

DESIGNING EFFECTIVE LOYALTY PROGRAMMES FOR ENHANCING CUSTOMER RETENTION IN THE NIGERIAN HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY

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Abstract

This study examined the role of loyalty programmes in enhancing customer retention in the Nigerian hospitality industry in Ilesa, Osun State. A cross-sectional survey design was adopted, and data was collected using a structured questionnaire. Descriptive statistics revealed that respondents generally perceive loyalty programmes positively, with value-based programmes having the highest perceived impact. Points-based, tiered, and value-based loyalty programmes all have positive and significant relationships with customer retention. The study concludes that loyalty programmes are effective in promoting long-term commitment. The study recommends that hotels integrate points-based, tiered, and value-based programmes strategically, to enhance customer retention and achieve sustainable competitive advantage.

Keywords: Loyalty Programmes, Points-Based, Tiered, Value-Based, Customer Retention, Hospitality Industry.

Introduction

The hospitality industry is a vital component of the global service economy, and it includes sectors such as lodging, food services, tourism, and event management (Adzoyi *et al.*, 2021). In Nigeria, the hospitality industry has witnessed considerable growth over the years, driven by urbanization, increased business travel, and the expansion of tourism activities (Chukwu *et al.*, 2021). The sector plays a significant role in national development through job creation, revenue generation, and foreign exchange earnings (Nwokorie *et al.*, 2024). The intangible nature of hospitality services, where experience, satisfaction, and perceived value dominate, makes customer retention a critical success factor (Idowu, 2024). In this regard, customer retention has been widely discussed as a firm's ability to maintain long-term relationships with customers and ensure repeat patronage (Artha *et al.*, 2022).

One of the most widely adopted strategies for enhancing customer retention in the hospitality industry is the implementation of loyalty programmes (Pereira *et al.*, 2025). Loyalty programmes are structured marketing initiatives designed to reward and encourage repeat patronage by offering incentives such as points, discounts, exclusive services, or personalized experiences (Bariha, 2021).

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These programmes have evolved from simple transactional reward systems to more sophisticated relationship-building tools that leverage data analytics and customer insights (Bauat, 2025). Literature suggests that loyalty programmes are effective in influencing customer behavior by increasing purchase frequency, strengthening brand attachment, and enhancing perceived value (Chapagain *et al.*, 2025). However, their effectiveness depends on how well they are designed and aligned with customer expectations.

In the Nigerian hospitality context, customers increasingly rely on service quality, online reviews, and personalized experiences in making decisions. This makes loyalty programmes serve as a strategic tool for improving customer satisfaction and retention (Ogunnaike *et al.*, 2022). Despite their potential benefits, not all loyalty programmes yield the desired outcomes, as poorly designed programmes may fail to create meaningful engagement or differentiate a brand in a competitive market (Dorotic *et al.*, 2011). This underscores the need for a comprehensive understanding of how loyalty programmes can be effectively designed to enhance customer retention. It is against this backdrop that this paper examines loyalty programmes and customer retention within the Nigerian hospitality sector.

Statement of the Problem

Customer retention remains a persistent challenge for firms in the hospitality industry, even as organizations continue to invest in loyalty programmes to sustain repeat patronage (Nwokorie *et al.*, 2024). Research indicates that many loyalty initiatives fail to generate the expected retention outcomes because they are not well aligned with customer preferences and perceived value (Koo *et al.*, 2020). Global studies affirm the potential of well-structured loyalty programmes to enhance retention (Pereira *et al.*, 2025), evidence from the Nigerian hospitality industry is limited and fragmented. Existing studies focus broadly on customer satisfaction and service quality rather than the specific design and effectiveness of loyalty strategies (Idowu & Ogunlade, 2024). This necessitates the need to understand how each dimension of loyalty programmes influences customer retention in the Nigerian hospitality context to inform more effective practice.

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this study is to determine the role of loyalty programmes in enhancing customer retention in the hospitality industry. The specific objectives are to:

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- i. assess the relationship between points-based loyalty programme and customer retention in the hospitality industry in Ilesa, Osun State.
- ii. evaluate the relationship between tiered loyalty programme and customer retention in the hospitality industry in Ilesa, Osun State.
- iii. determine the relationship between value-based loyalty programme and customer retention in the hospitality industry in Ilesa, Osun State.

Research Questions

1. What is the relationship between points-based loyalty programme and customer retention in the hospitality industry in Ilesa, Osun State?
2. What is the How does tiered loyalty programme influence customer retention in the hospitality industry in Ilesa, Osun State?
3. What is the impact of value-based loyalty programme on customer retention in the hospitality industry in Ilesa, Osun State?

Loyalty Programmes

Loyalty programmes are strategic marketing mechanisms designed to foster repeat patronage by rewarding customers for continued engagement and maintaining long-term relationships with firms. Empirical evidence reveals that the attractiveness and perceived value of loyalty programmes have a significant effect on long-term customer retention, with highly valued reward structures increasing commitment and repeat behaviour (Emuobor *et al.*, 2025). Loyalty programmes create incentives that encourage customers to revisit, purchase more frequently, and develop deeper psychological ties with brands, ultimately contributing to sustained patronage (Osarenmwinda & Ekanem, 2025).

Types of Loyalty Programmes

Points-Based Loyalty Programme: This reward customers with points for each purchase or engagement, which can later be redeemed for benefits such as discounts, free services, or exclusive offers (Eizuan *et al.*, 2022). In hospitality and other sectors, these programmes are used to encourage repeat patronage by offering tangible rewards that accumulate with continued use. For example, hotel

guests may earn points for each night's stay and redeem them for complimentary stays or room upgrades, which increases the likelihood of repeat bookings (Gawuna *et al.*, 2019).

Tiered Loyalty Programme: This classifies customers into different levels (e.g., bronze, silver, gold) based on their engagement or spending intensity, with higher tiers offering enhanced benefits (Dwivedi *et al.*, 2024). In the hospitality industry, tiered models are used to motivate guests to increase their usage of services to reach higher status levels, earning privileges such as priority check-in, room upgrades, or exclusive offers once certain thresholds are reached (Lentz *et al.*, 2022).

Value-Based Loyalty Programme: This emphasizes alignment between organisational values and customer values, fostering deeper emotional connection rather than merely offering transactional rewards (Nwankwo *et al.*, 2023). These programmes integrate social, ethical, or mission-oriented components into loyalty efforts, such as enabling customers to support causes they care about through their participation. Research highlights that emotional bonds and perceived value beyond purely economic rewards are key predictors of long-term customer loyalty and retention (Eizuan *et al.*, 2022).

Loyalty Programmes in the Hospitality Sector

Recent research shows that hotels and guesthouses that implement well-designed loyalty programmes can significantly improve customer retention by creating positive experiences linked to reward incentives, consistent communication, and personalised benefits (Hartanto *et al.*, 2026). Empirical evidence from hospitality research further indicates that loyalty programmes, when integrated with personalised offers and customer engagement strategies, contribute positively to long-term loyalty and sustained revenue growth in competitive markets (Pandirkar & D'souza, 2025). Moreover, literature highlights that programmes that go beyond material rewards such as those emphasising engagement, recognition, and meaningful experiences, can increase emotional attachment and overall customer loyalty (Hartanto *et al.*, 2026). According to Raheem and Jayasekara (2025), guest loyalty remains a cornerstone of success in hotels, affecting profitability, repeat business, and competitiveness.

Customer Retention in the Hospitality Sector

Customer retention refers to the ability of a business to keep its customers engaged with its products or services over time and to encourage repeat purchases or patronage (Nwankwo *et al.*,

2023). Research in hotel contexts shows that repeat guests are essential for business survival because retaining customers is generally more cost-effective than acquiring new ones, and loyal guests often contribute to stable revenue streams (Shipola & Mwanza, 2025). Customer retention is strongly associated with service quality attributes such as reliability, responsiveness, and satisfaction, underlining its importance as a strategic outcome for hotels (Nwokorie *et al.*, 2024). Bariha (2021) highlights that hotels that successfully retain customers are more likely to experience higher guest lifetime value and stronger market position, as retained customers often engage in repeat business, provide positive word-of-mouth, and reduce the costs of marketing and customer acquisition.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Commitment-Trust Theory component, which provides a relevant foundation for understanding how loyalty programmes influence customer retention (Alberico & Joaquim, 2023). The theory is an extension of Relationship Marketing Theory, and it argues that trust and commitment are central constructs that enable strong relational exchanges (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Trust reflects the confidence customers have in a firm's reliability and integrity, while commitment represents the desired long-term relationship maintenance between the customer and the firm (Abid *et al.*, 2022). Trust is cultivated when customers perceive that the rewards and benefits are delivered as promised, and commitment develops as customers anticipate ongoing value from continued engagement with the programme (Arthur *et al.*, 2023). Studies reveal that when relationship marketing practices emphasise these constructs, customer retention improves because customers feel valued and are more inclined to maintain their association with the brand (Hidayat & Idrus, 2023). Applying this theory to the current study suggests that loyalty programmes can enhance customer retention in the Nigerian hospitality sector, if they are designed to build trust through reliable rewards.

Review of Related Studies

Several studies have examined the relationship between loyalty programmes and customer retention across different sectors. Chukwu *et al.* (2021) investigated customer retention determinants in Nigerian hospitality using a survey design and found that relationship marketing strategies significantly influence repeat patronage. Similarly, Dwivedi *et al.* (2024) applied a quantitative approach in a mixed-service context and reported that customer relationship management positively

impacts both loyalty and retention, though the study did not isolate loyalty programme types. Eizuan *et al.* (2022) studied Tesco's loyalty programme and found that points-based rewards increased repeat purchases, highlighting the motivational role of tangible incentives in retail settings. Other sectoral studies reinforce these findings. Fourie *et al.* (2023) explored financial services and demonstrated that tiered loyalty programmes enhance engagement by offering escalating benefits, though effects on retention were measured indirectly.

Kaur (2024) applied a cross-sectional survey in retail and confirmed that structured loyalty initiatives positively influence customer retention metrics. Mdletshe (2023) examined fast-food loyalty programmes in South Africa and found that both emotional and reward-based components contributed to retention, suggesting the value of combining transactional and relational loyalty strategies. In the Nigerian context, several studies focused on service and hospitality industries. Nwokorie *et al.* (2024) used hotel data to show that customer intelligence and loyalty programmes jointly enhance retention. Francis and Etuk (2025) found that mobile network loyalty initiatives in Nigeria increased customer commitment through rewards, whereas Emuobor *et al.* (2025) demonstrated that telecom loyalty programmes improve retention and satisfaction simultaneously. Shipola and Mwanza (2025) confirmed similar positive effects in diverse African service sectors. Conversely, some studies, such as la Rose and Rowson (2017), emphasized that generic or poorly designed programmes yield limited retention benefits.

Despite the breadth of existing research, a clear gap exists: most studies evaluate loyalty programmes holistically or in non-hospitality contexts without distinguishing the specific impacts of points-based, tiered, and value-based programmes on customer retention. No empirical study has concurrently examined how these three distinct programme types individually affect retention within the hospitality sector, highlighting the need for the current study to address this methodological and contextual gap.

Conceptual Framework

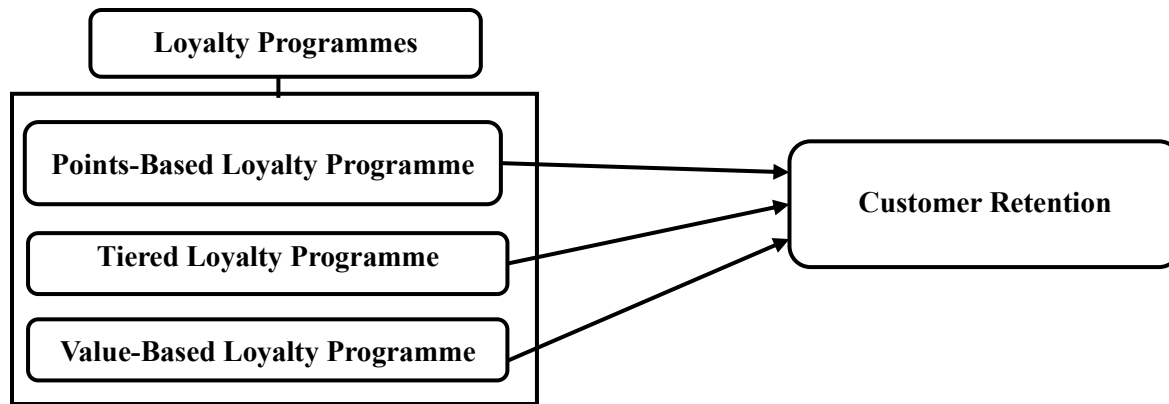


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework
Source: Researcher’s Design (2026)

Methods

This study adopted a quantitative cross-sectional survey design, with data collected at a single point in time from hotel guests in selected hotels in Ilesa, Osun State. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select 100 hotel guests who had prior experience with hotel services in Ilesa, and exposure to their loyalty programmes. This sample size is considered adequate for correlation analysis and meets minimum thresholds for statistical reliability in behavioural research (Hair *et al.*, 2019; Field, 2018). Data were collected through questionnaire, capturing respondents’ perceptions of loyalty programme effectiveness and their retention behaviour.

The instrument validity was assessed using construct validity. The exploratory factor analysis (EFA) results showed that all measurement items loaded significantly on their respective constructs with factor loadings above 0.60. Additionally, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure exceeded 0.70 and Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity was significant ($p < 0.05$). This indicates sampling adequacy and suitability of data for factor analysis. Furthermore, reliability test indicated that all variables demonstrated high reliability, with Cronbach’s alpha values ranging from 0.83 to 0.94.

Descriptive statistics was employed to summarise responses while correlation analysis was employed to test the relationships between the three types of loyalty programmes and customer retention, consistent with similar studies examining loyalty constructs in service industries (Mdletshe, 2023; Nwokorie *et al.*, 2024). Ethical considerations, including informed consent and confidentiality, were observed throughout the data collection process to ensure responsible research practice.

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Results And Discussions

Demographic Statistics of the Respondents

Table 1 shows the demographic profile of the respondents with 26% aged 26–35 years, 24% aged 36–45 years, 20% aged 18–25 years, and 30% aged 46 years and above. Gender composition shows a slightly higher proportion of males (56%) compared to females (44). Regarding educational attainment, 28% had secondary education, 22% held a diploma/NCE, 23% possessed a bachelor’s degree, and 27% had postgraduate qualifications. In terms of patronage frequency, 34% reported visiting hospitality services very often, 27% often, 18% occasionally, and 21% rarely. This highlights the fact that a majority are regular users. In addition, years of experience with hospitality services varied, with 33% having six years or more, 27% had less than one year, 22% had between one and three years, and 18% had between four and five years, suggesting a mix of both new and experienced customers.

Table 1: Demographic Statistics of the Respondents

Demographic Variables	Percentage	
Age	18 - 25 years	20.00%
	26 - 35 years	26.00%
	36 - 45 years	24.00%
	46 and above	30.00%
Gender	Male	56.00%
	Female	44.00%
Highest Level of Education	Secondary	28.00%
	Diploma/NCE	22.00%
	Bachelor's Degree	23.00%
	Postgraduate	27.00%
Frequency of Patronage	Rarely	21.00%
	Occasionally	18.00%
	Often	27.00%
	Very Often	34.00%
Years of using hospitality services	less than 1 year	27.00%
	1 - 3 years	22.00%
	4 - 5 years	18.00%
	6 years and above	33.00%

Source: Field Survey (2026)

Respondents' Perception of Points-Based Loyalty Programme

Table 2 shows that respondents are moderately aware of the points-based loyalty programme. While 26% strongly agree and 22% agree that earning points motivates them, 35% strongly disagree that they earn points for every transaction. Similarly, redemption of points for rewards such as free stays or discounts received mixed responses, with half of the respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing (48%) and the rest disagreeing (52%). This indicates that although points-based rewards are recognized, their implementation or perceived accessibility may be inconsistent.

Table 2: Summary Statistics of Points-Based Loyalty Programme

Points-Based Loyalty Programme	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Agree (3)	Strongly Agree (4)
I earn points for every transaction I make in my preferred hotel.	35.0%	17.0%	22.0%	26.0%
I can redeem my points for rewards such as free stays or discounts.	25.0%	27.0%	23.0%	25.0%
Accumulating points motivates me to visit the hotel more frequently.	30.0%	26.0%	22.0%	22.0%
Points-based rewards make me feel valued as a customer.	19.0%	30.0%	23.0%	28.0%

Source: Field Survey (2026)

Respondents' Perception of Tiered Loyalty Programme

As indicated in Table 3, tiered loyalty programmes are perceived moderately positively by respondents. While 29% agree and 20% strongly agree that they strive for higher tiers, a larger portion of respondents (60%) disagreed or strongly disagreed that membership tiers are offered or impactful. Similarly, perceptions of the benefits associated with higher tiers were mixed, with 47% agreement versus 53% disagreement. This suggests that tiered loyalty schemes are not fully leveraged or communicated to customers.

Table 3: Summary Statistics of Tiered Loyalty Programme

Tiered Loyalty Programme	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Agree (3)	Strongly Agree (4)
My hotel rewards frequent customers with different membership levels (e.g., silver, gold, platinum).	29.0%	33.0%	19.0%	19.0%
I strive to achieve higher tiers to access better benefits.	27.0%	24.0%	29.0%	20.0%
Tiered status encourages me to remain loyal to the hotel.	31.0%	21.0%	22.0%	26.0%
The benefits associated with higher tiers are attractive and meaningful.	27.0%	26.0%	27.0%	20.0%

Source: Field Survey (2026)

Respondents' Perception of Value-Based Loyalty Programme

Table 4 highlights that value-based loyalty programmes are moderately recognized and appreciated. About 33% of respondents agree that their hotels align loyalty programmes with personal values, and 24% strongly agree. However, 43% disagree or strongly disagree, suggesting inconsistent experiences with value-based initiatives. About 45% agreed with participation in socially responsible or emotionally rewarding programmes.

Table 4: Summary Statistics of Valued-Based Loyalty Programme

Value-Based Loyalty Programme	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Agree (3)	Strongly Agree (4)
My hotel aligns its loyalty programmes with values that are important to me.	22.0%	21.0%	33.0%	24.0%
Participation in the loyalty programme allows me to contribute to social or community initiatives.	23.0%	25.0%	28.0%	24.0%
Emotional and value-based benefits increase my attachment to the hotel.	27.0%	28.0%	19.0%	26.0%
Value-based programmes influence my decision to continue using the hotel's services.	30.0%	27.0%	24.0%	19.0%

Source: Field Survey (2026)

Respondents’ Perception of Customer Retention in the Hospitality Industry

Table 5 shows strong indicators of customer retention. A majority of respondents (70%) prefer familiar hotels, and 50% remain loyal even if competitors offer slightly better prices. However, only 7% strongly recommend hotels to friends, and only 6% strongly intend to continue using the same hotel, suggesting that while loyalty exists, proactive advocacy and long-term commitment are moderate. These findings imply that effective loyalty programmes, particularly points-based, tiered, and value-based, are essential for converting satisfaction into sustained retention and advocacy.

Table 5: Summary Statistics of Customer Retention

Customer Retention	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Agree (3)	Strongly Agree (4)
I prefer to stay in hotels I am familiar with rather than trying new ones.	0%	5.0%	70.0%	25.0%
I recommend my preferred hotel to friends and family.	7.0%	38.0%	48.0%	7.0%
I intend to continue using the same hotel for future stays.	9.0%	38.0%	47.0%	6.0%
I would remain loyal to a hotel even if competitors offer slightly better prices.	2.0%	39.0%	50.0%	9.0%

Source: Field Survey (2026)

Correlation Analysis

The correlation analysis presented in Table 6 indicates significant positive relationships between the three loyalty programmes and customer retention in the hospitality sector. Points-based loyalty programmes exhibit a moderate positive correlation with customer retention ($r = 0.434, p < 0.01$), suggesting that the accumulation and redemption of points positively influence customers’ decisions to remain loyal. Tiered loyalty programmes show a similar moderate correlation with customer retention ($r = 0.439, p < 0.01$), implying that progression through membership levels and access to associated benefits encourage repeat patronage. Value-based loyalty programmes display the strongest correlation with customer retention ($r = 0.689, p < 0.01$), highlighting that alignment with customers’ values, participation in socially responsible initiatives, and emotional engagement are particularly effective in fostering loyalty. Interrelationships among the loyalty programmes are generally weak, with points-based and tiered programmes showing a modest correlation ($r = 0.216, p$

< 0.01) and points-based and value-based programmes correlating slightly higher ($r = 0.225$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that each programme contributes to retention through distinct pathways.

Table 6: Correlation Statistics Results

		Points-Based	Tiered	Value Based	Customer Retention
Points-Based	Pearson Correlation	1			
	Sig. (2-tailed)				
	N	100			
Tiered	Pearson Correlation	.216	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000			
	N	100	100		
Value Based	Pearson Correlation	.225	.016	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.008	.060		
	N	100	100	100	
Customer Retention	Pearson Correlation	.434	.439	.689	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.002	.000	
	N	100	100	100	100

Source: SPSS Output

Discussion of Findings

This study’s findings showed that all three loyalty programme types are positively and significantly associated with customer retention. Points-based programmes showed a moderate correlation with retention ($r = 0.434$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that customers who consistently earn and redeem points are more likely to remain loyal. This supports findings by Eizuan *et al.* (2022) and Kaur (2024), who report that point incentives positively influence repeat behaviour. Tiered programmes also exhibited a moderate relationship with retention ($r = 0.439$, $p < 0.01$), consistent with research noting that tier status and associated privileges can motivate ongoing engagement (Fourie, Goldman, & McCall, 2023). Importantly, value-based programmes demonstrated the strongest correlation with retention ($r = 0.689$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting that alignment with customer values, emotional connection, and socially responsible features are highly effective in fostering loyalty. This corroborates the work of Mdletshe (2023), who emphasised the role of emotional and value-oriented benefits in driving sustained retention. The stronger role of value-based components may also reflect broader service-industry trends where customers increasingly seek meaningful relationships rather than purely transactional benefits (Dwivedi *et al.*, 2024). The findings confirm

the study's main objective: that points-based, tiered, and value-based loyalty programmes positively impact customer retention, with value-based initiatives showing particularly strong effects.

Conclusion And Recommendations

This study examined the influence of points-based, tiered, and value-based loyalty programmes on customer retention in the hospitality industry in Ilesa, Osun State. The findings indicate that all three programme types positively contribute to customer retention, though the strength of their impact differs. Points-based loyalty programmes moderately enhance retention by motivating customers through the accumulation and redemption of rewards, yet some customers perceive limitations in the accessibility and clarity of benefits. Tiered loyalty programmes similarly demonstrate a moderate effect, with higher membership levels and associated privileges encouraging repeat patronage; however, awareness and understanding of tier benefits are inconsistent among customers. Value-based loyalty programmes emerged as the most influential, highlighting that alignment with customers' values, emotional engagement, and opportunities for social or community participation significantly strengthen long-term loyalty. Applying the principles of Relationship Marketing Theory, these results suggest that loyalty programmes are most effective when they cultivate relational bonds, trust, and emotional attachment, rather than relying solely on transactional incentives. Overall, the study concludes that integrating points-based, tiered, and value-based programmes in a complementary manner can enhance customer satisfaction, encourage repeat visits, and provide a sustainable competitive advantage for hotels in the hospitality sector.

Based on the findings, the study recommends the following:

- i. Hotels should optimize points-based programmes by ensuring that points are easy to accumulate and redeem, and that rewards are attractive to encourage repeat visits.
- ii. Tiered loyalty programmes should be clearly communicated, with meaningful benefits at each level to motivate customers to progress and remain loyal.
- iii. Hotels should integrate value-based initiatives, such as sustainability practices, community involvement, and personalized experiences, to strengthen emotional bonds with customers.
- iv. Regular monitoring and feedback should be implemented to understand customer perceptions of loyalty programmes and improve programme design.

- v. Hotel managers should adopt a complementary approach, combining points-based, tiered, and value-based strategies to maximize retention in the hospitality industry.

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