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“You don't want to be sat on a sticky seat”: A Q-Methodological Foraging Analysis of Pub Consumer Choice

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Abstract

This study investigates how consumers trade-off between various features when making pub choices, a previously underexplored area. Uniquely we apply foraging theory as a multi-level, ecologically based approach examining analysis of product, physical and service elements to the non-digital consumer behaviour of pub choice. We use Q-methodology, an mixed-methods approach ideal for understanding subjective experiences and analysing in a comparative manner, to explore these trade-offs and develop two psychographic segments (Traditional Pint Loyalists and Inclusive Drinkers), moving away from static segmentations based on demographics. This research significantly contributes to consumer behaviour by offering a novel, structured segmentation that moves beyond outdated stereotypes, notably highlighting the growing influence of women and families in pubs as well as non-beer drinkers.

Keywords: Pub, Public Houses, Q-sort, Q Analysis, Foraging, Currency

Summary Statement of Contribution:

This research contributes by developing a novel, structured segmentation of pub consumers, utilising a dynamic psychographic approach. Furthermore, it introduces the first applied use of foraging currency within non-digital marketing literature proving a multi layered examination, and the first empirical study on foraging and consumer behaviour within an analogue, non-digital setting. Finally, it demonstrates a novel application of Q-methodology, rarely utilised in marketing/consumer behaviour studies, offering a robust approach to understanding complex consumer perceptions.

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Introduction

As quintessential institutions, Public Houses (pubs) are deeply embedded within the social and cultural landscape of the United Kingdom and Ireland, traditionally serving as establishments for the consumption of alcoholic beverages and often food. Far more than mere commercial entities, pubs are widely recognized for their profound contribution to community cohesion and individual well-being (Cabras and Mount, 2017). They serve as crucial communal hubs, fostering relaxation and facilitating the exchange of ideas (Bonsor and Heslewood, 1970), effectively acting as the quintessential 'third place' in English society, situated between the realms of home and work (Boak and Bailey, 2017). This cultural importance is mirrored by their significant economic impact, as pubs are a cornerstone of the hospitality sector, which stands as the UK's third-largest employer (UK Hospitality, nd; Cabras and Shannon, 2026).

Sadly, we are losing pubs at a startling rate due to government interventions (industry structure changes), competition from leisure activities, high beer duty/tax (BBPA, 2018) and more recently, Brexit, Covid, the cost of living/energy crisis (Wells and Waehning, 2022), increasingly high costs (Fraser, 2025) and pubs have to adapt to change to survive (Andrews and Turner, 2012). 15,800 pubs have closed over the first quarter of this century, with 350 disappearing in 2024 (Thatcher, 2025) and at the start of 2025 pub numbers had dropped below 39,000 for the first time (Kollewe, 2024). Halting this decline is important as pubs are often the last community space remaining in some, especially rural areas, and play a key role in tackling isolation and loneliness (Thurnell-Read, 2021). Where these community assets are

lacking, areas of deprivation have higher levels of poverty, unemployment and poor health (Qureshi and Fyans, 2021).

One important aspect to understand further is the role of pub consumers and what they seek in their pub visits and builds on work within the hospitality literature regarding the satisfaction, experience and co-creation of customer experience (Aksoy et al, 2022). Understanding both who uses pubs, and how they are perceived and used by different groups (Thurnell-Read, 2023) is central to ensuring pubs attract consumers and keep their doors open. As Mant (2018: 221) states "It isn't rocket science, running a pub. It's about people, understanding what they want from your pub and accommodating them".

Despite the importance of understanding pub consumers, existing approaches to segmentation have provided only a partial understanding of consumer behaviour. Pub consumers have traditionally been segmented using basic demographic variables, with age and particularly gender being prominent approaches (Schmidt and Sapsford, 1995; Gutze, 2016; Lugosi et al, 2020). However, demographic segmentation has been criticised for providing an inadequate and static representation of markets because it does not capture the motivations, preferences, and behaviours that shape consumer decision-making (Kumar et al., 2025). This limitation is particularly important in hospitality contexts, where consumption choices are often driven by experiential and motivational factors rather than demographic characteristics alone (Belhaj and Lehman, 2026). For example, motive-based segmentation has been successfully applied within food and beverage contexts to identify distinct consumer groups based on their underlying motivations and consumption behaviours (Hall et al., 2004; Castillo-Canalejo et al., 2020).

Within pub environments, emerging research also suggests that different consumer groups may engage with pubs in distinct ways, with implications for both customer experience and venue management. For example, Thurnell-Read (2017) demonstrates that real ale drinkers may be

associated with particular forms of drinking practices and identities that differ from those of other consumer groups, while research on pub crawls and nightlife tourism highlights how motivations and group characteristics can influence behaviours and levels of disruption (Tutenges, 2012; Tutenges, 2015; Wells et al., 2025). Such findings suggest that understanding pub consumers requires moving beyond demographic classifications towards approaches that consider the multiple factors influencing consumer choices, motivations, and behaviours.

However, research examining pub consumer segments remains limited, particularly in relation to identifying the range of factors consumers consider when selecting and evaluating pubs. Rather than suggesting that all aspects of pub consumption are already understood, the absence of contemporary segmentation research highlights an important knowledge gap: existing approaches provide limited insight into how consumers weigh different attributes, experiences, and expectations when making pub choices. Addressing this gap is important both theoretically, by extending understanding of consumer decision-making in analogue hospitality spaces, and practically, by providing pub operators with greater insight into how different consumer groups can be understood and engaged.

To address this gap we use an interdisciplinary foraging approach building on previous examples of this (e.g.; information foraging, Liu et al 2023) to examine choices consumers make and their preferences. Foraging theory focuses on animal feeding and consumption behaviour (Stephens and Krebs, 1986) including hunting, recognition, procurement, acquisition and ingestion/digestion (Mellgren and Brown, 1987). Unlike other methods of studying service environments, such as servicescape (Bitner, 1992) which focuses only on select environmental aspects, foraging theory allows us to simultaneously examine both the product (alcohol, food) and service aspects, including physical environments while deeply considering their interactions and trade-offs between these and providing a more dynamic

modeling of complex cultural consumer behaviour. We focus in particular on foraging currencies, defined as the metrics by which foragers evaluate the costs and benefits associated with alternative choices. While foraging currencies are traditionally conceptualised as the rate of energy acquisition in non-human foragers (Kaplan and Hill, 1992), this single-currency approach is insufficient for understanding human consumer behaviour, where decisions are shaped by multiple and often competing considerations. For example, information foraging research demonstrates that consumers search for and evaluate multiple features when making choices (Liu et al., 2023). Therefore, a multiple-currency approach is required to understand the diverse factors influencing pub consumers' decisions, highlighting the importance of identifying and examining the currencies that shape venue selection. We contribute to both the marketing/consumer behaviour and foraging literatures by examining behaviours in analogue, non digital spaces where previously consumer foraging work has examined online digital behaviour (for example see Adu-Mensah, 2025; Bailey et al, 2021).

We analyse this behaviour via Q-methodology to gain a detailed understanding and a comprehensive viewpoint to understand different subjective perspectives (Watts and Stenner, 2012). Unlike other similar methods, Q-methodology collects data in a comparative manner (Ho, 2017) and takes a mixed methods, qualitative and quantitative approach (Zabala et al, 2018) which has rarely been used in a marketing/consumer context (Daunt and Harris, 2017).

Overall, the research questions below guided our study:

What foraging currencies do different groups of consumers use in determining their choice of pub(s) to visit?

How do consumers trade off and balance between these currencies?

How can this knowledge be used to segment and target pub consumers?

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. We first review the literature on pub consumer behaviour followed by foraging theory. We outline the Q-methodology approach, followed by a discussion of our results. Finally, we discuss future research directions and practical implications.

Background and Literature

Pub Consumer Research

Perhaps surprisingly, given that almost 9 out of 10 UK adults visit pubs (Mintel, 2023) pub consumers have received relatively scant attention in the academic literature. One area of agreement is that people visit pubs predominantly for their social elements as a welcoming place for escape (Rowell, 2016, Lugosi et al, 2020; Thurnell-Reed, 2021). Connected is the draw of pub entertainment including watching, talking about, or taking part in sport and pub games (Rowell, 2016). Additionally, staff play an integral role beyond the serving of alcohol/food and facilitate pub sociability (Harrad, 2016). Consumers cannot avoid coming into contact with staff and Andrews and Turner (2017) note their importance in maintaining and creating pub atmosphere and in providing consistency of customer experience.

Research suggests that consumers show little interest in tangible features (such as tables, decor, etc) (Rowell, 2016) except as part of the overall atmosphere of the pub. While atmosphere is noted as important there is little agreement about what this entails. Taylor (2011) defines it as a combination of the context/design, the consumers/clientele and how the space is used. Rowell (2016) states it is an interaction between the licensee/staff, the physical/ambient factors and the clientele. Overall, it is clear that the atmosphere is a combination of both tangible and intangible elements but this has not been studied in depth and whether different groups of consumers prioritise certain atmospheric elements is not known. Additionally for some,

especially younger consumers, a preference for the home environment that is more easily manipulated to their own tastes (through music, decor etc), is providing an attractive alternative to pub atmospheres and an additional source of competition for pubs (Parry, 2025).

Contextually temporal aspects are also important to pub goers as atmosphere will change over the duration of a day, week and/or season. Some may visit a pub when it is more lively or quiet (Thurnell-Read et al, 2018), others when it is cosier (in winter) and others for a beer garden (summer). Pubs also have to be in an accessible location, preferable within walking distance and/or with adequate transport to attract consumers (Wells et al, 2023).

Beer, anecdotally considered central, is often a secondary consideration for consumers, impacting on the atmosphere (affecting atmosphere and clientele (Rowell, 2016)). Johnston and Bryan (1993) and Harrard (2016) note that the type/style of beer available had little significance on pub choice, while others suggest it is a key driver of pub choice (Murray and O'Neill, 2012).

Traditional pubs were considered to be largely a consumption space for men (Pratton, 2004) and segmentation by gender was largely irrelevant but over the last 20 years there has been a feminisation of pubs (Schmidt and Sapsford. 1995; Moss, 2009; Moss, Parfitt and Skinner, 2009) and a focus on 'new markets' of women, children and families (Lugosi et al, 2020). With levels of drinking reducing this century and additional leisure pursuits competing for the same consumers, pubs, faced with significant competition have sought to make their offering conducive to a wider range of consumers. This led to the study of women's needs and wants in the pub environment focusing on the provision of wine (Pratton and Carlier, 2012), food (Pratton and Mareschal, 2012), safety, better/cleaner toilets (Pratten and Carlier, 2022) and

being child friendly (Pratton, 2003; Lugosi et al, 2020). Much of this however looked at the current strategies of pub marketers and whether these preferences remain, and what different genders want from pubs is still largely unknown.

Effects on consumer behaviour from the impact of Covid (when pubs were forced to close their doors and many did not open inside for many months) have been observed in pubs. There has been suggestions that new pub behavioural 'norms' have emerged post pandemic with earlier visits to pubs and reduced evening footfall (Weller, 2025) and pub queuing (Boyd, 2026) (rather than using the whole of the bar) being especially noted. These consumer behaviours have shifted alongside a cost of living crisis and increasing costs for pubs (Fraser, 2026a) leading to significant affordability concerns for consumers with pint prices rising significantly over the last decade (Fraser, 2026b).

Additionally competitive socialising has seen an increase in popularity where, especially younger generations are seeking multi activity venues (Mintel, 2025a). Pubs are perfectly placed to benefit from this trend given the range of activities from pool to darts and skittles which are often available in pubs (Davis, 2026). Pub and hospitality design has also received more attention with pubs seeking to provide unique experiences (Martin, Jerrard and Wright, 2019) and the growth of taprooms and micropubs has been suggested as providing more inclusive spaces (DeMoor, 2024).

A final trend affecting pub consumers is an increase in the levels of abstinence and moderation and a resulting increase in no and low alcohol offerings across all alcohol categories (Williams and Katwala, 2022). Various studies suggest that over a third of consumers drink no and low alternatives either regularly or occasionally and a third of adults do not drink at all (Portman

Group, 2026). Additionally no and low alcohol drinks are more likely to be drunk by riskier drinkers of alcohol and those who come from more advantaged social groups (Perman-Howe et al, 2024). This is a consumer trend that pubs are increasingly having to respond to in their product offerings (Lloyd, 2025).

Marketing strategy has instead largely taken the opposite approach, rather than focusing on consumers, the strategy and segmentation of pubs has rather classified venues with the development of theme pubs (Brown and Patterson, 2000) and pub types (such as serious traditional, circuit and estate (see Fox, 1993). Additionally pubs have also been segmented into being traditional masculine pubs versus family/female friendly pubs (Schmidt and Sapsford, 1995; Lugosi et al, 2020) but we don't know if consumers perceive them in this way or whether this is a suitable marketing strategy.

It is clear that the elements above interact with one another (Lugosi et al, 2020) to attract pub consumers with Rowell (2016: p. 76) stating "the tangible features….have a large bearing on the social benefits….. There is a constant interaction between different tangible elements…. and potential social consequences" and any approach to examining pub consumer choice must study the intersections between these elements (Lugosi et al, 2020). Servicescape/pubscape models go part way to doing this but still inevitably examine the different elements in isolation rather than examining their interaction (Martin et al, 2019). There is no research that seeks to examine these interactions and how they are traded off in different segments and groups of pub consumers. We seek to fill this gap here.

Foraging Theory and Currency

A number of theoretical frameworks could be used to examine the pub choice and visiting behaviour. Utility theory is one theory that could have been used to assess pub choice behaviour and while utility theory (Samuelson, 1938; Lancaster, 1966) and foraging theory (Charnov, 1976; Stephens & Krebs, 1986) both target optimality and share similar behavioral violations (Kelenscher & van Wingerden, 2011), they diverge in decision-making architecture which led to our choice of focusing on foraging theory. Utility theory assumes individuals evaluate all options concurrently (Das, 2026), whereas foraging theory models sequential decision-making as an individual navigates environmental cues (Lloyd et al., 2023). Crucially, physical, temporal, and effort-based constraints are central constructs native to foraging theory (Mellgren & Brown, 1987), rather than secondary modifications as seen in newer utility models (Allen et al., 2019; Small et al., 2025). Foraging theory therefore serves as a superior behavioral analogue for analogue and physical consumer movement; such as pub choice; offering greater ecological validity and robust cross-species applicability (Kagel et al., 1995).

Overall foraging theory presents a range of straightforward models which examine behaviour as adaptive responses to different/changing environmental conditions in a habitat/context (Ydenberg et al, 2007) which can adapt as needs and preferences change and do not assume rationality. The foraging perspective allows both a flexible and holistic viewpoint. The organism's physiological state is also considered and the aim is to understand how they reach appropriate decisions in changing circumstances (Winterhalder, 1981) Additionally it allows an analysis of preferences that are both based on product/services available and the influence of the environments through a spatial analysis representing a multi layer inquiry. Human foraging experiences and behaviours are passed from generation to generation due to their cultural nature (Winterhalder, 1981). Tullock (1971) first noted the links between human consumer behaviour and animal behaviour in a paper entitled “The coal tit as a careful

shopper", Hantula (2012, pp. 549) notes that "just as we once foraged in forests and savannas we now forage in grocery stores and websites" and Wells (2012) developed a model of consumer foraging behaviour which examined prey and patch elements as well as social and temporal elements of consumer choice. While foraging for food (although often as a hobby, supplement or to find alternatives to homogenous and standardised food products) still takes place for consumers (Kajzer et al, 2017), there is a greater scope to apply foraging theory to a wider range of more sophisticated consumer behaviours.

Foragers forage in and across patches often travelling to one or more patches to get the food and nutrients they need. The term patch implies "any bounded spatial or temporal co-location of prey items" (Hantula, 2010, p. 87) and where resources are clumped together (Kaplan and Hill, 1992). Therefore, a shop or groups of stores is analogous to a patch for human consumer foragers and in our paper, as highlighted by Wells et al (2026) a pub is considered a patch.

In choosing between patches, or to forage across multiple patches foragers seek some minimum level of (or satisfice) a particular currency or try to maximise it (Kaplan and Hill, 1992). The currency part of the foraging model can be considered similar to a multi-attribute or multi-feature model (Rassuli and Harrell, 1990) where understanding how attributes/features interact and are traded off determines choice (within other aspects of foraging such as social and temporal factors). Choosing a suitable currency is important within foraging models and has been discussed extensively within the behavioural ecology literature. Most standard foraging models generally put forward food energy acquired per unit of foraging time but some models have also used, depending on species, food components (eg. protein) and fertility as currencies (Winterhalder, 1981; Kaplan and Hill, 1992).

Energy is not suitable for use for human foraging models as most global north consumers, except those in poverty, will meet and generally exceed daily energy requirements. Energy is analytically convenient, can be clearly studied and quantified but Kaplan and Hill (1992) note that humans may violate the assumptions of existing foraging models if energy is used as a sole currency (Winterhalder, 1981). Multiple currency models may therefore be more realistic for humans (Pyke, Pulliam and Charnov, 1977) which builds on economic theory where preferences are based jointly on several attributes rather than on a single attribute (Newman, 2007). Studies of hunter gatherer populations suggest they use nutrient maximisation (e.g. protein, lipid etc) and overall nutritional composition as well as calorific content (Keegan, 1986; Kaplan and Hill, 1992). This has led, in animal studies, to greater support to look at the satisficing of multiple nutrients and not only single nutrients to determine forage selection (Pretorius et al, 2012). Elephants have been shown to satisfy some nutrients and maximise others depending on resource availability (a constraint) and seasonal availability of different plants (in dry/wet seasons) (Pretorius et al., 2012). The indigenous Aché people in Paraguay also show nutrient sensitive foraging biassing meat and insect consumption over energy maximisation (Kaplan and Hill, 1992).

Wells et al (2026) in examining pub consumers using a foraging methodology showed that a multiple currency model was most appropriate highlighting four currencies (Patch Location, Patch Intangible Atmosphere, Patch Tangible Atmosphere and Prey Availability/Options) that drive patch choice. Patch location highlighted the importance of proximity in pub choice. Location has been shown to have significant impacts on the success of hospitality and tourism business with work on hotels (Silva, 2016) and restaurants (Prayag et al, 2012) being common, demonstrating strategic competition effects and both the negative and positive effects of proximity to similar businesses. Recent work shows that the impact of location on pub

visitation is significant with consumers most often visiting the closest pub available on a day to day basis even when they see this pub as deficient in some form (Wells et al, 2023). Patch intangible atmosphere covers aspects such as clientele and staff knowledge/friendliness which is specifically related to experiential value due to their interactive and immersive aspects (Pine and Gilmore, 1999) where consumers can be engaged, pleasured and meaningful and memorable experiences can be experienced (Varsheneya et al, 2017). Patch tangible atmosphere, incorporates the spaces themselves, how comfortable they are and features such as tables and chairs. Comfort within services is most often analysed in healthcare settings where it has been related to confidence and trust (Bhoomadevi et al, 2021) but has also been studied in restaurant environments where comfortable seating, for example, positively influences mental comfort and benefits the hospitality experience (Pijls et al, 2019). Even when consumers choose to stand, having comfortable seating is translated by consumers as being a caring practice (Pijls et al, 2019). Finally prey availability/options cover the food and drinks available in the pub and relate to work on product assortment and in particular how consumers perceive assortment items (Chernev, 2012). Wells et al (2026) did not go further in their analysis of currencies after their identification.

Where multiple currencies are used, each with different conceptual status, any two desirable traits could yield equal value in an infinite number of combinations and the trade offs between these are necessary to but may be difficult to model (Winterhalder, 1981; Ydenburg et al., 2007; Newman, 2007). Additionally these trade offs can be dependent on temporal aspects with for example, elephants trading off between plant quality and quantity depending on season (Pretorius et al., 2012).

It is clear that pub consumers observe and make these sort of trade-offs between the different identified currencies in pubs. Pierson, Reeve and Creed (1995), in examining beer and pub choice, highlight "the way in which attributes contributing to quality interrelate and how each brings to bear its own specific level of importance to the often-unique needs or desires of the individual consumer…" (pp 209). For example a pub consumer may state that beer choice, beer quality, amount and quality of seating is equally important when questioned but in a dynamic choice situation will show that they are willing to trade off amount and quality of seating to ensure their choice offers beer choice and quality. Conceptually this relates to stated preferences prior to purchase/consumption (features A, B and C are important) versus revealed preferences at the point of purchase/consumption (in dynamic choice environments C may be sacrificed to focus on A and B) where A, B and C may not be available in different combinations across different choices (Ben-Akiva et al, 1994).

We analyse these trade-offs between the aforementioned currencies to better understand the choices made by pub consumers and how they may balance between features which may or may not be available in pubs. This will allow us to understand at what point these currencies are maximised or satisficed, whether the trade-off between them can be modelled and whether this can be used to segment consumers and in turn be used by pubs to manipulate attributes which are seen as most beneficial by consumers.

Methodology

The study adopted a Q-methodology approach which is designed to examine perceptions, opinions, beliefs and attitudes about any topic of interest (Dieteren et al, 2023). It is designed to systematically study subjectivity and show people's whole complex viewpoints, or worldviews on a topic in a holistic way preserving nuance and structure of thoughts (Ho, 2017;

Zabala et al, 2018; Sneegas, 2020). Q-methodology can be contrasted with the more common R methodology. R methodology is a variable-centered approach that measures differences between variables (such as objective traits, behaviors, or test scores) across a large population to find generalizable, objective patterns. In contrast, Q methodology is a person-centered approach designed to study human subjectivity, correlating individual participants based on how they rank-order a set of subjective statements to identify distinct, shared viewpoints or perspectives (Brown, 1980). In R methodology, design focuses on a limited number of variables and a large sample of participants (e.g. through a survey), while in Q methodology a smaller sample is needed (see below).

Compared to other similar methods (for example likert scale questions or cluster analysis) Q collects data in an ipsative or comparative manner considering the relative ranking of perceptions and trade offs etc in comparison to others (Ho, 2017) and combines the advantages of both qualitative and quantitative inquiry where the researchers are expected to play an active role in the interpretative process (Zabala et al, 2018). We chose Q-methodology as a method to not only examine consumers' views of pubs and the reasons they visit, but also the structure and comparative manner of their worldviews.

Q-methodology is becoming increasingly popular across a range of disciplines including the social sciences (Dieteren et al, 2023), education (Coogan and Herrington, 2011), conservation (Zabala et al, 2018) and many more as well as being used in marketing where it has been used to study consumer showrooming (Daunt and Harris, 2017) and perceptions of healing foods (Song et al, 2024).

There are 4 stages in any Q-method study: (1) Study Design; (2) Data Collection; (3) Data Analysis and (4) Interpretation and Presentation. At all times we followed the best practice guidance and methodological checklists outlined by Sneegas et al (2021), Zabal et al (2018)

and Dieteren et al (2023). However even though clear guidelines exist there is, as noted in the best practice guidance, variability in application.

Study Design

The Q approach requires respondents to sort a number of written statements. Comparison against R methodology, The first step in Q is to develop a concourse of statements which represent the breadth of subjectivities about the issue at hand (Sneegas, 2020; Sneegas et al, 2021) and can be taken from the existing literature, grey literature, interviews or focus groups (Dieteren et al, 2023). Our concourse was based an earlier study (Wells et al., 2026) which used a multi method approach utilising diary methods, mapping and interviews to uncover the range of reasons consumers consider when choosing a pub and was used to develop the concourse for this project Specifically, participants recorded their pub visits using the DayOne app through photographs, text, and videos, providing real-time and reflective accounts of their experiences through an Ecological Momentary Assessment (EMA) approach (Piasecki, 2019). These data informed semi-structured interviews (Sandiford and Seymour, 2007) that explored participants' motivations, pub characteristics, food and drink choices, social contexts, and movement between venues. The resulting qualitative data were reviewed to identify recurring themes and considerations influencing pub choice, which informed the generation of the statements included in the Q-sort. During statement development, statements were reviewed to ensure they captured distinct aspects of the pub experience rather than unnecessarily duplicating the same concept as per Q-methodology best practice guides (Coogan and Herrington, 2011; Sneegas et al, 2021). While some statements addressed related experiential dimensions (e.g., comfort, atmosphere, and social interaction), these were retained where the earlier data collection indicated that participants considered them meaningful and distinguishable aspects of pub choice. As noted the initial project also took a foraging approach

and uncovered four different currencies (Patch Location, Patch Intangible Atmosphere, Patch Tangible Atmosphere and Prey Availability/Options).

Only a set of the concourse statements (called the Q-set) are used in the study. These should be the smallest representative sample from the concourse ensuring there are no gaps in perceptions and no redundant overlaps (Coogan and Herrington, 2011). All authors were involved in developing the statements, the earlier study and the reduction of statements from the concourse to the Q-set which involved both individual and group discussions in person to avoid bias in statement selection. Additionally in determining the final q-set statements the authors sought to ensure that the statements covered all of the four different currencies again to avoid statement selection bias (Hickman and Vecia, 2016). We sought a Q-set size which was neither too large to be overwhelming or too small to be comprehensive (Sneegas et al, 2021) and adequately covered each of the currencies outlined above. The final Q-set contained 58 statements (see Appendix A).

Data Collection

The P-set is the sample of respondents that complete the Q sorting procedure (Watts and Stenner, 2012). In Q methodology the sample, or P-set is needed that "establishes the existence of a factor for purposes of comparing one factor with another" (Brown, 1980: 192). While no set number is indicated the rule of thumb is that the p-set will be smaller than the q-set (Sneegas et al, 2021) and the majority of studies follow this (Dieteren et al, 2023). Reviews show that the p-set can range as widely as 7-300+ in size but most studies have a p-set between 20-50 with an average of 41.6 and a mode of 26 (Zabala et al, 2018; Dieteren et al, 2023). P-sets are always determined strategically and purposely (Dieteren et al, 2023) to avoid a homogenous group. In determining the P-set we selected participants across a range of ages, a mix of genders, occupational statuses, educational levels and where they lived encompassing a range

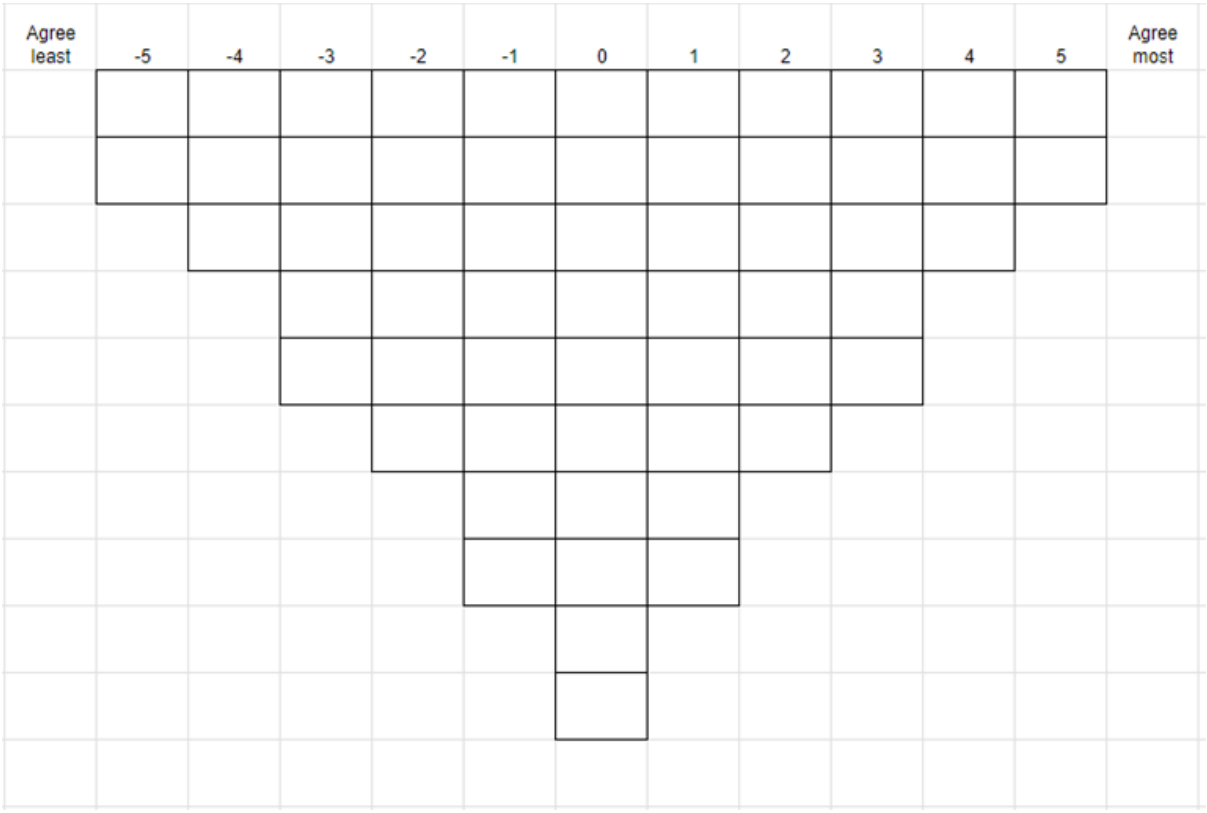
of observable characteristics as suggested by Zabala et al (2018). The participants ranged from 18-73 years old, 52% were male, 72% worked full-time, 20% part time and the rest were students, retired or unemployed. For 50% their highest education qualification was a postgraduate degree, for 26% they had an undergraduate degree and the rest had A Levels or GCSEs as their highest qualification. Finally 26% lived in the city centre, 41% lived in a suburb, and the rest lived rurally or in a countryside town or village. We also sought a mixture of participants by who they visited the pub with (family, partner, friends, alone etc) and what they predominantly drink (wine, beer, spirits, non alcoholic/soft drinks).

Our P-set comprised of 46 participants meeting the rule of thumb in Q that the P-set will be smaller than the Q-set (Sneegas et al, 2021) and close to the average size as noted by Zabala et al (2018) and Dieteren et al (2023) in their meta analyses.

The sorting procedure was completed with individual participants face to face. Participants were asked to sort the written statements into a symmetrical grid (see Figure 1). Participants were first asked to separate the written statements into three piles, those they agreed with, those they disagreed with and those they were neutral about. These piles were then worked through individually starting with the agreed pile and the right hand side of the grid. Choice was forced, rather than free choice, meaning they had to fit the shape of the grid (Sneegas, 2020) and the condition of instruction (Sneegas et al, 2021) for participants was agreement with the statements, each of which started with "The pubs I like to visit….".

Prior to completing the procedure participants completed a short questionnaire which asked for basic demographic information (age, gender, employment status) and whether consumers predominantly visited pubs alone/with friends/workmates/with a partner. The questionnaire also asked whether consumers were generally dominant in the choice of which pub to visit and what they predominantly drank while at the pub (beer, wine, non-alcoholic drinks etc).

Figure 1: Example Q-sort grid for participants



As is normal in Q, participants also took part in a short post q-sort semi-structured interview (Zabala et al, 2018) which lasted between 5 and 15 mins. This clarified that they were happy with their sort and participants were then asked to discuss the statements they agreed most and least with, anything that might have changed the statement placement and anything they felt was missing from the statements. The interviews were recorded verbatim and were transcribed by a professional transcriber before being subjected to thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2021).

The study had full ethical approval from the researcher's university prior to data collection and informed consent procedures were followed.

Data Analysis

In Q data analysis the data undergoes a data reduction technique called by person factor analysis, similar to Exploratory Factor Analysis (Watts and Stenner, 2012), designed to uncover those sort patterns which correlate with each other (Ho, 2017), that is they have like-minded individuals with similar viewpoints (Brown et al, 1999). The data analysis uncovers a number of factors (there are no rules regarding how many factors should be extracted although on average studies have between 1 and 10 factors and fewer factors are considered simpler and to have more clarity (Coogan and Herrington, 2011; Sneegas et al, 2021; Dieteren et al, 2023)). Eigenvalues are used in Q methodology to determine the indication of a factor to be extracted in the factor analysis and the general rule of thumb is that across the factors cumulatively anything in the region of 35-40% or above would be a sound solution. Additionally in Q-methodology the Kaiser-Guttman criterion suggests a factor can be suitable for retention if its eigenvalue is greater than 1 and if Humprehy's rule (having two participants who load significantly and exclusively on that factor) is met factors with eigenvalues less than 1 can be retained is there is potential for it to be an important minority perspective that is indicated by the literature or the qualitative data collection (Watts and Stenner, 2012; Brown, 1980). The aim is not to account for every drop of statistical variance but rather to reveal the structural, collective viewpoints that are actively operating in the discourse (Watts & Stenner, 2005).

In this study the q-sorts were intercorrelated and factor-analysed using Ken-Q Analysis Desktop Edition (KADE) (Banasick, 2019). 2 factors were extracted and rotated, which together explained 42% of the study variance meeting the rule of cumulative variance (7 factors were initially extracted, and by using the Kaiser-Guttman Criterion, Humphrey's Rule and a Scree Plot we settled on a two-factor solution (Kaiser, 1960; Brown, 1980; Cattell, 1966)). 30 of the 46 q-sorts loaded significantly on one or other of the 2 factors. Factor loadings of ±0.34 or above were significant at the $p<0.05$ level.

Interpretation and Presentation

The first stage of data interpretation in Q is to produce a factor array, a a composite Q sort, which weight and average all q-sorts associated with the factor (Sneegas et al, 2021) which is presented in q-sort visual form (as simplified bell-shaped distribution), and each factor array represents an idealised worldview of that factor (Sneegas et al, 2021). Being a merged average, the factor array looks like a single complete q-sort (Stenner et al, 2003: 2165). The two resulting factors arrays can be seen in Figures 2 and 3.

Factors are interpreted by holistically examining all statements in the array, how they relate to each other and how the pattern in any factor relates to the pattern in any other (Sneegas, 2020). As well as the item scores/factor arrays, the additional data (questionnaire/interview) was used in the interpretation process (Zabala et al, 2018). To avoid interpretative bias all authors individually interpreted the factors, using all three outputs (questionnaire results, factor arrays and qualitative data) and these were finalised in group discussion. In Q interpretation those statements which have scored highest and lowest (been less and more agreed with) are especially important alongside distinguishing and consensus statements. Consensus statements across factors indicate agreement between diverse perspectives (Coogan and Herrington, 2011; Zabala et al, 2018; Sneegas et al, 2021). Distinguishing statements are those where participants who load on that factor have placed "a statement… in a position… that is significantly different to where all the participants who have loaded on the other factors have placed that particular statement" (Coogan and Herrington, 2011; 27).

In the results section below, a description of each factor is presented alongside demographic details of the participants who loaded significantly on each factor. Comments made by participants, from the semi structured interviews, are included where they clarify the

interpretation. We begin by examining the consensus statements and then examine the differentiating aspects of the two factors.

Results

We first begin by looking at consensus between factors, that is, examining the aspects that were equally important across factors and consumers. We then go on to interpret factors 1 and 2 supplementing this interpretation with demographic and semi-structured interview data. We also compare with the extant literature where appropriate.

Consensus between factors

A number of elements were equally important or not important to both factors. These are areas where the preferences of all consumers converge and there are overlaps between the segments which are revealed as consensus factors (shaded) in Figures Two and Three. Table One contains each of the consensus statements and their numerical placement in each factor. Being consensus factors does not necessarily mean that both factors see these aspects as important (which is defined by the numerical placement), but they equally agree on their level of importance. This can be seen in Table One where factors at the top of the table are ones that are both important and agreed on, ones in the middle are agreed on but not seen as particularly desired or undesired by consumers and the ones at the bottom being agreed upon as being undesirable or not preferred.

Table One: Consensus Factors and Ranking

Factor	*Factor 1*	*Factor 2*	*Level of agreement with statement*
The pubs I like to visit are conducive for socialising.	4	3	High
The pubs I like to visit are unpretentious/down to earth.	3	3	High

The pubs I like to visit have friendly bar staff.	3	3	High
The pubs I like to visit are well looked after (clean/well maintained etc).	3	2	High
The pubs I like to visit have great service.	2	2	High
The pubs I like to visit aren't too crowded.	1	1	Medium
The pubs I like to visit are a good temperature.	0	0	Medium
The pubs I like to visit have regulars/locals.	0	0	Medium
The pubs I like to visit have clientele like me.	0	0	Medium
The pubs I like to visit are close to where I live.	-1	0	Medium
The pubs I like to visit are on route to other places I go.	-1	-1	Medium
The pubs I like to visit have live music.	-2	-2	Low
The pubs I like to visit have clientele my age.	-2	-2	Low
The pubs I like to visit are off the beaten track.	-3	-1	Low
The pubs I like to visit have a good variety of spirits.	-3	-3	Low
The pubs I like to visit have live sport on TV.	-4	-4	Low

The qualitative data also provides additional reflection on the consensus between participants. Among those aspects that are important to all consumers is that the pub is well looked after and participant 20 notes that elements such as this are just expected:

> "*…..good décor, well-maintained, good toilets - things like that - I suppose I just expect them without thinking about them*."

And that cleanliness was also an indication of care for consumers:

> "*I don't like sitting in a dirty environment…..Again, they're looking after the pub, they look after the cleaning, they look after the customers." (P2)*

This also aligns well with work suggesting that increasing cleanliness has been key in attracting families and women to pubs (Lugosi et al, 2020) and work examining the most important trends in hospitality management with sanitation/cleanliness/health/comfort being the most important trend identified for the next three years and staying highly important for the next 4-10 years (Aksoy, 2022).

Whether the pub was conducive for socialising, had great service and friendly bar staff was also important to all consumers supporting Thurnell-Read's work on alcohol, pubs and sociability (Thurnell-Read, 2021).

In terms of intangible atmosphere, friendly bar staff giving great service were important to all participants supporting prior literature that staff can play an integral role in pub atmosphere (Harrad, 2016). Spaces that were conducive for socialising (reflecting on the key objective for socialising given for visiting a pub) and unpretentious were popular. P11 noted:

> "*We don't drink at home at all, so the only time we drink is if we go out and the reason we go out is to socialise, so that goes hand-in-hand with visiting a pub*."

Additionally participants noted the importance of being able to hold a conversation, a key aim for patrons (Bolet, 2021) and be sociable as important:

> *"....if the noise level is right, then you can have a conversation; but sometimes music can be a bit overbearing or whatever...."* (P3)

At the other end of the scale both factors agreed that live sport on TV was not desired as it distracted from sociability which is perhaps unexpected given that prior research suggest that TV, at least for viewing sports is often welcomed in pubs (Dixon, 2014):

> "*I find it very off-putting basically to have big TVs in pubs or restaurants.....*" (P15))

Additionally, people were not concerned about the provision of smoking areas reflecting reducing smoking rates generally and in pub settings since the 2007 pub smoking ban (Taylor, 2011).

While not as important as the above elements either being highly desired or not, having clientele like and the same age as the respondents were equally important to both factors but were not ranked highly amongst either factor. Respondents broadly responded in the interviews supporting that this was not a key factor:

> *"I think there's something really nice about a pub that has a wide range of ages.". (P29)*

Where these are highly preferred consensus factors perhaps suggested threshold capabilities (Johnson et al, 2011) or fundamental requirements (Weller, 2024) that must be met by any pub wishing to attract consumers.

Factor 1: Traditional Pint Loyalists

Factor 1 has an eigenvalue of 15.584 and explains 34% of study variance. Nineteen participants are significantly associated with this factor. Fourteen (74%) are male, with an average age of 46 years (range 26 to 73). Nine participants visit a pub often (once a week or more) and the rest visit sometimes (more than once a month, less than once a week). Two visit the pub alone, sixteen predominantly with friends. All mostly drink beer.

For this factor, prey, and in particular beer, is very important. They rank the variety of types/variety of alcohol levels of beer, care of beer, guest ales, and local ales as important, reflecting the traditional and longstanding relationship between beer and the pub (Brown, 2010).

This focus on beer was supported by the interviews:

> "*I'll go for beer, beer's got to be good. It takes an art to do it. It takes skill. It takes a good deal and I like good beer*." (P16)

P22 also notes that nothing else matters if the beer isn't good:

> "*It was easy [completing the q-sort] because I had really quite strict criteria: the beer has got to be all right, and anything else doesn't really matter.....*"

Aligned with this they do not like chain pubs and prefer pubs that are independently run or run by a local brewery partially as this is aligned with their beer focus.

All participants across factors welcomed friendly bar staff but for consumers in this factor staff being knowledge about beer (noted as a key point of difference by Hadland (2024) between staff in pubs and in other drinking venues) was also important again linking to their focus on beer. Participant 39 noted:

> "*There's nothing worse than getting a pint of lager in a bitter glass, in an ale glass or something. So, if I'm going to somewhere, I'd like the person to understand why a glass is given to a traditional - to a drink, what the temperature is the beers should be kept at and how that should be, so knowledge is important.* "

With some of this group visiting the pub alone, but also highlighting the importance of staff this reflects what Harrard (2016) describes as a way of being 'alone together'. In terms of location this factor preferred community pubs, pubs in close proximity to one another and one's central/in the town/city were important.

Overall, in terms of the 7Ps of services marketing (Constantinides, 2006) these consumers are focused predominantly on the product (beer) and people/process (bar staff knowledge elements). These relate specifically to the currencies of prey and intangible atmosphere suggesting that to visit pubs with these features they are willing to trade off tangible atmospheric elements for suitable, well looked after prey (beer).

Figure 2: Factor 1 Factor Array

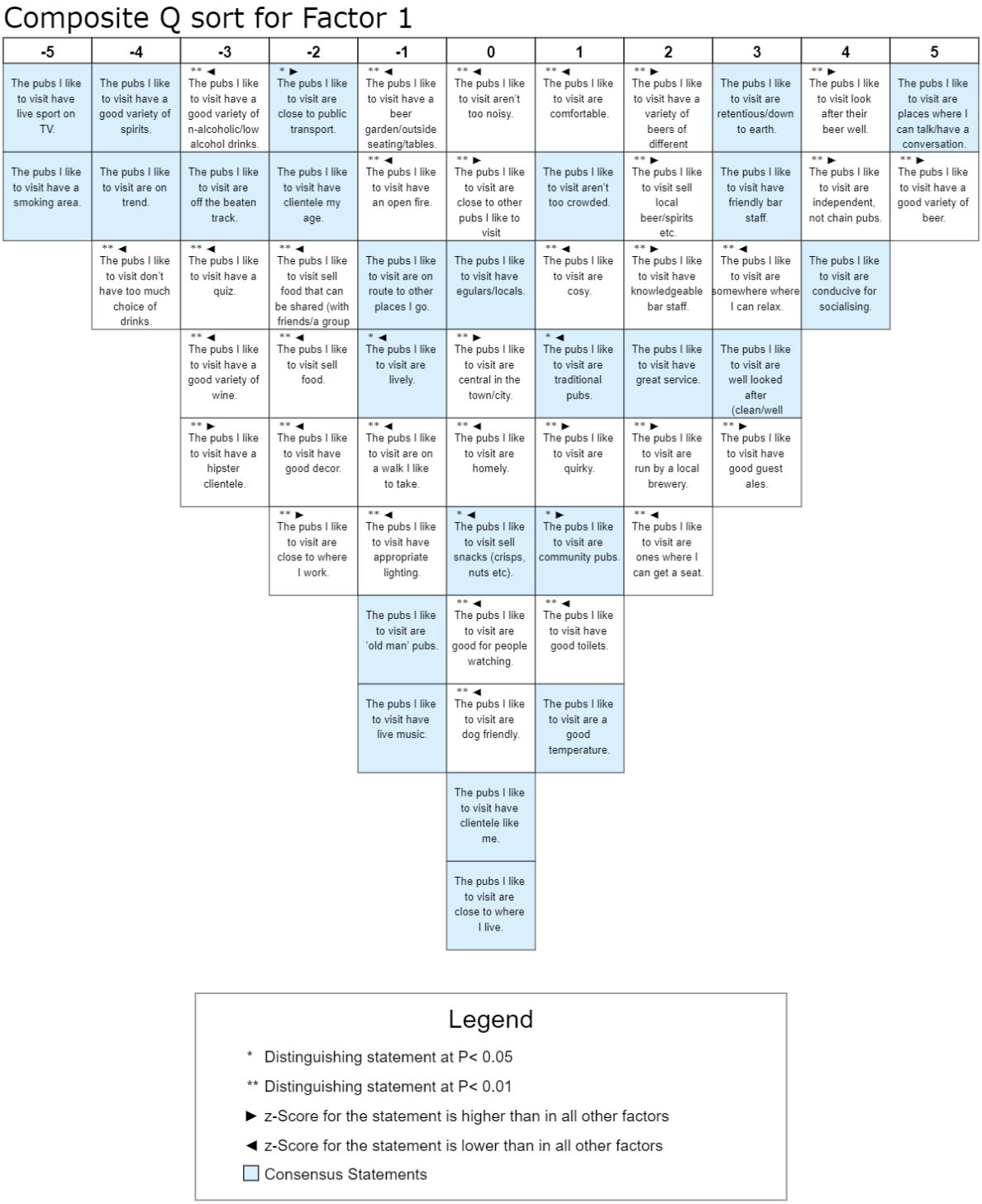
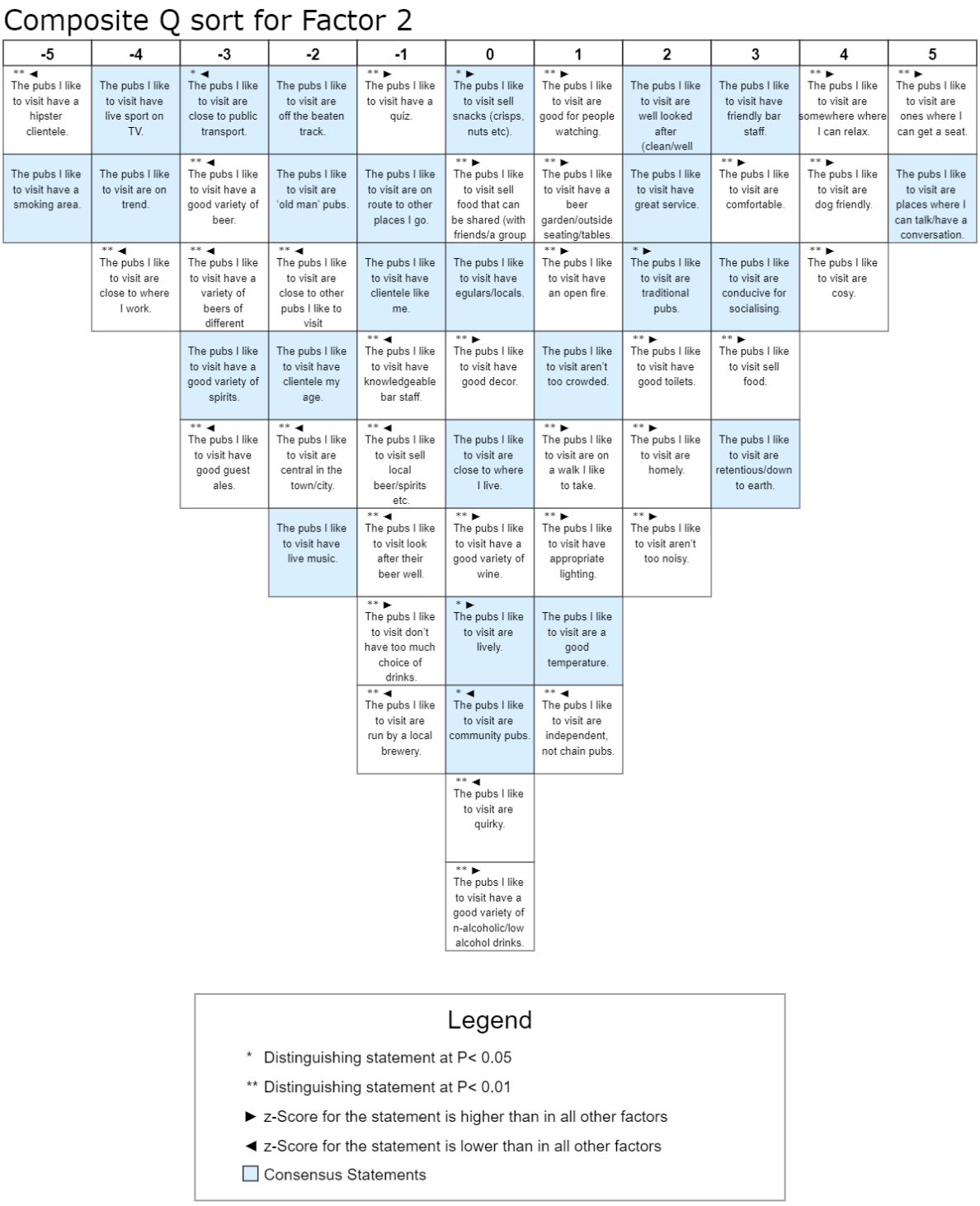


Figure 3: Factor 2: Factor Array



3.3 Factor 2: Inclusive Drinkers

Factor 2 has an eigenvalue of 3.5218 and explains 8% of the study variance. Eleven participants are significantly associated with this factor. Nine (81%) are female with an average age of 43 years (range 24 to 68). Five participants visit a pub often (once a week or more), four visit sometimes (more than once a month, less than once a week) and two rarely (once a month or less). One participant visits the pub alone but the rest visit with friends and/or family. No drink predominates in this factor with participants reporting drinking beer, no and low alcohol products, wine, and spirits reflecting pubs strategic moves towards offering wine over the last 10-15 years (Pratton and Carlier, 2010) and consumers growing interest in no and low alcohol alternatives (Waehning and Wells, 2024). In the interviews these participants highlighted that they were not 'beer people' setting themselves apart from those in factor 1:

> "*I'm not a beer drinker, so it doesn't matter to me if there is lots of different beer. I can usually find something I can drink in any pub I go to.... I wouldn't say I'm someone who's really aware of different kinds of beer and lager. Therefore, it just doesn't matter to me*." P29

The most important elements for this factor were related to the tangible atmosphere currency elements, going above and beyond what was expected by all participants with the ability to get a seat, cosiness, comfort, low noise, beer garden/outside area, appropriate lighting, an open fire and good décor rated as important which was also supported by the qualitative data. Hill et al (2018) suggests that these factors can be seen as affordances, or action opportunities, which facilitate alcohol drinking within licensed premises.

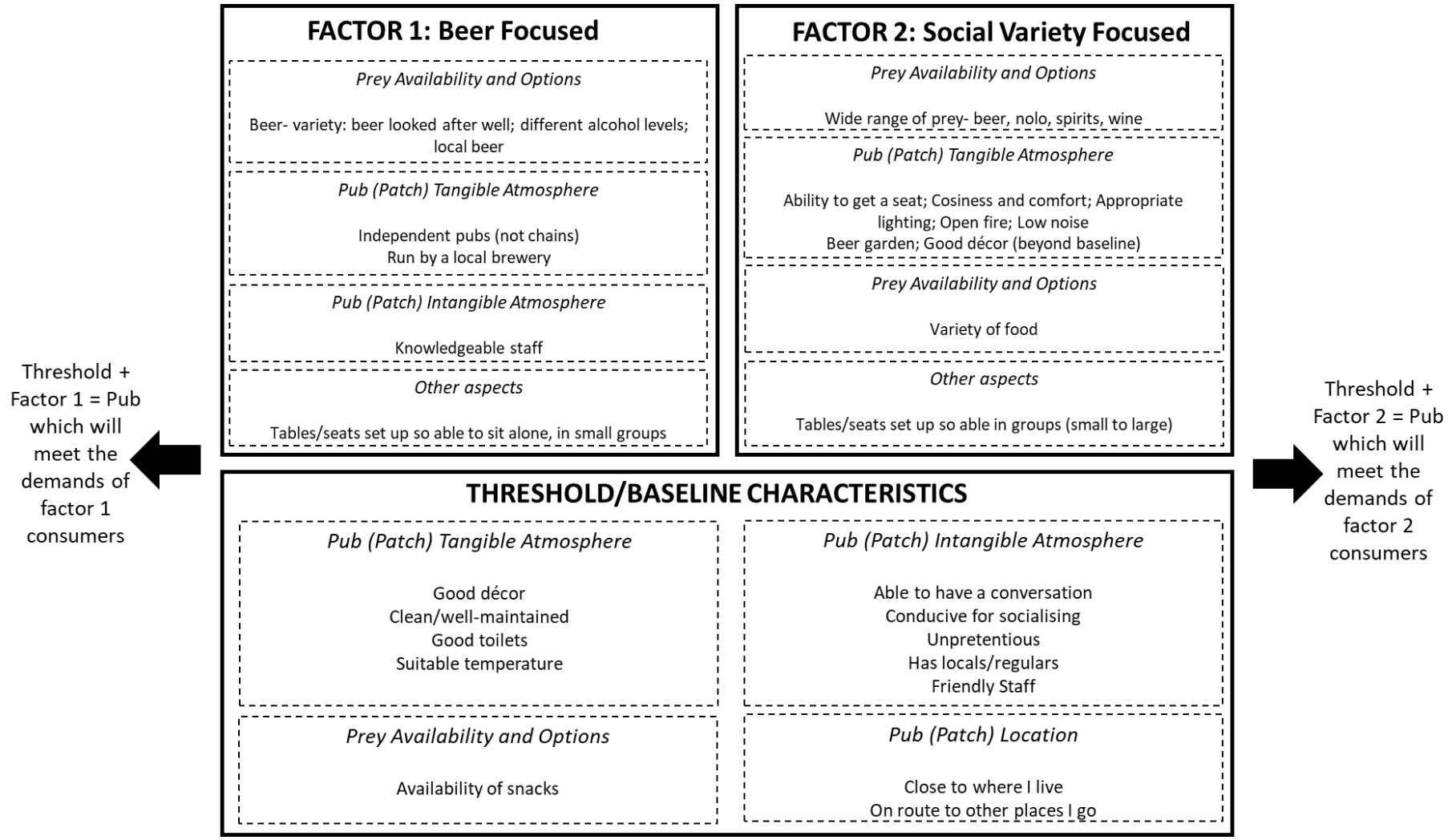
Additionally, prey items, other than beer, were ranked highly such as having food available ("*We'd want to be comfortable, cosy, and we'd want to have food.*" P12) and especially food that could be shared (perhaps reflecting that they are more likely to go with family/friends) but

also a good variety of wine and no and low alcohol drinks. In terms of location this group liked to visit pubs on a walk they might take.

Overall, these consumers had some interest in product/prey (drinks, food) and this was considerably broader than the beer focus of factor 1. The main focus of this factor, and a key currency for these consumers beyond prey, was tangible atmospheric elements that fit into the place and physical elements as parts of the services marketing mix (Constantinides, 2006). This suggests that consumers in factor 2 may be more likely to trade off intangible elements to ensure tangible elements and a broad level of prey are available.

The results for threshold (consensus) elements and each factor are included graphically as Figure 3.

Figure 3: Threshold and factor characteristics for consumers



Other reflections

Additional reflections can be made about how currency and trade-offs work. Firstly, there were expectations from respondents that there would be differences in what males and females preferred and required from pubs. For example good toilets which are noted in the literature as being important in creating family friendly pub experiences (Lugosi et al, 2020): *"as a bloke. As long as there's somewhere that I can go and have a pee, I'm happy*" (P2))

Secondly it was clear that who consumers were visiting pubs with had an influence on what currencies would be important and what would be traded off with some tangible atmospheric features becoming more important when visiting with family or a spouse. This might include food or cleanliness as noted by respondents:

"*...if I was going with mum and dad, obviously food would be more important*." (P11)

Thirdly the consumer's objectives in visiting a pub are important in determining the prioritisation of and trade-offs made between currencies. For a forager there are often multiple objectives and not all objectives can be met at once, so some objectives might be prioritised more vigorously than others (Newman, 2007). Wells et al (2026) highlight that for pub goers six objectives could be seen - (1) social, (2) variety/novelty, (3) occasion celebration, (4) to eat, (5) to get drunk and (6) for entertainment. It is clear here that these affect the currencies that the consumers seek to meet these objectives. For example, participants noted how a live music experience, entertainment such as football on the TV and going to the pub to eat would affect their choices and focus them on different currencies.

This also linked to the work of Harkin and Piirainen (2012) who note that consumers "..might go to one pub for the excellent food, another to watch football, and yet another for its prime selection of real ales" (pp 35).

Consumers also highlighted how trade offs and choices may change during different seasons noted as a key feature of the changing nature of the pub throughout the year (Tierney-Jones, 2024). Respondent P27 noted:

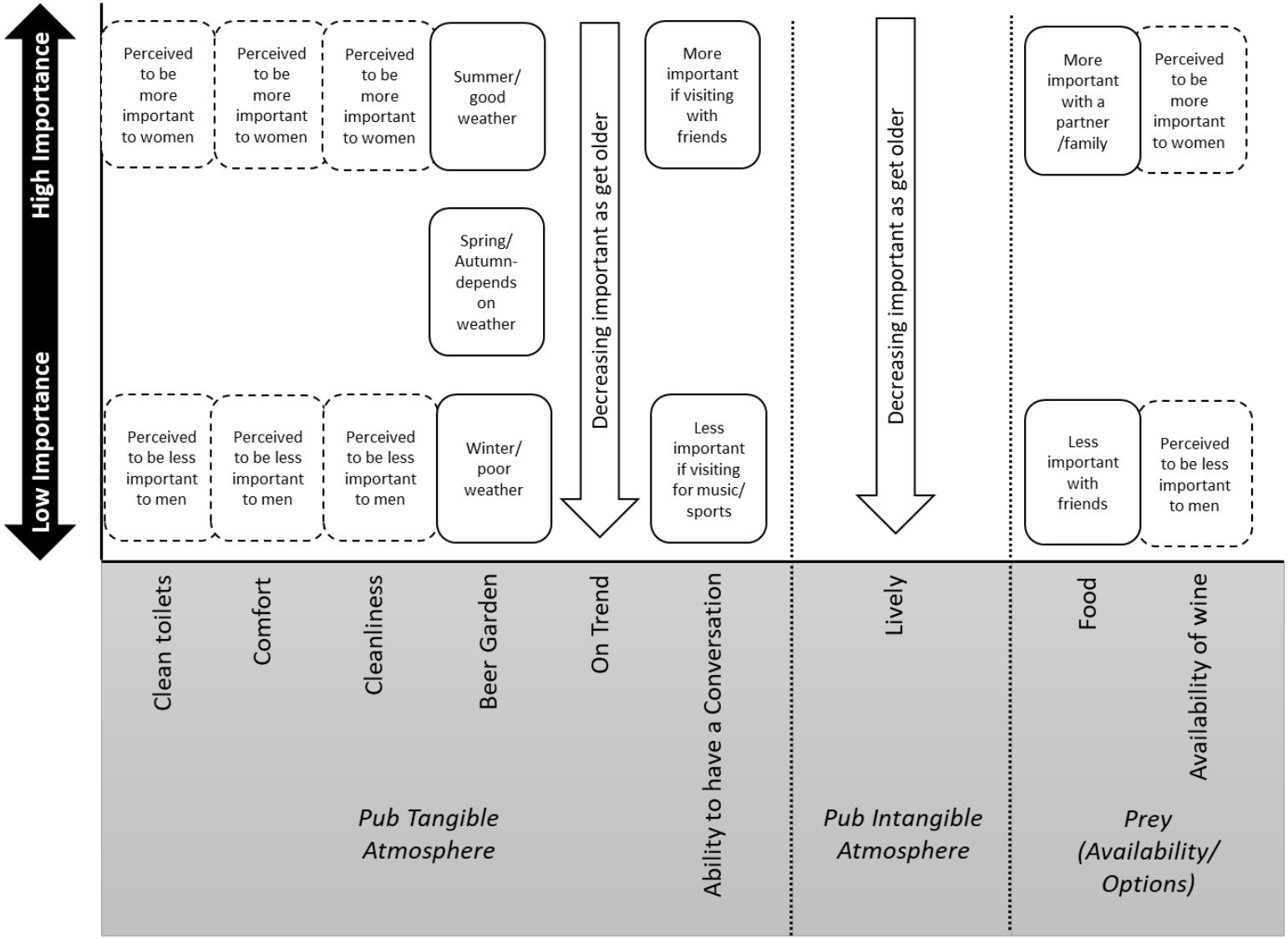
> " *So if it's winter it's not a priority, but if it's summer, it's a massive priority for me to have a beer garden*." (P27)

Finally, many of the participants reflected on whether their choices and priorities of currencies would have been different had they completed the q-sort when younger suggesting that currencies may be less or more important in different age groups or through life stages. A participant commented:

> "*so on trend probably would have come massively up. When you're in your 20s and you're going to the new bars, everyone goes to the new bars, I think that would have come further up….I wouldn't have been as bothered about a seat, I wouldn't have been as bothered about talking, having a conversation. ……There would have been a swap between the lively and the sort of more relaxed elements, definitely, and they've sort of moved in that direction.*" (P18)

These reflections are depicted graphically in Figure 4. Boxes with dotted outlines represent perceptions assumed by respondents.

Figure 4: Changes in prioritisation and importance of pub visiting currencies



Discussion, Practical Recommendations and Future Research

The research questions guiding our study were: (1) What foraging currencies do different groups of consumers use in determining their choice of pub(s) to visit? (2) How do consumers trade off and balance between these currencies? (3) How can this knowledge be used to segment and target pub consumers?

In answering the first question, our findings suggest that participants in this study evaluate pubs by considering all four currencies, viewing certain basic tangible and intangible elements as essential threshold capabilities. Beyond these basics, marketers may be able to leverage a number of dynamic capabilities to differentiate their offering. Preferences and priorities over currencies vary by segment; Traditional Pint Loyalists prioritise product quality/breadth and staff expertise, often accepting physical discomfort for a well-kept beer. Conversely, Inclusive Drinkers value the physical environment and a broader range of options, willingly sacrificing specialised staff knowledge in exchange for a diverse food menu and comfort. These findings should not be interpreted as representing all pub consumers, but rather as identifying distinct patterns of subjective preference within our sample that provide insight into how different consumers may evaluate pub environments based on the limitations of our chosen methodological approach. In answering our second question, the findings indicate a number of ways in which our respondents will and will not trade off between currencies. Consumers in our study identified baseline characteristics such as cleanliness, ability to have a conversation and friendly staff as important considerations. These appeared to operate as threshold expectations among participants, whereby failure to meet these requirements reduced the attractiveness of a venue such as excellent beer, good decor or a beer garden. However, when these baseline characteristics are met, consumers may trade off different dynamic characteristics and these trade offs will be determined by their segment with Traditional Pint

Loyalists willing to trade comfort for great beer and Inclusive Drinkers willing to trade staff knowledge for shareable food.

Additionally our research also highlights potential differences in currency perceptions expected across genders. Our two factors reflect prior literature that on the one hand, a traditional masculine pub with a focus on serious beer drinking (our factor 1) can be contrasted with family/female friendly pubs where pubs are most often visited in the company of others (Schmidt and Sapsford, 1995; Lugosi et al, 2020). However, given the exploratory nature and limitations of Q methodology, these findings should be viewed as indicative of different patterns of meaning rather than evidence of fixed gender-based consumer categories of any particular size or percentage of the pub going public. While women have been targeted in pub development over the last 30 years (Schmidt and Sapsford, 1995), and this segment appears to now be a significant part of the pub landscape there still appears to be a divide between more masculine and more feminine consumers, although both factors contain both genders. Our research therefore suggests that consumer priorities may vary across demographic and life-stage groups, but further research using larger samples would be valuable to explore the prevalence and wider applicability of these patterns (see below).

While we have empirically tested this framework with the pub environment, other service environments such as cafes, casual dining, hair salons, gyms, vets, co-working spaces, airports etc include both product (prey), location and tangible and intangible atmospheric elements and could also be analysed using a foraging framework. We do not suggest that the specific currencies identified within this study will transfer directly to other contexts; rather, we propose that the foraging framework provides a useful theoretical lens through which future research can explore how consumers evaluate and trade off different attributes across service environments. The specific currencies that would be considered important to consumers in

these various service environments might differ. For example, research shows that individuals seeking co-working spaces look for good accessibility and affordability (Wejis-Perrée et al, 2019) while airport users look for commercial offerings and well positioned waiting areas (Blichfeldt et al, 2017). Once the preferred currencies are understood (using both the extant literature and data collection) a foraging and Q-methodology approach may provide a valuable approach for developing context specific segmentation and understanding trade-offs across a wide range of service environments.

Practical recommendations

The understanding of pub consumers and their currency prioritisation provides potential practical insights for pubs and pub companies, addressing our third research question. Firstly, our findings suggest that pubs should consider meeting the threshold capabilities as without this consumers will be unlikely even to visit the establishment. While this may seem obvious, a quick glance through trip advisor and other related posts show that many pubs still do not meet these minimum standards and a report in 2024 highlighted that as many as one in 40 pubs fail food hygiene ratings (Singh, 2024). Once basic requirements are met, pubs may benefit from considering how their offering aligns with different consumer priorities rather than attempting to appeal equally to all consumers. Traditional Pint Loyalists represent a key market, but focusing solely on them may alienate Inclusive Drinkers (Factor 2). Beverage-led wet pubs may find prioritising Factor 1 consumers useful, whereas food-led venues may find more success with Factor 2 consumers, despite facing stiffer competition for a smaller demographic. These implications should be interpreted as strategic considerations rather than universal recommendations, given that pub markets vary considerably by location, customer base, type and competitive environment. In high-traffic urban areas, pubs may benefit from specialising in a single segment to stand out. Conversely, rural pubs with limited local

populations often lack the luxury of niche targeting and must adapt their offerings to satisfy both groups at once. Catering to both audiences is difficult, but not impossible, and careful consideration of the servicescape (Martin, Jerrard and Wright, 2019), especially in regards to demarcation of spaces, is important to provide drinking and eating environments that will work for both audiences. Our findings therefore highlight the importance of understanding consumer diversity rather than suggesting that a single optimal pub model exists. The issues of gastro pubs alienating drinking only consumers (our factor 1) has been documented (Lane, 2018; Moss, 2023) and gentrification has been both blamed for pubs disappearing as well as saving some pubs and attracting new markets (Clark et al, 2023) but our research shows the importance of catering to wide audiences. As Mutch (2000) notes pubs must provide a range of consumers with "the potential for multiple interpretations both temporally and spatially" (p. 372) and Sandiford and Drivers (2011) note that where a pub becomes focused on food, or an exclusive and expensive drinking establishment this is more likely to impact disadvantaged consumers in rural areas who do not feel welcome, are not able to pay increased prices and/or have transport to alternative venues. Pubs in particular should beware of creating exclusionary atmospheres, but being gastro (Moss, 2023) or focusing too heavily on any particular audience as a core principle of the, especially good, pub, making it different from many other service environments, is that it should always be an egalitarian and inclusive and welcome all patrons, regardless of background, status or class (Lane, 2018; Thurnell-Read, 2024)

Using the services marketing mix (Booms and Bitner, 1981) as a framework there are various specific marketing strategies that could be taken with regards to each segment of consumers. These are summarised in Table 2. Price does not come through as a key element so is not included in this analysis.

Table 2: Services Marketing Mix Practical Recommendations

Services Marketing Mix Element	Traditional Pint Loyalists	Inclusive Drinkers	All pub consumers
Product/ Service	Variety and quality of beer options (supported by excellent cellar management to ensure quality)	Variety and quality of all drink options (beer, wine, spirits, nolo, soft drinks) and also careful consideration of food options.	Careful consideration of augmented services (music, TV, sport) to allow conversation and not disturb ability to socialise.
Place	Focus on further place design is not necessary. Seating allowance for solo drinkers.	Careful design to ensure comfort, cosiness, and layout for sociability/groups.	Focus on cleanliness, hygiene and maintenance (especially toilets). Careful consideration of lighting and temperature.
Promotion	These consumers are more regularly in the pub so can be promoted to in the pub (posters, beer mats etc). Focus of communications should be on beer (choice, quality, guest ales etc). Beer festivals or similar could be a key consideration.	These consumers are less regularly in the pub so should be promoted to away from the pub (through social media, wider static media (posters, local newspapers etc). Focus of communications should be on variety of offer, the pub as a sociable space and welcoming environment.	Website/social media communicating location, facilities, opening hours.
People	Staff knowledge (esp related to beer) is important meaning that training should be prioritised to build and maintain this knowledge. Cellar care is especially important for quality of (cask) beer offer and cellar training, and knowledge should also be a key focus.	Staff play a role in facilitating sociability, enhancing comfort and having knowledge of the product offer.	Focus on core hospitality values (consumer centricity, respect, integrity and excellence) maintained and built through training. Ensuring adequate staffing levels to support consumers.
Process	Space to allow interaction (to discuss beer, and distribute/share knowledge and to allow for tasting prior to purchase decision) should be built into the process.	Mix of staff focusing on service (at the bar), maintenance of the general environment (e.g. table clearing) and consideration of table service.	Being able to afford (pub size dependent) 2 members of staff at a minimum to cater to those different needs
Physical Evidence	Use of certification to support staff training, beer knowledge, cellar	Use of certification to support staff training (general service).	

	management and other relevant qualifications.		

Future research

Our study, using foraging theory to analyse pub consumers and their currency preferences has outlined two key factors/segments of pub consumers. While we settled on an approach using foraging theory, other theoretical approaches could have been taken and been equally valuable. For example, affordance theory could be used to analyze pub choice behavior, building on its recent successful applications across retail (Borghini et al., 2021), material (Pavlyuchenko and Dion, 2025), and digital domains (Appau et al., 2026; Mardon et al., 2023). Specifically, scholars could investigate how consumption decisions are shaped by a combination of social affordances for interaction (Lopes et al., 2018), physical and spatial affordances such as lighting and crowding (Tomej and Xiang, 2020; Wang et al., 2025), and activity affordances regarding what the venue enables a patron to do (Buckley and Akhoundogli, 2020).

Methodologically, in terms of limitations with Q there is never a guarantee that it will uncover all viewpoints, and future studies might uncover additional viewpoints (Brown et al, 1999). Additionally, Q is not intended to be generalisable (Ho, 2017) and while it tells us what the range of views are further research is needed to tell us how frequent these views are in the wider population (Zabala et al, 2018). Therefore future research should seek to determine more broadly if these segments are observed across a wider group of pub consumers, checking if other viewpoints emerge, perhaps via a large-scale quantitative survey. While the sample was relatively broad in terms of age, gender, employment status, location/conurbation type and pub visiting behaviour further research could also analyse further characteristics such as socio-economic status, religion and income. Like many other methods Q-method cannot only model dynamic preference shifts in consumers attitudes to and behaviours related to pubs. Given that the analysis shows that preferences, prioritization and trade offs may change over time, future

research should seek a method that can model these shifts using a longitudinal research method collecting data at regular intervals to assess and understand changes. One way, which could build on these results is to use discrete choice experiments to present bundles of attributes/features to consumers (Fairchild and Howell, 2026), based on what we now know about different segments of pub visitors. This would not have been possible previously due to potential overload of participants due to the numbers of attributes/features examined (Akinc et al, 2024).

Additionally, it would be worthwhile to examine these results in light of further research comparing drinking space and place behaviours in the UK with other global consumers especially given that UK drinking spaces/places are often contrasted with European style drinking venues (Brown, 2016). This research would need to take into account different drinking cultures that are observed across Europe and more widely in terms of styles of drinking, drink choices, amount of alcohol consumption, frequency of drinking etc (Kilian et al, 2021). Future research should also seek to examine whether these segments/factors differ by age group/generational cohort. Rowell's (2016) work also suggests that socio-economic background might be a key feature of pub choice, finding that those from a lower socioeconomic background tended to put less emphasis on the tangible/physical features of pubs. While we included educational level in our pre-q-sort questionnaire this was not a determining factor across the segments but future work could explore this issue further.

Q-set additions

As part of the q-sort methodology we asked participants what might be missing from the q-set and what could be added to future research replicating this work. Consumers broadly stated that they felt most aspects were covered by the q-set but also mentioned some additions including: opening hours, pub games, car parking, family friendliness, prices/affordability and

quality of music. Opening hours in particular appears to have become a more salient issue since Covid lockdowns with many pubs altering their hours from what might be considered normal in response to consumers going out earlier (Perrett, 2025). Future research should determine whether these are worthwhile including as currency elements.

Conclusion

Our research develops an exploratory structured segmentation of pub consumers using a psychographic approach informed by foraging theory. Using the first applied use of foraging currency with the non-digital marketing literature we offer a multi layered examination of consumer decision-making and provide initial empirical evidence of how foraging concept and consumer behaviour can be applied within an analogue, non-digital setting. Finally the work demonstrates a novel application of Q-methodology, rarely utilised in marketing/consumer behaviour studies, offering a robust approach to understanding complex consumer worldview perceptions, trade offs between preferences while providing context-specific insights that may inform, rather than prescribe, pub management strategies for attracting and retaining patrons.

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