidence in the kitchen
5.2 'Good' food: how Foodies use influencers to negotiate food values	5.2.1 Food values and philosophies
	5.2.2 Fresh goodness nurturing the virtuous body
	5.2.3 Meat and two veg: the value of tradition
	5.2.4 Flexitarianism and cutting out meat
	5.2.5 Superfoods: curiosity and cult
	5.2.6 Comparative disappointment: unattainable standards of food presentation
5.3 Foodie identities: exploring self and food through influencers	5.3.1 Developing independence and Foodie-ism
	5.3.2 Identity congruence and trust
	5.3.3 Parenthood: feeding children well
	5.3.4 Learning to eat again following grief and loss
	5.3.5 Eat like me: emerging Foodie archetypes
5.4 The limits and perils of influencer influence	5.4.1 Ineffective brand advocates for products
	5.4.2 Foodie lurker behaviour
	5.4.3 Moving on: when influencers annoy Foodies
	5.4.4 Dangerous narratives: normalising orthorexia nervosa and demonising foods

Table 6: Themes interpreted from the data

5.1 The magnificent mundane: making food choice easier and more enjoyable

Influencers form part of a wider foodscape for the Foodies, but they are one of the easier to access and use sources and so are gaining in popularity. *"I've read lots of cookery blogs and cookery books over recent years and to be honest, I think I just take from all the things, the things that I like most from them"* (Olive, interview). At times influencers offer functional benefits not commonly offered by other sites – such as recipes with variations for common allergens or a food app that not only helps plan meals, but also helps procure food. The Foodies make use of the functionality of social media already for food choices – preferring online sources to conventional recipe books - and added functional benefits offered by particular influencers are especially appreciated when they make routine food planning and procurement easier. *"I actually really like the app because you can bookmark things and then you can send the recipes to yourself in a shopping list"* (Olive, interview). Despite an inconsistent lack of recognition on the part of the Foodies at how influencers affected the foods they bought and prepared, influencers were inspiring food choice. Foodies used influencers to find inspiration for foods with which Foodies are already familiar, and to find new foods while learning how to use these foods. Some Foodies also reported enjoyment when consuming influencer posts, turning to food media produced by influencers for entertainment. *"I spent a good forty minutes with [colleague] just showing her pictures of cookies and she would show me pictures of cakes"* (Pepper, interview).

5.1.1 My online cookbook: food-spiration from new sources

Social media influencers are one of a plethora of sources for food inspiration for the Foodies. Cook books and cooking shows have proven popular for information, entertainment and influencing food trends (Declercq et al., 2019; Johnston & Bauman, 2015; Tominc, 2013), however many respondents in this research professed a preference for finding recipes online. *"I go to the web faster than I go for [cookbooks] – and I pay money for them so why aren't I using them?"* (Colby, interview). The dynamic, multimedia content online combined with the search ability provided by search engines are impossible to duplicate in book format (E. Edwards, 2004), and social media apps such as Reddit and Pinterest allow users to capture content in a self-edited collection of content from a wide variety of authors. On Pinterest, Bran (interview) reported *"constant feeds of ever refreshing [recipes]... a lot of them the same, a lot of them slightly different"*. The functionality of social media as an effective content distribution system and the huge variety of content on this communication channel makes it a preferred site for the Foodie quest for new foods, and this preference for online benefits influencers.

There were several stated reasons for preferring influencers to other sources online; there was congruence between the influencer identity and the Foodies' identity (explored later in this chapter); the influencers provided unique entertainment value (explored later); and the influencer offered functional benefits beyond what are offered on other sites. For instance, one respondent made regular use of a particular site because the blogger provided variations of recipes. *"... she always has alternatives... a lot of her*

things are vegetarian or nut free... I can use her quite easily" (Quince, interview). This was particularly useful for this respondent as she already catered for various food preferences in her household, a dairy-free child and a husband who preferred vegan foods. The blogger's site offered alternative recipes for different sauces and toppings, mirroring what the respondent already does at home. Additional functionality can help websites attract and maintain attention of visitors (Chiang, Huang, & Huang, 2010). This costs time and money to achieve (Barnes et al., 2012), but if the functionality fits with how users already cook, and if enough users benefit to justify the investment, it may become a source of differentiation that leads to followership as it did for Quince.

Respondents reported finding and viewing food-related content from influencers via sites other than the blogs or personal webpages of the influencers. When looking for recipes from sites such as Pinterest or Facebook, respondents reported not always being familiar with who had posted the recipes. Rosemary (interview) described having found out about spelt pasta *from "one of those sites [blogs]... I can't remember which one"*. It was not uncommon for Foodies to find bloggers based on recipe searches for specific food.

> *"I used a cake I found back in January, that I know is awesome... I've never looked at any other recipes on her page! I came across this recipe via Pinterest."*
>
> (Clementine, diary)

Social networks have been reported to 'pool' content and people together topically, allowing users to access content and information without ever having to contact or even note the author (Trier & Richter, 2015). Rosemary

and Bran both reported noticing influencers after they had come up several times on their Pinterest boards. *“Amelia Freer (didn’t even know it was her until I checked where the recipes on my Pinterest board were coming from)”* (Rosemary, diary). This indicates that far from being recognised brands in their own right, many influencers may have popular posts which are popular because they fit a popular search category and the Foodies might not recognise the influencer. The Foodies appeared to enjoy being introduced to new sources. *“I always want to try new recipes, and new things”* (Clementine, interview). “*New recipe alert!!! … partner found this on the internet and saved to her Pinterest and shared to mine… Ability to find and share recipes via internet is genius!”* (Bran, diary).

Self-branding has long been reported as a means to be effective on social networks (Hasgall, 2013), and employing traditional branding practices to an online presence has been reported as an effective means to gather followers (Khamis, Ang, & Welling, 2017). Furthermore, some authors define influencers as those who engage in self-branding activities (Dhanesh & Duthler, 2019; Khamis et al., 2017), and so there is a disconnect between how the literature says influencer influence works, and how the Foodies are finding and noticing influencers. For the Foodies in this study, the influencers they found and used for food choice were not always well-known personalities or recognised by them. The way in which participants were finding and using influencers would indicate that a brand is not necessary to attract Foodies. While a number of followers undoubtedly helped popular influencers feature on the feeds of respondents, they were not always then recognised by the Foodies.

Followership is defined as a sustained and engaged interest in a particular site or individual (Bakker, 2018), and other than a couple of favoured sites, it was rare for Foodies to actively follow influencers. The influence of social media influencers on Foodies was complex, but many of their stated benefits were tied to the functionality of the internet. Publishers are no longer perceived to be the sole gatekeepers of quality information (Deiuliis, 2015), and this is due in no small part to the convenience and variety offered online. Because of the internet a plethora of information, *"menus, recipes are at our fingertips now"* (Reuben, interview). This makes it easy for influencers to publish and for many influencers to be found, but difficult for influencers to differentiate themselves.

5.1.2 Helping with the weekly food shop and creative meal planning

Respondents used menu planning for weekly food choices and influencers were being used to make food choice and procurement easier and more enjoyable. *"For me [following influencers is] a basis to get ideas"* (Dill interview). Most of the respondents reported making use of blogs (Brie, Rosemary, Bran, Olive, Clementine) while planning or doing shopping. *"I looked online for inspiration/ideas for this week's meals so I can do an online Tesco shop"* (Clementine, diary). Previous research reported similar behaviour among mothers in the United States who took cook books or magazines with them when food shopping (Mccabe & de Waal Malefyt, 2015). When asked what influenced weekly meals, Clementine (diary) identified herself as the single biggest influence on food choice and identified her drive to find and try new foods as a result of a desire to not eat the same meals too many times because *"I get bored"*. Creativity in the kitchen can

make routine tasks more enjoyable and imbue mundane tasks with symbolic value (De Solier, 2013; Mccabe & de Waal Malefyt, 2015). The Foodies sought out new influencers for creative inspiration and this helped make mundane utilitarian tasks more enjoyable.

There was only one instance where a Foodie bought something from an influencer, and this was an app from a blog. When discussing the purchase, Olive (interview) confessed *"I really find food planning a real drain... I'd probably say weekly I'd have a peruse [of blogs] for recipes while I'm sitting down to do my online shop*". Olive spent money on a blogger app because it helped her find inspiration, plan meals, and populated a shopping list all on one platform. The app helped her lighten the mental load of planning and managing food choices for her family. She reported finding the app *"... useful when sitting breastfeeding"* (Olive, interview). Social media influencers challenge existing branded sources of information, such as BBC's Good Food, when they can offer additional benefits such as populating grocery lists. Previous research has found higher followership in individuals who use social media for purposes other than connection with family and friends (Carlson & Lee, 2015), and this research has found Foodies are more likely to return to influencers continually if they offer new ideas and entertainment and/or functional benefits helping Foodies to perform food choice and preparation.

When planning meals on an ad hoc basis, many respondents reported enjoying the ability to make ingredient-led searches for recipes online.

> *"you go into that cupboard at the tail end of a weekend and you go "oh, I've got all these vegetables that I've got to use up. What am I*

> *going to do?" Parsnip. Into the internet. There you go – bing – there's a recipe for parsnip soup"*
>
> (Reuben, interview)

Previous research has identified adaptation suggestions – small variations to commonly prepared foods - as highly popular on social media (Steils & Obaidalahe, 2020). This kind of recommendation which adapts familiar foods, often without the use of a recipe, takes very little effort to understand, try and integrate. *"I like pasta... they [food blogger] made pasta with smoky bacon in it... I'll make my own pasta sauce and put in some smoky bacon"* (Reuben, interview). Foodies used influencers to find new ways to use foods they already enjoyed. *"I love the ideas that [food bloggers] generate, I would have never thought of a savoury crumble, but it was fantastic"* (Olive, diary). Research among Foodie movements in Europe has found a common interest among Foodies and professional chefs in returning to common ingredients, such as vegetables, to promote a more sustainable interest in good food (Schösler & Boer, 2018). Ease of use for Influencer content was important to the Foodies and proves posts need not be transformational or entirely original to garner interest.

In addition to making regular food choice more enjoyable and creative, the functionality of social media was allowing Foodies to share food work and food inspiration from influencers with others. Domestic food work is being embraced by both males and females as was evidenced by an active interest in home cooking by all respondents. Reuben (interview) enjoyed following a slow cooker microblog because *"you can take a cheap cut of meat and turn it into something special"*. Bran and his partner were very advanced in their use of social media, using Pinterest to share recipes remotely and plan

dinners together. *“It’s a democratic process... if I come back and [say], “hi honey, I’m home – what’s for dinner?” the chances are that I’ll probably have had to pick up ingredients for it on the way home anyway, or we’d already have planned it out”* (Bran, interview). Previous research has shown that domestic food work is often depicted in an idealised way, as a way to perform femininity assuming access to finances and time to cook (Rodney et al., 2017). While this research did not delve into gender differences, it did find evidence that men were taking an active interest and role in planning, procuring and managing (albeit to a lesser extent than female partners) food in the home.

Feeding oneself and others involves a lot of work, including learning about nutrition, technical kitchen skills, learning food preferences of others, shopping for ingredients, preparing foods and maintaining a clean kitchen (Flagg, Kisakha, Kilgore, & Locher, 2013). While the Foodies in this study were highly engaged with food and interested in trying new foods, the weekly food shop was still unanimously reported as being a chore. Foodies used influencers while shopping and meal planning to help make decisions easier and more enjoyable. Engaging with social media about food was an act of inspiration and productive leisure – seeking out recipes to produce as an enjoyable but productive activity (De Solier, 2013). Engagement with influencers as a source of inspiration is congruent with the Foodie archetype as an individual who enjoys food as a pleasurable part of their lifestyle (Johnston & Bauman, 2015). Creativity requires mental effort. By combining online shopping and influencer inspiration, the tasks of meal preparation and

grocery shopping become more efficient and enjoyable for the Foodies whilst also providing them with new ideas to try.

5.1.3 Lust-worthy: satisfying boredom and prolonging enjoyment

Looking at food on social media was reported by several Foodies as either an enjoyable form of entertainment or a means to ease boredom. When discussing which bloggers she follows, Pepper (interview) spoke with animation and excitement about several blogs before declaring *"Oh man, I'll just send you some links to the ones I really like!"* #foodporn has been reported as a tag used when social media users either want to show off their cooking skills or entice others to desire a food (Vaterlaus et al., 2015). Foodies often turned to influencers to lust after food. Reuben (diary) described being bored with daily sandwiches and spending his lunch reading *"a Facebook post about a steak restaurant"*, which then prompted him to have steak later in the week. Previous research has found that online sharing of food images increases a desire to consume (Kozinets et al., 2017). The Foodies often made use of social media to eat vicariously through the internet. Viewing foodporn encouraged spontaneity in the Foodies – particularly those who were hedonistic about food choice. Pepper (interview) was highly influenced by what she saw online *"I've seen this, I want to try this, I'm going to get that and cook it"*. Looking at food can provoke the desire for food (Spence et al., 2016), and the Foodies confirmed this.

The Foodies reported retaining memories, often of higher fat foods, they had seen online for a long time and these memories then affected food choice over time. *"I had the most fabulous peperoni and blue cheese pizza... the choice based on one I had seen on Edible Edinburgh Instagram Food a*

few weeks earlier" (Dill, diary). Social media is providing visual triggers to consume calorie-rich foods (Charry & Tessitore, 2021; L. K. Hawkins et al., 2020; Spence et al., 2016). In some cases, the Foodies reported an immediate desire to eat foods they had seen online, at other times they used influencers to increase desire for a food they will enjoy later as a special treat. *"I religiously follow her [London-based food blogger] because she eats at the most incredible restaurants... when I went down to London... we went to two of the restaurants that she recommended"* (Pepper, interview). Eating good food was often reported as a pleasurable reward, and one which Foodies liked to consider and plan. *"Got a few birthday parties coming up... will definitely save this [dessert recipe] ... to take to party as a special treat for Son"* (Quince, diary). Foodies reported using influencers to not only guide their choices, but also to prolong the pleasure of food by having something to anticipate.

The Foodies reported following influencers and viewing content as a form of entertainment. *"I really like her blog, I find it engaging and funny"* (Clementine, diary). Colby reported watching and even re-watching food vlogger videos with her partner. She listed several bloggers and vloggers she follows and stated, *"I just like watching things"* (Colby, interview). In his spare time Reuben (diary) reads about food online via *"a Facebook page"*. Social media is a very visual medium and social media influencers take time and care to present content online (Khamis et al., 2017). *"Beautiful food photography, beautiful recipes... I'm a big fan"* (Olive, interview). The time and effort that goes into food photography and visual presentation for influencers is on par with some professionally produced food media (Fitch,

2017). "*That's probably quite a big thing is the fact that they're really kind of good to watch, it's not half-hearted"* (Colby, interview). The Foodies reported regularly watching content from particular influencers. *"Watched Nutritionfacts.org video... I watch most of their videos"* (Rosemary, diary). Foodies were using influencers as a form of entertainment.

Traditional publishing companies have long claimed higher production values are attractive to readers and that this is something influencers would struggle to achieve (Guenther, 2011). Contrary to claims, the ability to produce quality content is available to influencers and valued very highly by some of their audience as a form of entertainment. Boredom has been found to be a powerful emotional trigger to eat (Koball, Meers, Storfer-Isser, Domoff, & Musher-Eizenman, 2012), and the findings of this research support this. The Foodies in this study linked boredom with social media influencers which in turn led to a desire to eat – and this desire was either immediately fulfilled or became a means to prolong the enjoyment of food. Previous research has found that when viewing food, the brain is predisposed to pay more attention to higher fat foods (Spence et al., 2016), and viewing unhealthy food choice is more powerful an influence than healthy food choice (Cruwys et al., 2015; L. K. Hawkins et al., 2020). For many of the Foodies, this proved true. Foodies reported paying attention to higher fat foods, with pizza being reported more than once as a food they had seen online and then desired by Reuben, Dill and Bran.

5.1.4 Accessible skills: inspiring confidence in the kitchen

Although all of the Foodies in the study were passionate about food, not all felt confident making food. When writing about a recipe, Quince (diary)

commented *"Looks easy enough, even I could make it ☺ Saved".* Influencers make food skills more accessible and less intimidating for Foodies.

> *"It's a life skill, you know? Being able to cook properly... it is actually an important one...I think he's [popular influencer] shown ... it's easy. It's just about getting in and getting your hands dirty and giving it a go."*
>
> (Bran, interview)

Bran made use of influencer recipes so much that he was able to recite them from memory. *"Salmon caprese: A Joe Wicks recipe that has become a firm favourite... done it so much its hardwired now"* (Bran, diary). Bran had also gained enough knowledge to be able to critically reflect on recipes. *"... partner found this [blogger recipe] on the internet... tasted good, but could do with refining"* (Bran, diary). Some Foodies picked up strategies for making food choices and food preparation more efficient. *"We do a large joint, so we'll cook a whole joint of beef, or a whole lamb leg, and we'll make lots of different dishes from that"* (Brie, interview). Other respondents reported making use of influencers to get ideas for how to improvise with food. *"I don't tend to follow their recipes, it's more I watch their videos and get ideas from it"* (Colby, interview). Not only are influencers helping Foodies with basic food learning, such as understanding how foods are put together and applying this knowledge to meals, but they are also enabling higher cognitive skills such as the ability to evaluate meals and create new meals (Bloom, 1956).

Videos were particularly important for learning, as they allow the process of cooking to be observed. *"I learnt to poach eggs through a video on a YouTube channel"* (Colby, diary). Influencers were even reported as making recipes easier to follow than other sources. *"There's another girl [blogger]... she used to take recipes from... celebrity cookbooks and adapt*

them so they're a bit more user friendly" (Clementine, interview). When discussing how she loves a particular blog's approach to food, Olive (diary) explains *"...they mention how much they love yoghurt... they explain they would love to eat more coconut yoghurt but that it is too expensive to do regularly"*. By including more information and giving more context to food choices, influencers allow respondents to see and evaluate the thought processes behind food choices and this allows more variables such as cost and effort to be considered. Foodies can see the value negotiations of influencers and this helps inform their own value negotiations. When describing a video series where a vlogger selected a few items from her fridge and then made a meal, Colby (interview) said *"... it's quite a good way to watch someone else cook... see how people think about food and how to put it together"*. Food blogs offer a contrast to expert sources in that their amateur nature has been reported to provide a sense of freedom to Foodies (De Solier, 2013). By describing the wider process behind cooking, Foodies felt they learned more from influencers.

Most of the Foodies enjoyed being able to cook spontaneously. When discussing an influencer who cooks from her garden, Pepper (interview) expressed appreciation for the influencer's ability to use what was growing in her allotment: "*... everything's always quite straight-forward, there's no kind of complicated processes: ...: "I picked this this morning, I just kind of fancied a snack" ".* Challenging themselves to make meals with foods that were available was a recurring theme among Foodies. Spontaneity in the kitchen requires creativity, skills and knowledge (Mccabe & de Waal Malefyt, 2015), and the Foodies recognised this. *"[Meals have] changed in line with our*

cookery skills... we're able to make far more from scratch" (Brie, interview). The Foodies reported turning to influencers to learn skills that they could apply for themselves. *"I'll read up on techniques for what I enjoy doing"* (Reuben, interview). The Foodies turned to influencers to learn skills and techniques that they could then incorporate to foods they would prepare without recipes.

Cooking from scratch is a highly valued skill that requires time, money and good time management skills (Wolfson et al., 2016). The Foodies were making use of influencers to learn skills and to learn by seeing how others managed food. Improvisation has previously been reported as a result of consuming mass material media about food (De Solier, 2013) and the Foodies in this study confirmed consuming influencer content was one way in which they had developed enough skills and knowledge in the kitchen to be able to improvise. Influencer videos are less produced than celebrity chefs as many bloggers cannot compete with high production values (Guenther, 2011). Far from being a weakness, the respondents seemed to appreciate seeing the process less choreographed and explained in more detail. The respondents reported enjoyment while exploring and preparing foods at home and took pride in being able to produce good food, which re-enforces the concept that consumption, when it is tied to identity making and enactment, can be more enjoyable (Cairns & Johnston, 2015). The respondents in this research confirmed that via influencers they are learning not just skills, but also the ability to cook creatively.

5.1.5 The magnificent mundane: section summary

Foodies expressed a preference for online sources over traditional cookbooks when searching for new recipes. Sometimes influencers were able to offer functional benefits beyond other sites which led to Foodies following those individuals loyally, but followership of individual influencers was rare and most Foodies enjoyed finding new influencers. Despite an emphasis in literature around differentiation online, self-branding for influencers did not always appear to be effective. Foodies found influencers because of pooled content, not always recognising the names of who they followed. *"It's usually just a case of if I see things [from blogs and micro-blogs] that pop up because I've liked other things"* (Pepper, interview). Far from being focused on developing a cult of their own personalities, the influencers who hold attention of Foodies blend personal narrative with food discussions. This allows Foodies to observe the influencer's process for choosing and making foods which makes the thought process behind food choice visible. "*I also love the way that [bloggers] have a pragmatic yet beautiful approach to their work"* (Olive, diary).

Foodies turn to influencers because they make routine food choice more enjoyable and have become a source of entertainment in their own right. *I just like watching things… just someone filming, like vlogging essentially what they've had to eat"* (Colby, Interview). The format of the influencer content (videos and detailed images) and the information in the content (featuring elements of narrative), allow Foodies to develop skills and knowledge whilst also witnessing the value negotiations of influencers. While traditional meals were being embraced, traditional values around domesticity

as a feminine domain were slowly changing to value egalitarianism and collaboration. Domestic food work has been reported as being embraced as part of masculinity in other countries (Klasson & Ulver, 2015). This research found that traditional values around who prepares authentic foods is slowly changing with both men and women embracing domestic food work. This research confirmed that food blogs present “normative culinary ideals”, which feature food and recipes while their narratives imbue deeper values and ideals about what the matter and practice of food means (Rodney et al., 2017).

Influencers are having a big impact on food choice, but the impact of individual influencers is not always recognised by Foodies as the recommendations come in the form of recipes. Therefore the influence of individual influencers was not as strong as the cumulative influence of several influencers integrating the same ingredients into recipes across sites.

5.2 ‘Good’ food: how Foodies use influencers to negotiate food values

For the Foodies in the study, food choice is heavily influenced by, and used to reflect their values. Food in the home played an important part of family life and food negotiations were often tied up with value negotiations. Content online is often targeted at users based on psychographic profiles and influencers have very clearly defined food values and philosophies (see Appendix 1 for a table of influencers respondents followed with their core value propositions). Previous research has suggested Foodies be targeted by marketers using celebrities to make healthy foods appear more

fashionable (Moons, Barbarossa, & Pelsmacker, 2018). The emphasis on healthy foods by celebrity chefs such as Jamie Oliver has established wellness through diet as a trend which is effectively popularised by celebrities and has become popular among influencers and Foodies alike (Johnston & Goodman, 2015; Lewis & Huber, 2015). The idea that food affects health is established as common knowledge in Western countries (de Moraes Prata Gaspar, Garcia, & Larrea-Killinger, 2020), and there were many instance where the Foodies discussed impact of foods on the body. Quince (diary) talked about Japanese food not making her *"feel gross after"*. Rosemary (diary) declared she had to give up wheat because she was "*3 lbs heavier the next morning after this food".* Influencers promote particular food and ways of eating as healthy without any evidence other than anecdotal accounts of their own experiences. Despite this – and perhaps because of it – food influencers are exerting influence on food choices.

The Foodies reported influencers further fuelling an interest in healthier lifestyle choices and this justifies the use of influencers to promote healthy food choice. *"Joe Wicks... has his own regime combining foods with exercise... loads on blogs and Pinterest"* (Bran, diary). These values appeal to Foodies and help contextualise food trends for the individual. For instance, many of the Foodies reported following a new trend, making *"energy balls and things with dates"* (Rosemary, interview), as a way to snack. Rosemary was following this trend as a vegan substitute for buttery and manufactured snacks, Pepper used these balls to ensure enough energy for her training, and Brie turned to them as a healthy reduced carbohydrate diet snack. It is accepted knowledge that food choice and patterns are influenced by the

wider consumption-related practices within established social structures (Klasson & Ulver, 2015). Social media influencers proved to be part of the wider influences on food choice sharing consumption-related practices, and they are forming part of the media landscape through which food choices are influenced and consensus around which values qualify food as good and desirable is reached.

5.2.1 Food values and philosophies

When deciding how to eat, maintaining control of their own food values was important to the Foodies, and while the Foodies reported being influenced by influencers many expressed well-defined values. *"He [coach she hired for her training] pushed the paleo thing for a little while, but... I don't like to limit myself"* (Pepper, interview). Where Foodies followed influencer guidance and suggestions, it was often because of practical reasons, with choices that were easily incorporated into the Foodies existing patterns. *"I don't have a problem with dairy... everything in moderation – but I do like nut milks... they taste nice and they're quite useful to be able to make if we run out of normal milk"* (Olive, interview). Social media has been identified as a facilitator and not imposer of food choices (Choudhary et al., 2019), and the Foodies confirmed this to an extent. Other influences – such as family, friends, practical considerations and financial restraints - were clearly important in shaping how the Foodies ate and what they considered to be good food and good eating practices.

Food and eating are dynamic in nature, changing as individual, social, cultural and economic meanings change (Luomala, 2005). The youngest respondent in this study, Colby, was by far the most easily influenced

respondent. Her experimentation with vegetarianism and veganism – which are balanced against the needs of others she eats with – suggest she is still negotiating values. Colby (interview) described her diet as being in *"a transition phase at the moment"* she has moved back home before going on a year abroad for university. University students have been identified as those who explore new foods while also not being as good at evaluating sources (Lioutas, 2014). Colby's unquestioning adoption of influencer suggestions and equally quick abandonment of new values was indicative of her stage in life. Many Foodies had clearly considered their food choices deeply and some were able to articulate philosophies around these choices. "*Life's for living... if you enjoy something then why deny yourself... I'm happy that we buy good quality food, that I eat fairly healthy during the week and that allows me the opportunity to have a wee blow out at the weekend"* (Reuben, interview). The Foodies were turning to social media influencers for inspiration and to learn about new foods, but the older Foodies tended to have very set values around what food means and how it fits with their lives.

For the Foodies in this study, food choice was something to be carefully considered and weighed against sometimes conflicting values. Social media influencers were playing a role in helping Foodies negotiate values and choose foods that fit with their pre-existing beliefs about what makes good food. While many of the Foodies had fairly set values around food, they enjoyed learning about how others valued food and at times used the information from influencers to evaluate and confirm their own values.

> *"I always choose the soy cream over dairy… I'm pretty sure the fat in it is better for us. I don't think I picked this up from a food*

blog, if anything lots of food bloggers seem anti soy at the moment as it is artificial."

(Olive, diary)

Influencers were good sources of information about the food values of others because they engage in stance taking around food values. The narrative and personal nature of blogs make them ideal sites for bloggers to participate in self-presentation while developing stances (Rahimpour, 2014). The Foodies were embracing not only the recipes and patterns of eating of the influencers, but also picking up on how they ate on principle. *"We're kind of – not doing Jo Wicks, but it's inspired by his kind of stuff… balanced and healthy*" (Bran, interview). Bran then went on to describe how he and his partner balanced their meals over the week and chose foods that were in line with the values expressed by Jo Wicks and other influencers they follow. The respondents reported making use of the stances of bloggers to evaluate, negotiate, and define their own food values.

5.2.2 Fresh goodness nurturing the virtuous body

Many of the Foodies were pre-occupied with the concept that eating well means eating for wellness and sought to balance hedonism with restraint. Gradual and personalised changes to exercise and diet are recognised as an effective way to ensure long-term health (Jakicic et al., 2012; NHS, 2021). Bran described a vegetarian meal of roasted vegetables inspired by an influencer as *"a nice, fresh dinner and given the party excess of the weekend, a meal to put one on an even keel... it really put goodness back into me!"* (Bran, diary). The concepts of 'freshness' and 'goodness' re-occurred in interviews. Pepper followed bloggers who put an emphasis on home grown foods and how to prepare them:

> *"They have an allotment which they keep all year round. So their food is heavily influenced by what's in season... Quite fresh, really healthy."*
>
> (Pepper, interview)

The concept of 'fresh' was regularly applied to foods that were not only good for the body, but also appealing to the senses. Luomala (2005) identified three ways to solve value negotiations between health and hedonism suggesting that (1) desirable foods could be redeveloped to become healthier, (2) healthy foods could be redeveloped to be more desirable, or (3) to investigate if rebalancing the attributes of foods to appeal to consumers could be a means to change preferences. The Foodies who regularly read influencers who are focused on health tend to find and frame healthy foods not only as nutritious, but also delicious and appealing. In this case, the foods here were not changed, but the narrative around healthy foods has.

Bran and Olive both also used the term "goodness" while discussing how they enjoyed influencers who incorporated vegetables into foods and framed them as both enjoyable and nutritious. *"I'm quite taken with a beetroot chocolate cake found on the green kitchen blog... [I] like the idea of putting vegetables in a cake, getting extra goodness into hidden places in food"* (Olive, diary). Influencers were helping Foodies embrace healthy foods by finding inventive ways to prepare them. Olive reported making *"pea and almond soup.... like the idea of raw soup and just blending everything... something I have been inspired to do by blogs"* (Olive, diary). Previous research has found that as long as unhealthy food is presented as socially desirable (e.g. sharing a take-away or the normalisation of drinking alcohol socially) healthy food will be less marketable, and evidence suggests eating

unhealthily is more socially desirable (Charry & Tessitore, 2021). The stated preference of most respondents for eating freshly prepared meals with an emphasis on fresh vegetables demonstrates influencers are successfully presenting healthy foods as highly desirable. Foodies stated a preference for fresh, colourful foods that included vegetables.

Although many of the respondents expressed contentment with their food choices, there was still evidence of guilt. Clementine (Interview) does not follow a diet saying, *"I should, but I don't"* (Clementine, interview). Social media is a popular sight for aspirational/motivational posts about healthy foods and diets (Vaterlaus et al., 2015), and this puts social pressure on those involved to eat a certain way in order to look a certain way (Fixsen et al., 2020). Clementine was the only respondent who reported following influencers who blogged specifically about weight loss. Weight loss bloggers often blog for accountability – to share their process and goals with readers (Leggatt-Cook & Chamberlain, 2012). Pepper also counted calories, but she was concerned about eating enough calories to balance against her training. *"With the running, the swimming and the cycling, carbohydrates tend to feature quite high in my diet... I put cashew nuts in quite a lot cause they're quite a good source of fat"* (Pepper, interview). Several respondents – Pepper, Rosemary and Olive – mentioned nuts as *"good fats"*. Rosemary was especially concerned about eating foods that were nutritious despite calory count *"because not all calories are created equally"* (Rosemary, interview). Caring for oneself properly through good food has become a duty and means to control the body to fit into socially acceptable shape (Johnston & Goodman, 2015). Most of the respondents in this study were less

concerned about the shape of their bodies and more concerned with their health – only Clementine and Brand mentioned weight loss as a goal. Influencers re-enforced and perpetuated beliefs and attitudes about what it meant to eat good food and how best to care for the body.

Certain trends, such as eating seasonal and local produce, appear to be impacting Foodie choice, but so are long established social norms around caring for the body by maintaining a slim figure. Even if Foodies did not mention body shape, that does not necessarily mean that was not part of their evaluation of what a healthy body is. Social norms are effective influences on food choice when individuals identify with the others in a group around which a social norm is present (Liu et al., 2019). For Clementine, the other mother bloggers she followed ate calory restricted diets in order to achieve and/or maintain slim figures. But Clementine's guilt around not eating a certain way is indicative of an extrinsic motivation – something she feels she 'should' be doing but has little motivation to do (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Individual's whose motivations are self-determined (intrinsic motivation) feel they are acting in a way that is reflective of their true selves (Hagger & Chatzisarantis, 2009). For those Foodies who embraced the terms of "fresh" and "goodness", healthy foods were reported as desirable – something they wanted to eat not only for health but also for enjoyment. When they are intrinsically motivated, people are more likely to enjoy and continue behaviours (Ryan & Deci, 2006). This research found evidence that influencers are perpetuating the concept that foods have different values and virtues. They perpetuate unhelpful narratives around foods being a source of

guilt and shame, but they are also helping to frame healthy foods as desirable.

5.2.3 Meat and two veg: the value of tradition

Despite literature reporting social media as a means to learn about different cultures (Yen & Dey, 2019), international foods did not feature very prominently in this study. Where foods from other cultures were mentioned, they tended to be examples of cuisine that had long been embraced and assimilated into the British diet. *"I always cook fresh... pasta sauce, or curry with rice"* (Clementine, interview). Dill expressed a preference and appreciation for *"everything he does [influencer] is about good British food... doing it well... classics, roast beef, and Yorkshires"* (Dill, interview). Dill's love for a roast was similar in expression to his nostalgia for his mother's roast dinners. *"It's proper home cooking... definitely not the best food I have had, and bits aren't perfect, but to me there is nothing better"* (Dill, diary). There was a common love for *"a proper meal... meat and two veg"* (Clementine, interview) among those respondents who were not vegetarian. Literature has identified a reverse-snobbery trend in Foodies, where simple foods done well and authentically have become a new form of distinction (Johnston & Bauman, 2015; Paddock, 2015). This research supports the continuation of this trend as Foodies embraced traditional culinary staples with an appreciation for authentic British dishes.

Authenticity of home cooked meals was important for the Foodies, but not for dishes from other cultures. When being introduced to foods from different cultures by their parents, Foodies reported varying degrees of authenticity. *"... there was no Indian food or Chinese food – and then, as the*

eighties emerged... she [mum] started making kormas and stuff... they were nice, but they weren't authentic" (Bran, interview). Authenticity when cooking foods has often been tied to learning to cook original recipes from scratch (Choudhary et al., 2019; Cronin et al., 2014). While Foodies did not express a sustained explicit interest in eating authentically, they did express a desire to cook British staples from scratch. For instance, Dill expressed an appreciation for a baked beans recipe he found via an influencer. He was willing to put in quite a bit of work for this recipe. *"You start with soaked beans... soak it the night before you make it, and then it's three-hours cooking... but it's worth it."* (Dill, interview). Respondents reported being introduced to new foods from co-workers and *"meeting more friends was a big influence in trying types of food"* (Dill, interview). For trying new foods from other cultures, the Foodies reported friends and family as bigger influencers than influencers, but influencers were helping Foodies find recipes for simple foods.

While previous research has focused on the authenticity of food from other cultures as part of Foodie identity (Schösler & Boer, 2018), this research found more emphasis was placed on the Scottish and British food context. Where there were foods from other cultures being embraced, these were either already well-incorporated into the Scottish food landscape or had been introduced by friends and family. So while the Foodies enjoyed being introduced to new foods and flavours by influencers, they appreciated foods that also fit within their existing context. Foodies expressed appreciation for authenticity as it related to traditional British foods, but were predominantly turning to influencers rather than parents for recipes they associated with

British cuisine. The ideas of traditional British cuisine expressed by Foodies were in line with some of the themes identified by Warde (2009) as being part of an emergent British cuisine, particularly as it relates to sourcing foods from gardens/using common vegetables and traditional dishes which the Foodies grew up with.

5.2.4 Flexitarianism and cutting out meat

The assertion from previous research that social media is a good platform for inter-community communication was upheld by the findings among respondents – particularly for those with a strong food-based identity rooted in ethics (Kizgin, Jamal, Dey, & Rana, 2018). Vegan ingredients, such as yeast flakes, were common across pantries of non-carnivores and influencers introduced these foods. *"[Vegan yeast flakes] has a sort of cheesy taste... you can use it over the top of pasta and sauce as a type of cheese... something that I picked up from YouTube"* (Colby, interview). This confirms the assertion by previous research that the vegan community is highly developed (Plante, Rosenfeld, Plante, & Reysen, 2019; Sikka, 2019), and on the surface appears to reaffirm that eating for social and environmental concerns is becoming increasing popular online (Ambrosi, 2018; Simeone & Russo, 2017). Brie (interview) reported storing her food chronologically *"to avoid food waste",* but her main reason for doing this was to save money and make her kitchen easier to manage. Despite mentioning several ethical concerns most of the respondents were not primarily motivated by the ethics of animal wellfare.

Both the male and female respondents expressed an interest in eating less meat, but for several different reasons. Rosemary became vegan after

having "*meant to try it for a month"* (Rosemary, interview). While ethics did motivate Rosemary (diary), this was not the only reason: "*drivers for this are health and the environmental impact of dairy... and meat"* (Rosemary, diary). Bran reported doing meat free Mondays after being introduced to the concept by bloggers. Influencer suggestions helped make it easier for Bran to adopt this pattern of eating, but the concept of a meat free meal was one with which he was already familiar as his mother cooked *"fish on a Friday... just because that's what happened... it's a throwback to the religious thing... one day without meat"* (Bran, interview). Women are often associated with leading changes in purchasing behaviour patterns based on ethical concerns (Ambrosi, 2018; Rosenfeld et al., 2020), but ethics were not the main focus of the meat reducers. The dedicated vegetarians (Rosemary and Quince) were the only ones who mentioned ethics, but this was not their primary motivation for not eating meat. Olive reported finding meat unappealing and being motivated by health, Colby was as swayed by cost as she was by ethics, and Bran was motivated to lose weight for his wedding.

While there was interest in adopting practices associated with eating more ethically, most of the Foodies rejected strict eating practices and identities. Colby's (interview) ethical motives for adopting vegetarianism did not lead to a *"strong enough interest... [not] to eat the same as everyone else".* For Olive, who expressed repulsion at meat, the social implications of becoming vegetarian were what stopped her. *"I think strict diets tend to be a bit alienating in social contexts... I'm never going to go vegetarian, but my preference is always going to be for vegetables"* (Olive, interview). Clementine (interview) confirmed the legitimacy of this fear as she had

stopped inviting a recently turned vegan friend to dinner because "*I'm getting a bit bored of vegetable fajitas without the sour cream and the cheese"* (Clementine, interview). Ethical eating practices are counter-cultural and require effort. Some of the Foodies were ready to commit to these practices and used media to support them through this transition – as in the case of Rosemary's online vegan community and vegan influencers. While ethical concerns were of interest to the Foodies, wider social influences and personal values (particularly sensory appeal, health and nutrition) were often more important.

Acculturation via social media extends beyond culture to include adoption of various ideological ethos (Yen & Dey, 2019). For the Foodies in this study, ethical eating was more likely to be embraced when it included a larger lifestyle change – such as adopting vegetarianism or veganism. Some of the Foodies were turning to social media for support to make larger lifestyle changes. While there were several ethical practices discussed around food (slow food, food waste, environmental concerns), these were rarely embraced by the Foodies and incorporated into their routines. Meat reducers have been identified as a growing group (Malek & Umberger, 2021) and this trend was being embraced with more meat reducers among the respondents than there were vegetarians and vegans. Where larger changes – such as adopting flexitarian, vegetarian, or vegan eating practices – were embraced, these were the result of multiple sources popularising these practices, much like conventional advertising works through repetition to keep products in the minds of consumers (de Chernatony, McDonald, &

Wallace, 2010). This research found the single influencer is not as effective as a cumulative influence for significant change to food choice.

5.2.5 Superfoods: curiosity and cult

One particular category of interest that was widely reported as being effective for influencer recommendations was superfoods. Previous research has linked the rise in the popularity of superfoods and clean eating trends to celebrity blogs (e.g. Gwyneth Paltrow's Goop), social media and influencers (Goodman et al., 2017; Sikka, 2019; Smith, 2020). It was not uncommon for respondents to have typical superfoods such as chia seeds and avocados in their pantries which they had embraced and incorporated into routine food choices. *"The matcha tea powder and the matcha powder [used in smoothies]– come from vegan blogs, or health blogs"* (Rosemary, interview). While other discussions seemed to confirm that social media discourse around superfoods and clean eating may encourage a tense relationship with food (Sikka, 2019). *"And these revolting goji berries... really bitter, and it's a horrible taste"* (Dill, interview). While many of these superfood foods are not supported as healthy by empirical research, the pervasiveness of certain discourse around foods, such as "superfoods" or preparing meals from scratch using whole foods, is compelling evidence that social media is an established communication medium for narratives around food values.

While some respondents were deeply committed to eating for health, and ate healthily by avoiding particular foods, the majority were not. For most respondents, embracing the superfood trend was part of an exploration of new and interesting foods as they value variety and nutritional benefit without sacrificing sensory appeal. *"I'm never really sold on something because of*

health benefit, I'm sold because it looks good" (Pepper, interview). The curious Foodies were keen to try new foods, and this included foods touted for being healthy, but who's benefits were sometimes vaguely understood under the label of 'superfoods. *"Jo Wicks – he's flavour of the month... he and Jamie Oliver tend to do the same thing... Super foods"* (Bran, interview). The superfoods are framed by influencers in such a way that makes these foods appealing. *"I've seen a recipe for the dates from my friend [a blogger] ... you whiz up the almond butter and put it in the dates, instead of eating sweets"* (Brie, interview). Traditionally, healthy foods have been advertised with a focus on information, nutritional benefits and health benefits, while hedonic food advertising has focused on sensory experience, pleasure, indulgence and acting on impulse (Bublitz & Peracchio, 2015). The food influencers are using and communicating about healthy foods in such a way that they are hedonically appealing.

Superfoods were often touted as an easy means to incorporate more nutrition into diets and there was evidence this was working. The prevalence of avocado toast pictures online demonstrate that vegetables are becoming staple breakfast foods.

> *"For breakfast I had avocado and cherry tomatoes on toast. Avocado is something I eat fairly regularly which is probably inspired by its popularity online especially on Instagram. Avocado toast is very trendy... I follow an account called @postyourtoast on Instagram."*
>
> (Colby, diary)

Particularly popular among the Foodies were white flour alternatives. *"Durham wheat pasta... slightly higher fibre than most things"* (Pepper, interview). Foodies reported embracing these foods as much for their

purported health benefits as their taste. Olive (diary) wrote about wanting to try spelt flour as a substitute for wheat flour as she was "*interested to try it for taste if nothing else".* There was scepticism for the health benefits of superfoods. *"... we looked at [blogger recipes] ... the food looks really nice... it's healthy, and kind of good for you – allegedly"* (Bran, interview). Although the reasons for foods becoming popular are complex, this research found that a prevalent motivator for food choice was a combination of curiosity, word-of-mouth and popularity, but that the sensory appeal and nutritional benefits of food were also important.

Those Foodies who are ahead of trends embrace superfoods early, and for those who are less trend-focused, superfoods are so pervasive that they become difficult to ignore. Ingredients typically associated with "clean eating" have become mainstream (Smith, 2020), and the respondents in this study confirm these are being embraced by Foodies. Superfoods are touted for their health benefits and this research found evidence that these foods were familiar to most of the Foodies who ate for health as a valued part of eating well. Goji berries, kale and other foods that are touted more for their nutritional value than outstanding flavour were being tried, and in some cases embraced, by the Foodies, but Foodies valued taste at least as much as health benefits. To be embraced, superfoods had to be appealing to the Foodies not only as nutritionally beneficial, but as appealing to sensory preferences and values. Influencers helped make these foods appealing by teaching Foodies preparation techniques and recipes to practically incorporate them into their diets whilst making them sound and look delicious and enjoyable.

5.2.6 Comparative disappointment: unattainable standards of food presentation

Paying attention to how foods look, and the way foods are presented with a critical eye was something reported by several respondents. *"Smoothie with peanut butter, milk, banana, spinach poured over mashed summer fruits doused with lime... It looks amazing with the contrast of colours"* (Olive, diary). The act of looking at food blogs, and paying attention to how food is presented, appears to be developing the ability and likelihood of respondents critically reviewing the presentation of food both online and offline*. "I was staying in a hotel... I had a selection of fruit as it was visually presented well, and I enjoy fruit"* (Quince diary). One of the respondents even reported following social media to look at beautifully presented food purely for the sake of looking at food. *"It's not so much a how you make it... it's called symmetry breakfast... every morning when they have breakfast... it looks incredible... they lay it out and it looks all pretty..."* (Pepper, interview). Presenting foods that have been excessively styled is typical of food porn (Taylor & Keating, 2018). Influencer presentations of food were appreciated as an art form by Olive, Quince and Pepper, but these respondents were the only ones who commented on the value of the visual presentation of food specifically.

Olive and Quince embraced elevated standards of food presentation in their own cooking. *"I do feel so satisfied if I can make something that looks amazing... when it doesn't look amazing but tastes good... I do still feel some satisfaction, but I prefer it when I manage both."* (Olive, diary). With traditional media, the visual appeal of foods is often over-emphasised, using

images with high production values, while the impact of food on the body is less often discussed (Spence et al., 2016). This research found that the effect of food on the body and quality of food was extremely important to the respondents who cared about visual appeal, and these respondents also happened to be mothers. *"My baked vegetables never look like his [influencer]!!"* (Quince, diary). The term gastro-porn originally referred to food that was presented in such a way to provoke excitement but also leave the viewer with a sense that the food was unachievable (Mejova et al., 2016). Even when these respondents were aware that influencers likely employ a *"very good food photographer"* (Quince, diary), as in the case of high-profile bloggers, it did not stop them from unfavourably comparing their own efforts. Quince and Olive were both interested in the visuals of their foods, nutritional value, quality and trying to present foods in visually appealing ways so their children would appreciate and enjoy them.

Social media posts are self-edited and food bloggers tend to display an idealised version of home cooked meals (Rodney et al., 2017). Foodies have been reported as those who build culinary capital by creating distinction from the masses via two sources: the aesthetic and practical (De Solier, 2013). For most of the Foodies in this study, the aesthetic was not as important as the practical. Some Foodies were prone to negative social comparisons as when Quince and Olive expressed comparative disappointment at how their food looked compared to how influencers presented the same foods. Research suggests that those who are predisposed to negative social comparison offline tend to experience this online as well (D. A. de Vries, Möller, Wieringa, Eigenraam, & Hamelink,

2017). It cannot be assumed that influencers were entirely to blame for the feelings of the respondents who did place a higher value on aesthetics. Visual aesthetics have been reported as one reason followers follow social media influencers (Ki et al., 2020), and being able to produce visually attractive food has been acknowledged as one of the ways in which female food bloggers perform femininity (Rodney et al., 2017). While visual presentation was only remarked upon by female respondents in this study, a study into Foodies in an offline context found both male and female Foodies were concerned with visual presentation of foods, linking pleasing aesthetics with competence. Unlike this research, the published findings of that study did not report feelings of dissatisfaction when foods were not presented well (Schösler & Boer, 2018).

5.2.7 'Good' food: section summary

The Foodies in this study had set values around foods and while they used influencers to learn new things, they were generally true to pre-existing values (e.g. maintaining a balanced diet). Influencers were perpetuating existing values around food, which included guilt around weight gain, but were also helping to make healthy foods appealing for the Foodies and others in their households by presenting them as desirable, e.g., by introducing new ways to prepare fresh vegetables. The Foodies reported an appreciation for traditional British foods cooked well. Established research identifies that discussions around food can impact and change modern identities (Abbots, 2017; Daya, 2016), and the data gathered in this research supports that assertion to an extent. Veganism and vegetarianism were popular among influencers, but harder to adopt as a firm commitment due to

existing social norms. While cumulatively, influencers were having a big impact on ethical food trends such as flexitarianism, individually their influence was heavily mediated by existing values. By following influencers, many Foodies reported being able to cook more creatively as a result of learning about the choices, methods, flavour combinations and skills employed by others.

Based on the data, the following food values were embraced by the Foodies.

Primary Foodie Food Values	
Sensory perceptions / appeal (Furst et al., 1996; Steptoe et al., 1995)	This was a prominent value for the Foodies who love food and prioritise foods they enjoy and that are appealing. Influencers were reported as making foods appeal to the senses.
Health & nutrition (Furst et al., 1996; Steptoe et al., 1995)	All of the Foodies were concerned with health and nutrition. Most did not mention weight loss but discussed nutritional benefit of food either in contrast to hedonic value/appeal or as desirable and enjoyable. Influencers were also embracing health & nutrition in their content.
Managing relationships (Furst et al., 1996)	In all cases, food choices were mediated by others and many Foodies valued foods they could enjoy with others. Influencers helped provide more detail as to how relationships can be managed through food and how foods can be altered to suit different needs and tastes.
Quality (Furst et al., 1996)	This was a prominent food value for many of the Foodies and was often valued above monetary considerations. Foodies were willing to spend more money on their food. Influencers were involved in promoting what makes for quality food.
Variety (Connors et al., 2001)	Foodies were keen to embrace variety, and often chose variety over convenience. Foodies actively sought new recipes and incorporated new ingredients and turned to influencers for inspiration, ideas and to introduce new foods.
Familiarity (Steptoe et al., 1995)	During the pantry review, many of the Foodies mentioned that they chose some foods or brands because they were familiar. This did not relate to influencers but was part of what might counter-act influencer influence.
Trendy (Barr & Levy, 1984; Mctavish, 2015; Harrish & Phillips, 2021)	Some of the Foodies actively sought new food trends, but even among those who were not keen to be at the forefront of popular foods, Foodies were embracing new food trends that were often introduced to them through influencers and their recipes.

Learning (Phillipov, 2016b)	This was a new food value not identified in literature. Philipov (2016b) identified learning about the provenance of food as a Foodie interest, but the respondents were not learning in a particular context. They enjoyed learning new skills, new information and experimenting with their food. Learning was a significant reason they engaged with influencers, and so is highly relevant to this research.
Secondary Foodie Food Values	
Monetary Considerations (Furst et al., 1996; Steptoe et al., 1995)	While monetary considerations were not at the forefront of food choice among respondents, it was mentioned by some. Although there are food influencers whose content is focused on eating on a budget, none of the Foodies mentioned these sources.
Ethics (Steptoe et al., 1995; Jabs et al., 1998; Malek & Umberger, 2021; Beverland et al., 2015; Rosenfeld et al., 2020)	Ethics were of concern to the vegan, vegetarian and meat reducing Foodies and so were specific to that Foodie type. However, animal welfare and environmental concerns were barely mentioned. Among this Foodie type, natural content of ingredients was valued. Health and distaste for meat were prominently cited reasons to embrace stricter vegetarian diets, while social pressure was cited as a reason to embrace flexibility. Influencers were reportedly used to help alter diets that were associated with more ethical and sustainable eating – such as meat reduction, vegetarianism and veganism.
Natural Content (Steptoe et al., 1995)	Some of the Foodies were very concerned with natural content. Quince, Olive and Rosemary were very keen to reduce prepared foods and use whole foods as often as possible. They embraced influencers who helped them achieve this and who inspired them with new recipes.
Sophisticated (Barr & Levy, 1984; de Solier, 2013; Mctavish, 2015; Walsh & Baker, 2020)	Some of the Foodies were keen to demonstrate a knowledge of food that was related to higher status and make food choices that distinguished them from others – such as picky partners. Foodies used influencer recipes and knowledge to demonstrate their sophistication and establish themselves as opinion leaders.

Table 7: Foodie food values

Unlike in Furst et al. (1996), monetary considerations and convenience were not a concern mentioned by most of the Foodies in their daily food choices, there was some indication that monetary considerations did feature for some of the Foodies. Many of the food values featured in the table above are specific to Foodies in their application, and so this research provides insight into the food values embraced by Foodies and provides insight into how these food values are promoted by influencers.

5.3 Foodie identities: exploring self and food through influencers

This section explores how Foodies explore and develop their identities through influencers. When asked why she follows a particular blogger, Clementine (interview) answered: *"She's a young mum, loves cooking, loves adapting recipes, has a busy lifestyle, and has a grumpy other half who's really fussy with his food... I just feel that I can actually really relate to her".* To remain relevant, influencers need to portray an image their audience can relate to while remaining focused on food. In literature, influencers have been reported to present idealised versions of identity such as the 'domestic goddess' femininity (Rodney et al., 2017). For certain social roles, such as parenthood in general and motherhood in particular, there was an engagement with food as a way to set values and priorities in the home and this was closely linked to the identity of both the family and the value of parent (Moisio et al., 2004). Foodies recognised themselves in the influencers they followed, but also recognised ideals of who they could be and how they can relate to others. Furthermore, several different Foodie

identities were interpreted through the data as not all Foodies fit with the classic definition offered by Barr & Levy (1984) and several of the Foodies varied greatly in what values they embraced and how they wanted to be perceived by others. Some Foodies were keen to embrace good food as that which was nutritionally optimised, others were keen to embrace new experiences and prioritised the sensory appeal of their foods, while others did fit with the classic Foodie identity.

5.3.1 Developing independence and Foodie-ism

Part of becoming independent is learning to feed oneself and the Foodies turned to social media influencers to learn about new foods. Without exception, Foodies reported their parents as having the largest influence on food choice when growing up. When Foodies became independent, they sought out new sources of inspiration. *"Discussing this food diary with [partner] has started a chat about old fashioned cut out and keep recipe books and how these are almost like food blogs of today!"* (Clementine, diary). Turning to media, including published sources and celebrity chefs, to broaden food knowledge and explore identity is an established norm (Goodman et al., 2017). Brie (interview) was one of those respondents and described childhood food as *"pretty beige... I was one of the first UK parent bloggers... other bloggers would have influenced me"*. Parenting and food have been the most popular topics for blogs (Charlesworth, 2015). For Brie, the influence of social media was based on her relationship with influencers, in contrast to Clementine's use of influencers as a type of publication – where she does not interact with the influencers, and returns to favourite recipes much like a favoured cook book.

The Foodies in this study confirmed previous research that found turning to food media was a means to cultivate sophistication in food choices (De Solier, 2013). *"... as you enter adulthood, you… meet people, you do things, you probably want to think you're quite urbane and… open to trying things"* (Bran, interview). Engaging in Foodie discourse – being able to articulate why certain foods are worthy – is a means to display Foodie identity and differentiation from others (Johnston & Bauman, 2015). Foodies reported several instances of being introduced to new flavours through influencers and clearly articulated their distinctness. *"I have gone out and bought things because [influencer]'s used them in her kitchen... sweet peppers... I prefer them over bell peppers... there's a wee bit more tartness to them"* (Pepper, interview). Specialist language is part of social worlds (Mennecke, Triplett, Hassall, & Heer, 2011) and cultural vocabularies can emerge around food (Fixsen et al., 2020). Foodies felt confident discussing foods and their different properties with demonstrable knowledge.

Foodies reported sharing their food expertise with others offline, and this was more common than sharing food choice online. Reuben (interview) was one of the rare respondents who reported sharing food choices on social media, *"people I work beside will say, "oh you like your food", and... ask for recommendations"*. Although not all Foodies reported using social media to display their own food identities, it was common for Foodies to share what they found with others offline to display and share Foodie-ism. *"I definitely do that [share food choice and recommendations] with my Foodie friends... I don't put anything on social media about food"* (Olive, interview). Foodies reported feeling confidence in sharing foods they found from influencers. *"I*

even serve them [blogger recipes] at dinner parties" (Clementine, interview). Being able to share recommendations with others, and being recognised for their good taste, was obviously a point of pride for respondents, but this was being demonstrated predominantly offline. Being defined as one who knows about food and cultivates preferences that are not mainstream is a long established means to develop and display taste and social distinction (Mennell, 1985), and Foodies turn to social media influencers as a means to practice and demonstrate their Foodie-ism.

Previous research has found that due to the volume of content available on social media compared to mass and paid for media, social consumers are better informed about food and prefer higher-value food than mass consumers (Simeone & Russo, 2017). For the Foodies in this research, social media was confirmed as a good site to learn about food and accumulate food knowledge including cultivating a food-based vocabulary to cultivate their Foodie-ism, even though they did not purchase goods from social sites. Bloggers recommend particular products and this demonstrates their status as opinion leaders (Sepp et al., 2017). By using a blog's recommendation and introducing new foods to others, Foodies are demonstrating their own opinion leadership within their social networks – at times online, but more commonly offline.

5.3.2 Identity congruence and trust

Narratives around how influencers made changes to their diets and how that had a positive impact on their lives were especially impactful to Foodies. *"I follow [blogger] posts... because she made choices that made a marked difference to her health... she's doing the same stuff as I'm interested*

in" (Rosemary, interview). This further confirms similarity of food related goals as a primary reason respondents followed influencers. In addition to being swayed by personal narratives and anecdotal evidence, Rosemary was one of the few respondents who also evaluated the sources of information used by influencers using what she perceived as medical literature. Her favourite blog was started by a doctor and informed by *"peer reviewed research... a high standard of information"* (Rosemary, diary). When asked if they referred to official sources such as the Good Food Guide (NHS, 2020), none of the respondents answered yes and many had not heard of it. Only one respondent – Olive who is a doctor – had heard of it, but felt she knew it well enough not to return to it. This draws attention to the fact that not many people refer to official sources for nutritional information. Most Foodies, when discussing how they had learned what foods were good for them seemed to have picked up how to eat from others – and these others include influencers.

The Foodies reported that they read through the stories posted by the influencers. "...*two to three times a week... I'll read the recipe... the story of it"* (Reuben, interview). This indicates that for Foodies, the wider context in which the influencer makes choices about food is important. Personal narratives help readers develop a sense of 'knowing' influencers, and this allows Foodies to evaluate influencer opinions for themselves. When discussing her blog, Brie discussed her goal in posting restaurant reviews. *"I wanted something that was honest... we're not going to always have the same tastes, but hopefully the pictures and the way that I describe things helps the people decide if they would like to go there"* (Brie, interview). This

helped Brie maintain her role as an opinion leader as someone who influences the behaviour of others (Nunes et al., 2018). Reading the stories of influencers helps Foodies build knowledge of influencers. This allows Foodies not only to evaluate influencer suggestions but anticipate if they will like their suggestions. This builds trust. *"For a while I thought she [blogger] was vegan, until she posted a picture of a steak... I kind of loved her more then"* (Pepper, interview). Foodies learn to trust influencers not only because they share similar tastes, but by getting to know the influencer, they can predict what they themselves might enjoy based on influencer recommendations.

While previous research found Foodies preferred published sources as established and legitimate to digital media, which they perceived as less trustworthy (De Solier, 2013), this research found respondents food blogs in particular as trustworthy online sources. Narratives around the effects of food on the body resonated with respondents who related to personal stories. Research strongly suggests that when it comes to information about diet and nutrition, people are less inclined to trust solitary expert opinions than they are visual proof or more commonly held views (Declercq et al., 2019), and for most of the Foodies, this proved true. However, another study found that when evaluating sources online, the more involved consumers already were with information, the more likely they were to use quality of an argument to judge credibility of information (Xiao, Wang, Chan-Olmsted, & Xiao, 2018). Rosemary and Olive were the only respondents who referred to quality of source in terms of expertise to judge the credibility of information. *"He [influencer] looks at food studies. He does meta analysis of food studies, and*

he only uses peer reviewed articles" (Rosemary, interview). But these two also used alternative measures such as the personal experience of influencers and their own experiences to evaluate information. For example, when discussing an influencer who wrote about her personal experience without evidence, Rosemary (interview) said she followed this influencer because "she made choices that made a marked difference to her health". Much of the literature around influencers and trust relates to influencer impact on consumer brand trust (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Nunes et al., 2018). This research found there was little brand recognition, but trust was important for Foodies to predict how much they might enjoy influencer suggestions. In this research, it appeared that the ability to understand and assess influencer recommendations against previous experience with the influencer's content and recommendations are more important than the influencer engaging in developing a unique brand.

5.3.3 Parenthood: feeding children well

The parents in this study took great care and put a lot of thought, effort and time into feeding their children. *"I love giving the kids wholesome food... reading [blog]... gave me a lust for my morning smoothie which I shared with Baby Son"* (Olive, diary). Preparing foods for others is an act of care (Hansen & Kristensen, 2017), and as such is a means to not only express love, but also instil values. Many mothers in the study identified having a baby as a time when they seriously reconsidered food choices and made use of food blogs to help investigate child feeding. "*I would say my current attitudes were stable, until around the time that I had [son]"* (Olive, interview). There are quite a few influencers who focus on recipes which claim they tailor nutrition

for young children. "*Used Annabell Karmel's blog to make daughter croquettes for dinner... lots of tasty sounding baby and toddler recipes"* (Clementine, diary). But making foods specifically for children was rare among respondents. *"[Daughter] didn't change our [food], we imposed our dietary wishes or will on [daughter]"* (Reuben, interview). Most of the Foodies felt quite strongly that sharing and eating foods together was important. Olive discussed making family meals using blogger recipes but omitting salt so they could be fed to the baby. *"I don't want to spend my life cooking a kids' tea and an adult tea"* (Olive, diary). Feeding young children well has a variety of value negotiations and specific dietary requirements, and the Foodies were making use of influencers to help navigate these, often linked to their roles in the home and identities as parents.

Many of the mothers expressed a desire to avoid pre-prepared foods when feeding children, and so the internet in general – and influencers in particular – offered advice and ideas for how to feed children from scratch to a variety of dietary preferences and requirements. Previous research has identified new mothers as being those who are highly engaged in social media around child feeding practices (Doub et al., 2016). Furthermore, the values that are embraced in the home help develop a coherent family identity and the role of carer is often evaluated against commonly held societal values – like the moral superiority of home cooked meals (Moisio et al., 2004). The mothers with young children in this study confirmed that they took family feeding seriously and turned to influencers to help them in this. *"Having the two kids with dairy intolerances when young... I do follow a few healthy living kind of sites"* (Quince, interview). For Quince, and the other

mother respondents, using social media to look at child feeding practices was reported as being prompted by the respondents themselves. Previous researchers have suggested an examination of social media to determine what prompts social media use for child feeding among mothers (Doub et al., 2016). This research found motivations to engage with social media were internalised, and so far from being prompted by social media, the motivation to engage with influencers was coming from respondents and their change in circumstances, but those deeply ingrained narratives about what makes a good parent were prevalent and tied to food choice and identity.

When feeding children, Foodies expressed an interest in introducing children to a wide variety of foods. For instance, Clementine (interview) was keen her daughter *"try absolutely everything".* Trying to introduce variety and guide developing attitudes to foods was important. *"I'm trying to get a bit more diverse with the cooking, because it's so easy to just do the same meals, you know with the kids, and nutritiously you just regurgitate the same stuff"* (Quince, interview). Quince used influencers to help find new foods with one of her stated goals being to instil in her children *"how to be healthy and strong, it's not about weight and stuff"* (Quince). The emphasis on helping kids develop a healthy relationship with food often involved moderation and sometimes involved introducing foods that were a compromise, such as unhealthy foods (brownies) made with healthy ingredients:

> *I'd read an article... about sweet potato brownies [from a blogger] ... I'm trying to teach the kids to eat healthily... I want them to be able to eat (and genuinely) enjoy anything so that they can go anywhere in the world and eat the local food- whether that's on a trip to India or to a friend's house after school.*
>
> (Olive, diary)

Influencers are helping parents work through value negotiations and framing of food for their children. They expressed concern for raising children who could fit in with others, indicating an awareness of the need to fit into wider social contexts. Most of these values were a continuation of those instilled in Foodies' childhoods and the parents were keen their children became worldly and flexible in their own food choices.

While influencers might not always be introducing new ideas to parents, they have the potential to amplify and re-enforce messages about food benefits and risks (Rutsaert et al., 2014). The respondents showed evidence of engaging with influencers while considering which foods to present to children, and how best to do so. Learning how to feed children from weaning to toddlerhood and beyond while introducing new tastes can be a challenge and bloggers focused on child feeding were being referred to by some Foodies. Other parents, such as Olive referred to blogs which created child-friendly recipes but ones which the whole family could eat together. Caring for others through food takes two forms – one where eating is a pleasure and caring for others through food is about making them happy, the other where eating is about providing fuel for the body to make it strong and healthy (Hansen & Kristensen, 2017). Foodies were keen to find foods for their children that had both these qualities. This confirms findings of previous research that in addition to prompting unhealthy choices, food that is presented well can be used to promote healthy lifestyles (Mejova et al., 2016) and social media is a space where healthy food is idealised (Walsh & Baker, 2020). Foodies took their responsibilities and roles as parents seriously and worked towards commonly embraced ideals in child-feeding.

Presentation of nutritious food in an appealing way is an important way in which the Foodies are trying to win over others in their households to eat healthily and as the Foodies would ideally like.

5.3.4 Learning to eat again following grief and loss

Along with gaining independence and the birth of a child, life events involving loss prompted the most significant changes to food choice. "*My mum died, and then food changed a lot... right at the start, we... sat and tried to remember and tried to find new recipes, but that was off of online good food [BBC]... that's what I do now [with influencers]* (Colby, interview). For Colby's family, learning to cook new foods became part of their grieving and healing process, and to facilitate this process and learn how to cook, Colby's father turned to food media. Rosemary (diary) began to spend "*lots of time investigating food topics"* following the death of her husband who "*loved all the things that give you bowel cancer, and then died from bowel cancer"* (Rosemary, interview). Previous research has found grief to be one topic through which users of social media gather in communities for support (Kapoor et al., 2018). Rosemary reported that she had joined a grief-based community online aimed at widows, but this was not connected to her diet. Her investigation of food topics was more of a hobby, that she began pursuing in more depth in response to her husband's death – as was the case with Colby's father who used food media to embrace his new role and identity in the home as sole parent and provider.

Bran reported the importance of food for future relationships when his marriage ended. *"I want to be able to [cook]... being in a relationship where I really didn't do much of the cooking, to then living on my own"* (Bran,

interview). Food is central to social practices, relationships and identity (Neely et al., 2014). Bran (interview) learned to cook to feed his son, but also to be able to attract a new partner, being motivated by the prospect of *"... entertain[ing] people in the future [said with a cheeky grin]"*. Becoming not only a competent cook but becoming recognised by loved ones as someone who knew about good food was important to the Foodies in their roles within the home. When he sent his son to school with leftovers from the night before, Bran (Diary) reported "*son said it was good and his school pals were jealous as it looked "awesome". I'll take that! ☺.*" Identity development is a continuous process whereby social environmental influences – such as food learning presented via social media influencers – are considered and integrated into identity (Cordeiro, Paixao, Lens, Lacante, & Luyckx, 2016). As circumstances and identity changed for the Foodies, they turned to influencers to become competent and even skilled at cooking because they felt this was important for themselves and their loved ones.

While there is a lot of emphasis on influencers using social media to build large followings and make money, motivations to build a presence online can also be rooted in personal experience. Schau and Gilly (Schau & Gilly, 2003) found personal websites were started for three distinct reasons; a change to circumstance or point of view; to foster personal growth; and to draw attention to a personal interest. This research found evidence that Foodies are connecting to influencers based on a common interest around food prompted by their own changing circumstances. Foodies enjoy reading about food from other sources, learning about foods for themselves, and becoming known and recognised amongst their friends, family and

acquaintances for their culinary abilities. Colby, Bran and Rosemary continued to turn to different influencers for food long after they had experienced loss. and so the habits formed during these transitional periods were enduring.

5.3.5 Eat like me: emerging Foodie archetypes

This research found a firm and sustained interest in defining ‘good’ food as that which is nourishing and healthy. The majority of the Foodies in this research did not fit Johnston & Bauman’s (2015) classic Foodie archetype as they lacked a snobbish devotion to trends and foods that were deemed too fancy or inaccessible. The respondents in this study were predominantly curious or playful Foodies, better personifying newer labels of the Foodie identity by embracing a desire to learn about food, adopt food as a passion and embrace a personalised understanding of what good food is that is part of identity-making, but not rooted in elevated status (Johnston & Bauman, 2015; Vila et al., 2021; Williams et al., 2019). The predominant Foodie archetypes in this research were therefore the ‘Healthy Foodie’ and the ‘Curious Foodie’ (presented in detail in Table 7). The respondents also confirmed meat reduction as a popular trend in and around Edinburgh.

Foodie Archetype	Key Authors	Key Attributes	Foodie Respondent Examples
Original / Classic Foodie	(Barr & Levy, 1984; De Solier, 2013; D. A. Harris & Phillips, 2021; Mctavish, 2015; Walsh & Baker, 2020)	Demonstration of superior knowledge and taste through new trends. Consumes foods which are interesting, trendy and high status. Uses food media but prefers to cite trusted and authoritative sources for food-based information.	Brie enjoys being introduced to new foods at restaurants through her food blog. Clementine reported pride in serving dishes at dinner parties that friends wanted know about and use. Rosemary evaluated the quality of sources.
Curious Foodie	(Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Cox & Blake, 2011; Johnston & Bauman, 2015; Vila et al., 2021; Williams et al., 2019)	Shares food knowledge that embraces quality and authenticity. Consumes foods which appeal to them and pursues food as serious leisure. Learns about food from a range of sources and likes to have a deeper knowledge of foods. Personalised definition of 'good food' related to personal preference rather than distinction.	When discussing why he posts food Reuben (interview) compared his interest to pet enthusiasts: *"that's the love of their life and that's what they enjoy, so why not? … that's why I put quite a lot on about food"*. Reuben also continuously highlighted his love of quality foods. Pepper did not like to limit her choices based on criteria and if something appealed to her personally *"I'm going to eat it".* Olive expressed distain for food trends.
Healthy Foodie	(Cleave, 2020; Hayes & Finney, 2014)	Food is not only for pleasure but for nourishment. Happily spend more resources on foods that are not only good but good for them. Easily swayed by anecdotal evidence and popular 'healthy' trends.	Olive (interview) reported sharing recommendations with Foodie friends: *"because we're all sort of similar attitudes trying to get our kids to eat well"*. Although Rosemary and Olive both sought good information, both reported being swayed be anecdotal evidence.

Table 7: Respondent Foodie archetypes

In their review of the UK's digital foodscape, Goodman and Jaworska (2020) identified food influencers as popularising 'clean' eating, healthy and 'free from' foods and lifestyles. This research into Foodies who follow these influencers confirmed that health was a major concern of Foodies who make use of social media influencers for food choice. The Foodies in this research who are interested in preparing and consuming healthy foods in the home are more likely to accept social media as an acceptable source of food-based knowledge, while Foodies in the wider population who are more interested in traditional Foodie values of indulgence, superior taste and expertise (Johnston & Bauman, 2015) might be less likely to turn to social media influencers for food based knowledge (De Solier, 2013). More research would be required to confirm this, but the link between this healthy Foodie type and social media fits with what literature has identified as key narratives around food online (Goodman & Jaworska, 2020; Smith, 2020; Walsh & Baker, 2020).

Unlike original definitions which identified Foodies as elitist or snobbish and prone to follow trends (Barr & Levy, 1984), the Foodies in this study were more concerned with defining 'good' food as that which is simple, or traditional food well done. While some studies have indicated that an interest in simple and accessible foods might indicate a more democratic approach to Foodie-ism (Johnston & Bauman, 2015), the Foodies in this study were less driven by wider social concerns. One respondent mentioned slow food chains, and even those who were reducing or not consuming meat were primarily motivated by health concerns and sensory preferences with only two mentioning ethical concerns, which was surprising given the focus in

academic work on ethical and sustainable food choices in Foodie populations (Emontspool & Georgi, 2017; Goodman & Jaworska, 2020). This is less surprising when considering the push for communications about the link between poor health outcomes and over-consumption of processed foods and red meat (Bradford & Grier, 2019; Wells, 2017). The respondents in this research indicate that despite reported resistance to the adoption of healthy foods in Scotland (Food Standards Scotland, 2021), messages about healthy foods are being embraced by curious Foodies.

5.3.7 Foodie identities: section summary

Respondents valued influencers more highly than other media personalities, such as celebrity chefs, as they were easier to follow and provided more personal narrative around their food choices which allowed the Foodies to identify with them. However, Foodies did report referring to celebrity chefs online and watching food programmes, and so influencers are only one part of a wider food media landscape. Foodies enjoyed being able to follow the step-by-step processes and decision making around food choice which are integrated into the stories influencers tell about food, and this helped them both evaluate and eventually trust influencer content. Although there was recognition that regularly posting about food required work, Foodies did not feel obligated to help influencers by leaving reviews or sharing content online and most respondents used influencers as one-way information sources, but parasocial interactions and social bonds were important for sustained interest in influencers over time. Influencers were used as trusted sources for learning about food during times of transition, loss and grief, and Foodies often first learned to turn to influencers during

these periods, which led to enduring habits of using influencers. Trust with influencers was developed over time as Foodies felt they could evaluate influencer content for themselves.

5.4 The limits and perils of influencer influence

This section explores the limits of influencer influence, why the lack of online engagement with influencers might not indicate a boundary of their influence, and instances where influencer influence could be considered negative. Contrary to established literature around influencers which claims these individuals are effective brand advocates (De Veirman et al., 2017; Lou & Yuan, 2019), the Foodies in this research paid little attention to brands and rarely bought brands based on influencer recommendation. Clementine was the only respondent who mentioned looking for recommended brands from influencers. *"… quite often she'll recommend a certain brand of something cause it's lower fat than other brands"* (Clementine, interview). In contrast, many of the Foodies bought foods from different suppliers or brands because of availability or in one case to save money as in the case of Olive buying nut butters from a whole foods supplier in bulk. While ingredients were being bought by Foodies, little attention was paid to actual branded food items and Foodies generally preferred to take brand recommendations from friends and family. However, as explored in previous sections, influencers were having an impact on the daily and long-term food choices of Foodies. Influencers have the power to both promote and condemn food and there is limited anecdotal evidence that they can have a big impact on the supply chain of foods (Overbey, Jaykus, & Chapman, 2017). Coconut oil featured in nearly every respondent's pantry. *"I'd never used coconut oil, but because it was in*

the recipes we saw, we went and bought coconut oil" (Bran, interview). Despite the prevalence of the ingredient, it was a controversial choice and Olive (diary) reflected:

> *I've never been 100% convinced it is as healthy as many of the fashionable food bloggers suggest. The British heart foundation does not currently feel there is enough evidence to promote it as a 'heart healthy' food... Studies have not yet been completed... my worry is that the benefits of coconut oil are simply an internet myth and that we are causing significant heart disease by excessive consumption of it.*

Social media has been reported to be a medium through which food information is disseminated quickly (Steils & Obaidalahe, 2020) and this provides information about which foods to avoid. Evidence influencers perpetuate narratives and habits that can contribute to eating disorders and disordered eating behaviours such as food avoidance is presented.

5.4.1 Ineffective brand advocates for products

It was common for Foodies to buy unbranded ingredients and less common for them to buy particular brands based on influencer recommendations. More often than not, when trying new ingredients from recipes and sources online, brands were not mentioned: *"there's probably some miso paste in there, which I wouldn't have known about if not for reading a food blog"* (Olive, interview). In most instances where a specific brand was pointed out by Foodies, the recommendation had come from a source known offline: *"the coffee... that was recommended by my cousin and his wife"* (Reuben, interview). Previous studies have found that in order for consumers to buy a particular brand on influencer recommendation, a high degree of trust is required and the brand awareness of the product must be high as well – which is not always achieved through consumers accessing

influencers for information retrieval or entertainment (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Brie pointed out the rapeseed oil in her pantry was bought after observing an influencer cooking with this over several recipes, but she referred to her as *"my friend, who's also a lifestyle blogger"* (Brie, interview). The Foodies generally preferred to take brand recommendations from friends and family than influencers, unless they considered influencers friends.

This study did find two instances where a food influencer directly played a role in raising brand awareness for a participant. As with offline brands, in order to attract consumers online, brand awareness is required (Rios & Riquelme, 2010), and social media influencers often make money by promoting particular brands that are well-aligned to them personally. *"PB fit, it's 90% less fat... I prefer it to peanut butter... I use it loads in cooking... it was out of a blog that I follow that recommended it... she'll recommend a certain brand of something cause it's lower fat than other brands"* (Clementine, interview). Another respondent reported buying a particular jar of sauce after seeing it featured as part of a recipe in a *"YouTube video... which my friend shared... it just looked amazing"* (Pepper, interview). At first glance, these examples appear to confirm the strength of consumer to consumer recommendations as discussed in literature (Kannan & Li, 2017; Lou & Yuan, 2019; Mangold & Faulds, 2009). However, it is important to note that these two examples were the only instances where a particular brand was mentioned by name that was tied directly to an online influencer, and Pepper also considered her source a friend as she followed several influencers with whom she had subsequently developed friendships.

There were other instances where recommended brands were discovered via social media as a channel in particular, but these were credited to community groups, or friends who told Foodies about foods via social media. *"This is my chocolate bar [from] a Dundee company, called Almighty Foods... I found out about them from a vegan site"* (Rosemary, interview). Targeting online communities and influencers who take part in online communities of interest for niche products is recognised in literature as an effective way to promote products online (Kapoor et al., 2018), and this research confirms this, but indicates networks that are locally based and focused on niche interests (such as veganism) may be more influential than individuals. Local community sites were popular among the respondents who reported spending more money on food (namely Rosemary and Reuben). Reuben, for instance, followed a local butcher. But these two respondents did not follow influencers to find particular brands. *"The ones [influencers] I generally follow give information but don't provide a shop"* (Reuben, interview). Reuben (interview) expressed unwillingness to shop online even if he did see something he wanted via an influencer: *"I wouldn't buy it from the Facebook page... it would influence me to go buy something"*, but when asked, he could not think of anything he had bought based on an influencer post. Influencers are generally reported as being good communication channels to promote brands – particularly those with a niche appeal - because they are perceived to be authentic and credible (De Veirman et al., 2017). However, the respondents in this study who had more disposable income preferred getting recommendations for products from local community groups or to find foods through local businesses.

Where Foodies internalised suggestions from food blogs as patterns or rules, they presented food choices as self-led. Many of the Foodies were confident assimilating recommendations themselves and then applying them in new ways. *"The nut butters from Deliciously Ella... I wouldn't often go and get her book out, but I use a lot of her ideas"* (Rosemary, interview). Rosemary reported using the recipes of several influencers, but as these recipes had been used many times, she felt confident making food from scratch without guidelines, and often reported forgetting where particular recipes and food items had first been recommended. *"I would never use white sugar – I would tend to use honey, or coconut syrup, or coconut sugar... I guess that's been influenced by a few of the people I follow on Facebook"* (Quince, interview). Where there is good fit between the already established food literacy of Foodies and the influencer, recommendations are easier to embrace (Steils & Obaidalahe, 2020) and the Foodies did not always immediately recognise recommendations. *"... the things that we buy – is it by recommendation?... I guess it is because it's in the recipes we try"* (Bran, interview). Restlessness with food, and seeking out new foods with enthusiasm is a long established trait of Foodies (Barr & Levy, 1984). This appears to be the key motivation for Foodies to seek out influencers – to expand their exposure to new foods and ways to cook with these items. Even when Foodies are not seeking out new foods, influencers are introducing them to these items through recipes and often influencer recipes use familiar ingredients (as in the case of coconut oil).

For most of the Foodie respondents, social media influencers were not a particularly strong means to be introduced to new brands. Many of the

Foodies in this study expressed confidence choosing food for themselves and the ability to discern good foods is an important aspect of the Foodie identity (Barr & Levy, 1984) with Foodies in this study being pro-active about trying new foods for themselves. There is a host of literature build around the premise that influencers are powerful marketing channels because they leverage their opinion leadership in order to influence consumers as third party endorsers (Booth & Matic, 2011; De Veirman et al., 2017; Freberg et al., 2011; Nunes, Ferreira, Freita, & Ramos, 2018; Uzunoğlu & Kip, 2014). While influencer recommendations have proven to be highly effective to raise brand awareness for categories such as travel, (Lou & Yuan, 2019), the respondents in this study indicate that food influencers are not as effective in promoting branded products or drawing attention to particular branded ingredients, although they were effective at promoting restaurants.

5.4.2 Foodie lurker behaviour

While the influencers were very good at presenting self-image and shared interest, there was little interest from most of the Foodies in developing actual relationships with these personalities. Social media was a platform to see others, but not to be seen by others. *"On social media I'm purely a follower... [not] someone that will try to gain attention by following someone... to get recognised"* (Dill, interview). Most respondents were perfectly happy to lurk while seeing and using content from food influencers, but others felt the need for some reciprocity. *"I'll review, if I use a recipe... I'll post up to say, "worked a treat – superb"* (Reuben, interview). When discussing how his fiancée had recently commented on a blogger's recipe, Bran (interview) reflected "*I reckon [blogging] must be very time consuming*

and very difficult". Most of the respondents treated influencers as information providers, and themselves as information retrievers (Trier & Richter, 2015). Despite recognising the time and effort it took to produce content around food, the Foodies did not feel beholden to contribute to posts or interact with influencers.

Some of the respondents felt very clearly that leaving reviews on review sites was part of a virtuous cycle. *"I use trip advisor... if I'm looking for a recommendation, I want to know that it's someone that's taken the time to give a recommendation... it sort of validates the honesty of it"* (Reuben, interview). When discussing why she left reviews for restaurants, Clementine expressed deep empathy for restaurants. *"I know a lot of people only do them [reviews] when there's a problem and not when they're good... having worked in a kitchen... you only tend to hear people that grumble, and not people that really enjoyed it"* (Clementine, interview). Although Clementine (interview) expressed feeling her favourite influencer is very much like herself. She also reported *"I just read, I don't comment on her posts"*. Influencers, like restaurants, rely on popularity with consumers for success. When asked why she prefers blogs to websites like BBC good food, Clementine (interview) replied *"Because they're tried and tested"*. Foodies treated influencers as reliable in and of themselves and did not feel the need to seek or leave feedback to evaluate them.

Communal spaces and the social interactions had online do not automatically follow the same rules as those offline (Belk, 2014). Where Foodies liked the influencers, they followed them, most often passively in their newsfeeds. *"[Content from blogs] just comes up on my newsfeed...*

either recipes or different food facts" (Quince, interview). Where they did not like influencers, they simply *"stopped following her"* (Olive, interview). For the Foodie who was also a food blogger, interacting with readers on social media had set circumstances:

> *"If people actually direct a question at me, or... leave a comment, I then try and respond. A lot of people just tag their friend... they're talking amongst themselves. But if somebody's on the page and says something. I kind of see that as a lone person in the crowd... So I go over and chat to them."*
>
> (Brie, interview)

The Foodies and bloggers seemed to have reached their own sets of social rules, or codes of conduct, to follow online. While there were some who used social media as a social space, most were happy to stick to pseudo-relationships with influencers, referring to them by name and feeling they could trust them, but not actually engaging with them.

Previous research has found evidence that one-way, or parasocial interactions and relationships via social media can impact consumer behaviour, emotions and thoughts (Yuksel & Labrecque, 2016). Some Foodies discussed the lives and choices of influencers as if they were friends, and even feeling guilty about food choices without ever contacting the influencer. In rare cases, influencers exerted a parasocial influence offline. *"For a while I've been having veggie options at restaurants but despite a vegan with a large following on Twitter being in the restaurant causing me to question my choice, I still had the chicken"* (Colby, diary). Colby's conflicting emotions were not enough to change her behaviour, but the influencer's presence did provoke an emotional reaction. Colby was the only respondent who reported this kind of emotional influence, while Pepper

was the only respondent who reported reaching out to develop relationships with some of the influencers she followed. *“I’ll always ask questions about what she’s made, and how long it took her... I chat to her quite a lot now ‘cause I followed her for ages, and she follows me now too... she’s a lovely girl”* (Pepper, interview). Pepper and Brie were the only respondents who reported developing relationships with influencers, and these two were the only respondents who also had their own blogs to which they regularly contribute. Colby does have an Instagram presence but is not as dedicated to it as Pepper or Brie. Other than Reuben, who reported leaving comments for influencers, the other respondents were happy to simply follow anonymously.

Turning to social media to learn about food proved a means to find others with consumption patterns, styles of living and beliefs similar to the Foodies (Hewer & Hamilton, 2010). Foodies did not feel compelled to establish actual relationships with the influencers, and despite an acknowledgement that regular posts require effort, there was little evidence Foodies felt any need to contribute to the influencer’s popularity. While they recognised a virtuous cycle in recommending restaurants and using review sites, the Foodies treated influencers as independently reliable as based on their own experiences and not necessarily the recommendations of others. Foodies learned to trust influencers based on learning about them and using that information to predict whether or not they would share their opinions. Despite not developing an actual relationship with influencers, Colby reported having feelings of guilt about her food choices in the presence of an

influencer – similar to feelings she reported when choosing to eat meat when in the presence of friends who do not consume meat.

While literature around social media influencers puts a lot of emphasis on followership for attachment and intimacy (Ki et al., 2020; Taillon, Carolina, Mueller, Kowalczyk, & Jones, 2020; Torbarina, Jelenc, & Brkljačić, 2020) and to better facilitate influencer marketing and persuasion (Carlson & Lee, 2015; De Veirman et al., 2017; E. Kim & Kim, 2022; Nunes et al., 2018), the respondents in this study were not all active followers and most were passive online. But this did not mean they were passive offline.

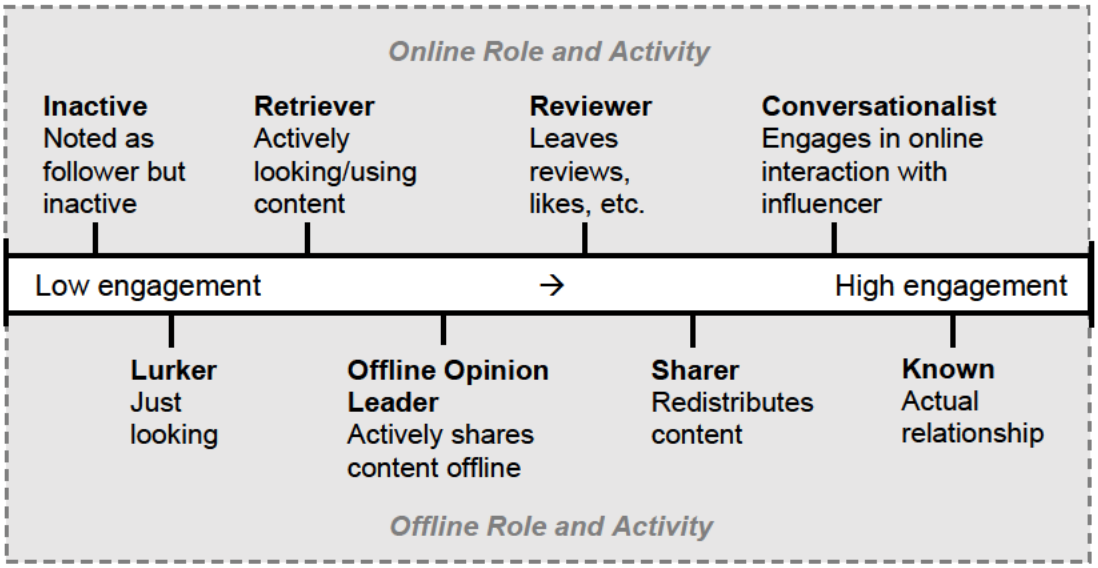

Figure 4: A typology of engagement with influencers

The typology above recognises that even though users might not be active online, they may still be playing a role as opinion leaders offline. They may also be sharing influencer content and increasing their reach offline. In rare cases, relationships that began online can become actual relationships which are not limited to online.

5.4.3 Moving on: when influencers annoy Foodies

When discussing influencers, the Foodies reported several things that irritated them. While the narratives influencers use often help contextualise their choices and convince Foodies to adopt eating practices for themselves, there were instances when this was not appreciated. While Clementine reported that she enjoyed it when influencers shared how they ate to lose weight, Dill did not appreciate this and preferred less personal narrative. *"... there might be things that are in between his personal life... there's a diet one... he's lost a lot of weight. I haven't looked at that one as much"* (Dill, interview). There were times Foodies reported influencers sharing too much information. *"... it just got really repetitive, and she talked about her bowels all the time"* (Olive, interview). Even for those who reported enjoying following influencers because of the ethos or philosophies around their food choices, there were limits to what they felt was relevant. *"...saw a deliciously Ella post... about how we shouldn't feel our worth is measured by our Facebook likes – ironic coming from Ella – who initially had a food blog that seems to have become a motivational/ lifestyle blog – littered with pictures of a model advertising the life she is trying to sell"* (Olive, diary). Foodies did not appreciate when influencers over-shared or were perceived to be patronising, hypocritical or elitist.

Olive expressed feeling a sense of ownership over Deliciously Ella's success, and felt quite strongly that she had become too big a brand:

> *"I would always claim I was the first person to know about Deliciously Ella, because I read her first Telegraph article, way before she was famous... but I've kind of gone off Ella a bit... [she's] just extremely yummy and has become like a mega brand*

– all of which is just a bit off putting... it's probably a bit of a pride thing. I like to be ahead of the curve."

(Olive, interview)

While research has found that some Foodies enjoy being in fashion and take pride in setting trends, others prefer to be more accessible and democratic in their approach to food (Johnston & Bauman, 2015). Deliciously Ella is an easy target for criticism from Foodies who wish to be democratic as she promotes expensive ingredients which are beyond the purchasing power of the average household, and she has a very large following. Pepper reported enjoying following Deliciously Ella, but also followed a spoof of Ella. *"Deliciously Stella... she'll be like... "I'm making sure I get all my greens today" and it's lots of green Haribo. She is amazing... She makes me laugh"* (Pepper, interview). Most of the Foodies expressed appreciation for learning about why influencers eat as they do, but many did not want to follow anyone who took themselves too seriously. When discussing Amelia Freer, Olive (interview) – one of the few influencers followed who is a registered Nutritional Therapist – expressed a preference for her over bigger names. *"I suppose she is a brand, but I feel she's less in your face"* (Olive, interview). Food influencers must be careful to develop recognition without being too polished a brand or too popular.

Cost of ingredients, being perceived to be patronising or overly complicated were sources of frustration for the Foodies. Olive was one of the few Foodies who discussed unfollowing influencers because of cost. *"I read the Hemsley sisters... but they're really pretentious, and I think their recipes are really expensive"* (Olive, interview). Although others still followed some influencers who irritated them, there were clear sources of tension. Being told

how to eat and cook by others was sometimes interpreted as patronising by the Foodies. Bran (interview) reported following Jamie Oliver and Joe Wicks, both of whom he described as *"a bit of a prick"*. Although Clementine acknowledged influencers needed to cater to a range of skill levels, at times she found the level of information frustrating. *"I find her blog slightly patronising in places (i.e., telling you exactly how to peel potatoes!)"* (Clementine, diary). Finding a balance between providing new ideas, introducing new ingredients and being accessible is not simple. *"I liked the recipe... so much that I bought the accompanying book- but [it] was definitely a disappointment... the recipes are either really obvious things or have random, really expensive ingredients that even I don't have in my cupboard"* (Olive, diary). To be influential influencers needed to be introducing new foods and ideas, but also remain accessible and approachable.

Previous research has found elitism to be considered morally wrong by modern Foodies, but that the Foodies still sought out expensive ingredients (De Solier, 2013). This research found that price sensitivity was rarely an issue for the Foodies, but there was distain expressed for influencers who did not acknowledge the cost of high-priced items. Other influencer habits which were very annoying to Foodies included over-sharing personal information, taking themselves too seriously, or being perceived as patronising. Celebrity chefs and influencers need to balance presenting an aspirational presence with being accessible (Goodman et al., 2017; Rodney et al., 2017). This difficult balance was not always achieved by influencers. While qualifications or expertise were rarely important to Foodies, the ability to communicate effectively and strike the right balance between sharing

personal narrative and focusing on food was an important skill for influencers to be effective.

5.4.4 Dangerous narratives: normalising orthorexia nervosa and demonising foods

Orthorexia nervosa is a label for an emerging, socially approved eating disorder which is indicated by fear around unhealthy foods and an extreme focus on eating for health (Fixsen et al., 2020). Some of the Foodies who were very focused on health had health scares or had known someone with a food-related health issue. "*I had this random cholesterol test when I took part in a study at work and that gave me quite a shock... I didn't need to be so strict once I had lost the weight"* (Olive, interview). Ill health often causes individuals to consider foods in dichotomous terms – weighing the benefits (nutritional value) of foods against drawbacks (nutritional deficiencies and excess calories) (Poulain, 2017). While Olive's approach to healthy eating had eased over time, Rosemary continues to follow influencers who are highly focused on nutritional value and equate poor diet with negative health outcomes. *"Evening – made my juices for the week, influence here is Joe Cross ('Fat, sick and nearly dead' film)"* (Rosemary, diary). Research has found evidence that those who follow self-imposed food rules out of desire for control are in danger of disordered eating (Barnett et al., 2016). Among the respondents in this study there was some evidence of fear-based food choices and restricted eating practices.

There has been research tenuously connecting alternative diets – such as gluten-free and veganism – with orthorexia nervosa as there were parallels between exclusion diets and disordered eating (Barnett et al., 2016;

Fixsen et al., 2020). When turning to sources for clear and accurate food-based knowledge to suit alternative diets, it can be difficult to find credible sources. Trading on professionalism and using professional networks - e.g. registered dieticians – is one way to protect consumers from inaccurate claims about nutrition online (Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, 2016), and there were some influencers the Foodies followed who were either doctors or nutritionists. But the medicalisation of food-based advice based on empirical studies can still be problematic. *"... he [blogger/doctor] wrote a book called how to not die... that's had quite a big impact on the stuff that I eat and don't eat"* (Rosemary, interview). Although evidence supports the posts on this blog, the way in which the information is presented is fear-based. Furthermore, Olive expressed concern over a lack of detailed professional knowledge about food among doctors. *"[Blogger] seems to try to pedal the blog's credibility on the fact that she is a doctor... [but] I know we get very little teaching on nutrition as under or postgraduate level, so I am pretty irritated by this assertion"* (Olive, diary). With little agreement as to what is healthy, even among experts, the onus is on consumers to evaluate conflicting advice around food for themselves. This leaves a dangerous gap for fear-based narratives and anecdotal evidence to fill the void.

This research found evidence that some of the Foodies were potentially vulnerable to dangerous narratives around food. Rosemary's focus on eating is related to her husband's death and one of the respondents was in recovery from an eating disorder:

> *"I was bulimic when I was around fifteen, sixteen, seventeen, and then... went the other way and just overate... everything in moderation now... for a while I said I'm not going to have sugar.*

> *So the first thing I craved was chocolate. I just find, if I rule things out, that's all I want to eat. So I just don't rule things out. Ever."*
> (Pepper, interview)

Looking at foods online provokes powerful sensory memories, can invoke physical reactions – such as salivation – and can even become a substitute for eating (Lavis, 2017). After discovering they had nothing to eat at work during a break, Pepper and a colleague took to social media. *"I spent a good forty minutes just showing her pictures of cookies and she would show me pictures of cakes"* (Pepper, interview). Looking at images of food online and "ingesting" these visually has been reported as a way to satisfy food cravings and can be used to replace eating – which can aggravate disordered eating (Lavis, 2017; Spence et al., 2016). Previous research has found that shoppers go "window shopping" online for entertainment, imagining but not actually consuming (Ek Styvén, Foster, & Wallström, 2017), and in the case of Pepper – despite the fact she is a recovering bulimic – the lack of guilt or restrictions in her diet would suggest she was simply window shopping with her colleague. Orthorexia nervosa is becoming increasingly prevalent as excluding food groups for ethical and social reasons is socially accepted (Fixsen et al., 2020). Foodies who exclude foods and eat vicariously online are at risk.

For most of the Foodies, anecdotal evidence about how to eat and which foods to choose or avoid was far more compelling than empirical evidence. To successfully overcome disordered eating practices, those in recovery must re-learn the culture around eating or they risk not being able to transition back into healthy eating patterns with others (Arnaiz, 2009). Exclusion diets pose a threat to those with, or at risk of developing,

disordered eating, because they normalise food avoidance which then becomes part of the wider culture around eating. Research has found that a higher number of followers of healthy food influencers on Twitter can act as a nudge to increase the intention of eating healthily among those who follow influencers (Charry & Tessitore, 2021). While this may explain the awareness of the most popular influencers who promote exclusion diets (such as Deliciously Ella) among respondents, respondents did not appear to be influenced by number of followers. Instead, they were swayed by elements of the influencers' personal narratives that aligned to their own food values, life histories and goals.

Superfoods, as alternative food choices, are often framed as being a "right" dietary choice, which frames established foods as "wrong" (Barnett et al., 2016). The concepts around some popular exclusionary eating practices appear quite rational on the surface.

> *"We use gluten free bread... not because we're intolerant to anything... it's this man's fault. This Jo Wicks dude... it's about balancing out how much protein to carbs."*
>
> (Bran, interview)

It was not uncommon for respondents to try cutting out particular foods and at times, these practices were in line with official guidance. *"I always crave sugar after a long training ride... the rest of Sunday was spent trying not to snack"* (Pepper, diary). Many of the respondents were concerned about fat and sugar content in their diets, and limiting intake of foods that are high in these is recommended (NHS, 2020). While cutting back on commonly over-consumed foods (such as bread) is a sensible general suggestion, the assumption that they should be having less bread – irrelevant of what they

consumed – was prevalent among the Foodies. "*For breakfast I decided not to have bread after having 2 slices of toast most mornings this week (maybe influenced by the prominence of low carb/gluten-free diets online) ... instead [made food] ... inspired by a [clean eating influencer]"* (Colby, diary). The framing of some foods, such as bread, as a "wrong" food choice appeared to be embraced by many Foodies without evidence or measure.

Respondents reported excluding one food group often led to consideration of excluding others. Just as the "free from" aisle in the grocery store tries to cater to all food intolerances, many of the recipes that cater to one kind of exclusion-based style of eating will exclude other common allergens as well. *"Blog on Facebook came up with Quick and Easy Chocolate Muffins: free from gluten, drains, dairy and eggs... I like the sound of quick and easy and dairy and egg free" (*Quince, diary). Because they exclude dairy for allergies and reduce animal products in their diets, the blogs Quince follows often exclude gluten. Without expressing a desire to exclude gluten, Quince reported following gluten-free recipes. While research suggests limited consumption of processed foods is not damaging to health (Smith, 2020), some respondents in this study equated high fat processed foods with poison. *"[Husband] isn't very good at moderation... I hate having [crisps] in... I know he's just going to poison himself"* (Olive, interview). There was evidence that Foodies resisted influencer narratives around food where they had their own strong views. *"I always choose the soy cream over dairy if possible as I'm pretty sure the fat in it is better for us... lots of Food bloggers seem anti soy at the moment as it is artificial"* (Olive, diary). Influencers are perpetuating established discourse around healthy foods and avoidance of

foods that humans do not require for nutrients, but the influencers and Foodies were also perpetuating the notion that some foods are wrong.

Food narratives that depict some foods as good, others as bad, and the impact these judgements to the consumer and human body have been well documented in research (Abbots, 2017; De Brún, McCarthy, McKenzie, & McGloin, 2014; L. Edwards, Occhipinti, & Ryan, 2000). Whilst some of the Foodies did apply labels to foods such as poisonous to edible foods, most Foodies approached excluding foods carefully and only did so to accommodate dietary requirements according to allergies and preferences. Previous research has suggested that perceived norms around food consumption displayed via social media have an impact on other social media users' habits and preferences around food choice (Charry & Tessitore, 2021; L. K. Hawkins et al., 2020). The perceived frequency of Facebook users' fruit and vegetable consumption positively predicted the consumption of fruit and vegetables of other users (L. K. Hawkins et al., 2020). The demonisation of certain food groups – such as gluten – is a popular trend online (Sikka, 2019) and Foodies appear to accept this as a sensible suggestion. Official guidance does advise complex carbohydrates should be consumed in moderation (NHS, 2020). However, practices such as eating gluten free alternatives are likely not as healthy for the majority of consumers as they substitute fortified wholegrain products with starch-heavy ingredients and preservatives.

5.4.5 The limits and perils of influencer influence: section summary

This research found that where brand recommendations were more likely to be effective, was in online communities based on either a common

interest or common location where food recommendations for restaurants and smaller niche brands were more relevant. This contradicts previous research which found value homophily between influencers and followers was less likely to lead to influence on purchase decisions than aspirational similarities (Shoenberger & Kim, 2022). While Foodies appreciated the personal narratives of influencers, too much personal information was off-putting. *"It definitely seems to be a lot more about her than her recipes these days"* (Olive, diary).Other negative influencer habits included patronising tone of voice and becoming too much of a brand. Exclusion diets which demonise foods were largely embraced by the Foodies, most often on the basis of anecdotal evidence. In general, the influence of feelings and life experience were playing a large role in determining the influence of social media influencers on food choice. Although exclusion diets are very popular, most of the Foodies were very reflective in whether or not they embraced them. *"I read a book about going wheat or gluten free... I wanted to see what the arguments were for it... I didn't think it made a scrap of difference to anything, so I've rejected [it]"* (Olive, interview). Diet and nutrition were very much being decided based on how the Foodies felt food impacted their bodies, and this seems to be a pervasive trend. Scientific evidence is not as persuasive for the Foodies as anecdotal stories, their own lived experiences and the perceived physical impact food has on their bodies – which is something most of the students reported noticing. This research found Foodies are evaluating their food choices based on the corporeal impact of food on their bodies and how their bodies felt after consuming particular foods.

5.5 Chapter Summary

This research set out to explore the impact of social media influencers on the food choices and identities of those consumers who identified themselves as Foodies. The Foodies provided ample evidence that the internet in general, and social media influencers in particular, were having an impact on how the Foodies shopped for foods, learned about preparing foods, related to others through food, and developed their own identities as they explored food. This confirms social media in general, and influencers in particular, as popular communication and entertainment channels for Foodie interests (Cox & Blake, 2011; Goodman & Jaworska, 2020). Through an exploration of how influencers make food choice easier and more enjoyable, this research found that Foodies were using influencers to plan, shop for and prepare foods. By referring to influencers, Foodies learned to improvise and were able to become more creative in their food choices – introducing new foods and avoiding boredom through too much repetition. Foodies also embraced influencer content to learn about new foods and develop their skills and creativity. Influencers were helping Foodies develop specific skills and confidence in the kitchen, and their casual style made Foodies feel less intimidated. Foodies turn to influencers not only for knowledge, but also for entertainment, reporting enjoyment of watching the wider processes of food choice – for instance by understanding how influencers chose foods based on values as part of a wider narrative. This provided insight into how and why Foodies use social media influencers and what tools and functionality they embraced online.

Negotiation of values was the area where influencers had the largest impact on Foodie food choice. This research confirmed influencers communicated their food choice within the context of a personal narrative involving stance-taking (Abidin, 2015; Rahimpour, 2014). In this way, they clearly articulated their values around what makes for good food and eating well. The Foodies were interested in influencers who shared their values and with whom they could identify (Feng, Chen, & Kong, 2020), and this re-enforced and perpetuated common wider social narratives around food. Of great interest to the Foodies were eating for health and caring for the body. Unlike other studies which found Foodies had a taste for foods from other cultures or foods perceived to be exotic (Emontspool & Georgi, 2017; Richards, 2015), the respondents in this research were very interested in cooking authentic British cuisine and turned to influencers to help them do this. The Foodies appreciated simple foods done well and were generally not keen on over-complicated or fussy recipes for regular food choice as they had other time commitments to balance. They appreciated influencers who helped them maintain a balance. Flexitarianism was another big trend the Foodies reported embracing through influencers, with many reducing meat consumption for health reasons. Influencers were a leading source for information about which foods are healthy and popular with superfoods being found in the pantries of most Foodies. Comparative disappointment about their aesthetic skills in presenting food was expressed by some of the mothers in this study, and this appeared to be linked to their desire to win their families over to healthy foods. A table of Foodie food values was

presented and how these values were linked to daily food choice and over-arching food philosophies was explored.

Foodies also turned to influencers to explore their food based identities and to develop their Foodie-ism. Influencers were trusted as sources because Foodies felt they could identify with their stories. Influencers helped Foodies develop, refine, and display their Foodie identities, allowing them to become recognised ‘Foodies’ and opinion leaders about good food among their friends. This was contrary to previous research that found that ‘Foodies’ were not likely to make use of social media sites to learn about food (De Solier, 2013). This also extended to learning to caring for others, with the addition of children, learning how to cook for them and careful consideration of what values to pass on to them through food choice became key considerations for parents. All of the parents of younger children reported turning to social media to find recipes and other parent bloggers to plan and prepare meals. Foodies turned to influencers during times of grief to learn about new foods and this then turned into an enduring habit. The influences on Foodie identities were explored through this research – both online and offline – and the Foodie identity has been presented as an evolving and multi-faceted identity with different archetypes.

The data demonstrates how food-based influencers are not strong brand advocates but confirms they are having a large impact on which ingredients become popularised (Smith, 2020). While Foodies shared food choice with others offline, few displayed this identity online, preferring to follow influencers without developing relationships with them. Influencers became trusted sources as judged by the Foodies themselves – they did not

notice follow numbers and were not swayed by the popularity of influencers when deciding to trust them. So despite a recent research focus on number of followers and influence (Charry & Tessitore, 2021; De Veirman et al., 2017; Janssen, Schouten, & Croes, 2021), the Foodies in this study did not regularly notice influencer popularity. In fact, being too popular was something the Foodies did not appreciate in influencers. The Foodies and influencers had set rules around contact in social media contexts – particularly around leaving reviews for restaurants – but these codes of conduct did not translate to influencers. It was very rare for Foodies to develop actual relationships online. Where influencers were too focused on lifestyle or were perceived to be patronising, Foodies stopped following. There were several areas in which influencers were helping Foodies make practical and well-considered choices about foods, but they were also contributing to an uninformed and anecdotal focus on health and wellbeing. Influencers also contributed to the labelling of certain foods as “wrong” which has been linked to disordered eating (Fixsen et al., 2020). There was further evidence that the narratives around food on social media about exclusion diets and eating for health are normalising orthorexia nervosa (Fixsen et al., 2020; Sikka, 2019), and some of the Foodies expressed fear-based attitudes to food which were mirrored by the influencers they followed. This research developed a critical knowledge of the limits of influencer influence and explored where this influence might be spreading damaging narratives, attitudes and behaviours.

CHAPTER 6: Conclusions, contributions and recommendations

The aim of this research was to explore the effect of social media influencers on consumers' food choices with a focus on consumers who identify as Foodies. This chapter demonstrates that the research aim and research objectives have been addressed. Recommendations, the contribution to knowledge, limitations of the research and possibilities for future research are set out. From the data, four key themes were interpreted that provided insight into how Foodies were making use of influencers.

The themes link back to the following research objectives:

- **The magnificent mundane: making food choice easier and more enjoyable:** The first theme explores how social media influencer help Foodies manage food choice. It emerged from insights into what social media-based functionality consumers used from or with influencers to manage food choices. Many of these tools fit with the strategies (Furst et al., 1996) Foodies adopted for food choice. This developed a better picture of how Foodies valued the content provided by influencers.

  RO1: To apply Furst et al.'s (1996) comprehensive food choice model to Foodies to understand how and why Foodies use social media influencers to inform their food choice.

RO3: To examine how the digital foodscape of influencers affects the dietary attitudes, behaviours and identities of people who identify as Foodies.

- **'Good' food: how Foodies use influencers to negotiate food values:** The second theme critically reviews the food values which drive Foodie food choice. From this, an understanding of the discourse around 'good' food was developed. The research found that influencers were shaping the Foodie consumer opinions, attitudes, and behaviours around food choice.

RO4: To critically assess how the digital foodscape of influencers with which Foodies engage is impacting Foodie attitudes and behaviours to inform daily food choices.

RO5 To understand the meanings and values Foodies ascribe to influencers, the values they espouse, the content they produce and the tools they offer to help consumers manage food choice.

- **Foodie identities: exploring self and food through influencers:** The third theme is a review of how the Foodies explore their identities as they interact with influencers. At times, identities and values were closely inter-twined, confirming Furst et al.'s (1996) assertion that food choice informs identity. Individual influencers are shaping change, and while there were some similarities in values and interest across individual Foodies and across the influencers they follow, there is a wider foodscape or consumer culture around food with a plethora of values and identities.

RO1: To apply Furst et al.'s (1996) comprehensive food choice model to Foodies to understand how and why Foodies use social media influencers to develop their Foodie identities.

RO2: To discuss the significance of food and food-based identity in contemporary consumer culture, to understand Foodie-ism as an evolving interest and Foodie as consumption-based identity.

RO3: To examine how the digital foodscape of influencers affects the dietary identities of Foodies.

- **The limits and perils of influencer influence:** This theme directly informs a critical discussion of the extent and limits of influencer influence and the limits of how Foodies choose to engage with them and their content. In addition, the perils of influencer influence are also explored as they relate to dangerous narratives that influencers proliferate and also what is excluded from 'good' food.

RO4: To critically explore the extent and limits of influencer influence on consumers with a high subject knowledge within the context-specific consumption category of Foodies in and around Edinburgh.

This research found a shift in Foodie identities and values when choosing foods. This led to defining Foodie-specific food values (Table 7) and the proposed Foodie archetypes (Table 8) as sub-categories of the Foodie identity.

6.1 Contributions to theory

There is a growing body of research into the digital foodscape and how it impacts offline food narratives and trends (Johnston & Goodman, 2015; Goodman & Jaworska, 2020). There is also a body of research into how food choices are influenced online and by social media influencers (Rodney et al., 2017; Coates et al., 2019; Coates & Boyland, 2021; Charry & Tessitore, 2021). There is less research, particularly qualitative into influencer marketing from the perspective of consumers (Abidin, 2015; Lou, 2021). This research addresses this gap by focusing on a particular consumption-based identity: Foodies. This research makes several contributions to theory which are presented as they relate to the research objectives.

6.1.1 Research objective 1:

To apply Furst et al.'s (1996) comprehensive food choice model to Foodies to understand how and why Foodies use social media influencers to inform their food choice and develop their Foodie identities.

Foodies are highly knowledgeable consumers, and while previous research identified fashion consumers did not make purchasing decisions based on shared values with influencers (Shoenerger & Kim, 2022), food behaviour and food choice is highly impacted by shared values. This supports food choice models and research which assert that food choice is heavily linked to values (Furst et al., 1996; Connors et al., 2001; Chen & Antonelli, 2020). Furthermore, consumer research has identified consumers are increasingly values-driven (Euromonitor, 2021b; WARC, 2021). This

research found that Foodies were highly values-driven in their food choice and identities and what follows is a discussion of which food values are central to the Foodie identity, and how influencers address these values.

Some of the values identified in the original food choice model were among those which were the most salient for individuals to weigh when making food choice (quality, nutrition and sensory appeal were particularly relevant), and the literature review into food featured a review of subsequent studies into food choice and identified values that are linked to the Foodie identity. In the findings and discussion chapter, Foodie food values are identified (Table 7) as those which were interpreted as important to respondents. This is a unique contribution to the literature around food choice, Foodies and social media influencers. Sharing values with influencers did have an impact on how relatable and useful Foodies found influencers and their content demonstrating that food influencers may relate to their audience in ways which differ from other influencers.

Some food values were particularly important to Foodies. Variety and adventure have been identified as primary motivations for Foodies the context of travel Foodie-ism. Once again, Barr and Levy's (1984) original Foodies enjoyed finding new foods and being at the forefront of good taste, but the Foodies in this research approached exploration without always linking this to cultural capital and a desire to impress, so it was an extension of their variety-seeking. Similarly, the research around Foodies in the context of food tourism highlights several social motivations centred around status for sharing and taking pictures online (Mendini et al., 2019; Vila et al., 2021). Most of the Foodies in this study expressed an aversion to sharing food

images online, preferring to consumer content rather than produce it. The Foodies in this research expressed a love of variety and adventure because they became bored eating the same meals or wanted to explore new flavour combinations and new ways of eating. Influencers introduce Foodies to new foods and provide ideas for new ways to prepare existing foods.

Another food value of import to Foodies was learning. While Cairns et al. (2010) defined Foodies as people who enjoy consuming good food and learning about it, the value of learning has been an under-explored one in much of the literature around Foodies. This was one of the primary values that Foodies identified as being meaningful both to how they chose foods (as opportunities to learn new skills) and why they consumed influencer content (to see skills demonstrated, to learn about new foods and new ways to prepare foods with which they were familiar). Influencers also helped contextualise how they made food choices, managed food in the household and related to others through food by providing narratives which were values laden and linked to social factors. Barr and Levy (1984) defined a Foodie as being someone who knows about good food, but this knowing was linked to a devotion to trends and social knowledge. The Foodies in this study were far more interested in learning about food to know its attributes, how to prepare food, mastering skills in the kitchen and being able to know enough to improvise with their food choices and meals. Influencers were preferred sources of this kind of information because of the level of detail and context they provide in their content (more on this in RO5).

There were values identified by food choice models and through literature around Foodies which were not front of mind among respondents.

Foodies as a group are typically associated with middle class, being those who can afford to eat well and be selective with their food (Lewis, 2018; Neuman & Fjellström, 2014; Richards, 2015). It is therefore not surprising that money did not feature as a prominent value negotiation. However, it was surprising that Foodies were less concerned with ethics of eating as this contradicts previous research which linked Foodie-ism and food issues such as environmentalism and sustainability and social equality (Clendenning et al., 2016; Schösler & Boer, 2018; Vásquez & Chik, 2015). While some of the Foodies did embrace trends such as flexitarianism and meat reduction, the Foodies in this study did so for health reasons rather than ethical ones. Influencers were a source of knowledge and inspiration for Foodies who wanted to change their eating habits and pattern, as well as those Foodies who wanted to take joy in day-to-day food preparation and choice. Food influencers are strong source of information and inspiration around food and they are often values-driven.

6.1.2 Research objective 2:

To discuss the significance of food and food-based identity in contemporary consumer culture, to understand Foodie-ism as an evolving interest and Foodie as consumption-based identity.

While Foodies were once a niche group, passion for food has been on the rise among the wider population, within contemporary British culture and online (Hootsuite, 2021; Goodman & Jaworska, 2020; Johnston & Bauman, 2015; Lewis, 2018). This is indicative of an active and growing digital foodscape with a wider range of food-based information available online (Lewis, 2020), and increasing consumer dependence on information online to

inform consumption choices (Euromonitor, 2021b; Hootsuite, 2021). The interest of Foodies in exploring, enjoying and defining ‘good’ food has been a consistent Foodie attribute (Barr & Levy, 1984; De Solier, 2013; Johnston & Bauman, 2015). But there is little agreement around what defines food as ‘good’ as the values of individuals are reflected in discussions around ‘good’ food (Baggini, 2014). There are so many differing values around food choice, and the link between values and identity is firmly established in both Foodie and food choice literature (Barr & Levy, 1984; De Solier, 2013; Furst et al., 1996; Vila et al., 2021; Walsh & Baker, 2020). Therefore, this research proposes Foodies no longer be considered a cohesive, singular identity, but one with plural sub-categories or archetypes.

Although the definition of Foodies has changed slightly through publications to recognise a slight range of Foodies, from elitist to more democratic and those who simply spend more on food (see Table 1 for Foodie types identified in literature) most authors approach Foodie as a singular label. The proposed archetypes identified in this research include the original / classic Foodie, the healthy Foodie and the curious Foodie (as detailed in Table 8). Barr and Levy’s (1984) original Foodie was highly involved in food trends and eating out, and this Foodie archetype is still part of mainstream Foodie culture. Part of Johnston and Bauman’s (2015) book about Foodies elaborated on the tension between the snobbish elitism of the original Foodie type and more democratic approaches to Foodie-ism. While the Foodies in this research were largely embracing less trend-led Foodie-ism, embraced home cooking and chose what to eat based on what they thought they would enjoy, most did not quite fit into either Foodie definition

proposed by the previous texts. Some of the Foodies were closer to the classic Foodie in that they enjoyed eating out, introducing their friends to new food trends and enjoying foods that were still exclusive in that they were not widely available. But none of the Foodies appeared to be interested in democratising good food and making it more widely available. The Foodies were instead focused on food as it related to their own consumption and how they fed their family and friends.

The Foodie archetypes introduced here should be considered a starting point only as other types are likely present. Archetypes implied in literature but not found in this research – such as Johnston and Bauman's (2015) democratic Foodie – have not been included in these archetypes because respondents did not refer to concerns related to this type. The proposed archetypes should be deemed a starting point due to the small sample included in this work. Further segmentation of types may also be justified. For instance, fit Foodies may warrant a separate label from healthy Foodies as those who love good food and eat calory-heavy diets to increase energy levels will behave very differently from healthy Foodies who focus on nutritional benefit, or slimming Foodies who want to lose weight and restrict calories without compromising flavour. While Foodie destination research has attempted to segment Foodies (Kline et al., 2018; Mohd-Any, Mahdzan, & Cher, 2014), this research proposes archetypes as more fitting to more fully explore the differences in Foodie identities. They are proposed as a starting point to better understand consumer motivations in the context of food choice and may appeal to different consumer segments.

6.1.3 Research objective 3:

To examine how the digital foodscape of influencers affects the dietary attitudes, behaviours and identities of people who identify as Foodies.

Previous research found that Foodies did not find online sources such as bloggers or influencers to be legitimate sources of food knowledge (De Solier, 2013). In contrast, this research found influencers to be highly influential sources of food information, learning and inspiration. Influencers and while influencer were not effective at promoting branded foods online, they were informing daily food choices and values – which had a long-term impact on food choice. The analysis demonstrated this most clearly in how attitudes and behaviours around healthy food choices were being shaped through influencer. This research confirms previous work that found social media influencers provide social nudges that are promoting healthy food choices (Charry & Tessitore, 2021). But while Charry & Tessitore (2021) linked a high number of followers as acting as an effective social nudge, the Foodies in this research reported choosing healthy foods that were included in recipes across influencers, making repetition across influencers and their recipes the effective nudge.

Research reports that a lack of social desirability of healthy foods is a stumbling block to a healthier diet and that eating unhealthily is more socially desirable (Charry & Tessitore, 2021). Previous research has suggested solving value negotiations between health and hedonism by developing healthy foods to be more desirable (Luomala, 2005). As long as unhealthy foods are presented as socially desirable, healthy food will be less marketable (Charry & Tessitore, 2021). This research found influencers are

re-framing healthy foods as desirable – both for themselves and for others– and this is effective in appealing to Foodies. Research reports that a lack of social desirability of healthy foods is a stumbling block to a healthier diet and that eating unhealthily is more socially desirable (Charry & Tessitore, 2021). Previous research has suggested solving value negotiations between health and hedonism by developing healthy foods to be more desirable (Luomala, 2005). The clear link in this research between the use of social media influencers and healthy food choices may indicates an emergent wider social interest in healthy eating. The research does indicate social media and influencers are key drivers of the idealisation of heathy foods (Boepple & Thompson, 2014; Walsh & Baker, 2020).

Social media influencers are having a large impact on presenting and framing healthy foods as desirable among Foodies in Scotland. Favourable descriptions (fresh, goodness), beautiful presentation and photography of healthy foods was reported by the Foodies as means by which influencers presented healthy foods as desirable. This confirms previous research that found well-presented food can be used to promote healthy lifestyles (Mejova et al., 2016). All the Foodies agreed that they liked to prepare and consume foods which were nutritious but did not like to compromise on enjoyment of their food. This was particularly relevant for encouraging healthy eating among children. While a study of children's eating habits and Social Media Influencers reported children exposed to healthy food choices through influencer content did not prompt the children to make healthier food choices (Coates et al., 2019b), the respondents in this study did report choosing healthy recipes as inspired by influencers and used influencer ideas to make

healthy foods more appealing for children. Influencers were sharing ways they had overcome picky eater in their own homes – for example, by hiding healthy foods in tasty recipes or by presenting vegetable as more appealing. The Foodies in this research were embracing food which was good for them as 'good' food which was enjoyable and the prevalence of this among all respondents suggests a wider social interest in healthy eating popularised online.

6.1.4 Research objective 4:

To critically explore the extent and limits of influencer influence on consumers with a high subject knowledge within the context-specific consumption category of Foodies in and around Edinburgh.

As identified in the literature review, previous research has made much of influencer-follower homophily, parasocial relationships and popularity to explain influencer influence. This participants in this research reported behaviours and attitudes that contradicted previous research and the research explores how consumers with high subject knowledge respond differently to influencers than other consumer groups. This is particular to consumers in categories such as food which are heavily tied to values (Furst et al., 1996; Vila et al., 2021). How the findings from this research challenges existing research into influencer influence are detailed in this section.

This research has found that perceived homophily of food values and food goals (e.g. losing weight, weaning children, becoming vegan) were key reasons Foodies turned to social media influencers and took their recommendations. However, this research found that influencers made for poor brand advocates for products. The only instances where Foodies

bought specific brands based on influencer recommendation was when there was a close personal bond – either through a close perceived similarity or where the influencer was also a friend. This finding supports literature that confirms consumers are more likely to make a purchase based on a personal recommendation from someone they know (M. C. Han & Kim, 2017; He et al., 2016; Szolnoki, Dolan, Forbes, Thach, & Goodman, 2018). But it is contrary to many research studies which found influencers are strong brand advocates (Booth & Matic, 2011; Lee & Eastin, 2021; Sánchez-Fernández & Jiménez-Castillo, 2021; Shan et al., 2020). While influencers were highly influential in recommending restaurants and while Foodies reported purchasing ingredients which were previously unfamiliar to them, these food items were rarely branded.

Where homophily between influencers and Foodies was relevant was where they shared values or had similar social dynamics in their homes. Foodies reported influencers were ‘like me’ and even reported the influencer was ‘who I am’ and so they felt strongly linked to the influencer through shared identity and values (Perez-Vega et al., 2016). Research has found that perceived homophily of superficial characteristics (appearance, social status) and aspirational aspects of influencers were more likely to lead to consumers following influencers to help guide their purchases while value-driven homophily was less likely to impact purchase intention (Shoenberger & Kim, 2022). However, food choice is tightly tied to values, and this research found that often reported following influencers who shared their values and not following influencers whose values were not aligned to their own.

Current research into influencers suggests that parasocial relationships are important to influencer influence (Breves et al., 2021; Reinikainen et al., 2020; Leite & Baptista, 2021), but this can vary across consumer type (Bhattacharya, 2022; Lou, 2021). Among the Foodies, parasocial interactions and relationships were reported as ways in which barriers around trust and critical appraisal of information are lowered. Personal experience of influencers was important to Foodies who also relied on their own corporal experiences with food to evaluate it, for examples reporting certain foods made them feel heavy or bloated. Some of the Foodie respondents were describing some foods as ‘poison’ and had a real focus on ‘maximising nutritional value’. This indicates preoccupations which are like those described as part of orthorexia nervosa (Fixsen et al., 2020; Walsh & Baker, 2020). Social media influencers are perpetuating these narratives by rejecting and even demonising certain foods while promoting others – and this is often without evidence to support beyond their own personal experience. However, there was resistance to some of these narratives by Foodies who recognised that purist ideals were not healthy and that influencers were involved in promoting ‘supposedly’ heathy trends. Once again, the Foodie’s ability to critically assess influencer content seemed to be highest when there was a mismatch between influencer values and Foodie values. Therefore, while influencer influence is very high and while parasocial interactions and relationship do reduce the critical evaluation of their recommendations, Foodies are more influenced by their own values than influencers.

While the number of followers and popularity of an influencer has been shown to have a positive impact on influencer credibility (Campbell & Farrell, 2020; Charry & Tessitore, 2021), some of the Foodies reported that influencers who were too popular were off-putting. Foodies who value trendy foods like to be ahead of trends, but most Foodies value foods based on their own internally held values – such as quality, nutritional benefit, or sensory appeal. Most respondents reported turning to influencers for inspiration and to learn about food and this was explained as a more accessible form of learning than more traditional sources. Influencers make food preparation and complex recipes look easier and more accessible and part of their appeal was their lower production values. Foodies learn not only what to make, but why certain ingredients work with others and the properties of foods. This helps Foodies develop independence and creativity in the kitchen as they are able to critically understand how to balance flavours and textures and what substitute ingredients they can use for recipes and specialist diets. Not only did Foodies report cooking to recipes, but they were quite often changing recipes to suit their tastes or putting together their own dishes. This demonstrates that influencers have a huge influence in how Foodies cook and learn skills in the kitchen, but that the Foodies also take this food knowledge beyond what the influencers are teaching them.

6.1.5 Research objective 5:

To understand the meanings and values Foodies ascribe to influencers, the values they espouse, the content they produce and the tools they offer to help consumers manage food choice.

Foodies reported influencer content as easier to search, having more detail, and being more readily accessible than traditional media. Foodies often reported being involved with influencer content – paying active attention because the content is helping address needs, negotiate values and fuel an interest in food. Consumer behaviour is often tied to deeper social and identity needs (Solomon et al., 2019), and this study has explored how influencers allow Foodies to engage in exploration around their values and identity. Foodies consistently referred to their life experiences as they related to influencers and adopting strategies from influencers to manage food and food work. In this way, influencers were being referenced and related to not just for food values, but to develop strategies for managing food in the homes as well (Furst et al., 1996). So not only were daily food choices of Foodies being impacted, but their long-term food choices were influenced as well.

Influencers were preferred choices for food-based information and exploration in part due to the detail of their content and the functionality of social media. Because influencers participate in intimate self-disclosure and reveal their wider food contexts (Leite & Baptista, 2021; Sau-Wa, 2022), they reveal wider factors involved in food choice (such as social influences including relating to others and social norms) and this leads to Foodies being better able to evaluate the match between the wider factors involved in the influencer's food choice and their own wider context. As discussed in the findings and discussion, Foodies used influencers as interactive cookbooks and found tools that helped them manage mundane tasks particularly useful. Pinterest boards helped one household enable better sharing of tasks related to food planning, procurement and preparation and an app launched by an

influencer was helping one respondent populate weekly grocery lists. Additionally, the familiarity of Foodies with using the internet in general increases the accessibility of influencers. And while the proliferation of influencers online has led to concerns that saturation makes them less effective at reaching consumers, the collective power of influencers to produce content that has variety – even when the differences between recipes is negligeable – is valued by Foodies who like to compare and contrast different ingredients and methods for food preparation.

One of the key findings that came out of this research was developed throughout the recruitment and analysis. Many potential respondents did not identify themselves as “followers” of particular influencers. When approached about participation in the research, respondents often asked for further clarification as to what was meant by “following” an influencer online. A lack of clarity on what qualifies as a “follower” in the context of social media influencers outside of metrics-based definitions is lacking. Number of followers is easier to clarify as this refers to number of users who have taken some action on social media which can be quantified. This can be quantified by number of users who “follow” or “friend” an influencer, but can also be related to other engagement metrics such as likes, comments or number of times users re-share influencer content (Charry & Tessitore, 2021; De Veirman et al., 2017; Janssen et al., 2021). But as identified in research into online networks, there are important network users who leave no digital footprint (Trier & Richter, 2015). Trier and Richter’s (2015) study identified information retrievers as important users in an organisational context who use information efficiently and with expertise. Foodies often reported

combing multiple influencers and other sources to find information about food and they reported spreading their knowledge with their contacts offline.

This highlights the need for a more nuanced understanding of consumer engagement with influencers and the potential role these consumers play in spreading influencer influence offline. To that end, a typology of engagement with influencers was created (Figure 4). This research proposes that such a typology is necessary to better understand and more specifically identify the scale of influencer influence that will not be captured in conventional metrics. Some of the types include require conventional followership that can be measured online. For example , inactive users can be tracked by unique site visits. Other engagement types could be operating without ever leaving a digital footprint. For example, offline opinion leaders may be undetectable beyond counting site visitors and their engagement with content that they share offline cannot be traced online, but is nonetheless highly valuable. The proposed typology in Figure 4 captures not only online engagement, but also offline engagement.

6.2 Recommendations

The recommendations are divided into three subsections to address potential audiences, namely: influencers, marketers and food businesses looking to partner with influencers, and policy makers. The recommendations provide insight into how influencer can create content and present themselves in such a way to impact Foodie attitudes and behaviours, to inform daily food choices and develop Foodie identities. The research critically explored the extent and limits of influencer influence Foodies in

Edinburgh and this research provides recommendations for what influencers and marketers should avoid when trying to reach this high knowledge group. As this research has developed an in-depth understanding of how Foodies ascribe meaning and value to influencers, the food values they espouse and the content they produce, the recommendations provide insight into what social media-based functions and tools help consumers manage food choices. The importance of relating to Foodies through food values and commonality of identity is also considered with specific recommendations of how to leverage this.

6.2.1 Recommendations to influencers

The research found food-based influencers are powerful change agents, and that by engaging Foodies, who are food-passionate opinion leaders among their family, friends and acquaintances, influencers are able to spread their influence offline via the Foodies. Foodies are therefore a valuable audience to influencers. Influencers who wish to engage Foodies should clearly communicate their values around food. To raise their profile, influencers should pay attention to existing food trends – popular ingredients, new preparation tools and techniques – and produce recipes that employ these ingredients and methods to make their content more easily found. Although most food blogs have an element of lifestyle, influencers should consider having separate sections on their site or tags for their posts if they plan on posting frequently about new non-food related subjects to avoid disengaging their existing Foodie followers who expressed irritation at posts they perceived to be off-topic or too personal.

Foodies deeply value detail around food and recipes and personal context as this helps them learn and adapt food knowledge to themselves. Influencers should continue to provide information with personal details throughout as this is what makes their content compelling for the Foodies. Influencers who can relate their content to major life events (bereavement, divorce, welcoming and then weaning a child) or significant dietary changes (adopting veganism, losing weight) also have the potential to reach Foodies at times of dietary change – which were the times when respondents identified that their informational needs were their highest. This would also help Foodies find influencers who shared their goals and relevant circumstances more closely. Influencers are more effective at reaching Foodies when they share values or circumstances, so rather than focusing on mass appeal, influencers should focus on relating on a personal level with those who follow them and clearly relate their food choices back to values.

6.2.2 Recommendations to marketers and food businesses

When using food influencers to promote or introduce new foods, there are several strategies to attract highly engaged and knowledgeable consumers such as Foodies. The Foodies in this research did not always recognise influencers right away and often found new sources through their news feeds and as content that was being fed to them by platforms based on previous searches. Some Foodies do pay attention to food trends, but many are also practically minded and while they like trying new foods, they want to make use of the food they buy. The most effective means to introduce new food products and ingredients would be to align with several influencers so that those who follow them see ingredients repeated and incorporated into

several different recipes. The Foodies in this study reported that they rarely bought branded products based on influencer recommendation, but that they did buy ingredients based on recipes. If branded products can be related to goals of Foodies – such as losing weight or eating nutritionally rich foods – then they may have a greater chance of success at being purchased.

Promoting specific brands via influencers proved to be less effective among the Foodie respondents in this research and particular ingredients were noticed when they featured across several recipes. If brands wish to partner with influencers to promote specific products, it is highly recommended that they find smaller influencers who are also opinion leaders in a niche area (e.g. influencers focused on losing weight for diet-based appeals), who can consistently integrate specific products into a variety of recipes and who have a strong focus on teaching or informing their audiences. Smaller niche influencers who actively engage in two-way communicate with followers would be more effective promotional channels because having a relationship is important for recommendations to lead to purchase intention. This is consistent with current practitioner advice (DMI, 2021; Hootsuite, 2022), as well as research recommending micro influencers (Kay et al., 2020; Park, Lee, Xiong, Septianto, & Seo, 2021). It also confirms research that those who follow micro-influencers tend to have more product knowledge and respond more positively to influencer endorsements (Kay et al., 2020). Indeed, the respondents in this study who responded to influencer endorsements of particular products reported following smaller influencers who were well-aligned to their own personal interests in food. By providing not just product information, but also providing facts and benefits about the

products as they are related to niche interests, influencers will be more likely to attract the interest of Foodies. This aligns with previous research which identified that influencers often have a deep knowledge of their audience and are able to tailor content to them better than other professionals (C. Campbell & Farrell, 2020), and that influencers are effective at developing emotional bonds with followers (D. Y. Kim & Kim, 2021; Sánchez-Fernández & Jiménez-Castillo, 2021).

A legitimate link between influencer interest and brand has been reported as crucial to successful promotions as it allows an element of autobiography to be included and this creates a personalised portrait of consumption with which Foodies can identify and which is seen as an authentic recommendation (Hudders et al., 2021; Ouvrein et al., 2021). Foodies are particularly interested in more detail about food and how this relates to identity and lifestyle. Providing cues as to their food values and goals can help influencers attract Foodies who have similar interests. If influencers wish to partner with food brands, they should only choose those brands which are well-aligned with their principles and that are ideally aligned to their values and goals as well (i.e., weight loss, expanding their pallet, eating for nutritional value, being adventurous in the kitchen).

6.2.3 Recommendations for Scottish Policy Makers

> Our aspiration is that Scotland is a Good Food Nation, a country where people from every walk of life take pride and pleasure in, and benefit from, the food they buy, serve, and eat day by day. This will require a step-change and mean that: It is the norm for Scots to take a keen interest in their food, knowing what constitutes good food, valuing it and seeking it out whenever they can…

(Devlin, 2015, p. 3)

The Scottish Government is supporting the growth of several areas of the food and drink industry by: improving the seafood sector with the Scottish Seafood Partnership; funding advice to dairy farmers; launching a sustainable scheme for beef; and partnering with the EU to protect food names from competition and imitation based on geography and tradition (Scottish Government, 2022). Within Scotland there are several body devoted to promoting local food and drink including Scotland Food and Drink, the Scottish Seafood Partnership, Visit Scotland and several other smaller bodies related to specific product types such as the Scotch Whisky Association. Influencers are in a prime location in the UK foodscape as highly influential (Goodman & Jaworska, 2020) and this research found that many of their followers are interested in good British food done well. Prominent UK-based influencers who focus on locally sourced foods, seasonal eating and traditional dishes could be targeted to help incorporate more Scottish ingredients into their recipes and to better educate the general public as to the nutritional value and quality of Scottish food and drink products. Were this approach combined with proposed clear labelling of products in supermarkets as Scottish (Devlin, 2015), this could serve as a clear way to appeal to Foodie values of quality, to align to those Foodies who embrace simple British food done well and to help make purchasing Scottish products easier.

Food influencers not only make valuable potential partners for promotional food messages, they also make for damaging critics for some of Scotland's key food assets – namely meat and dairy. Influencers have been

identified as sources of information about food fads who perpetuate trends such as meat reduction and exclusion diets – with dairy being a key ingredient that is often excluded (Goodman & Jaworska, 2020; Walsh & Baker, 2020). Meat-free Monday, Veganuary and similar social initiatives to reduce meat consumption are also gaining popularity and meat reducers have been identified as a growing group (Malek & Umberger, 2021). This research found that Foodies were interested in the quality and health benefits of their foods and used influencers to learn about food. Scotland's plan to become a Good Food Nation involves the Scottish population embracing and valuing good food which benefits them nutritionally (Devlin, 2015). Food influencers can, and should, be used to promote the quality of local meat and dairy, to highlight their contribution to the local economy, to enforce messages about the health benefits of these foods, and to connect consumers who are concerned with animal welfare with high welfare producers.

Influencers can be leveraged as those who are making nutritious foods more desirable. Within Scotland 2 out of 3 people are considered overweight or obese (Food Standards Scotland, 2020). A recent survey of over 1,000 Scottish adults found that consumers recognise there are problems with unhealthy diets in Scotland, that they feel confident in their knowledge of what constitutes a healthy diet and that this does not necessarily translate into healthy eating (Food Standards Scotland, 2021). The report identified barriers such as time, cost and the 'feelgood' factor of unhealthy options including delivery foods which have few healthy options (ibid). This research found that influencer-Foodie relationships mapped

directly onto two of three of Katz's (1957) dimensions of opinion leadership – personification of shared values and competence. Competence was linked not only to knowledge of food and how to prepare it, but also strategic competence in areas such as balancing time and resource constraints or making healthy food appealing to children, and so the lifestyle information of the influencer was highly relevant to the Foodies and helps to address the barriers to eating well identified by previous research. Katz's (1957) third dimension of opinion leadership was strategic social position, and while having a lot of followers or relevant network connections helped influencers be seen by Foodies, having a socially prominent position was off-putting to the Foodies. Campbell and Farrell's (2020) findings that less popular influencers are perceived as more authentic holds true for food influencers, and so there is scope to work with smaller, local food influencers to improve the Scottish diet.

Finally, while influencers and Foodies are highly food-interested, targeting these groups will not reach all Scots. Research has revealed a global shift in food preparation and consumption habits, with more people learning new skills and cooking at home (Euromonitor, 2021b). While food is certainly a trend, this research was very much focused on a consumer group who are typically middle class or higher. This is not an insignificant group as 59% of the UK population is classified as the middle class according to household income adjusted for number of household members (OECD, 2019). However, the luxury of being able to indulge an interest in food as a hobby requires some disposable income and while Foodie-ism has become

less elitist, it is still very much limited to those considered middle class and higher.

6.3 Limitations

In order to avoid researcher bias in the process of analysis and presenting findings, the data and interpretations of that data must be grounded in the subjective meaning for the respondent (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006), and this should be presented in their own words as much as possible. It can be tempting to extrapolate, but this is not the function of the interpretivist researcher. The experiences of respondents reported in their own words were particularly valuable to inform the socially constructed meanings and values around influencer influence on food choice from the point of view of the Foodies (Given, 2008a). However the approach did not allow for a larger scale study that could have better confirmed and defined various Foodies identities and compared Foodie-specific interests to wider food trends in the population. As the food diaries were self-reported and kept over specific a two-week period, they were able to capture insights from respondents about their food choice, but more thorough methods could have been employed for understanding social media use had there been sufficient resources and given the skill to employ more sophisticated technological methods. For instance, had the respondents both kept a diary and had their online movements tracked using technology, this would have provided a fuller picture of the daily influence provided by social media influencers and may have shed light on behaviours that respondents themselves are not even aware of.

While this study does provide insight into how Foodies are making use of influencers and how influencers are impacting their attitudes, behaviours and identities based on an existing food choice model, the research is exploratory in nature as it examined the influence of social media influencers on this particular consumer type. A two-staged mixed methods approach may have allowed more robust exploration of the themes in a wider sample of the population to see which were prevalent among Foodies and which were perhaps specific to the group of respondents in this study. For instance, a wider survey may have provided an indication of healthy concerns related to food and explored more broadly how many Foodies are motivated to choose healthy foods out of nutritional benefits, to match weight loss goals or as a means to counter-act more indulgent food choices. In addition, by extending the time period of data gathering, data saturation may have been employed as a measure to ensure reliability rather than through benchmarking based on previous authors which was the method employed in this research.

The research did employ a small sample size and was cross-sectional. While an initial three Foodie archetypes are introduced, this is by no means a comprehensive typology. The Foodie food values could also have been more extensively explored and tested with a larger sample size or survey. While this research can effectively speak in great depth to how Foodies' food choices have changed and been influenced by influencers, it cannot speak to how that influence changes over time.

6.4 Future research

This research used a small group of participants to collect rich data. Several theoretical contributions have been discussed (Foodie food values, Foodie archetypes, typology of user engagement with influencers) which could now be further developed and tested on a larger sample. While the respondents in this research were predominantly curious and healthy Foodies, future research could explore further archetypes and values. Healthy food has been identified as a trend in the UK's digital foodscape (Goodman & Jaworska, 2020), and so social media may be a medium that appeals to a particular Foodie archetype. A large-scale research survey could be conducted to more thoroughly explore Foodie food values across a larger sample, and to link these values with a wider range of archetypes. As Foodies are such a large consumer group in the UK as identified in previous literature, identifying Foodie archetypes would lead to a deeper understanding of food messages that resonate with specific consumer groups based on their shared values.

Future research could involve mixed methods on a larger scale to make clearer links between influencers and food purchases. Longitudinal research that extends the study of Foodies' use of influencers over a longer time period might be another potential avenue to show longer-term relationships between social media use and evolving food choice and identity. Using more technology may have helped identify unreported links between influencers and food choice, such as tracking the online movements of respondents online and/or recording food shopping over a more extended time period to more clearly link content of online posts to the contents of

pantries over time. Research that follows the shaping of Foodie identities over a longer period of time might also help identify where influencers are being used as temporary sources of inspiration and where loyalty to specific influencers emerges and how this is shaped.

6.5 Chapter Summary

This research found that social media influencers have a cumulative effect on the food choices of Foodies. By engaging with social media around food and food choice, Foodies explored, questioned, and developed their food-based identities. The Foodie identity is significant to contemporary consumer culture within the UK and this research confirmed the use of influencers to explore Foodie identity and make food choices. The popularity of food on social media speaks to the cultural significance of food and Foodie culture in contemporary spaces, but this research found social media influencers are only one part of a wider food media landscape to which Foodies refer and in which they participate. In addition to having positive impacts, such as making healthy and local/culturally relevant foods desirable, influencers are also having a negative impact. Orthorexia nervosa, or the labelling of perfectly edible foods as dangerous or non-edible to the point of inducing fear about these foods, is a widespread disorder that is prevalent on social media. Influencers have been found to contribute to, and popularise, this disordered view of foods. Implications for theory and practice have been covered in this section which has addressed the aim and objectives of this research.

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Appendices

A1: Influencers' food philosophies and followers

In order to understand why certain influencers resonated with the Foodies, the most popular or favourite influencers of individuals are featured here. Research has found that a higher number of followers of healthy food influencers on Twitter can act as a nudge to increase the intention of eating healthily (Charry & Tessitore, 2021), and health-related influencers were consistently referred to by all of the respondents. By far, the most prolific influencer mentioned by name by Foodies is Deliciously Ella. This blogger and entrepreneur has been linked to the clean eating fad. Some of the Foodies mentioned bloggers who no longer have active sites and others mentioned influencers whose celebrity pre-dates their social media presence – Jamie Oliver, Nigella Lawson, Tom Kerridge – these have not been included below as they more clearly fit into the category of celebrity chef.

Influencer Followers	Respondent	About:
The Body Coach / Joe Wicks 4.1 million (Instagram) 4.4 million (Facebook)	Bran	*"I joined Instagram and started posting #Leanin15 recipes; quick and easy home-cooked meals in 15 seconds."* NOTE: during the coronavirus, Joe Wicks became a household name. At the time of the research, he was not as well-known, but follower numbers were taken after data collection.
Deliciously Ella 2 million (Instagram) 342,161 (Facebook)	Pepper Rosemary Dill Olive Clementine	*"I had been diagnosed with a condition called postural tachycardia syndrome, as well as ehlers-danlos and mast cell activation disorder, following four months in and out of hospital... I was prescribed a cocktail of medication, but unfortunately, they had limited success... I decided to turn to a whole foods, plant-based diet, and overhauled my lifestyle... I knew that I never wanted to compromise on taste – flavour, abundance and excitement had to sit at the heart of every meal."*
Symmetry Breakfast	Pepper	*"It just shows how you can take the everyday and make it beautiful."*

723,800 (Instagram) 7,800 (Facebook)		*"Breakfast time was the only guaranteed time we would have together... I wanted to make those 30 minutes a bit more special."*
Hot for Food 357,000 (Instagram) 56,000 (Facebook)	Colby	*"Vegan versions of popular comfort foods... like mac and cheese, burgers, Caesar salad, and even cheesecake is helping to catapult the vegan lifestyle into the mainstream and proving that plant-based diets are far from boring."*
Green Kitchen Stories 399,000 (Instagram) 140,000 (Facebook)	Olive	*"Welcome to our Green Kitchen. Here we cook and eat healthy and simple vegetarian food with natural ingredients, whole grains, good fats, fruit and vegetables."* *"I love everything green from broccoli to smoothies."* *"I am lactose intolerant but can't give up yogurt."*
Quirky Cooking 69,4000 (Instagram) 268,747 (Facebook)	Quince	*"I love helping families reduce the food stress, guiding them towards simple diet and lifestyle changes that will heal and nourish, one small step at a time... My mum taught me to cook from a young age, using basic ingredients, and cooking 'from scratch'. We gathered food from the markets, our backyard garden, and from local producers, and cooked mostly with what was in season and locally grown."*
Amelia Freer 160,000 (Instagram) 57,615 (Facebook)	Rosemary Bran Olive	*"I wholeheartedly believe that a good meal is one of life's greatest pleasures, while also being one of the most powerful tools we have for supporting health. These two benefits of food can stand hand-in-hand. But in a world of noise and confusion around nutrition and wellbeing, it can sometimes feel hard to find this balanced path for ourselves.... I therefore aim to share a consistent, calm and inspiring message, to empower readers to make informed lifestyle decisions that suit their own unique needs. There is no such thing as a 'one size fits all' approach to eating."*
Skinny Kitchen Secrets 33,000 (Instagram) 72,000 (Facebook)	Clementine	*"Gourmet Weight Watchers Recipes for the Discerning Dieter... I signed up for Weight Watchers and realised that, through the plan, I could combine my love and passion for good food and cooking with my new diet to produce the most wonderful tasting and filling meals whilst still losing weight."*
Slow Cooker Recipes Facebook page by Vicky	Reuben	*"Healthy slow cooker recipe page, with additional cooking chat, meals that aren't slow cooking related and tips and ideas for cheap budget meals as well."*

4,958 (Instagram) 463,366 (Facebook)		

A2: Participant information

Thank you for expressing interest in taking part with this doctoral research into food choices and food bloggers.

The research will take part in three stages:

Meeting 1 (no more than 1 hour)

A. Between the dates of Monday May 29th and Friday June 10th, interviews will take place that will last no more than an hour.

B. This will include a hands-on analysis of the contents of your pantry and fridge including pictures being taken of the food in each location.

This is to provide insight and a record into food purchasing and consumption habits. During this meeting, you will be provided with a 'food diary' (whose purpose I will explain) and you can ask any questions. The interview will be recorded as part of the data collection.

Food diary (two weeks)

- Sunday June 11th until Saturday June 24th you keep a diary in which you record your food choices and any influences or social media interactions that might be relevant to those food choices.
- During the week of June 26th I will pick up your food diary.
- The food diary can be returned if you would like to keep it.

If at any time you would like to withdraw your participation, you will be able to do so. If you feel uncomfortable, or unsure of anything, please do ask. Your participation is appreciated, but it is voluntary.

I know people have busy lives, and I am happy to work around your schedule, although the two week time-span for the diary is important for the integrity of the research method.

Please let me know if you have any questions.

Kind regards,

Kristen Marshall
PhD Candidate
Edinburgh Napier University
[redacted]
Telephone: [redacted]

A3: Interview guide

Consent was sought at the beginning of the research by reviewing the participant information, asking for permission to record and by re-iterating that consent is voluntary and be withdrawn at any time.

I would like to start by having you walk me through the food in your kitchen. Could you please describe the places you have food in the house, ideally by showing me.

Pre-interview: For each location, I have a list of questions:

What food do you regularly use in this location?

- Is there anything in this location that you've bought based on recommendation?
- Is there any food in this location that you wish weren't here?
- And is there any food in here that you're particularly excited about?

Main body of the interview:

General routines around food.

- What is your diet or eating pattern like?
- Can you please just talk me through the meals you eat during a regular week – where you eat these and with whom?
- What daily influences – either dietary guidance, health guides, bloggers, your parents – can you think of that shape this diet?
- Are you happy with your current diet?
- Is there anything that stands in the way of you eating as you would like?

Now I want to ask about other influences that have shaped your own food preferences over time.

- Who/and or what influenced your food choices growing up?
- How have your food choices changed over time?
- Who or what influences these changes over time.
- Who is the single largest influence in your diet at the moment?

Food choices and social media.

- Do you write a food blog or regularly post to food about social media as a known person who people follow?
- Do you share food choices, recommendations, restaurant reviews, etc. with others either online or offline
- Do you regularly follow any food bloggers?
- Who is the one person that you follow the most?
- How often do you follow them?
- Why do you follow them?
- Have you ever bought anything from this person's blog, or anything affiliated with it.

Do you have anything to add?

A4: Excerpt from interview

KM (Interviewer) - Do you regularly follow any food bloggers?

R (Respondent) – Yes.

KM – Could you give me a list?

R – Oh. Oh man. I'm sure her name's My Skinny Kitchen, but I'm going to have to double check.

KM – Ok.

R – There's two I follow – I'll just double check – if I go into my… I don't know if you would class, like, Nigella as a food blogger? She does a lot on social media, well I don't know if it's actually her or someone else, but she's somebody I follow. Skinny Kitchen Secrets.

KM – Skinny Kitchen Secrets. Ok.

R - Skinny Kitchen Secrets is one, and the other I have to find my… favourites. … There we go. My darling – what's it called? My darlings and me.

KM – Ok. That sounds nice. Is that?

R – I follow her for her cakes. That's where I get my recipes for cakes. So I do follow her. And I'm actually just realizing that, um… Ehm, and this is the other – a spicy perspective. Don't use them a lot cause they've stopped posting recently, so I don't – I've not been on their page for a while, but I do – yeah. Like I – when I google a recipe, if I fancy doing something new and different, or I want a recipe for it. I tend to now prefer to go to a food blogger than to go to, like, BBC good food.

KM – Oh really, ok.

R – Yep.

K – Why is that?

R – Because they're tried and tested.

A5: Food diary instructions and consent

<u>Taking part in the research project:</u>

Thank you for taking part in this research into food choices and food bloggers. Your participation in this research is voluntary. If you feel unwilling or unable to continue at any point, you have the right to withdraw.

This research is being undertaken by the researcher (Kristen Marshall) as part of a PhD thesis being undertaken with Edinburgh Napier University's Marketing subject group. Your contributions will be included in that final work, and in any publication of the results. You will not be identified by name in any published results, and neither

will any individuals you mention. The only personal information I will use is set out bellow. This is to help me contextualise your input:

Age range (please circle the applicable range):

21-30 | 31-40 | 41-50 | 51-60

Occupation: _____

Gender (please circle):

Male | Female | Other

Because food choices often involve others, I would like you to list other people who are likely to influence your food choices over the following two weeks. E.g. dependents, those with whom you have regular meals, meal planner, cooks, etc.

The information you provider will not be shared out-with the PhD supervisory team. If you would rather omit the name and provide the relationship only, then please do. Keep this sheet with your diary to update as others are involved. If you run out of slots for people, please write them on the back of this page:

1) Name: _____ Relationship: _____

2) Name: _____ Relationship: _____

3) Name: _____ Relationship: _____

4) Name: _____ Relationship: _____

5) Name: _____ Relationship: _____

The paper copy of the diary and all electronic files (including recordings and pictures) will be kept on a secure computer until the PhD is submited, the expected completion date is January 2019. After this, all recordings of your voice will be destroyed. However, with your permission the images from the pantry audit, or your own pictures from social media, may be included in publications to help illustrate the research findings.

If you are happy to take part, please confirm the following statement:

I, (please print your name) _____ understand the time commitment being asked of me. I also understand the nature of this research and am able to provide informed consent. I am free to withdraw my participation at any time and my participation is entirely voluntary.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Diary Instructions

Thank you!

In this diary, we would like you to keep a full, detailed record of any time you interact with a food blog or other site of interest (including if you are just reading updates). You should also write about anytime you post to social media and it is food related, any time your food choices are influenced by others, or anytime you make a

particularly food choice (tried a new recipe, ate something you used to have as a child, went out for a meal, etc.).

To do this, we suggest the following:

1. Put each entry into the food diary as soon as possible after it occurs, preferably on the day it happens.
2. If you find you have a day when you do not make active food choices, please make a note of why you did not have time to consider those food choices.
3. Please write clearly, and make use of extra pages. You can add as much paper as you like. There is an extra section in the back where you can add any additional thoughts as you go.
4. If you are influenced by a particular food blog, vlog, website, friend, or other outside source, please tell us!
5. If you feel that your food choices over the two week period are not as they would usually be, please tell us!

If you decide you don't want to do the diary, or find you can't complete the full two weeks, please return the diary as far as you have completed it.

If you have any questions throughout the diary writing period, please get in touch:

Kristen Marshall

[redacted] or via mobile [redacted]

A6: Excerpt from food diary

THURSDAY June 15th, 2017

Been reading green kitchen stories again overnight (breastfeeding) which gave me a lust for my morning smoothie which I shared with Baby Son. Again a bit of a luxury to sit down and enjoy it as Son is in nursery.

Totally inspired by their idea of a savoury yoghurt bowl (1/6/17) so I dress up my hot lunchtime cauliflower and fennel soup with cold chopped fresh tomatoes, chickpeas, cheese cubes and parsley. Bit random but tastes really good and psychologically I feel great packing all of that veg in. I love the pictures of food online- usually really colourful and inspiring. I also love the way that green kitchen bloggers have a pragmatic yet beautiful approach to their work. In their post on 1st June they mention how much they love yoghurt although a couple of the family are dairy intolerant. They explain they would love to eat more coconut yoghurt but that it is too expensive to do regularly. I would definitely criticise deliciously Ella on this point- her blog is stunning and full of beautiful pictures but often her recipes and ingredients are expensive and there seems to be no acknowledgement that for most people a daily coconut yoghurt is outwith budget.