
Everyday positivity: An appraisal analysis of online identity in food blogs

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Abstract

This paper analyses a number of “About me” sections of Danish food blogs to the purpose of investigating how bloggers discursively construct online identities. The blogs belong to a hybrid genre, containing both commercial products (recipes) and the personal narratives of bloggers on their everyday lives. Because of the highly subjective character of the narratives, the appraisal framework from systemic functional linguistics was chosen as an analytical tool to uncover patterns in evaluative language. Through the selection of content and the way it is discursively presented, bloggers seek to create a bond with an imagined audience, with whom they form a so-called ambient affiliation. Two such bonds are identified: a positive-thinking bond and a feeling-of-safety bond.

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Introduction

Nowadays, the Internet offers rivalling platforms for analogue products, one example being food blogs. According to a column brought in the Danish daily *Information* for November 2012, the Web site *madblogs.dk* featured an overview of Danish blogs about cooking, recipes, etc. as well as blog posts from these, tracked 500 Danish food blogs in 2012. In June 2023, a visit to the site showed that it was currently tracking 790 blogs. It would thus appear that the food blog genre is very much alive.

As a genre, the food blog is a hybrid, containing commercial products (recipes) as well as the bloggers’ descriptions of, and personal comments on, their everyday lives, homes, families, travels, experiences, and values. According to Tredinnick (2008), social media provides users with the power to define themselves socio-culturally by sharing their ‘cultural life’. Thus, social media provides individuals who have not previously had a public voice with a mouthpiece enabling them to share personal content. According to

Lupton (2020), social media, such as blogs, allows individuals to develop a personal brand and even microcelebrity status, for example, through their exposed lifestyles, ethical choices, or chosen food-consumption habits. In this sense, the intention to exhibit authenticity is a characteristic of blogs. In addition, Duffy and Kang (2020) suggested that microcelebrity reflects cultural values. Thus, blogs can be said to reflect contemporary cultural tendencies of society.

Blogs are one example of a social media genre that affords users the possibility of sharing content and enables sender-receiver interaction (Lomborg, 2009). They share with the adjoining genre, the vlog, the fact that they combine discourse and visual representations and that they allow interaction between the sender and the audience, thus offering a “useful space to explore personal (but public) accounts of ‘everyday life’ in an ever-changing present (Hookway, 2017)” [1]. In food blogs, the bloggers’ personal accounts are often exhibited on an “About me” subpage, where they introduce themselves to the surrounding world offering short narratives about children, travels, and personal experiences. It is a fact that branding strategies of today more often than not rely on social media, which creates a sort of personal relation with the audience to the purpose of capturing and maintaining the audience’s attention. It can be maintained that the fact that the essence of food blogs is to offer recipes from one individual to another enhances credibility, giving the impression that recipes are “passed on from one family to another”. The “About me” subpage offers therefore an interesting window into the blogger’s self-construction.

In Lomborg (2009), *Directionality axis: monological-dialogical* is one out of three dimensions used to categorize blogs into subgenres. Her analyses revealed that blogs vary significantly in their degree of sender-receiver interaction, as some blogs are mere self-expression aimed at an audience, whereas others manifest a high degree of interaction (Lomborg, 2009). In the blogs analysed in this paper, only limited interaction was present. Although this situates the blogs at the monological end of Lomborg’s axis, we assume, on the basis of systemic functional linguistics (SFL), that they include an interpersonal dimension (Martin and White, 2005), and we further assume that the creation of interpersonal relations is an inherent characteristic of blogs. However, these relations are not based on physical communities, but on an online social relation with one or a plurality of individuals in the ‘immediate’ surroundings, without any direct interaction being necessarily involved. ‘Immediate surroundings’ is thus to be understood as cognitive relations based on shared values and feeling and is termed *ambient affiliation* (Zappavigna, 2011; Zappavigna, 2012; Zappavigna and Martin, 2018). When the bloggers voice feelings and values, they can, therefore, only assume that receivers are able to identify with these. An imagined receiver like this is called an *imagined audience*, precisely because senders are dependent on their own imagination when posting online, where receivers may be individuals belonging to many different contexts (Litt and Hargittai, 2016). This ‘invisibility’ of receivers makes their exact characteristics unknown to the sender and they are, in a manner of speaking, lumped together as a group that is treated as a unified receiver. This phenomenon is called *context collapse* (Hollenbaugh, 2021).

When bloggers present thoughts and feelings online, they are constructing an online identity. This identity is social, by building on interpersonal relations between the blogger and an imagined receiver. With an unknown receiver, the social relation being created depends on the values ascribed to it by the blogger. This is achieved in the way the bloggers portray themselves and their surroundings in their blogs, whereby, consciously or unconsciously, they seek to control the impression made on imagined receivers. This is achieved partly through the selection of certain types of content rather than others, termed *filtering* (Rettberg, 2014), and partly through a verbalization of this content.

With this background, our aim is to analyse the discursive universe created in food blogs, *i.e.*, the types of subject matter that are verbalized and the way this is done, in order to investigate how online identities are discursively constructed, and to investigate how these contribute to branding their commercial products.

Our aim is not to generalize across large populations, but to contribute to an understanding of human experience through interpretation (Jackson, *et al.*, 2007). The very fact that the content of personal food blogs is related to the bloggers themselves, and their experiences, thoughts, and feelings, makes them subjective in character. For this reason, the appraisal framework from SFL was chosen as an analytical tool

to uncover patterns in evaluative language. As we will see below, the appraisal framework was specifically conceived to unveil speakers' evaluation of phenomena of the world, on the premise that speakers build social relationships by expressing these evaluations (Martin and Rose, 2003). A significant advantage of this framework is that, while serving to identify various kinds of evaluative meanings, it also enables the uncovering of meanings that are not overtly evaluative, but may nevertheless prove to be so in a given context. In applying the appraisal framework in the analysis of language use in blogs, we find support in Michele Zappavigna, whose research is similarly concerned with the construction of online identity and social relations through evaluative use of language on the basis of shared values and feelings (e.g., Zappavigna, 2014, 2012, 2011). Zappavigna (2014) examined the construction of relations with potential receivers by Twitter users through the presentation of values and feelings in hashtagged posts on Twitter. By means of the appraisal framework, she demonstrated how senders use discursive patterns of evaluation to establish relations with receivers, termed bonds, which typically manifested themselves through examples of everyday situations that receivers may recognize and identify with.

Our analyses complement Zappavigna's analyses of Twitter, partly by showing how bonds may be created in a different online discursive context and by uncovering the characteristics and purpose of these, and partly by demonstrating how evaluative meanings can be analysed at a more detailed level by means of the appraisal framework.



Online self-representation and identity

Social media affords users the possibility of presenting a certain image of themselves, *i.e.*, of staging one's person in a way that promotes an identity sought for, partly by selecting or excluding content, partly by verbalizing selected topics in a certain way. Such strategies are termed *filters* by Rettberg (2014). She distinguishes between four types, of which the *cultural filter*, *i.e.*, the cultural conventions deciding which items of information are filtered away, is of primary relevance to our investigation. As an example, Rettberg (2014) mentions the fact that parents, in their baby diaries, tend to upload photos of smiling rather than screaming babies, even though the latter are also very much part of reality. In our analysis, this filter refers to the shared assumptions influencing the bloggers' written posts and uploads. Since social media users automatically interact with others, either through direct, virtual contact or through communication with an undefined receiver, the receiver is the fulcrum of the selection and avoidance of content, in so far as there is no self-representation without an audience. As already mentioned in the introduction, we have adopted Zappavigna's (2011) concept of *ambient affiliation* to refer to the kind of virtual relationship where sender and receiver do not interact directly with each other. Instead, the relation can be established when bloggers use the content of the blog to invite receivers to become part of the universe that they are constructing. In Zappavigna's own words, "[i]nterpersonally-charged tweets invite with their hashtags an ambient audience to align with their bonds." [2] On the one hand, blog content is based on the blogger's feelings and values and, on the other hand, it is based on the ability of these feelings and values to resonate with a receiver. In this sense, bloggers communicate on the basis of their personal identity, which is shaped in tandem with social context: "... [I]dentity is generally associated with the ways in which people label themselves or come to be labelled as members of social groups on the basis of shared values, experiences or characteristics." [3] In other words, part of human identity is dependent on group belonging. The concept of *ambient affiliation* sheds light on the identity created in personal blogs as something constructed by means of shared attitudes 'activated' by a sender by reference to values and feelings that the sender represents. The identity constructed by the blogger can thus be discursively 'controlled', based on the self-image the blogger seeks to project *vis-à-vis* the user.

The ideal image created by bloggers of themselves is thus the fulcrum of proposed shared attitudes that characterize ambient affiliation. From a figure-ground perspective, belonging to a group with shared values automatically (though possibly indirectly) distances individuals from, and positions them in relation to, other groups. The same point is made by Tajfel and Turner (2000) in their theory of social identity, *i.e.*,

that an individual's identification with one group (called 'in-group') entails differentiation from other groups, which are accorded the status of 'out-groups'.

Imagined values and social bonds

Bloggers create an online identity through self-representation by means of blog content selected on the basis of values and feelings assumed to resonate with receivers. Since bloggers and receivers are not physically co-present, but relate to each other in the form of *ambivalent affiliation*, the type of values in question are ones "that are proposed but not shared." [4] In this sense, bloggers seek resonance with receivers, who thus come to serve as a kind of 'echo chamber' for blog content. The type of relation established in this way is referred to as *bonding* within appraisal theory. According to Martin and White, "... the investiture of attitude in activity, the resonance of attitude with events and things (abstract or concrete), around which shared reverberations we align into communing sympathies of kinship, friendship, collegiality and other of the many kinds of affinity and affiliation." [5] The concept of *bonding* stems from the field of psychology, where it refers to a human process of creating intimate relations with each other [6]. Zappavigna and Martin (2018) further explained that *bonding* is commonly understood as a dialogic type of activity where individuals negotiate values with each other, e.g., in conversation, but it may also occur without any direct interaction, in the form of *ambient affiliation*. According to several researchers, *bonds* can be created by means of evaluative language (Knight, 2013, 2010; Zappavigna, 2014, 2011; Martin and White, 2005). Several researchers have investigated the creation of bonds in online communication. Knight (2013) examined the role of humour in bonding and Zappavigna (2014, 2011) charted systematic patterns in the creation of bonds in tweets.

The appraisal framework

The appraisal framework from SFL categorizes evaluative language. A basic assumption in SFL is that language is used to construe experience in social interaction and that the social context in which language use is embedded is always relevant (see Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004). This means that one key function of language (including the exchange of evaluative meanings) is to create and calibrate social relations. One of the basic tenets of SFL is that any linguistic utterance fuses three lines of meaning, termed *metafunctions* (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004; Martin and White, 2005). The *ideational function* is representational meaning (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004), i.e., the 'aboutness' of the utterance. The *interpersonal* metafunction concerns the way language constructs the relation between sender and receiver (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004) and is thus sensitive to extra-linguistic phenomena such as social roles, emotional charge, etc. (Martin and White, 2005). Finally, the *textual* metafunction serves to organize ideational and interpersonal content into coherent text (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004). According to SFL, one important interpersonal resource is evaluative language (Hood, 2019; Martin and White, 2005) and according to Zappavigna, "[i]t is the interpersonal meaning that builds and sustains online social networks." [7] In SFL, evaluative language is analysed on the basis of the appraisal model, which includes three primary evaluation types: *attitude*, *engagement*, and *graduation* (Martin and White, 2005), which always occur alongside each other. Martin and White (2005) describe *attitude* as an umbrella concept encompassing three subtypes: *judgement*, *affect*, and *appreciation*.

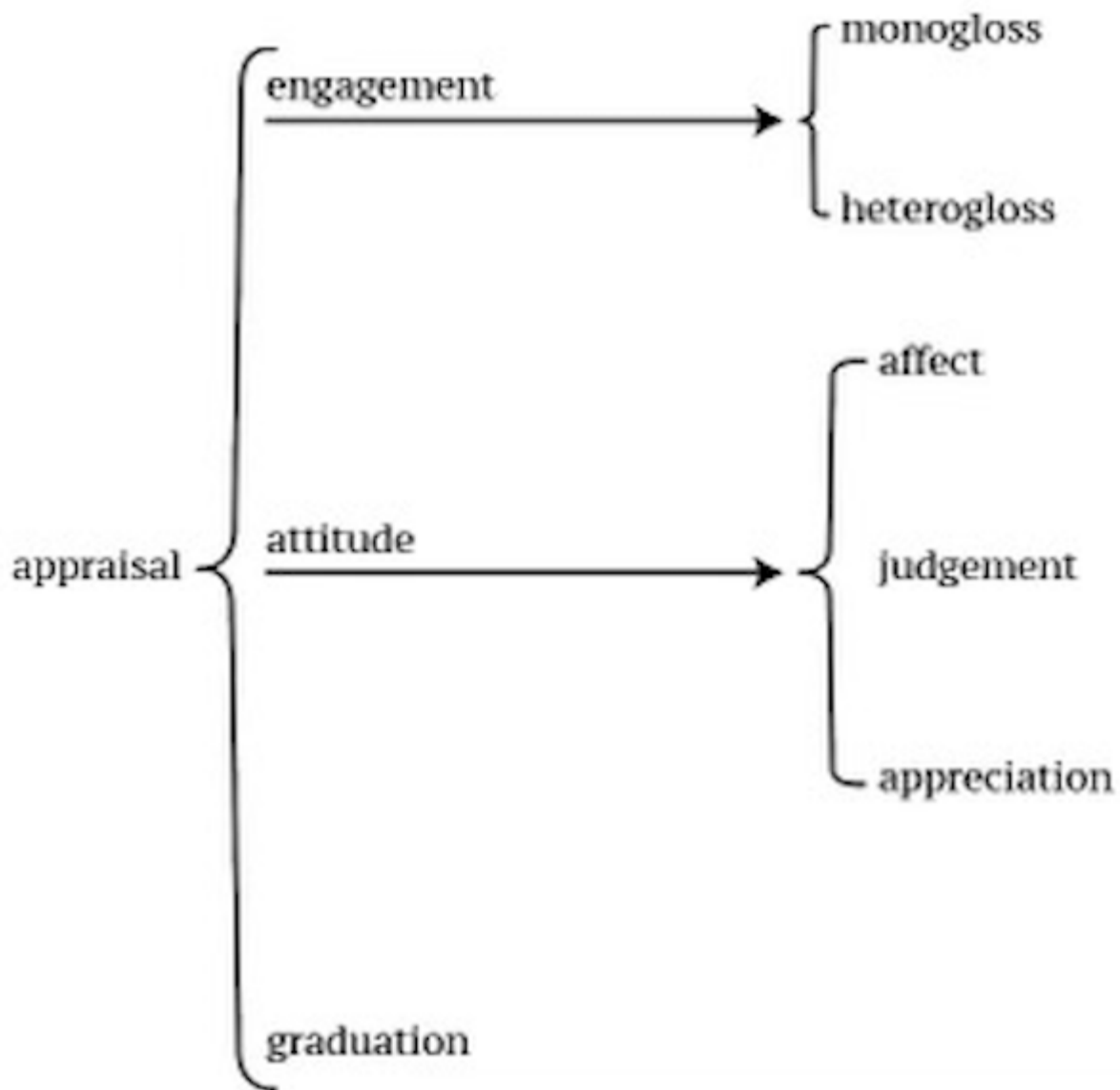


Figure 1: Simplified version of Figure 1.18 in Martin and White [8].

Martin and White (2005) explained that judgement, affect, and appreciation map three regions of feelings: ethics, emotions and aesthetics. The ethical dimension is inherent in judgement, which concerns attitudes towards human behaviour, *i.e.*, character judged against a set of normative principles (Martin and White, 2005). *Judgement* is subdivided into *judgements of esteem* and *judgements of sanctions*. The former pertains to character in terms of ‘normality’, ‘capacity’, and ‘tenacity’, explained by Martin and White as “how unusual someone is”, “how capable they are”, and “how resolute they are”, respectively [9]. One example of *judgement of esteem* is ‘*The minister is a man of action*’, where *man of action* judges the minister’s character in terms of traits expected in a minister, on the basis of normative principles regarding resoluteness. *Judgements of sanctions* concern veracity and propriety, or, in Martin and White’s own words, “how truthful someone is” and “how ethical someone is.” [10] One example would be ‘*The minister is not trustworthy*’, where *trustworthy* is a judgment of the minister’s character in relation to traits expected in a minister, on the basis of normative principles regarding truthfulness. The emotional dimension is found in *affect*, which is used about emotional reactions (Martin and White, 2005). One example is ‘*I am annoyed by the minister*’, where *annoyed* signifies the sender’s emotional reaction to the minister’s actions. The aesthetic dimension is manifested in *appreciation*, which is concerned with the evaluation of ‘things’

(Martin and White, 2005), e.g., ‘*It was a marvellous day*’.

In these examples, the evaluative meanings are lexicalized in *action*, *trustworthy*, *annoyed*, and *marvellous*. As noted earlier, lexicogrammatical items and text that are not evaluative in themselves may, however, acquire evaluative meaning within a given context. Thus, Martin and White (2005) described how the choice of ideational meanings can invoke evaluation without attitudinal lexis. These two different ways of signifying evaluation are referred to as *inscribed* and *invoked* attitude, respectively (Martin and White, 2005). On this note, Pounds (2015) pointed out that distinguishing evaluative from non-evaluative meanings could be difficult since interpretation is always context- and culture-dependent.

The *engagement* category is based on the assumption that communication by means of language is always implicitly a dialogue with other utterances, either real or imagined, which means that different attitudes are always taken into consideration. This is also called intersubjective positioning (Martin and White, 2005). Thus, an example like: ‘*It is never too late to quit smoking*’ somehow responds to claims as ‘*it is too late to quit smoking*’. In the words of Martin and White: “all verbal communication occurs against a heteroglossic backdrop”. [11] This also goes for expressions which, on the face of it, do not explicitly reflect dialogue with others, that is, so-called, monoglossic utterances.

Finally, the category termed *graduation* refers to degrees of evaluation, which soften or amplify the attitude expressed, e.g., *rather unproblematic* (Martin and White, 2005).

Data and methods

This study did not require measurements of populations, but rather thorough scrutinization of data to understand their meanings. This is the essence of qualitative studies, which, in addition, are open and flexible in nature, allowing evaluation of the data in an iterative process, as explained by Busetto, *et al.* (2020). On this basis, data gathering and analysis took place dynamically, and data collection was ended when data did not reveal new insights (data saturation). Lacking information about rules for an acceptable sample size, we have followed Levy and Sarmento’s (2020) strategy of choosing an amount that “made for a realistic workload.” [12] On this basis, the data of the investigation was a small sample of ‘About me’ pages of nine Danish blogs in the public domain on the Internet. The blogs were accessed April 2021 — December 2022 and selected, in accordance with the purpose, on the criterion that they should combine a commercial element (culinary recipes) and a personal element. The evaluative expressions and the co-text in which they occur have been translated into English to the purpose of this article. In the analyses, we refer to individual bloggers as *she* since they turn out to be all women.

The topics of the ‘About me’ pages were relatively homogeneous. It was hardly surprising that all of the texts introduced the content of the blog. Besides, most of the texts also introduced the blogger herself, her family, and their place of residence. Another characteristic was that the blogger narrated her own life, presenting her outlook. Some of them also detailed their education or occupation and activities of their everyday life. Since all nine blogs featured recipes, food was a central topic. Two of the blogs also related important events in the blogger’s life (childbirth and a serious case of illness experienced by a relative).

The personal nature of some of the content in the data gives rise to ethical considerations about how to satisfy formal rules governing the sharing of information and about how to treat this information with respect. A concurrent consideration is of course the researcher’s obligation to conduct critical analysis. In their *Ethics guidelines for Internet-mediated research*, The British Psychological Society (BPS) (2021) points out the fuzziness of the border between the private and the public spheres, which in individual cases may obscure the distinction. This dilemma is highly relevant to our data, where elements that firmly belong in the public domain (the promotion of a commercial product) occur alongside personal content. In the treatment of data, however, the most important criterion is any presence of personal sensitive data, which is

decisive for researchers to obtain consent [13]. Since this is not the case here, our obligation was an ethical one, *i.e.*, the endeavour to approach the data with neutrality in order to avoid value judgements. In this regard, our approach aligns with Fage-Butler's (2021), who followed BPS's anonymization guidelines by correcting typos and grammatical errors in private data, by deleting 'characteristic phrases' in cases the removal was not detrimental to the analysis, and by replacing certain words with synonyms, and by replacing certain sentence parts with "(...)". As blogs belong in a multimodal genre, they include visuals. We have left these out of our analyses in order to secure anonymization. Apart from measures such as these, both the translation of the examples into English and the fact that examples from different blogs were "mixed" in different tables significantly reduces their 'traceability'.

Analysis of blogs

The focus of analysis are the three attitude subtypes of the appraisal framework, *i.e.*, *judgement*, *affect*, and *appreciation*, including the question of *inscribed* vs. *invoked* attitude, and the question of positive versus negative evaluation (see [The appraisal framework](#)). *Engagement* and *graduation* are included when they are relevant to the analysis of evaluation. The examples analyzed are divided into the types of appraisal that they represent, *e.g.*, Attitude: Judgement. In each subsection, the examples are presented in tables according to the subtype *e.g.*, Inscribed positive judgement in the category Attitude: Judgement. In the tables, each example is coded with the topics they represent, for example Family, if the example is about the blogger's child. The lexical items that give rise to evaluative meaning are underlined, for example *delicious*. After each table, the analysis of examples is detailed.

Attitude: Judgement

[Table 1](#) below provides examples of inscribed positive judgement, *i.e.*, where the blogger judges herself and others according to normative principles.

Table 1: Inscribed positive judgement.		
Number	Topic	Example
1	Family	Our <u>lovely</u> son (...) was born in October 2014.
2	Family	I am the mother of two <u>delicious darlings</u>
3	Family	I am the mother of 4: Twins (...) and the cherry on top, their little brother, who is <u>such a charmer</u> .
4	Family	My children are <u>really cute</u> , to my own mind
5	Family	Together we have the <u>world's best</u> children
6	Family	I live with my <u>lovely</u> boyfriend in the city.
7	Sender	I am <u>very lucky</u>
8	Mental state	I bake lots of cakes and pies — and I prefer those without flour and sugar, which you can eat every day with a <u>clear</u> conscience.

In 1–6, the character of the blogger’s family members was positively judged by means of attitudinal lexis, and in 5 the judgement was even graded by means of *the world’s*. Although the specific basis of the judgement of the children was not apparent, conceivably, it was concerned with their personality or behavior (judged from a given set of norms). In this way, the judgement was positive, reflecting *social sanction: propriety*: “behaviour we praise” [14]. More interesting, perhaps, was that the positive evaluation of children, indirectly, could also be a positive evaluation of the blogger herself, *viz.*, her ability as a mother/child rearer. In other words, the examples can additionally be analysed as invoked judgement regarding social esteem. In 2, this judgement was emphasized since it occurred within a so-called *relational* clause in the transitivity system of SFL (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004). Rather than describing the relation by means of a *possessive* relational clause (‘x has y’), which would have been ‘I have two delicious darlings’, the blogger’s actual choice was the *intensive* type of relational clause (‘x is y’) (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004). In other words, she described herself in terms of the mother-child relation, thus attributing a particular quality to herself, which was the role of mother, and which was made explicit and emphasized.

In 7, the judgement was concerned with the favorable circumstances of the blogger’s life, *viz.*, her job and the fact that she was writing the blog. The evaluation may thus be categorized as positive judgement of normality in terms of social esteem.

Whereas the evaluations in 1–7 pertained to qualities or circumstances, 8 was an evaluation of a mental state. The blogger presented herself as a person who bakes lots of cakes that can be eaten with a *clear conscience*. As it does not as such engage with dialogic alternatives, it can be categorized as a monoglossic utterance. However, on the premise that all utterances imply other positions, it could be argued that, in this example, the parenthetic relative clause presents its content as taken-for granted: it is “not up for discussion.” [15] In this way, the blogger construed both herself “and the intended reader as having categorial membership” in a “particular attitudinal community” [16], *i.e.*, within an existing discourse according to which flour and sugar should be avoided. At the same time, via monoglossia, she construed those who have a different view (a counter group) — groups of people who eat cakes that cannot be eaten with a clear conscience, *viz.*, those containing flour and sugar — “as not needed to be recognized or engaged with in any way.” [17]

By mentioning that she consumes cakes daily, she appeared to present herself as a *bon vivant*, but also seemed to curb this by limiting herself to what she defined as healthy cakes. This is an example of social sanction, in that the blogger judged herself as having the ‘right’ kind of attitude, *i.e.*, propriety.

[Table 2](#) presents examples where judgement is implied from context, rather than through an attitudinal lexis.

Table 2: Invoked positive judgement.		
Number	Topic	Example
1	Family	I am the mother of <u>three whirlwinds</u> .
2	Sender	The brain behind the blog is a <u>down-to-earth girl from the western part of Copenhagen</u> .
3	Family	Here in my blog, you can read about the things I like: My children, renovating our house, shopping, my pregnancy, and the everyday life in a <u>‘liver-paste family’</u>

1 was yet an example of a blogger using an intensive relational clause to discursively construct herself in the role of mother. At the same time, she used the metaphor *whirlwinds* about her children, described as being ‘very energetic’. The blogger thus projected an image of herself as a mother who can ‘cope’ with the challenge of managing energetic children. This makes it a case of invoked positive judgement of the blogger’s capacity with reference to social esteem.

In 2, *down-to-earth* and *a girl from the western part of Copenhagen* contributed evaluative meanings, by judging the blogger’s normality with reference to social esteem. *Down-to-earth* encoded a judgement of the sender as realistic and practical, connoting ‘ordinariness’. ‘girl’ being a translation of a Danish slightly pejorative slang word for girl/woman, but also sometimes used as a term of endearment, thus supporting the reference of *down-to-earth*. On the basis of cultural background knowledge of Copenhagen, ‘*western part of Copenhagen*’ created associations to lower-middle class residential areas. Whereas these may lead to negative evaluation, in this case, the reference was turned into something positive, by being used as part of the blogger’s description of her own identity.

In 3, *liver paste* was a reference to a staple of Danish lunches. Characteristically, the paste is grey in color and the word in itself forms part of a number of idioms to denote qualities like ‘average Danishness’, ordinariness, and everyday life. In the context of this example, the wording conjures up a social group characterized by ‘ordinariness’, which the receiver may identify with. The reference to *liver paste* was, therefore, used to judge the blogger relative to normality.

In sum, the judgement was used in the blogs to create values associated with the blogger herself and her family. Through positive judgement, identity was based on an association with a good family, having certain rules of life, being a strong mother, and appreciating one’s ordinary everyday life and domestic activities.

Attitude: Affect

Where *judgement* is evaluation of the actions or behavior of persons, affect is used to evaluate the feelings evoked in persons by someone or something. The examples in [Table 3](#) all instantiate inscribed, positive affect.

Table 3: Inscribed positive affect.		
Number	Topic	Example
1	Family	I am the wife of a man who always makes me <u>proud</u> .
2	Life	I <u>love</u> life with all its nuances, perfection and imperfection — but in this blog I have exclusive focus on the lovely things in life.
3	Life	As a family we <u>love</u> quality time.
4	Work/job	I <u>love</u> the work on the blog.
5	Work/job	I am so <u>grateful</u> for both of my favourite occupations [work and the work on the blog].
		You can also read about my love of our

6	Pets	<u>beloved</u> dog.
7	Interaction	I <u>am looking forward</u> to many entertaining hours together with you.
8	Interaction	I am always <u>happy</u> with sweet comments and constructive dialogue.
9	Interaction	I <u>appreciate</u> any comment.
10	Cooking	I <u>love</u> cooking.
11	Interaction	I am <u>really happy</u> that you have ended up here on my blog.
12	Food	I share my <u>joy</u> in plant-based food.
13	The blog	I <u>enjoy</u> every second I spend on the blog.
14	Activities	I am <u>crazy</u> about chatting, laughing, (...) and eating bread made from sourdough and chocolate.

These examples feature internal states or processes, rather than externally expressed affect (e.g., weeping or laughter), and affect directed at a so-called *trigger* (Martin and White, 2005). This was the case in 13, where the blog was the trigger of the blogger's state of enjoyment.

1 was another case of the sender describing herself with reference to her role in a relationship, here marital relations. In the relational clause she was ascribed the quality 'proud', thus acquiring the discursive role of *emoter*, the one experiencing a feeling (Martin and White, 2005). The husband, in turn, was the one responsible for the action of 'making', whereby he was ascribed the role of *trigger*, a kind of invoked judgement of him. Moreover, by using the intensive relational clause, this judgement may be said to have 'rubbed off' on the blogger in her role of wife, whereby this also was an example of invoked judgement of the blogger herself, in her capacity as being the wife of this man, *i.e.*, capacity with reference to social esteem.

In 2, the blogger initially paid tribute to the positive as well as negative aspects of life through affect, making her appear as a person with a realistic outlook on life. In the following, however, she filtered away the negative aspects, thus contributing to a 'discourse of positivity'.

In several examples, the interpersonal relation was created in a more explicit way when the blogger addressed the receiver, either directly by means of a personal pronoun (7 and 11) or through the noun *comment*, which referred to the receiver's possibility of engaging in dialogue with the blogger (8 and 9). In other words, interaction with the receiver infused the blogger with positive affect, no matter whether this was merely imagined interaction or potential future interaction that the receiver was encouraged to take part in via the comment section. However, while example 9 expressed appreciation of any kind of comment, the positive affect in 8 was limited to positive comments, cutting off any negative voices (which would not express any appreciation of the blogger). Exactly because of the existence of non-constructive voices, *i.e.*, negative comments, were thus anticipated, the example also featured *engagement* apart from *affect*. In this sense, only certain voices were granted membership of the group, whereas other voices were relegated to the status of 'counter group'.

Affect was used in the blogs to create values by expressing positive emotional reactions. Thereby, the negative aspects of human emotions were filtered away and only feelings such as joy and satisfaction were

brought into play. Through positive reactions, a kind of identity was created, based on positive evaluation of the feelings evoked by the blogger's family, life, interaction with others, and food.

Attitude: Appreciation

Appreciation concerns the evaluation of "things". [Table 4](#) contains examples of *inscribed positive appreciation*.

Table 4: Inscribed positive appreciation.		
Number	Topic	Example
1	Place	After some years in <u>lovely</u> Copenhagen, my family and I have returned to my childhood town.
2	The content of the blog	In this blog, I share all my many <u>wonderful</u> recipes and other <u>nice</u> things.
3	Food	My food philosophy is based on good taste and good experiences: <i>Good</i> organic ingredients and always with room for <u>good</u> homebaked bread.
4	Food	My cakes and bread are <u>quite popular</u> .
5	Food	Here you will find recipes of everything from sinful desserts to <u>healthy</u> and quick everyday meals for the whole family.
6	Food	You can find <u>delicious</u> brunch and breakfast recipes in my blog.
7	Life	In my blog, I share <u>cozy</u> glimpses of my everyday life.
8	Work/job	The whole work on the blog is <u>wildly exciting</u> .
9	The content of the blog	I also write personal <u>reflective</u> posts about thought-provoking experiences in my life.
10	Life	I attempt to take a <u>positive</u> approach to life.
11	Life	In my blog I have exclusive focus on the <u>lovely</u> things in life.
12	Life	<u>Coziness, joy</u> and <u>positivity</u> are <u>faithful</u> companions in my kitchen.

In these examples, the bloggers exhibited appreciation of food, life, and work, among other things, by

emphasizing their positive qualities, whereas negative qualities were filtered away. One example was 8, where it was difficult to imagine that there would not be routine, and hence boring, aspects to this work, which was an aspect that retreated even further into the background because of the amplifying meaning (graduation) encoded in *wildly*. In other cases, the appreciative item expresses some kind of inherent, or at least an expected, quality. This was seen in 3, where the item *good* did not provide any new information about organic ingredients and homebaked bread, considering that the blogger would be unlikely to mention foods that tasted bad. Verbalizing the inherent or expected quality was equivalent to emphasizing it. In 9, *reflective* did not carry any decidedly value-laden appreciative meaning like *lovely*, but being reflective must necessarily be understood as something positive. In these examples, the bloggers were explicitly attributing positive qualities to things.

In 10 and 11, the adjectives *positive* and *lovely* ascribed a positive value to certain elements of life. The blogger indicated that this value represents an ‘adopted’ outlook, resulting from an explicit filtering of ‘total reality’ by choosing to focus on the positive aspects. The nouns in 12 all evaluated an atmosphere through positive appreciation. Moreover, *Coziness* (‘*hygge*’) was intimately associated with Danish culture, connoting a homely and warm atmosphere. In this way, the intimate surroundings of home and family were understood as qualities in life.

[Table 5](#) provides a single example of inscribed negative appreciation.

Table 5: Inscribed negative appreciation.		
Number	Topic	Example
1	Food	Assuming that plant-based food is <u>boring</u> , <u>difficult</u> and <u>expensive</u> is not a good reason to avoid a green lifestyle.

By differentiating herself from the negative evaluation of plant-based food, the blogger accentuated the values she herself identified with, the importance of a ‘green’ (*i.e.*, plant-based) lifestyle. In other words, the blogger introduced several voices into the discourse, which means that, in this case, engagement resulted from an heteroglossic utterance.

In other cases, instantiations of negative appreciation were not created through attitudinal lexis but expressed more indirectly.

Table 6: Invoked positive appreciation.		
Number	Topic	Example
1	Birth	Our son was born on a <u>rainy October day</u> .
2	Birth	Born on a <u>day in August in the middle of an extremely hot summer</u> .
3	Food	Here you will find recipes for everything from <u>sinful desserts</u> to healthy and quick everyday meals for the whole family.
4	Place	After some years in the city, my family and I have returned to my <u>childhood town</u> .

5	Place	We live in a <u>small brick house</u> in the provinces.
6	Place	I water the flowers in my <u>little boat house</u> in Copenhagen Harbour.
7	Place	We reside close to Odense on <u>a farm</u> .
8	The content of the blog	I also write personal, reflective posts about <u>thought-provoking</u> experiences in my life.

In these examples, two instances of childbirth were evaluated by means of time adverbials. These adverbials carry appreciation although *rainy October day* and *a day in August in the middle of the hottest part of summer* were not evaluative on the surface. The two time adverbials created a ‘backdrop’ for the (positive) events, *i.e.*, the birth of the blogger’s two children, and the positive context ‘rubbed off’ on the associations created. The atmosphere created by these two adverbials indirectly resulted in evaluative meanings.

In 4–5, the reader learned that the blogger moved back to her childhood town in the provinces, where she lives with her family in a small brick house. Here, a ‘native-soil’ theme was invoked, which, in combination with *small brick house*, created a nostalgic effect — the reader was able to imagine a small, cozy, and homely house. On the surface, *small brick house* may be a neutral expression, but it opened up the possibility of an underlying, positive appreciation, by speaking to a cultural assumption that small brick houses tend to be cozy, homely, and nice. This example illustrates Pound’s (2015) point that implicit evaluation is culturally dependent. It is easy to imagine cultures where references to small brick houses do not carry the same positive evaluative meaning. In 7, *farm* is a translation of a Danish word for ‘farm’ mostly used in communication with children. It, therefore, indicated positive appreciation, since the word connoted a ‘children’s universe’ and idyll, and thereby was associated with something ‘cozy’. In the analysis of 5–6, the adjective *small* is significant. Since *small* characterizes places as limited in space, it may connote safety. In 6, however, the connotations of *small* were pushed in the direction of ‘comfort’ and ‘privilege’, since it is a well-known fact that even very small boat houses in Copenhagen can be expensive and, therefore, often attract privileged segments of the population.

8 is also part of [Table 4](#) since the adjective *reflective* must be analyzed as inscribed positive appreciation. *Thought-provoking*, on the other hand, should be analyzed as an example of invoked positive appreciation since it does not in itself carry any positive meaning, but the fact that the audience can read about the blogger’s *thought-provoking experiences* indicated that these were interesting for others. In these examples, the evaluative meanings were invoked and not inscribed, because they were not encoded in words, but were created on the background of the cultural frame of reference and receivers’ knowledge of the world.

Appreciation was used about ‘things’ in the bloggers’ lives, *e.g.*, events, places, home, family, and life in general. In this way, the bloggers construed their identities partly through these positive circumstances of life, which contrasted with other, and less beneficial, circumstances as well as different lifestyles (‘counter groups’).



Conclusion

The analyses demonstrated how bloggers, in order to market their products, created online identities

through self-representation in the public space by sharing narratives of their personal lives. What legitimizes the strategic use of these types of narratives may be the gradual dissolution of the borderline between the private and the public spheres, where individuals surrender their privacy. According to Keen (2012), we are living in “the age of great exhibitionism”, where ordinary people can stage themselves as “self-styled celebrities” in the social sphere [18].


When it comes to the way in which the bloggers’ online identities was construed, a central finding of this study was the evaluative character of their language. The evaluation meant that bloggers expressed their emotional attitude to persons and things, thereby typically influencing receivers’ attitudes and emotions (Pounds, 2015). A common feature of evaluative meanings in the blogs was the positive verbalization of different aspects of life (e.g., ‘healthy food’ and ‘liver paste family’) [19]. The evaluative meanings were often explicitly encoded in positive attitudinal lexis such as *lovely* and *love*. In those cases where the evaluative meanings were implicit, the language created mental images of well-known types of experience (e.g., childbirth) or a cultural frame of reference regarding the world (e.g., *small brick house*). The evaluative meanings were used to create value on the basis of which an online identity was constructed. On the one hand, this identity was characterized by taking a positive approach to people and the aspects of life verbalized in the blogs and, on the other hand, it was created by emphasizing the value of everyday life: the home, family, and domestic life. Consequently, the type of universe in which this identity was embedded is an everyday universe characterized by positive circumstances of life and experiences and populated by people for whom things are going well and who inspire gratefulness. Apart from being expressed through evaluation, this universe was conjured up through the bloggers’ selection and avoidance of information on the basis of cultural conventions (*cultural filter*). Moreover, the selection of content for text was dependent on the expectations that receivers must necessarily be assumed to have *vis-à-vis* the genre (*genre filter*, according to Rettberg, 2014). ‘Everyday life’ has a mundane quality and may therefore be associated with something trivial and tedious, but when it is textualized in the public domain and thus construed as something worth reading about, it can be argued that is ‘elevated’ to something special (e.g., “In my blog I share enjoyable glimpses of my everyday life”).

The bloggers invited imagined receivers into this universe, thus seeking to establish a relation to them (*ambient affiliation*). In other words, by means of the virtual identity created, the blogs invited users who could identify with the values behind this identity, creating a social relation of shared emotions: a *bond*. In the analyses, we identified two bonds: a *positive-thinking* bond and a *feeling-of-safety* bond. Originating in the field of positive psychology, positive thinking consists in focusing on the positive aspects of life: “Our happiness is dependent on the quality of our thoughts. We’re not happy because we’re happy, we’re happy because we interpret the things that happen to us as good” (Puff, 2021). By choosing a positive approach to things (“all my work on the blog is wildly exciting”) or by explicitly verbalizing types of positive evaluation that may appear self-evident (“my lovely children”), the bloggers created a bond with receivers who took a positive attitude. By way of comparison, posting selfies representing one’s physical appearance in a flattering light may positively affect others’ perception of one’s offline identity (Hollenbaugh, 2021). In extension, Rettberg (2014) characterised the sharing of photos of our everyday life as a way of appreciating quotidian experiences. In this sense, bloggers constructed an identity through the way that they labeled themselves (Tredinnick, 2008). The feeling-of-safety bond was created through references to homely, nostalgic, and everyday types of experience and phenomena. In this sense, the values on which this bond was based formed a contrast to the values of what Baumann (2000) called liquid modernity, a society in which dynamism, changeability, and mobility are the only constants.

On a par with the bonds identified by Zappavigna in her investigations, the bonds identified in the blogs construed ordinary phenomena as something special. The nature of the bonds identified by Zappavigna and those identified here were different, though. A point of difference was that the bonds in the tweets tried to establish a relation of solidarity between tweeter and user on the basis of a self-ironic approach to a well-known feeling of ‘bad manners’ or ‘unsuccessfulness’, whereas the purpose of the bonds in the blogs analysed here appeared to be the construal of a life situation by means of a kind of private CV for which the user was assigned the role of empathetic and (potentially) like-minded audience. The difference between the bonds could be explained by reference to the different character of the two types of social media.

Whereas the form of communication in tweets is more ‘immediate’ and less planned, manifesting itself in frequent updates, blog posts were less frequently updated (Java, *et al.*, 2009). Furthermore, this study analyzed were ‘About us’ texts, which tended to be carefully crafted and were not developed spontaneously. This characteristic emanates from the hybrid character of commercial blogs. Their purpose is commercial, on the one hand, but at the same time they are used as a platform for sharing of personal narratives.

In that sense, the blogs in this study branded themselves by creating a relation that, according to Fournier and Avery’s theory of branding, supports “people with meanings that can help them in their lives.” [20] In virtue of the values attached to a product (related to family and domestic activities and to particular rules of life, *e.g.*, a healthy diet, a clear conscience), it created a (potentially) meaningful relation to users. According to Brinkmann (2008), in late modernity, a meaningful existence is assumed to presuppose success within all aspects of life, *i.e.*, education, work/career, romance, and it is assumed that this success should result in “different kinds of self-actualization and personal development.” [21] According to Brinkmann and Eriksen (2005), personal development is a requirement within most aspects of life. In the past, it was incumbent on individuals to accept their place in society and adopt the concomitant values and responsibilities, whereas today it is up to the individual to “choose or invent the personal goals of his/her development.” [22] Given this observation, the universe construed in the blogs may be characterized as one of constancy and one that sticks to familiar things. Also, by offering a set of rules for living, the universe becomes the antithesis of Bauman’s (2000) liquid modernity, that tends to create identity problems for modern individuals. Yet, while, paradoxically, the universe created in this way draws on values associated with safety, homeliness, and ‘constancy’, at the same time, this lifestyle requires time and a surplus of energy, thus representing a dynamic and changeable lifestyle. The blogs represented self-actualization based on a set of values that reflect a successful way of life within the framework of modern Western culture.

Our analysis of the blogs thus showed how evaluative meanings may contribute to the creation of an online identity and, in this way, create an interpersonal relation to an audience based on a positive understanding of everyday life. This relation is in implicit opposition to relations with different values and feelings, *i.e.*, relations built around topics that give rise to critical questions about life, *i.e.*, urgent contemporary problems such as climate, gender, and war. Obviously, the topics verbalized in the blogs were closely related to the products offered in the blogs, but they were also a virtual window onto a kind of life that transgresses the boundary between the private and public spheres. However, given the relatively uniform character of this kind of life, it comes across as a kind of imitated authenticity. 

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Notes

1. Braun and Carruthers, 2020, p. 86.
2. Zappavigna, 2011, p. 801.
3. Tredinnick, 2008, p. 135.
4. Knight, in Zappavigna and Martin, 2018, p. 6.
5. Martin and White, 2005, p. 211.
6. “APA dictionary of psychology,” at <https://dictionary.apa.org/bonding>.
7. Zappavigna, 2012, p. 11.
8. Martin and White, 2005, p. 38.
9. Martin and White, 2005, p. 52.
10. *Ibid.*
11. Martin and White, 2005, p. 99.
12. Levy and Sarmiento, 2020, p. 23.
13. <https://aoir.org/reports/ethics.pdf>.
14. Martin and White, 2005, p. 52.
15. Martin and White, 2005, p. 101.
16. Martin and White, 2005, p. 157.
17. *Ibid.*
18. Keen, 2012, pp. 12 and 24.
19. It should be mentioned that one of the blogs featured a negative evaluative expression concerning experienced illness. This example obviously did not contribute to an atmosphere of positivity, but it created a relation of confidentiality with the receiver. Ethical considerations precluded the use of this example in the analysis.
20. Fournier and Avery, 2011, p. 4.
21. Brinkmann, 2008, p.10 — our translation.
22. Brinkmann and Eriksen, 2005, p. 9 — our translation.

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Everyday positivity: An appraisal analysis of online identity in food blogs

by Lotte Dam and Helle Dam Jensen.

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