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## **INNOVATIVE APPROACHES TO BUILDING CUSTOMER LOYALTY IN THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY**

### **Summary**

*The article explores the mechanisms of customer loyalty formation in the hospitality industry under digital transformation and evolving consumer expectations. The specifics of consumer behavior in hospitality are analyzed, highlighting the predominance of intangible and emotionally driven components over services' functional and technical characteristics. Theoretical approaches to loyalty formation are systematized. Particular attention is given to the role of digitalization in transforming consumer decision-making mechanisms: online reviews and social media have become dominant sources of information, emphasizing the strategic importance of online reputation management. The study also examines the impact of consumers' environmental awareness on developing competitive advantages in hotel enterprises through implementing sustainable practices and eco-certification. Innovative tools for enhancing competitiveness are considered in detail. It is proven that effective customer loyalty management requires a multidisciplinary approach that integrates functional, emotional, and technological components into a comprehensive customer experience management system aimed at establishing long-term competitive advantages.*

### **Introduction**

The contemporary hospitality industry is undergoing a profound transformation driven by the convergence of several structural factors: the intensification of global competition, a radical shift in the architecture of consumer expectations, and the exponential growth of digital technologies shaping the customer experience. The traditional paradigm of hotel management – based on service standardization, pricing strategies, and physical infrastructure – is becoming increasingly ineffective in an environment where consumers have gained unprecedented access to information, comparison tools, and platforms for articulating their experiences through online reviews and social media.

Global trends in the hospitality sector indicate a structural shift from transactional interaction models to relational strategies focused on creating unique, emotionally rich customer experiences as the primary source of competitive advantage. Within this context, customer loyalty formation is evolving from a tactical marketing tool into a strategic imperative that directly determines a company's financial resilience and ability to generate sustainable cash flows amid volatility in demand. The ability of a hospitality enterprise to implement innovative technological, organizational, and

communication solutions has become a critical factor in retaining its existing customer base and fostering long-term emotional attachment to the brand – manifested in repeat transactions and positive word-of-mouth within the consumer's social network.

The economic rationale for investing in customer retention strategies is supported by numerous empirical studies showing that the costs of maintaining an existing customer are significantly lower than those of acquiring a new one. Moreover, loyal customers tend to demonstrate higher transaction frequency, lower price sensitivity, and a stronger propensity to generate positive recommendations, collectively reducing marketing expenditures on attracting new guests. In this regard, innovative approaches to loyalty development – such as the use of intelligent customer relationship management systems, service personalization platforms based on big data analytics, integration of environmentally responsible practices, and the implementation of innovative technologies in operational processes – create systemic opportunities for building long-term, mutually beneficial relationships with customers, enhancing their perceived satisfaction, and strengthening their emotional connection with the brand.

At the same time, the growing consumer demand for service quality, individualized offerings, and social and environmental responsibility of hospitality enterprises underscores the need for systematic scientific research into the mechanisms, tools, and strategies of forming innovative approaches to customer acquisition and retention. Such analytical work is of theoretical significance for advancing service marketing concepts and of direct practical value for hospitality enterprises seeking to establish a sustainable competitive position in a dynamic and technologically saturated market.

## **Chapter 1. Theoretical foundations of consumer behavior in the hospitality sector**

### **1.1. The essence and specificity of consumer behavior in hospitality**

Consumer behavior in the hospitality industry represents a multidimensional phenomenon characterized by a complex interaction dynamic between the consumer and the service provider. This process encompasses successive stages of decision-making: recognition of need, systematic search and processing of information, comparative analysis of available alternatives, intention formation and booking, direct service consumption, and post-purchase evaluation – crystallizing in the form of satisfaction, loyalty, and a propensity for repeat transactions or generating positive word-of-mouth recommendations.

The principal distinction between consumer behavior in the hospitality sector and behavior in traditional goods markets lies in the dominance of intangible, emotionally charged components of service interaction. Whereas in the case of tangible products, the consumer can objectively assess physical characteristics before purchase, in hospitality services, the key determinants of satisfaction are subjective expectations, feelings of psychological comfort, the quality of personalized attention from service staff, and the overall atmosphere and ambience of the establishment. The inseparability of the service from the process of its delivery, along with the

simultaneity of production and consumption, leads to a high level of subjectivity in quality perception. The latter depends not only on the material and technical base of the accommodation facility but also on contextual characteristics of the interaction, the level of service culture among staff, the degree of technological integration into the customer experience, and the consumer's own psycho-emotional state at the time of service provision [2].

Empirical research in the hotel and tourism industry allows the identification of four key categories of determinants shaping the decision-making structure: individual-psychological factors, sociocultural influences, situational constraints, and technological mediators of choice.

Individual psychological factors reflect the internal motivational and cognitive architecture of the consumer. The motivational structure determines the primary need for rest, psychophysiological recovery, comfort seeking, or the demonstration of social status through prestige consumption. Perceived risk – financial, functional, or psychosocial – directly affects the consumer's willingness to experiment with new or lesser-known accommodation providers. Quality expectations, formed based on prior consumption experience, existing industry standards, and personal reference frameworks, serve as the main criteria for service evaluation and determine the level of post-purchase satisfaction and readiness to develop stable brand loyalty [6].

At the same time, it would be a methodological error to reduce consumer behavior to a purely individualistic paradigm without considering the sociocultural context in which it is enacted and gains meaning. The influence of family environment, reference groups, and cultural norms establishes the institutional boundaries of acceptable behavior, defines leisure style, and sets the expected level of service. Social surroundings shape collective perceptions of the prestige of particular types of hotels or tourism services. At the same time, cultural differences among societies determine specific expectations regarding hospitality, comfort standards, and ethical norms of service delivery. In a multicultural global environment, hospitality enterprises must adapt service models to the cultural patterns of diverse consumer segments, ensuring relevance, authenticity, and cultural sensitivity of the customer experience [25].

Situational factors directly influence the context and structure of decision-making in the consumption of hospitality services. This category includes the primary purpose of travel (business, recreational, or cultural-cognitive), budget constraints, length of stay, and seasonality. These parameters create specific conditions that modify the relative importance of different service attributes. For instance, business travelers prioritize infrastructure functionality, service efficiency, quality of business amenities, and the property's strategic location in relation to business districts. In contrast, contemporary leisure travelers focus on the emotional richness of experiences, the diversity of entertainment options, the aesthetic appeal of the environment, and the overall atmosphere of the stay. Seasonal variation affects not only the price elasticity of demand but also consumer expectations regarding service availability, quality, and personalization, creating a temporal dynamic of consumption priorities.

In the context of the industry's ongoing digital transformation, technological factors have gained substantial significance. Online booking platforms, user review aggregators, and mobile applications have created a new informational environment in which consumers can systematically compare alternatives, reduce informational uncertainty, and monitor the quality of their decisions. User-generated reviews serve as social proof, reinforcing trust in the brand – or conversely, reducing booking likelihood in response to negative quality signals. Digitalization stimulates the development of personalized services, where machine learning algorithms and recommendation systems account for individual preferences and behavioral histories, ensuring higher relevance of offers, which translates into greater satisfaction and strengthened loyalty.

Hence, consumer behavior in the hospitality sector results from the complex interplay of psychological processes, sociocultural context, situational circumstances, and technological conditions of market functioning. Recognizing this multidimensionality and interdependence of factors constitutes a necessary methodological prerequisite for developing effective marketing strategies grounded in a systematic, empirically substantiated understanding of the modern consumer's motivations, contextual determinants, and evolving expectations.

## **1.2. Digital transformation and online reputation management**

One of the most fundamental structural shifts in the modern hospitality market is the digitalization of consumer decision-making processes and the formation of customer experience. The digital environment – particularly online reviews, social media, booking platforms, and specialized aggregators – has become the dominant source of information for potential guests, who increasingly trust user-generated content more than traditional corporate communications or advertising messages.

Online reviews serve as a form of social proof, significantly reducing information asymmetry between the consumer and the service provider – a classical issue in markets with high uncertainty regarding quality. Empirical studies employing large datasets and econometric methods confirm the statistically significant influence of review quality, sentiment, and perceived credibility on booking intentions. It is important to note that the impact of reviews is heterogeneous and moderated by the brand's reputational capital and the hotel's category: for lesser-known accommodation providers, online reviews are a critical factor in building initial trust, whereas for established international hotel chains, they play a moderating but not decisive role [9].

Under these conditions, strategic online reputation management is evolving from a tactical communication tool to a key enterprise competitiveness determinant. Practical work with digital feedback requires a reactive, timely response to negative comments and complaints and a proactive communication strategy: systematic generation of positive content, integration of review analytics into service improvement processes, and customer feedback insights to adapt operations and enhance service quality.

Consistency and coherence of the customer experience at all stages of interaction – from the booking platform interface and the hotel's visual presentation to direct physical contact with staff and post-purchase communication – build trust and

emotional attachment to the brand. Therefore, digitalization in hospitality should not be reduced to mere automation of operational processes or implementing technological innovations. Rather, it functions as a tool for constructing an integrated experience management system, where online reputation, brand authenticity, communication transparency, and the quality of digital interaction constitute the fundamental foundations for building long-term customer loyalty and sustaining competitive advantage in the dynamic hospitality market.

### **1.3. Economic and environmental imperatives: a new paradigm of consumer choice**

Contemporary dynamics of consumer behavior in the hospitality sector reflect deep structural transformations driven by economic challenges and the growing environmental awareness of society. The COVID-19 pandemic catalyzed a fundamental re-evaluation of consumer priorities: guests became significantly more sensitive to safety, hygiene standards, and booking flexibility. These parameters have evolved from fundamental hygiene factors into critical competitive advantages, as consumers increasingly prefer establishments that guarantee physical comfort and psychological confidence during their stay.

Alongside the heightened focus on safety, interest in sustainable consumption has markedly increased. A new segment of consumers oriented toward sustainable development, environmental responsibility, and corporate social accountability is emerging. Modern guests increasingly consider a hotel's ecological practices a meaningful criterion in their booking decisions [29].

In response, hospitality enterprises are actively implementing sustainability management programs: energy-efficient technologies, resource recycling systems, waste minimization strategies, reduction of single-use plastics, and inclusion of locally sourced organic products in menus. However, empirical studies show that the mere presence of ecological practices does not automatically translate into greater customer loyalty. The decisive factor is the consumer's trust in the authenticity of the enterprise's claims and the perception of its environmental initiatives as genuine, systemic practices rather than superficial marketing gestures.

Moreover, the consumer's personal value system moderates the positive effect of communicating sustainable practices. Recent research confirms that consumers prioritizing environmental responsibility as a core personal value exhibit a significantly higher likelihood of repeat visits and positive recommendations [7]. Thus, economic pressures and ecological awareness are shaping a new paradigm of consumer behavior in hospitality – one where safety, sustainability, and trust in the authenticity of a company's practices become key determinants of consumer choice and competitiveness in the marketplace.

### **1.4. Emotional experience and the experience economy**

A fundamental characteristic of the hospitality industry lies in the exceptional role of emotional experience and consumer memory in shaping the subjective evaluation of service quality. Unlike the purchase of tangible goods, where consumers can objectively assess a product's physical attributes, in hospitality the guest remembers not so much the technical parameters of the interior or the functional quality of equipment as the overall atmosphere of the stay – the sense of emotional comfort, the

sincerity and attentiveness of the staff, and those seemingly minor emotional details that construct a unique, personalized impression of the establishment.

Contemporary research confirms that the perception of service quality is formed not only by functional attributes – such as room cleanliness, service speed, or the organoleptic properties of food – but also by a complex set of sensory, emotional, and social factors that, in integration, construct the guest's holistic experience. In this context, the concept of the experience economy acquires both analytical and practical significance, as it shifts the focus from service provision as a standardized transaction to creating a unique event endowed with emotional, symbolic, and narrative value for the consumer [15].

The success of a modern hospitality enterprise is increasingly determined by its ability to create a personalized experience that satisfies the guest's basic functional needs, forges an emotional bond with the brand, and evokes a sense of interactional uniqueness. This personalization may manifest in insignificant details from an operational standpoint but psychologically meaningful to the consumer: a personal greeting using the guest's name, offering a favorite beverage based on previous visits, or accommodating dietary preferences during booking or menu planning. Such an approach transforms a hotel from a functional space for temporary accommodation into a domain of emotional experiences, where the guest is not merely served according to standards but becomes part of a personalized narrative of interaction with the brand [31].

This leads to the industry's strategic orientation toward the systemic design of guest experience, which integrates elements of perception psychology, relationship marketing, service design, and human resource management as the key bearers of service culture. The management of emotional triggers, the thoughtful design of the sensory environment (lighting intensity, olfactory stimuli, musical background), social dynamics, and the quality of interpersonal communication with staff – all become tools for shaping a positive, recognizable, and differentiated brand experience that stimulates repeat visits and generates positive recommendations within the consumer's social network.

### **1.5. A multidisciplinary approach to the analysis of consumer behavior**

Implementing practical approaches to consumer behavior management in the hospitality industry requires a comprehensive, multidisciplinary framework that extends beyond the traditional marketing paradigm. The modern guest embodies complex cognitive and emotional processes; therefore, to effectively understand and manage behavior, it is necessary to integrate insights from behavioral economics, consumer psychology, sociology, data analytics, and service design.

Behavioral economics identifies and conceptualizes how cognitive biases, heuristics, and contextual effects influence hotel or restaurant choice. Consumer psychology explains how emotions, risk perception, and quality expectations shape subjective satisfaction and experience evaluation. Sociological analysis uncovers the role of social norms, group influence, and cultural patterns in determining consumer decisions. Meanwhile, service design provides practical tools for systematically designing consumer experiences that correspond to different guest segments' needs, values, and expectations [13].

For the scientific analysis of such multidimensional behavior, relying solely on quantitative methods is insufficient. Surveys, controlled experiments, or big data analysis can reveal statistical regularities in choice, booking behavior, or service evaluation. Still, they do not fully capture behavior's deep motivational structures and emotional aspects. Therefore, qualitative methods – such as in-depth interviews, focus groups, participant observation, and ethnography of consumer experience – are increasingly employed in academic and applied research. These methods help reconstruct the context and subjective meanings of consumer-service interactions.

Combining quantitative and qualitative research strategies provides a more complete and nuanced understanding of consumer experience as a complex system in which rational, emotional, and social components interact and mutually influence one another. Such methodological synergy forms a robust foundation for evidence-based managerial decision-making – from developing personalized marketing strategies to the systemic design of the consumer journey aimed at building long-term, emotionally rich relationships with clients [27].

### **1.6. Summary of the specific features of consumer behavior in hospitality**

The hospitality sector's consumer behavior possesses several distinctive characteristics that fundamentally differentiate it from consumer behavior in traditional product markets. It is shaped by a complex interplay of rational and emotional factors and is closely connected with the context of consumption, the quality of interpersonal interactions, and the guests' subjective expectations based on prior experience and social references.

Unlike tangible goods, hotel and restaurant services are characterized by inseparability from the delivery process, high intangibility, and the dominance of emotional components in quality perception. The impossibility of assessing service quality before consumption creates a high level of perceived risk, increasing the importance of external quality signals such as brand reputation, online reviews, and the visual presentation of the establishment.

At the same time, consumer decisions are significantly influenced by social norms, recommendations from reference groups, online reviews, and technological innovations that transform the ways information is sought, alternatives are compared, and trust in service providers is established. The digital transformation of the industry not only changes operational processes but also fundamentally restructures the mechanisms of consumer decision-making, providing clients with tools to reduce uncertainty and enhance control over the quality of the expected experience.

A synthesized overview of the main features of consumer behavior in the hospitality sector, integrating the determinants, mechanisms of influence, and industry-specific characteristics discussed above, is presented in Table 1.

The presented characterization reflects the complex nature of consumer behavior in hospitality, where the decision-making process, service consumption, and post-consumption reactions are closely interrelated. A primary distinction is the intangibility of services, which prevents prior evaluation and necessitates trust in the brand, reputation, and social proof. The simultaneity of production and consumption strongly depends on human factors, the emotional state of staff and guests, and the quality of interaction at the moment of contact. The emotional component of

experience becomes central, as it largely determines satisfaction, loyalty, and willingness to return.

Table 1  
**Specific features of consumer behavior in hospitality**

	<b>Criterion</b>	<b>Explanation</b>
1	Intangibility of service	Service has no physical form; consumed simultaneously with provision
2	Simultaneity of production and consumption	Service is created at the moment of guest interaction
3	High emotional intensity of experience	Emotions are a key element of consumer evaluation
4	Personalization of expectations	Expectations depend on previous experience, social status, culture
5	High role of social proof	Choices are influenced by reviews, recommendations, social networks
6	Context sensitivity	Behavior varies depending on trip purpose, season, budget
7	Influence of technological innovations	Digital services transform the consumer journey – from search to payment
8	Socio-cultural determinants	Behavior is shaped by cultural norms and traditions
9	Experience-oriented rather than product-oriented	Core value lies in the feelings generated by the service
10	High importance of post-consumption stage	Reviews, repeat visits, recommendations determine long-term customer value

*Source: compiled by the author based on [2; 6; 9; 15-19; 25; 27; 29]*

The hospitality sector is susceptible to context – the purpose of the trip, season, social status, and budget. Accordingly, behavioral patterns of tourists, business clients, or family travelers may differ significantly. Technological innovations transform traditional communication channels and decision-making methods: online booking, mobile applications, and ratings/reviews create a new digital ecosystem of guest-establishment interaction. Simultaneously, sociocultural characteristics shape expectations and norms of behavior, requiring cultural competence from staff [21].

Modern consumers increasingly focus on functional attributes and the emotional and symbolic dimension of the experience – feelings of uniqueness, comfort, and belonging. Consequently, the post-consumption stage becomes decisive: positive experiences are translated into public reviews, and the consumer experience contributes to the hospitality enterprise's reputational capital.

Thus, consumer behavior in hospitality is a systemic, multidimensional process combining rational, emotional, social, and technological components. Its specificity is defined by the simultaneity of service creation and consumption, the critical role of emotional experience, high levels of personalization, and the influence of digital communication channels. Managing such behavior requires a deep understanding of guest motivations, consumption context, and mechanisms of trust formation. Enterprises that effectively integrate this knowledge into their strategies achieve sustainable competitive advantage and customer loyalty.

## Chapter 2. Building consumer loyalty in the hospitality industry

### 2.1. Satisfaction theory and perceived service quality

The formation of consumer loyalty in the hospitality sector represents a critical strategic objective, which requires integrating multiple theoretical approaches that conceptualize the mechanisms by which a one-time transaction is transformed into long-term relationships characterized by repeat interactions, positive recommendations, and emotional attachment to the brand. Contemporary scholarly literature identifies several dominant theoretical frameworks and analytical models frequently applied for a systematic analysis of loyalty: satisfaction theory, the perceived value concept, the multidimensional SERVQUAL model, approaches emphasizing the holistic consumer experience, and modern frameworks integrating principles of sustainable development and corporate social responsibility. The following analysis systematizes these theoretical approaches and elucidates their relevance in hospitality.

Satisfaction theory and the concept of perceived service quality constitute fundamental analytical frameworks for understanding the mechanisms underpinning consumer loyalty in the hotel sector. The central premise of this approach is that guest satisfaction serves as a critical mediating variable, transmitting the effect of perceived service quality and value to behavioral intentions, including repeat patronage or recommendations within social networks. In other words, even if a customer rationally evaluates a service as high-quality and functionally beneficial, complete attitudinal and behavioral loyalty cannot form without a positive emotional experience that generates subjective satisfaction [30].

In hospitality, guest satisfaction is a multidimensional construct integrating rational-cognitive and affective-emotional service perception components. Rational parameters encompass objectively measurable service characteristics, such as sanitary and hygiene standards of rooms, ergonomic features of furniture and equipment, temporal efficiency and accuracy of service, organoleptic properties of food, and the functionality of technical services. Emotional components include the establishment's subjective atmosphere, the service staff's friendliness and personalized attention, and minor, yet psychologically significant, details that create a sense of individual care and uniqueness for the specific guest.

For example, staff members who can remember a guest's preferences, address them by name, or proactively offer a favorite drink without prior request create additional emotional value that significantly enhances subjective satisfaction. Similarly, a thoughtfully designed aesthetic atmosphere in public areas, harmonious musical accompaniment, strategic use of olfactory stimuli, or design accents in room decor strengthen the emotional experience and reinforce positive perceptions of the establishment [20].

Perceived service value correlates with satisfaction and determines the guest's willingness to engage in repeat interactions with the enterprise. If the customer perceives the balance between the price paid and the quality received as fair or favorable, and if expectations are met and exceeded, trust in the brand and emotional attachment are established. Consumer loyalty in this context manifests in two interrelated but conceptually distinct forms: behavioral loyalty, characterized by

repeat visits and increased use of supplementary hotel services; and attitudinal loyalty, reflected in generating positive reviews and active recommendations within social networks or digital platforms. Empirical evidence confirms that satisfaction is a critical variable in the causal chain of loyalty formation, integrating emotional, rational-cognitive, and socio-communicative components of consumer behavior [24; 30].

In practical terms, these theoretical insights imply that managers should focus on compliance with standard operational service metrics and systematically creating an emotionally rich and unique guest experience. Staff can implement service personalization strategies, account for seasonal or cultural specifics of different consumer segments, and leverage digital services to enhance booking convenience or communication responsiveness. Such managerial actions increase perceived care, foster a trusting atmosphere, and build enduring emotional bonds between guests and the brand.

Furthermore, trust and the subjective perception of value are crucial for sustainable loyalty. Suppose a guest is confident that they received fair value for money and that the establishment consistently attends to their comfort and individual needs. In that case, the likelihood of repeat visits rises significantly. Thus, loyalty is formed not solely through objective technical service quality but through the integrated interplay of emotional satisfaction, perceived value, and trust in the enterprise [19]. Consequently, satisfaction theory demonstrates that effective loyalty management requires adherence to formalized service standards and strategically creating a positive, emotionally rich guest experience that transforms visitors into repeat clients and active brand advocates.

## **2.2. The multidimensional SERVQUAL model of service quality**

The SERVQUAL service quality model is one of the most validated and widely applied methodologies for assessing perceived service quality in the hospitality and tourism industries. Its conceptual architecture is based on five key dimensions of service quality, which allow for a systematic evaluation of different aspects of service delivery.

The first dimension, reliability, reflects the establishment's ability to consistently fulfill promises accurately, consistently, and in accordance with stated standards. The second dimension, responsiveness, describes the willingness and promptness of staff in addressing guests' needs and requests. The third dimension, assurance, encompasses employee competence, professionalism, and the ability to instill confidence through demonstrated expertise. The fourth dimension, empathy, captures the level of individualized attention, understanding of specific customer needs, and the staff's capacity for emotional resonance with guest expectations. The fifth dimension, tangibles, includes physical infrastructure, equipment, hygiene standards, and the overall presentation of the premises [3].

Applying this model in hospitality enables managers to systematically diagnose discrepancies between guest expectations and actual service delivery, identifying critical gaps that negatively affect satisfaction and, consequently, loyalty formation. For instance, if staff demonstrate high empathy and respond promptly to requests, but the physical infrastructure or technical equipment does not meet contemporary

standards, the overall subjective impression of the guest may be negative, reducing their likelihood of repeat visits.

In the context of advancing digital transformation and the rise of contactless service models, the traditional five dimensions of SERVQUAL are complemented by technological quality parameters. These include the usability of online booking interfaces, the functionality of mobile applications for ordering or staff communication via chat services, the degree of integration of management information systems, and the speed of request processing through digital interaction channels. Such technological innovations can significantly enhance perceived reliability and responsiveness while building additional trust and psychological comfort for tech-oriented consumer segments [3].

Multidimensional service quality models allow for consideration of technical-functional aspects of service and the guest's emotional and social experience as integral components of perceived quality. For example, strategically integrating an aesthetically designed physical environment, empathetic staff behavior, effective digital services, and personalized offerings creates a holistic, synergistic experience that directly determines subjective satisfaction and behavioral loyalty. Thus, SERVQUAL and similar multidimensional analytical constructs do not merely measure service quality; they provide a conceptual foundation for developing loyalty management strategies, positioning customer satisfaction and emotional experience as central elements of a company's competitive advantage.

### **2.3. Expectation-confirmation model and the role of consumer experience**

The expectation-confirmation model is widely used in hospitality to explain the mechanisms of guest satisfaction and loyalty formation theoretically. The theory's central premise is that consumers form certain expectations about a service before direct interaction. After experiencing the service, they cognitively compare their expectations with the actual outcome. If the experience meets or exceeds these expectations, positive satisfaction arises, stimulating behavioral intentions for repeat visits and the willingness to provide positive recommendations. Conversely, suppose expectations are not met or are violated by a negative experience. In that case, guests experience cognitive dissonance and disappointment, reducing loyalty and a lower likelihood of future transactions [1].

Expectation-confirmation theory helps explain that loyalty in hospitality does not arise automatically as a function of standardized service quality but develops through a continual process of comparing expectations with experience. Guests systematically assess how sanitary and hygiene standards, ergonomic comfort, service quality, and availability of additional services align with their idealized perceptions of an optimal hotel within a given price segment. When actual service matches or positively exceeds expectations, guests form a stable, favorable attitude toward the establishment, manifested as behavioral loyalty through repeat bookings and attitudinal loyalty through active recommendations.

Contemporary research emphasizes the importance of the holistic consumer experience – a multidimensional construct encompassing the functional and technical aspects of service and emotional, sensory, cognitive, and social components of interaction. Guests evaluate not only objective technical characteristics of rooms,

organoleptic properties of food, or service speed, but also the subjective spatial atmosphere, aesthetic design parameters, quality of interpersonal interactions with staff, and the convenience and functionality of digital services. Emotional reactions, perceived psychological comfort, and recognition of personalized attention create an emotional memory of the stay, strongly influencing future behavior.

From this theoretical perspective, loyalty is formed through the strategic creation of a unique and personalized experience: when a hotel systematically considers individual guest preferences, proactively offers additional service elements that demonstrate care, or provides pleasant, unexpected extras, consumers experience positive emotional effects that are consolidated in long-term memory. This approach strengthens positive expectations for future visits and increases the likelihood of repeat bookings and the generation of positive reviews within social networks [1].

Thus, expectation-confirmation theory and consumer experience-oriented approaches demonstrate that strategic management of expectations, the creation of emotionally rich, multisensory experiences, and systematic attention to detail are central to building sustainable loyalty. Hospitality enterprises that account for rational-functional and emotional-affective components of service perception can satisfy current guest needs and transform them into repeat clients and active brand advocates.

#### **2.4. Integrative models of loyalty formation**

Contemporary integrative models, developed using qualitative methodologies for systematic analysis, demonstrate that loyalty formation in hospitality is a complex and multidimensional process that cannot be reduced to a simple linear dependence on isolated quality parameters. These models encompass not only functional and tangible aspects of services – such as technical service quality, sanitary and hygiene standards of rooms, aesthetic characteristics of the interior, and the condition of physical infrastructure – but also the intricate emotional bonds formed between guests and the hotel brand [5].

Key categories determining loyalty include service personalization, systematic attention to the details of consumer interactions, additional perceived value that guests obtain through service elements beyond the standard package, and the subjective perception that their individual needs and preferences are addressed on a personalized level rather than through standardized protocols. Emotional connections are formed through the quality of interpersonal interactions with staff, the carefully curated atmosphere of the hotel, aesthetic and ergonomic design parameters, and small but psychologically significant details that create a sense of individual care and psychological comfort.

These elements enhance the guest's subjective satisfaction, trust in the brand, and emotional attachment, as the client feels valued not merely as a source of revenue but as a unique individual with specific needs. In this context, loyalty is perceived not solely as a behavioral tendency for repeat visits but as a comprehensive attitude toward the brand that integrates a behavioral component (repeat transactions, increased spending on additional services) and an attitudinal component (emotional attachment, willingness to recommend, defending the brand's reputation in social discussions).

In the context of digital transformation and heightened consumer concern about safety and hygiene, contactless technological services play a vital role. Empirical research shows that integrating mobile applications for automated check-in, in-room online service ordering systems, and digital communication channels with staff positively impacts loyalty, particularly among clients who seek to minimize physical contact due to personal safety or health concerns [14]. However, it is important to note that the social aspect of direct interaction with staff can modulate this technological effect: for some guest segments, personal contact, empathetic communication, and human friendliness remain critical determinants of satisfaction, even if they highly value technological innovations.

Thus, the modern theoretical approach to loyalty formation in hospitality integrates functional, emotional, and technological components into a single system for managing the consumer experience. Service personalization, systematic attention to interaction details, and strategic creation of emotional connections provide a strong foundation for long-term loyalty. In contrast, digital and contactless services enhance this effect, particularly in the context of contemporary expectations for safety, convenience, and technological efficiency. This comprehensive, multidisciplinary approach allows hospitality enterprises to build sustainable customer loyalty and create differentiated competitive advantages in a dynamic, highly competitive market.

In contemporary hospitality, digital transformation and technological innovation increasingly influence guest loyalty. Theoretical approaches related to the Industry 4.0 concept emphasize that the use of advanced technologies – such as big data, the Internet of Things (IoT), process automation, and personalized digital interfaces – can significantly enhance perceived service quality and create a convenient, efficient, and emotionally comfortable experience [3].

Digitalization allows guests to feel control over the service process, reduce waiting times, and receive personalized recommendations based on previous visits and preferences. For example, mobile booking apps, electronic check-in, digital keys, chatbots, and in-room service ordering systems significantly increase convenience and reduce stress during the stay. This generates additional satisfaction and influences the guest's decision to revisit and recommend the establishment to others.

Simultaneously, sustainable practices are gaining attention as drivers of loyalty. Modern consumers increasingly consider environmental and social aspects of hotel operations when making decisions. Programs for energy saving, waste sorting, eco-friendly materials, and support for local producers meet guest expectations and create additional value and trust in the brand. Research indicates that guests are more likely to show loyalty to establishments that transparently communicate their “green” practices and demonstrate their authenticity [29].

Thus, digital transformation and sustainable practices are essential determinants of modern loyalty. They do not replace traditional service aspects – cleanliness, comfort, and friendly staff – but significantly enhance their effect. Hotels that integrate technology, personalize experiences, and simultaneously adhere to sustainability principles gain a competitive advantage and build a stable base of loyal clients. This

comprehensive approach satisfies functional and emotional guest needs in a contemporary digital and socially responsible environment.

Additionally, perception of sustainable environmental, social, and economic hotel practices is an essential driver of loyalty: when guests consider sustainability claims authentic and feel that these practices align with their values, stable loyalty and intentions for repeat visits increase [8].

**Integrated Models.** In contemporary literature, integrated models combining several aforementioned theories have become popular. Integrative loyalty models in hospitality combine multiple theoretical approaches to comprehensively reflect the relationship between perceived service quality, perceived value, satisfaction, and customer loyalty. These models are based on the idea that satisfaction is a key mediator through which quality and value influence repeat visit intentions and attitudinal brand commitment [30].

Integrated models combine classical approaches such as Satisfaction Theory, SERVQUAL for assessing perceived quality, Expectation Confirmation Theory (ECT), and approaches that consider Customer Experience and the emotional components of service. Additionally, modern aspects of digitalization and sustainability are included, as they affect perceived value and build brand trust [4; 29]. Such models allow hotel managers to evaluate which factors most strongly influence guest satisfaction and, consequently, loyalty and develop comprehensive strategies for managing customer experience, where functional, emotional, technological, and socio-environmental aspects are interrelated.

Equally important theoretically in loyalty formation is the role of staff and the internal service climate. Hotel employees act as direct agents of customer interaction, significantly influencing perceived service quality, guest emotional experience, and satisfaction. Research shows that staff awareness of loyalty program goals, understanding of incentive mechanisms, and attitudes toward these programs directly determine the effectiveness of such initiatives [16].

Suppose employees do not support the loyalty concept, fail to understand how their actions affect guest satisfaction, or feel an additional workload without appropriate motivation. In that case, external marketing efforts may be ineffective. For example, even well-designed bonus programs or personalized offers will not achieve the desired result if staff do not ensure service consistency, attention to detail, and the guest's emotional comfort.

Service climate describes the atmosphere within an organization, including service standards, internal rules, motivation, and communication among employees. When the service climate is favorable, employees are more likely to show initiative, demonstrate empathy, and ensure consistency in service delivery. This, in turn, enhances guest satisfaction, increases the effectiveness of loyalty programs, and fosters stable customer attachment.

Thus, managing the internal service climate and developing staff competencies are crucial for integrated loyalty strategies. Guest loyalty is shaped not only through external marketing efforts but also through the quality of the internal organizational culture, staff professionalism, and their commitment to the service concept and customer value.

## 2.5. Summary of theoretical approaches to customer loyalty formation in hospitality

It is important to note that customer loyalty formation in hospitality is a multidimensional process that combines classical and contemporary theoretical approaches. Table 2 summarizes the main concepts used to assess perceived quality, satisfaction, emotional experience, digitalization, and the role of staff, demonstrating their contribution to guest loyalty formation.

Table 2  
Key theoretical concepts for customer loyalty formation in hospitality

Nº	Concept	Content	Application in Hospitality
1	Satisfaction Theory	Loyalty is formed through guest satisfaction	Determines how well the service experience meets expectations
2	SERVQUAL	Measures perceived service quality across five dimensions: reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, tangibles	Assesses strengths and weaknesses of service, identifies priorities for improving loyalty
3	Expectation Confirmation Theory (ECT)	Satisfaction increases if experience meets or exceeds expectations	Explains why loyalty develops after service consumption
4	Customer Experience / Emotional Approaches	Loyalty is shaped through the guest's emotional, sensory, and social experience	Evaluates the importance of personalization, atmosphere, and unique experiences
5	Grounded Theory (Integrative Models)	Includes functional, emotional, technological, and additional value factors as drivers of loyalty	Identifies which aspects of guest experience most strongly influence repeat visits
6	Industry 4.0 / Digitalization and Sustainability	Technologies and sustainable practices enhance convenience, satisfaction, and trust	Uses big data, IoT, automation, personalized services, and "green" initiatives
7	Service Climate / Role of Staff	Internal service climate and staff attitudes determine the effectiveness of loyalty programs	Professionalism, support for loyalty concepts, and attention to detail impact satisfaction and repeat visits

Source: compiled by the author based on [1; 3–5; 8; 14; 16; 19; 20; 29; 30]

Thus, loyalty formation in hospitality is based on a comprehensive combination of theoretical approaches: from evaluating perceived quality and satisfaction to emotional experience, digitalization, and internal service climate. This emphasizes the importance of an integrated approach, where each component interacts with others, ensuring stable behavioral and attitudinal loyalty among guests.

## Chapter 3. Innovations as a tool for attracting and retaining customers

### 3.1. Key vectors of innovation in hospitality

In exponential technological development and evolving consumer expectations, hotel enterprises need systematic implementation of innovative solutions to maintain competitiveness and ensure high service standards. Innovations have transformed

from an optional differentiation tool into a critical determinant of market survival and strategic development in hospitality.

Digitalization of customer service represents one of the priority vectors of innovation. The integration of chatbots, functional mobile applications, and automated booking systems allows optimization of guest interaction processes, reduced waiting times, and improved operational efficiency. Mobile applications enable guests to check in contactlessly, access rooms digitally, and order services without physical interaction with reception staff, enhancing the customer experience and optimizing workforce allocation.

Service personalization relies on the systematic collection and analytical processing of data on guest preferences, enabling the creation of individualized service packages tailored to each client's specific needs. Based on stay history, hotels can generate targeted offers that maximize conversion probability and increase subjective satisfaction. This approach fosters emotional attachment and strengthens behavioral loyalty.

Sustainable development and eco-innovations are gaining critical importance amid growing demand for environmentally responsible services. Implementing energy-efficient technologies, using renewable energy sources, and eliminating single-use plastics align with evolving consumer values. Hotels that obtain environmental certifications gain competitive advantages in attracting conscious consumers oriented toward sustainable tourism principles.

Operational management innovations optimize internal processes, reduce costs, and enhance adaptability to a dynamic market environment. Automated management systems, big data analytics for demand forecasting, and dynamic pricing provide strategic flexibility for enterprises responding to volatile market conditions.

### **3.2. Technological innovations: artificial intelligence, internet of things, and data analytics**

Technological innovations are a key determinant of competitiveness, enabling deep customer engagement by creating a differentiated service experience. The dynamics of consumer expectations require proactive implementation of technologies to establish new quality standards and points of competitive differentiation.

Artificial intelligence allows hotel enterprises to enhance service by automating routine operations and providing a personalized approach. Chatbots and virtual assistants reduce response times to guest inquiries, improving satisfaction and building a positive reputation. Machine learning systems for demand forecasting help anticipate peak occupancy, optimize staffing and infrastructure resources, and minimize losses from disruptions or overstock. Ukrainian studies emphasize that modern automation significantly impacts service quality, economic efficiency, and competitive advantage in hospitality enterprises [22]. AI algorithms are used for dynamic pricing, analysis of consumption behavior patterns, and optimization of marketing costs, allowing reactive and predictive management.

However, AI implementation faces challenges: the need for high-quality data, a shortage of qualified specialists to configure models, and the requirement for clear ethical and legal frameworks, particularly regarding the processing of guest personal data. Without these elements, the technology's potential cannot be fully realized.

The Internet of Things introduces an additional dimension of innovation through smart devices: thermostats, lighting, security, and climate systems that are remotely or automatically controlled. This enhances guest comfort and reduces energy and maintenance costs. In the Ukrainian context, studies on energy efficiency demonstrate that optimizing energy systems leads to cost savings and improved service quality through fewer technical failures [10]. Integrating AI with IoT supports sustainable development, lowers electricity costs, and enhances ecological reputation.

IoT technologies create an intelligent environment where guests gain individual control over their stay parameters – temperature, lighting, security – via mobile apps. Such an environment fosters a sense of personalization and increases loyalty in a competitive market.

Big data analytics serves as a connecting element that maximizes the effectiveness of AI and IoT. Analysis of guest behavior, preferences, booking history, and communication channels provides a reliable foundation for managerial decision-making. Personalized marketing campaigns and customer segmentation increase profitability and reduce costs of untargeted actions [12; 22]. Analytics allows pricing optimization based on the competitive environment and market demand dynamics. Even in crises, transformations force businesses to actively use digitalization and analytical approaches to management [17; 18].

Technological innovations are synergistic: only their integration creates the efficiency necessary to achieve competitive advantage. Investments in AI without high-quality data are ineffective; IoT solutions require integration with management structures and staff support. Risks must be considered – high initial investments, shortage of skilled professionals, cybersecurity threats, and ethical data protection issues.

For hotels, the key is not the application of individual technologies but building an innovative ecosystem where AI, IoT, and data analytics operate interactively: automating service, personalizing experiences, optimizing resources, and ensuring sustainability. This approach allows for the generation of demand, the establishment of new service standards, and the creation of emotional bonds with consumers, which becomes a decisive factor in a competitive environment.

### **3.3. Non-technological innovations: eco-certification, personalization, and digital experience**

When studying innovations, it is essential to focus on approaches beyond technological solutions that are significant for consumers and the market: green certification and environmental standards, personalized offers, and virtual and augmented reality technologies.

1. Green certification and environmental standards. Obtaining eco-certification confirms a hotel's commitment to sustainable development, minimizing environmental impact, and complying with ecological regulations. Holiday Inn Kyiv officially received the Green Key certificate in Ukraine in October 2024. Bukovel Resort is actively preparing for certification through sustainability seminars. Apart Hotel Shelter in Bukovel also received Green Key [28].

Green certification serves several functions in enhancing competitiveness. First, it acts as a trust marker for conscious tourists who select hotels based on environmental

impact. Second, it encourages more efficient resource usage – energy, water, materials – reducing operational costs. Third, it becomes part of a marketing strategy: certified hotels gain an advantage in promotion.

Implementing environmental standards poses challenges: investment in infrastructure modernization, changes in operational processes, documentation, and regular audits. In the Ukrainian context, it is important to consider resource price volatility, logistics issues for eco-materials, and the need to raise staff awareness.

2. Service and marketing personalization. Using data on previous stays, booking history, and guest preferences, hotels create individualized offers that exceed expectations. Ukrainian media provide examples of how personalized services increase loyalty: hotels analyze reviews and social media to offer relevant services [19].

Personalized offers correlate with higher satisfaction and repeat visits, especially when guests feel their preferences are considered. This increases average revenue per guest and reduces costs associated with low-effectiveness mass marketing campaigns.

Personalization challenges include data privacy protection, collecting high-quality data, integrating multiple sources, and implementation costs. Excessive personalization can create a perception of privacy invasion.

3. Virtual and augmented reality technologies. Virtual tours of hotel facilities, grounds, and spa centers provide guests with a complete understanding of the service, reducing information asymmetry and increasing trust. Augmented reality is used to visualize amenities or create interactive content.

Scientific studies confirm that digital tours increase engagement and user satisfaction, especially with thoughtful design [32]. In Ukraine, the technology is actively discussed in the context of marketing and customer engagement, even before booking.

Innovative approaches can complement each other. A hotel with Green Key certification can integrate environmental responsibility into personalized communication, while a virtual tour demonstrates the implementation of green practices. Such an integrated approach enhances reputation and reduces the risk of discrepancies between expectations and actual quality.

### **3.4. Practical recommendations for Ukrainian hospitality enterprises**

For Ukrainian hotels, several aspects of innovation implementation are critical. First, setting priorities considering available resources: choose initiatives that bring maximum effect with minimal cost – second, establishing a system for collecting and analyzing guest data for service personalization while ensuring information security, and third, selecting partners and suppliers that comply with ecological and digital standards. Fourth, investing in modern design of digital solutions with user-friendly interfaces and creating a holistic marketing narrative that combines technology, sustainability, personalization, and innovative communication to build a competitive advantage.

The research results of innovative approaches in hospitality are summarized and presented in Table 3.

Table 3  
**Innovative Approaches in Hospitality**

Innovation Area	Essence / Technology	Benefits for the Hotel
Artificial Intelligence (AI)	Chatbots, virtual assistants, demand forecasting	Optimization of staff workflow, increased efficiency, cost reduction
Internet of Things (IoT)	Smart thermostats, lighting, security systems	Energy savings, resource control, improved comfort
Big Data and Analytics	Collection and analysis of guest behavior data	More accurate planning, effective marketing, flexible pricing
Green Certification (Green Key, EarthCheck)	Implementation of eco-standards and energy-saving technologies	Enhanced reputation, reduced resource costs
Personalized Offers	Use of CRM and historical booking data	Increased loyalty, repeat visits
Virtual and Augmented Reality (VR/AR)	Virtual tours, 3D presentations of rooms and services	Higher booking conversion, improved marketing

*Source: compiled by the author based on [10; 12; 17–19; 22; 23; 24; 28; 32]*

Thus, hotel and restaurant industry innovations have become a key factor in enhancing competitiveness and shaping a positive brand image. Using artificial intelligence, big data, eco-technologies, digital services, and VR/AR solutions allows hotels to optimize internal processes and create a personalized, comfortable, and emotionally engaging experience for guests. Implementing such technologies requires a well-thought-out strategy, partnerships with innovative suppliers, and a focus on sustainable development, ultimately leading to increased customer loyalty and stable competitive advantages in the market.

### Conclusions

Studying innovative approaches to fostering consumer loyalty in the hospitality sector allows us to formulate several conceptual conclusions regarding the transformation of competitive mechanisms in the modern hotel industry.

Consumer behavior in the hospitality sector is characterized by fundamental specificities that distinguish it from traditional goods markets: the predominance of intangible, emotionally charged components over services' functional and technical parameters. The inseparability of the service from its delivery process and the high level of subjectivity in quality perception make emotional experience, personalized staff attention, and the atmosphere of the establishment critically crucial for shaping consumer satisfaction.

The formation of consumer loyalty is a multidimensional process determined by the complex interaction of rational-cognitive, emotional-affective, and behavioral components. The integration of theoretical approaches demonstrates that the guest's subjective satisfaction acts as a critical mediating variable, transmitting the influence from perceived service quality to behavioral intentions for repeat visits and generating positive recommendations. Loyalty manifests in two interrelated forms: behavioral (repeat transactions, intensified use of services) and attitudinal (emotional attachment, brand advocacy, active recommendations).

Digital transformation has fundamentally restructured consumer decision-making mechanisms: online reviews and social media have become dominant sources of information, reducing information asymmetry. Managing online reputation has become a strategic imperative for competitiveness. At the same time, the significance of environmental consciousness is increasing: hotels that systematically implement sustainable practices and communicate their authenticity gain competitive advantages among environmentally aware consumers.

Innovative approaches have evolved from an optional differentiation tool to a critical determinant of market survival. Technological innovations – artificial intelligence, the Internet of Things, big data analytics – demonstrate maximum effectiveness in synergistic interaction, optimizing operational processes, increasing energy efficiency, and ensuring personalized communication. Non-technological innovations – eco-certification, customized offers, virtual reality technologies – create additional dimensions of competitive advantage.

Thus, effective loyalty management in the modern hospitality industry requires a multidisciplinary approach that integrates functional, emotional, and technological components into a holistic system for managing the consumer experience, focused on building long-term, emotionally rich relationships with clients and creating sustainable competitive advantages in a dynamic market environment.

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