Pubs Crawls and Pub Crawlers: A Systematic Literature Review and Consumer Behaviour Analysis

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Abstract

Pub crawls are a phenomenon which are part of the hospitality sector and contribute to consumer experiences within the Night Time Economy. We show the current state of knowledge in this immature field via a Systematic Literature Review methodology. Building on this we provide a novel theoretical typology of pub crawl classification based on levels of organisation, supervision/accompaniment and geography. Highlighting the processional nature of pub crawls, where consumers move through multiple individual contexts and as a spatially embedded hospitality experience, we delineate the experience into antecedents, processes and outcomes. Our analyses lay foundations for further fine-grained theorisation. We examine the potential and strategic roles of hospitality managers tasked with pub crawl management and development. Finally we highlight key conceptual and empirical gaps for future research.

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"Groups in fancy dress lurching obliviously through rush-hour traffic. Ill-considered, al-fresco toilet stops. A lone straggler swaying towards the neon oasis of a takeaway." Flynn (2023)

1.0 Introduction and Background

The Oxford English Dictionary defines a pub crawl as "a visit to a succession of pubs with drinks at each one" while the Cambridge English Dictionary defines pub crawls as "a visit to several pubs, one after the other, having a drink or drinks at each one; bar hop". Thus pub crawlers move between commercial drinking retailing spaces (such as pubs, bars and nightclubs) aiming to consume alcohol in each of these spaces. Pub crawls can be organic and personally developed by the pub crawlers themselves as described by Flynn (2023) through to large and organised events, such as beer crawls in youth tourism hotspots (e.g. Tutenges 2012; 2015) and crawls run by companies such as Carnage UK.

Pub crawls are common but not everyday occurrences and even a brief examination of the literature suggests that they are often associated with Risky Single Occasion Drinking (RSOD) and that media coverage shows many negative features such as binge drinking, violence and antisocial behaviour (e.g. Hill, 2009; Gross, 2015; Flynn, 2023; Maclure, 2023). There is little evidence of exactly how negatively impactful pub crawls may be although one large pub crawl in the USA was said to cost $111,000 in police department overtime with its 25,000 participants (Strunsky, 2016).

However other work also hints to the potential positives of pub crawls, as drawing visitors to to particular areas (such as the Transpennine Ale Trail), or out of standard busy periods such as winter or during the week (Goulding and Pomfret, 2022) and to allow collaboration between different drinking establishments (Alonso et al, 2017). For this reason pub crawls support the night time economy (NTE) in various ways (Bell, 2008; Zmyslony and Pawlusiński, 2020) and with, for example, pubs in the UK declining in numbers (50 pubs vanish a month, Weller, 2024) being included in pub crawls may be a way to raise income and potentially slow this decline. Pub survival has been noted as pubs are important in facilitating community cohesion and wellbeing in local communities (Cabras and Mount, 2017) as well as being the hub of social life as well as contributing to the economy (Andrews and Turner, 2012).

Knowing whether pub crawls would be a potential market to expand, or how and when they should be controlled would be useful for pubs/bars. To do this we need to know what specifically pub crawlers do on pub crawls, how they behave and what pub crawls look like. This paper presents a systematic literature review of peer-reviewed and grey literature on pub crawls, synthesising available evidence to generate an integrated understanding of their characteristics, functions, impacts, and strategic potential. In line with Dietze et al. (2017), we address the need to examine both event-level dynamics and individual behaviours. Drawing also on Hughes et al. (2011), we foreground the importance of environmental context between venues in shaping alcohol consumption practices and associated outcomes.

In our systematic literature review (SLR), we show that the pub crawl literature is immature and hence we seek to synthesise the knowledge that is available, identify gaps and support early theory development (Frank and Hatak, 2014). Hence, we contribute to the literature in the following ways. Firstly, we contribute by synthesising the extant literature, from across dispersed empirical and conceptual work, which has never been attempted before, conceptually presenting it as a processional movement through multiple individual contexts and as a spatially embedded hospitality experience. Second, we present a novel theoretical typology of pub crawl classification, based on our analysis, highlighting conceptual gaps, in particular related to organic pub crawls, and laying the groundwork for more fine-grained theorisation. Thirdly we provide, based on our processional movement model, key considerations and strategic implications for hospitality practitioners managing pub crawls or considering them as part of their strategy while balancing economic opportunity with social responsibility and venue management. In doing so we highlight pub crawls as an underutilised lens through which to explore the intersection of alcohol-related leisure, hospitality strategy, and servicescape design. Finally, we contribute, via the conceptual gaps we have highlighted, a range of future research directions.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows. First, we present the SLR methods followed by a descriptive analysis of the results and present our novel theoretical typology of pub crawl classification. This is followed by our consumer behaviour analysis highlighting a processional movement model approach. Finally building on our discussion we present key areas for hospitality management consideration followed by future research directions.

2.0 Methods

The study of pub crawls is an emerging and underdeveloped field, rather than being mature where the relevant literature is sparse, conceptually fragmented and distributed widely across different disciplines and sources. We therefore align with Frank and Hatak (2014) that in this instance the aim of our Systematic Literature Review (SLR) is to synthesize foundational knowledge, identify conceptual gaps, and support the early stages of theory development rather than to perform exhaustive empirical aggregation.

To ensure transparency we followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Review and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) framework (www/prisma-statement.org). We developed our search terms by discussion between co authors who had experience in this area and liaison with our university librarian. The search terms were tested and showed that there are many synonyms for pub crawl and we developed a single search string to include the most common of these. We used the Boolean operator, OR and appropriate truncations (*) to allow for alternative US/UK spellings (Page et al., 2020). Our final search string was:

"pub crawl" OR "bar tour" OR "pub tour" OR "bar crawl" OR "bar hopping" OR "bar hop" OR "beer crawl" OR "Ale tour" OR "Ale trail" OR "Assize of Ale" OR "tipple trek" OR "drink expedition" OR "tavern tour" OR "party pilgrimage" OR "alcohol odyssey" OR "Drinking tour"

Following prior publications we used four interdisciplinary databases for our search for both academic and trade publications: Scopus, Web of Science, EBSCO and Ovid (Bullock et al, 2018; Glińska and Siemieniako, 2018; Gusenbauer and Haddaway, 2020). We utilised databases that had interdisciplinary coverage (Carrera-Rivera et al, 2022) across a range of

social sciences and science/medical based publications. The search took place (with no time limits) on the 27th May 2025 through Covidence (2025). Following similar protocols (e.g. Szablewska and Kubacki, 2023) after duplicate removal 549 publications remained. Two of the authors applied our inclusion criteria to the titles/abstract (insight into pub crawl consumers/focused predominantly on pubs crawls, English language) and excluded some false positives (e.g. US legal system (the 'bar'), computer systems (progress bar) and space debris (V-bar hopping)). We also excluded papers focused on brewery and/or museum tourism as we could not guarantee people were actually drinking and did not align with the definitions of pubs crawls included in the introduction. Any conflicts were resolved by consensus via discussions online or in person. With 194 papers remaining, two authors completed full text analysis using the same criteria with 56 papers remaining and removing papers where full text was not available, the central focus was not pub crawls and brewery focused papers as above.

Additionally we used citation tracking (forward/backward searching) to examine reference lists and citations. 20 of the remaining articles were journal articles and were assessed to locate additional relevant articles and maximise the search coverage (Szablewska & Kubacki, 2023). We entered the doi of the papers into Citation Chaser (developed by Haddaway et al, 2022) and found 589 articles through the backward search and 413 papers through the forward search. We removed duplicates and subjected the titles/abstracts/full texts to the same exclusion criteria resulting in 7 articles retained. This resulted in a total of 65 papers for the systematic review which aligns with suggestions by Paul and Criado (2020) in terms of the numbers of papers needed to provide a robust foundation for a meaning synthesis. Our systematic review data collection is summarised in Figure 1.

Figure 1 PRISMA flow diagram of data collection
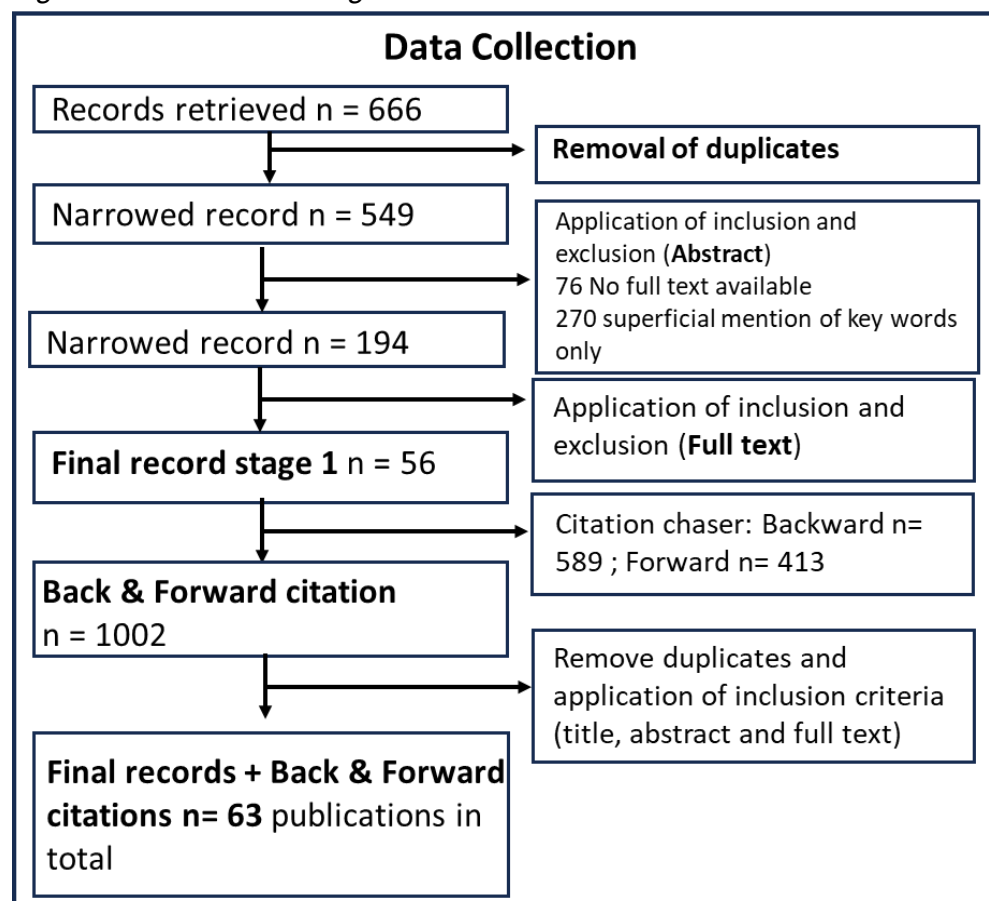
3.0 Descriptive analysis

In this section, we provide a descriptive analysis of the 63 articles (see full list in Table S1 - Supplementary Materials). Firstly we segment the articles into academic (26) and trade journals/business magazines (37), with the former providing analysis of the phenomena versus the later providing more commentary on pub crawls in action. The earliest paper in either category is from 1997 and there are frequent years without any relevant publications up to and including 2025 (see Figure 2). Overall both trade and academic publications increased marginally from 2012, reducing again from 2017 although at no point there is intensive investigation of the phenomena and it is clear that this behaviour remains relatively under researched again highlighting the timeliness of a review to highlight conceptual gaps and provide future research directions.

For both types of articles there is work across a number of geographical areas although the focus of the work is from English speaking countries (especially given our inclusion criteria) where there is traditionally a high level of alcohol consumption (WHO, 2024)(see Table 1). Some areas are focused on due to their particular connection to youth tourism or a particular author's interest (for example the Sunny Beach area of Bulgaria (Tutenges 2012; 2015)).

Figure 2 - Number of publications p.a. (trade and academic) 1997 to 2025
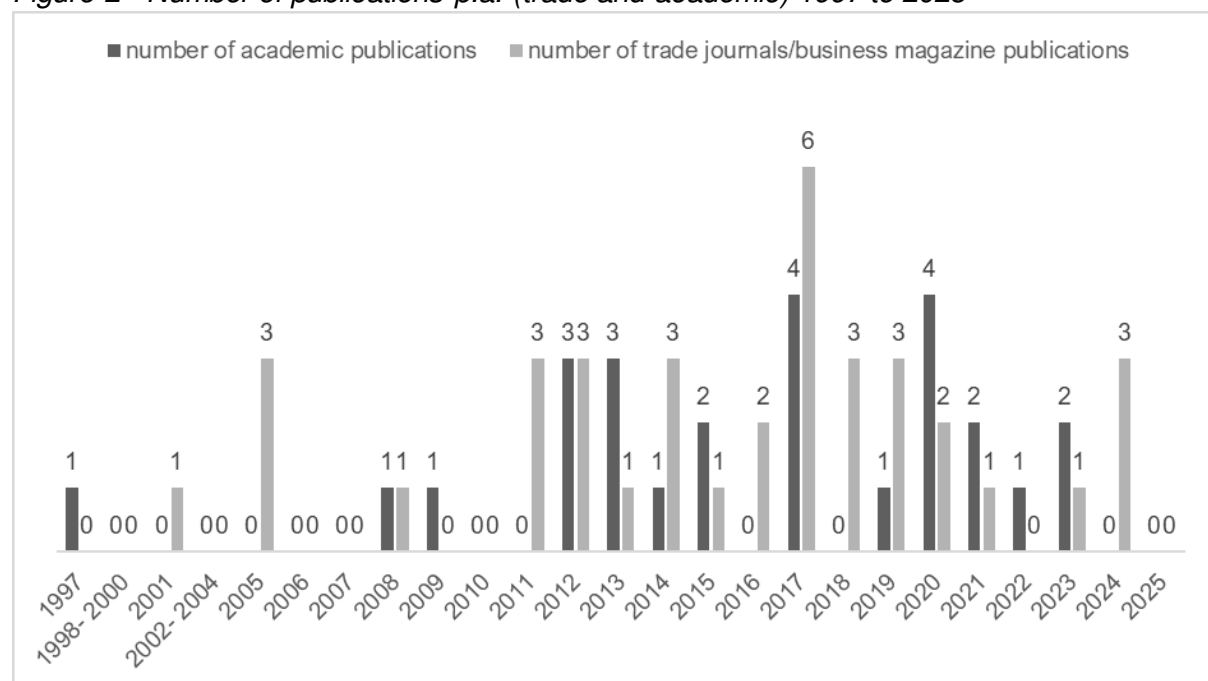
In terms of outlets, for the academic outputs, 19 are in journals, 4 are chapters and 3 are conference publications. For the 19 journal outputs the largest number (10) are situated in journals related to drugs or alcohol. For trade/magazine outputs 14 come from the Morning Advertiser, the main trade magazine for the UK pub industry. The further 23 trade/magazine outputs have been published across a range of outlets with no common themes.

A range of different methods have been used. Secondary data analysis (4) was used in studies assessing pub crawl route options. Quantitative surveys have also been prevalent (7)

to record drinking event facts and drinking levels. Qualitative analyses (7) are also common with interviews, observations and ethnography having been used. Finally, mixed method approaches using surveying alongside physiological measures of alcohol levels (e.g. transdermal alcohol sensors) (3), mixed quantitative and qualitative approaches (1) and mixed qualitative approaches (3) have also been used. Finally, one was a conceptual paper.

Most papers have weak or no theoretical underpinnings with only four studies having a base framework or theory. These included 'crowd theory' (Tutenges, 2015), 'rhythm analysis' (Thurnell-Read, 2021) and 'stakeholder theory' (Duarte Alonso, 2017). While a few authors have published more than one paper on pub crawls (e.g. Sébastien Tutenges and Thomas Thurnell-Read) most outputs have been created by a wide range of different unconnected authors.

Table 1: Country of study and type of publication (Academic or Trade Journal)

	Academic Journal	Trade Journal	Total
UK	6	18	24
USA	4	15	19
Canada	2	1	3
Australia	4		4
Japan	2		2
Bulgaria	2		2
Switzerland	1		1
Ireland		1	1
Portugal	1		1
Sweden		1	1
New Zealand	1		1
France	1		1
Cyprus	1		1
China	1		1
n/a, not mentioned or worldwide		1	1

4.0 Consumer Behaviour Analysis

Our analysis, below, first examined the various definitions and characteristics of pub crawls to understand the variations between different types and styles of pub crawls. We then analysed the literature using a process framework of antecedents (prior to the crawl), processes on the crawl and outcomes (after the crawl analysis) in a similar manner to Vichiengior et al (2019).

4.1 Defining pub crawls and their characteristics

While crawl was the most common term used for this type of behaviour the terms krawl, walks, hops, trails, tours and expeditions were also used. Pub crawls fell into two organisation categories. Some pub crawls were organised by the individuals on them who design the route and pubs to be visited (sometimes with the help of an App or website). The main focus of research has however been on pub crawls where they are organised by an external body (either accompanied or not). Pubs crawls might be organised by local CAMRA (Campaign for Real Ale) or SIBA (Society of Independent Brewers) groups (Coleman, 2017a), as part of conferences or workplace events (e.g. Emmons, 2016), by independent companies promoting a particular area (likely to be self-directed) (Thurnell-Read, 2021) and tourism companies in holiday resorts (likely to be accompanied) (Tutenges, 2012; 2015; Sönmez et al, 2013).

In terms of temporal variation, length was not always discussed but where it was highlighted there was significant variation. A number of pub crawls were on one day or an evening with start times generally noted to be early evening with tours lasting a number of hours and crawls lasting up to 24 hours over the course of a day (for example Carnage UK pub crawls reported by Quigg, 2013). Organised crawls were more temporally restricted and often available on one or a couple of days only (sometimes due to a particular theme). For example, the SantaCon crawl reported by Dockterman (2014) and the Easter pub crawl reported by Coleman (2017b). Trails were also sometimes time restricted but were generally available over a particular week or month or across a number of months, or in some cases available indefinitely, especially if not accompanied by a guide (for example the West Somerset Railway Rail Ale Trail (Coleman 2017a)). Some non-accompanied trails were also available any day, but were more popular on weekends (for example the Transpennine Ale Trail reported by Thurnell-Read, 2021). Sutton (2017) also notes how "the most successful trails [for pubs] encourage people to use pubs over a longer period of time, for example a week or a month - this has the double benefit of encouraging responsible consumption as well as promoting pubs beyond a single night".

Spatially, pub crawls also showed a lot of variability depending on mode of transport. If crawlers travelled by foot the expectation was that the venues would be in the same (high outlet density) area, city or town. Roberts (2013) notes that the main part of the night for their respondents involved having a drink in a number of different venues, normally within walking distance from each other, but with a short journey to get between them. Some pub crawl routes are spread over a mile or more, with longer distances being travelled using public transport. Where pub trails took place over a number of days, weeks, months the distances travelled could be extensive with, for example, the Pub2Pub expedition covering 30,000 miles, 22 countries and three continents (A'Court, 2017). Thurnell-Read describes pub crawls as 'trans-spatial phenomena' which is also clear from our review. For many respondents in Roberts (2013) study, short distances between outlets were important for practical reasons so that it was easy for groups to stay together, and especially for women, walking in high heels. Roberts (2013) also found that the "density of premises and their spatial proximity increase the likelihood of drinking to excess" (pp 584). Other authors, however, suggest that the switching between sitting, standing and walking between venues can "prevent inebriation reaching undesired levels" (Flynn, 2023).

The most popular travel mode for pub crawlers was by foot. This mode was described as active walking (Tutenges, 2015), but is also derived as "erratic..involving playful detours,

hesitations and pauses in movement and tracking back, especially once levels of intoxication increased" (Thurnell-Read, 2021: 329). Other modes of transport, both public and private that were noted, especially for ale trails, or crawls over more than a day included trains, buses, cars (with a designated driver) and taxis. An organised crawl noted a bar hopping VIP package that included door to door limousine travel between venues (Mass. Lawyers Weekly Staff, 2012).

In terms of the number of pubs or bars visited within a crawl, this very much depended on whether the crawl/trail was expected to last an evening, a day, a week or longer. The minimum number for it to be defined as a pub crawl appeared to be 2 while there appeared to be many crawls that took in between 4-9 establishments. For example when SantaCon came to Riverhead the route comprised nine venues (LIBN Staff, 2014). Where trails took place across regions or were available for extended time periods, there were often a number of pubs that could be visited, although it was not expected that most pub crawlers would visit all pubs. From the research it was also clear that the greater number of pubs/bars visited correlated with the number of drinks consumed and potential level of drunkenness (e.g. Dietze, 2017; Lambhart 2017).

Flynn (2023) states that "...the one essential ingredient beyond any particular beer, building, or food remains the same: your chosen company" highlighting the importance of who you pub crawl with. Pub crawlers normally join pub crawls with groups, friends or co-workers. The size and type (single sex or mixed; couples or single) of friendship groups differed significantly even within the same crawl. Some, like the Transpennine Ale Trail particularly attracts males, but each friendship group can differ as noted by Thurnell-Read (2021): "the size of groups varies…Groups of six or more, sometimes as large as twenty, consistent exclusively of men in their 20s, 30s or 40s. Smaller groups, often noticeably hanging back from the main throng on the platform, are formed of threes and fours, also invariably male, in their 40s and beyond" (pp 327/328). Quigg (2013) reported on mass student commercial pub crawls (charging a fee for attendance) that a third of participants were with friendship groups of one to five people, 43% with six to ten people and 24% with over 10 people. Some pub crawls like the Transpennine Ale Trail attract very different types of groups who can be differentiated by their style of dress (polo shirts versus checked shirts) and their choice of drinks (real ale versus lager) (Thurnell-Read, 2021). These different types of participants are important to highlight as research suggests that real ale enthusiast drinkers are considered unlikely to cause trouble and are more 'civilised' in their drinking behaviour (Thurnell-Read, 2017). While bad behaviour, or trouble on pub crawls is discussed briefly in a number of publications this is not always expanded on although one publication refers to "horrifying images from last year's New York City SantaCon are still fresh in the nation's mind: Eight well-marinated Yule fools, somewhat lacking in holiday spirit, brawling their way
through the streets of downtown Manhattan. The unfortunate Christmas clash, caught on various personal videos, lit up YouTube like an 80-foot Rockefeller Center spruce" (LIBN Staff, 2014) suggesting on this crawl, fighting seemed to be the issue.

For some pub crawls, single people are encouraged to join pub crawls to make friends especially on organised/accompanied crawls (Broughton, 2001). Adkin (2008) described pub crawls as being appropriate for expatriates looking to meet new friends or for tourists to discover new taverns. On accompanied and organised tours these friendship groups coalesce into "a throng…sharing both in and moving through space….an intensely social and

liberating experience" (Thurnell-Read, 2021; pp 329/330). As these groups join together single pub crawls can have hundreds if not thousands of crawlers with some mass commercial pub crawls having 600-1000 individuals (Quigg, 2013). Reporting on an upcoming St Patrick's Day New York Pub Crawl the International Business TImes suggested that as many as 12,000 people would take part (IB Times Staff Reporter, 2012). Researchers who have studied commercial pub crawls within tourist resorts also highlight the crawl leader as an important participant who leads the crawlers from venue to venue, organising games and competitions and could be seen to control and manipulate the crowd (Tutenges, 2015).

A small number of pub crawls include an explicit theme, such as Christmas sweaters, Disney and religion but many do not. Some organised pub crawls, especially those charging an attendance fee (for example the Shamrock Shuffle charged $20 for tickets (IB Staff Reporter, 2012)), include a t-shirt that would be worn on the pub crawl allowing pub crawlers to identify one another and to be seen as part of the group. Some pub trails also encourage participants to get a stamp at each venue with different numbers of stamps relating to a prize and a discussion point between pub crawlers (Lloyd, 2024).

Taking the above into consideration, we propose an initial novel theoretical typology of pub crawl classification (see Figure 3) as a contribution to the literature. This separates pub crawls based on level of formal organisation. For formally organised pub crawls, we separate crawls into those that are accompanied/guided versus those which are self-guided. Non-accompanied/unguided organised crawls and not formally organised "organic" tours are then classified by the time over which the crawl is completed. It is clear overall that formally organised, whether fully accompanied or self-completed, have been studied far more frequently than more organic pub crawls. The lack of research on non-formally organised 'organic' pub crawls may be down to the fact that it may be hard to follow these as they may not be as predictable as more formally organised versions.

Figure 3 Theoretical typology of pub crawl classification based on level of organisation and temporal / spatial variation
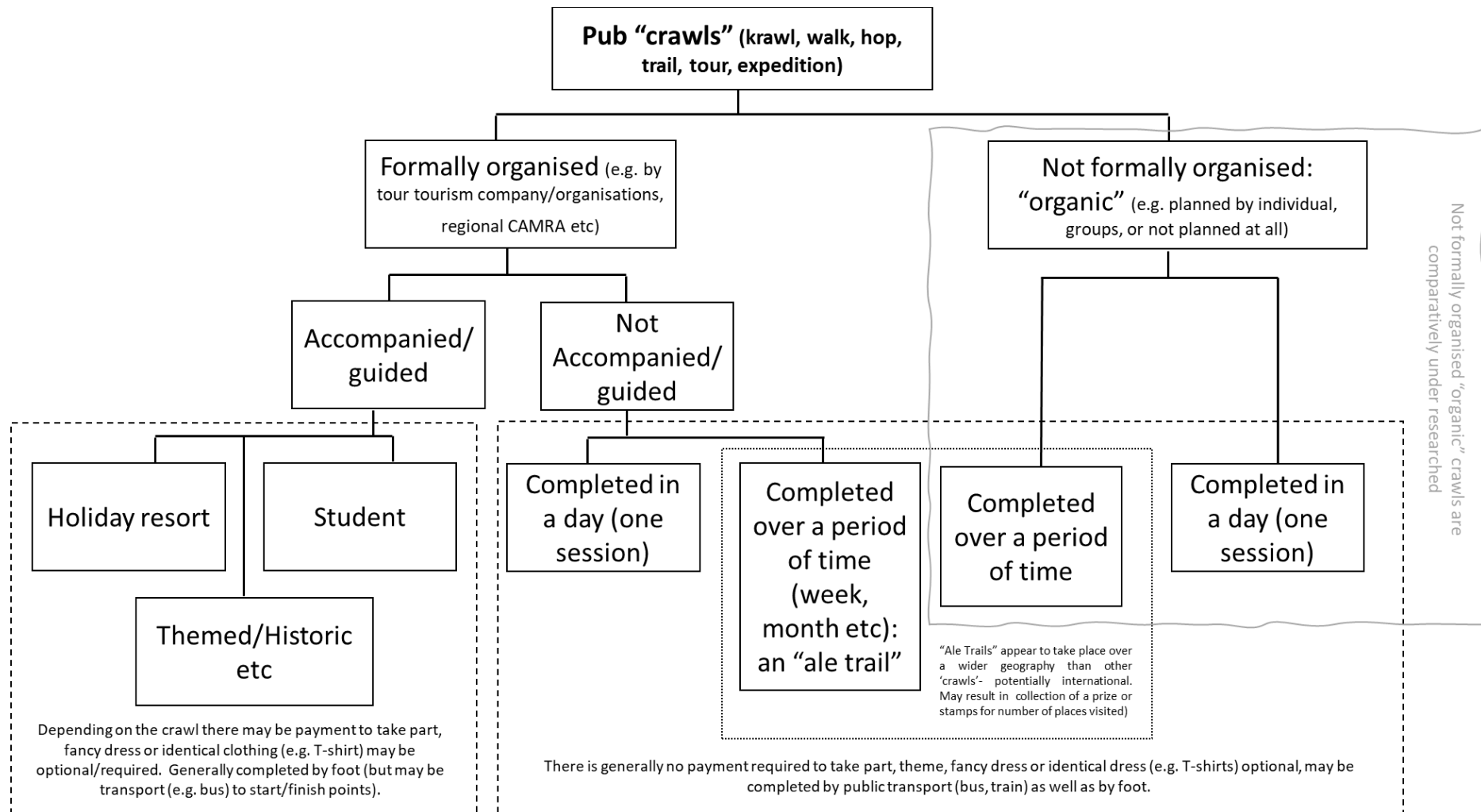
4.2 Antecedents: pre-crawl motives and behaviour

Fun, hedonism and to be silly are key motives for many pub crawlers (Roberts, 2013; Tutenges, 2015). While 'to get drunk' was put forward as a motive, this was almost always caveated by the fact that this allowed the participants to have fun and relax to enjoy the event, rather than a primary focus. For example, Wicki (2010) indicated that students typically consume alcohol for positive reasons such as pleasure or social engagement and this also appears to be the case for pub crawlers. The social perspective is also highlighted in participants enjoying people watching during the crawl (Broughton, 2001). Pub crawlers also state the motives of meeting and spending time with friends, the ability to meet potential partners and to benefit from drinks promotions as motives aligning with the social alcohol aspects (Clement, 2020). A number of pub crawlers were motivated by the feeling of being part of something bigger, e.g. crawls run by charities or to be part of celebrations (of a brewery anniversary, student end of semester, stag/hen do etc)(Stone 2018, Leader, 2020). Finally, some pub crawlers were motivated by the novelty of visiting venues, potentially off the beaten track, to find hidden gems, to explore and discover new towns and cities (Ashgar, 2020). Finally one pub crawl (Admin, 2008) explicitly had a historic motivation as it was designed to take in historic sites in Boston as part of the crawl.

A number of behaviours could be observed prior to the crawl. Planning for the crawl was key. In organised crawls this included payment, perhaps with the receipt of a crawl t-shirt or admission badge. A wide variety of information sources may be used to gain information of organised crawls or to plan organic crawls such as maps, guide books, websites, apps, social media, flyers and posters. One common pre-crawl behaviour given a significant amount of attention, is pre-loading/pre-drinking/prinks, that is drinking prior to the start of the crawl at individual homes or private parties. Zahnow (2022) reports that 77% and Quigg (2013) that 90.9% of respondents had pre-loaded prior to pub crawls. Motivations for preloading, in particular cost and enhancement of the night out are reported in the wider preloading literature as are the potential negatives (increased risk of violence) (Foster and Ferguson, 2014).

Even up to immediately before the pub crawl participants may be told what the appropriate dress is, for example "We tell them that they're not supposed to wear high heels. They're told that in their hotels so that they have a chance to go to their rooms and change" (Tutenges, 2015: 291). Gover (2012) presents the potential ramifications of poor choice when it comes to fancy dress on pub crawls. They reported on a Durham University rugby team pub crawl where students dressed as Jimmy Savile (who was a sexual abuser), an act rightly considered in poor taste and for which the pub crawlers were punished by the university.

It is clear that the pre-crawl stage is important for preparing, mentally, physically and practically for the crawl. This preparedness is expected to have an influence over how the event feels and how participants behave by moulding their expectations (Tutenges, 2015; Flynn, 2023) especially for organised crawls. Collins (2004: 35) shows why this may be important by stating that a "gathering that lacks a common focus and a shared mood is tame; it provides little or no arousal"

4.3 Processes: on-crawl behaviour

On-crawl behaviour is the focus of much of the extant literature. Drinking levels are generally reported to be high and a number of papers make the link between multiple locations and increased drinking levels. As noted by Thurnell-Read (2021: 327), "there is a clear pressure

to align alcohol consumption within the group so that, as rounds of drinks are bought, the pace of drinking becomes collective rather than individual" and additionally it is noted how different groups of pub crawlers may drink different drinks. As well as drinking in the venues themselves, side-loading behaviour (Cameron et al, 2022) is frequently mentioned with participants drinking between venues, on public transport, in public spaces either bought specifically for side-loading (bought with them on the crawl or at an off licence) or half drunk drinks being carried from venues. This behaviour is not unusual considering that Mattson (2015: 1) notes how crawls "take advantage of streetscapes that link public houses where inside and outside are blurred".

It is also clear that there is enjoyment in moving between venues and organised crawl set routes are not always adhered to. Participants may be syphoned off to other appealing venues and there may be difficulty monitoring the route (especially for unguided tours) as inebriation increases. The order of venues is also important, and may move from quieter bars and pubs to a dance bar or nightclub. Rhythms of drinking may change (Clapp, 2017) and sociability may alter with Tutenges (2015) noting early in the evening, people tend to stay in the same place and talk with a limited number of people that they already know and then gradually they come to move more, talk less, and mingle with strangers.

Some pub crawls, where the order of pubs are not defined strictly or options are available, is highlighted in the literature due to the consumer choice options this opens up. In terms of attraction the main aspects crawlers looked for was the age of the clientele, social class, the music playing and the opportunity to dance although this research focused on youth tourist hotspots (Tutenges, 2015). Reasons to move on are multifaceted, from boredom (of the place, the music), to avoid trouble (Roberts, 2013) and to meet a timetable, for example, of a train to the next location (Thurnell-Read, 2021). Venues are reshaped and reconfigured as different actors move into and out of them and therefore change over time. Similarly, Roberts (2013) notes flocking behaviour as participants follow their friends, the music and atmosphere. These movements are also disrupted, for example, by a missed train, or groups may fragment as some stay in places they like, while others move on to new venues. At this point, for some, the crawl element itself may be over.

Along the way, the market may intervene, either passively or actively, to entice participants with discounts, social media, free drinks, or tickets to other venues, or may stop individuals continuing through the use of door security staff (or police presence). For example one crawl offered $1 domestic drafts, $2 domestic bottles, $3 well drinks and $4 orders of Jameson for participants who had purchased a pub crawl pass (IB Staff Reporter, 2012). For organised crawls, there may be games or activities along the crawl such as competitions and tasks to be ticked off (e.g. a Doctors and Nurses event required tasks such as 'snog a random' to be ticked off (Hubbard, 2013)) or activities about drinks education (Shaw, 2025). T-shirts, included as part of the crawl price may also be required to allow entry to venues or to take advantage of promotions and be involved in activities. Transport companies, such as train and bus companies, can also intervene to affect behaviour and to affect the pace of the crawl as can local authorities who can ban drink discounting, remove, for example, free entry for women and seize false identification (Dodd, 2012). For charity crawls, there may also be monetary collection along the route. One pub crawl also asked participants to bring non-perishable food items with them which could be donated to charities and the bars which participated donates to a charity, Toys for Tots (IB Staff Reporter, 2011). Another crawl sold event bracelets at

each stop for donations to two charities (LIBN staff, 2014). Additionally, T-shirts and fancy dress make the participants appear as a group, a collective rather than as individuals. One report noted "green-clad people bustling through the streets and bars" (IB Times Staff Reporter, 2012).

A range of anti-social behaviour was noted, such as inappropriate urination, vomiting, and groping in public view (sometimes leading to sexual activities with each other, strippers and sexworkers (Sönmez et al, 2013)), falling down and being sprawled in the gutter (Hubbard, 2013), damage to venues, aggression/violence and singing/noisemarking (not always unwelcome by the group and may be amplified by crawl leads with megaphones). Some antisocial behaviour, such as dancing on tables may be accepted and even encouraged at certain venues suggesting different venue rules and norms. It is suggested that this anti-social behaviour increases the longer and more complex the crawl sequence (Zahnow, 2022). The crawl leaders also have a part to play in this, by encouraging drinking and competition they also encourage people to "get more and more blasted and hammered until everyone is going wild and running amok" (pp 288) and that "pub crawls in Sunny Beach have an inclination for destruction….glasses, bottles and furniture" (Tutenges, 2015: 294). The antisocial behaviour itself was also noted as being worthy of entertainment, by some pub crawl participants and locals alike (Thurnell-Read, 2021). There was also a suggestion that this antisocial behaviour might be more acceptable in an urban setting, but not on, for example, a Saturday morning in a rural setting (Thurnell-Read, 2021) suggesting differing temporal/spatial acceptability.

4.4 Outcomes: post-crawl behaviour and effects

Some papers also consider the longer term impacts or post pub crawl behaviour. The conclusion of the pub crawl is mentioned only a little with food, buses, taxis, lifts home and perhaps continued drinking at home part of the concluding rituals. The antisocial behaviour noted above can have long term impacts for residents and regulars who have to suffer regular violence and noise pollution. Publicans and society also pay for some of this through venues having to put in more safeguarding and security to manage drinkers and in some cases CCTV installation and police presence is increased. Individual antisocial behaviours may come back to haunt participants who for example might be found guilty of public order or other offences or people may have serious injuries if there is fighting along the crawl (and may need medical attention/hospitalisation if serious). One bar hopping graduate student who had been driving between venues (and drinking) was, for example, convicted of drunk driving (Zagier, 2014). Another publication reports on a bar crawler getting hit by a car while crossing the road to their next bar in poor weather (Mass. Lawyers Weekly Staff, 2012).

There are however positive outcomes from crawls, which are often not picked up in media reports. Crawls can be financially very impactful. For example, crawlers on the St Patrick's Day New York Pub crawl were expected to spend $44.6 billion, $35 each. Crawls allow brewers and publicans to showcase their works and venues to get a financial uplift which is much needed in difficult economic times. Sutton (2017) notes that rather than promoting irresponsible drinking "they can be very useful in promoting healthier attitudes to alcohol consumption. Licensees must abide by the mandatory conditions of the licence, and pubs and bars provide a supervised environment". There is also a suggestion that the motive of the pub crawler may affect the chance of antisocial behaviour with ale drinkers on ale trails expected to be less problematic. Additionally, more job opportunities may be available, especially in rural areas, less visited areas (often rural and suburban) may also attract visitors and there

may be enhanced collaboration between venues, especially for formal trails. Finally, some crawls raise significant sums for charity and for those travelling alone they can provide great socialisation activities. For most pub crawlers, however, a hangover may be the main impact they feel, but as Tutenges (2015: 294) explains "hangovers should not be misinterpreted as mere side effects of heavy drinking; these are not unexpected accidents, but central aspects of the festivities".

5.0 Discussion, Conclusions and Future Research Agenda

Our systematic literature review has presented the current state of work on pub crawls. Levels of pub crawl research have been stable between the period 1997 to 2025 and while increasing a little from 2012 there are several years when no work has been published. We highlight in the above review the immaturity of the field and the need for further conceptual and empirical development. Studies are largely focused in English speaking countries with a culture of heavy drinking. There are a variety of methodologies employed, but theoretical maturity is weak. There are many different types and characteristics (geography, time, travel mode, organisation, company and themes) of pub crawls and many different behaviours that can be delineated across the pub crawl experience. The characteristics have allowed us to propose a theoretical typology of pub crawl classification (Figure 3) and a processional movement model considering antecedents, on-crawl behaviour and post-crawl behaviour highlighting the multiple individual contexts pub crawlers move through and highlight it as a spatially embedded hospitality experience. On the crawl itself, key considerations relate to drinking (levels/types of drinking), movement, options, market and other interventions, anti-social behaviour and temporal/spatial acceptability. Finally, we highlight outcomes and longer-term impacts including concluding rituals, hangovers, impacts on regulars/locals, responses by stakeholders and job opportunities. However, a key aim of the paper was to present a hospitality analysis to help managers within venues to prepare for, deal with and strategize regarding pub crawls. Additionally, we sought to highlight conceptual gaps to signpost future researchers. We cover these two aspects in sections 5.1 and 5.2 below.

5.1 Practical recommendations for hospitality
It is evident that pub crawls have a number of potential positives for hospitality venues including attracting new customers, increased custom and visitor revenues and ability to showcase the products served, the venues themselves and regions and destinations. However on the more negative side it is apparent that there is a possibility of negative outcomes for hospitality venues due to antisocial behaviour, damage and violence. For hospitality venues which are part of or plan to become part of pub crawls it is clear that there needs to be strategic consideration of a number of elements within the hospitality setting which should be carefully considered. These are detailed below by crawl stage, aligning with our analysis above (and are represented graphically in Figure 4 alongside details of relevant locations of this behaviour and activities as discussed above).

5.1.1 Pre-crawl
Pre-crawl hospitality activities will depend largely on whether the venues are already part of the crawl or are considering this, with the former being related to planning and the later related to strategy. In terms of strategy for possible inclusion, careful consideration about whether being part of crawl is the most appropriate strategy is important. While being part of a pub crawl could bring in additional clientele and revenue, which is attractive given the current precarious nature of the hospitality industry, this also needs to be balanced with the needs of regular, local clientele who rather than being transient visitors may be loyal to the venue bringing in considerable income over a longer period of time and have a level of place attachment (affective, cognitive and behavioural) which may be damaged by these types of activities (Sandiford and Divers, 2019). Pubs must also consider who their central clientele is. For example, many pubs have moved towards being family friendly (Lugosi et al, 2020) and

encouragement of any activity which might affect the main clientele of an establishment must be carefully considered. Whether residents, who may not visit the venue, are likely to support expansion of this type of event is, as Wang et al (2023) suggest, likely to depend on how much their quality of life is affected by antisocial behaviour etc. Ale trails, due to the longer time period they span appear to be less disruptive and this may be one way to benefit from pub crawls without significant negative impact.

Segmentation is another key area that a venue considering being involved in a pub crawl should consider. The literature suggests that different types of pub crawlers may be more likely to be troublesome or problematic based on their motivations and behavioural characteristics. For example Thurnell-Read's (2017) work suggested that real ale drinkers are not as likely to cause trouble compared with non real ale drinkers, and Tutenges (2015) highlights 'lively' crawls in youth tourism hotspots. Motive-based segmentation is already used within hospitality related to drinks and food (Hall et al, 2004; Castillo-Canalejo, 2020) and there is no reason why a typology of pub crawl consumers could not be developed and provide useful to hospitality managers for segmentation of pub crawlers. Deciding which style of pub crawl to take part in, and the types of segments and their motives that this may attract is likely to be key to levels of disruption and sustainability for all involved. Of course for some venues their location (rural, suburban, urban) and size will additionally restrict what they can be involved in.

Regardless of whether a venue is already involved in, or planning to be involved in a pub crawl, inter-organisational collaboration and coordination are key elements. While collaboration is an under researched issue within hospitality (Phillips and Moutinho, 2014) it is clear that collaboration with a holistic range of stakeholders (aligning with stakeholder theory, see Barakat and Wada, 2020) other venues on the same crawl, local authorities, independent entities (such as CAMRA, SIBA, tourism companies), emergency services and travel companies is important to ensure crawls are managed and facilitated effectively. This aligns with broader trends in guest experience research, particularly in food and wine tourism, where studies emphasize the importance of cross-stakeholder coordination, enhanced service training, and shared information systems to meet evolving visitor expectations (Stewart et al., 2008; Ramos et al., 2018). Research on food tours further highlights co-creative dimensions such as authenticity, interaction, and sensory engagement as vital to perceived quality and emotional resonance (Carvalho et al., 2021). These insights underscore the need for structured collaboration in mobile, multi-venue events like pub crawls, which present unique challenges and opportunities for service integration and destination-level experience governance.

Both for pub crawls already taking place and ones which might be created, there also needs to be consideration given to impacts and strategic planning at a macro, regional or town, level (rather than the micro, venue level) as pub crawls, by their core nature, will include more than one venue and can take in significant geographical scope. There is no reason that, where relevant to the city or region, that a pub crawl could not be a beneficial addition, and could form part of a wider hospitality strategy and act to shape destination image and place branding/image formation. Of course this would also rely on keeping pub crawls non-violent and reducing any potential for antisocial behaviour otherwise pub crawls may cause a destination to have a poor image. Pub crawls, like other aspects of hospitality, for example gastronomy (Gordin et al, 2016) or food events and festivals (Yang et al, 2020; Sánchez-

Sánchez, 2025), can influence how destinations are perceived and experienced by associating it with a specific food item or category (Frost et al., 2016).

Finally, for those venues already involved in pubs crawls venue preparation, prior to crawl commencement is key. Physical changes may be made to the hospitality venue servicescape to cope with larger numbers of consumers (for example adapting the spatial layout), adjusting music, lighting and temperature as well as providing extra signage if appropriate to ensure pub crawler satisfaction (Wang et al, 2025). A final planning decision to make is whether there is a need for extra security at the venue, in particular door supervision to maintain order, safety and security (Akerele, 2023). This is likely to depend on the style and type of crawl and the segment of consumers it attracts suggesting fit between security, venue and crawl characteristics is important. However, while door security may make the venue safer, many consumers hold negative perceptions of door security staff perceiving that they themselves are violent and aggressive (Winlow et al, 2001) and therefore the presence of even well trained 'bouncers' can be off putting to patrons.

5.1.2 On-crawl

As already noted above, the servicescape, the physical and social environment of the venue is important in determining consumers satisfaction with a venue (Wang et al, 2025). This aligns with the atmospherics literature, with atmosphere often being noted as a key aspect of importance to pub consumers (Rowell, 2016) which suggests that these elements can affect behaviour of patrons in a multitude of ways (Grayson and McNeill, 2009). As noted above the ambient (temperature, lighting), design factors (layout, furniture) and exterior factors (signage) can be planned and adjusted prior to a crawl (and with experience how these elements play out specifically in any venue can be learnt and further adaptations made). One more unpredictable element, which although some planning can be done prior to the event, may also need management during the event is social factors. As noted above the intersection of regulars and pub crawlers needs to be managed carefully with potential issues of over crowding or misaligned expectation. If the segment for the crawl is similar to regulars this interaction may not be problematic, but there may be a clash in motives and behaviour between the groups. Each venue will be different but there may be decisions about separating the groups, through physical partitioning of spaces. An influx of new patrons may also lead to (over) crowding which could result in dissatisfaction (although some studies do suggest that overcrowding does not necessarily cause dissatisfaction), spatial displacement (consumers moving to other spaces or venues to avoid crowding), negative emotions, perceived lower levels of comfort and reduced intention to revisit (Dogru-Dastan, 2022).

Another key stakeholder is venue staff. Staff expectations may be very different in pub crawl venues with, for example, Gray (2023) reporting that staff on a pub crawl (in this case the Leeds Otley run) report the experience as intense, busy and chaotic. For venues that are predominantly part of a pub crawl, staff employed may be very different from a non-pub crawl venues and again the aspect of fit, in this case venue staff fit, becomes important. Staff training which has been shown to support employees and demonstrate that they are valued, enhance skills and improve service quality (Waqanimaravu and Arasanmi, 2020) should also be considered as well as simply adding more staff on pub crawl days/times to ensure no individual is overworked.

Promotion is also a key consideration for venues and in particular drinks promotions. The literature notes that many pub crawl venues provide drinks promotions, for example lower priced drinks (IB Staff Reporter, 2012) to pub crawl participants. However, as it is clear that consumers visiting multiple venues are likely to drink more (Lambhart 2017), potentially leading to negative consequences, so that any promotion of higher levels of drinking must be carefully considered from an ethical perspective. Essentially the need to generate sales needs to be carefully considered against the ethical problems with premises licence holders (in the UK) expected to ensure safety of patrons, take steps to prevent crime and antisocial behaviour and not to sell alcohol to intoxicated individuals (Pratten, 2007). Venues could instead offer promotions on food, or no and low alcohol products as an alternative promotional strategy. For venues not on the main pub crawl itinerary there is also the potential to use promotions (whether alcohol, food or no and low alcohol products) to draw consumers away from the core route and benefit without being a central aspect of the crawl and potentially being less disruptive to regular clientele.

A number of pub crawls are aligned directly with charity collections or have a role of giving back to the community (for example one pub crawl's entry fees were used to subsidise cheap bus journeys for local people (Warren, 2019)). Especially where there might be local disruption venues could decide to use the pub crawl as a vehicle for charity collection as a kind of cause-related marketing which has been used in other hospitality venues such as hotels (Tanford et al, 2020).

Finally, and linking to aspects of collaboration there is scope for venues, alongside other external stakeholders to investigate the potential of technological support for pub crawl venues, wider stakeholders and pub crawlers. The literature in this area has begun to test and suggests various wayfinding solutions (Lui et al, 2009; Chow et al, 2012) which could be used to power, for example Apps, which could be useful to help pub crawlers and also other stakeholders including venues. As well as being of use to consumers in determining stops and providing guidance about travel options, these could also be utilised to manage flows and movements of people to ensure no venues suffer significant crowding or overload. Especially if pub crawlers were asked to 'check in' at each venue this could allow venues to understand in live time who is on the crawl and respond to this with changes in staff levels for example. Coupled with AI, a technology already being used in hospitality, a system such as this would have the potential to optimise resource management and improve operational efficiency, which in turn will lead to enhanced consumer satisfaction (Mahalashmi and Bharath, 2025).

5.1.3. Post-crawl

For hospitality venues post-crawl is a time for recovery and reflection. This may range from physical recovery if there has been venue damage or simply restocking. Reflection may also take place at this time and the support of employees, especially where there has been high levels of consumers, violence etc should be carefully considered. Heightened work pressures can have destructive impacts on employee mental health and well-being (Giousmpasoglou, 2024) and if left unchecked could lead to problems retaining staff. For venues regularly involved in pub crawls the post-crawl actions may simply be planning for the next crawl and engaging in the pre-crawl elements discussed above.
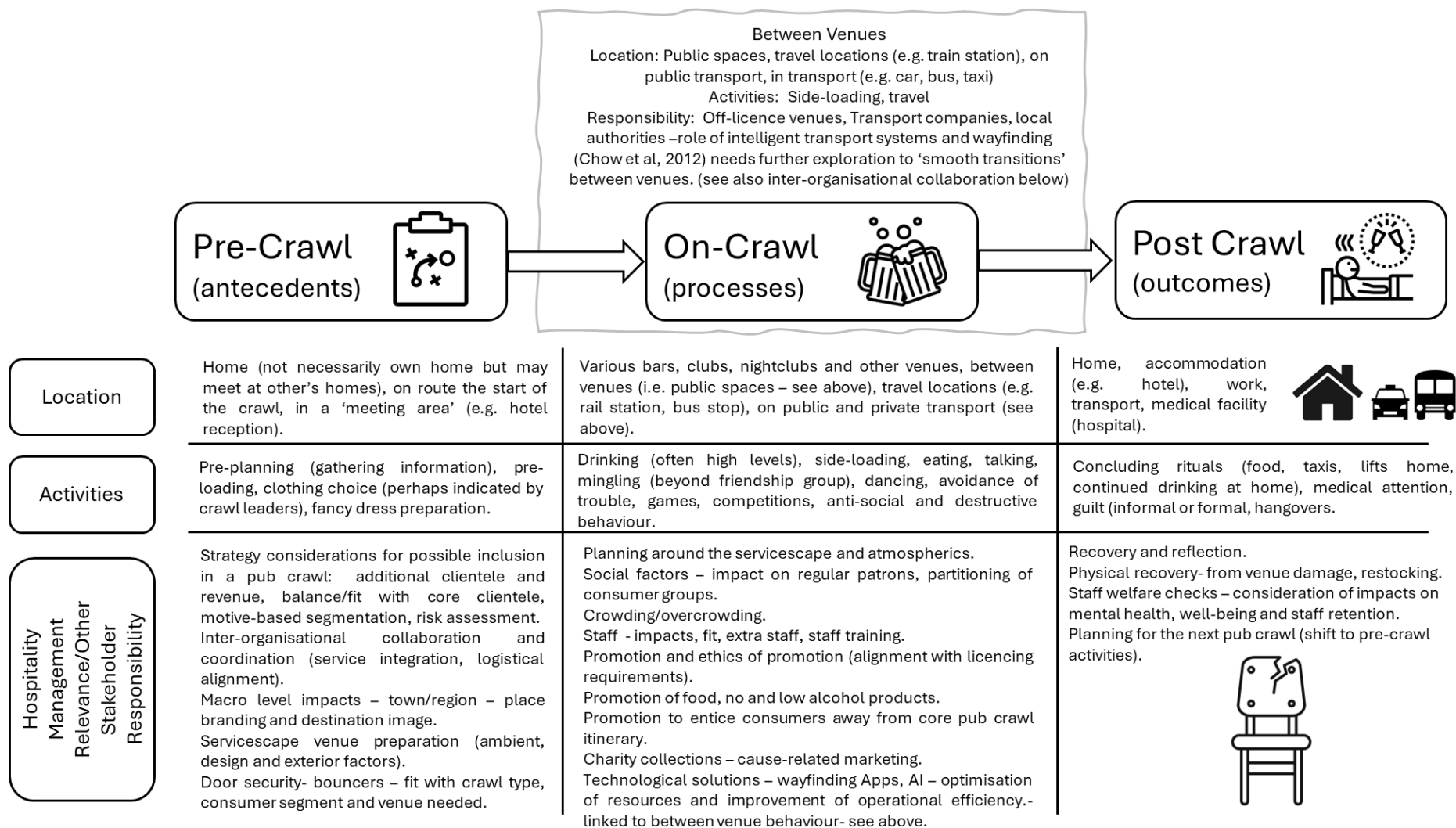
5.2 Future research agenda

Due to the limited extant research there is plenty of scope for future research. Firstly, characteristics of crawls should be examined further and it would be useful to widely sample crawls to determine levels of geographical spread, time, transport, venue number and pub crawler numbers quantitatively. Organised, whether accompanied or not, crawls are the main focus of research and future research should examine organic (self designed/spontaneous) crawls. While a number of papers suggest demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of participants this has not been systematically approached and may aid to segment pub crawlers (which could be of use to hospitality managers- see above). Research is needed to deepen our understanding of pre-crawl behaviour and to compare this across different pub crawls types. This for example might examine pre-loading behaviour, whether this is done in groups or as individuals and how much and in what ways this leads to higher alcohol consumption and/or harm especially compared to in venue drinking (Foster and Hyeman, 2013). This is also the case for crawl behaviour where, for example, weather, seasonality and use of apps need research attention. These contextual elements and interactions need attention as does the feeling of time across crawls. Food is another area where further work would be welcomed as food may be used positively to affect alcohol consumption and level of intoxication (Dodd, 2012), but Flynn (2023) also notes that food could produce a sluggishness which might affect the continuation of the crawl. The end of the crawl (concluding rituals) and how this relates to next day behaviours, and longer term implications are scantily analysed and this particular stage would benefit from further understanding.

Examining different viewpoints is important in any research and both interdisciplinary and disciplinary perspectives are valuable in the understanding of any particular phenomena. We purposely chose four interdisciplinary databases to use in the review to not restrict ourselves to any particular discipline but this also showed how disciplinarily narrow the focus in the area is. Ten of the academic publications are in drug and alcohol journals, meaning a public health perspective has largely been taken. Others come from sociology, transport, urban studies, history, information and communication, tourism, criminal justice and leisure studies although much more could be done from both these and additional disciplinary perspectives.

Methodologically, challenges of reporting actual versus reported behaviours are similar to other areas, where additionally the intake of alcohol may affect the ability to accurately recall behaviour. It would be helpful in future research to compare different methods of alcohol measurement such as self-reports, blood alcohol concentration (BAC), aggregate measures, mobile device data and machine learning, breath and transdermal methods and how they might work over the course of, before and after pub crawls specifically (Piasecki, 2019). A few of the most comprehensive studies in this area have used in-depth go-along methods and observation to capture real time behaviour which could be combined with intoxication monitoring as above. Mapping and visual methods could also be usefully used to determine the geographical range of crawls, route planning and within crawl decisions. Overall qualitative research which according to Dandiford and Seymour (2007) is infrequently reported in hospitality journals should have rigorous data analysis procedures. Quantitative methods could be used to determine the economic impact on individual venues, and local venues. Whichever methods are used these could interact with people who are drinking and/or intoxicated. While Aldrige and Charles (2008) state that the risk can be managed and are offset by the benefits of this type of research they also note that specific measures and considerations around informed consent need to be carefully planned.

Finally, we purposely did not choose to analyse newspapers in our review but future research could examine the ways in which pub crawls are discussed and to understand the messages about and meanings given to pub crawl elements as a form of document analysis (Bowen, 2009). This in turn could be contrasted to our analysis using academic and trade sources. Table S2 summarises these potential areas of future research and suggested research questions.

Figure 4 Practical recommendations for hospitality and wide stakeholder groups related to pub crawl stage.

Between Venues
Location: Public spaces, travel locations (e.g. train station), on public transport, in transport (e.g. car, bus, taxi)
Activities: Side-loading, travel
Responsibility: Off-licence venues, Transport companies, local authorities –role of intelligent transport systems and wayfinding (Chow et al, 2012) needs further exploration to 'smooth transitions' between venues. (see also inter-organisational collaboration below)

	Pre-Crawl (antecedents)	**On-Crawl** (processes)	**Post Crawl** (outcomes)
Location	Home (not necessarily own home but may meet at other's homes), on route the start of the crawl, in a 'meeting area' (e.g. hotel reception).	Various bars, clubs, nightclubs and other venues, between venues (i.e. public spaces – see above), travel locations (e.g. rail station, bus stop), on public and private transport (see above).	Home, accommodation (e.g. hotel), work, transport, medical facility (hospital).
Activities	Pre-planning (gathering information), pre-loading, clothing choice (perhaps indicated by crawl leaders), fancy dress preparation.	Drinking (often high levels), side-loading, eating, talking, mingling (beyond friendship group), dancing, avoidance of trouble, games, competitions, anti-social and destructive behaviour.	Concluding rituals (food, taxis, lifts home, continued drinking at home), medical attention, guilt (informal or formal, hangovers.
Hospitality Management Relevance/Other Stakeholder Responsibility	Strategy considerations for possible inclusion in a pub crawl: additional clientele and revenue, balance/fit with core clientele, motive-based segmentation, risk assessment. Inter-organisational collaboration and coordination (service integration, logistical alignment). Macro level impacts – town/region – place branding and destination image. Servicescape venue preparation (ambient, design and exterior factors). Door security- bouncers – fit with crawl type, consumer segment and venue needed.	Planning around the servicescape and atmospherics. Social factors – impact on regular patrons, partitioning of consumer groups. Crowding/overcrowding. Staff - impacts, fit, extra staff, staff training. Promotion and ethics of promotion (alignment with licencing requirements). Promotion of food, no and low alcohol products. Promotion to entice consumers away from core pub crawl itinerary. Charity collections – cause-related marketing. Technological solutions – wayfinding Apps, AI – optimisation of resources and improvement of operational efficiency.-linked to between venue behaviour- see above.	Recovery and reflection. Physical recovery- from venue damage, restocking. Staff welfare checks – consideration of impacts on mental health, well-being and staff retention. Planning for the next pub crawl (shift to pre-crawl activities).

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