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**The Impact of Loyalty Programmes on Brand
Loyalty in UK Luxury Hotel Chains: A Study of
Emotional, Experiential, and Behavioural Responses**

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate the impact of loyalty programmes on brand loyalty among UK-based luxury hotel chains. Three major hotel brands: Marriott, Four Seasons, and Peninsula Hotels were selected. The study employed a qualitative case study methodology, using semi-structured interviews with 11 participants. Thematic analysis revealed eight core themes: loyalty models, personalisation and memory, emotional connection and belonging, service recovery, exclusivity and signalling, valued features, advocacy and brand relationship drivers, and improvement ideas. The findings indicate that while points-based systems are effective for driving behavioural loyalty through tangible benefits, experiential and invitation-based models are crucial for fostering attitudinal loyalty. Selective advocacy, preference portability, and curated experiences emerged as key opportunities for programme innovation. This study contributes to luxury hospitality research by highlighting the interplay between transactional and emotional (or relational) loyalty and offers practical, brand-specific recommendations for enhancing loyalty strategies in the premium hotel sector.

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Chapter One: Introduction to the Study

1.1. Background

Increasing competition within the hospitality sector has created a need to improve the quality of guest services in relation to several factors, including guest loyalty (Luo and Qu, 2016). Guest loyalty is essential to the success of the hospitality sector, especially given the shifts in consumer expectations (Tefera and Govender, 2017). Hospitality sector consumers not only look for genuine services from their service provider but also look for a better customer experience as part of their stay. With the rise of digitalisation, customers often have more touchpoints with the hotel (Collins, 2023) and may seek better amenities, write reviews and share with their community on their experience with specific hotels (Sanchez-Gonzalez and Gonzalez-Fernandez, 2021).

A loyalty programme or rewards programme is intended to help understand consumer needs, provide tangible benefits, and maintain their intention to revisit the hospitality brand (Tanford et al., 2016). Traditionally the role of loyalty programmes was largely to achieve more tangible benefits like late check outs, room upgrades, free Wi-Fi, and discounts for restaurants or other activities (Koo et al., 2020). This was achieved through the accumulation of points by being loyal to the hotel (Chun et al., 2020). More recently there has been a shift away from purely tangible benefits to intangible benefits like exclusive experiences, upgrades, and lifestyle benefits, particularly following the Covid-19 pandemic (Kim et al., 2023). More attention is being paid to emotional and experiential factors which could build strong customer loyalty and to highlighting the need for better retention and advocacy. In the context of loyalty building, the ability to differentiate from rivals with respect to customer touchpoints, providing distinctive experiences through brand identity and brand association, is important (Reitsamer et al., 2024). This dissertation will present an evaluation of loyalty building, with a specific focus on existing loyalty programmes and their influence on the UK luxury hospitality sector.

1.2. Industry Context and Rationale

There are 854 luxury hotels in the UK, with a 10 per cent annual increase between 2022 and 2023. This is associated with a consistent increase in occupancy rate and average room rate (Global Data, 2025). For example, there has been 10 per cent growth in the occupancy rate since 2019. The average room rate increased from £214 in January 2019 to £424 in December 2024 (RSM UK, 2024).

Despite these positive trends, there are some concerns. For example, evidence shows that the hospitality industry is saturated with options, with some boutique hotels and luxury homestays being considered as an alternative to luxury hotels (Intel, 2024). There is also the rising cost of customer acquisition. Extant literature on customer acquisition costs in the hospitality industry shows that it is much more expensive to acquire a new customer than to retain an existing one (Hyun and Perdue, 2017). Particularly in the hospitality sector, this can rise to five to seven times the underlying costs. According to Akbar and Tracogna (2018), 48 per cent of consumers had been frustrated by interactions they had had in the past year and 51 per cent wanted to leave brands which do not personalise their experience. There is strong evidence to show that data-driven operations can create a path to personalisation. For example, Stewart (2024) recognises that a personalised guest experience through loyalty programme participation can improve guest satisfaction by 15 per cent. Furthermore, 81 per cent of travellers are willing to pay more for personalisation and want hotels to use their data in an optimal manner. Loyalty programmes which are driven by such data can play a key role in achieving these outcomes.

Another important factor linked to loyalty building in the luxury sector is to maintain the brand image. Satornsantikul and Nuangjamnong (2022) posit that by positioning loyalty programmes as a way to build emotional connections with the consumer, it is possible to bring in personalised brand experiences. Evidence also shows that a luxury consumer who purchases from a brand is willing to pay a premium for both tangible and intangible benefits (Gallart-Camahort et al., 2021). Luxury programmes offer rewards, personalised services and unique experiences which play a role in repeat purchase and increased lifetime value (Hassan et al., 2018). Furthermore, loyalty programmes that include benefits like referrals can make customers brand ambassadors, creating opportunities for new consumer acquisition.

Most of the loyalty programme-related research focuses on traditional models that have prioritised transactional benefits (Ahmed and Alzoubi, 2020). This research intends to look beyond this, as luxury hotel guests are looking for factors that can provide meaning beyond financial rewards through preferences for symbolic elements and an emotional connection with the brand.

1.3.Problem Statement

Although loyalty programmes are well established across the wider hospitality and retail sectors, their specific implementation and efficacy within the luxury hotel market remains under-researched. Clients of luxury hotels tend to prioritise experiential value, bespoke service, and elevated social standing over purely monetary rewards, dimensions that traditional, points-based systems may fail to address adequately. Therefore, examining the role of loyalty programmes in fostering brand loyalty within the luxury hospitality context represents a relevant and necessary area of academic investigation.

Despite the abundance of research on customer loyalty and loyalty programmes in the broader hospitality industry, studies specifically targeting the luxury hotel segment are relatively scarce. Much of the existing literature tends to generalise across hotel categories or focus on measurable outcomes such as customer retention rates and revenue metrics. As a result, there is limited academic understanding of the emotional and symbolic aspects of brand loyalty in luxury hospitality, where brand perception and experiential quality are central to guest satisfaction.

This dissertation seeks to address this gap by examining how luxury clientele perceive and emotionally engage with loyalty initiatives. It endeavours to enhance theoretical understanding of loyalty development by investigating both behavioural loyalty, such as repeat visits, and attitudinal loyalty, including emotional connection and brand advocacy. The analysis is grounded in qualitative themes derived from existing scholarly literature and industry discourse.

1.4.Research Aim and Objectives

a. Research Aim

The principal research aim is to critically investigate how loyalty programmes influence brand loyalty in UK-based chain luxury hotels, focusing on the emotional, experiential, and behavioural responses of their clientele.

b. Research Objectives

The research objectives are as follows.

- ☐ To examine how loyalty programmes in UK-based chain luxury hotels drive both behavioural loyalty and attitudinal loyalty.

- To explore the emotional and experiential dimensions of loyalty and their impact on guest perceptions.
- To identify the specific loyalty programme features most valued by luxury clients, and how this brand engagement, and reasons for returning.
- To assess how valued loyalty programme features shape advocacy, reasons for returning, and selective brand recommendations in the luxury hotel sector.
- To examine guest suggestions for innovation and improvement in loyalty programmes, focusing on personalisation, cultural experiences, and digital preference portability.

1.5. Justification for the Study

This research contributes to academic discourse on customer loyalty by addressing a gap present in existing literature, namely the emotional and experiential dimensions of loyalty within the luxury sector. There has been considerable research to understand how loyalty programmes may impact success within the hospitality sector. However, most of this research has focused on transactional factors and mechanisms, including repeat purchase behaviour and sensitivity to discounts. In contrast, the purpose of this dissertation is to extend beyond this transactional focus to look at attitudinal loyalty, a form of commitment characterised by the connection a customer feels towards a brand, often leading them to engage in brand advocacy.

Through this research, we also intend to explore how loyalty programmes could potentially foster attitudinal loyalty and create psychological attachment in the minds of consumers, an aspect that has been underexplored within the context of peer-reviewed research in luxury hospitality. This study is grounded in important theoretical frameworks such as relationship marketing and service-dominant logic, and it extends these theories by considering the role of intangible factors like emotional and symbolic value and their influence on both behavioural and attitudinal loyalty. This theoretical integration aims to enhance understanding of how loyalty develops and is maintained in the high involvement and experience-driven luxury hotel sector.

From a managerial perspective, this study intends to provide actionable information regarding how loyalty initiatives are perceived by consumers. Guests who frequent luxury hotel chains belong to a specific demographic, and their expectations from loyalty programmes may differ from those in other sectors. These expectations could include prioritised personalised services, exclusivity, and a strong sense of brand experience or engagement. This research aims to understand which aspects of loyalty programmes are most valued by these customers and which

are perceived as less important. These insights can enable marketers to design and tailor loyalty programmes that better align with the lifestyles and identities of luxury guests.

1.6.Scope

This study focuses on the loyalty programmes of international luxury hotel chains currently operating in the UK, with particular emphasis on Marriott, Four Seasons, and the Peninsula. It examines both the structural features of these programmes and customer perceptions. Key areas of investigation include guest awareness, engagement with loyalty initiatives, and expectations from the programmes, along with their influence on behavioural intent. The study considers both behavioural aspects, such as frequency of stay, and attitudinal factors, including emotional commitment and willingness to act as brand ambassadors. Emphasis is placed on understanding loyalty as a relationship-building tool, extending beyond transactional incentives. Specific attention is given to the role of symbolic rewards, social recognition, and the creation of personal connections within the loyalty strategies employed by these hotels.

1.7.Delimitations

To ensure that there is focus and relevance, this dissertation does not include findings from budget, boutique or mid-range hotels. The geographic scope is restricted to the UK, focusing on three case study organisations. The study does not engage in a detailed operational or financial analysis of specific loyalty programmes. The research centres on the perspectives of consumers who are aware of the loyalty programme prioritising emotional, experiential and behavioural responses.

1.8.Structure

This dissertation is organised in five chapters. Chapter One presents the background of the study and the rationale. Chapter Two presents an in-depth review of literature, focusing on both theoretical and empirical research on the subject. Chapter Three presents an overview of the research design, data collection and sampling. Chapter Four details the study findings and discusses these findings in relation to the study's research objectives. Chapter Five concludes the study by presenting the study recommendations, future research directions and limitations.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1.Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present the review of literature of the study. The chapter begins with an evaluation of the dimensions of loyalty. This is followed by a discussion on the core dimensions, importance of loyalty initiatives and finally comparison of the loyalty programme models (traditional and non-traditional) within the chosen organisations.

2.2. Behavioural and Attitudinal Loyalty in Luxury Hospitality: Foundations for Guest Commitment

Extant literature acknowledges that loyalty is a key element of the hotel business strategy contributing to long-term competitive advantage (Dixit et al., 2019). Large global corporations in the hospitality sector focus on brand-based loyalty development as key to achieving customer retention (Dixit et al., 2019). Consumer demand for brand experience and brand engagement (Ong et al., 2018) has brought attention back to brand loyalty and its relevance. Loyalty was conceptualised by early theorists from a behavioural perspective, focusing on repurchase action as the core outcome (Rather et al., 2019). However, authors soon recognised that such a unidimensional approach to defining loyalty is not effective and there is a need to include assessments of consumer belief, attitude and affect. This led to a focus on both behavioural and attitudinal aspects of loyalty (Oliver, 1999). In this review of literature, we focus on prior conceptualisations of loyalty as a multidimensional construct by identifying diverse attributes within attitudinal and behavioural loyalty.

Behavioural Loyalty

The first core attribute of behavioural loyalty is repurchasing intent. A common and well-established metric of loyalty is repurchasing intent, as identified across multiple studies (Curtis et al., 2011). Furthermore, Karunaratna and Kumara (2018) identify that a favourable purchase intent is essential to the long-term organisation-consumer relationship. In the hotel industry, as Khan et al. (2015) recognise, the intention to revisit the same hotel is one of the biggest indicators of consumer loyalty (Gorska-Warsewicz and Kulykovets, 2020).

The second attribute of behavioural loyalty is cooperation. In their seminal research, Morgan and Hunt (1994) recognise that cooperation is a core behavioural outcome of any behavioural

exchange. More recently, this concept of cooperation has been extended to co-participation or co-production of this experience (Ahmad, 2016). As Merken (2016) argues, in the growing digital service economy, customer-driven engagement with the brand with respect to sharing content and making comments could add significant value to the firm. Therefore, as Akhgari and Bruning (2024) posit, the more cooperative contribution with an organisation there is, especially positive co-production, the greater the loyalty to the brand. Akhgari and Bruning (2024) argue that though the concept of cooperation has previously been identified as a behavioural outcome or predictor of loyalty, in the current service economy, cooperation is a core behavioural outcome of an ongoing exchange relationship. According to Shulga and Busser (2020), customers play an essential role in value co-creation, which can enhance overall repurchase intent. Similarly, Chathoth et al. (2016) conclude that co-creation creates higher order engagement in hospitality, thereby impacting repurchase intent.

The third behavioural attribute contributing to loyalty is the notion of word of mouth (WoM). Consumer behaviour in the form of engaging in WoM is an indicator of behavioural loyalty (Marcos et al., 2022). According to Watson et al. (2018), in relational marketing, WoM shows strong evidence of consumers not only patronising or returning to a brand but also recommending it. In the hospitality industry, Kandampully et al. (2015) indicate that the future of loyalty extends to customer feedback and recommendation (i.e. WoM) engagement, especially through social media. Moliner-Velazquez et al. (2019) also recognise that eWoM is an important indicator of loyalty in the evolving digitalisation of services in hospitality industry.

Attitudinal Loyalty

Attitudinal loyalty is conceptualised as a psychological process that may influence customers' attitude to repeatedly choose one brand over others due to attitude or preferences (Khan et al., 2015). Attitudinal loyalty is more complex than behavioural loyalty as it focuses on the underlying factors that may drive repeated purchase and brand advocacy (Saini and Singh, 2020). Three important attitudinal loyalty components are discussed in this review, these being relationship satisfaction, continuance commitment and affective commitment.

Palmatier et al. (2006) defines relationship satisfaction as the affective and emotional state towards a relationship, examined in a cumulative manner over the entire history of exchange between the consumer and the brand. Relationship satisfaction is an affective indicator of loyalty as it indirectly contributes to increased purchase intent (Akhgari and Bruning, 2024).

Relationship satisfaction is also linked to the relational element of positive WoM (Lee, 2016). In an investigation of relational bonds, Shammout (2020) identifies that creating relationship satisfaction with the customer is an important indicator of behavioural loyalty.

Another aspect of attitudinal loyalty is consumer commitment (affective and continuance). Continuance commitment is the feeling of necessity a consumer may have in terms of wanting to stay with the brand. Continuance commitment could be driven by a moral obligation and the need for relationship consistency (Paisri et al., 2022). In the context of the tourism industry, Paisri et al. (2022) identify that continuance commitment in the hotel industry makes customers less likely to switch to other hotels. However, this kind of commitment could also mean that they are not as likely to act as WoM promoters of the hotel. Furthermore, they are less likely to highlight negative experiences that are minor.

Affective commitment is a more common indicator of attitudinal loyalty as it contextualises consumers' attachment to a firm and a brand. For example, affective commitment refers to attachment as the perception of favourableness (Li et al., 2020). Affective commitment is more emotional than rational, and such an effect can help in developing and maintaining loyalty. Affective commitment creates emotional and psychological bonds and can impact brand loyalty (Akhgari and Bruning, 2024). Evidence from the hospitality industry shows that where service quality and personalised interactions are key to success, affective commitment is essential to create an emotional connection. This emotional bond goes beyond transactional benefits to foster better engagement and patronage.

In summary, this review of literature posits that brand loyalty encompasses both behavioural aspects (repurchase intent, WoM, coproduction) and attitudinal dimensions (continuance and affective commitment, relationship satisfaction). In this dissertation, the aim is to understand how such dimensions of loyalty may impact UK-based hotel chains and their loyalty initiatives in influencing consumer loyalty.

2.3. Emotional and Experiential Influences on Guest Perceptions of Loyalty Programmes

According to Ogilvy One (2020), the adage of loyalty being earned has evolved to have new meaning wherein brands cannot simply focus on discounts and rewards as a way to generate loyalty. Consumers crave a connection with a brand and want to be loyal to brands that may resonate with their own values and aspirations. Therefore, it is becoming increasingly important to focus on the notion of emotional loyalty. Emotional loyalty is conceptualised as a

way to generate both sensory and intellectual engagement through better experience (Ghorbanzadeh, 2021).

Emotional branding is key to successful brand engagement as it helps bring customers close to organisations that align with their goals and identities. Emotional attachment to the brand is an indicator of loyalty, especially in scenarios where the customer feels as if the brand recognises their needs (Jindal et al., 2023). This may occur when the customer feels gratified with their experience with the brand. Ahmed et al. (2024) argue that such an emotional connection is particularly important in the hospitality sector. This is because at several touchpoints there is a chance that the consumer does not enjoy their experience with their stay. There is a focused need to create better experiences, not only through the right infrastructure and service quality but also by creating the right human moments. For example, Nixon and Rieple (2014) identify that in Ritz-Carlton there is a model whereby the staff are able to create bespoke moments, which can help staff to adopt autonomy to create a better experience for the consumer. The goal of emotional branding is to create an attachment or loyalty, resulting in brand advocacy.

The importance of symbolic consumption is recognised in the context of emotional brand building. According to Rincon et al. (2023), consumption is not just the satisfaction of the needs and desires of individuals, but rather a mediator of human relationships. Therefore, consumption is a social activity that can be facilitated through symbolic engagement with brand products. Customers want to show who they are through symbolic consumption, which makes choosing a brand crucial. In such consumption patterns, the role of the social network is pivotal to their practice. If their social network accepts the brand, they will be loyal to the companies that helped them fit in (Belk, 1984; Landon Jr, 1974). This is the perfect situation for businesses to work towards long-term viability, as they will keep providing goods to customers who identify with the company's principles and symbols (Andronie et al., 2021; Musova et al., 2021).

There are four aspects that can explain consumer behaviour when it comes to symbolic consumption (Sirgy, 1998). One is the consumer's real self-concept, which is how they see themselves. There is also their societal self-concept, which is their belief in how society perceives them. Then there is the ideal self-concept, which is what they desire to be. The last aspect of symbolic consumption is the individual's ideal social self-perception (Sirgy and Su, 2000). A number of studies, including those by Tangsupwattana and Liu (2018) and Barbosa and Rincon (2022), take lifestyle into account as a fifth component that clarifies symbolic

consumption. This is because, as previously mentioned, consumers' lifestyles define their purchasing patterns, which are unique to each individual (Han et al., 2020). By highlighting the ways in which customers build and transmit their identities through brands, symbolic consumption supplements this viewpoint. Rather than practical necessity, symbolic significance frequently outweighs prestige and self-expression in emotional consumption.

In the context of the luxury hospitality industry, the service design is another core aspect that may integrate consumers' emotional expectations with symbolic drivers. The service design in luxury hotels is found to be embody the need for sensory stimulation and service immersion (Tuominen and Ascencao, 2016). In luxury hotels, the design philosophy is not just the delivery of specific service quality expectations but rather the experience of the role of consumer strategy and engagement (Alfakhri et al., 2018). According to Lin and Choe (2022) there is a lack of knowledge regarding the factors that influence how someone understands, values or connects with a particular services during consumption. Customers' impression of an all-encompassing services cape is entropic (Orth et al., 2016). Therefore, it is possible that in a luxury setting, this impression of the service design may influence customers' overall emotional connection or ties to the brand. As Steriopoulos et al. (2024) conclude, such a design philosophy extends beyond simple product delivery to orchestrating an experience and could evoke affective response. In the specialist hotel industry, there can be better opportunities to curate this experience. In their reflection on a heritage themed hotel, Steriopoulos et al. (2024) contend that sensory experiences throughout the entire stay can create emotional engagement and loyalty extending beyond the simple metrics of value for money or expected service quality.

2.4. Loyalty Initiatives as Strategic Tools for Brand Identity, Guest Satisfaction, and Retention

The previous section focused on the role of emotional and experiential elements as essential to customer loyalty. In this section, the impact of such elements on the brand identity of the hospitality organisation and its implication is recognised.

According to da Silveira et al. (2013), both the academic community and businesses understand the need for a strong brand identity when it comes to handling brands successfully. From a static to a fluid strategy, from company-centred to customer-interactive, a multi-dimensional view of brand identity has evolved. Kapferer (1992) first proposed the term "brand identity" to describe the way a company sees and values its brands. The organisation determines this

identity by studying its consumers, rivals and the marketplace in depth (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2000). Designing a logo and tagline, geographical strategy, customer trend, staff grooming norms, organisation and culture are all intangible aspects of a hospitality brand's identity (Mohammed et al., 2016). For instance, to distinguish its brand from competitors, W Hotels uses colours, iconography, tone of voice and passion points (O'Neill and Mattila, 2010).

Businesses must re-evaluate their long-held assumptions in light of today's fast-paced market. While it is important for a brand to have a constant voice and look, consumers also see brand identities as evolving across time as a result of upper management and other stakeholders' collaborative efforts (da Silveira et al., 2013). According to da Silveira et al. (2013), there are two parts to a brand's identity: the core identity, which includes the most important and permanent parts of the brand, and the extended identity, which includes additional parts that can be changed depending on the situation. In this section, the importance of the extended identity created through brand prestige, storytelling and brand innovation is discussed.

Brand prestige in the context of luxury branding is a crucial factor impacting brand identity. In their research, Jin et al. (2016) conclude from their examination of the impact of brand prestige that prestige is crucial to trust and satisfaction. Customers are more likely to remain loyal to brands that can consistently maintain prestige as part of their brand identity. Furthermore, Lo and Yeung (2020) identify that brand prestige may impact guests' experiences within a luxury hotel. The prestige of the brand can be linked to the core identity of the brand and suggests that when hotels successfully communicate their identity and purpose, it could lead to both repeat patronage and more emotional engagement. Both these studies demonstrate the core value that the prestige of the brand brings to its identity. Prestige in luxury is not symbolic but rather a strategic tool that can be used in order to deepen customers' loyalty, to align their identity with not only superior service but also memorable experiences. There are hotels that leverage on their brand prestige and exceptional service. For example, the Four Seasons offers a preferred partner programme, providing bespoke travel experiences and opportunities to meet its guests' personalised itineraries. Its positioning of the loyalty programme here is an extension of its brand uniqueness and its prestige signals a shift towards personalisation and exclusivity.

Another determinant of brand identity is brand storytelling. Extant literature has shown that in luxury branding in general, storytelling is a valuable tool to reinforce brand identity and improve guest loyalty (Von Wachenfeldt, 2021). In the context of luxury hotels, Ryu et al. (2019) argue that narrative-driven strategies are often used with the goal of evoking emotional

responses to convey brand values and brand uniqueness. For example, Ryu et al. (2018) examined how brands' stories can influence consumers' perceptions within luxury hotels. The authors identified that when the narrative is well defined, it can create a specific identity linked to the brand. This can lead to narrative transportation, where the customer is immersed in the brand story, which enhances their image of the brand and may emotionally resonate with the brand. The study concluded that when guests connect with the brand's story, they are more likely to form a favourable attitude towards the brand and improve brand patronage. Ahmed et al. (2024) also contend that authentic storytelling can contribute to emotional engagement and brand distinction.

Therefore, storytelling is not just an addition to the communication strategy, but rather a core determinant to establishing brand identity. Storytelling can also lead to behavioural loyalty by encouraging customer co-production and WoM activities through the honest sharing of experiences, humanising the brand and creating a better sense of trust and connection to the brand. A good example of a brand using storytelling is Aman. Aman integrates storytelling as part of customer engagement and loyalty generation. It creates narratives to emphasise the uniqueness of its locations (Arantes et al., 2025). Every property has a narrative that is shared with members with an invitation to become part of this narrative. The storytelling strategy contributes to an emotional connection with the brand and can make guests brand advocates and brand ambassadors. If the consumer feels connected to the identity, then they are more likely to return to the brand and recommend it to others.

The final attribute discussed is brand innovation. According to Eroglu et al. (2016), innovation, whether technology- or human-centric, can play a key role in enhancing the customer experience as well as contributing to brand loyalty. In their investigation of service innovation and customer loyalty, Tai et al. (2021) conclude that innovation has to be both human-driven and technology-driven. They found that specific aspects like personalised service and emotional attentiveness given through human innovation become part of the brand identity and can generate better customer delight. This delight further increases customer loyalty. Giannoukou (2024) concludes that innovation should be central to brand building in the hospitality sector. In particular, technology innovations like AI-driven personalisation and mobile-enabled services could shift consumers' perception of the brand and encourage guest retention. Innovation should be a balance of both technology- and human-driven factors and can become a core differentiator that ultimately impacts brand identity and enhances the guest experience.

2.5. Comparing Loyalty Programme Models in Leading Luxury Hotel Brands

Loyalty programmes are considered key tools used to create better customer relationships and improve customer retention (Fook and Dastane, 2021). Loyalty programmes have been deployed in diverse ways in the luxury sector, however, and there can be distinct expectations from consumers who purchase luxury goods.

Traditional Approach

Koo et al. (2020) assert that in the midscale or cheap hotel segments, loyalty is associated with points-based systems that provide transactional advantages. Conversely, in the luxury sector, the loyalty programme emphasises recognition and individuality (Iyengar and Venkatesh, 2024). In contrast to other industries that employ a systematic tiered methodology for loyalty programmes based on points, there is an emphasis on customer value or significance. Zuo et al. (2017) assert that the majority of hotels implement reward programmes based on the number or frequency of stays, potentially leading to a tiered hotel loyalty system. Within the luxury hotel sector, hierarchical positioning correlates with prestige, establishing a symbolic hierarchy based on guest significance. In luxury hotels, the concept of tiers in the loyalty programme may be rooted in exclusivity as a factor influencing tier advancement (Wang, 2023). In lesser tiers, there may be an emphasis on advantages such as personalised greetings and room preferences. Conversely, in elevated tiers, advantages may include special event invitations, private dinners, and customised concierge services. The loyalty programme aims to preserve the exclusivity of the experience rather than commercialise recurring patronage, hence sustaining the image of luxury (Peng and Chen, 2019). The aforementioned evidence suggests that the tiered structure of loyalty programmes in hospitality organisations may be associated with emotional loyalty, stemming from trust and affective commitment.

Non-Traditional Approach

In contrast to other luxury sectors, the hospitality luxury business has recognised the need for and adopted experiential loyalty programmes, i.e. non-traditional loyalty. Loyalty membership can serve as a substantial intangible incentive for clients, depending on the robustness of the hotel brand. Lemmetyinen et al. (2016) assert that hoteliers should invest in branding to enhance brand recognition. The Ritz-Carlton emphasises the customisation of services. Dimitrakaki (2023) further notes that such companies may transcend conventional loyalty programmes that solely utilise a points-based reward system. This is due to their desire to establish stronger emotional connections with their guests (Nixon and Rieple, 2010). An

exemplary case is the Ritz-Carlton, where the Mystique platform serves as an adaptation of the loyalty programme. User data are gathered from previous visitor preferences and behaviours to provide personalised solutions. These personalisation features may encompass not only broad recognition but also preferred meal alternatives, room preferences, and other specific requirements. Moreover, at many luxury hospitality establishments, the concept of luxury programmes encompasses high-net-worth individuals and frequent luxury travellers who may have access to invitation-only accommodation. The objective of this patronage extends beyond the physical accommodation to encompass the overall stay experience, including event access, concierge services, and other intentional experiential requirements (Yang and Mattila, 2016).

Loyalty Programmes at Marriott, Peninsula and Four Seasons

At Marriott International, the Bonvoy loyalty programme has both traditional and experiential (non-traditional) elements. Therefore, it has a hybrid approach to loyalty programmes. The Bonvoy programme allows members to earn points on their hotel stays. These are then redeemed for transactional outcomes like an additional night of stay, upgrades if available in specific hotels, and partner rewards. There are different tiers of membership within the Bonvoy, including silver, gold, platinum, titanium and ambassador (Marriott International, 2023). Every level sees an escalation of benefits, which can create better behavioural loyalty. According to Papmehl (2020), higher tiers at Marriott are intended to improve emotional and experiential elements. However, there is a subtle shift away from transactional benefits to emotional benefits. Hospitality (2024) discusses how aspects like personalised welcome gifts are evident at the highest level, along with a personal travel advisor. There are opportunities for Marriott members to create 'moments' where they can use their points for curated events (Marriott Bonvoy Moments, 2024). This shows an extension beyond traditional aspects to focus on non-traditional emotional elements.

At the Four Seasons, there is no clear evidence of a points-based loyalty programme. The Four Seasons acknowledges that the goal is to create personalised and emotionally relevant services (Schlappig, 2024). It continues to reject a public tiered loyalty programme. According to Luxury Travel Diary (2024), this is based on the view that unique guest experiences are the goal of good service. The hotel does not want to have transactional models like points and tiers which could be indicative of ultra luxury branding. To successfully create its loyalty programme and branding, significant investment is made in staff training. Staff are trained to give individualised consideration. To implement the non-traditional loyalty programme

successfully, the staff are also given autonomy to give support. For example, Gheorghe and Muntean (2024) contend that attributes like customised amenities, providing and accommodating food preferences and dietary needs, are some examples. At the Four Seasons, importance is given to emotional connection. Therefore, attitudinal loyalty is the primary target of its loyalty programme without the structured approach of rewards and tiers.

At the Peninsula Hotel, there is evidence of a non-traditional loyalty programme. It has a programme called the Pen Club which targets travel advisors rather than individuals. Similar to the Four Seasons, at the Peninsula Hotel importance is given to personalisation (The Peninsula Hotels, 2020). Loyalty is therefore cultivated in a subtle manner by focusing on attention to detail and giving individual attention. Returning guests are given curated amenities, invitations to events, and others (Ott, 2022). There is no evidence of a tiered loyalty programme. Therefore, the Peninsula approach can be exemplified as a non-transactional strategy similar to the Four Seasons method.

2.6. Research Theory and Research Gap

The commitment trust theory that is proposed by Morgan and Hunt (1994) is chosen as the foundational theory of this research this theory focuses on two critical mediators of long-term relationships between a business and a customer. According to this theory when there is a relationship between the customer and the business higher levels of trust could lead to better commitment to retain the relationship. Therefore, if there is perception of high level of trust they are more likely to engage in a cooperative behaviour and sustain long term loyalty with the organization. In this theory trust refers to the confidence that one party most likely the customer has in the reliability and integrity of the other that is the business. Commitment involves a belief in the value of the relationship and a need to maintain or sustain the relationship. Therefore, commitment may be exhibited by the customer forming emotional attachment to the brand, actively participating in loyalty initiatives and continuing patronage with the organisation (Ratz, 2024). The basis of this theory is that there is a need to move beyond transactions to building relational agreements where there is a mutually beneficial agreement between the two stakeholders.

From the review of literature, some important insights have been designed. Firstly, the loyalty programme in the luxury sector is designed to personalise the experience, enhance consistency of service and provide exclusive member privilege. In this context, it is important to match the theory to the context. The commitment-trust theory is used as a framework to explore how

loyalty initiatives can be used by luxury industries like the hospitality sector to build experiential and emotional brand relationships which foster loyalty.

In the hospitality industry there is a long history of using loyalty programmes as strategic tools to increase customer retention and enhance brand loyalty. However, there are some key research gaps that need to be addressed. Firstly, while the existing literature has focused on how functional aspects of loyalty programmes including point accumulation and tiers are relevant, these may not apply to the luxury sector. Though there is some evidence on loyalty elements (attitudinal and behavioural), the focus of the same within the luxury sector is limited. This research intends to focus on emotional, experiential and relational dimensions as relating to customer loyalty within the context of the UK-based luxury hotel chains. Much of the scholarship also relates to transactional loyalty without focusing on affective elements (trust and commitment) which can shape-long term customer relationships. Moreover, brand prestige, storytelling and innovation are powerful elements which need to be explored as part of the loyalty programme framework.

Chapter Three: Methodology

3.1.Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present the methodology of the study. The chapter provides details on the research design (research philosophy, research approach and research method), data collection (methods, sampling) and data analysis.

3.2.Research Philosophy

This study adopts the interpretivist research paradigm. The interpretivist paradigm is concerned with understanding the subjective meaning that an individual may assign to a specific social phenomenon. In social sciences in particular, interpretivism posits that individuals may interpret and act upon the world in several ways, often shaped by culture and context. Therefore, similar methods of interpretation used in physical sciences cannot be applied (Alharahsheh and Pius, 2020). The meaningful dimension of human experience can be understood only when there is engagement with existing socio-cultural frameworks.

In the current study, the goal is to examine the emotional, behavioural and experiential elements that impact loyalty programmes. Therefore, use of an interpretivist paradigm is the most optimal. Guests who visit luxury hotels are not just passive consumers of services but may use their lived experiences to make decisions on loyalty programmes. Several factors like the personal lens of status, identity and memory may influence their decision-making process. Interpretivism is ideal as it also adopts a relativist ontology, assuming that there can be several interpretations of the same event (Scott, 2017). This study does not attempt to arrive at a single universal truth regarding the effectiveness of loyalty programmes. Rather, the aim of the study is to explore differences in meaning associated with loyalty and its drivers across the three chosen brands. A strength of this approach is that it is flexible and open to several methods like case studies, ethnography and narrative assessment (Potrac et al., 2014).

Reflexively, the researcher acknowledges that the use of the alternative paradigm, positivism, is not ideal for this research as there is no independent and dependent variable and there is a need for researcher engagement. The researcher, as an individual who engages with the discourse of hospitality, believes that their own thoughts and output will also impact the research process. The use of interpretivism can help provide a framework to explore the

richness of individual consumer experiences and allow the researcher to draw conclusions from them regarding the current status of loyalty programmes.

3.3. Research Approach

The research approach of the study can be either inductive or deductive. A deductive approach uses a top-down strategy to test specific hypotheses. This research adopts an inductive research approach as it helps build theoretical insights through observations and patterns (Azungah, 2018). It begins by tracking stakeholder observations and then evaluates them to identify patterns, themes and underlying relationships instead of testing existing hypotheses. Though theories like relationship marketing are integrated into this research, it is essential to evaluate how these theories can be built on through the current research. Therefore, an inductive research approach is preferred.

3.4. Methodological Choice

The methodological choice of the study can be qualitative, quantitative or mixed. A quantitative mono-methodology is useful if the goal is to identify the degree of relationship between an independent and dependent variable (Creswell et al., 2003). For example, if the goal of the study were to understand how consumers' perception of luxury hotel loyalty programmes impacted financial performance, then this method would be useful. In the current research, the use of a qualitative mono-methodological approach is most ideal. This approach can help collect non-numerical data regarding the individual's experience. In order to comprehend the context, events and experiences, qualitative research aims to answer the study questions of "how" and "why" (Saunders et al., 2020). The current research explores how luxury programmes are perceived and why we need to understand both tangible and intangible benefits of loyalty programmes' influence on attitudinal and behavioural loyalty.

In the current research, there is a need to understand the experiences of consumers regarding emotional, experiential and behavioural responses. Qualitative research helps better understand the complex reality of this phenomenon (Bryman and Bell, 2011). The qualitative approach is relevant in studies where there is utilisation of open-ended questions which can be nuanced and provide more opportunities for interpretation (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). A qualitative method has been used by other studies in this field. For example, Lu et al. (2015) evaluated the perception of service quality and customer satisfaction in luxury hotels. Similarly, Iloranta (2022) believed that through the use qualitative research it is possible to determine the emotional end experiential dimension of luxury tourism.

Within the realm of qualitative research, the researcher is the most crucial instrumental component. In this research, the role of the researcher is not just identify key stakeholders who provide relevant insights on the research subject but are also able to present a reflexive evaluation of study outcomes. At the same time, as Saunders et al. (2020) argue, there can be limitations of bias. This is because it is possible that the researcher will organise all of the material that he or she has obtained based on his or her own personal perspective. In this context, one way to address is to evaluate researcher capabilities. It is necessary to assess the researcher's competencies in terms of comprehending research procedures when a qualitative study is being conducted (Holloway and Biley, 2011). Another drawback is the time it takes to gather data, which adds an element of ambiguity that cannot be eliminated from qualitative research. For example, the original goal of this study was to reach a maximum of five participants in each hospitality organisation. However, we were only able to reach a total of 11 participants. This is due to the time that was spent in conducting the research.

3.5. Research Strategy

In this study the research strategy of the study is a case study qualitative research method. As Baskarada (2014) remarked, the use of case study as a research strategy consists of conducting detailed investigations with data that could be collected over a period of time with the aim of providing an analysis of the context of the research. This approach can focus on a single unit or a few units with the goal of providing in-depth description of the research phenomenon. Yin (2018) also contend that use of case studies can be more effective in that they provide an opportunity to gather context specific information about a chosen research subject. A case study is not a choice in methodology but in the item to be researched (Yin, 2018). Because the case under investigation is unique and constrained, a case study is required to fully understand it. For the objective of gaining a better understanding of a previously unexplored or poorly understood topic, case studies collect detailed information about a specific person, program, or event (Baskarada, 2014). Case studies are useful in studies where why and how are assessed. In this study use of Marriott, Four seasons and Peninsula Hotels help identify diverse approaches to loyalty where a structured tier-based programme and an unstructured experiential model is used. This variation provides an opportunity to compare and contrast loyalty programmes. The method also allows for a rich method to compare data and provide depth of narrative regarding emotional connection and personalisation.

3.6.Data Collection

Data collection in this research is carried out using semi-structured interviews. Extant literature shows that semi-structured interviews are well suited to addressing complex social and behavioural research needs (Adeoye-Olatunde and Olenik, 2021). The aim of this study is to understand how luxury hotel guests perceive and engage with loyalty programmes. In this context, semi-structured interviews are the most appropriate method, as they provide the flexibility needed to explore social and behavioural dimensions in depth.

Unlike structured interviews, which do not allow for follow-up or probing, semi-structured interviews follow a flexible guide that ensures key research questions are addressed. Unstructured interviews, while open-ended, are not preferred in this study, as the lack of direction may be challenging for a novice researcher and could divert the conversation from the core objectives. Semi-structured interviews offer a balance, giving the researcher a flexible structure to follow while enabling natural conversation flow (Karatsareas, 2022). The interview guide in this study includes broad, open-ended questions along with targeted follow-ups. These were designed to explore behavioural, attitudinal, emotional and symbolic dimensions of consumer loyalty, specifically in relation to loyalty programmes offered by the selected luxury hotel chains.

Interview questions can be grounded in either a conceptual or theoretical framework (Foley et al., 2021). A conceptual framework builds on existing models to apply them in specific contexts, while a theoretical framework draws from established theories to inform the nature and focus of the questions. In this study, the theoretical frameworks of relationship marketing and service-dominant logic shape the interview direction. At the same time, the researcher remains open to adapting and building on participant responses to ensure meaningful insights are generated. This approach allows depth while maintaining alignment with the core research objectives. Appendix I presents the study interview guide.

3.7.Sampling and Participant Selection

This study adopts a purposive sampling methodology where the goal is to identify and recruit participants who are able to provide rich and relevant perspectives on loyalty programmes in the luxury hospitality sector. Purposive sampling is appropriate as it is a non-probability sampling methodology where specific participants are targeted to take part in the research and are chosen because they meet specific search criteria (Bryman and Bell, 2011). The inclusion criteria for this research required that participants:

1. Be existing or past guests of at least one of the three target luxury hotel chains, Marriott, Four Seasons, or Peninsula within the UK.
2. Be members, or have prior membership, of the hotel's loyalty programme.
3. Have stayed at the respective hotel on at least two occasions, ensuring sufficient familiarity with the brand and its loyalty offerings.
4. Have stayed at the hotel in the last one year.
5. Can speak in English.
6. Is willing to give consent to take part in the research.

The participant recruitment process was a complicated one where the researcher made use of personal networks, referrals as well as platforms like Facebook to identify individuals who may be part of online communities. This approach ensured that the access to the individual was finetuned and the researcher was able to choose one participant who met the research criteria. Furthermore, only stakeholders who met all six criteria were asked to take part in the interview. A total of 20 participants were identified to take part in the study. However, only 11 agreed to take part in the research. A final sample size of 11 participants was included in the study.

3.8.Data Analysis

According to Boyatzis (1998), making sense out of seemingly unrelated material and a way of seeing are two broad definitions of thematic analysis (p. 4). It is described by Braun and Clarke (2006) as a way to find and examine patterns of meaning in a dataset, specifically texts. The use of thematic analysis was considered as the right way to conduct research in this study. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is sometimes described as a "engaged, intuitive" investigator who considers "the ways in which they are part of the analysis, a personal, and sometimes even emotional, experience." This suggests that the process is organic and reflexive. In the current research, the use of thematic analysis is chosen as it provides an opportunity to evaluate the diversity of thought including emotional and symbolic experiences of the guests.

The process of thematic analysis begins with actual transcription. At this stage the entire transcript of each participant was read, and notes were made. After that, the next step was to choose quotations that illustrate the data and accurately portray different perspectives and trends that are relevant to the research goals and can be mapped. For example, in each transcript the quotes which had the most impact was highlighted. The next step is to examine the

keywords, In this stage, the data are carefully examined to determine overall effectiveness and relation to the chosen research subject. These terms are extracted from the data and summarise the participants' views and experiences. According to Bryman and Bell (2011), coding relies heavily on keywords, which serve as the backbone to the analysis and aid in the transformation of raw data into understandable, manageable chunks. Finally, there is grouping of themes. At this point, the researcher moves away from a categorical and code-level analysis and towards a more conceptual, theme-based interpretation (Bryman and Bell, 2015). The following table presents a codebook for the thematic analysis process. The sub-theme, theme, codes used and key inclusion and exclusion criteria were identified.

Table 1: Code Book

Theme	Sub-theme	Code	Example Quote	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Theme 1: Loyalty Models (Experiential vs. Transactional)	Experiential Loyalty	Anticipatory recognition	"My dietary needs were remembered, my room arranged in a familiar style."	Loyalty from personal history, no points/tier.	Tier or points-driven loyalty.
	Point-Driven Programmes	Status-linked perks	"I've advanced to the Platinum Elite tier which now strongly influences my hotel choices."	Benefits tied to points/status.	Recognition without points/tier.
	Invitation-Based	Private access	"The invitation felt quite personal and thoughtful... like a private salon."	Invitation-only access.	Open enrolment programmes.
Theme 2: Personalisation and Memory	Anticipated Personalisation	Pre-arrival preparation	"Pillow already set to my usual preference, eucalyptus scent in room."	Prepared from past knowledge.	Generic gestures.
	Recognition-Based Personalisation	Unspoken familiarity	"No one ever said welcome back valued member..."	Subtle recognition of guest history.	Formal loyalty announcements.
	Status-Linked Personalisation	Public acknowledgment	"Being thanked for your loyalty..."	Linked to tier recognition.	Gestures without loyalty mention.
Theme 3: Emotional Connection and Belonging	Safe Haven Emotions	Emotional grounding	"I've come to associate their properties with peace, clarity, warmth..."	Emotional comfort or security.	Functional satisfaction only.

	Comfort Through Familiarity	Predictable comfort	"The sense of familiarity... creates a sense of comfort for me..."	Comfort from familiarity.	Satisfaction not tied to familiarity.
	Quiet Trust and Mutual Respect	Respectful rapport	"There's a sense of bilateral trust..."	Mutual respect/trust.	Transactional-only relationships.
Theme 4: Service Recovery	Effective Recovery	Creative resolution	"They didn't simply compensate; they reimagined the moment."	Swift, personalised resolution.	Basic or delayed fixes.
Theme 5: Exclusivity and Signalling	Discretion-Linked	Less but better	"Luxury isn't... about offering more..."	Exclusivity via restraint.	Mass-market exclusivity claims.
	Elite Tier Exclusivity	Visible privilege	"Dedicated elite check-in counters..."	Tier-only perks.	Benefits for all guests.
	Silent Luxury	Gesture over status	"Luxury is... silent, intentional and immersive."	Discreet, meaningful gestures.	Ostentatious displays.
Theme 6: Valued Features	Tangibility	Concrete perks	"I most value the room upgrades, complimentary breakfast..."	Specific tangible benefits.	General appreciation.
	Inner Circle Access	Private cultural experiences	"Private dining, tasting, discreet upgrades..."	Unadvertised /invitation-only access.	Public/open events.
	Staff-Driven Value	Personalised relevance	"What I value most is the human memory..."	Staff memory/adaptation.	Perks not tied to staff.
Theme 7: Advocacy and Brand Relationship	Brand Identity as a Recommendation Driver	Identity alignment	"Four Seasons offers a human-centred approach..."	Values match between guest/brand.	Price-only recommendations.
	Brand Satisfaction Reinforcing Loyalty	Satisfaction as advocacy	"Marriott has managed to maintain high standards..."	Satisfaction leads to advocacy.	No link between satisfaction/advocacy.
	Brand Engagement Deepening Connection	Multi-channel engagement	"I've attended a rooftop jazz evening..."	Active engagement with brand.	Passive relationship.
	Reasons for Returning	Recognition continuity	"Being offered an upgraded room without asking..."	Returns due to consistent recognition.	Returns unrelated to loyalty.
	Brand Recommendation	Value alignment	"I often recommend Four Seasons..."	Targeted recommendation.	Blanket recommendations.

	n — Selective Advocacy		Seasons to travellers...”		
Theme 8: Improvement Ideas	Private/Digital Preference Portability	Cross-property preferences	“Offer a private invitation-only portal...”	Preferences travel across properties.	Generic tech suggestions.
	Curated Cultural/Experiential Rewards	Experience-driven loyalty	“More personalised member journeys like curated city experiences...”	Specific experience-based rewards.	Vague calls for more rewards.
	Storytelling About Staff Craft	Service transparency	“More storytelling around how they select and train staff...”	Behind-the-scenes service stories.	General marketing content.

3.9.Ethics

To protect the privacy, safety and wellbeing of everyone involved, this study will follow all applicable ethical guidelines. It is the policy of the university to gain informed consent before conducting any interviews and to make participants aware that they can withdraw from the study at any moment without consequence. In order to shield individuals’ identities, we shall anonymise their data and preserve it safely. A university-approved encrypted drive with a password will ensure the safety of all data. Only the researcher and their academic advisor will have access.

Chapter Four: Findings and Discussion

4.1.Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to conduct a cross-transcript thematic analysis of eleven interviews. The goal is to provide consolidated patterns and themes observed across participant accounts. The focus of the chapter is on understanding guests' perceptions and experiences of loyalty programmes. A total of eight themes were observed and are detailed through this chapter.

4.2. Loyalty Models

Several views were expressed regarding the nature of loyalty models, most of the participants highlighting the difference between experiential and transactional models. Three of the eleven participants recognise that experiential loyalty is evident. In particular, two participants from Four Seasons believe that the loyalty programme was targeted and exclusive. At Four Seasons in particular, the guests believe the loyalty model to be rooted in the recognition of long-term support given by the guest rather than focusing on tiers or points. Over time, the brand will deepen its knowledge of guests and be able to provide more personalised solutions. These findings are evident in the following supportive extracts.

“Four Seasons doesn't have a conventional public facing loyalty programme, but they operate with a more defined guest recognition model. I have come to notice small gestures and upgrades tied to my preferences and booking history.” – T1.

“Four Seasons doesn't offer a standard loyalty programme and, honestly, I think that's one of its strengths... It's a kind of loyalty that feels earned on both sides rather than raked.” – T3

Participants from the Marriott hotel indicated that there was evidence of transactional benefits through the third points-driven strategy. They believe that the Bonvoy programme is largely rooted in a structured point-based systems with multiple tiers. Members join the programme for the tangible rewards, including upgrades and late checkout, and the ability to earn and redeem points creates habitual loyalty. Therefore, there is evidence of clear transnational strategies.

“I joined the Marriott Bonvoy about six years ago... benefits stacked up... reaching gold elite status... early check-in, welcome drinks, and staff referring to past preferences.” – T6

“I’ve been a member of the Marriott Bonvoy programme for about seven years now. Over time, I’ve advanced to the Platinum Elite tier, which now strongly influences my hotel choices. The ability to accumulate points and enjoy elite privileges like lounge access or room upgrades makes me feel valued and gives me more control over my experience.” – T5

At the Peninsula club, there is evidence of exclusivity driving loyalty programme membership. There is no public enrolment: an invitation is sent to become part of the loyalty programme. Guests believe that long-term stays, spend in the hotel and consistency in patronage impact their ability to gain an invitation.

“It’s not the kind of programme you sign up for, it’s invitation only, which adds a layer of exclusivity, the value lies in how your preferences are remembered and how your experiences are refined over time.” – T8

“I joined after a fourth stay at their properties... The invitation felt quite personal and thoughtful, not algorithmic... what attracted me... was the way the membership promised access to exclusivity, almost like a private salon rather than a scheme.” – T9

These findings show that loyalty models in luxury hotels may vary significantly and influence how a guest connects with the brand. Experiential loyalty is built through personal history and recognition. Points-driven programmes have created structured incentives. This mix is evident in literature. According to Zuo et al. (2017), a tiered hotel loyalty network may emerge as a result of the fact that most hotels have incentive programs that are tied to the amount or frequency of stays. Hierarchical placement corresponds with prestige within the luxury lodging business, creating a symbolic hierarchy based on the significance of guests. One possible origin of loyalty program tiers in high-end hotels is the idea of uniqueness as a determinant of tier advancement where there is both transactional and intangible benefits (Wang, 2023).

4.3. Personalisation as Central to Loyalty Programmes

The guests from Four Seasons recognised strong support for personalisation. Anticipatory actions are implemented once a guest makes a booking, including remembering room setup, preferences of fruits and customisation of amenities. Guests believe that small actions and requests are recorded, and this helps generate better personalisation and a feeling of intimacy. As one participant noted:

“The doorman greeting me by name or the room being stocked with my favourite fruits, whether it’s the lighting setup in my room or the way breakfast is presented according to my rhythm, it’s all shaping a deeper connection with the brand.” – T1

Another guest from the Four Seasons similarly reported that the kind of personalisation provided extends beyond data specific algorithms as it is rooted in people. For example:

“...curated newspaper instead of a stack, a pillow already set to my usual preference, a room scented lightly with eucalyptus because I once mentioned I find it relaxing. These aren't random upgrades, they're proof that Four Seasons pay attention in ways that algorithms can't replicate.”
– T2

The guests from the Peninsula hotel similarly recognise the need for integrated preferences. Guests’ needs are not just remembered or curated based on prior requirements. An unspoken language of familiarity is actively evident. Rather than using verbal thanks, there is strong support for discretion and a sense of belonging. This theme is strongly reflected in the following comments.

“No one ever said welcome back valued member. Instead... robe size already in the room or right number of hangers... It’s an unspoken language of familiarity.” – T10

“The staff members remember my name... doorman greeted me personally... restaurant staff suggest dishes based on what I liked before... those small details really matter.” – T11

At the Marriott, the status associated with the tier of loyalty programme results in quality of personalisation. For example, elite members are acknowledged at check-in and offered specific upgrades and early access. There is evidence of visible perks associated with tier status. This can be accompanied by personalisation, including room temperature and dietary needs. At the Marriott, status recognition is through a balance of formal tiered levels and personalised care. As two guests remarked:

“The staff frequently acknowledge my platinum elite status; early check-in, suite upgrades and welcome gifts all reinforce the idea that my loyalty is noticed and appreciated. Personalised experiences like remembering my preferred pillow type or offering a late checkout without asking really shape my perception.” – T4

“Being thanked for your loyalty, being offered an upgraded room without even asking...” – T7

These findings can be compared to those in literature. Personalisation in luxury is a powerful loyalty driver with guests valuing services that are tailored to their needs. Anticipation of personalisation and recognition influences the drivers of loyalty building. This view is supported by prior literature. Such a personal connection is crucial in the service industry, according to Ahmed et al. (2024). This is due to the fact that there are multiple points of contact where the customer may have a negative experience during their stay. Creating the proper human moments is just as important as having the right architecture when it comes to improving experiences.

4.4. Emotional Connection

The sense of emotional connection and personal belonging is strongly reflected in the chosen transcripts. For example, guests have associated the Four Seasons with emotional elements like bringing peace and considering it a safe haven. A bond is created and is constantly developed through consistent and attentive service. Unlike a simple focus on transactional loyalty, the aim of creating an emotional connection is to make the guest feel cared for beyond simple tangible benefits. As one participant remarked:

“I’ve come to associate their properties with certain emotions, so peace, clarity, warmth.” – T2

“With Four Seasons, I feel something closer to emotional grounding. The properties evoke a specific state of mind, calm, centred and taken care of... I associate Four Seasons with moments of personal clarity.” – T3

The guests from Marriott similarly highlighted that the emotional bond develops as a result of creating comfort through familiarity. The guests believe that steps are taken to make them feel 'at home' through the actions taken by the staff. Therefore, the Marriott was preferred by them as it created a reliable sense of warmth and recognition. For example:

“The sense of familiarity when I walk into their hotel, especially when I’m traveling solo, creates a sense of comfort for me... personalised service makes it feel like a home away from home.” – T4

The Peninsula hotel guests similarly believe that there is a sense of trust that builds through targeted actions. The service style is carefully cultivated, fostering a sense of bilateral trust where the guests understand each other's expectations. The result is refining emotional loyalty to prioritise reliability and dignity. For example:

“There’s a sense of bilateral trust. I never feel like they’re trying to sell me something... It’s a relationship that allows space for the guests to breathe and feel respected.” – T9

“With Peninsula, the connection feels cultivated rather than emotional in the warm sense. It’s more formal types of loyalty, almost like mutual respect.” – T8

The importance of emotional connection is recognised in literature. Emotional connection is key to transforming guest relationship and creating a sense of belonging. Quiet trust and mutual respect is developed when guests perceive the brand as committed to their overall wellbeing. The emotional bond can be harder to replicate than other opportunities. This view is supported in literature. Better experiences must be made, and not just with high-quality infrastructure and services, but also with the intentional cultivation of meaningful human moments. As an example, Nixon and Rieple (2014) point out that the Ritz-Carlton has a model where employees may make personalised experiences. This empowers employees to take initiative and provide a better experience for customers. Emotional branding aims to make people feel something for a brand, which will hopefully lead to them advocating for it.

4.5. Service Recovery

Across all three hotels, there is evidence of swift service recovery. Guests believe that when there are unexpected errors, the speed of response and the type of support given is extensive. This can include several factors, including delayed transfer, booking errors and room issues. For example:

“Though disappointing... immediate apologies, alternative arrangements and sincere follow-up left me feeling cared for; that reinforced rather than diminish my loyalty.” – T1

The emphasis here is on speed and sincerity in resolving the problem. The staff immediately apologise and take steps to resolve the issue beyond simple compensation. This can include personal notes, giving curated experiences, and the steps taken to ensure guest wellbeing and satisfaction. The actions taken further enhance guests’ trust in the brand. Staff actions not only neutralise the negative incident but deepen guests’ trust, guests interpreting the recovery strategy as proof of the brand's commitment to supporting wellbeing. This evidence is clearly seen across all three hotel guest experiences, as evident from the following extracts.

“During a stay in Dublin... the suite I had booked wasn’t available... the front desk manager offered a partial refund, complimentary dinner, and an extended check-out... reminded me why I chose Marriott.” – T6

“At the Bangkok branch... the check-in was super slow... but the staff handled it very well... later even sent me a handwritten note... showed me they cared... even when things didn’t go perfectly, it was still okay.” – T11

Service recovery is recognised as the ideal way to build consumer trust. Service recovery as a loyalty enforcer reimagines the experiences to leave the guest feeling valued and respected. Personalised resolution can lead to better creative gestures and help transform disappointments into loyalty building. Gheorghe and Muntean (2024) contend that factors like paying attention to customer needs and accepting inherent challenges is given importance. At the Four Seasons, importance is given to emotional connection.

4.6. Signalling Exclusivity

There is evidence of signalling exclusivity through actions carried out for guests who belong to loyalty clubs or programmes. For example, at the Four Seasons, this exclusivity is built through restraint. They adopt a ‘less but better’ philosophy, where no overt gestures are made. However, steps are taken to make small actions meaningful and relevant. The guests believe that exclusivity is created through a sense of signalling that they are important to the organisation. For example:

“Luxury isn’t just about offering more, it’s about knowing when to offer less but better... Four Seasons keeps its loyalty structure feeling exclusive without being exclusionary.” – T2

There is evidence of silent luxury at the Peninsula wherein exclusivity is evident through access to private experiences and cultural previews. These feel personalised and signal to the guests that they are part of a unique and exclusive club. This dissertation characterises such exclusive signalling wherein the gesture is designed to feel more natural as silent and intentional. For example:

“The absence of... a point earning structure signals that exclusivity isn’t earned by volume but by mutual recognition... makes it feel more luxurious.” – T10

“It avoids the tropes of conventional luxury... luxury is communicated through gestures, anticipation and restraint... silent, intentional and immersive.” – T9

Marriott guests, on the other hand, believe that exclusivity is linked to elite tier benefits within the Bonvoy programme. Here, exclusivity is largely transactional, and the signalling of these benefits include tier-specific achievement and the motivation to upgrade one’s status. The

approach to exclusivity motivates the guests to aspire to reach higher levels, where the elite tiers are both a reward and an incentive for more stays. For example:

“The Bonvoy elite benefits feel exclusive... dedicated elite check-in counters, welcome amenities... all signal exclusivities.” – T4

Exclusivity signalling in luxury hospitality helps understand how guests feel valued and engaged. Silent luxury focuses on understated intentional acts which can convey refinement without overt display. This exclusivity is signalled by levels. There are different tiers of membership within the Bonvoy, including silver, gold, platinum, titanium and ambassador (Marriott International, 2023). Every level sees an escalation of benefits, which can create better behavioural loyalty. Loyalty in the Peninsula is also linked to exclusivity. It is therefore cultivated in a subtle manner by focusing on attention to detail and giving individual attention. Returning guests are given curated amenities, invitations to events, and others (Ott, 2022).

4.7. What Counts as Value for Guests

There are several differences between what guests consider valuable. For example, the Marriott guests place significant value on the tangible benefits tied to elite status. They believe that factors like complimentary breakfasts, upgrades and access to exclusive areas are the most important. Flexibility in redeeming points, steps to enhance the travel experience through access to hotels and other concrete factors are considered important. These tangible benefits make it easy for the hotel to appreciate and measure their needs and help the guests feel accepted. For example:

“I most value the room upgrades, complimentary breakfast, late checkout and priority service... The elite status tiers also motivate me to stay more often. These benefits make a noticeable difference to my trips, whether I’m travelling for business or leisure, because they give me more comfort, convenience and sometimes even save me money. Knowing I can count on these perks makes Marriott my go-to choice.” – T4

In the case of Peninsula, on the other hand, value is driven by the notion of invisible luxury, and access to private dining and subtle personal touches like arranging unique curated experiences is important. The ability to culturally enrich the stay experience has been central to guests’ perception of value. Guests at Peninsula appreciate that the benefit is not transactional but is rather relational; they are therefore of the view that the Peninsula brand builds loyal customers as it focuses on quality over quantity. For example:

“The most valuable aspect is not tangible... private dining, tasting, discreet upgrades... more valuable to me than points or vouchers. These are things you can’t buy into — they’re offered because you’re known and trusted. The fact that they’re unadvertised makes them feel even more special. I don’t have to ask; it just happens, quietly and perfectly aligned with my tastes.”

– T10

The guests from Four Seasons value the human encounter most highly. They find that the brand carries forward personal details, some of the employees reaching out to others within the chain to gather insights into guests. They appreciate the experience, which does not rely on digital prompts or focus on membership numbers. The approach is found to reinforce the idea that luxury is largely personal and can be adapted if steps are taken by humans within the programme to maintain the quality of service. For example:

“What I value most is the human memory at the heart of the programme. There's no app flashing my status, no need to quote a membership number, but a sense that the hotel is carrying forward an understanding of who I am. On work trips, I've had a private study area arranged; on leisure stays, I've been offered a later checkout or a quiet table for breakfast. The flexibility is built into the philosophy, not just the policy.” – T2

These views can be compared to prior evidence in literature. Guests define value through both tangible and intangible factors referring to concrete benefits and personalised touches. A mix of both will drive both attitudinal and behavioural loyalty. Prestige in luxury is not symbolic but rather a strategic tool that can be used in order to deepen customers’ loyalty, to align their identity with not only superior service but also memorable experiences. There are hotels that leverage on their brand prestige and exceptional service (Lo and Yeung, 2020). In this context prestige and loyalty is driven by the perceived value as well the perception of brand identity and prestige.

4.8. Advocacy and Brand Relationships

Guests want to give patronage to brands whose identity strongly relates to the personal values of the traveller. At the Four Seasons, this is determined by human centricity. Similarly, at the Peninsula, it is driven by refined rituals, while at the Marriott, it is based on dependability and consistency. For example:

“The Peninsula Club is an extension of the brand’s DNA... [it] reinforces Peninsula’s positioning as refined, selective and timeless. It avoids the tropes of conventional luxury—

luxury is communicated through gestures, anticipation and restraint—and that’s exactly why I’d recommend it to people who appreciate that style.” – T9

“In contrast to Marriott or Hilton, where loyalty often feels systematised, Four Seasons offers a human-centred approach. It reinforces the identity of Four Seasons as a luxury brand that prioritises experience over structure. The relationship feels like a dialogue rather than a service transaction, and that’s the kind of thing I want to recommend to travellers who care about those values.” – T1

The guests also believe that brand satisfaction could reinforce loyalty. The higher the satisfaction, the stronger the ability to become an advocate. Guests want to recommend brands whose services are able to meet and exceed expectations, especially with reference to emotional and service recovery moments. For example:

“Extremely satisfied... I never felt like I was being processed through a loyalty system. The relationship feels mutual, like a guest and host who already understand one another. That mutual respect makes me confident in recommending Peninsula to those who value understated service.” – T10

“Marriott has managed to maintain high standards across its properties for years. Even when something goes wrong, they handle it in a way that makes me feel like a partner in their brand journey rather than just a customer. That level of satisfaction is what makes me comfortable recommending them.” – T4

Brand engagement through several actions like apps and events are found to create ongoing touchpoints. The guests feel as if their stay is given significant importance and they want to advocate for the brand. In particular, the use of applications is found to create better engagement in meeting pre-arrival requests, providing ease of access to instal adjustments and contributing to better post-stay feedback. This is evident across all three hotels, where feedback is directly provided through the digital platform, improving convenience while fostering personal connections. For example:

“I have also provided feedback directly through their apps and have received personalised responses sometimes.” – T1

“I personally interact through the Bonvoy mobile app... attended a rooftop jazz evening in Paris...” – T6

Guests return when brands are able to recognise their preferences and provide consistency of service. Loyalty programmes create habits that can offer both tangible and intangible benefits. For example:

“Yes, I have intentionally chosen Four Seasons again because my dietary needs were remembered, my room arranged in a familiar style, and even my lighting preferences set before I arrived. That sense of being quietly anticipated is more meaningful to me than typical awards, and it’s a big reason I return.” – T1

Finally, brand recommendations are also a theme that is discussed. In particular, the guest not only wants to talk about the brand but also wants to recommend it to those who fit the criteria of being a loyalty member. Clearly, there is selective advocacy, where they only recommend those who may appreciate the brand approach and values. This protects the brand identity and an initial screening is carried out as part of the recommendation.

“I often recommend Four Seasons to travellers who prioritise emotional values and seamless service over tangible rewards. If someone’s main goal is to rack up points or chase discounts, it’s not the right fit. But for those who want a calmer, more personal form of luxury, it’s the only brand I’d suggest.” – T1

“Yes... but I would explain that it’s not a typical programme with free nights or a points system. It’s better for people who care about luxury, peace, and great service.” – T11

Advocacy in the brand is selective and that only when the guest is satisfied with the brand they will support it. Reasons for repurchasing relate to service continuity and greater in-depth connections. The guest will recommend the brand only if they feel others will like the brand's narrative and story. In the context of luxury hotels, Ryu et al. (2019) argued that narrative-driven strategies are often used with the goal of evoking emotional responses to convey brand values and brand uniqueness. For example, Ryu et al. (2018) examined how brands’ stories can influence consumers’ perceptions within luxury hotels. They conclude that when the consumer is happy with the story of the brand then they are more willing to work towards brand value development and brand engagement.

4.9. Improvement Ideas and Next Frontier

There are several ideas and thoughts on ways to improve. For example, some of the participants believe that it is necessary to build on digital spaces and digital engagement. For the Four Seasons, this has been identified through discreet online portals where guests can make notes

on their stay and future expectations. At the Peninsula, the need to improve the quality of communication without the brand asking for repeat details from the customer is recognised. These themes are evident in the following statements.

“Offer a private invitation-only portal for frequent guests not to track points, but to allow for shared preferences, favourite destinations, or even past guest experiences to travel with you from one property to another. It could simply be a tool for the hotel team to continue tailoring stays as the guest evolves. It would reinforce the brand ethos while adding even more coherence to the global guest journey.” – T2

“More digital personalisation... having my preferences visible across all Peninsula locations through the app... would deepen the bond further.” – T10

Another recommendation is curating one's cultural experiences or providing better experiential rewards. For example, guests expressed the need for loyalty programmes to expand beyond upgrades to give cultural updates. Marriott guests called for city tours and artist collaboration. It is interesting to see that the curation of experience is largely supported at Marriott, a programme where loyalty supports more tangible rather than experiential benefits. For example:

“More personalised member journeys like curated city experiences or behind-the-scenes hotel access... enhance in-app personalisation.” – T5

“I'd love to see more curated experiential rewards like destination-based experiences or invitations to local cultural events... Increasing personalisation through AI-driven suggestions in the app would deepen the emotional connection for me.” – T4

At the Peninsula hotel, on the other hand, the suggestion is for brands to share more about the people who work there. The guests call for more storytelling of the activities of the brand—in particular, storytelling on how the staff are trained and selected as a way to add depth and human connections. The purpose here is to highlight the brand's commitment to excellence by showcasing brand-specific activities which are intended to create a rich narrative. As one guest remarked:

“Perhaps a better way to communicate progress... more storytelling around how they select and train staff... it's the staff that deliver the brand sales.” – T8

These views can be compared to those in literature. Dimitrakaki (2023) clearly observes that such companies may surpass typical loyalty programmes that merely employ a points-based incentive scheme. This is due to their desire to build better emotional ties with their guests (Nixon and Rieple, 2010). An such case is the Ritz-Carlton, where the Mystique platform serves as an adaption of the loyalty scheme. In order to offer tailored solutions, user data is collected from past visitor preferences and behaviours. These customisation options may include not just general recognition but also specifics like preferred meals, rooms, and other needs.

4.10. Frequency Implications

The following table presents a summary of the themes and the frequency of occurrence of these themes.

Table 2: Summary of themes and frequency

Theme	Sub-theme	Frequency
Theme 1: Loyalty models (experiential vs. transactional)	Experiential loyalty	3/11
	Point-driven programmes	4/11
	Invitation based	4/11
Theme 2: Personalisation and memory	Anticipated personalisation	3/11
	Recognition-based personalisation	4/11
	Status-linked personalisation	4/11
Theme 3: Emotional connection and belonging	Safe haven emotions	2/11
	Comfort through familiarity	4/11
	Quiet trust and mutual respect	4/11
Theme 4: Service recovery as a loyalty reinforcer	Effective recovery	11/11
Theme 5: Exclusivity and signalling	Discretion-linked	3/11
	Elite tier exclusivity	4/11
	Silent luxury	4/11
Theme 6: Valued features and what “counts”	Tangibility	4/11
	Inner circle access	4/11
	Staff-driven value	3/11
Theme 7: Advocacy and brand relationship drivers	Brand identity as a recommendation driver	11/11
	Brand satisfaction reinforcing loyalty	10/11
	Brand engagement deepening connection	10/11
	Reasons for returning	10/11
	Brand recommendation — selective advocacy	16/11
Theme 8: Improvement ideas and “next frontier”	Private/digital preference portability	3/11
	Curated cultural/experiential rewards	3/11
	Storytelling about staff craft (rare)	1/11

Chapter Five: Conclusion

5.1.Revisiting Objectives

The first objective of the study was to examine how loyalty programmes impact behavioural loyalty and attitudinal loyalty in the UK. Behavioural loyalty refers to tangible experiences from which the guests make meaning and can include willingness to stay with the brand, to choose the brand over competitors and to participate actively in loyalty programmes. Behavioural loyalty is effectively observed at the Marriott, where loyalty is personified through the Bonvoy programme. Guests see a transactional approach where the accumulation and redemption of points leads to a tiered progression. Complimentary upgrades and late check-outs are factors that have helped to have created habitual booking behaviour with the Marriott. Attitudinal loyalty extends beyond behaviour and signifies a deep emotional attachment to the brand and preference for the brand. Four Seasons and Peninsula guests talk about drivers of attitudinal loyalty. Here, the decision-making process is driven by personalised engagement. These include anticipation of service requests, providing additional services, invitation-only loyalty models, and the need to form a relational bond with the customer. In these luxury chains, the guests like to be part of the loyalty programme as they feel recognised and understood. In practice, while these forms of loyalty overlap, the findings suggest that behavioural loyalty is more prominent at Marriott, driven by structured points. Attitudinal loyalty, on the other hand, is stronger in the other two brands where relational and experiential strategies are present.

The second objective of the study was to explore the emotional and experiential dimensions of loyalty and its influence on guests. The interview findings show that across all brands the emotional and experiential factors emerge as a consistent theme. Across the brands there is strong evidence of both emotional and experiential factors. The personalised element of greeting guests by name and remembering their food and their preferences was a consistent theme across the interviews. At Four Seasons, guests feel that anticipatory service, including preparation of rooms and amenities, has been critical to its success. At the Peninsula, there is evidence of a language of familiarity. At any Peninsula hotel the guests feel that there is a seamless integration within the service choreography. Furthermore, the personalisation at Marriott is linked to loyalty status data. These experiential moments also create an opportunity to enhance exclusivity. They can create a feeling of belonging, trust and appreciation and may leave a strong impression, even more than the monetary value of rewards. The consistency and

subtlety of these interactions reinforce an emotional connection and may impact the guests' attitudinal loyalty.

The third objective was to identify specific loyalty programme features that are valued by luxury clients. Guests across the three brands identify specific loyalty programme elements influencing their return to the brand or recommendations. For example, Marriott has tangible and flexible benefits that influence the value of the programme. Features like guaranteed late check-out and priority service continue to influence their return decision. At the Four Seasons, the most valued element is the human memory. The guests feel accepted and that every employee, even in hotel locations they have never been before, is warm and engaging. Therefore, human memory is at the heart of their service and enables context-specific elements to create meaningful benefits. The Peninsula guests value 'invisible luxury', where private, cultural experiences impact the value. There are unadvertised upgrades which further contributes to a sense of exclusivity and reinforces the sense of loyalty. These features continue to shape future revisits and the willingness to become an ambassador for the brand wherein guests recommend the brand to people whose preferences and values match the brand service philosophy.

The fourth objective was to assess if these loyalty programmes shape advocacy and impact reasons for returning. Advocacy across all brands was evident with most participants willing to talk about the brand. However, there are two factors which seem to impact advocacy. The first is the service recovery. The guests feel that there have been several experiences of loss of service quality. However, each this time has been addressed through better service recovery. The service recovery has often been excellent across all three hotels, extending beyond simple financial compensation. The second factor is the presence of selective advocacy. Guests are willing to recommend the hotel to others only if they feel that the other person will appreciate the brand's approach to service provision. For example, Peninsula hotel guests will recommend the brand to others only if they are drawn to new cultural experiences. Similarly, at the Four Seasons, the brand is recommended if the potential guest will value emotion over brand style. Engagement beyond the stay also has an impact on advocacy. Guests want to be connected with the brand from the time of booking, including the use of digital applications for pre-arrival and engaging in direct personal communication with known staff. Reasons for return are linked to continuity of recognition and the prediction of excellence.

The fifth objective was to understand guest-led innovative recommendations for the brands. There are three categories of recommendations made by guests. Firstly, they want more digital engagement. They want more of their preferences to be stored in a secure and private manner so that they can be seamlessly integrated and accessed whenever the hotel employees need the information. Guests do not want constantly to repeat common requests. The second recommendation is to provide better experience-based rewards. There is a need to provide culturally immersive experiences that are unique and exclusive to the hotel, including private gallery tours or city walks with local experts. Finally, guests at Peninsula want more information about the service craft. They want to know how the employees are trained and how the service philosophy evolves within the organisation.

5.2.Recommendations

The key recommendation for the Marriott brand is the need to build on the strength of its established Bonvoy tier-based programme. However, the guests continue to talk about transactional benefits more than emotional elements. The brand can benefit from looking beyond these to consider emotional connections. The guests could be provided with more experiential elements, including curated cultural activities or social events which have the potential to appeal to all of its members. Marriott can also diversify its value proposition this way beyond simple point accumulation. The organisation can also make creative use of guest information within its database and achieve better personalised outcomes. This could involve looking at guest preferences (e.g. preferred time of check-in, type of room, time of arrival, type of meal) and make decisions on personalisation. There should be a balance between personal intimacy at the location level with the broader benefit of being a member. According to De Kervenoael et al. (2020), the best way to improve guest experience is to work towards gathering and acting on guest feedback. At several touchpoints steps should be taken to ensure that the right feedback is made available. This could help evaluate if the right level of engagement is being made with the guest.

At the Four Seasons, steps should be carried out to prioritise anticipatory service provision. The brand should ensure that this service need is always met and that the brand will protect itself from dilution of its service quality. Every new property should sustain this level of personal recognition. There should be consistent training of staff members. At the Four Seasons, steps could be taken to incorporate digital tools which can enable guests to share preferences. This could be an in-depth analysis of guest preferences which could continue to

provide better anticipatory services. These can be designed for internal staff use where the emphasis is on subtlety and discretion. Also, the tool can be integrated with personalised assistants and chatbots as an addition to the human experience and service quality. Any technology that is introduced should be made available in an easy-to-use manner. According to De Kervenoael et al. (2020), digital technology in the hotel industry must be reliable and provide immediate results. Customers anticipate uninterrupted service with less wait time. Using digital technology, gamification methods in hotels are a great way to meet the goal of surprising customers and making their experience more memorable. Hoteliers can benefit from the lessons learnt from gaming, which is renowned for its capacity to captivate audiences and create memorable experiences, especially as our lives are becoming more and more "game-like" (Koivisto and Hamari, 2019). At the same time too much reliance on technology can be challenging. It is crucial to talk about how hotels could make guests feel less human, as that can be a big concern when it comes to digital technology (e.g., Belanche et al., 2021).

At the Peninsula, consideration should be given to improving the nature of loyalty programme induction. While there is an invitation-only approach to the Peninsula Club, it could be beneficial if guests were to recommend others who may benefit from becoming loyalty members. Clearly there is a soft capitalism approach. This type of capitalism shows a more "caring, sharing ethos" and is more adaptable to the complicated nature of modern markets. The intertwined relational process between the consumer and the corporation can continue to grow if Peninsula adopts a form of reflexive marketing (Pridmore, 2010). This would enable their expectations for familiarity and recognition to be met without impacting the brand commitment to privacy. The brand should also expand its range of cultural experiences and identify more ways to engage clientele. Furthermore, it can integrate digital experiences offered on its online platforms, including the digital application, which can help keep guests engaged with the brand. This could include partnerships with local artists, curated tours and other experiences.

5.3.Conclusion

This study presents an examination of loyalty programme effectiveness on brand loyalty in UK-based luxury hotels which focus on emotional, experiential and behavioural elements. The findings show that across all brands personalisation and emotional resonance help shape loyalty outcomes. Advocacy has been selective with individuals wanting to recommend those who match the brand style with the value of the recipient. The recommendations made emphasise

the need for balance between scale and a sense of exclusivity where curated experiences with transactional rewards can improve guest experience.

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Detailed Thematic Analysis – Appendix I

Four Seasons Interview I – Adhiha

Sub-theme	Code	Supporting Quote(s)	Timestamp
First impressions and brand identity	First impression and brand identity	“From the moment I stepped into the London property at 10 Trinity Square, I noticed a different pace and attitude.”	0:00:14
		“The ambience always combines comfort with elegance. And I came to associate the brand with a sense of calm sophistication.”	0:00:34
Loyalty model and recognition	Loyalty recognition model	“Four Seasons doesn't have a conventional public facing loyalty programme, but they operate with a more defined guest recognition model.”	0:00:56
		“I have come to notice small gestures and upgrades tied to my preferences and booking history.”	0:01:00
Reasons for returning	Motivation to return	“Yes, I have intentionally chosen Four Seasons again... my dietary needs remembered, my room arranged in a familiar style. That sense of being quietly anticipated is more meaningful to me than typical awards.”	0:01:34
Brand engagement	Brand engagement	“I have also provided feedback directly through their apps and have received personalised responses sometimes.”	0:02:07
Advocacy	Recommendation rationale	“I often recommend Four Seasons to travellers who prioritise emotional values and seamless service over tangible rewards.”	0:02:37
Emotional connection	Emotional connection	“There is a strong connection, especially because many of my visits have been linked to personal events, short wellness breaks, anniversaries and relaxation.”	0:03:05
Service recovery and loyalty	Service recovery and loyalty	“Though disappointing... immediate apologies, alternative arrangements and sincere follow-up	0:03:43

		left me feeling cared for, that reinforced rather than diminished my loyalty.”	
Satisfaction	Overall satisfaction	“Four Seasons succeed in delivering experiences that feel skirted and personal without overt familiarities.”	0:04:12
Memorable experiences	Memorable experience	“The hotel arranged a custom yoga session... based on a brief mention I had made during a prior visit.”	0:04:40
Personalisation	Recognition and personal touches	“The doorman greeting me by name or the room being stocked with my favourite fruits...”	0:05:13
		“Whether it’s the lighting setup in my room or the way breakfast is presented according to my rhythm, it all shapes a deeper connection with the brand.”	0:05:39
Valued features	Valued features	“Unspoken privileges such as rooms that suit my past preferences, meaningful upgrades without needing to ask...”	0:06:12
Experience vs rewards	Experience over rewards	“Experience is paramount... what’s memorable is not what I get but how I am treated, like respected individually, not as a statistic.”	0:06:50
Brand comparison	Comparison with other brands	“In contrast to Marriott or Hilton, where loyalty often feels systematised, Four Seasons offers a human-centred approach.”	0:07:18
Brand identity through loyalty	Loyalty shaping brand identity	“It reinforces the identity of Four Seasons as a luxury brand that prioritises experience over structure.”	0:07:49
Exclusivity	Exclusivity	“The absence of public tiers or generic offers contributes to the feeling of exclusivity.”	0:08:21
Improvement suggestions	Improvement suggestion	“Perhaps a clearer though still discreet channel of communication for loyal guests...”	0:08:47
Overall summary	Overall summary	“Their loyalty culture is not transactional. It’s experiential,	0:09:26

		sensory, and built on genuine hospitality.”	
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Four Seasons II – Deji

Sub-theme	Code	Supporting Quote (verbatim)	Timestamp
First impressions and brand identity	Human, intuitive service	“Among them, Four Seasons properties have delivered some of the most seamless and memorable experiences. My first encounter was in London and I remember being struck not just by the architectural beauty or location but by how intuitive the staff were from the first interaction.”	0:00:03
	Warmth and elegance balance	“Since then I've also stayed at the Four Seasons Hampshire, which offers a completely different energy, quiet, restorative and immersed in nature. What's always stayed with me about Four Seasons is how it balances elegance and warmth. Unlike some luxury brands that can feel overly formal or clinical, Four Seasons properties in the UK strike a very human tone.”	0:00:32
	Ceremony with discretion	“Even something as simple as morning coffee arrives with a sense of ceremony.”	0:00:32
	Evolving with guest needs	“...delivered with discretion, but also genuine warmth as well. But in short, every stay has felt like a chapter in a	0:01:05

		longer story, where the hotel evolves with my needs.”	
Loyalty model and recognition	Non-traditional, unspoken loyalty	“Yes, so while Four Seasons does not operate a traditional loyalty programme with points and status levels, I have found their unspoken loyalty system to be even more powerful.”	0:01:23
	Personalisation deepens over time	“Over the last five years of returning to their properties, I've noticed a steady deepening of personalisation. I've received handwritten notes referring to past days, tailored amenities that perfectly match my travel goals, and even invitations to experiences that aren't listed publicly. This kind of recognition feels more authentic than chair badges.”	0:01:23
	Quiet recognition	“It's a type of loyalty that isn't broadcast but felt deeply.”	0:01:56
Motivation for repeat stays	Return driven by being remembered	“I've returned to Four Seasons properties in the UK and abroad primarily because of how well I've been treated, not through rewards but through remembering who I am.”	0:02:21
	Anticipatory gestures	“During a visit to Hampshire, the staff remembered that I enjoy early morning runs. On my second visit, they proactively suggested running trials and offered a ready-packed wellness kit.”	0:02:21
	Belonging over transactions	“Rather than being driven by like transactional gain, my return visits	0:02:21

		are driven by emotional comfort and a sense of belonging.”	
	Trust-based creation of stays	“I don't have to end my place through bookings. The brand invests in knowing me and creating my stays based on that trust.”	0:02:55
Brand engagement	Concierge as curator	“Before a trip, I often reach out directly to the concierge for curated suggestions tailored to the destination. Their local insight often goes beyond what I find online.”	0:03:10
	Direct feedback and follow-ups	“After my visits, I tend to share feedback, not through surveys but directly with managers I've built a rapport with. I've even received follow-ups weeks after my stay asking if a suggestion I made had improved. That back-and-forth engagement makes me feel like my voice matters.”	0:03:26
Recommendation	Not for points-chasers	“It's not the kind of programme where you're going to be racking up points or getting automatic discounts.”	0:03:57
	Recognition over status	“For frequent travellers who often feel like just a reservation number, Four Seasons offers an antidote. The brand recognises you without needing to remind you of your status. That's rare.”	0:04:21
	Pre-emptive knowing	“...it's the only place where the service knows who I am before I even introduce myself.”	0:04:35

Emotional connection	Deep, evolving bond	“...with Four Seasons, I would describe ~~like~~ —my emotional connection as deeply rooted and evolving.”	0:04:42
	Emotional states and safe haven	“I’ve come to associate their properties with certain emotions, so peace, clarity, warmth.”	0:04:42
		“It’s used like a safe haven I can return to both physically and emotionally.”	0:05:17
Handling negative experiences	Service recovery reimagines the moment	“We were offered a private space in the garden lounge instead with a customised menu prepared in less than an hour and a complimentary wine pairing chosen by the sommelier.”	0:05:40
		“They didn’t simply compensate, they reimagined the moment. That ability to recover without disruption and to do without blame or delay reinforced my trust in the brand.”	0:06:11
Satisfaction with relationship	Dialogue, not transaction	“The relationship with Four Seasons feels like a dialogue rather than a service transaction.”	0:06:24
	Seamless adaptation	“When I switched to a plant-based diet, they adapted seamlessly. I didn’t even have to explain on my second visit: my preferences had already been noted.”	0:06:24
	Mutual respect	“It’s a relationship built on mutual respect.”	0:06:46
Memorable experiences	Quiet empathy	“...a handwritten card in my room with a quote about resilience and	0:07:01

		healing along with a selection of calming herbal teas and a wellness journal. They didn't make a spectacle of it. There was no mention at check-in, no intrusive follow-up.”	
		“It was simply there when I walked in. That small act of empathy done with such quiet understanding has stayed with me longer than any luxury suite or spa treatment could.”	0:07:29
Recognition and personal touches	Seen, not scanned	“These things tell me I'm being seen, not scanned.”	0:07:48
Personalisation and relevance	Relevance over abundance	“True luxury isn't about abundance, it's about relevance.”	0:08:27
	Proof of attention	“A curated newspaper instead of a stack, a pillow already set to my usual preference, a room scented lightly with eucalyptus because I once mentioned I find it relaxing. These aren't random upgrades, they're proof that Four Seasons pays attention in ways that algorithms can't replicate.”	0:08:41
Valued features	Human memory at the heart	“What I value most is the human memory at the heart of the programme. There's no app flashing my status, no need to quote a membership number, but a sense that the hotel is carrying forward and understanding who I am.”	0:09:09
	Flexible, context-specific perks	“On work trips, I've had a private study area arranged, on leisure stays, I've been offered a later checkout or	0:09:09

		a quiet table for breakfast. The flexibility is built into the philosophy, not just the policy.”	
Experience vs rewards	Emotion over discounts	“While rewards are easy to replicate, discounts, upgrades, points, emotional connection requires effort, time and empathy.”	0:09:49
	Support vs free nights	“That kind of support is what earns loyalty, not a free night.”	0:09:49
Comparison with other brands	Opposite of tiered models	“Compared to other hotels or brands like Marriott, Hilton or even IHG, which have structured loyalty tiers, Four Seasons feels like the opposite... Four Seasons rewards familiarity and presence... more emotionally consistent across properties.”	0:10:32
Brand identity through loyalty	Mindful relationships	“By not following the mainstream points-based model, they communicate that their version of loyalty isn't about a mass accumulation, it's about mindful relationships.”	0:11:03
	Depth over scale	“...confident enough to focus on depth over scale.”	0:11:31
Exclusivity	Less but better	“Luxury isn't just about offering more, it's about knowing when to offer less but better... Four Seasons keeps its loyalty structure feeling exclusive without being exclusionary.”	0:11:38
Improvement suggestions	Private preference portal	“...offer a private invitation-only portal for frequent guests, not to track	0:12:08

		points, but to allow for shared preferences, favourite destinations, or even past guest experiences to travel with you from one property to another.”	
		“It could simply be a tool for the hotel team to continue tailoring stays as the guest evolves. It would reinforce the brand ethos while adding even more coherence to the global guest journey.”	0:12:27
Final reflection	Loyalty as intimacy	“Loyalty and hospitality are no longer just about incentives. It's about intimacy.”	0:12:47
	Quiet, confident care	“There's no countdown to the next tier or alert about expiring rewards. Instead, there's a quiet, confident kind of care that always meets me where I am.”	0:13:00
	Relationship, not system	“...but as a relationship and that to me is the most serious experience a brand can offer.”	0:13:23

Four Seasons III – Sneha

Sub-theme	Code	Direct Quote	Timestamp
Emotional connection	Emotional grounding	"With Four Seasons, I feel something closer to emotional grounding. The properties evoke a specific state of mind, calm, centred and taken care of... I associate Four Seasons with moments of personal clarity."	0:02:59

Personalisation	Tailored touches	"When I walk into a room and see the curtains drawn to match my preferred lighting or a book by an author I've previously mentioned left on the nightstand, it sends a powerful message—you matter."	0:05:34
Service recovery	Respect through resolution	"Yes, once in Geneva. There was a mix up with my airport transfer... the manager personally reached out to help me reschedule my meeting venue... That maturity in handling mistakes won my respect."	0:03:32
Loyalty without points	Relationship over transactions	"Four Seasons doesn't offer a standard loyalty programme and honestly I think that's one of its strengths... It's a kind of loyalty that feels earned on both sides rather than racked."	0:00:41
Consistency across locations	Global service consistency	"There was one instance where I booked a last-minute stay in Istanbul... the front desk had already arranged a light meal... That kind of consistency across borders is what drives my loyalty."	0:01:13
Staff attentiveness	Natural appreciation	"The appreciation doesn't come from being greeted with grand gestures. It's in the pauses, how the staff wait for you to speak instead of rushing through a script, or how your preferences quietly appear without a word."	0:05:04
Subtle exclusivity	Exclusivity through memory	"The absence of a formal programme is itself a reflection of exclusivity. Loyalty is built on shared experience, not milestones... The exclusivity isn't in	0:08:06

		what's restricted, it's in what's remembered and refined."	
Thoughtful touches	Personal empathy	"When I returned from a yoga class, I found a small gift... a woven bracelet with a note that read 'strength through softness'... It felt entirely personal and it brought me to tears."	0:04:45
Trust as loyalty driver	Human relationship	"Most loyalty programmes reward spending. Four Seasons rewards attention, attention to detail, to timing, to emotion... the brand has managed to offer something rare, a human relationship."	0:09:01
Preference memory	Remembering guest choices	"Not only did they remember my preference for a top floor room... That kind of consistency across borders is what drives my loyalty."	0:01:13

Marriott I – Morris

Sub-theme	Code	Supporting Quote(s)	Timestamp
First impressions and brand identity	First impression and brand identity	"I've stayed in several luxury hotels across the UK, but my most consistent experience has been with Marriott Hotels, particularly their autograph collections and the JW Marriott properties."	0:00:08
		"The service, consistency and comfort level at Marriott's properties have made them my go-to choice for both business and leisure."	0:00:35
Loyalty model and recognition	Loyalty recognition model	"Yes I've been a Marriott Bonvoy member for over six years now... I've worked my way up to platinum elite status. The programme has become a	0:01:22

		key reason I continue choosing Marriott."	
Reasons for returning	Motivation to return	"Earning points towards free nights and receiving complimentary upgrades is very motivating for me. Even when cheaper options are available, I choose Marriott because I know what to expect from them and those elite benefits make a huge difference."	0:01:29
Brand engagement	Brand engagement	"I frequently use the Marriott Bonvoy app... for checking in, choosing my room, and chatting with staff."	0:02:01
		"I also follow Marriott Bonvoy on Instagram and LinkedIn... The social media content, especially member stories and destination features, help me keep emotionally connected with them."	0:02:26
Advocacy	Recommendation rationale	"I often recommend Marriott and the Bonvoy programme to my friends and colleagues... I feel confident recommending them to my closest friends and family."	0:02:36
Emotional connection	Emotional connection	"The sense of familiarity when I walk into their hotel, especially when I'm travelling solo, creates a sense of comfort for me... personalised service makes it feel like a home away from home."	0:03:08
Service recovery and loyalty	Service recovery and loyalty	"Yes, I had a less than ideal experience once... However, the way the staff handled the situation, upgrading me and offering points as compensation, reaffirmed my loyalty."	0:03:35
Satisfaction	Overall satisfaction	"Marriott has managed to maintain high standards... They treat me like a partner in their brand journey."	0:04:02

Memorable experiences	Memorable experience	"The concierge surprised me with a handwritten note and a custom welcome basket based on my preferences noted in the app. It made me feel incredibly valued and recognised."	0:04:39
Personalisation	Recognition and personal touches	"The staff frequently acknowledge my platinum elite status; early check-in, suite upgrades and welcome gifts all reinforce the idea my loyalty is noticed and appreciated."	0:04:52
		"Personalised experiences like remembering my preferred pillow type or offering a late checkout without asking really shape my perception."	0:05:13
		"It moves the experience from transactional to relational... It makes me feel seen, which deepens my emotional attachment to the brand."	0:05:28
Valued features	Valued features	"I most value the room upgrades, complimentary breakfast, late checkout and priority service... The elite status tiers also motivate me to stay more often."	0:05:50
Experience vs rewards	Experience over rewards	"While the points and discounts are valuable, I personally value the emotional and experiential benefits more. Small gestures, exclusive events and personalisation elevate the loyalty programme for me."	0:06:20
Brand comparison	Comparison with other brands	"I've tried Hilton Honors and IHG Rewards... but Marriott Bonvoy stands out to me in terms of recognition and consistency."	0:06:46
Brand identity through loyalty	Loyalty shaping brand identity	"Marriott Bonvoy has become synonymous with the Marriott brand... it's embedded into the brand's strategy and perception."	0:07:21
Exclusivity	Exclusivity	"The Bonvoy elite benefits feel exclusive... dedicated elite check-in	0:07:21

		counters, welcome amenities... all signal exclusivity."	
Improvement suggestions	Improvement suggestion	"I'd love to see more curated experiential rewards like destination-based experiences or invitations to local cultural events... Increasing personalisation through AI-driven suggestions in the app would deepen the emotional connection for me."	0:08:18
Overall summary	Overall summary	"Marriott Bonvoy is one of the few loyalty programmes that has kept pace with modern guest expectations. It blends digital convenience with a personal service and global reach with local charm."	0:08:56

Marriott II – Ashira

Sub-theme	Code	Supporting Quote(s)	Timestamp
First impressions and brand identity	Brand consistency and service quality	"The Marriott has been a frequent choice due to its broad presence and reputation."	0:00:05
		"Whether it's for work events or personal getaways, I'm drawn to the Marriott because of its consistent hospitality and recognisable standard of service."	0:00:19
Loyalty model and recognition	Loyalty tier influence	"I've been a member of the Marriott Bonvoy programme for about seven years now."	0:00:41
		"Over time I've advanced to the Platinum Elite tier, which now strongly influences my hotel choices."	0:00:54
Reasons for returning	Loyalty benefits as retention driver	"The ability to accumulate points and enjoy elite privileges like lounge access or room upgrades makes me feel valued and gives me more control over my experience."	0:01:21

Brand engagement	Multi-channel brand engagement	"I use their app to handle my stays efficiently, read travel inspiration features, and occasionally interact with the brand on social media."	0:01:32
		"I also take part in member promotions and give feedback after most of my stays, which helps me build a two-way relationship."	0:01:48
Advocacy	Advocacy and brand ambassadorship	"I've recommended the Bonvoy to friends and even clients... the app, the range of properties and the elite benefits make it easy to promote with confidence."	0:02:03
Emotional connection	Emotional loyalty	"There's a familiarity that comes with staying at their hotels... the staff remembering small preferences or the design language that feels inviting."	0:02:31
Service recovery and loyalty	Service recovery and trust	"The room had maintenance issues... the staff took ownership of the situation, offering a sincere apology and bonus points. That was enough to maintain my trust."	0:02:58
Satisfaction	Relationship depth	"I feel the relationship is strong and built on mutual value... [they] engage their loyal guests in a way that feels authentic."	0:03:14
Memorable experiences	Personalisation and surprise	"The front desk arranged a special celebration set up in my room because I'd mentioned an anniversary in the app... it was unexpected and incredibly personal."	0:03:52
Personalisation	Guest recognition	"They often mention my status during check-in and I've had staff go out of their way to ensure that I'm comfortable."	0:04:18
	Personalisation impact	"From remembering my dietary preferences to setting the room temperature how I like it... it speaks	0:04:31

		volumes about how the brand values loyalty.”	
Valued features	Elite benefits and flexibility	“Late checkout, better rooms and exclusive access areas are incredibly valued... flexibility in redeeming points across different brands and categories.”	0:05:06
Experience vs rewards	Emotional over transactional loyalty	“Feeling like a valued guest and being recognised individually has a longer lasting impact than just accumulating points.”	0:05:26
Brand comparison	Competitive advantage	“Bonvoy is ahead in terms of balance... reliable perks, brand variety and consistent delivery.”	0:05:37
Brand identity through loyalty	Loyalty as brand pillar	“Bonvoy has become central to Marriott's image... [it] reinforces the global luxury identity and plays a strategic role in customer retention.”	0:06:13
Exclusivity	Luxury reinforcement	“Dedicated check-in, curated welcome gifts and lounge access give a tangible sense of exclusivity.”	0:06:42
Improvement suggestions	Personalisation innovation	“More personalised member journeys like curated city experiences or behind-the-scenes hotel access... enhance in-app personalisation.”	0:07:21
Overall summary	Loyalty programme as lifestyle companion	“Marriott Bonvoy feels more than a traditional loyalty programme... [it] focuses on recognition and emotion, not just discounts.”	0:07:42

Marriott III – Camille

Sub-theme	Code	Supporting Quote(s)	Timestamp
First impressions and brand identity	Localisation and dual purpose appeal	“The first time I stayed at a Marriott luxury property I was impressed by how the international brand managed to localise its service... blending	0:00:05

		heritage architecture with contemporary design and personalised interactions that didn't feel scripted."	
		"Over time Marriott became a go-to... for the way it catered to both business and leisure needs without compromising the sense of escape I look for in a luxury stay."	0:00:05
Loyalty model and recognition	Loyalty tier influence	"I joined the Marriott Bonvoy about six years ago... benefits stacked up... reaching gold elite status... early check-in, welcome drinks, and staff referring to past preferences."	0:00:40
Reasons for returning	Loyalty benefits as retention driver	"After staying at the [Marriott] in Barcelona... complimentary upgrade and spa voucher... I deliberately sought out other [Marriott] properties... the loyalty programme turned my preference into a habit."	0:01:24
Brand engagement	Multi-channel brand engagement	"I personally interact through the Bonvoy mobile app, but also through their curated events platform... attended a rooftop jazz evening in Paris... I also read Marriott's lifestyle content, particularly their sustainability stories, and participated in feedback panels."	0:01:58
Advocacy	Advocacy and brand ambassadorship	"I often recommend Bonvoy to colleagues and family... fits those who want to stay within a trusted brand while exploring different kinds of hotels... more practical than poetic."	0:02:36
Emotional connection	Strategic over deep emotional loyalty	"With Marriott Bonvoy, I feel a sense of alignment rather than deep emotional attachment... occasional emotional highlights like being recognised by staff... or receiving a surprise dessert on your birthday."	0:03:07
Service recovery and loyalty	Service recovery and trust	"During a stay in Dublin... the suite I had booked wasn't available... front desk manager offered a partial refund,	0:03:39

		complimentary dinner, and an extended check-out... reminded me why I chose Marriott.”	
Satisfaction	Relationship depth and evolution	“I’m highly satisfied overall... feel valued as a repeat guest... sense of progression... more curated partnerships and lifestyle content... growing with the programme, not just collecting points.”	0:04:14
Memorable experiences	Personalisation and surprise	“Anniversary trip... staff decorated [the room] with petals and a framed photo from our last stay in Vienna... deeply touching... showed how Bonvoy’s data and service culture can come together in meaningful ways.”	0:04:42
Personalisation	Guest recognition	“At high-end Marriott hotels... using my name naturally, pre-setting room temperature, remembering I prefer still water... transforms the experience from a transaction into a relationship.”	0:05:19
	Personalisation impact	“Personalisation is what separates a good stay from a lasting impression... quiet acknowledgements that reflect an understanding of my habits... drive loyalty more than promotions ever could.”	0:05:51
Valued features	Flexibility and tier motivation	“I can redeem points for stays, transform them to airline partners, or use them on unique experiences... tier system motivates me... mobile check-in, late check-out and guaranteed reservations are incredibly useful.”	0:06:24
Experience vs rewards	Shift from transactional to emotional	“Bonvoy has traditionally leaned towards transactional rewards... but inclusion of experiences and curated events shows they’re trying to build emotional equity... both matter.”	0:07:01
Brand comparison	Competitive advantage	“Compared to others like Hilton Honours or IHG, Marriott Bonvoy is more structured and expansive... doesn’t have the intimate, high-touch feeling of Rosewood or Mandarin	0:07:23

		Oriental... offers scale and reliability with emotional texture layered in.”	
Brand identity through loyalty	Loyalty as brand pillar	“Bonvoy is a defined feature of Marriott’s identity... the glue that ties together a vast and varied portfolio... turns fragmented hotel experiences into a connected lifestyle.”	0:07:58
Exclusivity	Luxury reinforcement	“At the top tiers... lounge access, premier upgrades, invitations to private events... could do more to deliver exclusivity in tone and emotion... personalised trip planning or member-only destinations.”	0:08:26
Improvement suggestions	Personalisation innovation	“More proactive gestures... recognising a guest’s travel anniversary or sending location-specific dining suggestions... partnerships with artists, chefs or cultural institutions.”	0:08:56
Overall summary	Loyalty programme evolution	“Guests today want more than consistency, they want connection... Marriott has a strong infrastructure with Bonvoy, but the next frontier is emotional storytelling... could set a new standard for modern loyalty.”	0:09:28

Marriott IV – Pavanith

Sub-theme	Code	Direct Quote	Time Stamp
Brand consistency and experience	Consistency of service	“Marriott properties have been among the most consistent choices in terms of quality and reliability... each Marriott experience has offered a slightly different vibe while maintaining a uniform standard of comfort.”	0:00:04 – 0:00:36
Brand consistency and experience	Balance of elegance and warmth	“Marriott manages to strike a nice balance between elegance and warmth.”	0:01:07

Loyalty programme impact	Long-term membership	“I’ve been a Marriott Bonvoy member for a little over five years now... I started to appreciate the range of benefits, from flexible redemptions to room upgrades and exclusive experiences.”	0:01:20 – 0:01:52
Loyalty programme impact	Breadth of brands	“Bonvoy is much more broad, covering a wide range of brands, from the luxurious Ritz Carlton to more lifestyle-focused offerings like Moxi or Aloft.”	0:01:52
Loyalty programme impact	Repeat stays due to loyalty programme	“I chose to stay at the JW Marriott Grosvenor House several times... because of how smooth my experiences have been as a Bonvoy member.”	0:02:24 – 0:02:41
Personalisation and recognition	Recognition as a loyalty member	“Being thanked for your loyalty, being offered an upgraded room without even asking, or having access to the executive lounge... I will also be treated as more than just another guest.”	0:02:41
Personalisation and recognition	Use of app and engagement	“I interact with the brand regularly through the Bonvoy app... requesting amenities and communicating directly with the front desk.”	0:03:21
Advocacy and recommendation	Recommending to others	“I actually already have recommended the Marriott Bonvoy to friends and co-workers... the programme’s benefits are accessible... It rewards even moderate loyalty.”	0:04:14 – 0:04:45
Emotional connection	Reliability and mutual respect	“With Marriott, I’d describe the connection as built on reliability and mutual respect... There’s an emotional comfort in predictability.”	0:04:57 – 0:05:25
Service recovery	Recovery builds trust	“A room at a Marriott property was not properly cleaned... I was moved to another room, received a handwritten apology... the recovery process... convinced me to stay loyal.”	0:05:40 – 0:06:03

Memorable experiences	Upgraded suite and personal touch	“During a stay at Marriott Hotel Park Lane... they arranged an upgraded suite, a hot meal and a personalised welcome note... turned what could have been a stressful situation into something unexpectedly comforting.”	0:07:06 – 0:07:41
Personalisation and recognition	Staff remembering guest	“Restaurant staff recall my name... front desk agents acknowledge that I’ve stayed before... makes me want to return.”	0:08:01 – 0:08:27
Personalisation and recognition	Small touches	“When I walk into a room and see my favourite herbal tea... I immediately feel like I’m at home.”	0:08:44 – 0:09:11
Programme features valued	Flexibility and tier benefits	“Flexibility of point usage... milestone-based rewards such as suite night awards... convenience, savings and recognition.”	0:09:22
Programme focus	Balance between rewards and emotional loyalty	“Historically, the programme has been reward heavy... but Marriott is slowly recognising the value of emotional loyalty as well.”	0:10:01 – 0:10:33
Comparative advantage	Comparison with other brands	“Compared to Hilton... I found Bonvoy more rewarding overall... Marriott strikes a strong balance between factual rewards and emotional recognition.”	0:10:39 – 0:11:04
Brand identity	Loyalty programme as brand unifier	“Marriott Bonvoy... allows Marriott to unify its diverse range of properties under one umbrella... Bonvoy isn’t just about rewards, it’s community.”	0:11:21 – 0:11:50
Exclusivity	High status perks	“When you reach the highest status levels, the service becomes noticeably more exclusive... lounge access, upgrades, late checkouts.”	0:12:00
Improvement suggestions	Proactive personalisation	“More proactive personalisation... special dates... tailored experiences... local recommendations based on past behaviours.”	0:12:36 – 0:13:05
Future of loyalty	Human experience over repetition	“We’re moving into a new era of loyalty... travellers like myself don’t	0:13:13 – 0:13:38

		just want upgrades, we want to be understood.”	
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Peninsula I – Lui

Sub-theme	Code	Direct Quote	Time Stamp
Brand identity and experience	Asian heritage and British refinement	“What is different about the Peninsula from others? It's a blend of Asian heritage with British refinement. The attention to service design and guest experience feels more choreographed than spontaneous.”	0:00:06 – 0:00:36
Loyalty programme structure	Invitation-only exclusivity	“It's not the kind of programme you sign up for, it's invitation only, which adds a layer of rest... the value lies in how your preferences are remembered and how your experiences are refined over time.”	0:00:56 – 0:01:33
Return motivation	Consistency and recognition	“I returned because of consistency in the description, the precise execution of service, and the unspoken recognition that developed between you and the staff.”	0:01:39 – 0:02:04
Engagement	App and private experiences	“My engagement is primarily through their digital concert and app for pre-arrival requests and in-room control... I have also attended private experiences arranged through the Peninsula Club, like wine tasting in Hong Kong and an art exhibition preview in London.”	0:02:11 – 0:02:42
Advocacy	Selective recommendation	“I would, but only to those who understand what Peninsula offers... If someone values ritual, calm, and refinement over the commercial perks, then I recommend it wholeheartedly.”	0:03:00 – 0:03:33
Emotional connection	Formal loyalty and mutual respect	“With Peninsula, the connection feels cultivated rather than emotional in the warm sense. It's more formal types of loyalty, almost like mutual respect.”	0:03:38 – 0:04:15

Service recovery	Composed and dignified response	“Apologising discreetly, offering a handwritten apology from duty manager and adjusting the room charge without me having to ask... the Peninsula response was dignified and efficient.”	0:04:21 – 0:04:57
Overall satisfaction	Precision over friendliness	“I feel valued through gesture, precision and consistency rather than overt friendliness, and that works perfectly for my style of travel.”	0:05:07 – 0:06:08
Memorable experience	Personalised coffee ritual	“That evening, I found a set of single-origin cold brew bottles... with a note saying we notice you miss your morning ritual... extraordinary.”	0:06:08 – 0:06:27
Personalisation	Elegantly understated recognition	“Your preferences are simply carried out smoothly... from how your slippers are laid out, to the temperature of the room and timing of housekeeping.”	0:06:31 – 0:07:08
Personal touches	Thoughtful global consistency	“They provide a rare tea blend I tried in Tokyo at a London property without me asking... creates the sense that you're known globally, not just a single location.”	0:07:16 – 0:07:57
Valued features	Invisible luxury	“Room, sense, pillow, firmness, minibar contents, even the reading materials... It's about invisible luxury, not showmanship.”	0:08:07 – 0:08:43
Programme focus	100% experience over points	“Peninsula offered... intangible incentives, emotional equity, respect and precision... far more to me than discount.”	0:08:53 – 0:10:11
Brand identity	Timeless, culturally-rooted luxury	“It reinforces Peninsula as a timeless brand, culturally our luxury... You are not part of volume driven system. You're part of a quiet ecosystem of refined guests.”	0:10:21 – 0:10:46
Exclusivity	Discreet loyalty	“Peninsula does not advertise its loyalty club... loyalty is built originally through experience, not tiers.”	0:11:03 – 0:11:36
Improvement suggestions	Communicating progress	“Perhaps a better way to communicate progress... more storytelling around how	0:11:42 – 0:12:16

		they select and train staff... it's the staff that deliver the brand sales.”	
Future of loyalty	Silent but powerful	“I believe the future of loyalty is silent but powerful... I’m loyal not because I get freebies, but because I get remembered.”	0:12:27 – 0:13:01

Peninsula II – Asaph

Sub-theme	Code	Direct Quote	Time Stamp
Brand identity and experience	British sensibility with international elegance	“What stood out to me was its ability to merge the international elegance with a distinct British sensibility. The service is delivered with quiet precision and every aspect from the concierge to the dining experience feels curated rather than commercial.”	0:00:07 – 0:00:35
Loyalty programme structure	Invitation-only exclusivity	“I joined after a fourth stay at their properties... The invitation felt quite personal and thoughtful, not algorithmic... what attracted me... was the way the membership promised access to exclusivity, almost like a private salon rather than a scheme.”	0:00:47 – 0:01:09
Return motivation	Recognition and continuity	“It was more like how they remembered me, the exact type of pillow I prefer, or like the way the lighting was set in my suite... It created a sense of continuity between the distinct travel moments.”	0:01:18 – 0:01:44
Engagement	Cultural and curated experiences	“I regularly use their app... I’ve also attended private viewings... and once participated in a cultural evening that paired rare wine tasting with a local historian’s talk. These moments deepened my engagement far beyond standard transactions.”	0:01:52 – 0:02:15
Advocacy	Selective recommendation	“I’d only suggest this to someone who values discretion, consistency and high context service... more attuned to those	0:02:28 – 0:02:44

		who appreciate elegance that doesn't need to be advertised."	
Emotional connection	Quiet appreciation	"With the Peninsula, there's a sense of quiet emotional connection... rooted in a deep appreciation of how they consistently deliver clarity and calm. It's like returning to a friend's home... There's already an understanding."	0:02:56 – 0:03:12
Service recovery	Creative handling of inconvenience	"During a visit to the Peninsula Bangkok, the car transfer was delayed... They offered a guided walk through a nearby art district while the situation was being resolved... reinforced my loyalty more than if nothing had gone wrong."	0:03:23 – 0:03:51
Overall satisfaction	Bilateral trust	"There's a sense of bilateral trust. I never feel like they're trying to sell me something... It's a relationship that allows space for the guests to breathe and feel respected."	0:03:56 – 0:04:18
Memorable experience	Personalised cultural gift	"I found a small leather-bound notebook... embossed with my initials... Inside they'd left a handwritten note of cultural spots based on our previous conversations... Nearly curatorial."	0:04:21 – 0:04:48
Personalisation	Subtle recognition	"It's subtler, like the valet addressing me by name... or the pianist... playing a piece I'd mentioned liking during a previous stay. Those moments feel intuitive rather than orchestrated."	0:05:04 – 0:05:20
Valued features	Centrality of small details	"I judge luxury brands less by their chandeliers and more by how they remember the little things... I feel like that elevates them from excellent to exceptional."	0:05:32 – 0:05:45
Programme focus	Discretion and access	"There's no flashy promotions... instead there's access to quieter check-ins, private bookings at partner galleries... I value access over accumulation."	0:06:08 – 0:06:27

Emotional connection priority	Experience over rewards	“Without a doubt, it focuses on experience and emotional resonance... invited to watch a rehearsal at the Royal Opera House... That’s the kind of thing that creates a lifelong memory and builds real loyalty.”	0:06:30 – 0:06:50
Comparative perception	Crafted vs transactional	“In contrast to brands like Marriott or the IHG, which are a lot more transactional, Peninsula feels crafted... While others offer benefits, Peninsula offers belonging.”	0:06:55 – 0:07:07
Brand identity	Extension of brand DNA	“The Peninsula Club is an extension of the brand’s DNA... reinforces Peninsula’s positioning as refined, selective and timeless.”	0:07:28 – 0:07:50
Exclusivity	Silent, Intentional Luxury	“It avoids the tropes of conventional luxury... luxury is communicated through gestures, anticipation and restraint... silent, intentional and immersive.”	0:07:57 – 0:08:14
Improvement suggestions	Personalised digital log	“Perhaps a digital log of personalised experiences or past stays... would deepen the sense of legacy with the brand and allow the relationship to evolve.”	0:08:27 – 0:08:44
Future of loyalty	Meaningful rewards	“It’s not about freebies, it’s about feeling anticipated... rewards meaningfully... Not the perks, but the principle.”	0:08:52 – 0:09:04

Peninsula III – Soundarvan

Sub-theme	Code	Direct Quote	Time Stamp
Brand identity and experience	Integration of East Asian service in British context	“The Peninsula stood out for its precision and thoughtful integration of East Asia service in the British hospitality context. The experience felt accurate without being flashy, something I particularly value.”	0:00:07 – 0:00:34

Loyalty programme structure	Invitation-based model	“I became a Peninsula Club member nearly two years ago... Unlike most loyalty schemes, this one is subtle and invitation-based rather than collecting points. The emphasis on long-term recognition and meaningful gestures... [is] more in line with how I travel.”	0:00:38 – 0:01:08
Return motivation	Familiarity and consistency	“The Peninsula Club builds loyalty through its consistent service quality and its intuitive memory of past preferences... I return... because of how effortlessly they recreate the familiarity, even across different properties.”	0:01:15 – 0:01:40
Engagement	Digital and in-house experiences	“I used the Peninsula app to tailor my stay... I also joined members-only in-house activities like wellness workshops and chef-led culinary previews... It’s a brand that favours a decrease in over digital buzz and I respect that.”	0:01:49 – 0:02:18
Advocacy	Selective recommendation	“I would [recommend]... only to those who genuinely appreciate refined service and intentional quiet luxury... appealing to those who prioritise atmosphere, subtle gestures, and predictability.”	0:02:28 – 0:02:55
Emotional connection	Mutual understanding	“I feel a calm assurance with Peninsula... more like mutual understanding than emotional bonding. There’s a comfort in predictable excellence... an appreciation for their standards and consistency.”	0:02:58 – 0:03:50
Service recovery	Measured and respectful response	“During a stay at Peninsula Shenzhen... They corrected it swiftly, left a handwritten apology and followed up discreetly... made me feel more confident in the brand’s value.”	0:03:50 – 0:04:03
Overall satisfaction	Mutual relationship	“Extremely satisfied... I never felt like I was being processed through a loyalty system. The relationship feels mutual,	0:04:07 – 0:04:37

		like a guest and host who already understand one another.”	
Memorable experience	Anticipatory service	“At Peninsula Paris... they had already arranged for spa access, refreshment and a quiet suite... anticipated what I would need before I asked.”	0:04:37 – 0:05:05
Personalisation	Unspoken familiarity	“No one ever said welcome back valued member. Instead... robe size already in the room or right number of hangers... It’s an unspoken language of familiarity.”	0:05:13 – 0:05:36
Impact of personal touches	Silent trust	“Finding a particular type of water I prefer already stocked in my room... makes me feel remembered rather than managed... it builds a silent trust.”	0:05:40 – 0:06:09
Valued features	Inner circle access	“The most valuable aspect is not tangible... Private dining, tasting, discreet upgrades... more valuable to me than points or vouchers.”	0:06:09 – 0:06:37
Programme focus	Emotional and experiential connection	“The Peninsula Club is almost entirely driven by emotional and experiential connections... rare cultural moments like a tea master session in Tokyo.”	0:07:05 – 0:07:12
Comparative perception	Minimal but deep	“Compared to... Hilton Honours... the Peninsula Club is minimal but much deeper... ahead in terms of cultural sophistication and silence.”	0:07:20 – 0:07:48
Brand identity	Understated and relational	“The Peninsula Club reinforces the brand image as understated and sophisticated... It’s not transactional, it’s relational.”	0:07:48 – 0:08:20
Exclusivity	Mutual recognition	“The absence of... [a] points earning structure signals that exclusivity isn’t earned by volume but by mutual recognition... makes it feel more luxurious.”	0:08:25 – 0:09:10
Improvement suggestions	Digital personalisation across locations	“More digital personalisation... having my preferences visible across all Peninsula locations through the app... would deepen the bond further.”	0:09:10 – 0:09:25

Overall summary	Trust over time	“The Peninsula Club... earns you trust over time through care, consistency and culture... loyalty feels less like strategy and more like a shared journey.”	0:09:35 – end
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Peninsula IV – Anastasia

Sub-theme	Code	Direct Quote	Time Stamp
Brand identity and experience	Calm and elegant luxury	“It felt calm, welcoming, not too flashy... The service is thoughtful and the design makes you feel relaxed and it’s really elegant, not over the top, just how I like it.”	0:00:06 – 0:00:21
Loyalty programme structure	Invitation through experience	“I joined after staying in Chicago where they hosted... a private event... it felt more like being invited into... a specific lifestyle group than a typical reward programme... that personal touch made me want to join.”	0:00:27 – 0:00:41
Return motivation	Familiarity and consistency	“It’s not because of the points... but because it felt familiar and comforting. The staff remembered me and the atmosphere was always calm and consistent... that’s why I just keep going back.”	0:00:51 – 0:01:10
Engagement	Events and lifestyle content	“I take part in the events and I use also Peninsula’s academic experiences... I also read their lifestyle content... Sometimes I even plan my trips around the things they feature. It feels like a relationship.”	0:01:18 – 0:01:38
Advocacy	Selective recommendation	“Yes... but I would explain that it’s not a typical programme with... free nights. It’s better for people who care about luxury, peace, great service... calmer and more personal.”	0:01:43 – 0:02:01

Emotional connection	Trust and reliability	“It’s not super emotional, but I trust them. I feel like they’re reliable and elegant and gives me peace of mind when I stay there.”	0:02:06 – 0:02:17
Service recovery	Composed resolution	“At the Bangkok branch... the check-in was super slow... but the staff handled it very well... later even sent me a handwritten note... showed me they cared... even when things didn’t go perfectly, it was still okay.”	0:02:28 – 0:02:44
Overall satisfaction	Personal and non-intrusive communication	“The Peninsula doesn’t spam me with emails... messages feel thoughtful and calm... I don’t feel like just another guest.”	0:02:48 – 0:03:08
Memorable experience	Personal cultural gesture	“In Tokyo... they organised a traditional tea set in my room because I had once said I like Japanese culture... custom map showing nearby tea houses... it felt very personal... made me feel important.”	0:03:10 – 0:03:30
Personalisation	Genuine recognition	“The staff members remember my name... doorman greeted me personally... restaurant staff suggest dishes based on what I liked before... those small details really matter.”	0:03:36 – 0:03:52
Impact of personal touches	Comfort and familiarity	“Luxury is in little things... when my room already smells the way I like it, or they give me the kind of pillow I prefer without asking... makes the hotel feel... like a habit, not just a one-time stay.”	0:03:58 – 0:04:17
Valued features	Quiet access and exclusivity	“I like the quiet access... invites to private events or special experiences... [it’s] about quality not quantity.”	0:04:22 – 0:04:44
Programme focus	Emotional connection over points	“Definitely more about emotional connection... no points or tiers... focus is on how you feel before, during and after your stay... that kind of care stays with you longer than any discount.”	0:04:49 – 0:05:06

Comparative perception	Creative and personal	“Other hotels reward you often but the Peninsula goes deeper... thoughtful experiences based on your culture or past visits... more creative and personal, not generic.”	0:05:10 – 0:05:29
Brand identity through loyalty	Elegant and emotionally smart	“The programme reflects the brand’s values, like elegant, patient and emotionally smart.”	0:05:39 – 0:05:51
Exclusivity	Calm and private	“It’s not about showing off or spending to earn your status... exclusive because it’s calm and private... [they] value the relationship, not just because you spend a lot of money.”	0:05:56 – 0:06:08
Improvement suggestions	Personal member area/app	“Maybe they could add a personal member area or an app... to save your preferences, suggest experiences or notify of events... more connected without being pushy.”	0:06:13 – 0:06:36
Overall summary	Meaningful and personal loyalty	“Loyalty programmes... should feel more personal and thoughtful... The Peninsula Club... makes me feel like I’m part of something meaningful, not just a guest... that’s why I stay loyal.”	0:06:39 – 0:07:02