

The Irish Pub: Past, Present – Whither the Future?

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Declaration: I hereby declare that this dissertation is my own work.

Signature: _____

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Executive Summary

The purpose of this research is to examine the main economic, legislative, and socio-cultural factors that are currently influencing the pub trade in Ireland and their specific impact on a sample of publicans in both Galway city and county. In approaching this task the author engaged in a comprehensive literature review on the origin, history and evolution of the Irish pub; examined the socio-cultural and economic role of the public house in Ireland and developed a profile of the Irish pub by undertaking a number of semi-structured interviews with pub owners from the area. In doing so, the author obtained the views and opinions of the publicans on the current state of their businesses, the extent to which patterns of trade have changed over recent years, the challenges and factors currently influencing their trade, the actions they believed to be necessary to promote the trade and address perceived difficulties and how they viewed the future of the pub business within the framework of the current regulatory regime. In light of this research, the author identified a number of key findings and put forward a series of recommendations designed to promote the future success and development of the pub trade in Ireland.

The research established that public houses are currently operating under a very unfavourable regulatory framework that has resulted in the serious decline of the trade over the last decade. This decline appears to have coincided initially with the introduction of the ban on smoking in the workplace and was exacerbated further by the advent of more severe drink-driving laws, especially mandatory breath testing. Other unfavourable conditions include the high levels of excise duty, value added tax and local authority commercial rates. In addition to these regulatory factors, the research established that a major impediment to the pub trade is the unfair competition from supermarkets and other off-licence retail outlets and especially to the phenomenon of the below-cost selling of alcohol. The recession has also been a major contributory factor to the decline in the trade as also has been the trend towards lifestyle changes and home drinking mirroring the practice in some continental European countries.

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List of Abbreviations

AGM	Annual General Meeting
ASAI.....	Advertising Standards Authority of Ireland
ASH.....	Action on Smoking on Health Ireland
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CPI	Consumer Price Index
DIGL.....	Drinks Industry Group Ireland
DOHC.....	Department of Health and Children
EEC.....	European Economic Community
ETS.....	Environmental Tobacco Smoke
EU	European Union
GAA.....	Gaelic Athletic Association
HSA.....	Health and Safety Authority
INVF.....	Irish National Vintners Federation
LVA.....	Licensed Vintners Association
NCT.....	National Car Testing
OTC.....	Office of Tobacco Control
PTAA.....	Pioneer Total Abstinence Association
RSA.....	Road Safety Authority
RTE.....	Raidió Teilifís Éireann
SAD.....	Seasonal Affective Disorder
UCD.....	University College Dublin
VAT.....	Value Added Tax
VFI.....	Vintners Federation of Ireland

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Context of the Research

The relationship between alcohol and the Irish has always been a highly complex, contentious and paradoxical one. On the one hand the state derives a substantial proportion of its tax revenues to run the country from the sale of alcohol and from that point of view it is obviously in the interests of the government to ensure that the pub trade continues to be vibrant and successful so that excise duties, value added tax, corporation tax and income tax continue to flow into the state's coffers. A substantial number of jobs owe their existence to the alcohol and drinks industry and this is obviously a further important reason why it is in the state's interests to ensure that this level of employment is maintained so that income tax continues to be paid and people will not become dependent on social welfare benefits. So far so good. These are all the positives as far as the government is concerned. Down through the years it seems to be the case that the downside of the pub trade was never a major factor or a cause of much concern to the state authorities. Obviously there was always a propensity for the Irish to abuse alcohol and get drunk which led to the infamous "fighting Irish" reputation we gained throughout the world. The social problems caused by alcohol, such as domestic violence, did not become an issue until the health and personal social service system started to become better developed from the beginning of the 1970s. Up to then there was an attitude that whatever went on within the home was a matter for the family and was not the business of the state. The whole situation changed dramatically when alcohol started to cause serious damage to the health and welfare of society. With the development of the modern roads infrastructure and the build up of huge volumes of cars and traffic travelling at high speeds, the dangers of driving under the influence of drink started to become a major national priority. The number of deaths and serious injuries from road traffic accidents led to the enactment of legislation imposing strict blood alcohol limits and introducing a system of random breath testing with very serious criminal sanctions for drivers caught driving over the limit. This was complemented by the introduction of the National Car Test which was designed to remove defective and dangerous vehicles from our roads. In parallel with the increased focus on alcohol and road deaths, there was increasing concern within the medical and health promotion professions about the high incidence of premature deaths from carcinoma and heart

disease. Research had established tobacco smoking was a significant contributory cause of these diseases. This led to the introduction by the Department of Health and Children in 2004 of a ban on smoking in the workplace. Despite major objections from the licensed vintners' trade, this smoking ban was strictly applied to public houses. This government intervention has directly resulted in the closure of many pubs throughout the country with many jobs being lost in the process. The impact seems to have been particularly felt in the more rural areas due to the lack of a public transport network and the fear of drivers being caught driving under the influence or without a current NCT certificate. The role of pubs in rural areas has, rightly or wrongly, been equated with the type of essential social service being provided by rural post offices in providing an essential focus for contact and socialisation especially for the elderly and those living alone in isolation. Against the background of the increasing regulatory environment and its adverse effect on the pub trade, there was also increasing concern and dissatisfaction within the trade about what was perceived as unfair competition from the off-licence sector and the below-cost selling of alcohol. Health promotion and advertising initiatives were making people more conscious of looking after their health and avoiding alcohol abuse and cigarette smoking. Lifestyles began to change in response to these initiatives. More and more a trend developed of people purchasing drink in supermarkets and drinking at home, mirroring the cosmopolitan lifestyles of some continental countries. All of this was having a major adverse impact on the pub trade; especially those pubs which failed to adapt with the changing trends and introduce innovations and incentives to maintain their customer base. On top of this already difficult situation, the Celtic Tiger abruptly departed and the country was hit by recession in 2007 caused by the property and banking implosion leaving a trail of economic and social destruction in its wake. The economic downturn caused massive problems for all areas of economic life, with factory and business closures, layoffs, redundancies, house repossessions and an increasing dependency on social welfare benefits. This caused a further reduction in the pub trade as customers were forced into adopting a more restrictive lifestyle to survive.

This is the general context in which the author has undertaken to research the topic. The author will engage in a comprehensive literature review tracing the historical

evolution of the Irish pub from earliest times up to the boom years of the 1990s and into the meltdown years commencing with the smoking ban in 2004.

1.2 Focus of the Research

The pub trade is perceived by all accounts to have suffered badly over the past few years. This has caused serious alarm and dissatisfaction within the licensed vintners' representative bodies and among pub proprietors themselves who argue that the trade has been unfairly treated and targeted by government in their drive to enforce a range of health, safety and other public interest measures. The vintners argue that the trade fulfils a vital economic and community function and that it is in the public interest that it should be safeguarded and promoted by the government rather than discriminated against in this manner. Obviously the vintners are subjective in their criticisms and have a vested interest in protecting the trade. On the other hand, the government also have vested interests in ensuring the preservation of the pub as a vibrant and successful economic entity in view of the huge financial resources the pub trade is contributing directly and indirectly to the state in the form of excise duties, value added tax, corporation tax and income tax as well as to local authorities in the form of penal municipal and county rates. Obviously any serious downturn in the pub trade should result in a diminution in the amount of those duties, taxes and rates unless there is evidence to show that any shortfall or deficiency in tax revenues from the pub trade are offset by corresponding increases in those revenues from other sectors of the industry such as off-licence sales from supermarket outlets. The research is being undertaken to establish and quantify the range of factors currently influencing the pub trade and the extent to which those factors are leading to the decline in the trade and whether the anger, alarm and dissatisfaction publicly expressed by the vintners and mainly directed against the government, can be objectively justified.

1.3 The Research Objectives

- The primary objective of this research is to examine the main economic, legislative, and socio-cultural factors that are currently influencing the pub trade in Ireland and their specific impact on a sample of publicans in both Galway city and county.

In order to achieve the primary objective the author will seek to accomplish the following secondary objectives:

- trace the origin, history and evolution of the Irish pub by engaging in a comprehensive literature review;
- examine the socio-cultural and economic role of the public house in Ireland;
- develop a profile of the Irish pub by undertaking a number of semi-structured interviews with five publicans from Galway city and county and in doing so, the author seeks to obtain their views on:
 - the current state of their businesses;
 - the extent to which patterns of trade have changed over recent years;
 - the challenges and factors currently influencing their trade;
 - the actions they believe to be necessary to promote the trade and address perceived difficulties; and
 - how they view the future of the pub business within the framework of the current regulatory system.
- propose recommendations for addressing the diverse and complex series of problems besetting the licensed pub trade in Ireland.

1.4 Limitations of the Research

In approaching the research topic, the author was conscious of the range of regulatory measures introduced by government over the past decade to address major public health and safety concerns in the areas of drink-driving and smoking and was aware that these measures had been directly blamed by the vintners' bodies for causing serious damage to the pub trade. The research was approached within the framework of this knowledge but the author undertook the task independently and objectively without being influenced by any prior subjective publicity or opinions attributed to the vintners lobby. Alcohol and tobacco smoking attract extremes of opinion which are largely incompatible and mutually exclusive. At one end of the spectrum you have the opinion that alcohol is evil and should be completely banned such as it is in Muslim countries. There is also a total intolerance of smoking and a complete failure to understand why anybody with any ounce of responsibility or concern for personal health, could engage in such a filthy habit causing such damage to their lungs and to the wider environment. At the other end of the spectrum you

have those who feel that alcohol is good, that it is a human and civil right for people to drink if they wish, that smoking and alcohol should not be subject to government regulation or control at all and that the ban on smoking in the workplace and the drink-driving laws and random breath testing were measures that were –way over the top, disproportionate, unnecessary and an affront to civil liberties. The author sought to balance these types of contrasting, contradictory and conflicting opinions and to deal with the topic in a rational, unbiased, objective manner.

The research was limited by the small number of interview subjects but those who were interviewed expressed almost complete unanimity in relation to the main causative causes for the decline in the pub trade as reflected in the literature review. In that respect the interview cohort, while small, was nevertheless reliable. It is not considered that anything useful would have been gained by interviewing a greater number of interview participants even if that had been feasible, which it was not, due to time and resource constraints and to the difficulty of securing additional participants to volunteer their time to talk about their personal business experiences in the pub trade. These represented the main areas of limitation of the research.

1.5 Summary of the Findings

The findings of the interviews supported the general conclusions of the literature review that the pub trade was in serious decline, primarily as a result of government regulation in the areas of drink-driving, the smoking ban and the below-cost selling of alcohol, but also due to high levels of VAT, Excise Duties and Local Authority rates over which the vintners themselves have no direct control. While there is a certain amount that the vintners themselves can do to promote the attractiveness of their pubs and maintain a viable level of trade, the general consensus from the research participants is that without government intervention in relaxing the severity of current regulations and reducing the impact of high tax and excise duties, it will be very difficult for all but the most resilient and determined of public houses to survive the current unfavourable environment. This will be explored in depth in the following chapters and a number of recommendations will be put forward by the author for addressing the diverse and complex series of problems besetting the licensed pub trade.

1.6 Structure of the Thesis

Chapter One has presented an overview of the research topic and put it in context. The particular focus of the research was examined in detail and the author's primary and secondary objectives have been specified. The limitations of the research and a summary of the main findings have been put forward.

Chapter Three outlines the research methodology undertaken by the author to achieve the stated objectives.

Chapter Four presents the five interviews undertaken by the author and the main findings derived from an analysis of the data.

Chapter Five outlines the set of recommendations put forward by the author in light of the research findings and a subsequent conclusion.

The following chapter, Chapter Two, consists of a comprehensive literature review tracing the historical evolution of the Irish pub from its earliest beginnings up to the boom years of the 1990s and into the meltdown years commencing with the smoking ban in 2004.

Chapter Two: The Historical Evolution of the Irish Pub

2.1 Introduction

“...the happy social occasion is the ideal environment for the human ritual of ‘taking a drink’. As such it has always had – and will always have – great social significance” (Desmond Morris 1998).

The purpose of this chapter is to present an extensive review of the literature pertaining to the Irish pub trade. The author will trace the history and evolution of the public house from its establishment in the 12th century by the Normans, right up until the present day. The challenges facing the drinks industry and their specific impact on the publicans of Ireland are discussed. Further, the performance of the on-licensed sector, its contribution to our economy and the initiatives being undertaken by the vintners of Ireland to counteract the adverse effects of present times are investigated.

2.2 The History of Alcohol in Ireland

“Alcohol is the anaesthesia by which we endure the operation of life”

George Bernard Shaw (1856 - 1950)

Since earliest records began the consumption of alcohol has been shown to have played a central role of the Irish cultural tradition (Molloy 2002). The art of distillation and brewing were extensively practiced in Ireland, and most certainly the Irish were consuming a fermented product, be it fruit, grain or honey some 5,000 years ago (Connolly 2010; Bunbury & Fennell 2008). Whiskey (*uisce beatha* in Irish or ‘water of life’) was introduced to Ireland in the 12th century, and served medicinal functions for over 200 years before it became to a popular recreational drink in the 15th century. The knowledge for distilling spirits may have been acquired by the monks during their pilgrimages to Rome (Molloy 2002). Arguably, this culmination of experience resulted in the fine art of brewing stout perfected by Arthur Guinness in the eighteenth century (Connolly 2010).

While alcoholic beverages were available in other nations, the Irish embraced the opportunity to a far greater extent than many other countries. In the earliest days, monks living alone sought solace in the fermented grain or honey produced through their perfection in the art of distillation. In addition, the consumption of alcohol

provided a source of nutrients and calories (Braudel 1974). Food was considered inadequate (Lough 1896), resulting in the propensity to replace eating with drinking in response to certain situations (Bales 1962). The medicinal, antiseptic and analgesic properties of alcohol alleviated a host of common ailments - a tradition that lasted until the early twentieth century with the dawn of modern medicine (Institute of Alcohol Studies 2006; Hanson 1995).

2.2.1 Alcohol: Escapism from Reality

The drinking of alcohol offered an escape from isolation and the reality of a person's situation (Connolly 2010). In the eighteenth century, agricultural land in Ireland became more and more the property of English landlords. The majority of these were absentee landlords who showed little if any compassion for the people who worked the land. Their primary concern was rent. Those unable to pay were evicted, and with no rights, the control rested exclusively in the hands of the landlords and those who upheld law and order were habitually in league with landlords (Truman 2000). The rural population of Ireland, which was the large bulk of the population, lived lives of acute poverty. The chronic hardship and deprivation endured by the poor was momentarily alleviated by alcohol during these particularly difficult times.

Irish weather and climate were considered an important cause of intemperance in Ireland (Blaney 1974; Lough 1896). With long, dark and wet winters, the Irish people were prone to a form of mood disorder which has now been diagnosed as Seasonal Affective Disorder or SAD (Connolly 2010). One can only imagine the depression, boredom and feelings of hopelessness that existed in Irish homes prior to the arrival of the automobile, television, and associated forms of transport and communication. Alcohol, and most certainly music, offered a welcoming source of comfort during those seemingly endless winter nights.

Increasing emigration in the nineteenth century resulted in the division of families, estrangements, and a melancholy loneliness (Clark 1982). In many parts of Ireland depopulation occurred which resulted in households with only the very old or the very young, a scenario that added to the reliance of drink as a sedative and a cure for loneliness. Rural deprivation that induced delayed and late marriages was another

part of the loneliness quotient that could not be offset by the long-established sociability of the Irish (Brody 1973).

In certain occupations drinking was a customary and integral part of one's job, and these social meetings often led to patterns of heavy drinking. Abstaining from such customs positioned the individual outside their social group, often resulting in condemnation from fellow peers. Workmen were commonly paid their wages in the public house, which resulted in episodes of extreme drunkenness, with public order offences and violence an everyday occurrence. The custom of 'treating', when customers were obliged to drink at someone else's instigation and the implied obligation to treat in return resulted in the consumption of vast quantities of alcohol (Blocker, Fahey & Tyrrell 2003).

Drinking was a prominent feature of economic life in Ireland (Cronin *et al* 2001). Negotiations involving the purchase of land or stock were sealed with a drink. Fair days and markets would guarantee the consumption of vast quantities of alcohol. Recognised as an integral part of the social and economic fabric of Irish society, drunkenness appeared to be socially structured and therefore acknowledged as a part of social behaviour (McMahon 2008).

2.2.2 Illegal Distillation

Illegal alcohol production was a lucrative business in Ireland, and undoubtedly did much to promote alcohol consumption especially in rural areas. Brewing *poitín* ('little pot'), which involved the inexpensive distillation of potatoes, served both as an intoxicating beverage and as a treatment for illnesses such as rheumatism and arthritis (Connolly 2010). During the 18th century, spirits became widely accessible, to the extent that whiskey began to substitute wine among the upper classes and ale among the lower (The Oxford Companion to Irish History 2007). With its increasing popularity and availability, the English government instituted a taxation policy on all whiskey products, and thus contributed to the growth of illicit distillation (Molloy 2002). The economic impact of the Famine was responsible for destroying the illicit industry in the 1840s (McMahon 2008). In addition, the Irish constabulary took over the monitoring of illicit distillation in the 1850s, bringing it under strict government control (The Oxford Companion to Irish History 2007).

2.2.3 The Irish Working Class in Great Britain

With abject poverty widespread in the nineteenth century, drink provided an escape for the working classes in Ireland, and indeed throughout Europe and the United States. Large numbers of Irish people emigrated to Great Britain in search of employment. The Victorian era brought exceptional prosperity to England and the Continent through colonialism, which was visibly reflected in the creation of many notable buildings and monuments in cities London, Paris and Dublin (Connolly 2010). Despite the vast contribution in the construction of these structures, and with no unions to act on their behalf, the Irish working classes were paid a pittance for their hard labour, and were categorised as uneducated, inferior, and undisciplined (Cucchiara 2006). Times were particularly difficult and drink, primarily beer, cider and gin cushioned the stresses of life.

The wealthy upper classes encouraged the consumption of drink by erecting great gin palaces, which offered a welcoming alternative to the dilapidated and overcrowded tenements of the urban poor. The vulnerability of the inferior class was abused to a great extent. George Sims, the son of a wealthy businessman, wrote of his experience in witnessing the poverty of the masses in London. An extract from his book *How the Poor Live* (cited in Spartacus Education 2011) depicts the chronic hardship of this era. *“The gin-palace is heaven to them compared to the hell of their pestilent homes. A copper or two, often obtained by pawning the last rag that covers the shivering children on the bare floor at home, will buy enough alcohol to send a woman so besotted that the wretchedness, the anguish, the degradation that await her there have lost their grip. The drink dulls every sense of shame, takes the sharp edge from sorrow, and leaves the drinker for awhile in a fools' paradise”*.

2.2.4 The Temperance Movement in Great Britain

Despite the huge percentage of hard-earned wages spent in the drinking emporiums, the Victorian upper class soon recognised that alcohol consumption negatively impacted on worker performance, and therefore posed a major threat to the Nation's welfare and economy (Abel 2001). Consequently, temperance movements began to emerge, which sought to restrict the use of alcohol in various ways. The primary aim of the movement was to treat the perceived social problems arising from industrialism. The drink of the working classes, principally spirits, was the target of

this campaign. The auspicious wine consumption of the middle and upper classes was not deemed to be the source of the societal affliction brought on by the spirits consumed by the lower class (Connolly 2010; Abel 2001). Many working class men took offence to the temperance movement and believed that its leaders were hypocritical because they inferred that the dilemma of drunkenness lay only in the working class (Shiman 1988). Furthermore, the campaign failed to address the real issues of poor sanitation, overcrowding, and discontent with workplace conditions (Thompson 1988).

2.2.5 The Temperance Movement in Ireland

In the 1830s and 1840s, Ireland became a temperance stronghold. There were two waves in Ireland's temperance movement. One was essentially Protestant and led by the more affluent members of society, such as progressive landlords and industrialists (McMahon 2008). Their objective was to improve the livelihoods of their tenants and workers. For example, Quaker employers such as the Jacobs of Dublin had a policy to encourage their workers to contribute part of their wages to a savings club which required members to be teetotal (McMahon 1985). A number of historians viewed this policy as an attempt by the ruling classes to uphold power over their workers. Abstinence would effectively result in less poverty and thus ease the burden on the capital's resources.

Father Theobald Mathew (1790-1856), a Franciscan friar led the second wave in Ireland's temperance crusade. Total abstinence from alcohol was encouraged, which appealed to those yearning for freedom from the wretched drink. Over the course of a ten-year period, five million men, women and children 'took the pledge' as a result of his work (Quinn 2002). Unfortunately, and despite his great efforts, the movement lost impetus when huge numbers of Irish either emigrated or died as a result of the potato blight which ravaged crops, and contributed to the Great Famine that hit Ireland in 1845 (Connolly 2010).

2.2.6 The Influence of the Catholic Church on the Irish People

The Catholic Church exercised considerable influence over the lives and social habits of the Irish people down through the centuries. The great majority of the Irish people belonged to the Catholic faith. This influence was pronounced across the whole

spectrum of Irish life including schools and education, personal health and social welfare, family planning, unmarried mothers, social activities, sport and culture. The local parish priest virtually controlled every aspect of community life. The Archbishop of Cashel always had the honour of throwing in the ball to start All-Ireland Football finals in Croke Park. Furthermore, before the match the two captains had to kneel and kiss the Archbishop's ring by way of due deference to the Church.

The government were expected to consult with the Catholic Church and comply with their wishes in areas of family life that the church wished to control. An example of this was the infamous Mother and Child Scheme in the early 1950s which had to be abandoned by the Department of Health in the face of church objections and hostility. Every child on making their confirmation at around the age of 12 was expected to 'take the pledge'. This meant that the child made a vow or commitment in church to abstain from alcoholic drink until he or she reached the age of majority at 21 years. It was unheard of for any family to go against the Church and not to actively comply with this church policy.

The influence of the Pioneer Total Abstinence Association (PTAA), which was closely affiliated to the Catholic Church, was also significant in creating an awareness of the abuse of alcohol and the damage it caused to society. The PTAA had a huge membership throughout the country. The Association especially encouraged young men to join as this was the group most at risk. Members of the PTAA had to show their affiliation by wearing a pioneer pin. This tended to be looked at with a degree of disdain by some drinkers who regarded such people as misguided and abstaining because they were "too mean to drink". (Interview with Coyle 2011).

There is no doubt but that the activities of both the church and the PTAA, notwithstanding how objectionable some may now regard the methodologies employed, resulted in a lot less people abusing alcohol than what might have otherwise been the case in a more liberal, less restrictive society.

In the new constitution created by Taoiseach Eamon de Valera in 1937, the influence of the Catholic Church was very pronounced with the role of the Holy Roman

Catholic and Apostolic Church being given special recognition (Kissane 2000). This special place of the Catholic Church in the constitution was removed following a Referendum in 1972. This church-dominated society was very different to the secular society that has evolved over the past twenty five years with there now being a very clear and unambiguous division between Church and State.

2.2.7 The Drinks Industry: The Source of Ireland's Individual Wealth

Although poverty was still rife at the end of the 19th century, overall economic conditions were much improved, and life a great deal better for Irish people after the Famine. With a smaller number of labourers and unskilled workers available, wages were higher (Molloy 2002). Supported by the establishment of Ireland's railway network, both the tourism and drinks industries began to flourish, creating much needed employment in what was an impoverished, agricultural economy.

Commercial breweries and distilleries began to penetrate the countryside with their products, and were a source of much of Ireland's individual wealth (Connolly 2010). The drinks industry created employment not only in production but also in its distribution and consumption. The establishment of the Guinness Brewery at St. James Gate, Dublin in 1759 assisted much of the capital's populace in securing employment, thus contributing to the country's economic development. Arthur Guinness's brewery sold only 21 per cent of its output in rural Ireland in 1855, yet by 1880 sales had increased to 40 per cent (The Oxford Companion to Irish History 2007). Some of the reasons the Guinness brewery accomplished such control and domination across Ireland were: its adept ability to successfully harness the power of first the canals and then the railways to dispatch its beers throughout the country; its brew proved superior than that of rivals and the brewery paid close attention to quality control; its export market was quite substantial, ensuring economies of scale; and the company employed rigorous measures to undercut its rivals (Molloy 2002).

By the beginning of the twentieth century Dublin, Belfast and Cork were saturated with small breweries and distilleries, including Jameson, Powers, Caffreys, Murphys, and Beamish & Crawford (Molloy 2002; Connolly 2010). With a population of approximately four million, Ireland had no shortage of drink to supply the needs of its people. Drink was an accepted element of Irish culture and its consumption was encouraged. Despite high unemployment and resultant emigration in the 1970s and

early 1980s, drink remained a constant in the lives of the Irish people. Although the government recognised the implications of excessive drinking on society, the industry was a much needed source of revenue and so for at least the first six decades of the State, acceptance was the order of the time.

2.3 The Origin and Evolution of the Pub in Ireland

The consumption of alcohol in a pub, an abbreviation of ‘public house’ dates back many centuries. According to the 12th century Book of Leinster, a brewer and an innkeeper were the first to set foot on Irish soil in the wake of the biblical flood (Fennell & Bunbury 2008). Prior to the Norman invasion in the 12th century, the Irish did have a place to consume alcohol, and were not charged for this provision. The lord in authority was expected to offer a welcoming service to guests, planned or unplanned (Rousseau-Pletcher & Pletcher 2008). The title of *briugu*, or ‘hospitaller’ was bestowed to the more generous of these lords (Molloy 2002; MacEoin 1997). The role of hospitaller entitled one to a higher ranking in Celtic society. Briugu status was totally dependent on maintaining a plentiful supply of beer, as to refuse hospitality meant a loss of status. Due to the costs involved in keeping guests entertained, and ensuring “*a never-dry cauldron, a dwelling on a public road and a welcome to every face*” (Molloy 2002 p.1), briugus were very wealthy individuals. The office of briugu survived in recognisable form up until the arrival of commercial inns and taverns in the 16th century. However, the hospitable customs of the briugus continued into the 19th and 20th centuries with many of the older generation of publicans providing meals and drinks ‘on the house’ to travellers seeking their assistance.

2.3.1 The Establishment of Taverns

The Normans brought to Ireland their law codes and customs. The business of taverns was one such custom of great importance to Irish sociality. Samuel Johnson is credited as having stated in 1776 that “*there is nothing which has yet been contrived by man, by which so much happiness is produced as by a good tavern or inn*” (cited in Boswell 2005, p.278). Ireland’s first taverns were founded in Norman settlements of Leinster and the Pale. Winetavern Street in Dublin, as shown on modern day maps, was so called as it was the city’s main hub for the alcohol trade in the 12th century (Molloy 2002). These first taverns would originally have been

established as wine importation businesses, the primary business of which was in “off-sales” – selling wine to keep the cellars of the local nobility well-stocked. In today’s modern Ireland, when alcohol is sold to be transported elsewhere, it is sold at an off-licence. Eventually, these taverns became centres of social significance, where buyers would gather and converse over a glass of wine, with food as well as drink available. Having discovered social properties of drink, the notion of sharing a drink in a public setting was undoubtedly a significant development in the evolution of the Irish pub (Connolly 2010).

2.3.2 The Start of Pub Control in Ireland

Historically, laws governing liquor licensing have been complicated and multifaceted (Gulliver and Silverman 1995). *“It is illegal to sell alcohol in the State without a licence. Beyond this simple statement, the liquor licensing laws defy easy summary or brief characterization”* (The Competition Authority 1998:4.1).

The Normans introduced the first liquor licensing laws in 1635, and controlled the operation of public houses and the products for sale. In addition, a tax on all alcohol was introduced by the Normans, highlighting that even 900 years ago, drink was a popular target for filling law-making coffers (Molloy 2001). In most parts of the country, apart from areas ‘within the pale’, the Irish people were reluctant to pay a tax on a product that had never existed since time began. For that reason the majority of communal drinking in rural Ireland occurred in small shebeens, or unlicensed houses, most of which produced their own beer and ales. One can assume that these unlicensed houses were in abundance throughout rural Ireland as by the seventeenth century Dublin alone, where pubs were subject to regulation, had one public house for every three to four households (Connolly 2010).

The number of licensed premises continued to rise throughout the 1600s, no doubt due to the fact that monies from licence charges were an important and lucrative source of revenue to the exchequer. Regulations during this period dealt solely with the operation of pubs, with little attempt to limit the number of licences. An 1833 Act purposely abolished restrictions on new licences once the candidate was of reputable character (Connolly 2010).

The Irish Drinks market became regulated with the introduction of the Liquor Licensing (Ireland) Act in 1902. The purpose of this Act was to prevent the increase of public houses in Ireland (Maguire 2006). Prior to the 1902 Act, there was no limit to the number of licences which could be in operation at any one time. As one observer noted: *“Up to the year 1902, the right of any person to apply to the licensing authorities for the grant to him of a licence for the sale of intoxicating liquor in Ireland was a common law right. That right was absolute and the licensing authorities were bound to hear the applicant for the particular form of licence sought”* (Shillman 1941, p.1). The total number of pubs operating in Ireland was 13,509 in 1896 or 14,326 including the 817 off-licences (Cucchiara 2009). Under this new licensing system publicans were protected from competition in various ways. Section 2 of the 1902 Act provided that: *“From and after the passing of this Act (July 31st 1902) no licence shall be granted for the sale of intoxicating liquors, whether for consumption for on or off premises...”* (Lawson 1903, p.185 cited in Tara.ie). There were however, a number of exceptions to the restriction on the issue of new licences. To be eligible for a new licence the applicant had to terminate one current licence and be engaged in:

- the renewal of an existing inactive licence;
- the alteration of an existing premises; or
- a move to another premises in the immediate locality due to the termination of a lease or obliteration or necessary purchase of the previous existing premises.

Alternatively, the issue of a new licence could be made to:

- a rural property provided it was not located within one mile of an existing premises of the same nature as one issued before the initiation of the Intoxicating Liquor Act, 1960 (two active licences required termination for the candidate to come within this exception); or
- an urban premises provided a rise in population of distinct proportions had occurred in the applicable town or city (one licence from the same area as that of the proposed new premises required termination for the applicant to come within this exception).

In addition, an applicant could be refused a licence on qualitative grounds. Section 13(1)(d) of the 1960 Act provided that a Court could refuse to issue a licence:

- if the applicant was of poor character or conduct;
- the new premises was deemed unfit or an inconvenience, taking into account the number of previously licensed premises in the neighbourhood; or
- on the basis that the existence of a licence for the new premises would be unfavourable to the business of other premises licensed to sell alcohol in the vicinity.

The enactment of the 1902 Act had the following effects as outlined hereunder:

- a reduction in the number of licences issued;
- the licensing system created entry barriers for potential operators as due to the limits on the number of licences, existing licences now had the worth of property;
- the ‘one mile rule’ prohibited entry into what would have been potentially lucrative locations;
- the licensing system was inflexible in the sense that geographic delimitations were not capable of keeping up to date with demographic changes. Therefore, many areas that were clearly urban, were classified as rural, resulting in these locations being generally underserved, while a high number of licences remained in rural areas; and
- the provision allowing the Court to refuse to issue a licence on the grounds that it may threaten the business of existing operators, directly hampered competition, posing an impediment for innovative new entrants with the ability to offer an improved product or service (The Competition Authority 2010; Cucchiara 2009).

In 1925 the Revenue Commissioners assessed the qualitative limits in relation to the 1902 Act. It was satisfied that a sufficient timeframe had elapsed, and that the resolution of all legal matters pertaining to licensed premises should meet the terms of the Intoxicating Liquor Act of 1902 (Cucchiara 2009).

“In 1925 an Intoxicating Liquor Commission was appointed by the Executive Council to ascertain whether the number of licensed premises in the State was in excess of requirements and, if so, to suggest methods to reduce the numbers. The main recommendation of the Commission was that the number of licensed premises in certain areas was excessive (most parts of Dublin being an exception) and

therefore a scheme should be introduced whereby a licence in a particular area could be abolished on the grounds of an excess of licensed premises in that area”(The Competition Authority 1998: 2.2). In an effort to reduce the number of licences, it was established that no new licences would be permitted. The Commission was forced to close pubs that were in decline, resulting in the removal of 299 licences in 1927, and approximately £50,000 was paid in compensation to publicans (Cucchiara 2009; The Competition Authority 1998).

2.3.3 The Public House in 20th Century Ireland

The public house took centre stage as a vital aspect of Irish society in the twentieth century, “*performing many economic and social functions, from locations for trade and commerce, to transportation nodes, to bases of political and community-based organisations*” (Share 2003, p.1). Throughout Ireland there were far in excess of 13,000 pub licences, a number that represented roughly one licence for every 250 men, women and children (Connolly 2010). The sale of alcohol in the Irish pub was a steady source of revenue, with drinking inside the home a rarity, with the exception of Christmas, Easter or a family occasion, such as a christening (Connolly 2010). Despite the unappealing nature of these houses, with their dark and lacklustre interiors; they reflected the preferences of their male customers. There was no reason to improve or reinvent as the pub was essentially a place for a man to have his few drinks, relax, smoke and chat with neighbours and friends; the surroundings were of little or no importance. However, pubs were not without character and ambience. Both publicans and those they served ensured that there was always plenty of entertainment, in the form of story-telling, gossip, and laughter. The pub acted as the social hub of the community. With little else in the form of entertainment, these premises were a welcome escape from the daily drudgery of one’s life. Everyone knew each other, and the social aspect of frequenting the pub ensured that trade remained stable both day and night.

2.3.4 Mixed Trade Establishments

Although the selling of alcohol was guaranteed on a daily basis, Ireland had an excessive number of licensed premises. Small villages and towns had, in some cases,

over 30 pubs serving 200 houses (Molloy 2002). As a result, the majority of publicans throughout much of the last century could not manage to run their operations to the exclusion of any other business, and most engaged in alternative enterprises in addition to the sale of intoxicating beverages. Grocery stores, hardware stores, shoe shops, and funeral parlours had a bar counter where one could reflect and take pleasure in a pint or two. Mixed trading establishments were customary throughout rural Ireland up until the late 1960s. An Irish tourist guide book written by Bulson (1969, cited in Molloy, p.78) stated: *“The impression that many English visitors have got of Irish villages is that you can get a drink in every shop.”* Unfortunately, with the arrival of supermarkets and increased automobile ownership, coupled with a deteriorating market for Irish agricultural produce in Britain due to post-war depression, the pub-cum-shop businesses began to decline and came to a sorrowful end by the early 1970s.

2.3.5 Male Domination of the Public House

The proprietors of public houses were predominantly male, with women neither welcomed nor served at the business end of the pub counter. Customers were essentially static, with the same men frequenting the public house most evenings. Licensed premises that dealt primarily in the sale of intoxicating liquor were strictly men-only establishments – a masculine domain (Share 2003). Mc Nabb (1964 p.233) states that in rural Limerick of the 1960s *“a respectable woman would never set foot inside one of these places unless there is a grocery shop attached. She certainly never drinks in the local bar”*. Molloy (2002 p.80) reports that up until the 1970s, women were excluded from most Irish pubs, and even then *“it was still common to see women and children sitting outside a pub while husbands and fathers were drinking inside and it did not become illegal for a licensee to refuse to serve a woman because of her sex until the Equal Status Act was passed in 2000.”* Well into the 1980s, a woman entering a pub, whether it be rural or urban, could expect to be verbally abused, disregarded by both the publican and the clientele, or refused a drink (Connolly, 2010).

2.3.6 The Arrival of Women – A Welcome Change

The establishment of the lounge bar, an additional room in a pub where women were welcome, heralded the beginning of cleaner, better-lit and more comfortable

surroundings. The ambience of the lounge bar was more refined than the atmosphere of the public bar, a place where gentlemen could bring their partners and where 'respectable' ladies could drink alcohol openly (Molloy, 2002). In the guidebook *Irish Pubs of Character* written in 1969 and cited in Molloy (2002, p.81), Irish journalist Maurice Gorham notes the difference between the traditional male-only establishment and the modern lounge bar in the following two paragraphs:

“The windows on the street need show no more than a liquor licence or framed showcards for brands of whiskey, not necessarily those still available inside. Women are not seen in the bar, not many women frequent the pub and those that do are tucked discretely inside a little compartment known as the snug. That is our vision of the traditional Irish pub, the pub of 10, 20, or 50 years ago and pubs of this kind are still with us.

But a new trend has set in, the pubs of today are more often light and spacious with wide leather settees, carpets under foot, taped music playing or a television set interrupting the conversation; places where women are expected and catered for and where there is no snug. Probably, the pub itself is all lounge and has no simple straightforward bar, where waiters circulate carrying trays laden with a bewildering variety of drinks.”

Watson (2002, p.209) in *Understanding everyday life* observes the changing nature of the pub, the feminisation of drinking spaces, and their increasingly domesticated setting:

“Pubs have become carpeted and furnished. There are soft furnishings and household artefacts, magazines and newspapers, children’s areas and tiled washrooms, all replicating, on a grander scale, elements of home and family life.”

Associated with such changes was the introduction of new lighter beers and white spirits, such as vodka to cater for the emerging market of women drinkers (Molloy, 2002). These lighter drinks began to gain widespread recognition and acceptance amongst male drinkers, a trend which suggests that there has been a significant 'feminisation' of drinking in society (Share, 2003).

2.3.7 Changing Nature of the Irish Pub

After centuries of relative stability as a male-only institution, the beginning of the 1970s saw the nature of the Irish pub change. The drivers of change included a number of different factors: the emergence of the women's movement; the growth in suburban living; and changing consumer preferences for food and drink (Connolly, 2010). In 1973, the Vintners Federation of Ireland (VFI) was formed through the unionisation of the Irish National Vintners Federation (INVF) (Dublin-based) and the Licensed Vintners Association (LVA) (National). This amalgamation resulted in the majority of publicans and licensees in Ireland belonging to the same trade organisation in almost a century (Vintners Federation of Ireland, 1936 – 2002). However, the union was short-lived due to conflicting issues on trade between Dublin and the rest of the country. While the capital was experiencing steady growth, with larger pubs and unionised workers, rural pubs had a declining trade, smaller premises and staff that were 'in-house' (Molloy, 2002). In 1980, the Dublin LVA amicably withdrew from the VFI, yet to this day work in partnership on matters of joint concern.

On the 25th anniversary of the VFI in 1998, founder member of the organisation Tom Flynn (cited in Molloy, 2002) stated that our country and indeed our pubs had gone through "*tremendous changes in all respects – to the benefit of both the trade and its customers*". The Irish pub, he continued, had entered a new age of diversification with the introduction of food, entertainment, and other ancillary services, such as the colour television which had a huge positive impact on trade. The VFI has been instrumental in its role as mentor to both vintners and publicans, lobbying on behalf of its 5,000 members on issues such as licensing, employment, service, and participation in activities that are deemed advantageous in the generation of goodwill for the trade (Vintners Federation of Ireland, 2011).

Ireland's entry into the EEC, also in 1973, was a significant boost for our economy as a whole, not least for Irish pubs. No longer content with our image as a largely agricultural island, Ireland began to emerge from seclusion. A new generation of young Irish people who had spent time in foreign countries - particularly in the United States, returned to our shores and relayed their experiences to family and friends. They had witnessed the diverse cultures that existed internationally,

socialised in pubs where both genders were treated as equals, and as both employees and customers, understood the operations of establishments that catered for the needs of their customers - young, single, men and women. These young, educated, innovative-minded, and well-travelled Irish required an atmosphere and service similar to that experienced abroad, and thus created a market force for the publicans of Ireland.

Changing centuries old traditions in reaction to these new challenges did not happen overnight, yet in time the majority of existing establishments began to address their operations and their markets and adjusted accordingly (Connolly 2010). A new breed of publican also entered the market for the first time, with the knowledge, skills, expertise, and travel experience to essentially give a changing society what they required. The late 1970s and early 80s saw a huge rise in suburban communities throughout Ireland. To accommodate for such growth, and with licensing laws restricting the establishment of new pubs; urban licensees began to make significant adjustments to both the size and design of their premises. Additionally, the young, single, men and women of Ireland sought variety, and fuelled a demand for a livelier bar scene. Such societal developments contributed to the arrival of the ‘superpub’ in the 1990s. These establishments could accommodate as many as a thousand patrons at a time. As Roth (2006 p.8) stated *“Karaoke machines, pool tables, and large-screen TVs are fast replacing the humble hearth, the cracked leather stools, and the sawdust covered floors that have long been the natural background to the spontaneous conversation, traditional music, and fierce political debate for which this island is known.”* Family-owned pubs also increased in size, and according to Molloy (2002) more than a third of pubs throughout Ireland expanded their retail size from 1994 to 1999.

2.3.8 Universal Appeal of the Irish Pub

The universal appeal of the Irish pub became hugely popular in the early 1990s and is now replicated right across the globe. The traditional pub concept can now be experienced in places such as Singapore, Sydney, Sydney, Atlanta, and Rome. In the early 1990s, two companies began selling prefabricated Irish pubs around the world. The Irish Pub Company was appointed by Guinness as their sole Irish pub concept designer, and the company has designed over 500 pubs and built in excess of 500

outlets (The Irish Pub Company 2011; Roth 2006). The Irish Pub Design and Development Company lets its customers select the type of –traditionall pub they would prefer: cottage style, the shop pub, the Gaelic pub or the contemporary pub. In 1998 there were approximately 1700 Irish pubs in 42 countries worldwide (Slater 2000).

2.3.9 Prosperous Growth

Irish pubs experienced prosperous growth during the 1990s and early 21st century and as Connolly (2010 p. 29) wrote “*The golden age of the Celtic Tiger coincided with the golden age of the Irish pub.*” Rapid economic development, high employment, and resultant wealth transformed one of Europe’s poorest countries into one of its wealthiest. With increased prosperity and higher disposable incomes, the Irish embraced their new found wealth and pubs began to enter their best years. Consumers fuelled demand for not alone drink but also food, and many publicans, particularly in urban areas, introduced a range of food options which not only encouraged new business but increased overall sales, which in some cases was higher than the margin on drink (Connolly 2010). Additionally, entertainment evolved from the television and traditional music of earlier years, to more modern day music that met the required market demands and consumer preferences. Live bands and disc jockeys, singing and dancing, and copious amounts of drink were an entirely new phenomenon and one that kept the larger venues in business seven nights a week. Trade was prosperous, times were good and the Irish pub culture was alive and well.

In more rural areas, adapting to new market forces and changing economic times was not as pronounced as in cities and large urban areas. The rural pub was quite different from its urban counterparts in terms of customer profile, and its redevelopment focused on doing the basics well (Connolly 2010). Good service, a friendly disposition, warm atmosphere and plenty of laughter kept the local community entertained. Some rural establishments expanded where possible, with new kitchens, food service facilities and function rooms being added to cater for larger groups, weddings, funerals and related gatherings. Other publicans introduced large screen televisions, facilities for dancing and live music to their existing business. The gradual advancements of the rural pub did not change their position as

a central element in the fabric of rural society (Connolly 2010). Their role was diverse and multidimensional in not alone fulfilling the basic function of dispensing alcohol, but of equal if not greater importance, also acting as a focal point and meeting place for local community events where one could meet with others, discuss topics of interest, watch television and engage in a variety of recreational pastimes such as darts, pool and card-playing. Invariably the visit to the pub was not primarily for alcohol consumption but more for the purpose of having an enjoyable social outlet to talk with other people and ease loneliness and social isolation.

2.3.10 From Boom to Bust

Regrettably, the soaring popularity and turnover of the Irish pub began to rapidly decline as Irish pubs faced a series of major challenges beginning in 2004 with the introduction of the smoking ban. The advent of such legislation had a devastating effect on the Irish pub and many have had to shut their doors due to a lack of trade. In the ensuing years, a series of measures have, one by one, changed the nature of the pub trade and decimated its very existence. The smoking ban, random breath testing, the abolition of the Groceries Order, changing consumer lifestyles, the economic downturn and stricter drink-driving laws have brought the pub trade to its knees. Across the country, it is estimated that one pub a day is closing its doors and thousands of jobs have been lost as a result. In addition, an important element in the fabric of rural society is also lost.

In the following section, the author will examine these issues in greater detail and their specific impact on publicans throughout Ireland. Furthermore, the economic contribution of the drinks industry and the performance of the on-licensed sector will be discussed. The health implications associated with over consumption of alcohol is presented, as this issue is of particular importance given the prevalence of binge drinking and growth in home alcohol consumption. Advice from various sources as to how the vintners of Ireland can cope with the present challenges and face the future with optimism is put forward.

2.4 Factors Influencing the Pub Trade in Ireland

2.4.1 The Smoking Ban

On 30th January 2003, the then Minister for Health and Children Micheál Martin TD announced at the launch of the *Report on the Health Effects of Environmental Tobacco Smoke* (2003): “I’m banning smoking in the workplace, including restaurants, trains and pubs.” Speaking in a very forthright manner, the Minister made it very clear that he was taking very seriously the findings of the study aimed at identifying “the degree of consensus that exists among leading international scientific authorities on the question of the hazard and risk posed by environmental tobacco smoke to human health in the workplace.” The study was conducted by a team of independent scientists, led by Dr. Shane Allwright, senior lecturer in epidemiology in the Department of Public Health and Primary Care at Trinity College Dublin. Commissioned by the Office of Tobacco Control and the Health and Safety Authority, the report, as the Minister continued “.... proves, on the best of international scientific evidence, that there is harm in Environmental Tobacco Smoke. Proven harm about which there is not only a consensus in the worldwide scientific community, but a significant, substantial consensus.” The Minister’s speech concluded: “I believe that in every decade, we are presented with one major choice - a choice where, if we call it right, we change the future for the better. This is one of those choices, and I’m making the call the way it must be made, eleven months from now, taking tobacco out of the workplace” (Department of Health, 2003).

On the same day that Micheál Martin announced the proposed ban on smoking in the workplace, Action on Smoking on Health Ireland (ASH), issued a press release in support of the smoking ban stating that “members of the general public must recognise and respond to the right of other citizens to unpolluted air” (ASH, January 2003). On 23rd October 2003, it further stated “this legislation is not about the right of a smoker to smoke – it is about denying the right of one worker to pollute another’s space” (ASH, October, 2003). At a seminar organised by the Office of Tobacco Control “*The Costs and Productivity Impact of Tobacco Use*” on 2 October 2003 Micheál Martin declared that “As Minister for Health and Children I am fully

aware of the enormous burden that the consumption of tobacco products directly imposes on our health care system through active and passive smoking... The State assumes most of the costs of health care and tackling the tobacco epidemic is a Government approved public health priority. A significant number of beds in our acute hospitals are occupied by people with tobacco related illnesses” (Department of Health 2003). The burden of smokers on the health system was further echoed by Seamus O’Reilly, Consultant Medical Oncologist of Cork University Hospital. In a letter to the Editor of the Irish Times 2003, O’ Reilly highlighted some of the financial repercussions of smoking in his support of the ban: *“Smoking is responsible for 25 per cent of the cancers we have in Ireland and at any one time over 50 per cent of hospital beds are occupied by patients suffering from illnesses related to smoking. Its deleterious financial, emotional and physical effects on our society have been established for over a half a century”* (O’Reilly 2003). The announcement of the proposed smoking ban was warmly welcomed by health-promotion interests. The Department of Health and Children (DOHC) was not alone on the ‘pro’ side and gained full support from a very strong civil society alliance the Pro Health Lobby. In addition, the Minister gained the approval of the relevant state agencies – the Health and Safety Authority (HSA), the Office of Tobacco Control (OTC) and The Health Boards (DOHC, 2005/2006).

On the other end of the spectrum were those interest groups in opposition. The hospitality sector in Ireland, in particular the licensed trade, challenged the government on their plans to impose the smoking ban. Concern was particularly felt by the publicans of Ireland, especially those in rural areas, the majority of which are small, family-owned businesses that depend heavily on local trade to make a living. The patrons of pubs in rural areas are primarily of the older generation, and enjoying a drink and a smoke in the company of others is for many, their only source of social interaction. The Vintners Federation of Ireland (VFI) and the Licensed

Vintners Association (LVA) objected strongly to the legislation, predicting that a ban on smoking in pubs would have severe negative economic consequences for themselves and for the country as a whole with massive job losses and a halt in the flow of tourists visiting Ireland. Former President of the Vintners Federation of Ireland Joe Browne speaking at the 30th Annual Conference of the Federation in 2002 described the proposed ban as “*outrageous, unenforceable, and unworkable.*” He further added that the world renowned Irish pub ambience would be irreparably damaged forever should a smoking ban take effect, and that it would also have a seriously damaging impact on the tourism industry. “*Ireland trades on the Irish pub when promoting Ireland abroad and one of the key selling points is the quintessentially relaxed pub atmosphere,*” he said. “*Tourists want to visit the Irish pubs portrayed in books, films and ads - busy, friendly, full of ambience and atmosphere - not bleak empty establishments with more patrons on the streets outside smoking than inside the premises*” (Irish Hospitality Industry Alliance (IHIA) 2003, p.17).

On the 23rd August 2003, the LVA and the VFI embarked on their biggest attempt to convince the Minister to consider a different approach to the ban. A package of initiatives, entitled “*Customer Choice and Common Sense*” was announced which comprised the following measures:

- from January 2004, 50% of pubs would have designated smoking rooms;
- smoking at the bar prohibited as of January 2004;
- installation of ventilation equipment to effect a minimum of 12 air changes on a hourly basis with independent confirmation of ventilation standards;
- exemption from the ban for owner managed pubs with five employees or less;
- a review and assessment by Government and industry in November 2005; and
- scientific research by government into levels and impact of Environmental Tobacco Smoke (ETS) in the workplace (Keane, 2006).

Despite their efforts to dissuade the blanket ban from going ahead, the Minister made it clear to the hospitality sector that efforts made to date had no impact on his commitment or resolve and that a compromise was out of the question (Gilmore, 2005). The threat of the smoking ban was now a reality. On the 29th March 2004,

Ireland's workplaces became smoke-free under provisions in the Public Health (Tobacco) Acts, 2002 and 2004.

2.4.1.1 The Impact of the Smoking ban on Irish Pub Trade

The introduction of the smoking ban has been particularly felt by small, rural family-owned pubs throughout Ireland. At a VFI meeting two months after the ban, a number of members reported a significant decrease in sales, with drink suppliers' revenue down by between 15-25% (Condon, 2004). VFI president Seamus O'Donoghue stated: *"Our fear of a severe loss in business as a result of the ban has become a reality for many members. Daytime trade has dropped off considerably and many customers now arrive later and stay for shorter periods. Once the summer season ends and the weather becomes more inclement, further loss of business is inevitable"*. In a press release issued by the VFA on June 1st 2004, Donal O'Keefe, Chief Executive of the Licensed Vintners' Association stated: *"Figures from the Dublin trade clearly show that, on average, pub revenues have been hit by between 12% to 15%.... a sustained downturn of 12% to 15% is a serious matter for Dublin publicans and has clear implications for both jobs and the Exchequer... the ban is hurting"* (PR Newswire 2004). On the first anniversary of the smoking ban the LVA issued a statement confirming that the impact of the ban on business had been a negative one. Donal O'Keefe stated that while the ban was complied with very well, predictions on the loss of business proved accurate. *"Approximately 2,000 full and part-time jobs have been lost in the Dublin pub trade over the past yearwhile the smoking ban is not the only factor responsible for the decline, it is without a doubt, the main contributing factor. The rate of decline which began to emerge in 2000, has tripled from 3% to 9% in the space of one year – the year the ban was introduced"* (LVA 2005). In 2006, 440 fewer licences were issued or renewed than in the previous year, with the greatest number of closures in rural areas along the West Coast. An estimated 1,000 rural pubs shut their doors in the three years following the smoking ban (Lister, 2007). The disturbing impact that Ireland's smoking ban is having on the traditional pub will lead to an increase in social isolation in rural communities, according to Kevin James O' Mahony (2010) in a Letter to the Editor of the Irish Independent entitled *Smoking ban not fair on publicans*. He states that the

ban will lead to a “*surge in binge drinking in private houses, a loss in tourism revenue and a decline in Irish cultural traditions*” (O’ Mahony, 2010).

Irish pubs and other licensed premises are a central part of the essential custom of socialising. The imposition of strict clinical controls in social outlets which are essential to our much publicised, world-renowned, reputation for conversation, conviviality, social interaction and ‘craic’ has had very adverse implications for the pub trade and has been seriously damaging to the fabric of Irish society, especially in rural areas where the importance of the pub as a social resource cannot be overstated. Smoking and drinking were embedded in the culture of our country for hundreds of years. As Connolly (2010, p.132) wrote “*In rural Ireland, the smoking ban became the straw that broke the camel’s back.*”

2.4.2 Random Breath Testing

The main legislation dealing with road safety in Ireland is the Road Traffic Act 1961. The law has been updated and modernised over the years and following the introduction of the Road Traffic Act 2006, the Gardai now have greater powers to prosecute the offence of drink driving on Irish roads (Road Traffic Act 2006).

Prior to the introduction of the 2006 Act, and in order to administer a breath test to a driver, the Gardai had to be of the opinion that a motorist had:

- committed a road traffic offence; or
- had been involved in a road traffic accident; or
- be of the opinion that the driver of a vehicle was under the influence of alcohol.

The Gardaí now have the power to administer breath analyser tests at mandatory alcohol checkpoints to any driver. There is no longer a need for the Gardaí to be of the opinion that a driver has consumed any alcohol (Meagher 2006). This practice is known as random breath testing, and it has increased the chances that anyone who drives in Ireland under the influence of alcohol will be stopped at a checkpoint, have the alcohol level detected and face prosecution by the Gardaí.

The checkpoints are authorised by a Garda Inspector, and are designed only to test for alcohol on drivers' breath. These checkpoints can be located anywhere in a public place approved by the Garda Inspector. This includes roads outside licensed premises, nightclubs, hotels, or any other establishment that serves alcohol, as the aim of these checkpoints is to reduce the occurrence of drink driving accidents.

In a presentation to the Joint Committee on Transport in 2006, Acting Chief Executive of the National Safety Council Noel Brett discussed the situation regarding road safety in Ireland, highlighting key statistical information on collisions, injuries and fatalities from 1998 to 2005. According to the report 400 people died in road collisions in 2005, showing a concerning rise of 26 deaths or 6.7% on 2004 when a total of 374 people lost their lives. 2003 was the safest year on Irish roads in over 40 years. 76.9% of all road fatalities were the result of poor driver behaviour, with the main causes cited as excessive speed and driving while intoxicated (Brett 2006). According to Alcohol Action Ireland (2010), alcohol accounts for almost one in three fatalities on Irish roads, resulting in an average of 120 lives lost each year due to alcohol-related car crashes.

Since the implementation of mandatory breath testing measures in 2006, the number of deaths on our roads has fallen from 400 in 2005 to 212 in 2010. 38% of these deaths were under 25 years of age. In the first 12 months after implementation 92 lives were saved (Bedford 2008). These results are evidence that mandatory breath testing had an immediate impact, and significantly reduced alcohol-related harms on our roads.

As a further extension of the measures contained in the 2006 Act, further legislation under the Road Traffic Act 2010 will lower the drink drive limit from 80mgs to 50mgs, along with a lower 20mg limit for learner and professional drivers. The reduced limits which are due to take effect in September 2011 will also provide for mandatory alcohol testing of drivers injured in road collisions (Road Traffic Act 2010).

2.4.2.1 Impact of Drink Driving Legislation

A 2009 survey of on-licensed premises commissioned by the Drinks Industry Group of Ireland (DIGI) sought information from a sample of 748 premises on what impact random breath testing of drivers had on on-licence alcohol sales. No negative impact was felt by 6% of public houses, 12% of public houses in Dublin and 5% of public houses elsewhere in Ireland. A 'significant negative' impact was noted by 65% of public houses, Dublin public houses (43%) and 69% of public houses elsewhere in Ireland. The 69% non-Dublin public house share shows that almost seven in ten public houses in the rest of the country experienced a significant negative impact as a result of random breath testing. A large concern was the decline in public house licences between 2007 and 2009. Numbers decreased from 9,418 in 2007 to 8,867 in 2008 (DIGI 2009). Between 2007 and 2009 a total of 833 pub licences were not renewed with Galway accounting for 55 of non-renewals (O'Regan, 2010).

The advent of mandatory breath testing has had a huge impact on pub trade and the wider communities in Ireland, especially in rural areas with an ageing population and inadequate public transport services. According to Turtle Bunbury (2008), the author of *The Irish Pub* "*Random breath tests put the fear of God into old people. It's the end of freedom. For so many farmers and country people, the pub was their principal refuge. They could perch themselves in a bar stool, sup upon creamy stouts and golden whiskeys, puff tobacco, cackle and snort, exchange gossip and fall in love again.*"

For many decades, the local pub offered its patrons a real sense of continuity, regularity and order, the essence of a healthy community life. Due to a lack of trade, publicans have been forced to close their doors, and their demise has left many feeling increasingly isolated (Keaney 2007). The majority of public houses (45% in 2009) are located in small towns (with a population of 10,000 or less) and most of them (94%) are independently owned or family run businesses (DIGI 2009).

Ireland's rural public houses are not simply drinking establishments. They contribute to the quality of life experienced by rural residents by not alone serving as a social focal point in villages but also providing a meeting place for friends and family, community groups and associations (Stevenson 2007).

The Government are ‘driving a wedge’ between the Gardaí and rural communities, according to independent Councillor John Kelly who stated in an interview with the Mayo News (2007) that *“the wrong people are being targeted. It is not the single bachelor man in rural Ireland that is causing these accidents nor is it the responsible publican that may be forced to close down due to lack of business”*. Gardaí voiced concerns about the impact the legislation is having on their relations with the rural community. A serving member told the Mayo News that *“faith in the guards is being eroded by checkpoints manned by members of the Gardaí who are absolute strangers to the areas. It is causing disquiet among the rural communities and is reducing respect for the police force in general.”*

The Vintners Federation of Ireland (VFI) is totally opposed to the proposed reduction in drink driving limits (VFI 2009), and accuse the government of *“deliberately destroying the pub industry.... the new blood alcohol limits will be the final nail in the coffin”* (VFI 2010). While the organisation has categorically stated that it is in full support of any measures to reduce fatalities on Irish roads, it is of the opinion that the legislation will have no major impact on road casualties. Referring to a report by the Road Safety Authority (RSA) to the Minister Noel Dempsey in 2008 which stated that research on reducing the level further from 80mg to 50mg had not seen the expected decline in alcohol related collisions; the VFI have urged the government to sustain current limits estimating that 5,000 jobs could be lost as a result of pub closures if present limits are reduced and *“ putting a tremendous extra financial burden on the state to the tune of €100m annually in increased social welfare payments”* (VFI 2009).

2.4.3 Below-cost selling of alcohol

On Tuesday 8th November 2005, Micheál Martin the former Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment announced that he had secured approval from Government for the repeal of the 1987 Groceries Order (Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation 2005). He stated that *“The Groceries Order has acted against the*

interests of consumers for the past 18 years and it is now time for consumer interests to prevail” (Martin 2005). The main objective of the 1987 Order was to prohibit below cost selling by larger retailers in a manner that would adversely affect smaller businesses. However, for an industry to thrive in a global economy, domestic market competition is vital for growth and sustainability (Martin 2006).

On the 20th March 2006 the 1987 Groceries Order was abolished by the Competition (Amendment) Act 2006 (Collins, 2010). The removal of restrictions on below cost selling was welcome news for Irish consumers and large retailers alike. Unfortunately, the abolishment of the Order has led to a surge in alcohol sales in off-licensed premises to the detriment of the on-licensed sector.

Since the turn of the century, there has been a noticeable increase in the number of premises licensed to sell alcohol for consumption off-premises. This figure increased threefold in just seven years, with 637 off-licence licences awarded in 2007 alone (Kerr 2008). The off-licence share of the drink’s market stands at 50% and is continuing to grow (O’Shea 2010). A host of unfavourable factors such as the smoking ban, drink-driving legislation and downturn in the economy created a market force for such premises as more and more people have chosen to drink in the comfort of their homes (Euromonitor International 2010). In addition, the Intoxicating Liquor Act 2000 abolished the requirement that an existing licence must firstly be extinguished in the same vicinity of the proposed premises. As a result, applicants can tender for the extinguishment of a licence attached to premises in any location in Ireland (Clarke 2009). The abolition of the Groceries Order effectively allows supermarkets, convenience stores, and petrol stations to sell alcohol below unit-cost, as a loss leader, to attract customers to purchase cheap alcohol, while inflating the price of other goods (DIGI 2010). Despite the prevalence and continued growth of the off-licensed sector, statistics indicate that the Irish are drinking less. According to a report by DIGI (2010), there was a per capital decrease of 9.9% in 2009, on top of a 7.7% decline in 2008. Other statistics from the report show:

- by volume, consumption decreased by 5.9% in 2008 and by 8.9% in 2009;
- consumption as of 2010 is 21% below the peak year of 2001;
- alcohol consumption levels in 2009 were the lowest since 1996.

2.4.3.1 Impact of Below-Cost Selling of Alcohol

The on-licensed sector has been heavily affected by the rise in off-licensed alcohol sales, and has called on the Government to abolish the below cost selling of alcohol in supermarkets, or alternatively to impose a minimum price based on the alcohol content at which it can be sold (DIGI 2010; European Supermarket Magazine 2011). According to figures from the Revenue Commissioners published in the Irish Times (2011), 1,300 pubs have closed their doors over the past five years, down from 8,922 in 2006 to 7,616 in 2010 and equating to one licence not being renewed daily. The VFI (2010) which represents 4,500 rural publicans, say the below cost selling in supermarkets is to blame for the continuing decline of pub trade. Since June 2006, an estimated 20,000 people have become unemployed in the pub industry, with 3,000 jobs lost in the first six months of 2010 (VFI 2010). The removal of restrictions on below cost selling has “broken the back” of the industry as on-licensed premises are unable to compete with their prices (VFI 2010; RTE News 2011). The cost of a pub’s licence is based on its turnover, while off-licences pay a flat fee, with the saving allowing them to charge lower prices. The cheap sale of alcohol has created a perception that the pub is ripping people off with their prices, which the DIGI (2010) say is untrue. *“It has to be borne in mind that when you buy a product in the supermarket it is either consumed in the home or elsewhere but the pub is also providing the atmosphere, service, heat, insurance etc.”*

In an interview with Roisín Burke (2009), the then president of the VFI Val Hanley said that people’s lifestyles have changed since the Seventies and Eighties and they are not going to the pub as often. *“People had nothing else only the local bar at the time. It would be full on a Wednesday night. People had more time and their lives were more relaxed.”* He addressed the challenges faced by the independent off-licences, as although more people are drinking within the home, they are more inclined to buy their alcohol in supermarkets when they do their grocery shopping. According to Hanley, the Groceries Order favours the supermarkets, allowing them to sell alcohol at prices that the independents simply cannot compete with. He stressed his concern at the prevalence of wine consumption, and that children are being raised in a drinking environment that is not properly controlled. He said that publicans and the VFI intend to do all in their power to improve trade by raising training and quality standards in their pubs.

Admittedly, current supermarket prices are creating difficulty for the on-licensed sector, but according to Rotwell (2011), they are not the primary reason for the decline in business. She claims that the economic downturn means that few people nowadays can either afford or allow themselves the luxury of going to the pub two or three times a week, as the cost of doing so is too high. However, the fact that drink can now be purchased at less than a euro per bottle is “ethically questionable”.

In an article by Reilly (2010), publicans claim that the cheap availability of alcohol has created a cohort of young teenage problem drinkers, and that there has been a huge rise in the number of people, women in particular, that have been banned from certain pubs as they are drunk on arrival, having consumed alcohol at home. Higher levels of drinking at home were escalating the problems associated with underage drinking as it is difficult to control consumption in the home.

O’Shea (2010) says publicans are increasingly challenged with “naggin-isation” of pub culture, whereby customers are bringing in small bottles of spirits and furtively pouring it into their soft drinks beneath the table. “Pre-loading” is another trend becoming more commonplace amongst the younger generation. It involves the consumption of cheap supermarket drink at home before finishing off with a couple of drinks in the local bar or nightclub.

The price of drink is the main reason pubs are struggling according to an article by Pope (2011). Unsympathetic customers quote the expense of drink as a factor in the demise of the industry, and that publicans overcharged during the Celtic Tiger years with extortionate prices. In response, VFI president Gerry Mellett cited that comparing drink prices of supermarkets to pubs was unjust as publicans provide light, heat, entertainment, and atmosphere in a controlled environment that come at a cost. Mellett predicts that the rural pub is severely threatened and the possibility of extinction had now become a reality.

2.4.4 Changing Consumer Lifestyles

Although poverty was prevalent in Ireland throughout much of the 20th century, drink remained an accepted part of the Irish culture, and there is little doubt that the drinks trade in Ireland was quite recession-proof. Despite high unemployment in the 1970s and early 1980s leading to mass emigration, the Irish still drank copious

amounts of alcohol and publicans had a steady source of income. Fast forward to 2011 and the picture is significantly different.

Over the past two decades Ireland's economy and social landscape has changed enormously. During the late 1990s our country experienced an economic boom which lasted well into the last decade. The Celtic Tiger roared ferociously bringing remarkable wealth and prosperity. However, Ireland's good fortunes were not to last, and in 2009 a property price crash hit Ireland, coinciding with a recession which resulted from a global economic slowdown and credit control tightening. The impact of the economic downturn has resulted in high levels of unemployment and indebtedness, which has significantly altered consumer's attitudes, behaviour and spending patterns. One noticeable trend is the shift from on-licensed to off-licensed alcohol purchases.

A report by Euromonitor International (2010) on consumer lifestyles in Ireland gives an in-depth analysis of current consumer trends and projections for the future. The information was gathered from a wide range of sources and cross-checked to ensure accuracy and consistency. The author will summarise the main findings relevant to alcohol consumption and emerging consumer trends.

Consumers are increasingly buying alcohol from the off-licensed premises in an effort to save money. This trend began to emerge prior to the recession, as consumers felt they were being charged excessively high prices in pubs. The introduction of the smoking ban, random breath testing and a lack of public transport in rural communities has also had an impact. Public houses are heavily regulated which creates considerable barriers to entry, and thus permits publicans to increase prices of alcohol. Customers now spend more time at home or with friends. If consumers do go to the pub, it is likely that they will have a few drinks beforehand. The biggest driver of the drinks market are the young male population aged between 18 to 25 and this age group is expected to decline by over 14% by 2020.

The pub is facing a "perfect storm" of economic, socio-cultural, regulatory and legislative factors which is adversely affecting its survival. To regain its role in society, the report states that the liberalisation of licensing laws would allow entry into the market, thus strengthening price competition. The corollary of the pub's decline has been the growth of the "cocooning" trend that has seen the Irish spending

more time at home. This emerging trend has increased sales of widescreen televisions, computers and laptops, games consoles, and similar electronic equipment.

Between 2005 and 2009, Ireland's urban population grew by 17.5% while its rural counterpart grew by a mere 0.1%. The main factor behind this trend is the attraction of city life to the younger generation, who leave a predominantly older population behind. Urban consumers tend to socialise outside the home more so than rural citizens. This is primarily due to their younger age profile, the fact that many facilities and amenities are more accessible, and with a shorter commute they have more free time.

Consumers are becoming more value-conscious and increasingly seeking discounts, promotions, using coupons and bargaining like never before. As of 2010, 30% more people are using coupons than they did in 2008. Spending on alcohol and tobacco decreased from €4,128 million in 2008 to €3,600 million in 2009. In 2010 Irish people paid 70% more than the EU average for alcohol and tobacco, and faced the 5th highest overall prices of the 27 EU member countries. Alcohol and tobacco are 28% higher here than in the United Kingdom.

Expenditure on beer, the dominant drink in the sector, has declined both in the on and off-licensed sectors, with consumer expenditure falling by over 11% between 2007 and 2009. Wine and cider have grown in popularity, as have sales of premium bottled lager. Sales of Guinness have declined with market share falling from 35% in 2000 to 27.2% in 2009. Despite an increased awareness of the health implications of drink and a trend for lower alcohol consumption, non-alcoholic beer was less than 1% of total beer volume in 2008. Branding of beer is important, as consumers tend to be loyal. Annual volume consumption of wine grew by 14% between 2004 and 2009, while beer consumption fell by 10.5% during the same period. Off-trade sales of wine accounted for 77.5% of all wine consumed in Ireland in 2009, a rise of 8.8% over 2004. Spirits consumption rose by 10.5% between 2004 and 2009. Off-trade sales of spirits accounted for 66.6% of volume consumption in 2009, a rise of 11.4% since 2004.

Rising consumer confidence over the next few years is expected to increase consumer expenditure on alcohol by 12.8%, reaching almost €2 billion in 2020.

Wine expenditure will drive this growth and is expected to reach €560 million by 2020. The consumption of vodka and some imported beers will decline due to the number of immigrants leaving Ireland, as these drinks tend to be well-liked by consumers from Eastern Europe.

The propensity of consumers to cocoon themselves at home increased due to the recession. This trend is not expected to change by 2020, which will have a negative impact on the foodservice sector, public houses and the entertainment sector. Trips to the cinema have declined due to the recession, and this may be as a result of the large, flat-screen LCD televisions that are now a dominant fixture in most living rooms. Consumers are either renting movies from DVD stores or via the internet and watching them at home. Again this trend is expected to continue up until 2020. Today's consumers are becoming increasingly aware of the negative repercussions of binge drinking on their health, and have begun to address their habits. Extensive media coverage of the dangers of alcohol has heightened awareness. A study undertaken by Slán (2009) on the drinking habits of over 10,000 people aged 18 and over found that approximately 40% of women and 70% of men consumed an excessive amount of alcohol over an extended period of time. In total, 56% of survey participants reported a damaging pattern of alcohol consumption, and a small percentage (16%) acknowledged that drink had affected their health.

The findings of the report paint a clear picture of the modern day consumer. Value is an important factor in purchase decisions, and people are cutting back on their spending overall. The stay at home trend is likely to continue with alcohol continuing to be purchased in the lowered priced outlets such as supermarkets. The price of drink in pubs is one of the main reasons why consumers do not frequent very often, coupled with the smoking ban and random breath testing legislation. Cocooning and drinking at home are trends that are likely to continue in the foreseeable future. People are becoming more aware of the health implications of excessive drinking due to widespread media coverage of the dangers of binge drinking, and it is likely that through continued public awareness the Irish will be consuming less in the future.

2.5 Health Implications of Alcohol

The Chief Medical Officer of the Department of Health and Children (DOHC), Dr. Tony Holohan (2010) states that *“If we reduced alcohol-related harms by 30%, we would save 30 lives per month and 600 overnight hospital admissions per day.”* Speaking at an Alcohol Action Conference in September 2010, Holohan acknowledges that there are some positive aspects to alcohol, such as social lubrication and some health benefits, but that these are only derived from low consumption levels. He stresses the devastation that alcohol has caused to individuals, families and society. The effects of alcohol amount *“to over 10% of all inpatient costs, 14% of psychiatric hospital costs, 7% of GP costs and up to 30% of emergency department costs.”* The Irish binge drink more than any other European country, and teenagers and young adults drink more than young people in any other European country. Holohan addresses the effects alcohol has on economic productivity which cost approximately €330 million in 2007. *“The drinks industry will espouse the benefits to society of the employment and income that the industry generates, however, this argument is based on the assumption that if people didn’t drink the money spent on alcohol would not be spent on other goods and services”*, he said. In his conclusion, Holohan cites that there is no single measure that can work to reduce the implications of alcohol abuse on society and that *“a sustained multisectoral approach to the alcohol epidemic, backed by a strong political and societal consensus, is required to reduce alcohol consumption levels.”*

According to Alcohol Health Ireland (2011), the growing availability, promotion and affordability of alcohol in off-licensed premises are associated with the rise in the number of drink-related harms. The national charity claims that the price of alcohol is a key driver in the consumption of alcohol, and that minimum pricing of alcohol should be introduced. The proposed new measure would primarily affect those who drink large quantities of alcohol, and also children and young adults who tend to consume cheap alcohol. The charity highlights the costs of drink-related harms to our healthcare system, which amount to €3.7billion a year including health, absenteeism and crime-related costs - €3,318 for each taxpayer in Ireland. Alcohol prices in Ireland fell by 4.6% from September 2009 to September 2010, while overall average prices increased by 0.5%. In answer to the question: *“would banning below cost selling of alcohol not have the same effect as minimum pricing?”* Alcohol Ireland

state that with below cost selling, it would be difficult and also costly to work out the cost price (manufacture, transport, packaging, etc.) as that can change over time, making a ban on below cost selling next to impossible to employ, monitor and enforce. However, with minimum pricing the cost of a drink is derived by using the formula: minimum price per unit X number of units of alcohol = price. The calculation of a minimum price would need to take into consideration the present market, alcohol sales and consumption levels, data on health and crime and then set at a level that will ease the burden of harm caused by alcohol misuse.

2.6 Performance of the On-Licensed Sector in 2010

In May 2011 the Drinks Industry Group of Ireland (2011) released a report which examines the performance of the on-licensed sector of the drinks market in 2010. The sector is facing challenging times with pronounced rates of decline.

The main findings of the report are as follows:

Prices

- On-licensed alcohol prices fell by 2.9% from 2009 to 2010. As measured by the Consumer Price Index (CPI) average alcohol prices were 4.4% lower in 2010. There was a decrease of 8.2% in off-licence alcohol prices from 2009 to 2010.

Retail Sales

- Volume of bar sales decreased by 10.5% in 2010 and the value of sales fell by 13.1%. The decline in sales was higher than predicted due to the lower decline in alcohol consumption in 2010 than in 2009. Since 2007 there has been a 25% decline in bar sales volume which resulted in a significant loss of employment.

Employment

- Total employment fell from 64,918 in 2008 to 53,982 in 2009 – a loss of 10,936 jobs overall. In 2008 there were 29,306 full-time employees decreasing to 25,972 in 2009, resulting in a loss of 3,334 full-time jobs.

According to the report, the prospects for 2011 are not positive, and it is predicted that a further 3,000 jobs will be lost in the public house sector this year.

2.7 The Economic Contribution of the Drinks Industry

A report commissioned by the Drinks Industry Group of Ireland (2010) identifies the economic contribution made by the drinks industry to the Irish economy. Since 2008 the industry has continued to decline, yet it contributes substantially through its manufacturing, wholesale distribution and on and off-licensed premises.

- In 2009 spend on beverages was €7.185b equating to 8.5% of total consumer expenditure. Off-licences made up 34.8% of alcohol sales and 65.2% was spent in pubs, bars, restaurants, hotels and nightclubs. Alcohol sales peaked in 2007 at €7.230b, dropping to €6.531b in 2009.
- 10% of on-licensed premises had a turnover of less than €30,000 in 2008. 49% had sales of under €200,000, while a small number (3%) had sales of €2.5m or above. 47% of public houses outside Dublin had sales of €200,000 or under compared to 6% of Dublin public houses.
- The majority (94%) of pubs are family or independently owned and operated.
- Manufacturing is comprised of 34 enterprises and 40 local units in 2008. Diageo and Irish Distillers are two of the larger enterprises operating in Ireland. The manufacturing of drinks accounted for 3.3% of manufacturing VAT in 2008 and 2.2% of manufacturing employment. Average salary in drinks industry is €55k compared to €39k in total manufacturing.
- Alcohol consumption amounted to €6.531b in 2009, the equivalent of 7.7% of total personal consumption. Non-alcoholic beverages equalled €654m. Overall consumption fell from 9.9% in 2000 to 7.7% in 2009.
- 4,263 people were employed in the manufacturing of drinks in 2008. 75,177 jobs in on-licensed premises, 4800 in off-licences, amounting to 84,240 jobs in total in 2008.
- Total drinks exports in 2009 were €997.7m compared to imports of €668.2m. Drinks exports accounted for 1.2% of total exports.
- Purchases by Drinks Manufacturing Industry in 2008: materials and fuel (€1107.9m), industrial services (€27.4m), non-industrial services (€563.1m),

purchases (€1698.4), production (€2773.2), intermediate consumption (€1718.8) and gross value added (€1055.4).

- Excise totalled €968.0m in 2009 and VAT contributions of €1045m
- International brands such as Guinness, Jameson, and Baileys create a high quality profile for Ireland in terms of tourism. The Guinness Storehouse is the number one fee charging tourist attraction in Ireland with 1019166 visitors in 2009 alone, with the Old Jameson Distillery attracting 248000 visitors.
- 7% of visitors identified the pub as an advantage. This figure is much higher than factors such as good accommodation and good internal transport. Our culture and history, Irish people and scenery are also factors identified by visitors as advantages of travelling to Ireland.
- The drinks industry is a main sponsor of horse racing in Ireland

Overall the report indicates how significant the drinks industry is in contributing to our economy in terms of employment, manufacturing, tourism and regional development. The on-licensed sector provides 89% of all drinks related employment, and has been the overall worst performer in terms of employment losses in recent years. Changes in the market and recent regulations are the main causes cited for this decline. Predictions for the next few years are that the industry will continue to weaken in the on-licensed sector.

2.8 The Future of the On-Licensed Sector: Strategies for Survival

Ahead of the 38th AGM of the Vintners Federation of Ireland (VFI) in May this year, results of a survey undertaken by Ask Chilli on behalf of the VFI bring to light the challenges that publicans are facing and the measures being taken to counteract the fall off in trade:

- sales declined by 7% in the first three months of 2011;
- 7,000 on-licensed staff became unemployed in 2010;
- 65% of publicans have reduced their staff levels in the last 12 months;
- working hours were reduced by 73% of publicans;
- 3 in 5 that serve food have reduced the price of their food offerings;
- 73% of publicans have employed cost saving measures such as reduced utility bills, installation of energy-saving measures and reduced trading hours;

- 44% saw ‘Value’ as the key driver to attracting more trade ‘Events’ (14%) and ‘Service’ (19%);
- 85% of vintners wanted the Government to address the below-cost selling of alcohol; and
- 79% called on the Government to reduce local rates (Drinks Industry Ireland 2011).

At the AGM held in the Slieve Russell Hotel, County Cavan in May, the VFI launched a new blueprint for the pub trade entitled “Options 4 Recovery” in an attempt to limit the loss of jobs from the industry, and to assist the hundreds of struggling pubs throughout the country in combating the economic downturn. Pat Nolan (2011) of Drinks Industry Ireland reported from the event.

The document according to guest speaker Maurice Pratt (2011) “*was absolutely on the money*”. Businesses that satisfy customers profitably and market to their needs have a strong advantage. Publicans must adapt to successfully overcome the present challenges. He pointed out that “*despite all that’s happened, the pub remains part of the fabric that defines us. It’s in our DNA.*” He advised publicans to address the value perceptions of their businesses as customers believe that prices have not adjusted to the current financial situation they find themselves in. Improvements in value over time will assist in recovery of market share, so a shift of focus from price to value was necessary. Pratt recommended that businesses make use of social media such as Facebook and Youtube. By embracing the new tools of communication, publicans can market to their customers needs and improve the value perception of pubs. Speaking also at the meeting, VFI President Gerry Mellett said that vintners must fulfill the needs of the modern consumer and pubs that remain closed all day were not meeting those needs.

2.8.1 Options 4 Recovery – Blueprint for the future of the pub trade

The document will challenge publicans to ensure customers are given the highest quality of service and value. VFI CEO Pdraig Cribben urges publicans to promote themselves, provide leadership and to increase involvement in local events and festivals. The recovery programme focuses on four main areas:

Standards: Looking after the Customer

The document highlights the competition publicans face from, not other publicans as was traditionally the case, but from supermarkets, the cinema, leisure centres, the home and any other place that money can be spent. Meeting the needs of the customer is a prerequisite to survival.

Value: The Value Perception

Value relates to the atmosphere, service, entertainment and the quality offered to customers. It involves the entire experience and is not just about the price. There is a perception that pubs are expensive and publicans must ensure that the value of the offering counteracts the ill-perceived issue of price.

Costs: Remove the Barriers

The issue of costs as reported by Nolan (2011) are outside publicans' control and therefore the VFI are urging the government to: amend the legislation on rates to permit a premises to be re-rated if requested; vehicles used for commercial purposes to be exempt from Vehicle Registration Tax; VAT rate to be reduced to 13.5%; the abolishment of the Joint Labour Committee system; and the introduction of minimum pricing for alcohol.

Promotion: Events and Marketing

To increase footfall the document advises that publicans must give the consumer a reason to go out. Marketing the business through online social media networks will build awareness and strengthen relations with customers.

Mary Lambkin (2010) Professor of Marketing in UCD Smurfit School advises publicans to adapt and adjust to the new realities of changing consumer trends, increased competition from supermarkets and other off-licensed premises. Lambkin states that many well-operated pubs have recognised the need for change, enhanced their business models with the result that current challenges facing businesses has had less of an impact on them when compared to those that have failed to adapt to changing consumer patterns and lifestyles.

Social drinking now requires a special event according to publican Emmett Lynch (2011), owner of Hugh Lynch's in Tullamore. 15 years ago, advertising events on a poster would attract the custom - that is not the case nowadays. Publicans must

embrace alternative marketing and advertising media to promote events, special offers and to communicate with their customers. *“Today we are in competition with any other alternative outlet for discretionary income”*, said Lynch. To meet customer expectations it is important to have the products available that the customer wants, served at the right temperature and in good quality glassware. He believes that it is better to increase the value offering rather than lowering the price, as once prices are dropped it is very difficult to raise them in the future. Customer interaction is very important, as are clean premises, friendly well-trained staff and high quality service. Enthusiastic and happy staff create a positive atmosphere and add value to the customer’s experience. Traditionally, Lynch’s customers were predominantly older men. In 2008 the pub was revamped with a new bar, function room and smoking areas. The objective of the exercise was to add a younger generation to their existing older male clientele. Due to budget restrictions the ‘old man’s’ section remained and today the pub is doing extremely well; the older generation have embraced the new surroundings and are frequenting the pub more often than ever. Lynch quotes a saying of Walt Disney *“Do what you do so well that they will want to see it again and bring their friends”*. Publicans must make every effort to give customers a reason to visit. Establishing good relations with customers, staff, community groups, and trade partners is paramount for future success. Building an online presence on YouTube, Facebook and using other forms of media will reap rewards and assist in promoting and marketing a business.

“We are looking at word of mouse if we want to attract younger age groups into our pubs”, said Donal O’Keefe LVA Chief Executive at a seminar on ‘Online Marketing of Pubs’ last year (Drinks Industry Ireland 2010). According to O’Keefe, modern technology is the future and publicans must act now and embrace its presence. Facebook has 500 million members, and on average members visit 80 pages of groups and events. Twitter has approximately 220,000 users in Ireland alone, and according to guest speaker Deirdre Waldron, Managing Director of Agency.com, *“social media is not a fad but a fundamental shift in the way we communicate”*, as over half the world’s population are under 30 and have always known it. Gareth Irvine from Cyber.com explained how social media has a *“multiplier”* effect and suggested that vintners send their details to a number of online sites such as Irish Social Media Monitor, Pubtalk and Proper Pint. John Lamphiere from Facebook

advised businesses to build a brand image on Facebook, acquire customers, build relationships and empower customers to spread the word. Michael Wright of the Wright Group stressed that publicans must connect with the 18-25 year age group as they will not become regular customers once they depart the nightclub scene. He states that while a small 12% of over 45 year olds have a Facebook account, the numbers are growing and therefore social media is still applicable if customers are of an older age group.

In an article written by John O' Sullivan, VFI Chairperson and publican (Drinks Industry Ireland 2010), the importance of continual adaptation and reinvention is emphasised. Publicans are coping with the challenges of present times with a combination of innovation, thriftiness and commonsense. Employee numbers and wages have been reduced, energy saving measures and other forms of cost cutting have been introduced. Pub owners cannot take anything for granted and must spend more time behind the counter and personally tending to business. Thinking outside the box and seeking new ways to encourage and entice custom is necessary. On-trade businesses are suffering due to the explosion in off-licensed premises and must sell the Irish pub experience to customers as being a warm, welcoming, sociable and fun venue to enjoy good times with family and friends and have the craic. O' Sullivan is truly of the belief that with innovation and re-invention, and a blend of good imagination, determination, personality and charisma, the Irish pub can be restored and sustained on into the future.

2.9 Summary

This chapter has traced the historical evolution of the Irish pub trade and explored the nature and the role of the pub in Irish society from the time of its inception in the 12th century by the Normans right up to the present time when the very existence and future of the pub is being threatened by a variety of serious challenges never before encountered in this country. These challenges have been thoroughly outlined and discussed by reference to the available published literature. Their impact on the licensed pub trade in Ireland were assessed and evaluated and finally the performance of the licensed sector, its contribution to our economy and the diverse initiatives being taken by the vintners of Ireland to counteract the current challenges and promote future trading viability were identified and investigated.

From the earliest times drinking has almost been as synonymous with Irishness as the shamrock and the harp. We have achieved a degree of international folklore with this reputation. In more recent times thankfully this image has gradually been replaced by one that acknowledges the unique contribution of Ireland to international sport, culture, literature, theatre, the arts, education and science, international peace-keeping and security, third world relief and the development of our own vibrant, progressive economy which has established Ireland as an important player on the international stage.

Drinking has always seemed to be a feature of economic and social life in Ireland. The influence of the drinks trade permeates almost every aspect of Irish life. It is to be seen in the sponsorship of major sporting events such as the Guinness GAA Championships and the Heineken Cup in Rugby. This often gives rise to criticism that sport extols and glorifies alcoholic drink and gives bad example to young people. Over the past 25 years or so the shape of Irish society has changed fairly dramatically with the advent of secularisation, the creation of a clearer division and distinction between church and state, the greatly reduced influence of the church and religious institutions, the major developments in education and the change from a defensive, inward-looking, protectionist regime built on the concept of low level, agricultural based, self-sufficiency to a modern, progressive country that became recognised during the Celtic Tiger era as one of the wealthiest nations in the world. This era saw the advent of the singing pub and the super-pub, especially in urban centres, driven by economic success, higher disposable incomes and the need for high-quality social outlets to meet the changing patterns of societal needs and expectations. The Irish pub became transformed during this era from the very primitive and basic –sawdust on the floor|| variety to modern, comfortable places of entertainment, relaxation and conviviality.

The Irish pub entered a new age of diversification with the introduction of bar food, entertainment and other ancillary services such as widescreen colour television and the broadcasting of major sporting occasions which had a hugely positive impact on the licensed trade. Young, well-educated, innovative-minded, ambitious and well-travelled Irish people required a pub ambience, atmosphere and service similar to those experienced abroad and this added great impetus to the transformation of the Irish pub scene during a time of great economic prosperity. The wealth of the

population and the removal of gender barriers led to significant increases in the level of consumption of alcoholic drink. Unfortunately, some unscrupulous publicans exploited and cashed in on this favourable situation by charging excessive prices and generating supernormal profits for themselves at the expense of the consumer. This had a damaging effect on the industry generally, especially on the tourism trade, which did not welcome this type “rip-off” culture. In conjunction with this and driven mainly by European Union directives, the country was becoming increasingly concerned about health and safety issues, especially the high incidence of deaths and serious injuries from road traffic accidents and deaths from smoking-related illnesses which were having a major impact on the cost of the health and personal social services and resulting in greatly reduced productivity and economic output. Attention began to focus on the social unacceptability of drink driving and smoking in the workplace. Government began to address and tackle these issues shortly after the turn of the century by bringing in new legislation and regulations banning smoking in the workplace, including licensed premises, and introducing lower blood alcohol levels and random breath testing coupled with severe penalties for persons caught driving in a public place while under the influence of alcohol. Other regulations sought to eliminate the number of defective vehicles on our public roads by introducing a mandatory national car testing regime, as a further initiative to reduce the incidence of road traffic accidents and associated deaths and injuries on the public roads. These measures, while not focused directly on the pub, were to have a most profound and far-reaching impact on the licensed trade, especially in the more rural parts of the country where public transport and taxi services were not readily available. It is acknowledged that these regulations, taken collectively, have had quite a devastating effect on the pub trade generally and have resulted directly or indirectly in many pubs being forced out of business. Random breath testing, the below-cost selling of alcohol by supermarkets, changing consumer lifestyles, the increased focus on health and safety, mandatory vehicle testing, lack of alternative transport and much stricter drink driving laws, have combined to bring the pub trade virtually to its knees in many parts of the country. This situation has been exacerbated even further by the parallel demise of the Celtic Tiger and the economic recession which has ruthlessly enveloped the country since 2007 with devastating effects on employment, personal income, savings and a greatly reduced capacity for social and recreational spending. The research shows that spending on alcohol and

tobacco decreased from €4.128m in 2008 to €3.6m in 2009. In 2010 Irish people paid 70% more than the EU average for alcohol and tobacco and faced the 5th highest overall prices of the 27 EU member states for those commodities. Alcohol and tobacco prices are 28% higher here than in the UK where there are similar market conditions and infrastructure. The new regulatory framework is creating a propensity for consumers to cocoon themselves at home and adopt a pattern of drinking that by tradition Ireland has never adopted. This trend is not expected to change over the next decade, a scenario which presents the public houses with a major challenge if they are to survive. People are becoming much more conscious of the impact of alcohol, tobacco smoking, environmental pollution and sedentary lifestyles on their health and wellbeing and are much more perceptive in this respect compared to previous generations.

2.10 Conclusion

It is clear from the research that the drinks industry is making a very significant contribution to our economy in terms of employment, manufacturing, tourism and regional development. There is an onus on government to counterbalance this with the regulation of the industry to secure the attainment of vital public interest objectives in terms of health and safety, reducing the carnage from road traffic accidents and deaths from carcinoma, heart, pulmonary and other smoking-related conditions, all of which have major negative economic and social costs for the country. The challenge facing the government and the licensed industry in the years ahead is to formulate and develop strategies to secure the attainment of these public interest objectives while at the same time preserving and promoting the future economic viability and success of the Irish pub trade to the mutual benefit of both. One must be complementary to and compatible with the needs of the other but this creates a most difficult and complex balancing act. These objectives, while not mutually exclusive, will require much ingenuity, innovation, initiative and resource deployment to create the climate for continuing confidence and investment in an industry which has been hit to such a major extent by the smoking ban, random breath testing, below-cost selling of alcohol, changing lifestyles and the recession. Hopefully these challenges can be successfully and effectively met, as the disappearance of the Irish pub from the landscape would take away a significant part of the social fabric of the community and represent a huge loss to the country in

terms of the important economic, social, cultural and recreational role it has always fulfilled.

In the following chapter the author will discuss the methodology used to successfully undertake the research study

Chapter Three: Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the research methodology that has been utilised whilst undertaking this study. Research methodology as defined by Somekh and Lewin (2005, p.346) involves “*the collection of methods or rules by which a particular piece of research is undertaken*” and the “*principles, theories and values that underpin a particular approach to research*” while Walter (2006, p.35) argues that methodology is the structure of reference for the research which is influenced by the “*paradigm in which our theoretical perspective is placed or developed*”.

In deciding on the most suitable method for obtaining the particular information that is required to satisfy the study aims and objectives, Bryman (2001, p.64) states that the method should “*reflect preferences about the kind of data that a researcher wishes to obtain and practical consideration related to time, resources and access to the sources of data*”.

In this chapter, the author will outline:

- the objectives of the research;
- review of the literature;
- underlying philosophical assumptions;
- the research design and the role of the researcher;
- advantages and disadvantages of semi-structured interviews;
- research idiom selection;
- sample size and sample selection;
- the interview process and analysis; and lastly
- ethical considerations.

3.2 The Objectives of the Research

The primary objective of this research is to examine the major economic, legislative, and socio-cultural factors that are currently influencing the pub trade in Ireland and their specific impact on a sample of publicans in both Galway city and county.

In order to achieve the primary objective the author will seek to accomplish the following secondary objectives:

- trace the origin, history and evolution of the Irish pub by engaging in a comprehensive literature review;
- examine the socio-cultural and economic role of the public house in Ireland;
- develop a profile of the Irish pub by undertaking a number of semi-structured interviews with five publicans from Galway city and county and in doing so, the author seeks to obtain their views on:
 - the current state of their businesses;
 - the extent to which patterns of trade have changed over recent years;
 - the challenges and factors currently influencing their trade;
 - the actions they believe to be necessary to promote the trade and address perceived difficulties; and
 - how they view the future of the pub business within the framework of the current regulatory system.
- propose recommendations for addressing the diverse and complex series of problems besetting the licensed pub trade in Ireland.

3.3 Review of Literature

Both primary and secondary data were collected and analysed in conducting the research for the study. The literature review can be classified as secondary data which has previously been collected and recorded by others (Sarantakos 2005). The information contained in Chapter Two was informed from sources such as drinks industry reports, books, government publications, newspapers and magazines, professional and trade associations, online journals, websites and academic research. An informal interview was also undertaken with an elderly county Galway resident on the influence of the Church on Irish society before the advent of secularisation. Ideas originating from the literature become an important consideration in relation to the research findings (Becker & Bryman 2004).

Given the significant and vast history of the Irish pub, the author is of the opinion that in order to examine the factors currently influencing the pub trade, it was essential to present the reader with an educated account of the public house as it

developed over the centuries. This review put the study in context as the author moved from the past to the present.

3.4 Underlying Philosophical Assumptions

All research whether it be quantitative or qualitative is based on some underlying assumptions as to what constitutes valid research and which research method is the most appropriate (Blumberg, Cooper & Schindler 2005). It is therefore necessary to gain some knowledge of research philosophies prior to embarking on a research study. Positivism and interpretivism (or phenomenology) are the two most well-known research philosophies used in the conduction of research. Positivism is the view that social science should reflect or mirror those of the natural sciences (Blaxter, Hughes & Tight 2001). In this paradigm, the researcher should remain objective and removed from the objects of the research. Research tools such as questionnaires and experiments can enable the researcher to capture real life. The basic principles of this philosophy are:

- the social world is external and as such is viewed objectively;
- research is value free; and
- the role of the researcher is to remain independent and analyse the world from an objective standpoint.

The main aim of the positivist research is to propose explanations which will then lead to control and predictability. Positivism according to Guba and Lincoln (1994) is a predominant way of understanding the social world, and refer to it as the 'received view'. Positivism can be applied to various kinds of phenomena and Sarantakos (2005) uses four concepts by which a positivist perception can be applied: human beings, the nature of science, purpose of social research and reality. Quantitative research is quite generally considered to be a classic example of positivist research (Crotty 1998). According to Creswell (2008), quantitative research is designed to:

- have a narrow and explicit hypothesis;
- acquire observable and measurable data;
- gather information from a large number of individuals;

- contribute favourably to statistical analysis; and
- compare the results of the research with predictions in an unbiased way.

Interpretivism (or phenomenology) is concerned with the assumption that access to reality is only possible through social interaction and constructed through the use of language, consciousness and shared meanings. The basic principles underlying interpretivism include:

- the social world is constructed and meaning applied via the subjective views of individuals;
- the researcher is involved in the observation;
- research is motivated by interests (Blumberg, Cooper & Schindler 2005).

Social phenomena is complex and therefore simple fundamental laws are inadequate in addressing and interpreting social issues. Knowledge needs to be understood and interpreted by exploring why people have different experiences and what meanings people give to the social world. Patton (1990 p.71) defines phenomenology as *“one that focuses on descriptions of what people experience and how it is that they experience what they experience. One can employ a general phenomenological perspective to elucidate the importance of using methods that capture people's experience of the world without conducting a phenomenological study that focuses on the essence of shared experience.”* Researchers taking an interpretive or phenomenological approach focus on the essence of lived experience (Rossman and Rallis 1998). The author seeks to explore comprehensively the opinions and views of the study participants and why possible variations exist in their experiences and therefore the chosen philosophical approach is interpretive in nature. It is the author's view that to effectively conduct the study, it is necessary to gain a greater insight into the inner perspectives of the participants and the positivist approach is restrictive in this regard. It is the author's belief that the acquisition of knowledge requires experience which is not achievable through the measurement of hard facts. The major data source for exploring the inner perspectives of individuals is through interviewing. Patton (1990) states that the specific purpose of the interview is to determine what is in and on someone else's mind.

3.5 The Research Design and the Roles of the Researcher

“A research design is a structure or framework within which data is collected. The function of a research design is to ensure that the evidence obtained enables us to answer the initial question as unambiguously as possible” (De Vaus, 2001 p.8; Becker & Bryman, 2004 p.188). From the outset of a research study, a decision must be made as to whether to employ a qualitative or quantitative research strategy. As the name suggests *“quantitative studies rely on quantitative information (i.e. numbers and figures)”* (Blumberg, Cooper & Schindler, 2005 p.191), the objective of which is to develop and employ mathematical models, theories and hypotheses pertaining to natural phenomena (Becker and Bryman, 2004). In contrast, qualitative research as defined by Creswell (1998, p.15) *“is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The research builds complex, holistic pictures, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducted the study in natural setting.”* As the author intends to explore the views and experiences of the selected sample, and seeks to gain a greater insight into complex issues, a qualitative research paradigm was chosen. In the author’s opinion, and in order to obtain qualitative data, the interview was deemed the most advantageous method for collecting the necessary data from the participants of the study. May (1998, p.120) suggests that *“interviews yield rich insights into people’s biographies, experiences, opinions, values, aspirations, attitudes and feelings.”* Interviews can be structured, semi-structured or unstructured and can be conducted either face-to-face or by telephone. The structuring of the interview depends on the type of information one wishes to obtain (Horn 2009). In a structured interview, the researcher uses a detailed interview guide quite similar to a questionnaire. In this type of scenario, the interviewer knows what he or she wants to determine and the participant answers the direct questions (Gillham (2000). Specification is accomplished but no unexpected discoveries are made: a high level of structure excludes them. At the other extreme, if one wishes to obtain information which cannot be predicted, a very open and unstructured form of interview is suitable. A semi-structured interview falls somewhere between the two, usually commencing with rather defined questions and achieving defined answers, while permitting the interviewee to elaborate further and including more open-ended questions (Walliman 2001).

The type of interview deemed most suitable for the study being undertaken was the semi-structured interview. The researcher chose a semi-structured interview approach and used an interview guide containing a list of questions to ensure that all necessary areas were covered and questions were asked in a similar way in all interviews. However, the order of questions quite often varied during the interviews as the direction taken by the respondent changed course. Additional questions and probes were used in certain instances to gain a greater understanding of a particular issue that the researcher felt was significant to the study. The considerable benefit of using semi-structured interviews for this study is their flexibility. In-depth interviewing involves a thematic, topic-focused approach to posing questions, which the researcher wishes to explore while still allocating scope for flexibility, which enables both the researcher and the participant to develop unexpected themes (Mason cited in Becker and Bryman 2004).

The researcher is the instrument in the interview process, unlike in questionnaire research where the survey is the instrument (Horn 2009). Therefore, it was important that a successful relationship was built with the interviewees quickly as it allowed for good quality information to be collected. As interviews are predominantly about exploring and listening, the researcher listened intently to what was being said and demonstrated positive body language throughout the duration of the interviews. Questions were clarified when necessary and short comments made as the interviews progressed, thus assisting in the establishment of trust and the development of a good atmosphere. Ensuring the confidentiality and anonymity of the respondents is an important role of the researcher and one that was given due consideration from the outset.

3.6 Advantages of Semi-Structured Interviews

The overpowering advantage of the interview is the richness and vividness of the material it can unearth (Gillham 2000). It is less obstructive to interview participants as it encourages two-way communication, and can additionally function as an extension tool to elicit further information. Semi-structured interviews verify what is already known but also provide the opportunity to acquire new knowledge. Having “.....key themes and sub-questions in advance lies in giving the researcher a sense of order from which to draw questions from unplanned encounters” (David

Sutton 2004, p.87). The researcher performing semi-structured interviews has more flexibility than one conducting a structured interview, and Patton (2002, p.343) suggests to “...*explore, probe, and ask questions that will elucidate and illuminate that particular subject.*”

3.7 Disadvantages of Semi-Structured Interviews

Highly skilled interviewer techniques are required in order to elucidate answers to research questions. The researcher must demonstrate the ability to think of questions during the interview and therefore must be focused, interested and dedicated to the matter at hand (Horn 2009). There is a danger that the interviewer may unintentionally give out signals/cues that guide the interviewee to answer questions that the interviewer expects to hear. Interviews are a costly endeavour in terms of time and expense and require a longer time period for the collection of data (Blumberg, Cooper & Schindler, 2005).

3.8 Idioms of Research

Gubrium and Holstein (1997, cited in Silverman 2006, p.57) use the term ‘idiom’ to describe particular vocabularies, exploratory styles and techniques of writing. They examine four different qualitative ‘idioms’:

- Naturalism - A hesitance to impose meaning and a preference to conduct observation;
- Ethnomethodology – Similar in approach to naturalism as regards its attention to detail but locates it in the study of conversational analysis;
- Emotionalism – Researcher yearns for personal or intimate contact with participants, prefers open-ended interview techniques, and endeavours to comprehend the impact of the life story of both researcher and participants; and
- Postmodernism – Attempts to challenge the concepts of ‘subject’ and the ‘field’ and supports pastiche as opposed to science.

3.9 Research Idiom Selection

The researcher has selected emotionalism as the research idiom of the study. Emotionalism assists in the understanding of people's experiences as it encourages the participant to tell their own stories by means of the interview (Morrison 2006).

3.10 Sample Size and Sample Selection

The use of sampling enables the researcher to study a relatively small fraction across the strata of the target population, yet obtain data that are representative of the whole (Bryman 2001). Population as defined by Walliam (2001, p.232) is used to describe *“the total quantity of cases of the type which are the subject of a study.”* The target population for the purpose of this research are publicans in Galway city and county. A representative sample of the population was chosen from publicans in four geographical areas of Galway city and county. In addition, the researcher purposively chose one publican from a small town in county Galway as part of the study due to this person's distinct and innovative approach to attracting customers, marketing acumen and his enviable enthusiasm to succeed.

Sampling is necessary for a number of reasons as stated by Horn (2009). Firstly, it is uneconomical to study all the elements of a population and a representative sample is deemed satisfactory in terms of gaining an accurate analysis of the entire population. Secondly, due to time constraints, there are limited options available to the researcher and a sample must be chosen for the purpose of the study. There are two forms of sampling that may be used when selecting members of a sample – probability and non-probability sampling. Blumberg, Cooper & Schindler (2005, p.235) state that *“probability sampling is based on the concept of random selection – a controlled procedure which ensures that each population element is given a known non-zero chance of selection.”* In contrast, non-probability sampling does not employ a random selection of elements from the population and *“is commonly used when deductive reasoning drives the methodology”* (Horn 2009, p.111).

Stratified random sampling is a probability sampling method wherein the researcher segregates the population into several subgroups or strata and subsequently randomly selects the elements proportionally from the different subgroups (Experiment-Resources 2008). The researcher selected four mutually exclusive strata or

subgroups from the target population based on their geographical location and randomly chose one element from each of these subgroups. The sampling frame from which the elements were drawn was a list of all current, valid, publican licensed (7 day ordinary) premises in Galway city and county. This list was obtained from the Office of the Revenue Commissioners. Additionally, one element was purposively chosen by the researcher to partake in the study.

3.11 The Interview Process

Writing an interview guide is an important component of semi-structured interviews as the interview begins with an unstructured approach and moves to a semi-structured interview (Blumberg, Cooper & Schindler, 2005). The interviewer seeks to obtain the respondents' viewpoint regarding phenomena appropriate to the broader research problem. The interviewer compiled a set of questions that were considered important for the purpose of gaining an in-depth understanding of factors currently influencing the pub trade and their specific impact on the sample of publicans chosen to partake in the study. Questions were not necessarily asked in the order in which they appear and in most instances the participants spoke at length on a particular topic which covered multiple questions. Appendix A contains the interview guide. Topics that were covered in each interview included:

- background of the interviewee – experience in the pub trade and involvement in the business;
- the changes they have witnessed in the market over the last number of years;
- the challenges that the publicans are currently facing;
- competition – who are the publicans' competitors and how has that changed;
- annual sales/turnover – has there been an increase or a decrease and what factors have influenced this figure;
- cost-saving measures - have the participants introduced any cost saving measures over the last number of years;
- what are the key drivers to attracting business; and
- the participants' plans for the future.

The five interview participants were contacted either by phone or in person and the interviewer briefly outlined the purpose of the study and requested their contribution

to which they willingly obliged. Suitable times and dates were arranged at the participants' convenience and all five interviews took place over a period of ten days beginning in late July this year. Prior to the commencement of each interview, the researcher made certain that the interviewees fully understood that the research was being conducted to gather information on the factors currently influencing pub trade and the impact of such factors on their own particular business. All participants were assured that they had the right to decline to answer any questions or to withdraw or discontinue at any time without consequence. Each interviewee was presented with the interview consent form (see Appendix B) which was signed by both parties. Permission to audiotape the interview was obtained from each interviewee and assurance was given that the details disclosed would be treated in the strictest of confidence. The average length of each interview was approximately 20 minutes and documented via a tape recorder.

Each interview recording was transcribed verbatim and the content of each analysed in detail. Given the small number of interviews that were undertaken by the researcher; the process of analysing and interpreting the data was a relatively straightforward process. Answers to the questions posed and the views of the participants on the factors influencing their trade were examined under the following categories: background; customers; sales/turnover; factors influencing pub trade; cost-saving measures; attracting business; and plans for the future. The accrual of such rich data exposed numerous findings that are outlined in full in the next chapter.

3.12 Ethical Considerations

According to Walliman (2001), there are two standpoints from which ethical issues in research can be viewed. The values of honesty and truthfulness on the part of the researcher must be clearly demonstrated and secondly, those concerning the responsible adherence to privacy and confidentiality. Punch (2000, p.75) states that *"all social research involves consent, access and associated ethical issues since it is based on the data from people and about people."* As the participants of the study were disclosing details on the challenges they are currently facing and their views on particular issues affecting their livelihoods; it was the researcher's responsibility to ensure that information was treated in the strictest of confidence. The researcher re-

iterated to participants of the study that their identity would be kept anonymous and reassurance was given that the information obtained would not be divulged to others.

3.13 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the methodology design utilised in this research. A qualitative research strategy was chosen as the author intends to explore the views and experiences of the selected sample and seeks to gain a greater insight into complex issues. Semi-structured interviews were deemed the most advantageous and suitable method for collecting the necessary data from the research participants. A probability sampling method was used by the researcher and the chosen participants were assured that information would be treated in the strictest of confidence. The data collected was transcribed and analysed in detail. The findings of the interviews, which were drawn from the researcher's reflections and the opinions expressed by the interviewees, are presented in full in the next chapter.

Chapter Four: Findings/Analysis

4.1 Introduction

The following chapter will present the research findings and subsequent analysis of the data based on the five interviews conducted with the research participants. It is without reasonable doubt that the smoking ban, random breath testing, below-cost selling of alcohol and changing consumer lifestyles have had a profound impact on the livelihoods of the research participants. Pseudonyms are used for the purpose of protecting the identity of the interviewees.

4.2 Interview 1 with Martin

4.2.1 Background

Born and raised in County Galway, Martin spent his younger years working in his father's pub and enjoyed every minute of it. Days would be spent behind the bar pulling pints, chatting to locals and tending to business. In 2001, after spending over a decade abroad working as a bar manager in a number of different establishments, Martin returned to Ireland and purchased a premises in Galway city. He is a member of the Vintners Federation of Ireland but does not attend meetings or participate in any organised events. In more recent times he has taken on a more active role in his pub as he highlights the difficulties of the last number of years, and on how important it is now more than ever to be present for your customers.

4.2.2 Customers

When asked had he witnessed any changes in the market over the last number of years, Martin said that there had been "*significant changes*" to both the trade and in the drinking patterns of his customers. "*A few years ago the place would be packed from Thursday to Sunday with modest trade the rest of the week but that has all changed.*" He said that it is not "*socially acceptable*" anymore to be seen in a pub a few evenings a week. "*The day trade in drink is gone.*" He spoke at length about the decline of his trade and although the pub still draws a good crowd on Friday and Saturday nights, the rest of the week is very quiet apart from the sales generated from food, which account for 40% of overall sales. He has always served food and trade consists of a morning trade for breakfast, lunch trade and an evening trade. "*Food is a big factor in the equation.... otherwise the pub would be dead from Monday to*

Thursday.” When asked to explain further the drinking patterns of his customers, Martin said that customers no longer spend an entire evening in the pub as they once did and tend to arrive later and have just a couple of drinks. Some he said have started to surreptitiously bring in their own drink and that certain pubs in Galway city have now put security staff on the doors to check bags as people enter. *“People are now buying their drink from the supermarkets as it’s so cheap and they’re drinking more and more at home and going out less”*, he said. The pub culture has changed completely according to Martin and he blames the government. *“When drink can be bought cheaper than water, why wouldn’t people buy it?”* He expressed his concern for the escalation of home drinking and the amount of younger kids getting intoxicated on cheap booze in an uncontrolled environment.

4.2.3 Sales/Turnover

When asked about his annual sales/turnover and whether this had increased or decreased, Martin said that he has seen an overall decrease of almost 30% year on year and that this was continuing to decline. Sales have gradually fallen since the introduction of the smoking ban but are more pronounced in recent times.

4.2.4 Factors Influencing Pub Trade

In response to what factors he believes caused this decline, the main reasons cited were the combination of the smoking ban, cheap price of drink in supermarkets, shift to home-drinking due to a lack of money and random breath-testing. He acknowledges that publicans in rural areas are finding it much tougher to survive, yet he mentions a number of well-known pubs in the city centre that have closed in recent months which were doing extremely well up until a few years ago and he envisages that more will suffer the same fate. On the issue of random breath-testing, Martin said that the impact was suffered by the industry as a whole not least to his own business but that people have adjusted somewhat and as the majority of his regular customers are living in and around Galway city, there is plenty of transport available to and from the city centre. The smoking ban was a severe blow to the pub when it was first introduced and sales began to decline thereafter. However, the business has adapted somewhat and customers have access to a heated smoking area to the rear of the premises.

According to Martin, the major threat these days is the supermarket selling alcohol below-cost price and that until this is stopped, publicans are going to suffer. *“Do you think customers would go out more if drink was not as cheaply available?”* Martin was asked. He thinks that it would certainly change the present situation and make pubs a more attractive option but that trade would never be back to what it used to be. People have less money these days and are deciding to socialise at home. Further to this, Martin was questioned on the price of drink in pubs and whether that was preventing customers from frequenting as often. In reply, Martin said that price is an issue and that he has reduced both the price of drink and food offerings in an attempt to bring in more customers but that his overheads are huge with high commercial rates, regulation and taxation affecting the prices charged. *“I am competing with the supermarkets who can sell alcohol at a price that I simply cannot meet.”* While in earlier years it was the other publicans in the vicinity that were the competition, now it is the off-licences, supermarkets and petrol stations. He said that if there is to be any hope for the publicans to survive long-term, the government must address the issue of below cost selling.

4.2.5 Cost-Saving Measures

The author asked questions regarding the measures taken to reduce the costs of doing business. Martin highlighted a number of different areas where he has had to cut expenses. In the last two years he has reduced staff numbers and cut the hours of existing staff members. He stresses that only for the provision of food and the revenue it generates; he would have had to reduce his trading hours in order to make ends meet. Further, he has energy saving measures in place and is trying to reduce his utility expenses all the time. The price of meals has also been reduced with daily specials and other offers being promoted each week.

4.2.6 Attracting Business

The key driver to attracting business in Martin’s opinion is the provision of a high quality personable service, good value for money and strong employee-customer relations. Positive well-trained staff are vital according to Martin and ensuring that the customer is well looked after is very important. Also he notes that the whole boy meets girl dimension makes the pub more appealing to those hoping to meet a prospective partner. *“You can’t meet new people inside the four walls of a living*

room.” The pub provides music from Thursday to Sunday with finger food available free of charge. Martin has a full-time Marketing and Sales Manager employed who is responsible for promoting the business and building an on-line presence via their website and Facebook account. Martin firmly believes that the use of social media is imperative in attracting custom and is definitely *“the way forward.”* He intends to hold more events in the coming months such as a “Singles Night” and various theme nights which he has held in the past and have proved very successful. The winter months are a lot quieter leading up to Christmas, according to Martin and they are the times when events and promotions are needed to maintain business. He intends to continually look for new ways to improve and give the customers value for money and an incentive for going out.

4.2.7 Plans for the Future

Martin expresses his concerns for the future but remains optimistic. He said that trade will *“never be restored to what it was prior to the introduction of the smoking ban in 2004”* but that he would do his utmost to keep the business going as best he can in the short-term. As for his long-term plans, Martin answered honestly that it is all about survival and that the market will dictate the future direction he takes. *“The government must help us out and address the situation of below-cost selling before any more publicans are forced out of the business.”* He would also like to see a reduction in VAT and excise taxes on alcohol and said that many tourists with children are being forced away from pubs due to the legislation on underage being in licensed premises after 9pm, which makes pubs family unfriendly and affects tourism in Ireland by dissuading parents with children.

4.3 Interview 2 with John

4.3.1 Background

John has been involved in the pub trade for the past 15 years and owns and manages a pub located a few miles from Galway city centre. He managed a pub in County Westmeath for a number of years before moving to Galway and has had his current premises since 2000. He currently has one full-time and one part-time employee. He has been a member of the Vintners Federation of Ireland since 2005 and attends meetings locally. He sponsors a local football team and is heavily involved in GAA.

He works full-time behind the bar and has built up a good relationship with his customers over the years.

4.3.2 Customers

John's customers are both young and old ranging in age from 18 to 80 years of age and are mostly from the immediate area. When asked how the market has changed over the last number of years, John stated that he had noticed a steep decline in both the number of customers and the frequency of their visits. "*It's the younger age group that are shying away from the pub more and more and having parties at home or in a friend's house*", according to John, but the majority of his older customers visit at least once a week and mostly on a Saturday or Sunday night. Some of his customers call in three or four evenings during the week for a pint after work as they live locally. He mentions the increase in off-licensed sales of alcohol from supermarkets, which he says is "*slowly killing the pub industry.*" Further John spoke about the promotion of alcohol in newspapers which he said is leading to excessive alcohol consumption by not alone young people but the overall population. "*In earlier years the pub was the centre of activity throughout Ireland and drinking at home was just not done. People came to the pub to socialise and get away from it all but that has all changed.*" He said that the older generation still enjoy their few drinks but it's the social aspect that they come for most of all.

4.3.3 Sales/Turnover

In answer to whether there has been an increase or a decrease in sales over the last number of years John said that his sales had fallen by approximately 30% year on year and cited the smoking ban and random breath testing as the "*root cause*" for this decline together with supermarket sales. He predicts that sales will decrease further over the next number of years as the continual trend is towards home-drinking.

4.3.4 Factors Influencing Pub Trade

John was asked what he believes led to the decline of his sales to which he replied "*The smoking ban was the starting point for the decline of the drinks industry as a whole, and that's when things started to go downhill.*" When asked had he made provisions for customers who smoke, John said that he had an outdoor seating area which facilitates the smokers. He said the random breath testing was a significant

factor for the fall-off in sales but he stressed that “*is fortunate*” to be located near the city centre and that most of his custom came from the local area that live within a short walking distance of the pub. He drew attention to the rural publicans and their communities who he said have been “*badly affected*” by the drink driving legislation and will be further hit when the new blood alcohol limits take effect this year. John talked at length about the changes in the social habits of the Irish and that the pub is no longer considered the main source of entertainment for many people, especially the younger generation. A “*lack of affordability*” has also influenced the choices people make as regards their social lives “*When money is tight and drink is cheaply available elsewhere, people will choose to drink at home.*” He said that the government should put a halt to the sale of cheap alcohol or introduce a minimum pricing which would level the playing field for both the on and off-licensed sectors. John also expressed his annoyance with certain publicans who are overpricing customers and feels that it reflects badly on the publicans who are trying to make a decent living in a very tough climate. When asked who is his main competitor, John answered that it was most “*certainly the off-licensed sector*”, in particular the local supermarkets of which there are three in the local area. He was asked his opinion on whether people would visit the pub more often if drink was not as cheaply available and to this John responded that “*more people would return to the pub if the option wasn't there to purchase as cheaply elsewhere.*”

4.3.5 Cost-Saving Measures

In an effort to reduce costs John has started using energy-efficient lighting throughout the pub, with sensor lighting installed in both the male and female restrooms. He has put in a night timer which he says has greatly saved on electricity charges. He also plans to install timers on both the fridges and drink cooling system in the coming months. He would like to see the government “*reducing local authority charges in the upcoming budget*” which the VFI are lobbying for. John has not reduced the opening hours of his pub and although the day trade is quiet in comparison to what it was in previous times, his plan is to remain trading as per normal for the immediate future. In terms of staff numbers and working hours, John has reduced the number of working hours of one staff member and in the last two years has had to let one part-time employee go.

4.3.6 Attracting Business

John loves the social aspect of working in the pub and could not see himself working in any other occupation. He said there is a “*good community spirit*” in the vicinity and that his customers - some of whom have become good friends, come to meet up with neighbours and friends, enjoy a few drinks, have a game or two of cards, watch a match and generally just to unwind. When asked what was the main factor he considers important in attracting business, John said that he regards “*good service and atmosphere*” as very important factors in keeping the customers happy. According to John, his staff are very dedicated to the job and have great personalities and interact well with people. He said in the current climate it’s necessary to do the best one can but “*it is a struggle to say the least.*” Only for his “*love of the business and the loyalty of his customers*”, John would have quit the game long ago. He has reduced the price of drink as much as he possibly can over the last year or so in an attempt to attract more business and to also retain the custom he has at present. John sponsors a local football team which brings in trade after games during the week and he holds a weekly lotto draw. In terms of marketing the business, John has a Facebook presence but readily admits he does not use it to its full advantage and it is something he plans to make effective use of in the future.

4.3.7 Plans for the future

John hopes the situation will improve for the publicans and that the government will assist them in reducing the costs of being in business. He would like to see a reduction in VAT similar to the hospitality sector which has now been reduced to 9%. He spoke about the number of jobs such a reduction would create for the sector, in addition to boosting sales and making the pub a more attractive and affordable source of entertainment. He is keeping an open mind on the future and said that the number of pub closures in recent years has made him more determined to succeed.

4.4 Interview 3 with Michael

4.4.1 Background

Michael leases a pub in a small town in County Galway. Prior to opening the pub in 2003 he was a disc jockey for 13 years and worked in most pubs and nightclubs in Galway city and county. He also worked as a barman for a number of years in

Galway. Michael always had a bit of a “*gra*” for opening up his own pub. He is a member of the Vintners Federation of Ireland and would like to have a more active role but has not the time to do so at present but perhaps in the near future.

4.4.2 Customers

In response to “*how has the market changed*” over the last number of years, Michael said that “*publicans are getting a lot wiser in that they have to offer the customer more.*” He said that publicans are moving away from the bigger companies such as Diageo and are looking into smaller breweries such as those in the wine and cocktail trades. He said that those who are not will get left behind and are wasting their time. Michael’s customers range in age from 25 to 70. He said that customers are “*a lot more educated on their drinks and in their attitudes and want value for money.*” In addition he said that his “*customers want choice*” which was not something you would get in the traditional Irish pubs 20 years ago and that they know what they want. When asked had he noticed any changes in the drinking patterns of his customers Michael replied “*Absolutely.*” He used to have eight to ten regular customers coming in from Monday to Thursday who would have three to four pints and had been driving in and out all their lives but they are all gone now due to the drink driving laws. People are not drinking as much according to Michael as they are afraid of the laws.

4.4.3 Sales/Turnover

When asked if there had been an increase or a decrease in sales over the last number of years Michael said that sales have fallen by 33% in the past 18 months.

4.4.4 Factors Influencing Pub Trade

When asked what factors have influenced the decline in sales, Michael said that the smoking ban has had an impact on trade and he has since built on an extensive smoking area to the rear of the pub which is very comfortable. The random breath-testing and stricter drink-driving laws have affected Michael’s trade as previously mentioned. His own personal view on the legislation is that it is a “*no-win*” situation and would not change, and that while his business has declined as a result, he said that if a man he knew had three pints and hit a member of his family he would say why was he behind the wheel in the first place. When asked who his main

competitors were, Michael replied “*Off-licences and no one else.*” The ability to “*give customers value for money*” was cited as a current challenge. Customers are questioning the price of drink in his pub when they can buy 10 times the amount in an off-licence for half the price. “*People don’t see the costs of running the business*”, said Michael. He said the closure of so many pubs is as a result of the drink-driving laws and price wars between the on and off-licensed sectors. He said the “*smoking ban was a bully boy tactic from a Minister who just wanted a statue made of himself.*” The government are very quick to implement different measures that cost nothing but when it comes to doing what is necessary they are clueless, according to Michael.

4.4.5 Cost-Saving Measures

Michael said he had cut costs and a lot of it is just a matter of common sense. The Vintners Federation have various different cost-saving methods and Michael uses those and has reduced his utility bills as a result. Staff numbers have been cut as the pub is not as busy as it once was. He said that back in 2004 on any given Saturday night he could have six people behind the bar, two doing the glasses and staff on the door but now he can manage himself with two employees, one full and one part-time. His pub is closed all day and opens at 7pm each evening.

4.4.6 Attracting Business

Michael says “*value for money*” is the key driver for attracting business. He does special offers every week even though it is still regarded as illegal in Ireland to have “Happy Hour” unless this occurs in the first hour after opening. He said that this was brought in to tackle binge drinking which is still happening but now within the home and on a greater scale. He wants people to realise that there is value for money to be had in the pub and that one can have a great night out and perhaps meet the woman or man of their dreams. The pub has still got the “*good romantic image*”, with good craic to be had. He said “*the Irish are not a culture of home drinkers by nature*” and never will be. Michael said the pub is where you go to laugh and to cry, to talk and do deals, to get away from the troubles at home and that the government and also the Tourism Board have to start realising that. As an example, he spoke about a time a couple of years ago when he played a round of golf with one of the top directors of Guinness Ireland. This director had asked Michael for his opinion on the

new Guinness advertisement which featured a man drinking a can of Guinness looking out over Dublin city. Michael said it was “rubbish” and that an earlier Harp Lager ad from 1980 with Sally O’ Brien “and the way she might look at you” is what is needed. “*Hustle and bustle in the pub with a bit of craic.*” Michael sells large bottles of wine at a good price and said he has to do a lot of research into the wines he sells so that the customers won’t see them in the local off-licence at a cheaper price. As there are now questions over the legality of the “Happy Hour”, Michael might do offers such as three long-necks for 10 Euros and other similar promotions. The pub sells a wide range of premium products which Michael is a firm believer in. In addition to getting a premium product served in top-quality glassware, the customer is also getting a great service and value for money, with a beer garden and live music at the weekends. Michael does not serve food in his pub and said that he is a traditionalist and that there are plenty of restaurants and gastro pubs if food is what one requires. Michael loves meeting people and showing foreign tourists how to make a good Irish coffee. He likes to talk about the Guinness and says this is the image he wants people to bring back home with them, and not one of young teenagers drinking cans down a side street. As regards the marketing of the pub, Michael is way ahead of the posse. He uses social networking sites such as Facebook and Youtube to promote the business online. Numerous videos have been uploaded in recent times which are extremely captivating and very effective in terms of marketing the pub both in Ireland and across the globe.

4.4.7 Plans for the Future

Michael’s plan for the future is to work hard and to make his pub one of the most talked about pubs this side of the country. He wants people to realise that publicans are not a bunch of money-grabbers and are working so hard to create the right atmosphere and give customers good value for money. The pub is part of our heritage said Michael and he believes we can still save the Irish pub but help is needed. The government must bring in a ban on below-cost selling as what these off-licences are doing is more or less illegal. In a pub, the drinking is controlled says Michael, but down in Tesco teenagers are buying alcohol that would last his customers for a year. He said suppliers also need to bring down their costs and that this needs to be addressed.

4.5 Interview 4 with Joseph

4.5.1 Background

Joseph owns and runs a family-owned pub in a small village in County Galway. He has been involved in the business for the last 18 years. He spent his younger years travelling to many parts of Europe and further afield before returning to Ireland in 1990 to take over the running of the business from his late father. Joseph is a member of the Vintners Federation of Ireland but does not attend their meetings.

4.5.2 Customers

Customers range in age from 25 and upwards and are mainly from the local community according to Joseph and when asked how the market had changed over the last number of years Joseph said that the *“pub industry has collapsed and that his business has suffered substantially.”* People are watching their money and those who came to the pub regularly at one stage are not coming in as often according to Joseph. In relation to the drinking patterns of his customers, Joseph stated that *“the day trade is not a quarter of what it was and people are not drinking as much when they do come in.”* Joseph went on to say that the majority of his customers in years gone by were the more senior members of the village who would come in for a couple of drinks and a few cigarettes, but that that routine had come to an end in more recent times due to government legislation. As for the younger generation *“parties and entertaining at home is what more and more people have started doing”* according to Joseph. However, he said that there were still many locals who enjoy meeting with friends on a Friday or Saturday night but that they tend arrive later in the evening, drink a lot less and some are dependent on neighbours, friends or family members to bring them home afterwards as there is no access to a taxi service in the immediate vicinity.

4.5.3 Sales/Turnover

In response to whether his sales had increased or decreased over the last number of years, Joseph stated that there was a decrease year on year of approximately 35% with business declining since the smoking ban took effect.

4.5.4 Factors Influencing Pub Trade

The major factors contributing to the decline in sales according to Joseph are an accumulation of the smoking ban, random breath testing, economic downturn which has influenced the drinking patterns of customers and the off-licences selling alcohol cheaply. *“The smoking ban really affected business and continues to do so”*, stated Joseph. A non-smoker himself, Joseph said that although he much prefers working in a smoke-free environment, from a business perspective the impact was severe. He thought that business might pick up in that people who disliked smoky atmospheres might frequent more often but this has not been the case. Coupled with the random breath testing and the NCT measures introduced by the government, *“many older people, particularly those living alone won’t take the chance anymore in driving to the village in case they get stopped on the road driving home and breathalysed.”* Joseph said that these measures have greatly influenced the small community and restricts the independence of the more vulnerable members who looked forward to the chat and a couple of pints of an afternoon or an evening. *“The government are directly targeting the rural publicans and their communities with these restrictions.”* He stressed that transport is readily accessible in the city and surrounding areas and that the impact has not been as severe. Further he addressed the high costs involved in running the business and that customers complain about the price of drink but that he can he can ill- afford to bring down the prices which he said are much cheaper than those charged by some publicans in neighbouring villages. *“Local authority charges, energy costs, water charges and the VAT and excise duty on alcohol are crippling, yet it is understandable that people are not happy, but unfortunately there is little I can do about it at present.”* The impact of the economic downturn has left many with little or no choice but to stay at home, according to Joseph, and with *“off-licences selling drink below cost price, nine times out of ten people are going to avail of the cheaper alternative, especially in these times.”* Asked who he considered to be his main competitor, Joseph said that *“the pubs and supermarkets in the nearest town are the competition and pose a major threat to the business.”* Middle-aged customers are the least likely to drink at home claimed Joseph, stating that the majority of his custom are those in the 40-60 year age bracket who come for the music at the weekend, the chance to meet up with other locals and for a drink or two.

4.5.5 Cost-Saving Measures

Joseph has reduced costs in all areas of the business. He now works full-time in the pub all week and has had to reduce the number of working hours of both his staff members. Since last winter he has started to open the pub in late afternoon from Monday to Thursday as the day trade is no longer there. Before the smoking ban was introduced, music was held nightly four times per week. This has now been reduced to just two – Friday and Saturday nights. In addition, Joseph has become more energy-efficient and notes that the Vintners Federation of Ireland have written a guidebook on cost-saving measures which has enabled him to reduce some of the high costs involved in operating the pub.

4.5.6 Attracting Business

According to Joseph, the key driver to attracting business is “*good value for money, friendly service and a pleasant atmosphere.*” He explains that customers’ expectations have changed and they will no longer accept poor service or standards. He works hard to ensure that his regular customers are happy with the service offering and believes in constantly engaging with both customers and the local community as a whole to help gauge local views and insights in relation to the pub trade and to ensure as far as possible that his services are compatible and complementary to local needs and conditions. He would be very conscious of his responsibilities in the pub trade and in ensuring that no complaints can be made against his establishment in relation to underage drinking, overcharging and so on. Joseph is determined to run a lawful, responsible, attractive service at all times. If he cannot make a living in doing things “by the book” then he would have no qualms about getting out of the business altogether. He is very concerned about alcohol abuse and young people. He points out that well over half the alcohol sold in Ireland is now sold outside of the pub, often in the uncontrolled environment of the supermarket. He feels that there is a “*great onus of responsibility on the government to stop this below cost selling.*” Joseph argues that it is no coincidence whatever that the increase in underage drinking, binge drinking, public order offences, vandalism and associated social and health problems have occurred in direct parallel with the steady increase in supermarket and off-licence trade sales.

4.5.7 Plans for the Future

Joseph is very interested in the environment and especially in the concept of renewable energy and is actively exploring the possibility of having solar panels and a wind generator installed as he believes these alternative sources of electricity have great potential in reducing overhead costs and promoting greater cost efficiency and enabling keener pub pricing to be introduced. Joseph's pub is located in a fairly scenic area that has potential, with suitable promotional advertising, to attract a good number of visitors and tourists. He hopes to build on this potential external trade in the future as it has not been exploited up to now for various reasons. He will be making representations to the Tourist Board to secure their backing for this initiative. He wants to turn his premises into the "idyllic Irish traditional pub" of "The Quiet Man" kind with all the features that are typically and traditionally synonymous with all that is best in Irish country life. In conjunction with this he will hopefully be providing a limited bar food service to cater for increased visitor and tourist numbers. The pub has live music on both a Friday and Saturday night with the focus being mainly on traditional Irish and ceili music. He plans to have a better mix of traditional and modern music in the future in order to attract a greater cross section of the community and especially the younger generation. He believes this will be problematic however due to the unfair competition from supermarket sales which cannot be competed with no matter what attractions he provides in his pub. This is a source of great concern to him and he is adamant that it needs to be tackled as an urgent priority by government.

4.6 Interview 5 with Kevin

4.6.1 Background

Kevin owns and manages a family-owned pub in a small village in County Galway. He was born and reared above the pub which his parents ran up until the late 1990s, at which time Kevin took over the business. The family had a mixed trade establishment up until the mid 1980s selling alcohol, food, cigarettes, household goods and agricultural products. Kevin works most nights in the pub and runs another business during the day.

4.6.2 Customers

When asked had he seen any changes in the market over the last few years, Kevin said *“Very much so. Since 2004/2005 business has slackened off a great deal and I would put it down to the smoking ban to start with and the drink-driving severely affected sales and custom.”* He went on to say that his customers, the majority of which are from the local area are not coming in as much as they used to before the drink driving legislation took effect. *“It is a small community and everyone knows each other. My older customers are severely restricted and depend on neighbours and relatives to take them to and from the pub.”* Talking about the days before the random breath testing came in, Kevin said that there would be a large gathering of locals, especially elderly men who would come for a few pints of an evening and catch up with neighbours on local news and talk about old times. He said that is not happening to the same extent at all nowadays but that the local people are great for keeping an eye on the older citizens and do their best to bring them into the village on any given night. Customers range in age from 18 years and upwards although he has noticed a decline in the number of younger people in both the pub and in the village itself and that many have gone on to college, moved into the city or have left the country to get work. Also, he commented on a lack of money in general amongst people due to the economic downturn and many cannot afford to go out as often as they would have at one time. *“Times are hard at the moment for many members of the community and socialising has taken a back seat”*, yet he comments that *“the weekends can be fairly busy”* and *“they are kept going”*.

4.6.3 Sales/Turnover

In response to his sales and whether they have increased or decreased over the last few years Kevin stated that *“sales are down year on year by over 30%”*.

4.6.4 Factors Influencing Pub Trade

When Kevin was asked what the main factors were in causing the decline in sales, the factors cited were the smoking ban, random breath testing, off-licensed selling of alcohol and people not having the money to go out as often and are entertaining more at home. Expanding on these factors Kevin spoke about the immediate effect the smoking ban had on trade which was particularly evident in the winter months when

people were forced outside in bad weather to smoke. *“It was very tough on the older customers and a big change that many were not able for.”* He added *“for some people a drink and a smoke go hand in hand and it has put them off coming in.”* Most of the younger customers managed to adjust according to Kevin but overall the numbers fell from there on in. Outer seating is provided for smoking customers to the front of the premises. In relation to the drink-driving laws, Kevin cited that it has severely damaged both the pub trade and the community in its entirety. *“Locals are uncomfortable about having a few pints and they fear their licence will be taken away.”* He further added that these measures together with the introduction of the mandatory National Car Test (NCT) was totally disproportionate and having a highly discriminatory effect as far as rural communities, especially the elderly and those living on their own in isolation are concerned. Such people according to Kevin are *“fearful of continuing their traditional custom and habit of driving a few miles to the local pub for a couple of pints in case they would be caught for drink-driving or having no NCT certificate.”* According to Kevin such people never represented an accident risk and it is unfair that they are now *“being made virtual recluses in their houses because of government regulation.”* He added that these kinds of problems cannot be overcome unless some type of subsidised or incentivised transport service can be established to service the local community and bring them to the post-office, shops, church and the pub. When asked who is main competitor was, without hesitation Kevin said that *“the supermarkets are my main competitors and I blame the government for allowing them to engage in below-cost selling which is a disincentive to pubs and is causing young people to abuse alcohol all over the country.”*

4.6.5 Cost-Saving Measures

According to Kevin all aspects of the running of the pub have to be thoroughly examined in order to ensure that the pub is operating to optimum cost-efficiency and cost-effectiveness and that there is no wastage or unnecessary overheads. This is the first priority in ensuring that the business remains operationally viable. Kevin has cut the hours of some members of staff to reflect the later opening of the pub which is now 5pm from Monday to Thursday and 12pm Friday through until Sunday. Kevin has also changed his electricity to a more competitive supplier. Ensuring that competitive quotations are obtained for repairs, maintenance and upkeep to get the

best price possible is another factor in reducing the costs of doing business. In addition, Kevin tries to secure the best deals from drinks suppliers to enable the pricing structure to be kept as low as possible and any new services introduced in the pub are subject to prior rigorous evaluation to ensure customer uptake and profitability.

4.6.6 Attracting Business

Kevin said that the key to attracting business is “*a comfortable, friendly attractive environment, reasonable prices, good standard of service and a quality product.*” In addition, the pub holds regular community events such as sporting celebrations, live music from Thursday to Sunday, card games during the winter months, darts competitions, table quizzes and sponsorship of local community events. He gets good sponsorship advertising from the local GAA team displaying the name of the pub on their jerseys. Kevin said the pub needs to become a key vocal point for the community. The pub caters for events such as funerals, anniversaries and birthday celebrations and this helps to build community relationships which he believes is very important for the pub trade.

4.6.7 Plans for the Future

Kevin believes in constantly adapting to meet changing conditions and circumstances and he strongly advocates that a business such as a pub has to change with the times. However, he said that this must not be done at the expense of damaging traditional pub values. He would like to reduce prices but feels that this is heavily dependent on the government modifying the VAT and Excise Duty regimes. Kevin is considering, in conjunction with a number of other local pubs, setting up a minibus service in order to transport patrons to and from the pub. He also intends to organise a community table quiz with each town land in the catchment area nominating its own team to compete against all other town lands. This should be popular and attract a good crowd during the winter months, thereby boosting the pub trade and promoting community development, according to Kevin.

4.7 Interview Findings

- Random breath testing and the smoking ban are having a disproportionate impact and detriment on rural communities and rural pubs because of isolation factors, social demography and the absence of public transport.
- The below-cost selling of alcohol in supermarkets is a major factor in the decline of the pub trade.
- There is a major trend and shift towards home drinking mirroring the practice in some continental countries. This is facilitated by the below-cost selling of alcohol.
- Public houses are being seriously affected by local authority rates which are a major financial burden with little or no service return.
- Excise duties on alcohol are resulting in the price of drink being too dear and this is a major disincentive to retaining customers.
- The 9 pm exclusion of children is not family-friendly and needs to be relaxed in the interests of the tourist and holiday trade.
- Building community relationships is very important to the pub trade through sponsorship and supporting local community initiatives, sporting events, the arts and cultural projects.
- The advertising and promotion of alcoholic drink by supermarkets, especially those engaged in below cost selling, represents a serious factor in the abuse of alcohol by young and underage persons and needs to be controlled.
- The sale and marketing of alcohol by supermarkets in the same manner as the advertising of essential food products such as bread and meat is causing a level of consumption that is contrary to the public interest and is at variance with the code of practice agreed by all involved with the drinks industry.
- The consumption of alcohol in outdoor areas – so called “bush drinking” - is not the way a dangerous product like alcoholic drink was ever meant to be consumed. It needs a controlled environment and controlled measures of supply.
- The setting of a minimum price for alcohol and tighter regulations around how alcohol is promoted and sold would greatly help in tackling the problem of binge drinking and the associated public order offences, vandalism and criminality.

- There needs to be an increased focus on those who deliberately push down the price of drink such as supermarkets that offer volume-led promotions and sell alcohol like tea, sugar and coffee on special offers which only encourages irresponsible consumption especially among young people.
- Any further tax or excise increases would make Ireland totally unattractive from a tourist perspective and make the price of drink substantially higher than in all other member states of the European Union.

4.8 Discussion

From time immemorial, the pub has in all its different guises occupied a prominent place and fulfilled a special role in Irish society. The drinking of alcohol has been as synonymous with Irishness as the shamrock, the harp or the red-haired feisty colleen as portrayed by Maureen O'Hara in "The Quiet Man". Pubs have existed in Ireland in one form or another since the Norman invasion of the 12th century ranging from the early primitive sheebeen to the superpub that characterised the 1990s. The licensed trade has been a major contributor to the success of the economy and the creation of full employment during the so-called Celtic Tiger era as well as generating substantial revenues for the state coffers in the form of excise duties, value added tax, corporation tax, income tax, commercial rates and other financial impositions. The role and influence of the pub increased exponentially as Irish society left behind the depressed and repressive post-war years and entered an exciting new era in the swinging 60s culminating in the boom economic period of the 1990s and into the new millennium when the country became very wealthy and disposable incomes grew substantially.

The pub has over the generations always been an important focus for local communities especially at a time of celebration, success or achievement or to mark special occasions. It has fulfilled a central role in the social, cultural, recreational and sporting life of the Irish and has been a place for meeting, conversation, lively debate, card games, music and song. It would be difficult to visualise Ireland, especially the smaller towns and villages, without the pub such has been its intrinsic importance to community life. The Irish pub has been copied and reinvented in many foreign cities throughout the world, although in many cases the authenticity factor is conspicuous by its absence in terms of the genuineness of the product. There can be

no doubt however that the Irish pub is an important brand name for the promotion of Ireland at an international level and is a significant contributor to tourism and the economy.

The zenith for the Irish pub was reached during the boom years of the Celtic Tiger. This era was characterised by the phenomenon of the singing pub, the super-pub and the night club with huge crowds spilling out onto the streets at pub closing time leading to growth in demand for ancillary services such as fast-food outlets as well as creating a major policing and public order control problem for the Garda Authorities. Side by side with these developments, major health and safety concerns began to be expressed about the high incidence and societal cost of tobacco-related conditions such as carcinoma and heart disease which were the cause of serious mortality and morbidity in the country.

The huge increase in deaths and serious injury from road traffic accidents also became the focus of major attention with driving under the influence of alcohol being portrayed as the chief cause of this unacceptable situation. National radio, television and media advertising campaigns were directed towards changing anti-social behaviour. The cost to the country in terms of health and personal social services, rehabilitation, work absenteeism, reduced economic output and productivity as well as the whole trauma and scandal of death and injuries on the roads began to be highlighted at all levels in the media, politics and government.

Influenced by membership of the EU, increased international travel and growth in personal wealth, changes in societal lifestyle patterns began to take effect leading to a substantial increase in home drinking in parallel with going to the pub. Defective vehicles causing road traffic accidents also became the focus of government attention and a system was established for the mandatory testing of vehicles under the National Car Test (NCT). It became an offence for car owners to drive a vehicle without a current NCT certificate, thus creating additional transport difficulties especially for low-mileage drivers with older cars living in the more rural and remote parts of the country.

This era was also noteworthy for a certain culture of rip-off prices in many of the more prominent and fashionable pubs, with the operators greedily exploiting the high demand for alcohol by charging excessive prices and generating supernormal profits

for themselves at the expense of regular consumers and tourists alike. There was an understandable lack of sympathy for operators when the downturn in the pub trade set in after the smoking ban was introduced. The country began to see a huge increase in off-licences and especially in supermarkets selling alcohol. Pub operators and the vintners' bodies began to complain bitterly that their businesses were being destroyed by unfair competition and below cost selling in these outlets.

The downward spiral in the pub trade began in earnest with the implementation of the ban on smoking in the workplace, including public houses, in 2004. Many seasoned drinkers were totally put off by not being allowed to have a smoke with their pint. They argued that their civil and human rights were being violated. Despite vigorous protests from the smoking lobby and the tobacco manufacturers, the ban was enforced. Drink driving was tackled by introducing statutory blood alcohol limits and random breath testing. They had far-reaching consequences. Drivers caught driving under the influence of alcohol faced public odium and embarrassment as well as severe criminal sanctions including automatic disqualification.

The trend towards off-licence purchases and home drinking continued apace, with a significant fall-off in the pub trade especially in the more rural areas where alternatives to driving oneself to the pub were not readily available. This led to the closure of many public houses throughout the country. The final onslaught on the pub came with the demise of the Celtic Tiger and the arrival of the economic recession in 2007 caused by the property and banking implosions. This economic downturn had a devastating impact on the country as a whole with substantial business failures, job losses, high unemployment, emigration, mortgage default, home repossessions, social deprivation and an increasing dependence on state handouts and social welfare benefits being the order of the day.

In the face of this unprecedented operating environment, many pubs fell by the wayside especially those that remained in a time-warp and failed to adapt to changing conditions, circumstances and realities. It was time for vintners to take serious stock. Their backs were to the wall. The whole future of the Irish pub was under serious threat. In order to survive, pubs have to adopt radical, innovative, imaginative strategies to maintain the viability of their businesses. The use of social

media such as Facebook and YouTube is seen as essential in promoting trade and engaging effectively with consumers and clientele.

Pubs have to become more cost-conscious and cost-efficient so that a more attractive pricing structure can be introduced and better value given to the customer. Some of the required changes lie within the discretion and control of the vintners themselves. However it is clear from the research that without government intervention, the efforts of the vintners on their own will not be enough to save the industry as it is manifestly evident that the main causative factor in the decline of the pub trade has been government legislation and regulation aimed at addressing health and safety concerns in the workplace, tackling the high incidence of mortality from carcinoma and heart disease and the reduction in road traffic accidents causing death and carnage on our roads.

Pubs are being crippled by astronomical local authority rates for which they are deriving little or no return in terms of the services they provide. The smoking ban is here to stay but there ought to be less drastic methods of enforcing it in pubs such as allowing for the internal designation of separate, well-ventilated smoking areas as a more attractive proposition for the smoking fraternity than the present discriminatory regime that tends to make pariahs out of those who smoke. The rates of VAT and Excise Duties will need to be reviewed and taxation incentives made available to pubs that fulfill prescribed statutory conditions in relation to job creation, service range and quality, and geographic location. In rural areas it will be difficult for the traditional rural pub, which may cater for an ageing, more socially isolated and dependent clientele, to survive without some form of subsidised transport system being introduced, given the problems and risks associated with consumers using their own cars in the random breath test and NCT era.

There is little doubt but that all the primary and secondary research and interviews with the vintner's points emphatically to Irish pubs being under serious threat. There are very difficult and challenging times ahead. Many pubs will inevitably not survive. Only those that are progressive, innovative, imaginative and are seen to provide a good quality service at a reasonable price in a nice, relaxed, comfortable, convivial, friendly atmosphere, and are fit for purpose in all respects, are likely to survive in the current adverse environment. Thinking outside the box will truly

become the order of the day with continuous re-invention, monitoring of changing consumer lifestyles and preferences, and a blend of imaginative thinking, determination, leadership, personality and charisma, all combining to form a powerful focus for development in conjunction with astute leadership support coming from the vintners representative bodies.

It is very difficult to see the government being in a position in the current recession to introduce any measures that will result in a decrease in the already depleted tax revenues of the state. Hopefully in the longer term the government can be prevailed upon to implement some or all of the measures recommended by the author so as to ensure that the future of the Irish pub is preserved and protected as an important part of the fabric of Irish society and as a vital contributor to Irish economic, social and cultural wellbeing.

Chapter Five: Recommendations

- The present system of levying Local Authority rates on licensed premises should be reviewed as there appears to be an inherent inequity and unfairness in the rateable valuation methodology currently used to calculate the substantial annual rates bill which bears no relationship to the revenue generating capacity and profitability of the business nor indeed to the market value of the enterprise. The process for lodging appeals against excessive valuations should be streamlined and expedited to promote a greater degree of transparency and fairness in the way the system operates.
- Consideration should be given to providing tax relief to pubs fulfilling prescribed criteria and conditions in relation to approved services, location, employment and facilities on the same basis as is currently afforded to manufacturing enterprises under the Finance Acts.
- The drinks industry should provide subsidies and incentives for the setting up of suitable transport services to service public houses in rural areas where no public transport system is available and where the provision of such transport would assure the continued operational viability of the rural pub concerned. The government should recognise the role of such services by granting an element of tax relief to the operators of such transport.
- Establish a scheme in conjunction with the Tourism Board whereby tourists to this country are offered a discounted price on drinks and food purchased in participating Irish pubs on production of relevant discount voucher authenticating the person's tourist status.
- Introduce customer loyalty schemes whereby customers are issued with privilege cards granting them certain concessions and benefits in relation to pub services and prices. The implementation of such a scheme would give publicans access to customers' personal information and therefore enable a greater understanding of customer demographics. Secondly, by offering drinks at a reduced price to customers, publicans can become more competitive and cheaper than their competitors. Information on promotions,

events etc. can be directly sent on to customers, thus assisting in the development of good relations and the potential for sales growth.

- Today's consumers demand value for money. Publicans must therefore add value to the customer's experience by ensuring the delivery of a first class service offering, attention to detail and warm inviting surroundings. The provision of food can greatly enhance the potential for increased profits and the author would advise publicans to explore all viable options available in the quest for gaining a competitive edge over rivals. At this present time, the publicans' main competition is those selling alcohol below-cost. The growth in home-drinking, motivated by the availability of cheap alcohol has been to the detriment of the public house. The consumer needs a reason to go out and it is in the publicans' best interests to provide that reason.
- Third level institutions such as Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology should consider establishing suitable training programmes in conjunction with the industry to meet the training needs of family-operated pubs and also a course on succession planning to prepare prospective pub owners on the successful operation and management of the business.
- The provisions in the Landlord and Tenant Acts allowing upward-only rent reviews of leased premises should be changed so as to permit such rent reviews to be revised downwards where market considerations so determine. The current system is imposing an unfair costs burden on leased pubs where the level of rent payable is way out of line with the market rate currently prevailing in the area.
- The blanket ban on smoking in public houses should be reviewed in light of practical experience since the ban was introduced in 2004 and as an alternative, consideration might be given to a modified system whereby a certain section of the pub would be designated as a smoking area subject to strict controls in relation to ventilation systems and the health and safety of bar staff. It should be noted in this regard that The Netherlands which was one of the first countries to introduce a smoking ban, has since reversed its decision and now allows smoking in pubs and restaurants.
- Review the current system of below-cost selling of alcohol products in supermarkets which is causing unfair competition to the pub trade and

consider either banning such below cost sales or alternatively imposing a minimum pricing regime reflecting public policy interests. Minimum pricing would put all retailers of alcohol, i.e. pubs, restaurants, hotels, supermarkets and off-licences on an equal par and seek to address the prevalence of binge drinking in society and the incidence of public order offences associated with excessive alcohol consumption.

- The current rates of Excise Duty and Value Added Tax on beer and spirits should be reviewed in order to allow pub prices to be reduced and to promote increased trade and economic viability in the current difficult trading environment.
- Special incentives should be given to rural pubs and those in remote areas to encourage them to remain open for business having regard to the important social function they fulfill in terms of providing a social service-type role for persons, especially those living alone and the elderly, who would otherwise have little or no social contact within the local community.
- The cost of soft drinks in pubs appears to be grossly excessive and should be reviewed having regard to the importance of the –designated driver‡ concept whereby one individual abstains from alcohol on the night and undertakes to act as driver for the group. There is little incentive in promoting this proposal due to the cost of soft drinks being almost as expensive as the alcoholic product. Consumers are mystified as to why soft drinks should be up to 200% dearer in pubs than in retail outlets and it is clear that pubs have a case to answer in this regard.
- Consideration should be given to the de-regulation of pub licensing and allowing more flexible opening/closing hours so as to create greater competition and responsiveness to demand within the trade, promote greater efficiency, reduce prices and facilitate staggered closing times to reduce the incidence of anti-social behaviour and public order offences.
- The blanket prohibition on children being in pubs after 9.00 pm ought to be accorded a degree of flexibility and discretion in the case of hotel bars and family holiday situations where the child is supervised by a parent or parents who currently are unable on account of the ban to remain in the pub beyond 9

pm. This policy as currently operated is not family-friendly, is damaging to good relations and is altogether counterproductive.

- The author recommends that public houses should make maximum use of online social media facilities and networks such as Facebook, YouTube, Irish Social Media Monitor, Pubtalk and Proper Pint and should fully embrace these websites and new tools of communication to market and promote their businesses, to engage with the consumers, especially those in the younger age group, to respond to customer needs, to monitor and assess changing trends, to advertise their services and to generally improve the image and value perception of pubs. By obtaining the email addresses of both prospective and regular customers, publicans can use YouTube to directly send videos to a target audience which can significantly assist in building strong and loyal relations. Videos that are creative or humorous have the potential to go ‘viral’, meaning that possibly thousands of people will be sharing a video with others online, thus maximising exposure to a business that is completely free of charge. Audiences need to be entertained, informed and engaged in order to arouse interest and prolong attention so it is advisable ‘go all out’ and demonstrate resourcefulness, ambition and a willingness to succeed.
- Alcohol advertising codes are in need of reform, especially with regard to the placement of such ads and effective monitoring. The current system of self-regulation as between the Advertising Standards Authority of Ireland (ASAI), the media/broadcasters and the drinks industry has proved to be ineffective, especially in relation to below-cost selling and underage drinking.

Conclusion

The foregoing recommendations are put forward in light of the research and consultation processes undertaken by the author in order to create a better framework and infrastructure for pubs to remain operationally successful and viable in the current difficult trading conditions. As we have seen, these difficulties have been largely brought about by the economic downturn, the smoking ban, the restrictive drink-driving laws, the random breath testing regime, the below-cost selling of alcohol and unfair competition from supermarket outlets and the rather restrictive regulatory and licensing framework for public houses and the accessibility problems created in rural areas with the lack of public transport and taxi services.

The taxation recommendations are put forward more in hope than with any great degree of confidence that they will be adopted as it is unlikely with the current state of the public finances that the government will entertain or be in any way amenable to foregoing existing revenues by reducing tax and excise rates to help the ailing pub trade out of its current trading difficulties. Similarly it is difficult to see the government giving any degree of prioritisation to offering tax incentives to public houses in the current environment no matter how important such incentives are perceived to be. It is a matter for the organised licensed vintners' trade, through the Vintners Federation and other representative bodies, to continue to advocate for such changes as are deemed to be necessary to promote the viability and economic wellbeing of the industry in this country.

There is widespread consensus that pubs must change with the times and be responsive to changing consumer needs, demands, social trends and lifestyle changes in relation to the services that need to be provided. This process requires continuous, ongoing engagement, consultation and communication with the pub's customer base. It is most essential in this regard that pub owners avail to the fullest possible extent of the network of social media facilities at their disposal such as YouTube and Facebook which are regarded by all commentators as being hugely significant and important in promoting and advertising the pub and getting its message across effectively to the pub's patrons, customers and the broader community. The importance of these social media tools cannot be over-emphasised. Unfortunately most of the recommendations require government action or intervention which in the

current adverse budgetary climate may not be forthcoming. In the absence of such government intervention and action, it is vital that the industry itself through its own ingenuity, resources and methodologies employs every available means at its own disposal to support pubs experiencing difficulty in the current adverse environment and to protect the future of the pub as an important institution within the Irish societal framework pending the eventual hoped for government action.

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Appendix A

The Interview Guide

The Irish Pub: Past, Present - Whither the Future?

Q1. Can you give me a brief synopsis of your background and experience of the pub trade in Galway?

Q2. Describe your current involvement in the business?

Q3. Have you seen any changes in the market over the last number of years?

Q4. Who are your customers?

Q5. How has the customer changed?

Q6. Have you seen a change in the drinking patterns of your customers?

Q7. In relation to sales/turnover of drink, has there been an increase or a decrease in annual sales revenue?

Q8. What are the challenges you are currently facing?

Q9. Which factors would you consider have caused the most impact on your trade?

Q10. Who are your main competitors?

Q11. Have you introduced any cost-saving measures over the last number of years?

Q12. What would you consider are the key drivers to attracting more business?

Q13. What, if any, special initiatives, ancillary services, innovations, special offers etc. have you introduced in your own pub to attract customers?

Q14. What is your plan for the future?

Appendix B

Masters of Business in Strategy and Innovation Management

Galway – Mayo Institute of Technology

Interview Consent Form

The Irish Pub: Past, Present – Whither the Future?

Audrey Naughton, GMIT, Galway. Email: anadrey@eircom.net Phone: (087) 1360284

This interview consent form has been prepared for the purpose of the researcher's Master's dissertation on the Irish pub trade. Prior to the interview, both the researcher and interviewee will sign two copies of the consent form. The interviewee will be given one signed copy of the signed form.

Consent for Participation in Interview Research

- I volunteer to participate in an interview conducted by Audrey Naughton, a Master's student of Galway – Mayo Institute of Technology. I am aware that there are approximately five publicans being interviewed as part of the primary research. I fully understand that the study is being conducted to gather information on the present status of the Irish pub and to develop a profile of my own establishment; the factors impacting pub trade; the measures (if any) being employed to counteract these; and to gain an insight as to my opinion and views on the future of the Irish pub.
- My participation in this interview is voluntary. I may withdraw or discontinue at any time without consequence. I have the right to decline to answer any question or to end the interview if I feel at all uncomfortable during the interview session.
- The interview will last approximately 20 minutes. Notes will be taken during the interview. An audio tape of the interview and subsequent dialogue will be made.
- I am aware that the researcher will not identify me by name or by business in any reports using information obtained from this interview, and that my confidentiality as a participant in this study will remain secure.
- I have read and understand the explanation provided to me. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

My signature

Date

Signature of Researcher _____