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# **The effect of perceived authenticity of food towards experience and place attachment at the State Fair**

by

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in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
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## ABSTRACT

The state fair is a significant event that represents a place, attracting numerous tourists (Nelson, 2009). State fairs offer a wide range of food and beverages that combine various ingredients and flavors. The authenticity and uniqueness of the food at the state fair are important elements that have the potential to motivate people to travel to a destination (Robinson & Clifford, 2012). While a number of studies have attempted to focus on different type of festivals (Roozbeh, Ng, & Boo, 2013), less attention has paid to the state fair and its visitors' experiences and attachment. Furthermore, research has rarely investigated how food, particularly authentic food at the state fair is important in influencing visitors' experiences that leads them to have emotionally bond to the destination. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine if the perceived authentic food will influence visitors' experiences and place attachment in the state fair setting.



An online survey was used; 533 responses were analyzed using Mplus structural equation modeling. Results indicated that the initial model proposed in the study was partially supported where perceived authentic food significantly predicted experience and place attachment. In addition, a mediating effect was found in the model as hypothesized; perceived authentic food at the state fair had a significant indirect effect on attachment to the place. However, there was no significant interaction effect of perceived authentic food on the relationships between experience and place attachment.

This study expands the literature on festival research particularly at the state fair by focusing on attendees' perception of food, experience and place attachment. Overall, this study verified that perceived authentic food has significant impacts on experience and place attachment. In addition, the study is among the first to investigate the





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importance of authentic food at the state fair by applying the cue utilization theory. As a theoretical foundation, the cue utilization theory successfully identified the role of food in bridging food and attendees' experiences and attachment to a destination. The identified theory enables the study to verify that perceived authentic food is an indicator in determining attendees' experience and their emotional sense of a place. This study will help the state fair organizers to recognize the important role of perceived authentic food in influencing visitors' experience at fairs and attachment to the place. State fair organizers should advance their marketing strategies to the next stage, making greater efforts to introduce authentic food at the state fair to invite potential visitors and magnetize currents attendees to the state fair.



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## The effect of perceived authenticity of food towards experience and place attachment at the State Fair

*"Food is everything we are. It's an extension of nationalist feeling, ethnic feeling, your personal history, your province, your region, your tribe, and your grandma."*

- Anthony Bourdain, *Kitchen Confidential* (2000)

### CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Food plays a great role in social life and in tourism (Tikkanen, 2007). Food is not only a functional component of a trip, but also highly experiential, sensual, symbolic and ritualistic (Mitchell & Hall, 2003). In some instances, food is regarded as an essential part of the travel experience, as it provides tourists with memorable and agreeable pastimes (Sanchez-Canizares & Lopez-Guzman, 2012). In other words, tourists also seek something different from their everyday life when traveling, and this may include the taste of authentic food.

In the tourism context, authenticity refers to tourists' personal evaluation of the extent to which their expectations for a destination hold true during a visit (Jain, 2014). Throughout the first part of the new millennium, authenticity has been a prominent topic in tourism's foremost journals (Buchmann, Moore, & Fisher, 2010). Researches have conceptualized the meaning of authenticity using different associations and denotations, such as genuineness, timelessness, tradition, and originality, as well as cultural, personal, or positive evaluations (Aaker & Drolet, 1996; Ballantyne, Warren, & Nobbs, 2006; Stern, 1996).





Authentic food, like fashion and design, is an expression of art, and through culinary products and dining experiences, consumer identities are enhanced and expressed (Gyimothy & Mykletun, 2009). Authentic food refers to a genuine form of food or product that is unique, homegrown, natural, and homemade and has distinctive extrinsic product attributes (Groves, 2001). Authentic food is becoming one of the main attractions for any destination. According to Kalenjuk, Tešanović, and Gagić (2015), only authentic dishes can satisfy the curiosity of travelers; their research may be evidence that authentic food has a significant impact on tourism. Apparently, the authenticity and uniqueness of food has the potential to motivate people to travel (Groves, 2001; Robinson & Clifford, 2012).

A festival is recognized as an important driving force in tourism. A festival is defined as “a celebration of a theme or special event for a limited period of time, held annually or less frequently” (Smith, 1990, p.187). Festivals allow visitors to experience new flavors in a pleasant environment and engage with producers, manufacturers, or local people (Mason & Paggiaro, 2012). The state fair, in particular, is one of the most popular festivals in the United States (Lipsey, 2014, June 5). State fairs, which began in the nineteenth century, are an annual occasion for states to celebrate the tradition and festivity of the harvest, which came from the discipline and labor of farming life (Gaskell, 2000; Nelson, 2009). The state fair can be a significant event that represents a state, attracting numerous tourists (Nelson, 2009).

State fairs offer a wide range of food and beverages that combine various ingredients and flavors. Food in particular is one of the main motives for people to visit a state fair. The Iowa State Fair organizer, for example, revealed that about 70 percent of





respondents reported that food was the top attraction at a state fair. The fair runs the country's largest state fair foods department with approximately 200 food stands and “70 delectable items on a stick” (Iowa State Fair, 2016). This implies that food can be a critical factor in attracting potential attendees to a fair where refreshment stands are placed around every corner (Leslie, 2007). The authenticity and uniqueness of the food are important elements that have the potential to motivate people to travel to a destination to attend a state fair. (Groves, 2001; Robinson & Clifford, 2012).

Food is a critical element in forming positive experiences (Okumus, Altinay, & Roper, 2007) and developing emotional attachment (Bezirgan, 2014), thereby strengthening the relationship between experience and place attachment. Indeed, a state fair evokes positive emotions and memorable experiences, which can lead to attachment to a particular state through various engagement opportunities such as entertainment and other activities (Shwaluk, 2009). Experience has become an indispensable element in

travel, tourism, and destination branding (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). Place attachment emphasizes a strong connection between an individual and a particular setting (Hidalgo & Hernandez, 2001). The concept of place attachment has received special attention from social science researchers over the last four decades (Lewicka, 2011).

The perceived authenticity of food can be a cue that represents the event quality and experience (George, 2001; Munoz & Wood, 2009; Olson & Jacoby, 1972). Cue utilization theory, introduced by Easterbrook (1959), describes product attributes that could be an important basis for the consumers' assessment and impressions of the quality of the product (Cox, 1962; Jacoby, Olson, & Haddock, 1971). Regarding the food business, the interest in ethnic restaurants shown by an increasing number of Americans





may be evidence of a search for authentic food experiences (Finkelstein, 1989; Shelton, 1990). Customers outside the referent ethnic group do not have the knowledge to determine whether cuisine is authentic or modified to a local cuisine style (Lu & Fine, 1995). This is where cues may be critically utilized because customers are often uncertain about the quality and benefits of products that they aim to purchase (Akdeniz et al., 2014; Erdem & Swait, 1998). This implies that cue utilization theory could provide a perspective toward understanding the role of food that is perceived to be authentic as it relates to experience and attachment to a place.

### Background of the Study

The term fair is rooted in the Latin word “feria” which means holy day

(International Association of Fairs and Expositions, IAFE, 2017). Feria refers to a



religious event where large numbers of people assembled for religious worship, usually

around temples in a great city (IAFE, 2017). In 1765, the first North American fair,

which continues to operate today, took place in Windsor, Nova Scotia. In 1811, Elkanah

Watson, a New England patriot and farmer, known as the "father of U.S. agricultural

fairs," created an association called the Berkshire Agricultural Society and organized its

first event (IAFE, 2017). The show included animal exhibitions and a competition for the

best oxen, cattle, swine and sheep. Watson worked diligently for many years helping

communities organize their own agricultural societies and their respective fairs. With

Watson's assistance, most counties in New England organized their own agricultural

shows or fairs, and the movement spread. In nineteenth century, almost every state and





region in the U.S. organized one or more agricultural fairs or exhibitions, annually (IAFE, 2017).

There are approximately 73 state fairs in the United States (Everfest, 2017). State fairs mainly aim at promoting agriculture, including livestock and farm products, as well as displaying new products, processes, and ideas (Gaskell, 2000). Modern state fairs, however, have added various food and entertainment options, such as carnival rides, games, and concerts to attract more people. With a variety of food offerings, state fairs have become a significant means of promoting rural areas and boosting their economies (Illinois State Fair Foundation, 2015). Additionally, live concerts, exhibitions, competitions, and rides appeal to international visitors. Bassett reported that at the Texas State Fair, American cultural experiences like food, rides, and petting zoos, were favorites among international visitors (Bassett, 2016 October).



Over the years, state fairs have adapted and changed to meet the demands of attendees. As the president and CEO of the Oklahoma State Fair noted, there are people who come to the fair every year to recapture childhood memories (Raymond, NewsOK.com, 2016 September); they feel attached to the place and state where they grew up. The relationship between people and places is an important topic in place-related research (He, 2013). When people travel, their experiences have the potential to shape their motivations, perceptions, place attachment, and future behaviors (Prebensen & Foss, 2011). Visitors that become emotionally attached to a state fair may come again in the future. Some attendees visit state fairs every year (Keenan, 2016, August 10). Furthermore, visitors who came to the fair also visited surrounding areas, especially places of interest in a particular state (Iowa State Fair, 2016).





The state fair is an auspicious channel to invigorate the local economy (Rohrer, September 2013). For instance, the Minnesota State Fair brought in \$41,351,000 in 2011, from its carnival, grandstand, parking, campgrounds, live entertainment, competitions and sales. Revenue also came from non-fair events such as sponsorships, licenses, and utilities (Report to the Minnesota State Legislature, 2012).

State fair vendors across the nation back in the 18<sup>th</sup> century initially started selling traditional American foods such as chocolate chip cookies, cream puffs, funnel cakes, cotton candy, candy apples, corn dogs, and hamburgers. With new ingredients and technologies, food vendors have added new items such as elephant ears, beef and chicken on a stick, deep-fried candy bars, and Kool-Aid pickles (Rosenfeld, Suddath, & Carbone, 2015). State fair organizers have recently begun to invite local food producers and restaurants to offer diversity in food that can play a driving force in attracting more people (Pratt, 2014).



### Problem Statement

While a state fair can be an important tourism event for the respective state, only a few studies have paid attention to state fairs in the context of tourism, and most event studies have focused on festivals, excluding state fairs (Brocato, 2007; Falassi, 1987; Mason & Paggiaro, 2012; Organ, Koenig-Lewis, Palmer, & Probert, 2015; Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Roozbeh, Ng, & Boo, 2013). Therefore, there is a need to further study tourism as it relates to state fairs.

Though state fairs have maintained a stable number of attendees each year (Readers.com, 2016 August 5), fair organizers have rarely examined consumer research





to understand their attendees. In addition, little research has paid attention to attendees in a state fair setting. This indicates the need for more extensive studies to understand consumer behavior at state fairs.

Furthermore, though food is an essential item at a state fair, few studies have paid attention to the important role of food in visitors' overall evaluations regarding experiences and satisfaction. Moreover, research on authenticity has been limited to food tourism and festivals in general (Jiang, Ramkisson, Mavondo, & Feng, 2016; Novello & Fernandez, 2016). The few studies done in state fair settings have focused on information technology and history; there has been little emphasis on food-related topics (Goode et al., 2004; Litchfield, Martin, & Schultz, 2015; Marquart et al., 2006). There is a limited understanding of food, particularly, authentic food at a state fair and more extensive research is needed to examine whether food at state fairs is perceived as authentic. It would be useful to know what components of food deliver authentic values, and whether perceived authenticity of food is important to consumers who visit a particular state.

Cue utilization theory has been broadly employed within business research in order to understand patronage intentions, product presentation, and product evaluations (Akdeniz et al., 2014; Gooner & Nadler, 2012; Rao & Monroe, 1988; Richardson et al., 1994; Szibillo & Jacoby, 1974; Wang, Cui, Huang, & Dai, 2016). Food is a product; therefore, cue utilization theory might be a sound theory to describe the role of food in the state fair context. Wang and Matilla (2015) recently employed this theory in a food service context. However, little known research has applied this theory to food tourism (Kunz & Seshadri, 2015). This study attempts to adapt the cue utilization theory to better





understand the role of consumers' perceptions of authentic food as it relates to experience and place attachment among attendees at the state fair.

Extensive studies have examined tourists' experiences in various settings such as festivals, (Brocato, 2007; Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Manthiou, Lee, Tang, & Chiang, 2014; Roozbeh, Ng, & Boo, 2013), hotels and lodgings (Ali, Hussain, & Ragavan, 2014; Apivantanaporn & Walsh, 2013; Oh, Fiore, & Jeoung, 2007), restaurant (Tsai, 2016), theme park (Jain, 2014), island destinations (Hussain, Lema, & Agrusa, 2012; Rivera, Semrad, & Croes, 2015), and rural areas (Bessiere & Tibere, 2013; Sidali, Kastenholz, & Bianchi, 2015). However, little research has investigated fair goers' experiences in the state fair. Thus, further study is needed to contribute to future literature regarding attendees' experiences at the state fair.



Place attachment could be an important element in understanding the role of state fairs in connecting attendees to a particular state. Numerous studies on place attachment have focused on different contexts such as rural areas (Loureiro, 2014), wineries (Cardinale, Nguyen, & Melewar, 2016; Gross & Brown, 2008), and heritage (Vong, 2015). However, little investigation has explored attendees' place attachment to the state where the fair takes place. Thus, there is a need to explore how state fairs may contribute to building fair goers' attachment to a given state.

Much research has reported the strong relationship between experience and place attachment in various settings such as wineries, restaurants, heritage building, and the natural environment (Cardinale, Nguyen, & Melewar, 2016; Gross & Brown, 2008; Tsai, 2016; Vaske & Kobrin, 2001). Although the link between experience and attachment has been examined in previous studies (Bitner, Booms, & Mohr, 1994; Vaske & Kobrin,





2001), there is little research to explore how the experiences of state fair attendees might cause them to develop a deeper attachment to the state. Hence, there is a need to understand fair goers' bonding to the state based on their experiences at the state fair.

Based on previous studies, it is assumed that authentic food has a significant relationship with both experience and place attachment as a moderator and/or mediator. Extant literature has investigated the moderating role of food on consumers' engagement with the food service sector (Kang & Jeong, 2008; Chen, 2007); however, little empirical research has examined the impact of food on building place attachment through the interaction effect of experiences using a holistic model (Bezirgan, 2014). Thus, there is a need to explore the role of perceived authenticity of food on experience and place attachment among state fair attendees.



### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to examine the role of authentic food in forming experiences and place attachment in a state fair setting. Cue utilization theory was used to investigate whether food can be a cue to influence a person's experience and attachment to the state where the state fair was held. Based on the above theoretical rationale, this study had the following specific objectives: 1) to examine the impact of authentic food on experience at the state fair, 2) to explore the effect of authentic food on place attachment, 3) to investigate the relationship between attendees' experiences and place attachment, 4) to determine whether experience mediates the relationships between perceived authenticity of food and place attachment, and 5) to determine if perceived authenticity of food moderates the link between experience and place attachment.





### Significance of the Study

The state fair significantly contributes to increase profit of the local communities.

However, there has been limited research to understand the state fair business.

Considering the popularity of this annual event and the importance of state fairs to local communities, this research contributes to filling a gap in the literature. The knowledge gained from this study provides an opportunity to focus on the state fair industry in future studies. This study may provide important insights related to consumer research on state fairs. Exploring state fair attendees behavior help food vendors and organizers to develop appropriate strategies to provide food that meet attendees' demands.

Food is increasingly considered a factor that contributes to high state fair



attendance and contributes to the local economy from daily sales (Rohrer, September 2013). While most festivals offer food, this study increases understanding about whether

food at the state fair in particular was perceived to be authentic by attendees, thereby expanding the literature on the importance of authentic food and attachment to place. In particular, the application of the cue utilization theory provides a unique approach to understanding the role of food in state fair settings and contribute to better describing how authentic food can play a role in influencing attendees' experiences at state fairs.

The ability to understand attendees overall experience is paramount to the sustainability of the state fair business. In fact, experience has played a prominent role in understanding tourist behavior (Cohen, 1988; Crang, 1996). Examining the experiences of a sample of state fair attendees offers a better understanding of consumer feelings and insights from the perspectives of education, entertainment, escapism, and esthetic





experiences. This study further helps state fairs to better services, leading to greater business growth, and enhancing local and state economies.

People often have an emotional bond to places they feel reflect their identities (Kyle, Mowen, & Tarrant, 2004). Attendees who engage in personal relationships through social interactions, networking with other attendees while enjoying the state fair's offerings, could develop an attachment to the place where the state fair is held. This is one of the first studies to apply the concept of place attachment to the state fair context by including these four components; place dependence, place identity, place affect, and social bonding. By investigating attendees' place attachment, this study highlights the importance of attachment in the state fair business.

As food and experiences have generally been researched by academic scholars (Apivantanaporn & Walsh, 2013; Bessiere & Tibere, 2013; Tsai, 2016), this current study expands the literature by integrating food, experience, and place attachment concepts in one study. As it is the first in hospitality and tourism study to discuss these links, the results explain the influence of perceived authentic food on overall experience and place attachment. Incorporating three constructs of perceived authentic food, experience, and place attachment, a holistic model was developed to provide greater insights into the role of authentic food in influencing attendees experience and their attachment to the place.

### Definition of Terms

**Cue utilization theory** is a set of principles on attributes of a product that could be an important basis for consumers' assessment and impressions of the quality of the product (Cox, 1962; Jacoby, Olson, & Haddock, 1971).





**Food tourism** is a form of tourism in which a holiday or an event is focused on preparing and/or eating particular foods (Castree, Kitchin, & Rogers, 2013). It becomes a way to pursue enjoyment of unique and memorable food and beverage experiences, regardless of the distance of the destination.

**Festival** is described as “a means by which culture can be celebrated, preserved, and represented in a public forum before an audience” (Abramson & Haskell, 2006). It is a common expression of human activity, contributing to both social and cultural lives.

**State fair** is an annual state event to celebrate a state’s agriculture and traditions through exhibitions of livestock and farm products, usually held in late summer or early fall (Gaskell, 2000).

**Authentic food** refers to a genuine form of a product based on a particular



setting, place, region, or country. Food can be perceived as authentic when it is unique, homegrown, natural, and homemade and has distinctive extrinsic product attributes (Groves, 2001).

**Experience** is “a subjective mental state felt by visitors during a service encounter” (Otto & Ritchie, 1996, pg. 166). Moscardo (2009) proposed that a tourist experience can be defined as a “continuous process made up of a set of events or activities occurring at a destination that often involves contact with tourism-related organizations and their personnel, and is driven by expectations of some sort of benefit” (p. 101).

**Place attachment** is described as an affective relationship of an individual to a particular setting (Hidalgo & Hernandez, 2001) or a strong connection between a tourist and a destination (Smith, Siderelis, & Moore, 2010). It also refers to “the extent to which





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an individual value and identifies with a particular environmental setting” (Moore & Graefe, 1994, p. 17).



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## CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides an extensive review of the literature as it relates to the research problem, beginning with an overview of festivals in the United States. Background on state fairs is provided, and food tourism is discussed in terms of consumers' perception of authentic food. In particular, definitions and previous studies on food tourism and authenticity are considered. To better explain this study, this chapter describes the concept of an "experience economy," as well as the dimensions of the model. Finally, the topic of place attachment is introduced, and related previous research is presented.



### Festivals and Fairs

The festival industry has been rapidly growing since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Yeoman, Robertson, Ali-Knight, Drummond, & McMahon-Beattie, 2003). The word festival comes from the Latin words "festum," which means public happiness, jolly, or playful, "feria" that means absence from work to honor something (Falassi, 1987). Specifically, a festival can be described as "a means by which culture can be celebrated, preserved, and represented in a public forum before an audience" (Abramson & Haskell, 2006). Not only a cultural celebration, a festival is consumed socially, especially by people who share similar interests. In addition, people are pleased by the fact that they can enjoy a moment outside of the normal environment of daily life; thus, the festival plays an important role in the community. This claim, supported by previous research,





indicates that festivals are vital expressions of human activity, contributing to lives both socially and culturally (Allen, O'Toole, Harris, & McDonnell, 2011).

Previous literature indicates that festivals have been researched in multiple disciplines (Arcodia & Whitford, 2006; Getz, 2010; Matheson, 2005). Most research on festivals has examined economic impacts (Getz, 2000, 2008; Harris, Jago, Allen, & Huyskens, 2001; Page & Connell, 2010), experience (Axelsen & Swan, 2010; Manthiou, Lee, Tang, & Chiang, 2014; Robinson & Clifford, 2012), place attachment (Davis & Martin, 2014; Lee, Kyle, & Scott, 2012; Ram, Bjork, & Weidenfeld, 2016), satisfaction and loyalty (Kim, Suh, & Eves, 2010; Lee, Lee, Lee, & Babin, 2008; Wan & Chan, 2013; Yoon, Lee, & Lee, 2010), motivation (Park, Reisinger, & Kang, 2008), destination branding (Lee & Arcodia, 2011), and festivalscape (Bruwer & Kelley, 2015; Mason & Paggiaro, 2012).



A number of reviews of different topics in festival literature have been

undertaken, particularly in wine tourism (Beverland, Hoffman, & Rasmussen, 2001; Bruwer, & Lesschaeve, 2012; Sparks, 2007), food (Boo, Ghiselli, R, & Almanza, 2000; Kim, Suh, & Eves, 2010; Organ, Koenig-Lewis, Palmer, & Probert, 2015), rural destination (Gration, Arcodia, Raciti, & Stokes, 2011; Janiskee, 1980, 1991; Moscardo, 2007), music (Bourdeau, De Coster, & Paradis, 2001; Bowen & Daniels, 2005; Wilks, 2012), and cultural festival settings (Abreau, 2005; Agrusa, 2000; Felsenstein & Fleischer, 2003). The current study goes beyond the research areas and settings mentioned above; state fairs were chosen as the study setting.

Fairs have been common events since they began in the American colonies in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The first fairs were known primarily for agriculture, and they served as a





showcase for regional farm products and livestock (Reed & Rodgers, 2009). The fair was a commercial venue where merchants from distant countries would come together, bringing their native wares to trade with one another (IAFE, 2017). Consequently, the term “fair” was derived from trading activities among foreign merchants. The fair was perceived as beneficial to the community as “the fairs gave rural families an opportunity to see first-hand the latest agricultural techniques, equipment, crops and livestock” (Reed & Rodgers, 2009).

Among the kinds of popular fairs in the United States is the state fair. A state fair is an annual state event, usually held in late summer or early fall, to celebrate the state’s agricultural traditions, through exhibitions of livestock and farm products (Gaskell, 2000). In addition, it is one of the few events at which rural people gather in large

numbers to sightsee or display new products, processes, and ideas (Gaskell, 2000). The state fair is an important state social event; people attend a yearly town meeting, as well as educational exhibitions and entertainment activities.

Hospitality and tourism-related research on state fairs, however, provides an inadequate understanding among scholars and practitioners due to insufficient literature. Prior research on the state fair has been conducted in multiple areas such as: medical cancer screening in a state fair setting (Rogers, Goodson, Dietz, & Okuyemi, 2016), veterinary livestock disease at the state fair (Thunes & Carpenter, 2007), memory (Nelson, 2009), and history (Pratt & Marling, 1993; Warner-Ward, 1953). As food is an important element at state fairs (Iowa State Fair, 2016), scholars have emphasized the nutritional content of the food at the fair. This nutritional information is accessible to fairgoers from mobile phones (Litchfield, Martin, & Schultz, 2015). Additionally, since

