

Pop-ups, Meetups and Supper Clubs:
An exploration into Online Mediated Commensality
and its role and significance within contemporary
hospitality provision.

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Abstract

This thesis introduces the concept of Online Mediated Commensality (OMC) as an example of contemporary hospitality provision. Since the beginning of the twenty-first century an increase of exchanges of hospitality being mediated using online technologies has changed the way in which individuals interact and challenges the traditional boundaries between strangers. While some research has been done on accommodation, little has been researched on the interactions around the meal and the online mediation of experiences.

The aim of this research is to explore the role and significance of OMC and its place in contemporary hospitality provision. Through a detailed review of academic literature on concepts relating to commensality, hospitality, alternative economies and home, a conceptual understanding of the phenomenon was achieved. Due to the paucity of research on the OMC phenomenon, a review of recent non-academic and anecdotal sources (newspaper articles, reviews, books relating to experiences of OMC) was used to scope the phenomenon's contemporary significance. Due to the exploratory nature of this research, and the social nature of the phenomenon, a qualitative approach to research is used to gain insight into the interactions, behaviours and social practices of those participating. Two stages of research material collection are used (Autoethnographic Participant Observation and Discussion-style Interviews) to critically understand and interpret the phenomenon.

The findings identified a number of social practices around the shared meal. Interpretations of the phenomenon resulted in the identification of the 'Home-food Economy', in which OMC is placed, which embodies and embraces ethical, shared and innovative dimensions of an alternative economy. Attractions of the phenomenon are identified as being that it is different to mainstream hospitality provision and is strongly associated with 'traditional' norms and values relating to family, background, nationality and identity. Interactions and social practices are identified as being fleeting, transient, momentary experiences of hospitality which rarely transcend the setting of the meal. These interactions are conceptualised within a proposed 'Social Interaction Capital', which represents the nature of social

interactions experienced as well as its presence within a liquid, fluidly mobile contemporary society. The study has identified a social phenomenon which is constructed within the confines, conditions or thresholds of hospitality.

In terms of future implications, this thesis suggests that while OMC will not achieve prominence over mainstream hospitality provision, it will continue to develop and grow in popularity for those who are interested in the more alternative, socially orientated experiences of hospitality and the meal. Further research on OMC could take a global perspective and highlight any cultural/social differences relating to commensality and its online mediation. Similarly, Social Interaction Capital could be further elaborated on in a range of hospitality settings to articulate its reach and contextualisation within hospitality studies and its place within contemporary society.

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Reflective Prologue: A journey of food and commensality

As a child, I was a very fussy eater. Cheese, bread, roast potatoes and carrots was about as far as I got (and the carrots had to be chopped long-ways, I wouldn't eat them round). As I grew older, mealtimes became stressed and tense as I would refuse to try certain foods, pick out the ingredients I did not like and look feebly at my parents when presented with something that I knew I wouldn't like.

I did, however, love a Sunday roast. Chicken was my favourite, the crispy skin, white breast meat, with roast potatoes, carrots and gravy and apple crumble and custard for dessert. This became a staple Sunday meal, with the familiar smells wafting through the house and my parents and I sitting down at 6pm to enjoy a meal that I, or we, knew I would like. Looking back, it was not just the meal that I enjoyed but the theatre around it. The preparation as my parents would go through the usual process like a well-oiled machine; the Top 40 being played on Radio 1; the setting of the table which, although was always the same, always felt special; an event to bring an end to the week or the beginning of new one. The sight of my Dad carving the chicken on the counter, the dog at his feet waiting for scraps, the passing of dishes around the table as we helped ourselves to the different parts of the meal and the excitement of pouring the gravy (and later, custard) over the food before we began. We always ate together and would not leave the table until everyone was finished.

I also enjoyed meals with extended family and friends. Again, usually a roast or something more exotic like lasagne, chilli or a curry, the larger dining table would be used to fit more people around it. Conversations, laughter, stories and jokes would be shared and the meal became an event, a special occasion for a large group of family and friends. These were less regular occurrences and involved individuals coming together during holidays or certain times of the year (Christmas, Easter, Birthdays, etc.).

As I got older, I realised that the domestic family meal that I experienced at home was not the same everywhere. I heard of people eating alone; while watching TV; in

separate rooms and at the same time as other activities. I found that, for me, meals added structure to the day, a time to converse within the domestic home and catch up on what has happened during the day. I began to eat out with friends at cafés, restaurants and bars and began to experience different cultures, styles of dining and the idiosyncrasies of others which I was not familiar with (I remember being stared at, as I began eating my meal before the head of a host family had said grace – something I had never experienced before).

My interest in food peaked when I moved to the south of Spain in my mid-twenties. A new language, culture and routine changed my food habits and I discovered that eating out was a much more regular occurrence than I had experienced in the UK. With not much money, knowledge or conversation skills in Spanish, two Americans (who arrived at the same time as myself) and I would point at items on the menu in bars and restaurants and see what came along. Fussiness was no longer an option as we would try whatever was presented. I enjoyed the new tastes and began eating a range of meats, vegetables, fruits, cheeses and sauces that I had never tried before. I began to recognise items on the menu and as my Spanish improved, I ordered with confidence and became more adventurous. We ate in small groups, sharing plates and dishes. Meals lasted longer, were more informal and took place late into the night.

I also became more adventurous with my own cooking. I began to put meals together, following recipes online, experimenting with different ingredients and processes. I gained a confidence in cooking and would prepare meals for my flatmates and friends who were complimentary of the food and the meal experience. We held pot luck parties where friends would bring dishes, ingredients and foods and we would combine skills and ideas to provide a meal. With a multicultural group of friends, meals were often a mixture of national dishes, styles and traditions. We would have enough food for 10-12 people and those who did not cook would bring drinks, help tidy up or do dishes at the end of the night.

After two years in Spain, I moved back to Scotland and began working in a hotel restaurant. My interaction with food changed again as I became the server of the meal. Individual plates served to individuals paying for the experience. I enjoyed this

job but found that a distance was created between the food and those eating it. There was no sharing, limited interaction and a more formal approach to dining where etiquette, expense and status seemed of more importance than what was being eaten. I also found less time for my own mealtimes. Long shifts often meant that I was eating quickly, when I had a break, or eating alone late at night when I finished a shift. I was not cooking as much and found less time or inclination to do so. I found cooking-for-one much less enjoyable.

A year later I moved to Glasgow to study a Masters' degree in International Hospitality & Tourism Management. I moved into a shared flat in the city and soon began cooking again. At first I made meals for flatmates then friends and family. I had more time, space and interest in cooking and began to experiment again with meals, new dishes, styles and ingredients as well as eating out at a range of restaurants, cafés and bars. Cooking, dining and sharing meals with others became my hobby, one of my main interests and something which I did to relax, unwind and something which I got pleasure and enjoyment out of. I love the whole process, from start to finish (even doing the dishes and cleaning the kitchen).

As one of my main interests, my interaction with food and dining, helped me focus on my PhD topic. I began to explore new ways in which dining experiences were being held, organised and consumed around the UK. I moved to Edinburgh, to a bigger flat, with a bigger kitchen and continued to cook, share meals in the domestic home with my wife, groups of friends and family. I spend a lot of time in the kitchen and find it a creative, relaxing space. Friends and family enjoy the meals my wife and I provide and we enjoy setting them up. My sister-in-law recently said, as she started eating a meal that I had prepared, 'Gav, this is great, you should open a restaurant'. 'No' I replied as I sat down next to her, 'for me, the best thing about cooking is eating'.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the thesis and focuses on an emerging and increasingly popular social phenomenon within contemporary hospitality provision which, within this thesis, is termed as Online Mediated Commensality (OMC). What OMC represents is a popular area of hospitality provision, which has yet to be fully researched within academia and a phenomenon which is still developing, growing and changing in contemporary society. It is therefore this gap in knowledge that this thesis seeks to address by developing a number of concepts, theories and assumptions related to the phenomenon of OMC. This chapter first provides a background to the study before putting it in context. Next, the aim and objectives of the study are identified, I discuss my role as a researcher and the overall research process. Finally, each chapter of the thesis is briefly introduced.

1.2 Background

Hospitality, in a broad sense, has been understood in recent texts as being at the heart of contemporary society (Selwyn, 2000; Lynch, Germann Molz, McIntosh, Lugosi & Lashley, 2011). The focus of this thesis is on the social aspects of hospitality which have been discussed in recent texts of the twenty-first century (Lashley & Morrison's (2000) *In Search of Hospitality*; Lashley, Lynch & Morrison's (2007) *Hospitality: A Social Lens*; Germann Molz & Gibson's (2007) *Mobilizing hospitality: the ethics of social relations in a mobile world*). Germann Molz (2012a, 2012b, 2013) introduces the notion of network hospitality which further identifies the social aspect of hospitality by contextualising it with advances in online technologies, online communities and a socio-cultural orientated economy. The motivation for participating in network hospitality is often, as Rosen, Lafontaine & Hendrickson (2011) argue, to connect with strangers who may have similar interest and world views. Bialski (2011) further suggests that this, as well as the online facilitation of exchanges, encourages new rules and expectations of engagement and relationship building that questions the traditional boundaries between strangers. The social

aspect of hospitality is further developed in relation to food, dining and the exchanges found within the meal.

My study is situated within hospitality studies. The current research agenda for hospitality studies seeks to expand its scope beyond a static business-managerial focus to a more critically engaged agenda embracing reflexivity, emotional understanding and relational ethics (Zhang, Lynch, McIntosh & Wengel, 2016). Hospitality studies also represents a highly liberal, multi-disciplinary perspective where researchers can engage with a range of academic networks and thus raising its disciplinary profile and inclusivity (Lugosi, Lynch & Morrison, 2009; Zhang, et al, 2016).

While previous research related to meals has, for example, focused on the family meal (Douglas, 1972), eating together (Julier, 2013), eating out (Warde & Martens, 2000), breakfast (Laurier, 2008) and café culture (Laurier & Philo, 2006), there is a paucity in research on the shared meal among strangers and the online facilitation of these meals. Commensality, in its most literal form, means eating with others (Sobal & Nelson, 2003). While this definition is nothing new in terms of our understanding of meals and dining, hospitality provision in the twenty-first century has seen a growing phenomenon of social meals organised online which provide an alternative to the more traditional restaurant-style dining. Broadly termed as supper clubs, meetups, underground, pop-up or home restaurants, these events offer an alternative to the restaurant scene where individuals and groups can attend an event based on sharing the experience of the meal in a range of settings. To put these in context, Alldis & Alldis (2015: 1) define pop-ups as events which *“[take] over an unused or unusual space for a short period of time and offer a quirky experience that is out of the ordinary”*, supper clubs differ slightly as the setting is usually the host’s family home, while Meetups allow offline social gatherings for individuals who share a common interest or passion (Sessions, 2010).

While the phenomenon is under-researched and includes a number of different terms it is difficult to clearly state it in terms of numerical significance. Recent online searches, however, identified that in September 2016, over 80 meals are advertised on grubclub.com (Grubclub, 2016); over 40 Supper Clubs and Popups in London

advertised on edibleexperiences.com (Edible Experiences, 2016); and, over 30 food related Meetups taking place in Edinburgh and surrounding areas with meetup membership ranging from 300 to over 1000 individuals (Meetup.com, 2016). Further investigations identified that many more experiences of OMC are advertised independently using social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.) or individual websites. While there are multiple ways of finding out about these meals online, these initial searches suggest that there is a popularity and demand for alternative meal experiences which are seen as different to the traditional restaurant scene.

The idea of hosting a meal and sharing it with others has also been strengthened in recent years by media representation in television programmes such as: *Come Dine with Me*, where four or five amateur chefs compete against each other, hosting a dinner party for the other contestants with the winner winning a cash prize (Channel 4, 2016); *Instant Restaurant*, which sees two amateur cooks create a restaurant in their own homes for one night only (BBC, 2013); and, *My Pop-Up Restaurant*, which follows aspirational home cooks from across the UK, who dream of becoming professionals as they open up their very own supper clubs, create a menu and charge guests to attend, putting their culinary skills to the ultimate test (Channel 4, 2016). The idea of hosting a dinner party, preparing dishes and sharing this experience with others has, therefore, become a popular venture for many. While some of these events encourage social 'get-togethers' and sharing of food with no monetary exchange, others provide a more commercial or, at least, cost covering venture where a charge helps facilitate experiences of the shared meal.

The trend of hosting dining experiences, in this way, is closely associated with the increasing development of online technologies which sees these events being organised online and through social media. In the context of this research, the term 'online mediated commensality' is used when talking about this phenomenon. After initial investigations in the phenomenon, OMC is defined as:

'social events structured around the meal that are organised online to attract interested individuals or groups'

1.3 Context

As previously mentioned, OMC is an under researched area of study. Initial investigation showed a paucity in terms of statistical analysis but the following sources demonstrate an initial perspective of the phenomenon and its place within contemporary society.

The Digital Disruption and Small Business in Scotland report (2015) identifies the tourism and hospitality sector as being significantly affected by developments in online technology. The report suggests that:

Few would dispute that we live and work in an era of rapid technological change. The digital and social media revolutions are already disrupting a wide range of industries, threatening to transform existing ways of doing things and existing business models. (Hamill: 2015: 3)

The report argues that the main ways, in which the sector is using digital technology, is through online booking, customer feedback and payment processing as well as providing general information about prices and events. The report states that 96% of respondents in the sector have derived clear business benefits from using digital technologies. These benefits include improved customer communication and satisfaction levels. The main uses of digital technology is through websites and a growing awareness of social media outlets (Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, etc.). While the report argues that the tourism and hospitality sector is digitally aware and taking advantage of the available online tools, 90% admit that they do not use digital technology to its full potential (Hamill, 2015: 36).

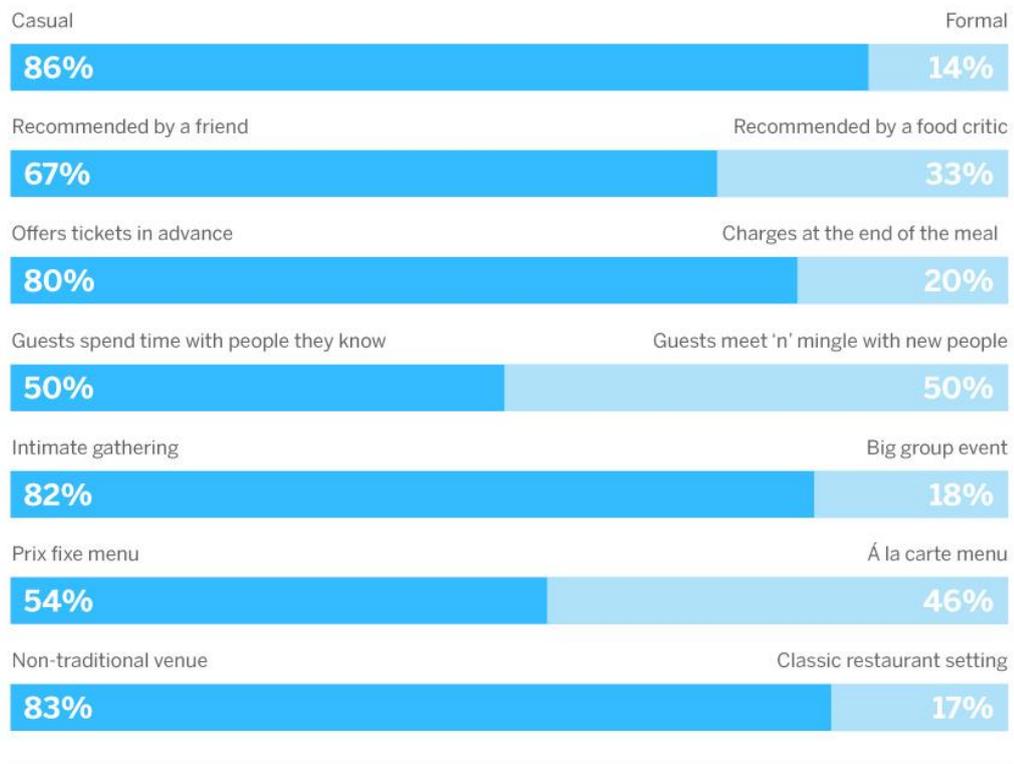
The report strengthens my thesis' place within contemporary hospitality provision as its digital disruption is demonstrating a change in the way business, at whichever level, is being operated and where opportunities are being developed. Similarly, the Centre for Economic and Business Research produced a report entitled Britain's Pop-Up Retail Economy 2015. The report identifies a growth in pop-up retail sector which provides a strong catalyst to regenerate the nation's high streets. The report states that pop-ups have flourished following the financial crisis and an ever-evolving creative and innovative consumer culture. The report argues that 49% of

respondents believe that pop-ups have a positive influence on the high-street and that two thirds of new businesses will begin life as a pop-up.

More specifically, a U.S. study looking at the rise of pop-up dining events noticed an 87% growth in 2014 as compared to previous years. The study defines dining events of this nature as “one-time food events that offer guests a taste of something different (...) unexpected locations, a personal interaction with the chef, or a unique menu or theme” (Hoffman, 2015). Figure 1.1 displays a number of findings from the report which suggest that attraction to these dining events strongly relate to casual, intimate gatherings held in non-traditional venues.

The Perfect Pop-Up Dining Event

Eventbrite asked 2,000 foodies to weigh in on their ideal pop-up dining experience



Source: Eventbrite "Food & Drink 2014 Trends" study. Based on survey of 2,000+ attendees of U.S. pop-up dining experiences and special food & beverage events on Eventbrite in 2014. Data analysis for this survey was conducted by Kelton, a leading global insights and research firm.

Figure 1.1: The Perfect Pop-Up Dining Event (Hoffman, 2015)

There is also a preference for tickets to be bought online, in advance of the dining event and for recommendations to come from friends rather than restaurant critics. This suggests that these events are an alternative to the mainstream restaurant experience and viewed more like going to a concert or sports event where tickets are bought in advance (Hoffman, 2015). The report also identifies that these dining

events are social whether this means spending time with friends or meeting new people at the dining event.

While these documents give an indication on how the phenomenon of OMC might be placed within contemporary hospitality provision, they fail to illustrate it fully and merely draw brief interpretations. My intention with this research project is to develop a fuller understanding of the phenomenon from which interpretations and suggestions can be made on its role in contemporary society. In order to bring focus to my study I chose to situate it within the United Kingdom.

1.4 Research Aim & Objectives

The aim of this research project is exploratory as the phenomenon of OMC has not previously been researched or detailed in academic literature. The overall aim of this thesis, therefore is:

To explore the role and significance of Online Mediated Commensality and its place in contemporary hospitality provision

Within this aim I address the following objectives:

1. Undertake a critical review of literature surrounding key concepts and the emergence of the phenomenon
2. Explore the attraction of OMC from both guest and host perspectives
3. Identify how OMC fosters social interaction/exchange
4. Discuss the impact OMC has on contemporary hospitality provision
5. Consider the theoretical and practical implications of findings

1.5 My role as a researcher

The purpose of the Reflective Prologue, which precedes this chapter, is to give an idea of my personal interest and experiences of some of the concepts that underpin the phenomenon of OMC. I also hope to convey that the concept of commensality is something which is participatory, interactive and social in nature. My approach to researching OMC therefore needs to be similar in nature. The research process will be underpinned by my own involvement, participation and critical reflections of it. It

is, for this reason, that much of this thesis is written in the first person. As I expand later in Chapter 3 (Research Methodology & Methods), my perception of reality is that it is subjective in nature and socially constructed by individuals. I, therefore, need to be critically reflective in my research approach and style of writing.

As previously mentioned, I have an interest in food and social dining. The reasons for the topic of my research are strongly influenced by this. It was important during the research process that I was viewed by others, not just as a researcher, but as an individual participating in OMC. My identity as a researcher, although overt, should not negatively affect my interaction with others, the meal and the experiences of OMC. I felt it important that I present myself as I would in any social situation and the fact that I was a researcher, doing research, should not restrict my participation in whatever took place. I had to think about who I was, how I wanted to present myself and what kind of information I wanted to share with others.

At the time of the research, I was 30 years old, engaged to be married and employed at a university. I was also a relative newcomer to Edinburgh and, therefore, not local to other locations in which research material collection took place (Glasgow, London, Manchester, York). I am quite sociable, without being over the top or over enthusiastic. I dress casually (jeans, t-shirt, trainers, etc.) and feel I am quite approachable. I am also of an age where I have experienced the development of digital technology, the Internet, use of mobile phones and mobile applications. I have learned how to use digital technology but am not dependent on it.

Although my presence and participation in the phenomenon was due to my PhD study, I did not want to be solely defined by the fact that I was a PhD student. I wanted my identity to transcend my role as a researcher and, therefore, be able to experience the phenomenon of OMC as myself while critically reflecting on my own participation as well as that of others.

1.6 Research Process

My role as a researcher, therefore, impacted on my methods of collecting sufficiently valuable and trustworthy research material. The participatory, interactive and social nature of the phenomenon meant that I would need to use qualitative methods to

gain insight into the phenomenon. I also identify myself with the interpretivist paradigm which follows a subjectivist ontology and epistemology. Reality, therefore, is viewed as being socially constructed and meaning is associated with social phenomena and practices. Previous research on hospitality has seen similar, socially engaged qualitative methods being used (Lynch 2005a; Lugosi, 2008; Germann Molz, 2012a, 2012b). Based on my role as a researcher and theoretical understanding, I chose two distinct, yet connected, stages of material collection to best suit my overall aim and objectives.

Stage 1 involved Autoethnographic Participant Observations of experiences of OMC. The autoethnographic focus of observations allowed for a form of self-narrative which placed the self within the social context as well as participating in the context itself. Using this method, I was able to communicate complex feelings, expressions and experiences as well as critically engaging with and reflecting on my own participation. Stage 2 involved Discussion-style Interviews held with hosts/organisers of OMC. Interviews were chosen to strengthen material collected in Stage 1 and to act as a follow up opportunity with hosts/organisers of OMC. Interviews were discussion-like to develop a stronger bond between the interviewee and myself and to encourage an interactive process, delving deeper into interpretations and observations. Although the stages of research material collection take place separately, they are viewed as interconnected and linked to strengthen each other thus affording an overall perspective of the phenomenon.

Both stages were analysed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is used to interpret information about participants' lives based on what they say and do. Through this analytical process, I was able to make interpretations on the social practices and idiosyncrasies of the phenomenon of OMC (Wilkinson, 2011). The analysis process resulted in a detailed narrative of both stages of research material collection.

1.7 Thesis Structure

The thesis is written in six interconnected sections. The first, **Chapter 1 – Introduction**, contextualises the thesis in relation to previous academic research as well as its place within contemporary hospitality provision in the UK. In this chapter,

I aim to set the scene for the overall research project and introduce its aim and objectives, research process and thesis structure.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review, contains a critical review of relevant academic literature (key authors per theme identified below). This chapter is divided into five sections: *Understanding Commensality* (Fischler, 2011; Danesi, 2012a; Grignon, 2001), *Hospitality, otherness and performance* (Derrida, 2000a; Bauman, 2000; Goffman, 1959), *Network Hospitality and the growth of an alternative economy* (Arvidsson, Bauwens & Peiterson, 2008; Bialski, 2011; Germann Molz, 2012a) *Home as an ethos of hospitality* (Di Domenico & Lynch, 2007; Wiles, 2008) , and *Online Mediated Commensality* (Rodgers, 2011; Kera & Sulaiman, 2014). The chapter and the development of the interconnected sections builds an understanding of the phenomenon of OMC, elaborates a number of related theories and concepts and describes its emergence within contemporary hospitality provision.

Chapter 3 – Research Methodology and Methods, identifies my overall research philosophy and approach as well as the methods used to collect research material. Here, I state my position as an interpretivist, qualitative researcher. I detail the two stages of research methods used for material collection (Autoethnographic Participant Observation and Discussion-style Interviews) and their appropriateness for this study. I discuss the thematic analysis process I followed in order to develop and contextualise my research findings.

Chapter 4 – Findings, details the analysed findings of both stages of research material collection. The chapter is divided into two sections, dealing with Stage 1 (Autoethnographic Participant Observation) and Stage 2 (Discussion-style Interviews) separately. Both sections build a narrative of the themes identified in the analysis process. The narratives progressively develop a deeper understanding of what is taking place within experiences of OMC and identifies some of the motivations, personal backgrounds and experiences of those participating, organising and hosting these experiences.

Chapter 5 – Discussion, situates and explores the phenomenon and its place within contemporary hospitality provision. Findings are discussed in relation to relevant theory and academic literature. This combined synthesis of findings and theory aims

to bring further clarity to the phenomenon understood in terms of knowledge creation, future development and the societal impacts of an under researched phenomenon. This chapter is divided into five sections. The first section, *OMC: Types and Attractions*, acts as a contextual extension of the previous chapter (Findings) and identifies some of the key differentiations between OMC and more traditional forms of dining out. *Commensality: the conceptual make-up of OMC*, identifies three interconnected components (sociability, identity, the meal) which are identified as being inseparable to experiences of commensality. A new typology of commensality is developed and added to previous literature (Grignon, 2001). *Hospitality: Social Conditions*, builds on Derrida's (2000) intrinsic perspectives of conditional/unconditional hospitality. I argue that a number of social practices are conditions or expectations of participation in the phenomenon leading to its unique and natural nature. *Home-food: a conceptual gaze* delves into the broader conceptual themes identified within the phenomenon. The Home-food Economy builds on the previously discussed alternative economy, performance and otherness. The final section of this chapter, *Social Interaction Capital*, is developed from the previous sections and devised OMC Framework. The OMC Framework identifies Bell's (2012) 'moments' of hospitality as central to the attraction of the phenomenon. This section takes that notion further and conceptualises these moments as a source of capital similar, yet distinctively different, from that of social capital. Social Interaction Capital discusses the social interactions as temporary, transient and uniquely contextualised within experiences of OMC. The nature of these social interactions are placed within a contemporary, liquid society which are fleeting, socially fluid and moving with a rapidly changing world.

Finally, **Chapter 6 – Conclusions**, brings this thesis to an end and discusses the overall findings of the research, and its associated contribution to knowledge. Some limitations are identified, along with possible areas for future research. The initial aim and objectives are revisited and contextualised here with reference to the research project and its final outcomes. This thesis begins and ends with a reflective piece of writing giving my research approach further coherence. The Reflective Prologue and Post-script should be treated as reflective bookends which

contextualise my approach and engagement within the phenomenon and the findings and contributions of this thesis.

1.8 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter has been to introduce the background and context of this research project. OMC is introduced as a new and developing example of contemporary hospitality provision which has been under researched and analysed. In presenting the phenomenon, I have given it a brief definition and put it into context regarding the paucity of previous research. I have also identified how I will research the phenomenon as a socially engaged, qualitative researcher and how my own engagement in the phenomenon is essential in terms of conceptualisation and knowledge creation. This chapter also gives detail of the structure of this thesis and what each chapter contains. The next chapter (Chapter 2 - Literature Review) critically reviews relevant academic literature where the components of the phenomenon of OMC are further explored.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Chapter Introduction and Structure

This chapter presents a review of relevant literature relating to the key concepts within the phenomenon of OMC. The literature review has been written in five key sections which highlight different concepts and themes relating to the phenomenon. Each section aims to critically develop an understanding from a broad to focused narrative of the OMC phenomenon. A brief introduction to each section and the overall structure of the literature review will be detailed below.

In **Understanding Commensality**, I develop a deeper understanding of the concept of commensality. As the concept is at the very heart of this thesis, I felt it important to begin here. Commensality is first given definition by a range of sources before detailing its key characteristics. It is argued that the sharing of meals is a social, cultural and identity forming entity with strong links to family, home and upbringing. The decline in the importance around mealtimes and therefore commensality is identified as a response to societal changes and a potential reason for the growth of the phenomenon under study.

In **Hospitality, otherness and performance**, I discuss Derrida's intrinsic perspectives of hospitality. Derrida identifies hospitality encounters as conditional but under an overarching unconditional essence. These perspectives are discussed as the phenomenon of OMC represents encounters of hospitality which are, more often than not, less structured than the encounters found within traditional examples of dining out (e.g. restaurant, café). It is argued that encounters of hospitality are social acts where the conditions are negotiated by those taking part. The concepts of otherness and performance are also discussed as integral to our understanding of hospitality encounters in contemporary society.

Network Hospitality and the growth of an alternative economy builds on the discussion in the previous section and identifies the growth of more ethical, shared and alternative ways of experiencing encounters of hospitality. In this section, I discuss the motivations and attractions to Network Hospitality and how it is structured online. The discussion continues by identifying a broader economy, in

which Network Hospitality is included, that is argued as being more ethically centred and which uses online technologies to reach a wider audience of interested individuals. The possible futures and developments of this kind of economy are then discussed.

Home as an ethos of hospitality builds on an underlying concept found in the first three sections. Home is closely associated with experiences of commensality as space where encounters of hospitality take place as well as a venue for a number of examples of network hospitality. The concept of home, in this section, is unpacked and defined broadly in relation to space, mobility and self. Viewing home as a multi-dimensional concept, links are made between home and hospitality. It is argued that the concept of home is indicative to alternative forms of hospitality provision and where conditions of hospitality are subtly suggested, negotiated and understood.

In the final section entitled **Online Mediated Commensality**, I bring together the previously discussed concepts in relation to the phenomenon of OMC. While there is limited academic literature on the phenomenon, the combination of the previously reviewed concepts and more anecdotal references to the phenomenon develops a conceptual understanding of OMC. In this section, I also highlight the social significance of OMC within contemporary hospitality and why it is the focus of this thesis.

2.2 Understanding Commensality

2.2.1 Introduction

This section of the literature review will develop an understanding of the concept of commensality by highlighting the cultural, traditional and social values linked to commensality. My intention here is to argue that these values can influence an individual's interpretation of the importance of mealtimes, their interaction with food and their behaviour and manners around the table. While a decline in the importance of shared meals is noted, it is argued that there is still a need, want and attraction to commensality and sharing meals with others. In conclusion, I argue that commensality remains important within contemporary society and while it may, in some cases, be considered a novelty, it still has an important role to play in individuals' socio-cultural exchanges and as an act of hospitality.

2.2.2 Defining Commensality

In order to understand commensality, definitions of the term must be analysed. The derivation of commensality comes from the noun commensal which means "*one who eats at the same table (as another)*" and from the Medieval Latin commensalis, from com- "*together*" + mensa -"*table*" (Online Etymology Dictionary, 2016). Commensality, therefore, in its more literal form means eating at the same table. Sobal & Nelson (2003) provide a simpler definition of commensality as 'eating with other people' suggesting that the act of eating together is of more significance than where the experience of commensality takes place. Seremetakis defines commensality as "*the exchange of sensory memories and emotions, and of substances and objects incarnating remembrance and feeling*" (1994: 225). This definition focuses more on the emotional and sensory connection with what is being eaten suggesting that commensality is about more than satisfying a nutritional need. Grignon defines commensality as "*a gathering aimed to accomplish in a collective way some material tasks and symbolic obligations linked to the satisfaction of a biological need*" (2001: 24) which argues that commensality is a combination of satisfying a nutritional need as well as an emotionally symbolic togetherness experienced by those sharing food.

Obligations, exchange and relationships are terms often used when discussing hospitality (Lashley, Lynch & Morrison, 2007; Germann Molz. 2012a; Lashley & Morrison, 2000). Similar links can be made between hospitality and commensality. Selwyn (2000) describes the hospitality found within commensality as something which can strengthen and encourage links between groups of kin and define and redefine social boundaries of these groups. In such groups, Grignon (2001) articulates that their relationship may not be a pre-existing one; therefore, the encounters of commensality may be extemporaneous, short-lived or temporary. In some cases, relationships could be more long lasting but still remain informal and occur on the fringe of habitual social lives of the individuals involved. Csikszentmihalyi (1997) suggests that two conditions are needed in the kind of relations found within exchanges of commensality. Firstly, that a shared goal, however small or perceivably insignificant it may seem, must be found in the relationship. Secondly, that one must show interest or attention to the other's goal, and ideally vice-versa. When these conditions are met, Csikszentmihalyi states, "*it is possible to get the most valuable results from being with other people – to experience the flow that comes from optimal interaction*" (1997: 81). Whatever the group, or occasion, situations where commensality exists place an emphasis on social harmony and social integration of the group (Mars, 1997). Commensality can represent an occasion where contacts are made, status is enhanced or maintained and where individuals are united through a sense of moral obligation.

Commensality often conjures up the image of families sitting around a table for an evening meal, close friends, or couples, practicing general forms of reciprocity and the wider extended family brought together at Christmas Day or Birthday celebratory meals. These events signify convivial rather than formal occasions. Fischler, however, suggests there is a gradient of commensality events that stretches from "*intimate, familiar, informal, convivial, to unfamiliar, formal, strictly etiquette-driven occasions*" (2011: 535). Mary Douglas similarly suggests that a line exists between the type of commensality and the status of those with which it is shared, "*Drinks are for strangers, acquaintances, workmen, and family. Meals are for family, close friends, honoured guests*" (1972: 66). Both authors suggest that commensality exists on a

range of levels, which are generally understood amongst those with whom commensality is experienced.

Grignon (2001) further identifies six types of commensality: domestic, institutional, everyday, exceptional, segregative and transgressive. Although these different types share some common features, they are not as wholly idealistic as other evaluations may suggest. Domestic commensality is generally linked to family and private life, the family meals, discussions and routines that are found in households and dining rooms. This is in contrast to the institutional commensality found within hospitals, nursing homes, army barracks, prisons and boarding houses. Institutional commensality is bound by regulations and where the institution often controls the social interactions, the freedom and relaxed nature of domestic commensality is, therefore, quite different. Everyday commensality describes daily exchanges of families, neighbourhoods, close friends, acquaintances and communities. It can examine how different close-knit social groups work to facilitate common values, beliefs and constraints. Exceptional commensality, however, describes much more memorable events of heightened commensality which are often used to celebrate occasions (Birthdays, Easter, Christmas, weddings, funerals, etc.). These differ from everyday commensality as they stretch to a larger social network of extended family, friends and acquaintances in sharing an important or celebratory occasion. Segregative commensality exists when a group meets to share food and/or drink to define or strengthen group mentality by rejecting and excluding others. In this way the group includes some members in order to become more visible and to demonstrate its exclusivity and possible hierarchy. In contrast, ambivalence is a key characteristic of Transgressive commensality which recognises and embraces oppositions of social groups and borders of separation.

Grignon's typologies of commensality argue that the relationships found within them are contextual and may be in contrast to an overly positive, pleasant, friendly experience to which we may be more familiar. By looking at different types of commensality, more negative, primitive and socially exclusive aspects that are often ignored or under analysed can be identified. Each type of commensal eating pattern exhibits inclusion and, therefore, exclusion of established networks of relationships

that delineate the range of people who share food and drink together which can demarcate an individual's social world (Sobal & Nelson, 2003, Julier, 2013).

2.2.3 The family meal

The meal is often seen as a time and space where commensality occurs most regularly. Meals are daily, taken-for-granted events which help structure and regulate the lives of groups and individuals. While much of our engagement with food and eating is, as Marshall (2005) argues, unspectacular and inconspicuous, the meal is a lived experience combining sensual, emotional and cognitive energies as part of a highly symbolic event. The experience of the meal satisfies not only nutrition and satiety but also acts as a communicative tool incorporating sociability and identity formation (Nyberg & Olson, 2010). Meals, as Meiselman (2008) states, are both event and product as they refer to the event of eating, as well as to what is being eaten. Furthermore, Meiselman argues that meals are events that are defined by the number of individuals present – a meal must contain more than one person. It cannot exist without any social interaction, communication or symbolic exchange. Holm (2001) supports this and suggests that it is through the shared meal that groups untie and assemble, develop and discover themselves.

The most common experience of the meal is often those which occur within the family unit. The traditional family meal is, as Mestdag (2005) argues, the archetype of commensality or an ideal to which individuals aspire to. The family meal and the lessons learned from it, from a young age, often have a lasting influence in terms of socialisation, civility, politeness and manners (Kenneally & Le Bel, 2009). Positive childhood experiences of eating together around the family table can lead to positive attitudes towards the meal, health and wellbeing and the reproduction of 'family' and 'home' in later life (Hooper, Ivory & Fourgere, 2015). Archambeault further suggests that shared family meals can help develop social skills and socially appropriate behaviour from a young age:

Children who participate in shared meals acquire and practice table etiquette, learn to express themselves at the table in socially appropriate ways (...) Food greases the wheels of conversation, encouraging people to socialise without a purpose other than experiencing one another (2013: 15)

The sense of togetherness, experienced around the family meal, signifies elements of bonding and the ability to share emotions, feelings and opinions in a safe, familiar space. Family meals are often served 'family-style' where the contents and serving of dishes are freely available to all involved and encourage a sense of sharing resources and opening the space up to appropriate socio-emotional sharings (Belk, 2010). The safe and familiar space also helps to reduce some of the formalities that are present around other forms of dining.

The continuation of shared cultural practices as found around the family meal give individuals the opportunity to exchange information, build confidences and socially interact with others (Valentine, 1999). Interacting with others, understanding the dynamic of give-and-take, turn-taking and showing interest in others are some of the most important lessons learned through the experiences of the family meal (Archambeault, 2013). These lessons, or more broadly, the act of sharing, is essential in understanding how to interact and socialise with others. Belk (2009 as cited in Archambeault, 2013: 16) suggests that sharing, found around the family meal, can result in "*an expanded sense of self that embraces other people more than other things*". The venue of the family meal is most commonly associated with the family home or the home of other family members. The familiarity of the home as venue can ascribe more taken-for-granted sharing privileges and experiences. The fact that one may feel 'at home' suggests that permission or invitation to exchange in the family practices of the meal are not needed (Belk, 2007). The experiences of the family meal can be identified as a site where sharing is encouraged and cultural, social and emotional practices are developed and cultivated. The family meal, therefore, can become the basis of an individual's interactions and behaviours around food, the meal and the sharing of it.

2.2.4 Sharing meals

Our understanding of commensality should not be limited solely to the family meal. Shared meals can occur for a range of different reasons, occasions, and in a range of different settings with various groups of individuals. The act of sharing involves an understanding of reciprocal commitment and involvement between individuals (Fischler, 2011, Selwyn, 2000). The intimate exchange of food can encourage,

consciously or not, a physical bond which can constitute the very structure of social organisation (Fischler 2011). The feelings of amity and bonding can occur while sharing a meal as well as signifying that the diners share a number of characteristics, values and behaviours (Morgan, 2012). Whether the shared meal is informal, ceremonial or celebratory, those involved can feel temporal equality and the intimacy which can generate symbolic communication and further interpretation (Morgan, 2012).

It is not just the exchange of food and drink that is present within commensality but exchanges of a social, symbolic and psychological nature (Grignon, 2001). The continued inclusion within a group is constituted in the behaviour of the individuals and their exchanges. The sharing of tasks and costs; the social practices around the table; the meeting and inviting of new people to a group and the need for intimacy in social relationships, as suggested in Danesi's (2012a) work, encourages the development of independence in young adults and a move away from parental family life to a larger social network. The setting of the meal, around a table or otherwise, also negates rules and customs associated with the shared space including distribution, sharing, interactions, etiquette and table manners and can, therefore, offer a relative degree of security and expectations amongst diners (Fischler, 2011). It is suggested that table manners are one of the key elements "*in the process of transmission of culture, social skills, social ethics or social regulation of access to resources*" (Fischler, 2011: 538). Lacking these manners may be viewed as inconsiderate, impolite and result in possible exclusion.

Douglas & Nicod (1974) suggest that it is during meals that individuals learn social structure and social norms through understandings of group morality, local practices and world views. That said, relationships formed through experiences of commensality are rarely fixed or rigid but, rather, are continually evaluated, assessed and managed building mutual bonds of reciprocity and moral codes amongst the group (Sobal, 2000). Similarly, Douglas suggests:

If food is treated as a code, the messages it encodes will be found in the pattern of social relations being expressed. The message is about different

degrees of hierarchy, inclusion and exclusion, boundaries and transactions across the boundaries (1972: 61).

Douglas's conceptualisation of food as a code encouraging appropriate social interaction brings further credence to commensality as a form of hospitality. While hospitality cannot take place without social interaction between others, neither can commensality.

2.2.5 Commensality & Sociability

The sharing of food has been stated as being pivotal in social life and the interactions within it can provide a vast range of types of communication, sociability and socialisation (Danesi, 2012a). Simmel (1910/1997) suggests that eating is both a primary biological and social function. The difference between eating and other sensory processes is that:

What I think, I can communicate to others; what I see, I can let them see, what I say can be heard by hundreds of others – but what a single individual eats can under no circumstances be eaten by another (130)

This is where Simmel (1910/1997: 130) suggests the shared meal works its magic as it turns *“the exclusive selfishness of eating’ into ‘a habit of being gathered together”*. It is through this that the sociological structure of the shared meal emerges as individuals with no special shared interests can gather together for a common purpose. Commensality, therefore, should not just be associated with ceremonial or special occasions but as the daily, social occurrence of the meal. Commensality can build up kinship, bonding and temporarily strengthen social interactions and intimacy. This idea is supported by Fischler, *“If eating a food makes one become more like that food, then those sharing the same food become more like each other”* (2011: 533).

Danesi (2012b) discusses the pleasures and stresses of eating together. One of the key pleasures discussed is the convivial social interactions between like-minded people and the fact the food is not the most important aspect of a group sharing a meal together. Laughter, dynamic conversation, playing games, watching a film and other communal activities are all seen as equally important as the food, *“even if nice*

food helps to create a good environment, bad food does not mean that people do not share a convivial occasion” (8). It is also the act of cooking together, trying new dishes and sharing recipes and tastes that are important aspects of experiences of commensality. Danesi (2012b) argues that it often the formality, rigid norms and expected manners that are a source of stress around eating together. By creating a comfortable, sociable and relaxed environment for sharing food, a low degree of formality and a high degree of intimacy are preferable dimensions for the shared meal. The intimacy existing between commensals can allow individuals to feel comfortable, not to feel judged, and to be able to express themselves freely (Danesi, 2012b).

It is worth, however, looking at instances where these acts are done alone because as we have discussed, commensality is not always possible or desired. Fischler (2011) suggests that people generally prefer to eat in company rather than eating alone and that solitary eating is perceived as something negative. It has been suggested that the solitary eaters incur suspicion for excluding themselves from communal eating and sharing of food and conversation. Danesi (2012b) also suggests that people experience a number of stresses while eating alone, for example, fear of judgment in a public place, lack of motivation when cooking for one, association with poor nutrition and the fact that commensal eating is deeply embedded in cultural consciousness. However, Danesi (2012b) also describes a number of positive aspects of eating alone. It may be more relaxing not having to take part in small talk, full concentration can be made on what is being eaten, having freedom of food choice and time of eating and having a moment to oneself without noise and distraction. Danesi’s work does however suggest that most people, although they do not mind eating alone, do prefer to eat in company. Lashley, Morrison & Randall (2004) agree and describe meals as acts that can make and/or maintain social relationships. Through sharing a meal, a sense of security, social cohesion, belonging and trust can develop from the intimate social relationships found within it. The creation of what Lashley et al (2004) call a ‘social group comfort zone’, means that group members can relax, express themselves and connect through collective social and emotional needs. Danesi (2012a) suggests that the sharing of food can act as a ‘social lubricant’, which can enable social relations to be established and maintained.

2.2.6 Commensality & Identity

If commensality provides an opportunity for social interaction and sociability, it also provides a way in which those sharing the meal can display their identities and relationships with the food being shared. The way in which individuals share food can represent the meaning that is associated with that food and the relationship the individual has with it (Archambeault, 2013). By sharing a meal, or eating together, Simmel (1910/1997) notes that individuals satisfy a need for interaction and developing social ties through a union of conviviality. Sobal & Nelson (2003) support this by stating that it is within these rituals of joint eating that individuals establish personal relationships and integrate social ties and common identities. Danesi (2012a) notes two opposing conceptions of food that have a direct impact on commensality. Firstly, individuals have a tendency to conceptualise food in an individualistic way, centred on nutritional value, healthiness, food choices and dietary individualisation. The second notion sees food in a more social or commensal manner where the idea of sharing and togetherness are central characteristics. Both notions are important in developing an understanding of food intake and behaviour but seem to be placed at opposing ends of the spectrum, viewing food as either individualistic or social. Douglas (1982) suggests that food is both a social matter as well as an element that provides care for the body.

Through food choices, individuals can express themselves; communicate with a range of social groups and present attitudes to their bodies in terms of healthy/unhealthy food intake. Barthes, (1979, as cited in Wood, 1995) however, describes food as a system of communication that signifies cultural meaning to those who consume it. Barthes argues that not all foods are necessarily significant on a collective social level and that often they are only a reflection of personal taste. Walker also sees food as both an individual and social entity. Morgan suggests that what the food means to those consuming it and how it is consumed is of more interest:

Foods are replete with meaning, meaning that is layered: some foods are for personal consumption, a private invocation of sentiment and memory, others are (...) redolent of a sociality, a suggestion of belonging and a wider, shared

experience of commensality inscribed within very specific social and cultural practices (2012: 191)

Selwyn (2000) describes food as a universal ingredient of hospitality and it is through the processes of preparing, cooking, serving and receiving food that an act of “*culturally transforming natural substances*” (35) ensues. It is, therefore, argued that the act of commensality binds together those who share a moral code or understanding. It is through the giving and receiving of food and the symbolic acceptance of others that makes commensality a significant interaction between individuals and their identity formation (Selwyn, 2000).

Danesi (2012a) argues that an individual’s identity is constructed, experienced and celebrated through commensal eating occasions that have common aspects and important social meanings. Selwyn (2000), however, suggests that it can be the food, as well as the sharing of it, that is symbolic in defining and redefining identities. Through commensality, identities can be further developed as new food flavours, culinary skills and social practices are experienced. As Danesi (2012a) suggests, the communal meal is not just about the food but about forms of communication, topics of discussion, context of consumption and new leisure activities. Walker (2012) contests that while food is only one of many markers of identity, “*it holds a special place amongst cultural symbols through both its indispensability and its polysensorial character*” (191). Associations of food can therefore be linked to memory, family, nationality, nostalgia and other components that form and capture identities. As well as an individual context, commensality also acts as a contributing feature of strengthening the identity of a community. Walker (2012), for example, states that commensality becomes a crucial aspect when food and ingredients that are seen as ‘local’ to some communities or nationalities become exotic or rare due to migration or relocation. The production, preparation and sharing of these ‘local’ foods enables the expression of different facets of identity or identities. Commensality, in these cases, strengthens the identification and togetherness of the community by focusing on values, traditions and foods of their home community. Practices of commensality can, therefore, become deeply symbolic in terms of belonging and identity formation (Walker, 2012).

2.2.7 Values & Risks

Sobal & Nelson (2003) identify two perspectives/interpretations of contemporary patterns of commensality. Firstly, it has cultural value which emphasizes the strength of traditional norms which encourage eating and sharing a meal with others. They suggest that eating alone should not be considered a 'real' meal as the process of eating with others can provide social support and structure. Secondly, they discuss the concept of structural individualism as a hindrance to commensality. This includes the social isolation of the fast pace of mass society, lack of eating routines, eating without others, dietary individualisation and the risk of over eating and unhealthy eating patterns. While these perspectives are not mutually exclusive and can operate simultaneously, they can provide useful interpretations on contemporary commensality. Lashley et al (2004), however, suggest that the occasion of a meal can take on heightened meaning as it can become "*valued as an object, employed as a means to re-embed social cohesiveness and belonging in an increasingly fragmented and fragile social world*" (172). In accordance with Sobal & Nelson's work, the authors suggest that it is through this re-emergence of social cohesion that commensality attracts cultural and traditional value and significance. Adelman, Ahavia & Goodwin (1994) suggest that commensal meals provide a 'meeting point' that is of increasing significance for those living an individualized lifestyle, living alone and/or with a limited social life. It is often the risks and dangers of commensality that are ignored or underestimated.

Although commensality can create bonds and sociality, it does not mean that it is without risk. A potential risk lies in the fact that relationships that are promised through an over-positive understanding of commensality may not materialise (Selwyn, 2000). Hirschman (1996) also notes that although everyone needs to eat, the act of eating together does not permit a wholly free flow of conversation and it can often be 'banal' or 'normal' table talk among individuals who share nothing else than the need to eat. Rosser (1994) further suggests that negotiations and conversations around the dining table could result in conflict as well as harmony and that commensality is not a remedy or panacea for fostering social agreement or conformity. Fischler (2011) notes that eating has become individualised, medicalised and mitigated by nutritional sense. Although these issues are linked to health

concerns, they do pose difficulties in terms of commensality and eating food together which are structured around mealtimes, conformity with tradition, control and sociability. Fischler proposes that commensal patterns of eating can act as a regulating force in food intake and help maintain obesity and unhealthy eating at a lower level than in cases where food patterns are less structured, less commensal, and more open to individual choices.

Some have argued that the meal is losing its cultural and social significance. Time constraints, technology and the fact that meals often take place at the same time as other activities (watching television, working, commuting, etc.) have all been influential on the importance of the meal (Holm, 2001, Archambeault, 2013). The importance and prevalence of the family meal has also been affected by changes in society, family dynamics, living arrangements, convenience foods and eating alone (Fulkerson, Neumark-Sztainer & Story, 2006). Steel (2008, as cited in Kera & Sulaiman, 2014) suggests that the decline of family meals and the social interaction associated with it, is having a negative impact on contemporary society as individuals are not in control of what they are eating, nor are they inviting friends around to share in experiences of commensality.

2.2.8 Conclusion

The reviewed literature on commensality presents a number of aspects that will be of great interest in terms of OMC. If social interaction around shared meals is on the decline, does OMC then provide a space for those missing that interaction to embrace it? While commensality and various typologies are defined, it will be of interest to see if the commensality of the phenomenon fits with any of these definitions or whether a new definition to fit the phenomenon is needed. Sociability is mentioned as a key component of commensality by a number of authors. Sociability is also a key component of hospitality which I will discuss in the following section.

2.3 Hospitality, otherness and performance

2.3.1 Introduction

This section of the literature review will begin with the discussion of Derrida's intrinsic perspectives of hospitality. Derrida's perspectives suggest that hospitality is conceptualised by its unconditional *law* and its conditional *laws*. The paradox found within these perspectives gives prominence to the very nature of hospitality – one that is based on conditions with an unconditional essence. The paradox of these perspectives will be discussed in relation to boundaries and thresholds of hospitality as well as the mastery of the host and the intrusion hospitality can have on their private space or home. The concept of otherness and relationship between strangers will then be discussed. Hospitality is presented as a relationship between individuals, others or strangers. The relationship is thus discussed with reference to the work of Georg Simmel and Zygmunt Bauman. Bauman places the relations of strangers within a liquid, fluid, contemporary society where interactions are influenced by the fast pace of society and the development of online technology. The interactions between strangers will then be contextualised with reference to Goffman's work on performance. Performance and the social interactions between performers and audiences, I suggest, are at the core of encounters of hospitality.

2.3.2 Conditions of hospitality

Derrida (2000a) presents two intrinsic perspectives of hospitality. Firstly, an unconditional, hyperbolic law of hospitality which is offered to the Other under no pre-arranged circumstances or obligations. In this case, the Other should be welcomed with no question of his arrival, name or reason to visit. Secondly, a conditional hospitality, based on laws or conditions of how the guest will behave and act under the host's jurisdiction. The law of unconditional hospitality is said to be offered *a priori*, to another, irrespective of their background, status, religion or reason for their visit, while the laws of conditional hospitality are concerned with rights, duties, obligations and reciprocity. Derrida stipulates that, while the law of unconditional hospitality is necessary and essential to our understanding of hospitality, without the conditional laws it would be "*in danger of remaining a pious and irresponsible desire, without form and without potency, and of even being*

perverted at any moment" (2001: 22). Furthermore, as Barnett (2005) suggests, the corruption of the unconditional law of hospitality is by no means accidental as it opens up an imperative to develop effective and common sense laws or conditions of hospitality.

The unconditional law of hospitality is, as Derrida (2000a) notes, without imperative, duty or order. If hospitality is to be structured around these issues, then it inevitably becomes conditioned and no longer absolute or unconditional. This, however, questions whether hospitality can ever be purely unconditional or whether it needs conditions to be structured most effectively. In approaching this question, Derrida acknowledges a strange hierarchy of the law and the laws of hospitality:

The law is above the laws. It is thus illegal, transgressive, outside the law, like a lawless law (...) law above the laws and law outside the law (...) But even while keeping itself above the laws of hospitality, the unconditional law of hospitality needs the laws, it requires them (2000a: 79)

Cheah (2013) suggests that absolute or unconditional hospitality is an impractical process as it fundamentally disrupts human reason in terms of urgency and exigency. Derrida also subscribes to this view by stating that the idea of unconditional hospitality is:

practically impossible to live (...) but without at least the thought of this pure and unconditional hospitality, of hospitality itself, we would have no concept of hospitality in general and would not even be able to determine any rules for conditional hospitality (2003: 129).

It is through the axiom of unconditional hospitality that one must try to determine the *best* conditions, limits or application of the laws in providing hospitality (Derrida, 2005). Both perspectives of hospitality present a paradoxical view of hospitality. While the unconditional view is 'the impossible', as it is unrestricted, purely altruistic and without law, the conditional form of hospitality cannot exist without it. One must hold an unconditional understanding of hospitality in order for it to exist in its conditional state.

2.3.3 We do not know what hospitality is...

The paradox found within Derrida's perspectives of hospitality allows him to state repeatedly in one of his papers (Hostipitality, 2000b) 'We do not know what hospitality is'. We do not know what hospitality is because, as Derrida suggests, it cannot be seen as a present being, an object of knowledge or a mode of being-present and it remains as a contradictory or paradoxical imperative. The question of hospitality places us at an 'aporetic crossroads' which underlines the difference of the experience of hospitality and the understanding of what hospitality is. Derrida hypothesises that:

this necessary aporia is not negative; and that without the repeated enduring of this paralysis in contradiction, the responsibility of hospitality, hospitality – when we do not yet know and will never know what it is – would have no chance of coming to pass, of coming, of making or letting welcome (2000b: 12)

If we do not know what hospitality is, it becomes an un-crossable, indefinable and unknown threshold or passage that allows one to welcome or be welcomed, be received or hosted by the other. Sticking with the analogy of the 'aporetic crossroad', Derrida suggests that we are running from one difficulty to another, from better or worse or from impossibility to further impossibility:

It is as though hospitality were the impossible: as though the law of hospitality defined this very impossibility, as if it were only possible to transgress it, as through the law of absolute, unconditional, hyperbolic hospitality, as though the categorical imperative of hospitality commanded that we transgress all the laws (in the plural) of hospitality (...) And vice versa, it is as though the laws (plural) of hospitality, in marking limits, powers, rights, and duties, consisted in challenging and transgressing the law of hospitality, the one that would command that the 'new arrival' be offered an unconditional welcome (2000a: 75-77)

Hospitality requires that a guest be greeted and welcomed as a 'somebody' rather than a serialised nobody. This, Dikec, Clark & Barnett (2009) argue is not due to an

ethical imperative of the unconditional or a political imperative of the conditional but as an imperative, balancing the welcome of 'somebody' unconditionally while imposing conditionality on them by attributing the identity and boundaries of the host. Hospitality is structured by the regulation of relations between inside and outside and by temporarily bringing an 'outsider' inside. It is, therefore, implied that an 'outsider' is not a familiar (spouse, child, citizen) but a stranger, an unknown or the invited Other. Hospitality is, therefore, structured on this relationship rather than its content (Still, 2010). Derrida notes that if the Other is defined as a stranger "*one is already introducing the circles of conditionality*" (2000b: 8) and therefore corrupting the law of absolute unconditional hospitality. This corruption, however, allows the host to have some control, some power over who they invite, who they choose to allow into their home and offer hospitality. It is through these conditions, that the host can filter or choose who they host and offer hospitality, again suggesting that hospitality is as much exclusion as it is inclusion.

2.3.4 Thresholds and boundaries

That said, if the aforementioned threshold is indeed un-crossable, indefinable and unknown, it, therefore, cannot be closed which would suggest that hospitality cannot take place. Derrida uses the 'door' to illustrate this point:

To take up the figure of the door, for there to be hospitality, there must be a door. But if there is a door, there is no longer hospitality. There is no hospitable house. There is no house without doors and windows. But as soon as there are a door and windows, it means that someone has the key to them and consequently controls the conditions of hospitality. There must be a threshold. But if there is a threshold there is no longer hospitality (2000b: 14)

Derrida here suggests that if there is a threshold to hospitality, then pure, absolute or unconditional hospitality cannot exist as the threshold constitutes conditions. Barnett's (2005) reading of Derrida further implies that it is the existence of such thresholds that make relating to others and, therefore, hospitality possible. Hence, Derrida also notes that if hospitality *is* the threshold, then its impossibility can be made possible if the threshold is overcome and that hospitality "*can only take place 'beyond' hospitality, in deciding to let it come, overcoming the hospitality that*

paralyzes itself on the threshold which it is" (2000b: 14). It can be suggested that, in its necessary impossibility, the threshold must enable or limit hospitality. The very fact that the threshold is not regulated, or at the disposal of general knowledge, thus makes hospitality possible and open to the risks of being perverted (Derrida, 1999).

Similarly, the concept of boundaries can play an important part in understanding the nature of hospitality and its conditions. Westerhoff defines boundaries as living systems which are determined, contained and limited and which define and establish identity:

Boundaries are lines that afford definition, identity, and protection – for persons, families, institutions, nations. They can be tangible, like the walls of a room; intangible, like the bonds that encircle a family or a community; or they can defy ordinary description altogether. A boundary gives us something to which we can point and ascribe a name. Without a boundary, we have nothing to which we can invite or welcome anyone else (1999: 7)

Dikec et al (2009) suggest that the distinction between Derrida's conditional and unconditional hospitality is linked to the creation and crossing of boundaries. By controlling boundaries and maintaining territories (physical or psychological), one can choose how to relate to others based on their own identity formation. These boundaries enable individuals to respond effectively to others and limit their inclusion/exclusion. While some boundaries can be tangible and visible, many are intangible or invisible and more difficult to understand from the outside. Beliefs, values, loyalties, commitments, life stories and worldviews can all differentiate individuals from each other and, therefore, create boundaries. In order to create boundaries or allow others to cross them, one must, as Westerhoff (1999) suggests, have a sense of who they are, what they believe in and how they distinguish themselves from others. It is, therefore, this identity formation that affords boundaries, *"if we do not lay claim to who we are, we will be nothing, and inclusion in our number will have no meaning"* (31).

Another reason for the creation of boundaries, especially in terms of hospitality, is that it affords a protection, order and safety to the individual, family, home, or nation.

In Derrida's view of unconditional hospitality, no boundaries are set to monitor or encourage the other's behaviour, which, therefore, creates a tension and danger in hospitality:

Anyone who encroaches on my 'at home', on my ipseity [selfhood], on my power of hospitality, on my sovereignty as host, I start to regard as an undesirable foreigner, and virtually as an enemy. This other becomes a hostile subject, and I risk becoming their hostage (Derrida, 2000a: 55)

If boundaries are not set, or adhered to, the structure of hospitality will fail and both parties will become hostile to each other. Still (2005) suggests that this also brings up ethical considerations of the boundaries of the human, how these are set up and maintained and how one reacts when their boundaries are pushed. In terms of hospitality, the real tensions and dangers can occur when a guest does not share the principles of hospitality and the generosity of the host. This further implies why unconditional hospitality is impossible and must be constrained or conditioned by boundaries.

Derrida (1999) thus talks of boundaries and/or conditions as a 'third party' which acts as a protector and mediator of violence between the guest and the host. Again, while this third party is not wholly visible or tangible, it is the calculative, deliberative and, therefore, conditional justice on which the basis of hospitality rests. The inclusion of the third party ensures that absolute or unconditional hospitality cannot exist, "*the law of absolute hospitality commands a break with hospitality by right, with law or justice as rights. Just hospitality breaks with hospitality by right*" (Derrida, 2000a: 55). It can neither be, as Cheah (2013) suggests, a matter of charity or philanthropy, as by implying the existence of a third party, which helps to police or monitor hospitality, implies exclusion. Exclusion goes against the law of absolute hospitality.

2.3.5 Master of the House

The invitation of the Other is bound in conditions, rules and limitations to whom one offers hospitality. While this allows hospitality to take place, it also protects the host from violence and/or parasites (Dufourmantelle, 2013). Derrida affords a 'common sense' approach to hospitality within the home:

It does not seem to me that I am able to open up or offer hospitality, however generous, even in order to be generous, without reaffirming: this is mine, I am at home, you are welcome in my home, without any implication of 'make yourself at home' but on condition that you observe the rules of hospitality by respecting the being-at-home of my home, the being-itself of what I am (2000b: 14)

By reaffirming mastery of the home and being-oneself, hospitality limits itself at the outset and remains on the threshold of itself and this is why we do not know what hospitality is: *"Once we know it, we no longer know it, what it properly is, what the threshold of its identity is"* (Derrida, 2000b: 14).

But, if there is a threshold or a door to hospitality, it must be opened, unlocked or even conditioned by a *someone* for their guest. Who opens the door or threshold is, therefore, in charge of setting the conditions of the hospitality provided. It is, as if the threshold or crossing of it, is an agreement to the conditions that lie beyond it. The idea of mastery (master of the house, the father, the familial despot) comes through in Derrida's writings of hospitality as the definer of conditions and 'head' of the household, community, state or nation. It is, in the case of this discussion, the master of the house that represents, submits and submits the Others to the conditions of hospitality (Derrida, 2000a). In doing so, the master of the house reinstates their power, ipsiety and authority on those in his or her home. By maintaining their authority, they are also able to limit or control the hospitality proffered and remain the 'being-oneself in one's own home' (Derrida, 2000b). Still (2010) suggests, however, that by limiting hospitality as a means to demonstrate mastery, one may provoke the guest by reinforcing the imbalance of power. Cheah (2013), however, notes that due to the understandings of obligation between the host and the guest, hospitality remains within the host's power and control. It does not, however, mean that the idea of otherness or alterity does not come into play. Haddad (2013) argues that if hospitality relates to one's self or identity then it must be constituted through a relation to, or an awareness of, otherness. Others argue that through hospitality, the guest is often forced to adhere to the perceptions of the host and unable to truly be themselves (O'Gorman, 2006), but, if hospitality is a

relationship based on conditions, then it is the acceptance of otherness, of both the guest and the host, which can lead to new experiences, crossing of boundaries and thresholds, hospitable interactions and openness.

2.3.6 Strangers and otherness

Dufourmantelle (2013) argues that hospitality and the adherence to conditions within it, acts as a social tissue, where encounters with the Other and the acceptance or tolerance of otherness can take place. Otherness can also be described as an encounter between strangers and, it is with strangers, that many encounters within hospitality take place. Encounters with strangers, it is argued, construct some of the most important social, cultural and economic exchanges in contemporary society (Kera & Sulaiman, 2014).

Simmel (1908/1950) argues that the stranger should not be viewed as an individual who arrives and then disappears but as someone who arrives and then remains, almost adding value, temporarily or not to a given situation. Simmel states that the stranger:

is fixed within a certain spatial circle – or within a group whose boundaries are analogous to spatial boundaries – but his position within it is fundamentally affected by the fact that he does not belong in it initially and that he brings qualities into it that are not, and cannot be, indigenous to it (1908/1950: 143)

These qualities of closeness and remoteness, it is argued, are found in all forms of social relationships. The reciprocal tension found within them, however, produces a specific nature between the relationships between strangers. Simmel's stranger is demonstrated as a union of togetherness based on closeness and remoteness:

The stranger is close to us insofar as we feel between him and ourselves similarities of nationality, or social position, of occupation or of general human nature. He is far from us insofar as these similarities extend beyond him and us, and connect us only because they connect a great many people (1971: 147)

The element of trust is also highlighted in Simmel's essay. Trust, it is argued, can be generated with the stranger as they are impervious to communal norms and moral claims. Feldman argues that the stranger is then placed as a trusted other: "it is as if

symbolic distance from those nearby imbues the stranger with an infallible rationality, and this rationality inspires trust” (2012: 305).

While the work of Simmel paints the stranger as someone who can potentially add value to a situation and be trusted within a group, Bauman’s view of the stranger is quite different. Bauman argues that encounters with strangers are unique and often transient:

a meeting of strangers is unlike the meetings of kin, friends, or acquaintances – it is, by comparison, a mis-meeting. In the meeting of strangers there is no picking up at the point where the last encounter stopped, no filling in on the interim trials and tribulations or joys and delights, no shared recollections: nothing to fall back on and to go by in the course of the present encounter. The meeting of strangers is an event without a past. More often than not, it is also an event without a future (it is expected to be, hoped to be, free of a future), a story most certainly ‘not to be continued’, a one-off chance, to be consummated in full while it lasts and on the spot, without delay and without putting the unfinished business off to another occasion (2000: 95)

Bauman’s view on the encounters of strangers is closely associated with his writings on contemporary society. Using the term ‘liquid modernity’, Bauman presents contemporary society as *“a society in which the conditions under which its members act change faster than it takes the ways of acting to consolidate into habits and routines”* (2005: 1). Bauman notes that the liquefaction of social structures, personal relationships, communication, lifestyle choices, value systems, knowledge and meanings are becoming largely ephemeral and transient, usually fleeting and used or enjoyed for short periods of time. This, it is argued, can lead to instability, uncertainty, up rootedness and more nomadic existences where satisfaction is derived from consumption. While Bauman’s writings on Liquid Modernity can, at first, seem negative or desultory, Lee (2006) argues that a more socially fluid society can lead to new frontiers or experience and knowledge. Individuals can experience and be exposed to new forms of identity formation which encourages a new sense of freedom which can challenge preconceived notions or ideals (Lee, 2006).

Bauman (2000) also argues that liquid modernity suggests a fading or dissolution of traditions. Lee (2006), however, argues that tradition is not likely to disappear completely but be realigned and contextualised within the expectations of its present setting. Lee states that liquid modernity is:

a generator of novel experience surpassing all traditions. Cultural mixtures and collages of traditions become accepted as the 'real thing' in a borderless world that places no limits on the production of ersatz images (2006: 362)

Liquid modernity, therefore, is not so much a move away from traditions, stability and social structures but a societal movement that is moving with, rather than away from, a rapidly changing world. The more fluid, fast paced society, as discussed by Bauman, is one driven by new technologies, innovative and creative thinking and changes in consumerism. Individuals live for the moment, keep up with changing trends and fashions and are responsive to the new and the popular (Lee 2006). While Bauman (2000) may argue that Liquid Modernity decreases solidarity and the maintenance of meaningful relations amongst individuals, it is also argued that the development of technologies and innovation can increase an individual's awareness and opportunities for a variety of forms of social, cultural and economic exchange.

The writing of Feldman (2011, 2012) places Simmel's conceptualisation of the stranger within contemporary society and the innovations in technology as mentioned by Bauman and Lee. Feldman (2012) argues that online technology and the communication of it encourages results in interactions between technology, space and social relations. In relation to Bauman's discussion of a liquid or fluid society, Feldman argues that the stranger, "*is perched on the pendulum between belonging and estrangement, swinging to and fro*" (2011: 117) which creates a sociality between strangers which is based on a paradox. The stranger, therefore, finds themselves belonging to a number of spaces, communities and interactions which are mediated by online technology and open to negotiation and contestation. Feldman (2012) argues that the stranger then finds themselves within the co-existing

states of inclusion and exclusion, belonging to, but distant from, sociality and the social relations experienced with others.

Liquid modernity, online technologies and the interactions between strangers, therefore, have a number of implications on contemporary hospitality. Hospitality can relate to the fluid social lives of individuals, meeting strangers with whom they have no past connections and no expectation of future interactions. Individuals become fluidly mobile and pick up new social interactions as they encounter new experiences. One's consumption, online interactions and innovative use of technology facilitates new, fashionable trends of hospitality from a guest and host perspective. The guest-host relationship then remains fluid and interchangeable. The values attributed to hospitality can become fleeting, consumed and commercialised. Traditions of hospitality can become realigned or recomposed and seen as new experiences which may assert a thinner, less substantial experience of traditional values. Alternatively, these new experiences of hospitality may reinvigorate, or bring stronger connections to, what Derrida calls, unconditional hospitality – where the essence of hospitality is structured around provision, generosity and goodwill to others, irrespective of their identity.

2.3.7 Performance

The understanding of performance is often cited when discussing encounters of hospitality (Lynch et al, 2011; Di Domenico & Lynch, 2007). Goffman, in *The Presentation of Everyday Life* (1959: 22) states that performances are an *“activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his continuous presence before a particular set of observers and which has some influence on the observers”*. A performance has two main aspects; setting and personal. The setting relates to the physical layout, décor, furnishings or venue where the performance takes place. The personal aspect relates to the age, gender, race, speech patterns, body gestures, social status and role in the interaction of those performing. Encounters of hospitality incorporate both aspects from the guest and host perspectives. The setting of hospitality is where the encounter takes place. The setting can vary in a number of ways from the personal home, selected special venues or restaurants and cafés. While the settings are all seen as spaces where the encounter of hospitality

can take place, they are also settings where identities, preferences and histories can be communicated, represented and performed. The personal aspects are strongly connected with these identities. In the first instance, it could be argued that the host's personal attributes are where the performance begins but as the encounter continues each individual performs their individual roles within the encounter of hospitality and in relation to the setting in which these performances take place.

Goffman argues that there is often a tendency for individuals to offer or perform an idealised impression of themselves. Within hospitality, these idealised impressions could include that of the perfect host, generous, vivacious and attentive to their guests, or the perfect guest, gracious, receptive and well behaved or mannered. The idealised impressions are viewed by others as those that agree with accepted societal values and conceal actions that are inconsistent with this view. Goffman further states that the presentation of idealised impressions will lead to the feeling that the individuals, or performers, are closely related to each other in an ideal way and that the performance experienced is special, unique and unrepeatable. This is also present within hospitality encounters as those taking part seek a genuine regard for each other, rather than a repeated script of superficial interactions. Goffman further presents two types of performance; the real and the false. A real performance is understood to be sincere and honest whereas a false one is more associated with the work of an actor playing a part. While the two may not be too dissimilar in their construction, it is the feeling and sense under which they are performed that will denote the appropriateness of the social interaction between the performers.

As performers, individuals hope to present themselves in the best possible way. Our selves are viewed and judged by the performances that we give to those who are viewing them. As Goffman argues:

In our society, the character one performs and one's self are somewhat equated, and this self-as-character is usually seen as something housed within the body of its possessor, especially the upper parts thereof, being a nodule, somehow, in the psychology of personality (1959: 252)

Performances take place in front of an audience. An audience observes the performers and their actions and the desired impression they wish to perform. The

audience, as well as the performers, are bounded in space, time and identity of a given performance. The performance and the observations of it are, therefore, *“continual adjustments of self-presentation based on the presence of others”* (Hogan, 2010: 2). Goffman’s work presents performances as an idealised interaction between performers and audiences. Strong links can be made here between the relationships between guest and hosts and what is performed within encounters of hospitality. While at first glance, the performance between these groups may seem static and perfunctory, its nature is more complex as the social interaction found within the performance continually evolves based on the presence of the other. Idealisation and impression management may change based on the representation and response of otherness. Performance is not specifically linked to one group. The audience, it could be argued, are performing just as much as the performer. Relations are therefore fluid and interchangeably influencing the performances of others. Performances, thus, become fluid interactions between a larger group of individuals, each performing an idealised, honest or preferred impression of themselves to an audience in a bound time and space. In any interaction, an individual can be both performer and audience as they take on the dual task of simultaneously performing and observing. Encounters of hospitality, thus, become performances of individualised roles, under the observation of others, where each individual initiates performed social interaction amongst others in the context of the encounter of hospitality.

2.3.8 Conclusion

The reviewed literature on Hospitality, Otherness and Performance introduces a theoretical understanding of hospitality based on Derrida’s intrinsic perspectives. The discussion notes the paradoxical state of Derrida’s perspective stating that, without one, the other would be ineffective and vice-versa. Derrida’s work also details how interactions of hospitality are structured and can take form based around thresholds, boundaries and expected obligations. As many examples of hospitality take place between strangers, non-familiars, or Others, Simmel and Bauman’s conceptualisation of the stranger adds further contextualisation. Liquid Modernity and its links to contemporary society, develops an understanding of how strangers

interact and perform with each other. The role of hospitality within contemporary society is introduced and I will further investigate this in the following section.

2.4 Network Hospitality and the growth of an alternative economy

2.4.1 Introduction

In the previous section of the literature review, hospitality was conceptualised as a social, relational concept between others. Its place, within contemporary society and the insurgence of online technology, was also detailed as being a mediator of social relations within the modern world. In this section, hospitality and its online mediation will be further investigated under the term of Network Hospitality. The work of Germann Molz presents the concept of Network Hospitality as the provision of hospitality with a social or cultural exchange being of more prominence than an economic based exchange. Network Hospitality is also structured using online technologies and is seen as an alternative to the mainstream provision of hospitality. Network Hospitality is placed within an alternative economy where value is placed on ethics, sharing and morality rather than purely making economic profit. Discussion of ethical and sharing economies is further explored as being the basis of online mediated transactions, the sharing of resources and the growth of a range of forms of Network Hospitality. While the future of such economies is contested, it is argued that for them to remain attractive, they will remain as a subordinate to capitalism. That said, the alternative economy in which Network Hospitality finds itself, has impacted on how individuals relate, exchange and interact with others.

2.4.2 The Growth of an alternative economy

In today's society, we are noticing an increasing crisis of value and a growing immaterial economy that is deemed invaluable in a capitalist society (Arvidsson, Bauwens & Peiterson, 2008). Responding to capitalism and a growing influence in social and environmental values, an alternative economy has taken prominence in business and enterprise. In what Arvidsson (2009) calls 'contemporary capitalism', value is derived from the ethics within social organisation rather than the generation of knowledge or profit. This change in valuation has seen the creation of an alternative economy which is structured primarily by networks, social recognition and is based on generosity, trust and reciprocity (Arvidsson et al, 2008).

2.4.2.1 Ethical Economy

Arvidsson et al (2008) discuss an ethical economy which is found in contemporary society in terms of business and enterprise. The use of the term 'ethical' is not to suggest that the ethical economy is better than the mainstream corporate economy but that it is motivated by a value logic which is distinctly different to the capitalist economy. As Arvidsson et al (2008) suggest, the ethical economy is based on 'affective affinity', rather than purely power or monetary obligations. The use of the word 'ethical' also relates to the fact that obligations are of an indeterminate nature and that the source of value is often an 'ethical thing' like a community, shared value or belief (Arvidsson et al, 2008). Bauman (1993) similarly notes that the term 'ethics' relates to a moral code which should be followed and/or adhered to by any moral person. This moral code may be linked to a value or belief system and mutually coherent principles followed by a network or community. While it is noted that transactions and interactions can and will continue to take place without such moral codes, Koslowski (2001) suggests that these interactions work much better if an ethical or moral code of relations is followed.

It is, therefore, the shared values and beliefs of networks that are suggested to be the most important aspects of the ethical economy. Solomon (2004) suggests that, individuals are better off, or benefit most by working, co-operating and acting together under a shared value set or ethical rules. Bauman (1993) concurs with reference to ethical rules by suggesting such rules:

may guide our conduct toward each other – ours towards others and, simultaneously, others' towards us – so that we may feel secure in each other's presence, help one another, co-operate peacefully and derive from each other's presence a pleasure untainted by fear and suspicion (16)

Koslowski (2001) also suggests that by following the ethical rules, as shared in a network or community, individuals will not suffer loss of wealth, reputation or regard and will not violate their own self-interest. Mauss (1969: 3) states that "*it is groups, and not individuals, which carry on exchange, make contracts and are bound by obligations*" suggesting that the moral, or indeed ethical, obligation upheld by the group members acts as a mechanism which encourages and obliges reciprocity.

Another aspect, associated with an ethical economy, is that it seeks to create and sustain values and norms that strengthen a particular network of social relationships rather than establishing a universal or global moral code (Arvidsson, 2010). This concurs with Aristotle's view of ethics which focuses on constructing community through mutual values, passions, purpose and integrity and the fulfilment of obligations and earning pride and respect in one's practices (as cited in Solomon, 2004). The Aristotelian view suggests that *"we are first of all members of a community and our self-interest is for the most part identical to the larger interest of the group"* (Solomon, 2004: 1028). This suggests that identities and meanings are found within the communities or networks with which individuals relate most strongly.

Altman (2005) argues that an ethical economy, altruism and moral behaviour depends largely on the perception and preferences of the individual, their economic, cultural and social constraints. The fact that the ethical economy is now seen as something new and alternative is because it has previously been marginalised in a capitalistic, selfish, mainstream society. Once this mainstream view has been dispelled, Altman (2005) suggests that engaging in altruistic, ethical and moral behaviour will bring out a number of opportunities that may not have been previously achieved. Cullis (2005), however, notes that care should be given when grouping these concepts together as synonyms as there are strategic places for each of them within the ethical economy.

2.4.2.2 Sharing Economy

While the ethical economy is discussed by some authors, others call this alternative economy the sharing economy. The sharing economy refers to a range of exchanges which are facilitated through online platforms and which can be for-profit as well as not for-profit (Richards, 2015). The sharing economy is also described, by some, as a wider subset of a collaborative economy which uses online communication and technologies to cope with a growing consumer awareness fuelled by social commerce and sharing (Botsman & Rogers, 2011, Hamari, Sjöklint & Ukkonen, 2015). While 'sharing' conjures positive ideals and ethical values, in reality, the sharing economy struggles to clearly define what they mean by sharing. John (2013) notes that there

is a slight fuzziness in what is being shared and what is meant by 'sharing'. While sharing is seen as fuzzy and difficult to define, the act of sharing is commonly associated with a communal act, linking individuals to each other, creating feelings of solidarity and bonding (Belk, 2010). While sharing can entail the more traditional acts of distribution and communication, it can also involve the sharing of feelings and emotions which can create and regulate social ties, social norms and reciprocity (John, 2012). Sharing, therefore, in economic terms is not just based on the sharing of goods, services and underutilised resources but of a 'social sharing' of relationships, however transitory or temporary they may be. The sharing economy can be viewed, at one end, as an antidote to capitalism and a prelude to collaboration and community rather than isolation and separation (Richards, 2015). At the other end, however, the sharing economy and those acting within its rhetoric are highly competitive and profit driven. What transpires is a paradox of whether the sharing economy is sharing or a capitalist niche acting as a remedy for a hyper-consumerist culture (Schor, Walker, Lee, Parigi & Cook, 2015).

What the sharing economy does promote is the possibility of doing economy differently with regards to participation, collaboration and access to resources (Richards, 2015). As the economy of the twenty-first century places importance on technology, social relations and sharing information, the sharing economy could be described as "*more friendly, empowered, collaborative and locally orientated capitalism*" (Schor et al, 2015: 15). The use of online technology in facilitating exchanges, therefore, operates as an assurance structure, limiting uncertainty and promoting trust between those involved in the interaction. Schor et al (2015) suggests that the sharing economy and its use of online technology encourages trust and a shared value or belief system amongst its users:

This rhetoric of peace, love, and understanding is more than clever marketing. There really is a new business model here, and it depends on sharers believing the hype. The new sharing economy leverages value from strangers' tenuous social connections online – and for that to work, people need to have a significant amount of trust in their online communities (2015: 17)

But while trust is promoted amongst strangers, it can also reduce some of the serendipities involved in meeting new people without a prerequisite of an online facilitated value system. Schor et al, (2015) suggest that interactions within the sharing economy, therefore, become normalised and less open to chance and spontaneity.

2.4.2.4 Disruptive Innovation

Both the ethical and sharing economies have led, in some respects, to examples of disruptive innovation. The process of disruptive innovation seeks to promote unique experiences, services and/or products to a growing market through an innovative internet-based business model (Guttentag, 2015). Disruptive products and services also offer a number of benefits. They are often seen as cheaper, more convenient alternatives, offering more value for money, and appealing to new or less-demanding customers (Christensen & Raynor, 2013). They can also lead to further business innovation, experimentation and/or growth and can feel new or alternative to those experiencing them. A successful disruptive product or service will generally improve over time and experience, thus, becoming more attractive to a growing market (Guttentag, 2015). Christensen, Raynor, & McDonald (2015) argue that disruptive innovation should refer to the continuous evolution of a product, service or experience rather than viewing it at one fixed point.

What all three of these perspectives (ethical economy, sharing economy and disruptive innovation) do promote, however, is the ability and possibility of doing economy differently. As the economy of the twenty-first century places importance on technology, social relations and sharing information, the alternative economy could be described as “*more friendly, empowered, collaborative and locally orientated capitalism*” (Schor et al, 2015: 15). While the use of the word capitalism here may go against the more ethical end of the alternative economy, this definition strengthens how the alternative economy uses online technology to facilitate exchange, limit uncertainty and promote trust between participants. Others argue, however, that the serendipities involved in meeting, interacting and exchanging with others are reduced, normalised and less open to spontaneity due to their online mediation (Schor et al, 2015).

2.4.3 Network Technology

It is through the development of the web and network information and communication technologies that the aforementioned alternative economy has seen significant growth (Jenkins, 2006, Arvidsson, 2009). Its innovative nature suggests that its future development will *“radically redraw the boundaries of capitalist economy and redefine the field of conflict and compromise of which it evolves”* (Arvidsson, 2010: 638). As Jenkins suggests, while such practices had previously been peripheral, *“the Web has pushed that hidden layer of cultural activity to the foreground”* (2006: 137). John (2013) argues further that the idea of an ethical or sharing economy is a fundamental product of network technologies and the Internet which enables the act of distribution and/or communication amongst individuals.

Mark Zuckerberg, founder of Facebook, recently described his motivations for creating a social network as ‘a social mission’ which would make people better connected. He suggests that one of Facebook’s objectives is to *“strengthen how people relate to each other (...) discover new ideas, understand our world and ultimately derive long-term happiness”* (as cited in Magid, 2012). While Zuckerberg’s view could be considered biased, or even utopic in nature, we cannot dispel the fact that online social networks like Facebook and Twitter have changed the way in which we communicate with each other and develop relationships. As Solis (2009) suggests, online social networks have their roots in relationships and encourage the interaction and collaboration between real people. By embracing different kinds of networks, individuals are changing how they learn, interact, discover and share (Solis, 2009). Scorpio (2012) suggests that the online facilitation of the ethical economy has been catalysed by social, economic and technological trends that are being represented and communicated through social networks: *“What started online as the sharing of information has quickly turned into a full-fledged economy, with individuals sharing their homes, cars and skills with the help of mobile devices”*.

The links between the ethical/sharing economy and online social networks, through which it is often facilitated, suggest that it will be central to the emerging economic ecology of the contemporary society (Arvidsson, 2010). In doing so, immaterial production has effectively been socialised and put at the direct disposition of those

within online social networks, thus, empowering the alternative economy and freeing it from capitalist constraints (Arvidsson, 2009). The ethical economy has been criticised by some as being *“little more than a cynical response to the new demands put forth by a more networked and better informed public opinion”* (Arvidsson, 2010: 637). Argandoña (2003) argues, however, that the strength and future growth of the ethical economy is not a consequence of development in technology but will be based on the decisions, behaviours and values of the people who use them.

Through its use of network technology and online mediation, the alternative economy is seen as a source where new social networks, stronger ties and more tightly knit communities can be encouraged and experienced. Solis (2009) implies that, through the social capital and strength of ties found within them, individuals are able to make valuable decisions on their own behaviour as well as influencing the behaviour of others. Solis argues:

We’re now joining and creating our own communities online where we create, shape, and steer attention democracies (...) We’re no longer limiting relationships to friends, family and associates. As our comfort and interaction increase in social networks, the relationships we forge within each reflect our interests and aspirations (Solis, 2009)

It is through such networks and communities that trust, reputation and reciprocity can attribute value (Arvidsson, 2010). Argandoña (2003) suggests that working within a network has a number of benefits as it initiates the idea of sharing, loyalty, trust and empowerment. It also suggests a much more flexible and social relationship which adapts to the changing reality of the alternative economy. Relations can become more personal, especially when they move from an online to offline state and a greater transparency and access to information can be found. This can, however, lead to problems of fairness of access as well as a risk and disruption to more traditional sequences of events. Relations can also become more impersonal and regulated if they are restricted to the constraints of not moving from an online to offline state (Argandoña, 2003). The creation of trust and social capital, within these online networks, can deploy common affective and communicative skills (Arvidsson, 2010) as well as the ability to create community *“to make people feel that*

they belong to something greater, nobler and more powerful than themselves” (Arvidsson, 2009: 20) and to which they can believe in and give meaning and shared value to their lives.

Argandoña’s (2003) argument suggests that the development of the ethical/sharing economy is dependent on how it is used by individuals and whether expectations are met, obligations are repaid and trust is earned. This issue is of most prevalence when, as Bialski and Batorski (2010) discuss, exchanges lead from an online to an offline state and individuals have to navigate who to trust or not and with whom to share and exchange. Green (2012) also notes that difficulties may arise when exchanges lead to real flesh-and-blood interactions rather than just a trivial social exercise. In these cases, trust becomes a crucial factor in the success of exchanges and interactions. To some extent, trust exists in all forms of human interaction and, as Solomon (2004) suggests, should be seen as a dynamic process of communal practices and relationships rather than a static cultural ‘ingredient’. Others suggest that trust is associated with a healthy, egalitarian society which enables co-operative behaviour in both permanent and temporary groups (Vilares, Dam and Kording, 2011). Solomon (2004) discusses the need to trust as a basic human virtue and its absence is not only rare but disastrous, *“(a) person incapable of trust is a person who is something less than fully human, less than fully socialized, less than fully a member of society”* (1039).

An aspect that hopes to balance the risk factor, is that of reciprocity which is often expressed to justify trust even if it comes at a cost or imbalance of exchange (Vilares et al, 2011). Germann Molz describes exchanges in an alternative economy as following *“a social pact, one that ensures not only the proper relationship (...) but also as a contract that extends a binding moral code across the whole community”* (2007: 66). Similarly, Aramberri (2001) suggests that a key factor is not the monetary link but a mutual pact or bond that is understood by participants and strengthens the importance of reciprocity. As part of the reciprocal exchange, participants have expectations as to how one another behaves and interacts, whether face-to-face or through online mediation.

Fehr & Gächter (2000) imply that reciprocity is a response to interactions experienced by an individual. It can, therefore, have positive and negative implications and should not solely be linked to ethical or moral behaviour (Cullis, 2005). Another aspect of the reciprocal exchange, that could prove problematic, is the threat of one participant taking too much or only taking from the experience and not repaying the gesture of goodwill. Many online networks, of this kind, try to counteract this potential parasitic imbalance through the concept of trust which, in turn, aims to ensure the safety of the network and encounters with fellow members. In doing so the network, or moderators of a network, attempt to create a 'safe community' where rules, values, objectives and expected behaviours are adhered to. In achieving this, the network creates a positive and productive community "*in which members are open to each other, but enclosed within this economic chain of reciprocity and obligation*" (Germann Molz, 2007: 75). It is through these concentrated networks or communities that Solis (2009) suggests form a more meaningful, social and trusting exchange. The future growth and propensity of the exchanges, found within these networks, suggests that one's behaviour and/or contribution to the economy, ethical or otherwise, will be measured by reciprocity, recognition, value and benefaction (Solis, 2009).

Exchanges facilitated through network technology have seen the beginning of a reputation system based on online reviewing and rating which has been suggested to objectify one's 'ethical value' (Arvidsson, 2010). These peer based forms of measurement have two important novelties. Firstly, the value is not conferred by one central gaze but a range of glances implying a democratisation of an individual's ability to decide what the value should be. Secondly, one's overall social impact is seen as the main form of value which identifies a social rather than monetary motivation and seeks to expand one's reach and quality of social impact (Arvidsson, 2010). Germann Molz (2014) suggests online mediated exchanges are increasingly revolving around one's reputation. Botsman & Rogers (2010) further suggest that, in time, "*it will be our online reputations rather than cash or credit scores that grant us access to the goods, services, and collaborative lifestyles of the sharing economy*" and that it is through our reputations that we will be represented as individuals, communities, networks or partnerships. Our reputations, Germann Molz (2014: 133)

continues, will “*constitute trustworthiness through a complex amalgam of personal attributes, social networks, and attention*” and will reflect our personal qualities, character, integrity and skills.

2.4.4 Value & Future of an alternative economy

The growth of both the ethical and sharing economies has witnessed a distinct shift in value from the monetary incentives of capitalism to the immaterial production of ideas, innovations and experiences (Arvidsson et al, 2008). This complies with Solomon’s (2004) view that “*Goods should be exchanged for their ‘real value’ – not just profit seeking*” (1022). While this view leaves us asking ourselves ‘What is real value?’, the value found within the alternative economy, Arvidsson (2010) suggests, is its ability to construct “*temporary forms of order in complex productive networks*” (640). The author describes the value of ethics as being able to create order and direction leading to trust, social capital and sustained co-operation within networks. On the other hand, it is noted that the value of ethics can attract external interest which can be problematic in terms of command and/or remuneration (Arvidsson, 2010). Argandoña (2003) concurs with this view and sees the potential for creating a sharing, trusting and more transparent environment for transactions and interactions within networks, while disloyalty, increased insecurity, uncertainty and the violation of moral codes could be potential dangers. Mauss (1969), however, notes that value can be both material and emotional and in some cases exchanges and the value gained from them can be entirely emotional, immaterial and intangible.

It is important to predict or understand how this growing economy and its online facilitation may develop further and how this may affect the way in which individuals interact, exchange and view each other in future societies. Arvidsson et al (2008) suggest that the future will see a growing gap between the direct non-monetary creation of social value and the possibility of its monetization within the capitalist economy. In response to this, new social mechanisms will need to be found to recognise the production of non-monetary wealth as something that is socially valuable. The authors suggest three scenarios for the possible interaction of ethical production and for-profit production. The first scenario sees an alternative economy remain as a subordinate mode of production. The first variation of this scenario

suggests a continuation of its current state as either a 'niche' or 'alternative' phenomenon while the second variation suggests a source of cheap or even free labour which would cut costs in an attempt to find new talent. In the second variation, diminishing ownership would result in diminishing rights and while the economy would still create value, solely privileged economic interests would hold this value and true participants would become tenants of the economy and, in effect, pay rent to remain in it.

The second scenario sees the alternative economy exist on the same footing as the capitalist economy. This scenario implies the recognition and understanding of the value of innovative ways of sharing experiences through social networks. For this scenario to take place, the capitalist economy would still need to be seen with more prominence, as the strength of the alternative economy could only exist under a capitalist hegemony. In the third scenario, the dominance is held in the alternative economy. This, the most radical of scenarios, would place capitalism as a subordinate system dealing mainly in the production of scarce, mostly material goods. This scenario suggests that peer production is far more productive than for-profit production and, therefore, it is seen as a competitive advantage for companies and organisations to adopt the characteristics held in the alternative economy. All three scenarios suggest that an alternative economy will be key in the future and will enhance, rather than repress, social production, social capital, and the value of social wealth and non-monetary, reciprocal exchanges (Arvidsson et al, 2008). If this is the case, the alternative economy could establish a tradable value standard, between different communities, leading to a growth in autonomy and separation or a more ethical 'blended value' system incorporating a reform of capitalism, sustainability and social responsibility (Arvidsson, 2009).

Some argue that the future of an ethical, moral and sharing economy is being undermined by the way in which online technologies create superficial, fleeting connection with others (Bauman, 2003). Others promote online technology as an innovative way of sharing experiences amongst strangers that can only grow through its online mediation. Botsman & Rogers describe the alternative economy and its online mediation as "*a new idea with an old ethos*" (2010: 180) which encourages

openness, community and accessibility, all of which, they argue, are part of our contemporary online culture. Germann Molz (2013) argues that society's online culture is shaping the ethical and moral qualities of sociability and exchanges that are found in an offline state. The future of these exchanges, therefore, it is argued, will continue to develop in line with societies developing interactions with network technology. Whatever the future holds for the alternative economy in terms of its power, equality or sub-ordination, it is clear that its current state and development is having an impact on how many individuals interact and exchange with others.

2.4.5 Network Hospitality

The phenomenon of Network Hospitality began to gather in popularity in the mid-to-late twentieth century. With its focus on the provision of hospitality, with a social/cultural exchange rather than making economic profit, it became an attractive alternative for those seeking new experiences. Early examples included SERVAS - "*an international network for making contact with people from all over the world*" (Servas Britain, 2015), and Hospitality Club - "*Our aim is to bring people together – hosts and guest, travellers and locals*" (The Hospitality Club, 2015). Similar networks continued to grow in popularity due to the development and accessibility of online technologies in the early twenty-first century. Couchsurfing.org, with the tagline "*Couchsurfers share their lives with the people they encounter, fostering cultural exchange and mutual respect*", now hosts a community of over 10 million users in more than 200,000 cities around the world (Couchsurfing.org, 2015). Airbnb.com has also grown from 120,000 listings at the start of 2012 to over 2,000 000 listings in 2015 and allows individuals to "*Rent unique places to stay from local hosts in 190+ countries*" (Airbnb.com, 2015). Commensality based networks are also seeing a rapid growth from networks such as eatwith.com, with the tagline "*Dine in homes around the world! Meet amazing people, eat great food and enjoy unforgettable experiences!*" (eatwith.com, 2013), to a range of more informal networks promoting home based supper clubs, secret restaurants and various food based meet-ups. This 'network hospitality' provides exchanges of hospitality that are often free of charge and motivated on a shared, social experience rather than making economic profit (Germann Molz, 2012a). The motivation for participation in such networks is often to connect with strangers, who may have similar interests and world views (Rosen,

Lafontaine & Hendrickson, 2011). This, as well as the online facilitation of exchanges, can potentially challenge more conventional approaches of hospitality provision and be seen as alternative or peripheral practices.

In an age where many are seeking to remove themselves from the standardisation, commoditisation and perceived superficiality of hospitality experiences, some are seeking new and exciting ways of travelling, discovering new places and meeting new friends. Bialski (2011) states that the new and emerging trend of network hospitality is encouraging new rules and expectations of engagement and relationship-building that question the traditional boundaries between strangers. Network Hospitality can therefore foster encounters of trust, intimacy, closeness and/or mutual learning which are becoming ever popular in an increasingly mobile and globalised world.

With hospitality being facilitated in this way, we are noticing a development of social bonds, mutual interactions and the satisfaction of social needs which blur the boundaries of both the guest/host relationship and the private/commercial domain (Lashley, 2000). Within the private domain, hosts often see hospitality as an opportunity to host, socialise, build relationships and fill social or status related needs. The guest, in this domain, performs the role of evaluating the experience and the interactions between individuals and/or families. It can also, however, be a source of stress and tension in terms of expectations, rules of behaviour and pleasing the guest (Lashley, 2000). Within the commercial domain, the provision of hospitality is based on monetary exchange and providing a service. The sense of mutual reciprocity and obligation is reduced and the motives for being hospitable are mostly ulterior and profit related. While in the private domain there is a sense or understanding that the roles will, one day, be reversed, this is rare in the commercial domain as *“the exchange of money absolves the guest of mutual obligation, and loyalty”* (Lashley, 2000: 14). Another shift in engagement, related to network hospitality, is that the venue is changing from the commercial arena of hotels, hostels and B&Bs to the private realm of the host’s home or other selected private venues (Germann Molz, 2012b). This relates back to what Aramberri (2001) suggests is the ‘old covenant’ of hospitality which is based on exchanges of generosity, goodwill and reciprocity rather than purely money or hierarchy.

It is argued that encounters found within Network Hospitality produce a different form of sociality based on solidarity, compassion and equality rather than the impersonal connections found within commercial hospitality (Germann Molz, 2012b). Germann Molz further suggests that, through network hospitality, strangers are developing and experiencing stronger relationships that are less detached, objective and dispassionate than normal. It is through such forms of hospitality that the risk of encounters with strangers is reduced and, instead, interactions encourage an *“embodied, dynamic and fun connotation of conviviality, the possibility that being with strangers is an enjoyable end in itself, not a togetherness to be endured”* (Germann Molz, 2012b: 102). Selwyn (2000) defines hospitality, from an anthropological perspective, as an act that should establish a relationship (new or old) through a material and/or symbolic exchange of goods and services. This definition of hospitality fits well with that of network hospitality as it suggests that both guest and host must share and agree to a moral framework or universe to enable successful exchanges of hospitality (Selwyn, 2000). Bialski & Batorski (2010) suggest that encounters found within network hospitality develop their own rules of engagement and familiarisation. Users are attracted to this form of hospitality due to it being an alternative to the mainstream and they enjoy the ease of communication, the common understanding and the unique closeness between individuals. While the interaction begins online by a shared interest in the form of hospitality, Bialski & Batorski (2010) argue that the strength of social interactions take place during the offline experience with others while experiencing the hospitality of the network.

Germann Molz (2012b) suggests that the online interactions and face-to-face hospitality encounters can hold potential risks but it is the overwhelming previous positive experiences of such networks that override these risks. One of the most common risks or concerns of such networks of hospitality is that the guest takes too much, stays too long or does not behave appropriately. While new forms of hospitality are blurring the boundaries of more normative forms of hospitality they still conform to Selwyn (2000) and Lashley's (2000) concepts of hospitality as a relationship based on mutual obligations and reciprocity. The forms of reciprocity in network hospitality are more often implicit in terms of social relations, conversations,

interactions and learning from one another as well as the continued understanding of the style of hospitality provided.

2.4.6 Motivations

One of the key motivational factors of these forms of hospitality encounters is that it represents an act of generosity, which involves sharing hospitality and establishing social bonds (Lashley, 2000). Germann Molz (2012b), in agreement with Bauman (2000), further suggests that encounters of hospitality, increased togetherness and non-commercial emotional intensity with strangers are one of the conditions of modernity which reconceptualises relations amongst strangers. Telfer (2000) also identifies a number of motivations for hosting guests in a manner that is associated with those found within network hospitality. These motivations include a desire for company, a desire for the pleasures of entertaining, a desire to please others, the desire to meet another's need and an allegiance to the duties of being hospitable and providing hospitality. Telfer also suggests that ulterior motives in being hospitable are also common. These have got nothing to do with the guest's pleasure or welfare but are mainly a desire to show off skills, sophisticated taste or wealth. Aside from any ulterior motives, the motivations for providing hospitality and being hospitable all rest in a concern for the guest and the interactions with them. Other reasons for being hospitable are enjoyment and talent. By displaying talent and skills and enjoying the process of providing hospitality one, it is argued, will be naturally hospitable. Telfer presents a final reason why people are hospitable which links most closely to the forms of hospitality discussed in this section:

The most important reason why people choose to pursue the trait of hospitableness is that they are attracted by an ideal of hospitality, founded on a sense of the emotional importance of the home and of entertaining and of the special benefits which sharing them can bring (2000: 53)

While the motivations for involvement in such forms of hospitality may seem charitable or altruistic, the relationship between the guest and the host survives on mutual codes, understanding and boundaries of behaviour. Certain rules, ways of behaving and codes of conduct should be adhered to or understood in these encounters. While Telfer mentions an 'ideal of hospitality' the author does not delve

further into what really constitutes this ideal, what it involves and how it is perceived or created. While hospitableness and the growth of network hospitality are of great interest, it would not be sensible to suggest they are utopic, purely other-regarding or altruistic practices. What Telfer does not mention in her discussion is the money involved in providing hospitality. While some examples of network hospitality are non-commercial (Couchsurfing, for example), many others are not. This is not to say that they are purely commercial, profit driven ventures, but the exchange of money does take place and is needed for the exchanges to take place.

2.4.7 Conclusion

As mentioned previously, one of the attractions to network hospitality is the alternative, social and non-mainstream aspects of the hospitality provided. It is argued that network hospitality stems from a growing alternative economy that places its values on ethics, sharing and moral values. While the ethical and sharing economy present differing interpretations of how exchanges are presented and disseminated they are common in terms of their differentiation and ability in 'doing economy differently' (Richards, 2015). Advances in technology and the online mediation of interactions within Network Hospitality has seen a range of examples which explore how hospitality is 'done differently'. From the non-monetary exchanges found in Couchsurfing to the temporary renting of personal properties of Airbnb, the alternative provision of hospitality and its online mediation is becoming ever popular. The following section of the literature review will focus on the changing venue or ethos of the hospitality provided in network hospitality. While it will be argued that the concept of hospitality is often associated with links to home and upbringing, it is now becoming more to do with the venue, setting, identity and interpretation of many examples of network hospitality.

2.5 Home as an ethos of hospitality

2.5.1 Introduction

In this section of the literature review the concept of home will be explored as being an ethos of hospitality. Home has been mentioned, in previous sections of the literature review, as having links to commensality and the shared meal; as a space where encounters of hospitality take place and through which conditions are negotiated; and as a popular venue for examples of Network Hospitality. Here, the concept of home will be defined with reference to three larger components: space, mobility and self. Literature is drawn from a range of disciplines and home is detailed as a multi-dimensional concept that is constantly evolving and relating to emotional and psychological processes consisting of a diverse layer of meanings. The concept of home is then put into context with reference to hospitality literature. It is argued that home is the first place where encounters of hospitality are experienced and, therefore, one associates acts of hospitality to the value systems attributed to home. While home can be contextualised in a number of ways, its links with hospitality can bring further connections to a sense of belonging, feeling at home, domesticity, meaningful interactions and comfort. Home, therefore, is argued as being at the heart of hospitality, Network Hospitality and commensality - the key concepts on which the phenomenon of online-mediated commensality rests.

2.5.2 The concept of home

The concept of home has been mentioned in previous sections of this literature review. Commensality draws strong linkages to home in terms of family, family meals, traditions and upbringing. Derrida uses the idea of home as the site where hospitality is offered to an Other, *"I am at home, you are welcome in my home"* (2000b: 14). Network Hospitality also uses the home as a venue in which exchanges of hospitality take place. The links between home and hospitality are not surprising. Blunt & Dowling (2007) argue that home represents the first form of hospitality from which all others are associated. The growing significance of incorporating home, within contemporary hospitality provision, reflects the growing merger between work and leisure (Di Domenico & Lynch, 2007). This merger also brings connections to the previous discussion of an alternative or ethical economy. Incorporating the

idea of home with hospitality provision may make encounters feel more intimate, personal and less superficial than other forms of hospitality (McIntosh, Lynch & Sweeney, 2011). The concept of home is, however, contested and is representative to individuals in various different ways. The following review will highlight a number of ways in which home is understood and conceptualised.

2.5.3 Home as space

The idea of space in relation to home can, on occasion, be simplified to the image of a house or single structure where one might live. Although house is often, but not always, a source of home it is by no means the only space that allows one the feeling of home. When defining home, a broader set of definitions should be used. Broader definitions of home range from the place where one lives, a house or other dwelling, a family or group sharing a house, a person's country, city, region, birthplace, etc. and the environment or habitat of a person or animal (Collins Dictionary, 2016a). Although the definitions provided here and, similarly in other dictionaries, are no surprise we can see that they do span further than the idea of a house. A further definition which supports this, is that of 'at home' which is synonymous with 'at ease' (Collins Dictionary, 2016b).

Home can be described as something which individuals possess but that has to be constructed by those who possess it. In relation to this, a clear difference can be found between house and home. A house, in this sense, can be viewed as a construction aimed at housing a collection of materials where people live, whereas a home can be described as the meaningful experiences associated with and within a physical construction (Fowler & Lipscomb, 2010). A house can be seen as a physical structure which can only be made a home when an individual negotiates, decorates and arranges the space in order to display their identity or sense of place within it (Fowler & Lipscomb 2010). While a house can be an example of home, it is often simplified to be the main construct, while in terms of space, home can exist simultaneously as a house, neighbourhood, city, nation or region (Terkenli, 1995). A house or physical dwelling should be viewed as one component of the multi-dimensional concept of home. It is, perhaps, inadvisable to limit the concept of home

solely to a structure of residence as it should be viewed as something which is malleable, flexible and which is constantly evolving (Manzo 2003).

The meaning of home should, therefore, be identified as something which can be thought of in a much broader sense. Home can be found in a range of physical, metaphysical and psychological spaces which can be identified in a range of different ways. Manzo (2003) suggests that a 'sense of home' can be provided by a wide range of sites which can include shops, parks, restaurants, cafés and natural spaces in the local community. These spaces of home can often be identified as unimportant, repetitive and representative of everyday lives (Zahra, 2012). These spaces, however, are deemed valuable and can strengthen an individual's emotional relationship to a place and give it more personal meaning as an aspect of their 'sense of home'. Douglas (1991) reiterates the importance of space in creating a sense of home. While the space does not need to be fixed or large in terms of size, it is essential in creating a sense of home as "*home starts by bringing some space under control*" (289). In a similar vein, Short (1999) identifies home as being when 'space becomes place' and where a space is personalised and/or of meaningful significance to an individual. This space then becomes a stable centre from which the world can be perceived, conceived and experienced and where identities can be developed (Nowicka 2007). Horwitz & Tognoli (1982) surmise that an individual's concept of home is better understood as a relationship to an environment rather than the environment itself. It could be suggested that the environment, in this case, could be personal, social, political, cultural or a deeper relationship between sense of place, sense of being or simply feeling comfortable and/or at peace with where one lives. Russo (2012) argues that home, in whichever context, should represent a guaranteed ontological security which allows the individual to belong and to feel 'at home'.

2.5.4 Home as a mobile concept

Taking a more critical perspective, Brickell (2012) considers home as being not just a physical location or dwelling but also as something which is both imaginative and metaphorical. In terms of space, it can be viewed as something that is an emotional signifier of belonging and identity. This can be built within the individual and can transcend time, space and relationships. Young's (1997) perspective identifies the

fact that home is open to form the processes by which people make meaning and develop their own understanding of self. Through personal objects, their arrangement and significance, the individual can develop and create layers of meaning which can strengthen their sense of home around them, wherever they may be. These layers can be built by values of home like security, safety, control, autonomy and personalisation. In a similar vein, Nowicka (2007) suggests home can be formed in a range of locations through routines, repeated practices, habitual social interactions and rituals. By creating a sense of normality through these practices, a sense of home and familiarity can be built around oneself. Home should be seen as something which can be taken along with individuals when they are on the move through time and space. Johnson (2007) concurs, suggesting that home is more a state of mind than a physical place. Issues such as place and space, history, local knowledge, family ties and aspects of familiarity alter and differentiate one's relationship to home. These issues are neither static nor interchangeable and aspects such as temporality and mobility can develop one's identity and understanding of belonging, self and place attachment.

Expanding philosophical assumptions of home, the phenomenological perspective of 'being-in-the-world' is viewed as a "*fundamental, irreducible essence – so that place is an inseparable part of existence*" (Manzo, 2003: 48). This perspective views both home and dwelling as existential qualities which mean that a range of places and spaces over time can be of central importance. Heidegger (1927/1978) supports this and suggests that 'being-in-the-world' can extend beyond one setting and beyond the built environment. This should not be seen as an activity that we perform but as a way in which we exist in the world. Tuan (1977) suggests that emotional links can be made to a range of places by human experiences. These can be both positive and negative but can endow value to a place or setting. Here, Heidegger relates these issues, as well as strengthening our understanding of the difference between house and home.

The truck driver is at home on the highway, but he does not have his shelter there; the working woman is at home in the spinning mill but does not have her dwelling place there... (1927/1978: 145/6).

Phenomenologists view both dwelling and home as existential states. Used metaphorically, Seamon (1979) defines 'at homeness' as *"the usually unnoticed, taken-for-granted situation of being comfortable in, and familiar with, the everyday in which one lives"* (79). Here, home is suggested as an abstract signifier of a wider set of associations and meanings which can be found in a range of places (Moore, 2000). Manzo (2003) further supports this by suggesting that 'home' is *"a spatial metaphor for relationships to a variety of places as well as a way of being in the world"* (56). The author does, however, comment that home is often viewed too literally as being connected to the residence and that a more liberal view is needed to truly define what 'home' is.

In this regard, home should be seen as being about relationships to both people and things and not linked to a fixed place or structure (Nowicka, 2007). These relationships should be viewed as both active and mobile connections to physical, social and psychological spaces around the individual. Nowicka (2007) concludes that feelings of home *"extend beyond single localities because they involve globally stretching, heterogeneous networks that are always potentially close. Such networks bind times past and present, and they bind places"* (83). If home is to be viewed as a set of relationships, it should not just be where an individual is 'in the moment', but where and when they potentially are in terms of reflection on the past or their aspirations for the future (Nowicka, 2007).

2.5.5 Home as a symbol of self

Aspects that represent home can hold deeply meaningful and emotional signifiers of identity and memory. These signifiers can be profoundly personal reflections on an individual's nostalgic past, childhood memories and of 'who they are'. The 'who am I?' question can be tackled through a number of social/psychological perspectives including people, things, activities, routines and places which are integral parts of everyday life. These can be defined as mechanisms through which identity can be defined and situated (Cuba & Hummon 1993). Marcus (1997) looks at the importance of home in everyday lives and how it is symbolic to the identity of the individuals within it as *"a place of self-expression, a vessel of memories, a refuge from the outside world, a cocoon where we can feel nurtured and let down our guard"* (2). However,

Lynch (2005b) takes a more outward approach and suggests that the home acts as a means of self-expression which others are required to admire and respect. Both views here are supported in discussing the bonds made between people and places and how this can assert a sense of belonging where the place forms part of the individual's self-identity. Moore (2000) strengthens this idea by suggesting that home should be seen as a relationship between the physical setting and the individual. This relationship and the meanings found within it, can transcend the physical context and heighten our sense of belonging and sense of self. This relationship to physical environments of home, and the artefacts/objects placed within it can aid in developing one's sense of self.

In terms of memory, it could be suggested that the idea of home is not located within a certain space but something that is much more fluid and transcendental. Also, as previously discussed, home should not just be related to a physical structure or setting but as an inclusive, ever evolving state of mind. Bachelard states:

For a house that was final, one that stood in symmetrical relation to the house we were born in, would lead to thoughts—serious, sad thoughts—and not to dreams. It is better to live in a state of impermanence than in one of finality
(Bachelard, 1958: 61)

To others, permanence and continuity are aspects that clearly define and strengthen their sense of belonging to place, people and things. Continuity can bring a sense of security, safety, comfort and a 'place' where one feels they can return to where they feel a warmth and "*atmosphere of friendliness and support for the self*" (Smith, 1994: 33).

It is argued that home should not just be viewed as an extension of self but of those who live within it (Fowler & Lipscomb, 2010). The social aspects of home also have a huge impact on understanding the self and how reactions and interactions with others can be influential. The home can act as a social network through the relationships that are built within it. These relationships can include those within the family circle and who live within the physical structure (Russo, 2012) as well as people in the local community, friends, relatives, neighbours, etc. Blunt & Varley (2004)

support this viewpoint and suggest that home influences and is influenced by social relationships. These relationships do not only happen within the domestic setting of the home but also far beyond the household. Uriely (2010) further characterises interactions in the 'home' setting as being fundamental to the shared experience of coming together and enjoying one another's company; by making someone 'feel at home' the social interactions can be more meaningful. However, in order for social aspects to be influential, the concept of privacy must also be looked at. In order to control social situations and interactions, the home must also be able to provide periods of private times of reflection and peace. This can be achieved by providing levels of privacy where access to the self can be controlled and negotiated. It could be suggested that, in order to feel most at home, one must feel as comfortable in opening the door to others as they do in closing it to be alone or re-establish control.

2.5.6 Home: a multi-dimensional concept

Home is, therefore, a multi-dimensional concept which is shaped and developed by many factors and changes over time and space. It can be described as something which is "*neither wholly absent nor present*" (Moore, 2007: 152) and which is determined by aspects of personal, temporal, physical, social, economic and political life. Seen as a wider set of relationships between people, places and things, the concept of home can offer a valuable insight into the human situation and co-existence in the world (Terkenli, 1995). Mallett's (2004) conclusion best defines the complexities of defining or understanding 'home'. Mallett suggests that the home is dependent on a number of elements: the individual, their lifestyle, age, space inhabited, state of mind, identity, past experiences, present and future ambitions, emotional connections, thought processes, routines and rituals. What is home one day may not be perceived as home the next, and the feeling of home is referred to in an insurmountable number of ways which vary over time and place. Home can be conceptualised as an evolution of change (Mallett, 2004).

Similarly, Wiles (2008) describes home as a "*slippery, multi-layered, ongoing process*" (116) which is inclusive of physical space, affective social relationships, symbolism, emotional ties and meanings. The placing of home within these changing patterns of interaction over time make it an almost impossible essence to define as each person

has their own personal definition (Moore, 2000). What we are able to define is that the social and spatial aspects of home are inherently connected, be it with the individual or the idiosyncratic meanings of home. Home should be viewed as a transitory, emotional and psychological process that consists of a diverse layer of meanings which are developed and changed over time and space.

2.5.7 Home & Hospitality

The multi-dimensional conceptualisation of home and its uses within contemporary hospitality are of great interest. To reiterate Blunt & Dowling's (2007) argument, home is where the first experiences of hospitality take place and from where future forms of hospitality take their influence. Russo further states the multi-dimensional aspects of home as "*A physical place, a symbolic place. It is not a spatial experience, but something that includes cognitive and emotional elements, inseparable from family values*" (2012: 314). Russo (2012) argues that home, however, represents a place where hospitality and a number of related relationships (trust, reciprocity, co-operation) can take place. These relationships link to those between others (guests and hosts, strangers, communities, etc.) and how the understanding of these relationships are necessary within encounters of hospitality. While Russo states that these relationships are readily found within the home, McIntosh et al (2010) suggest that the host can exercise greater control over the behaviour and interaction of their guests. Using the aphorism 'my home is my castle' the author's argue that the host (or Master of the House) is in control of their domain, their home and that those invited into it should respect and abide by the rules of the house. Derrida's perspective of conditional hospitality can be used here as those who are allowed to cross the threshold, do so under the conditions, rules or obligations of the host. Russo, however, argues that while the host may set the conditions, it is not to say that the guest/host relationship remains static, observed and unchallenged, "*we open the doors of our home to the face of the other, who challenges us, inviting us to respond, to make a gesture of acceptance*" (2012: 313). It is the interplay between guest and host, the social interaction, the spontaneity and the unpredictability that can be the attraction of hosting from a home perspective.

Lynch (2005b) suggests that some of the main attractions of using the home as a space for hospitality (commercially or otherwise) is for social and psychological benefits. Social interaction, the meeting of new, interesting people becomes a common aspect of hosting. While individuals will often be hosting strangers, or non-familiars, they do so in the secure space of their home, or feeling at home in their surroundings. McIntosh et al (2011) also observe the social component of hosting and further note that hosts and guests alike may seek 'people like us' with whom to share their experiences of hospitality and interaction. The use of domestic symbols, artefacts, décor and possessions also allow for sites of interest or security in the exchange of hospitality (Di Domenico & Lynch, 2007). While the guest may feel indebted to the host, these symbols can be used to get to know, consciously or not, the personality, characteristics and values of the host. Responses and perceptions of these domestic symbols or idiosyncrasies of the host can, therefore, influence the social exchanges within encounters of hospitality.

Domesticity is also seen as an attraction of home as a place for hospitality. Russo (2012) suggests that the fragility of family ties and the erosion of intimate relations are influential to the growth of hospitality experiences that are connected to the home. From a host's perspective, Russo argues that, a series of actions and attitudes; *"to want, to receive, to discern tastes and needs, to care for, to offer the gift of one's time and attention"* (2012: 316) are present which reflect a positive attitude towards the Other, domesticity and hospitality. From a guest's perspective, the attraction may be the reverse of these actions and attitudes. It may also be the feeling of experiencing real, authentic hospitality related to the home and invitation to the home of others. Feeling at home in an other's construction of home, as part of an extended family or to be privy to their family values and characteristics, may also be the attraction of forms of hospitality that 'feel like home' in, however, temporary a state they may be experienced.

2.5.8 Conclusion

As previously mentioned, commensality, hospitality and network hospitality have a number of connections with the concept of home. A range of connections can be made, including the physical space where interactions take place, the identification

of values, traditions and beliefs associated to home or how individuals relate experiences to their own understanding of home. As stated in this section of the literature review, home is discussed in relation to space, mobility and self. These components identify home as being multi-dimensional and can be conceptualised in a number of ways. Hospitality, it is argued, is strongly associated with the ethos of home which is identified in a number of examples of contemporary hospitality provision. OMC, it is argued, has strong links to the concept of home which can be identified in a number of different ways. The discussion in the next section of the literature review will begin to construct an understanding of the phenomenon and its links to previous sections of the literature review.

2.6 Online Mediated Commensality

2.6.1 Introduction

The final section of the literature review brings further coherence to the phenomenon of online-mediated commensality. While there is limited academic literature on the phenomenon, this section aims to combine the previously discussed concepts of the literature review with more anecdotal, experienced-based and media sourced literature on online-mediated commensality. In doing so, this section of the literature review will provide a springboard into the conceptual understandings of the phenomenon as well as the reason for its exploration within this thesis. Online-mediated commensality is suggested as being a significant aspect within contemporary provision of hospitality in an increasingly changing industry.

2.6.2 Online Mediated Commensality – Introducing the phenomenon

As previously stated, the phenomenon of Online-mediated Commensality is defined in this thesis as ‘social events structured around the meal that are organised online to attract interested individuals or groups’. The growth of this phenomenon has identified a change in the way individuals are dining out and how meals are constructed and structured around online technology. It has been suggested, in the literature, that contemporary British society has seen a decline in the prevalence of family meals, the decreasing importance of meal times and the fact that eating is often done alone or at the same time as other activities. Commensality, therefore, has become more of a novelty and the experiences found within OMC, it will be argued, identify why the phenomenon is in a state of growth and development.

An increasing ‘foodie’ culture in the twenty-first century has also impacted on the growth of new ways of dining, engaging and interpreting food. Cairns, Johnston & Bauman define a foodie as a person “*with a passion for eating and learning about food*” (2010: 591). While this definition demonstrates an interest and passion for food, others relate foodie culture with an openness, curiosity and intellectual fascination in the appreciation of food. Much of this engagement with food and dining experiences is facilitated online by a range of digital practices like blogging, social media and the participation in food related discussion fora (Vasquez & Chik, 2015). While the term ‘foodie’ may, or may not, be strongly related to those

participating in OMC, a link between dining and experiences with food and its online facilitation can be made.

While there is limited academic literature on OMC, those writing on commensality and communal dining suggest that there are great pleasures associated with sharing a meal with others. Julier (2013) suggests that there are both tangible and intangible rewards relating to engaging in commensality. The shared experience of the meal allows individuals to socialise, converse, interact and to feel connected to one another. Another attraction to such meals is the opportunity to experience something different, to meet new people, experiment with new tastes, cuisines and cultures (Yates & Warde, 2015). It is the combination of tangible and intangible rewards that are found within OMC that are seen as the main attraction. One writer on the phenomenon argues that the chance to enjoy top-quality food and to meet new people offers a more unique, complete experience of the meal than those found in regular restaurants (Schofield, 2015).

When discussing the concept of commensality, it has been argued that the concept is about much more than just the food being served and is about the entire experience. Those participating within the phenomenon agree and as one suggests, all aspects are important in creating a successful meal experience:

All the elements matter, but it's about getting the mix right. The food is important (...) But I have always loved the sharing aspect of a meal, that coming together around the table and changing the world. So the setting, and the atmosphere it creates, plays a big part too (Mooney, 2015)

The difference between dining in restaurants and going to online-mediated meals is argued as being key to the development of the phenomenon. Its inclusion in the wider phenomenon of Network Hospitality places its social and cultural exchanges as an element which differentiates OMC from dining at regular restaurants. As one author argues:

The idea is that people visiting a city – or indeed people living there – can search out a more authentic experience, one in which they can have a proper exchange with local people and make new friends (Schofield, 2015)

It is also suggested that OMC is not a competitor for restaurants but a new market or way of doing business that is influenced by contemporary habits of consumers. Similar to other forms of Network Hospitality, the motivation is largely focused on providing hospitality, creating a social event for strangers, a love of food and dining and the opportunity to do something different to more mainstream experiences of hospitality (Willis, 2014). As Smillie (2009) suggests, this form of hospitality creates some peculiarities relating to the enactment of the phenomenon when the online interaction leads to an offline social encounter:

there's a lot of trust involved (...) Walking into a complete stranger's house for dinner can be a fairly challenging experience, welcoming them in, perhaps more so. Apparently quite a lot of people are a little nervous upon arrival, although the shared experience of a set menu gives people common ground, and naturally the novelty factor is a conversation starter – it struck me as a comfortable cross between site specific theatre where you're not exactly sure what's going to happen, and a nice party... (Smillie, 2009)

While economic profit may not be a primary motivator for Network Hospitality, monetary exchange does often take place in the overall experience. It has been used, in some cases, as an opportunity to test business ideas, products and services in an affordable setting with low risk factors (Mooney, 2015). The online mediation of such meals can reach a wider audience and attract those who are interested in experiencing dining events that differ from the more mainstream experiences found in restaurants.

Other authors suggest that it is the online mediation and the use of social media that brings like-minded individuals together. Tep (2008) suggests that this can forge a sense of community that goes beyond traditional ties of family and friends. Kera & Sulaiman (2014) agree by suggesting that while commensality is usually a manifestation of pre-existing relationships, its online mediation places the interactions among strangers as almost as important as relations with family and friends. Archambeault (2013) argues that online mediation and the use of social media is a popular example of contemporary sharing which will continue to grow with the development of technology. Feldman (2012: 307) defines social media as “digital

platforms of interaction” where social exchanges can be encouraged and enacted. The use of social media, and other online technologies, has provided experiences of hospitality between strangers. In this excerpt, a participant in the phenomenon notes how the online mediation promotes their meal, brings strangers together and enables a secure payment system for the provision of the meal:

We also used our website, Facebook and Twitter to spread the word more widely. Cooking for strangers in your own home is all part of the fun, and we ended up making some great new friends. People paid in advance so there was no risk of them letting us down (Willis, 2014)

OMC encourages sharing from an online to an offline social occasion, where social interaction and conversation commence around the meal. Kirsten Rodgers, one of the first to write about her own experiences of hosting meals that can be described as OMC, suggests that meals are ways in which communities, cultures and individuals communicate and identify with each other, “*meals are memories, milestones in our lives*” (2011: 41). Kera & Sulaiman (2014) describes the growing phenomenon of OMC (in this case termed as underground restaurants) as follows:

The growing networks of underground restaurants reverses this decline of home cooking and family dinners. The clubs introduced a possibility of semi-private dinners by combining the fast pace of the modern living and our need to experience new restaurants with the intimacy of small dinners at home. The pervasiveness of social networks enabled the coordination between strangers, who organise such semi-private events in their homes (2014: 198)

Kera & Sulaiman surmise that the growth of this phenomenon is due to the decline of home cooking and family dining, the development of online technologies and the search for new and different experiences of social dining.

The significance of home is also highlighted in the discussion of those who are participating in the phenomenon. As a venue, link to family memories and values or to nationality and identity, home has become an ethos for Network Hospitality and the phenomenon of OMC. Differentiation and alternative experiences of dining can also be linked to memories, family, sociability and home. The following quotation

suggests how childhood memories and dining experiences with the family affect the style of dining found at online mediated meals:

Every summer when we were young, our Dad would pick a day when we'd all have dinner in the garden. We'd take the chairs and the kitchen table out on to the grass and we'd pile the table high with salads and all sorts of different food. It felt very special. It's that memory, that feeling of excitement, that we try to evoke at all of our meals (Mooney, 2015)

The home is also commonly used as a venue for OMC. Hosts, in these cases, aim to recreate meal experiences for strangers in their own homes. Private homes can create a homely vibe, inclusive of artefacts, decorations and practices linked to the identity and hospitableness of the host which are seen as attractions to those interested in attending. The following excerpt, based on an individual's experiences of hosting meals in their home, suggests that hosting meals can lead to further business opportunities:

Our restaurant (...) started out three years ago as two trestle tables in our small London flat. [We] were all passionate about food and wine, and wanted to create the best evening we possible could in our own front room. We eventually turned our supper club into a business, but anyone who likes the idea of cooking good food for their friends – or even strangers – can give it a go (Willis, 2014)

This excerpt supports the view that OMC (and other forms of Network Hospitality) are motivated firstly by a passion and interest in food, hosting meals and hospitality but can lead to further business opportunities.

2.6.3 Online-mediated Commensality – a professional reflection

To end this literature review I have selected an excerpt from Kerstin Rodgers' 2011 book entitled 'Supper Club: Recipes and Notes from The Underground Restaurant'. Rodgers started her supper club from her own home and used social media to advertise and promote her meals as well as providing a secure payment system for bookings. The selected quotation details some of the reasons why she chose to organise and host her version of OMC. She states:

Because I love to cook. Because I love to mother. Because I'm a feeder. Because I love to share. Because I like to be in control. Because I enjoy the potential for chaos. Because I'm lonely. Because I like to stir things up. Because I like causing trouble. Because I find it funny and it makes me laugh. Because I want to change things. Because it's now my job, it's my living. Because it makes me cook things I wouldn't be bothered to try for just me and my daughter. Because I don't have a big family. Because I love community. Because it's fun to come up with an idea and make it happen. Because, although I love words, I like action even better." (Rodgers, 2011: 46)

I have chosen this quotation as it contextualises an individual's attractions and reasons for participating in OMC. While this is just one individual's perspective, many of the ideas taken from this quotation can be seen as linkages to themes discussed in the literature review (Table 2.1).

| Theme | Quotation from Rodgers (2011) |
|------------------------|--|
| Commensality | <i>I love to cook, I'm lonely, it makes me laugh</i> |
| Hospitality | <i>I love to mother, I like to be in control</i> |
| Network Hospitality | <i>I love to share, I enjoy the potential for chaos, I like to stir things up, I like causing trouble, I want to change things, it's now my job, it's my living, I love community, it's fun to come up with an idea and make it happen</i> |
| Home | <i>it makes me cook things I wouldn't be bothered to try for just me and my daughter, I don't have a big family</i> |

Table 2.1: Linking themes to Rodgers's quote

2.6.4 Conclusion

OMC demonstrates a new and emerging form of hospitality provision which builds on previous discussions on Network Hospitality, developing online technologies and the growth of an alternative economy. OMC, therefore, represents an example of contemporary hospitality provision which distinguishes itself from more traditional forms of hospitality or commensality provision. Further links can be made to OMC's

place in society and the changing social practices and performances of individual, strangers or others who take part in the phenomenon.

2.7 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has provided a detailed review of literature relating to the social phenomenon of OMC. The sections of the chapter aim to develop the discussion of five key components which I associate with the phenomenon. Firstly, Understanding Commensality discusses commensality's defining features, elements and place within contemporary society. The second section, Hospitality, performance and otherness, discusses Jacques Derrida's intrinsic perspectives of hospitality which I view as being pertinent to the phenomenon under study. The incorporation of otherness and performance also details how hospitality is placed within a contemporary 'liquid' society. Thirdly, Network Hospitality and the growth of an alternative economy discusses how online technology and alternative economies have influenced hospitality provision and given rise to such examples as OMC. The fourth section, Home as an ethos of hospitality, details the conceptualisation of home in connection to space, mobility, self and as something which is the ethos of hospitality and hospitality provision. Finally, OMC develops an understanding of the phenomenon under study with reference to academic as well as anecdotal references of those within the phenomenon. This section concludes with a quotation which, I feel, begins to explore the essence of the phenomenon and its interconnections with the previously discussed sections of this literature review.

This chapter also acts as a stepping stone into the field. It develops an understanding, of what others have written about OMC and its components, and has allowed me to think about how I will explore the phenomenon further through the process of research material collection. The following chapter, Chapter 3 – Research Methodologies and Methods, will detail my approach to academic research and how I have collected valuable research material to further explore, understand and make interpretations on the phenomenon of OMC.

Chapter 3 Research Methodology & Methods

3.1 Introduction

The following chapter details my overall research methodology and methods used for this research project (Figure 3.1). While great interest is often placed on the research methods that are attributed to a research project, these methods must be viewed through a broader lens or overarching philosophy for them to be deemed appropriate. In this chapter, I state my overall research philosophy in **Research Ontology & Epistemology**. My approach follows an Interpretivist paradigm and, more specifically, I view myself as a symbolic interactionist who places meanings and subjectivity as central to understanding social phenomena and the interactions within them. I state why **Qualitative Research** is deemed most appropriate for this research project by referring to Denzin & Lincoln's moments of qualitative research and my own role as a socially situated researcher.

Analytical Ethnography discusses my methodological preference to collect research material under a fluid, socially orientated approach which is analytical rather than evocative. **Research Material Collection** discusses the two stages of research methods used for material collection. Stage 1, Autoethnographic Participant Observation, is discussed as a research method before being put into context of the research process that has been carried out. Similarly, in Stage 2, Discussion-style Interviews, the method and research process is discussed. The purpose of the two stages and their discussion in this chapter is to elaborate on how the overall research process progressed and fits my overall approach to the collection of research material. Some of the limitations of this research project are stated, how they were approached and dealt with in the most effective and appropriate manner. The issue of reflexivity and quality criteria within qualitative research is also discussed here. **Thematic Analysis** details the style of analysis, its appropriateness and the analytical process undertaken, in order to demonstrate a coherent narrative which clearly represents the thematic development of the collected research material and its relevance to the overall aim and objectives of this thesis. Finally, I refer to quality criteria within qualitative research, in order to reflect upon the trustworthiness of the research approach followed before concluding the chapter.

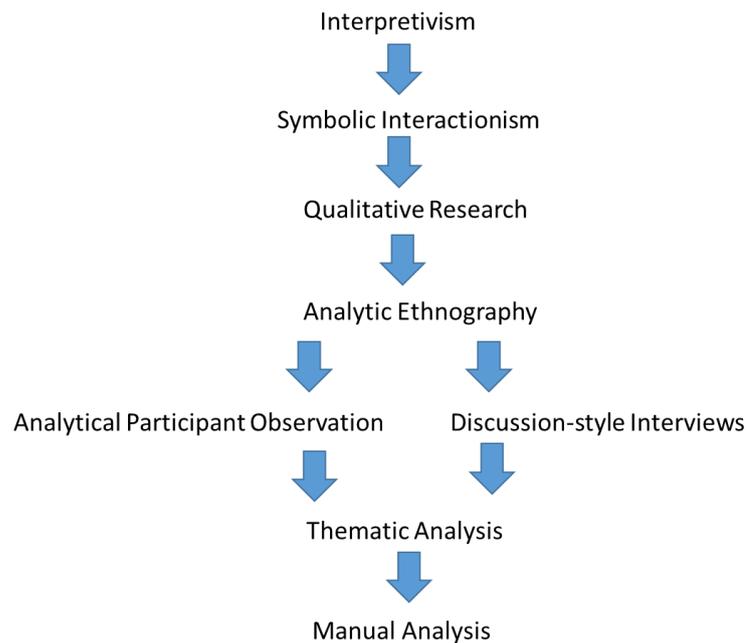


Figure 3.1: Research Methodology and Methods Chapter Structure

3.2 Research Ontology & Epistemology

The following section details my philosophical position as a researcher. Any researcher's actions need to be underpinned by a paradigm which details a set of beliefs defining their world view. Guba & Lincoln (1998: 200) define a paradigm as a human construction that represents *"the nature of the 'world,' the individual's place in it, and the range of possible relationships to that world and its parts."* Paradigms are constructed by 3 main elements; ontology, epistemology and methodology. Ontology, or the study of being, acknowledges questions of the nature of reality and the assumptions or claims that a particular approach makes (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). Epistemology, or the theory of knowledge, acknowledges the origins and nature of knowing and the construction of knowledge. Methodology, the study of how we collect knowledge about the world, relies heavily on the researcher's ontology and epistemology and the kind of knowledge they seek determines their methodology (Goodson & Phillimore, 2004). Guba & Lincoln (1998) provide three interconnected questions regarding the elements of a paradigm (Table 3.1). These questions act as major foci around which a paradigm is considered and/or identified.

| Element | Question |
|---------------------|---|
| Ontology | <i>What is the form and nature of reality and what can be known about reality?</i> |
| Epistemology | <i>What is the nature of the relationship between the researcher and what can be known?</i> |
| Methodology | <i>How can the researcher find out what they believe can be known?</i> |

Table 3.1: Three interconnecting questions (adapted from Guba & Lincoln, 1998: 201)

As previously identified, my research interests lie in social perspectives relating to hospitality, the meal and commensality. Initial research and knowledge on the phenomenon of OMC suggests that motivation or participation comes from individuals' interest in food, social interaction and experience and that meaning is often associated with these experiences of OMC. Reality, therefore, is subjective in nature and emphasis is needed on the identity and relationship with others within the phenomenon (Amba & Widdershoven, 2011). A subjectivist ontology assumes that there is not one single external reality but instead the existence of multiple realities. A subjectivist epistemology identifies the co-creation of understanding among social actors within the natural world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The interpretivist paradigm presents a subjectivist ontology and epistemology and, therefore, understands social reality by the interpretation of meanings held by the social actors within their social world (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007).

My ontological and epistemological position is interpretivist, as I view reality as being subjective and socially constructed and that meaning is associated with social phenomena and practices. The roots of interpretivism are often associated with the German sociologist, philosopher and political economist, Max Weber. Weber put forth the concept of *Verstehen*, which concerns the need to gain an understanding of the human and social sciences. This comes in contrast to the concept of *Erklaren*, the explicative approach focused on causality, which is often found within the natural sciences (Crotty, 1998). Based on the tradition of *Verstehen*, the interpretivist

thinker, or researcher, is seeking to understand the 'meaning' of social phenomena and the individuals and interpretations within it (Schwandt, 1994).

O'Donoghue (2007) argues that the value of using an interpretivist approach to research is that it can delve in to individuals' perspectives of a phenomenon. O'Donoghue suggests that the importance of reality is "*what people perceive it to be*" (2007: 20), thus reflecting traditional methods in social science research that depend on observations of interactions that take place in the natural setting of the participants. By utilising the Weberian term of 'social action', interpretivists define human behaviour as something, which is subjectively meaningful, either in terms of the meaning intended by the individual(s) or the meaning attributed to the individual(s). In the case of Interpretivism, the meaning is not seen as something objectively correct or true but as subjectively constructed around individual perspectives (Weber, 1922/1978).

3.2.1 Symbolic Interactionism

Under the broad term of Interpretivism, symbolic interactionism views meanings and subjectivity as central in the role of understanding behaviour on an individual and societal basis. The interpretivist tradition identifies two views of meaning and how it can be understood. First, meaning is said to reside in the consciousness of an individual's intentions, beliefs, motivations, attitudes and desires. By understanding an individual's own description of an action, the aim is to understand the meaning of the action in terms of the individual's intentions (Schwandt, 2007). Second, meaning is associated with a larger system of actions located within a comprehensive scheme of communication, value or norms. In both views, it is assumed that meaning of an action is fixed, finished and complete and, therefore, determinable or discoverable by the researcher (Schwandt, 2007).

Symbolic interactionists argue that meaning emerges, develops and is maintained through social interaction (Duguid, 2014). Symbolic interactionist research aims to capture the way in which individuals perform ordinary, everyday activities as intentional, interpretive and creative processes. Two key concepts are present within symbolic interactionism: the nature of self and social interaction (Di Domenico & Phillips, 2008). The symbolic interactionist perspective argues that it is through

symbolic communication that individuals are bound together in cooperation, shared culture, socialisation and cumulative knowledge (see Figure 3.2). It is, therefore, argued that symbolic interaction and socialisation are the basis of human reality and society.

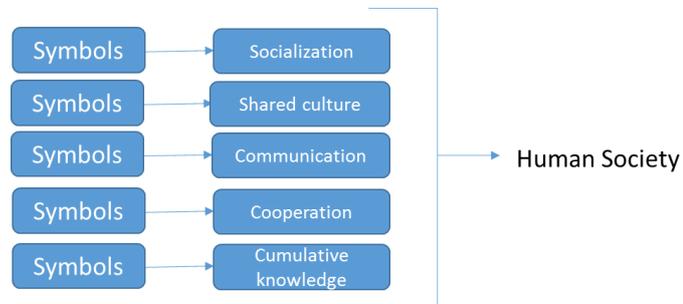


Figure 3.2: Symbols/Human Society (Charon, 2009: 62)

Symbolic interactionism places meaning on symbols or social objects having central importance with those interacting with them.

George Herbert Mead is considered the founder of symbolic interactionism. His ideas, published in *Mind, Self, and Society* (1934), argue that consciousness is not separated from action and interaction, but is integral to both. Mead was part of the 'Chicago School', a group of sociologists at Chicago University at the beginning of the 20th century. The 'Chicago School' developed a means of understanding social relations in a heavily qualitative manner which was rigorous in data analysis and used the city as a social laboratory. Mead's work, amongst others, gave rise to the exploration of the self and the nature of social interaction between individuals within society. Herbert Blumer (1969), strongly influenced by the work of Mead, further argues:

The meaning of a thing for a person grows out of the ways in which other persons act toward the person with regard to the thing. Their actions operate to define the thing for the person (1969: 4).

Symbolic interactionism, therefore, sees meaning as something which is socially produced, created and formed through interaction with others and their defining activities. Social interaction is recognised as being of vital importance to symbolic interactionism. Social interaction does, however, display its own peculiarities and

distinctive characteristics. Humans define each other's actions by the meaning they associate with these actions rather than the meanings attributed to them by the giver of the action. Human interaction is, therefore, structured around the use and understanding of symbols, interpretation or ascertaining meaning of another's actions (Duguid, 2014).

Through a symbolic interactionist perspective, the self can be conceptualised as being constructed by social processes and activities. Erving Goffman, in *The Interaction Ritual* (1967), states that the self is built up on each occasion of social interaction. Goffman, again building on Mead's work, defines the self as not something owned by an individual but something which is temporarily loaned to oneself depending on the social situation they are in and the social interactions experienced at any one time. Goffman defines the makeup of society and social interaction within it as involving;

1. Presentation of selves that are consistent with the facets of individuals' social lives
2. Support of one another's projected selves,
3. Protection of one another's face
4. Ritual expressions of respect and regard for one another

These components, Goffman argues, are moral principles that are at the basis of social worlds and society itself. Goffman's work and its linkages to symbolic interaction, manifest a strong indication on the presentation of selves within social interaction. From a research perspective, Goffman and other symbolic interactionists emphasise the dynamism of humanity as social beings. Humans interact, cooperate, communicate and use their past experiences and plans for the future to influence the directions of individuals, groups, communities and society.

Herbert Blumer (1969) defines symbolic interactionism under three basic premises;

1. *Human beings act towards things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them.*
2. *The meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows.*

3. *These meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters* (Blumer, 1969: 2).

It is under these premises that symbolic interactionism has become an influential approach within social sciences and empirical research. While symbolic interaction will not be able to explain all aspects of human society, it is useful and a suitable perspective to understand human social life and to contribute to our knowledge within social sciences (Charon, 2009).

Symbolic interactionist research aims to capture and interpret activities in everyday life based on the meanings and social interactions based around them. The nature of this kind of research is often open-ended and uncertain of its final outcome and it is, therefore, the process of interrogation and exploration that will yield useful interpretations (Rock, 2001). Through symbolic interactionism, the researcher must play an active role as a research instrument whereby they are part of, or at least immersed in, the phenomenon under study. In this way, the researcher can attempt to understand the perspectives of the individuals within the phenomenon. Charon further supports this view of symbolic interactionism by suggesting that the central principle is that *"we can understand what is going on only if we understand what the actors themselves believe about their world"* (2009: 197).

In line with the aim and objectives of my own research, following an interpretivist, symbolic interactionist approach is deemed most appropriate as the aim is to deal with social interactions, personal feelings, values and understandings of individuals within a social phenomenon. This approach allows me to describe meanings and to develop subjective understandings of humans, their behaviour and how their realities are produced and constructed (Lew, 2011). While symbolic interactionism is not solely linked to qualitative research methodologies, the next section will detail how I will use a qualitative approach to research material collection and analysis.

3.3 Qualitative Research

Due to my subjectivist ontology and epistemology and the fact that I view reality as being socially constructed, a qualitative approach to research material collection is

essential in understanding the social phenomenon of OMC. Much has been written of the implementation and development of qualitative research, from an objective positivist perspective of the early twentieth century, to a more contemporary, subjectively sophisticated approach to contemporary research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

Denzin & Lincoln (2005) present eight 'moments' of qualitative research which demonstrate the developmental stages of qualitative research of the twentieth and early twenty-first century. While the moments of qualitative research can be seen as artificial, overlapping and interconnected, they do present a 'performance' of developing ideas which facilitate a sensitive and sophisticated perspective of the pitfalls and promises of qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

I locate my approach to qualitative research as most strongly linked to Denzin & Lincoln's fourth and fifth moments. The fourth moment, Crisis of Representation, views self as being integral to knowledge creation. Fieldwork and interpretation of it is also recognised as a single process where the researcher should write themselves in as participants of the phenomenon under study. The fifth moment (Postmodern) encourages new ways of using ethnographies as a research method to generate small scale theories responding to specific social phenomena and/or practices (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Lynch 2005a).

Lynch (2005a: 544) further argues that qualitative research has impacted positively on engagement, reflection and participation within their studies:

A contribution has been made to opening up the qualitative hospitality researcher's "imagination" and to encouraging reflection on the interaction of the investigator and the subjects of observation in the way that knowledge is constructed and presented to different audiences.

3.3.1 'I am a socially situated researcher'

As previously mentioned in my Chapter 1 – Introduction, I place strong emphasis on my own participation in the research process. As a socially situated researcher (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011), I acknowledge my own identity, interests, biases and experiences as being influential to my understanding of the social phenomenon

under study. Similarly, the Reflective Prologue which precedes Chapter 1, introduces my reflexive approach to qualitative research which will be further discussed later in this chapter. These elements, as argued by Denzin & Lincoln (2011: 15), suggest that while the future of qualitative research is not clearly planned or predicted:

We are in a new age where messy, uncertain, multivoiced texts, cultural criticism, and new experimental works will become more common, as will more reflexive forms of fieldwork, analysis, and intertextual representation.

These issues and the qualitative methods I used to collect research material for this thesis will be discussed later in this chapter. The next section, however, discusses my qualitative methodological preference of Analytical Ethnography which underpins the selected methods for research material collection.

3.4 Analytic Ethnography

I have chosen the methodological preference of Analytic Ethnography to collect research material. Analytic ethnography places qualitative research methods as an analytic rather than evocative tool for material collection and analysis. While an evocative approach focuses on narratives that open up conversation and emotional responses, an analytical approach focuses on a theoretical development of broader social phenomena (Ellingson & Ellis, 2008). Ethnography, as a broad research method, identifies the strength of a fluid, flexible and negotiated nature of social order and interaction as a social process. The use of ethnography as a research method allows a researcher to generate reconstructions of social interactions between individuals within social processes. In doing so, researchers also remain faithful to the participants and settings while drawing linkages and comparisons to theoretical constructs (Atkinson, 2015). While, it has been argued, ethnography can be criticised for not reaching the critical depths and analytical rigour of other research methods, analytic ethnography seeks to appease this notion and do justice to the complexities of the collected research material and the complexity of the phenomena under study.

Anderson (2006) presents five key features that can make ethnography a more analytical process. First, *complete member researcher status* allows the researcher

to place themselves in the social world and/or social actions under study. As complete members, the researchers come close to, as Adler & Adler (1987:67) suggest “*approximating the emotional stance of the people they study*”. Complete membership, however, can prove problematic as a researcher’s multiple foci will always be separated, in some ways, from the other group members as the researcher has to be more analytic and self-conscious (Anderson, 2006). Second, *analytic reflexivity* involves the self-conscious introspection and contemplation of understanding the perspectives of self and others in relation to one’s actions and interactions with other participants (Anderson, 2006). By inserting personal reflexive views of the self, within their analysis, ethnographers place themselves with their personal experiences and sense-making to form part of the representational process they are engaging in (Atkinson, Coffey and Delamont, 2003:62). Third, *the narrative visibility of the researcher’s self*, argues that the visibility of a researcher, within the text, allows for the incorporation of feelings and experiences which allow the reader to understand the social world under study. Anderson’s fourth point, *dialogue with informants beyond the self*, suggests that, unlike a more evocative approach, analytic ethnography is grounded in self-experience but aims to reach beyond it as well by engaging effectively with others. Davies (1999:184) argues, it should be seen “*not in terms of self-absorption, but rather [in terms of] interrelationships between researcher and other.*” Tracy (2010) further argues that a sense of researcher transparency further adds to self-reflexivity of subjective values and biases as well as sincerity between the researcher and participants.

Finally, Anderson suggests, analytic ethnography has a *commitment to theoretical analysis*. He argues that it has a value-added quality which transcends the social phenomena under study through broader generalization and conceptualisation. Anderson further notes that analytical ethnography allows a researcher to gain insight into a social phenomenon that reaches beyond the personal, emotional or ‘insider’ perspective to a more analytical perspective of a social world. A methodological advantage of analytic ethnography is the close contact and involvement with the social world under study which allows for a privileged vantage point to access different kinds of data (Anderson, 2006). In terms of analytic advantages, ethnography allows the opportunity to combine and make connections

between biography and social structure. It is this combination that is of most importance in this method as the resulting analysis can explore an ethnographer's personal experiences and perceptions.

3.5 Research Material Collection

Under an analytical ethnography perspective, I chose to collect research material in two stages. Although the stages take place separately, they are intrinsically linked and interconnected. The use of two stages of research material collection aims to strengthen my understanding, conceptualisation and knowledge of the OMC phenomenon.

3.5.1 Stage 1: Autoethnographic Participant Observation

The first stage of research material collection involves my engagement and participation in the phenomenon of OMC. I want to understand the phenomenon by observing the interactions of others, but also to understand and reflect on my own participation and actions within the phenomenon. Autoethnographic Participant Observation brings together two interlinking research methods which allow for a form of self-narrative that places the self within a social context as well as participating in the context itself. With an autoethnographic focus, I am able to communicate the intangible and complex feelings, expressions and experiences that may not be accessible through more conventional methods (Muncey, 2010). At the same time, I am able to focus on critically engaging with and reflecting on my own participation (Tedlock, 2008). Using this method allows me to develop a hands-on understanding of the experiences of OMC, the setting, participants' interactions, motivations and behaviours. The following paragraphs discuss autoethnography and participant observation and detail how they are used to formulate a deeper understanding of the phenomenon.

3.5.1.1 Autoethnography

Holman Jones, Adams and Ellis (2013) argue that autoethnography in contemporary social sciences research creates a change or reconsideration of how individuals think, research, relate and live. When engaging in a social phenomenon, such as OMC, the exclusion of the personal, feels uncomfortable and untenable. Historically speaking,

autoethnographies were constructed around complex stories about significant phenomena which often exemplified moral and ethical behaviour and aided readers to make sense of themselves, others and the society in which they lived. Scholars then began to make stronger connections between social sciences and literature which were self-consciously value-centred, meaningful and grounded in personal experiences (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011).

The etymology of the word, *Auto* (self), *ethnos* (culture) and *graphy* (research process), suggests that different research perspectives put varied emphasis on each of the three axes resulting in a discussion amongst scholars regarding precise definitions (Reed-Danahay, 1997). Other definitions suggest that autoethnography combines aspects of autobiography and ethnography. While autobiographers write about 'epiphanies' or important moments that affected their lives, ethnographers write about a culture's values, beliefs, relationships and experiences in order to better understand the culture under study (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011). Autoethnography, therefore, has to combine the perspectives of 'self' and 'other' and participate in the culture, in whichever way is deemed appropriate, in order to represent findings under an analytical framework. As a research method, autoethnography should reflect the interaction and interconnectivity of self and other. Atkinson suggests that, treated in the correct manner, autoethnography can provide an insightful yet analytical research method which identifies and is dependent on one of its key principles: "*the homology between the social actors who are being studied and the social actor who is making sense of their actions*" (2006: 402).

It is, therefore, the communication and/or interactions between myself and the participants which is of great interest within this study. As Ellis & Bochner (2000) suggest, autoethnographers are privileged to be "*communicating humans studying humans communicating, we are inside what we are studying*". It is through the dynamic human activities and communications, that essential aspects of the research can be found and integrated. In doing so, autoethnographies demonstrate a more personal, interactive and collaborative relationship of the phenomenon under study as well as endowing it with meaning and value (Ellis & Bochner, 2000).

Autoethnographies are, therefore, seen as a product of the interaction and the autoethnographer's interpretation which, as Atkinson (2006: 402) suggests "*implies a degree of personal engagement with the field and with the data*".

Ellis & Bochner (2000) suggest that one of the key strengths of autoethnography is that it seeks verisimilitude, "*it evokes in readers a feeling that the experience described is lifelike, believable, and possible*" (751). Autoethnographers realise and appreciate that different people can perceive the 'truth' in different ways during the same experience (Ellis, Adams and Bochner, 2011). The question of trustworthiness is, however, in the hands of the autoethnographer, their credibility and experience of autoethnography. Transferability in autoethnography inevitably moves the focus from the participants to the reader. It is, therefore, determined by how it relates to the way the autoethnographer illuminates or communicates an unfamiliar culture effectively to a wider audience.

Autoethnography is often criticised in terms of being too heavily focused on art rather than science and dismissed from social scientific standards as being "*insufficiently rigorous, theoretical and analytical and too aesthetic, emotional and therapeutic*" (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011). Ellis & Bochner (2000) similarly question the notion of narrative truth, within autoethnography, suggesting that the stories, by their very nature, can distort past events and experiences and can also "*rearrange, redescribe, invent, omit, and revise. They can be wrong in numerous ways – tone, detail, substance, etc.*" (745). Holman Jones (2005: 764), however, notes that, through autoethnography, researchers view research and writing as "*socially-just acts*" where the goal is to produce analytical, accessible texts. Chang (2007) also notes that one of the benefits of autoethnographic research is in its readability, for both researchers and readers, as it enhances cultural understandings of self and other.

Anderson (2006) argues that autoethnography should be used as an analytical rather than evocative research method. Denzin (1997: 228) agrees that a more evocative perspective can "*bypass the representational problem by invoking an epistemology of emotion, moving the reader to feel the feelings of the other*". Ellis & Bochner (2000) agree that less analytical perspectives can make storytelling closer to that of a novel or biography which tends to blur the boundaries of academic and fictional works.

While this form of autoethnography has its place in many research projects, authors such as Anderson (2006) and Atkinson (2015, 2006) argue that a more analytical view of autoethnography can present a more critically examined form of inquiry.

3.5.1.2 Participant Observation

While autoethnography inevitably involves aspects of participant observation, I felt it appropriate to further discuss the use of participation observation as a research method. In doing so I aim to strengthen the use of this method with a strong autoethnographic focus.

Participant observation has long been used as a method of understanding social worlds, behaviours and interactions (Dahlke, Hall & Phinney, 2015). While in the early part of the twentieth century participant observation was viewed as an objective, positivist research method (see Young (1969) *The ethnography of Malinowski: The Trobriand Islands, 1915-18*), it has now progressed to a more interactive, subjective, reflexive view of otherness (McCurdy & Uldam, 2014). Atkinson & Hamersley (1994) argue that all social research is a form of participant observation as the social world cannot be studied without the researcher being a part of it. From this view, they suggest that participant observation *“is not a particular research technique but a mode of being-in-the-world characteristic of researchers”* (249). The role of a researcher using participant observation is to participate in the activities and/or daily life of those under study by entering into conversations with participants, observing behaviours within different situations and making interpretations of observed events (Becker, 1958). Participant observation allows for the collection of research material in a relatively unstructured way which produces a combination of cognitive and emotional information on those under study (Tedlock, 2008).

Brewer (2000) describes participant observation as a means of studying people, in naturally occurring settings, in order to capture their social meaning by participating directly in the setting. Holstein & Gubrium (2008) argue that participant observation is the opportunity to understand social reality ‘as it really is’ and to provide rich descriptions of people, their interactions and how and why these take place in their natural or ‘native’ settings. Participant observation, therefore, has an epistemology

centred on interaction and the reciprocity of perspectives between social actors and/or participants.

DeWalt & DeWalt (1998) suggest a number of basic elements, attributes and attitudes that are required to conduct successful participant observation. The authors note that the researcher should be open minded and non-judgmental and show genuine interest in learning more about the participants' behaviours, thoughts and feelings. Good communication and listening skills are important in terms of interpreting discussions and observations and researchers should be open to 'being surprised' and learn to accept and embrace the unexpected. By developing these attributes, researchers will have a better chance of developing suitable rapport and gain the trust of participants. This approach allows the researcher to access more personal experiences that are often concealed from outsiders (Patterson, Bottorff & Hewat, 2003). Achieving this kind of access is heavily dependent on the ability, characteristics and experience of a researcher as well as the nature and context of the group under study and the kind of information sought from a research project (DeWalt & DeWalt, 1998).

The advantages of participant observation stem from the ability to obtain valuable research material which can allow for a deeper and less limited understanding of a phenomenon. The collected research material relies solely on the explanations of the participant on why they take part in the phenomenon and what this entails (Patterson et al, 2003). Participant observation can be seen both as a research material collection method as well as an analytic tool which can enhance the quality of the research material obtained as well as the quality of the interpretation. In this research project I want to obtain valuable information from the participants rather than just 'getting by' in the phenomenon under study. I am therefore eager to develop a systematic understanding of the phenomenon which can be analysed, interpreted and shared with colleagues (DeWalt & DeWalt, 1998). Participant observation also adheres to the emphasis on the social construction of reality as stated through symbolic interactionism. The complex and inter-related activities of participants (as well as the researcher) is a major contribution of using participant observation (Dahlke, Hall & Phinney, 2015).

While I believe Autoethnographic Participant Observation to be the most appropriate and suitable way of gaining valuable research material, it was not until I made my first steps into the field of OMC that I was able to visualise how material would be collected and if participants, hosts and organisers would be willing to take part in my research project. The pilot meals I attended before the research material collection took place were valuable in exploring the phenomenon and the people within it.

3.5.1.3 Pilot meals

At the early stages of the research (May 2013), I joined a meetup group based in Glasgow. Meetups, as will be discussed later in this thesis, are organised by individuals who are interested in a particular social event where members 'meetup' to experience that event with other interested individuals. Meetups are usually non-commercial and can include a range of social events. For the purpose of my research, I was looking at meetups focused around the meal. The meetup group that I joined organised meals in their personal homes for 6-10 individuals. Before the meal took place, each individual was asked to bring along a dish for the diners to share. At this early stage, I realised that the individuals attending had a keen interest in food and the shared meal. The food they contributed often came with a story or reason why they had chosen to prepare it. These stories were often linked to nationalities, background, food preferences or experiences. At the two meals attended, I also saw that some attendees had previously been to a number of these meals and had developed friendships/associations with other diners, while others were attending for the first time. During discussions around the table at these meals, I mentioned my interest in these kinds of meals and the potential for a research project. The diners reacted positively to this and the general consensus was that they would be happy/interested to take part when, or if, the opportunity arose.

The meetup stopped operating a few months after I attended my first two meals. This was due to the relocation of the main founder of the group. While these meals did not form part of the official sample, they did provide me with initial experience of OMC and the potential popularity and growth of the phenomenon. From these experiences, I was able to begin formulating the scope of this research project as well as identifying sources of similar online mediated meals.

3.5.2 Sample - Stage 1

Suitable meals for the first stage of research material collection were identified as fitting with my own definition of OMC: 'social events structured around the meal that are organised online to attract interested individuals or groups'. Meals were sourced online and those that I deemed suitable for further investigation matched my definition.

I initially contacted the hosts/organisers of suitable meals via email. Emails detailed my research aim and objectives and how I hoped to carry out my research (See Appendix 1). I asked the hosts/organisers if they would be happy for this to take place at their meal. In terms of research ethics, I also stated that my identity as a researcher would be made explicit to other diners at the meal, but aside from that, I would act as a normal attendee. It was imperative that I embraced the meal and the experiences of it in the most natural way as this was in line with my research methods and overarching research philosophy. I also mentioned that observations would be written up after the event and not during the meal itself. I invited hosts/organisers to reply with any further questions or comments. This was done via email or by phone depending on the host/organiser's request.

The majority of hosts/organisers replied positively to the initial emails and were happy for the research to take place. Table 3.2 and Figure 3.3 display the response rate and type of host/organisers. Some hosts/organisers had a couple of questions/queries relating to the research but, once answered, were happy for the research to take place. A small amount, of those contacted, thanked me for my interest but would prefer if their meals were not part of the research. In these cases, I would thank them for their reply and no further contact would be made. In other cases, I received no reply from hosts/organisers. In some cases, a further email would be sent as a reminder of the first email. If no reply was received after this, then those meals would not be attended as part of the research.

| Response type | Number of responses |
|------------------------|---------------------|
| Agreed to take part | 42 |
| Asked not to take part | 2 |
| No response | 15 |
| Total contacted | 59 |

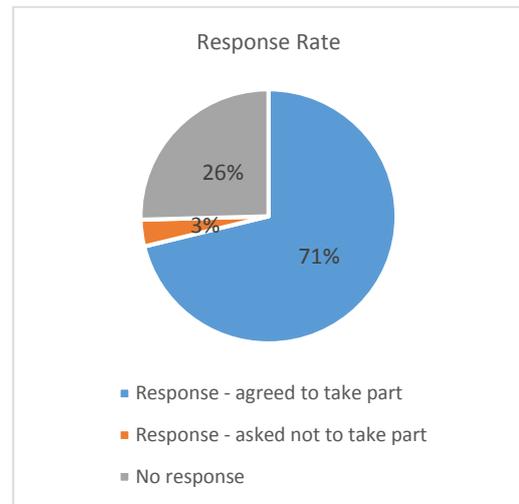


Table 3.2 & Figure 3.3: Response Type/Rate

3.5.2.1 Final Sample

Thirty-eight meals were attended as part of the research material collection (Table 4.1, p.114). The attended meals took place in Glasgow, Edinburgh, London, Manchester and York between November 2013 and September 2014. These cities were chosen as they had a significant amount of suitable meals that fitted the criteria of the sample. Meals in London took place during two trips where a substantial number of meals (seven) could be attended.

3.5.2.2 Field notes

As mentioned in the emails to hosts/providers of OMC, field notes would be written after my attendance at a meal. It was important that field notes were written as soon after the meal as possible. DeWalt & DeWalt (1998) suggest that ethnographic field notes should be written, as soon as possible, and not trusted to memory as this may affect the accuracy and trustworthiness of the observations. I would often sketch initial field notes on paper while travelling on public transport from the meal to wherever I was staying. Once in a more suitable location, I would transfer these notes to my laptop and write more detailed and structured field notes. As Ellingson (2009) suggests, ethnographic field notes should be rich with detail, with thick descriptions of experiences which should record material incorporating all of the senses as well as personal reflections and questions. Boone (2003: 218) further notes that it is important to incorporate all aspects of the research experience including setting,

activities, order of events, and behaviour and interactions of participants. My field notes aim to incorporate all of the above elements, as well as additional interpretations, which develop an overall understanding of all observations. On average, field notes of attended meals were between 4000-6000 words (see example in Appendix 3).

3.5.3 Stage 2 - Discussion Style Interviews

Although ethnographic methods are seen as suitable research methods to gain a valuable understanding of a phenomenon and the people within it, its trustworthiness is strengthened with the use of additional research methods. Using ethnographic research in conjunction with other methods can improve the quality and consistency of a research project.

The second stage of research material collection, therefore, involves discussion-style interviews with the hosts/providers of OMC. Through the interviews, it was intended to encourage discussion of motivations for participation, the social interactions experienced and how the setting of the meals facilitates commensality. Interviews were chosen for the second stage of the research material collection as they can be used to a) strengthen, re-confirm or further discuss material collected in Stage 1, and b) as a follow up opportunity with the providers/hosts of the meals. Follow up interviews are often used alongside ethnographies as they allow the researcher the opportunity to elicit perspectives on the meanings of social phenomenon under study (Ellingson, 2009). The interviews would also allow me to delve deeper into the interpretations and observations highlighted in Stage 1. De Fina & Perrino (2011:1) describe interviews as a "*real communicative event*" which can incorporate detailed discussion and evaluation of social practices rather than the potentially fleeting, short-lived observations found in ethnographies.

Rather than follow a strict structure, the interviews would be more conversational or discussion like. Structured or closed-question interviews would not suit this research project. Some of the issues related to structured interviews, such as clarification of meaning, establishment of relevance, lack of elaboration and inflexibility of flow (Roulston, 2006), suggest that a range of limitations would inhibit the depth and intensity of the collected research material. In contrast, the conversational style of

the interviews affords a closer bond between myself and the interviewee as well as the interview becoming an interactive process that incorporates the views and interpretations of both parties. Baker's (2002) approach to open-ended interview techniques, focuses on studying the interview as an interactive conversation, treating the interview as an account rather than a report and finding identities, values and beliefs of the interviewee. These views promote the open-ended interview as a more human practice which encourages deeper understanding of the interviewee and the ability to view them within the social phenomenon under study.

Ellis, Adams & Bochner (2011: 280) further support a more reflexive and dyadic style of interview that allows an important, yet subtle, change in focus:

Though the focus is on the participant and her or his story, the words, thoughts, and feelings of the researcher also are considered, e.g., personal motivation for doing a project, knowledge of the topics discussed, emotional response to an interview, and ways in which the interviewer may have been changed by the process of interviewing. Even though the researchers experience isn't the main focus, personal reflection adds context and layers to the story begin told about participants.

The importance of reflexivity, in this sense, is that the nature of the conversation, themes discussed and interaction between the researcher and interviewee provides an "ongoing interpretation of its own significance" (Briggs, 1986:106).

By making the interviews discussion-like, I was able to create a comfortable relationship with the interviewee. This approach encouraged the development of rapport and trust between myself and the participant as well as promoting a more interactive process of discussion (Bochaton & Lefebvre, 2011). For success in this style of interview, I needed to gain the trust of the interviewees to best collect the most reliable research material. In doing so, I had to try to be as transparent as possible at the beginning stages and communicate effectively why the interviews were taking place, the nature of the research, duration of the interview, how the information would be used and how the interviewee would be represented in the findings (Harvey, 2011). By gaining the trust of the interviewee in the 'small talk'

stage of the interview, a certain rapport or working relationship can be developed. While some form of working relationship was formed during the planning stages of the research project, it is important to re-establish the relationship for the interview phase.

Attempting to build a successful relationship with the interviewee should balance the impact between encouragement, active engagement, reflection and ensuring the discussion remains focused (Hannabuss, 1996). An awareness of the importance of a strong and clear opening to the interview, using appropriate language and avoiding jargon, avoiding closed questions and knowing how best to focus the pace of the interview is also essential (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009, Hannabuss 1996). I also had to be adaptable and flexible, in terms of research style, so that it fits with the level and personality of the interviewee. In doing so, I can use the interview to draw out spontaneous reactions, ask for examples or more detailed descriptions and aim to make the interview as similar to 'normal' conversation as possible (Hannabuss, 1996, De Fina & Perrino, 2011).

With regard to the objections specific to interviewing and analysis, Kvale (2007) notes that interviews are dependent on the interrelationship between interviewer and interviewee and should be seen as research instruments to obtain knowledge in the most effective way. A subjective perspective or recognised bias may highlight specific aspects of the phenomenon under study. With reference to trustworthiness and transferability, Kvale (2007) notes that several interpretations of the same interview are often a strong characteristic of interviews and need not be a weakness; credibility often depends on the craftsmanship and ability of the researcher; and the number of participants relies on the necessities and purpose of the study. Kvale (2007) further interprets these objections and suggests that, in reverse, they point out positive aspects of using interviews as a primary source of material collection which can give "*privileged access to the subject's everyday world*" (87). Some further implications of using interviews suggest that they are expensive, intensive and time consuming, which run the risk of covering only a small, and possibly unrepresentative, sample of participants (Hannabuss, 1996). While the sample size may be restricted due to time and cost restrictions, the findings of this research project should "*be treated as*

indicative, not substantive” (McIntosh and Siggs, 2005: 76) and, therefore, a large sample set may not add trustworthiness to the research project.

3.5.4 Sample - Stage 2

I choose to refer to the interviews as ‘discussions’ (or discussion-style interviews) as this is the intended dynamic which aims to create a natural and/or intimate research environment. The majority of the interviewees, used for Stage 2 of research material collection, were linked to some of the meals attended during Stage 1. The potential of a follow-up interview was mentioned in the initial emails sent to the hosts/organisers and the majority were happy to take part. Interviews were organised via email. I left the time, date and venue of the discussion-style interviews, as much as I could, to the discretion of the interviewee. The majority of discussions took place in cafés and bars, suggested by the interviewee. On some occasions, where the researcher and interviewee were in different locations, discussions were held over Skype. The figure below shows the setting of discussion-style interviews.

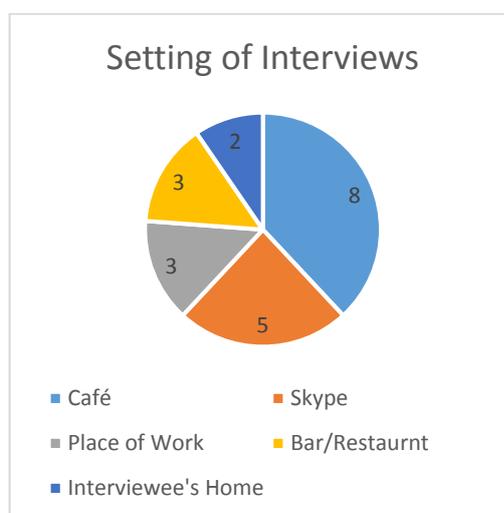


Figure 3.4: Setting of Interviews

Twenty-one discussion-style interviews took place between December 2013 and September 2014 (see Table 4.4, p.156). Interviews, on average, lasted between 40-50 minutes. Each interview was recorded using two digital recorders (Olympus VN-8500PC/Samsung Galaxy Ace). Two digital recorders were used to minimise wastage of material if one stopped functioning. I explained that the digital files would only be

listened to by myself and that transcriptions would be anonymised when excerpts were presented in the thesis. Eighteen of the interviewees were hosts/organisers of attended meals from Stage 1. Two interviews (D11, D14) were with hosts/organisers of meals that I was unable to attend due to timing/availability/location. One interviewee (D13) was a regular attendee of OMC that I met at a meal who was particularly interested in the phenomenon and my research.

The response rate of interviewees was high. Twenty-six interviewees were approached. Five potential interviews did not take place due to being unable to arrange suitable time/location for interview or lack of response after attendance of a meal. On two occasions, discussions were cut short or could not take place as planned. On one of these occasions, the interviewee only had limited time to answer questions due to a prior arrangement (D15) and another, on Skype, had to be cut short due to a breakdown in technology (D21). While these two discussions incurred limitations, beyond the researcher's control, they did, however, provide valuable information and material to be included in the analysis.

3.5.4.1 Transcriptions

Discussion-style interviews were transcribed verbatim (see example in Appendix 4). Transcriptions were made as soon after the interview took place as possible. This was done so that the content of the interview remained fresh in my mind and to avoid a backlog of transcriptions which is both time consuming and tiring. All transcriptions were made using a basic transcription software called Express Scribe. Express Scribe was used due to previous experience of using this software in transcribing interviews. The software merely aids in the speed of transcribing rather than any part of the analysis process.

3.6 Research Ethics and Integrity

Both stages of research material collection were successfully approved by Edinburgh Napier University's Research Integrity process. Once the attendance of a meal and/or interview had been organised, I would send the host/organiser a consent form via email (see Appendix 2). This consent form detailed the specifics of the research and was agreed upon via a further email or the signing of the consent form. Participants

were told that they would be free to end the research stage at any time. Participants were also made aware that they would not be identifiable in the research findings, in any way, and that pseudonyms would be used when writing up. Field notes and transcriptions were typed up using Microsoft Word and stored on my password protected personal computer. No one else has access to these documents. Field notes and transcriptions are all anonymised and no names are used to identify participants or interviewees.

3.7 Thematic Analysis

In this section, I will detail the features and process of thematic analysis, my use of manual analysis rather than qualitative data analysis computer software packages and the overall analytical process undertaken.

Thematic analysis seeks to discover information about participants' lives through what they say and do. In doing so, it can make interpretations on the particularities of the social practices or phenomena under study (Wilkinson, 2011). This form of analysis can also be linked to symbolic interactionism as it can be especially useful in capturing complex meanings found within collected research material as it affords a deeper level of analysis of multiple realities and how they may be represented through personal narratives or activities (Guest, MacQueen & Namey, 2012). A more flexible approach to analysis, as Clarke & Braun (2013) suggest, can allow thematic analysis to be applied within a range of theoretical perspectives and frameworks.

Thematic analysis is a process through which qualitative data is organised through the identification, analysis and reporting of themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It is important, through thematic analysis, that themes found within the research material are questioned, challenged and confirmed before they can be conceptualised and represent useful knowledge in relation to the research aims (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014). Thematic analysis focuses on themes and patterns that are identified through the collected research material. Themes represent certain behaviours, lived experiences or perceptions of participants which are brought together to construct a comprehensive picture of a participant's (or, in this case, my own) experiences (Aronson, 1994). Each theme represents patterns

found in the data and captures something important in relation to the research question to which meaning and interpretations can be given. Criteria for themes can be based on repetition, recurrence and forcefulness found within the collected research material (Owen, 1985). The collected research material can be analysed in groups of similar codes which can shape the initial stages of analysis.

Braun & Clarke (2006) suggest six phases of thematic analysis (Figure 3.5) that allow for a critical and thorough approach to analysing collected research material. The first phase is for a solid immersion and familiarisation of the collected material. At this phase, the researcher should note any initial analytical observations or linkages to reviewed literature. Morris (2015), however, notes that, at this stage, it is not important to worry about coding but to read, re-read and understand each piece of collected material. It is in the second phase of thematic analysis that codes should begin to form from the collected research material. These codes should be linked and relevant to the broad research questions and/or objectives. The coding process leads into the third phase where themes are identified through coherent and meaningful patterns found within the collected research material.

Phase 4 is when a devised set of themes is refined. Some themes will be discarded as they are too diverse or not supported enough in relation to the collected research material, others may collapse into each other to form stronger themes while others may need to be broken down into separate themes. Information within each theme should be meaningfully coherent with clear and identification distinctions between them. The trustworthiness of individual themes should relate to the collected research material and accurately reflect the meanings evident in the collected material as a whole. In Phase 5, themes should be defined and further refined to how they will be presented in the findings. Essentially, this phase should identify the essence of what each theme is about. Themes should be organised into a coherent and internally consistent account with an accompanying narrative (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The story of what each theme represents should be identified with consideration of how they fit into the broader overall narrative of the findings. It is in this phase that the names of themes should be further refined. Names of themes

should be concise, easily identifiable and should immediately project a sense of what the theme is about.

The final phase, as suggested by Braun & Clarke (2006) is the interpretation and writing up which is integral to the analytic process. It is during this process that Seidman (2013) suggests the researcher must ask themselves what they have learned from the analytical process, how connections can be made among the collected research materials and what consistencies or inconsistencies the collected research material has to the reviewed literature. This final phase allows for the beginning stages of formulating the discussion chapter of a thesis by bringing all the research elements together.

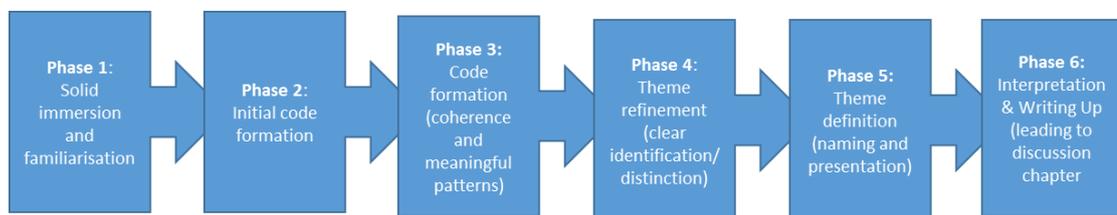


Figure 3.5: Six phases of thematic analysis (adapted from Braun & Clarke, 2006)

Through thematic analysis, I was able to produce a list of themes that were found in the collected research material. Thematic analysis of transcripts followed an indicative approach where themes were strongly linked and identified to the collected research material (Patton, 2002). Inductive analysis is a process of coding collected research material without fitting it into pre-existing coding frames or preconceptions. While analysis, it is argued, cannot be totally free from theoretical and epistemological commitments, an inductive approach means that analysis is driven by the collected research material rather than the analytical preconceptions of a researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Themes were then organised in a way that reflects how they were conceptualised and, therefore, relate to each other and the research aim and objectives. In organising these themes, I developed a hierarchy of themes, subthemes and minor themes related to subthemes. The process of organising themes, in this way, helped develop a conceptual model of the phenomenon under investigation (King, 2010). The following paragraphs will detail the developmental stages of thematic analysis and how these are represented in the findings.

3.7.1 Manual Analysis

It was an early decision to analyse collected research material manually rather than using a qualitative data analysis computer software package like NVivo. Although I looked into the use of software packages, it was deemed unnecessary as I believed it would not significantly add value to the analysis process. I also had previous experience of manual analysis and did not feel confident, despite receiving initial training, in using analysis software. Furthermore, the use of analysis software does not match my research philosophy and the nature of the overall research project. I felt that organising and structuring themes using software packages might make the analysis more objective than subjective. I was also concerned that using a software package might impact on the flexibility and messiness of analysing qualitative research material and, thus, potentially lose the essence and significance of the collected research material. Also, as I was present in the collected research material, I was concerned that organising themes using software packages may not reflect this in the most effective way.

3.7.2 Analytical process

The following paragraphs will detail the analysis process of collected research material. When using the term 'transcript' or 'transcriptions', I refer to both the typed Autoethnographic Participant Observations (Stage 1) and digitally recorded and typed Discussion-style Interviews (Stage 2). Transcriptions from Stage 1 were analysed first, followed by transcriptions from Stage 2. I analysed transcriptions sequentially (starting at Meal 1, etc.) as a means of organising my work in the most effective way.

During the typing up of transcriptions, I began to have thoughts on analysis, comparisons and had already begun making research notes and markings on the printed transcriptions. I felt close to and engaged with the transcriptions and believe that this is an important part of the analysis process which would not be enhanced using software packages and, therefore, lead to distancing myself from the transcriptions. This stage of analysis relates to Braun & Clarke's 1st phase of thematic analysis – *familiarising yourself with collected research material*. Making notes and comments on printed transcriptions was the beginning stage of coding. A code can

be a word or short phrase that “*symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing and/or evocative attribute*” to a portion of text within a transcription (Saldaña, 2016: 4). I analysed transcriptions line-by-line with associated words, phrases and comments that reflected observations, practices and discussions within the transcriptions. This was initially done by hand and I then transferred these words, phrases and comments into the original Microsoft Word documents (Figure 3.6)

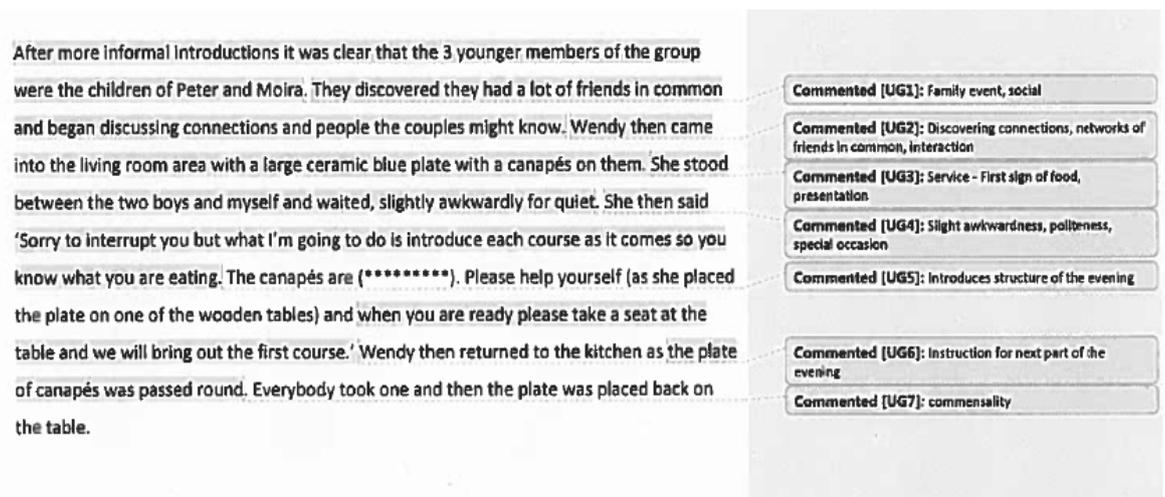


Figure 3.6: Excerpt of initial coding of transcript

The first 10 transcriptions (of both phases) were analysed in this way. The next stage involved devising a coding framework based on the words, phrases and comments on the first 10 transcriptions. The coding framework was based on the first ten transcripts although remained flexible and further codes were added or adapted as further transcripts were analysed. From these coded transcripts, an initial coding framework was constructed (Column 1 in Table 3.3 & Table 3.4). Codes were numbered and then the subsequent transcripts were coded using the numbers from the framework. Initial coding is associated with Braun & Clarke’s 2nd phase of thematic analysis – *generating initial codes*.

When all transcripts were coded, I began to compile separate Microsoft Word documents representing each code. This process involved copying every section that represented a code (e.g. Stage 1, Code 1 = Social, Table 3.3). Each section or excerpt would be referenced by transcription number and line number so they could be referred back to the overall transcription and easily located in the findings (e.g. M17: 36-40 = Meal 17, line 36 to 40. Figure 3.7).

I noticed 3 people getting out a car that was parked across the road. They made their way towards the door and looked at me. 'Are you here for the supper club?' I asked them. 'Yes, we hope so anyway!' A woman in her late 40s said. 'I rang the bell but nothing happened' I said as I rang it again. (M17: 36-40)

Figure 3.7: Example of transcription referencing

This was quite a messy and time consuming process as many excerpts represented multiple codes. Once I had a word document for each code, I began to analyse each code separately looking for commonalities, differences, recurring features and notes of interest. In doing so I was able to look for overarching themes and related subthemes which would bring further coherence to the analysis of collected research material. I was then able to develop a more focused framework for my analysis. This is represented in column 2 of Table 3.3 & Table 3.4 - 1st Level Thematic Analysis and represents Braun & Clarke's 3rd phase of thematic analysis – *searching for themes*.

The next stage of analysis involved reviewing themes and building a narrative around them which would begin to build the findings section of this thesis. The construction of a narrative needed to be coherent and clearly represent the emerging themes of the collected research material in relation to the aim and objectives of the research project. Themes were reviewed in terms of order within the narrative and their relation to each other (Braun & Clarke's 4th phase of thematic analysis – *reviewing themes*). The name of themes was also reviewed to demonstrate coherence clarity for the reader. Within the narrative, I used direct quotations to strengthen and further qualify my interpretations and thematic development. Using direct quotations allowed me to strengthen the constructed narrative and sequence of themes and subthemes (Braun & Clarke's 5th phase of thematic analysis – *defining and naming themes*). Column 3 of Table 3.3 and Table 3.4 - 2nd Level of Thematic Analysis, shows the reviewed themes and subthemes which are then presented in the findings section. The findings section represents Braun & Clarke's 6th phase of thematic analysis- *producing the report*. 2nd Level of Thematic Analysis represents the structure and sequence of the Findings section which develops the themes,

subthemes and interpretations of the collected research material and its thematic analysis.

| Initial coding framework | | 1 st Level thematic analysis | 2 nd Level thematic analysis |
|--------------------------|------------------------|---|---|
| 1 | SOCIAL | SOCIAL | CONTROL |
| 2 | SHARING/COMMENSALITY | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Humour | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-meal control |
| 3 | COMMUNITY | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awkwardness | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informal Organisation |
| 4 | INTERACTION | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender roles |
| 5 | ATMOSPHERE | SHARING | |
| 6 | CIVILITY/POLITENESS | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conversation | COMMUNALITY |
| 7 | HOME | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experience | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community/Togetherness |
| 8 | ONLINE MEDIATION | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome |
| 9 | SOCIAL MEDIA | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inclusion/Exclusion |
| 10 | FORMAL/INFORMAL | CONNECTIONS | |
| 11 | SERVICE/FOOD | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Possible | SOCIAL |
| 12 | COMMON INTEREST | Futures | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interactions around the table |
| 13 | ENTREPRENUERSHIP | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Past | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awkwardness |
| 14 | HUMOUR | Interactions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Humour |
| 15 | TASTE | | |
| 16 | CONTROL/INSTRUCTION | INCLUSION | CONNECTIONS |
| 17 | IDENTITY | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making connections |
| 18 | THEME/SPECIAL OCCASION | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exclusion | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing stories |
| 19 | AWKWARDNESS | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Past interactions |
| 20 | POSSIBLE FUTURES | CONTROL | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Possible futures |
| 21 | WELCOME | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-event control | DIFFERENCE |
| 22 | INCLUSION/EXCLUSION | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informal Organisation Control | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informality |
| 23 | SETTING/SEATING | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender/Mastery | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Passing plates |
| 24 | FAMILY | DIFFERENCE | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Experiences |
| 25 | NEW EXPERIENCE | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informality | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special Occasions |
| | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Experience | BUSINESS MANAGEMENT |
| | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special Occasion | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotion |
| | | ENTREPRENUERSHIP | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation |
| | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotion | |
| | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation | |

Table 3.3: Stage 1: Autoethnographic Participant Observations – Thematic Analysis Framework

| Initial Themes | 1 st level Analysis | 2 nd level Analysis |
|------------------------|--|---|
| 1. IDENTITY | IDENTITY | UNDERSTANDING THE MEAL |
| 2. ATTENDEE MOTIVATION | IMPORTANCE OF THE MEAL | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family • Identity • Importance of the meal |
| 3. HOST MOTIVATIONS | HOST MOTIVATIONS | MOTIVATIONS |
| 4. FAMILY | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hospitality • Enjoyment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hospitality • Enjoyment • Difference to restaurant |
| 5. SOCIAL | ATTENDEE MOTIVATIONS | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social motives • Inspiration |
| 6. HOME | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social • Difference to restaurants | SOCIAL |
| 7. SETTING | FAMILY | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interaction • 'Family style' dining • Like-mindedness • Awkwardness • Social control |
| 8. ENTREPRENEURSHIP | COMMENSALITY | DIFFERENTIATION |
| 9. DIFFERENCE | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family style • Social | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contrast to restaurant • Themes • Domestic home • Setting |
| 10. ONLINE MEDIATION | ENTREPRENEURSHIP | ONLINE MEDIATION |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inspiration • Gap • Pilot • Cost • Team • Growth • Diversification • Business | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online knowledge • Limitations & Dependency • Payment |
| | SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP | MANAGING COMMENSALITY |
| | FEEDBACK | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finding a gap • Pilot meals • Feedback • Pricing • Team • Business • Growth |
| | DIFFERENTIATION | |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Themes | |
| | ONLINE MEDIATION | |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limitations • Dependency • Payment | |

Table 3.4: Stage 2: Discussion-style Interviews – Thematic Analysis Framework

3.8 Trustworthiness and criteria of qualitative inquiry

In order to strengthen the value of qualitative research, Lincoln and Guba (1985: 290) discuss trustworthiness as an overarching concept which places rigour and value on qualitative research. They question the issue of trustworthiness as follows:

How can an inquirer persuade his or her audiences (including self) that the findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to, worth taking account of? What arguments can be mounted, what criteria invoked, what questions asked, that would be persuasive on this issue?

Cope (2014) further advances Lincoln & Guba's issue of trustworthiness by discussing five criteria of qualitative inquiry that parallels the quantitative vocabulary:

credibility, dependability, confirmability, transferability and authenticity. Credibility refers to the truth of collected research material and the interpretation of it. For qualitative studies to be viewed as credible, the descriptions of human experience and interaction should be recognisable by individuals who share the same experiences. Dependability refers to the constancy of collected research material over similar conditions and participants. Confirmability is based on the ability of researchers to demonstrate that research material is representative of the research participants and not the views, biases or agenda of the researcher. Transferability refers to the extent to which the research findings are applicable to another setting or group. Finally, authenticity relates to the faithful representation of the feelings and emotions of the participant's experiences (Cope, 2014).

Tracy (2010) further develops the criteria for quality in qualitative research in their Eight Criteria for Excellent Qualitative Research (Table 3.5). While many of the elements as mentioned by Lincoln & Guba (1985) and Cope (2014) are present, the criteria of sincerity is of great interest in terms of this research project. Sincerity, Tracy argues, is not linked to a single reality or truth but the fact that research is *"marked by honesty and transparency about the researcher's biases, goals, and foibles as well as about how these played a role in the methods, joys, and mistakes of the research"* (2010: 841). Similarly, the audiencing of qualitative research also promotes how we communicate value to a variety of audiences. Fiske (1994) argues that a larger social reality can be theoretically derived from the collected research material and the content of qualitative research should therefore 'speak' to a larger audience. In terms of this research project I use thick description and direct quotations to deepen the understanding of what is taking place within OMC, by enabling the voice of participants (and myself) and the observed interactions. In doing so I aim to demonstrate the values of what took place within the research and enhance readability, accessibility and further understanding to wider audiences. While transparency is essential in gaining the trust and being honest and open with participants, this is not possible without addressing the issue of reflexivity, which will be discussed further in the following section.

| Criteria for quality | Various means, practices and methods through which to achieve |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Worthy topic | The topic of the research is <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relevant • Timely • Significant • Interesting |
| Rich rigour | The study uses sufficient, abundant, appropriate and complex <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theoretical constructs • Data and time in the field • Sample(s) • Context(s) • Data collection and analysis processes |
| Sincerity | The study is characterised by <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-reflexivity about subjective values, biases, and inclinations of the researcher(s) • Transparency about the methods and challenges |
| Credibility | The research is marked by <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thick description, concrete detail, explication of tacit (nontextual) knowledge, and showing rather than telling • Triangulation or crystallization • Multivocality • Member reflections |
| Resonance | The research influences, affects or moves particular readers or a variety of audiences through <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aesthetic, evocative representation • Naturalistic generalizations • Transferable findings |
| Significant contribution | The research provides a significant contribution <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conceptually/theoretically • Practically • Morally • Methodologically • Heuristically |
| Ethical | The research considers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Procedural ethics (such as human subjects) • Situational and culturally specific ethics • Relational ethics • Exiting ethics (leaving the scene and sharing the research) |
| Meaningful coherence | The study <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achieves what it purports to be about • Uses methods and procedures that fit its stated goals • Meaningfully interconnects literature, research questions/foci, findings and interpretations with each other |

Table 3.5: Eight Criteria for Excellent Qualitative Research (adapted from Tracy, 2010: 840)

3.8.1 Reflexivity

An essential aspect of qualitative research, interpretivism and symbolic interactionism is the ability for a researcher to be reflexive in their work and to learn more from critically exploring or questioning their assumptions. Reflexivity is the process of critically reflecting on the self and understanding how social background can influence what is being observed, given meaning and interpreted within the research context. Lincoln, Lynham & Guba (2011: 124) describe reflexivity as a

“conscious experiencing of the self as both inquirer and respondent, as the one coming to know the self within the process of research”. In doing so, the authors argue that researchers force themselves to engage with their multiple identities, representative of the fluid self within the research setting.

Goodson & Phillimore (2004: 36) argue that reflexivity is an integral aspect of producing knowledge. They acknowledge the concept of indexicality – contextual position of knowledge relating to a particular temporal, geographical or social moment – within the research process and argue that trustworthiness within the field can only be achieved through openly reflexive interpretation and exploration. Due to the exploratory nature of this research and my own engagement within the experiences of OMC, reflexivity is an important aspect of this research project. While it is understood that, as a researcher, I cannot become completely objective when conducting research, I can be reflexive in my thinking and engagement and understand my own subjective interpretations in order to understand the behaviour and engagement of others within the phenomenon.

Hertz (1997: viii) argues that to be reflexive is *“to have an ongoing conversation about experience while simultaneously living in the moment”*. Tracy (2010) further argues that reflexivity acts as a commentary about subjective feelings and sense-making throughout the research process. In terms of my own reflections during the research process I would often take a number of hand-written notes when writing up field notes or interviews, when travelling back from an attended meal or interview, or even at other occasions where I was thinking about my own experiences throughout the research process. I would often revisit these notes during the research process and implement them into my writing. Towards the end of this research project I wrote a reflective piece based on my overall experiences of food and commensality. This reflective piece, which precedes Chapter 1, reflects on my memories and interactions of food, mealtimes and social interactions around food from a young age up to the beginning of this research project. At the end of this research project, I reflected on my own participation and experiences of OMC and discussed its place within contemporary hospitality provision.

3.8.2 Limitations

One of the biggest limitations, of both stages of material collection, is that they are time consuming methods. Each meal usually lasted between 2-3 hours plus travel time. Similarly, discussion-style interviews, on average, lasted between 60-90 minutes, including preparation time and brief discussions and pleasantries after each interview. Again, while I tried my best to make best use of time, on some occasions, I needed to travel to undertake interviews which again added to travel time and costs. While I tried to make best use of travel time, in terms of transcribing and note taking, on some occasions this was not possible. Cost was also a limitation as meals and travel had to be paid for. I do feel, however, that I was able to carry out the research effectively despite these limitations. Both stages of research material collection were brought to an end once I had reached a saturation point, where I felt I was not learning anything new about the phenomenon, and believed I had collected valuable data that would answer my overall aim and objectives of the study.

Another potential limitation is in terms of cultural diversity of the research project. Due to time and cost limitations the study had to take place in the UK. This, however, did not limit the diversity of cuisine styles or nationalities of attendees or interviewees (see Table 4.1 & 4.2). This limitation did allow me to understand how the phenomenon, in the UK, was creating varied, alternative and creative forms of commensality, what impact these experiences have on those attending and how this reflects society as a whole.

3.9 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have outlined my research methodology for this thesis. I have stated my philosophical position as an interpretivist researcher with a subjective ontology and epistemology. More specifically, I have clarified my approach to research as a symbolic interactionist, viewing meaning, subjectivity and social interactions as central in the role of understanding behaviour on an individual and societal basis. Due to the exploratory nature of this research project, I have argued that a qualitative approach to collecting research material is most appropriate. I have qualified this in terms of my research ontology and epistemology and discussed the issue of trustworthiness and reflexivity within qualitative inquiry. Furthermore, I have

argued, analytic ethnography as my methodological preference to carry out research. Under this perspective, I have given detailed explanation and justification of my methods for research material collection. Stage 1 of material collection involves Autoethnographic Participant Observation. This method was chosen as it allows me to engage and participate in the phenomenon and observe the behaviour of others while reflecting on my own participation. Stage 2 of material collection involves discussion-style interviews with host/organisers of OMC. This style of interviewing allows for a discussion of motivations for participation, the social interactions experienced and how examples of OMC are organised. Both stages act as an opportunity for a deep understanding of the phenomenon of OMC.

The analysis process creates a coherent narrative which represents the emerging themes of the collected research material. This narrative, which includes a number of extracts from transcriptions of both stages, is contained in the next chapter. Chapter 4 – Findings contextualises the chosen methods and brings further clarity, understanding and interpretation to the phenomenon under study.

Chapter 4: Findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from both stages of research material collection. Stage 1 (Autoethnographic Participant Observation) is presented first followed by Stage 2 (Discussion-style Interviews). The findings of both stages have been analysed through 3 levels of thematic analysis. The analysis process has culminated in two thematic frameworks (Table 4.2 & 4.5) which guide the findings of both stages of research material collection.

4.2 Stage 1 (Autoethnographic Participant Observation)

The following section presents the findings gathered from Stage 1. Thirty-eight meals were attended as part of the research material collection. Information on the final sample of attended meals can be found in Table 4.1. Meals are identified by M (meal) followed by the number (1-38) of the meal attended. Meals are numbered in chronological order. Direct quotations from transcripts are identified by line number.

| Meal # | Venue | Location | No. of diners | Table setting | Cuisine |
|--------|-------------------|------------|---------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1 | Church Hall | Glasgow | 36 | 3 communal tables | Indian |
| 2 | Restaurant | Glasgow | 30 | 4 communal tables | Scottish |
| 3 | Restaurant | Edinburgh | 20-30 | 2 communal tables | Italian |
| 4 | Private home | Manchester | 8 | 1 communal table | British/Vegetarian |
| 5 | Bar | Edinburgh | 30-40 | buffet, mixed seating/standing | Mixed |
| 6 | Restaurant | Glasgow | 8 | 1 communal table | French |
| 7 | Restaurant | Edinburgh | 20-30 | 2 communal tables | Italian |
| 8 | Church Hall | Glasgow | 50+ | 5 at table | British |
| 9 | Restaurant | Edinburgh | 25 – 30 | 2 communal tables | Spanish |
| 10 | Café/Delicatessen | Edinburgh | 15 -20 | 1 communal table/mixed seating | Scottish |
| 11 | Restaurant | Glasgow | 30 | mixed seating | American |
| 12 | Café/Delicatessen | Edinburgh | 24 | 5 communal tables | Portuguese/ Vegetarian |
| 13 | Community centre | Manchester | 56 | 8 communal tables | Indian |
| 14 | Community centre | Glasgow | 10 -15 | mixed seating | British |
| 15 | Private home | Edinburgh | 9 | 1 communal table | Asian |
| 16 | Restaurant | Glasgow | 6 | 1 communal table | Scottish |
| 17 | Private home | York | 6 | 1 communal table | French |
| 18 | Private home | Edinburgh | 12 | 2 communal tables | British |
| 19 | Bar | Edinburgh | 14 | 1 communal table | Scottish |
| 20 | Restaurant | Edinburgh | 40+ | mixed communal tables | Scottish |
| 21 | Urban Farm | Edinburgh | 20 | mixed seating/standing | Scottish |
| 22 | Restaurant | Edinburgh | 24 | 3 communal tables | French |
| 23 | Restaurant | Edinburgh | 8 | 1 communal table | Japanese |
| 24 | Café/Delicatessen | Edinburgh | 15 -20 | 1 communal table/mixed seating | Scottish |
| 25 | Restaurant | Glasgow | 6 | 1 communal table | Scottish |
| 26 | Café/Delicatessen | Edinburgh | 16 | 1 communal table | Scottish |
| 27 | Private home | London | 14 | 1 communal table | Vegetarian/ American |
| 28 | Private home | London | 12 | 1 communal table | British |
| 29 | Café/Delicatessen | London | 20 | 3 communal tables | Japanese |
| 30 | Café/Delicatessen | London | 18 | 3 communal tables | Argentinian |
| 31 | Restaurant | Edinburgh | 12 | 1 communal table | Spanish |
| 32 | Bar | Edinburgh | 20-30 | buffet, mixed seating/standing | Mixed |
| 33 | Restaurant | Glasgow | 4 | 1 communal table | British |
| 34 | Bar | Glasgow | 12 | buffet, mixed seating/standing | American |
| 35 | Bar | Edinburgh | 20-15 | buffet, mixed seating/standing | Mixed |
| 36 | Café/Delicatessen | London | 15 | mixed seating | British |
| 37 | Art Studio | London | 10 | 1 communal table | American |
| 38 | Private home | London | 16 | 3 communal tables | Indian |

Table 4.1: Final Sample – Stage 1 (Autoethnographic Participant Observation)

Table 4.2 presents the thematic framework which guides the findings of Stage 1 (Autoethnographic Participant Observation) which follows.

| Theme Number | Theme | Definition | Subthemes |
|--------------|---------------------|--|-------------------------------|
| 1 | Control | How meals were organised and structured online and during the meal itself | Pre-meal control |
| | | | Informal Organisation |
| | | | Gender roles |
| 2 | Community | How a sense of togetherness is developed at meals | Community/ Togetherness |
| | | | Welcome |
| | | | Inclusion/Exclusion |
| 3 | Social | Social practices and observations of how individuals and groups socialise with each other at meals | Interactions around the table |
| | | | Awkwardness |
| | | | Humour |
| 4 | Connections | How individuals connected with each other, shared experiences and the potentialities for future meetings | Making connections |
| | | | Sharing stories |
| | | | Past interactions |
| | | | Possible futures |
| 5 | Difference | How the meals were presented as different to more normative dining experiences | Informality |
| | | | Passing plates |
| | | | New Experiences |
| | | | Special Occasions |
| 6 | Business Management | Elements that demonstrated skills related to business management which acted to develop further success of meals | Promotion |
| | | | Evaluation |

Table 4.2: Thematic Framework from Stage 1: Autoethnographic Participant Observations

4.2.1 Control

Control refers to how OMC is organised and structured. Three subthemes have been identified as *Pre-meal control* which discusses how experiences of OMC are organised online before the meal takes place; *Informal Organisation* discusses the informal organisation of the meals as they take place; and *Gender Roles* identifies examples of gender roles and their interpretation during experiences of OMC

4.2.1.1 Pre-meal control

Each meal attended was advertised online either through social media or its own website. These descriptions would provide potential customers or guests with the basic information of what was being advertised and whether it was of interest or not to them. Typical advertisements found online were as such:

*'For our events at the *****, we charge £15 a head for the full experience. This includes starter, mains (3 curries, naan, rice), dessert, Indian drinks (Lassi and Chai) and corkage for your BYOB' (M1: 5-7)*

Initial advertisement of meals ensured that the guest was aware of the style, venue and timing of the meal and how much the meal would cost. The venue, however, was sometimes not advertised online and was only given out to those who had confirmed their booking. Not advertising the venue until a place is confirmed ensured that no extra guests could turn up at the venue unannounced or by just passing by and wandering in. Some meals used this as a pull factor by referring to it as a 'special' location or that the address would be revealed the day of the meal; for example, a text message detailing the address would be sent to those attending a couple of days beforehand:

*'The secret location is a 5 minute walk from ***** Station however the exact address will be sent to you 48 hours before the night of the dinner' (M13: 11-12)*

Other information, offered prior to the meal, included alcohol requirements i.e. BYOB, corkage charges, bar information, etc. This was often coupled with information about dietary requirements and allergies:

'Wines are BYO (except for the pre-dinner drinks which I supply) (...) I use garlic, spices, nuts, dairy products & wheat in a lot of my recipes. I, therefore, do not recommend my menus for anyone with any allergies or intolerance to these ingredients' (M17: 10-18)

The above host deters those with allergies or specific dietary requirements from attending whereas other examples provide alternatives if they are contacted in advance:

'Please let us know asap if you have any specific dietary requirements such as allergies or if you require meat-free options' (M18: 12-14)

In both cases, the hosts ensure that those attending the event are aware of the situation regarding the type of food provided. One, it could be suggested, is excluding those who may have allergies or intolerances and the other is including them on the basis that they let the host know in advance. In some cases I noticed certain guests received slightly different foods from others as they had made arrangements beforehand. The level of control ensured that guests were aware of the style of food, price, and timing of the meal prior to their arrival. From the hosts' perspective this helped to structure the meal and the potential for variations or questions occurring.

In terms of timing, many of the meals suggested an end time. Although this was often flexible, this gave the host some control over how long people stayed at the venue. On most occasions, the evening would come to a natural close while on other occasions, groups or tables would stay slightly longer if they were in deeper conversation or had made stronger connections. While this was quite a natural occurrence, the control is still in the host/organisers' hands and was often suggested by the clearing of plates or tidying up rather than diners being asked to leave. Timing during the meal was also an important way in which the host was able to structure and plan the meal effectively. While some meals gave an indication of timings or certain parts of the evening, the majority were more informal and were communicated or suggested as the night progressed. The following is an example of how a chef/host gave information on the timing of the meal:

After the musicians played, the chef (Paulo, 40s) came into the middle of the room and said 'Thank you to the musicians and thank you all for coming tonight. I hope you all enjoyed your first course. All the food I cook is from scratch so it might take longer to prepare. The next course will be served in about 15-20 minutes so I hope that is all ok. Enjoy your night and thanks again' (M12: 160-164)

4.2.1.2 Informal Organisational Control

The informal nature of how meals were organised was a common feature. Proceedings, timings and, when appropriate, method of payment were often identified through discussion between the host and the diners. This would also give the host the opportunity to make sure all diners were enjoying themselves and that the night was going well:

Des (early 50s) came over to us and said, 'Everything ok with dinner folks?' We told him that we had enjoyed the meal and the fisherman's pie seemed to be a favourite around the table. Des told us that he had reserved 2 tables for the blues band and that we could sit there whenever we liked. 'Best to pay for your dinner first, but Angela (50s) is sorting that out' he said as he gestured to the woman who was sitting next to Suzy (late 30s). Angela had put her glasses on and was working out how much people owed when they told her what they had had before they gave her money (M19: 208-215)

As previously mentioned, in terms of prior information regarding the meals, payment was sometimes made in advance. On other occasions, the bill was worked out and shared between the diners equally. At some meals, however, payment was made on a donation basis in cash at the end of the evening (See Figure 4.1 and Table 4.3). While these meals suggested a donation amount on their websites/social media, the power of how much one should leave was with the guest. Cash was rarely handed over directly to the host but was often placed in envelopes or placed in a donations box:

When I got back into the dining room most of the table had been cleared and an envelope had been placed in front of each couple, or group. The envelope was white and just had 'Thank you for your kind donation 😊' written on it (M18: 206-209)

This method of payment was never really discussed or verbally instructed, by the host, but was just a general understanding which was subtly referred to at the end of the meal. While using this method of payment involved an element of trust being given to the guests, there was never an indication that the guest would not pay the full amount although, similarly, the amount each individual or group paid was never discussed.

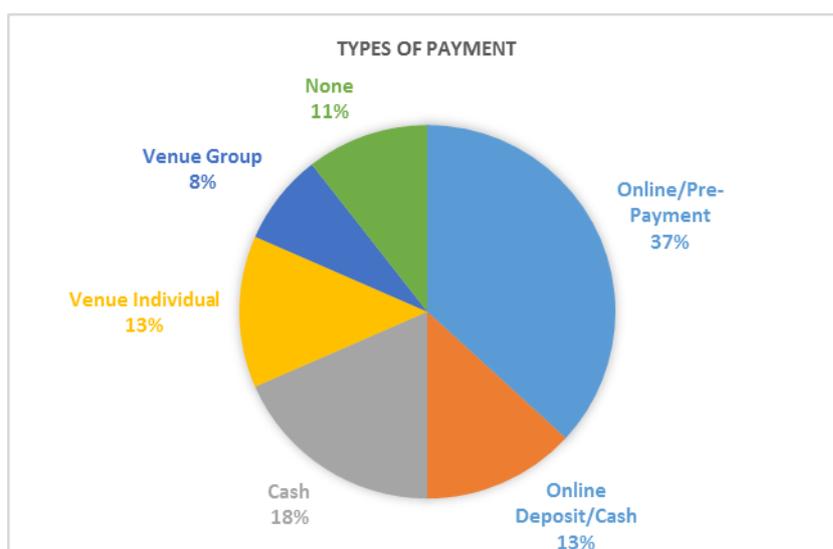


Figure 4.1: Types of Payment

| Payment Type | Details |
|----------------------------|--|
| Online Pre-Payment | Meal is paid for in full online in advance. No further payment required at the meal. |
| Online Deposit/Cash | A deposit is paid online in advance which confirms your place at the meal. Suggested cash 'donation' is made at the meal. |
| Cash | Meal is paid for in full in cash at the end. |
| Venue Individual – | Meal takes place at a chosen venue and is paid for individually after the meal. |
| Venue Group | Meal takes place at a chosen venue and is paid for by the group after the meal. This involves individuals putting money together (usually cash) and then paying as one transaction |
| None | No payment is required to attend the meal, although further drinks could be bought at the venue if wished. |

Table 4.3: Payment Type/Details

When hosts opened up their homes for meals, there was often a suggestion of what areas were open to the guest and which were not. Usually, guests would be shown into the living room and dining room of the home and these were open and where the meal was held. Other areas of the home were usually out of bounds. This was generally tacitly understood and guests would not venture further from the open areas. There was also always a bathroom that the guests could use and this was either explained at the beginning of the evening or when an attendee asked the host. Going to the bathroom was usually the only occasion where a guest would move from the dining area to another room in the house and the potential for looking at other

areas of the house would occur. Hosts would often close doors to other rooms of the house, implying that they were not to be viewed by guests:

Coming out the bathroom I noticed 3 closed wooden doors in the hallway. This signified areas that were closed off to guests and which remained part of the host's private home (M4: 320:322)

This was common for most of the meals, held in private homes, as the host would control what was visible in the spaces that the guests would have access to.

One common aspect found at many of the meals was the way in which hosts got the attention of the diners. The clinking of a knife or fork on a glass seemed to be the universal sign for attention and was often present at the beginning of a meal or when the host wanted to gain the attention of the guests:

someone on the other table clinked their knife against the side of a glass to signify that someone was going to speak. The woman (early 30s) that had taken our names was standing in the space near the till and was waiting for everyone's attention (M7: 101-103)

While 'clinking' was a common occurrence at meals it was rarely done more than once and usually signified the beginning of a meal. It remained an informal signifier of attention and was always met with the desired request. This informal control was also present in the seating arrangements. Seating was generally flexible and guests were asked to "take a seat, anywhere you like" (M2: 32). This flexibility often encouraged social interactions among different groups or individuals attending the meal. Without strict table plans a more relaxed, familiar atmosphere was experienced and diners were more likely to socialise freely rather than being seated at a specific table. This style of seating would also allow the diners to choose where they wanted to sit and with whom they wanted to share the experience with. The informal nature of how the meal was set was often conducive to social interactions and the ability to make new connections with fellow diners.

4.2.1.3 Gender roles

Gender roles could come into play where individuals chose to sit and some of the interactions that took place around the table. Due to the nature of the social situation of the meal, it was observed that men would sometimes sit themselves at

the head of the table before others were seated, possibly following a traditional or natural position that they take in their own homes:

The man who had sat himself at the head of the table stood up and introduced himself as Tommy (mid 40s) and introduced his wife, Sandra (also mid 40s), who I sat opposite (M8: 58-59)

In this example it is also interesting that Tommy introduced his wife to me rather than her introducing herself. While this may follow social/cultural conventions, it may also follow a status stereotype or protective male characteristic. In other examples, it was observed that conversations would be started or initiated by strong male figures and coupled with certain duties such as choosing and pouring wine, telling stories and the aforementioned 'clinking' which suggested being in control of the structure of the meal. In the following example, two similar characters alternatively competed for mastery of the meal:

I noticed that both Steven and Peter (both early 50s) had placed themselves in central places around the table and liked to be 'in charge' of wine duties, water pouring and conversations. Although they were sometimes playfully challenged by their partners (or children) this suggested that it was a role they were used to at other dining or family occasions (M4: 171-174)

While the men at the table seemed to enjoy the status of being 'head of the table' and in control of certain aspects of the meal, they also, at times, would battle for the best story or playful one-upmanship:

Peter and Steven then began to discuss wine and different places they had tried and bought special types of wine. Peter mentioned a wine cellar that he had been to in Barcelona. Steven had also been there and re-pronounced the name of the cellar in what seemed like perfect Spanish (M4: 195-197)

Alternatively, the gender roles could be challenged before the meal started. This suggested that the gender roles of those attending were often traditional but that they could be relaxed or reversed:

'Shall we have ladies at the top of the table tonight?' Bev (late 40s) suggested as she took the chair at the top of the table closest to the conservatory door. 'Sounds good' said Marion (early 50s) as she took the chair at the other end of the table. 'I'll just sit where I'm told' Mark said with a smile on his face (M17: 143-147)

Interestingly, at the same event, one of the female guests would play a more motherly role in terms of how the meal was served and shared among the group:

'Shall I dish up?' Andrea (late 40s) asked 'Just pass me your plates and we can pass them round. Gavin, will you serve the mash?' 'Sure' I said as Andrea passed me the first plate. Andrea took the plates from the rest of us and served a generous helping of the lamb on to it before passing the plate to me. I then placed another generous helping of the mash on the plate before passing the plate back to the diner (M17: 190-195)

While Andrea volunteered to serve the rest of the table, she was also in control of how much each diner was given and the process of passing plates around the table.

4.2.2 Communality

Communality refers to how a sense of togetherness or community is developed at meals. Three subthemes have been identified as Community/Togetherness detailing how individuals are brought together to experience the same meal; Welcome discusses how guests can be welcomed into the experience of the shared meal; and Inclusion/Exclusion discusses how these concepts are experienced and may influence the overall experience of communality.

4.2.2.1 Community/Togetherness

The concept of community was often identified at the meals but could be conceptualised in a number of different ways. Some meals were linked to an already existing group, where the ethos and values of which were shared, and a number of individuals would catch up and reconnect at meals:

I looked around for familiar faces from the previous event. I noticed James (50s), who ran the events, and we shared a smile and a quick hello. I noticed Arnold (early 60s), from the previous event sitting at one end of the table, already in deep conversation with some other people that I did not recognise (M7: 35-37)

On these occasions the arrival of new individuals was often met positively with an element of inclusion rather than a feeling of exclusivity. At other meals, the idea of community or group cohesion was still developing and there was still an element of newness to the meals:

A woman (30s) who I recognised caught my eye and said 'Hi how are you? Haven't seen you for a while'. 'No', I replied politely 'can't always make the meetups every week'. 'I don't think I've missed one yet!' she said with a laugh as another woman handed her a drink (M19: 37-40)

The individual, in this example, was obviously a regular attendee and noted that, although we had met before, I had not been to all of the meals. This was a common

occurrence at a number of meals that were linked to an existing, or developing, community or group. One fellow attendee mentioned this at one of the meals:

'It's funny how we all meet up at these foodie events isn't it' he (40s) said, 'I noticed Catherine tweeted about this event and I thought 'I'm rarely in Edinburgh on a Monday night so why not?'' (M31: 121-123)

This individual's comment linked the meals' advertisement on social media and how some of them could be accessed or attended at short notice by those who were part of an online forum/group of shared interest.

Photography was also used to bring a sense of togetherness to a group. A group photograph was often suggested by members of the group and could be taken easily using a mobile phone or digital camera. Photos often involved the group getting close together and posing for a photo around a table:

Just before Becky (mid 30s) went back into the kitchen, Lara (early 30s) asked if she could take a photo. Becky agreed and Lara passed her a camera. Becky stood at the kitchen door and we all moved closer to each other so we were all in the photo (M4: 273-276)

The camera, or phone, was usually passed around the group for each of us to see the photo that had been taken. This was an interesting observation as it provided each of us with a visual representation of what the group looked like from a different perspective. Diners often asked for copies of the photos or in some cases these photos were shared using social media or the group's website.

Conversation often started quite quickly at meals and, on some occasions, new arrivals were under the impression that individuals already knew each other or had met each other previously:

One of the girls then asked 'So how do you guys all know each other then?' 'We don't' Mike said 'we just have beards and thought we'd sit together, we have just met'. The rest of us laughed and the other man said 'Yeah sorry, my name is Joe and this is Molly' as he introduced himself and his girlfriend (both early 30s) to the table. Mike and Sylvie (both mid 30s) introduced themselves as did I and then the two girls introduced themselves as Lisa and Susan (mid 20s) (M30: 68-72)

Instances like this were common and it was often observed that conversations started quickly and the exchange of names was often secondary. More often than not, information about the meal, how individuals had found out about meals or

similar meals they had been to, was the primary discussion topic. Finding commonalities or sharing experiences was usually of more interest than names or occupations. As one attendee suggested, the purpose of these meals was to meet like-minded individuals who shared common interests or values:

'For me it's about creating community around food' she (late 20s) said, 'you get to meet some interesting people and get a connection with them, you know, just like now...and for me it's about meeting similar types of people, not just vegetarians but people who enjoy doing this sort of thing and are maybe a bit 'out there' or a bit adventurous' (M13: 149-152)

The sense of togetherness found at meals could involve future meetings, meals or social experiences with some of those who had attended. Although these instances were not always realised, there was often a mention of meeting up in the future:

*As the rest joined us outside we began to walk together down towards ***** Station. We chatted as we walked and mentioned catching up at one of the future events (M25: 295-298)*

While no firm commitment of a future meeting was formed, there was a sense that many of the individuals could repeat the process in a similar way at some point in the future. Community, whether temporary or more regular, was an important part of the meals attended and can lead to the discussion of inclusion, exclusion and welcome.

4.2.2.2 Welcome

The online mediation of meals often presented a welcome, sometimes, homely feeling to the meal experience. Within the online mediation, the feeling of welcome was also informal and could create the sense of a friendly relationship with the host before the meal took place. First names were often used, in these instances, which created a feeling of personalisation and being made welcome to a special event: *'Dear Gavin, Hope you are well and anticipating the ***** supper party next week!' (M18: 7-10)*. Informal collective nouns were also used to welcome individuals in the online mediation e.g.: *'Dear supper clubbers, We can't wait to welcome you to our home' (M38: 11)*. More established groups used the online mediation to ensure that new-comers would be made welcome. For example, one organiser suggested how he could be recognised by anyone who had not been before: *'For any newbies, I will wear my mid-week badge!' (M9: 10)*.

The idea of welcoming guests was also present at the beginning stages of meals. Often organisers or hosts would move around the room introducing themselves to their guests, identifying any new members and interacting with them, as well as making guests feel welcome and comfortable in the designated setting of the meal. Some hosts also extended the welcome by personalising or designing menus. Some menus were homemade, informal and on one occasion personalised for each diner:

*At the top of the menu it said 'Hi Gavin! Welcome to ***** and 'We, Mina and Saira, hope you enjoy your evening here...the food and the company! We would love to welcome you back so stay in touch' (M38: 49-52)*

The beginning of the meals usually began with some kind of welcome from the host or organiser. They were usually the first person you met when you arrived and they would then direct you to the dining room or designated space. Often the host would introduce you to other guests or their helpers/team for the night:

*'Hi, my name is Nico (mid 30s) and welcome to ***** tonight. ***** is my supper club and comes from a passion for Japanese food. I will introduce my team tonight, our chef, Aki.' The young Japanese man who had opened the door smiled and said 'Welcome, I hope you enjoy a good night!' 'And this is Yoon, this is her first time working at ***** and she is from South Korea.' Yoon blushed and looked nervous but smiled and said 'Hi, hope you enjoy!' (M29: 97-102)*

On other occasions, the team was made up of family members and the introductions became more informal and similar to being welcomed into a private home or family occasion:

Anthea (late 20s) continued, 'let me introduce you to my Mum, this is Anita' she said as she introduced me to an Indian woman in her 50s. 'Mum and Dad are the cooks tonight, mostly anyway, and this is my brother TJ'. A tall man in his 30s came over and shook my hand. 'Glad you could make it, Gavin, nice to meet you' (M13: 61-64)

The idea of welcome, however, was not just experienced from a host to their guests but also between guests. Fellow diners would often welcome each other to the table. The social nature of the majority of meals ensured that other guests joining pre-existing or recently formed groups would be welcomed quickly and naturally:

As we were talking, two Asian girls in their 20s came over to the two seats at my end of the table. 'Is it ok if we join you?' one of them said quietly. 'Of course' I said, 'the more the merrier.' (...) When Mike (early 30s) turned round

and saw the two new additions to the table he said 'We have a full table! Great...welcome' (M29: 61-68)

4.2.2.3 Inclusion/Exclusion

Another way of welcoming individuals into a group setting was by including new members in conversation, finding a bit out about them and making connections with others:

*Maureen (late 50s) asked me 'Is this your first *** *****?' I told her that it was and she said 'Great, you are the same as Nora (mid 20s), she is visiting from the States and just decided to come along (M3: 62-64)*

The inclusion or togetherness of the group was sometimes disrupted by the setting of the meal. On some occasions, it was observed that individuals would adjust the setting to include more members in a discussion or experience:

Phil (40s) noticed there was quite a distance between him and John (early 50s) and suggested we move the chairs closer to form a semi-circle. Everyone agreed and John, Tom and Lucile (both mid 40s) brought their chairs closer into the space to create, almost, a circle (M6: 54-56)

While sometimes this was a natural thing to do amongst the diners, on other occasions, the host would adjust the setting or make introductions or connections to bring the group together. In this example, the host noticed possible connections between two groups who had separated around a table:

Marina's (mid 30s) introductions had brought the two ends of the table together a bit and everyone was involved in the same conversation (M27: 265-266)

The nature of these meals did, on a number of occasions, break down the social safety barriers and other individuals were included in discussions or conversations between already connected groups. For example, on one occasion I found myself at a meal with a group of five close friends. The social experience and the atmosphere of the meal temporarily brought me into this group and stories were shared and explained easily and with no feeling of exclusion: *'I felt included in all aspects despite the close relationship of the rest of the group' (M17: 138-139).*

On other occasions, however, issues of exclusion were experienced at meals. Occasionally conversation around the table was more difficult and rarely moved away from pre-existing groups. Exclusion was rare and could be linked to individual or

group motivations or to personal information and understandings of social cues and manners:

Sheila (mid 50s) was chatting to the woman next to her. The conversation sounded a bit personal and quite serious, so I did not attempt to join in. They were speaking quietly and in confidence (M24: 115-116)

Other occurrences of exclusion could be seen as rude or potentially status related. The following example suggested that an event was being used for catching up with old acquaintances or friends where newcomers were acknowledged but not easily included in conversations or discussions:

I returned to where my plate was and sat at the table and took a bite out of my sausage roll. Arnold and another (...) regular acknowledged me but continued with their conversation (M21: 64-66)

Exclusion was generally a rarity at meals and the feeling of inclusion and welcome often outweighed it. On one occasion, some diners' reluctance to be included in the meal was commented upon by some of the other diners as something strange and uncommon:

I noticed that the two girls sitting next to Nick (late 20s) got up and made their way to the kitchen door and I soon saw them walking up the stairs and it seems they had left. This created a big gap in the middle of the table at either side. When Shelly (mid 30s) returned to her seat she commented on the two girls leaving. 'That's strange' she said, 'they left before the end of the meal and they didn't interact with anyone, I tried to speak to them at the beginning but they just turned in to each other and talked to themselves' (M27: 189-195)

The fact that exclusion was commented on, in this way, suggested that it is a rare occurrence. There seems to be an overarching feeling of being welcomed, included and incorporated in the group for the duration of the meal.

4.2.3 Social

This theme refers to the social practices identified and observations of how individuals and groups socialise with each other at meals. Three subthemes have been identified as *Interaction around the table* which discussed how the table acts as a social space where individuals interact, converse and socialise; *Awkwardness* which discusses observed aspects of social awkwardness; and *Humour* which details how humour was often used to allow social interactions to take place.

4.2.3.1 Interactions around the table

The importance of the table, as a space for the shared meal and inclusion around it, was a common observation. There was often a feeling of social cohesion around a table as the individuals and groups shared the table for the entirety of the meal and shared the food and conversation within it. This was often an important factor and demonstrated that meals were not just about the food presented:

*'for me it's just as much about the social aspect as it is the food stuff. Like this...if it wasn't for the *** ***** we might not be speaking like this and having this kind of conversation'* (M26: 166-168)

When individuals and small groups joined a table, initial introductions or conversations would start and open the table up to everyone around it. Conversation usually started, sometimes awkwardly, with smiles and initial eye contact which led to introductions of names or where you were from. 'Have you been here before?' or 'Have you been to things like this before?' were usually the first questions asked and conversation would lead on from there. This usually happened in small groups or around the table and was quite natural in getting started. Introductions often led to brief background information, where you were from/lived, occupation, and interest in food events. The interest in food events was usually the starting point for further conversation as there was often a common connection and people often asked 'have you been to...?' and made recommendations of places that they had tried or heard of. Sharing and recommending places diners have been before often led to comparisons of different cities and countries. One diner, who had recently moved to the UK, compared dining events to her native US:

Tiffany (early 30s) began to tell about supper clubs and pop-ups she had heard of in New York. They had recently moved to London from there and said there are much more supper clubs and pop-ups in London. 'It's great, we have been to a few so far, they are a good way of meeting interesting people as well as trying some great food!' (M27: 108-112)

It was often this common interest in food events that made conversation flow quite quickly and easily. Conversations often moved from a standing area where people gathered before the meals to the table where the meal was often set. Small groups often formed and sat together where conversations often continued. It was observed that conversations often progressed when these smaller groups had formed and a

broader set of conversation topics developed. These would often include sharing likes and dislikes, experiences and stories.

On some occasions, the sharing of new space, sitting next to someone at the table would start initial conversation. This was quite a common occurrence and suggests that people attending these meals are naturally quite sociable and are not inhibited or put off by starting conversation with others. Other examples suggested that individuals would prefer to make connections with each other before conversation would occur. An example of this was when someone approached me after hearing I was doing research on the meal:

Matt (early 30s) said to me 'Lyd was telling me that you are researching supper clubs? That sounds fun.' I told him a bit about my research and my trip to London so far. He asked me about where I was from and we soon got chatting about the Commonwealth Games and the opening ceremony that had been on the previous evening (M28: 83-87)

In this example, Matt had heard from his partner, who I had already spoken to, about my research and then used this as an opener. From this, a natural discussion of things of interest ensued unrelated to the opening question. My identity, as a researcher, often acted as an easy opener as many found it interesting and it would lead naturally into further discussion, socialisation and introductions to other individuals at a meal. As the meals progressed, the socialisation process became easier and more natural. A similarity was often made to meals with friends and family. This was representative of some of the personal levels of conversation. In this example, a couple were asked how they got together:

'We had always been mates and in and about the same pubs together. Both our parents owned pubs (...) so we would always see each other when we were out.' 'My mum noticed him first and told me that he was a 'nice boy'. Asha (late 20s) continued, 'I just thought of him as a mate until we started hanging out a bit more, and we have been together ever since (M37: 169-172)

This level of conversation was quite common in terms of getting to know one another by personal storytelling around the meal. It could be argued that the familiar nature of the communal meal is conducive to a deeper level of conversation.

Conversation often began while discussing the food that was being eaten. Diners would often share their opinions on the food with each other in terms of taste, likes,

dislikes and comparisons to similar foods they had had before. On first trying the food, nods of heads or shared facial expressions were common and often moved to more detailed discussion about what was being eaten and diners shared their opinions quite openly and naturally:

'Smells great', said Tommy as his nose almost touched the plate (...) 'That's really nice' Frazer (late 20s) said, as if surprised (...). 'That's amazing' Tommy agreed 'I love the croquettes'. I agreed with him and said 'it's a bit dark though, it's difficult to see exactly what you're eating!' 'Yes, we could be eating anything' Sandra (mid 40s) joked, 'but it tastes alright to me!' (M8: 98-102)

Another common observation was the dip in noise that occurred when diners first tried their food. An obvious shift in noise levels was evident as diners stopped talking and started eating:

The room went quiet and was in stark contrast to the chat and noise that preceded the starter. 'It's amazing how everybody stops talking when the food comes out' the man (50s) (...) said to no one in particular (M20: 91-93)

This dip in noise levels only lasted for a few short moments but was often commented on and used as something to get the conversation flowing again.

Occasionally, when the tables were separated, due to design or venue, social interaction did not occur as easily:

Suzanne and Danny (both late 30s) seemed to be getting on quite well and were having their own conversation on their table. I wondered if the separate table made this happen easier or if it would have happened anyway (M23: 154-156)

In contrast, an observation, at some meals, was when the conversation continued after the meal and the table still created a social space where the physical act of eating no longer held the group together. An example of this occurred when a table was cleared after the meal had finished: *'As the table was cleared it was as if the four of us moved in a little bit closer, making use of the available space' (M9: 218-219).*

4.2.3.2 Awkwardness

On some occasions conversation around the dining table could become a little awkward. Awkwardness could occur when someone, around the table or in a group, tried to force the direction of conversation. In this example, one of the diners took it upon themselves to start the introductory process by selecting someone to begin:

Suddenly Marc (late 30s) started talking louder and said 'Why don't we go round the table and tell everyone where we are from and what we do?' After a short silence Marc said to Lily (early 30s) 'ok you can start' (M15: 74-76)

While there was sometimes an awkward silence at the beginning after someone started talking, the conversation often became more natural as more people contributed and added to the comments of others. Some individuals might be quite shy or slightly embarrassed, to be put on the spot and asked to give information about themselves, but this was quite rare as the majority of those attending events of this nature were socially confident and used to sharing information with others that they might not know. Some topics of conversation also prompted awkward or heated discussion. Politics was one such topic. The following quotation displays an individual's response to being asked how they would vote in the Scottish Independence Referendum:

Margo (early 60s) groaned and said 'I'm sick of this referendum, can't wait until it's over and we can all get back to normal.' Trish (early 30s) agreed and said 'It's all over the TV and newspapers, to be honest I haven't taken much interest so far but will before I make up my mind.' Nobody gave their opinion on which way they were going to vote and the question did come with some resentment (M25: 250-255)

If a topic of conversation did not get much response, the nature of the events meant that topics were rarely pushed or forced.

Other examples of awkward social moments were due to "inappropriate" questions or language that may offend or surprise other attendees. As conversations developed, individuals may be able to gauge appropriate conversation topics, levels of humour or teasing as they get to know each other. Unless a group quickly develops and similar levels of conversation and humour are identified, the levels might remain 'safe' and not verge far from polite or civil conversations.

Actions that could also be considered anti-social could prompt awkward situations. On a few occasions, the issue of smoking cropped up. Smoking outside a venue is now seen as acceptable behaviour. At one meal, held in someone's home, a diner started smoking an e-cigarette. Although they, arguably, do not have the same health considerations to normal cigarettes it still seemed to be a strange addition to the dining table. Shared looks by other diners went round the table but the host did not

seem to mind, so it did not become an issue. At another event, again in someone's personal home, individuals gathered on the balcony, after the meal or in between courses, to engage in conversation and to enjoy the view:

As we spoke (...) Siena made a face towards Jack (both early 30s) suggesting that she was unhappy with something. Jack knew that Siena was reacting to the Spanish girls who were smoking on the balcony. I could smell it too and was wondering if they had asked or whether they thought that because they were outside it was ok (M28: 244-247)

The smell of cigarette smoke here was affecting others' enjoyment of the meal.

Awkward social interaction could also occur between guests and hosts. In the example, a guest was quite abrupt with a host and, while this kind of interaction might be more appropriate in a restaurant, both the host and guest in this case felt a bit embarrassed and awkward:

The woman opposite me (late 30s) hadn't finished her sorbet and there was still quite a lot in her glass. Jill (the host's mum, 50s) (...) asked her politely if she was finished with her sorbet. 'No!' the woman replied quite abruptly almost giving Jill a fright, 'I haven't finished it yet'. Jill retreated and went back to the kitchen area while the woman returned to her sorbet and quickly finished it. Jill came back soon after and took her glass. The woman said 'sorry, I was just taking my time and really enjoying it' slightly apologetically (M18: 183-189)

While this example was quickly resolved, at slightly larger meals, the discussion of the food and the diner's opinions of it might be hurtful or disrespectful towards the host and their cooking and hospitality:

Asha wasn't impressed with the chickpea pizza, 'I don't know what that is? It doesn't taste of anything and its cold!' Jeremy asked 'Is this what fried hummus would taste like?' 'No, hummus has much more taste' Paco answered as we all shared our opinion on the chickpea pizza (M37: 133-136)

Here, the nature and size of the gathering, allowed for the sharing of opinions as the host was unlikely to be affected or offended but, in other situations, this might lead to a hostile environment affecting the atmosphere of the event.

4.2.3.3 Humour

Humour was also often used to alleviate any awkward social situations amongst attendees at the meals. The sharing of humorous stories or situations often became part of the meal experience. Once individuals had started conversations and judged

the appropriateness of language and topics, the sharing of stories would begin and often these would be fun, light-hearted and result in laughter among the group. Some examples of this were of individuals sharing personal stories or incidents that had happened to them which did not involve the other members of the groups' opinions or experiences. Often these stories were aimed at making people laugh, to shock them or to provoke a reaction. An example of this was when a diner shared a story about her partner's mother who was staying with them at the time of the event:

'We should take some of this back for your mum' Asha said to Paco (both late 20s) as she started laughing. Paco rolled his eyes and laughed. Asha then went on to tell us about Paco's mum who was visiting. 'It's been quite a while now and I just want my house back' Asha told us. Paco told us that she is vegetarian, quite fussy with food and quite alternative. 'That's a good word for her' Asha added, 'she also doesn't wear any clothes in the house.' The rest of us all stopped eating and looked at Asha and Paco. Paco rolled his eyes again and they both started to laugh. 'Yeah it's not the best' Paco continued, 'I have asked her to put some clothes on but she doesn't see anything wrong with it. 'I'm looking forward to the day that I don't come downstairs in the morning to see your mum naked making toast!' Asha said. The rest of us laughed as Asha and Paco told us about their experiences with Paco's mum (M37: 138-147)

Other examples of humorous stories were when the story was constructed by the opinions, stories and humour of the group of diners. In the following example, the story developed from a shared interest in the topic and the addition of other diners' experiences and related sub-stories:

Mike and Joe (both early 30s) were still having their 'weird' food conversation and Mike asked Lisa (20s) if she ate vegemite back in Sydney. 'Oh yeah, my parents love it but I'm not bothered. I don't miss it. They have it with jam and cheese and all sorts of strange combinations!' The table soon moved into one conversation and Mike told us of his love for toasted jam sandwiches when he was a student. 'I used to put them in the George Foreman but you have to let it cool for a bit cos as you know hot jam is like eating lava!' We all laughed and I asked him if he would have one when he gets home tonight if he was still hungry. 'Haha, no, well we don't have a George Foreman anymore, Sylvie was tired of cleaning all the burnt jam off it!' Everybody laughed again and Susan (20s) added, 'I had a friend who used an iron to toast vegemite sandwiches' the rest of us looked at her for more information, 'yeah she would toast one side, flip it over and do the other side.' 'Genius!' Mike said, 'I would have probably done that if I had ever owned an iron when I was a student!' 'But can you use the iron afterwards?' Sylvie (30s) asked. 'Oh I have no idea...' Susan said with a laugh. The rest of the table joined her and Joe said 'you can imagine

someone ironing a white shirt and having a jam stain all the way down it while Mike is eating his toasted jam sandwich!’ (M29: 80-93)

The meals often had a sociable, light-hearted feel to them and this encouraged laughter and sharing of stories and opinions that did not stray into topics that were too serious or sensitive. The shared experience of the meal also led to a number of humorous situations especially when diners were trying new foods or ways of dining. In some cases, the sharing of a new experience and the addition of laughter and informal conversation made the trying of new food and experiences more relaxed and, perhaps, lessened the stresses of more traditional forms of dining out. This example indicates a relaxed atmosphere, the sharing and passing of new/exotic types of food and a sense of humour that is shared amongst the diners:

Eric (mid 40s) picked up the ramekin and asked ‘Jackie (early 40s), have you tried this before? The best way to try it is just by putting a spoonful in your mouth...’ The rest of us laughed and Jackie said ‘I’m not that gullible...but I do like spicy food so I will try it.’ She took the ramekin from Eric and put a small amount of the green paste on her plate (M12: 126-129)

Other examples, of when humour was used to alleviate potential awkward situations, were when smaller groups or couples joined a larger group around a table. With groups, that were formed prior to the meal, there is a shared sense of humour, in-jokes or mannerisms that would only be appreciated or accepted by those ‘in-the-know’. Due to the social and often intimate nature of meals, these elements were often shared and added to the larger group to make them feel included in the joke or the personality of the group:

‘my husband said I should go out to this again tonight – won’t be long until I can’t go out again’ Tina (late 30s) said as she pointed at her bump. ‘Are you pregnant?’ Karl (early 30s) said with a grin on his face, ‘I just thought you had been eating more?’ Tina laughed and turned to me and said ‘This is his sense of humour, you will get used to it’ (M38: 60-63)

In the example above, Karl’s sense of humour was shared by his friend, Tina, to the rest of the group ensuring that we were part of the joke and understood the intricacies or personalities of the pre-existing group or relationship. Humour was a common observation of meals and the interactions between attendees. It was used as an inclusive force, which involved diners or small groups of diners, in the sharing of stories, personalities and the shared experience of the meal itself.

4.2.4 Connections

Connections refers to how individuals connect with each other, share experiences and the potentialities for future meetings. Four subthemes are discussed. *Making connections* refers to how individuals make initial connections at meals; *Sharing stories* discusses how stories are shared among individuals as conversations and further connections develop; *Past interaction* refers to connections that are made due to past meetings or experiences between individuals; and *Possible futures* refers to possible future interactions that may develop from the attended meals.

4.2.4.1 Making Connections

One regular observation of meals was how individuals make connections with each other. A common first question at the beginning of a meal was 'Have you been here before?' or 'Is this your first supper club/pop-up?' These questions usually started conversations about the meal, itself, previous visits or whether it was a first time experience and usually led on to more detailed conversation about similar meals that individuals had been to. The discussion of other attended meals was often of interest and connections were made as experiences were shared and compared:

*'Have you been to *****?'* she asked. *'Yes I was there in February, really enjoyed it and she was really interesting too', I replied. 'I have been 3 times and totally love it, you always meet some interesting people and it's so cool cos it's in her front room, she is there with her partner who is pouring the wine and her dog is sometimes there too'* (M13: 94-97)

Sharing experiences of similar meals was often a starting point for conversation and common ground. Stories of memorable previous events also occurred when a common interest was established. For example, in the following excerpt, a story of an event that a group had experienced was shared as it was memorable for different reasons:

As we ate Andrea spoke about a supper club that they had been to in York where the host had been really rude and where they had to wait outside until she was ready. 'It was awful, it started off badly and didn't really improve, luckily we were able to laugh about it but it was so expensive, the food was excellent but the portions were tiny, I think we had fish and chips on the way home cos we were still hungry.' *'Oh yeah I remember that one', Marion said 'I think she had been on Masterchef, and the food was good but she wasn't interested in the diners, I remember it got to 10 o'clock and we were basically told to leave'* (M17: 165-173)

If it was someone's first experience of meals, of this nature, they may look for reassurance or for information about previous meals and experiences, perhaps, to know how to act or to understand the structure of the evening:

'This is my first time here, have you been before?' Laura (late 30s) asked me. I told her I had been to 3 or 4 of the events and that I had always enjoyed them and met some interesting people. Greg (mid 30s) told us that he had been to 3 and had had similar experiences to me. 'Sometimes it's a bit of a challenge getting here on a Monday evening, though' he told us, 'sometimes you forget and get that Monday night feeling and just don't want to get off the sofa!' Greg laughed as he spoke and Laura agreed with him (M35: 36-47)

This discussion of previous meals, whether it was an individual's first time or being welcomed by more regular attendees, was a common first point of conversation. There seemed to be a shared common interest of food and similar events and conversation usually started quite easily on a shared interest. When a common interest was established, relating to similar meals and previous experiences, conversation would often move on to determine other shared interests. Food, unsurprisingly, was the first port of call and this often involved sharing experiences and recommendations of places to eat, restaurants, cafés or delis in the local area. Discussion of the local area, the city in which the meal was based, often led to discussion about jobs, background and family.

4.2.4.2 Sharing stories

Due to the social and, sometimes, intimate nature of the meal, conversations occasionally became quite personal. Individuals felt comfortable to share stories about their lives, that may either be entertaining or humorous or, in some cases, may look for advice or support from their fellow diners, even though this may be their first, and possibly only, meeting. One entertaining story occurred at a small event with 8 people around a table in the home of the host. The man told a story which he had obviously told before but felt comfortable telling it around the table in order to entertain his fellow diners:

The story was about one of the actors in Coronation Street who was a plumber before he went on to drama school. Steven told the story well and had enjoyed telling it before. The punch line to the story was that when his foreman found out that he was leaving the company to go to 'acting school' he told him, 'You should be good at that, as you have always acted a cunt around here!' Everyone around the table laughed. The punch line was funny and I don't think

anyone was expecting those words to come out of Steven's mouth (M4: 300-305)

The expletive language in this story indicated that the storyteller felt comfortable sharing this with his fellow diners and that he was able to judge that this story would be appropriate at this meal. Another example took place at a meal which took place in a bar/restaurant with around 16 individuals around a long table. The table split into smaller groups of individuals, some of whom had met before and others had not. On this occasion, one of the diners, who I had met once before, began to ask his fellow diners for relationship advice:

Duncan (late 40s) brought me back into his conversation with Julie (mid 30s), 'I was telling Gavin that I think I'm in a relationship but not sure...' Julie then asked him more about his new girlfriend and gave some advice. Duncan got his phone out and showed us a picture of him and the woman. 'You look happy there, must be something there, how often do you see each other?' 'That's the thing, usually only once sometimes twice a week, she's always really busy with work whereas I would like to see her more often, my work is just from 9-5 so it's a bit of an issue.' The three of us continued to talk for a while about his new relationship (M19: 193-200)

This conversation is interesting as the individual was asking for quite personal advice on his relationship from people he had only met a couple of times. He obviously felt comfortable sharing this information with his fellow diners who reciprocated with advice or suggestions. The next example also demonstrates the sharing of personal information, but in this case, not for advice but for clarification or reason for attending meals of this kind:

Helen (early 50s) paused and then said 'My husband died almost 2 years ago...heart attack, it was quite sudden.' Helen sipped at her drink and Olga (early 60s) said 'Oh that's awful, I'm sorry to hear that.' Helen continued more positively and said 'I guess it's good that we were both quite independent, we had our own friends and did things on our own, not always together...I mean it's still difficult sometimes but at least I still had my social networks, friends and groups that I continue to socialise with. But that's why meetups are good because you get to meet new people, who don't know you as a widow' (M33: 145-151)

In quite an intimate setting with a small number of diners (4), this diner felt comfortable sharing this information at the table as it gave us some information about who she was, why she enjoyed coming to meals. These examples indicate that the sharing of stories around the table can often develop quite quickly around

strangers or people who have only met a couple of times before. It can show that once a common interest or connection has been established, it can lead to a deeper level of discussion and investigation in the shared space of the meal.

4.2.4.3 Past interactions

On some occasions, diners were able to reconnect from previous meetings. The following excerpt shows how two individuals recognised each other from a previous meal:

*I recognised Tom (early 50s) from Monday evening's event (...) and sat next to him. We said hello to each other and he asked me how my night at ***** the night before had been (M22: 22-24)*

On some occasions, recognising a familiar face made the first interactions at other meals easier with a sense of safety or familiarity. While previous interactions may not have been strong or particularly memorable, the fact that individuals have a past suggests that the development of a relationship, in whatever sense, may be possible. These reconnections were more common at meals that took place in a certain city or that are linked to a pre-existing group. The larger the events were where the more reconnections occurred and, on some occasions, became expected by certain individuals:

I noticed a familiar face at the other end of the table talking to Des. It was Duncan, who I had met a few times before at various meetups. He looked up the table and saw the spaces at our end of the table, caught my eye and made his way up and sat with us. He had also met Brian before and started chatting as the waitress began to serve the main courses (M19: 137-141)

Some reconnections were stronger than others. On most occasions, those individuals who were meeting again would chat, exchange a 'hi, how are you?' or at a minimum make eye contact and smile at each other. Other reconnections were stronger and individuals would carry on conversations from previous meetings or make a strong effort to reconnect and continue the relationship:

*James came over to join me from the other table. 'Gavin, how the hell are you? That was some feed wasn't it, I couldn't finish the main course!' he said as he shook my hand. (...) 'Listen...remember that table we sat at at ***** *****? Well I was in the other day and they told me that the other day the ceiling had collapsed right on top of that table and they had to close for the afternoon! Incredible, might have to be careful where I sit from now on.' James started laughing (M22: 170-176)*

On other occasions, the memory of previous encounters was stronger with some more than others. This often occurred at larger meals where names were not always exchanged:

A woman (50s) tapped me on the shoulder and said 'You decided to come back then?' I vaguely recognised her from the first meetup and said 'Yes, it seems like a good group to join.' 'Great' she said as she went to speak to someone else (M9: 76-79)

Other past interactions were linked to previous friendships or connections to the host of the meal. On some occasions, a connection with the host was the reason why an individual might attend a meal:

Tina told me that she knows Mina and Saira (the hosts) as they are from the same region in India as her. 'We don't know each other that well, but we have family connections' Tina told us, 'their food is great though, so this should be fun' (M38: 43-45)

Another example shows a stronger friendship which led to informal discussions during the meal between the host and her friend:

It seemed that Becky and Lara were friends and Becky leant against the kitchen doorway and chatted to Lara and Peter for a while in between courses. Lara had heard about Becky's upcoming wedding towards the end of the year and congratulations and questions about the wedding were shared (M4: 132-135)

The informal nature of their discussions and the way they caught up on personal events suggested that they had interacted in similar ways on previous occasions. Their friendship, in this case, added to the informal, family style of the event and allowed other guests to contribute to conversations in this way.

While meals of this kind are not specifically designed to create or foster future interaction, their very nature and a sense of like-mindedness often means that individuals will meet again at future events or, at a minimum, might suggest that they may see each other at a future meal. The possible futures and the reconnections of some individuals at events also adds an extra layer to the meals where attendees can reconnect with those they have met previously as well as the continued meeting and interaction with new people.

4.2.4.4 Possible Futures

The nature of the meals and the connections made between like-minded people would often suggest possible future interactions among fellow diners/attendees. These possible futures were observed at meals and differed in terms of potential and strength of future interaction. The most common instances of possible futures were the informal kind which usually came out of politeness at the end of an event:

Christie (late 40s) and Phil finished their wine and gathered their belongings. They came to the rest of the group and said it was nice to meet us all. 'Maybe see you at another meetup' Phil (40s) said to me. I shook their hands and said it was nice to meet them (M6: 222-224)

Examples like this were common when attendees often lived in the same city and had made a connection during a meal. The strength of these informal possible future interactions did not stray from a handshake or a polite 'see you next time' and, from my experience, were rarely realised. While these suggestions did not have strong levels of intent to meet in the future, they often worked as a polite end to the meal with no pressure to make any future plans:

Jan (late 30s) and I walked to the end of the road together and then went our separate ways. 'Nice to meet you' Jan said 'maybe see you at another of Ken's nights'. 'Yeah see you again' I said as I walked down the street (M12: 282-284)

Other examples of possible futures were slightly stronger and would involve exchanging contacts with fellow diners to potentially meet again at another time. These exchanges of contact details were usually based on the potential for networking or friendship. Occasionally, strong ties would be discovered between individuals and a stronger sense of connection was made:

Alice (late 20s) asked me if I had a pen as Maureen (late 50s) looked for some paper in her bag. Albert (early 60s) produced a pen from his top pocket and I gave Alice one of my business cards and she wrote her name and email address on the back of it before giving it to Maureen. Maureen looked at it and placed it in her bag. 'I'll get in touch, either tonight or tomorrow morning' she told Alice (M7: 255-259)

On other occasions, networking or information sharing was the reason for sharing contacts. Similar occupations or interests would encourage potential future interaction:

Annie (early 50s) got her postcard out and gave it to Moira and asked her to put her email address on it. She then gave the card and pen to me and asked me for my email address. 'I know of another supper club (...) that you might be interested in. I will email the details to you' (M4: 348-350)

It is difficult to anticipate what happens to these possible future interactions after the meal takes place. The fact, that possible future interactions may occur, suggests that a reason for attending may be to connect with like-minded people with the potential for developing or extending a social circle or network. The strongest example of possible future interaction was when individuals discussed future events and meeting again at them. In these cases, no plans were made apart from the suggestion that they might see each other at a specific future meal or event. From my experience, future interactions were more likely when linked to a specific event or meal rather than the informal 'see you next time' examples mentioned earlier:

*Celeste (mid 20s) asked me if I was going to go to the ***. I said I was thinking about it but wasn't sure if I had anything else on that night. I said that I was definitely going to check out the ***** the following week (M3: 335-336)*

In this example, the mention of two possible future events suggested that it was possible that we might see each other again but no formal plan or exchange of contacts was made to secure future interaction.

It was clear that the social aspect of the meals was of more importance than 'making friends'. Observations suggested that, while the meals were social, connections were often made, laughs, personal information and, sometimes, emotions were shared, it was not evident that the majority of these relationships continued outwith the meal. Often seen as 'one off' occasions or as semi-regular meetups or communities, there was rarely a case for meeting up socially elsewhere. Individuals may re-connect, at similar meals, but the majority of cases saw the meals as independent and not-repeated. One attendee summed this up well by suggesting:

*'Socially, we don't make friends or see these people again, but that's what I like, the transience and temporary meetings of people...it's fun and there is no pressure. It's like the one at ***** we told you about, we could have stayed there all night with the people we met at the table, but when the night came to an end we all said goodbye...and that was it...but that didn't matter' (M28: 201-205)*

4.2.5 Difference

Difference relates to how meals are presented as different to more traditional dining experiences. Four subthemes are identified as *Informality* which discusses the informal nature of the meals attended; *Passing plates* details how plates of food are often passed around the table by diners rather than served restaurant-style; *New Experiences* discusses the novelty of the experiences of the meals and *Special Occasions* details how meals were used or attended to celebrate a special occasion or time of year.

4.2.5.1 Informality

The majority of meals had an informal or relaxed atmosphere to them which was often in contrast to the social interactions and services found within restaurant culture. The informal nature of meals was often something that attracted attendees to it and signified a difference to more traditional dining practices where a more formal approach is anticipated and expected. Meals were often set around large communal tables and while the usual crockery, cutlery and condiments were present, the way they were presented was more unique and relaxed than that of a restaurant:

The tables were simply decorated and covered with black paper, with four or five candles scattered evenly. Places were set with plates and cutlery and a plastic blue beaker. Jugs of water with cucumber slices were at each end of the table as well as coloured chalk in case one wanted to decorate their place setting (M1: 25-29)

An informal attitude was important as it meant that it suited the social and interactive nature of the meals. Although a dress code was rarely mentioned, most people dressed casually or smart/casual. This included the hosts/organisers, as well as the guests, and it was often the case that, unless you already knew, you would not be able to detect the difference between guest and hosts based on their clothing.

The informal nature of meals could also affect individuals' interactions with each other and with the food they were eating. Plates of food were often passed around the table by the diners creating a stronger physical relationship with what we were eating and how it was shared. As this is quite different to experiences found in most restaurants, connections could be made to informal practices and behaviours related to family meals and communal dining. For some, this may display habits or practices

that may be seen as rude or inappropriate in a restaurant environment. This excerpt from one of the events displays a physical connection with the food and the hesitation present before enacting what might be considered an inappropriate practice in another setting:

When we had finished our main course there was still a lot of the jus on our plates. I saw Wilma (40s) looking at the basket of bread in the centre of the table. 'Good idea' I said as I picked up the basket and offered Wilma one. Wilma laughed and said 'I'm so full but I can't let the sauce go to waste, is there a small piece in there?' Wilma looked in the basket and picked out a smaller piece of bread. I then picked out a piece and we used the bread to mop up the jus from our plates (M22: 131-136)

The sharing of food and experiences and the informal nature of the meal ensured that diners could feel comfortable using these kind of practices. Similarly, many of the meals, although presenting quality food, were not steeped in a formality or snobbery towards the food that was eaten. Food was, of course, often discussed and likes, dislikes and opinions were shared but the meals were shaped around a love of food and the meal rather than one's expertise or how much the ingredients cost. In this example an attendee (Ben) asked the organiser (Gregor) about some of the food that was being eaten:

Ben (late 20s) and I tried the 'duck ham' but couldn't work out why it was called duck ham. 'Or maybe it's Dutch ham?' Ben suggested. Gregor (mid 40s) was standing behind us and Ben asked him 'Is it duck or Dutch ham?' 'Duck' Gregor replied as he reached for the dish and took one, 'don't ask me why though, the chef did tell me when he dropped them off but I can't remember what the link is...very nice though.' Gregor smiled and shrugged his shoulders as he moved to speak to someone else (M32: 104-109)

The informal nature of the meals also translated to the relationship between host and guest. At some events, you could see and hear the conversations going on in the kitchen area. Unlike a restaurant, the conversations were quite relaxed and veered from topics relating to the food to more personal chit-chat, jokes and laughter: *'During the courses you could hear Becky and Carla chatting naturally in the kitchen'* (M4: 187). These occurrences were common and would break down barriers between guest and host and a more personal relationship between the two parties would be established.

Meals became just as much about the interactions between those present as it was about the food. In a more formal setting, this was not always the case and not as easy to establish or break away from hierarchical relationships. The informality of these meals made this easier and signified a differentiation between meals of this nature and restaurant behaviour. While the meal or dining out is often littered with formal, expensive or etiquette driven ideals, OMC is more concerned with breaking down some of these barriers and creating a social space to share a meal and interact with, and meet new people, who may have a similar interest in a more natural, informal, relaxed setting.

4.2.5.2 Passing plates

When food was served, a common observation was the way in which diners passed plates and shared the food around the table. At smaller events, this occurred around one communal table. At larger events, the small groups that formed, around larger communal tables, would pass plates among themselves. This process of passing things around the table often started with the menu. This also acted as an ice-breaker, a commonality among the diners. It was noticed, at many of the meals, that menus were either placed at each setting, before arrival, or a menu would be placed at the centre of the table to be shared by the diners:

Sandra passed the menu to me and I had a quick look to remind myself of what we were having. I then passed it to Hannah (late 20s) who was sitting next to me and after she looked she passed it over to Frazer who quickly put it back in the centre (M8: 89-91)

The passing around, even before the food arrived, offered a sharing and a physical connection between diners who may not know each other. A similar interaction was found when food arrived. The style of service often depended on how the experience of passing plates around the table occurred. The majority of the events encouraged a sharing of plates of food rather than a more restaurant styled plate service. This was often referred to or reminded people of 'family-style' dining (Figure 4.2) where food was placed in larger bowls and passed around the diners where they could help themselves:

She helped herself using the big silver serving spoon in the bowl before passing the bowl on to me. I did the same and then passed the bowl on to Jack (...) As I passed the bowl over to Jack (early 30s) he was met with another bowl

coming from Anya's (30s) side. I took the bowl from Anya, which contained roasted chicken thighs in a soy chilli sauce, I placed one of the thighs on Jack's plate and one on my own before passing the bowl on to Sienna (M28: 163-168)

The example showed that, as well as helping themselves, diners were able to serve others when appropriate. This experience was quite natural and reminded some of the diners of experiences of dining with families. Similarly, the following example shows how plates were naturally passed around a smaller group of diners at a larger event:

The diners passed the plates around their smaller groups and helped themselves to a portion of each tapas and put it on their plate. All the diners seemed used to this style of sharing and passing plates amongst themselves (M9: 161-164)

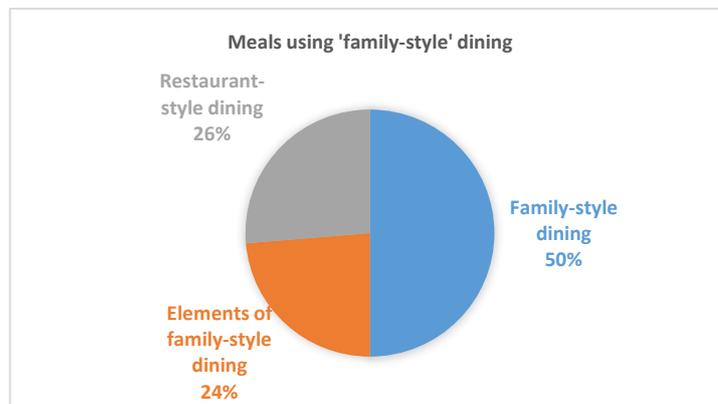


Figure 4.2: Meals using 'family-style' dining

The ease and naturalness of the passing of plates suggests that the process is normal or even instinctive to most of those attending. The link to family also suggests that the passing of plates and sharing of food is something that most of the diners learnt from an early age. There was also an air of politeness around the passing of plates as the diners were conscious of how much they should take, ensuring that there was enough for everyone:

plates were passed around and shared around the table. People checked how much others were taking and sometimes asked if they could take a second, or third helping of one of the dishes (M31: 146-148)

The passing of different dishes, around a small group of diners, offered a chance to comment or rate the different dishes with informal conversation or comment. This allowed the group to share their opinions on the experience of the meal that they

had shared together. The clearing, stacking or tasks involved in the service process of the meal was also observed as something which diners often took a natural responsibility for. Regularly, diners aided in the process of serving the food by offering to help out or by making the process easier for the hosts or organisers:

As there was not much space behind Annie, Moira (both early 50s) and myself, the diners got into the habit of passing the plates down the table rather than waiting for Carla or Becky (both mid-late 20s) to present a plate to each of us. This was quite a nice example of how the table worked together and shared responsibilities and aided the host in serving each other (M4: 214-219).

This kind of politeness was also present when plates were being cleared. The informal or more natural atmosphere that existed, at many of the meals, enabled diners to aid in the clearance of plates and dishes:

Darren (mid 20s) and I stacked our plates and bowls on top of each other and passed them to the waitress. When she came back again, the women behind us passed their plates down to me and I passed them to the couple in front of me who handed them over to the waitress (M10: 201-204)

On some occasions, usually when the event took place in someone's home, guests would often offer to help the host out in some way with the preparation or service. On some occasions, this was met with gratitude and the guests would share responsibility for some of the tasks involved in producing the meal. While often, no help was needed and the host just thanked the guest, on some occasions guests were able to help out with setting up or the presentation of the meal:

'Do you need any help Ken?' Pam (50s) asked. 'Not just now but maybe in 10 minutes or so...Some of you could set the table if you want?' (M15: 82-84)

4.2.5.3 New Experiences

For many of the diners, it was often a new experience or the first time they had been to a meal of this kind. Individuals often said that they were attracted to these events as they were interested in food and new experiences. The sense of exploration for something new and/or different was common among attendees. Many compared meals of this kind as a refreshing contrast to going to restaurants:

'We have just started going to stuff like this' Sylvie (30s) added, 'we just got bored of going to boring restaurants all the time and decided to try something different (M29: 43-45)

The social aspect also meant that initial conversation often revolved around previous or first time experiences of OMC. It was often used as an introduction or as a way to strike up conversations:

'This is our first ever supper club, I had never heard of them before but we are visiting our daughter (points to woman in her 20s on the balcony) and she thought we would enjoy it. They have been to a couple, I think' (M28: 62-65)

The new or unexpected social aspects of the meals could also explain, on the rare occasions, why some may not embrace the concept or interact with other diners. As it is different to the restaurant scene which the majority of diners are used to, it may put people out of their comfort zones and result in exclusion from the meal or event. On one occasion, this was suggested as a potential reason for some diners leaving an event early:

I said 'Maybe it's their first supper club and it wasn't what they were expecting.' Amelia (mid 20s) agreed and said 'It's our first one too and I did feel a bit intimidated with the social aspect at first' (M27: 196-198)

Here, we can see that some other first time attendees also felt slightly intimidated or unsure of the social aspect before they arrived. Another example suggests that someone who was experiencing their first meal was slightly nervous or unused to socialising in this way and it took time for them to get used to this style of interaction with new people:

I could tell that Helen (early 50s), as a first timer, was a bit overwhelmed by the speed of the conversation and the fact that she had not been able to contribute anything yet (M33: 47-49)

The vast majority of observations suggested that most attendees embraced the social aspect rather than viewing it as something strange or that would prohibit them from attending future meals.

The new experiences also related to the venues in which meals were held (Figure 4.3). Many attendees mentioned never having eaten a meal in a stranger's home, a church hall, an arts studio, community centre, etc. before and this gave them a new dining experience.

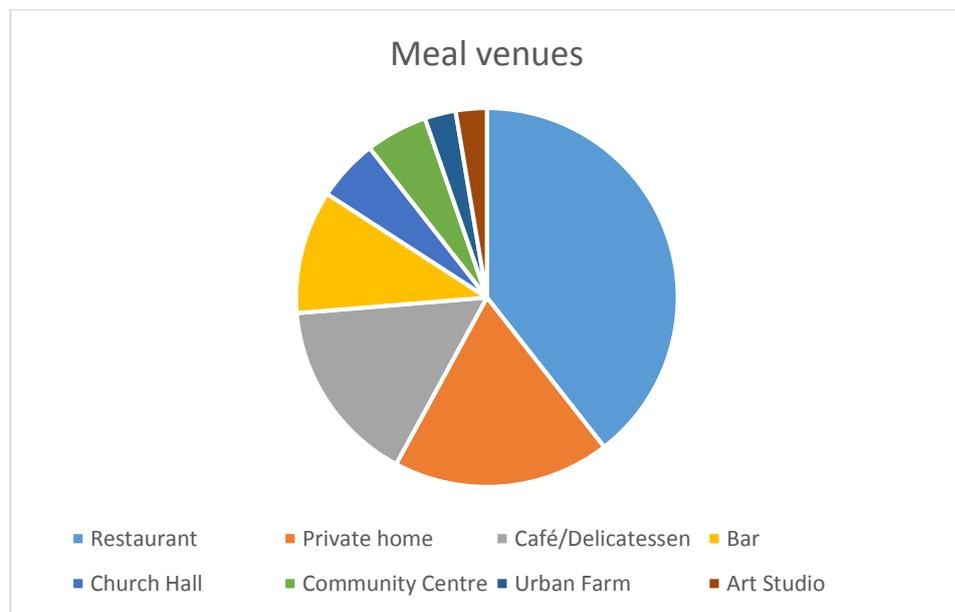


Figure 4.3: Meal Venues

On other occasions, the new experience was involved in the transformation of a local building or attraction into a dining venue which added an extra layer of experience to it:

‘Have you been here before?’ I asked the man (mid 30s). ‘To the deli, yes, we live just up the road, so come in here regularly, but this is the first time we have come in for a dinner like this’ (M36: 62-64)

The new experiences for diners could range from the venue, food, social aspect or style of dining and would often elevate the experience as something which differed from normal dining or dining out routines and rituals.

The slight disillusionment or boredom with restaurant dining often encouraged individuals to look for something different. The social aspect, or the way in which the meal was set or presented, was a key contributor to OMC being seen as different. Some attendees were often surprised at how these elements impacted on their enjoyment of the evening:

As we talked about the night one of the men (early 60s) said, ‘it’s interesting to sit at communal tables as you get to meet people and chat to them while you eat’ (M2: 160-162)

After experiencing different kinds of meals, some attendees began to look for more of the same. They would start to find a range of alternatives to the restaurant scene as they could see a number of benefits to them as well as an overall enjoyment:

‘Yeah we looked for something different and quite enjoyed it’ Paco continued, ‘it’s cheaper as well and the food was great at the last one’ (M37: 114-115)

In terms of making meals different, on some occasions, added entertainment was included. Added entertainment was sometimes part of the meal, e.g. showing a themed film, musical entertainment, a raffle, or attending a talk or presentation (Figure 4.4). On one occasion, the chef picked up his guitar towards the end of the meal and he played some songs for his guests:

‘A good party always has some kind of entertainment, so I hope you like this and enjoy it before dessert’. Elliot (early 30s) introduced the first song as a love song. ‘I wrote it about a girl I met who had the most beautiful blue eyes in the world’ (M37: 195-197)

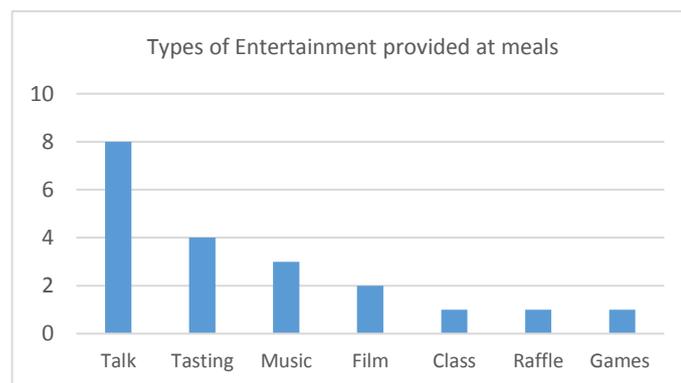


Figure 4.4: Types of Entertainment provided at meals

4.2.5.4 Special Occasions

Many of the meals were given a unique or special occasion vibe due to the venue and setting. A common observance was the way in which the venue or setting was personalised for the event:

*The old school building (...) stood out as the big glass windows had a yellow stencil on them saying ‘***** ***’. As I approached the building I also noticed the ***** *** logo sprayed on the pavement in different colours leading me to the door (M14: 20-22)*

As these colourful directions were not usually placed around the building, it suggested that the meal was ‘special’ in its temporality and the way in which it had used a venue in a different way. Menus were also used to personalise or specialise

meals. In this way, diners felt part of a 'one off' occasion as the menus would be dated or only used for this event:

A scrolled menu was at each place (at a diagonal) held together with a black and gold ribbon (M13: 76)

The menus often acted as souvenirs to events and it was common for guests to be seen putting the menus in their bags to take home with them (See Appendix 5). This, again, suggests a key differentiation between OMC and dining in a restaurant.

A special occasion was sometimes used as an excuse or reason for hosting meals. Some meals were held at certain times of the year (e.g. St Andrew's Day (M2), Edinburgh Festival (M32)) while others were linked to personal times of the year for the organiser or host:

Since it's my Birthday on June 30th, and since I love sushi, I thought I'd combine the two for a fun evening. I did a similar class in Virginia about two years ago and still have my kit but I thought being taught by a master sushi chef again might sharpen my skills a bit (M23: 2-4)

At other occasions, guests would attend meals to celebrate a birthday or anniversary. One event saw 5 members of a family attend an event to celebrate a birthday (M4). At another meal, diners around the table discovered that one of the diners would be celebrating a birthday the following day. Aspects of the meal then became a celebration of that diner's birthday:

Mike asked if anyone would like some more Sake (...) Mike turned to Joe and said 'You have to have some cos it's your birthday' and poured a generous helping into an empty glass. Joe thanked him and lifted the glass and said 'Cheers everyone, thanks for a great night.' We all lifted our glasses, said cheers and began to clink each other's glasses saying 'cheers' again and 'happy birthday' to Joe (M29: 204-209)

Meals had a sense of being unique, different, special and an event that would not be repeated in the same way again. This adds further contrast to restaurant dining where the social aspect is often repeated with partners and/or family members. The menu, in these cases, is often standardised as it offers the same options each time. These different elements added something to these meals and made them stand out as 'one off' or special occasions.

4.2.6 Business Management

This theme refers to elements that demonstrate skills related to business management which act to develop further success of meals. Two subthemes are identified as *Promotion* which discusses different ways hosts or organisers promote their meals; and *Evaluation* which discusses how hosts or organisers evaluate feedback and previous meals in order to develop future meals.

4.2.6.1 Promotion

From a host perspective, meals often provided an opportunity to promote future events, products and themselves. Promotion was often done in an informal manner, in keeping with the style of the meals, and was often quite subtle. Promotion often occurred through conversation or a short speech at the beginning or end of a meal. The more informal sources of verbal promotion came from hosts or organisers asking guest to spread the word:

As Elliot took off his guitar he thanked everyone for coming. 'Please tell all your friends if you have enjoyed it, if you haven't enjoyed it just tell them that you did!' (M37: 204-206)

The informality and humour related to this form of promotion suited the feeling and atmosphere of the meals themselves. Other forms of promotion were more tangible and involved using leaflets or flyers to promote future meals. This was often done quite subtly as leaflets were left at tables and it was down to the diners whether they read them or not:

*I noticed Alex (40s) putting some glasses with daffodils in them on one of the tables along with a leaflet about ***** ** (M14: 121-122)*

Another example of using tangible forms of promotion was one host who gave each guest a goody bag:

*Inside the bag was a jar of home-made apple chutney, a post-card advertising ***** ***** and a business card with contact details on it (M4: 346-347)*

The goody bag contained contact details as well as visual and edible memories of the event itself. The gifts were a form of promotion/advertising but still remained personal and connected to the meal that had been attended. Other forms of visual aids that acted as promotion or advertising were found on menus. As previously mentioned, the menus were often personalised and taken away by guests as

souvenirs. Many of the menus also displayed the identity of the event as well as further promotion through social media:

*A small white card menu was also at each setting. ***** was typed at the top of it alongside, I imagine, the Japanese for it. The menu was in the centre with the website details at the bottom (M29: 31-33)*

Another example of linking social media to the event itself could often be found through using a logo or a strong visual aid. Logos often acted as a connection from the online mediation to the meal itself and could be seen as a visual aid to recognising the venue where the meal was being held. The following example shows how a subtle use of a logo signified where the meal was taking place (in this case, a house in a residential area):

I found the house number easily and noticed 2 jars with tea lights on the porch. I also noticed a small sticker on the door which matched the logo of the website (M4: 17-18)

Social media was also a big part of how hosts and organisers would advertise their meals. As the meals were mediated online, the guests were well versed in online technology and this was often the main way in which meals were found. Social media was also used as the main source of promotion and information about future events:

*'...We will be running events like this in the future so please keep your eye on the website or social media, #***** (laughs) for further details' (M13: 258-259)*

In this case, the host was able to mention the meal's Twitter handle easily and naturally to signpost where guests could find out further information.

Twitter and Facebook often seemed the most common places to find information about meals and provided links on how to book and pay. While the meals are mediated online, it seemed that there was still a need to promote the websites and social media outlets on a verbal/face-to-face basis:

*'We get most of our business through our website' Shelly told us, 'it basically runs itself now and we just have to monitor it and update it occasionally. It's called the ***** ***, you guys should check it out' (M27: 223-225)*

The subtle and, often, informal ways in which hosts promote their meals shows an aspect of entrepreneurial activity with the potential for future growth and/or development. Another example of entertainment was when a host started a raffle

for all the guests. Each guest had a raffle ticket on their menu and prizes were linked to other businesses related to the hosts businesses (e.g. a portrait, voucher for future events, etc.) (M12).

Another host told the diners towards the end of the meal that a portion of the money taken would be donated to a charity that the host and their family supported:

'...One final thing before I we get the tea out is that £1 from each of the tickets sold for tonight is going to WaterAid which is a charity working to provide fresh water for children in India. It's a charity that my family always like to support so we hope to promote it and hopefully you will be able to give some more towards it at another time' (M13: 159-162)

While the charity donation was not expected as part of the event, it was applauded by the guests and added an extra layer to the purpose of the meal. Whether expected or not, the additional entertainment or elements were usually met with the same positive spirit in which they were offered. These additional elements and the continued effort to create different experiences made many of the meals feel like special or unique occasions.

4.2.6.2 Evaluation

Another way in which many hosts used their meals to get feedback from guests was through evaluating or gathering guests' opinion about the meals. Evaluation was gathered in a range of ways from hosts which would give them valuable information about how the meal had been sourced and what elements had been successful or could do with improvement. As meals were often advertised through social media, websites or databases, hosts were often interested where guests had heard about the meal. One host asked a list of questions online before the meal; others were trying to find out about you as a person and some asked for information to evaluate where guests were obtaining information about the meal e.g.: *'- How did you hear about ***** *?'* (M13: 22). Others would use an evaluation card to obtain information about what people thought about the meal. The following example gave each diner the opportunity to give feedback combined with the chance to win a prize or voucher for future meals:

I picked up the water glass and inspected the piece of paper. It was a raffle ticket for tonight's event where you could put your contact details and select

which was your favourite course of the night. There was also space for further comments and information about the courses (M12: 38-41)

Other ways of evaluation were more informal and, again, more in keeping with the atmosphere and nature of the meal. Hosts would often speak to guests towards the end of the meal to see what they thought or if they had any suggestions:

*As we were all sitting Ken (late 40s) asked 'So guys, what do you think of my ***** idea? Does it work?'* (M15: 211-212)

Feedback received was largely complimentary and guests would talk about their enjoyment of the food and the atmosphere. One of the questions that was often asked was whether guests would come back to a meal like this in the future:

Maria (late 30s) then asked if we had enjoyed the evening and asked for some feedback (...) Maria made a couple of notes on a piece of paper and said 'Thanks that's great, would you come to an event like this again?' (M37: 180-191)

The ways in which hosts would ask for feedback was usually quite informal and resulted in the sharing of ideas and interests relating to events of this nature. Gaining information through evaluation would give hosts ideas on what guests had enjoyed and thought about the meal. This information could then be put into the development and success of similar meals in the future.

4.3 Findings – Stage 2 (Discussion-style Interviews)

The following section presents the findings gathered from Phase 2 (Discussion-style Interviews) of the collected research material. Discussion-style interviews were held with hosts/organisers of meals defined as OMC. Twenty-one discussion-style interviews were held as part of the research material collection (Table 4.4). Discussion-style interviews are identifiable by I (Interview) followed by the number (1-21) of the interview. Interviews are numbered in chronological order.

| Interview # | Age (approx.) | Gender | Occupation | Location | Nationality | Setting of interview | Commercial/ Non-commercial motives | Link to Meal # |
|-------------|---------------|--------|-------------------------------------|------------|----------------|----------------------|------------------------------------|----------------|
| 1 | 30s | Male | General Manager of restaurant | Glasgow | Scottish | Bar | Commercial | M2 |
| 2 | 30s | Female | Self-employed chef/tutor | Manchester | English | Private home | Commercial | M4 |
| 3 | 30s | Male | Minister | Glasgow | Scottish | Café | Commercial | M1 |
| 4 | 20s | Female | Student | Glasgow | French | Bar | Commercial | M6 |
| 5 | 50s | Male | Writer/Advertising & Marketing | Edinburgh | South African | Café | Non-commercial | M3, M7, M26 |
| 6 | 40s | Male | Massage Therapist | Edinburgh | Portuguese | Café | Commercial | M12 |
| 7 | 30s | Female | Artist/Producer | Glasgow | Scottish | Café | Non-commercial | M14 |
| 8 | 50s | Female | Housewife/Part-time teacher | York | French | Via Skype | Commercial | M17 |
| 9 | 20s | Female | Self-employed (fashion/food design) | Manchester | British-Indian | Via Skype | Commercial | M13 |
| 10 | 30s | Female | Project Manager | Edinburgh | Scottish | Café | Commercial | M18 |
| 11 | 30s | Female | Project Manager | Edinburgh | Scottish | Community Centre | Non-commercial | |
| 12 | 30s | Female | Financial Advisor | Edinburgh | Irish | Café | Non-commercial | M15, M23 |
| 13 | 20s | Female | Student Advisor | Manchester | American | Via Skype | Non-commercial | M4, M13 |
| 14 | 20s | Female | Self-employed events manager | London | Australian | Café | Commercial | |
| 15 | 20s | Female | Self-employed chef/events manager | London | English | Private home | Commercial | M28 |
| 16 | 30s | Female | Lecturer | London | American | Café | Commercial | M27 |
| 17 | 40s | Male | Journalist | Edinburgh | Scottish | Public Garden Square | Non-commercial | M5, M32, M35 |
| 18 | 60s | Female | Retired | Glasgow | English | Bar | Non-commercial | M16, M25, M33 |
| 19 | 50s | Male | Finance/IT | Edinburgh | English | Bar | Non-commercial | M9, M19, M31 |
| 20 | 30s | Female | Business Consultant | London | Argentinian | Via Skype | Commercial | M27 |
| 21 | 40s | Female | Designer | London | Indian | Via Skype | Commercial | M38 |

Table 4.4: Final Sample - Stage 2 (Discussion-style Interviews)

Table 4.5 presents the thematic framework which guides the findings of Stage 2 (Discussion-style Interviews) which follows.

| Theme Number | Theme | Definition | Sub-themes |
|--------------|------------------------|--|--|
| 1 | Motivations | Motivating factors relating to involvement in OMC | Hospitality Enjoyment Difference to restaurant Social motives Inspiration |
| 2 | Understanding the meal | How the meal is viewed, its links to family, nationally and identity and its importance within society | Family Identity Importance of the meal Enjoyment Difference to restaurant Social motives Inspiration |
| 3 | Social | Interpretations of the social aspects within OMC and their importance. | Interaction 'Family style' dining Like-mindedness Awkwardness Social control |
| 4 | Differentiation | Aspects that make OMC different to restaurant style dining | Contrast to restaurant Themes Domestic home Setting |
| 5 | Online Mediation | The use of online mediation and social media in the organisation and facilitation of OMC | Online knowledge Limitations & Dependency Payment |
| 6 | Managing Commensality | Aspects related to management and business that are identified within OMC | Finding a gap Pilot meals Feedback Pricing Team Business Growth |

Table 4.5: Thematic Framework from Phase 2: Discussion –style Interviews

4.3.1 Motivations

This theme refers to the motivating factors relating to involvement in OMC. Positive experiences of the meal, the passion that many of the interviewees had relating to food, cooking and providing hospitality, often motivated them into hosting meals in a range of different contexts. The subthemes of *Hospitality*, *Enjoyment*, *Difference to restaurant*, *Social motives* and *Inspiration* represent the subthemes that will be discussed.

4.3.1.1 Hospitality

As Table 4.4 illustrates, OMC hosts and organisers can have commercial or non-commercial motives to their meals. Figure 4.5 shows the commercial/non-commercial split:

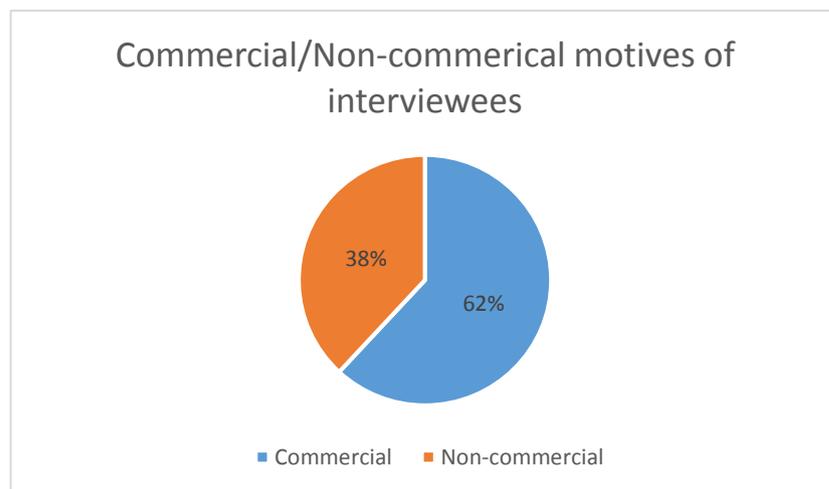


Figure 4.5: Commercial/Non-commercial motives of interviewees

Interviewees with both commercial and non-commercial motivations demonstrated a desire to provide hospitality to others. This was often coupled with concepts of welcome, interaction and exchange rather than making profit or a precursor to further business ventures. As one host described, their desire to provide hospitality was in response to their experiences of working in the hospitality industry:

I wanted to be a chef very early and did work in restaurants for a long time and kind of got a bit disillusioned by the whole restaurant thing ... partly because I was just, just working so many hours I didn't really have a life (laughs) and partly I wanted more interaction with the customers because most of the time I was either in a basement kitchen or completely out of the way and I wanted to be able to see the people I was cooking for. The reason I

got into catering in the first place is because I enjoyed cooking for friends and family (I2: 8-16)

It was often the social and interactive aspects of hospitality that sparked interest in catering. Experiences of working in the industry, however, did not always match their expectations and, therefore, a move towards OMC provided a more positive outlet for hospitality. Other hosts described hospitality as a welcoming and inclusive force which they are able to provide at their meals:

I always like to welcome my guest (...) I think it's just nice, it adds to that welcoming thing of hospitality (...) I kind of like to let people know how the eating is going to go and kind of a little bit about the story (...) and where the food comes from and that's really why I do it, I want people to share that insight (I9: 225-230)

Other aspects of providing hospitality were again in response to the restaurant industry. High prices often related to this response. One interviewee mentioned how they aimed to make their meals affordable and accessible in providing positive experiences of hospitality:

[the meal] was accessible, folk were able to come in, have a nice time, a good wee evening out, it isn't costing the earth and they're fed and watered and have a nice wee time (I1: 61-64)

4.2.1.2 Enjoyment

A motivating factor for the continuation of hosting meals was the enjoyment. As one host simply put it, '*We enjoy it a lot... can barely stand by the end of it, but it's with a smile on our faces!*' (I21: 78-82). Another interviewee suggested that, while they had earned more in previous careers, the enjoyment, flexibility and variety of experiences they found outweighed this:

I'm very much enjoying this, definitely prefer it to working full time in restaurants, I earn less but I'm much happier (laughs) and have much more of variety and flexibility in my work and my life (I2: 510-517)

Similar experiences suggested that it was not the monetary benefits that motivated most interviewees but the hospitality and social experiences they were providing for others. One host suggested:

it's probably one of the most fulfilling things... (...) What I love...the moment I love, is... I focus so much on everything else, the cooking is actually quite a

small part of it, all the other stuff takes up the time (...) but it gets to Saturday night and I'm heating stuff up and tasting it and I'm like 'this is glorious! This is beautiful, I would pay money to come here!' and I think it's at that moment that I'm glad I'm able to share this with people (I3: 632-644)

While the provision of hospitality was a key motivating factor for many, others found that OMC gave them the opportunity to experiment with their skills and the concept of the meal but did not tie them into a full time career. One interviewee suggested that this was a key motivation for them, to see what they could achieve but without being dependent on it or it being their main source of income:

one of the reasons I wanted to do it is cos I had been to supper clubs myself and that seems like the perfect way to, to make it a little bit more than a hobby but not make it a full career (I16: 87-93)

This view suggests that hosts were more interested in the provision of alternative hospitality and the social interaction and exchanges within it than they were in making a profit or a prominent business venture. Another host stated that their involvement in organising meals was quite time consuming: *'it's a little bit like a part time job, but I enjoy it'* (I18: 361-364) suggesting that their involvement might be seen as more of a hobby than a business. Others, however, treated their meals as more of a business and were motivated to continue to strive and develop their business. One host saw their motivation as making their meals into a bigger business opportunity:

I would get more satisfaction out of it if it was a bigger project, but that's not to say that it doesn't make me happy just now ... or I haven't been happy up until this point (I10: 262-270)

Another interviewee, however, suggested that making their meals into a bigger business venture would be detrimental to their enjoyment and motivation. They likened their meals, based on previous experience, as the antithesis of running a restaurant:

I think if I had started a restaurant it would be kind of tying whereas this is really sort of small and I can work it round other things, do other things as well and I get to do the whole thing myself, meet people at the door, I lay the table, choose my own music, you know just everything (...) you would never get in a restaurant. So it's more of a reaction against what I was doing, and trying to take all the positive elements of that, and none of the negatives (I2: 3-28)

While the motivations for hosting and organising meals had a number of variations, a common aspect was that of providing hospitality. The hospitality mentioned was related to issues such as welcome, interaction and exchange with the guests and a more domestic, rather than a purely commercial, leaning.

4.3.1.3 Difference to restaurants

OMC has a number of factors that are quite different to that of going to a restaurant. This was a common observation and could relate to the social interaction, the way the food was served or the attention the guests got from the host. One host described how some of their guests referred to their meals as a different way of dining out:

people seem to think that it is just a different way of dining out, for example a couple were saying 'instead of going out as a couple 'again' you get to go out and meet other people' which you can't do in a restaurant (...) So I think they come for the social side of things (...) you have got to be someone who enjoys impromptu social contact because obviously if you are a bit of a shy person you wouldn't enjoy that kind of thing (I8: 122-127)

This example expresses a monotony towards restaurant dining and how the social aspect was a key difference and attraction of OMC. Similarly, the attention and intimacy of these meals was also seen as something different to restaurants and a further attractive quality. One host commented:

I think they like the fact that they get full attention. That the table is theirs for the whole night...they don't have the kind of variants of restaurants where it could be really busy and it might take longer for their food, they know they are the only ones coming (...) but it should be quite comfortable, it's a different environment, its homely (I2: 226-231)

OMC often provides an alternative to other forms of dining out which can be suggested as a motivation to attend meals of this nature, to experience something different, for the first time and which has a different ethos and identity to other establishments. One interviewee suggested that individuals choose to come to their meals for the following reasons:

Cos it's tasty and really cheap! (laughs) (...) My perception is that we were trying to make it a community venture, not trying to make it like a business so it was maybe more accessible for people cos they could come and hang out for as long as they wanted (I7: 205-216)

It could also be argued that many of those attending these kind of meals were motivated by the unknown aspects of the experience. Often they involved going somewhere new, not knowing exactly what to expect or who you would meet. One host suggested that the unknown was something they believed was attractive about their meals:

I think maybe it's a little bit of the unknown (...) maybe there is an aspect of 'oh what's going to happen?' 'Who am I going to meet?' 'Who am I going to be sat next to?' 'What will it be like?' Curiosity about the location, (...) I think it's a little bit about having some adventure (116: 284-297)

Some hosts only reveal the menu and the dishes that will be served at the time of the meal. One interviewee, who did this, suggested that this would be attractive to some, more than others, but that it was another motivating factor which differed from other establishments where you can read menus online or even choose what you will be eating in advance:

I don't know if this is the case with all supper clubs, but for mine I don't tell them what they are eating, so it's a surprise, so it's either a turn-off or a turn-on for people. I think the people that come here are excited by that and the idea that they are just going to get something and hope that they like it... (12: 209-225)

In terms of characteristics of those who attend online mediated meals, many of the interviewees described themselves as being social, confident and adventurous and who wanted to experiment with something different as a means of personal exploration:

I think it's just people who a) are just really interested in food, they can be really particular about where they go to dine out. That's one kind of guest. Then we have people who are just looking for something different to do. Then we have people who come looking for friends, it's a good way of meeting new people and you can't really go out to a restaurant and sort of nudge the person next to you and go 'Hi' (laughs) that doesn't really work (19: 70-78)

The main motivations discussed for those attending online mediated meals are: the social element, the alternative experience of hospitality and the meal, and the common interest in food and dining. This is by no means surprising and is closely linked to the motivations held by the hosts for running their meals. What is present amongst the phenomenon is that it is constantly developing and changing and, therefore, there is a sense of temporality to the events in terms of their longevity and

the experiences they provide. One interviewee described individuals who attended meals as follows:

You have the ones that, they are almost against chains, things that are popular; they want to be unique and go to events that nobody else has done (...) Then you have the ones that read something and thought 'this is interesting, I have always wanted to do it' and are glad now to have the opportunity, glad that there is someone else as crazy as them (laughs) (I20: 93-99)

It could, therefore, be added that another motivation of attending these kinds of meals is that they will only be experienced by a small number in comparison to more traditional forms of dining. This sense of elitism could be attractive to some and be seen as a motivating factor to experience hospitality and the meal in a way that would only be available for a limited time and for a limited few.

4.3.1.4 Social motives

In terms of motivations to attend online mediated meals, the interviewees suggested that the social aspect was one that they thought was a major factor. One interviewee described why they decided to go to meals of this kind:

I was looking to change my circles so that I didn't spend my entire time in the pub or at work. (...) I went along to the first one about a year and a half ago and was really, really surprised (...) at what a great scene it was. I was expecting it to be pensioners and people with no lives (laughs) but I was really, really impressed at how relaxed it was and I've gone to quite a lot of stuff since (I12: 11-16)

Others suggested that while the meal was the first motivating factor, the social side of it was quite natural and became just as important, even if a little unexpected:

I don't think many people come thinking consciously, 'I want to meet a stranger tonight' (...) But what happens is that even if you are in a group of 4 or 6, you might be at the end of a table with another group of 4 beside you, so you have that kind of cross-fertilisation (...) you quite often get them chatting to other people. Which is good to see (I3: 249-278)

While this may be something that was unexpected by some, the premise of commensality is that it is a social activity and this may well be a motivating factor, consciously or not. The experience of the shared meal often attracted socially confident people who wanted to experience both the meal and the interaction found around it.

Another aspect that was seen as a motivating factor was that it was something that they did not experience in their day-to-day life. As previously mentioned, the frequency and importance of family or collegial meals are said to be diminishing and/or combined with other activities. Some interviewees suggested that this could be something that motivated people to attend online mediated meals:

a social meal is something to look forward to, something to actually get involved with. A lot of us now because of the way we eat fast food and supermarket food or people who just cook on their own (...), you know, I think food can be more of a social thing (I19: 337-342)

Similarly, another interviewee suggested that there is something special about sharing a meal with others, no matter who they are or what relationship individuals have with each other:

I think eating out is quite a special thing, I think it's nice to eat with people (...) People live on their own and its nice just to get out and meet people (I18: 200-204)

The meal, or in this case, eating out is often seen as an activity done with others and where the image of the solo diner is seen as strange or looked upon with pity or suspicion. OMC, however, allows these negative stigmas to be dispelled.

4.3.1.5 Inspiration

The inspiration to start organising or hosting online mediated meals often came from a passion for cooking and an idea to do something a bit different with the meal concept. The majority of hosts, especially those who cooked the meals themselves, had been encouraged by friends and family to share their talents with a wider audience. While the majority of hosts had full-time jobs and other commitments, they still felt the need to investigate other experiences of OMC to see what others were doing. This often led them to formulating their own plans and ideas of how they could host or organise similar meals:

we went to a couple of supper clubs (...) before plunging into it. One of them was very good and one of them was very disappointing and I came out of it thinking 'I could do a lot better than that'. So I thought 'why not?' its minimal expense, it's not difficult to organise, let's go for it. So I organised a website from a cheap web provider, sorted out a few menus and that was it (I8: 22-38)

This was quite common amongst interviewees and often led to them starting up their own meals through social media and basic websites. Initial meals would give the

interviewees a feel for running meals before investing more time and effort into running them more frequently. Another interviewee had the idea of starting their own supper club after attending other events of this nature and discovering a shared interest in their family:

I love cooking, I'd just sort of got into baking, my mum was kind of saying 'I'm dying to open up a cafe, a wee tea parlour'. It was like stars were aligning and I was like 'Mum, I've been to this, we're doing it - fuck it' (laughs) that was really how it was and it has almost unconsciously snowballed from that little spark and before I knew it I had a houseful of people (I10: 26-29)

Previous experience in hospitality or catering was often used when experimenting with the concept of the meal. Experience, combined with knowledge and understanding of using social media and online applications, often led interviewees to experiment with OMC:

I kind of got passionate about food, got some experience in managing restaurants (...) and started a food blog (...) I started to have a lot of dinner parties (...) and when I came back to England my sort of desire was to open up a restaurant, but obviously didn't have the cash. I had heard of supper clubs before, in New York and Miami and I knew there was loads in London but nothing in Manchester at the time and I thought it would do really well in Manchester and also a really good way of testing out my food and seeing how people would receive it (I9: 11-18)

Other examples of where inspiration came from were a desire to do something a bit different and which would be seen as attractive to others. The inspiration for many of the hosts often came from a combination of a love of cooking or hospitality, industry or catering experience and an understanding of what was happening in the industry and what individuals may be looking for as an alternative.

4.3.2 Understanding the meal

This themes refers to how the meal is viewed and understood. The meal's links to *family, identity* and its *importance* within society represent the three subthemes that will be discussed.

4.3.2.1 Family

Our earliest experiences of commensality usually come from family meals. These can range from daily occurrences to semi-regular or annual special events. A number of the interviewees recalled memories of their childhood and the importance of food

and family meals. One interviewee mentioned the regularity of family meals and how it was sometimes the only opportunity the family got to all be together:

every night at 6 o'clock we were all at that table and it might have only been for 15 minutes but it was every night, Saturday night it was 7 o'clock, for some reason, and Sunday it was Sunday lunch and you didn't miss any of these meals (I12: 347-350)

It could be argued that it is not the food that is of utmost importance but the family bond and the togetherness felt around the table. Similarly, another interviewee mentioned that the experience of the meal might resonate with many attendees:

I think it does kind of remind people, in a way, of being in their own family unit, how they relate to people, how they talk to people in that setting. And I know, I come from quite a small family, I never had the experience of a big family dinner and maybe there is an aspect of me that finds it a bit of a novelty to have this kind of big meal (I13: 40-45)

Here, sharing a meal with a large number of people could be seen as having a novelty factor to the experience. The influence of family and their relationship with food, learning to cook and sharing food with others was also seen as an important aspect of the meal. One host described how they learnt how to cook from their family and how it was always a normal part of their upbringing:

...cooking comes from my parents, everything comes directly from them and my brother, cooking was a normal thing in my house. Every weekend people came to my house, people I don't even know came to eat (I6: 11-15)

Family can, therefore, have an influence on cooking, sharing and communal dining. Many of the hosts linked their relationship to food and the meal with specific members of the family:

I loved my Granny (...) and there was something about her cooking, that when I taste a meal sometimes and it's like 'that's my granny' and it was modern in a way, but when we look back on it now it wasn't really modern but she would use certain herbs and certain spices and there was such a naturalness to her, she was a bit of a hippy I think at heart and had a sense of nature about her (I10: 188-193)

For many, the relationships the host had with family members and cooking still resonate with their values and way of cooking and hosting. Another host described how they learnt to cook online from their mother while studying abroad. They also

stress that family is an important aspect of how their meals work and how their guests have reacted positively to it:

I learnt to cook from my mum, you know, when I was in the States she taught me how to cook over Skype, you know that family connection. And when I came back she was still teaching me new dishes and still does today (...) My dad has also always been in to cooking and my brother did the same degree as me in the States so we kind of all share that foodie passion and I think with the supper club as it's in the home...I don't think I actually do anything different in terms of stressing the family aspect (I9: 57-63)

In this example, the family unit is important, not just in terms of memories and traditions but, in how the meal is served. Another host described a similar situation while hosting meals as a family unit:

there was me, my mum and my auntie, the passion was there from day one. We are a family that really wants to provide a warm, social experience that involves food. So it was kind of easy for us. That could have been all our family sitting there...(I10: 91-94)

It is evident here that family is an important aspect to many of the hosts in how they conceptualise the meal and also how it is served and provided to others. Interestingly, another host added that one reason for setting up their meals was down to a change in family dynamics:

now my boys have left home I feel rather despondent (laughs)...certainly in cooking terms, you know having a family reduced from 4 to 2 makes a huge difference and you know we have always entertained quite a bit as well and we have come to a point now where social life is slowing down some, I don't know why (laughs) (I8: 11-15)

The host suggested that their meals gave them the opportunity to cook and create food for others, something that they were very passionate about but were doing less of due to having a reduced family unit. Other hosts described the feeling and experience at their meals as: 'like a little family' (I2: 284). One interviewee described how they attempted to create a family feel or atmosphere:

[The meal] was specifically delivered on communal tables because the idea was a family roast (...) We wanted to create that family atmosphere in a way. So we had tables of 10 (...) people didn't necessarily know each other but everything was served family style as well so you had to kind of share it out (...) we took pictures of people that were at the table so they might not have known each other at the beginning but at the end we took a family portrait (I14: 160-169)

It was clear that the understanding, influence and creation of a family vibe was important to the majority of hosts when constructing and serving their meals. As the meal is such an important part of how individuals grow up, socialise and share, it is understandable that that relationship with family still resonates.

4.3.2.2 Identity

Interviewees often mentioned links between food, the meal and their own background, nationality, culture or experiences. Some interviewees described following traditions as an integral part of their strong relationship with food:

A lot of the things we have eaten (...) we have done our due diligence on origins or anything interesting we can find about it. When we started talking about doing a supper club we decided we needed a 'hook' so getting back to our roots is that 'hook'. So far it has been a good decision (I21: 88-92)

Different national cultures can impact on the style and mentality of individuals' relationship with food and the sharing of it. One interviewee mentioned how their nationality and dining traditions has strong links to commensality and the social aspect of the meal:

Some of the ideas of course might be linked to being Argentinian, for example, what we call the 'sobremesa' when you finish eating you don't leave the table, you finish eating, you stay at the table and you chat perhaps for one hour or so each time (I20: 212-215)

Sobremesa, from Spanish, is literally translated as 'over the table'.¹ The definition of sobremesa lies in close relation to the concept of commensality and can, perhaps, be closely connected to the experiences found within OMC.

Religious identities could also have an influence on cooking, food sourcing or dining practices. One host, who is also a minister, suggested that his meals were constructed around Christian values:

*it goes back to my identity as a Christian and this is how I run the ***** **, you know that's the reason that it is Fairtrade and organic, and vegetarian cos these are the ethical values that are informed by my faith (I3: 143-147)*

¹ the leisurely time after we have finished eating, but before we get up from the table. Time spent in conversation, digesting, relaxing, enjoying. Certainly not rushing. Not reserved for weekends -though it can be longest on Sundays- even weekday and business meals have sobremesa. For Spaniards, how we eat is as important as what we eat (www.sobremesa.us)

Another host referred to Buddhist principles (I6) and how they had influenced the sourcing of ingredients for their meals. It is unclear, however, whether these religious beliefs are intended to be shared among guests and those attending the meals.

The popularity of vegetarian meals was present amongst the interviewees. Being vegetarian and having a passion for improving the variety and standard of vegetarian food was something that some of the hosts found important. There was a consensus amongst those providing a vegetarian menu that they were not just targeting vegetarians to come to their meals. It was mentioned as a response to boring or unimaginative vegetarian food in restaurants and an opportunity to encourage others to experience good vegetarian food:

there are so many delicious things that are totally fine for vegetarians to eat (...) it just takes a bit of creativity to change a typically seafood or meaty dish into something that can have all the depth and the flavour but is made without the meat (I16: 125-129)

In most cases, interviewees identified a strong passion for cooking and sharing food with others which acted as a key driving force for their involvement in OMC:

I just love cooking...from a family who is just obsessed with food, we are from the south west of France and down there food is a religion just about, so I have been well brought up in that respect because we have always had really good food at home... (I8: 2-6)

Other hosts mentioned that their passion for cooking and food had led them to make it more than just a hobby. Some interviewees mentioned that they did some training to hone their skills which led to the first ideas of setting up their meals:

food has always been a passion and I did some chef training a couple of years back (...) then I thought I want this to be a little more than just a hobby but not give up my day job, (...) so yes I just slowly started preparing ideas and, you know, to create a supper club basically (I16: 3-9)

Passion was also strengthened by many of the interviewees' sense of creativity. Many wanted to use their passion for cooking and food to create something unique and different to the usual restaurant scene:

I started doing these supper clubs about a year ago, cos I have always been like really, really into cooking, (...) and also entertaining and also design like

creating a really personal experience (...) I've been kind of like praised for attention to detail which you don't get in restaurants (I15: 3-6)

Creativity and passion were also linked to previous experience. Some mentioned developing skills and learning from previous work experience and how this pushed them to follow their passion for food and cooking. One host discussed their experiences, at a young age, of being around food and working for food related businesses and how this encouraged her to continue:

my granny had a cafe when I was at primary school and I worked in the cafe so it's like something that is ignited and burns inside you and I'm like 'I have to cook' there's no ifs no buts, it must happen. And other loves have ignited and burned out but this one, so far hasn't (I10: 67-75)

The identity of the interviewees was as diverse and various as the guests who attend their meals. While their identities differed in terms of age, nationality, status and background, one thing that was present among all was their passion for providing unique and creative meals for a range of different individuals. Each interviewee was able to incorporate their own values, nationalities or traditions into their meals which made for further separations from the restaurant industry and more traditional forms of dining.

4.3.2.3 Importance of the meal

It was evident that experiences of meals and eating with others were heavily structured around family values and interviewees' own identities. The importance of the meal was further articulated by many as being fundamental to socialising, sharing and interacting with others. Some linked this to family, socialisation or a deeper human need linked to society and a sense of belonging. One interviewee suggested that the shared meal was something that was integral to historical societal development and shared behavioural norms:

I think it's historical, it's sort of in our culture and goes back beyond all things we associate with human culture. It's like, well my view is it's the civilising, it's part of the founding of civilisations (...) once we learnt to cook, social groupings developed from that and basically that community and society as we know it, before that we were foragers or very nomadic people, but once you have a fire to tend and you are cooking it tends to create a division of labour where some are off doing one thing and others are tending the fire and cooking and then everyone comes back together, maybe only for one meal a

day, but to eat a meal together and through that development of cooking that's what created the founding of a society (17: 532-545)

Another interviewee also commented on the historical aspect of the meal but also that, while it was something that brought people together, it was also a pleasurable experience and something to be celebrated:

It's the oldest thing on earth isn't it? People sitting round in a circle and sharing some food. It's what you do to keep alive in the first place, in your circle, in your tribe, whatever (...) it's sharing, being good to somebody, it's a pleasurable thing to do. (...) I think that is why people still like doing it and if it tastes good that is even better (laughs) (18: 355-364)

The social aspect of the meal was also iterated by many of the interviewees. The meal or eating food was mentioned as a common need and a human act that was culturally shared and understood. It was described by some, as something which broke down social barriers and created a sense of equality among those sharing a meal:

I think once you cook together with other people and sit down and share a meal, I don't think it matters who you are and I think that's really unique (17: 562-565)

Another interviewee mentioned how food can also be a shared emotional experience that can be linked to the communal meal and the intimate links between those sharing in it:

I think that food is common to every single human being in the world. (...) it brings people together. We have something in common immediately, you know, we might not have a love per se for food but we need it and generally speaking food, food relates to emotions, you can have a really bad day and have a good meal and instantly you feel better (...) that emotion we feel when we eat something is important cos when you share that with other people it affects how you feel (19: 279-285)

The social and historical aspects of the meal were the major factors mentioned by the interviewees related to the importance of the meal. Others, however, suggested that there was a sense that the meal was, in some cases, becoming less important or more fragmented in terms of its societal make-up. Some mentioned that they were aware of a slight demise in how the meal was treated and conceptualised within modern work/life practices:

the UK, in particular, is really bad at not giving time to meals in terms of its work culture. (...) there isn't the same sense that you get in other countries where meal times are kind of protected and lengthy (...) time for meals is really important (I7: 588-593)

Similarly, another interviewee commented that while the shared meal, family or otherwise, might be diminishing, it was still seen as important by many, '*thankfully our modern way of life hasn't quite killed that off yet, which is a nice thing*' (I8: 359). This, it could be argued, may form the basis of why OMC is a popular experience for many. While it may be seen as a special occasion or something linked to nostalgia, family or ceremonial celebrations, it is also something which is quite natural when the opportunity is presented. As one interviewee suggested, the common bond and sociability of the meal was captured within OMC:

it doesn't matter who you are with really, even if you are at a table full of strangers it's that love of food that brings you together, you might not have anything to talk about but you can say 'oh what was your favourite food?' and you will have an opinion and you will talk and you will start socialising (I9: 277-299)

The naturalness to the shared meal also helped create a positive experience, or combination of experiences, which makes OMC an attractive, different and symbolic experience of hospitality:

it's a natural thing to do (...) we need food to be nourished and food has all these sensory things going on that make us really happy (...) So when you provide that good experience, a nice environment, good tastes, good company it's just like a, almost like a wee magical thing, a great chemistry thing going on that makes people happy and makes people want to be happy (I10: 293-305)

4.3.3 Social

Social refers to the interpretations of the social aspects within OMC and their importance within the phenomenon. Five subthemes are identified as *Interaction* which discussed the range of social interactions observed at meals; *'Family-style' dining* which discussed the style of dining used at meals; *Like-mindedness* which details the shared values and personality traits of interviewees and attendees; *Awkwardness* which refers to experiences of social awkwardness observed at meals; and *Social control* which details how interviewees try to encourage social interaction at their meals in a number of ways.

4.3.3.1 Social Interaction

Commensality is a social act, a sharing of food and experiences with fellow diners. The social aspect was mentioned by all the interviewees. Whether meals involved meeting strangers, new people, pre-existing communities or regularly meeting groups, the social aspect was often as, or in some cases more, important than the food that was served. The social aspect was important to many of the interviewees and some even suggested that it was the awkwardness or negative experiences of eating alone that made them set up communal meals:

having travelled around the country one of the things you have to do is eat (...) eating on your own in a restaurant and reading a book or a newspaper or something in between courses...it's not very nice (...) it's much better in a social environment (I19: 79-85)

Another interviewee suggested that the social aspect was important and that the meal provided common ground shared by those attending a meal:

if you enjoy eating, that's the only prerequisite and you enjoy talking to people and I guess that's what makes it so popular (...) you have an opener, and a really easy opener and you are not going to get into a row (...) So that's maybe why it works. You don't need to have any great knowledge about it and you are not going to offend anybody (I12: 312-319)

As suggested, food can be an 'easy opener' to conversation or further social interaction. Another interviewee observed that, while many individuals came to events on their own, they quickly began to socialise with other attendees and were able to find common ground or interests quite quickly:

I think a lot of people come along to the event on their own (...) [and] seem to kind of embrace it and you are right the food thing is helpful in doing that because...yeah...it always gets people talking...everyone has always got an opinion about food (I17: 360-365)

Other interviewees referred to food as an ice-breaker which can initiate non-verbal interactions that may lead to further socialisation and conversation:

I think it's an immediate ice breaker... you taste something good, you do end up making eye contact in appreciation... at the very least! Yeah I think that's it...even bad food actually...(laughs) (I21: 115-117)

There was also an understanding that a bond was formed merely by sharing a meal with others. The fact that individuals were sharing an experience, food and social interactions around the table meant that, often, they were sharing a feeling of

togetherness and that issues of status, age, expertise, wealth, etc. were no longer important.

The idea of making the experience very different to restaurant-style dining was important and added to the social interaction processes found at the meals. One host shared how they promoted their meals and how they felt it needed to be a relaxed vibe in order to be popular:

it's about 'come along and have a beer and just chat about what's going on' and, you know, because of the audience, the chat about what's going on is about food but you don't need to force that and, you know, if people want to come along and talk about, you know, their DIY project or whatever, I couldn't care but fundamentally the common link amongst the audience is food (I17: 164-172)

Striking up conversation was also mentioned by other hosts. While, at first, they were quite surprised at how quickly conversation started at meals, it was now seen as the norm and diners would quite often start conversing when they arrived and met new people:

it's interesting for me with my background in psychology seeing how everyone like connects or meets, or are they chatty? Like the bunch on Wednesday immediately everyone was striking up conversations and that's not always the case but the majority of the time I think that it is. It's very interesting how that all kind of evolves quite kind of naturally (I16: 335-342)

With conversations starting and individuals socialising with each other, often from the early stages of a meal, it would be interesting to see whether social interactions occur again outwith the meal or event attended. Some interviewees mentioned that they had experienced diners sharing contact details, phone numbers or social media profiles at the end of meals. Some suggested that this was more likely to happen at smaller, more intimate meals:

we have had 1 or 2 more events like that which have been quite small and then at the end of the night they start sharing contact details... and that's amazing! When the events are larger when you have more than 20 people it might happen on one occasion but then usually when it's smaller it's the whole table saying 'oh yes let's keep in touch' (laughs) (I20: 67-76)

While this was observed by the host, it is difficult to see whether these connections were actually re-established or whether the experience of the shared meal encouraged an automatic sharing of contact details. Other interviewees, however,

suggested that they had personally experienced re-connecting with someone they had met at a meal:

Because it's a single table I think it opens it up for more discussion, it's a different environment and makes people come out of their shells a, a bit more, at least in my experience. So I have met people through that that I have kept in touch with (I13: 24-27)

This interviewee suggests that the intimate sharing of a table fostered further interaction and the sharing of contact details and future interactions. An organiser of larger events, however, suggested that, due to the regularity of meals and events and the development of a group of regular attendees, the meals and events had become a large part of their social circle:

I feel that by now, after 6 months, and seeing fairly regularly the same people, I feel they are my friends and this is my social circle now... whether it's actually a meetup or if someone texted me and said 'I'm going to see such and such' (...) if I'm free I would go, cos I know those people well enough to know that I would have a good night out (I19: 185-196)

In this case, although it may not be consistent with other interviewees, the organiser had made strong connections with many of the other attendees and this had led to further socialisation outwith the online mediated meals.

4.3.3.2 'Family-style' dining

A term that came up quite a lot during the discussions regarding how the food was served was 'family-style'. Serving food family-style involves serving food in large platters or dishes and allowing the diners to help themselves and pass the dishes around the table. One host suggested that this encourages a sharing of food and conversation:

it's nice to have that whole sharing, passing things round. It encourages conversation, it encourages people to share (...) the way I do it, is a big part of the experience, instead of having everything, you know, plated... (I2: 77-84)

The idea of sharing and encouraging conversation was identified as an important aspect of serving meals family-style. Another interviewee suggested that it was a big part of meals for them: *"I liked the family-style serving of that event I think it can open it up for more discussion"* (I13: 13). Another host described that the way their food is served gives the diners a sense of ownership and responsibility of the meal as well as fostering the beginning stages of socialisation:

I think it creates a convivial atmosphere, something social, there's something happening there (...) I do, purposefully put it on the table and it's for you to help yourselves. (...) I mean it gets people to talk to each other, doesn't it? 'Can you pass me this, blah blah blah' and it starts something... (18: 267-277)

Serving meals family-style around a communal table was also important. One host displayed their passion for communal dining:

[I] love the idea of communal dining and just thought the two things of socialising and dining just go together really well it's kind of like a great marriage, so we did one and got a fantastic response. That was started off by 8 people at the time and now four years on, well the biggest one that you came to was plus 60 so I think it's still growing I guess... (19: 19-22)

Another interviewee mentioned that there was something quite special about small meals set around a communal table as it feels more familiar and makes communication easier:

there's something quite exciting about big events and it just creates a different kind of atmosphere (...) but it lacks the, I find I just can't talk to people, get to know people, it breaks it down a bit more when it's just a small table and it feels, it feels kind of like family. It puts you almost automatically in this mind-set that you know the others already (113: 31-39)

4.3.3.3 Like-mindedness

Another aspect, often mentioned by the interviewees, was in relation to the kind of people that came to meals and how they would interact and socialise with each other. The meals often put strangers or groups of strangers together. Some interviewees mentioned that, while attendees can be from a range of demographics, they were often socially confident with a willingness to socialise with new people:

certainly the conviviality of it is a part, is what people are looking for in that respect. Some people, I suppose, might treat it as a kind of networking thing, but often you get people from different age groups, different backgrounds so it's a bit of a social mixer and people seem to enjoy that. They are all usually socially confident and socially active people as well. So it kind of works (18: 138-144)

Others suggested that they had not encountered any individuals that they would describe as shy, although, from discussions and comments, some attendees seemed to be trying something different, to push themselves out of their comfort zone and try something new:

I don't think shy people would want to come, meet random people, people they have never met before. Some of them get involved (...) they are taking a step out of their comfort zone, which sounds good to them (...) There seems to be a wide range of age groups, intelligence groups (...) it's a vast range of people, there is no reason why we can't get on, and surprisingly enough they do (I19: 292-299)

This diversity of attendees was often commented on and, it could be suggested, that there is not a certain type of person that attends meals but a range of people who are willing to socialise with others and who share a common interest or goal. One interviewee commented on the range of individuals that attended meals:

*I thought it would all be people who couldn't go out and make friends of their own and you know, pensioners, people in weird circumstances but it really is quite a variety. The last event I was at there was a girl from Greece who lived in Belfast who had flown over for the weekend (...) so you get some people like that, retired people, artists, people whose circumstances have changed maybe through being widowed, divorced, whatever. Lots of travellers, lots of people who are only spending a really short space of time in ***** (I12: 24-32)*

We can see from this comment that there could also be a transient element to OMC - momentary meals in momentary spaces. It may be seen as a social way of meeting people in a certain setting for a short period of time, a way of avoiding the usual tourist traps and normative forms of dining. A range of interviewees mentioned that the communal social situation found in OMC differentiated from restaurant-style dining.

The meal, or sharing of food, was seen as a safe way in which strangers could converse and share interests, ideas and commonalities. One host commented that they believed that the social aspect and meeting people with similar interests was the main reason for attending meals:

most want to socialise with someone, with someone they have something in common with (...) I think other reasons can be just meeting other people, discussing things with random people... trying new products as well... I think they are the main reasons. They are the reasons I would go (...) sharing common interests and discovering products... (I4: 244-250)

It was suggested that individuals, who attend meals of this kind, already share an openness or ability to socialise with others which makes them similar in some sense. Some described an open-mindedness and willingness to take part in something a bit different:

I suppose there's maybe there's this belief that there's already this open-mindedness to experience something a little bit different or that there's this first step that even participating in something like that that you might be more open to, to various aspects of friendship or just being social and, therefore, you come across more trustworthy? I'm not sure... but for me I think there was an aspect of 'well you have made the choice to be here and that actually defines you as somebody a little bit different' (I13: 145-150)

This interviewee also discusses the fact that they have met a wide range of different people and often experienced in-depth, personal conversations about a range of topics. It could be argued that, while OMC can attract a wide range of individuals in terms of age, status, background, nationality and occupation, there is a shared social confidence or social need of the majority of attendees. If there is a common interest, it is that individuals want to take part in these meals. They are willing and have a want for socialising with new people and sharing views, opinions and interests.

4.3.3.4 Social Awkwardness

While the common interest of attending online mediated meals may conjure an image of idealised social interaction among strangers around a table, the interviewees also mentioned some awkwardness that can occur at their meals. Like any form of social interaction, there can often be a case of misunderstanding or differences of opinion or behaviour. There was often a slight awkwardness at the beginning of a meal or when individuals began to arrive. This, however, was often short lived and as soon as conversation picked up, the atmosphere became more relaxed:

I think sometimes there's a bit of awkwardness when people first arrive and they've got to, sort of introduce themselves. That's why the cocktails are quite good cos it kind of relaxes people, gives them something to do, talk about and discuss but after the first 10 minutes always, everyone's mates, and it's fine... (I2: 118-122)

The welcome drink, or in this case cocktail, was commonly used as a way to welcome individuals to a situation, giving them all something in common and at the same level of interaction. Another host, when asked if it was ever awkward when guests arrived for one of their meals, added: '*Not really, I've just done it so many times that it's just like second nature to me*' (I15: 56-57). This was a common understanding amongst many of the hosts that, the more they ran meals, the less awkward it became for them and that this often made the guests more relaxed and less awkward.

Interviewees presented largely positive experiences of hosting meals. When asked about awkward experiences, some of the hosts could only think of one example where the meal had not gone quite to plan or guests had behaved in a way that created an awkward atmosphere or situation. One host described a guest whose behaviour and attitude created a negative atmosphere and did not suit the usual feeling of meals:

he was just this pompous twat and putting out bad vibes and the way he was talking to his wife and stuff, everything was put downs and I just thought, 'you are a fanny!' and my mum was like 'I hate him' (laughs) but what, one guy out of hundreds, you know? (I10: 126-135)

As this host argues, these experiences are minimal and not regular. Similarly, another host remembered the only occasion where a guest's behaviour was not normal or expected which created an awkward feeling to a meal:

one of the women of the couples drank so much (...) she was totally smashed and when she was talking she was slurring, you know, and after coffee, they had had quite a lot of aperitif on top of the wine supply, and quite a lot at the table, and after coffee she asked for another bottle... which she drank all to herself...it was just coming to the point where I was just taking all the glasses away as she was knocking everything off, it wasn't very pleasant (I8: 143-152)

In this case, an excess of alcohol created some tension at a meal and between the guests and host. Alcohol was an issue with another interviewee who was responsible for payment at the end of the evening. In this case, the bill was shared equally at the end of the meal:

when the bill came at the end (...) this person said they didn't have any cash on them and could they pay by credit card, and then they said 'I will pay the whole bill with credit card' and then you can just give me the money', it sounds simple (...) so what I did was, without really thinking, I just gave him all the money and that included the tip as well. So it meant when the bill came it meant they didn't have a tip. And I actually had to send a tip to them later...felt so awful...and it all came out of my own pocket! (laughs) (I18: 131-139)

The unexpected behaviour of guests was often noticed by others as well as the host themselves. In this incident, a couple left a meal before the end and had made no attempt to socialise with the other guests. The host commented that this was again a rare occurrence:

maybe they had never been to a supper club before but there is kind of an unspoken thing that when people come they come knowing that you will chat

and talk with others, I mean there's no rule, you know, people don't have to but the interesting thing to me is that a friend, who was at the other end of the table, did comment that those guests didn't chat to anyone else and this person found that kind of strange and for me, I just want people to have a good time and one of the most interesting and in a way most enjoyable aspects of it is - every time is different, you meet people (I16: 204-210)

As previously noted, these incidents were rare. It was often suggested that there was a common understanding amongst those attending online mediated meals. This common understanding may be that the purpose of the meal is, not just to eat together but also, to socialise with fellow diners and share a unique or different experience with them. This understanding could link to the previous section suggesting a like-mindedness of attendees and thus limiting the amount of social awkwardness among them. One interviewee noted that they had heard of some aspects of exclusion and awkwardness at other meals but had never experienced it themselves:

I have never walked away feeling...like I was isolated or it didn't...I've never had an experience where it just didn't work (I13: 46-53)

4.3.3.5 Social Control

Many of the interviewees mentioned how they wanted to create a social space, a shared experience or a meal that encouraged discussion and interaction. The interviewees mentioned that, by encouraging social interaction, communality and a sense of togetherness at their meals, they were making a clear distinction between their meals and dining at a restaurant. While social interaction does take place at restaurants, it is generally between friends, family, colleagues or associates and rarely between strangers. With OMC, the meals often provided a space or an opportunity to meet new people and socialise around a common bond or interest.

Some interviewees suggested that the social interaction should feel natural and welcoming rather than being engineered or forced. One host expressed the view that, by keeping the event simple and relaxed, the individuals would use the experience to socialise and interact with others:

I think if you over engineer them and you try to make them too much of one thing or another, you strangle the life out of them instantly and you make it too much of a, of a closed shop (...) it's not about endorsing particular things

and all that kind of thing, it's just about offering up the discussion space for the thing to take place, it's got nothing to do with me, or it's got very little to do with me other than, you know, I just prompt people to turn up at a particular time (I17: 176-188)

Others mentioned the excitement they felt when they heard guests, who did not know each other previously, make connections, laugh and start conversations together:

people should be able to be free to do what they want at any level of interaction but it is really nice when you see strangers laughing together. Like when I'm doing the dishes or when I have my back turned and I just listen behind me and people are like chuckling away (...) and you just think 'yes!' that is where the magic happens in a lot of ways (I10: 157-161)

While the last two examples suggest that observing the social aspect of their meals is a source of enjoyment and achievement, it does involve some elements of control and suggestion. Other hosts noted that, while social interactions were often quite natural and free flowing, they occasionally needed to be controlled or subtly suggested with reference to an end point. One interviewee described how they sometimes had to subtly control their meals to remind their guests that there was an end point:

It's only a couple of times people have stayed until midnight, it's just cos they were interacting so nicely that you don't, it's not me to say 'right its 11 o'clock!' So I just let it fizzle out, sometimes I might start putting things away from the table to let them know that it is the end of the meal, but generally people are pretty well behaved with that (laughs) (I8: 156-165)

Another element of social control was in relation to the number of guests present at meals. While many of the meals were restricted to the size of the space available, others were more flexible and it might not be possible to predict the exact numbers before the meal takes place. Interviewees discussed how the number of attendees could affect the social aspect of the meal:

Average I would have said would be about 12 (...) if you get beyond that number, the social interaction is reduced (...) people can't talk to people at the other end of the table. So areas where we can have a stand and a drink at the bar that does help with the mingling, I will help introduce people to one another (...) but the bigger the group, the more difficult that becomes (I19: 111-120)

It is clear that the majority of individuals attending meals are doing so for the social aspect just as much as the food. Similarly, those who are organising them aim to encourage natural social interaction with a suitable number of attendees. If this number gets too many or too few, then this may hamper or affect the value of the social interaction present. This was a common consideration amongst a number of interviewees. One interviewee, who was about to relocate and therefore would not be personally organising meals anymore, described his involvement as a personal achievement:

I feel...as if I had done something I have never done before in my life. So I am very proud of what I have achieved and I think people have been very happy with the way it has worked out. I would be sad, I think, if they just decided it was just too much like hard work, cos I have put in what I considered to be hard work... (I19: 230-240)

The passion and enjoyment of socialising with others was a clear motivation for their involvement and this was a common aspect for many. While making profit, or creating business opportunities was important for some, the social aspect was clearly an essential factor for the success and continued popularity of meals.

4.3.4 Differentiation

Differentiation refers to aspects that make OMC different to restaurant-style dining. Four subthemes have been identified as *Contrast to restaurants* which details some of the key differences; *Themes* which refers to themes that are attributed to meals; *Domestic home* relates to those meals which are held in the domestic home setting; and *Setting* which details how the setting of the meal differentiates them from more traditional settings.

4.3.4.1 Contrast to restaurants

A common understanding of OMC is that it is very different to going to a restaurant. This was an aspect that many of the interviewees shared and that motivated them in their creativity and passion for hosting meals. This made their meals stand apart from a restaurant scene, which many thought, was becoming a mundane and standardised experience. Many of the hosts referred to this differentiation as key to their growing success and continued popularity. One interviewee simply stated: *'There's a*

quirkiness to it that is so unique' (I10: 21-22). Another suggested that their difference to going to a restaurant is really important:

it is so different to a restaurant and offers so many things that a restaurant can't. Obviously there's the social part of it, you know being able to come along and potentially leaving with friends, I think that is a massive pull. Being able to eat 'family style' it's very difficult from a pricing point of view in a restaurant and I think that's very natural for me (I9: 251-254)

The social aspect and the experience of being welcomed to the meal was also noted by some as being quite different to most restaurants. One host mentioned that it is often the combination of food, relaxation and the atmosphere that attract guests to their meals:

it has to be a warm, a relaxing experience and you have to be excited by the food and it has to be this kind of chemistry that makes people think 'mmm this is different' (I10: 103-104)

Another interviewee mentioned they like people to feel 'at home' at their meals and as if they could act or behave as they can in their own homes:

people get a lot more relaxed in a supper club than you do in a restaurant. You know, I have seen people just sit back and you want people to feel at home (...) that's part of the whole hospitality, if people want to take their shoes off, I don't mind, you know, I mean no one has, but if they wanted to sit on the couch, or just whatever, you know...you couldn't do that in a restaurant (I16: 184-191)

Hospitality was discussed by many of the interviewees as being essential to their approach to hosting. Hospitality was often linked to informality and as a relationship between the guest and host rather than more formal experiences: '*We didn't want to be formal about it; we wanted to have a friendly approach*' (I4: 25-26). Similarly, another interviewee described their interaction with guests as 'theatre' and something which is not experienced in the same ways at other dining establishments:

that 'theatre' of supper clubs, that show that we put on for the evening... In a restaurant you can't really do that, it becomes a bit more mundane and you can't really add that hospitality factor, you can give good service but I think hospitality and service are two different things (I9: 250-266)

Many of the hosts suggested that how they serve their guests and the interaction between them was also different to that of working in a restaurant. When discussing the differences, one of the interviewees suggested that, while they believed that

restaurant dining would still remain popular, the option to experience other types of dining experience was important and offered a different business prospect for many:

it is completely different to sitting at a restaurant and I think that type of dining will still be popular...even if people can do both, go to restaurants and come to private dining event and also, you know, from a business perspective, I wouldn't have been able to open up a restaurant but I have been able to open up a supper club (12: 327-336)

4.3.4.2 Themes

Another way, in which interviewees differentiated themselves from restaurants, was by attributing themes to their meals. Themes could relate to the identity and nationality of the host. Some of the interviewees connected their food to their nationality and wanted diners to experience food that was not often found in restaurants in the UK:

I wanted to present French food that is not usually found in French restaurant menus. So very much an emphasis on regional cuisine and less known dishes, if you like, and I have tried to include in that the more exotic side of French cuisine, which a lot of people don't know (18: 52-63)

Themes could change in accordance with the time of year or special events or festivals. This would bring a freshness and originality to their meals at different times, again a reflection of moving away from the standardisation some felt they experienced in restaurants.

Others would use different forms of entertainment to add something extra to their meals. Games, activities, music, workshops were all used as additional aspects to the meal to make them memorable and unique. One of the hosts described their meals as something special which incorporated a range of different activities:

it's a very special event, it's not just a pop up restaurant, it's a pop up night. We try to do it a bit different than other pop-ups, they don't do the music, the raffle (...) I like what we do, trying to make it a bit different (16: 77-84)

Many of those attending, some hosts observed, were experiencing OMC for the first time. Experiencing something new for the first time can be seen by some as daunting or a bit strange but, as some of the hosts suggested, they often embrace it positively and understand that it is not the same as other dining experiences:

its stranger for the guests cos they are just like 'I'm sitting in someone's dining room...it's kind of weird' but on the whole I think people are quite excited about it, kind of buzzed about it and I think people who have heard about it through friends know it must be safe and it's not anything strange (I9: 84-87)

Others suggested that the concept of communal dining with strangers was becoming more acceptable and a popular way of dining out:

people are a bit more accepting of that communal dining, don't really know who they will be sitting next to, etc., etc. so that's not such a scary idea any more but it is more about trying something new (I14: 336-339)

As suggested here, as the concept becomes, in some cases, more normalised, it does still stand out as being different to more traditional forms of dining. Like any experience of hospitality, or otherwise, as soon as it becomes static or seen as mundane or standardised, the appeal and attraction will change and may shift towards other alternatives.

4.3.4.3 Domestic homes

With some of the meals taking place in domestic homes, this added another distinction between some experiences of OMC and restaurant dining. While it may seem strange to some, to provide a meal to strangers in your home, many of the hosts that held meals in their homes felt it was quite natural and added a uniqueness and personality to their meals. One host commented on the initial concerns of hosting at home, at first, but that now it felt more normal and enjoyable:

when I first approached my Mum and said like 'Do you mind if we invite random people over for dinner that we've never met before' and she was like 'No, what's wrong with you?' (laughs) So it was a bit strange (...) my friends were like 'do you really want to do that?' and I was like 'yeah everyone's doing it'. And I think it was a little bit odd at first, a little bit scary but now it is just like second nature cos, you know, touch wood we have never had any weird instances. (...) it's quite an intimate thing, inviting people to have dinner in your home, I think it actually adds to the atmosphere (I9: 34-44)

One interviewee, however, suggested that, as you do not usually know the people you are inviting into your home, you could be vulnerable to negative comments or opinions that may affect the relationship and atmosphere of the meal:

You are maybe opening yourself up to a bit of ridicule as well for people to come it and say 'oh she could do with running a duster round!' (laughs) 'I don't think much of their choice of art' I don't think people do that at the things that I go to, or they don't vocalise it anyway (I12: 290-292)

Similarly, another host mentioned the potential for guests to be nosy or to try and investigate areas of the home that were not open to guests:

the most nosy people get are looking at my book cases, or you know looking around this space [dining room], which is obviously, I make sure that I'm happy for everyone to see what is in this space. I've not had anybody trying to peek inside the bedrooms or anything. It is a bit strange, or was initially to have strangers in your house but it sort of feels like having friends over now (I2: 239-243)

The issue of boundaries in the home was raised by some of the hosts. Some mentioned closing doors that were not for public viewing or explaining, at the outset, where the bathroom is to avoid anyone snooping or getting lost in their homes. The boundaries of the kitchen were also deemed important and as a separate space where guests were not allowed. One host described how they like to keep the kitchen off limits for the guests:

I make it quite clear that the kitchen is a no go area. I have had, a couple of times, people offering to help clear up and I just say 'no its fine thank you'. (...) I prefer people not to come and see the kitchen, it's a working kitchen, you know, full of stuff. It's a small kitchen as well so no room for anyone else so I like to keep it separate... (I8: 181-185)

While hosting a meal at home can have risks or concerns and could potentially be quite intrusive or invasive, generally individuals are well behaved and respectful of their host's personal space. One host recalled the behaviour of guests and how they often retained the fact that they were in someone else's home and despite the social, convivial atmosphere would remain respectful:

they still retain that sense of etiquette, you know 'I'm in someone's house right now' so you don't overstay your welcome when you've just met that person or you've just met that person a couple of times and you are actually in their personal space (I10: 124-126)

Maintaining a 'homely' atmosphere was important to many of the hosts who held meals at personal homes. One host suggested that the homeliness felt at a meal is important in terms of atmosphere as it helps individuals feel comfortable and interact with their surroundings:

it should be quite comfortable, it's a different environment, its homely, I think people have a bit of a, there's a voyeuristic quality about it, seeing in people's houses, seeing what they look like, seeing what their stuff is. I get quite a few

comments about furniture and rusty things in the corner and 'where's, why have you chosen that?' and that sort of stuff (I2: 216-220)

The idea of home could also transcend to what kind of food is prepared in it. One host called their style of cooking as 'home cooking' and how this was an important aspect and attraction of their meals:

that is how we eat all the time at home anyway, you know, processed food doesn't come into this house (...) that is the way I have been brought up, I cook everything from scratch all the time, and it's no particular effort for me (I8: 193-195)

Hosting at home was an important factor for another host who was not able to host meals in their own home. When asked about the venue and its significance for their meals they answered:

most supper clubs that I have been to are in people's houses and they like change their, maybe move furniture into their living room or maybe have a big house or whatever (laughs) We have a lovely open plan flat but it's just not big enough (...) I have some good friends who were encouraging me to do something in food and offered that I could use their house. So it's a big kitchen, big dining room, all in one level with the bathroom so it just seems to work (I16: 48-56)

Although not their own home, this host enjoys the use of a larger homely space where the guests can interact sociably and where the host can prepare and set up everything with ease and without losing the vibrancy and attributes of the home. The concept of home also provides individuals with strong memories of communal dining, shared meals and commensality from a young age. While not all meals observed were held in the home, those that were, did add a uniqueness to them which also distinguished themselves as something different from restaurant dining and the components found within it.

4.3.4.4 Setting

While not all the meals were set in the domestic home, the setting they were held in was important in terms of differentiation. Many of the meals were held in designated spaces of a restaurant or in converted spaces which were adapted especially for the meals on a temporary basis. Whatever the setting, the majority of meals were set around communal tables. One host described how the communal table worked for them in terms of creating a personal touch to meals:

if there were more tables I think you'd lose that kind of personal touch. I like to speak to everybody at once about the food and have their full attention, whereas if there are more than one table then you lose that and then you may as well go and eat in a restaurant (I2: 124-130)

Other hosts were able to be more flexible in using their selected space for meals. Some hosts were able to adapt space to suit the number of diners they could accommodate:

it's really versatile, we move the sofas out and everything when we have big ones. So yeah I'm lucky being in such a versatile space (I15: 26-30)

While the ability to be versatile was possible for some, others were limited to how many individuals they could host at a meal due to the size/space available. This was not, however, seen as a limitation and often became part of the experience e.g. an intimate, family, communal experience. The experience of moving the concept, from a domestic to a more commercial setting, was a concern for many hosts who were organising meals in larger spaces away from the home. Many discussed the suitability of the space they were using and how they wanted it to feel different and appropriate for the intended meal experience. Many were held in spaces that were adapted for the meals to take place. Spaces like church halls, arts studios, community centres, cafés and delicatessens were used to hold meals on arranged evenings. One interviewee described why a particular space was used for meals:

we wanted it to have that kind of retro, cool kind of feel with that recycled crockery, your granny's wedding set kind of thing (...) it had massive windows on 3 side so it was a beautiful light space, it's called the Annex cos it's the Annex to the school, it was the science classroom, Billy Connolly's classroom, well he went to that school anyway (...) So it had that kind of charm that it's been this community centre that's been kind of bashed together (I3: 263-275)

Others chose the space as it had a creative or artistic vibe to it which suited and complemented the identity of the meal being held there. One host described the space that they used for their meals:

It's a ceramics area, (...) The owner is quite a creative person, she loves painting, she loves doing all of this crazy things and when I saw the place I thought 'Yes!', this place has a lot of character and for the type of event we are running, its perfect (I20: 155-166)

When asked about the availability of the space to the host for their evening meals, they added: *'it's closed; it opens till around 5 or 6 in the afternoon'* (I20: 166). This

use of empty spaces was a common observation as a number of interviewees would use spaces that were usually closed or were not running in their usual capacity at the time that the meals would be taking place. For example:

it's a big old barn of a place... (...) it sits there and does nothing on a Monday night, broadly, they wouldn't have it open up there unless we had said. And that's a good fit cos we don't want to take over a place and put it out of business, cos that would be a bad thing (I17: 196-200)

Other interviewees, who held their events in cafés or designated restaurant spaces, would often adapt the space or use specially designed menus and props to significantly differentiate their meal from the usual dining experiences found within that space:

we do quite a lot of design with our menus and space (...) we can't completely change the space but for our beaches theme we have beach towels for table cloths, we've got buckets, plastic sandcastle buckets to hold our cutlery, bits and pieces like that so its subtle but kind of helps to create the atmosphere. (...) Last year we did a festivals theme (...) we had a little CD case as our menu, so yeah we always try to make that a talking point as well, try to make it a bit different and, I mean that gets people talking, they are like 'oh what's this?' (I14: 247-260)

Adapting the space and décor to suit the hosting and desired meal experience also added to making the meals unique, or one-off experiences. One interviewee, who also attended various meals, suggested that the size of the meal and where it was set could provide different experiences:

in a big space, a really big space you just feel kind of overwhelmed by it. Its noisy and (pause) there is an aspect of excitement about it but I just like being in a really cosy, comfortable, even though it's a strange place it just feels really familiar (I13: 59-68)

The different sizes and settings can have positive implications on how the meal is experienced and enjoyed by those attending. The discussion of the setting of meals further strengthens the understanding that it is not just the food or even the social interaction found within OMC, but the way in which the setting or space is used to facilitate the meal experience.

4.3.5 Online mediation

The following theme will detail the use and influence of the online mediation and use of social media within OMC. While online mediation is inherent within this

phenomenon, the experiences and opinions on how online mediation is used will identify how dependent, or not, meals are on it. This theme will also build an understanding on the ease of using social media and how knowledgeable hosts and organisers need to be to best use online technology to their advantage. Three subthemes have been identified as *Online Knowledge, Limitations & Dependency* and *Payment*.

4.3.5.1 Online Knowledge

The majority of interviewees mentioned that having a basic knowledge of social media and website management enabled them to advertise and promote their meals effectively. Due to the fact that many of these meals were set up as additional businesses or a way to experiment with the concept of the meal, many of those interviewed suggested that their basic knowledge enabled them to get things started and to provide a platform where they could present, promote and advertise their meals. One interviewee suggested that setting up a basic webpage alone has helped them run their meals effectively:

Well, I mean I am no great whiz on the IT front. I can work a website, I can rework it and stuff, I don't really want to spend money on a website cos that is not the purpose (...) I hope it presents things clearly and it's easy to navigate, I'm open to suggestions, of course, as to improvements (...) I just don't want to spend money on things like that, for me it's not worth it and because it's not a business, a proper business so I am kind of holding back from that (I8: 93-99)

Another interviewee used their basic knowledge to set up a website and other forms of social media. These channels, in addition to general word of mouth and networks of friends and colleagues, have allowed their meals to grow and sell out:

So up till now I have just done all my own advertising so I have, I made a website which I made myself. I don't know how it is with other supper club people but when it kind of starts off as your own little baby and you just start off and do it all on your own. I learned how to use WordPress and made a website and, you know, its fine, not amazing but it does the job. And then a Facebook page and a Twitter page. So those 3 things and just word of mouth, meeting people, giving cards, friends telling friends, that sort of thing. And with that and not doing any more than that I've been booked out every single time (I16: 24-30)

The majority of those interviewed had set up their own websites and social media outlets based on their own knowledge and understanding. Some mentioned that this

was a valuable way of starting up a new business venture or merely a way of trying out an idea to indicate further success. For a business to grow and develop, however, more attention would need to be paid towards social media developments. The time constraints and efforts to maintain an effective social media presence were also highlighted:

if I got somebody, a young 20 something in, to manage the Facebook profile, manage the Twitter, set me up with a Pinterest, do that, blah di blah then they'd be flying more so than I would. I've just not got the time and my skills have gone rusty, even in four years, cos the landscape of social media changes all the time so that's definitely 'a piece' to give to somebody else, and just say right 'here's your framework, now just fly with it'. But I do my best with the time I've got, I use it to promote events, I use it to post photos which are a great interaction for people, they love it and just wee general bits of chit chat maybe a recipe here and there but really it doesn't get enough attention. It's just the thing that I use to sell the tickets (I10: 204-239)

Others mentioned that setting up social media platforms was easy and invaluable to the advertising and promotion of meals. It was suggested that a basic knowledge and understanding of social media and setting up a website is all you need to get started:

In terms of setting it up, Twitter and Facebook are really easy (...) I paid someone to set up the [website] but now I operate it myself and that's really simple as well so yeah it's all pretty easy. As long as you've got some computer knowledge, some very basic computer knowledge it's fine. (...) I had to get a couple of mates to coach me on Twitter beforehand but it's massively invaluable (I2: 462-470)

Similarly, another interviewee implied that the website design they used was very straightforward and gave further exposure to those who were interested in attending meals:

it's a very easy thing to do (...) very well organised and within a couple of weeks there was 40, 50, 60 members that were signed up with some sort of interest of meeting up midweek which is how the group was set up (I19: 27-30)

Setting up webpages and social media platforms gives meals greater exposure to a wider network of individuals who might be interested. Exposure was mentioned as an important factor for the growth and success of any form of OMC. While social media and websites proved effective, some interviewees mentioned a number of databases that they would sign up to give them more exposure. Databases such as GrubClub, Edible Experiences and Find a Supper Club (see Appendix 6) were

mentioned as effective ways of promoting meals to a wider audience. The majority of those who used them suggested that the extra expense was worthwhile as it gave them greater exposure and also provided an effective link to their own social media outlets and websites.

Another host mentioned how they can use social media if they have a cancellation at short notice:

last night I had two people cancel at short notice and so I sent a tweet, put something on Facebook and sent a newsletter saying 'Right I've got 2 last minute places' (...) And people got back to me straight away saying 'Great we'll have them' and that wouldn't work if there wasn't social media (12: 474-482)

Social media allows an immediate response or connection between hosts and guests before the meal takes place. This form of communication can ensure the relaying of any last minute changes and the ability to double-check details, times or locations. It can also allow the host to advertise any cancelled spaces at their meal - an option which would otherwise not be as instantly available.

4.3.5.2 Limitations & Dependency

While online mediation and the use of social media has a range of benefits, its limitations were mentioned by a number of interviewees. Some suggested that the number of people interacting with social media is not representative of those attending meals. While it may seem that a lot of people are interested, the reality is that only a small number of individuals will actually attend:

I think most people that accessed it through social media never came, they were like 'we really want to come' and were following it (...) But a lot of people were interested and following what was going on. I added tweets and posts on the Tumblr site, not every day but quite often about what we had been doing. So I think a lot of people were aware of it and interested in it even if they didn't come to it (17: 271-283)

Another interviewee, who uses meals as both a social and a networking opportunity, argues that social media only acts as a part of what the meal is trying to achieve:

[On] Twitter you can say something and then just walk away (...) So if you get the people in a room and you do it on a face to face basis...yeah I think you are more likely to get things to stick (...) if you want to get those groups of people together, face to face, things will happen (117: 128-136)

These limitations suggest that while social media and online mediation can act as elements that attract, facilitate and promote OMC, it is not without its frailties. Some of the interviewees mentioned that there was still a place for more traditional forms of marketing. The use of flyers, posters and word of mouth were still used to advertise and promote events:

We do a few flyer drops and posters now and again but that is not a consistent thing and I don't think that brings in a lot of business but its more an awareness (I14: 182-184)

Others suggested that word of mouth was still an important aspect of generating interest and potential attendees especially for new and inexperienced hosts:

a lot of word of mouth, even friends in other countries reaching out to their friends here... a lot. We are tapping into our personal networks since we are not known or professional cooks. We need people who can vouch for the dinner parties we have hosted socially in the past (I21: 32-39)

When individuals hear about meals through word of mouth, their first port of call, if interested, would be to check them out on social media. It could be suggested that this begins a cycle of online/offline sharing. One host discussed the growth of social media during the development of their meals and how this online social sharing really helped:

people are really good about kind of sharing, you can kind of get a bit of a buzz going about certain events (...) I think social media has really exploded over the last 12-18 months, I mean every other person has Twitter now whereas when I first started it wasn't as popular. But it's been, I mean I'm semi-dependent on it now, from a promotional point of view (I9: 99-104)

Although word of mouth is still an important part of promotion, there is a growing dependency on social media and the promotion and exposure found within it. A number of interviewees commented on this and suggested that their events were dependent on social media.

When asked whether these kinds of meals could exist without online mediation or social media, the responses often displayed a dependency on them in terms of growth and success. One suggested that although the concept of sharing meals with others was nothing new, the idea of running them without social media was almost impossible:

I mean I think it's almost, I would say dependent on social media. I...they have existed, the idea of it has existed for a long time but I just (pause) I can't see how it would have spread as efficiently as it has without the media, social media (I13: 241-243)

While most hosts admitted that their meals are dependent on social media, others suggested that the concept could exist without it but that, in terms of success, time management and accessibility, the phenomenon would not have been able to grow in popularity without social media and online mediation:

The beauty of doing it online is the ability to share information so quickly and to a massive amount of people at the same time. If you think about how long it would take me to tell a person, then another person, then another person and to find people who would be interested and free at the same time. I think it would be doable but maybe not as effective or successful (I9: 109-133)

It is evident here that, without its online mediation, OMC would not have experienced the growth and popularity that it has in the past decade. One interviewee noted:

before we started doing social media, there was a website and a newsletter, but obviously now we have more channels (...) we have become much more active, it's like, you know, there's lots of chatter out there on all sorts of things so online is where it is! (I5: 363-368)

The online mediation is a major factor in how meals of this nature have grown. This is not to say that traditional face-to-face networking and word of mouth are not still extremely important in increasing the popularity of awareness of OMC.

4.3.5.3 Payment

Another important aspect of OMC is how guests or attendees pay for the meal they are attending. While some work on a cash donation basis, others involve some kind of online payment being made, either in full or as a deposit, to reserve a place at the meal (See Figure 4.1 & Table 4.3). The decision to use online payment systems had a number of positive and negative impacts for hosts and organisers of meals. Some saw the benefits of using an online payment system as it showed professionalism and made sure all payment aspects were taken care of before the meal took place:

I think from a customer perspective I think it makes it look more legitimate. You've got a company to complain to, it's not just getting a stranger's bank details and thinking 'ok I'm just going to send them some money...will I get it back or am I going to get anything from it?' So it makes it more official, I

suppose and from my perspective it means I'm not running the risk of people not turning up and losing the money and the seats. So it works both ways I think (I2: 490-496)

Using a payment system ensured that guests were less likely to cancel or to not turn up at a meal. One host used a secure payment due to previous bad experiences:

Before we used to ask people just to bring cash on the night but that lead to last minute cancellations, and when you have cooked fresh food for 32 people and you get a cancellation of four last minute, it's too late to get more people and it's a bit waste of food. That's my biggest pet peeve, the wastage of food, it became very expensive actually so that's why I decided to do it online (I9: 124-128)

Last minute cancellations proved a factor for many of the hosts and some introduced online deposit payments to be made for meals, so as the cost of food was covered, even if a last minute cancellation occurred:

people pay a fiver via PayPal and then they get to pay their donation on the day (...) sometimes people leave more than that which is great. Sometimes people leave less than that and you think 'well that was a bit of a scunner!' but that's the risk I take by leaving it open as a bit of a donation thing, sometimes people don't turn up but that fiver has covered their food costs (I10: 222-226)

The use of suggested donations was popular among some hosts as they preferred to receive a cash donation at the end of the night. While this could prove a risk of underpayment, hosts were generally pleased when receiving cash donations:

I have never had a case where no one paid at the end (...) But it's like, I'm not sure as well of the best way, so far its worked out, everyone's paid, I haven't had any cancellations or, you know, lost out in that way (I16: 254-257)

This approach was common amongst those who asked for cash on the night. They had rarely experienced an under payment and on some occasions received more than the suggested donation. Some hosts appreciated that, it could be considered a risk but unless the size or popularity of their events changed significantly, they would not move to using an online payment system. One host suggested that the potential cost of setting up an online payment system put them off:

it's a risk and if this was our only income as a household I would probably do it quite differently. I would need to have set up a PayPal deposit or something like that and there is certainly an advantage to that (...) but my hunch tells me that it would be expensive to add that into the website so it's not necessarily about having a freedom to cancel, although that would help with that but it's

just having the hassle of setting that up. Cos the website just sits on its own, I never touch it apart from putting in up-coming dates...so yeah that's why I haven't done that (I3: 190-201)

As suggested here, the size, frequency and business status of meals may affect whether they use an online payment system. While one host suggested that the use of donations did not suit them as they preferred everything to be taken care of before the meal took place:

I've been to some supper clubs where they hand over an envelope where it says 'The minimum donation is this...' and you feel under pressure to add more and I don't like that personally. I prefer just to say 'This is how much it is', they pay it in advance, I don't have to worry about going 'come on then...' at the end of the night (laughs) (I2: 501-506)

While payment for meals is an important issue, the methods of payment are used in a number of different ways. Online payment is seen as a more professional, fool-proof means of guaranteeing payment for meals and also avoiding any payment at the end of a meal which may seem awkward in terms of social interaction. The cash payment or donation at the end of the meal could, however, lead to underpayment or a pressure on the guest to overpay for their meal. The use of a 'pay cash on the night' rhetoric, however, could lead to guests not turning up to the meal and the host not able to cover their costs and food wastage. The most appropriate means of payment is, therefore, still seen as a slightly awkward interaction and the best way in which to establish payment is still under question.

4.3.6 Managing Commensality

The growing popularity of OMC means that those running meals have had to think how their meals are managed, promoted and priced. The following theme will detail a number of business related aspects that were discussed with interviewees. The following subthemes have been identified; *Finding a gap, Pilot meals, Feedback, Pricing, Team, Business, and Growth.*

4.3.6.1 Finding a gap

Understanding what was missing from the industry or what restaurant-style dining failed to offer its customers, was important for those interested in OMC. Interviewees mentioned that providing something 'different' with the meal concept was important and a good alternative to restaurants. One interviewee commented:

people said 'you should open a restaurant' I can't open a restaurant, I don't have time to open a restaurant plus it's also very expensive. So I started thinking 'why not do an event?' So at that time I was thinking about it I thought I was the brilliant brains behind the idea (laughs) but when I looked into it, a lot of others were already doing it. So I thought 'I can do this with my dishes' (16: 37-42)

While this host was not the brains behind the idea, the concept was still new and offered an alternative to the dining scene. Other examples of identifying gaps mentioned, were on when the meals would take place. This was often seen as a bit of an experiment to see when meals would be most popular. Some chose to run their meals on a Monday night as this was seen as the quietest night of the week where some individuals might be looking for something to do. Also, as one interviewee suggested Monday is often a restaurant's night off:

the reason we do it on Monday night is that theoretically restaurants take the night off on a Monday, that doesn't apply to everywhere but, you know, the traditional night off for restaurants has been a Monday night (117: 164-166)

Other interviewees researched what nights were most/least popular and held their meals on the quieter nights to try and attract more people to their meals:

they don't get many events that are on a Sunday so... it was interesting (...) to roll it out and see how it worked (11: 421-423)

Another host mentioned that they thought about their own behaviour and had made their decisions about when to run their meals on this:

Fridays people might be going out of town or have other plans, maybe less of a restaurant night? Maybe more of a 'go to the pub' and maybe not have an exact plan. Then Mondays are not always a night where people are willing to go out and eat, so when I think about when I usually go out for a meal during the week, the 3 middle days tend to make more sense. But I'm still not 100% sure, it's a kind of learning as you go thing (116: 232-237)

Admittedly, this host also suggested that they were still experimenting with the best option for holding their meals. Once interviewees had established something different about their meal concept that was not found elsewhere, their concept and ideas could begin to take form.

4.3.6.2 Pilot meals

Pilot meals were often used at the early stages to see if the concept and structure of the meal worked. Pilot meals were often organised where friends and colleagues

were invited to experience the interviewees' meals. Pilot meals offered an opportunity to trial a meal with people that were known and trusted to give honest feedback. One host described a pilot meal held in their home:

I had done a mock one in my house just with my friends and then just did loads of sort of feedback after each dish and we would just sit and they would make notes and we would really analyse it...like a researcher...so that was the kind of the, you know, beginning stage (I16: 16-22)

Feedback received from pilot meals would aid in developing the structure of meals as well as getting comments on the food being served. Pilots were also an important way of learning from mistakes. Interviewees mentioned how nerves and over complicating things would affect their hosting and add unnecessary difficulty to meals:

it was pretty nerve wracking and I think in the beginning I made a few mistakes, you know when you are nervous about stuff you end up trying to over compensate for stuff so I would spend loads of money and try and do ridiculous desserts that were really expensive and make things more complicated for myself. As I've gone on I've learnt from every mistake... (I2: 626-631)

Another interviewee mentioned that in the early stages mistakes were made and things went wrong until they were able to develop a model or structure for running their meals:

at the start it was hit and miss, I was trialling, I was trialling the model and as time goes on, don't get me wrong there are still a few mishaps from time to time (...) but it's definitely improved since day one (I10: 46-52)

Developing a model or structure was an important aspect, at the early developmental stages, of running meals and it could often take a number of attempts to get the right balance and meet the guests' expectations. It was common that the hosts continued to learn from every meal and had to adapt and modify the structure and service in situ. It was clear, however, that by holding pilot meals at the beginning stages, they were able to trial, test and experiment with their hosting, service and structure and get valuable feedback from trusted friends and colleagues.

4.3.6.3 Feedback

Feedback was not just needed at the early stages. Due to the informal nature of the meals, most of the feedback was collected through discussion with the guests and

the comments they made about the meals. Comment cards, where guests could comment on their experience anonymously, were also used. One host who used this way of getting feedback said they had never had any negative feedback and that this was reflected in the money left as a donation:

I have to say people have never questioned the amount. I have this little box and people put discreetly what they want in the box, there has never been a remark or comment or anything (...) On two or three occasions people have put more, so that, of course I don't know until they have gone cos I don't look at the box until they have gone, so sometimes I have had a little surprise, a little extra fiver or something (I8: 245-251)

Similarly, another interviewee commented on receiving positive feedback on their meals which was strongly linked to the social aspect of the meal. They described the feedback as:

really positive in general people seemed happy to be around other people and talking to each other, it just was friendly and relaxed, like being in a pub, friendly atmosphere and with things they enjoy - the food and the wine (I4: 108-117)

Other interviewees who received positive feedback discussed how they did not allow it to let them become complacent and were quite critical of their meals, cooking and the hospitality they provided:

so far everybody seems to be delighted, and hugs and kisses when they are leaving and 'oh my god, I need the recipe' (...) but that's probably because my standards are, there is a perfectionism in my standards and I can critique myself reasonably hard but I'm ok with that, I think that's a good thing (I10: 60-63)

Feedback was not always positive, however, and some interviewees mentioned how they dealt with negative feedback and what they might do to rectify negative experiences. One interviewee described how they dealt with a negative comment:

in the 2nd event we had a couple of bloggers who really didn't like it at all (...) The description of the event hasn't changed at all from the first one to the last one we were doing, it hasn't changed at all, however the way they interpreted it wasn't the best way at all and they didn't get to enjoy (...) But I told them 'Look if we have another event, I am going to invite you to come for free and you can see all the changes we have made' (I20: 248-260)

It was unclear if the guests, in this case, took up the offer but the offer to provide a positive experience in the future was an innovative way to strengthen the reputation

and popularity of their meals. While the feedback received was largely positive, it still provided the hosts with an understanding of what they were doing right and what their guests were enjoying about the meals provided. Receiving and acting on feedback is an important way of developing a business or business-minded ventures for future growth and popularity.

4.3.6.4 Pricing

Pricing was another issue that needed to be established at an early stage. Many judged how much they would charge on other meals of this nature that were offering something similar. One host suggested they needed to think about what they were spending on the meal and for them not to be losing out:

It is based on other supper clubs, it's also based on what I am buying in, the ingredients, what I must spend and so on, the quantities...you will notice that I don't plate up my food... I don't portion it up. I just put a dish on that table, like you would if you were in my family and people have a very generous helping of food. So I think, you know, that's the way I kind of price it. I'm not really doing it to make a profit but, you know, it's nice to have a little extra hundred quid or something (18: 233-239)

While profit was not necessarily a motivating factor, it was important not to be out of pocket. This was a common aspect of how the majority of hosts priced their meals and it was clear that they were aware of what other hosts were charging for similar meals. The sourcing of quality produce was important for many as this was integral to how they cooked and presented their food. One host mentioned how they calculate the price of their meals based on what they were buying in:

*I have never really viewed the ***** as a business, especially when we first started cos first of all we buy all our produce, it's all fresh good quality and we buy it all at retail prices we don't go to the kind of green grocer whole sellers, you know, where restaurants would buy in bulk, we don't buy in bulk so we don't get a discount in price there (19: 191-197)*

Covering costs effectively was essential and their meals were not about making a profit. Cost was also an issue for some with regard to how much work they were putting into their meals. One interviewee commented that, while they enjoyed hosting meals, they were frustrated at how much work they had to do to in setting up meals:

It's only been recently that I can manage to get minimum wage for the amount of hours that I do, and that's if I get a good night. Do I really want to keep doing it when it's bloody hard work? For £2 an hour (...) and it takes me about 30 hours to do a curry house, so if I do it once a month, am I willing to do it all for £60 a month? When we don't really need the money and it's a trifling amount? (I3: 353-361)

While the majority of interviewees did not mention issues such as this, it is clear that if they had, that the passion and motivation for running meals would diminish. Similarly, the cost of hiring a venue for a meal can restrict the frequency of when they take place:

Well if you do one pop-up every week, it can work out more expensive than having a restaurant. Because the rent you pay is much more expensive (...) but if you did a pop-up once a month you could make a bit more money out of it, but that's the way it works. But you have to know how you are going to work it out so you don't lose money (I6: 107-111)

As this interviewee clarifies, it is essential that running a meal, in whichever context, does not involve losing money. This can, however, have reductions on how often meals can be held, the number of guests that can be accommodated and the quality of the produce served. While there is a sense that many of the events are organised and hosted in a natural, family-style manner, not necessarily linked to a business mentality, the issue of pricing and cost covering are an important factor for the success and facilitation of OMC.

4.3.6.5 Team

While many of the interviewees started their hosting or organising meals on their own, it was a common understanding that the meals could not be run by just one person. They often involved the help or assistance of at least one other person even if they were behind the scenes. At the smaller meals, the host usually had a helper to make the running of the meal smooth and to help out with serving, clearing and cleaning. Some hosts mentioned using friends to help out:

Basically I only ever have friends, I haven't got to a point where I have needed to hire anyone though at times a KP just doing dishes would be quite useful (laughs) as it's a lot of hours at the end cleaning up. But yeah I have just had friends who have agreed to help me and they get to eat nice food and umm and I just get them a cab home and that's the arrangement and they are happy to do it (I16: 65-71)

Friends that helped out were often given food on the night, paid by a gesture like a cab fare home or in the next example a free ticket to one of the host's meals:

they volunteer, and in return for their help, they get food and drink on the night and they get a ticket for another event. I've got a group of about 6 or 7 people that help me out, they're all friends and I just sort of say 'these are the dates, can anyone do it?' and they say they can and then they will come to another event at some time (I2: 64-68)

Asking friends to help out was often used as it was more cost effective than hiring someone. Also, the hosts knew who they were working with and that they already had a good relationship. Other hosts worked with family members at their meals: 'my husband is my scullery maid in the kitchen, so does all the tidying up' (I8: 183). Another host described working with their partner and how they divided tasks equally so that they were working to their strengths:

my boyfriend comes and helps most of the times (...) We always have someone in charge of the oven as it's quite an operation (...) I am the one more in charge of the social aspect, yes and then Antonia takes care of getting everything sorted out in the kitchen (I20: 38-48)

Other hosts who ran slightly larger meals mentioned that they would hire one or two people to serve or help in the kitchen. While these individuals might not be friends or family, they were known to be responsible and experienced waiters or caterers. This was, however, only mentioned by a small number of interviewees. The majority of the interviewees use a small team of individuals to help them organise meals. The majority use friends, family or like-minded individuals who are interested in running similar meals rather than hiring staff.

4.3.6.6 Business

For some of the interviewees, the idea of running their meals as a main business was evident. While some were happy to run a business related to their meals, others preferred to keep it as a hobby. Some hosts mentioned how their meals had resulted in them running a main business related to food, meals and catering:

I'm self-employed and I do the supper club, I do catering, I do some teaching at a cookery school, I do canapés for wine tasting events (...) so there's, kind of, lots of elements but I like to think that the supper club is my focus (I2: 160-163)

Another suggested that, while they can see a number of benefits to making their meals their main business or source of income, at present, it was not possible:

I'm sure a lot of people might sort of dream about that and it would be wonderful and I have lots of ideas about how I might do that. But yeah, for now I'm just gonna keep going as I am and hopefully it will just grow naturally and the opportunity will come along (116: 278-283)

One issue that some of the interviewees faced was how they dealt with certain legalities related to business, earnings and hygiene. This often affected online mediated meals that took place or were prepared in the private home more than larger events that took place in larger hospitality establishments. One host detailed how they had dealt with these issues and what steps they had been through:

With my own [supper club] I'm registered with the council and I'm registered with Food Hygiene so they can come and check my kitchen in the same way they can in a restaurant. So food hygiene-wise that's covered by that. And business legality-wise because I'm self-employed and because I don't pay staff, then I can still remain self-employed and register myself as a business. If I did start to employ people that would make it much more complicated (...) I have had legal advice, this, what I'm doing now is totally legitimate (12: 344-354)

Other interviewees, who did not run events as regularly, had also had to register their kitchen with Hygiene Standards to deem it appropriate as a catering facility. One host, who had been through the process, discussed what this entailed:

I got in touch with the food standards hygiene office and said 'I'm thinking of doing this...what do I need to do?' and they said they would have to come and see the kitchen and ask me a bunch of questions... (...) so they came out had a look at my kitchen, it's a fairly new kitchen so they were relatively happy but they said things like 'you have to make sure your dishwasher is set to the highest temperature' and there has to be ventilation so there always has to be a window open but with a fly screen on it (13: 546-563)

Others suggested that, if this was needed for them to be able to host meals, then it would see an end to their involvement in OMC:

I mean my worst nightmare would be to have the tax inspector booking in and having a nosey around but I know if I did declare it, if I did want to have it as a business, I would have to have a brand new kitchen. But I don't want to go into it really, if I have to stop I will just stop. But I must say that I am a house wife 'my kitchen is clean' (laughs) and obviously I am very careful with things as much as I can be (18: 350-354)

18's opinion on legal issues, relating to running online mediated meals from their home, was common amongst those who were not thinking of making it their main business or running meals more frequently. The legal issues may be seen as a paradox to the style of hospitality being provided and could lead to the experiences of OMC becoming more in line with the experiences, of both the host and guest, of restaurant-style dining. The difference between OMC and restaurant-style dining was further epitomised by another interviewee who was running meals as a main source of income:

I started cos I love home design and entertaining I guess, and cooking and it's all sort of evolved into like a permanent business but I don't think that the sort of proper, proper restaurant business is sort of sustainable as a full time job because...you, it gets a bit saturated (...) you know it needs to constantly stay fresh and exciting whereas if you just like carry on and do them too often then it kind of lacks its buzz... which I think is kind of very key to the nature of popups (...) I definitely find that if I don't do one for ages and then I put one online it sells out like really quickly whereas if I was doing them all the time they can lose their buzz a bit (I15: 11-17)

The host's passion for providing hospitality and cooking meals for others had become their main business. This example further suggests how the phenomenon differs from that of restaurants and traditional forms of dining out. The interviewee suggested that, in order for meals of this nature to remain popular, they need to continue to be original, creative and innovative. This sense of innovation in creating experiences of commensality and, therefore, hospitality suggests that the entrepreneurial spirit of those providing OMC differs from those within the restaurant industry.

4.3.6.7 Growth

The growth of the OMC scene has also led to a number of the hosts beginning to think of their meals as more of a business rather than just a hobby or a part time venture. Some mentioned that the popularity of their meals had made them more passionate about continuing and adapting their meals in the future. Many of the interviewees mentioned exploring further opportunities linked to their online mediated meals. It was suggested that the online mediation allowed the opportunity to diversify their outputs and develop other products and services. Some interviewees discussed that, from the success of their online mediated meals, they had been approached by individuals and asked to do private catering jobs:

Well at the moment I do them like once every 3 weeks just because the private, my private bookings are increasing so the popups are just a means for me to showcase what I do (I15: 19-20)

Other opportunities encountered would also promote online mediated meals and vice versa. This kind of promotion was often seen as an important way of increasing business opportunities and could also lead to collaborations with others with similar catering experiences. Some interviewees were also experiencing diversification by selling homemade products that were part of what was offered at their meals:

we want to diversify in terms of selling our unique masalas in a jar...that's a possibility. Some other websites have approached us, for conducting classes, this seems like a good idea too (I21: 94-102)

It is clear that the online mediation of business offers a range of other opportunities and a means to which individuals can get their name shared among a range of different networks. This interviewee suggested how their work had diversified since the success of their meals:

I've been food writing for a few years now and I have got a lot of recipes online (...) I like to keep it as open as possible, so yeah, I think more events, more cookery classes, more food writing, I don't really have a business plan per se I just want to pursue doing things that I love to do and as long as people are receptive to what I'm doing I'm going to try and keep it at that level I think. My dream of opening a brick and mortar restaurant I think that's not really for me anymore (I9: 238-246)

While this hosts admits to not having a structured business plan, their involvement in a range of different and diverse aspects shows a business-minded attitude and potential for business growth. In this case, the range of opportunities found through OMC had changed their opinion of opening a traditional restaurant. This was a common feeling among interviewees as they saw more benefits in terms of cost, flexibility and opportunities to experience diversity from their meals.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter has presented the findings of both stages of research material collection. The findings are guided by their respective thematic frameworks which advances an understanding and development of what is taking place within the phenomenon of OMC. In the next chapter, the findings will be further explored, discussed and contextualised with regard to academic theory and relevant literature. The following chapter, Chapter 5 – Discussion, will bring further clarity to what is taking place within the OMC phenomenon and make interpretations of how this is impacting on hospitality provision, social interaction and society as a whole.

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to elaborate on the findings of the previous chapter. The combined findings of both Stage 1 (Autoethnographic Participant Observation) and Stage 2 (Discussion-style Interviews) generate a deeper understanding of the OMC phenomenon and its place within contemporary hospitality provision. The aim here is to discuss the findings in relation to relevant theory and academic literature sources. The combined synthesis of findings and theory aims to bring further clarity to the phenomenon under study in terms of knowledge creation, future development and the societal impacts of an under-researched phenomenon.

5.2 Structure

This chapter is written in six key sections. The sections aim to develop an understanding of the phenomenon adding further clarity and interpretation with reference to literature. First, ***OMC: Types and Attractions*** acts as an extension of the previous chapter (Chapter 4 – Findings) and places OMC as a form of network hospitality. Three types of OMC are discussed along with the key attractions of the phenomenon. The purpose of this section is to give further contextual understanding of OMC as a phenomenon and act as a prelude to the sections of this chapter that follow.

Commensality: the conceptual make-up of OMC, focuses on the experiences of commensality within OMC. Three components are identified as *sociability*, *identity* and *the meal*, all of which are necessary and identified within the findings as being inseparable to experiences. Each component is discussed separately while their inseparability within the concept of commensality is clear. A new typology of OMC is identified and added to the literature of commensality typologies.

Hospitality: Social Conditions, discusses the social conditions of hospitality identified within the findings. Building on Derrida's intrinsic perspectives of conditional/unconditional hospitality, the discussion argues that a number of social practices are conditions, or even expectations, of individuals' involvement in the

phenomenon. The nature of these social conditions, however, feel or have a regard for the unconditional which strengthens the argument that, while hospitality needs to have conditions or laws, its essence is pure or unconditional.

While the first sections of this chapter are closely associated with the structure of the literature review, *Home-food: a conceptual gaze*, begins to delve deeper into the broader conceptual gaze identified within the findings. The concept of Home-food, it is argued, is related to values, skills, sociability, setting and identities that are identified in the findings and associated to 'doing' hospitality differently. Within this section, a Home-food Economy is identified by building on a number of factors relating to the aforementioned alternative economy. Concepts of Otherness and Performance are also identified as being key within this alternative economy. The Home-food Economy and the previous sections of the discussion lead to **A framework for OMC** depicting what is taking place within the phenomenon and how each piece interlinks with the other. The framework identifies a central point described as “‘moments’ of hospitality, ‘throwntogetherness’” (Bell, 2012). It is this aspect that will be discussed in the final section of this chapter.

Social Interaction Capital, builds on the previously mentioned 'moments' and argues that it is the social interaction, within the experiences of OMC, which act as an unconscious, intangible form of capital which individuals take with them, elaborate and take influence from in further experiences of OMC, or other forms of (network) hospitality and social interactions. The discussion here, draws on literature on social capital, culinary capital, networked individualism and discusses the influence that these temporary, transient or momentary social interactions have on individuals experiencing them. The nature of these social interactions are placed within a contemporary (liquid) society which, it is argued, are fleeting, socially fluid and moving with, rather than away from, a rapidly changing world.

5.3 OMC: Types and Attractions

The first section of this chapter acts as an extension of the previous chapter (Chapter 4 – Findings). This section places OMC as a form of network hospitality and gives details of the three types of OMC identified in the findings. The sections then bring together the key attractions to the OMC phenomenon with reference to reviewed literature. The purpose of this section is to give further contextual understanding of OMC as a phenomenon and act as a prelude to the sections of this chapter that follow.

5.3.1 OMC as Network Hospitality

OMC is identified as a form of network hospitality (Germann Molz, 2007, 2012a, 2012b). Network hospitality provides opportunities for hospitality among like-minded individuals and came into prominence at the beginning of the twenty-first century due to advances in online technology. The hospitality provided varies in terms of type, setting and price but has an expectation of social and cultural exchanges. Whether charging a fee or separately pricing the hospitality provided, network hospitality is seen as a social, unique experience that is often less expensive than more traditional forms of hospitality provision while offering additional attractions and experiences. Initial examples of network hospitality focused on accommodation and, more specifically, sharing the domestic home (Couchsurfing, Airbnb). An interest in dining and shared meals gathered and sites such as findasupperclub.com, eatwith.com and grubclub.com grew in popularity. The popularity of these sites, as well as more informal networks, signified the growth of the phenomenon of OMC where the focus of network hospitality changed from accommodation to the shared experience of the meal.

Authors such as Paula Bialski and Jennie Germann Molz have discussed network hospitality through their research and, while focusing on accommodation, their definitions and interpretations fit those found within the research on OMC. Bialski (2011) suggests, network hospitality encourages new rules, expectations and interactions among strangers. It is this form of sociality that Germann Molz (2012b) argues, demonstrates a distinct difference and alternative to purely commercial and

often impersonal experiences of hospitality. While Germann Molz and Bilaisk offer much in the emergence of network hospitality and the changing interactions and organisation of contemporary hospitality provision, their work is limited in that it relates mainly to the interactions of Couchsurfing. While research on Couchsurfing has influenced the discussion of network hospitality, further innovation and advances in online mediation have pushed the argument further. A more commercial approach has, therefore, been attributed to network hospitality (Ikkala & Lampinen, 2015). The findings of this thesis demonstrate how OMC offers individuals 'different' experiences of hospitality and the meal which are fundamentally social, interactive and alternative to the mainstream. The differences identified in terms of commercial/non-commercial and how experiences of OMC are organised are discussed in the following paragraphs.

5.3.2 Online Mediation

The way in which OMC is structured and organised differs to more traditional forms of dining out (restaurants, cafes, bars, etc.). Its key difference is that, without its online mediation, the phenomenon would not exist in its current state. With a growing understanding, knowledge and use of online technologies, individuals generally source areas of interest online. OMC, therefore, as a phenomenon is able to promote itself through a number of social media and online outlets for best exposure and visibility. The ease and cost-effective manner of social media outlets also provides an opportunity, for those organising meals, to develop a route to best expose themselves to those interested. In some cases, the online mediation of commensality is used to promote, advertise and have a strong online presence, whereas others use a basic Facebook or Twitter page which only provides basic information on their meals. Findings identify that OMC is dependent on social media and its online mediation which, in turn, develops an alternative and growing approach to hospitality provision. This dependency strengthens Jenkins' (2006: 137) argument that the internet and its development is pushing an alternative or "*hidden layer of cultural activity to the foreground*". OMC, therefore, represents a growing form of hospitality provision which is creating new business and social opportunities.

5.3.3 Three types of OMC

In terms of organisation, three types of OMC have been identified: Pop-ups, Supper Clubs and Meetups (Figure 5.1). All three types share the key components that fit within my definition of OMC: *'social events structured around the meal that are organised online to attract interested individuals or groups'*. They do, however, differ in how they are organised, managed and run. All three are set as social dining events but some are seen as more commercial and place more importance on their online mediation than others. The following descriptions of the three types of OMC aim to further place them in terms of their commercial/non-commercial elements.

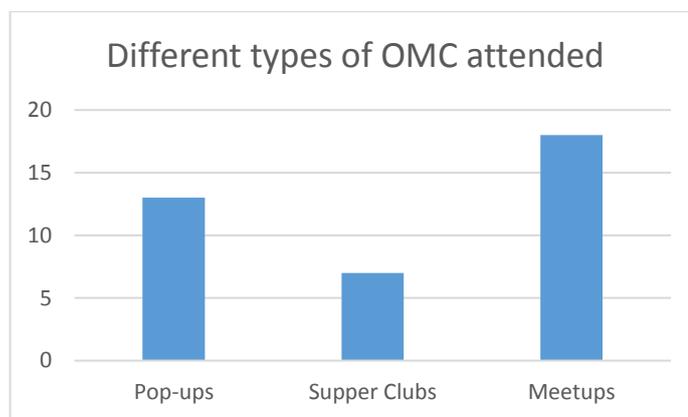


Figure 5.1: Different types of OMC

5.3.3.1 Pop-ups

Pop-ups are identified as being most commercial and most business-like in their management. While the end product is still the shared experience of the meal, the motivations behind pop-ups are more centred on promoting the host/organiser's food, produce or other businesses (restaurants, cafés, catering, etc.). This is not true on all occasions, but as a rule, pop-ups seem to have more of a business-centred approach to their meals, are more regular and cater for a larger number of diners. Pop-ups are also more likely to use secure online pre-payment systems rather than cash/donation payments (Figure 5.2).

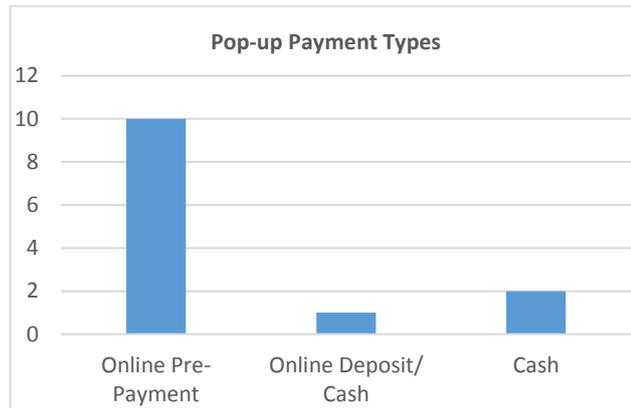


Figure 5.2: Pop-up Payment Types

5.3.3.2 Supper Clubs

Supper Clubs also have links to business or additional incomes but this is balanced with a social, more family orientated approach to their meals. Although they are selling a product, the family, intimate, flexible feel offers a less business-like experience of the meal. The number of diners are smaller (6-12) and all the Supper Clubs attended take place in the private home of the host. Some Supper Clubs use secure payment systems while others rely on cash payments or suggested donations at the end of the meal (Figure 5.3). Supper Clubs are not as regular as Pop-ups and on average take place once a month.

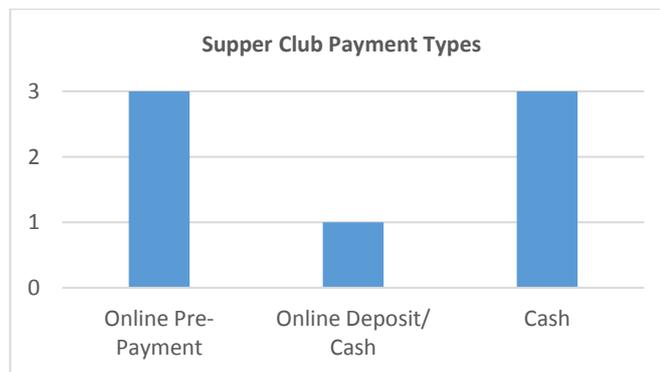


Figure 5.3: Supper Club Payment Types

5.3.3.3 Meetups

Meetups are organised as social meals where individuals can 'meet up' with others. They are run by an organiser or small group of organisers at different venues. The money for food and drink (if necessary), however, is paid directly to the venue rather than to the organisers. Payment is taken using a range of payment types (Figure 5.4). The experience of Meetups is more like going out for dinner with friends or family

members than attending a special event meal. While money does, inevitably, change hands, the organiser of the Meetup is not benefiting in terms of economic profit and, therefore, Meetups are viewed as being non-commercial in terms of their organisation.

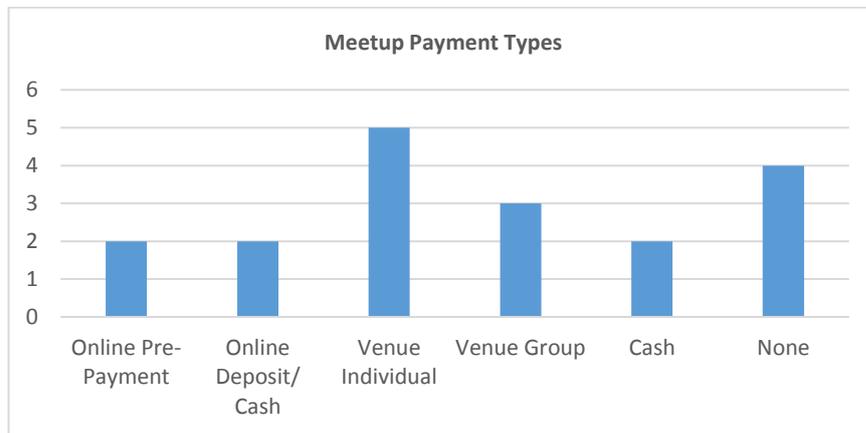


Figure 5.4: Meetup Payment Types

Figure 5.5 illustrates the organisational stages of the three types of OMC. Pop-ups are suggested as being the most advanced in terms of being business-centred and, therefore, have less stages and more structure. Some Supper Clubs use a similar organisational process while others are less structured and more informal in terms of payment and attendance. Meetups have a looser structure and are more likely to fluctuate in terms of attendance. Payment, in the case of Meetups, however, are made directly to the venue so the organiser is at no risk of losing money.

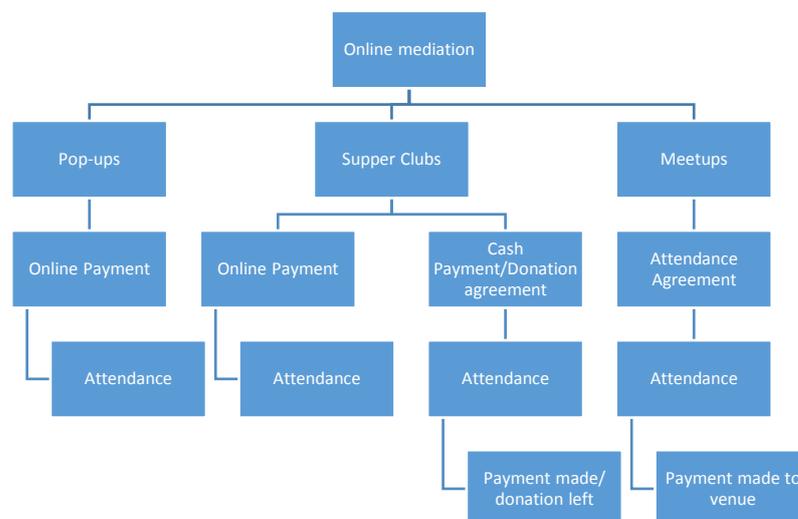


Figure 5.5: Structure of OMC types

The online mediation and stages of organisation allow hosts or organisers to organise their meals in their preferred manner. Those who choose to run their meals, using online payments, are able to host meals in the security that the money has been paid in advance. This system decreases the risk of losing money and/or food wastage. This approach also means that no payments are needed at the end of the meal. This reduces the commercial feel of the event at the time of the meal. Those choosing to take cash payments, or donations on the night, run the risk of being underpaid or losing payment. As identified in the findings, however, this was a rarity and a trusting relationship was held between the guest and host. While these hosts may run a risk of underpayment, the nature of hospitality and personal interaction with their guests encourages a different relationship. Germann Molz (2013) and Bialski (2011) both acknowledge the issues of trust and argue that network hospitality can foster encounters of trust, closeness and intimacy as well as the opportunity for mutual learning from experiences.

5.3.4 Commercial/non-commercial approaches to OMC

Figure 5.6 suggests where the three types of OMC are placed in regards to their commercial/non-commercial approach.



Figure 5.6: Commercial/Non-commercial continuum

I suggest that Pop-ups are at the commercially orientated end of the scale, with Meetups at the non-commercial, more socially orientated end. Supper Clubs are placed in the middle of this continuum, presenting a balance of commercial and non-commercial/social approaches to their meals. While the three types differ in some ways regarding their organisation, online mediation and payment, their similarities in terms of the experience of commensality are still present. Their shared characteristics and use of online mediation help place the phenomenon of OMC as something alternative and different to more traditional forms of dining. The above

discussion also points out different ways in which network hospitality can be organised, structured and paid for. Although OMC is described as the phenomenon at the heart of this thesis, its differences and types are identified as they provide different ways in which OMC is present within contemporary hospitality provision.

I argue that the different types of OMC continue to blur the domains of hospitality from a social, private and commercial perspective (Lashley, 2000). While it would be convenient to place each type of OMC into its own domain, the reality is that they blend into each other with their characteristics showing in each domain. While OMC presents differences to previously researched forms of network hospitality, there are some key similarities. Germann Molz (2012b) argues that network hospitality is changing, from traditional venues of hospitality provision, to more alternative venues that add a uniqueness to experiences of OMC. Similarly, the social interaction present in OMC is different to other forms of hospitality provision as it is more personal, dynamic and convivial (Germann Molz, 2012b). Another similarity between OMC and other forms of network hospitality is that they develop their own rules of engagement which are, again, alternative to the mainstream (Bialski & Bartoski, 2010). OMC also provides opportunities for individuals to organise meals and experiences for others while achieving a desire for either company, enjoyment and the demonstration of skills or talents (Telfer, 2000). As some of Telfer's (2000) desires for being hospitable suggest, providing hospitality is not purely economically driven but can encompass a range of tangible and intangible benefits which can be achieved on a conscious or sub-conscious level.

5.3.5 Attractions to OMC.

The previous paragraphs have begun to associate some of the attractions of OMC from a host/organiser's perspective. The following section will draw on the attractions of OMC from a broader (host/organiser and guest) perspective as identified in the findings.

Figure 5.7 displays some of the main attractions to OMC as detailed in the findings.

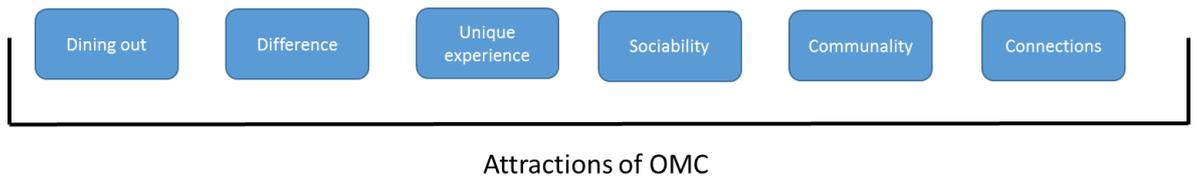


Figure 5.7: Attraction of OMC

5.3.5.1 Dining out

Dining out relates to a growing ‘foodie’ culture in the UK today. Foodies, as suggested by Cairns, Johnston & Bauman (2012), are those individuals with a passion for food, dining out and learning about new food and cultures. Rodgers (2011) further states, from a host’s perspective, that the experiences of OMC need to be different in order to stand out:

“Remember: you are not a proper restaurant; you don’t have to pretend to be one. At first you will probably try to ape a restaurant – after all, this is the model that we know, but afterwards, as you gain confidence, tear up the rulebook!” (Rodgers, 2011: 59)

Schofield (2015) also suggests that OMC provides individuals with a more authentic meal experience which is said to be a unique or novelty experience from most other forms of dining out. I argue that while ‘foodie’ was not a term used specifically within OMC, the phenomenon does represent a growing awareness and engagement with alternative food experiences that differ from the traditional restaurant or café experience.

5.3.5.2 Difference

The difference between OMC and more traditional forms of dining was often cited as being a key motivating factor. Table 5.1 details some of the characteristics of OMC and how they differ from more traditional forms of dining out.

| Characteristic | Online Mediated Commensality | Traditional forms of dining out |
|----------------|------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Seating Style | Communal | Segregated, separate |
| Interactions | Shared/social interaction | Individualised/ social restriction |
| Service | Shared service | Restaurant service |
| Timing (start) | Set start time | Seating times |
| Timing (end) | Suggested end time | Discretionary |
| Menu | Set menu | Choice of menu |
| Setting | Unique setting | Traditional setting |
| Drinks | BYOB/Welcome drink | Bar service |
| Formality | Informal | (more) Formal |

Table 5.1: Characteristics of OMC and traditional forms of dining.

The search for dining experiences that differ, or are alternatives to the mainstream, therefore, supports Vasquez & Chik's (2015) view. They suggest that food and food related activities are being discussed, accessed and experienced online, using online technologies and social media and leading to an offline, social experience. Willis (2014) also argues that social media spreads the word of alternative dining experiences and encourages interest and attraction to OMC. Overall, the informal approach often experienced within OMC is another attraction and differentiating feature. I suggest that informality is important in encouraging social interaction around the table and that this differs from many formal, etiquette driven experiences that can be found in traditional restaurants and eating establishments.

5.3.5.3 Unique experiences

Another notable difference between OMC and traditional forms of dining is the setting. Many examples of OMC use unique settings to host meals. These can range from personal homes, church halls, arts studios and office buildings to more traditional spaces such as cafes, delicatessens and restaurants. While the latter may seem quite normal venues to host a meal, OMC often takes place at times when the venue was not being used in its normal format or where the space was altered to host OMC rather than the venue's usual state of hospitality provision. The difference or alteration of the setting is important in making OMC feel more of a special occasion or event and, again, added to the social aspects which were seen as an attraction to

OMC. Linking the setting to the aforementioned start/end times and set menu also differentiated OMC from more traditional forms of dining out.

5.3.5.4 Sociability

The social aspect was mentioned heavily in the findings as being a key attraction of OMC. Themes of communality, social interaction, connections and social motives are presented as features that are present in OMC and, in contrast, to more traditional forms of dining out. The social perspective found within OMC relates to a more flexible, less formal aspect of dining that moves beyond formal and etiquette driven associations with dining (Danesi 2011b). Aspects such as the communal table, interaction around the meal and ease of conversation and making connections, strengthen Fishler (2011) and Danesi's (2012a) understanding that individuals generally prefer to eat in company and express themselves in the comfort, and often, intimate atmosphere found within the shared meal and, therefore, experiences of OMC.

5.3.5.5 Communality

When dining at a restaurant, the timing of when you start and end your meal is at the discretion of the customer. OMC, however, is structured around a start and, often, suggested end time which is stipulated by the host/provider. The lack of choice and structured timing strengthens the social aspects of OMC. In terms of timing, diners arrive at the same time, start the meal at the same time and experience the meal together, thus creating a sense of togetherness and communality to the meal. This strengthens Lashley's (2000) discussion of the importance of shared experiences of hospitality and the creation of social bonds, while Germann Molz (2012b) mentions the motivation of experiences of network hospitality as being an increased togetherness and emotional intensity with strangers.

5.3.5.6 Connections

Similarly, as the diners are experiencing the same food, they are able to build on similar connections which, as detailed in the findings, often lead to further connections being made, discussed and elaborated on. Experiences, therefore, foster a social experience where connections can be made to other individuals attracted to the phenomenon. Individuals share an experience, welcome each other, find

common ground and begin to interact (Smillie, 2009). The novelty factor of OMC becomes a conversation starter, in itself, and the social experiences and connections made supports, what Tep (2008) suggests, moves beyond traditional ties of friends and family to interaction with strangers. The shared social experiences of OMC allow individuals to socialise, converse and feel connected with one another. As Rodgers (2011) argues, the social experiences of the shared meal create memories, milestones and stories that are retold to others.

While attraction to network hospitality has been previously discussed and researched, the attractions of OMC adds further clarification on the phenomenon. The focus of OMC is the act of commensality and the embodied experience of the meal. The social and communal experiences found in OMC are stronger and more intense than other forms of network hospitality where interactions may be more fleeting and less socially constructed. Figure 5.7 displays the main attractions of OMC as detailed in the findings. The following sections will expand on these attractions with reference to commensality, its construction and conceptual makeup and then to hospitality in terms of its conditions and theoretical underpinning. Both of these further demonstrate how OMC differs from more traditional forms of dining and its place within contemporary hospitality provision.

5.4 Commensality: the conceptual make-up of OMC

The findings demonstrate a deeper understanding of the meaning, use and construction of the concept of commensality. In this section, 3 components of commensality are identified; *sociability*, *identity*, and *the meal*. Each component is discussed separately while their inseparability from the concept of commensality is evidently clear. The discussion of the components of commensality builds a deeper understanding of what is taking place within the phenomenon and why it is seen as an attractive alternative to the dining scene. A new typology of the commensality found within OMC is also identified with reference to typologies previously identified by Grignon (2001).

5.4.1 Sociability

OMC is a social phenomenon. It is not just the food that is shared but is also the sharing of a social experience which, it is argued, is inherent to the act of commensality. Sociability is argued as being a key component of commensality within the literature. Fischler (2011) suggests that the social component of commensality helps to strengthen social interaction, create bonds and intimacies among those eating together. Danesi (2012a, 2012b) and Lashley et al (2004) further discuss the pleasures found while eating with others with links to belonging, social cohesion and socio/emotional sharing. The social aspect of the meal leads to what Lashley et al (2004) call a 'social group comfort zone' encouraging a time where individuals can relax, express themselves and connect over the common bond of the meal. While the literature often refers to commensality as taking place among pre-existing groups, the interaction found within OMC is often between strangers.

The social component of OMC, therefore, differs from other experiences of commensality in a number of ways. When experiencing meals (in a more traditional sense), individuals usually come as a pre-existing group, a couple, a group of friends, a family, work colleagues or acquaintances. What occurs within OMC, however, is somewhat different as while individuals may attend with partners, friends or family

members, they will then be put into a social situation with others – non-kin, non-familiars or strangers. Often set around one, or a number of, communal tables, OMC provides a more social, participatory, shared experience of the meal. The experience of communality, rather than the segregated, separate tables at most restaurants, encourages social interaction with strangers on a number of levels. From my experiences, the social interaction within OMC results in conversations/interactions with others outwith any familiar pre-existing groups.

The strength of the social relations, found within OMC, means that meals are often likened to ‘sharing a meal with friends’, or ‘like a family’ and the shared experience of passing plates and dishes of food around the table is often referred to as ‘family style’. The demographics of those attending online mediated meals, although quite varied, shows a strong leaning towards individuals in their 30s-40s. A reason for this demographic majority is the potential change in societal make-up of the lives and experiences of a generation. Arvidsson et al (2008) suggest an attraction of the exchanges, found within OMC, is to those living individualised life-styles in a fast paced society where the traditional family unit is not as much of an expectation or where careers, city dwelling or economies govern lifestyles. As a result, it is argued, the meal has lost its status as a time for the family, where everyone gets together at the end of a working day to share food, stories and time together (Fulkerson et al, 2006). Instead, the meal may be seen as a necessity rather than a pleasure and it often takes place at the same time as other activities (e.g. watching television, working at a desk) (Holm, 2001; Archambeault, 2013). Similarly, OMC also provides the shared meal opportunity for those who have, for one reason or another, experienced changes in their lifestyles (separation, relocation, children leaving home). It is suggested that this could mean that their family or social unit has changed and potentially left a gap where the meal and/or opportunity for social interaction is limited. I argue that OMC, therefore, provides an opportunity for the communal meal for those who do not have it in their everyday lives as well as an opportunity for individuals to recreate or reconfigure the social groupings that can be experienced or created around the shared meal.

The use of the space, in which the meals are set, often heightens the social aspect of OMC. More often than not, meals are hosted on communal tables where segregation of diners is not encouraged or designed. The use of a communal dining table acts as a symbolic link to home, togetherness and is representative of the individuals who sit around it (Visser, 1991). Communal tables afford a space where diners may interact with one another, share opinions on what they are eating and even pass plates of food, or bottles of wine/water around the table. Conversation seems to flow more naturally around a communal table and interactions with strangers seem safer as the common bond of the meal brings individuals together. The social space is initially created by the host/organiser and often embodies the social behaviour of their guests. The social behaviour of the guests is not constrained but encoded in the setting of the host and their interactions, idiosyncrasies or subtle instructions. Guests soon find common ground in, either what they are eating experiencing or in similarities/differences that they pick up on through initial conversation. The communal setting aims to alleviate many of the constraints present with restaurant dining (e.g. formality, ordering, waiter service, servility). The communal table, again, makes social interaction and conversation more natural.

5.4.2 Identity

Identity is a key component to understanding the concept of commensality. The identities of those taking part in OMC, from both guest and host perspectives, build an understanding of why, and in what way, individuals participate in the phenomenon. Walker (2012) suggests that food and the meal are replete with meaning linked to belonging, memory, personalities and values. Danesi (2012a) further argues that identities are celebrated through shared meals and that those interested and participating in them share an understanding of how to act, behave and interact with one another. Selwyn (2000) describes an understanding of behaviour around the meal, as a moral code or universe, which should be shared in order that exchanges of hospitality take place. Sharing a moral code, understanding or behaviour around the shared meal is necessary in terms of inclusion within OMC. Those who do not share a moral code with their fellow diners may be exuded, consciously or not, from the meal and interaction around it.

Experiences of friction and exclusion are rare within this research project. Occasionally, I noticed that some individuals could be temporarily excluded while they negotiated what the shared understanding or appropriate behaviour of the meal is (Table 5.2).

| Rare examples of social exclusion |
|--|
| As we talked, I noticed that the two girls sitting next to Nick got up and made their way to the kitchen door and I soon saw them walking up the stairs and it seems they had left. This created a big gap in the middle of the table at either side. When Shelly returned to her seat, she commented on the two girls leaving. 'That's strange' she said, 'they left before the end of the meal and they didn't interact with anyone, I tried to speak to them at the beginning but they just turned in to each other and talked to themselves.' (M27: 189-195) |
| Angie started up the conversation again with a similarly abrupt question as before. 'You're 60 as well, aren't you?' she asked Helen. Helen looked up from her meal and said 'No'. 'You don't look 60 at all' Orla added, surprised at Angie's question. 'That's because I'm not, I'm 52...and quite upset' (M32: 166-174) |
| he was just this pompous twat and putting out bad vibes and the way he was talking to his wife and stuff, everything was put downs and I just thought, 'you are a fanny!' and my mum was like 'I hate him' (laughs) but what, one guy out of hundreds, you know? (I10: 126-135) |
| one of the women of the couples drank so much (...) she was totally smashed and when she was talking she was slurring, you know, and after coffee, they had had quite a lot of aperitif on top of the wine supply, and quite a lot at the table, and after coffee she asked for another bottle... which she drank all to herself...it was just coming to the point where I was just taking all the glasses away as she was knocking everything off, it wasn't very pleasant (I8: 143-152) |

Table 5.2: Rare examples of social exclusion

The attraction of OMC largely suggests a moral code of the shared meal, social interaction and experience of others. The rarity and temporary experiences of exclusion demonstrates that those, not sharing a similar understanding, would not be interested in attending such meals. I suggest, therefore, that while the phenomenon of OMC is inclusive and welcoming of those who share a similar moral code or understanding, it excludes those who do not.

The sharing of a moral code or understanding allows individuals to interact with each other and share identities, personalities, interests and experiences. Whether based on upbringing, cultural symbolism or links to home or family, the interpretation of the importance of the meal allows participating individuals to share it with others with similar associations. Participating individuals often link their identity (nationality, race, occupation or skillset) with meals, dining and commensality. From

a host perspective, meals are a way in which they are able to share their identities with others who may be interested in experiencing them. This could link to a number of factors including, the style of food, ethnicity or authenticity of a meal, venue or style of hosting. Hosts often share stories or insights about the food, the way it is served or the background of the food.

In terms of nationality, OMC can provide attendees with an exotic element to the meal. While guests may have eaten food, of that particular origin, at a city-centre restaurant, they may not have had such a connection, or social interaction, with the host who is from (or an expert on) that country or origin. Questions are then able to be asked on the food, and information is exchanged between guest and host on the peculiarities of the food, the way it is served and the differences from previous experiences identified. The variety of cuisines and nationalities of the interviewees (Table 4.1 & 4.4) suggests that OMC is as much an experience of cultural exchange as that of social exchange. The exchange of cultural identities is provided through the interaction of individuals at the meals.

Family is often influential on the hosts' (and guests') interpretation of the meal and can be intrinsic (consciously or not) to how they present or recreate their meals for others. A sense of family values is also present in terms of the shared, social experience of the meal, the civility and reciprocity found within them and the shared responsibility of everyone taking part. The concept of home is also important in terms of the identity of those participating in OMC. Home, as previously discussed in the literature, can be conceptualised in a number of ways, all of which present important aspects in terms of identity (Wiles, 2008, Mallett, 2004).

Identity can also relate to how individuals present themselves in different circumstances and in front of different individuals. For example, the way we act and behave at work is not the same as we do in our homes or around our families. While experiences of OMC are social and certain information about the identity of those involved is shared and identified with, the temporality and short-termness of the meals means that these sharings are fleeting, superficial or, in some ways, falsified

for the duration of the meal. While socialisation occurs, as they are often one-off occasions, it allows individuals to present themselves in their preferred manner (Goffman, 1959). There is no need to share problems and the intricacies of our everyday lives, but instead individuals can discuss similarities, hobbies, families or experiences in a relatively safe environment.

5.4.3 The meal

The meal and how individuals identify with it is also important in understanding how people interact and identify with food and how it is shared and eaten. As Meiselman (2008) argues, the meal relates to an event of eating as well as identifying what is being eaten. Identifying the meal as a component of commensality may seem obvious but, by further examining its importance, its inclusion can be identified. In support of the previous components of commensality, Sobal & Nelson (2003) argue that the meal is where individuals can integrate social relationships and common identities. Simmel (1910) also states that the shared meal allows individuals to satisfy a need for social interaction through a union of conviviality. Danesi (2012b), however, argues that the meal can be a site of stress if it is too formal and that the creation of a relaxed, comfortable environment with low degrees of formality is preferable for many.

Informality is an aspect which differentiates OMC from more traditional forms of dining out. From the social welcomes and socialisation, with hosts and other guests alike, to interaction and sharing of roles/responsibilities during the meal, to the conversation and sharing of stories which, more often than not, extend beyond the service of food and consumption of it. Meals are rarely hurried, with no sense of meals coming to an unnatural end or guests being rushed away by the host. Service is more relaxed and the host is part of the meal rather than just serving their guests. Service is welcoming, light-hearted, humorous and natural. The informal approach affords a more friendly, relaxed and social atmosphere to the meals (Warde & Martens, 2000). Those new to OMC are welcomed and included into the phenomenon by those who had experienced it before. Hosts usually intermingle with the guests, ensuring (through serving or otherwise) that everyone is enjoying the meal and included in social situations.

Clothing is also more informal and the atmosphere is one of sociability rather than formality. Social interaction and the expectation of it, is more common than an etiquette-driven socialisation which may inhibit or ostracise some individuals (Danesi, 2012b). The fact that OMC is more communal than other forms of dining out adds to an informal style of dining which encourages sharing among diners. The blurring of host/guest relations means that the hosts are often part of the meal, its interactions and conversations, rather than just serving the meal. At the same time, however, hosts are in control of the hospitality they are providing and the difference between guest and host is present. While the meal, or dining out, is often littered with formal, expensive or etiquette driven ideals, I suggest that OMC is more concerned with breaking down some of these barriers and creating a social space to share a meal and to interact with and meet new people who may have a similar interest in an informal, relaxed setting. The informal nature of the meals ensures that social/cultural exchanges can take place and become as much a part of the meal as the food itself.

5.4.4 OMC – A new typology of commensality

It is the combination of the aforementioned components (sociability, identity, the meal) which enable a deeper understanding and conceptualisation of the concept of commensality.

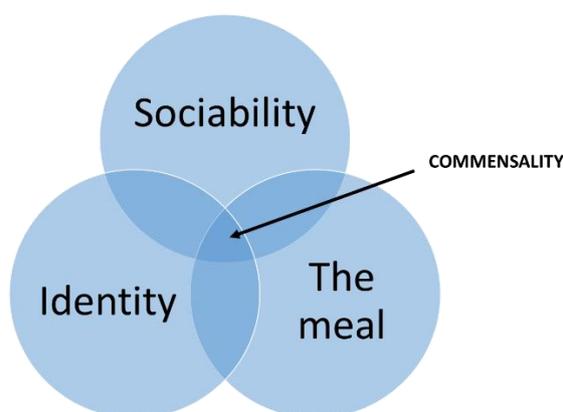


Figure 5.8: Components of Commensality

Figure 5.8 demonstrates the interconnectivity and inseparability of the three components of commensality. Without one of these components, I argue, commensality does not take place. While neither the host, nor the guests, can create

or engineer commensality by hosting a meal, by encouraging the sharing of food and drink, and attracting those interested in this exchange, commensality inevitably occurs.

The three components of commensality and their interconnectivity develop an understanding of commensality as mentioned in the reviewed literature (Danesi, 2012a, 2012b, Fishcler, 2011, Walker, 2012, Sobal & Nelson, 2004, etc.). What the components only partially achieve, is the differentiation of the commensality found within OMC and other, more traditional forms of dining experiences. The work of Grignon (2001) explores 6 types of commensality: domestic, institutional, everyday, exceptional, segregative, and transgressive. Table 5.3 identifies a number of characteristics as found within Grignon’s typologies of commensality:

| Type of commensality | Characteristics |
|----------------------|--|
| <i>Domestic</i> | <i>Family, private life, family meals, discussions, routines, household, dining rooms</i> |
| Institutional | Regulatory, institutional control. Found in hospitals, prisons, army barracks, nursing homes, etc. |
| Everyday | Daily exchanges of families, friends and communities. Common values, beliefs and constraints |
| <i>Exceptional</i> | <i>Celebratory occasions – Birthdays, Christmas, weddings, etc. Larger social networks of extended family and friends.</i> |
| Segregative | Used to close/strengthen group mentality – excluding others, demonstrates exclusivity and hierarchy. |
| Transgressive | Recognises and embraces opportunities of social groups and borders of separation, ambivalence, openness. |

Table 5.3: Typologies of Commensality (adapted from Grignon, 2001)

As Grignon’s typologies suggest, not every experience of commensality is necessarily positive, wanted or memorable. There does seem, however, to be a desire, an interest in positive and memorable experiences of commensality by those participating within OMC. While commonalities can be identified in different types of commensality, the nature of the commensality found within OMC, I argue, is most commonly associated with domestic and exceptional commensality. Domestic

commensality identifies elements of home, family, discussion and household dynamics and Exceptional commensality places commensality as a special occasion which stretches our social networks to extended family and friends. Both types, however, do not fully define OMC and while the phenomenon in its current state would not have existed at the time of Grignon’s writing, I argue that OMC can be added as a new type of commensality.

Adopting Grignon’s characteristics and types of commensality and framing commensality within the phenomenon and its definition (‘social events structured around the meal that are organised online to attract interested individuals or groups’), the following type of commensality is suggested (Table 5.4):

| Type of commensality | Characteristics |
|----------------------|---|
| Online mediated | Online mediated, social meals among like-minded individuals and strangers, taking place at unique locations at pre-arranged times |

Table 5.4: Typology of Online Mediated Commensality

The above typology of commensality argues that the commensality found within OMC is different to those defined in Grignon’s other typologies. Adding to Grignon’s typologies suggests that commensality, and therefore OMC, is viewed differently in terms of its place within society. OMC is less of a normality of everyday life and more of a social, inclusive expression of personality, identity and values. OMC is, therefore, proposed as an alternative form of dining out and an example of a contemporary form of hospitality provision.

5.5 Hospitality: Social Conditions of OMC

As previously suggested, the social element related to OMC is seen as a major attraction. While socialisation, conversation, interaction and participation are mentioned in the findings, the following paragraphs will note how the social element is connected to a broader theoretical understanding of hospitality, as previously referenced, in the literature. The social perspective of the meal has been discussed, in academic hospitality literature, as a symbolic act encouraging bonds of trust, closeness and friendliness (Lashley, 2000). These bonds, it is argued, are found within the guest-host relationship as well as between fellow guests who are sharing the experience. Visser (1991: 53) states that '*sharing food is the foundation of civilised behaviour*' and the social rules and structures found around the meal are still relevant with reference to OMC. One of the most important aspects of commensality is that it is a social entity, it cannot be achieved without an Other and it is through the exchanges and interactions that we can begin to understand the importance of commensality as a social component of hospitality research. That said, in order for OMC to achieve this kind of social interaction, a common understanding, set of rules, or to borrow Derrida's term, 'conditions' must be in place. Lynch (2005a), for example, discusses the concept of social control in acts of hospitality which can subtly control and/or construct appropriate behaviour in an allocated setting. Without this understanding of conditions of hospitality, OMC is in danger of losing its structure, trust and reciprocity.

5.5.1 Conditions of Hospitality

Derrida (2000a) discusses hospitality as a paradoxical state of the unconditional and the conditional. Firstly, an unconditional, absolute law of hospitality which is offered to the other under no pre-arranged circumstances or obligations. In this case, the Other should be welcomed with no question of their arrival, name or reason to visit. Secondly, a conditional hospitality, based on laws or conditions of how the guest will behave and act under the host's jurisdiction. The law of unconditional hospitality is said to be offered *a priori*, to another, while the laws of conditional hospitality are concerned with rights, duties, obligations and reciprocity. Derrida (2001) stipulates

that, while the law of unconditional hospitality is necessary and essential to our understanding of hospitality, without the conditional laws hospitality is potentially in danger of becoming a vulnerable, irresponsible desire, without form and structure.

Dufourmantelle (2013) further argues that the essence of hospitality is unconditional but can only exist under the laws of conditional hospitality which act as a social tissue based upon exchange and reciprocity. While the unconditional view is *the impossible*, as it is unrestricted, purely altruistic and without law, the conditional form of hospitality cannot exist without it. Dufourmantelle argues that, one must hold an unconditional understanding of hospitality in order for it to exist in its conditional state. By balancing both perspectives of hospitality one is able to be welcomed, unconditionally as a guest, but under the conditions that offer protection, identity and respect to the host.

5.5.2 Social Conditions

Commensality, and therefore OMC, is a social act which takes place with others. Figure 5.9 shows how some of the social conditions found within OMC have a regard for Derrida's (2000a) natural or unconditional perspective of hospitality. They are, however, conditions of the phenomenon and elements which are fundamental to the nature and attractions of OMC.

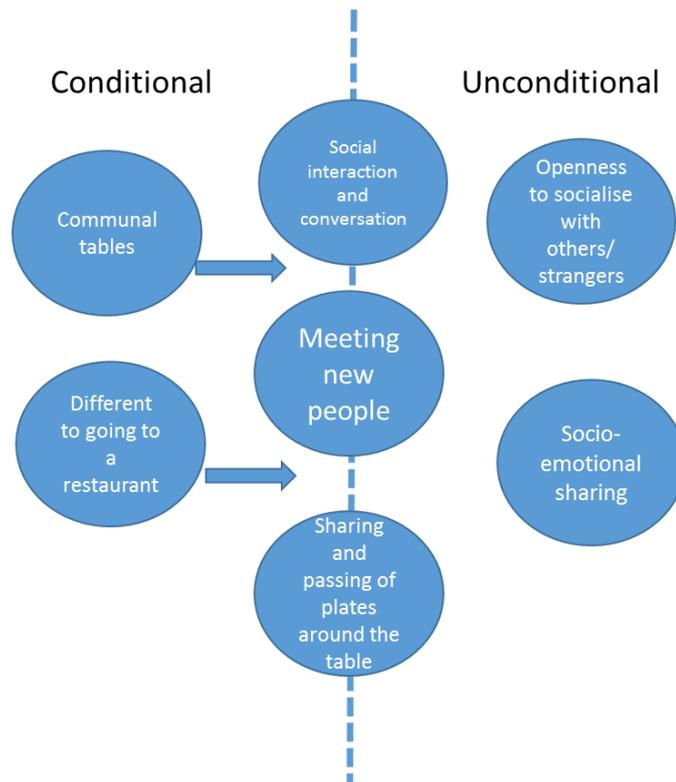


Figure 5.9: Sample of social conditions and their regard for the unconditional

The social conditions in Figure 5.9 will be further discussed below. Examples of these social conditions from the findings of this research project are found in Table 5.5.

| Social Conditions | Extract (Interviews) | Extract (observations) |
|--|---|---|
| Communal Tables | it was an early decision to make it, to get these big tables and not even ask people if they wanted to sit together but just to say 'here it is', you know, and it sort of became part of the experience. (I3: 193-196) | As we talked about the night one of the men said, 'it's interesting to sit at communal tables as you get to meet people and chat to them while you eat' (M2: 160-162) |
| Different to going to a restaurant | that table over there, the big one - I always fill with strangers. Most people book in couples, 2s or 3s and I have this big table in the cafe...so I mix people up, I call it the networking table. I use it to put different people that don't know each other on it, they talk, meet new people (I6: 133-136) | 'We have just started going to stuff like this' Sylvie added, 'we just got bored of going to boring restaurants all the time and decided to try something different. (M30: 43-45) |
| Social interaction/conversation | sometimes there's a bit of awkwardness when people first arrive and they've got to, sort of, introduce themselves. That's why the cocktails are quite good cos it kind of relaxes people, gives them something to do, talk about and discuss but after the first 10 minutes always, everyone's mates, and its fine... (I2: 118-122) | 'for me it's just as much about the social aspect as it is the food stuff. Like this...if it wasn't for the *** ***** we might not be speaking like this and having this kind of conversation.' (M25: 166-168) |
| Meeting new people | meeting new people and making new friends and doing more than just the smile and nod, umm its actually really hard (...) maybe, I don't know, it's a little bit harder for people to open up and just go talk to a stranger but maybe things like supper clubs and experiences like that, it offers an opportunity to do something a bit different (I16: 308-314) | One of the girls then asked 'So how do you guys all know each other then?' 'We don't' Mike said 'we just have beards and thought we'd sit together, we have just met'. The rest of us laughed and the other man said 'Yeah sorry, my name is Joe and this is Molly' as he introduced himself and his girlfriend to the table. (M30: 68-72) |
| Sharing and passing plates around the table | Food is all about sharing, the way we grew up, it's like 7 o'clock it's dinnertime, everybody needs to be there and then we share the food. It's all sharing, sharing food, sharing feeling, sharing experiences. I mean we are separated every day, but the mealtime is the only time when the family all gets together to eat together, that's how it should be. (I6: 196-199) | The diners passed the plates around their smaller groups and helped themselves to a portion of each tapas and put it on their plate. All the diners seemed used to this style of sharing and passing plates amongst themselves. (M9: 161-164) |
| Openness to socialise with others/strangers | 'I mean, call it what you want, it's just breaking down barriers, saying no one is better than anyone else, we all sit together' (I5: 189-190). | Marina's introductions had brought the two ends of the table together a bit and everyone was involved in the same conversation/discussion. (M27: 265-266) |
| Socio-emotional sharing | It surprised me, at first, but I almost expect it now (laughs) out of somebody at least...it pleased me, if anything because I, I like being quite open with people, I like people who are being quite genuine and open about themselves, then I will reciprocate if I feel that that's the kind of person that they are. And I really enjoy, I really enjoy that because it's not something that I get in my work or my day-to-day life. It's a breath of fresh air (I13: 132-136) | Helen paused and then said 'My husband died almost 2 years ago...heart attack, it was quite sudden.' Helen sipped at her drink and Olga said 'Oh that's awful, I'm sorry to hear that.' Helen continued more positively and said 'I guess it's good that we were both quite independent, we had our own friends and did things on our own, not always together...I mean it's still difficult sometimes but at least I still had my social networks, friends and groups that I continue to socialise with.' (M32: 145-151) |

Table 5.5: Social Conditions of Commensality (extracts)

5.5.2.1 Communal Tables/Different to restaurant

OMC is set around a communal table(s) where individuals sit with strangers or other groups of strangers. The decision to use communal tables is seen as a key part to bringing strangers together and to try to encourage socialisation, conversation and

interaction. The togetherness felt around a table is an important aspect as it makes the experience very different to that of a restaurant (Schofield, 2015). OMC is often likened to having dinner with friends as everyone shares the experience, around the same table, rather than segregated restaurant-style tables (Visser, 1991). Findings also identify that the issue of communality (feeling of belonging arising from common interests) around the table is something much more human in terms of equality and togetherness. This ideology of equality, communality and sharing are indeed the very premise of commensality and the experiences of OMC.

5.5.2.2 Social interaction/conversation

Findings suggest that expanding friendship groups is not a key motivation but social interaction and conversation with others often is. It is argued that it is the common bond of the shared meal that gets conversations started (Julier, 2013). The fact that those attending OMC all share a unique experience gives them an equal grounding that could encourage the first exchanges and interactions. Some experiences of OMC try to encourage social interaction between diners by suggesting an activity or space to break the ice. In the majority of cases, this was done by a 'welcome drink' which was offered to each diner and took place away from the table at an open space conducive to introductions and light conversation. While the welcome drink was a common experience and often got things started in terms of socialisation and conversation, other examples were games and interactive activities that were at the table. Different interactive activities (games, question cards, etc.) are used to help the diners, who often do not know each other, interact. An important aspect of such activities is that, while they are there to encourage social interaction, they should not inhibit it or make the diners feel uncomfortable from the outset. Interactive activities are often used subtly by placing them on the table before the diners arrive and with no instruction or enforced participation.

5.5.2.3 Meeting new people

Meeting new people is also part of the attraction of OMC. One of the reasons people attend OMC is for the social side of it and not just for the food. OMC is described as a good social mixer with people of different ages, backgrounds and experiences coming together to share an experience (Rosen et al, 2011). It was noted that

individuals find it difficult to meet new people and that OMC provides an opportunity or an occasion to do so. The condition of meeting new people, however, is a key driver for people attending OMC rather than making new friends. The exposure to meeting other people and sharing experiences with them often outweighs the motivation of making new friends. It is suggested therefore, that the meetings are temporal, rather than intended to last, outwith the experience of OMC.

5.5.2.4 Sharing and passing plates around the table

Serving the food as 'family-style', where the food is served in large dishes or plates with the diners helping themselves and sharing plates around the table, is also discussed in the findings. A common experience of OMC is the sharing and passing of plates and dishes around the table (Belk, 2010) and diners ensuring everyone has enough of everything before they begin eating. Even on occasions where social interaction is not as free flowing around the table, there is still a natural tendency to wait for everyone to be served, or to have their plates full, before everyone begins eating. Table manners are also noted in the findings and, while this is often something taken for granted (Visser, 1991), I suggest it is linked to upbringing, family and experiences with food and the sharing of it.

5.5.2.5 Openness to socialise with others/strangers

The very nature of commensality is that it is a social act (Danesi, 2012a). One of the key conditions of OMC is, therefore, that individuals should be open to socialise with others. The openness to socialise is expected whether the diners are strangers, come in small groups or are, in some way, connected. While the socialisation process can take place on a range of different levels, the research found that OMC often attracts a certain kind of person. In describing attendees, the terms socially confident, socially active and open minded often come up. It is, however, not just the being social that is an expectation of OMC, it is often the being social with strangers that may be of more interest. The interaction of strangers around food is an area of interest identified in the findings.

5.5.2.6 Socio-emotional sharing

As previously mentioned, it is not just the sharing of food which is expected at OMC but a more personal socio-emotional sharing of identities, interests, backgrounds and

experiences. While this condition may be the most difficult to conceptualise due to its personal nature, the findings identify a number of examples where personal information is shared with strangers that have just met and are sharing a meal together. I suggest, therefore, that OMC provides a safe space where a deeper level of social interaction can take place if personal characteristics or interests are shared between individuals. The findings demonstrate that socio-emotional sharing can take place when related to issues such as nostalgia, family background, nationality and/or personal preferences. Those who experience such sharings, often respond positively to them and again refer to OMC as an opportunity to connect with others on a personal level.

5.5.3 Social Conditions of OMC

These conditions are not just suggested by those hosting or attending each meal but, I suggest, are the very premise of OMC and the reason they attract and interest like-minded people. The shared nature of the meal (i.e. communal tables, family-style dining) may refer to an unconditional regard towards hospitality that both comforts and welcomes the guest. Terms such as *openness*, *sharing*, *interaction* and *togetherness* that are present in the social conditions discussed, suggest an unconditional naturalness to the exchange of hospitality within OMC. That said, there are a number of conditions or, as Derrida (2000a) describes them, 'laws of hospitality' that are needed for OMC to take place. One of these conditions is that the guest and hosts are aware that they are attending an organised event and that the provision of hospitality, however absolute or unconditional it may feel, is based on respect and the rules stipulated by the host. While these rules can be subtle or relaxed in their presentation, they are necessary and the possible ignorance or disregard of these rules may result in conflict or hostility between parties. These rules can include imposed conditions such as physical boundaries, social control or suggested icebreaker activities as well as more subtle conditions such as natural social interaction, manners, behaviour and civility. While these social conditions are essential in terms of OMC's existence as a phenomenon, they do encourage or have a regard for the unconditional perspective of hospitality.

The social component of OMC is one which drives both those attending and hosting. The socialisation is very much part of the whole experience of sharing food, interests and narratives with others, without the pressure or intention to move these social groups outwith the event in which they are constructed. In some cases, this may happen but this is not, it seems, a key motivating factor. The social or communal aspect of OMC also differentiates itself, in terms of more traditional forms of dining, where groups and individuals are often separated from others. A more open minded, socially confident, participatory, 'open to anything' attitude is needed to experience OMC to its fullest and to be included, rather than excluded, in the social realms of others.

The social conditions of OMC, therefore, range from mere civility and politeness to deeper social interaction and conversation around the shared meal. While this kind of social interaction can be found in more traditional forms of dining out amongst friends and family, it is the interaction amongst strangers which seems to be the main difference and attraction of this phenomenon. This investigation of conditionality does, however, support Dufourmantelle's (2013) suggestion that the unconditional nature of the hospitality provided is one of the key social conditions of its existence and attraction. This acts as a social tissue which enables OMC to take place and feel different and more personal than other forms of hospitality provision.

5.6 Home-food: a conceptual gaze

Through the exploratory research on the OMC phenomenon, the broader conceptual gaze of Home-food represents an alternative take on the provision of food, drink, the meal and hospitality. The meal is an understood concept, a mainstay of the concept of hospitality and largely understood within the industry as taking place in the settings of restaurants, cafés, bars and other, more traditional, forms of commercial eating establishments. What Home-food presents is, however, turning some of the traditional underpinnings of the meal and commerce on its head. Its organisation, online mediation, consumption and forms of payment and its place within contemporary economy suggest the Home-food is a way of dining, interacting and ‘doing’ hospitality differently.

5.6.1 Home-food

The findings identify a number of elements which have been brought together to understand the concept of Home-food. The 5 key elements are: identity, sociability, values, skills, and setting (Figure 5.10).

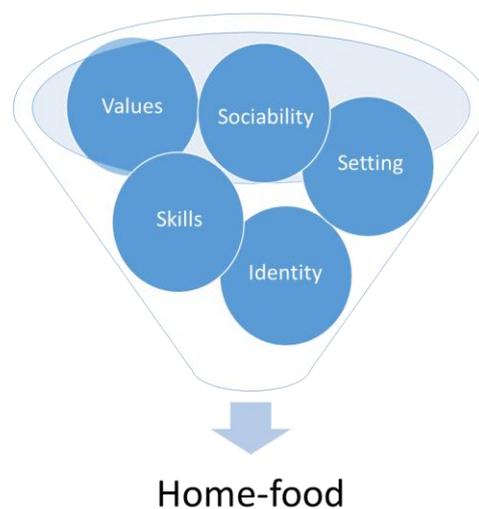


Figure 5.10: Elements of Home-food

Table 5.6 identifies a number of characteristics that belong to each element. These too have been identified through the exploratory research process of OMC.

| Elements of | Characteristics | Illustrative Quote from research findings |
|--------------------|--|---|
| Home-food | | |
| Identity | Nationality, origin, occupation, status, self | <i>I just love cooking...from a family who is just obsessed with food, we are from the south west of France and down there food is a religion just about, so I have been well brought up in that respect because we have always had really good food at home...(18: 2-6)</i> |
| Sociability | Sociability, communality, interaction | <i>'for me it's just as much about the social aspect as it is the food stuff. Like this...if it wasn't for (this meal) we might not be speaking like this and having this kind of conversation' (M25: 166-168)</i> |
| Values | Sharing, togetherness, community, family | <i>I think that food is common to every single human being in the world. (...) it brings people together. We have something in common immediately, (...) food relates to emotions, you can have a really bad day and have a good meal and instantly you feel better (...) that emotion we feel when we eat something is important cos when you share that with other people it affects how you feel (19: 279-285)</i> |
| Skills | Social, culinary, business, organisation, technology | <i>I started doing these supper clubs about a year ago, cos I have always been like really really into cooking, (...) and also entertaining and also design like creating a really personal experience (...) I've been kind of like praised for attention to detail which you don't get in restaurants (115: 3-6)</i> |
| Setting | Uniqueness, informality, communality, social | <i>I think maybe it's a little bit of the unknown (...) maybe there is an aspect of 'oh what's going to happen?' 'Who am I going to meet?' 'Who am I going to be sat next to?' 'What will it be like?' Curiosity about the location, (...) I think it's a little bit about having some adventure (116: 284-297)</i> |

Table 5.6: Elements and characteristics of the Home-food movement

The use of the term 'Home-food' is based on a number of the findings from this study. Food, the meal, commensality and their importance found in much of the collected research material was strongly associated, directly or indirectly, with home. The concept of home is also contextualised in reference to identity, family, background, nationality, socialisation, memories and nostalgia. Its hyphenation, here, aims to represent the interconnectivity between the two components.

The research findings suggest that participants relate 'home' with family, place, identity and belonging. These references are not, however, solely linked to home as a setting but the broader concepts of space, mobility and self. The findings demonstrate strong links to other academic sources. Wiles (2008: 116), for example, describes the concept of home as a "*slippery, multi-layered ongoing process*" which can be identified in a number of ways. The findings show that food and an individual's relationship with it, is also replete with meanings, symbolism, identity, familiarity and belongings. Certain foods called back memories of family, occasions, destinations and cultures and often had a profound effect on those experiencing them. The meals, in this study, also acted as a learning vehicle for those not familiar with the food, style of dining or cuisine. This learning would come from the host or others who were more familiar with the idiosyncrasies of each meal. The sharing of information at meals encourages a dialogue between those sharing the experience, learning from each other, interacting and conversing about personal similarities and differences throughout the duration of the meal.

The choice of the term Home-food, in detailing the broader conceptual gaze of what is taking place, is apparent as the two words become interconnected, inseparable and constant in terms of their understanding within the phenomenon under study. The concept of Home-food also represents alternative experiences of hospitality where individuals can link the meal to their own concepts of home. Whether it be their physical location, the setting, the style of service or the style of food, individuals can attend meals to, consciously or not, reconnect with, reimagine or reconceptualise home for themselves. It is here, that the structure and organisation of OMC leads to an experience of hospitality which encapsulates the uniqueness of the phenomenon.

Figure 5.11 identifies a number of ways in which an interest in Home-food can be expressed. The term expression is used here to show representation of feeling, characteristics and/or spirit of what is highlighted in the findings and within the discussed conceptual understanding of Home-food. Similarities can be made between this figure and that representing Attractions of OMC, both of which will be

used in a developmental framework (later in this chapter) which will illustrate the components and inter-relationships within the OMC phenomenon.



Figure 5.11: Expressions of Home-food

5.6.2 The Home-food Economy (HFE)

Using Home-food as a concept, however, does not truly represent what is taking place within OMC. My intention here, is to detail how the concept underpins this study and how this will have implications for the broader context of contemporary hospitality provision. On one hand, Home-food can be seen as a Movement. And this was my first use of the term – Home-food Movement. However, movements or social movements, generally relate to group action of a specific cause seeking social change or recognition. In the case of a Home-food Movement, the cause may be to sustain the diminishing family/communal meal, to broaden levels of social interaction, cohesion and change. On closer inspection, however, the findings do not demonstrate an overall manifesto, aim or group action or sense of activism. I questioned, then, whether this was enough to use Home-food Movement as a conceptual term. Or, is Home-food representing a social phenomenon, based on the exchange of a traditional form of hospitality which is becoming less of a societal norm or regular occurrence, due to social change and the dynamics of society? Are individuals presenting opportunities to recapture a dying or diminishing social act – the shared/family meal – and then profiting from it - profiting in an economic, social, cultural and experiential manner? The Home-food Economy, therefore, proved more suitable in capturing the phenomenon.

The use of the word economy, rather than Movement, thus stipulates that what is taking place is based on exchange and reciprocity which is monetary or otherwise. While many of the meals within this economy are for profit, or where money is at least used to facilitate acts of commensality, there is also a cultural and social

exchange taking place which often absolves the exchange of money and becomes the main attraction.

Links can be made between the Home-food Economy and the characteristics of the aforementioned alternative economy (Table 5.7). In terms of the ethical economy the HFE facilitates exchanges of 'ethical things' (Arvidsson, et al, 2008) such as a social experience, a belief or value system and the provision of hospitality towards others. The HFE also demonstrates moral understandings of behaviour, appropriateness and appropriate levels of social interaction for the duration of an attended meal. Elements of the sharing economy are also present within HFE. Exchanges are not purely commercial (and sometimes not at all) but invariably promote a shared, social, collaborative, communal experience. The meals promote, not just the sharing of an experience i.e. the meal, but a socio-emotional sharing, social bonding and reciprocity around social norms that are associated with more non-commercially orientated experiences of hospitality. The meals within HFE also present a number of facets that bring innovative and creative opportunities for business-like interactions and experiences. Connections to Disruptive Innovation can be made, as the meals provided a unique opportunity which had a number of benefits when compared to alternatives. This innovative approach to providing meals saw the development of potential new markets and alternatives within hospitality provision.

| HFE characteristics | Meals | Interviews |
|------------------------------|---|--|
| Ethical Economy | <i>'For me it's about creating community around food (...) you get to meet some interesting people and get a connection with them, you know, just like now...and for me it's about meeting similar types of people, not just vegetarians but people who enjoy doing this sort of thing and are maybe a bit 'out there' or a bit adventurous' (M13: 149-152)</i> | <i>I think it does kind of remind people, in a way, of being in their own family unit, how they relate to people, how they talk to people in that setting. (I13: 40-42)</i> |
| Sharing Economy | <i>plates were passed around and shared around the table. People checked how much others were taking and sometimes asked if they could take a second, or third, helping of one of the dishes (M26: 146-148)</i> | <i>I think it creates a convivial atmosphere, something social, there's something happening there (...) I do, purposefully put it on the table and it's for you to help yourselves. (...) I mean it gets people to talk to each other, doesn't it? 'Can you pass me this, blah blah blah' and it starts something... (I8: 267-277)</i> |
| Disruptive Innovation | <i>'we looked for something different and quite enjoyed it (...) it's cheaper as well and the food was great' (M36: 114-115)</i> | <i>it needs to constantly stay fresh and exciting whereas if you just like carry on and do them too often then it kind of lacks its buzz... (...) I definitely find that if I don't do one for ages and then I put one online it sells out like really quickly whereas if I was doing them all the time they can lose their buzz a bit. (I15: 11-17)</i> |

Table 5.7: HFE Characteristics 1

The following framework (Figure 5.12) details how the concept of Home-food exists within the aforementioned alternative economy.



Figure 5.12: The Home-food Economy framework

The Home-food Economy (and, therefore, OMC) is sourced, on one hand, by those interested in the meal, sociability and different experiences of dining. On the other hand, the Home-food Economy can be sourced by those with an interest in exploring business and/or social ventures based around the meal. While the figure shows these as separate components they are not, necessarily mutually exclusive, and interest can evolve simultaneously from both perspectives. When interest, in either case, is initiated, it is through its online mediation that information is sourced and shared among interested individuals. The Home-food Economy, therefore, represents an aspect of hospitality provision that incorporates aspects of identity, social interaction, values, skills and setting associated with the meal. Its online mediation and its association with the alternative economy, fosters interaction between like-minded individuals with similar interest and shared moral frameworks, related to the meal and the components found within it.

The HFE represents opportunities for interested individuals to experience the hospitality, social interaction and related experiences found within the shared meal. The concept of Home-food is identified as containing 5 key components: identity, sociability, values, skills and settings. These components, and their combination, are identified in the research findings and develop a deeper understanding of what is taking place within the phenomenon and, therefore, what is being exchanged. The HFE demonstrates a nuanced, alternative economy which takes influence from ethical, shared and innovative perspectives. While alternative economies have been previously identified in hospitality provision, they have focused on accommodation and home sharing and have not been specifically related to the meal and the intimate interaction around it. The HFE represents how the experience of the shared meal and, the online facilitation of it, is becoming more popular in a fast paced, liquid society (Bauman, 2000). Interested individuals are able to fleetingly experience alternative, creative and unique meals with like-minded others.

While my definition of OMC is still appropriate in defining the phenomenon, a further definition of the broader Home-food Economy can now be established as: '*An*

alternative economy promoting memorable experiences of the meal where identities, skills and values are shared among participants in a sociable, unique, hospitable setting'. While this definition builds on previous examples of network hospitality, it further demonstrates how alternative economies and online mediation of experiences are becoming intrinsic aspects of a broadening approach to contemporary hospitality provision.

5.6.3 An Economy of Otherness

The HFE represents not just an alternative economy structured around meals, sociability and a way of doing economy differently, but also what will be discussed as an 'economy of otherness'. The act of commensality, the meal and the interaction around them, as previously discussed, are, fundamentally, occasions which are shared, experienced and structured with other individuals. Similarly, hospitality is located as an interaction with an Other (Derrida, 2000a), or viewed through a social lens (Lashley et al, 2000). These seminal works discuss hospitality as social acts, acts which cannot, or will not, take place without the presence, interaction or negotiation with an Other. The Other, in the case of hospitality, can range from the stranger, or non-kin to the guest who is invited, welcomed or included in the conditioned space of the host. In whichever case, hospitality becomes a social interaction, meeting (or mis-meeting) of others and the associated fragility, stresses, pleasures and experiences linked to these experiences of otherness. Experiences of OMC similarly provide experiences of otherness, or othering, where the social interaction with others is a condition of the experience. The findings demonstrate that the social interaction found around the meal is a key motivating factor in attending experiences of OMC. While this motivation may not be the primary motivation, it is identified as being discussed by the vast majority of those taking part. The social interaction, around the meal, acts as a springboard where discussions, humour, identity sharing, and the making of connections stem. I argue, that the interactions among individuals are largely positive. While they do not often, in this study's findings, move outwith the social interaction of OMC, they are discussed at future meals and are strongly associated with what is memorable about each meal.

What takes place within OMC is a communicative display of knowing, seeing and interacting with others in the confines of the communal meal. The transience and temporality of OMC and its setting addresses a commonality amongst those sharing the experience but does not, in most cases, extend beyond the meal (Table 5.8). The online-mediated meal is defined by its temporary nature which encapsulates the social experiences within it. While findings identify a vast range of positive social experiences, it is rare to hear about these social interactions (with strangers, non-familiars and non-kin) taking place outwith OMC. This is not to say that the intention to reconnect elsewhere is not present but that the reconnection elsewhere is not a key motivation of OMC. Each experience of OMC is unique and different to the next. While repeat visits to the same, or similar, experiences of OMC may provide commonalities, the social experience will always be different – shared with different people, within different environments and with the range of variables that affect every social interaction.

| HFE Characteristics | Meals | Interviews |
|---------------------|---|--|
| Otherness | <i>'Socially, we don't make friends or see these people again, but that's what I like, the transience and temporary meetings of people...it's fun and there is no pressure. It's like the one (...) we told you about, we could have stayed there all night with the people we met at the table, but when the night came to an end we all said goodbye...and that was it...but that didn't matter' (M28: 201-205)</i> | <i>I was looking to change my (social) circles so that I didn't spend my entire time in the pub or at work. (...) I went along to the first one about a year and a half ago and was really really surprised at how...at what a great scene it was. I was expecting it to be pensioners and people with no lives (laughs) but I was really really impressed at how relaxed it was and I've gone to quite a lot of stuff since. (I12: 11-16)</i> |

Table 5.8: Characteristics of HFE 2

5.6.4 Performance: Momentary meals in momentary spaces

The uniqueness of the meals found within OMC can also be likened to a performance. The way OMC is structured means that a start time and end time is suggested. Meals are held at a selected venue which is chosen due to its ability to host a meal under the specifications of those hosting it. Goffman's (1959) theoretical underpinning of performance can also be highlighted here as individuals 'perform' during experiences of OMC. In the 'moment' of OMC, individuals can present themselves as the perfect host or the perfect guest. Individuals can present an idealised, possibly practiced, version of themselves that they want to present to others to show themselves in the best light e.g. socially active, experimental, interesting, alternative.

To take the concept of performance further, the hosts become the lead role, the principal character around which the rest of the performance revolves and transpires. They set the pace, the scene, the conditions, the food and the way in which it is served. Without their understanding of the meal, their identity and their ability to host, the meal would not take place. This is not to say that the guests or the diners are just an audience, as without their presence the performance, or meal, could not take place. Guests bring their own identities to the stage, or table, and interact with those around it. Guests interact with the host, respond to hospitality provided and become part of the performance. They adhere to subtle conditions while making the experience their own and creating new performances or subplots around the meal. These subplots, or social interactions, around the meal thus become their own performances linked to, but independent from, that of the host (Table 5.9).

| HFE Characteristics | Meals | Interviews |
|---------------------|--|--|
| Performance | <i>Peter and Steven then began to discuss wine and different places they had tried and bought special types of wine. Peter mentioned a wine cellar that he had been to in Barcelona. Steven had also been there and re-pronounced the name of the cellar in what seemed like perfect Spanish.</i> (M4: 195-197) | <i>that 'theatre' (...) that show that we put on for the evening... In a restaurant you can't really do that, it becomes a bit more mundane and you can't really add that hospitality factor</i> (I9: 250-266) |

Table 5.9: Characteristics of HFE 3

Goffman's (1959, 1964) work on performativity and behaviour uses the term 'copresence' which, it is argued, begins to represent the social interactions found within OMC. Goffman states that copresence takes place at social occasions. Social occasions are defined as a "*social affair, undertaking, or event, bounded in regard to place and time*" (1963: 18). Copresence is defined as the expected conditions obtained through the social occasion and the social interaction within that occasion. Goffman states the copresence is achieved or encountered when individuals within the social occasion "*sense that they are close enough to be perceived in whatever they are doing, including their experiencing of others, and close enough to be perceived in this sensing of being perceived*" (1963: 17). While Goffman positions copresence as a condition of social occasions and interactions, it must be noted the concept of copresence is subjective in nature as well as variable and responsive to contextual factors of any social occasion (Campos-Castillo & Hitlin, 2013). Campos-Castillo & Hitlin (2013) also suggest that the perceptions sensed within copresence are based

on 'mutual entrainment' between actors. Mutual entrainment is defined as the synchronisation of attention, emotion and behaviour between social actors.

Campos-Castillo & Hitlin further Goffman's definition of copresence as follows:

the degree to which one actor perceives entrainment with a second actor and sees the second actor reciprocating entrainment, where entrainment is a linear function of the synchronisation of mutual attention, emotion and behaviour. (2013: 171)

This definition presents links between copresence and Derrida's perspectives on hospitality. It is a reciprocal relationship based on, at least two, individuals where the strength of the relationship is based on behavioural conditions or obligations toward each other. Campos-Castillo & Hitlin (2013) further argue that copresence amongst individuals increases with a salient social identity. The values, interest and participation in OMC can, therefore, represent a salient social identity. Social interactions with a salient social identity can strengthen relationships within the social occasion and lead to a more trusting, intimate or deeper involvement (Nowak, 2001).

It is the structure of OMC which can idealise the concept of copresence found within it. The social occasions are organised by set times and obligations which encourage or enable the positive social interactions found within them. While OMC encourages a social sharing of experiences, identities and meaningful interactions, there are also experiences of temporality with strangers who will (probably) not reconnect again. This is not to take anything away from the interactions that take place. The parts individuals play, or how they are perceived in that social occasion, are, however, possibly not representative of their everyday lives. Experiences of OMC do, however, represent, as Bell suggests, flickering moments of hospitality, "*little islands, magic touches, throwntogetherness*" (Bell, 2012: 149). While these moment of hospitality may not lead to lasting friendships, communities or social groupings, they do represent elements of sociability where values, identities and memories can be shared in the socially understood setting of the shared meal – a site where many of these elements are established and sourced.

5.7 A Framework for OMC

The OMC framework (Figure 5.13) demonstrates how the phenomenon and its conceptualisation can be understood. The framework details the attractions of OMC, expressions of the concept of Home-food, the interaction of an alternative economy and its online mediation and the experiences of performance and otherness that take place within OMC. A number of interconnections are made, between some of these processes, as they do not display components that are mutually exclusive and these components may influence and/or effect other components within the framework.

While the framework does not suggest a start point per se, I have chosen to begin the discussion of the framework with *Attractions of OMC* which is detailed on the left hand side of the framework. The discussion begins here, as these elements are strongly referred to in the findings of my material collection and are framed in the first section of this chapter giving an understanding of the popularity of the phenomenon. Attractions of OMC details the reasons that individuals are attracted or interested in the forms of dining found within OMC. These individuals are interested in food and experiences of dining out and may be seeking an alternative to the restaurant scene. OMC provides an attractive alternative with a number of benefits. The social aspect is a key finding and attraction of the phenomenon and one which differentiates OMC from more traditional restaurants and dining establishments. The meals provide an opportunity to socialise with others around the table, to meet new people, share stories and interests around the shared experience of the meal. Communal tables play a large part in the social aspect of OMC and, this seating arrangement, I argue, demonstrates a key differentiation between this form of dining and the segregated, separate tables found in the majority of restaurants.

Findings also show that the social aspect of the meals allows individuals to make connections with fellow diners and hosts. They are able to share experiences, ideas, opinions and converse around the table. Initial topics of conversation usually begin around food, dining and similar online mediated meals/experiences but often lead to more personal examples of storytelling, sharing of identities and backgrounds,

resulting in the feeling of togetherness around the shared meal. While the social aspect of the meal provides a difference to restaurant style dining, the uniqueness of the experience and the setting of the meal is also a main attraction.

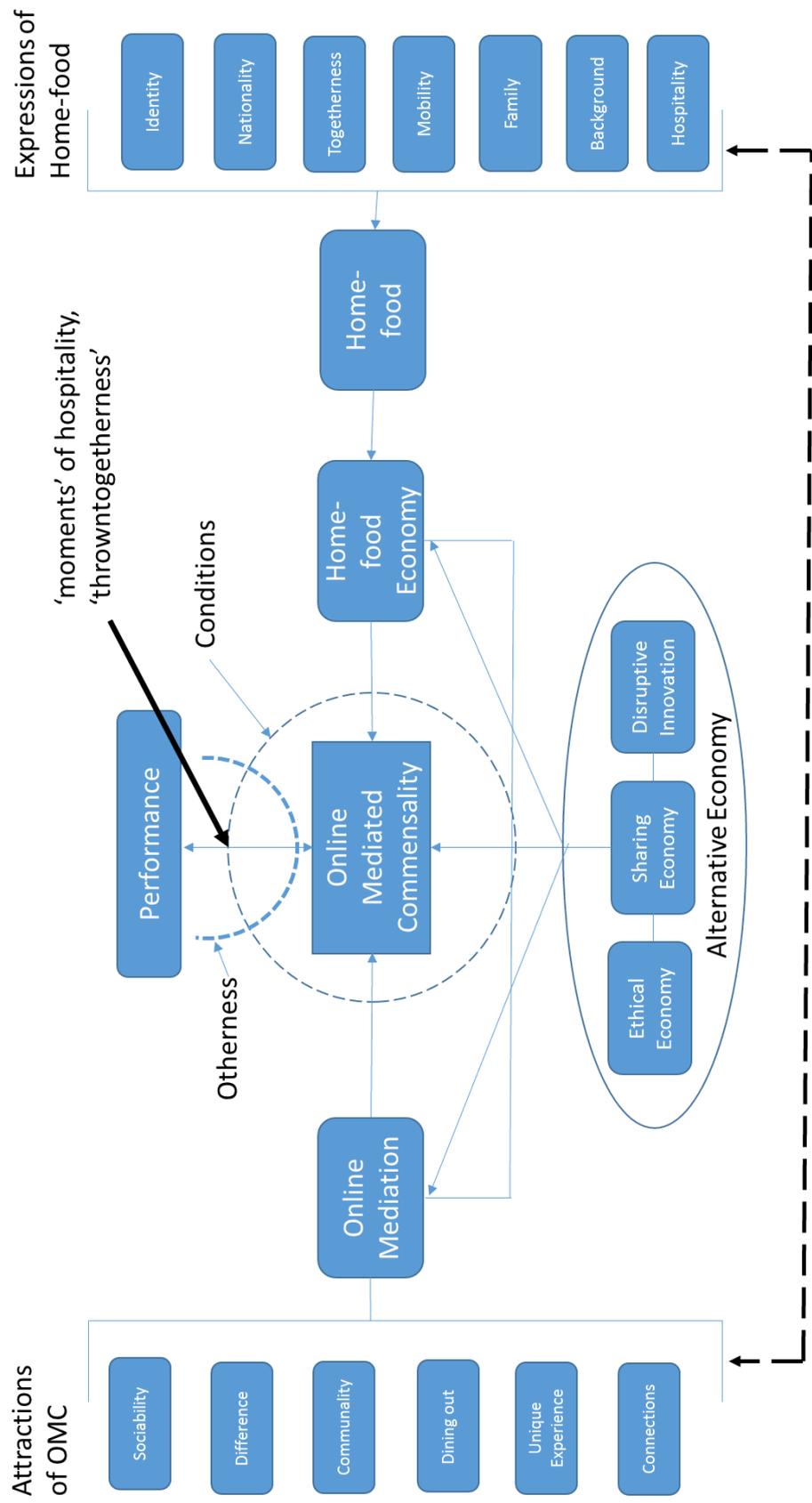


Figure 5.13: OMC Framework

Sharing these attractions and interests in alternative forms of dining leads individuals to search for meals, of this nature, in their local surroundings. As with most events, alternative experiences and attractions in contemporary society, the search is facilitated online using a range of applications (social media, smartphones, databases, etc.). Within the framework, the **Online Mediation** component represents this search and mediation of online mediated meals. The search, selection and online mediation of the meal inevitably leads to the **Online Mediated Commensality** component which is at the centre of the framework. This centrality of this component and the fact, that it is the very premise of this thesis, means that before it is explored in more detail, other components of the framework will be discussed first, to contextualise and connect the framework as a whole.

Expressions of Home-food, on the right hand side of the framework, detail a number of expressions (feelings, characteristics, spirit) towards what has been termed as Home-food. Home-food represents a number of connections that individuals had between food and their home environment. These connections often linked to an individuals' identity, nationality, family, background and upbringing. These elements are usually individuals' first interaction with food and the meal. Meaning is often associated with these experiences of eating, dining and the sharing of food. The family meal is commonly an individual's first experience of commensality and togetherness found around the meal. While home can relate to family and upbringing, it also relates to mobility, self and the spaces in which individuals live, inhabit or experience. Links are also made between home and hospitality. Home is often described as a space where hospitality is natural, unconditional and based on care, reciprocity and generosity. Findings and discussion of Home-food extend from its conceptualisation to the **Home-food Economy** where the experience of home-food is exchanged between interested individuals. The home-food economy, as suggested in the framework, leads to Online Mediated Commensality, the central component of the framework.

At the bottom of the framework, the dotted line indicates a connection between Attractions to OMC and Expressions of Home-food. This dotted line suggests that the

two components can exist simultaneously and can be combined and interchanged in a number of ways which attract or expose individuals to the phenomenon.

Above this dotted line is an oval entitled **Alternative Economy**. The findings identify that the online mediation and the proposed Home-food Economy exist in an alternative economy which takes influence from ethical and shared economies as well as the concept of disruptive innovation. Again the components of Online Mediation and the Home-food Economy are connected as, while their motivations may come from different attractions or expressions, they are both present in the process of organising and attending OMC. The phenomenon of OMC is, therefore, placed within an alternative, online mediated, home-food economy.

The central component of Online Mediated Commensality is encircled by a dotted line entitled **Conditions**. These conditions, also described as Social Conditions, relate to the conditions of hospitality present within OMC. While these should not be mistaken for rules or strict obligations, within the phenomenon and the accepted invitation into a unique space for a meal, a number of obligations, behaviours and interactions are expected. These conditions, if adhered to, can result in inclusion into the meal by the host and other guests or diners.

Above the Online Mediated Commensality component is **Performance**. This represents the performances that take place within experiences of OMC. As previously mentioned, these performances relate to how individuals present themselves in the momentary experiences of the meals attended within OMC. These performances may differ from how individuals present themselves in everyday life and could be idealised or practiced in order to present one's self in the best possible light. Below Performance and encapsulated in Conditions is the curved dotted line entitled **Otherness**. Otherness represents the interaction between others which is central to the OMC experience. As previously noted, OMC and experiences of network hospitality, cannot take place without the interaction and experience of otherness. Interaction with others can influence the overall experience of OMC, the conditions in which these interactions take place and the performances that individuals play.

The framework displays a central point where the components of Online Mediated Commensality, Performance, Conditions and Otherness meet. This point is linked to the previously discussed “‘moments’ of hospitality or ‘throwntogetherness’” (Bell, 2011). These ‘moments of hospitality’ demonstrate the coming together of all the components of the phenomenon. In the section that follows, further conceptualisation is made on what takes place within these ‘moments of hospitality’ and the experiences of OMC.

5.8 Social Interaction Capital

The social interactions found within OMC are often seen as spontaneous or serendipitous meetings of strangers. The organisation process of OMC and the larger Home-food Economy, however, suggests that those attending share a number of personality attributes, characteristics or traits. The fact that individuals have shown an interest in OMC is one very basic similarity shared between those attending meals of the kind. The information search, the online interaction (in whichever capacity) and the attraction of attending experiences of OMC are some of the basic similarities. When interacting around the meal, further similarities were communicated through discussions and conversations.

The interaction of otherness and the motivation of sharing the experiences of OMC with other, like-minded individuals, suggests that sociability is one of the key defining features of the phenomenon. If sociability, interaction, or otherness are seen as defining features, a more conceptual view of what this represents is necessary. The sociability and social interactions that are experienced within OMC, I suggest, creates a form of capital similar to the cultural and social capital found within other forms of network hospitality (Germann Molz, 2012a, Bialski, 2011).

5.8.1 Culinary Capital

Bourdieu's identification of multiple forms of capital (economic, social, cultural, symbolic) has influenced a number of discussions of alternative, or intangible capitals, which enhance or broaden an understanding of status and power relating to a range of practices. Culinary capital is termed by Naccarato & Lebesco (2012) as the way individuals' food-related practices reflect a certain set of values that are privileged over others. A range of aspects relating to culinary capital include: locally sourced, sustainable ingredients; knowledge of food and wine; ability to compare and contrast menus of high-end restaurants; asserting value of certain dietary preferences; notions of authenticity and exoticism; participating in food-related projects and being a skilled home cook. Naccarato & Lebesco (2012) argue that individuals, perceived as possessing culinary capital, use their food practices to create and sustain identities which align with the norms and expectations of society. While

similarities can be seen between culinary capital and some of the experiences of OMC, there is a lack of mention or suggestion of the meal and the social interaction found around it. In a similar vein, the foodie culture, as mentioned earlier by Cairns, Johnston & Bauman (2010), represents individuals with a passion for food and learning about it but there is little attributed to the social experiences of the meal.

While some aspects of culinary capital and foodie culture can be associated with the experiences of OMC, a more socially orientated form of capital is more appropriate to understand the phenomenon. Social capital is viewed as the advantages, benefits or access to resources that individuals gain from interaction with others. The following paragraphs will detail an understanding of different forms of social capital and how these can be developed to define the form of capital found within OMC.

5.8.2 Social Capital

Pierre Bourdieu defines social capital as:

the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition – or in other words, to membership in a group (1986: 248).

Bourdieu's work focuses mainly on the benefits of participation and the deliberate construction of sociability for the purpose of creating the resource. Two key elements pertaining to social capital were identified: the social relationships that allow individuals to access resources and the amount and quality of these resources. The intangibility issue found within social capital is identified as "*unspecified obligations, uncertain time horizons, and the possible violation of reciprocity expectations*" (Portes, 1998: 4). The intangibility of social capital can, however, benefit the actors involved as "*by their very lack of clarity, these transactions can help disguise what otherwise would be plain market exchanges*" (Bourdieu, 1973 as cited in Portes, 1998: 4). Bourdieu, strengthens his view of social capital, by suggesting that it must be seen as a form of capital as it is produced from established relationships with specific aims and shared values (Bourdieu, 1986).

Coleman (1988) suggests social capital is inherent in relationships between and among actors and should be seen as a valuable resource to those involved. Coleman suggests that, while physical capital is tangible and embodied in material form and human capital is tangible, to a lesser extent, in skills and knowledge, social capital is less tangible still as it resides in the relations among people. Coleman, however, suggests that social capital does facilitate productive activity and that a group, with strong elements of trustworthiness and extensive trust will, accomplish more than a group that does not possess such attributes. Coleman's analysis of social capital depends strongly on the trustworthiness and co-operative relationships of the actors involved.

5.8.3 Networks

Bourdieu and Coleman discuss social capital as between individuals within groups. Describing experiences of OMC as groups or networks of individuals, a further investigation of social capital can be made. Szark (1990: 10) defines networks as *"organized systems of relationships"*, and suggests that a network based on exchange, communication and social elements can embrace and increase social and economic capital. Lynch (2000) notes that a strong understanding of the network constitution can help shape and strengthen the behaviour of members in terms of beliefs, values, norms and expectations (moral framework) and the kinds of social relations found within the network. It is suggested, that it is through an individual's networks and ties, that opportunities for transactions of social capital are created. The strength of these transactions is linked to the norms and trust found within the networks (Adler & Kwon, 2002).

Granovetter (1973) discusses social capital with reference to strong and weak ties. Strong ties represent frequent interactions and weak ties as limited interactions. Granovetter's work proposes that an individual's strong ties form dense networks while a network of weaker ties is less dense. Networks of weak ties can be more fruitful than those made up of strong ties, as connections to weaker, more indirect ties can influence and open up more information channels. As Granovetter suggests *"the fewer indirect contacts one has the more encapsulated he will be in terms of knowledge of the world beyond his own friendship circle"* (1973: 1370). This 'bridging'

of weak ties is often seen, at an individual level, and utilises what individuals have developed in their own networks while reflecting their own value structure and priorities (Davidsson & Honig, 2003).

Although the benefits of indirect ties can be considered limited, they can play an important role as resources that stretch an individual's reach and improve access to information (Ahuja, 2000). Steel (2012) strengthens this idea by suggesting that, however fleeting and transitory interactions may be, the social capital found within them is beneficial as it emerges through an individual's capacity and skills to build connections. Interactions of social capital can be seen as demonstrating a sense of spatial connectedness as well as fostering reciprocal and mutually beneficial relationships (Steel, 2012).

5.8.4 Networked Individualism

While links can be made between social capital and OMC, I suggest that the social capital within the phenomenon should not solely be considered as a resource but more of an experience. OMC, as a form of network hospitality, represents collections of individuals who share, or at least understand the values, norms or motivation of the network and aspire to behave accordingly. While networks have previously been discussed in relation to social capital, Barry Wellman's discussion of networked individualism builds on this and places it in a more connected society influenced by online mediation and a broader access to information.

Wellman discusses social capital in relation to online interactions and the role of the internet and social media. Networked Individualism is defined as ways in which individuals communicate, connect and exchange information which provides opportunities, experiences, rules and procedures (Rainie & Wellman, 2012). Wellman further argues that, as individuals begin to incorporate online interactions, information and social networks into their lives, they have changed the way in which they interact with each other. Rainie & Wellman argue that as a society we have become:

increasingly networked as individuals, rather than embedded in groups. In the world of networked individuals, it is the person who is the focus: not the family, not the work unit, not the neighbourhood, and not the social group (2012: 6)

Wellman further argues that, as networked individuals, we are more connected to sparsely knit, diverse networks rather than being embedded group members. These connections can meet a range of social, emotional and economic needs. Aspects of Granovetter's strength of weak ties can also be drawn on here as networked individuals have a variety of social ties rather than one densely knit network of ties. Wellman (2002) identifies that, if strong ties are unable to satisfy an individual's need, then they will seek satisfaction from weaker ties. Weaker ties are more likely to provide new information or solutions, as they are better connected with more diverse social circles. The changing social environment and a broader access to information means that individuals are more willing to exploit 'remote' relationships in a physical, emotional and social sense. Rainie & Wellman describe these 'remote' relationships, and the experiences they gain from them as "*the broader milieus that give people their place in life by providing the main means of connecting to the broader fabric of society*" (2012: 13).

While networked individualism suggests a 'broader milieus' of social experiences and provision of social capital through interpersonal resources or relations, the strength and value of these interactions must be questioned. Interacting with diverse, better connected, like-minded individuals has a number of benefits but, as we are all individuals, our motivations and the meanings we put behind these interactions remain personal and subjective. Rainie & Wellman describe some experiences of networked individualism as havens or bandages. Havens represent networked experiences which signify a sense of belonging to an individual, whereas, bandages represent experiences where the networked individual temporarily alleviates the stresses and strains of their lives by accessing the social interaction and/or support of others. While these aspects both have their merits, networked individualism represents partial membership of a temporary or transient group. I argue that this is often the attraction to OMC, but, if an individual is looking for a long term social group then they may need to look closer to home and their stronger ties for this support.

Wellman further explores this notion and asks whether network individualism will begin to “*deconstruct holistic individual identities*” (2002: 17). He argues that the compartmentalisation of personal life could create an ‘insecure milieu’ where individuals do not fully belong, do not fully know each other, or even themselves.

5.8.5 Transient, temporary social interactions

While social capital research develops an understanding of OMC as a form of capital, it is not until networked individualism is considered that a clearer reference point can be identified. Networked individualism brings clarity to the temporary nature and transience of social interactions which are identified in the findings. Experiences of OMC are between weak ties, possible strangers, unfamiliar who share a common interest in the shared meal and alternative forms of dining out. The social interaction at meals is the main attraction, expectation and condition of the phenomenon. While interactions may begin awkwardly, with anxiety or an unsureness, interactions soon develop and connections, links and similarities are found between those sharing the experience. Laughter, conversation, sharing of stories and identities take place, as individuals learn about each other, negotiate appropriate topics of conversation or behaviours and develop a relationship within the context of the meal. A sense of occasion is present, as each individual performs and presents themselves in their preferred manner and competes, subconsciously or not, to be socially active, confident or knowledgeable amongst others.

However strong, entertaining or meaningful these social interactions within OMC are, they are still viewed as temporary, transient and fleeting in nature. As the experience comes to an end, it is rare to make concrete plans to meet up elsewhere, to reconnect or to swap contact details. Instead, the social interactions, remain in the context of that experience of OMC. It is here, that Social Interaction Capital begins to form as the stories and experiences, of that meal, become the stories that are told to others. The experiences influence further experiences and are then shared with future others within OMC, other forms of (network) hospitality and further social interactions.

To take Bourdieu’s theorisation of capital, Social Interaction Capital can be interpreted as power or status in that, the more experiences individuals have of interacting with others, the more interesting, socially active and/or socially attractive

they may seem. Further reference, however, can be made to Bauman (2000) and Lee's (2006) conceptualisation of liquid modernity. The nature of these social interactions is placed within a contemporary (liquid) society, which is argued as being fleeting, socially fluid and moving with, rather than away from, a rapidly changing world. The nature of these social interactions move from place to place, setting to setting and with a multitude of others. Each social interaction is unique, as is the experience of OMC, and they lead to further unique social interactions. I suggest that initial social interactions can be as basic or as tenuous as the interest in the phenomenon and can begin and develop on nothing more than this.

Social Interaction Capital can, therefore, be described as an intangible and experiential capital which cannot be measured, counted or even conceptualised by those who accrue it. It can, however, be viewed as integral to the growth of alternative economies like the aforementioned Home-food Economy. In an increasingly networked, online mediated society, those searching for new unique experiences to meet, interact and experience identities, cultures, alternatives and otherness, have the potential of these experiences at their fingertips. While society is made up of social experiences that span beyond hospitality, I argue that hospitality, the relationship between individuals, is at the basis of social interactions. It is from these basic experiences of hospitality that social interactions can evolve, mature, develop or expand into something unique, valuable and transferable from one experience to the next.

5.9 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter has been to synthesise the findings of this research project with academic theory and literature in order to bring further clarity and understanding of the findings in terms of knowledge creation, future development and the societal impact of the phenomenon of OMC. The first four sections of this chapter (Types and Attractions, Commensality, Hospitality and Home-food) develop a deeper understanding of the phenomenon and its place within contemporary hospitality provision. This is further strengthened by links to academic literature which develops theoretical and conceptual knowledge on the phenomenon. The first four sections lead to a visual representation of the phenomenon (A Framework for OMC). The framework details the attractions of OMC, expressions of the concept of Home-food, the interaction of an alternative economy and its online mediation and the experiences of performance and otherness that take place within OMC. The elements within the framework should not be viewed as separate, inseparable entities, but elements which are interconnected, fluid and flexible.

The central point of the framework is as “‘moments’ of hospitality, ‘throwntogetherness’” and represents my overall discussion of the experiences of OMC as a source of Social Interaction Capital. Social Interaction Capital, as discussed in the final section of this chapter, builds on the concepts of culinary capital, social capital, networks and networked individualism. The discussion of these concepts, and their links to OMC concludes in a source of capital which, I argue, exists within the phenomenon of OMC. While Social Interaction Capital is an unconscious, intangible and experiential capital which cannot be measured, it can be viewed as integral to the growth of unique social experiences of otherness as well as an emerging form of networked hospitality provision. Social Interaction Capital will be discussed further in relation to its societal impact and its impact on contemporary hospitality provision in the following Conclusion chapter.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

As stated from the outset, this thesis is exploratory and focuses on an under-researched area within contemporary hospitality provision - OMC. The purpose of this concluding chapter, therefore, is not to write in terms of finality, closure or as an end point, but as a conclusion of my explorations of an emerging and developing phenomenon while leaving space and springboards for future investigation, exploration and interpretation. This thesis has introduced the social phenomenon of OMC, given it definition – *‘social events structured around the meal that are organised online to attract interested individuals or groups’*, and put it into context within contemporary hospitality provision. The purpose of this chapter is to conclude on my developing understanding of the phenomenon under study with reference to my methodological insight, research aim and objectives, findings and discussion. I will also state my contributions to knowledge as well as the limitations of the research project. These final elements will lead to the proposed opportunities of further research in the subject area of contemporary hospitality provision and its associated theories, concepts and broader societal foundations.

6.2 Methodological Insight

This thesis begins and ends with reflective pieces of writing which state the reflexive nature of inquiry that I hold as part of my researcher identity. It has been essential for me to be socially situated, engaged and participatory within the social phenomenon under study in order to gain insight, knowledge, understanding and interpretation of what I am studying. My methodological preference and methods used to collect research material had to represent this approach. I naturally associate academic research with a subjectivist paradigm which places meaning as central to knowledge creation. I also see myself as a qualitative researcher whose strengths lie in engaging, participating and conversing with those within the phenomenon under study. My choices of methods, for research material collection, were both reflective and analytical and allowed me to naturally immerse myself within the phenomenon,

while identifying myself as a researcher and later taking an analytical approach to understanding the collected material.

Autoethnographic Participant Observation and Discussion-style Interviews both enabled me, as a researcher, to be fully active and engaged in the phenomenon under study. The use of these methods, as discussed in Chapter 3, further strengthens Denzin & Lincoln's (2005, 2011) development of reflexively analytical forms of qualitative research. My intention, throughout this thesis, is to place myself within, while reflecting on the social phenomenon of OMC. In doing so, I aim to state how my role as a socially situated researcher best enables the understanding of complex social phenomena and future exploratory research projects which could be influenced by this thesis. In doing so, I hope to strengthen the role and development of advanced qualitative research within the social sciences and, in particular, hospitality studies.

Hospitality, as has been identified continuously within this thesis, is a social entity, something which cannot and will not take place without the engagement of others. To research hospitality, I argue, we must be within it, be part of the interaction and reflect on our own participation and engagement. Engaging and participating in and reflecting on the phenomenon of OMC and choosing appropriate research methods has allowed me to achieve the aim and objectives of this thesis as will be discussed in the following section.

6.3 Research Aim and Objectives

The overall aim for this research project is:

To explore the role and significance of Online Mediated Commensality and its place within contemporary hospitality provision

In order to achieve this aim, I developed the following research objectives which focus on specific areas of the research process. In the following section, I will restate each of the objectives and detail how these objectives were achieved with reference to the research findings and discussion.

6.3.1 Objective 1: Undertake a critical review of literature surrounding key concepts and the emergence of the phenomenon.

The first objective was important in developing an understanding of a range of concepts and theories linked to the phenomenon under study. While OMC had not yet been fully researched in academia, there are a number of concepts relating to it that needed to be contextualised in order to distinguish the phenomenon in its own right. While some of the concepts (commensality, hospitality, performance, home, etc.) recall seminal works by a number of influential scholars (Derrida; Goffman; Bauman), I have brought these works up-to-date, contextualised them within contemporary society and connected them to scholars who are studying similar phenomena in the field today (Germann Molz, Bialski, Danesi, Guttentag).

The literature review contains five sections. The first four sections (*Understanding Commensality; Hospitality, otherness and performance; Network Hospitality and the growth of an alternative economy; and Home as an ethos of hospitality*) provide a critical discussion on some of the key concepts surrounding the growth of the OMC phenomenon. The fifth section (*Online Mediated Commensality*) introduces the phenomenon and builds on the first four sections of reviewed literature. While this section does contain elements of anecdotal, non-academic literature, this is used to put the phenomenon in context and place it within contemporary hospitality provision. The purpose of the first objective was to develop a critical understanding of OMC before entering the field. While reviewing literature does not seek to explain the phenomenon, it does act to generate an understanding of some of the concepts, theories and interactions that might be found within the research material collection. Gaining knowledge of the interlinking concepts and theories allowed me, as a researcher, to critically engage with the phenomenon, understand social practices within it and gain an understanding of what is taking place and how this relates to previous, and indeed future, research projects.

6.3.2 Objective 2: Explore the attraction of OMC from both guest and host perspectives.

Attractions to the phenomenon are identified in the discussion chapter and implemented into the OMC Framework. Attractions of OMC are identified as Sociability, Difference, Communality, Dining out, Unique Experiences and

Connections. My intention here is not to repeat what has already been discussed in relation to attractions but to expand on these attractions with reference to both guest and host perspectives. These perspectives are not mutually exclusive and can be identified by both perspectives, thus strengthening the discourse of the blurring of guest/host perspectives within contemporary hospitality provision (Di Domenico & Lynch, 2007). One of the key attractions to OMC is the fact that, from both guest and host perspectives, what is on offer is different to traditional forms of dining out. Whether the difference is identified as the social interaction/exchange, unique setting or venue, communal dining, interaction between guest and host, or the online mediation, each helps to place OMC as a new or different experience. Those experiencing OMC may also be attracted to these meals precisely due to their temporariness, transient, momentary or 'one off' nature, which suggests, that if these opportunities are missed, they will not return.

From a business perspective, OMC can also represent a testing ground for skills, ideas and innovation (Guttentag, 2015; Christensen et al, 2015). As discussed in the findings and discussion, those who are more business-like in their approach to OMC may wish to develop their ideas further, perhaps, one day into a fully-fledged business. OMC, therefore, provides a way of experimenting and testing these business ideas in a low-risk, low-cost environment where feedback and evaluation can be easily sought.

Within OMC, a broader conceptual gaze of Home-food is identified. Expressions of Home-food (Identity, Nationality, Togetherness, Mobility, Family, Background and Hospitality) can also be understood as motivating factors which attract individuals to the phenomenon. While presented separately (yet interconnected) in the OMC Framework, Attractions to OMC and Expressions of Home-food provide an all-round perspective of why individuals are attracted to this form of social dining, be it as a host or guest. These perspectives demonstrate the complexity and subjective nature of why individuals find OMC attractive, interesting or worth experimenting with.

6.3.3 Objective 3: Identify how OMC fosters social interaction/exchange

The social aspect of OMC, and of many of its components has been discussed throughout this thesis. The OMC definition, '*social events structured around the meal that are organised online to attract interested individuals or groups*', strongly suggests that the meals are social in nature and in contrast to any segregated or solo dining experiences (Danesi, 2012b). The social aspect is then discussed throughout the literature review, with reference to the act of commensality (Sobal & Nelson, 2003; Fischler, 2011), hospitality (Lashley et al 2007; Lynch et al, 2011), network hospitality (Germann Molz, 2012a, 2012b) and interactions with home (Nowicka, 2007; Russo, 2012; Uriely, 2010). Sociability is identified as one of the attractions of OMC, along with communality and connections, which also suggests elements of social interaction. Similarly, togetherness is identified as one of the expressions of Home-food which again has links to social interaction and exchange.

Social interaction and exchange that take place within experiences of OMC can range from introductions, conversations and discussions to a deeper level of social engagement around the intimate setting of the shared meal. While some may argue that these social interactions are superficial, mere performances of idealised selves in their preferred light, I argue that the social interactions and exchanges within OMC are useful, meaningful and representative of the mobile, liquid society in which we live (Bauman, 2000; Lee 2006). My discussion on Social Interaction Capital expands on these interactions as a means of capital. While this form of capital is unconscious, intangible and immeasurable, it does provide participants with unique experiences, interactions and moments of hospitality, which in future interactions are discussed, shared, interpreted and elaborated on. I, myself, have told stories of my experiences of OMC with others, not just as a researcher but as an individual whose experiences act as part of my own identity, enter my personal narrative and begin to define who I am as a person.

My findings and discussion strongly suggest that the OMC phenomenon does foster social interaction and exchange. Social interaction and exchange takes place within the meal itself and, while they rarely lead to repeated interactions with the same

people within the same setting, they do lead to further stories, experiences or interactions with others outwith the phenomenon and within further experiences of OMC.

6.3.4 Objective 4: Discuss the impact OMC has on contemporary hospitality provision

This objective discusses the impact that OMC is having on contemporary hospitality provision. My study takes a UK perspective so many interpretations can be only linked to this setting. Connections, however, can be made to wider geographical locations where examples of OMC have been identified (USA, Australia, New Zealand, France, Scandinavia, Western Europe, etc.).

This thesis initially builds on Germann Molz's (2012a, 2012b) conceptualisation of network hospitality, where exchanges of hospitality have a social/cultural, rather than an economic motive. Others such as Bialski, 2011, Rosen, et al, 2011, and Bialski & Bartoski, 2010, discuss network hospitality with reference to CouchSurfing, where non-monetary exchanges take place within the same online network. Further discussions on network hospitality continued (Guttentag, 2015; Ikkala & Lampinen, 2015) with reference to AirBnb, where a monetary exchange was included within the exchange of hospitality. AirBnb, although contested by some, still retains elements of social/cultural exchanges which place it within the network hospitality schema. OMC has links with both examples, yet the focus shifts from accommodation to the interactions around the meal. As previously discussed, the identification of Pop-ups, Supper Clubs and Meetups place different examples of OMC on a commercial/non-commercial continuum. While slight variations occur within definitions, they all share the same end product of a socially orientated meal which still fits my original definition.

It could be argued that those having most impact on contemporary hospitality provision, from an industry perspective, are those charging competitive prices and identifying a gap in the restaurant sector. However, I argue that all examples of OMC are having an impact on contemporary hospitality provision. They all present elements that are different, missing or novel to restaurant scene and that restaurants might wish to learn from in re-evaluating their offer. The impact on the industry is, however, neither positive nor negative. While the number of experiences of OMC

are growing, they do not present a threat to the restaurant scene. My argument here is that this is not the host's/organiser's intention. In order to remain unique, interesting, or underground, OMC needs to remain temporary, momentary and non-mainstream. The moment they become normal, standardised, expected or mundane experiences, is the moment they no longer fit the OMC definition. Also identified in the findings, was that participants, just like myself, still enjoy going to restaurants. As previously noted within my discussion of Home-food, the phenomenon is not based on activism or a strong anti-capitalism manifesto, but on different experiences of exchange, social interaction and encounters with the like-minded.

Another observation worthy of note, is the demographics of experiences of OMC. All my experiences took place within cities, as this is where I was able to locate the most experiences of OMC. I suggest, therefore, that OMC is an experience most prominent in cities and, therefore, those participating are city dwellers who may experience contemporary, liquid society in a different way to those living in rural areas of small towns. City dwellers, and my experiences of OMC, also suggest that those participating are socially active, socially mobile professionals with few financial concerns. It could be argued, therefore, with further research, that OMC represents a middle-class, city phenomenon which further brings clarity to experiences of hospitality as an inclusive/exclusive force. This understanding is nothing new and draws comparison to a quotation used in Florida's (2003) paper on Cities and the Creative Classes:

Great cities have always been melting pots of races and cultures. Out of the vivid and subtle interactions of which they have been the centers, there have come the newer breeds and the newer social types (Park, Burgess & McKenzie, 1925 as cited in Florida, 2003: 3)

While further research is needed on the demographics of OMC, initial suggestions of this nature can be made from my analysis of the phenomenon.

My prediction for the future of OMC is its continued existence, development and growth in popularity, yet never wanting or achieving hegemony over more traditional dining experiences. The concept of networked individualism and the fluid view of

society means that more individuals will become aware of OMC and some of these will experience the phenomenon for themselves.

6.3.5 Objective 5: Consider the theoretical and practical implications of findings

The final objective takes a broader perspective on theoretical and practical implications of the findings of this thesis. While much of this objective is present in the discussion chapter, I will highlight some of the key theoretical and practical implications with reference to some of the theoretical underpinnings of the study.

Derrida's (2000) intrinsic perspectives of hospitality – the conditional laws and the unconditional law - have been discussed and critiqued by previous researchers (Cheah, 2013; Dufourmantelle, 2013). My positioning of Derrida's perspectives is in relation to the relationship between guest and host and how these conditions are navigated, negotiated or implied. More specifically, my discussion of conditions was under that of 'social conditions', where conditions of hospitality are discussed under a social lens. My findings strengthen Dufourmantelle's (2013) identification that hospitality can only exist under a conditional perspective, yet the very essence of hospitality is unconditional, absolute or pure. The social conditions of OMC demonstrate conditions which are interpreted as essential within OMC. These conditions feel natural, sociable and unconditional, yet are the very premise on which the phenomenon rests.

Derrida's perspectives of hospitality describe the negotiation of conditions between others. While these conditions of hospitality, social or otherwise, are negotiated, the individuals perform to best present themselves or be best perceived by others. Goffman's (1959) concept of performance is often associated with encounters of hospitality and is present within OMC. Performance is identified as an element within the OMC Framework and is placed within the social conditions and experience of otherness. Performance and otherness develop a deeper understanding of how strangers, unknowns and non-kin interact and socialise within OMC. Each individual begins to perform, present themselves as the perfect guest, host and individual in order to interact with other performers present. I suggest that, while interactions within OMC may begin as performances or presentations of selves, they can become

more natural, social and less performative as the individuals ease into the setting, expectations and social experiences of the shared meal.

Bauman's *Liquid Modernity* (2000) brings further clarity of how a phenomenon like OMC is placed within the confines and characteristics of contemporary society. Strengthened by the work of Lee (2006) and Rainie & Wellman (2012), OMC is placed within a networked, liquid society strongly influenced and mediated by social media and online technologies. Interactions are more fleeting, transient and with weaker ties rather than strong ties of family and friendship groups. While Bauman may present a darker picture of contemporary society, Lee (2006) puts this view in contrast and suggests that this is the state of modernity and contemporary society, where traditions and the ways of being are rapidly changing, developing in an increasing mobile, borderless society. Traditions of hospitality are, therefore, adapting, changing and developing within a liquidly mobile world. OMC represents one of these traditions of hospitality which, although it matches many of the traditional conceptions of hospitality, now seems unique, novel and new to those participating within them.

6.4 Contributions to knowledge

The contributions to knowledge from this thesis follows three lines of developing knowledge. First, this thesis creates new knowledge on an, as yet, under-researched area of contemporary hospitality provision – OMC. Second, it also creates conceptual knowledge relating to the social phenomenon under study, namely within the Home-food Economy and concept of Social Interaction Capital. Finally, this thesis, develops the use and understanding of advanced qualitative research methods on a social phenomenon, within a constantly changing and developing area of study, which will continue to change in future years. While this third contribution has already been discussed at the beginning of this chapter, the first two will be further discussed in the next paragraphs.

Research on OMC was identified after previous research on CouchSurfing and the non-monetary interactions between guest and host (Urie, 2012). Meals were mentioned as important aspects within these interactions and I began to investigate

the idea of meal sharing and commensality between strangers. I coined the term 'Online Mediated Commensality', after initial investigation and attendance of pilot meals, as it represented a new aspect of social dining which was yet to be researched fully within academia, and more specifically, hospitality studies (as mentioned on page 5). What has transpired from this research project is the understanding of a new social phenomenon which incorporates social practices of hospitality, commensality, interaction, sharing and identity formation. While these practices may sound idealised or utopic in nature, the nature of exchanges are set within the confines of a meal where the social conditions of OMC are understood and, more often than not, adhered to.

While the inevitable social perspective has been identified as crucial within interactions and exchanges, the development of business-like approaches to OMC also contributes to the broader understanding of business and its online mediation. In terms of conceptual development and knowledge creation, the Home-food Economy is representative of a new emerging economy within contemporary hospitality provision in which OMC is placed

The Home-food Economy is sourced online by those interested in dining experiences which are sociable, unique and different to more traditional forms of dining out. HFE represents aspects of identity, social interaction, values, skills and settings, associated with the meal, as well as a shared moral framework relating to the importance of the shared meal and commensality. Building on the ethical and sharing economies and the concept of disruptive innovation, the HFE is placed within a fast paced, liquid society and defined as:

An alternative economy promoting memorable experiences of the meal where identities, skills and values are shared among participants in a sociable, unique, hospitable setting

The shared, social aspects of HFE and, therefore, OMC led my thinking to the theoretical contribution of Social Interaction Capital which brings my discussion chapter to a close. My OMC Framework presents a central point within the experience of performance, otherness and social conditions of OMC which is termed as 'moments' of hospitality, 'throwntogetherness'. Social Interaction Capital

represents an intangible, immeasurable and unconscious form of capital which, I argue, is built from these 'moments' of hospitality experienced within OMC. This form of capital comes from the transient, temporary social interactions which are identified within OMC, and which rarely reappear outwith the initial experience. Social Interaction Capital is argued as being integral to the growth of alternative economies like HFE and the broader phenomenon of OMC. Hospitality, at its most basic, is built on social interactions which can evolve, mature and develop into memorably unique experiences which make individuals who they are in terms of identity, personality and future social interactions.

6.5 Areas of further research

As mentioned in Chapter 3, one of the limitations of this study was that it only took place in the UK. During my research journey, I discovered, not surprisingly, that this phenomenon was present in other destinations around the world. Further research on the phenomenon could take an international perspective to identify whether there is something fundamentally 'British' about the experiences of OMC or whether commensality and shared meals are more of a human interaction which transcends international borders.

As previously discussed in this chapter, further information could be obtained about the demographics of those interacting within OMC in the UK or other locations. Are there trends, within those participating, in terms of age, gender, income, nationality? Does OMC take place in rural areas or is it a popular phenomenon specific to city living? Does the setting or location of OMC say something more about the state of contemporary society, its fluidity or the nature of the social interactions that take place within it? These questions could further be investigated in future research on the phenomenon of OMC.

Finally, further research based on this thesis could take my Social Interaction Capital concept and see if it exists in other forms of contemporary hospitality provision. Could this concept be understood outwith hospitality or in other social situations not connected to the meal? My view is that Social Interaction Capital can span beyond the experiences of hospitality, but without the confines, or conditions of OMC, this

form of capital becomes even more ethereal in nature and becomes less contextualised and linked to our sub-conscious. That said, and worthy of further discussion, the concept of Social Interaction Capital may always be present if we view society as something which is constructed within the confines, conditions or thresholds of hospitality.

6.6 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has given detail of my conclusion of this thesis. I first highlighted the advances in methodological insight with reference to qualitative methods and my engagement and participation within the phenomenon. This engagement and participation, I argue, is fundamental to my understanding and interpretation of the social phenomenon of OMC. I then revisit my overall aim and objectives to this thesis and further elaborate on their importance and interconnectivity. Then, my contribution to knowledge is identified. My exploration of an under-researched area of study, and the theoretical and methodological development is identified as a valuable contribution to hospitality studies and the broader social sciences. Finally, I present areas for future research on the phenomenon of OMC and, most specifically, the development and further investigation of the concept of Social Interaction Capital relating to hospitality provision and contemporary society.

My final remarks on the phenomenon of OMC, and its place within contemporary hospitality provision and social interactions within society, are highlighted in the Reflective Post-script which follows. Reflexivity has been mentioned in many chapters of this thesis and it is with a personal reflection that I begin and end this thesis.

OMC: A reflective post-script

Research material collection ended when I felt I had reached a saturation point – where I was no longer learning or experiencing new things from my material collection. From then on, my involvement in OMC stopped. Although I was still interested in the phenomenon, I felt that continued participation would cloud my judgement over what was counted as research and what would become part of my own spare time. I needed to make a clear departure from the phenomenon in order to analyse the material I had collected in a structured and rigorous manner. While I did not attend or speak to any more participants of the phenomenon, I still remained a member of a number of databases, groups and mailing lists. When analysing the research material, I was aware that the phenomenon continued without me. On occasion, I would see a meal or a new group being advertised which piqued my interest, but I chose not to attend as I was deep in the analysis process and did not want any new information to interfere with the analysis.

In January 2016, around 5 months after completing my analysis and finding section, I noticed a new group through meetup which looked interesting. The-sociable-sous-chefs-half-pint-tapas-society, a new Edinburgh based meetup group, announced an evening entitled *'Meet, cook, drink, eat, share. Cook for and with others'* at the organiser's home one Friday evening. As I was free that evening, I decided to sign up. It had been long enough from my research material analysis that I was confident that it would not affect that analysis. The organiser suggested that attendees bring £1.50 to cover the food that he was supplying. The evening would be loosely structured around cooking, sharing and eating together. The food would have a Spanish element to it but with no rules or strict protocol. Attendees should bring whatever they would like to drink.

My initial interest in attending this meal was not to write up my experience, analyse the content or even to include it in my thesis. What transpired, however, was an experience of OMC which contextualised a number of findings and areas of discussion that are representative of my thesis as a whole. I, therefore, chose to write a reflective piece on my experience. Once I had written it, I emailed the host of the

meal and asked if it could be included in my thesis. The host responded positively and said they had enjoyed reading the piece as it reminded them of the experience of the meal we had shared. In line with previously mentioned research ethics and integrity, culturally specific pseudonyms are used throughout.

The following description represents a reflective description of my experiences of this meal. While this description (more of a diary entry) differs in terms of detail of my transcriptions of Stage 1 of research material collection, a feel for the experience of OMC and my own engagement in it, is generated. My reflections of this meal are supportive of many of the aspects found within the Discussion chapter in terms of differentiation, commensality, hospitality, organisation, home-food and social interaction capital.

29th January 2016

I arrived at the address of Neil, the organiser's home at 6.30pm. I rang the buzzer and was told to come up to the top floor of the block of tenement flats. As I arrived at the top of the stairs, I saw a door slightly ajar with light spilling into the dark stairwell. I half-knocked on the door, saying 'Hello?' as I pushed the door open. Neil welcomed me into the hallway by shaking my hand and ushering me in the door. *'Nice to meet you, I was a bit worried that no one would turn up, I've never done anything like this before so not really sure how it works'*. Neil (50s, English accent) led me into his kitchen-dining room. A rectangular wooden dining table displayed a range of vegetables, oils, bread, meat and seafood ready for preparation. Some plates, crockery and glasses were also stacked on the breakfast bar ready for use. I placed my bottle of red wine on the table. Neil had already opened a bottle of red wine and offered me a glass. He poured the red wine into a tumbler and passed it to me. *'Cheers'* we both said as we raised our glasses. *'Take a seat'* Neil said as he offered one of the wooden seats around the dining table. He sat down across the table and we began talking about the meetup and why he had set it up. *'I had heard about meetups and as I have just moved to Edinburgh, I thought it would be good fun to meet people who are also interested in this kind of thing. I have a farm in the south of Spain, so I go back there quite a bit.'* I told Neil that I, too, had lived in the south of Spain and also a bit about my work with meetups and my thesis. Neil seemed impressed of my area of study and I reassured him that this was not part of my research but just something that had interested me, my interest in cooking and my love of Spanish food and culture.

As we continued chatting, the buzzer went. Neil got up and said *'Looks like it won't be just the two of us after all!'* Neil answered the buzzer and instructed his guest to come up to the top floor. Soon Neil and a man in his 30s entered the kitchen. I stood up and was introduced to Juan. Juan and I shook hands. Juan placed a backpack on the table and said *'I wasn't sure what to bring'* as he took a bottle of wine, some

bottles of beer and a French stick out of his bag. *'That's great, we should be able to create something with all of this'* Neil said, as he gestured towards the table full of food. I noticed Juan had a Latin/Spanish accent and asked him where he was from. *'Columbia, but I have been here in Edinburgh for around 7 years.'* The three of us talked as Neil poured Juan a glass of wine. As we chatted the buzzer went again and soon we were joined by another man in his 30s. Milek, shook hands with everyone as he, too, began to get things out of his bag. *'I didn't read the instruction properly'* he said, *'and I've made some food that just needs to be heated up'*. Milek handed over a Tupperware to Neil. *'It's chorizo cooked in red wine. I made it last night so it should have lots of flavour.'* After the Tupperware, Milek also produced a bottle of red wine and some beers which he placed on the breakfast bar before sitting at the table looking at all the food on the table.

Conversation flowed easily, the four of us introduced ourselves and toasted each other as we clinked our tumblers of wine together. Neil started organising the food and asked Juan and I to cut some vegetables and bread. Juan and I started putting together some montaditos (Spanish sandwiches) using the cheese, pepper and meats. Neil chose to prepare some prawns over at the hob. As we prepared some food, the conversation continued. It was light-hearted and we shared a few laughs as we talked about where we lived in Edinburgh. We soon realised that none of us were actually from Edinburgh or Scotland and we compared our experiences of living in the city. Milek, from Poland, lived near me and we talked about some bars, restaurants and cafes that we had both been to. Food soon arrived at the table and we naturally passed plates around and helped ourselves. Neil topped up wine and soon opened another bottle of red wine. As we ate, conversation flowed on a range of topics covering, family, jobs, hobbies, holidays, food and drink. At one point Milek got up and started preparing his chorizo dish using the frying pan on the hob. I began chopping some onions and an aubergine to accompany it. Neil had made his kitchen open and available, so permission was not needed and we were able to use all the ingredients provided. Milek placed his chorizo dish on the table and we began to try it, ensuring everyone had some. Juan cut some more bread to go with it. I then went to the hob and started preparing my aubergine dish. The kitchen was small enough that the person preparing food was still part of the conversation. As each person prepared a dish, the others would ask questions about it and compare it to dishes they had tried or made before.

The evening continued in this manner until most of the food had been used. The conversation didn't dry up and the wine and beer continued to be shared amongst the four of us. While Neil had mentioned that others had said they were coming along, none of us asked if anyone else would be joining us and after a few hours the interaction seemed normal as we got to know each other. At one point, we heard the front door opening. Milek and I looked at each other and smiled as we were not expecting anyone else to join us. *'Ah that's Jess, my daughter'* Neil said, as if surprised. He got up as the kitchen door opened. Jess (20s) walked in and looked around slightly nervously at the 3 strangers in her kitchen. We all introduced ourselves and Jess soon joined us and was poured a glass of wine. I looked at the

time and was quite surprised to see that it was nearly 11pm. The night had flown by and we were all a bit surprised to see that it was this late. We continued to talk for a while but then the three of us decided that it was time to go. Neil, too, was also surprised at the time and thanked us all for coming. We talked about doing something similar in the future and agreed that it would be a good idea. We mentioned possible dates but agreed that it was probably easier to organise online as we couldn't agree on a date that suited everyone. The three of us collected our bags and jackets and thanked Neil and Jess for their hospitality. We left the flat and walked down the stairs, still chatting about the night and meeting up again in the future.

Juan, Milek and I walked together towards the main road. As we reached the main road we shook each other's hands and exchanged '*nice to meet you*' and '*see you again*' before going our separate ways.

Since this experience, further meals of this meetup group have taken place at the same and other locations. By keeping an eye on the posts of the meetup group, each of these meals consisted of different individuals, different meals were made and inevitably different social interactions were experienced. Although, this only represents one example of OMC and its place within contemporary hospitality provision, it suggests that the findings and discussions made in this thesis are still relevant, ever changing and demonstrate future developments of this form of OMC, hospitality and social interactions in an increasingly fluid, mobile society.

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Appendices

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Appendix 1: Initial email to potential participants

Hi *****,

I am a PhD student at Edinburgh Napier University and am currently doing some research on home-based supper clubs, dinner parties and pop-up restaurants.

The focus of my research is on the use of home as a setting for hospitality experiences, commensality (the act of eating and/or cooking together), social interaction and meeting new people.

The information from your website and social media seems to tick a lot of the boxes of my research focus and I would like to discuss the possibility of using one of your events as part of my studies with you.

Please do not hesitate to get in contact with me with any questions, comments or suggestions about my research

I look forward to hearing from you and thank you in advance for any information you may have.

All the best

Gavin Urie

████████████████████
████████████████

Informed Consent Form for Project Participants

Participants should read this form and ask any questions about the study or the procedure before the discussion proceeds.

Project title: *An exploration into online mediated commensality*

In signing this form participants agree to take part in the above research which will take place in two distinct phases.

1. The observation of an agreed commensality ‘event’
2. Follow up discussion-style interview

Both phases will be undertaken by the researcher (Gavin Urie) and agreed upon in advance between the researcher and participant.

The observation:

The researcher will participate in the event along with fellow guests although their identity as a researcher will be known to all involved. The researcher will make ethnographic notes after the event, which will be transferred onto a password-protected computer. The researcher will be the only person who has access to this computer.

The interview:

The interviews will take place at an agreed time and location. The estimated duration of interviews is between 45-60 minutes. Interviews will be recorded using a digital voice recorder (Olympus VN-8500PC/Samsung Galaxy Ace). Interviews will be transcribed by the researcher and a copy of the transcribed interview will be sent to the participant by e-mail. Participants may be quoted in the final report but will remain anonymous at all times.

All information provided will be treated with confidence and will not be shared with any person, organisation or agency unconnected to the research project

Appendix 2: Consent Form

You have the right to refuse to participate before, or at any point during the interview. You can also refuse to answer any question. Please inform the student researcher if you have any concerns over this research project. Alternatively you can contact the student's supervisor (Prof. Paul Lynch, e-mail: [REDACTED])

Statement of Consent by Participant

I have read and understand this form and agree to participate in this interview and abide by the conditions outlined above.

Signature: _____ Print: _____ Date: _____

Appendix 3: Autoethnographic Participant Observation of Meal 13 (M13)

On booking for this event through the website designmynight.co.uk I received the following information.

Hailed as *****'s first secret supper club, The ***** ***** is your chance to dabble in some truly high-class, home-spun Indian fare. A truly social eating experience, the 'Indian Feast Pop-Up Restaurant' is an evening of hearty conversations and charming dishes in a wholly secret location. Made fresh, using locally sourced ingredients and family flung flair, a brand new and bespoke menu is featured at every event.

This ticket secures your place at our "Indian Feast Pop-Up Restaurant" at The ***** ***** on Saturday 12th April 2014.

We do not serve any alcohol so you are more than welcome to bring your own drinks. We can fully cater for vegetarians-please let us know upon booking. The secret location is a 5 minute walk from Victoria Station however the exact address will be sent to you 48 hours before the night of the dinner. Please note, tickets are non-refundable.

IMPORTANT: To confirm your place and to receive the exact location, please ensure you email ***** after purchase of tickets.

I followed the instructions and emailed Anthea. I received a further email:

Hi Gavin,

Thanks for your booking for 1 at our ***** ***** Indian Feast Pop-Up Restaurant on Saturday, 12th April 2014.

To confirm your booking, could you please confirm the following information about yourself and each of your guests (as elements of the event are personalised):

- How did you hear about The ***** *****?
- Do you have any dietary requirements?
- Please tell us a little about yourself: what do you do/hobbies etc.?
- What is your contact number?

Dinner starts at 7.00pm-please be punctual. BYOB. The location will be hosted from a city-centre location, approx. 5 minutes' walk from ***** *****. The exact address will be texted to you 48 hours before the night of the dinner.

Looking forward to hearing from you!

I responded with the required information and Anthea emailed me back thanking me for. I received the following email 2 days before the event:

Hello,

Please find details below for this Saturday's ***** ***** Indian Feast Pop-Up:

Date: Saturday 12th April 2014

Time: Doors open at 6.30pm for a prompt 7.00pm start-please be punctual!

Appendix 3: Autoethnographic Participant Observation of Meal 13 (M13)

Location:

**** *, *****, *****, ** *

This is approximately a 3 minute walk ***** Station. The entrance of the location is shown on the photos attached. There is street parking nearby to ***** Station and also on ***** .

If you have any questions in regards to directions, please call *** on *****. The event will be finishing at approximately 10.00pm. BYOB.

Please email back to confirm you have received this email

Looking forward to hearing from you and seeing you on the night.

Come hungry!

Anthea x

The *****

I found the correct street in Manchester on a wet Saturday night but could not see an obvious venue for the event. As I walked up the street towards a main road I noticed a large building to my right which looked like an office block. I noticed a couple of wet, weather-beaten pieces of paper attached to the metal handrail. As I looked closer at them I could see that they said '*****'. I walked up the stairs towards the building and as I got closer I could see a number of set tables through the glass to the left hand side. Some more paper signs directed me to the revolving doors where I could see people standing in the foyer behind them. I went through the doors and was greeted by a young Indian woman. 'Hi, are you here for *****? What's your name?' I introduced myself and the woman said 'Ahh so you made it here ok, I'm Anthea how was the journey?' 'Fine' I said, 'apart from the weather.' 'I know, it's not been great today!' Anthea continued, 'let me introduce you to my Mum, this is Anita' she said as she introduced me to an Indian woman in her 50s. 'Mum and Dad are the cooks tonight, mostly anyway, and this is my brother TJ'. A tall man in his 30s came over and shook my hand. 'Glad you could make it Gavin, nice to meet you.' The foyer was quite dark and was lit only by about 20 tea lights which were set on the reception desk to the right. The floors were a dark shiny marble. Anthea, Anita and TJ were all dressed in black shirts and trousers. Anthea then said 'I'm not sure if we will get a chance to chat tonight but hopefully we can do it over Skype next week.' 'That would be great' I said. Anthea then introduced me to a waiter who then took me to my table. The waiter, also dressed in black, led me into the room to the left of the foyer where 7 tables were set up. The dining room was lighter and each window had been decorated with a coloured Indian-style silk scarf tied across it. The tables were long and each seated 8 (3 both side and 1 at each end). There were 7 tables in total (56 settings in total). The waiter showed me to my table which was in the right corner of the room. The table was covered with a light white table cloth and was set with a dark red paper napkin with knife, fork and spoon on top of it. Each setting had a wine glass and a colourful arrangement of flowers was in the middle of the table. A glass holding a red lit candle stood either side of the flowers. A scrolled menu was at each place (at a diagonal)

held together with a black and gold ribbon. Two small plates of what looked like thin pork scratchings were next to the candles at either end of the table. I noticed a large marble light in the corner of the room which matched the marble walls of the room. A decorative chain of colourful elephants was hanging from the light and I noticed that this was repeated at the other light fittings in the room. Each setting had a name place and as I sat down the waiter came back with a shot glass with a white liquid in it with flashes of green. 'This is your Tulsi Lassi Shot, enjoy'. I thanked the waiter as he placed the small glass in front of me. I placed my bottle of sparkling water on the table and poured myself a glass before putting the bottle on the floor under my seat. I opened my menu by untying the ribbon to see what was in front of me. 'Tulsi Lassi Shot – Creamy sweet lassi flavoured with fresh basil, served with crunchy fenugreek mathi snacks'. The menu was split into five sections; the lassi shot was first then a starter, 5 main dishes, a dessert and finally a traditional Indian tea. As I was reading the menu the waiter led a girl (20s) to the table. The girl thanked the waiter as she looked for her name place. Her name place was next to mine and I introduced myself to her. 'I'm Connie...but you could have guessed that' she said with a laugh. Connie took off her coat and placed a bottle of wine on the table. 'So did you come on your own as well? I thought I was going to be the only one!' I told her that I was here on my own and told her a little bit about my research. Connie seemed really interested in my research and told me that she had been to a few pop-ups, supper clubs and similar events in Manchester. 'Have you been to ***** *? she asked. 'Yes I was there in February, really enjoyed it and she was really interesting too' I replied. 'I have been 3 times and totally love it, you always meet some interesting people and it's so cool cos it's in her front room, she is there with her partner who is pouring the wine and her dog is sometimes there too.' We shared experiences of ***** *'. Connie told me that she was attracted to it because it was vegetarian as she hasn't found many supper clubs that were totally vegetarian. 'I'm a pescatarian so it was great to be able to go to an event where you didn't have to worry about ordering something different or having something special made for you...it doesn't happen very often .' 'Yes, I think the other side of it is that some meat eaters might be put off because it is vegetarian... but when I was there, the food was so good that you didn't miss the meat at all, when I used to work in restaurants the veggie option was always terrible like mushroom risotto or veggie pasta!' I said. Connie laughed and said 'Yeah it's better now, but it used to be a really limited choice'. The dining room was filling up now and most of the other tables were full or almost full. 'This is the first one I have been to where they ask you about your interests in an email beforehand though' Corinne said. 'Same here' I said, 'I wonder why they did that' Corinne said, thinking about it. 'Not sure really, maybe they try to put similar people together at the same table, but that doesn't mean they are going to get on!' We both laughed in agreement. The room was getting noisier with talking and the scraping of chairs on the hard flooring. 'I wonder where the rest of our table is?' Connie asked as she looked around at the other tables. We both tried our lassi and fenugreek snacks as we waited. 'Mmm that's a good start' Connie said as she finished her lassi shot.

The waiter led a group of 3 over to our table. Two men and a woman (mid 30s) came over to the table with some bottles clinking in a plastic bag. They looked for their names and the woman (Debbie) sat next to me while Des sat at the end of the table and Connor sat opposite Debbie. We all introduced ourselves to each other as they opened a couple of bottles of cider and shared it between them. They were served their lassi shots by the waiter and

Connor said 'Is there alcohol in this? I thought this would come at the end.' 'There's no alcohol in it, it's just a refresher... I think it is also to clean your palate' Connie told him as the three of them tried their shots. The three of them started talking amongst themselves and I asked Connie if she knew anything about the venue. 'Yes it's the old cooperative...the new one is over there' as she pointed to a modern looking building across the road, 'they call it The Egg, as it looks like a boiled egg with the top sliced off it...kind of...but this building is empty but the council are encouraging people to use it for events like this, gigs, community events, stuff like that...I'm coming to the Sunday assembly atheist church service here on Sunday.' As Connie spoke, three women (20s) approached our table. They seemed a little bit flustered and one of them said, as they worked out where each of them was sitting, 'Our taxi dropped us off at the other end of the road and we couldn't find the place'. The women sat down and organised their drinks (shared bottles of beer) and introduced themselves to the table. Lauren (opposite me), Becca (next to her, opposite Connie) and Katie (at the end of the table). Just as they were introducing themselves to us we heard someone clinking a knife on the side of a glass and the room quietened down. Anthea was standing at the beginning of a large staircase, a couple of steps up, with a glass in her hand. Anthea welcomed us all to the ***** and said '***** aims to promote family style Indian dining and recipes that have been passed down from my great-grandmother from the north of India, to my grandmother who is now in Delhi, to my mum who is now here in Manchester and has passed the recipes down to me. The food tonight is like the food we eat at home and share amongst our friends and family and we hope you enjoy it and enter into the spirit of the evening.' Anthea told us about the starter and said that they would serve that in the next few minutes. The diners clapped as Anthea came down from the steps and made her way back into the kitchen. The 3 girls at our table were all looking at the menu and Connie and I did the same.

The starter was 'Aloo Tikki Chaat – Punjabi style potato cake flavoured with paprika, green chilli & coriander seeds, topped with coriander & mint yoghurt sauce & home-made tamarind chutney'. The starter came out quickly and the waiters served each table at a time. The starter came on a small side plate with the potato cake in the centre with a colourful garnish on top of it. 'Smells great' someone at our table said as we all waited for everyone to have food in front of them. When everyone had the starter in front of them we started to eat. There wasn't much conversation during the starter, aside from a few 'mmm's and people exchanging approving glances. I asked Connie what she thought of the starter. 'Good so far' she said, 'I love the garnish and the pomegranate.' I then asked Connie why she was interested in pop-ups, supper clubs and events like this. 'For me it's about creating community around food' she said, 'you get to meet some interesting people and get a connection with them, you know, just like now...and for me it's about meeting similar types of people, not just vegetarians but people who enjoy doing this sort of thing and are maybe a bit 'out there' or a bit adventurous'. We continued talking about my research for a while and had a number of similar views and experiences. The others at our table kept to their groups of three and were chatting happily. Everyone seemed to enjoy the starter and all the plates were clean and were then cleared by the waiters. Once the plates were clear one of the waiters came over to our table and asked if he could take the flowers away to make more space. He also cleared the empty shot glasses from the appetiser. Connie got up and went to the toilet and I noticed Connor and Des both looking at Des' phone. 'It's gone to penalties' Des told Connor. 'Is that the semi-final?' I asked them. 'Yeah it finished 1 each so it's gone to

Appendix 3: Autoethnographic Participant Observation of Meal 13 (M13)

a penalty shootout...we both want Wigan to win'. 'Me too' I said. The three of us talked about football, our teams and predictions for the end of the season. Des kept us up to date on the penalty shootout, which Wigan lost to Arsenal. The room was noisy with chatter and laughter coming from all the tables. The girls at our table were laughing and sharing out their drinks between them. Lauren caught my eye and asked 'So do we get to choose the curry or do we get a bit of everything?' 'I think it comes in bowls and we all help ourselves' I said as I took my menu from my coat pocket. The menu had 5 main courses listed;

Murgh Masala – Succulent chicken roasted in onions, ginger, garlic, tomato, ***** garam masala, turmeric & fresh coriander

Tori Kofta Mattar – Spicy kofta balls made from fresh courgettes cooked with peas, flavoured with cumin, ginger, tomatoes, paprika & sun-dried fenugreek

Saag Paneer – Traditional Indian cheese cooked with spinach in a classic Punjabi style masala

Dal Makhni – Urad dal, kidney beans & channa lentils blended together, cooked in onions, ginger, garlic, ***** garam masala, tomatoes & fresh cream

Fresh Salad – Cucumber, radish, red onion & tomato salad

** The main course is served family style, with fresh chappatis & Basmati cumin rice **

Lauren too was looking at her menu and asked me 'Do you come to many of these?' I told Lauren a bit about my research and she seemed quite interested. 'So did you come down from Edinburgh just for this?' I told her that I had. 'We are from Cumbria and we wanted to come, we tried to book one last month but were too late...Becca comes down every Sunday as she is doing a uni course here part-time. So we came down with her and will go shopping tomorrow while she is at uni, then drive back together. I asked Lauren if there was anything like this happening in Cumbria. 'No, not that I am aware of, I suppose it happens more in big cities but I haven't heard of anything like this up our way. Is it normal to ask for personal interests in an email beforehand?' 'That's the first time I have seen that, not sure why they did that, maybe to try and seat similar people together or something like that' I said. 'Maybe' said Lauren, 'I can't even remember what I wrote down' with a laugh. I noticed that food was coming out from the foyer area and the smells filled the room. 'Smells good', Connie said as she returned to her seat. As we spoke I noticed some of the waiters coming from the kitchen area with dishes of food. One of the waiters came to our table and presented us with a dish of curry. 'Chicken Murgh Masala' he said as he placed the dish of curry at the centre of our table. We all looked at the curry and took in the sight and smells of the curry. 'Smells amazing' someone said. 'I presume we just use the same plates?' said someone else. We still had our starter plates at the table, which were all clear and decided to continue using them for the main course. Waiters continued to come to our table with the other curry dishes (Tori Kofta Mattar, Saag Paneer, Dal Makhni) and we all helped ourselves to a portion. The fresh salad, chappatis and Basmati cumin rice also arrived and we began to eat.

A greater silence filled the room this time as the diners started to eat and try all the curries. 'This is great' Lauren said as the rest of the table nodded their heads and agreed with her. Connie asked me if I had ever been to India. I said I hadn't and she said it was her target to get there one day. 'I have a friend from India and her family always say that I have a place to

stay if I want to visit...so I really have no excuse. It's just difficult getting a good amount of time off work to make it worthwhile, I would really need 3-4 weeks to make the most of it'. I asked Connie what she worked as. 'I work in student accommodation, so I get a flat with the job on site and have to be there on a rota basis...just in case anything happens. It's a catered hall of residence so I also promote eating together with the students. I think it works; it promotes healthy eating, social skills and respect for others. They tend to sit away from me though as I am the strict one that can give a disciplinary for bad behaviour' she laughs as she says this. We discussed the importance of communal eating and its benefits. As the diners continued to eat, the noise level increased as more conversations started. When dishes were finished waiters took the empty dishes and then brought back a replacement dish of the same curry. 'That's impressive' Connor said as he helped himself to the new dish of the chicken curry. TJ came over to our table towards the end of the main course and asked us if everything had been ok. We all said it had been and he asked 'Have you had seconds of all the curries?' 'All except the kofta' Katie said 'and that was my favourite!' Becca and Lauren laughed and hid their faces in embarrassment. TJ smiled and said 'Ok I will see what I can do, enjoy the rest of your night'. He spoke to a passing waiter who nodded and returned to the kitchen area as TJ went to speak to another table. After a couple of minutes the waiter returned with a smaller dish of the kofta. 'Amazing' said Katie as she helped herself to one of the kofta balls and some of the sauce. She then passed it to Corinne who took some and passed it over to Becca and Lauren. 'Do you want half a one?' Becca asked Lauren 'there's not enough for everyone'. 'Ok' said Lauren. I said I was ok for extra kofta and helped myself to some more Saag Paneer. 'This one is definitely my favourite' I said 'I love the goat's cheese'. 'Me too' said Lauren 'what's been your favourite Becs?' Becca had her mouthful of kofta and started to laugh as she pointed at her cheeks signifying that that was her favourite. We all laughed and Connie said that the Dal had been her favourite. Connor said he couldn't choose as everything had been great while Des and Cassie both agreed on the chicken. Connor added 'Everything has been great, I eat quite a lot of curry but stuff like this is so fresh and tasty it kind of puts you off going to the usual places and takeaways as they all taste pretty much the same...a bit boring and predictable' 'Yeah the one we go to near us is rubbish compared to this' Becca adds. 'It's not that bad!' Katie adds sounding hurt but laughing at the same time. Corinne said 'it's nice to try something 'authentic' like this, even though I hate that word'. We continued to discuss takeaways and different cuisines as the waiters came and began to clear the plates and dishes from our table. We refilled our glasses with the water or drinks we had brought with us and continued to talk.

Once the plates had been cleared I saw Anthea standing on the steps again and she started to speak. The diners were quick to turn around and listen to her. 'I hope you all enjoyed the main course...Did you all enjoy the main course??' she shouted encouraging cheers and claps from the diners. 'Great well we have a dessert coming now, to cleanse your palate. It's called a Mango Malai and has cooked apple and cardamom crumble topped with a saffron yogurt, topped with mango and pineapple sorbet, topped with almonds and pomegranate. We will bring it out now and hope you enjoy!' Anthea stepped down from the steps and the diners clapped. Connor and Des were smiling at each other and Des said 'Good job I can eat double' with a laugh. Connor looked disappointed and then told Lauren and I that he was practicing lent. 'I have given up anything with sugar in it for lent. So Des will be getting my dessert.' 'Do you not get a night off for special occasions?' I asked. 'No, I prefer to be strict; otherwise

every night would turn into a special occasion!’ Conner replied. Lauren said that she had tried to give up chocolate but had failed early on. ‘Have you given up alcohol?’ Lauren asked me. ‘No’ I said, ‘I’m just not drinking this week as I am on antibiotics...and have been overdoing it recently.’ ‘I think it would be easier to give up booze than sugar’ Connor added, ‘I think that most January’s I go the whole month without drinking, cos I don’t drink in the house and usually don’t go out much during January either.’ As we spoke the desserts arrived at our table. They were in large wine glasses and the different layers looked interesting and impressive. ‘They look amazing’ Connor said as he passed his dessert to Des. Des had a taste and made an exaggerated ‘mmm’ sound just to annoy Connor. We laughed and Connor said ‘its fine, I can cope’. The dessert was really nice and everyone finished it pretty quickly. ‘That was great’ Corinne said as she finished, each layer was totally different and really tasty.’

It was almost 10pm now and the waiters were clearing the dessert glasses. Anthea stood on the steps again and the diners turned round to listen again. ‘Hope you all enjoyed the dessert...Did you all enjoy the dessert??’ The diners cheered and clapped again in response. ‘Great, I’m glad everyone liked it. The final course will be Elaichi Chai which is a traditional Indian tea infused with crushed cardamom & fennel seeds which will be served with sweet Indian cardamom shortbread. We will get that out to you soon. I would like to thank everyone for coming tonight and hope you have enjoyed it. We will be running events like this in the future so please keep your eye on the website or social media, #spiceclub (laughs) for further details . One final thing before I we get the tea out is that £1 from each of the tickets sold for tonight is going to WaterAid which is a charity working to provide fresh water for children in India. It’s a charity that my family always like to support so we hope promote it and hopefully you will be able to give some more towards it at another time. ’ The diners all clapped when Anthea said this and it was obvious that everyone appreciated the gesture. ‘Ok thanks again and hope to see you all again soon!’ Anthea stepped down from the steps and the diners clapped again. ‘Great, a cup of tea to finish. I hope it’s like a proper British builder’s tea’ Connor said with a laugh. ‘Well India is where tea came from originally’ Corinne added ‘so it might be, I drink chai tea every day and it can be quite similar but just with added spice!’ As we spoke Anthea came to our table and asked ‘The tea we serve traditionally comes with milk, just checking that that is ok with everyone, or I can make some without too?’ We all agreed to have the tea with milk.

As Anthea left our table Becca and Lauren were talking about the event and supper clubs. Becca said ‘So, can anyone start up a supper club?’ Lauren looked at me and said ‘Well we could ask the expert’. I smiled and told them a bit about all the events I had been to and the variation that I had experienced. I told them that sometimes they start as a group of friends cooking and eating together and that sometimes they are experiments to see if people could run a larger establishment. ‘One thing I have noticed though is that no matter what size the event is, you don’t realise how much work it is to get everything organised and ready for people coming over, if it’s friends it’s not that bad but if it is strangers who are paying, it can get pretty stressful, and I think that puts a lot of people off after they try it a few times.’ ‘Yeah I don’t know if I would like a load of strangers in my house, eating my food, judging me! But if it’s just you guys I don’t care’ Lauren said with a laugh looking at Becca and Katie. The tea arrived and was served in plain white mugs and a plate of small biscuits. The tea looked like a normal ‘British’ cup of tea with milk. We all tried the tea and everyone liked it, ‘it’s a bit

Appendix 3: Autoethnographic Participant Observation of Meal 13 (M13)

sweeter than normal tea but it's really nice' Connor said. Some of us tried the biscuits which were like a spiced shortbread. 'These are nice too' Lauren said. Becca agreed 'they taste nice but are a weird texture...a bit sandy' everyone agreed and started to laugh. As diners finished their tea some of them got up to leave. I looked at my watch and it was nearly 10.15pm. I had to catch a train to my hotel and said that I was going to have to leave and said it had been great to meet everyone. Corinne said 'Hey, I'd be interested in hearing more about your research. I'm thinking about doing some further study too so it would be good to get your advice on it when I do so'. 'No problem' I said, 'I would be interested in talking to you further about some of the other supper clubs you have been to too'. I handed her one of my business cards and told her to get in touch. She thanked me as I put my jacket on and left the dining room. We were one of the last tables still sitting by now as most of the other tables had left. As I got to the foyer I saw Anthea talking to someone else. I waited for her to finish and said 'Thanks so much, had a really good night'. She gave me a hug and said 'That's great! Have a safe trip back to Edinburgh'. We arranged to keep in contact via email and organise a Skype interview in the next few weeks. I said goodbye to Anthea and waved to TJ and Anita who were talking to others behind her and I left the building through the revolving doors.

Interview via Skype – 8th May 2014

R: Firstly ***** if you could tell me a little about yourself, your background?

I9: Yeah yeah, my name is *****, I was born in Manchester, went to uni in America where I did a degree in Hospitality Management. I lived in America for about 5 years, after I graduated I came over back to England, that's when I started the ***** umm I kind of started that as a labour of love, a labour of food [R: ok] kind of wanted to dip my toes in the restaurant industry, but I do work full time aside from that, I have my own fashion business (right) So I'm back in Manchester now umm and i balance my life between fashion and food...so that's just a little bit about me

R: That's a good balance to have (laughs). So, tell me a little bit about ***** , the idea, how did it start

I9: When I was in the states, doing a degree in hospitality management, the degree actually focused on restaurant management umm and so as part of my degree I had to do internships in restaurants. So I kind of got passionate about food, got some experience in managing restaurants out there and started a food blog there, a recipe blog, I started to have a lot of dinner parties out there, really enjoyed it and when I came back to England my sort of desire was to open up a restaurant, but obviously didn't have the cash. I had heard of supper clubs before, in New York and Miami and I knew there was loads in London but nothing in Manchester at the time and I thought it would do really well in Manchester and also a really good way of testing out my food and seeing how people would receive it. Also love the idea of communal dining and just thought the two things of socialising and dining just go together really well [R: yeah] it's kind of like a great marriage, so we did one and got a fantastic response. That was started off by 8 people at the time and now four years on, well the biggest one that you came to was plus 60 so I think it's still growing I guess...

R: Ok and do you still have the passion for it?

I9: Oh yeah, even more so actually. Initially the reason was that I really wanted to open a restaurant, and that's changed [R: ok] doing the ***** has taught me where my passion lies and what I want to do and what I want to make out of it. So I think my passion for it has really grown

R: Ok. I was at a supper club in ***** two weekends ago [I9: ok] and some of the people I was with they were asking me about my research and they told me that they had been to this great supper club in Manchester, you a year ago, and that it had been in this Indian family's house and I said 'oh was it *****?' and they said it had been [I9: wow great!] so obviously their experience was quite different to mine as they said they had been in your family home. How was that as an experience?

I9: Doing it at home?

R: Yeah

I9: Well most of them have been at home, the ones I have done outside, the pop-ups have been the minority of actual events the majority have been at home. When I first came up with the idea, most supper clubs that I had researched had been in the house. But yeah when I first approached my Mum and said like 'Do you mind if we invite random people over for dinner that we've never met before' and she was like 'No, what's wrong with you' (laughs)

Appendix 4: Transcription Interview 9 (I9)

So it was a bit strange, also the concept 'up north' wasn't very sort of, my friends were like 'do you really want to do that' and I was like 'yeah everyone's doing it'. and I think it was a little bit odd at first, a little bit scary but now it is just like second nature cos, you know, touch wood we have never had any weird instances. And it's quite nice, we served it family style, as we do at home and it felt kind of 'in place' you know it's quite an intimate thing, inviting people to have dinner in your home, I think it actually adds to the atmosphere, so I thoroughly enjoy having the ones at home.

R: And do you continue to do them at home?

I9: Yeah, I mean, my plan is for 2014 is to do much more pop-ups as we have a lot of demand and at home we can only do 32 max...

R: That's quite a lot?

I9: Yeah it is actually (laughs) but you know it can be quite intrusive and a bit invasive at times cos it's your home and I've got 32 dining chairs in the garage at the moment and can't really use the garage and it can sort of get in the way so I think home is going to be secondary and trying to make pop-ups the primary now, but we will see how it goes.

R: Yeah, one thing I noticed, even though the one I was at wasn't at your home, there was still a family atmosphere, you know, your brother and your mum and your dad were there [I9: yeah] has that always been the way [I9: yeah] and does that come from your background? Is that an Indian thing?

I9: Yes very much so. I learnt to cook from my mum, you know, when I was in the states she taught me how to cook over Skype, you know that family connection. And when I came back she was still teaching me new dishes and still does today and when I did the supper club, obviously it being at home, you know my family home, I did the supper club with my mum. My dad has also always been in to cooking and my brother did the same degree as me in the states so we kind of all share that foodie passion and I think with the supper club as it's in the home...I don't think I actually do anything different in terms of stressing the family aspect, I think we do the same as we do at home just at a different venue, I think it just carries through naturally. I think with the ***** people do just put family and food together cos that's just how we do it I guess. So I think it's just a naturally thing and Indians when it comes to food, we are very, it's a big thing, we don't let guests come into our home without offering them food, or just even tea and snacks, we don't like guests to leave with an empty stomach. We would regard that as disrespectful, I guess. So yeah it's definitely a cultural thing.

R: Ok and what kind of people come to *****?

I9: Massive mix, huge diversity. We had babies, children, students, CEO of companies. Artists, photographers, I think it's just people who a) are just really interested in food, they can be really particular about where they go to dine out. That's one kind of guest. Then we have people who are just looking for something different to do. Then we have people who come looking for friends, it's a good way of meeting new people and you can't really go out to a restaurant and sort of nudge the person next to you and go 'Hi' (laughs) that doesn't really work. and people who are just looking for something new...yeah just a massive mix I don't think I could put my finger on one type of person that comes, it's just been astounding at the mix of people that come, how many people it's attracted.

Appendix 4: Transcription Interview 9 (I9)

R: Do you ever get any comments from people that this is the first event like this they have been to?

I9: Yeah most of the time, it's not that big in Manchester. There are only 5-6, at max 10 supper clubs in Manchester whereas London you have 80-90 different types. So yeah generally speaking most people come, unless they are regulars of ours are new, they have never done it before. I think most of the people at your table were new, they had never done it before. And I think most people, in the home anyway, its stranger for the guests cos they are just like 'I'm sitting in someone's dining room...it's kind of weird' but on the whole I think people are quite excited about it, kind of buzzed about it and I think people who have heard about it through friends know it must be safe and it's not anything strange. So yeah...hope that answers that question...

R: Yes, it does. One of the other things I am interested in terms of my research is how these events happen online. What is the process that you have been through in terms of promoting yourself, running it through the website, social media?

I9: Yeah so it's been a massive help, social media, the way we do it, it has changed, but the way we do it now is that I've got a mailing list so people who subscribe to our mailing list get priority about hearing about an event. So I will have a date and I will send out a newsletter and it will have the booking link on there. I sell tickets online, as you know obviously (laughs) and then they will buy a ticket and then I always ask them to email me and I tend to ask a few questions. They usually book up through that but if not I will push it through Facebook or twitter [R: ok] and yeah, it's usually pretty good it can get people retweeting other people's tweets so you can share it really quickly if there are any spaces that do become available. Also letting people know about upcoming events, people are really good about kind of sharing, you can kind of get a bit of a buzz going about certain events. It's been a massive help, I think when we first started out, even to fill up the smaller ones cos no one had really heard about it and it was such a weird concept so social media really helped that back in the day (laughs). I think social media has really exploded over the last 12-18 months, I mean every other person has twitter now whereas when I first started it wasn't as popular. But it's been, I mean I'm semi-dependant on it now, from a promotional point of view. And obviously hearsay obviously helps, word of mouth is big in terms of promotion.

R: Do you think, are these kind of events dependant on online facilitation and social media, could it run without it?

I9: It...(pause) That's a good question...I think it could do, absolutely, yeah, I don't know if they would sell out as quickly or sell out at all. The beauty of doing it online is the ability to share information so quickly and to a massive amount of people at the same time. If you think about how long it would take me to tell a person, then another person, then another person and to find people who would be interested and free at the same time. I think it would be doable but maybe not as affective or successful.

R: and possibly not as able to run them as regularly

I9: Exactly yeah

R: and with the payments, you use an online payment system

I9: That's right

Appendix 4: Transcription Interview 9 (I9)

R: Do you have overheads with that, do they take a fee?

I9: Yeah they take a booking fee. Some websites I have used in the past, they charge you as well, you know like PayPal, umm but yeah with booking fees, there is an expense associated with that...yeah

R: But it's not too much, it doesn't put you off using it

I9: Not at all it helps if anything, a lot of people prefer, to know that it's a secure booking website, to know they have secured a place, they have a ticket. Before we used to ask people just to bring cash on the night but that lead to last minute cancelations, and when you have cooked fresh food for 32 people and you get a cancellation of four last minute, it's too late to get more people and it's a bit waste of food. That's my biggest pet peeve, the wastage of food, it became very expensive actually so that's why I decided to do it online

R: Its security for you and security for the guest I suppose

I9: Exactly yeah

R: Ok. One thing I noticed that was quite different to many of the others I have been to is that you ask these questions at the beginning, you know, hobbies, interests. Why do you do that?

I9: So initially the reason that I did that was that I was inviting strange people into my home (laughs). It wasn't that I was screening people by any means it was just nice to know what kind of people are coming into your home. And secondary, one of the things that I did was that people might have similar interests, or have shared hobbies or something and, if I could, I would sit them together, if not I wouldn't at all. its funny thought cos I have had so many times when people have said to me 'It's amazing, the people you sat us with were so similar, we've exchanged twitter' and they might come again and tell me 'we are still in touch with the people we met at the last supper club'. By no means it's not like I'm engineering it, matchmaking or anything like that but I might go 'oh the both like Man Utd' you know something like that, it's going to be random anyway so why not.

R: Sure, I suppose some places, where you have a table for 8 people, you have to sit at the same table but if you have more numbers it could be quite useful...

I9: Yeah it's always been like 'if' there's something, I have never been like coercing anything, it's just like if there's something then fine, I wouldn't spend hours sort of (laughs) mulling through information but I think the primary things was that when I am inviting people into my home its quite nice to know a little bit about them but it also serves as a talking point and making people feel welcome in the house so I can ask them something and make people feel at ease because it was a bit of a strange concept at first. But yeah I always like it when people say that they have particularly enjoyed the company as well cos that is such a bit part of supper clubs.

R: Yeah definitely. I think also the idea of welcome and sending a personal email to them as well it adds a different aspect even before you get to the supper club as people know that it is ***** that is running it and people look for that person to make a connection before the evening starts so I think it's a good thing to do. Some places do that sort of thing in a similar way but some places don't and you don't have that, you get to a place and you are not sure who you are looking for. I was certainly made to feel very welcome at the *****.

I9: Thank you

R: How different are the events, the pop-ups at different locations, how different are they from the events run in your own home?

I9: Well from a food perspective...obviously my home kitchen is a domestic kitchen, when I do it at pop-up locations it is in a commercial kitchen so that in itself is different, not knowing where the pots and pans are when it's not your own kitchen is different, so you have to kind of run things in a different manner and be more prepared. Also I think having to shift everything that I do at home and take it to another location that in itself can be a bit of a challenge...just cos everything I do at home is second nature and I have it running like clockwork in my head [R: yeah] I've done it some many times so 'this will happen at this time, this will happen at this time' but in a pop-up location just from a logistical point of view I've never done it before so it's a bit more challenging in terms of preparation. From a guest point of view...from a front of house point of view (pause) I literally do things the same way I don't change things at all, the difference with the one that you came along to was that because it was larger umm I just had a couple more helpers than I would normally do just for the logistics of serving in a different way, but in terms of hospitality I don't change anything, I've never done that it in the past either it's always been the same way, I have the same format, I randomly interrupt guests during the meal to say my little bits and stuff. So that's all the same, the cooking of the dishes is the same it's just the environment of the kitchen that is a difference.

R: And tell me about the venue, was that the first time you had held it at that venue?

I9: Yes

R: And how did you acquire the venue, how did you come about that venue?

I9: So that was actually through a mutual contact of mine, a friend of mine that knew someone that runs the events at the Co-op, obviously the old buildings aren't being used, I don't know if you noticed the new headquarters that were opposite our building [R: uhu] there is a lot of vacant space and they showed me a lot of spaces and I was like 'I don't like this or that' and I saw the reception and thought 'this is beautiful' and I loved the ceiling and the glass, and they were like 'no one's ever done an event here before' and I was like 'I will do an event here!' (laughs) and so we had a few meetings and we were shown round the kitchen and stuff and they were really excited about our concept and we were really excited about doing an event there. It was probably after about 5 or 6 meetings that we decided on a date and then we went ahead and put the tickets up.

R: And was there a charge for using that space?

I9: Yeah there was a hire fee

R: But you were able to make that all back with the tickets?

I9: Yeah I mean (pause) I have never really viewed the ***** as a business, especially when we first started cos first of all we buy all our produce, it's all fresh good quality and we buy it all at retail prices we don't go to the kind of green grocer whole sellers, you know, where restaurants would buy in bulk, we don't buy in bulk so we don't get a discount in price there. It's always been about covering our costs and we always give a percentage to charity

Appendix 4: Transcription Interview 9 (I9)

as well... but yes in the co-op, even with the hire fee we were able to cover our cost and able to give some to charity and kind of get everything running smoothly...

R: Yeah I thought that that was a really nice touch, when the charity was going to a water charity in India. Is that something you always do?

I9: Yeah from the beginning, every supper club we have done we always give something to charity. It's been different charities along the way, I'm always doing research with new charities, but for me I've never been like I'm going to do ***** ***** to earn lots of money it was always 'I want to test the waters with food so it's always been a labour of love. When I go into fashion, I'm always looking at profit and loss more from a financial perspective, I guess with the food it's because I love the food, it might sound a bit corny and cliché, but I literally don't, the money is secondary to what I am doing and the charity thing is important...it's good to give back.

R: Definitely. Is it intentional that you don't mention the charity, well from my interaction I wasn't aware that money was going to charity...?

I9: Umm well it's on the website, our charity page is on the website [R: ah ok] umm but I think I may have mentioned it in emails in the past but I guess there's so much information to give out beforehand I just think, 'let's just get them in the door, serve the food...' (laughs) and deal with everything else afterwards, I like to tell them all afterwards or through social media afterwards where they can click on the website and see where the money has gone.

R: Good, and I thought your interaction was good with everyone as well, when you stood up on the steps and spoke to everyone. Obviously that would be different in the home, maybe much more natural. Were you nervous at the event, getting up to speak in front of everyone

I9: Yeah it was a bigger crowd

R: and in a space that wasn't your home, you know, you would have to speak a lot louder

I9: Yeah shout!

R: Did you find that easy?

I9: I always get jittery, at first before I start, that's standard, even if I'm at home even if its 32 people or 8 people I always get a bit jittery. But (pause) I was probably just as jittery as I was at home, I don't think the number particularly threw me off, that's just my pre supper club nerves, I think it's just the adrenaline that gets you going. I think it was different as it was a bit bigger umm and I had to speak a bit louder but I always like to welcome my guest in that way, because I think it's, it's not that supper clubs that don't do it in this way, it's not that that is a bad thing but I think it's just nice, it adds to that welcoming thing of hospitality, that they are part of the ***** ***** for that night, I kind of like to let people know how the eating is going to go and kind of a little bit about the story of the ***** ***** and where the food comes from and that's really why I do it, I want people to share that insight. So it's not just like 'here's your food' and I'm in the kitchen, it's about so much more than that. But yeah I do like to be annoying, interrupt and do the speechy bit (laughs)

R: It was very effective and have the story about your family, where the food comes from, the style of dishes, the style of eating all sort of added to it because it is a sharing thing, and that's what my study is all about, kind of how food socialises people

I9: Sure

R: So yeah it worked well I thought. So what is the future plan for ***** *****, is it to continue to run as it is?

I9: Yeah well to run more sort of pop-ups as a pose to supper clubs at home, I also do cookery classes [R: ok] so to run more cookery classes. We have recently started to develop some products as well which we have started to sell, we have a range of spice boxes, different spice blends and chutneys so I would really like to push that as well. I've been food writing for a few years now and I have got a lot of recipes online as well so maybe some writing about down the ***** ***** route as well. I like to keep it as open as possible so yeah I think more events, more cookery classes, more food writing, I don't really have a business plan per se I just want to pursue doing things that I love to do and as long as people are receptive to what I'm doing I'm going to try and keep it at that level I think. My dream of opening a brick and mortar restaurant I think that's not really for me anymore.

R: What do you think the main differences between a restaurant and the ***** ***** would be? I mean you have already made your decision about not following through on a restaurant despite it being your original plan but what are the pros and cons of doing both?

I9: Well I think the reason that I don't want to do a restaurant is that I think the success of the ***** ***** has come because it is so different to a restaurant and offers so many things that a restaurant cant. Obviously there's the social part of it, you know being able to come along and potentially leaving with friends, I think that is a massive pull. Being able to eat 'family style' it's very difficult from a pricing point of view in a restaurant and I think that's very natural for me. And I think from the guests, and a lot of people comment on this that when you go to an Indian restaurant, say there's 2 of you or 3 of you [R: yeah] you'll buy a dish each and then you can't really buy anything else, unless you are at a buffet but then that's different again, but they love the variety of food and I like to showcase the massive range of Indian food that we have. Also that theatre of supper clubs, that show that we put on for the evening [R: yeah] In a restaurant you can't really do that, it becomes a bit more mundane and you can't really add that hospitality factor, you can give good service but I think hospitality and service are two different things. So, I think for those reasons I would prefer to continue with what I'm doing. Obviously I think there are limitations to the supper club, its one night, it's a ticketed event and all your planning goes into one night, for me I could spend a whole week of prep and it goes into 3 hours. With a restaurant it's instant umm but for me still I think the pros of the supper club outweigh the pros of a restaurant and its more rewarding for me, I like being able to meet new people as well.

R: Just to go back to something you said there, you said that you view hospitality and service as two different things. That's really interesting from my perspective but could you elaborate a little bit on that for me?

I9: Yeah, umm I think for me hospitality has always been about welcome, how you welcome your guests, how you make them feel in that environment, for me to be hospitable is to make people feel welcome. Whereas, you can give good service, you can serve the food on time, you can make sure the food is hot, I think service is a bit more functional while hospitality is more about feeling and making other people, you know, offer an emotional point of view. Service is about 'yeah I got good service, my water was always full to the top, and I was given the bill on time, I was in out...' So it's more clockworky, a bit more military I think.

R: Ok, and finally, quite a big question, but what do you think it is about food that brings people together. Food always seems to be a starting point for something else, why do you think that is?

I9: Well... I think that food is common to every single human being in the world. I mean you could be Japanese, Chinese, Indian, English, everyone needs food to eat first of all, as a basic and that is why it brings people together. We have something in common immediately, you know, we might not have a love per se for food but we need it and generally speaking food, food relates to emotions, you can have a really bad day and have a good meal and instantly you feel better from the inside and I think that emotion we have, that emotion we feel when we eat something is important cos when you share that with other people it affects how you feel as well. So, I think if you've got a plate of food on a table, and there are 5 or 6 people, they are instantly going to dive in, if it's a plate to share it kind of, that's instant socialising without even talking and that kind of brings people together. I think because that common base of food...can bring people together, you know you can enjoy a good meal with two people but with a group of people, a group of friends or family you can enjoy it even more and I think with supper clubs, it doesn't matter who you are with really, even if you are at a table full of strangers it's that love of food that brings you together, you might not have anything to talk about but you can say 'oh what was your favourite food?' and you will have an opinion and you will talk and you will start socialising. It's kind of like the passing of the food, and that's really why I like the passing of the food because everyone there is really interested, you know you might have someone that supports Man City and you might have someone that supports Man U but they both loved that chicken curry so they are mates because of that (laughs) I don't really know if I was articulate in my answer but I think it's because it is common and everybody needs food, and likes food and once you have a good meal everyone, it affects your emotions in positive ways and it just seems natural in a way.

R: Excellent, that's a good answer. Just one other thing that I forgot to mention. You mentioned that there are a few other supper clubs in Manchester. Is there a community of supper clubs? Do people know each other or know of each other?

I9: Yeah definitely, I think we are getting there. There's definitely no competition, we don't see each other as rivals or anything like that. Quite early on I had quite a few food writers, bloggers who have now started supper clubs and stuff. I have had quite a few people come and then ask me for advice and now they have started their own. So I'm always saying to people if you are interested in food and sharing it with others I think supper clubbing is the best way, I think I have seen people, especially on social media, they are very supportive of each other and when they see a new supper club out they are now quite up for trying it now cos they know what supper clubs are now in Manchester and they want to be part of it. The foodie community in Manchester can be quite cliquey, they all go to the same sort of restaurant but I think the supper club one are more supportive of one another, we are not a union we don't go out socialising with each other but we do silently support each other and we do go to each other's events and stuff so I think that's support in itself.

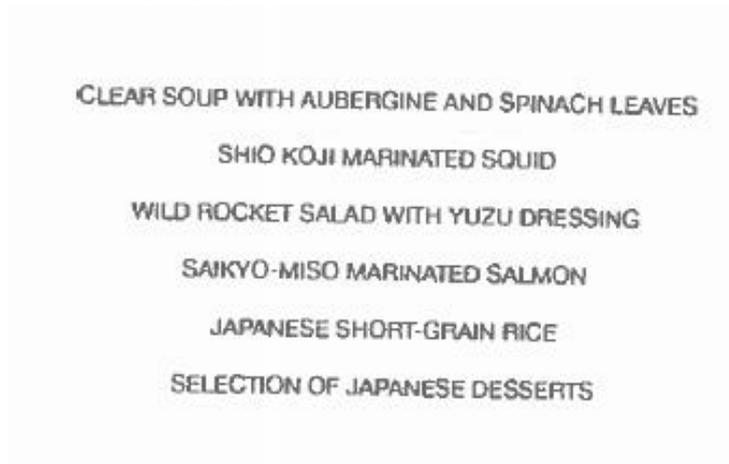
R: Perfect, I think that's all I need. Thanks

I9: Thank you!

1. M8 Menu



2. M29 Menu



3. M13 Menu

Tulsi Lassi Shot
Creamy sweet lassi flavoured with fresh basil, served with crunchy fenugreek naahi snacks

Aloo Tikki Chaat
Punjabi style potato cake flavoured with paprika, green chili & coriander seeds, topped with coriander & mint yoghurt sauce & home-made tamarind chutney

Murgh Masala
Succulent chicken roasted in onions, ginger, garlic, tomato, Spice Club garam masala, turmeric & fresh coriander

Tori Kofta Mattar
Spicy kofta balls made from fresh cowpeas cooked with peas, flavoured with cumin, ginger, tomatoes, paprika & sun-dried fenugreek

Saag Paneer
Traditional Indian cheese cooked with spinach in a classic Punjabi style masala

Dal Makhni
Urud dal, kidney beans & channa lentils blended together, cooked in onions, ginger, garlic, Spice Club garam masala, tomatoes & fresh cream

Fresh Salad
Cucumber, radish, red onion & tomato salad

****The main course is served family style, with fresh chappatis & Basmati cumini rice****

Mango Malai
Apple & cardamom crumble layered with sweet saffron infused yoghurt, topped with home-made mango & pineapple sorbet, roasted almonds & pomegranate

Elachi Chai
Traditional Indian tea infused with crushed cardamom & fennel seeds, served with sweet Indian cardamom shortbread

4. M27 Menu

Iced Café au Lait
creamy summertime cool down with a base of brandy and New Orleans chicory coffee

Deviled Eggs
ribble to whet your appetite - served cold with fresh mayo, horseradish, mustard seed and dill

New Orleans Cream Tea
cornbread and buttermilk biscuits with bread and butter pickles, molasses butter, whipped goats cheese & pepper jelly

Gumbo and Rice
rich and spicy Cajun stew with veggie sausage, mushrooms, gumbo file and king oyster "scallops"

Artichoke Salad
zucchini and carrot spaghetti, artichoke patties, grilled artichokes and buttermilk blue cheese dressing

Collard Greens and Grits
stone-ground creamy grits, smothered greens, fried green tomato, roasted pecans and a spicy red eye gravy

Lemonade Joe Box Pie
classic New Orleans dessert served with watermelon sherbert and English cherries soaked in Bourbon

Coffee and Chicory
traditional coffee from Café du Monde (selection of teas also available)

Appendix 6: Database Examples

1. Find a Supper Club



Join to discover where your local supperclub is or visit one on holiday. Discover their dates, meals, events. Meet other supperclub fans.

Link: <http://supperclubfangroup.ning.com/>

2. GrubClub



Grub Club is a Dining Out Marketplace connecting Chefs with Underused Spaces on one hand and with adventurous Diners on the other. Enjoy Innovative Menus from Michelin Trained Chefs in Cool Spaces all over London.

Our Vision is to build a global dining out platform that will allow Diners to grab a seat at a communal table from London to New York to Zanzibar.

Link: <http://grubclub.com/>

3. Edible Experiences



Discover, compare and instantly book food and drink experiences in and around London.

Welcome! Whether you're looking for a cooking, baking or butchery class; a tasting, foraging expedition, or supperclub or pop up, our hosts have something to tickle your tastebuds. Have a browse around. We hope something tempts!

Link: <http://www.edibleexperiences.co.uk>

Appendix 6: