

Obentō Talks: Women's Use of Social Media to Communicate in Japanese Food Culture

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Department of East Asian Studies

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Abstract

“Bento”¹ is not just a meal in Japan. Immersed in Japanese food culture, the ready-to-eat lunch box has more cultural than edible functions as it symbolizes a governmental ideology that attempts to portray Japanese women’s lives as wives and mothers. Additionally, bento has become an important tool for women’s communication allowing the exchange of messages between maker and eater through food arrangement and color balance. Due to the development of internet technology, bento has reached the virtual world as a theme for personal webpages where Japanese women are interacting with other people, engaging in conversations and exchanging opinions and feelings. This study investigates Japanese women’s motivation in using bento as a theme for such communication and self-expression in social media. Based on an analysis of personal webpage rankings and work from previous scholarship, this study first presents Japanese women’s interaction in virtual platforms as well as their relation to bento within Japanese society. Then, in order to focus on Japanese women’s opinion regarding bento-making and the use of social media to express opinions and communicate with an audience, an investigation was conducted with Japanese women using an online survey and a qualitative questionnaire. The investigation tools were developed to investigate participants’ opinions on specific questions, as well as to provide examples and details regarding such opinions. Notably, the results of this investigation not only reveals Japanese women’s motivation in making bento and interacting online, but also reasons why personal webpages and online interaction proved to be a good fit for Japanese women’s desire for communication and expression in social media.

¹ *Obentō* is the honorific form of the noun; for this study I will use the common form bento, which is defined as: “a Japanese-style packed lunch traditionally consisting of rice, vegetables, and Japanese specialties such as *sashimi* and *teriyaki*, and served in a lacquered or decorated wooden box” (“Bento,” *Oxford English Dictionary*).

Preface

This thesis is an original work by Eric Funabashi. The research project of which this thesis is a part received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board.

Project Name “Japanese Blog Authors Survey,” No. Pro00056910, April 28, 2015.

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my parents Suely and Edson Funabashi and my sister Martha Funabashi, who are my heroes and inspiration of strength and dedication. My family, who have always supported my decisions, even when they had to push me to it, I am what I am because of you.

I also would like to dedicate this study in memory of my beloved uncle Helio Yasuda, I miss you and I will have a lot to talk about food when I see you again.

Acknowledgments

This journey actually started a few years ago when I decided to pursue an academic career. Therefore, I would like to thank everyone who at some point contributed in guiding me to where I am now. The conclusion of my Masters closes the first chapter of my journey but the adventure certainly continues.

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my supervisor Dr. Mikael Adolphson. Dr. Adolphson believed in me, providing challenges I did not know I could meet and teaching me things I didn't imagine I could learn. Without his commitment, patience and guidance, this work would not have been possible. Having Dr. Adolphson as my supervisor taught me a lot not only about Japanese history, society and culture, but also about networking, academic life and skills I will use for the rest of my life. Dr. Adolphson, I am honoured I could be your student and thank you very much for your patience and for believing in me, this was a life-changing experience I will never forget.

I also would like to thank my friends and partners in this Masters journey--- Mikwi Cho, Peng Wang and Gaisha Oralova---for their invaluable support with criticism, feedbacks and translations and for making me laugh and giving me strength whenever I felt down. I also thank Jie, Honoka and Yijing for so much advice and support. Also, thank you Jane for your help in the final sprint. I hope we can meet again in the near future.

My gratitude also goes to our graduate coordinator Dr. Daniel Fried and our graduate advisor Gail Mathew, your support and professionalism assisted me in keeping the correct path. I also would like to thank Heather and Lora, for all their support and for making my journey a lot easier. Thank you to Dr. Commons, Dr. Quinter, Dr. Sun, Dr. Davis and all faculty members in

the Department of East Asian Studies for their concern on my research, every conversation we had was very important.

I also would like to thank Dr. Jean DeBernardi and Dr. Marko Zivkovic from the Anthropology Department for their support and advice regarding my current research and future academic career.

A very special thank you to all my Brazilians friends around the world: Lu Nigro, Paulao, Bruna, Carol, Alvaro, Guri, Julinha, Fe, Machado, Bia, Digao, Stephan, Gabi, Tais, Ivan, Wellington, Tiaguinho, Mari, Mourao, Ane, Oscar, Su, Joao and the Brazilian community in Edmonton for welcoming me with open arms and warm heart, also, thank you to Julio, Leina, Norio, Maze, Beto, Leo, Sagae, Camila, Roger, Meg, Sanae, Cris, Janets, Takashi, KK, Takeo, Sagaezinho, Kfank, Danilo, Karen, Henry, Waku, Paula, Mina, Lina, Celso, Livia, Bertola, Bill, Akira, Rafa, Goto, Joan and all my friends in Brazil to whom I owe so much for pushing me hard and supporting my decision to chase my dreams! I also thank C-chan, Clara, Wilson, Mario, William, Mei, Marcao, Bianca, Juliana, Erica, Cocaum, Joao, Sayaka, Celina and all my friends in Japan for your help in finding sources, the great times together and for every conversation we had, I hope we can meet again soon. Finally, I want to thank my friend Erica Saito in the US who helped in finding sources I thought I would never find.

Finally, I would like to thank my parents Suely and Edson, my sister Martha, my grandparents Ytsue and Yasuhiro and also Helio, Marcia, Jones, Mary, Sergio, Paula, Deborah, Vanessa, Camila, Thais and Igor for your understanding, encouraging and sacrifices you made so I could pursue my choices. I also would like to thank my brother-in-law Tiago and his family for kindly receiving me into their lives – Thank you very much!

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Chapter 1

Introduction

A country's food culture consists of more than just traditional dishes. In Japan one could even claim that the food culture is used to embed state ideologies in society, one of which invokes the role of ideal housewives. Indeed, food in Japan has been used to express different notions. For example, Anne Allison, the noted anthropologist at Duke University, classified bento as an "ideological apparatus" in her study that describes how home-made bento were expected to reflect both emotional support for children in nursery school as well as serve as a tool for teachers to evaluate the mother-child relationship.² Additionally, Klara Seddon, the research director for the Institute of Cultural Research, NY, has stated that Japanese women are now using food and social media to express their feelings and create communication channels to interact with other people.³ Allison's work on the use of bento for purposes other than consumption calls attention to the association of bento to ideological features. However, Allison's article is from 1991. Due to the development of technology, bento is now also being used to express opinions in a virtual realm. Seddon's work explores bento in such a realm. Focusing on one category of bento-themed personal webpages named "character bento blogs,"⁴ Seddon investigates the inspiration and dedication of character bento makers in infusing the daily cooking with a creative expression. The author argues that posting in character bento blogs about one's strategy in preparing meals is an "expressive process that communicates one's creative

² Anne Allison, "Japanese Mothers and *Obentōs*: The Lunch-Box as Ideological State Apparatus," *Anthropological Quarterly*, Vol. 64, No 4 (1991): 196.

³ Klara Seddon, "Bento Blogs: Japanese Women's Expression in Digital Food Culture," *Women & Performance*, Vol. 21, No 3 (2011): 304.

⁴ See chapter two for full explanation of character and other bento blog categories.

accomplishments.”⁵ In this study I will further investigate Japanese women’s use of bento-themed personal webpages as a means of seeking expression, communication and recognition in social media. In contrast to Seddon’s investigation, I will not focus on individual creative expression of bento makers; rather, more as Allison does in her article, I will conduct my analysis focusing on Japanese women and their portrayed role as mothers and wives. The investigation of women’s desire to achieve virtual recognition using bento as a theme for online expression can, possibly, provide a preliminary comprehension of a social behaviour of contemporary Japanese women. In this first chapter, I will introduce the history and influences on Japanese cuisine as well as bento’s promotion by Japanese media which turned the ready-to-eat lunch box into a tool for regional tourism promotion and private communication.

Japanese cuisine was greatly influenced by historical events. During the Meiji period (1868-1912), Japanese cuisine was influenced by the Western presence in the country. As many researchers have already noted (Ashkenazi and Jacob⁶, Bestor⁷ and Cwiertka⁸) its impact in the late nineteenth century was significant. In fact, the influence of foreign elements is very important in understanding the composition of current Japanese cuisine as most foreign dishes were adapted and incorporated as side dishes of the Japanese rice-centered meal. In addition, various Asian cuisines influenced Japanese daily meals. Some of the most popular dishes in Japan such as curry rice and Chinese fried noodles are good examples of Japanese-Western-Asian style of home cooking, which is also referred to as a “Japanization” of Western and Asian

⁵ Seddon, “Bento Blogs,” 315.

⁶ Michael Ashkenazi and Jeanne Jacob, *Food Culture in Japan* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2003).

⁷ Theodore C. Bestor, *Tsukiji: The Fish Market at the Center of the World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

⁸ Katarzyna Joanna Cwiertka, *Modern Japanese Cuisine: Food, Power and National Identity* (London: Reaktion, 2006).

food.⁹ Therefore, one should not be astonished if, when ordering a hamburger or Chinese fried noodles in Japan, it comes served alongside a bowl of rice and a soup. The first McDonalds opened in Tokyo in the 1970s and they were soon followed by other American fast food chains like Kentucky Fried Chicken and Mister Donut. Not only fast food chains, but also ice cream parlours and steak houses appeared in the next decade, consolidating the Western presence in Japanese food culture. Additionally, during the late 1980s and the early 1990s, a boom of ethnic food brought restaurants from all around the world to Japan's biggest cities.¹⁰ In response to the growth of foreign influence, in the mid-twentieth century, Japanese cuisine developed concepts such as *washoku* (Japanese traditional-style cuisine) as a counter-measure to the globalizing food scene. *Washoku* enhanced culinary skills from the Edo period (1603-1868) and focused on local products and "traditional" ways of cooking, serving and eating.¹¹

In Japan, meals present two distinctive visual characteristics: first, the size of portions, as a Japanese traditional meal is composed of a generous portion of rice, a soup and a large number of small portions of bite-sized sides. The second visual characteristic is the food arrangement and the presentation in different shapes, colors and sizes to turn every meal into a feast for the eye before the tongue. In regard to taste, Japanese cuisine values freshness of ingredients and focuses on extracting the best natural flavour of ingredients such as rice, soy sauce and fresh seafood while creating contrasts of different textures and flavours.¹² Therefore, it is not unusual to find crunchy and savoury pieces of *tsukemono* (pickled vegetables), served with a soft and sweet slice of fresh scallop *sashimi* (sliced raw fish or seafood) in the same meal.

⁹ Katarzyna J. Cwiertka, "Contemporary Issues in Japanese Cuisine," *Encyclopedia of Food and Culture*, Vol. 2 (2003): 325.

¹⁰ Cwiertka, "Contemporary Issues," 325.

¹¹ Cwiertka, *Modern Japanese Cuisine*, 21.

¹² Donald Richie, *A Taste of Japan: Food Fact and Fable: What the People Eat: Customs and Etiquette* (Tokyo; New York : Kodansha International: Distributed in the United States by Kodansha International/USA, through Harper & Row, 1985), 8-10.

Western and Asian influences on Japanese cuisine have benefited from Japanese media coverage where food is a ubiquitous theme: television programs, magazines, movies, cartoons and dramas emphasize local production and promote Western, Asian and Japanese food as an entertainment.¹³ Moreover, even simple dishes such as *onigiri* (rice balls) are reinvented weekly in television programs and magazines.¹⁴ Japanese media also plays an important role in promoting dish arrangements using multiple colors and shapes as well as famous local products called *meibutsu*, which are considered an important contribution to Japanese food heritage.¹⁵

Bento is part of such food promotion, usually composed of a large portion of rice and other small portions of sides. It was allegedly born in the sixteenth century when Oda Nobunaga, one of Japan's greatest general who promoted the political and economic unification of Japan with Toyotomi Hideyoshi and Tokugawa Ieyasu, distributed the first bento made of rice balls and pickles to his workers and soldiers during the construction of Azuchi castle. Nobunaga's general and successor, Toyotomi Hideyoshi, enhanced the creativity and artistic creations of boxes' design due to the strong influence of the tea ceremony in that era. The tea was served in special bento boxes with divisions for the teapot and a meal accompanying the tea ceremony.¹⁶ During the Edo period, bento was carried by samurai in their pilgrimage duty and was also served in the interlude of long performances of *kabuki* (Japanese popular drama with singing and dancing performed with elaborate designed costumes and make-up), *kyōgen* (Japanese comic theater) and *bunraku* (Japanese puppet theater).¹⁷ Today, bento is the most popular lunch dish for

¹³ Bestor, *Tsukiji*, 134.

¹⁴ Gavin Hamilton Whitelaw, "Rice Ball Rivalries: Convenience Stores and Appetite of Late Capitalism." In *Fast Food / Slow Food: The Cultural Economy of the Global Food System* ed. Richard Wilk, (Lanham, MD: Altamira Press, 2006), 133.

¹⁵ Bestor, *Tsukiji*, 139.

¹⁶ Maria Dolores Rodrigues Del Alisal, "Japanese Lunch Boxes: From Convenient Snack to the Convenience Store." In *Consumption and Material Culture in Contemporary Japan*. Ed. Michael Ashkenazi and J. R. Clammer (Kegan Paul International, 2000), 44.

¹⁷ Del Alisal, "Japanese Lunch Boxes," 44.

family members at work and children at school. It can either be prepared at home or bought in many places, from convenience stores to train stations or even delivered to one's office minutes before the lunch break. I would be remiss if I did not mention the *ekiben*, which is a short name for *eki-bentō* (train station bento). As its name says, it is a lunch box sold in train stations or on the trains on some occasions. In 1894, an *ekiben* promoting local and seasonal products called *meibutsu ekiben* (train station bento made with famous local products) debuted making each train station famous for its regional *ekiben* made with fresh and famous local ingredients.¹⁸ For example, featuring abundant local seafood, Shizuoka station's most famous *meibutsu ekiben* is the *tai-meshi* (sea bream with rice).

Not only the promotion of food as an entertainment or as a tourist attraction, but also the reduced options of leisure activities for women in the early twentieth century turned cooking into a hobby.¹⁹ Additionally, during the postwar period, the development of color-printed magazines and television programs contributed to the promotion of color balance in food appearance as the first bento cookbook was published focusing on food aesthetics and the importance of putting in effort whenever making it. Consequently, women were also under pressure as they prepared the meal for husbands at work and children at school.²⁰ More than a simple meal, bento became a tool to install a governmental ideology into Japanese society focusing on family wellness and portraying the role of Japanese women as wives and mothers. This ideology's interpretation turned bento into a tool for women's evaluation as mothers. On one hand, bento was considered a representation of the home's comfort for children at school. On the other hand, school rules

¹⁸ Paul H. Noguchi, "Savor Slowly: Ekiben - The Fast Food of High-Speed Japan," *Ethnology*, 3, No. 34 (1994), 321.

¹⁹ Katarzyna Cwiertka, "How Cooking Became a Hobby: Changes in Attitude Toward Cooking in Everyday Japan." In *The Culture of Japan as Seen Through Its Leisure*, ed. Sepp Linhart and Sabine Frühstück (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1998), 43.

²⁰ Tomoko Onabe, "Bentō: Boxed Love, Eaten by the Eye." In *Japanese Foodways, Past and Present* ed. Eric C. Rath, and Stephanie Assmann (Urbana, Chicago and Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 206.

require children to eat all food and children's performance in eating is directly related to mothers' performance in preparing.²¹

Bento is an icon in Japanese food culture; specialized magazines and television programs frequently promote new food arrangements and color balances to make it even more attractive. Moreover, such promotions in media also contribute to the use of bento as a communication tool between maker and eater.²² Recently, due to the technological development of new channels of communication bento reached the virtual world through personal webpages dedicated to food and bento. Such webpages are creating a means of direct interaction between internet users by which they may exchange personal experience and communicate through social media. An example of a popular topic among bento makers is arrangement suggestions, which often focus on the creation of bento decorated with characters from *anime* and *manga* (Japanese cartoons and comics respectively).²³ However, the biggest achievement of bento-themed webpages is the accessibility of information and its transposition from the private to the public sphere. Personal webpages teaching and suggesting how to use Western food in well-arranged meals promote bento concepts in different cultures and countries. A quick search on the internet will come up with webpages signed by authors from different countries such as France, Singapore and the United States. The second achievement of bento-themed webpages is the use of bento as a communication tool. Based on the use of food arrangement, communication through bento was typically restricted to communication between maker and eater.²⁴ However, through its

²¹ Allison, "Japanese Mothers and *Obentōs*," 203.

²² Onabe, "Bentō," 210.

²³ Seddon, "Bento Blogs," 301.

²⁴ Del Alisal, "Japanese Lunch Boxes," 57.

divulgarion on the internet, the maker's feelings are also shared with readers even though Japanese social media users do not commonly share personal information online.²⁵

Due to the association of bento with women's roles as mothers and wives and the isolation nature of activities related to household duties and children's education, this study gives special attention to Japanese women. Within such a context of activities, the development of social media has enhanced the promotion of communication among women leading to the main theme of this study: an investigation of Japanese women's use of bento as a theme for personal webpages to express and communicate in social media seeking recognition for their effort in cooking for their family.

The second chapter of this study, "Bento Goes Online," describes the development of personal webpages, more commonly known as blogs, and the popularity of food as a theme for blogs in Japan. Additionally, the second chapter provides an analysis of two Japanese blog rankings focusing on the key category of this study: bento blogs.

"Bento Blog Authors: Eating, Making and Posting," chapter three, offers a discussion of Japanese women's relationship with bento. Focusing primarily on women in society and their motivation in making bento, the chapter analyzes how bento is part of women's lives, from childhood to motherhood, as a governmental ideology attempted to portray Japanese women's duties as wives and mothers. The third chapter also demonstrates how food and blogs became important tools for women's desire for expression and recognition.

The fourth chapter, "Data analysis: Bento Bloggers' Voices," analyzes and discusses the result of an investigation conducted with bento blog authors using an online survey and a qualitative questionnaire. The analysis describes bloggers' opinions in making bento, expressing and seeking recognition within social media using bento as a theme for their personal webpages.

²⁵ Shin Mizukoshi, "Is Japan the 'Galapagos Islands' of Social Media?" *Global Asia* 9, No. 2 (2014), 38.

Readers may be interested in the synchrony between both investigation tools which allow for not only participants' opinions, but also examples and personal comments.

Finally, the fifth chapter summarizes the discussions of this study, including suggestions of possible future studies based on different perspectives such as gender or occupation.

NOTE: The translations in this study are mine unless otherwise noted.

Chapter 2

Bento Goes Online

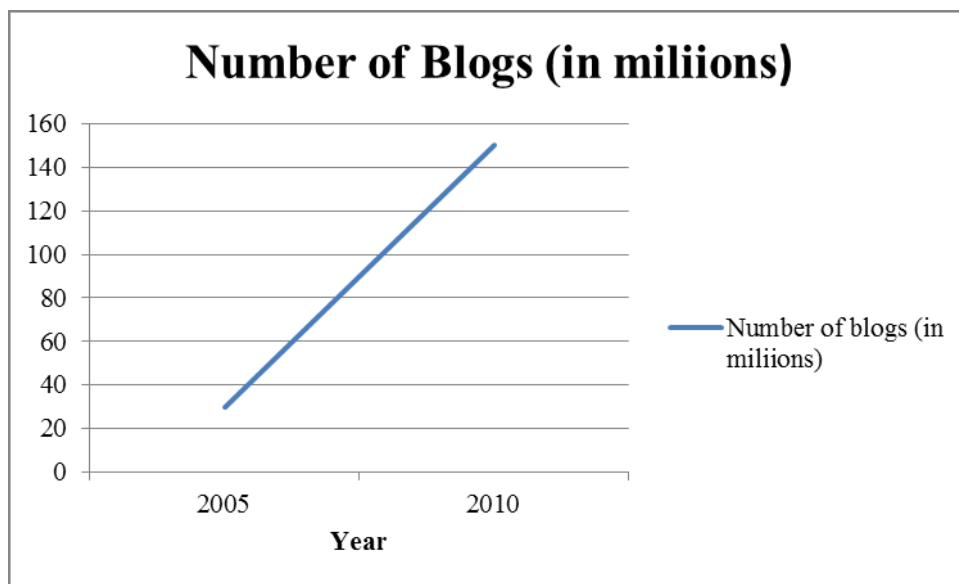
The space for exchange of information and discussions has shifted dramatically in the last ten years or so. From TV programs and printed sources to online tutorials and videos, the development of virtual sources has greatly increased the ability access to information. Andreas Kaplan and Michael Haenlein from the ESCP Europe Business School define social media as: “a group of internet-based applications that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content.”²⁶ The success of social media is associated with an individual’s desire to establish a connection with people possessing similar interests and needs, using this relationship to achieve their personal objectives.²⁷ In the last several years, the development of internet technology has allowed the creation of multiple resources for one’s expression. As an example, the weblogs, or simply blogs, which started in the late 1990s, stand out as a particularly powerful tool.²⁸ Blogs are personal webpages where authors can write about any topic, from hobbies to social psychology, even blogging about the blogging experience. Blogging is the word created in reference to writing, commenting and discussing a specific topic in a blog. The addition of new content can usually be made only once a day and although blog servers can be provided by private companies for a fee, internet users often look for free services, which are very similar to webmail platforms. Not surprisingly, big internet companies such as Yahoo and Google have their own blog tools: “Yahoo! Blog” and “Blogger,” respectively. The number of blogs has increased at impressive speed; the amount of blogs in the United States jumped from thirty

²⁶ Andreas M. Kaplan and Michael Haenlein, “Users of the World, Unite! The Challenges and Opportunities of Social Media,” *Business Horizons* 53 (2010), 61.

²⁷ César Sahelices-Pinto and Pablo Gutierrez-Rodriguez, “Identifying Central Individuals on the Internet: A Case Study with Food Related Weblogs,” *Journal of Food Products Marketing* 21, No.1 (2015), 69.

²⁸ Cait Caffrey, “Blogging in the 2000s.” *Salem Press Encyclopaedia Research Starters*, accessed December 4, 2015.

million in 2005 to more than one hundred and fifty million blogs in 2010 (Graphic 2.1).²⁹ In this chapter I will first introduce and discuss the popularity of a specific category of blogs: the food blog. Then, the discussion will turn to Japan where food blogs are incredibly popular. Among food blogs, one category is the most important for this study: bento blogs. I will further provide information about this category's popularity in Japan and other countries. Finally, in the last part of this chapter, I will argue that Japanese women are using bento and their bento blogs as a new kind of social arena where they can express themselves, be recognized for their effort in cooking and communicate with an audience.



Graphic 2.1: Increase of blogs in the US. Graphic created by the author of this thesis.

Food Blog Fever

Since such a variety of blog themes have emerged, they have been categorized into food, pets, cars, games and many others to ease the reader's search for topics of interest. For example, food blogs commonly share information about recipes, experiences in tasting exotic food and

²⁹ Signe Rousseau, *Food and Social Media: You Are What You Tweet* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012), 1.

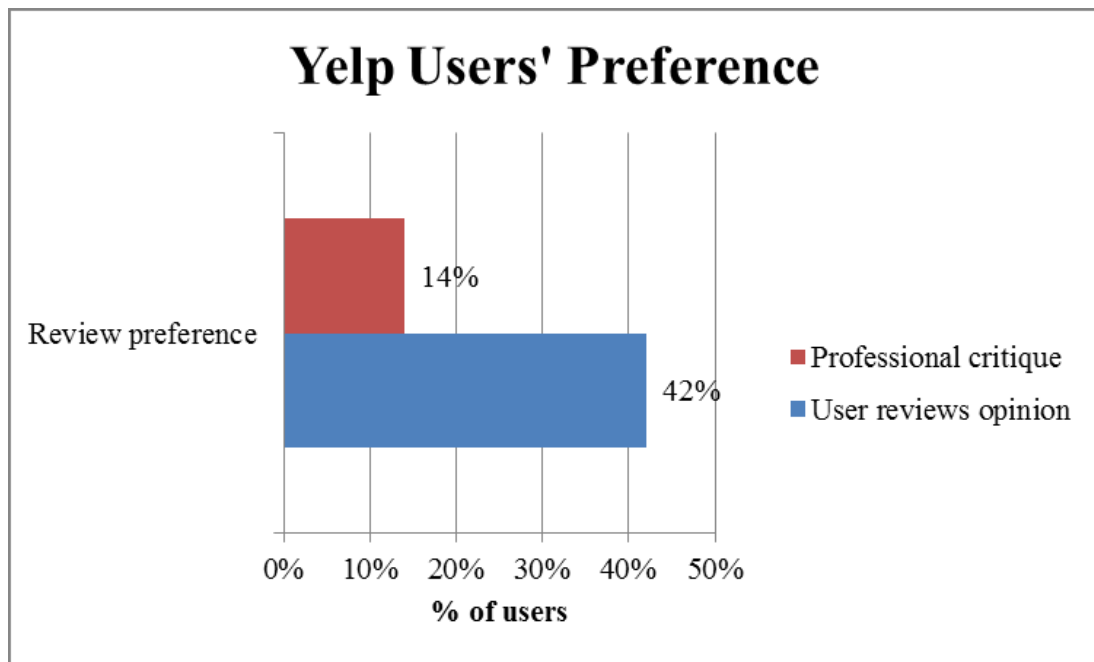
even evaluating meals in restaurants. The popularity of blogs has led to the development of a new occupation, the so-called blogger, which can also be a synonym for other blog-based professions such as restaurant critique or fashion consultant. Popular food blogs discussing and evaluating restaurants have an average of two thousand daily visitors and often the blogger's opinion about a restaurant is trusted as much as a friend's opinion. For the restaurant business it is a "double-edged" sword since a blogger's opinion can either elevate or degrade the restaurant's image.³⁰ The interconnected nature of blog networks provides a minute-by-minute update of links to recent posts enabling blogs to spread a considerable amount of information in a short period of time. Such a blog feature is leading both big and small restaurants to pursue their blog network as a solid promotional medium.³¹ A survey made with users of Yelp, a website founded in 2004 that provides consumers' reviews of local businesses, indicates that around 14% of restaurant customers rely on advice from professional critiques, but up to 42% prefer a user-review opinion (Graphic 2.2).³² According to a survey in 2010, 81% of restaurants participating in social media were already using its platform as a marketing tool and more than a half of them claimed an increase in positive mentions due to their presence in social media. Moreover, data from the National Restaurant Association of the United States reports that 92% of social media users eat at a sit-down restaurant at least once a month (this classification refers to casual dining restaurants with a table service and excludes fast food restaurants or others where customer order on a counter). Additionally, 58% of Americans now view restaurants online and 16% of all consumers are connected with their favourite restaurants through social media.³³

³⁰ Dearton T. Hector and Goutam Das, "A Taste of Power," *Business Today* 22, No.14 (2013), 106.

³¹ Joe Dysart, "Blogs Go BIG TIME," *Restaurant Hospitality* 89, No. 2 (2005), 66.

³² Rousseau, *Food and Social Media*, 60.

³³ *Ibid*, 69.



Graphic 2.2: Yelp users' preference on restaurant review. Graphic created by the author of this thesis

The content of food blogs can also be collected and published as a book, or “blook”, which are “books based on blogs or websites content.”³⁴ One of the most famous food bloggers is Julie Powell, who is the author of the Julie/Julia Project. During the period of one year, she documented her cooking experience in Julia Child’s *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*. Her blook *Julie and Julia: 365 Days, 524 Recipes, 1 Tiny Apartment Kitchen* was published in 2005, and in 2009 it was adapted as the movie *Julie & Julia* with Meryl Streep playing the role of Julia Child. Numbers from popular food blogs such as Deb Perelman’s *Smitten Kitchen*, which attracts up to four million unique views in a month, illustrates the popularity of food blogs even for those who might not be familiar with the category.³⁵

Although virtual, the relationship between bloggers and readers can be very influential. Joshua Meyrowitz from the University of New Hampshire calls attention to the relationship built through blog platforms. He refers to social scientists Donald Horton and Richard Wohl’s term

³⁴ Rousseau, *Food and Social Media*, 7.

³⁵ Ibid, 7-8.

“para-social interaction” to describe a relationship between one person and a group of followers. Para-social performers can establish contact with millions because “viewers feel that they ‘know’ the people they ‘meet’ in the same way as a friend or an associate.”³⁶ This kind of relationship is usually associated to celebrities and their fans. Indeed, blogs are ideal for this relationship due to the personalized nature of content and the reader’s ability to interact by commenting on site.

Food blogging communities are especially popular because they create a social experience by mingling offline content (cooking and eating) with online content (blogging about cooking or eating). The potential intimacy is created with the development of discussions about food, a topic that is ordinary and necessary on the one hand, or complex and full of influences on the other.³⁷ The social interaction in posting, commenting and replying in blogs is considered as the most important because it remodelled the consumer’s search for evaluations and opinions. It creates a source of information about accessibility, support in making the right decision and experience in using and evaluating a product or service.³⁸ Additionally, the use of individual networks has been facilitating the access to information about experiences and recommendations from other consumers leading to a positive impact.³⁹

As an example of such access to information, the Canadian blog *I am a food blog* which was elected “2014 Saveur Magazine’s Editor’s Choice for Best Cooking Blog” and “2014 Blog of the Year,” has more than 120,000 followers among Twitter, Instagram and Pinterest.⁴⁰

Pinterest is a social media platform based on bookmarking sites of interest and sharing images.

One’s individual network can also be influential for years, as evidenced by *Poires au Chocolat*,

³⁶ Joshua Meyrowitz, *No Sense of Place: The Impact of Electronic Media on Social Behaviour* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 119.

³⁷ Rousseau, *Food and Social Media*, 9.

³⁸ Fred Bronner and Robert de Hoog, “Social Media and Consumer Choice,” *International Journal of Market Research* 56, No.1 (2014), 53.

³⁹ M. Nick Hajli, “A Study of the Impact of Social Media on Consumers,” *International Journal of Market Research* 56, No. 3 (2014), 388.

⁴⁰ “I am a food blog,” accessed February 01, 2016. <http://iamafoodblog.com/about/>.

based in Cambridge in the United Kingdom, which has been active since 2009 and selected “Food Blog of the Year” in 2012 and 2014 by The Guild of Food Writers.⁴¹

Food Blog Fever in Japan

Adam Acar and Ayaka Deguchi from Kobe City University of Foreign Studies called attention to the popularity of social media in Japan noting that although Japanese users are not comfortable with sharing personal background information, they are very active users of personal social media such as Twitter and Mixi, which is Japan’s largest social network.⁴² Mixi belongs to Mixi Inc, a digital media company that offers multiple services such as social network services and mobile games. Indeed, Mixi became famous across the world due to its hit mobile game “Monster Strike” which exceeded fourteen million users in the first year.⁴³

Twitter is a micro-blogging platform with more than three hundred million users worldwide. On Twitter, users can update their status under the limit of 140 characters per post which allows Twitter to be quickly updated and provide information in almost real-time. Acar and Deguchi studied Twitter in Japan by comparing tweets from Japanese and American users and results revealed that Japanese users’ posts are more focused on self-related and TV-related topics (Figure 2.1).⁴⁴ Although the study does not provide any information about replies to tweets, which could represent a conversation between users, it enhances the argument that Japanese users use social media for self-expression.

⁴¹ “Poires au Chocolat,” accessed February 01, 2016. <http://www.poiresauchocolat.net/>

⁴² Adam Acar and Ayaka Deguchi, “Culture and Social Media Usage: Analysis of Japanese Twitter Users,” *International Journal of Electronic Commerce Studies* 4, No 1 (2013), 25.

⁴³ “Mixi,” accessed April 02, 2015, <http://mixi.com/>.

⁴⁴ Acar and Deguchi, “Culture and Social Media,” 27-28.

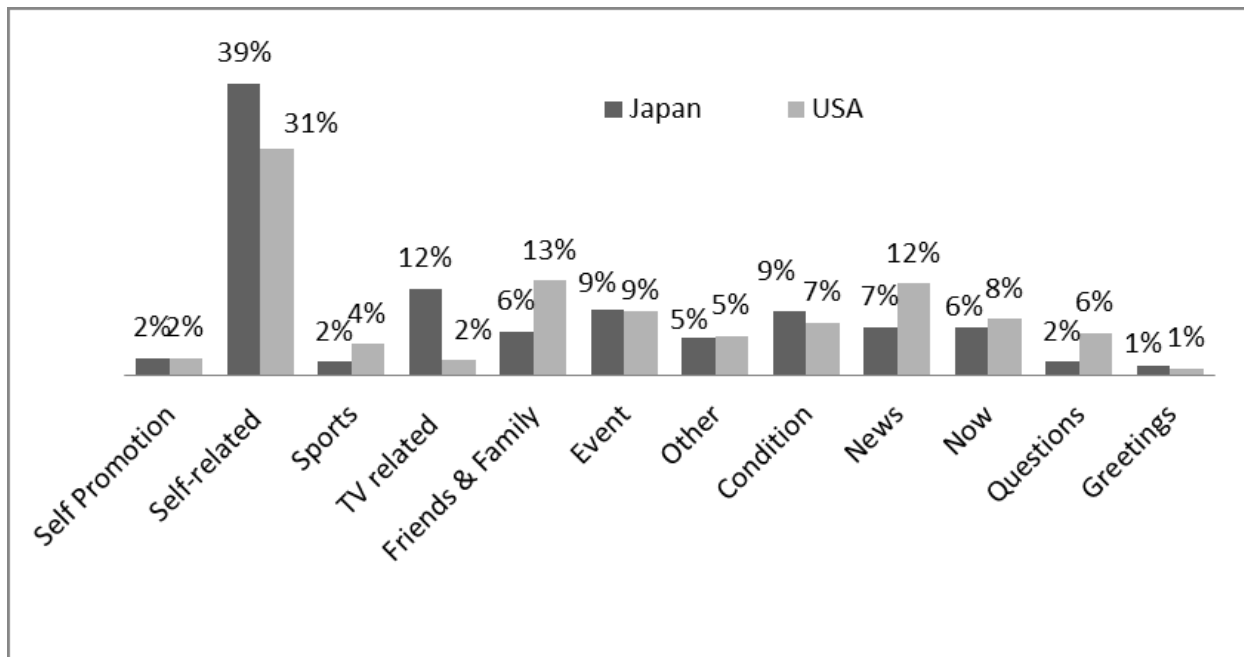
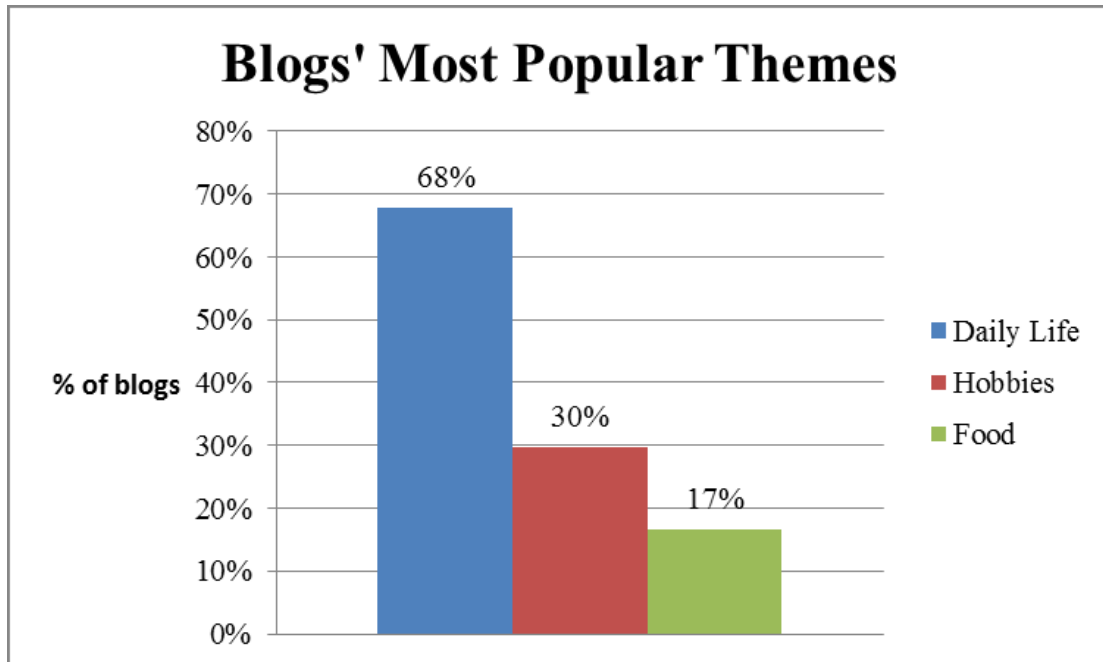


Figure 2.1: Comparison between Japanese and American tweets, the percentage indicates the distribution of post's topics for Japanese and American users of Twitter. In Adam Acar and Ayaka Deguchi, "Culture and Social Media Usage: Analysis of Japanese Twitter Users," International Journal of Electronic Commerce Studies 4, No 1 (2013), 27.

Indeed, personal pages such as blogs are very popular in Japan. Klara Seddon reported that Japan is the most active blogging nation with 74% of internet users reading blogs at least once a week. The most popular themes are: daily life (67.8%), hobbies (29.8%) and food (16.5%) (Graphic 2.3).⁴⁵ Blogs are classified in categories according to authors' perception of its main theme as, whenever registering a blog in a directory, the author has chance to choose more than one category that fits the blog's main theme. For example, a blog about someone's experience in cooking new recipes could be registered as a "food," "hobby" or even "daily life" blog or even all of them at once. In this chapter I will report my own experience in registering my personal webpage under such thematic classification.

⁴⁵ Klara Seddon, "From Bento to Blog: The Digital Culture of an Everyday Japanese Meal." In *Food and Everyday Life* ed. Thomas Conroy (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2014), 49.



Graphic 2.3: Blogs' most popular themes. The total of percentage will not be precise because blogs can be registered with more than one theme. Graphic created by the author of this thesis.

Within the context of such variety, blogs specializing in food are among the most popular in Japan. Risa Aihara, the chief-director of Ai-LAND Co, a private company specialized in portal sites for women, reported that the company's portal site of food blogs called "Recipe-blog" had, since its foundation in 2005, approximately twelve thousand blogs based on food registered in 2012. In addition, the Recipe-blog webpage has a monthly access of approximately one million visitors but, when considering all registered blogs' views, the access numbers raises to forty four million monthly.⁴⁶ Among food blogs, one of the most popular categories is bento blog which refers to personal webpages that have bento as the main theme of posts.

However, in the same way the concept of bento was exported from Japan to other countries bento blogs are also not restricted to the Japanese public. Bloggers from other countries such as the United States, France and Singapore are using bento to turn their blogs into a

⁴⁶ Risa Aihara, "The Cooking Site of Social Media Trend- Case by Food Blog Media 'Recipe-Blog.jp'," *Technical Report of The Institute of Electronics, Information and Communication*: Technical Report No 75 (2012), 32.

business. One of the most successful bento blogs outside Japan is “Just Bento” by Makiko Itoh, a Japanese blogger currently living in France. Her blog has more than 360,000 daily readers from all around the world and her cookbook based on recipes from blog posts was published in 2010 and is currently available in the US, the UK, Canada, France, Germany, Japan, South Africa and Australia.⁴⁷

To get a better picture of the variety and popularity of blogs in Japan, a blog directory called *Blogmura* (blog village) holds an impressive 126 different general categories such as travel, food and sports. Each general category is also divided into smaller and detailed groups to fit the blog topic. As an example of detailed groups, the food category is divided in topics like “French cuisine,” “desserts” and “bakery” among others. It should be noted that some general categories have more than thirty thousand blogs registered.⁴⁸ The bento blog category is one of the most popular categories. An analysis in *Blogmura* and another Japanese blog directory called Blog Ranking revealed over five thousand registered bento blogs and more than two hundred thousand daily readers for each of the top five blogs.⁴⁹ But numbers concerning bento blogs are not just impressive in terms of their content as they also provide information about authors’ profiles and serve as evidence of interaction between authors and readers. Before proceeding into the details of bento blogs, it is important to further explore the characteristics of bento previously discussed. Bento is more than packed food for a meal out of the home as talented cooks have turned the act of bento-making into an art of food design. Practices of bento decoration created nicknames that turned into the “categories” of bento: character bento (or *kyaraben* in Japanese)

⁴⁷ William Pesek, “Michelin Can Keep Its Stars, This is Way Cooler: William Pesek” Bloomberg Business, accessed March 06, 2015, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2010-11-28/michelin-can-keep-stars-this-is-way-cooler-commentary-by-william-pesek>.

⁴⁸ “Category Index” Blogmura, accessed December 6, 2015, <http://www.blogmura.com/category/index.html>.

⁴⁹ “*Obentō* Blog”, Blogmura, accessed March 06, 2015, <http://food.blogmura.com/> and “*Obentō* Blog Ranking”, Blog Ranking, accessed March 06, 2015, <http://blog.with2.net/rank1367-0.html>

and decorated bento (or *dekoben*). Seddon interviewed a *kyaraben* maker who described how she decided to start making *kyaraben*: “One morning, I just had extra time when I was packing lunch boxes for my boyfriend and me, so I just made an octopus with sausage and a chicken with an egg. When my boyfriend saw it, he just went ‘Awww.’ I just wanted to hear him say that again. [...] the best kind of reaction. And that’s why I make bento.”⁵⁰

The difference between *kyaraben* and *dekoben* is the “topic” of decoration. Usually *kyaraben* is based on characters from *anime* and *manga* (Japanese cartoons and comics respectively) and *dekoben* is based in decorations with characters created by the author him/herself, which could be represented by images of animals or mythological characters. Figures 2.2 and 2.3 below help illustrate the difference between *kyaraben* and *dekoben*.



Figure 2.2: *Dekoben*. Source: <http://d.hatena.ne.jp/dekoben/> Accessed April 02, 2015.



Figure 2.3: *Kyaraben* (Totoro and Pikachu from popular cartoons). Source: <http://yorokobukao.blog92.fc2.com/blog-entry-2429.html>. Accessed April 02, 2015.

When it comes to blogging about bento, visual differences are not the only division criteria as the maker, eater and other characteristics related to preparation developed different categories of bento blogs such as “economic” and “easy to make.” These divisions are focused on providing information so readers can easily locate which bento-related topic is more

⁵⁰ Seddon, “Bento Blogs,” 304.

interesting to them. An analysis of *Blogmura*'s bento blog category also revealed a diversity of topics. Often, one or more topics are only minimally different, and could conceptually be combined under the same topic (Table 2.1).

Category Name	Number of Registered Blogs
<i>Obentō</i>	1876
Easy Bento	299
Economic / Saving Bento	77
<i>Dekoben</i>	32
Drawing <i>Kyaraben</i>	4
<i>Kyaraben</i>	870
Wood Box Bento	108
Thermic Box Bento	32
Husband / Father Bento	611
Boyfriend / Sibling Bento	33
College / Speciality School Student Bento	4
Male Senior High School Bento	57
Female Senior High School Bento	33
Student Bento	334
Cram School / Supper Bento	35
Kindergarten Bento	242
Bento for Myself	293
Male Bento	149

Table 2.1: Bento blogs categories. Source: <http://food.blogmura.com/>. Accessed April 02, 2015. Table created by the author of this thesis.

Blog directories are responsible for the category division on their own database. However, the classification is made according to the authors' interpretation of their own blogs, which means, whenever registering in a directory, the author can choose to which category his/her blog belongs. For this reason it is possible to find bento blogs in "daily life" and "hobbies," as well as other categories within the "food" division like "home cooking." During my own experience in registering in such directories, I realized that the platforms supporting blogs are not strict with their categories. My webpage is not even related to food, but I managed to successfully register it as a bento blog. Indeed, this volatility of themes and organization is a characteristic of blogs. As a personal webpage, authors have total control over the structure and discussion topic. For this reason, readers will eventually find, within the bento blog category, personal webpages that probably used to have bento as main theme, but now are focusing on a different topic like general discussions toward food, restaurants or even topics from a totally different category like pets. An analysis in Blog Ranking's bento directory showed that, although belonging to the ranking of bento blogs, many personal webpages were focused on different themes.⁵¹ Similar to my personal webpage, these blogs were probably related to bento when they registered, but now discuss a different topic. Table 2.2 illustrates and compares the number of blogs that are not discussing about bento within the bento blog ranking.

⁵¹ "Obentō Blog Ranking," Blog Ranking, <http://blog.with2.net/rank1367-0.html>. This analysis was made considering 385 blogs ranked between April 03 and 04, 2015. Since the ranking is updated weekly, results may vary if the same analysis would be done on a second time due to the constant registration of new blogs and the inactivity of registered blogs.

Blogs within the bento category discussing a different topic	
Main theme of the blog	Number of blogs
Bento	222
Daily Life	80
Food (restaurants, home cooking and food products)	73
Pets	6
Inactive Blogs	4

Table 2.2: Blogs within bento ranking that are not bento-related. Table created by the author of this thesis.

Since the author is in total control of the blog content, why create divisions according to blog themes? The answer to this question is “the reader.” The division into categories aims to ease the location so readers can easily find their topics of most interest. Once a reader locates a post of interest he/she has the option to communicate with the blogger and discuss the post or any other topic of their interest. Bento blogs are not restricted to food discussions as, other than just bento or ingredients, bloggers are also posting additional information and opinions regarding different topics in their blogs creating a mixed post of bento and other topics. A screenshot from a popular blog’s post revealed that authors and readers are building a dialogue along the comment field discussing other topics such as weather, pets or daily life (Figure 2.4).



Figure 2.4: Comments from a post at <http://bentomid.exblog.jp/23608786/>, accessed February 03, 2015 / 19h03. Translation provided by the author.

Bento Blogs as New Social Arenas

The communication between bloggers and readers raises the question about the creation of a new virtual social arena to engage in an experience of conversation and expression online. Posts from the most popular blogs usually have a high number of comments from readers and authors themselves replying to comments. The number of comments in the most popular blogs can easily overstep hundreds depending on the post's topic. Ttkk, a Japanese blog author, registered 350 comments and over twelve thousand “likes” from Facebook and the blog server in

just one post (Figure 2.5). She is the author of one of the most popular bento blogs with more than three million monthly accesses.⁵²



Figure 2.5: Screenshot with highlighted “likes” and comments from <http://ameblo.jp/kaerit/entry-11982143513.html>, accessed March 09, 2015 / 15h20.

Seddon also stated in her study about *kyaraben* blogs that food bloggers, unlike cookbook authors, use the blog’s post-to-post platform to try to create different means of expression.⁵³ Within the blog structure, there are no fixed formats for posts, which allow authors to express themselves in different writing styles. For example, bloggers can use words and express themselves through narratives and recipes as well as make use of photography and drawings to experiment with expression in a more subjective way. These styles do not need to follow any chronological order and allow authors to develop their own style of posting. More than just

⁵² Anna Shudo, “Livro de bento feito com objetivo de assediar a filha vira best-seller no Japão” *IPC Digital*, accessed February 23, 2015. <http://www.ipcdigital.com/japao/livro-de-bento-feito-com-o-objetivo-de-assediar-a-filha-vira-best-seller-no-japao/>.

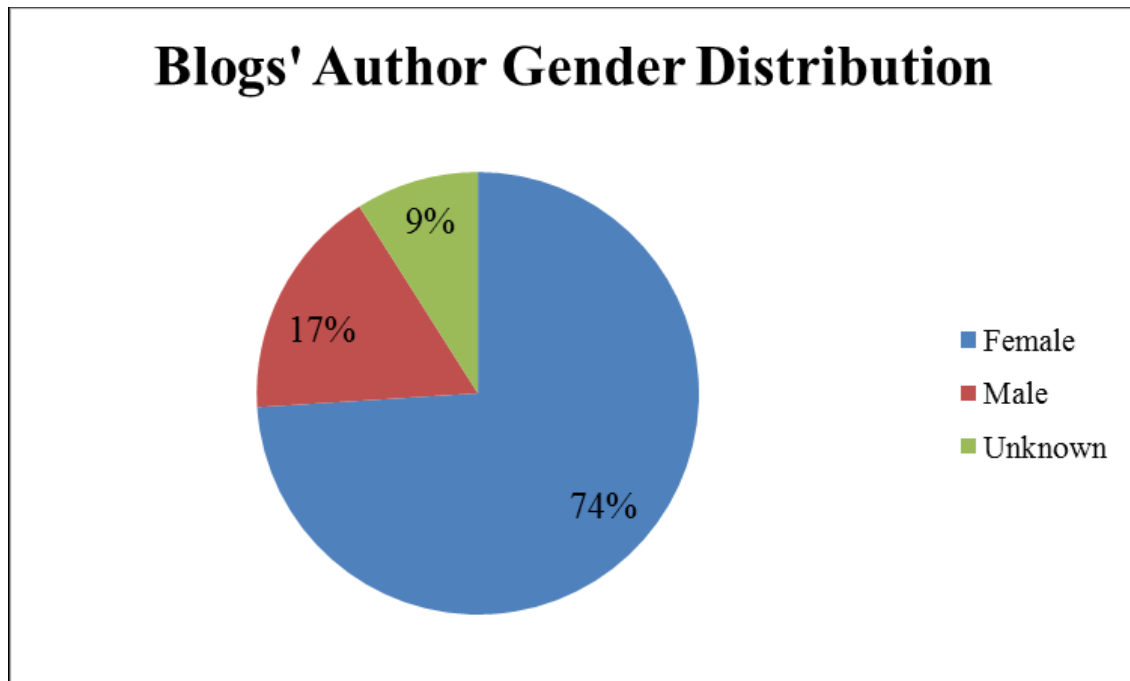
⁵³ Seddon, “From Bento to Blog,” 49.

showing high-definition food photographs, bloggers can choose to make a post commenting about their experience in cooking and eating or provide a list of ingredients and explanations about preparing a dish. A tour through a blog's archive can demonstrate the evolution of author's style.⁵⁴ Indeed, authors focus on translating the experience of food using a digital format, and the freedom in content as well as the structure to engage in discussion with readers increased the growing rate of the blogging activity.

Reasons for making bento or posting about it on the internet may be different according to age and gender. Interestingly, a gender analysis in Blog Ranking's bento blog ranking revealed a majority (74%) of female authors. The analysis also revealed a considerable amount of male authors (17%) and authors who did not have gender information on the profile page (9%) (Graphic 2.4).⁵⁵ Indeed, Japanese women are the main gender of interest for this study due to their particular use of bento blogs to communicate and seek recognition in social media.

⁵⁴ Seddon, "From Bento to Blog," 50.

⁵⁵ "Obentō Blog Ranking," Blog Ranking, <http://blog.with2.net/rank1367-0.html>. This analysis was made considering 385 blogs ranked between April 03 and 04, 2015. Since the ranking is updated weekly, results may vary if the same analysis would be done on a second time due to the constant registration of new blogs and the inactivity of registered blogs.



Graphic 2.4: Gender of blogs' authors. Graphic created by the author of this thesis.

In regard to the male public revealed in the analysis, a recent study calls attention to an increasing number of single men preparing their own bento. Products like cookbooks and bento boxes focusing on the “male public” are providing basic instruction and support for the improvement of men’s cooking skills. According to the study, although the act of making bento is considered a feminine job, cooking their own bento is, from the point of view of men, a way to save money and become popular among female colleagues at work.⁵⁶

The analysis of Blog Ranking’s list of registered blogs revealed important information regarding differences in the blog structure of male and female authors.⁵⁷ Curiously, many bento blogs by male authors do not offer a comments platform, which might mean that male authors do not have much interest in conversation with their readers. Table 2.3 illustrates such information

⁵⁶ Shu Min Yuen, “From Men to Boys – The Cooking *Danshi* in Japanese Mass Media,” *Women's Studies International Forum* 44 (2014), 222.

⁵⁷ “Obentō Blog Ranking,” Blog Ranking, <http://blog.with2.net/rank1367-0.html>. This analysis was made considering 385 blogs ranked between April 03 and 04, 2015. Since the ranking is updated weekly, results may vary if the same analysis would be done on a second time due to the constant registration of new blogs and the inactivity of registered blogs.

in contrast to blogs by female authors. Based on blogs' analysis, it is possible to identify three distinct structures of comments platform: the most common was the presence or absence of comments platform link attached to the post. However, some blog servers allowed the option of a private-message-only platform in which comments are directly sent to bloggers by email and are not exposed on the blog's page. Interestingly, among blogs with private-message-only platform, not one was a male-authored blog. The percentages on the chart below were calculated according to a gender division, which means that the percentage of "female authors without comment platform" was calculated based on the total number of blogs by female authors. The same criterion was used to calculate the percentage of "male authors without comment platform" which is also based on the total number of bento blogs by male authors.⁵⁸

Percentage of blogs without comments platform – division based on gender		
Blog's comment platform description	Female Authors (% of blogs)	Male Authors (% of blogs)
Blog WITH comment platform	79.3%	65.7%
Blog WITH PRIVATE comment platform	6.9%	-
Blog WITHOUT comment platform	13.8%	34.3%

Table 2.3: Comment platform according to gender. Table created by the author of this thesis.

Results support the argument that, in contrast to male authors, female authors tend to develop a more communicative interaction with their readers. In fact, female authors often use

⁵⁸ "Obento Blog Ranking," Blog Ranking, <http://blog.with2.net/rank1367-0.html>. This analysis was made considering 385 blogs ranked between April 03 and 04, 2015. Since the ranking is updated weekly, results may vary if the same analysis would be done on a second time due to the constant registration of new blogs and the inactivity of registered blogs.

graphic emoticons and assorted topics in the same post to enhance the possibility of dialogue with an audience. Asako Miura from Kobe Gakuin University, and Kiyomi Yamashita from Senshu University conducted a survey with Japanese blog authors regarding the social influence on blogging and found that positive feedback from readers motivated bloggers to continue posting.⁵⁹ In an interview with Seddon, a *kyaraben* maker explained the blogs' importance as a platform for communication in Japan, especially among female bloggers: "Communication between bloggers of any genre (not only bento or food blogs) in Japan, especially amongst female bloggers, is extremely important much more than it is among US or European bloggers. [...] When someone gets too busy to comment on or visit other blogs, you frequently see them apologizing."⁶⁰ The desire to communicate and interact with readers in a virtual arena might be the reason why more than 86% of female-authored blogs possess a comment platform. The question of women's desire to communicate with their audience will be further investigated in this study.

For women, the act of making bento carries a sense of obligation as well as a personal expression. Seddon noted that "women feel that personal expression and satisfaction are important elements when they make bento." According to the author, decorative bento can "be expressive and persuade one's child to eat the right food and fit into social conventions."⁶¹

Although more than one-third of male-authored blogs do not feature the comments platform it does not interfere with the post structure. Actually, the difference is the presence or absence of a link to the comments page located at the bottom of the post. Figure 2.6 illustrates such a difference. The screenshots on the left are from male-authored blogs without a comments

⁵⁹ Asako Miura and Kiyomi Yamashita, "Psychological and Social Influences on Blog Writing: An Online Survey of Blog Authors in Japan," *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 12, No. 4 (2007), 1466-1467.

⁶⁰ Seddon, "Bento Blogs," 312

⁶¹ Ibid, 314.

platform and the red circles highlight the spot where readers would be able to find the link for comments. To make such a contrast more evident, the screenshots on the right belong to female-authored blogs and the green circles indicate the links for the comments page.



Figure 2.6: Comments platform in a male and female-authored blogs. Figure created by the author of this thesis.

Blogs are creating a space that is private, controlled and individual, but at the same time also public and interactive. In addition to Seddon's argument that "bento blogs act as a mode of expression for women who cook,"⁶² Japanese women seem to find in this mode of communication a vehicle not only to express their opinions, but also to create a social arena where women can be supported and recognized for their effort. The next chapter will focus on analyzing Japanese women in society, their relationship with bento, and how food and blogs became important tools for women's expression and recognition online.

⁶² Seddon, "Bento Blogs," 315.

Chapter 3

Bento Blog Authors: Eating, Making and Posting

Japanese people are introduced to bento as early as preschool when they start to carry bento for lunch every day. Making bento and escorting their children to the school's gate or bus stop every morning are examples of activities Japanese mothers are expected to do to demonstrate their support for their children's education.⁶³ Bento then continues to be part of Japanese people's life for a long period as an alternative meal when out of the home as it is considered a good option to save money and eat healthy.⁶⁴ Perhaps more importantly, bento is not only considered a healthy alternative meal, but also a symbol of a state ideology imprinted on Japanese women using the "joy of motherhood" and the natural bond between mother and child as arguments to build a path to the role of mother.⁶⁵ The notion of *ryōsai kenbo* (good wife, wise mother) originated during the Meiji state (1868-1912) under the government's argument that households, which were considered the foundation of the nation, required good wives and wise mothers.⁶⁶ Andrew Gordon, the noted historian at Harvard University, describes that "although it may sound restrictive, the idea that women's primary duty was to serve as a good wife and a wise mother was, in some way, innovative as in Tokugawa Japan (1603-1868) women did not receive any formal education because they were not given any public role of importance."⁶⁷

⁶³ Lois Peak, *Learning to Go to School in Japan: The Transition from Home to Preschool Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 58.

⁶⁴ Akiko Yamada Taniguchi and Mayu Yamaguchi, "Attitude of Female University Students Towards Boxed Lunch," *The Journal of Kamakura Women's University* No. 19 (2012), 52.

⁶⁵ Shizuko Koyama, *Ryōsai Kenbo: The Educational Ideal of "Good Wife, Wise Mother" in Modern Japan*. (Boston: Brill, 2013), 134.

⁶⁶ Sharon H. Nolte and Sally Ann Hastings, "The Meiji State's Policy Toward Women, 1890 – 1910." In *Recreating Japanese Women, 1600-1945*, ed. Gail Lee Bernstein (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 158.

⁶⁷ Andrew Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan: From Tokugawa Times to the Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 113.

However, if children were to serve the military in the Meiji government, the home had to play an important role in preparing these soldiers. Therefore to raise children in the new era women needed education. The notion of good wife and wise mother was new in that women were to be educated and in that women's work at home was valued as a form of service to the state.⁶⁸ The term *ryōsai kenbo* is not commonly used in the present day, but it is no exaggeration to claim that the same notion of good wife and wise mother performing work at home to serve the state remain as a driving force that underpins the work done by mothers in Japan. For example, women's household responsibilities were seen as a support to what was considered the main productive element of society: husbands in the workplace and children in the education system.⁶⁹ Indeed, being a mother in Japan means acting within a cultural construct in which women are expected to sacrifice their own careers to manage the house, family and children.⁷⁰ In the previous chapter, the analysis of blog directories revealed a majority of female bento bloggers. To better understand the role of bento blogs for some Japanese women, we need to consider Japanese women in society and their relation to bento in general. Therefore, I will first discuss the image of an ideal housewife created by *ryōsai kenbo*, how the state ideology portrays motherhood and its effects on Japanese women's life. Then, the discussion will be focused on adult Japanese women and how bento becomes an important meal for them before marriage and motherhood. I will further provide information about what motivates women to prepare bento and how children's schools transform bento into a nearly-impossible task. In the last part, I will discuss how Japanese women seek individuality and freedom out of home as well as how food became an important tool for women's expression.

⁶⁸ Gordon, *Modern History*, 113.

⁶⁹ Nancy R Rosenberger, "Fragile Resistance, Signs of Status: Women Between State and Media in Japan." In *Re-imaging Japanese Women*, ed. Anne Imamura (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 19.

⁷⁰ Anne Allison, *Permitted and Prohibited Desires: Mothers, Comics, and Censorship in Japan* (Boulder, Colo: Westview Press, 1996), 112.

The Idealized Woman

During the Meiji era, compulsory years of education were supposed to be the same for boys and girls. However, due to elevated costs in education, boys were prioritized and girls were often engaged in domestic and farming work instead of attending school. Accordingly, girls' education was reformed to train them to be good wives and wise mothers.⁷¹ The governmental ideology was introduced to conceptualize woman as a citizen of the Japanese nation performing childrearing, housework and providing assistance to her husband.⁷²

In the beginning of the twentieth century, influences from European feminist movements and constant comparisons to western countries developed in Japanese women a desire to work out of home separating paid work from domestic work. Generally, domestic work is mostly associated with household and childcare. In Japan, however, besides taking care of the husband and children, women are also required to execute an extra amount of unpaid work taking care of elders and family members with special needs like disability.⁷³ Consequently, women's desire to work outside in addition to household and childcare resulted in Japanese women eventually engaging in dual labour. In enduring dual labour work, Japanese women created an elaborated version of the idealized portrait of "good wife and wise mother."⁷⁴ Yet, due to their irregular trajectory in professional life, government policies treated women as second class citizens and special rules for women employment such as leaves for menstrual discomfort and breast feeding acted in two opposite directions: while enabling women to continue working, they also discouraged companies to hire and promote women in the same way as men.⁷⁵

⁷¹ Vera Mackie, *Feminism in Modern Japan: Citizenship, Embodiment, and Sexuality* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 25.

⁷² Koyama, *Ryōsai Kenbo*, 49.

⁷³ Mackie, *Feminism in Modern Japan*, 189.

⁷⁴ Ibid, 183.

⁷⁵ Rosenberger, "Fragile resistance," 16.

In short, *ryōsai kenbo* idealized the image of housewives and turned motherhood into an ideology with mother-imprinted labour of caring such as making bento.⁷⁶ In the early 1990s, Anne Allison used the term “mother-imprinted labour” to define duties Japanese women perform under a gendered division of labour. Based on interviews conducted with Japanese men and women, Allison stated a gender division in labour as males assigned positions in the outside world with a poor engagement in their children’s education while females remained as the center of the home performing the management of the home and the raising of children.⁷⁷ I will be using the term “mother-imprinted labour” to describe duties that stay-at-home women perform including cooking, household and raising of children. One can thus argue that the notion of *ryōsai kenbo* persists embedded in Japanese society as women perform mother-imprinted labour in support of their husbands in workplace and children in education system. As an example, Suzanne Vogel, a renowned psychotherapist at Harvard University Health Services widely known for her research of Japanese culture, reported that about 95% of Japanese women got married before the age of thirty five, prioritizing marriage instead of a full-time professional career.⁷⁸ As housewives, their most common activities are: managing the husband’s income and household budget, cleaning, cooking, managing the children’s life and representing the family in community meetings such as neighbourhood and school reunions.⁷⁹

The difference in duties executed by men and women, and examples provided by adults in the household, likely foster in children ideas of gender separated in duties. Frequently, girls learn feminine attributes from women around her: usually her mother, other female relatives, and

⁷⁶ Allison, *Permitted and Prohibited Desires*, 103.

⁷⁷ Allison, “Japanese Mothers and Obentōs,” 205.

⁷⁸ Suzanne Vogel, “Professional Housewife: The Career of Urban Middle Class Japanese Women.” In *Gender and Japanese Society Volume III*, ed. Dolores Martinez (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2014), 64.

⁷⁹ Merry White, “The Virtue of Japanese Mothers: Cultural Definitions of Women’s Lives,” *Daedalus* Vol. 116, (1987), 153.

eventually from the school teacher.⁸⁰ A survey with Japanese boys and girls aged between thirteen and fifteen years about food-related domestic tasks revealed how they perceive gender separation in household duties. As an example, this survey showed that Japanese boys do not usually help in preparing meals because they consider it a female duty. According to the data, 43% of responding boys said they never help in preparing meals for their family and only 6% of responding boys answered they always help at home in preparing meals for the family (Table 3.1).⁸¹

Do you help prepare meals?	Girls (%)	Boys (%)
Never	16%	43%
Sometimes	73%	50%
Always	10%	6%

Table 3.1: Japanese boys and girls help in preparing meals. Source: Kazuko Okuda, Jeff Adams and Allan F. Hackett, "An Anglo-Japanese Study of Young People and Some Domestic Tasks Related to Food," *Journal of Consumer Studies & Home Economics* 24, No.3 (2000), 191. Table created by the author of this thesis.

This survey also investigated boys' and girls' opinion regarding who should be responsible for cooking and, not surprisingly, the majority of boys (61%) considered cooking a female responsibility. From the results shown in Table 3.2 it is possible to note that although 45% of girls believe cooking is an activity of both men and women, the majority of girls (51%) still answered they perceive cooking as a woman's duty. The survey demonstrated that the division in gender activities at home and examples provided by adults are potentially the main influencing factors in boys and girls perception of male and female duties.

⁸⁰ Vogel, "Professional Housewife," 65.

⁸¹ Kazuko Okuda, Jeff Adams and Allan F. Hackett, "An Anglo-Japanese Study of Young People and Some Domestic Tasks Related to Food," *Journal of Consumer Studies & Home Economics* 24, No.3 (2000), 191.

Who do you think should be responsible for cooking?	Girls (%)	Boys (%)
Men	3%	5%
Women	51%	61%
Both (men and women)	45%	34%

Table 3.2: Who Japanese boys and girls consider responsible for cooking. Source: Kazuko Okuda, Jeff Adams and Allan F. Hackett, "An Anglo-Japanese Study of Young People and Some Domestic Tasks Related to Food," *Journal of Consumer Studies & Home Economics* 24, No.3 (2000), 193. Table created by the author of this thesis.

Meeting Bento

Many Japanese children carry bento for preschool lunch every day before attending full time school. In the following years, bento remains as an option for meals at school along with the cafeteria or food purchased in stores and markets around school. Once high school is completed, many young Japanese women enrol in university, work out of home full or part time and attend leisure activities.⁸² Many young Japanese women decide to start living alone when they get into college or university or start a new job, and these changes in housing arrangement are often accompanied by changes in their eating habits.⁸³ In order to keep a good diet management to control their weight, health and nutrition, many Japanese university students stated they carry bento for lunch instead of eating outside and buying meals.⁸⁴ A study conducted by Akiko Yamada Taniguchi from Kamakura Women's University and Mayu Yamaguchi from Teikyo Heisei University in 2012 surveyed seventy two Japanese female university students between nineteen and twenty years old investigating their main concerns in preparing and consuming

⁸² Rosenberger, "Fragile Resistance," 14.

⁸³ Masatoshi Suzuki, Megumi Murashima, and Sharon L. Hoerr, "Body Mass and Fatness of Japanese College Women and Relationship to Place of Residence," *Nutrition & Dietetics* 64, No. 3 (2007), 159.

⁸⁴ Taniguchi and Yamaguchi, "Female University Students," 52.

bento. Results demonstrated that young Japanese women were concerned with nutrition balance, food expenses and food sanitation whenever consuming or preparing their own bento.⁸⁵

The first question inquired if students carried bento and for the 72% of participants who positively answered the survey investigated their main reasons for doing so. Although “saving money” was claimed to be the top reason, other responses such as “balance nutrition” and “food from market has too much calories” shows the concern of young women with food nutrition. In addition, other responses such as “want to increase the frequency of cooking” and “need to use ingredients left at home” could suggest some young Japanese women are concerned in practicing and developing their cooking skills (Table 3.3).⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Taniguchi and Yamaguchi, “Female University Students,” 52.

⁸⁶ Ibid, 54.

Reasons for carrying bento	% of answers (out of 52 respondents)
Saving money	60%
Balance nutrition / Good for health	13%
Someone else makes it for me	9%
Don't want to go to school cafeteria or shopping	4%
Don't want to produce garbage. Need to use the ingredients left at home	3%
I can eat whatever I like	3%
Want to increase frequency of cooking	2%
Food from market has too much calories	2%
Got tired of eating out	2%
The friend who eats with me brings bento	2%

Table 3.3: Reasons for carrying bento. Source: Akiko Yamada Taniguchi and Mayu Yamaguchi, "Attitude of Female University Students Towards Boxed Lunch," *The Journal of Kamakura Women's University* No. 19 (2012), 54. Table created by the author of this thesis.

Among the reasons for the remaining 28% of participants who did not carry bento, it is interesting to note that only one answer offered an alternative meal (eating at school cafeteria) and only 5% of responding students considered this option. For the majority of responding students the burden of preparing bento, washing the box and the lack of time to prepare it was more important than concerns with nutrition balance and money-saving (Table 3.4). Specifically, for these young Japanese women the benefits associated with bento were not good enough to convince them to prepare it.

Reasons for NOT carrying bento	% of answers (out of 20 respondents)
Don't want to prepare the bento or wash the bento box	45%
Don't have time to prepare it	27%
Nobody can prepare it for me	18%
It's extra baggage (Don't want to carry it)	5%
I eat at school cafeteria	5%

Table 3.4: Reasons for not carrying bento. Source: Akiko Yamada Taniguchi and Mayu Yamaguchi, "Attitude of Female University Students Towards Boxed Lunch," *The Journal of Kamakura Women's University* No. 19 (2012), 54. Table created by the author of this thesis.

In respect to the nutritious aspects of bento mixture, this survey showed that students did not only considered including healthy food such as vegetables, raw food and protein, but they also answered that they were conscious regarding ingestion of fibre, vitamins and minerals.⁸⁷ Among the answers, it is important to point out a small percentage of opinions not related to nutrition such as "use of food easy to prepare" and "eat what I like" prioritizing easiness in preparation and good flavour over nutritious characteristics (Table 3.5).

⁸⁷ Taniguchi and Yamaguchi, "Female University Students," 55.

Which nutrition concerns do you have about bento mixture?	% of answers
Eat more vegetables	36%
Eat more raw food	24%
Use food easy to prepare	22%
Eat more meat and protein	11%
Don't care about nutrition, eat what I like	7%

Table 3.5: Nutrition concerns about bento mixture. Source: Akiko Yamada Taniguchi and Mayu Yamaguchi, "Attitude of Female University Students Towards Boxed Lunch," *The Journal of Kamakura Women's University* No. 19 (2012), 55. Table created by the author of this thesis.

Easiness in preparation was often related to the question regarding the use of frozen and processed food in bento. The authors of this survey claimed that, due to the large availability in market and quality improvements, more people were using frozen and processed food to prepare bento.⁸⁸ The responses showed in table 3.6 confirm such claims as the majority of Japanese young women responded to not be against the use of processed and frozen food in bento.

Bento and use of processed and frozen food	% of answers	
	Yes	No
Do you use processed or frozen food in making bento	87%	13%

Table 3.6: Use of processed and frozen food in bento. Source: Akiko Yamada Taniguchi and Mayu Yamaguchi, "Attitude of Female University Students Towards Boxed Lunch," *The Journal of Kamakura Women's University* No. 19 (2012), 56-57. Table created by the author of this thesis.

Lastly, the survey also investigated young Japanese women's care in using bento and responses confirmed their concern with money-saving and nutrition balance (Table 3.7).

Importantly, responses regarding food hygiene were considered even more crucial than saving

⁸⁸ Taniguchi and Yamaguchi, "Female University Students," 56.

money. Therefore, based on all responses, the authors concluded that young Japanese women were spending time and effort preparing bento as they considered it a good option to control food sanitation, nutrition balance and money-savings whenever eating out of home.⁸⁹ Additionally, results of this survey demonstrated which were the main factors motivating Japanese women's decision in making bento. Specifically, concerns with nutrition features and money savings seemed to be the main motivational factor in making bento.

Care in using bento	% of answers
Nutrition features	38%
Sanitation features	29%
Money-saving features	25%
Appearance	5%
Flavour	3%

Table 3.7: Caring in use of bento. Source: Akiko Yamada Taniguchi and Mayu Yamaguchi, "Attitude of Female University Students Towards Boxed Lunch," *The Journal of Kamakura Women's University* No. 19 (2012), 57. Table created by the author of this thesis.

Bento and School

Japanese women's duty in motherhood is not only cooking as they also provide support for their children's education. Mothers' concern with their children's performance at school often causes mother to dismiss young boys and girls from household help so they can totally focus on their studies.⁹⁰ The pressure over children's academic success turned their performance at school into an evaluation tool of women's success as mothers. The constant search for improvement in supporting their children created sessions called *mama-juku* (mothers' cram

⁸⁹ Taniguchi and Yamaguchi, "Female University Students," 58.

⁹⁰ Vogel, "Professional Housewife," 65.

school) aiming to train mothers to help them with study.⁹¹ Additionally, obsessively devoted Japanese mothers are called *kyōiku mama* (educational mother), and their commitment in furthering children's education is not restricted to helping with homework as they can go from a simple help like sharpening pencils to more extreme attitudes such as investigating the rank of schools and tutors.⁹² Japanese mothers also participate in activities related to the children's school such as parent-teacher association (PTA) meetings and work groups of school-related activities. Consequently, Japanese mothers change their social network from their own interests to her child's and school's activities.⁹³

Preparing bento every morning for children's lunch at school is considered a mothers' daily activity until their children start attending a full time school.⁹⁴ In Japan, bento is more than just packaged food as it embeds a symbol of the mother-child relationship. Since it can be used to participate in the school routine, bento is also a way to socialize Japanese mothers as they can serve to demonstrate their concern for their child's psychological condition while being away from home. Women's dedication in planning and preparing bento usually starts the day before during grocery shopping for dinner. To cook and assemble one bento mothers spend, on average, from twenty five to forty five minutes every morning.⁹⁵ Moreover, Japanese mothers are in constant search for improvements in making bento as they frequently discuss about bento with other mothers, look for new recipes in specialized magazines and cookbooks and also buy objects that will be used only for bento decoration.⁹⁶ A main concern during bento preparation is the nutritional balance. In a survey investigating knowledge of food and nutrition, mothers of

⁹¹ Vogel, "Professional Housewife," 73.

⁹² Allison, *Permitted and Prohibited Desires*, 106.

⁹³ Peak, *Learning to Go to School in Japan*, 58.

⁹⁴ White, "The Virtue of Japanese Mothers," 156.

⁹⁵ Allison, *Permitted and Prohibited Desires*, 89.

⁹⁶ Ibid, 90.

preschool children were inquired regarding their sources of information about healthy food. Results demonstrated that Japanese women rely on popular media such as television, internet and magazines as much as they rely on information from governmental reports (Table 3.8).⁹⁷ The values on Table 3.8 were calculated based on the number of respondents who supported the source of information out of the total of respondents (supporters and those who were against the use of such source).

Sources to get information about healthy food	% of supporters (out of all respondents)
Family and Friends	70.3%
Television / Internet	67.3%
Newspaper / Magazines / Books	73.8%
Shop advertisement / Product package	55.3%
Government reports	69.6%
Talk with specialist (doctor / school / nutrition)	83.5%
Other sources	61.9%

Table 3.8: Sources of healthy food information. Source: Yoko Hashimoto et al. "Survey to Determine the Level of Knowledge About Food, Nutrition and Dietary Supplements and to Identify the Information Sources in Preschool Children's Mothers," *The Japanese Journal of Nutrition and Dietetics* 69, No. 1 (2011), 42. Table created by the author of this thesis.

It is noteworthy that, even though there are no specialists in medicine or nutrition working at schools, Japanese mothers rely on advice from teachers and instructors to prepare food for their children. Anne Allison's report emphasizes this situation based on her own

⁹⁷ Yoko Hashimoto et al. "Survey to Determine the Level of Knowledge About Food, Nutrition and Dietary Supplements and to Identify the Information Sources in Preschool Children's Mothers," *The Japanese Journal of Nutrition and Dietetics* 69, No. 1 (2011), 41.

experience in making bento in which she describes a conversation with her son's preschool teacher regarding the bento she sent to her son. Interestingly, the teacher reported observations about what kinds of food he did not like and what could be done to improve his performance in eating all his lunch. The school teacher also recommended adding small portions of food her son did not like in order to teach him how to eat everything.⁹⁸ In addition, the study conducted by Lois Peak from George Washington University investigating Japanese pre-schools calls attention to the burden bento might represent for foreign mothers who have difficulty understanding its importance for Japanese women. During an interview with a pre-school's director from Tokyo, he described the importance of bento for a child: "by making lunch each morning, the mother communicates her feeling for her child. [...] it is also important that bento be made especially for the child, not food left over from dinner or the adult's bento. [...] We ask mother to prepare small quantities of three or four different cooked foods, plus fruit and rice, each day [...]. It should be nutritious, be the kind of food children enjoy, look colourful and be cutely prepared. When the child removes the lid of his lunch box ... his mother's love and feelings should pop up out of the box."⁹⁹ Due to multiple requirements in making bento, Japanese women often complain about the stressful pressure in preparing it every morning. In an interview for a web-article, a woman reported she only sent cooked rice for her husband as bento arguing he could buy the side dishes in supermarkets and department stores near his office. Although the interview did not provide information about the husband's reaction, comments from readers were calling the wife "evil" for not preparing a full meal for her husband.¹⁰⁰ Indeed, nutrition requirements

⁹⁸ Allison, "Japanese Mothers and *Obentōs*," 203-204.

⁹⁹ Peak, *Learning to Go to School in Japan*, 59-60.

¹⁰⁰ Juju Kurihara, "Japanese Mums Get Stressed About Making *Obentō*," *Iromegane*, accessed March 25, 2015. <http://www.iromegane.com/entertainment/foods/japanese-mums-get-stressed-about-making-obento/>

and the psychological pressure for making it with a love-demonstrating arrangement turned bento into a stressful and nearly impossible-to-achieve task.¹⁰¹

Individuality Getaway

Recent changes in the job market and higher educational standards have increased Japanese women's ability to decide what to do in the future. Consequently, daughters and mothers are often engaging in conflicts about career choices and ways to secure social status. While daughters are clamouring for "self-improvement" and "do what I want," mothers' expectations include more secure choices in economic and social realms such as stable jobs and marriage.¹⁰² This claim for individuality also increased Japanese women's potential as consumers and called the attention of specialized media. As a result, housewives and working women were frequently targeted by mass magazines in an attempt to increase the development of feminization and self-cultivation among women.¹⁰³ For example, specialized magazines such as *Mart*, *Kateigaho* and *Croissant* targeted middle aged women offering alternative images of Japanese women in order to stimulate their desire to escape from tensions and subordinations experienced at home.¹⁰⁴ In addition, young women also engaged in entertainment and leisure activities such as cooking, flower arrangement and tea ceremony classes which were being offered to provide an escape from home and an opportunity to make new friends.¹⁰⁵ Food was also part of this process as young women were using food to express themselves and strengthen

¹⁰¹ Onabe, "Bentō," 216.

¹⁰² Lynne Nakano and Moeko Wagatsuma, "Mothers and Their Unmarried Daughters: An Intimate Look at Generational Change." In *Gender and Japanese Society Volume III*, ed. Dolores Martinez (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2014), 158.

¹⁰³ Barbara H. Sato, *The New Japanese Woman: Modernity, Media, and Women in Interwar Japan* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 11.

¹⁰⁴ Rosemberg, "Fragile Resistance," 20.

¹⁰⁵ Merry White, "Ladies Who Lunch: Young Women and the Domestic Fallacy in Japan." In *Asian Food: The Global and the Local*, ed. Katarzyna Cwiertka and Boudewijn Walraven (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2001), 65.

their relationship with friends. Using food as a fashion and social exchange resource, Japanese women aimed to dissociate the connection between food and “home” / “mother.”¹⁰⁶

However, Japanese women’s opinion about caregiving influences their life-style as they believe mothers should be at home in order to be physically present to take care of their children.¹⁰⁷ Furthermore, due to household duties, Japanese women are often neglecting their own social network and leisure activities prejudicing the communication with others. In particular, Japanese women often have complaints about not having much free time for other activities than the ones related to their children or house.¹⁰⁸ Consequently, the idea of public and private spaces is constantly inverted as Japanese women consider the city as a private space where they can enjoy a temporary freedom from their duties at home.¹⁰⁹ As demonstrated in the previous chapter, blogs play an important role in Japanese women’s expression and communication as it creates a public and interactive virtual space working as new social arenas even from inside the house.

To illustrate the importance of blogs for Japanese women as a tool for communication, expression and recognition, Figure 3.1 presents a conversation in the comments field between a reader and the blog author. Different from the example presented in the previous chapter, which illustrated how women are engaging in conversation in multiple topics, this dialogue illustrates a demonstration of recognition and intimacy between the reader and the author. The first sentence of each comment demonstrates a frequency in dialogue between reader and author as both salutes each other by saying it has been a time since their last contact. Moreover, a closer and detailed

¹⁰⁶ White, “Ladies Who Lunch,” 73-74.

¹⁰⁷ Susan Orpett Long, “Nurturing and Femininity: The Ideal of Caregiving in Postwar Japan.” In *Re-imagining Japanese Women*, ed. Anne Imamura (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1996), 165-166.

¹⁰⁸ Allison, *Permitted and Prohibited Desires*, 117.

¹⁰⁹ Brian Moeran, “Reading Japanese in *Katei Gaho*: The Art of Being an Upper-class Woman.” In *Women, Media and Consumption in Japan*, ed. Lise Skov and Brian Moeran (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1995), 137-138.

look into the content of the conversation reveals a mixture of formality and intimacy: first, the reader recognizes the author's effort in decorating the bento with a heart-shaped cut carrot "the carrot ... is overflowing with love." In response, the author demonstrates intimacy by making a joke "[...] red ginger would be better but I ran out and cheated using carrots. So is just a little love (laughs)." Yet, towards the end of message the author brings up the formality to politely thank the reader's appreciation "Thanking is unnecessary. Instead, I should thank you for your warm words."



Figure 3.1: Recognition and intimacy in comments at <http://meotowappa.blog46.fc2.com/blog-entry-2351.html#cmf/>, accessed January 27, 2015 / 18h30. Translation provided by the author of this thesis.

This chapter provided a deeper understanding of Japanese women in society, from *ryōsai kenbo*'s influence in women's duties at home to Japanese mothers' obsessive concern in supporting their children's education; women in Japan are constantly sacrificing their own

interests to benefit their children and husband. In addition, from childhood to motherhood, bento has always been present as an option for meal out of home, and recent research with Japanese women demonstrated that their motivation towards making bento is originated in nutrition, food sanitation and money-saving. Lastly, this chapter discussed women's neglect of their own social network due to household duties and children's school activities. Within such a context, blogs proved to be an important tool for Japanese women's communication as it creates a virtual arena for social interaction. In the next chapter I will analyze and discuss the result of an investigation conducted with bento blog authors about their opinion in making bento, blogging, and interacting with readers.

Chapter 4

Data Analysis: Bento Bloggers' Voices.

Information presented in previous chapters of this thesis provided an analysis that illuminates Japanese women's motivation in using bento to communicate in social media. The second chapter used a qualitative analysis of blog directories to illustrate how bento, as a theme for personal webpages, is turning bento blogs into social arenas where Japanese women are communicating and interacting with their readers possibly seeking recognition for their effort in making bento every day. Furthermore, the third chapter demonstrated Japanese women's relation to bento since young ages as well as how blogs became an important tool for women's social interaction as Japanese women are often neglecting their own social network and leisure activities due to the isolation nature of household duties. Therefore, thus far this study has illustrated "who" is using bento to communicate in social media and "how" they are doing it. Based on information from previous chapters, it is possible to speculate that Japanese women's motivation in using bento blogs to communicate and express in social media is due to the isolating nature of household work and their children's school activities that often neglects Japanese women's social network. Within such a context, it is possible that the virtual interaction with other people could be Japanese women's solution to keep a social life and gain social recognition for their effort in making bento for the family. Therefore, in an attempt to further understand "why" Japanese women are using blogs in such way, in this chapter I will analyze the result of an investigation I conducted with bento blog authors focused on investigating the connection between bloggers' motivation to post and interact with readers and their desire for expression and recognition. First, I will present the objectives and methodology of this

investigation with a detailed description of participants' recruitment and the strategic structure used to create the tools of this investigation. Then, a detailed analysis of participants' responses will be provided with special attention to answers directly related to the main objectives of this investigation. The discussion will then focus on results of this investigation and on contributions for the current thesis. Finally, in the last part of the chapter I will evaluate the tools used in this investigation.

The Investigation Tools in Detail

Within the scenario of Japanese women's activities related to household and children's school and their reduced time for leisure, networking and friendships, the interaction in a virtual realm could be a good option for social interaction as it eliminates geographical barriers allowing communication nation and worldwide. Therefore, the objectives of this investigation are:

- 1- To investigate the connection between Japanese women's motivation in using bento as a theme for blogs and their desire to communicate and be recognized in social media.
- 2- To assess the argument of the use of bento blogs as a mode of expression, communication and recognition within social media.
- 3- To evaluate the readers' importance in Japanese women's desire for communication and recognition.

Methodology

Blog characteristics such as the dynamism of the comment field, private messages platform and the inconsistency in the frequency of posts could easily weaken communication attempts with bento bloggers as a contact message could be lost or remain unread for weeks or

even months. Therefore, in order to ease contact with bento bloggers and attempt to collect the most accurate opinion from participants, this investigation was divided in two different tools: an online survey and a qualitative questionnaire. The different nature of each tool's structure allows the acquisition of distinct types of information from general to personal opinions.

Specifically, the online survey aimed to reach as many participants as possible investigating opinions about preparing and writing about bento. The survey questions were separated in two different sections: the first section inquired bloggers' motivation in using their own blogs as well as their communication and interaction with readers. The second section investigated bloggers' opinion in making bento and what characteristics they associate with it. Using the results of the online survey I expect to determine, in general terms, bloggers' motivation in blogging and the role of the reader within this context. Also, I expect to determine which characteristics are associated with bento and evaluate the argument of use of bento as a communication and recognition tool.

The second tool of this investigation is a qualitative questionnaire which, in contrast to the online survey, provided detailed information on Japanese women's motivation in blogging and their opinions towards bento's characteristics. Additionally, the questionnaire also assessed the argument of use of bento as a tool of communication, expression and recognition. I expect the results of this questionnaire to work in synchrony with results from the online survey providing detailed information on Japanese women's motivation in using bento as a theme for communication and recognition in social media as well as the importance of readers for bloggers.

Participant Recruitment

The selection of participants for this investigation was made based on their own blogs using a gender criterion. The previous analysis in blog directories made in second chapter of this thesis revealed a majority of female bloggers, which are the main gender of interest of this investigation. Therefore, the invitation and link to online survey was sent to female bloggers as well as to authors whose gender was not informed in the blog's profile. The contact with participants was made using the comments field and private message platform. Given the dynamism of such social media in which a message can easily be lost among many messages, the invitation and link to online survey were sent together in one single message. The regulation for online surveys from the Ethics Board of the University of Alberta states that for such a type of online survey, the participant's consent is given by clicking on the link. By clicking on the survey's link the blogger was redirected to a different webpage with access to the information letter, further explanations about this study and the questions itself.

On the other hand, participants' recruitment for the qualitative questionnaire was made in two stages: in the first stage, using the same gender criterion, an invitational email was sent to potential participants who provided an email address in their blogs. Bloggers without an email address in their profile page were contacted through the private message platform and invited to participate in the qualitative questionnaire. However, since the qualitative questionnaire required a signed consent form and a file exchange from each participant, bloggers contacted through a private message were required to first contact the author of this study by email in order to participate. At the second stage of recruitment, the questionnaire itself and the consent form were sent by email to bloggers who agreed to participate in this investigation. The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines by a Research Ethics Board at the

University of Alberta. A return deadline was not stipulated to avoid pressure on participants. However, by the time of data compilation after two months, out of four questionnaires sent to potential participants, two had been returned with their signed consent forms. A follow up email was sent to participants who did not answer but since no answer was received they were not included in the study.

In both tools, the participation was completely voluntary and respondents could skip and leave unanswered any question they felt uncomfortable with. No personal information such as real names, address or age was required but, if desired, participants could provide their nicknames used in their blogs. The consent form in the qualitative questionnaire required participant's signature and authorization to cite nicknames in this study. I believe the protection of personal information such as real names and addresses was very important to demonstrate the integrity of this investigation as electronic surveys and emails with questionnaire invitations can easily be taken as spam.

Structure of Investigation Tools

The structure of the online survey and qualitative questionnaire were created using the same strategic flow commonly used in marketing research for customer surveys: balancing the level and type of questions. Balancing level means using a variation of questions from trivial to complex questions. The main objective in applying such a balance is to use the survey's structure as an "ice breaker." An initial tension is very natural since participants do not know what to expect from the investigation and asking trivial questions at the beginning of survey will gradually break this tension making participants feel more comfortable. The balance in type of questions is created using different types of questions. For example, instead of the common

“one-answer-only” multiple choice question, several questions in the online survey allowed choosing many options as wanted. Moreover, not only did the survey structure permit the addition of a different answer in every question whenever the participant did not agree with the options provided, but also some questions did not offer any answers at all so participants could freely express their opinions. Using different types of question made the survey more dynamic and entertaining which also contributed in creating a friendly and comfortable environment to the respondent.

The order of questions is also important and the online survey was divided in two sections: the first section focused on questions regarding blogging activities such as blog’s main theme, frequency in posting and interaction with readers. Following the strategic flow, participants initially responded to trivial questions that gradually became complex until the last and most important question of first section investigating their opinion on use of blogs for recognition and expression. The second section targeted bloggers’ opinions regarding bento and what characteristics such as mode of communication and self-expression were associated with it. Finally, the last question of the online survey was an open space for any additional comments on bento or bento blogs.¹¹⁰

Similarly, the structure of the qualitative questionnaire was created under the same strategic flow but using only open-ended questions. Open-ended questions are those in which respondents are required to use their own words to answer since no options are provided as in multiple choice questions. Using the strategic flow, the questionnaire was developed to gradually increase participants’ level of concentration with a variety of questions from an ordinary to a more complex level. It is also important to note that, the sequence of questions was also carefully planned as an ordinary question in the wrong sequence could result in the participants’ decrease

¹¹⁰ See Appendix 1 for the complete structure of the online survey.

of focus. The qualitative questionnaire provided detailed information regarding the use of bento as a tool for communication, expression and recognition desire. Moreover, the questionnaire also focused on investigating bento's characteristics that motivates Japanese women and the importance of readers to bloggers.¹¹¹

Data Analysis

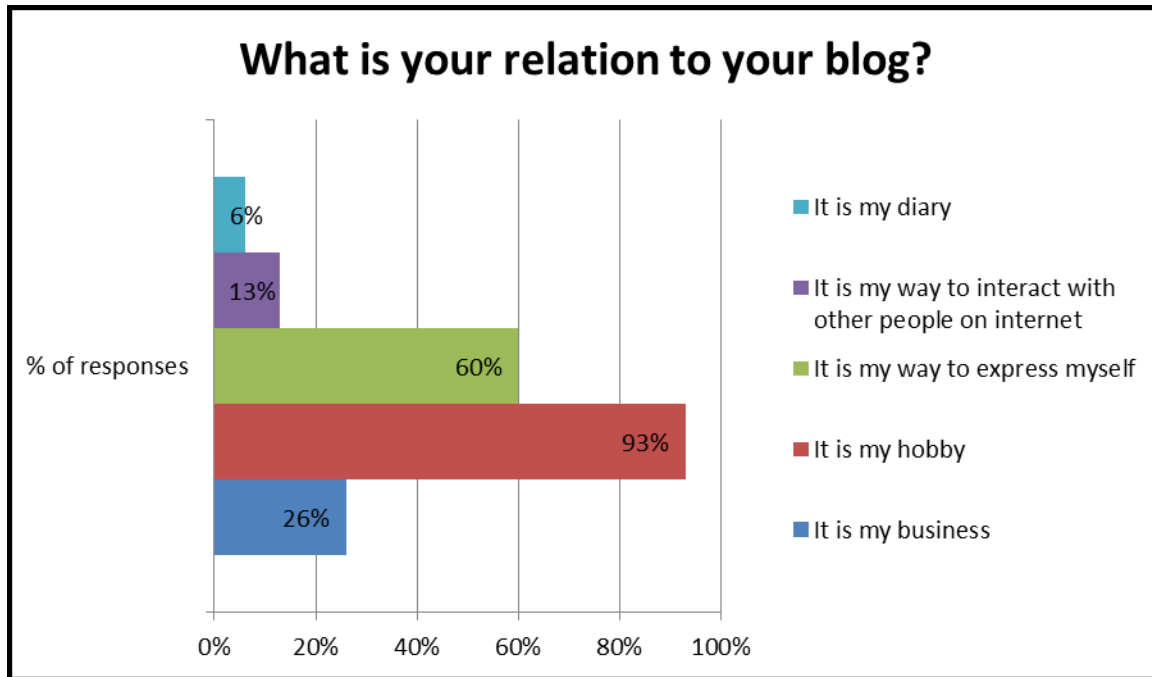
Results from the online survey and qualitative questionnaire will be analyzed separately for two main reasons: first, since the online survey has a restriction in opinions due to provided options of answers, they can be quantified and calculated in percentages of respondents who selected a specific option. Second, given the complexity in qualitative questionnaire's responses due to the absence of provided options, it will serve as an enhancement to opinions first investigated in the online survey.

Online Survey

The online survey had a total of fifteen participants and although the invitation was sent to female bloggers and authors whose gender information was not evident in the blog's profile page, the gender question in the survey revealed three male participants. However, responses from male participants were not discarded as male answers could be a good addition to compare with opinions from female answers. Initially, the online survey investigated bloggers' relation to their own blogs. For example, the majority of participants consider their blog as their hobby. This question, however, is an example of question that allowed bloggers to select as many fitting opinions as they felt appropriate. Interestingly, it is important to notice that besides a hobby, for

¹¹¹ See Appendix 2 for the complete structure of the qualitative questionnaire.

60% of respondents, the blog is also a tool for self-expression. Graphic 4.1 illustrate opinions regarding authors' relation to their blogs for different purposes rather than just a hobby.



Graphic 4.1: "Participant's relation to blog." Graphic created by the author of this thesis.

The investigation of bloggers' thoughts of their own blogs continued with an inquiry regarding their motivation to post. Options provided in this question aimed for a detailed rather than general opinion and participants' answers confirmed an intense use of blogs for expression and recognition (Table 4.1). It should be noted that, additional answers provided by bloggers revealed opinions with similar objectives but different focus. For example, answers such as "self-satisfaction" and "I want to share bento recipes with other people" can be directly related to recognition and communication respectively. Additionally, answers such as "inspiration from other blogs" and "use of blog as a record" demonstrated different motivation for posting.

Why do you like blogging? (participants could select more than one answer)	# of responses	% of responses (out of 15)
It is a way to demonstrate my skills and be recognized about it	5	33%
It is a way to share my opinion with other people	6	40%
It is a way to keep in touch with other people interested in bento	3	20%
Additional answers from participants		
I can look back at my life history	1	6%
After marriage and start making bento, other bento blogs motivated me to share my album as well	1	6%
It is a record of my creation	2	13%
I want to share bento recipes with other people	1	6%
Self-satisfaction	1	6%
To keep in touch with relatives living far	1	6%

Table 4.1: Participants motivation to blog. Table created by the author of this thesis.

The second chapter of this study illustrated how bloggers are using comments and private messages to keep a conversation with their readers. Targeting the communication in bento blogs, the online survey questioned the importance of readers in two different questions: first, participants were asked to qualify readers' importance from "I don't have interest in readers" to "very important." Second, for 53% of participants who qualified their readers as "very important" or "important," an additional question inquired the reasons for this importance. Answers in this

additional question demonstrated readers' importance in bloggers' desire for recognition and communication (Table 4.2).

In contrast to the 53% of participants who qualified their readers as "important" or above, when questioned if they replied to comments, 86% of bloggers affirmed to do so. Interestingly, this difference occurs because, according to participants, not replying to comments is considered impolite. Indeed, 77% of bloggers affirmed that they reply to comments on their blogs due to etiquette concerns (Table 4.3).

Why is the reader important to you? (participants could select more than one answer)	# of responses	% of responses (out of 8)
I want to keep a communication with them, they are my audience	3	38%
I want my blog and bento to be recognized	4	50%
The readers are potential customers to my business	2	25%
They encourage me to keep blogging	1	13%
I want my blog to be helpful in writing a blog	1	13%

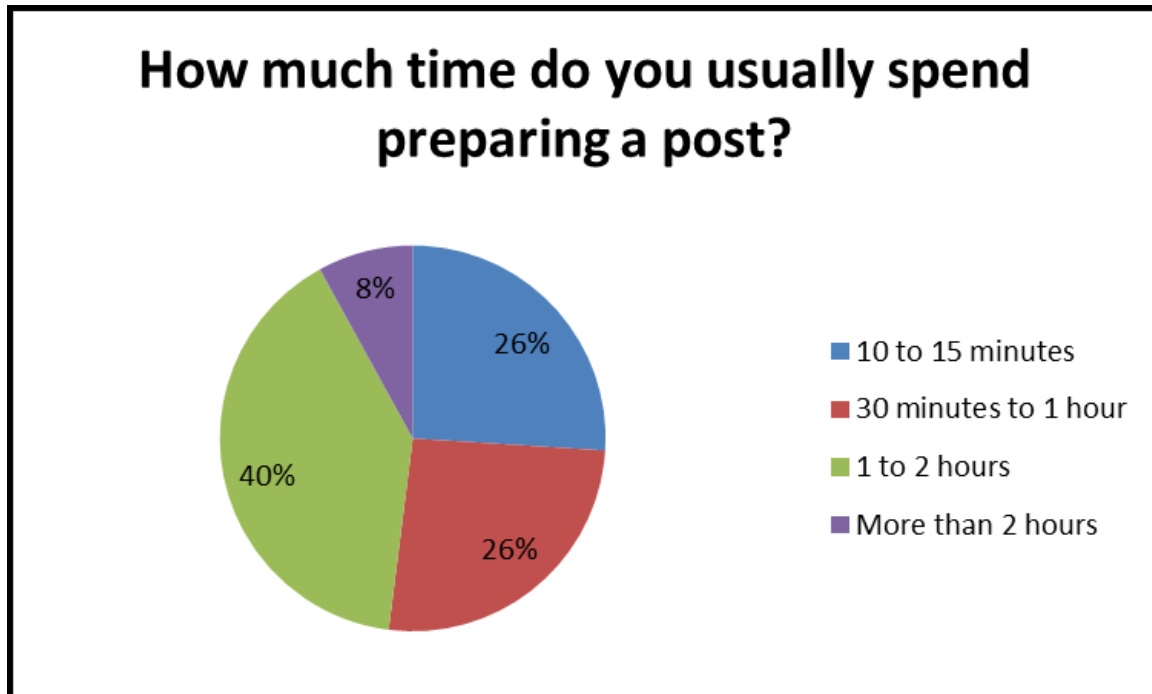
Table 4.2: Importance of the reader. Table created by the author of this thesis.

Why do you reply to comments in your blog? (participants could select more than one answer)	# of responses	% of responses (out of 13)
It is the etiquette, it is impolite to not answer	10	77%
I like to discuss opinions and ideas with other people	6	46%
The readers are my friends, we interact through blog when we cannot meet in person	2	15%
Sharing feelings and expectations is fun and I want to respond to their expectations	1	7%

Table 4.3: Reasons to reply to comments. Table created by the author of this thesis.

Creating a new post can be a time-consuming activity. Responses to the question inquiring how much time bloggers spent creating new posts stated that such time varies from fifteen minutes up to two hours demonstrating that creating new posts might involve more preparation than it would seem (Graphic 4.2).

On the first open question of survey, participants reported what changes the blogging activity brought to their lives. Answers like: “attention to latest news of bento,” “study of photo techniques and food’s color assortment and looking” and “It gave my daily life a smooth enjoyment” emphasized bloggers’ care in preparing their posts. Furthermore, blogs can also be linked to other social media as 46% of participants responded to have their blogs linked to another social media. Table 4.4 illustrates which social media were the most popular among bloggers.



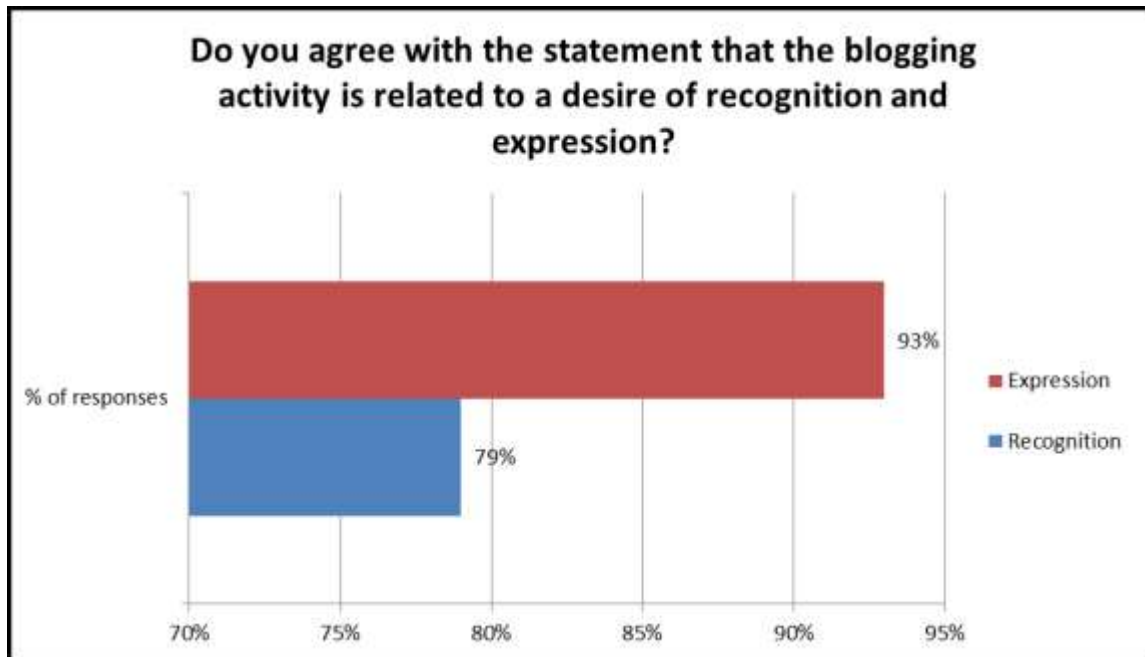
Graphic 4.2: Time spent preparing a post. Graphic created by the author of this thesis.

Which social media is your blog linked to? (participants could select more than one answer)	# of responses	% of responses (out of 7)
Facebook	4	57%
Twitter	4	57%
MIXI	2	28%
Other blogs	1	14%
Instagram	1	14%

Table 4.4: Social media linked to blog. Table created by the author of this thesis.

The last question inquiring the blogging activity investigated bloggers' opinion on the argument of use of blogs for expression and recognition. Notably, a high percentage of participants agreeing with the argument emphasize the claim of use of bento for recognition and

expression (Graphic 4.3). Results also demonstrate the importance of blogs as a recognition tool for Japanese women as only 16% of female participants did not agree with the statement. Moreover, these results support the previous speculation of Japanese women's desire for recognition in virtual interactions to gain social status.



Graphic 4.3: Recognition and expression. Graphic created by the author of this thesis.

The second part of the online survey focused on investigating bloggers' opinion about bento itself. The first question asked participants to state the first word in their minds when talking about bento. Interestingly, the answers can be classified in two different categories: concerns and aesthetics. Concerns included opinions related to the nutritious aspects of bento such as "healthy food" or "natural food" and even a participant's question "what I'm going to do

tomorrow?” The aesthetics category included words related to bento decoration such as “delicious look” or “cute” and popular bento decoration categories, *dekoben* and *kyaraben*.¹¹²

The investigation further inquired about bloggers’ opinion in bento characteristics separated into positive and negative points. Among good or positive points, participants’ answers emphasized the “joy of cooking” as well as more specific characteristics such as “saving money and eating healthy” and “control what my family eats out of the home.” In addition, 46% of participants considered bento’s characteristic as a “mode of private conversation with family members” a good point (Table 4.5).

What are the good points about making bento? (participants could select more than one answer)	# of responses	% of responses (out of 15)
I can control what my family eats out of home	5	33%
It is a chance to demonstrate and practice my cooking skills	4	26%
It is a way to save money and eat healthy	8	53%
I enjoy cooking and preparing bento	9	60%
I can privately communicate to my children/husband through bento	7	46%
I can put my own effort with ingredients I choose myself	1	6%
None of above	2	13%

Table 4.5: Good points about bento. Table created by the author of this thesis.

¹¹² See chapter two “Bento Goes Online” of this study for further details on *dekoben* and *kyaraben*.

In contrast to the positive points, the online survey also inquired into characteristics that might be considered bad or negative points. According to results, 46% of participants selected “time-consuming” as the top negative point. Additionally, participants also emphasized opinions such as “I feel it is an obligation” and “I hate to wake up early” as other negative points with 40% and 20% respectively (Table 4.6).

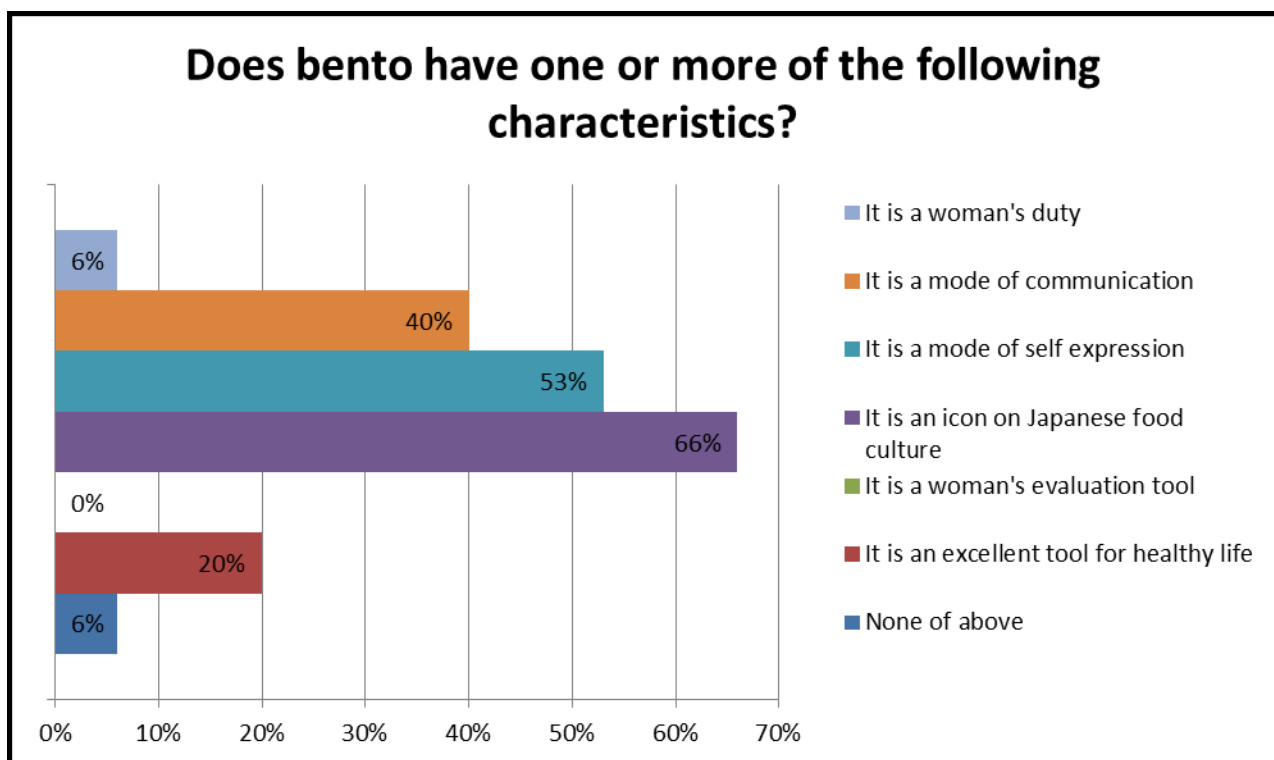
What are the bad points about making bento? (participants could select more than one answer)	# of responses	% of responses (out of 15)
I feel it is an obligation	6	40%
I don't like to cook	1	6%
It takes too much work and time to prepare	7	46%
I feel a pressure from society to make it perfectly	0	0
I have been criticized for it by school teacher and my own children	0	0
Additional answers from participants		
I don't think there is a bad point	2	13%
I hate to wake up early	3	20%
None of above	1	6%

Table 4.6: Bad points about bento. Table created by the author of this thesis.

In regard to characteristics associated with bento, this investigation also focused on opinions directly related to communication, expression and recognition rather than just nutritious

and money-saving characteristics. Interestingly, participants' responses revealed that besides an icon in Japanese food culture, bento is considered a mode of communication and self-expression with 40% and 53% of answers respectively (Graphic 4.4).

It is also important to note that, two options in this question were created to evaluate eventual influences from the *ryōsai kenbo*. As discussed in chapter three of this thesis, ideas from the governmental ideology still influences Japanese women's work at home with mother-imprinted labour.¹¹³ Importantly, as results demonstrated, only one respondent considered bento a woman's duty and neither male nor female participants considered bento to be an evaluation tool for women. Such a result not only weakens the assumption of bento as a symbol of *ryōsai kenbo*, but also enhances the argument of nutritional and money-saving features as Japanese women's motivations in making bento.



Graphic 4.4: Bento characteristics. Graphic created by the author of this thesis.

¹¹³ See chapter three “Bento Blog Authors: Eating, Making and Posting” of this study for further details on *ryōsai kenbo* and mother-imprinted labour.

The last question of the online survey offered an open space for respondents' additional comments regarding bento or bento blogs and 40% of participants expressed their opinion enhancing bento's aesthetics and effort in making it with comments such as "deliciously assembled," "art made of food presented in a small box" and "requires lot of time and cooking skills." Additionally, bloggers also emphasized the use of bento as an option for a "fun" and "nutritious meal" regardless the hard work in waking up early to prepare it.

Qualitative Questionnaire

The open nature of the qualitative questionnaire required participants to use their own words in their responses developing a personal approach to questions. Due to such an approach, answers in the qualitative questionnaire complimented opinions previously investigated in the online survey, providing details and personal points of view. As an example, when questioned about her reasons for starting a bento blog and what changes the blogging activity brought to her life, Kondo Nao,¹¹⁴ owner and author of the bento blog *magewappa-bento.com* stated: "[...] I started the blog in place of a diary. [...] Since I started my blog, I actively searched and studied much information regarding techniques such as photography techniques, writing style, information about ingredients and food styling."¹¹⁵

The online survey demonstrated bloggers' desire for communication and recognition. Interestingly, participants' responses in the qualitative questionnaire underscored the importance of communication features adding a geographical motivation. An anonymous bento blogger

¹¹⁴ Kondo Nao is the participant's nickname which is the same used in her bento blog. The author's real name is irrelevant to this study as within bento blog community, she is recognized by her nickname.

¹¹⁵ All responses from the qualitative questionnaire were numbered coded and translated. Full responses are available upon request.

living on a small island reported: “I live on a small island separated from Japan’s Honshu. Therefore, I can exchange information with friends in other prefectures.” Similarly, the geographical factor is also a motivation for Kondo Nao’s interaction with her readers: “[...] I live in the countryside and there are not many people with a similar hobby, so talking through the blog is a valuable enjoyment.” Additionally, bloggers’ responses also indicate that communication with readers in blogs acts as a motivational factor in continuing to post. An anonymous blogger stated: “[...] I interact every day in the comments field. The interactions with blog friends encourage my confidence. [...] ‘I will try my best today’ is how I feel.” Kondo Nao also reported concerns about readers’ opinion about her blog: “I wonder what other people thought about my content and the photos. I want to know what they sympathized with [...].”

The question inquiring about negative points in making bento in the online survey saw 40% of participants selecting an option in which bento was considered an obligation (Table 4.6). The qualitative questionnaire inquired about such obligations and answers from participants illustrated the reason for such a feeling, Kondo Nao stated: “Obligation, possibly more like a duty. A person’s body and heart is built from the food you have eaten. I think it is a big responsibility to make a healthy meal for working family members.” An anonymous blogger complemented: “I believe if bento is handmade it is possible to save money and manage health.” The questionnaire also asked bloggers regarding the use of bento for private communication and, even though participants agreed, they reported to not use explicit messages. An anonymous blogger stated: “Every day I prepare it (bento) pouring my affection into nutrition balance. It is a silent communication but I feel happy when the bento box comes home empty.” Also using silent communication, Kondo Nao reported: “I don’t add any message in special, but I think making bento every day for the worker is already a communication.”

Within the online survey, bloggers' responses often confirmed the use of bento as a theme for blogs to seek recognition for their effort. Focused on providing more details to such an argument, the questionnaire asked participants if they agreed with it. Interestingly, Kondo Nao's answer gave an example to why not only she agrees with the argument, but also why women choose social media to do so: "I agree. In comparison to men's job results, women's daily cooking, housework and concerns with waste is undervalued. But I think on the internet, you can record, transmit and express the important meaning that even housework possesses. [...] I feel that social media and women's emotion have a good affinity."

Finally, similar to the online survey, the last question of the qualitative questionnaire provided a free space for any additional comments. Interestingly, Kondo Nao's answer stated a re-evaluation of her own blog: "The questionnaire made me think again about my own blog. Initially, it was a blog for me, but now I have an objective of supporting other people's courage and provide a pleasant reading in my blog. Thank you very much." An anonymous bento blogger used the space to emphasize what changes the blogging activity brought to her life: "When I started the blog I wondered if I could interact with foreign people and not only Japanese. Just interacting in the comment field [...] I can approximately acquire knowledge about people's personality. Everybody is so lovely, we never met but we got a mutual understanding. Communication through bento is now for me indispensable."

The Results of the Surveys

The results of this investigation will be discussed in the following order: first, I will focus on the objectives stated at the beginning of this chapter; investigating the connection between Japanese women's motivation in posting and their desire for communication and recognition;

assessing the argument of use of bento blogs as a mode of communication, expression and recognition and evaluating readers' importance. Second, I will further discuss the tools of this investigation, the positive points in using an online survey and a qualitative questionnaire and what improvements could be done for future research using similar tools.

Motivation in Posting and Desire for Communication and Recognition

Answers from the online survey demonstrated a close relation between bloggers' motivation in posting and their desire to communicate and be recognized. The online survey revealed that besides a hobby, bento bloggers consider their personal pages a tool to express opinions and discuss ideas with readers within social media. Additionally, bloggers' answers in the qualitative questionnaire emphasized their motivation in communication including the role of geography in that motivation. Living in the countryside or far from big metropolises, participants reported using their blogs to make friends in different provinces and keep in contact with other people interested in bento.

A bento's characteristics related to good eating habits and nutritious aspects supports bloggers' motivation to post. Kondo Nao's statement illustrates this relation very clearly: "[...] the idea I have in managing a bento blog is to communicate to someone in the world, I will be happy if I can make this person healthy." Similarly, an anonymous blogger stated: "Although it is not a great cooking, I would be happy if a blog reader use it for any consultation." The analysis of results in the online survey and the qualitative questionnaire confirmed bloggers' motivation in using their blogs to communicate with other people and be recognized by their readers.

Assessing the Argument of Use of Bento Blogs as Tool for Communication, Expression and Recognition.

Questions in the online survey and the qualitative questionnaire assessing the argument of the use of bento blogs as a tool for communication, expression and recognition used exact words to avoid possible misunderstandings during the investigation. Not surprisingly, as a result of such a focus, the discussion previously presented about Japanese women's motivation to post already confirmed the use of bento blogs as communication and expression tools. However, in regard to recognition, Kondo Nao's statement: "[...] women's daily cooking, housework [...] is undervalued [...] But on the internet you can record, transmit and express the important meaning that even housework possesses" illustrates the argument of Japanese women's use of blogs to get social recognition for their work. Moreover, as analyzed in chapter three, Japanese women's dedication to childrearing and household duties does not allow them to build a solid professional career and the virtual recognition through their blogs could possibly represent a gain of social status or value.

Although such a statement is an opinion from a single blogger, data from the online survey supports the desire for recognition as 33% of participants affirmed to consider blogging as a way to demonstrate skills and be recognized for them (Table 4.1). In addition, 79% of respondents agreed with the statement that the blogging activity is related to a desire of recognition (Graphic 4.3). In assessing the argument for communication and expression, data from online survey makes it evident as 60% of participants affirmed to like blogging to share opinions or keep in touch with other people (Table 4.1), and 93% agreed to use blogs as a tool for expression (Graphic 4.3).

Evaluating the Reader's Importance

Readers play an important role in this investigation as they are the blogs' audience and the target public of bloggers' communication. Not surprisingly, 86% of bloggers affirmed replying to comments from readers and, as demonstrated in the online survey results, 53% of participants considered their readers "very important" or "important." A response from an anonymous bento blogger in the qualitative questionnaire illustrates the reader's importance: "I interact every day in the comments field. The interaction with blog friends encourages my confidence." Additionally, as previously revealed in blogs directories analysis in the second chapter of this thesis, female bloggers seem to be more concerned about readers than male bloggers.

Indeed, readers are targeted by bloggers seeking recognition as indicated by the online survey which revealed that 50% of participants, who qualified readers as "important" or above, associated such importance to readers' capacity to recognize blogger's bento and blog (Table 4.2).

Discussion of Investigation Tools

The current investigation was conducted using two different tools: an online survey and a qualitative questionnaire. I believe the combined results of both tools proved effective as the qualitative questionnaire provided detailed information regarding questions similarly inquired in the online survey. The online survey was mostly composed of multiple-choice questions and the majority of questions accepted multiple answers allowing participants to express as many opinions as possible. Moreover, participants also had the choice to provide their own answer in every question whenever the provided options did not fit with their opinion. I believe this

possibility, in combination with multiple and personal answers under the same question allowed participants to better express themselves increasing the accuracy of their answers. Additionally, the qualitative questionnaire proved to be a good choice for personal opinions as its open questions succeeded in providing details to opinions previously investigated in the online survey. Given the reduced number of participants, it is not possible to affirm that results reported in this investigation would prevail with a higher amount of participants. However, I believe the combined results from both surveys provided data for a primary discussion of this topic. In regard to future research, I would like to suggest a few observations on the structure of both tools.

The structure of both tools was created with a few “ice-breaker” questions to break the natural tension on participants but, especially in qualitative questionnaire, those questions could be reduced to one question only, probably the first question. The development in participants’ answers within the questionnaire suggested that detailed questions could be asked from the beginning, by simply arranging the order of questions in such a way that they would flow from less to more personal opinions. In regard to the online survey’s structure, my suggestion concerns the use of open questions as the online survey had three open questions requiring participants to use their own words in answers. However, not as many participants responded to the first question as the last one. Therefore, I would suggest using open questions in online surveys towards the final questions as an initial tension could be the reason for such few answers in the first open question of the survey.

One last note about the consent forms used in these surveys. The consent to online survey was given by clicking on survey’s link and due to the dynamism in virtual communications, I believe the presentation of all information in one single contact avoiding unnecessary additional messages with forms and links eased bloggers’ decision to participate in the survey. In contrast

to such dynamism, the qualitative questionnaire required bloggers' signature to consent participation. Since the invitation for qualitative questionnaire was made using direct communication exchanging emails, I believe the requirement of a signed consent form was a crucial factor in bloggers' decision to participate as such formality demonstrates integrity and veracity.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

In this study I have discussed Japanese women's use of bento as a theme for blogs to communicate and express in social media. The current thesis started by presenting an introduction to Japanese food aesthetics characteristics such as food arrangement and presentation, which is usually composed by a large portion of rice and a variety of small side dishes. Additionally, the introductory chapter demonstrated how influences from Europe and other Asian countries transformed everyday meals in Japan into a fusion of different cuisines adapted to the rice-centered style of Japanese meal. Among such variety, bento provided the focus for this study. Therefore, I have also presented the history of bento and illustrated how influences from Japanese media in bento aesthetics enhancing food arrangement and colors balance promoted bento as a communication tool between maker and eater.

In the second chapter, the discussion focused on the main topic of this study: bento blogs. Therefore, I first presented the definition of social media and blogs. Then, due to the variety in blogs themes, attention was turned to food blogs. Food is a very popular theme in Japanese social media and a qualitative analysis in two popular blog directories revealed a variety of personal webpages with themes related to bento. Furthermore, the analysis of blogger profiles and comment fields provided additional information which proved to be very important for this study: the majority of female bloggers and the intense interaction between bloggers and readers building a dialogue within the comments and messages platform. Indeed, readers play an important role in this interaction for their capacity of communication and recognition of bento and blog. Based on my analysis of this interaction, I claimed that Japanese women are using

bento as a theme for their blogs to create virtual social arenas where they can communicate, express their feelings and be recognized for their effort in making bento for their family.

To better understand the connection between Japanese women and bento blogs, the third chapter of this study used previous works from scholars to illustrate how a governmental ideology from the Meiji era called *ryōsai kenbo* influenced Japanese women's duties at home as they perform mother-imprinted labour in order to support husbands at work and children at school. The chapter also provided information from recent studies regarding the bento making activity. According to these studies, saving money and eating healthy seem to be Japanese women's main motivation in preparing bento every day. Furthermore, after the birth of the first child, Japanese women dedicate themselves to support their child's education. Chapter three also notes that in raising their children, Japanese women often find little time for their own social network and leisure activities because of duties related to the household and school activities for their children. As a counterweight to those duties, Japanese women frequently use social media to interact with other people to build a virtual social life where they can possibly be recognized for their effort in cooking and gain social status. The chapter also demonstrated how young Japanese women are using food as a tool for expression and strengthening their relationships with friends as they claim individuality and attempt to dissociate the connection between food and the image of mother or home.

The fourth chapter of this study presented the result of an investigation conducted with Japanese bento bloggers. Based on information from chapters two and three, I speculated that the activities related to household and children's school, which often lead Japanese women to neglect their own social networks and leisure activities, is the motivational factor of Japanese women's use of bento as a theme for personal webpages to interact in social media. Therefore,

the investigation aimed to investigate Japanese women's motivation in blogging and evaluate the argument of the use of bento blogs as a mode of communication and recognition. The investigation was conducted using an online survey, whose link was sent to female bento bloggers using comments and the private message platform, and a qualitative questionnaire sent to female bento bloggers by email. Since questions in the questionnaire required participants to use their own word in answers, the qualitative questionnaire worked in synchrony with the online survey providing detailed opinions. The combined results of both surveys revealed that Japanese women are using their personal webpages to communicate and express in social media motivated by: 1) an opportunity to express opinions and communicate with other people from different prefectures and countries interested in the same hobby and 2) a chance to create a virtual social arena where Japanese women can be recognized for their effort in cooking and possibly gain social status and value.

Additionally, in regard to the bloggers' desire for recognition, 79% of online survey's participants stated to consider blogs a tool for recognition (Graphic 4.3). As an example, Kondo Nao's answer in the qualitative questionnaire illustrates the importance of virtual interaction for women's recognition, the blogger states that "women's daily cooking, housework [...] is undervalued. But on the internet, you can record, transmit and express the important meaning that housework possesses." It is important to note that, results also called attention to the readers' importance in their role as audience of bloggers' expression and communication. Results of the investigation reported changes in bloggers' daily life due to the blogging activity. Responses in the online survey and the qualitative questionnaire confirmed women's dedication to other activities related to their own blog's improvement such as photography techniques, cooking and food arrangement skills and writing style.

Given the reduced number of participants, it is not possible to affirm that results reported in this investigation would prevail with a higher amount of participants. However, I believe the result of this study helped to provide a better preliminary comprehension of Japanese women's motivation in expressing and communicating using blogs as well as why social media has proven to be a good fit in women's daily routine.

For future studies, I would suggest a closer approach based, for example, on a topic evidenced by a participant's answer in the last question of the online survey: "there is a big difference between bento blogs of housewives and single office workers such as backgrounds, motivation, daily life etc..." the difference suggested in participant's response was not previously identified and therefore, was not considered for this study. Additionally, the qualitative analysis in blog directories conducted in chapter two revealed a considerable amount of male bento bloggers, which invites a study focused on specific publics such as male or single women bento bloggers as different publics could have distinct opinions regarding blogging and making bento. The development of a new investigation question based on results of this study could provide a different perspective in motivation to make bento and post in bento blogs due to marital status, gender, age or occupation.

A second suggestion for future studies is the association of bento with the notion of Anne Allison's concept of "mother-imprinted labour." The investigation revealed that many bloggers consider bento as a hobby, which means they could possibly make bento out of fun and not as a caregiving activity. Furthermore, as evidenced by the participant's answer in the last question of the online survey, the investigation did not inquire who the eater was which means that some bloggers are probably making bento for themselves and not for family members. A new investigation based on the notion of mother-imprinted labour and bloggers motivation could,

perhaps, provide a different understanding of the association of bento to the notion of mother-imprinted labour.

On the other hand, this study also calls attention to the possibility of a new investigation from a broader perspective not only focused on social media. I am particularly interested in taking a broader view and investigate the impact of media and use of celebrities in Japanese food culture. Given the massive use of celebrities in Japanese media and constant presence of Japanese food as a main theme for movies, dramas, *anime* and TV programs, I believe an investigation conducted in a broader perspective would enhance our comprehension of media's influence in society and its consequences for Japanese food culture.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Online Survey

I would like to express my appreciation for your collaboration in this research study. You were invited to be in this study because you are a Japanese blog author, which is the main topic of my MA thesis. Due to the development of technology in social media platforms, people are able to communicate through personal webpages, the blog. And among the multiple themes bento is one of the most popular in Japan. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary, and I will guarantee the confidentiality and anonymity of your answers by using only biographical data. In addition, as the sole investigator of this study, only I will have access to the results. The results of this study will be used in support of my thesis.

- 1- Gender (optional)
 - a. ☐ Male
 - b. ☐ Female
- 2- If you like to share your nickname, please use the space below (optional)
 - a. _____
- 3- What is the main theme of your blog? (check many as wanted) (optional)
 - a. ☐ Bento
 - b. ☐ Hobby
 - c. ☐ Daily Life
 - d. ☐ Food in general (restaurants, home cooking, food products etc.)
 - e. ☐ Other / Specify: _____
 - f. ☐ None of above
- 4- How often do you post in your blog? (optional)
 - a. ☐ Daily
 - b. ☐ Two or more times per week
 - c. ☐ Once a week
 - d. ☐ Two or more times per month
 - e. ☐ Whenever I have time to post
 - f. ☐ None of above
- 5- What is your relation to your blog? (check many as wanted) (optional)
 - a. ☐ It is my business
 - b. ☐ It is my hobby
 - c. ☐ It is my way to express myself
 - d. ☐ It is my way to interact with people on internet
 - e. ☐ Other / Specify: _____
 - f. ☐ None of above

- 6- Why do you like blogging? (check many as wanted) (optional)
- ☐ It is a way to demonstrate my skills and be recognized about it
 - ☐ It is a way to share my opinion with other people
 - ☐ It is a way to keep in touch with other people interested in bento
 - ☐ Other / Specify: _____
 - ☐ None of above
- 7- In your opinion, how important is your blog's reader? (optional)
- ☐ Very important
 - ☐ Important
 - ☐ Not much important
 - ☐ I don't have interest in readers
 - ☐ None of above
- 8- If you answered A or B in the previous question. Why is the reader important to you? (check many as wanted) (optional)
- ☐ I want to keep a communication with them, they are my audience.
 - ☐ I want my blog and bento to be recognized
 - ☐ The readers are potential customers to my business
 - ☐ Other / Specify: _____
 - ☐ None of above
- 9- Do you reply to the comments in your blog? (optional)
- ☐ Yes
 - If YES, why? (check many as wanted)
 - ☐ It is the etiquette, it is impolite to not answer
 - ☐ I like to discuss opinions and ideas with other people
 - ☐ The readers are my friends, we interact through blog when we can't meet in person
 - ☐ Other / Specify: _____
 - ☐ None
 - ☐ No
 - If NO why? (check many as wanted)
 - ☐ My blog does not allow comments
 - ☐ I don't have time to reply the comments
 - ☐ I am not interested in comments
 - ☐ Other / Specify: _____
 - ☐ None
- 10- Is your blog linked to other social media? (optional)
- ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
- 11- If YES, which social media? (check many as wanted) (optional)
- ☐ Facebook
 - ☐ Twitter
 - ☐ MIXI

- d. ☐ Other blogs
 - e. ☐ Other / Specify:___
 - f. ☐ None of above
- 12- How much time do you usually spend preparing a post? (optional)
- a. ☐ 30 minutes to 1 hour
 - b. ☐ 1 to 2 hours
 - c. ☐ More than 2 hours
 - d. ☐ Other / Specify:___
 - e. ☐ None of above
- 13- In your opinion, what changes the blogging activity brought to your daily life? (optional)
- a. ANSWER TEXT
- 14- Previous studies states that the blogging activity is often related to a desire of recognition and expression. Do you agree with this? (optional)
- a. ☐ YES to recognition and expression
 - b. ☐ YES to recognition but NO to expression
 - c. ☐ NO to recognition but YES to expression
 - d. ☐ NO to recognition and expression
 - e. ☐ Other / Specify: ___
 - f. ☐ None of above
- 15- When talking about bento, what are the first words that come to your mind? (optional)
- a. ANSWER TEXT
- 16- When did you start making bento? (optional)
- a. ☐ In High school
 - b. ☐ In College / University
 - c. ☐ When I got married
 - d. ☐ When I got a job
 - e. ☐ Other / Specify:___
 - f. ☐ None of above
- 17- In your opinion, what are the GOOD points about making bento? (check many as wanted)
(optional)
- a. ☐ I can control what my family eats out of home
 - b. ☐ It is a chance to demonstrate and practice my cooking skills
 - c. ☐ It is a way to save money and eat healthy
 - d. ☐ I enjoy cooking and preparing bento
 - e. ☐ I can privately communicate to my children/husband through bento
 - f. ☐ Other / Specify:___
 - g. ☐ None of above
- 18- In your opinion what are the BAD points about making bento? (check many as wanted)
(optional)
- a. ☐ I feel it is an obligation
 - b. ☐ I don't like to cook
 - c. ☐ It takes too much work and time to prepare

- d. ☐ I feel a pressure from society to make it perfectly
- e. ☐ I have been criticized for it by school teacher and my own children
- f. ☐ Other / Specify:____
- g. ☐ None of above

19- In your opinion, does bento have one or more of the following characteristics? (check many as wanted) (optional)

- a. ☐ It is a woman's duty
- b. ☐ it is a mode of communication
- c. ☐ It is a mode of self-expression
- d. ☐ It is an icon on Japanese food culture
- e. ☐ It is a woman's evaluation tool
- f. ☐ Other / Specify:____
- g. ☐ None of above

20- If you have any additional comment about bento or bento blog, please use the space below.
(optional)

- a. ANSWER TEXT

Appendix 2

Qualitative questionnaire and consent form

Consent Form

***Obentō* Talks: Women's Use of Social Media to Communicate in Japanese Food Culture**

Research Investigator:

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Dear Ms.

I would like to express my appreciation for your collaboration in this research study. You were invited to be in this study because you are a Japanese author of a bento blog, which is the main topic of my MA thesis. I got your contact through the bento blog network, which I also am a member.

Purpose

The purpose of my study is to investigate Japanese women's expression in social media. Due to the development of technology in social media platforms, women are able to communicate through personal webpages, the blog. And among the multiple blog themes, bento is one of the most popular in Japan. We hope that the information we get from doing this study will help us better understand crucial aspects of modern Japanese society. The results of this study will be used in support of my thesis and in publications and presentations related to this study.

Voluntary Participation and Anonymity

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary, and I will guarantee the confidentiality and anonymity of your answers by using only biographical data such as gender and nickname (if authorized). More specifically, my interests are about your opinion towards daily activities such as making bento and blogging about it. As I mentioned before my study aims to investigate women's expression through bento and blogs and your opinion in this questionnaire will be used to support my thesis. In addition, as the sole investigator of this study, only I will have access to the results. According to University of Alberta requirements, the data collected for this study are to be kept in a secure place for 5 years following completion of research project, the results of this questionnaire will be password secured and destroyed by the end of 5 years. I would like to request your authorization for the further use of information regarding this qualitative questionnaire, you can electronically sign this consent form using your nickname or just send me the answers along with this consent form. By just sending the answers I will consider that you agreed in participating in this study, but not agreed in citing your nickname.

(☐) Citations of this questionnaire's answers in my research project using your nickname (if provided).

Risks and Benefits

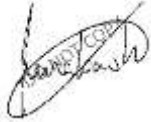
This questionnaire does not offer any risk to the participant, as mentioned before, your anonymity is guaranteed and you are free to not answer any question that makes you feel uncomfortable. Your participation in this study will collaborate and bring benefits for better understanding of modern Japanese society. This questionnaire is composed of questions that aim to identify the author's opinion about bento blogs and the blogging activity. The expected length of this questionnaire is 15 to 30 minutes (15 questions).

Information and questions

If you have any further questions regarding this study, please do not hesitate in contact me at efunabas@ualberta.ca. The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines by a Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta. For questions

regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Research Ethics Office at (780) 492-2615.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Eric Funabashi', written over a faint, circular, textured background.

Eric Funabashi
Graduate student
Department of East Asian Studies
University of Alberta.

Participant's Signature

Qualitative questionnaire and Consent form

Initially, I would like to express my appreciation for your collaboration in my research study. I also would like to request your signature in the consent form and please check if you agree with the item in the form.

1. First of all I would like to know more about your blog, why did you decide to start a bento blog?
2. How often do you update your blog? Did the blogging activity change your daily activities?
3. During my research I noticed that many authors keep a kind of conversation with their readers through the comments. Do you also interact with your readers? Why?
4. What this interaction with the reader represents to you?
5. In your opinion, why this interaction is (or is not) important?
6. Do you think women's expression and interaction enhanced with the use of social media?
7. Do you use social media for self-expression?
 - a. If YES – what kind of message you would like to send through social media?
 - b. If NOT – Why not?

8. When we talk about bento what are the first words that come to your mind?
9. Do you think making bento for the family is more an obligation or a caregiving activity? Why?
10. Some scholars claims that bento is also a communication tool between the maker and the eater, do you agree with it?
 - a. If YES, Did you ever used bento to communicate? What kind of message you sent?
 - b. If NOT, why not?
11. In many countries, as well as in Japan, cooking became a hobby and many men are learning how to cook. What do you think about the idea of a man cooking bento? Is it ok or bento is restricted to woman?
12. In your opinion, what do you think is the most important thing about making bento?
13. During my research, I saw studies arguing that bento was used as a blog theme so women could be recognized by their effort by posting their daily effort on internet. Do you agree with this argument?
14. What you wanted to share with your readers when you decided to start to write about bento?

15. This is the end of the questionnaire; do you have any questions or extra comments?
Would you like to say anything else about bento blog that we did not talk about?