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CUSTOMER LOYALTY FORMATION IN THE HOTEL INDUSTRY

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Customer loyalty formation in the hotel industry is a key strategic objective, grounded in a combination of theoretical approaches that explain how guests move from one-time service use to repeat visits, recommendations, and an emotional connection with the brand. In the academic literature, several major theories and models are most commonly applied to analyse loyalty, including satisfaction theory, perceived value theory, the SERVQUAL model, and expectation confirmation approaches. In addition, contemporary concepts increasingly incorporate the principles of sustainable development and corporate social responsibility, as well as digitalisation and personalisation [1; 2; 3; 4].

Satisfaction theory and perceived service quality are key approaches to understanding how guest loyalty is formed in the hotel industry. The main idea is that guest satisfaction acts as an intermediary factor between perceived service quality, the value of the service, and the intention to use the establishment's services again or recommend it to others. This means that even if a customer considers a service to be high-quality and useful, without a positive experience that fosters emotional satisfaction, full loyalty will not develop [2].

The SERVQUAL service quality model is one of the most widely used methods for assessing perceived service quality in the hospitality and tourism industries. It is based on five key dimensions including reliability, which reflects the establishment's ability to fulfil promises accurately and on time;

responsiveness, that is, the staff's readiness to respond quickly to guests' needs; assurance, which includes employee competence and their ability to inspire trust; empathy, which determines the level of individual attention and understanding of customer needs; and tangibles, which include physical interior and exterior infrastructure, equipment, cleanliness, and the presentability of the premises [1].

Integrated loyalty models in the hotel industry combine several theoretical approaches to comprehensively capture the relationship between perceived service quality, perceived value, satisfaction, and customer loyalty. These models are based on the idea that satisfaction acts as a key mediator through which quality and value influence the intention to revisit and form brand loyalty [2].

In hospitality, guest satisfaction encompasses both rational and emotional aspects. Rational aspects include room cleanliness, furniture comfort, service speed and accuracy, food quality, and the functionality of technical services. Emotional aspects include the establishment's atmosphere, the friendliness and attentiveness of the staff, and small details that create a sense of care and a personalised approach. For example, staff who remember guest's preferences, greet them by name, or offer their favourite drink create additional emotional value, enhancing satisfaction. Similarly, a pleasant atmosphere in the lobby, background music, scents, or design details in the rooms enhance the emotional experience and reinforce a positive perception of the establishment [4].

Digitalisation allows guests to feel in control of the service process, reduces wait times, and provides personalised recommendations based on their previous visits and preferences. For example, mobile booking apps, online check-in, digital keys, chatbots, and in-room ordering systems significantly enhance convenience and reduce stress during a stay. This creates an additional sense of satisfaction and influences the guest's decision to revisit the establishment and to recommend it to others [3].

At the same time, sustainable practices are gaining increasing attention as a factor in building loyalty. Modern consumers are taking into account the environmental and social aspects of a hotel's operations when making decisions. In particular, energy-saving programs, waste sorting, the use of eco-friendly materials, and support for local producers not only meet guests' expectations but also add value and build trust in the brand. Guests tend to show loyalty to establishments that openly communicate their "green" practices and demonstrate the authenticity of these actions. It was also noted that guests' perception of a hotel's sustainable environmental, social, and economic practices is a key driver of loyalty, thus, when guests perceive sustainability claims as authentic and feel that these practices align with their values, their loyalty and intention to return increase [3].

Main theoretical concepts and approaches for building customer loyalty in the hotel industry are presented in Table 1.

Table 1.

Theoretical concepts for customer loyalty formation in the hotel industry

№	Concept	Content	Application in the Hotel Industry
1	2	3	4
1	Satisfaction theory (Perceived service quality)	Loyalty is built through guest satisfaction	Determines the extent to which the service experience meets expectations
2	SERVQUAL	Measuring perceived service quality across five dimensions (reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and physical environment)	Assesses service strengths and weaknesses, setting priorities to increase loyalty
3	Expectation confirmation theory	Satisfaction increases if the experience meets or exceeds expectations	Explains why loyalty is formed after service consumption
4	Integrative models	Include functional, emotional, technological, and additional values as factors of loyalty	Identify which aspects of the guest experience most influence repeat visits
5	Digitalization and sustainable development	Technologies and sustainable practices enhance convenience, satisfaction, and trust	Demonstrates how automation, personalized services, and "green" practices influence customers' loyalty
6	Employee role approach	Internal service climate and staff attitudes determine the effectiveness of loyalty programs	Professionalism, commitment to the concept of loyalty, and attention to detail influence satisfaction and repeat visits

Source: compiled by author based on [1; 2; 3; 4]

Overall, customer loyalty in the hotel industry is built on a comprehensive combination of approaches: from assessing perceived quality and satisfaction to emotional experiences, digitalisation, and the internal service culture of personnel. This underscores the importance of an integrated approach, in which each component interacts with the others to ensure sustained behavioural and attitudinal loyalty among guests.

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TIKTOK AS A MARKETING TOOL FOR HOTEL PROMOTION

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Social media platforms have become an integral part of everyday life, occupying a substantial share of users' time and significantly influencing communication patterns and consumer behaviour. The number of social media users is constantly growing, having achieved millions of monthly active users worldwide (Pic. 1), and nowadays TikTok is among the most rapidly growing global audiences. The application had around 1.990 million global users at the end of 2025, with projections estimating growth to approximately 1.9 billion by 2029. Within country rankings, the United States led with 135 million users, followed by Indonesia with 107 million and Brazil with 92 million [1].

In this context, hospitality enterprises are increasingly utilising social media platforms as effective tools for brand promotion and customer engagement. In particular, TikTok has emerged as a powerful digital marketing platform due to its dynamic content formats and extremely high user engagement [2]. Hotels and restaurants actively employ TikTok to promote their services and attract new visitors. Furthermore, it helps strengthen brand awareness because the platform's extensive, diverse user base includes individuals from various age groups, social backgrounds, and income levels,