

# CULINARY COMMUNICATION PRACTICES: THE ROLE OF RETAIL SPACES IN PRODUCING FIELD- SPECIFIC CULTURAL CAPITAL

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## ABSTRACT

*Purpose: This chapter explores the practices underpinning the production of field-specific cultural capital at festivals, understood here as retail spaces that gather a plethora of distinct market actors.*

*Methodology/Approach: This research presents evidence from an ethnographic study employing an interpretative paradigm and multiple data collection processes. The empirical research has been undertaken in the context of food festivals associated with the foodie taste regime.*

*Findings: Three categories of practices that play a role in the production of field-specific cultural capital, namely representational, exchange, and experiential practices, are presented.*

*Practical Implications: Our chapter provides recommendations for food festival organizers and participants who need to improve their practices when facing challenges such as increasing international competition and costs or declining sponsorship.*

*Research Limitations/Implications: This chapter contributes to the growing body of field-level market analysis by showing how practices enabled by complex retail spaces contribute to the production of field-specific cultural capital. However, this chapter is limited by its focus on food festivals.*

*Originality/Value of the Paper: This chapter theorizes how practices enable the acceleration and diversification of field-specific capital exchange, as well as its integration with other forms of capital.*

*Keywords: Cultural capital; festivals; foodie; practice theory; retail*

## INTRODUCTION

Festivals represent a respite from the mundane world which offers opportunities to amplify moments of play and disinhibition (Bradford & Sherry, 2015). They bring together consumers, entertainers, and producers in an environment that stimulates multiple interactions amidst a general atmosphere of curiosity, exploration, and entertainment (Kim, Suh, & Eves, 2010; Mason & Paggiaro, 2012). Recent market reports show that the festival market is experiencing a series of challenges such as increasing international competition, increasing performers' fees, declining sponsorship, increasing production costs, and changing safety legislation (IQ Magazine, 2016). Yet contemporary festivals are multiplying proportionally with their growing popularity, featuring a broad diversity of consumers.

Literature in consumer research has explored the festival consumptionscape, with a focus on its role for community building, ~~identity experimentation and play~~ (e.g., Goulding, Shankar, & Elliott, 2001; Kimura & Belk, 2005; Maclaran & Brown, 2005; McAlexander, Schouten, & Koenig, 2002). Some studies have acknowledged the role that festivals have in enabling the development of cultural capital (Bradford & Sherry, 2015; Maclaran & Brown, 2005). However, less is known about the mechanisms and practices through which festivals support the production and exchange of field-specific cultural capital, although these insights shed light on the learning processes taking place in retail spaces. Exploring this research topic is furthermore relevant for festival organizers who want to design events that provide not only opportunities for physical interaction between different actors, but platforms that support learning and engagement. Our chapter addresses this gap and draws on studies concerned with the nature of markets and their practices (e.g., Araujo, Finch, & Kjellberg, 2010; Kjellberg & Helgesson, 2006, 2007; Lindeman, 2012), to analyze the practices of various festival actors, such as consumers, presenters, and producers. We find and present three categories of practices that play a role in the production of field-specific cultural capital, namely representational, exchange, and experiential practices and discuss their implications for the taste regime that they are associated with. Specifically, we explain how these practices enable the acceleration and diversification of field-specific capital exchange, as well as its integration with other forms of capital.

Our chapter contributes to literature field-level market analysis (e.g., Dolbec, 2014; Giesler, 2012; Scaraboto & Fischer, 2013) by extending our understanding of how field-specific capital is produced.

## FESTIVALS AS BUNDLES OF PRACTICES

Most festivals gather actors representing various product categories who express their identities and communicate with the outside world within the space of the **event** (Quinn, 2006). They also offer opportunities for experimentation with one's identity (Merkel, 2015), in terms of engaging in unregulated (e.g., over-drinking or over-eating) or atypical (eating a very eccentric or expensive dish) forms of behavior. Additionally, food festivals represent contexts where visitors part take in a hedonic experience while experimenting with different flavors, pleasant environments, and evocative interactions (Organ, Koenig-Lewis, Palmer, & Probert, 2015). Hence, through such opportunities for play and disinhibition, consumers are given the chance to accumulate and expand their knowledge about food practices, products, and producers (e.g., by attending cooking demonstrations or by trying new products).



Consumer research has linked such knowledge acquisition through interaction to the development of consumers' cultural capital (Arsel & Thompson, 2011; Holt, 1998; Seregina & Schouten, 2017; Tapp & Warren, 2010). Bourdieu (1977) explains that individuals pursue strategies that are in conformity with their goals by investing and competing for capital. This is achieved through practices, defined by ~~(Schatzki, 2001, p. 12)~~ as embodied, materially enabled sets of human activities organized around shared practical understandings. Building on these premises, consumer studies have established that practices may serve as a reason for status claim through both the symbolic meanings assigned to consumption objects exchanged, as well as their performative nature (Holt, 1998). Therefore, consumption-related practices are shaped by and shape the production of capital. A view of markets as constituted by practice enables the exploration of consumption as an ongoing accomplishment included in the intersection of multiple practices and social relations in everyday life (Halkier & Jensen, 2011). Investigating food festivals as bundles of practice therefore allows us to gain valuable insight into how cultural capital is produced.



## RETAIL SPACES AND CULTURAL CAPITAL

Previous studies have shown that retail spaces may facilitate the production of cultural capital (Arnould, 2005; Creighton, 1992; Haytko & Baker, 2004). Bourdieu (1986) defines cultural capital as assets in the form of one's talents, knowledge, skills and intellect (embodied state), cultural goods (objectified state), and educational qualifications (institutionalized state). Drawing on Bourdieu's work, extant consumer culture theory studies (Arsel & Bean, 2012; Arsel & Thompson, 2011; Holt, 1997; Ulver, Bertilsson, Klasson, Egan-Wyer, & Johansson, 2013) have



substantiated that field-specific cultural capital is a socially consequential currency within fields of consumption that can be mobilized in the status games associated ~~with the field and not in others~~. Retail spaces allow consumers to accumulate field-specific capital through interactions with representations and actors of the same consumption field (Creighton, 1992; Yamauchi & Hiramoto, 2016). Festivals are one of the few retail opportunities where a plethora of distinct actors ~~within a consumption~~ field gather and interact in the same physical space. They bring together consumers, presenters, and producers in an environment that stimulates multiple interactions within a general atmosphere of curiosity, exploration, and entertainment (Kim et al., 2010; Mason & Paggiaro, 2012). Some festivals target specific communities (e.g., the London Halal Food Festival in the UK), others focus on distinct product ~~category~~ (e.g., the strawberry festivals around the United States) and others are ~~supporting~~ a taste regime or an aesthetic (foodie festivals, organic food festivals). In this chapter, we propose that festivals provide a unique setting for the exploration of the accumulation, display, and exchange of cultural capital. Consumers, producers and presenters alike are given the opportunity to display (e.g., producers provide demonstrations, consumers attend competitions), accumulate or expand (e.g., all actors may attend cooking demonstrations or try new products) and exchange (e.g., presenters share recipes with other actors, consumers share their experiences with traders) knowledge about food practices, products, and producers.

~~Additionally,~~ previous studies have documented that food festivals ~~have a liminal character (Bakhtin, 1984) and~~ represent a respite from the mundane world which offers opportunities for amplification of moments of play and disinhibition (Bradford & Sherry, 2015). However, little is known about ~~such~~ retail spaces enable the production of cultural capital.

## THE FOODIE CONSUMPTION FIELD AND ITS FIELD-SPECIFIC CAPITAL

Consumption fields gather consumers with shared consumption-oriented interests (Ulver et al., 2013, p. 312). The consumption field explored in this chapter encompasses individuals who consider food a topic of serious aesthetic consideration, deliberation, and appreciation. They are (self-)described as “foodies” and they derive satisfaction from ~~being food~~ ~~producers~~ (cooking, growing, gifting, or selling food products), expressing their political views through food purchases or exploring distinct cultures through readings about their culinary traditions (Baumann & Johnston, 2010, pp. XVII–XVIII). The foodie consumption field includes different product categories and industries (food, cooking utensils, books, cooking classes, etc.) ~~and~~ consists of several types of actors who share a common interest and contribute to/draw from similar sources of refinement material (Ulver et al., 2013). The foodie taste regime has developed as a clear deviant standpoint from two main aesthetics of cuisine, namely fast-food and gourmet. Baumann ~~and~~ Johnston explain how the underpinnings of the foodie discourse

are the result of a dynamic interplay between dialectical ideologies of democratic inclusivity and cultural distinction (Baumann & Johnston, 2010; Johnston & Baumann, 2007). As the foodie consumption field is becoming more popular, participants engage in a quest for field-specific capital, conceptualized under the term “culinary capital” by Naccarato and Lebesco (2012). In its embodied state, culinary capital encompasses knowledge and skills to engage with representations of the foodie consumption field. Cultural goods such as cooking books and utensils, festival merchandise, gifts, and tokens from different restaurants are examples of culinary capital in its objectified state. Qualifications that certify the embodied cultural capital such as credentials of being a famous chef, a food/drinks critic, having an editorial position at a food magazine, hosting a food show, or giving cooking lessons are a form of institutionalized culinary capital. The latter also encompasses forms of social capital (Bourdieu, 1986) in the form of relationships, networks, and organizational affiliations. These forms of capital are becoming more attainable as the foodie regime is becoming more popular. Its prevalence is evidenced through presence in the media discourse, the increasing number of products and experiences targeting “foodies,” and the rise of festivals dedicated to the latter (Yeoman & Meethan, 2015). Indeed, foodie festivals are one of the few opportunities where actors of the foodie consumption field gather and interact in the same physical space.

While previous studies have discussed the reasons for which consumers take part in festivals associated with the foodie taste regime (e.g., Drapeau, 2012) and the long term cultural, economic, and social effects of food festivals (e.g., Organ et al., 2015), the role of foodie festivals in the production of culinary capital has not yet been analyzed.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND EMPIRICAL CONTEXT

The methodology used in this study is that of an ethnography employing an interpretative paradigm and multiple data collection processes (Venkatesh, Crockett, Cross, & Chen, 2017).

### *Context*

We analyze the context of an established multi-sited festival taking place annually in the UK. Run as a family business, 10 summer festivals (May–September) and two Christmas festivals are organized in various locations around the UK with a footfall of over 24,000 people attending each festival (company website, 2012). The events reunite a variety of producers (small food and drinks entrepreneurs, national brands proven on the food market, companies of different sizes selling products that do not formally belong to the food consumption field, e.g., furniture or teeth whitening products), presenters (chefs, sommeliers, cake decorators who are usually either popular television stars, e.g., winners of competitions such

as the Big British Bake Off or chefs from local restaurants). Some travel and attend all the events, while others only take part in the festivals that are local to them. Visitors are usually local. Their characteristics mirror those of their context (e.g., more cultural diversity around the participants at the events in London, more tourists attending the event in Edinburgh which takes place in the same time with the Fringe festival, etc.). The festivals take place in central locations of affluent cities and the entrance fees range from £10 to £14 per day, with a festival program costing £5. There are some important class similarities to be noted around festival participants. Overwhelmingly, they are part of a white middle class and dispose of the necessary resources to support their participation to the foodie taste regime. While not the focus of our investigation, class and privilege were considered when analyzing the context.

### *Fieldwork*

A bi-gender team (Belk, Wallendorf, & Sherry, 1989) conducted ethnographic fieldwork at nine festivals in various locations in the UK – two festivals in Oxford, three festivals in London, one in Birmingham, Brighton, Bristol, and Edinburgh) between August 2016 and September 2017. The prolonged immersion allowed us to gain a detailed and nuanced understanding of the cultural worlds of the festival actors (Belk, Fischer, & Kozinets, 2012, p. 65). Reflecting the versatile nature of how festivals are usually organized (Belk et al., 2012; Hall & Sharples, 2008), our activities and forms of engagement with the actors and artefacts of the festivals varied extensively from one event to the other. Some of these activities were: helping the organizers set-up the physical elements of the festival (e.g., building the structures of the theaters for the cooking demonstrations, displaying the outdoor banners signaling the area of the festival), working with traders (selling, helping them decorate their stalls, promoting their products in the festival area), helping presenters prepare their theaters for demonstrations, welcoming visitors to the festival, handing tickets, programs, etc. We also conducted recorded observational interviews (four with organizers, six with presenters, 33 with visitors, and 30 with traders), attended food and drinks demonstrations, took photos and documented our learnings and ad hoc interviews through fieldnotes and recorded memos. The composition of our interview sample mirrored the characteristics of the festival actors. Most interviews with visitors included couples or small groups, ~~most interviewed presenters were men~~. We purposely interviewed and observed producers and consumers found in different areas of the festival (e.g., market area, street food area, demonstration theaters) and presenters/producers representing a wide variety of goods or services (e.g., representatives of charities, chefs, deli, hot food, alcohol producers), etc. Upon transcription, the aggregated data (interviews, memos, observations, post-event reflections) yielded over 700 singled-spaced pages of text.

### *Data Analysis Procedures*

Transcribed data was imported into a qualitative software package. The first stage of coding the data consisted of finding descriptive themes illustrating practices, such as selling, demonstrating, eating, drinking, walking, resting. Second, the

identified practices were grouped into exchange, representational or normalizing, following Kjellberg and Helgesson's (2006) model. Third, in line with the objective of this chapter, namely to illustrate how festivals enable the production of field-specific capital, practices that were considered non-specific were removed. As the data analysis progressed, new types and categories of practices with implications for culinary capital accumulation, display, and exchange emerged. These categories were refined while consulting the literature on market practices, cultural capital, and experiential consumption. Conceptually ordered displays (Miles & Huberman, 1994, pp. 127–142) were perused during the iterative data analysis process.

## FINDINGS

In this section we elaborate on three categories of practices that illustrate how festivals enable the production of culinary capital, as identified in our data: representational, exchange, and experiential (Table 1).

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### *Representational Practices*

The two representational practices that depict the foodies taste regime during the festivals, as evidenced in our data, are simplifying and translating. The theme of simplifying the representations of what it means to be a foodie is

**Table 1.** Market Practices and Forms of Culinary Capital Exchanged at Food Festivals.

Market Practices/Main Initiators	Forms of Culinary Capital
Representational practices Initiated by producers and presenters – Simplifying – Translating	Skills (e.g., consumers are taught how to integrate foodie practices in their day to day life). Knowledge (e.g., consumers are taught how to recognize exotic flavors).
Exchange practices initiated by producers and consumers: – Pacing – Discounting/bargaining – Matching	Skills (e.g., consumers are taught how to match different foodie products). Knowledge (e.g., producers and consumers learn about the other's expectations through bargaining). Objectified culinary capital (e.g., festival merchandise).
Experiential practices initiated by presenters and producers: – Demonstrating/experimenting – Storytelling	Skills (e.g., consumers are shown how to prepare different dishes and taught how to assess the quality of foodie product through their senses). Knowledge (e.g., presenters and producers share/learn about others' success stories during demonstrations). Objectified capital in the form of books written by/photographs with presenters and producers.

prevalent in producers and presenters' practices. For example, in multiple cooking demonstrations, chefs discuss about the simplicity of cooking and teach consumers (and other festival actors) how to prepare straightforward recipes. Doing this, they explain and show how daily cooking routines may be adapted with little effort to incorporate foodie practices (e.g., selecting organic or exotic ingredients). They emphasize that cooking is an enjoyable practice that can be learned through a simple trial and error process (talking while preparing "French-trimmed" roasted lamb chops and flower-shaped organic courgette with saffron):

I've got a really good tip about cooking lamb. Do you want to hear it? First, put it in the oven, when you take it out, cut into it and it's not cooked, put it back in the oven! That's literally all that it gets. Food shouldn't be stressful, food should be fun and food should be all about enjoying yourself, making tasty food. (Excerpt from a cooking demonstration, Oxford, 2017)

Translating refers to the practice of explaining a product, behavior, etc., that is new to other festival actors. For example, several producers offered ethnic or "exotic" foods. Their selling technique include a translation of the original ingredients and meanings of those products as illustrated in the following fieldnote:

Andrew asks everyone to try the sauces. No passer-by is excused. Once a visitor tried it, he asks them what they think about it. Then, he encourages a conversation about the ingredients people can identify. Normally they fail. He then describes in words what Orange Habanero and chilies should taste like and how they are interpreted in the Nigerian cuisine. He is doing more than explaining and introducing, he is translating. (Excerpt from a memo recorded after working at the stall of a trader selling Nigerian marinade sauce, London, 2017)

These practices enable initiators (usually producers and presenters) to display their extant culinary capital. Additionally, by simplifying and translating what it means to be and act as a foodie, presenters and producers equip foodie festival participants with the culinary capital necessary to integrate foodie-specific practices in their daily routine.

### *Exchange Practices*

Exchange practices involved in performing individual transactions at festivals are initiated by either producers or consumers. Such practices include: pacing, discounting/bargaining, and matching.

Consumers use pacing ~~different~~ strategies for adapting their decision making to the context of the festival: some reported that they first check all the stalls and only afterwards make a purchase, others come to the festival on different days and separate the act of experiencing the festival from the act of purchasing goods for later consumption.

The practices of discounting and bargaining are often aligned with such pacing practices. Discounts are offered to encourage consumers to buy larger quantities. Significantly more substantial discounts are normally offered in the last day of the festival. Bargaining practices are often initiated by consumers in addition to or alongside discounts. Producers sometimes welcome negotiations with consumers because they represent opportunities to learn about the latter's expectations.



Another form of exchange practice used by producers to stimulate sales is matching. This practice is highly dependent on producers' skills to find a good match for their products next to their stall. As illustrated in the quote below, by encouraging participants to pair products from different stalls, vendors and traders teach consumers how to combine foodie offerings and support other producers' businesses.

We just thought, when people were going to buy their oysters, we would just say, come and have a glass of wine. Our white and our sparkling would be a perfect match to that, and obviously the guys there saw the benefit as well. It benefits everybody really. So, people would come and have a glass of wine here and we'd go, try some of those oysters. (Quote from an interview with the vendor at a wine stall, London, 2017)

These exchange practices provide festival participants with the opportunity to accumulate and exchange diverse forms of knowledge while making spontaneous decisions. Additionally, most of these practices (e.g., bargaining, matching) enable consumers to learn how to relate different foodie products to each other and how to find foodie products in other retail spaces. For example, some participants mentioned that they would often try to find products comparable with those that they discovered at a food festival in the supermarkets or at their local markets. Others have mentioned planning on trying new food and drink pairings following a wine or beer tasting session. Thus, the forms of embodied culinary capital enabled through exchange practices at the festivals allow participants to diversify their understanding of the foodie taste regime and are transferable to future exchange situations within the foodie consumption field.

### *Experiential Practices*

Producers, presenters, and consumers co-create experiences (Carù & Cova, 2003) through practices such as demonstrating/experimenting (e.g., partaking in cooking demonstrations in dedicated theaters, food sampling, or micro-demonstrations at individual stalls) and storytelling (e.g., traders sharing the background of their businesses or the processes they went through to arrive to a recipe). These practices allow festival actors to display their capital (i.e., presenters mention their credentials during demonstrations, traders display their expertise when presenting their products, consumers show their knowledge through the questions that they ask), but also accumulate and exchange new forms of capital through an accelerated learning process that engages different senses (smells, sounds, sight, and touch). Indeed, these practices are supporting what (Maciel & Wallendorf, 2005) termed "a complex system of evaluation that involves binding together bodily senses with institutionally provided discourses." Vendors and traders often use props to accelerate interactions, to support their sales pitch or to persuade visitors to engage. Numerous cooking/baking demonstrations are available and open to all registered visitors. These experiences are conceived (as explained by the organizers) and perceived (as evidence in interviews with visitors) as educational. Visitors acknowledge that the format of the festival allows them to learn during multiple demonstrations and does not require previous culinary capital, thus being "open to everyone":

Yeah, yeah, so it's actually like, you learn as well, so if you attended all of these things, you would learn about wine making or cider making or anything really, so it has the educational side as well. (...) Even if you are just a little bit interested in food, so you can just see and okay if it's not for you, then you can leave and go to any other demonstration.

Therefore, experiential practices enable the accumulation of diverse forms of culinary capital, over a brief period, without assuming, or expecting pre-existing knowledge and skills. The accelerated nature of the demonstrations and producer–consumer interactions determines visitors to welcome them with enthusiasm; they are often inquisitive (e.g., asking questions, taking notes, etc.) as they perceive the scarcity of these practices.

## DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Our findings illustrate three categories of practices that enable the production of culinary capital in the context of food festivals. First, representational practices, which entail simplifying and translating, facilitate the integration of new forms of culinary capital with existent skills and knowledge. These practices often aim to reduce the gap between presenters/producers and consumers. Second, by means of exchange practices, such as pacing, matching or bargaining, consumers, producers, and presenters co-develop and diversify the meanings and practice that are associated with being and becoming a foodie. Third, through experimental practices, namely demonstrating/experimenting and storytelling, the transfer of culinary capital is being accelerated. Producers and presenters use these practices to speed-up consumers' learning process and to provide an interactive, sensorial introduction to what it means to be a foodie. Several practices have an implicit or even explicit normative nature (Kjellberg & Helgesson, 2007) and teach festival actors what are the shared meaning and values needed to produce and reproduce a foodie identity. Therefore, through the acceleration, diversification and integration of culinary capital, food festivals create linkages between the festival and the objects, doings and meanings characteristic of the foodie taste regime (Arsel & Bean, 2012).

Our chapter extends knowledge of field-level market dynamics by providing new insights about the practices that support the production of field-specific capital. We extend Maciel and Wallendorf's (2016) conceptualization of the constitution of consumer cultural competence in taste centered consumption fields. While their theorizing focuses on inter-consumer collaborative practices within communities of practice, our work accounts for the practices that enable the production of cultural capital when producers and consumers meet within retail contexts. Yamauchi and Hiramoto (2016) also explore the interaction between producers invested with institutional capital and consumers. Their work illustrates how consumers learn while engaging in interactions with producers in a permanent consumption space. Adding to their findings, our chapter shows how different actors of a consumption field produce cultural capital through their interaction.

Our chapter has practical implications relevant for food festival organizers and participants who want to improve their practices when facing challenges such as increasing international competition and costs or declining sponsorship. Our

chapter shows how festivals can maintain their relevance by providing consumers with opportunities to develop forms of capital that are useful beyond the realm of the retail space. While festivals represent opportunities for escapism and exploration, our chapter underlines their role as learning platforms contributing to the development of consumption fields. This is particularly relevant given the upraise of small, niched festivals that are not intrinsically related to a taste regime and that have significantly shorter life cycles than the more established events (ParcelHero, 2016). As consumers find themselves on a quest for exploratory experiences (Weinberger, Zavisca, & Silva, 2017), festival organizers need to ensure that the relevance of the consumption opportunities that they provide goes beyond the festival consumptionscape.

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## **AUTHOR QUERIES**

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