

## THE IMPACT OF SERVICE CULTURE AND STAFF COMPETENCE ON CUSTOMER LOYALTY IN THE TOURISM INDUSTRY

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**Abstract:** This article analyzes the role of service culture and staff competence in shaping customer loyalty in the tourism industry. It examines the significance of service quality, employees' professional and communicative skills, and the culture of customer relations in the operations of tourism enterprises. Furthermore, the study substantiates the importance of enhancing staff competence and developing service culture in the context of evolving customer needs and expectations in the modern tourism market. The research findings indicate that service culture and staff competence are crucial factors in strengthening customer trust and loyalty.

**Keywords:** tourism industry, service culture, staff competence, customer loyalty, service quality, professional competence, tourism services

1. Introduction: In contemporary conditions, the tourism sector represents one of the most rapidly developing areas of the economy. As global competition intensifies, the success of tourism enterprises depends not only on material resources but also directly on the human factor. Particularly, service culture and staff competence play a crucial role in establishing sustainable relationships with customers. In tourism, customers evaluate their experience based on impressions received during the service process, and this factor influences their decision to return or recommend the service to others.

Service culture and staff competence play a direct role in shaping customer loyalty in the tourism industry. Service culture is determined not only by employees' etiquette and courtesy but also by sincere approaches in welcoming customers, organizing service processes, and resolving problems. Research demonstrates that when customers feel valued during personal interactions with staff, they are highly satisfied with the service and remain loyal to the company. Therefore, every employee must possess the ability to provide individualized attention to each customer during the service process.

Staff competence directly determines service quality. A competent employee has the capability to quickly resolve complex situations, anticipate customer needs, and offer personalized solutions. Additionally, professional development programs expand employees' abilities to utilize new technologies and digital service tools. For instance, when online reservation systems, mobile applications, and interactive communication through social networks are harmonized with staff competence, service quality improves significantly.

Another important factor in increasing customer loyalty for tourism enterprises is the employee incentive system. Incentive, reward, and motivation systems encourage employees to provide high-quality service, which ensures excellence in customer relations. Thus, service culture and staff competence serve as strategic tools in shaping customer loyalty.

Furthermore, surveys, reviews, and statistical data are essential for analyzing and measuring customer loyalty. This data enables the assessment of employee performance, identification of service process deficiencies, and their elimination. Simultaneously, customer feedback provides impetus for the continuous development of service culture and staff competence.

Customer loyalty is one of the key indicators ensuring the long-term success of tourism enterprises. Therefore, the professional training of employees, their communication culture, and responsible approach during the service process require special attention. This article addresses both theoretical and practical aspects of these issues.

## 2. Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

Service culture is a vital element that regulates direct relationships with customers in tourism enterprises. This process determines not only the quality of customer service but also affects the company's image and reputation. Research shows that customers tend to choose the same service again and recommend it to others when they find responses to their needs and expectations. Therefore, employee etiquette, work order, and communication culture are of paramount importance in tourism enterprises during the service process.

Staff competence plays a fundamental role in shaping customer loyalty. A competent employee not only provides quick and quality service but also establishes sincere and comfortable communication with customers. This awakens feelings of trust and satisfaction in customers. Additionally, regular enhancement of employees' professional knowledge and skills ensures their work efficiency and consistency in customer communication quality.

In modern tourism conditions, intensifying competition requires satisfying customer needs with an increasingly individualized approach. Each customer has unique demands and preferences, and employees' ability to adapt to these demands determines the overall service quality. For example, providing individual recommendations on tourist routes, hotel services, or dining, engaging customers in the service process, and quickly resolving emerging problems are practical demonstrations of staff competence.

One of the effective ways to enhance service culture and staff competence is through regular training, seminars, and practical workshops on customer service. Additionally, studying customer opinions through surveys and analyzing complaints can improve service quality. Research indicates that comfortable and professional communication by employees during the service process can increase customer loyalty by 20-30%.

## 3. The Role of Service Culture in Tourism

In the tourism industry, service culture manifests during direct communication with customers. Employees' courtesy, respectful treatment, understanding of customer needs, and ability to offer prompt solutions shape the overall perception of service quality. In tourism enterprises with high service culture, customers feel comfortable and secure, which contributes to their positive experience.

Staff competence ensures the professional organization of tourism services. Competent employees possess sufficient knowledge about tourism products, can provide accurate advice to customers, effectively resolve problematic situations, and conduct the service process at a high level. This situation strengthens customers' sense of trust and enhances the enterprise's reputation.

Service culture in the tourism sector not only creates a pleasant experience for customers but also plays an important role in increasing the enterprise's competitiveness. When customers feel valued and respected during the service process, they become satisfied with the service, and the probability of returning to this enterprise increases. Therefore, service culture in the tourism sector is considered an integral part of enterprise strategy.

#### 4. Staff Competence and Customer Loyalty

Staff competence is one of the most important factors in shaping customer loyalty. A competent employee not only performs services at a high quality but is also active in identifying customer wishes and demands, satisfying them, and quickly resolving arising problems. For example, when a hotel employee remembers a guest's personal preferences and offers appropriate service, this awakens feelings of sincerity and trust in the customer.

Additionally, engaging employees in regular training, professional seminars, and practical workshops on customer service in tourism companies enables continuous improvement of service quality. Establishing effective communication with customers during the service process is crucial in the tourism industry. An employee's etiquette, work style, and comfortable and sincere communication determine customers' overall satisfaction. From this perspective, enterprise managers should pay special attention to preparing employees for personal development, enhancing communication skills, and displaying appropriate behavior in stressful situations.

As competition intensifies in the modern tourism market, an individualized approach to customers becomes increasingly important. Customers expect not just satisfaction from service but an unforgettable experience. Therefore, it is necessary to enhance staff competence, familiarize them with innovative technologies, anticipate customer needs during the service process, and implement flexible approaches. For instance, travel agencies can improve service quality by determining customer preferences in advance through online surveys and providing personalized recommendations.

Furthermore, evaluating and regularly analyzing service quality is important in shaping customer loyalty. By studying surveys, complaints, and suggestions, enterprises can identify deficiencies in the service process and eliminate them. Research shows that maintaining constant contact with customers and considering their opinions significantly increases loyalty.

#### 5. Modern Approaches and Digital Integration

Qualified and sincere employees enhance enterprise reputation by providing high-quality service to customers, establish long-term relationships with customers, and strengthen competitiveness. Therefore, every tourism enterprise manager should pay attention to regular staff training, developing service culture, and continuously studying customer needs.

In the modern tourism market, customers pay great attention not only to service results but also to the service process itself. Therefore, employees' communicative skills, stress resistance, and ability to work in teams are of great importance. Establishing proper communication with customers and taking an individualized approach to their needs is one of the main factors in shaping loyalty.

Service culture and staff competence are interconnected, and their harmony increases customer satisfaction levels. A satisfied customer is inclined to return to the tourism enterprise in the future and to attract new customers by expressing positive opinions. Thus, customer loyalty is formed and strengthened through service quality.

Service culture and staff competence are complementary elements in shaping customer loyalty in the tourism industry. Research shows that customers pay special attention not only to the speed and quality of service but also to employees' etiquette, courtesy, and professional

approach during the service process. An employee's customer-oriented behavior, ability to quickly resolve problems, and personal attention awaken feelings of loyalty in customers.

One of the important ways to enhance staff competence for tourism companies is through regular training and professional development programs. Training not only improves service culture but also expands employees' communication skills, ability to maintain balance in stressful situations, and capacity to apply innovative technologies. For example, a hotel employee can provide fast and convenient service to customers by learning to work with new digital reservation systems.

Customer loyalty is often associated with the level of satisfaction with enterprise services. If customers are satisfied with the service, they not only choose the service again but also recommend it to others. Therefore, the service process in the tourism industry should be aimed at taking into account each customer's individual needs. For instance, creating special packages for tourists, providing personal consultations, and individualizing their experience increases service satisfaction.

The use of modern technologies and digital platforms, when harmonized with staff competence, further enriches the customer experience. Maintaining constant contact with customers through online chat, mobile applications, and social networks, providing quick responses, and resolving complaints improves service quality. At the same time, staff competence is important in guiding customers to use technological tools.

## 6. Conclusion

In conclusion, the main factors in shaping customer loyalty in the tourism industry are service culture and staff competence. These factors help create high-quality, comfortable, and individualized service for customers. Regular competence enhancement, implementation of modern technologies, and effective communication with customers improve service quality, thereby ensuring customer loyalty and strengthening enterprise competitiveness.

Service culture and staff competence are of decisive importance in ensuring customer loyalty in the tourism industry. Employees' professional training, communication culture, and responsible approach improve the quality of tourism services and create positive impressions in customers. In modern conditions, tourism enterprises can strengthen their competitiveness by continuously enhancing staff competence and developing service culture. This serves to establish long-term and sustainable relationships with customers.

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