Creating family-friendly pub experiences: A composite data study

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Abstract

Pubs have traditionally been important social and community spaces, hosting multiple consumer segments. Successful pubs have broadened their appeal, for example by expanding their food provision and targeting family segments. However, little is known about the features and practices that make pubs appealing to families. Drawing on a 'composite' data set, consisting of 40 qualitative interviews and 387 responses to a directed online discussion thread, this paper examines what contributes to making pubs family-friendly. Data show how parental consumption intersects with parenting work, highlighting how physical and symbolic design features, tailored services, social interactions, and socio-material practices of the food offerings can shape consumption experiences positively and negatively. The paper thus contributes to practical knowledge by identifying how pubs can create family-friendly experiences. It also contributes to theoretical knowledge by conceptualising how 'framing' processes or effects, shaped by personal, situational and socio-cultural 'imperatives', influence consumer perceptions, behaviours and experiences.

Keywords: Children; Consumption; Experience; Family; Pubs; Social servicescape

Highlights:
- Uses a composite data set generated through interviews and an instigated online forum
- Identifies the factors that make pubs welcoming for families with children
- Examines the role of physical and symbolic design coupled with tailored services
- Shows how interactions and food-related socio-material practices delight/frustrate
- Conceptualises how framing effects and diverse imperatives shape family consumption

1.   Introduction

The public house (or pub) has historically been an important part of social life in many parts of the world, especially in countries such as Australia, the United Kingdom (UK) and New Zealand (Kirby et al., 2010; Miller, 2019; Sandiford & Divers, 2014). Studies show that as a social institution it continues to have a positive role in communities, contributing to social cohesion, social capital and wellbeing (Cabras & Munt, 2017; Sandiford & Divers, 2019). Nevertheless, the pub sector has encountered considerable challenges, including a shifting demographic, changes in consumers' drinking behaviours and increasing competition from the cafe sector (Martin et al., 2019). These pressures have presented commercial opportunities, particularly as pub operators have moved away from relying on alcohol (or wet) sales, and increasingly focusing on food as part of their offering (Jones & Rowley, 2012; Mintel, 2019a; 2019b; Pratten & Maréchal, 2012). Furthermore, operators have recognised that the family market represents a strong potential income stream (Association of Licensed Multiple Retailers (ALMR), 2016; NDP, 2019; Proton Group, 2017). Indeed, financial experts largely attribute the increased number of families eating out, and child-friendly venues, as drivers of rising valuations of pubs (Schlesinger, 2018).

Recent years have seen growing academic interest in family experiences in hospitality and leisure settings more generally (Hay, 2018; Lugosi et al., 2016a; Schänzel & Carr, 2016). However, knowledge regarding families and children in pubs come primarily from journalistic commentaries in newspapers or trade publications, which focus on one of two themes: first, the tensions involved in welcoming families, either among resentful customers or families made to feel unwelcome in venues (Potter, 2017; Siddique, 2015; Sutherland, 2016); and second, offering practical advice on how to make pubs appeal to families, for example through their food offerings (Eversham, 2017; Hussein, 2016; Townshend, 2018). There is a dearth of academic research into pubs, which a) examines the consumption experiences of parents and carers with children, and b) provides empirical evidence regarding what makes venues family-friendly.

The theoretical and practical importance of studying family perspectives regarding pubs, rather than restaurants for example, is underpinned by some key socio-material features of contemporary pubs and the experiences they facilitate. Restaurant experiences are more likely to focus on a relatively narrow set of food-centric practices involving culturally-prescribed conventions such as eating in courses, using cutlery and observing table manners (cf. Hansen, 2014). A restaurant meal, even if adopting a buffet or self-service style, is also more likely to involve sitting in a delineated space i.e. at a table, with limited in-venue mobility.

Pubs accommodate a wider range of drinking, eating and interactional practices, including play among children, which are co-performed by disparate consumers in the same space. This creates greater scope for behaviours and noise that potentially lead to tensions between customers. Pubs also have further opportunities for people to move around the venue. Some may have differentiated spaces, including outdoor areas available for drinking, eating and childplay, with patrons moving in and across them. Such scope for mobility increases the chances that different groups of consumers, including children and adults, with different experiential motivations and expectations regarding behaviours, interact, thus raising the possibility for conflicts.

Historically, pubs were primarily adult-centric, male-oriented, working-class spaces, focused on the consumption of alcohol (Pratten, 2007a; 2007b). However, the evolution of pubs has challenged these historically embedded experiential and operational characteristics (Martin et al., 2019). Consequently, operators and consumers interact with a wider and more eclectic set of patrons, services and products in a single leisure space. This expansion of experiential possibilities amplifies the potential challenges of anticipating and accommodating increasing diversity.

The spatial flexibility of pub servicescapes, which incorporates multiple consumption practices and mobility, and the transformation of pubs to accommodate disparate consumers, including families, with diverse values, expectations and behaviours, presented two research questions for this research:

1. What are key socio-material dimensions of pubs that shape the consumption experiences of parents and carers with children?

2. How do parenting responsibilities intersect with leisure practices to shape expectations and outcomes of pub consumption experiences for parents and carers with children?

The former question is arguably more directly focused on generating consumer behaviour, marketing and operations management insights that help satisfy family segments through tailored pub services, products and designs. The latter question also has the potential to contribute to a better understanding of (family) consumer behaviour, but it also helps to create a richer theoretical understanding of how parenting identities, practices and socio-cultural imperatives frame perceptions of pub consumption experiences.

This study addresses existing gaps in knowledge regarding family pub consumption experiences using a 'composite' data set, comprising 40 semi-structured qualitative interviews and 387 contributions to a directed online forum on the topic of family-friendly pubs. The paper begins with a review of literature on the pub as a social space before exploring the literature on family consumption of hospitality and leisure. This is followed by outlining the social servicescape concept, which is used as a broad sensitising framework for the study. The findings and discussion examine three thematic areas: first, the general features of family-friendly pubs as communal spaces of consumption; second, family-friendly services and products; and third, food and food related practices as distinct features of family-friendly pubs. The conclusion considers the implications for future research and practice.

2. Literature review

2.1 The pub as social space

Previous research by social scientists has explored the social functions of pubs and bars, acting as places to build networks, express cultural values and maintain group cohesion (Hubbard, 2019; Markham, & Bosworth, 2016; Sandiford & Divers, 2011, 2014, 2019). However, research also recognised that pubs, like all social spaces are not inclusive for all (Johnson & Samdahl, 2005; Pratten & Lovatt, 2007). In the past they have been principally male, working class spaces often associated with excessive drinking and deviant behaviour (Campbell, 2000; Jayne et al., 2006; Kneale, 1999).

Perceived masculinity and emphasis on alcohol consumption as the primary source of revenue, coupled with shifting consumption patterns and a range of market

pressures, has presented a number of challenges for the pub sector, particularly in the United Kingdom (Andrews & Turner, 2012; Muir, 2012; Preece, 2016). Consequently, pubs have had to broaden their appeal to include women and families (Pratten & Lovatt, 2007; Roy Morgan, 2015).

The evolving nature of the pub as a social space is also reflected in the growing prominence of food in their experiential propositions (Jones & Rowley, 2012; Pratten, 2012). Academic research regarding the role of food in pubs has recognised market shifts, for example the increasing range and sophistication of food offerings (Maréchal, 2012; Pratten & Maréchal, 2012), and the growth of food-led pub genres such as gastropubs (Lane, 2018). However, academic work considering intersections of food and pubs has focused primarily on the wider societal dimensions, such as their role in gentrification (Ocejo, 2014) or their economic value (Cabras & Mount, 2016). Significantly, there is an absence of academic work examining how food is entangled within family consumption experiences in pubs, which reinforces the importance of studying the impacts of these and related socio-material dimensions.

Current knowledge regarding the family sector in pubs, including the role of food in their experiences, comes primarily from market research reflecting sectoral patterns of spend and patronage (Mintel, 2019a; 2019b) or from narrowly focused trade-oriented, journalistic commentary (Don, 2016; Eversham, 2017; Hussein, 2016). There is a dearth of academic research into factors shaping the consumer experiences of parents and carers with children. Nevertheless, there is a growing body of work on family experiences in tourism and leisure settings, which helps to frame the specific challenges involved in family-centric consumption.

2.2 *Family consumption of hospitality and leisure*

It is important to note at the outset that 'leisure' consumption for families reflects a series of contradictions. As recent studies have shown, leisure settings, such as pubs, do not simply translate into liberating, leisurely forms of consumption for those performing childcare duties (Carr, 2011; Schänzel & Lynch, 2016; Schänzel & Smith, 2014). They can offer temporary relief from the pressures of parenting. However, these leisure settings are another social domain outside of the home in which parenting responsibilities including feeding, changing, amusing, socialising and educating have to be performed. Moreover, within these public spaces, parents, carers and their children are subject to scrutiny by staff and fellow patrons, potentially adding to the pressure to be a 'good parent', whilst consuming leisure. Recent studies have thus highlighted that research and the management of family-oriented venues has to acknowledge the simultaneous existence of enjoyment, leisure, labour and potentially stress in family consumption (Freund et al., 2019; Khoo-Lattimore & Yang, 2018; Lugosi et al., 2016b).

Family experiences in hotels, restaurants and resorts have gained increased attention (Hay, 2018; Séraphin & Yallop, 2020; Schänzel & Carr, 2016), as have related issues such as family decision making processes (Chen et al., 2016; Khoo-Lattimore et al., 2015) and creating specialist services and products for families (Lee et al., 2016; Liu & Filimonau, 2020; Séraphin & Yallop, 2019). However, the pub as a distinct type of social space remains under-examined. This paper thus seeks to fill this gap in knowledge by exploring factors that potentially attract families to venues, shape their experiences and those that have the potential to detract from them. In this study a social servicescape perspective provides a generalised 'sensitising' framework (Patton, 2014), which helps

to draw attention to the interactions between various stakeholders and the consumption environment, and their potential impacts on customer experiences.

2.3   *Social servicescapes*

'Servicescape' entered the marketing and services lexicon in the early 1990s (Bitner, 1992; Wakefield & Blodgett, 1994), as a way to conceptualise the role of physical surroundings within service organisations, and their impacts on customers and employees. Since then this conceptualisation has evolved, incorporating human and service-relevant factors beyond the traditional physical domain (Pizam & Tasci, 2019; Zemke et al., 2018). Nilsson and Ballantyne (2014) emphasised the socially imbued nature of servicescapes, which are supported by a range of engagement dimensions and interaction zones that allow customers and providers to negotiate their roles, relations and experiences together. Research has thus argued for the strategic role of social servicescapes within consumption experiences as means of gaining competitive advantage (Alfakhri et al., 2018). Moreover, studies have stressed the need to examine intersections of social, physical and symbolic realms in examining antecedents and outcomes of consumer experiences (cf. Bolton et al., 2018; Torres et al., 2018).

One of the commonly adopted perspectives suggests that a combination of physical, social, symbolic and natural environmental dimensions (Rosenbaum & Massiah, 2011) are entangled to comprise a (perceived and experienced) social servicescape. Physically, these refer to the spatial layout and furnishings and the often-intangible ambient surrounds. Material artefacts laden with symbolism contribute to both a physical and socially symbolic servicescape (Pizam & Tasci, 2019), bringing aesthetic and functional qualities as well as a range of messages signalling belongingness (or not). Moreover, employees and other consumers perform and thus co-construct the social dimension within venues (Johnstone, 2012; Lugosi et al., 2020; Pizam & Tasci, 2019). Given the dynamic and multifaceted nature of pub experiences and of family leisure consumption identified above, studying the socio-material dimensions of pub experiences of parents and carers with children appears to be a substantial area of enquiry.

It is important to recognise the multidimensional nature of servicescapes and in particular the increased prominence given to the social aspects in research (Hanks & Line, 2018). Thus, while some dimensions of servicescape (i.e. the physical) are more controllable and manageable than others (e.g. the social or symbolic) (Rosenbaum & Massiah, 2011), service organisations are recognising the importance of multiple, intersecting stimuli to enhance customers' experiences (Martin et al., 2019). The complex needs of parents and carers in pubs, coupled with the potential for mobility and conflictual social interactions, further reinforces the need to study such experiences within family leisure consumption experiences.

Critically, literature has explored the impact of (social) servicescapes on particular customer groups in the market, which relates to and supports the objectives of this study. For example, Johnstone and Todd (2012), writing about retail environments as social servicescapes, argued that they allowed mothers to connect with the outside world, and deal with the isolation that motherhood can bring. Care giving can be a significant lifestyle and identity shift, and welcoming servicescapes could ease this transition (Johnstone, 2012). Lilius's (2019) research on the interplay between parenting and city living also highlighted that retail, restaurant and cafe service spaces

were integrated into the consumption geographies of middle-class families, facilitating their sociality and enabling them to express their (class) identities.

More specifically related to pubs, research on the impact of servicescapes on the experiences of women pubgoers showed that 'women perceive their desired pub experience as diametrically opposite to that provided by the traditional male-dominated pub' (Schmidt & Sapsford, 1995, p.34). Transforming pub servicescapes to ensure transparency and inclusivity thus made them attractive social spaces for women consumers. More recently, Martin et al. (2019) coined the term 'pubscape' to conceptualise efforts to envisage innovative servicescape environments that facilitate sociality, which can help to ensure that pubs maintain their roles as social and community spaces. Their study focused on the design and implementation processes of a case study pub company in developing their servicescapes. Nevertheless, their work serves to further stress the necessity to examine empirically the intersections of utilitarian and hedonic dimensions of pub social servicescapes and consumer experiences, particularly for parents and carers with children who have distinct needs and face unique challenges.

Existing studies thus stress the role of pubs as distinct types of social servicescapes facilitating consumer experiences for specific market segments. However, despite their historical and contemporary social functions, pubs as social servicescapes appealing to families, specifically those with children, have not been explored. This study addresses these gaps in existing knowledge by providing crucial insights regarding the socio-material factors that enable, enhance or constrain family experiences of pubs.

3.   Methods

3.1   Sample

This study followed an inductive qualitative strategy, adopting an interpretative, constructivist position (Lincoln & Guba, 2013) and utilising two methods: semi-structured interviews, and content analysis of contributions to an online discussion forum on the topic of family-friendly pubs. Interview participants were recruited through a combination of institutional databases, social networks and snowballing. The essential inclusion criterion was that they had to visit venues with children. However, within this purposive, 'criterion' sampling strategy (Patton, 2014), we sought to include consumers with different aged children and diverse patronage behaviours, ranging from light to heavy users.

The final sample of interviewees comprised 29 females and 11 males, which included mothers, fathers and those involved in caring for children. The majority of participants were 35-44 years of age, with the youngest 25 and oldest over 55. All the participants had either one or two children, whose average age was under 5, and ranged from 3 months to 15 years of age. Half the participants reported visiting venues with their children about once per week, about a third once to twice per month, and the remainder less frequently.

3.2   Data collection

The study's focus on the socio-material dimensions of parents' and carers' experiences in venues with children, and the lack of previous research, required an

exploratory approach. Semi-structured interviews were used to generate rich qualitative data, ensuring a certain degree of thematic focus and structure while allowing participants to explore new issues. Key areas considered were: venues participants visited and avoided, questioning the reasons for their choices; perceptions of the physical environments, service and products; and interactions with other customers. Participants were also asked to reflect on memorable positive and negative experiences (see Appendix 1 for an overview of questions and probes). Questions on socio-material dimensions of the environment were informed by previous work on social servicescapes (cf. Johnstone & Todd, 2012; Rosenbaum & Massiah, 2011). The open questions regarding positive and negative experiences in specific places sought to better understand the practical, embodied, symbolic and psychological dimensions of subjective experiences, which have been highlighted in previous work (e.g. Oldenburg, 1999; Walls et al., 2011). However, in crafting the protocols, we were also mindful of existing research on parenting and leisure which stressed the multiplicity of roles, tensions and opportunities involved for parents and carers (e.g. Mottiar & Quinn, 2012; Schänzel & Carr, 2016).

The interviews were conducted in pubs, cafes, restaurants, participants' homes and backyards and university rooms. These places were chosen because they were convenient for respondents, accessible and allowed for digital recording of the conversations. Several parents had children with them during the interviews. The interviews lasted for approximately one-hour and were transcribed in three batches, which allowed analysis to begin before all the data were collected.

The second data source was a publicly accessible discussion thread, which was instigated by a third party on a popular parenting networking site. The forum was identified as part of a wider exploratory 'investigative strategy' seeking to obtain information relevant to this study's research questions (cf. Bezzola & Lugosi, 2018). This material thus falls between 'naturalistic' and 'instigated' data (Speer, 2002). The thread was not created by academic researchers, and the authors had no input into the forum, its scope and focus or responses. Nevertheless, the thread was focused on a well-defined topic aligned with the study's aims, openly available and thus provided a complementary source of information to expand the scope of the enquiry whilst maintaining the focus. The original post stated: 'We'd love to know what you think makes a family friendly pub and to name any pubs in your local area which you believe have a great family friendly atmosphere.' This thread yielded 387 responses, totalling 22,877 words of usable text for analysis. The nature of the data and its source, meant that we had no control over who contributed and no demographic information was available about the forum's contributors. Nevertheless, it can reasonably be assumed that the forum contributors had experience of visiting pubs with children in their care, so they met the inclusion criteria.

3.3   Data analysis

Interview data were analysed by all the five authors reading and coding the transcribed material independently. The semi-structured question schedule provided common points of reference such as design and layout, products and services, which informed the initial analysis. These sensitising concepts were used in coding to identify 'semantic relationships' (Sandiford & Seymour, 2007), for instance examples of significant socio-material features, illustrations of how they were used or shaped

experiences and their affective qualities or attitudes towards them. These were enhanced by other codes identified through a more inductive, 'open-ended' process (Saldaña, 2009) where recurring patterns in the transcribed text were manually categorised by the researchers independently. Examples included 'other customers' and their roles, and the challenges of child-caring responsibilities linked to consumption experiences. These coded data were re-ordered into thematic areas of enquiry, used to focus the subsequent analysis exploring further semantic relationships; for instance, how other customers influenced perceptions of venues or shaped parents'/carers' behaviours.

The data generated through the online forum was initially read and assessed by four of the authors manually as part of a similar familiarisation process, combining pre-existing sensitising concepts with responsive, open-coding. Given its less structured nature, the data were subsequently cleaned and the usable text was further analysed using Leximancer: a software package that organises qualitative data using semantic patterns, capturing the frequency of words and lexical co-occurrence (Cretchley et al., 2010). Words or 'concepts', in Leximancer's terminology, that appear relatively often and clusters of concepts that frequently co-occur constitute 'themes' (displayed by the software as circles in Figure 1). The software generates text-based 'heat' maps, with the 'hottest' or most pronounced themes being in hot colours (red, orange), and the least in cool colours (green, blue) (see Figure 1). The positioning of each concept on the map (e.g. 'space') represents the connectivity to other concepts (e.g. 'table' or 'buggies'), helping to appreciate the context that a concept was more likely to appear in. Leximancer also produces concept-related lists of text supporting further interpretation.

Importantly, Leximancer processes data algorithmically to identify multiple potential patterns, but advanced analysis and interpretation of findings is researcher-driven and benefits from further refinement. For example, after the initial analysis, general terms such as 'places' or 'respondent' were removed from the list of automatically generated concepts since they did not add any value to our analysis. Synonyms (e.g., 'baby' and 'child'; 'buggy' and 'pram'; 'ambience' and 'atmosphere'), words with American and British English spelling differences (e.g., 'organization' and 'organisation') and the majority of word stems (e.g., 'adult' and 'adults'; 'seats' and 'seating') were manually merged.

In parallel with the software analysis, two of the authors read the clean and reduced forum data, working through standard thematic analysis involving familiarisation and open coding (Patton, 2014). Following this independent analysis, the authors conducted several meetings to discuss the potential meaning and significance of general concept patterns identified through Leximancer. An example was the term 'menu' and its association with terms such as 'portions', 'smaller' and 'chips' [fries].

It is important to stress that Leximancer was used primarily as an initial data sorting and ordering tool. The analysis continued to remain faithful to an interpretivist strategy in identifying substantial thematic areas that translate into meaningful findings. For example the term or concept 'crayon' featured heavily in Leximancer's outputs, but researcher interpretations led to the conclusion that this concept did not point to significant findings or contributions to knowledge per se. The team also discussed concepts and themes identified in the interview data to assess how they could be used to interpret the online forum data. These included further concepts such as 'home', 'welcome' and 'friendly' to think about motivations and rewards associated with consumption experiences, as well as qualities of spaces and experiences.

Following this, the authors discussed which thematic areas had the strongest potential for management application. Analysis, ordering and display were therefore part of an ongoing interpretative activity, continuing through to the writing process (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2018). In a final step, the findings from both data sets were re-evaluated by the team to identify the most insightful themes to be included in the manuscript.

4.   Findings and discussion

4.1   Parenting spaces – community places

The notion of pubs as family-friendly spaces had numerous dimensions to them. However, it was interesting to note that venues had to simultaneously address adults' needs as consumers and as individuals with childcare responsibilities. For example, as one parent noted during an interview:

> *And the other place we take [our son] to would be something like a carvery pub, because they don't do the kiddie menu with the chicken nuggets coming out of their ears. There is the veg, the kids can choose themselves, they are very child friendly, you can have a child's portion for example, it's food that I can give him with a clear conscience. It's a noisy, boisterous place, so if he freaks out it's fine, and it's a casual place.* (Brigitte)

The venue's product and service offerings, coupled with atmospheric components of the pubscape, enabled carers to perform multiple aspects of parenting: i.e. providing children the freedom to choose their foods and play, while assuring that they were feeding them responsibly. Moreover, reflecting the potential for children's mobility and the necessity of adult-child coexistence within pubs environment, forum contributors referred to having sufficient 'space between tables so you can walk an impatient toddler out without disturbing' others, the benefits of having 'enough space behind your chair [when] breastfeeding', and the importance of having adequate space to manoeuvre prams and buggies. Parents and carers appeared to evaluate the functionality and efficacy of the servicescape based on its ability to support or hinder their ability to perform their parenting duties.

However, there were also important psychological dimensions to pub servicescape experiences and evaluations, particularly as they amplified or negated risks associated with parenting in public. For example, informality was seen as an asset because of reduced normative expectations around the children's behaviour and adults' parenting skills. Similarly, children's noise was not seen to provoke criticism. These observations concerning noise echo previous research in foodservice settings, which showed that parents and carers actively sought out venues and evaluated them on their ability to make them and their children 'inaudible' (Lugosi et al., 2016b). Reduced scrutiny from fellow patrons because of children's noise, which may have provoked negative reactions, enabled parents and carers to enjoy pub experiences.

The work of parenting was key to framing expectations and experiences, but the data also showed that parent and carer responsibilities coexisted with the desire for pleasure. Venues thus had to appeal to parents as consumers more generally.

If it weren't for the very good beer and food, I probably wouldn't come as often. But to be perfectly honest, it's the staff, and being able to interact with people locally in the place, it's the community aspect of it that I personally find most appealing. It is one thing to walk into a pub that has nice beer and one thing to walk into pub that has nice beer and where people know your name, you come in and it sort of feels like it's part of a neighbourhood. I'm excited to bring people over here too, it really feels like a local. In some sense, it feels like this is my pub, or my neighbourhood's pubs anyway… The staff are very friendly. (Carl)

These kinds of responses reflected an ongoing, affective relationship with pubs, reminiscent of 'third places' (cf. Oldenburg, 1999). Moreover, the venues talked about in these descriptions had the potential to satisfy and delight across a number of physical, social, product and service factors, offering something for them and the children in their care.

We went to a "family friendly" pub once. It was soulless and awful. It felt like the aliens from "the Stepford Wives" had read that we humans like to spend time in pubs and had tried ever so hard to make a simulation of one. Setting out to be a "family friendly pub" is not the way to go.
On the other hand, we have at least three local pubs that are brilliant. Typically, with a first priority to be a great pub - excellent real ales, simple but delicious food, battered but serviceable furniture and cozy fires in winter. They are all lovely. They are also welcoming to families - all that's needed is a stack of high chairs, a box of toys in the corner and a baby change table (one that either a dad or a mum can use without feeling that the pub is assuming that mum deals with babies thank you). A bonus would be being open to doing food at a half-portion for half-price for kids, and flexible to allow any adaptions that might be needed for fussy eaters.
But if you're not focusing on being a great pub to start with, serving excellent well-kept real beers (and bringing variety with interesting guest ales) to everyone whether or not they have kids, then none of these things will make the place into an actually nice place to be. (Forum contributor)

This type of commentary also stressed the social and communal nature of the experience, thus recognising the role of other clients in making pubs friendly: 'For me, a family friendly pub is one where other customers don't cast scornful glances if your children dare to do something they don't like.' (Forum contributor). The family-friendly pub evidently contrasted with the traditional masculine and alcohol-focused spaces and servicescapes the literature reports (cf. Campbell, 2000; Jayne et al., 2006). More than this, although clearly women's experiences of pubs might typify this perspective (Schmidt & Sapsford, 1995), the representation of fathers in the data reflects new shared parenting practices. This resonates with Lilius's (2019) observations regarding the duality of servicescapes to facilitate parenting and adult sociality for fathers and mothers. The family-friendliness of pubs is arguably shaped by venues' ability to accommodate diverse types of carers, performing disparate parenting practices that can coexist with more traditional pub-related consumption patterns.

Interestingly, the same parent acknowledged their responsibility for maintaining the social order: 'but it's also one where parents don't let their kids run riot.' In fact, parents in the interviews reported tactically deploying tablets and other digital devices so their children remained stationary and quiet. The work of parenting was therefore an implicit dimension of their leisure consumption and parents relied on a combination of the pubs' and their own resources in these parental responsibilities.
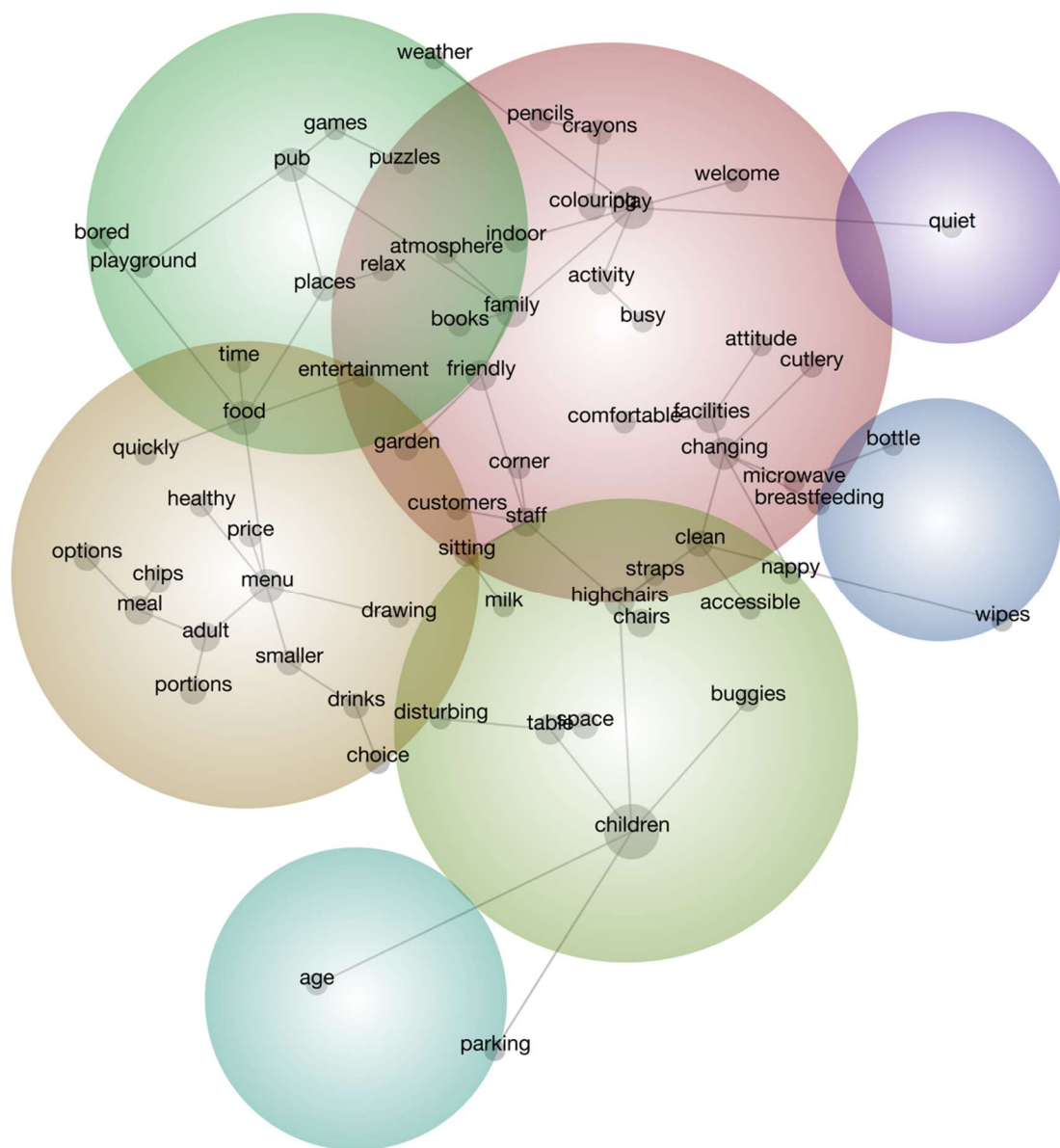

Figure 1: Leximancer concept map displaying family-friendly components of pub experiences

'Disturbing', which is implicit in the 'run riot' extract above, was a pervasive theme in the data, and the term 'disturbing' was almost always used in the context of space. For example: 'We have a separate area for those with smaller children meaning that we do not have to worry about disturbing 'couples'' and 'we often meet other families [in a pub] as we can take over a large corner for an afternoon, kids can play

without disturbing others' (Forum contributors). Data suggested that awareness among staff and parents for children's 'managed mobility' was key to minimising disturbance for fellow patrons. Three important issues were intertwined in this aspect of family-friendly experiences: that parents can relax somewhat as children do their own socialising while moving about in specific regions of the venue; that the functional but sometimes messy business of eating can be compartmentalised; and all this can function while respecting the space and comfort of other patrons. Previous work has suggested that spaces in which parents are temporally confined with other social groups are contested and can be places of angst and intolerance (cf. Lugosi, 2010; Lugosi et al., 2016b; Small & Harris, 2014). The data in the current study stressed that parents were often highly sensitised to the risk of disturbing others and proactive in attempting to minimise negative incidents. Purposive planning and arrangement of the servicescape could support their efforts, particularly if it facilitated the separation of family spaces within pubs.

4.2   Family-friendly facilities and services

As expected, family-friendly facilities were strong themes to emerge across the data. The socio-material environment and service interactions had to work in tandem to support the 'work' of parenting, which then enabled carers and their children to enjoy the leisure experience. These typically included clean toilets, changing facilities, including ones also available to men rather than just women: 'Good toilet facilities are a must' (Forum contributor). High-chairs and other appropriate furniture where carers felt their children were safe and comfortable were appreciated, as were activities such as puzzles and crayons to entertain the children: 'activity packs or colouring sheets are great for keeping little ones busy until their food arrives' (Forum contributor).

Distinct play areas also featured heavily in descriptions, the key qualities of which were 'delineated freedom' and 'surveillance'. In other words, play areas were seen as effective when they enabled children to amuse themselves while not disturbing their parents/carers or other customers. Moreover, they had physical boundaries, which helped contain children. Importantly, these were surveillable whilst the parents/carers could enjoy the food, drink and the experience. For example:

> *My [son] was a runner as a toddler. I was always on the lookout for places with fences, because it means he gets to run free while I sit back and watch from a distance. A glass of beer and a pub lunch while I watch him? What luxury!* (Forum contributor)

The servicescape enabled parents and care providers to perform their parenting responsibilities whilst simultaneously enjoying their delineated (micro) space and time within the broader consumption context.

Linked to the duality of roles and experiences (i.e. consumer/parent, leisure/work) it was important that families with children felt welcomed in venues, and staff supported them with both roles. A small number of respondents suggested that they appreciated specialised services such as warming of baby food. However, similarly to Lugosi et al. (2016b), family-friendliness was often communicated in small gestures from staff (see also Jung & Yoon, 2011). For example, illustrating such gestures, a forum contributor observed: 'A friendly smile when you walk in, good food which you

don't have to wait too long for'. Indeed, the concepts of 'friendly' and 'staff' were in close proximity (see Figure 1). Importantly, any notion of hospitality could similarly be undermined through the smallest of gestures. As another forum contributor noted: 'Not looking daggers at you when you walk through the door (although maybe I can understand it where my kids are concerned as they're not the quietest)'.

4.3   Food matters

The nature of food offerings was a substantial theme to emerge across the data sets. This had a number of dimensions including the type and quality of the foods, and the portioning. The quality and availability of chips [fries] and other staple comfort foods was a recurring theme. However, many parents were sceptical of the quality of items available in 'kids'' menus and welcomed appropriately priced child-portions of adult meals. For example:

> *And your kids' menu, it's always fish and chips, chicken nuggets, pizzas, ham burgers, why isn't it roast meat and vegetables and good healthy food, just a kid's portion, you know? I don't understand. So I don't like the menu-ing sometimes for kids.* (Sara)

> *A good choice of fresh food on a children's menu not just frozen fish fingers and chips or hot dog in a stale roll.* (Forum contributor)

Many of the forum contributors expressed similar sentiments in statements such as this: 'Child sized portions of adult menu rather than the typical chicken nuggets and chips.' Research has acknowledged the importance of children in decision making (Hay, 2018; Khoo-Lattimore et al., 2015; Lugosi et al., 2016a). Nevertheless, the concerns regarding 'kid's menus' and the desire to foreground adult food, points to the importance of appealing to adults, who have quality expectations and wish to socialise their children into adopting similar food practices and continue to be important decision makers in these contexts. This reflects an opportunity for practitioners to refine their offerings – reducing the number of specialised 'children's products' that do not necessary offer direct income streams because adults do not consume them. However, it is necessary to recognise a potential class bias in our samples. Therefore, it is important to consider whether concerns over kid's menus and adult portions translate across different demographic or cultural groups.

Linked to the food offerings were the accompanying aspects of service, for example cutlery:

> *One thing that would be great, would be cutlery for little ones. As we have been places before, and my 2 year-old feeds herself but the cutlery was huge and she's struggled with it, and they had no smaller ones.* (Forum contributor)

The availability of plastic cutlery was also mentioned in the context of safety. Dealing with receptacles, like baby bottles, was a frequent source of parental angst, which on the one hand could make an experience: '… microwave or any other sort of bottle warming facility very useful'; and on the other could undermine it: 'we've been to a few places

that simply refuse to warm up milk or food even in a kitchen or behind a bar' (Forum contributors). These again reinforced the positive contributions that small gestures of hospitality could make to family experiences because they helped to perform parenting responsibilities.

5.   Discussion and conclusions

The study's findings suggest that, in some respect, family-friendliness is underpinned by components applicable to many pub operations: good quality food offerings designed around the target segment's specific needs, a welcoming environment, personalised, hospitable service and a sense of community reflected in the physical environment and facilities but also the attitudes and behaviours of fellow patrons. However, the data also helped to appreciate how these features may take a particular form, or acquire specific meanings for parents and carers with children, thus translating into family-friendly experiences.

Figure 2 summarises six components shaping consumer experiences, three of which are essential servicescape dimensions: 'Space/Function', 'Ambient conditions', and 'Signs, symbols and artefacts', alongside 'Products', 'Service' and 'Other consumers'. It is important to note that within previous conceptualisations of social servicescapes (e.g. Rosenbaum & Massiah, 2011) interactions between and among employees and consumers were subsumed under 'social dimensions'. Here, 'Service' components, which include staff-customer interactions and processes, are presented separately from 'Other consumers' and the emotions, attitudes and behaviours they display. This was done purposefully to stress the role of co-present customers in shaping the experiences of parents and carers with children, and vice versa. As this and other studies have shown, other consumers can dramatically shift perceptions and experiences of hospitality places, reinforcing or undermining notions that they are 'family-friendly' (cf. Laurier & Philo, 2006; Lugosi, 2010; 2016b). Similarly, the wider shift in pubs from being primarily male, alcohol-oriented spaces to multi-segment, food-focused places, with increased opportunities for in-venue mobility, facilitating interactions and conflicts between adults and children, raise the possibility that family consumers disrupt the experiences of adults without children.
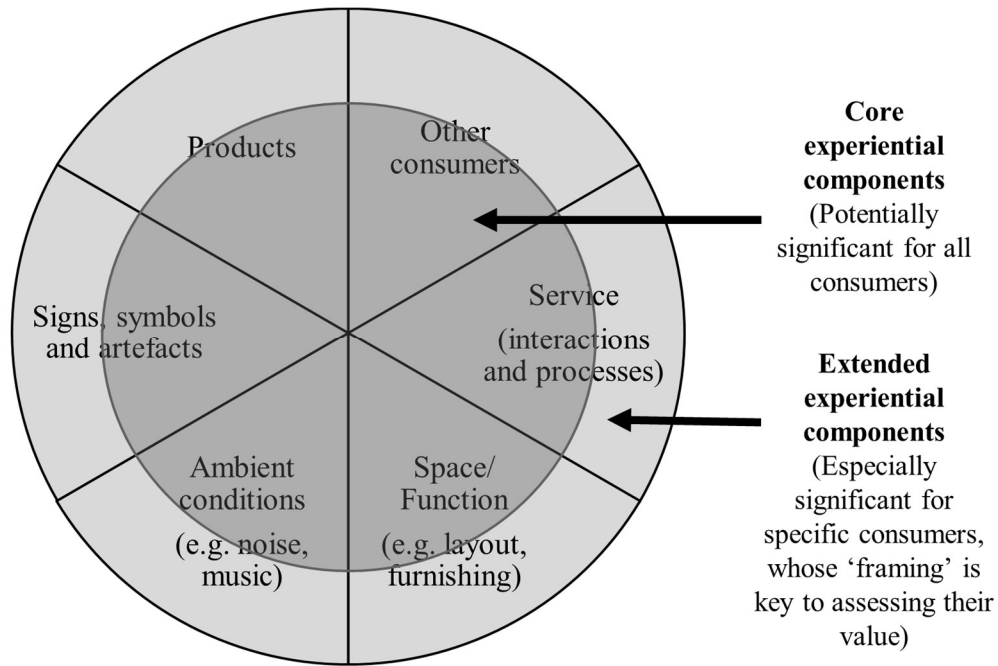
Figure 2. Core and extended experiential components

Arguably, the six components play distinct, extended roles in the experiences of particular segments, who assess the value of these dimensions based on 'framing' processes or effects. The findings help to understand how framing can operate in evaluating the experiences of parents and carers with children. Following Goffman (1974), 'framing' refers to the selective perception and interpretation of reality, as people draw on context-specific cues and tacit knowledge to give meaning to events, objects and actions. Scholars have debated whether frames are consciously or intentionally constructed, and if they should be seen in cognitive and behavioural terms, or as part of social phenomena (Fisher, 1997). However, in the current discussion, framing is used as a sensitising concept to stress that consumers draw on a range of contextual cues and culturally developed knowledge to shape their expectations of and practices in consumption experiences.

Figure 3 highlights that the framing of hospitality consumption experiences for those performing parental and caring roles is shaped by a number of 'imperatives'. Some of these are psychological or biological, for example, parents' instinctive need to feed a child or ensure their cleanliness and safety. Others are socio-cultural, stemming from societal expectations of how a 'good' parent or 'well-mannered' child should behave in public. Others are more contextual, for instance concerning social interactions with others, including between adults and children in a venue, or the socio-material qualities of a hospitality operation. These imperatives 'frame' how consumers, in this case parents and carers with children, perceive and interpret socio-material practices. Consequently, these processes of framing create expectations regarding the venue, the consumption experience, their behaviours and those of others co-present, including the service providers.
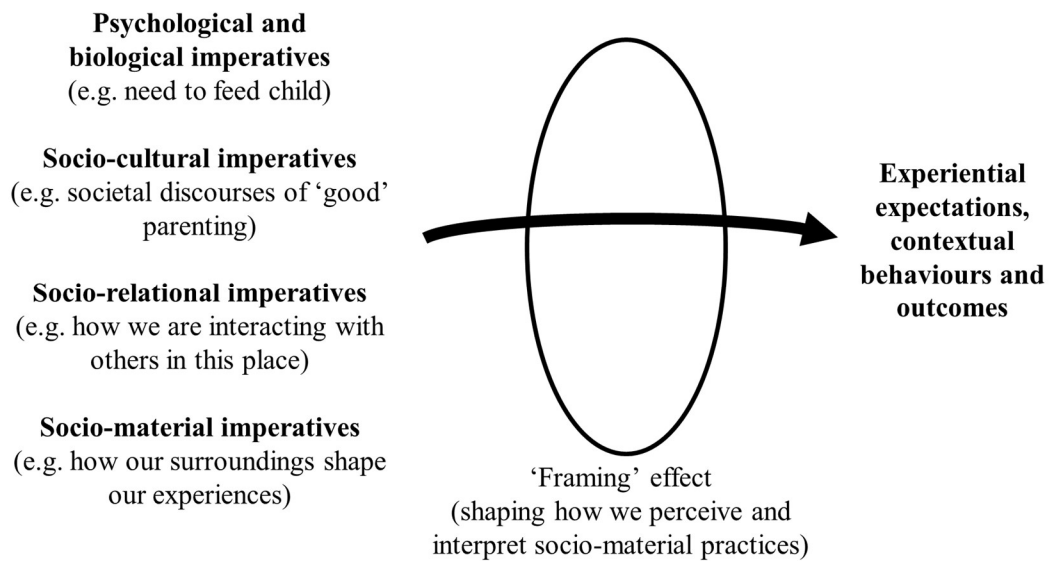
Psychological and biological imperatives (e.g. need to feed child)

Socio-cultural imperatives (e.g. societal discourses of 'good' parenting)

Socio-relational imperatives (e.g. how we are interacting with others in this place)

Socio-material imperatives (e.g. how our surroundings shape our experiences)

Experiential expectations, contextual behaviours and outcomes

'Framing' effect (shaping how we perceive and interpret socio-material practices)

Figure 3. Imperatives shaping parental framing

The framing effect, driven by biological, societal and contextual imperatives, shapes what they seek from the consumption experience. As Figure 4 illustrates, expectations from the venue, the operators and other consumers are thus framed by the extent to which they support or hinder the performance of caring responsibilities.
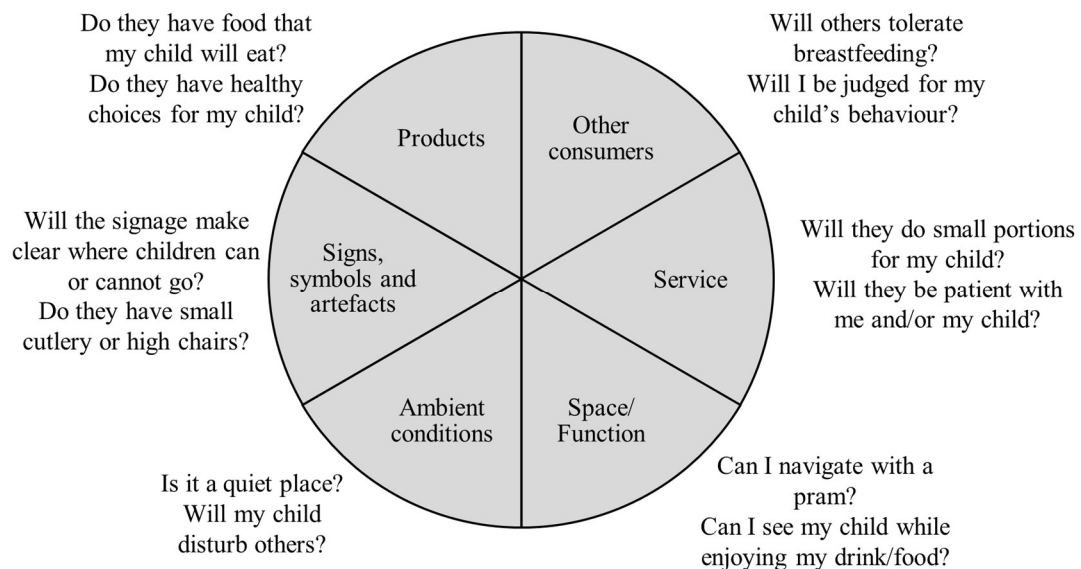

Do they have food that my child will eat? Do they have healthy choices for my child?

Will others tolerate breastfeeding? Will I be judged for my child's behaviour?

Will the signage make clear where children can or cannot go? Do they have small cutlery or high chairs?

Will they do small portions for my child? Will they be patient with me and/or my child?

Is it a quiet place? Will my child disturb others?

Can I navigate with a pram? Can I see my child while enjoying my drink/food?

Products | Other consumers | Service | Space/Function | Ambient conditions | Signs, symbols and artefacts

Figure 4. Examples of 'framed' evaluations of family-friendly experiential dimensions

5.1   *Practical and managerial implications*

This study's findings have implications for operations and marketing management, alongside strategic decision making. Regarding strategic business development, the six experiential components identified in this study could be incorporated into strategic Importance-Performance Analysis (IPA) (Sever, 2015),

using these as indicators to evaluate experiential performance and identify strengths and areas for potential improvement. This would be particularly relevant to pub operations targeting family segments, looking to disaggregate their performance in different domains of their experiential propositions e.g. service, product, design etc.

Operationally, the data suggests that creating or facilitating family-friendly experiences can be supported by relatively small changes to core offerings. In terms of design and layout, this involves adopting a separation strategy and creating dedicated, but surveillable spaces within venues. This can help to diffuse potential tensions stemming from conflictual interactions between children and adults. It also enables adults to perform parenting responsibilities while simultaneously pursuing their own leisure pursuits. More strategically, such insights regarding the usefulness of spatial separation and zoning, including how mobility in and across such spaces is managed, can be incorporated into the design and conceptualisation of pubscapes by operators principally targeting family segments and especially by those appealing to multiple markets in the same venue (cf. Martin et al., 2019; Tuomi & Tussyadiah, 2020).

From a product perspective, which also encompasses symbolic elements, making available smaller portions of adult menus, rather than dedicated children's menus, and providing smaller cutlery, can extend the perceived choice, assuring parents that their children have 'nutritious' food. Importantly, perceived choice can be achieved while maintaining efficiencies by utilising existing menu items and food preparation. However, the findings also point to the marketing implications of specific dishes, in this case chips [fries]. Given their wide appeal, concentrating on developing, maintaining and promoting the distinctiveness and quality of this one dish, or analogous signature dishes, could be used to generate interest and loyalty among adults and children.

Service and its symbolic elements also has a very important role in creating and maintaining family-friendly pub experiences. Staff explicitly recognising the challenges of parenting experiences in pubs and responding to the needs of parents who are 'doing parenting' whilst trying to enjoy their leisure, appears to have implications for affective relationships between consumers and place. Just as micro-aggression among staff and consumers can make places inhospitable (Lugosi, 2016b), small gestures expressing tolerance, patience and empathy towards the duality of 'parenting-in-leisure' can reassure parents and carers that they are welcome here as a family, and experience their visit as primarily focusing on enjoyable recreational consumption rather than parental labour in public. This may also extend to ensuring other consumers are made aware that families are welcome, for example responding appropriately to complaints about breastfeeding (cf. Lugosi, 2010).

Family-friendly service coupled with the purposeful use of artefacts also have implications for experience co-creation among consumers. Hospitable gestures, the visible presence of objects such highchairs, colouring materials and toys, and the dedication of space to playgrounds, inside play areas and pram parking spaces operate as a form of 'value signalling' (Lugosi et al., 2020), communicating to all users that the organisation is inclusive, accommodating and welcoming of families, children and parenting. Parents and carers in the study appeared to recognise and reciprocate organisational attempts to signal that they and their children were welcome, driving 'cooperative co-production' (Torres et al., 2018). This manifested in carers' disposition towards other patrons, and not only being conscious of, but also taking proactive steps in, respecting their needs and not disturbing them. Consequently, incorporating family-friendly dimensions into the socio-materiality of pub service experiences can potentially

augment the satisfaction of multiple consumer groups who simultaneously cohabit these places and have diverse expectations from these servicescapes (cf. Andrews & Turner, 2017; Martin et al., 2019).

5.2   *Theoretical implications*

The data were used to distil and distinguish between six experiential components, which can be used to appreciate how different socio-material elements combine to shape consumer experiences in pubs for parents and carers with children. As noted above, this proposed framework deliberately treated 'Other customers' as a distinct component, partly to acknowledge their substantial role in shaping family-friendliness of places (Lugosi et al., 2016b), but also because of the specific qualities of pubscapes to facilitate mobility and interaction between adults and children (Martin et al., 2019). Beyond this study, this framework can be used to conceptualise and evaluate consumer experiences and customer experience management components in other empirical contexts, within and beyond pub settings.

Moreover, the study proposed using the notion of 'framing' (Goffman, 1974) to conceptualise how and why the six experiential components may be interpreted and evaluated uniquely by distinct consumer segments. Furthermore, the discussion identified how diverse 'imperatives' can help to explain framing effects among consumers, which shape experiential expectations, behaviours and outcomes. This study pointed to imperatives operating at various conceptual levels ranging from the individual, the situational, to the societal. It distinguished between psychological and biological factors associated with childcare, contextual factors, including the socio-material and relational elements of the servicescape, and wider socio-cultural ones stemming from societal expectations regarding identity norms and practices. Examining consumer experiences and their management through framing effects and their underpinning imperatives provides a transferable sensitising framework for future studies seeking to understand antecedents, mediating factors and outcomes of consumer behaviour, with particular reference to experiential consumption.

5.3   *Methodological implications*

Finally, the study's integration of multiple data also has implications for research and thus represents a methodological contribution to knowledge. The study utilised what may be described as 'composite' data, from multiple sources, including semi-structured interviews and a focused online forum, which falls between naturalistic and contrived data. There is considerable scope to instigate analogous, focused contributions to online forums in future studies, but also to utilise such data sets even if its generation is not orchestrated by the researchers. Using multiple data in a 'bricolage' methodological strategy (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017) is established practice in ethnographic and case study research. However, this study shows the opportunities to combine multiple data sets including those generated purposefully for the study and those that directly align with the study's focus but not originally created within or for the research.

This study illustrated the potential of integrating diverse data and analysis techniques while highlighting that the ability to utilise these is determined by the homogeneity of the data and its alignment with the study's empirical focus. In this context, the complementary empirical material were used in a 'data triangulation'

strategy (Denzin, 2009). The study also pointed to challenges, particularly in processing, cleaning and analysing this type of 'messy' data, alongside the interview data which were more ordered due to their orchestrated generation. For the semi-structured interviews, the adoption of consistent data gathering procedures, parallel coding and dialogue during multiple cycles of analysis helped to ensure conceptual focus and rigour. This was complemented by the use of a less ordered, secondary data set, the forum contributions, which was processed using computerised, algorithmic ordering, display and data reduction processes (Cretchley et al., 2010). The study demonstrated how the different data were integrated through 'researcher triangulation' (Denzin, 2009) to ensure dependability, trustworthiness and credibility.

5.4   *Limitations and future research*

The current study's limitations point to opportunities for future research. Most obviously, the context was a traditional Anglophonic institution – the pub. While this gives some confidence that findings are transferable across pub settings in non-Anglophonic settings, there are opportunities to consider the impact of social servicescapes in other leisure and tourism settings, which nascent literature is beginning to explore (e.g. Mottiar & Quinn, 2012; Schänzel & Lynch, 2016; Schänzel & Smith, 2014) and in other cultures (Khoo-Lattimore et al., 2015). Furthermore, the employee perspective was not actively interrogated in the current study. Consequently, there is considerable scope to examine operators' perspectives on challenges and opportunities associated with family consumers. Future work can examine how their experiences can be managed alongside those of other consumer segments in informal social servicescapes such as pubs where in-venue mobility and interaction is highly likely. Moreover, recent literature has investigated children's roles in hospitality and tourism-related decision making, advocating for research to acknowledge their agency (Chen et al., 2016; Hay, 2017). The ethical complexities of conducting research with children constrained the possibility to capture their experiences and opinions in this study. Incorporating children's perspectives in future research could enhance existing knowledge of family, parental and children's experiences in leisure settings as defined by, and mediated through, servicescapes, in pubs and beyond.

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