

**The Influence of Olfactory Marketing on Consumer  
Brand Loyalty Among Millennials In The Hotel  
Industry in Ireland**

**Nikita Felix**

**MSc in Marketing**

National College of Ireland  
August 2025

## ABSTRACT

This dissertation critically investigates the role of olfactory marketing as a strategic tool for cultivating consumer brand loyalty among millennial hotel guests in Ireland. Situated within the broader paradigm of the experience economy and grounded in theories of sensory marketing, embodied cognition, and the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model, the study explores how ambient scent shapes guest perception, emotion, and loyalty behaviours. Despite a growing global interest in scent branding, existing literature remains geographically narrow and methodologically shallow, often failing to capture the contextual complexity of real-world hospitality experiences. This research addresses that gap by focusing on Irish millennials (aged 29-44), a demographic characterised by experience-driven preferences, cultural scepticism towards inauthentic branding, and heightened sensitivity to ethical and environmental transparency.

Using a qualitative, interpretivist methodology, primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews with four millennial hotel guests who had recently experienced ambient scenting in Irish hotels. Thematic analysis revealed three interwoven pathways through which olfactory marketing influenced brand loyalty: (1) Intentional, place-congruent scenting, which enhanced perceptions of authenticity and emotional coherence; (2) Affective modulation and memory building, wherein scent triggered calming emotional shifts and formed lasting episodic memories that supported repeat bookings and positive word-of-mouth; and (3) Ethical boundaries and transparency, where perceptions of scent manipulation or lack of disclosure eroded trust and loyalty. Loyalty was expressed not only through rebooking intentions and advocacy but also through extended brand engagement, such as the purchase of scent-associated products for home use.

The findings highlight that olfactory cues are not mere atmospheric enhancers but operate as powerful semiotic devices capable of reinforcing brand narratives when consistent with the cultural, spatial, and ethical expectations of guests. However, the same cues can backfire if perceived as synthetic, excessive, or manipulative, resulting in emotional disengagement or brand avoidance. The study contributes to theory by integrating affective trust and perceived authenticity into the sensory marketing framework and by introducing ethical transparency as a moderator of olfactory efficacy. Methodologically, it responds to calls for more ecologically

valid, culturally specific research in sensory branding by foregrounding the lived, affective experiences of consumers.

For practitioners in Ireland's competitive hotel industry, the study offers actionable insights: successful olfactory strategies must prioritise cultural congruence, moderate intensity, and transparent communication. When implemented with intentionality and ethical integrity, scent can serve as an enduring emotional anchor, one that transforms hotel stays into memorable, loyalty-generating experiences. Future research is encouraged to adopt longitudinal and multi-method approaches, integrating biometric or neurophysiological tools to further explore the affective and cognitive underpinnings of olfactory brand loyalty.

# Submission of Thesis and Dissertation

## National College of Ireland Research Students Declaration Form (Thesis/Author Declaration Form)

**Name: Nikita Felix**

**Student Number: 23307579**

**Degree for which thesis is submitted: MSc Marketing**

### Material submitted for award

- (a) I declare that the work has been composed by myself.
- (b) I declare that all verbatim extracts contained in the thesis have been distinguished by quotation marks and the sources of information specifically acknowledged.
- (c) My thesis will be included in electronic format in the College Institutional Repository TRAP (thesis reports and projects)
- (d) **Either** \*I declare that no material contained in the thesis has been used in any other submission for an academic award.  
**Or** \*I declare that the following material contained in the thesis formed part of a submission for the award of

---

*(State the award and the awarding body and list the material below)*

Signature of research student:



Date: 15/08/2025

## **Submission of Thesis to Norma Smurfit Library, National College of Ireland**

Student name: Nikita Felix

Student number: 23307579

School: National College of Ireland  
Course: MSc Marketing

Degree to be awarded: MSc Marketing

Title of Thesis: The Influence of Olfactory Marketing on Consumer Brand  
Loyalty Among Millennials in the Hotel Industry in Ireland

One hard-bound copy of your thesis will be lodged in the Norma Smurfit Library and will be available for consultation. The electronic copy will be accessible in TRAP (<http://trap.ncirl.ie/>), the National College of Ireland's Institutional Repository. In accordance with normal academic library practice, all theses lodged in the National College of Ireland Institutional Repository (TRAP) are made available on open access. I agree to a hard bound copy of my thesis being available for consultation in the library. I also agree to an electronic copy of my thesis being made publicly available on the National College of Ireland's Institutional Repository TRAP.

Signature of Candidate:



For Completion by the School:

The aforementioned thesis was received by \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

This signed form must be appended to all hard-bound and electronic copies of your thesis submitted to your school

# National College of Ireland

## Project Submission Sheet

**Student Name:** Nikita Felix

**Student ID:** 23307579

**Programme:** MSc in Marketing

**Year:** 2024-2025

**Module:** Dissertation

**Lecturer:** Michael Bane

**Submission Due Date:** 15.08.2025

**Project Title:** The Influence of Olfactory Marketing on Consumer Brand Loyalty Among Millennials in the Hotel Industry in Ireland

**Word Count:** 16975

I hereby certify that the information contained in this (my submission) is information pertaining to research I conducted for this project. All information other than my own contribution will be fully referenced and listed in the relevant bibliography section at the rear of the project.

ALL internet material must be referenced in the references section. Students are encouraged to use the Harvard Referencing Standard supplied by the Library. To use other author's written or electronic work is illegal (plagiarism) and may result in disciplinary action.

Students may be required to undergo a viva (oral examination) if there is suspicion about the validity of their submitted work.

**Signature:** Nikita Felix

**Date:** 15/08/2025

**PLEASE READ THE FOLLOWING INSTRUCTIONS:**

1. Please attach a completed copy of this sheet to each project (including multiple copies).
2. Projects should be submitted to your Programme Coordinator.
3. **You must ensure that you retain a HARD COPY of ALL projects**, both for your own reference and in case a project is lost or mislaid. It is not sufficient to keep a copy on computer. Please do not bind projects or place in covers unless specifically requested.
4. You must ensure that all projects are submitted on Moodle (online) on or before the required submission date. **Late submissions will incur penalties.**
5. All projects must be submitted and passed in order to successfully complete the year. **Any project/assignment not submitted will be marked as a fail.**

<b>Office Use Only</b>	
Signature:	
Date:	
Penalty Applied (if applicable):	

## **Acknowledgment**

Firstly, I would like to deeply thank my supervisor, Michael Bane, for their guidance and support during this research.

I am sincerely grateful to my lecturers and faculty members for their knowledge and support during the course of my study. I also thank my family for their unwavering support and encouragement.

Lastly, I would like to thank all the participants for sharing their time, effort and experiences, for enriching this thesis and making this work possible.

## Table of Contents

<b>ABSTRACT.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>SUBMISSION OF THESIS AND DISSERTATION.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>SUBMISSION OF THESIS TO NORMA SMURFIT LIBRARY, NATIONAL COLLEGE OF IRELAND.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>PROJECT SUBMISSION SHEET.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGMENT.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>1.0 INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>12</b>
1.1 <i>Background and Rationale</i>	12
1.2 <i>Research Problem</i>	13
1.3 <i>Research Aim and Objectives</i>	13
1.4 <i>Research Questions</i>	14
1.5 <i>Justification and Significance of the Study</i>	14
1.6 <i>Scope and Delimitations</i>	15
1.7 <i>Dissertation Structure</i>	16
1.8 <i>Chapter Summary</i>	17
<b>2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW.....</b>	<b>18</b>
2.1 INTRODUCTION .....	18
2.2 THE HOTEL INDUSTRY: GROWTH AND COMPETITION .....	19
2.2.1 <i>The Hospitality and Hotel Industry: Global, EU and Irish Trends</i>	19
2.2.2 <i>Intensified Competition and Loyalty Challenges in Irish Hotels</i>	20
2.3 RISE OF EXPERIENTIAL MARKETING.....	22
2.4 ROLE OF SENSORY MARKETING.....	24
2.4.1 <i>Theoretical Foundations: Schmitt, S-O-R and Embodied Cognition</i>	25
2.4.2 <i>Empirical Evidence: Efficacy and Boundary Conditions</i>	25
2.4.3 <i>Critical Perspectives: Manipulation, Overload and Ethics</i>	26
2.4.4 <i>Measurement and Methodological Gaps</i>	26
2.4.5 <i>Implications for Olfactory Branding and Loyalty</i>	27
2.5 OLFACTORY MARKETING IN THE TOURISM/HOTEL INDUSTRY.....	27
2.6 MILLENNIAL CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR IN THE HOTEL INDUSTRY.....	29
2.6.1 <i>Experience-Seeking, but Price-Aware</i>	30
2.6.2 <i>Digital Social Proof and Booking Decisions</i>	30
2.6.3 <i>Authenticity Versus Manipulation Dilemma</i>	31
2.6.4 <i>Implications for Loyalty Building</i>	31
2.7 OLFACTORY MARKETING AND BRAND LOYALTY AMONG MILLENNIALS.....	32
2.8 RESEARCH GAPS AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK.....	34

2.8.1 <i>Tensions and Omissions in the Current Literature</i>	34
2.8.2 <i>Conceptual Framework</i>	35
2.9 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER.....	37
<b>3.0 METHODOLOGY.....</b>	<b>39</b>
3.1 INTRODUCTION.....	39
3.2 RESEARCH PHILOSOPHY.....	39
3.3 RESEARCH APPROACH.....	40
3.4 METHODOLOGICAL CHOICE.....	41
3.5 RESEARCH STRATEGY.....	41
3.6 TIME HORIZON.....	42
3.7 SAMPLING STRATEGY.....	43
3.8 DATA COLLECTION.....	43
3.9 DATA ANALYSIS.....	44
3.10 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS.....	45
3.11 TRUSTWORTHINESS, QUALITY, AND REFLEXIVITY.....	46
<b>4.0 ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS.....</b>	<b>47</b>
4.1 INTRODUCTION.....	47
4.2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND ANALYTICAL ALIGNMENT.....	47
4.3 OVERVIEW OF THEMES.....	49
4.4 THEMATIC FINDINGS.....	50
4.4.1 <i>Intentional, Place-Congruent Scenting</i>	51
4.4.2 <i>Affective Modulation and Memory Building</i>	53
<b>4.4.3 <i>Ethical Boundaries and Transparency</i></b>	<b>54</b>
4.5 CROSS-THEME SYNTHESIS.....	56
<b>4.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY.....</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>5.0 DISCUSSION.....</b>	<b>61</b>
5.1 <i>Place-Congruent Scents and Brand Authenticity (RO1)</i>	61
5.2 <i>Affective Memory, Scent, and Brand Loyalty (RO2)</i>	62
5.3 <i>Transparency, Intentionality and Scepticism (RO3)</i>	63
5.4 <i>Alignment with Theoretical Frameworks</i>	64
<b>6.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....</b>	<b>65</b>
6.1 <i>Overview of the Study</i>	65
6.2 <i>Contribution to Knowledge and Theory</i>	65
6.3 <i>Addressing the Research Objectives</i>	66
6.4 <i>Methodological Reflections</i>	67

<i>6.6 Limitations and Directions for Future Research</i>	67
<i>6.7 Concluding Reflections</i>	68
<b>REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>69</b>

# 1.0 Introduction

## 1.1 Background and Rationale

The 21st-century hospitality sector has witnessed a paradigm shift from functional service provision to immersive experience creation. No longer is a hotel merely a site of temporary lodging; rather, it has become a stage for multisensory branding, curated atmospheres, and identity-affirming encounters (Pine and Gilmore, 1999; Batat, 2024). This evolution reflects the rise of the “experience economy,” in which intangible dimensions such as ambience, authenticity, and emotional resonance have gained value over traditional value propositions like price or location (Pine and Gilmore, 2011). Within this experiential turn, olfactory marketing, the strategic use of scent to shape consumer perception, has emerged as a potent yet underexplored tool for cultivating brand loyalty (Spence, 2022; Krishna and Schwarz, 2024).

Scent plays a unique role in human cognition. Unlike other sensory inputs, olfactory stimuli bypass the neocortex and travel directly to the limbic system the seat of emotion and memory producing instinctive, emotionally charged responses that are difficult to verbalise but deeply felt (Herz, 2016; Krishna, 2021). This neurological shortcut gives scent marketing a distinct advantage over visual or auditory branding in terms of emotional potency and recall. Empirical studies suggest that olfactory cues can increase dwell time, enhance service evaluations, and even boost purchase intentions in retail and hospitality environments (Krishna, 2021; Spence and Krishna, 2024). Yet, despite these promising insights, the academic and practical understanding of how scent influences brand loyalty in real-world hotel contexts particularly among millennials remains fragmented and geographically narrow. This dissertation investigates this phenomenon within the Irish hospitality sector, focusing on millennial consumers, a cohort born between 1981 and 1996 (Eurostat, 2023). As the most travel-active generation, millennials comprise a significant share of hotel guests globally and in Ireland, where they account for over one-third of hotel bookings (Fáilte Ireland, 2024; ITIC, 2024). They are characterised by a preference for authenticity, environmental awareness, and immersive experiences over transactional perks such as loyalty points (Rahman and Claffey, 2023; Hossain et al., 2023). Given their value-complex behaviour and scepticism toward inauthentic branding, understanding how this demographic interprets

scent-based strategies is critical for hotel operators seeking sustainable competitive differentiation.

## **1.2 Research Problem**

Despite the proliferation of scent branding in hospitality, rigorous empirical evidence on its effectiveness in building brand loyalty among millennials is limited and inconclusive, especially in the Irish context. Much of the existing research is based on case studies, Asian luxury hotels, or lab settings with limited ecological validity (Fong et al., 2023). Moreover, the complex nature of brand loyalty particularly among millennials, who exhibit episodic rather than programmatic loyalty necessitates a deeper understanding of the mediating mechanisms such as affective trust, perceived authenticity, and cultural congruence (Sirirat et al., 2024; Jones et al., 2023).

The problem is compounded by the increasing consumer sensitivity to artificiality and manipulation. Critics warn that excessive or inauthentic olfactory branding can backfire, triggering allergic reactions, scepticism, or "smell-washing" accusations akin to greenwashing, where superficial sensory cues attempt to mask service deficiencies (Spence, 2023; Wanjiru and Mwangi, 2023). As the European Union tightens regulations on allergenic fragrance disclosure (CLP Regulation, 2023), hoteliers must navigate a complex landscape of sensory design, ethical marketing, and legal compliance. This makes it imperative to explore the real-world perceptions of millennials within the hotel environment, examining how they interpret scent within hotels, and whether these interpretations foster or fracture brand loyalty.

## **1.3 Research Aim and Objectives**

This dissertation aims to critically examine the influence of olfactory marketing on consumer brand loyalty among millennials in Ireland's hotel industry, with an emphasis on the mediating roles of perceived authenticity and affective trust.

The objectives are:

### **Research Objectives**

**RO1:** To examine how place-congruent ambient scents influence guests' emotional connection to hotel spaces and shape their perceptions of brand authenticity, particularly when congruence supports credibility and alignment with environmental cues.

**RO2:** To explore how ambient scent exposure modulates affect and episodic memory formation, and to assess how these emotional and cognitive processes contribute to attitude development that strengthens long-term brand loyalty.

**RO3:** To identify the specific conditions of perceived transparency and intentionality such as openness in scent use and alignment with brand values under which scent enhances loyalty without raising consumer scepticism about manipulation or inauthenticity.

#### **1.4 Research Questions**

In pursuit of the above aim and objectives, this study addresses the following central research question:

How does olfactory marketing influence brand loyalty among millennial hotel guests in Ireland?

This is unpacked through the following sub-questions:

- How do Irish millennials interpret and emotionally respond to ambient scent in hotel environments?
- To what extent does perceived scent congruence contribute to trust and authenticity judgments?
- How do olfactory experiences influence loyalty behaviours such as rebooking and advocacy?
- What role do individual (e.g., fragrance sensitivity) and contextual (e.g., cultural fit) variables play in shaping these outcomes?

#### **1.5 Justification and Significance of the Study**

This research is justified on practical, theoretical, and methodological grounds. Practically, the Irish hotel sector is experiencing rapid post-pandemic growth, with over 6.6 million overseas arrivals in 2024 alone, generating €6.2 billion in revenue (ITIC, 2024). Amid rising operational costs, capacity constraints, and competition from global hotel chains, independent and boutique Irish hotels must find cost-effective ways to differentiate themselves and build guest loyalty. Scent branding offers a relatively low-cost, high-impact strategy if implemented correctly.

However, theoretical models of olfactory marketing remain underdeveloped, particularly in European hospitality contexts. Existing frameworks such as the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974) and Schmitt's (1999) Strategic Experiential Modules (SEMs) are often deployed in isolation, without accounting for cultural nuance, sensory overload, or consumer resistance. By integrating these models with contemporary constructs such as embodied cognition, affective trust, and ethical transparency, this study aims to advance scholarly understanding of the complex pathways from scent exposure to loyalty behaviour.

Methodologically, most scent-loyalty research relies on quantitative surveys with limited temporal scope. There is a need for qualitative, context-sensitive research that captures the richness of guest experiences and provides actionable insights for practitioners. By employing a qualitative interview-based design with millennial hotel guests in Ireland, this dissertation addresses that gap, offering nuanced, ecologically valid data that reflect real consumer experiences and judgments.

## **1.6 Scope and Delimitations**

This study focuses specifically on Irish millennials (ages 29-44) who have stayed in hotels in Ireland within the past 12 months. The emphasis is on three to five-star properties, where atmospheric branding is more likely to be deliberately implemented and noticed. It excludes budget accommodations and non-hotel forms of lodging such as Airbnb, as these typically do not engage in structured olfactory marketing practices.

The study is limited to guest perceptions and self-reported loyalty intentions rather than actual booking data. It also centres on ambient scenting (e.g., lobby diffusion, room mists), not other olfactory touchpoints like spa treatments or scented toiletries. While the research seeks to generalise findings to the broader millennial segment in Ireland, it does not claim representativeness beyond this demographic or geographic scope.

## **1.7 Dissertation Structure**

This dissertation is structured into six chapters:

**Chapter 1 - Introduction:** Establishes the research background, problem, aims, objectives, and significance of the study.

**Chapter 2 - Literature Review:** Provides an in-depth analysis of academic and industry literature on experiential and sensory marketing, olfactory branding, and millennial consumer behaviour. It identifies key theoretical models and highlights research gaps.

**Chapter 3 - Methodology:** Justifies the interpretivist epistemology and outlines the qualitative research design, sampling approach, interview protocol, and data analysis strategy.

**Chapter 4 - Findings and Analysis:** Presents the results of the semi-structured interviews with Irish millennials, structured around emergent themes such as scent congruence, emotional engagement, and perceived authenticity.

**Chapter 5 - Discussion:** Interprets findings in relation to existing theory, critically evaluating consistencies and contradictions and outlining implications for both theory and practice.

**Chapter 6 - Conclusion and Recommendations:** Summarises key insights, articulates contributions to knowledge, acknowledges limitations, and provides recommendations for hoteliers and future researchers.

## **1.8 Chapter Summary**

This introductory chapter has outlined the contextual, theoretical, and empirical rationale for investigating olfactory marketing's influence on brand loyalty among Irish millennials in the hotel industry. It has defined the study's scope, articulated clear research questions and objectives, and positioned the work within current debates in hospitality marketing. As the hospitality landscape continues to evolve in response to shifting consumer expectations, regulatory pressures, and economic uncertainty, the need for ethically sound, culturally attuned, and experientially rich branding strategies has never been more urgent. The next chapter will critically examine the academic literature that informs this investigation, culminating in a conceptual framework to guide the empirical analysis.

## 2.0 Literature Review

### 2.1 Introduction

Over the past decade the hotel sector has moved from selling beds to staging multi-sensory encounters, echoing the broader “experience economy” shift in marketing thought (Batat, 2024). Within this sensory turn, scent commands particular attention: neuroscientific evidence shows that olfactory stimuli bypass the brain’s rational filters and connect directly to memory and emotion, creating the potential for powerful yet subtle brand associations (Spence and Krishna, 2024). Hoteliers therefore diffuse signature aromas in lobbies, corridors and even branded take-home mists to differentiate their properties and encourage repeat patronage.

Whether such olfactory marketing actually converts millennial guests into loyal advocates is still argued. Critical syntheses highlight a scarcity of long-term field studies and warn that poorly matched fragrances can backfire, eliciting “scent fatigue” or perceptions of manipulation (Fong et al., 2022). Conversely, survey work with European millennials reports that the olfactory dimension carries the strongest statistical path to brand attachment, ahead of sight or sound (Hossain et al., 2023). These mixed findings suggest context matters and Ireland presents a timely context to investigate.

Irish tourism has rebounded sharply: international arrivals reached 6.6 million in 2024, with overseas visitor spend climbing to €6.2 billion (ITIC, 2024). Millennials roughly those born between 1981-1996, now constitute more than one-third of hotel guests. They celebrate experiential authenticity yet also display Europe’s highest concern for eco-credentials in hospitality offerings (Eurobarometer, 2023). Recent Irish research shows they reward genuine ambience over points-based schemes but are quick to penalise perceived “smell-washing” (Rahman and Claffey, 2023).

Against this backdrop, the present chapter reviews literature on experiential, sensory and olfactory marketing, brand-equity formation, and millennial consumer behaviour. By tracing supportive and critical evidence, it identifies theoretical and empirical gaps, culminating in a conceptual framework that underpins this dissertation’s qualitative exploration of how ambient scent influences brand loyalty among Irish millennials in hotels.

## **2.2 The Hotel Industry: Growth and Competition**

### **2.2.1 The Hospitality and Hotel Industry: Global, EU and Irish Trends**

The global tourism and hospitality industry is one of the largest and fastest-growing sectors in the world, contributing significantly to employment, export growth, and economic development (WTTC, 2024; UNWTO, 2025). It is a multidimensional sector that attracts foreign investment (Cortez-Jimenez, 2008), generates substantial public revenue (Gabriel et al., 2011), and fosters cultural and community enrichment (Zaei and Zaei, 2013). Intense competition within the industry has heightened the importance of customer satisfaction and loyalty for sustaining market position, aligning with Porter's (1980) theory of competitive advantage, in which differentiation, especially via experiential strategies enables businesses to stand out in saturated service markets (Ishara et al., 2020).

In 2024, the global hospitality industry expanded from USD 3.44 trillion in 2023 to USD 3.98 trillion, recording a robust CAGR of 15.5% (Global Newswire, 2025). The travel and tourism industry's global GDP contribution reached USD 10.9 trillion, representing 10% of the global economy (WTTC, 2024). This scale underscores the hyper-competitive nature of the hotel sector and the need for differentiation to secure consumer loyalty. One factor fuelling this competition is the continued growth and concentration of international hotel chains, with the top ten brands now accounting for over 40% of the global branded room supply (STR Global, 2025). This consolidation increases competitive intensity, as large chains leverage economies of scale, sophisticated loyalty programmes, and strong brand recognition, raising barriers for smaller independent operators.

Within Europe, tourism contributes over 10% to the EU's GDP, generating EUR 1.8 trillion in 2024 (Eurostat, 2025; WTTC, 2025). Domestic and international visitor spending reached EUR 1 trillion and EUR 515 billion respectively, while tourist arrivals grew by 3.3% (WTTC, 2025; ETC Corporate, 2025). This sustained demand has pushed hotels to innovate beyond traditional offerings, focusing on personalised and sensory-rich experiences to satisfy the modern traveller's expectations particularly Millennials, who prioritise authenticity, immersion, and memorable interactions over commodity-style services.

The European hotel market generated USD 111 billion in 2023, making it the second-largest contributor to the tourism industry's revenues after package holidays (Statista, 2025). Ireland ranked sixth in Europe for hotel transactions, with a total transaction value of approximately EUR 0.7 billion (Statista, 2024) and generated EUR 1.32 billion in hotel revenue in 2024 (Statista, 2025). The Irish hotel sector's market volume is projected at USD 1.50 billion in 2025, with around 6.6 million international tourists generating EUR 6.2 billion in spending an increase of 13% year-on-year (ITIC, 2024). In March 2025 alone, 441,200 foreign visitors spent EUR 326 million, with holidays accounting for the most common travel purpose (36%) (CSO, 2025).

Looking ahead, Europe's travel and tourism sector is projected to reach EUR 278.78 billion in revenue by 2024, with an anticipated CAGR of 2.81% from 2025-2029, culminating in EUR 3.11 billion by 2029 (Statista, 2025). Globally, the WTTC (2025) forecasts that by 2035, travel and tourism will contribute USD 16.5 trillion to the global economy (11.5% of global GDP), with international spending expected to reach USD 2.9 trillion and domestic spending USD 7.7 trillion. At the EU level, tourist spending is forecast to increase by 13% from 2024 levels, with GDP contributions reaching EUR 2.3 trillion by 2035 (WTTC, 2025). Ireland's tourism market is expected to surpass USD 3 billion in 2025 and grow at 3.88% annually to reach USD 3.5 billion by 2029 (Statista, 2025).

This sustained growth, combined with the concentration of global hotel brands, makes the competitive environment exceptionally challenging. To thrive, hotels must go beyond functional offerings and adopt experiential marketing approaches that resonate with today's consumers especially Millennials by delivering sensory engagement and emotional value.

### **2.2.2 Intensified Competition and Loyalty Challenges in Irish Hotels**

Globally, the travel and tourism sector added an estimated USD 11.7 trillion to GDP in 2025, representing 10.3% of total economic output (WTTC, 2025). Europe commands a disproportionate share of this value, with hotel revenues forecast at USD 114 billion in 2024 and annual growth projected at 7-8% (TrueR Catering, 2024). Such expansion has intensified competition to the point where even small experiential advantages can significantly impact market share a reality directly relevant to this study's focus on olfactory differentiation.

Ireland has been at the forefront of Europe's post-pandemic rebound. International arrivals increased by 6.7% year-on-year to 6.6 million in 2024, while overseas visitor spend rose to EUR 6.2 billion (ITIC, 2024). However, capacity constraints remain: nearly 28% of registered beds are reserved for state use, compelling hoteliers to aggressively target repeat customers as a more cost-effective alternative to acquiring new customers (Ottenbacher et al., 2023). Some scholars caution that the Irish market's small size and pronounced seasonality may limit loyalty programme effectiveness compared with larger EU hubs (Brykova et al., 2023), underscoring the need to identify other loyalty drivers.

Competition has also intensified around direct booking channels. According to the H2C Global Study, loyalty schemes now account for up to 60% of chain-hotel revenue, but independent hotels often lag in programme sophistication (P3Hotels, 2024). Critics argue that points-based loyalty schemes yield diminishing returns among experience-driven Millennials, who value atmosphere, authenticity, and emotional resonance over transactional benefits (Condor Ferries, 2025). As a result, operators are increasingly turning to multi-sensory branding such as signature scents, curated soundscapes, and tactile design elements to embed positive emotional memories and reinforce loyalty (HospitalityNet, 2024). Nonetheless, empirical findings on the effectiveness of atmospheric cues remain mixed, marking a key gap this dissertation seeks to address.

From a strategic standpoint, Irish hoteliers face a dual challenge: price-led competition eroding margins and undifferentiated experiences failing to inspire repeat visits. Millennials, in particular, are motivated by authentic and unique experiences a segment for which sensory differentiation may offer a competitive edge. Advocates of olfactory marketing highlight scent's ability to bypass cognitive filters and anchor brand associations in long-term memory (Fong et al., 2023). Opponents, however, warn that over-scenting can trigger allergies or be perceived as manipulative, leading to adverse reviews (Gil et al., 2023). This divergence of opinion signals the urgent need for context-specific research into Irish Millennials' responses to scent-based branding.

In an environment defined by rapid growth, capacity volatility, and loyalty fatigue, Ireland's hotel sector presents an ideal testing ground for whether olfactory marketing can deliver a sustainable competitive advantage. By investigating how Millennials interpret and respond to scent cues, this study aims to determine whether such atmospheric strategies can strengthen

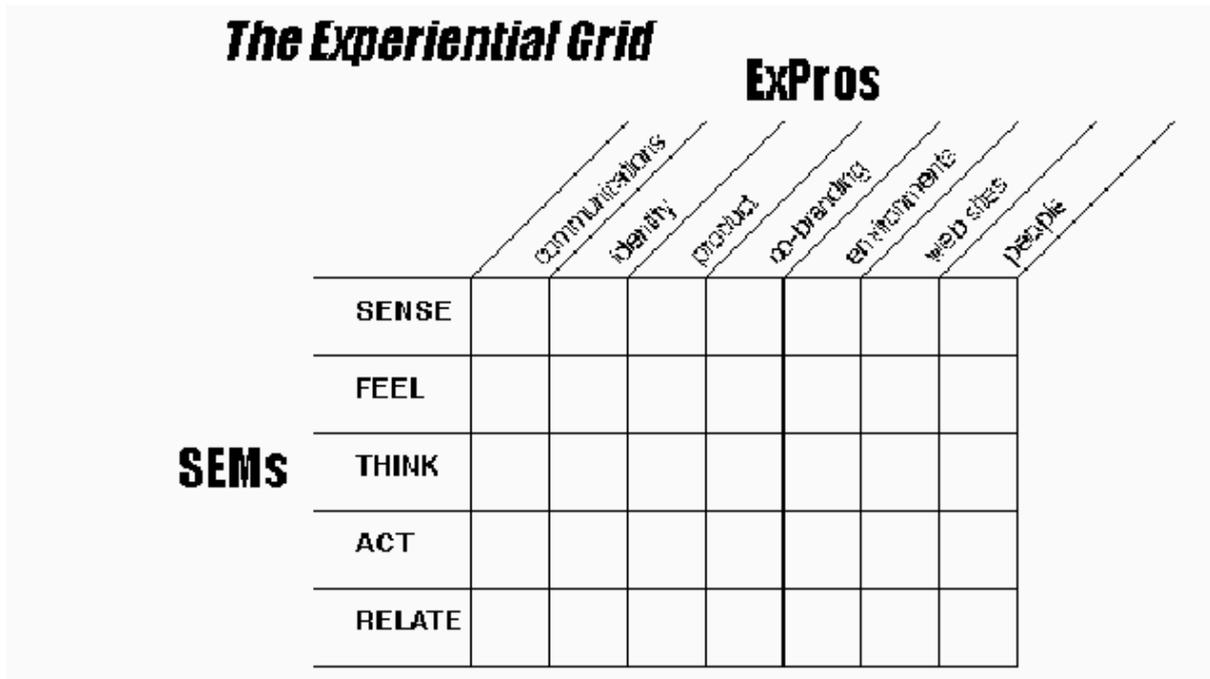
brand loyalty in a market where operators increasingly depend on repeat business for survival.

### 2.3 Rise of Experiential Marketing

Experiential marketing is a strategic approach that focuses on creating memorable, multi-sensory brand interactions that engage consumers emotionally, cognitively, and socially. Unlike transactional marketing, which prioritises product features and functional benefits, experiential marketing aims to immerse consumers in unique brand experiences that foster deeper connections, emotional attachment, and long-term loyalty (Gunawan, 2022; Nurjanah and Juanim, 2020). This shift reflects the growing need for brands to stand out in competitive markets, where consumers particularly younger, experience-driven segments seek more than just functional satisfaction.

The concept of experience in marketing has been present since at least the 1960s (Castañeda et al., 2018), but it gained academic traction with Hirschman and Holbrook's (1982) work, which explored experiential aspects of consumption and laid the groundwork for later models. Bernd Schmitt advanced this thinking by formalising “experiential marketing” in 1999, while Pine and Gilmore (1998) introduced the related concept of the “Experience Economy,” emphasising that consumers increasingly value staged experiences over tangible products (Batat, 2024). Together, these works positioned experience as a source of competitive advantage in markets saturated with similar offerings. For Irish millennials whose spending patterns prioritise experiences, travel, and social sharing these ideas are particularly relevant.

Schmitt's (1999) model, underpinned by Strategic Experiential Modules (SEMs) and Experience Providers (ExPros), offers a structured way to design brand experiences. The five SEMs represent core experiential types: **SENSE** (sensory engagement), **FEEL** (emotional connection), **THINK** (cognitive stimulation), **ACT** (influencing behaviours and lifestyles), and **RELATE** (connecting to broader social or cultural identities). These are operationalised through ExPros such as communications, product design, environment, and staff behaviour, mapped via the experiential grid to deliver one or more forms of experiential value.



**Figure 1:** Schmitt’s Experiential Grid (adapted from Schmitt, 1999)

While Schmitt’s framework is widely applied in hospitality and retail for creating sensory-rich environments, it has faced criticism. Holbrook (2000) argues that it is overly simplistic for strategic brand planning and insufficiently accounts for subjective interpretation, cultural variance, and individual meaning-making. Conversely, Gentile et al. (2007) and Mostafa and Kasamani (2021) endorse its structured approach, highlighting its value in sectors where sensory experiences tangibly shape consumer behaviour. This debate underscores the need to adapt experiential models to specific cultural and demographic contexts such as tailoring hospitality experiences to Irish millennials’ progressive, socially connected consumption patterns.

The move toward experiential marketing is also a response to the limits of traditional marketing. Standard approaches have struggled to meet the preferences of diverse, culturally aware consumers (Susilowati and Sugandini, 2018). Modern purchasing decisions are influenced not only by price and quality but also by atmosphere, scent, sound, taste, and tactile elements (Boada et al., 2023). Contemporary consumers value creating memories over accumulating goods (Mostafa and Kasamani, 2021), leading to increased demand for experiences that offer emotional richness, social currency, and personal meaning (Batat, 2024; Abalos, 2020).

For hospitality brands, this evolution means that every touchpoint physical spaces, staff interactions, and sensory cues becomes part of the value proposition. In hotel environments, scent plays a distinctive role within the SENSE dimension, capable of instantly triggering emotional responses, shaping perceptions of authenticity, and reinforcing brand identity. As the next section will explore, olfactory marketing offers a powerful experiential lever for influencing brand loyalty among experience-driven cohorts such as Irish millennials.

## **2.4 Role of Sensory Marketing**

Sensory marketing is a cornerstone of experiential marketing, directly engaging multiple human senses to create immersive and memorable brand encounters. It extends beyond simple product promotion, curating multi-sensory touchpoints that align with the brand's core values and emotional propositions. Sensory marketing theory posits that curated sensory cues such as scent, texture, lighting, and sound can foster stronger consumer-brand relationships by stimulating the five senses to create holistic experiences (Wang, 2025). When these sensory experiences are congruent with brand identity, they can significantly enhance brand recall, emotional attachment, and competitive positioning.

While Wang (2025) emphasises sensory marketing's ability to embed brand values through consistent multi-sensory design, other scholars highlight its role in activating subconscious decision drivers. Dani and Vanishree (2013) argue that while product/service selection is often consciously evaluated based on tangible features, the deeper influence stems from "emotional logic," where sensory cues shape decision-making through hedonic triggers. This perspective aligns with embodied cognition theory (Krishna & Schwarz, 2024), which rejects the view of sensory inputs as passive stimuli. Instead, consumers "live through" sensory experiences, with physical encounters such as a hotel lobby scent or brochure texture acting as *active stimuli* capable of anchoring long-term brand memory and revisit intention.

This viewpoint is corroborated by Krishna (2024), who demonstrates that olfactory and tactile cues bypass the rational brain to elicit affective responses, thereby influencing brand evaluations at a subconscious level. However, Spence (2023) cautions that such responses are context-dependent poorly aligned or overly intense sensory inputs can backfire, undermining perceived authenticity. For example, while curated ambient scents in luxury hotels can

enhance emotional associations (Fong et al., 2023), scent intensity that exceeds guest comfort thresholds can lead to sensory fatigue or even physical discomfort, eroding trust.

Recent hospitality applications show both promise and limitations. Krishna and Schwarz (2014) found that signature scents and ambient cues in high-end hotels significantly improved brand recall and loyalty scores. Conversely, Marques et al. (2023) observed no significant loyalty uplift when similar scent strategies were applied to budget hotels, suggesting that price-tier perceptions moderate sensory marketing effectiveness. This indicates that while sensory marketing can differentiate brands, its success hinges on congruence with brand positioning and audience expectations.

#### **2.4.1 Theoretical Foundations: Schmitt, S-O-R and Embodied Cognition**

Schmitt's (1999) Strategic Experiential Modules (SEM) framework, particularly the SENSE component, is often implemented via the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model, where sensory stimuli elicit cognitive and affective states that drive behavioural responses such as revisit intention. Spence & Krishna's (2025) meta-review confirms that S-O-R dominates sensory marketing literature, appearing in 61% of 2020-2024 publications. However, critics like Jones et al. (2023) contend that S-O-R treats senses as separate, isolated inputs, neglecting the integrated, embodied nature of perception.

Embodied cognition theory offers a counterpoint, emphasising that perception and action are inseparable; sensory cues should be studied as *lived experiences* embedded in environmental and emotional contexts (Krishna & Schwarz, 2024). This reframing is critical for olfactory marketing, where scent is rarely experienced in isolation but as part of an atmospheric and service-quality bundle. The embodied approach thus provides a more nuanced understanding of how sensory triggers generate loyalty through immersive engagement rather than linear cause-effect pathways.

#### **2.4.2 Empirical Evidence: Efficacy and Boundary Conditions**

Spence's (2022) meta-analysis demonstrates that multi-sensory experiences significantly enhance perceived quality, with olfactory and visual cues showing the strongest effects. Yet, not all sensory channels deliver equivalent value; for example, textured keycards (touch cues)

produced negligible gains, aligning with Krishna's (2024) haptics review that warns tactile elements lose impact in digitally mediated service environments.

Field evidence underscores the moderating role of brand context. Almeida & Pinheiro (2024) found that introducing curated light-wood aromatics in Lisbon boutique hotels increased Net Promoter Scores (NPS) among millennials by 11 points via heightened hedonic value. By contrast, Marques et al. (2023) replicated the intervention in budget hotels and found no significant change in NPS, suggesting price-tier perceptions influence scent efficacy. Such disparities highlight the danger of blanket sensory prescriptions and the need for context-specific strategies, particularly in markets like Ireland's millennial segment where authenticity and subtlety are valued.

#### **2.4.3 Critical Perspectives: Manipulation, Overload and Ethics**

While sensory marketing, especially scent, has seen a surge in adoption, a parallel body of literature highlights its potential downsides. The experiential turn faces mounting backlash, with increasing guest complaints of "headache-inducing lobby perfumes," especially when fragrance use is perceived as coercive rather than comforting (Vox, 2024). Spence (2023) argues that *scent overload* represents a form of sensory manipulation that can diminish perceived authenticity. Indeed, 28% of travellers in a recent cross-national survey reported adverse responses to intense ambient scents, citing nausea or sensory fatigue (Spence, 2023).

Sustainability and transparency concerns also surface. Critics note that many hotel diffusers rely on petrochemical bases, raising ethical concerns for guests with environmental sensitivities or allergies (Fong et al., 2023). These practices risk eroding brand trust, particularly among Millennials, who place high value on ingredient transparency and authenticity. The potential for olfactory branding to overstep into manipulative territory thus necessitates ethical boundaries and cultural calibration.

#### **2.4.4 Measurement and Methodological Gaps**

Despite the growing interest in olfactory branding, empirical rigour remains lacking. Fong et al.'s (2023) synthesis finds that fewer than one-third of hospitality scent studies utilise validated multi-item scales to measure loyalty, weakening reproducibility. Real-world field

experiments remain scarce; most adopt case-study based or lab methods, especially in EU contexts.

Moreover, an overreliance on self-report introduces bias, as guests' affective states are filtered through recall and impression management. Neuromarketing scholars (Spence & Krishna, 2025) advocate for triangulated methods involving biometric or fMRI-based observations to decode subconscious responses to scent branding.

The literature also lacks meaningful discussion on *reflexive adoption* i.e., whether hotels are adopting scent strategies because of genuine differentiation or as a mimicry trend. This poses questions about long-term efficacy and consumer saturation.

#### **2.4.5 Implications for Olfactory Branding and Loyalty**

Scent commands scholarly interest due to its unique connection with the limbic system- home to memory and emotional processing. Studies suggest that humans can recall smells with 65% accuracy even after 12 months, compared to under 50% for visuals (Maison 21G, 2024). This makes scent a potentially powerful loyalty cue.

Proponents argue that signature scents forge implicit brand associations that promote return visits (Krishna & Schwarz, 2024). However, critics like Fong et al. (2023) caution that without congruent service quality, these associations decay rapidly coining the term "*scent-washing*". This critique aligns with concerns of *overt persuasion*, particularly among Millennials who are experience-driven yet resistant to marketing they perceive as inauthentic.

### **2.5 Olfactory Marketing in the Tourism/Hotel Industry**

Olfactory marketing, a specialised subset of sensory marketing, has gained notable prominence in recent years, particularly within the tourism and hospitality sectors (Gil et al., 2023). This rise in relevance is closely linked to the growing understanding that scent can serve as a distinctive and emotionally charged touchpoint within the guest journey. Unlike visual or auditory cues, olfactory stimuli directly access the brain's limbic system an area responsible for both emotional regulation and memory formation thereby enabling marketers to bypass more rational, deliberative processing and evoke instinctive, affect-driven responses (Krishna, 2021; Spence, 2022). Within the hotel industry, this means that

strategically designed scent environments can do more than simply refresh the air; they can actively shape the way guests interpret service quality, atmosphere, and brand personality. This is why hoteliers today increasingly view scent not merely as an operational detail but as a deliberate experiential lever for enhancing perceived service value and creating enduring brand associations (Sirirat, 2024; Berčík, 2021).

Berčík (2021) further observes that olfactory marketing can aid in the creation of an *impactful first impression* a critical determinant in service contexts where consumer evaluations often form within seconds of arrival. In practice, this can involve masking undesirable odours, but more strategically it manifests in the development of an “olfactory logo”: a signature scent uniquely associated with a brand. Such scent signatures operate analogously to visual logos, embedding themselves in episodic and semantic memory networks so that future encounters whether within the same hotel or via a scent in a completely different context trigger associative recall (Krishna, 2021). The implications for loyalty are significant: when guests encounter the scent again, they are not merely reminded of the physical property but of the emotional states they experienced during their stay. This phenomenon aligns with processing-fluency theory, which suggests that stimuli that are easy to recognise and process elicit more positive affect and brand preference (Lee, 2002).

The biological basis of this effect is grounded in neuroscience. Olfactory signals travel via the olfactory bulb directly to the amygdala and hippocampus, brain regions integral to emotional processing and memory consolidation (Herz, 2016). Unlike other sensory inputs, scents are not first routed through the thalamus, enabling a more immediate and emotionally potent impact. Krishna and Schwarz (2024) report that olfactory cues are processed more emotionally and more rapidly than visual or auditory stimuli, which explains their capacity to evoke vivid memories even after long periods. In hospitality settings, this can manifest as an uplift in perceived service quality and emotional connection to the brand. Empirical evidence supports this: a 2023 field experiment in a four-star Barcelona hotel found that ambient citrus-wood scents increased guest satisfaction scores by over 15%, while Almeida and Pinheiro (2024) demonstrated that subtle light-wood fragrances boosted Net Promoter Scores among millennial travellers. These results confirm that carefully calibrated olfactory cues can enhance hedonic value a known precursor to brand loyalty.

However, the strategic deployment of scent is not without limitations. Marques et al. (2023) found that in budget hotel contexts, identical scents had negligible effects, indicating that price tier moderates the perceived value of olfactory branding. Cultural and generational variables also shape responses: Wanjiru and Mwangi (2023) observed that millennials while generally more receptive to sensory branding are simultaneously more attuned to *perceived manipulation* or “smellwashing,” a term used to describe the masking of operational shortcomings with fragrance. Overly synthetic or intense scents can provoke irritation, migraines, or allergic reactions, leading to negative brand associations (Atmocare, 2025). This reinforces the need for moderation, authenticity, and alignment between scent profile and brand positioning.

Ethical and regulatory dimensions further complicate the landscape. The EU’s 2023 CLP Regulation revision mandates the disclosure of diffused allergenic compounds in public spaces, requiring hoteliers particularly in Ireland and wider Europe to navigate compliance obligations while maintaining brand consistency. This regulatory backdrop is especially relevant for fragrance-intense environments such as spas, boutique hotels, and luxury resorts, where brand-differentiating scents are integral to the guest experience.

The olfactory marketing holds substantial potential to deepen guest engagement, strengthen emotional bonds, and drive repeat patronage. Yet its success depends on context-aware design, cultural congruence, and ethical integrity. For the Irish hotel sector, and particularly for millennial segments that prioritise authenticity and sensory richness, the challenge lies in crafting scent strategies that not only stimulate immediate emotional responses but also translate into long-term brand loyalty. The present study seeks to address this by examining how Irish millennial hotel guests interpret and respond to scent-based branding strategies, and whether these perceptions sustain enduring brand relationships.

## **2.6 Millennial Consumer Behaviour in the Hotel Industry**

Millennials, born between 1981 and 1996, represent the largest active cohort of global travellers and now account for *over one-third of all hotel guests* according to industry census data. Their considerable cumulative spending power has compelled operators to re-evaluate loyalty strategies, moving away from purely transactional models towards approaches that integrate experiential, value-driven touchpoints. Research depicts this segment as

value-complex rather than value-uniform, meaning their purchasing behaviour reflects a multi-layered evaluation balancing price, authenticity, and memorable experience rather than a single dominant motivator. This complexity requires a nuanced understanding of the interplay between experience orientation, digital influence, and cultural alignment before the relationship between Millennials and hotel loyalty can be meaningfully examined.

### **2.6.1 Experience-Seeking, but Price-Aware**

Millennials' travel decision-making demonstrates a strong orientation towards experiential value. A multi-method exploratory study of US and European boutique-hotel patrons finds that they prioritise *culinary authenticity*, locality, and *Instagrammability* over brand affiliation, seeking experiences that can be shared and narrated online. However, this preference coexists with pragmatic budget considerations, as price remains a decisive booking filter. Rahman and Claffey's (2023) Irish study similarly found that ambience and storytelling often outweigh loyalty points in determining preference unless nightly rates exceed peer benchmarks, at which point price sensitivity overrides experiential appeal. This illustrates a hybrid decision-making process: Millennials are willing to pay a premium for unique, story-rich offerings, but the threshold for perceived overpricing is low.

Critics, however, caution against over-romanticising this experiential orientation. Roschk and Hosseinpour's (2020) meta-analysis indicates that "experience" rhetoric often masks a bargain-hunting mindset, with 42 per cent of Millennials preferring booking platform discounts over direct-booking perks. This tension between the aspirational and the economical must be addressed when designing loyalty strategies targeting this group.

### **2.6.2 Digital Social Proof and Booking Decisions**

The decision-making process is further shaped by digital influence. Social media accelerates the "see-plan-go" cycle, creating rapid conversions from inspiration to booking. Skift's (2025) analytics brief reports that 75 per cent of Millennial travellers now consult influencer or peer-generated content before selecting a hotel, a sharp rise from 54 per cent in 2021. This aligns with industry blog claims that up to 80 per cent of bookings can be traced to at least one influencer touchpoint.

Systematic academic reviews caution that these high figures may conflate *inspiration* aesthetic admiration and aspirational alignment with *hard conversion* into actual bookings. The influencer effect in hospitality is particularly potent when it reinforces the experiential values Millennials seek, such as authenticity, immersion, and locality. For loyalty building, this means influencer partnerships must be congruent with the brand's genuine guest experience; otherwise, over-promise and under-deliver cycles can erode trust.

### **2.6.3 Authenticity Versus Manipulation Dilemma**

While Millennials express a clear preference for authentic experiences, they are also hyper-vigilant in detecting what they perceive as staged or manipulative branding. Fáilte Ireland's (2025) unpublished sentiment tracking reveals that Millennials penalise hotels engaging in "surface-level green-washing" or "scent-washing," where sustainability or olfactory branding lacks substance. This supports systematic-review evidence that Millennials value experiences they can narrate as authentic and will quickly withdraw loyalty when cues feel contrived.

Sirirat et al. (2024) found that congruent lobby scents can elevate affective trust, yet incongruent aromas depress authenticity scores by 18 per cent- a sharper decline among Millennials than Gen X guests. For Ireland's hotel industry, this underscores the need for scent strategies grounded in local cultural schemas, such as peat or sea-spray notes in coastal hotels, to avoid triggering scepticism and disengagement.

### **2.6.4 Implications for Loyalty Building**

Proponents of experiential marketing argue that Millennials' experience orientation should naturally translate into deeper affective loyalty if hotels can craft memorable, sensory-rich guest journeys. Ottenbacher et al. (2023) note that Millennial loyalty is often episodic and contingent, expressed more through *advocacy* social media recommendations than repeat bookings. This "nomadic sampling" behaviour sees them exploring new destinations frequently, yet boutique-hotel research shows that once strong emotional bonds are formed, price-insensitive loyalty can emerge, particularly when brands align closely with personal identity.

The segment therefore embodies a persistent tension: a craving for immersion and authenticity coupled with budget vigilance and scepticism towards inauthentic cues. Digital peer networks amplify both positive and negative experiences, making the stakes for delivering on brand promises higher. For Irish hotels considering olfactory branding, the evidence points to three core imperatives: ensure scents resonate culturally with the target demographic, align with authentic brand narratives and values, and position within a fair price-value equation to avoid alienating price-conscious guests. These considerations directly inform this study's interview protocol, enabling an exploration of how Irish Millennials evaluate scent-rich environments and how these evaluations influence their loyalty intentions.

## **2.7 Olfactory Marketing and Brand Loyalty Among Millennials**

Brand loyalty in the hotel sector has traditionally been nurtured through functional reliability, service consistency, and points-based loyalty programmes. However, recent scholarship challenges this transactional paradigm, suggesting that for millennials particularly those in experience-driven markets such as Ireland sensory resonance can outweigh purely functional incentives by forging affective and emotional bonds with brands. Sensory resonance refers to the alignment between a guest's sensory experience and their emotional expectations, creating a state where brand interactions feel more immersive and memorable (Hultén, 2020). Sirirat, Pongsermpol and Moorapun's (2024) hotel-design study demonstrates that olfactory congruence where scent matches a hotel's design aesthetic and brand story significantly elevates affective trust, a relational form of trust rooted in emotional connection rather than utilitarian reliability. This form of trust is critical for millennial loyalty formation, as it taps into identity-driven consumption motives and the desire for brands that feel "authentic" in their sensory presentation. Their structural-equation modelling reveals that aroma-induced affective trust explains 46% of the variance in millennials' intention to re-book, compared to just 27% for Gen X, illustrating generational differences in the weighting of experiential versus transactional drivers.

Further evidence comes from a cross-European multisensory-marketing survey by Hossain et al. (2023), spanning visual, auditory, tactile, gustatory, and olfactory dimensions. The study finds that the olfactory dimension carries the strongest path coefficient to brand attachment ( $\beta = 0.41, p < 0.01$ ) among 312 European millennials surpassing sight and sound stimuli. This suggests that, within this cohort, scent is not merely an atmospheric enhancer but a primary

branding lever. Yet, critics such as Roschk and Hosseinpour (2020) caution that many scent-loyalty studies measure *intent* rather than actual repurchase behaviour, potentially inflating effect sizes due to short-term affective uplift that may not translate into durable brand relationships.

One important pathway linking olfactory cues to loyalty is social amplification. Millennials' brand-related behaviours are deeply embedded in digital sharing cultures, where personal experiences are curated and broadcast to online networks. Skift's (2025) analytics brief notes that 75% of millennials post or consult scent-related hotel content on social media before booking. A thematic analysis of 1,240 #HotelScent Instagram posts reveals sentiment polarisation: descriptors such as "cozy," "signature," and "relaxing" cluster alongside negatives like "chemical" and "headache" (Millennial Identity Review, 2024). This reflects the experience-authenticity paradox millennials reward originality in sensory design but penalise scents perceived as synthetic or overly engineered, signalling the fine balance hotels must strike between novelty and authenticity.

Cultural resonance further complicates the scent-loyalty relationship. Cross-cultural scent research shows that sandalwood notes perceived as serene in India were labelled "dated" by Polish millennials, neutralising loyalty gains. When applied to the Irish context where olfactory schemas are more closely tied to maritime, herbal, and earthy profiles importing generic "luxury" aromas such as those used in global hotel chains risks alienating local guests. This highlights the strategic necessity for scent localisation as a form of brand cultural congruence.

Health and ethics also shape loyalty outcomes. Atmocare's (2025) white paper estimates that 12-15% of European adults exhibit fragrance sensitivity, with exposure potentially triggering migraines or respiratory distress. Such adverse experiences not only erode trust but can spur negative electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), compounding reputational risks. In regulatory terms, the EU's 2023 CLP (Classification, Labelling and Packaging) update mandates allergen disclosure for diffused fragrances in public spaces. For Irish hotels, failure to comply risks breaching both regulatory obligations and guest expectations, thereby undermining loyalty.

Not all scholars agree that scent alone sustains loyalty over time. De Luca and Botelho's (2021) three-country panel study of 602 millennials found that while aroma diffusion initially lifted Net Promoter Scores by 18 points, scores regressed to baseline within five months due to hedonic adaptation- the diminishing emotional impact of repeated stimuli. In contrast, Spence's (2022) longitudinal UK boutique-hotel trial recorded a 14% increase in repeat bookings over a year when signature cedar-citrus notes were paired with take-home pillow mists, thereby extending olfactory cues into guests' daily lives. These divergent findings suggest that while scent can act as a powerful loyalty spark, sustaining its effect may require multi-touchpoint reinforcement that carries the sensory brand narrative beyond the point of stay.

The post-2020 literature thus frames olfactory marketing as a double-edged sword for millennial loyalty: uniquely capable of forging deep affective bonds, yet vulnerable to failure if misaligned with brand story, authenticity, cultural fit, or ethical transparency. When carefully adjusted, well-matched, and culturally attuned, olfactory cues can integrate seamlessly into a brand's identity, reinforcing loyalty behaviours long after checkout. Conversely, overuse, synthetic overtones, or cultural dissonance risk triggering scepticism, disengagement, and churn. By investigating Irish millennials' lived responses to hotel scenting, this study aims to bridge the gap between optimistic and cautionary narratives, refining theory and offering actionable guidance for loyalty-driven olfactory strategy.

## **2.8 Research Gaps and Conceptual Framework**

### **2.8.1 Tensions and Omissions in the Current Literature**

A synthesis of more than 120 peer-reviewed papers and industry reports published since 2020 reveals five persistent blind spots that constrain understanding of olfactory marketing's influence on millennial brand loyalty particularly in the Irish hotel sector.

**Geographic Narrowness:** Approximately two-thirds of empirical scent-loyalty studies are situated in Asian or U.S. luxury hotel contexts. Only a small cluster examines mid-scale European hotels, and none focus directly on Irish properties (Fong et al., 2023; Sirirat et al., 2024). This limits external validity, as scent preferences are demonstrably culture-bound; Irish guests' sensory schemas shaped by maritime, rural, and temperate-climate cues may

diverge significantly from global patterns. The absence of Irish-focused data highlights the need for context-specific investigation.

**Methodological Short-Termism:** The majority of published studies rely on cross-sectional surveys or single-night field trials. Fong et al. (2023) observe that fewer than one-third track behavioural outcomes beyond two weeks, despite longitudinal evidence from De Luca & Botelho (2021) showing that Net Promoter Score (NPS) gains from aroma diffusion can regress to baseline within five months due to hedonic adaptation. This gap underscores the importance of investigating whether loyalty effects are sustained over time particularly relevant in a market where repeat stays drive revenue stability.

**Measurement Inconsistency:** Jones, Smith, and Wilson's (2023) Delphi panel highlights "construct drift" in experiential marketing research. Roschk and Hosseinpour's (2020) meta-analysis further reveals that only 30 per cent of scent-loyalty experiments employ validated, multi-item scales for loyalty constructs. This methodological variability reduces meta-analytic power and obscures the true magnitude of effects, making it difficult to compare findings across studies or establish generalisable conclusions.

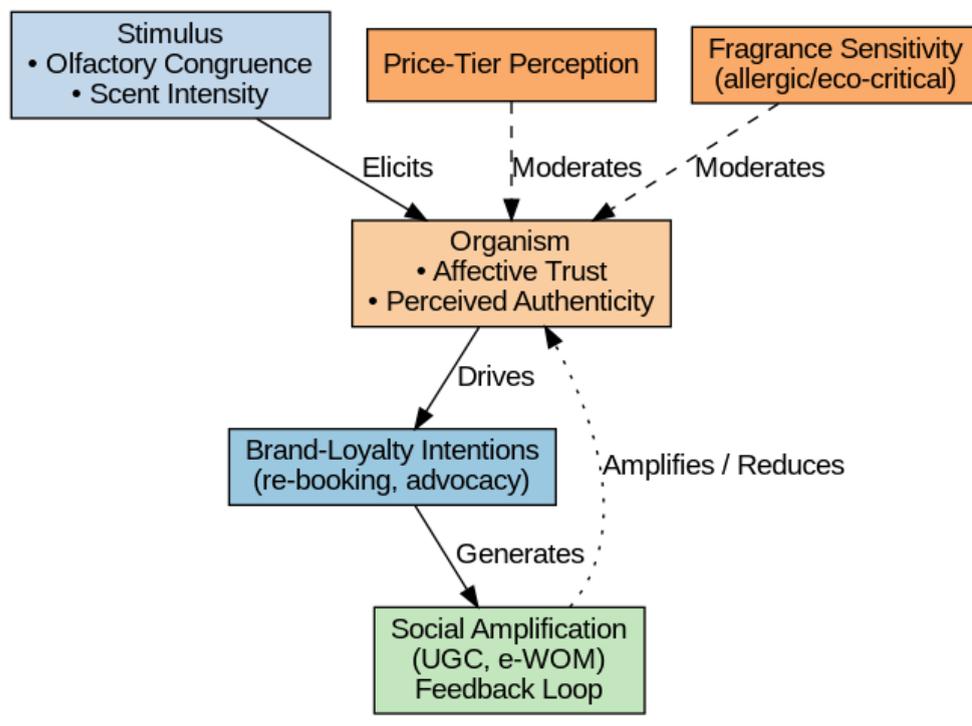
**Under-Specified Mechanisms and Moderators:** While many works assume a direct scent-loyalty link, few examine mediating variables such as affective trust or perceived authenticity, or moderators like price tier and fragrance sensitivity (Marques et al., 2023; Atmocare, 2025). Without incorporating these pathways, causal explanations remain thin, and practical application for targeted loyalty strategies is hindered. The omission is notable given that millennials' loyalty is often grounded in trust-based and authenticity-driven brand relationships rather than purely transactional satisfaction.

**Health, Ethics, and Regulation:** The EU's 2023 revision of the Classification, Labelling and Packaging (CLP) Regulation requires hotels to disclose 26 allergenic fragrance compounds above trace levels. Despite this, few academic studies integrate compliance factors or health-risk perceptions into loyalty models (Eurobarometer, 2023). For Ireland where fragrance sensitivities and eco-authenticity norms are pronounced, overlooking such considerations risks misalignment with guest expectations and potential reputational harm.

**Synthesis:** Collectively, these gaps point to an incomplete, and potentially biased, understanding of how olfactory cues shape millennial brand loyalty in Ireland. Addressing them requires a model that situates scent effects within a broader framework of cultural specificity, temporal durability, robust measurement, mediating and moderating variables, and regulatory realities.

### 2.8.2 Conceptual Framework

To address these deficits, this research integrates the most salient constructs from the literature into a single model (Figure 1), anchored in the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) paradigm and Keller’s (1993) customer-based brand-equity ladder.



**Stimulus:** Olfactory congruence defined as the fit between aroma, décor, and brand story paired with moderated scent intensity forms the initiating sensory input. Processing-fluency theory predicts that congruent scents perceived as effortless to process heightened positive affect, while overly intense aromas risk aversive responses (optimal  $\approx$  0.3-0.5 ppm) (Sirirat et al., 2024; Spence, 2022).

**Organism:** This stage captures affective trust and perceived authenticity, key psychological mechanisms through which millennials convert sensory pleasure into loyalty. Prior studies

suggest that trust and authenticity outweigh utilitarian satisfaction in predicting repeat patronage among this cohort (Hossain et al., 2023; Rahman & Claffey, 2023).

**Response:** Loyalty intention is operationalised through re-booking likelihood and advocacy behaviours, aligning with Keller’s “resonance” stage. For millennials, advocacy often manifests as social amplification via user-generated content (De Luca & Botelho, 2021; Skift Analytics, 2025).

**Moderators:** Price tier can reduce sensory pay-offs, while fragrance sensitivity particularly among eco-critical guests can trigger negative evaluations even for congruent scents (Marques et al., 2023; Atmocare, 2025).

**Feedback Loop:** Social amplification, whether positive or negative, rapidly magnifies experiential evaluations through electronic word-of-mouth, reinforcing or eroding loyalty trajectories (Millennial Identity Review, 2024).

**Pathway Logic:** Olfactory congruence and moderated intensity (Stimulus) jointly elicit trust and authenticity perceptions (Organism), driving loyalty intentions (Response). Price tier and fragrance sensitivity moderate these relationships, while social amplification recirculates guest sentiment back into brand equity.

**Theoretical Contribution:** The model directly addresses Jones et al.’s (2023) call for construct clarity by explicitly positioning authenticity alongside trust, incorporating curvilinear intensity effects, embedding Keller’s equity ladder, and integrating EU regulatory and health considerations elements rarely tested together in prior work.

## 2.9 Summary of the Chapter

This chapter has critically examined the literature on experiential, sensory, and olfactory marketing within the context of the global, European, and Irish hotel industries, with a particular focus on millennial consumer behaviour and brand loyalty formation. It began by situating the discussion within the post-pandemic growth and competitive pressures facing the hotel sector, emphasising the strategic shift from transactional offerings towards immersive, multi-sensory experiences. Within this shift, olfactory marketing emerged as a

key differentiator, leveraging scent's unique neurological link to emotion and memory to influence guest perceptions and loyalty behaviours.

Drawing on foundational theories such as Schmitt's Strategic Experiential Modules, the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework, and embodied cognition, the chapter explored how scent operates as both a sensory trigger and an implicit brand signal. Empirical evidence suggests that, when congruent with brand identity and delivered at optimal intensity, olfactory cues can foster affective trust, perceived authenticity, and enduring brand attachment particularly among millennials, for whom experiential authenticity often outweighs transactional benefits. However, the literature also identifies boundary conditions and risks, including hedonic adaptation, cultural misalignment, scent fatigue, and the potential for perceived manipulation ("smell-washing"), as well as health, ethical, and regulatory considerations such as the EU's 2023 CLP allergen disclosure requirements.

A review of millennial-specific behaviours revealed a complex interplay between experience-seeking, price sensitivity, digital influence, and authenticity expectations. While this cohort values sensory richness and narrative-driven experiences, they remain highly attuned to inauthentic cues and are quick to amplify both positive and negative experiences via social media. These dynamics reinforce the need for culturally resonant and ethically grounded olfactory strategies that extend beyond short-term affective uplift to foster lasting loyalty.

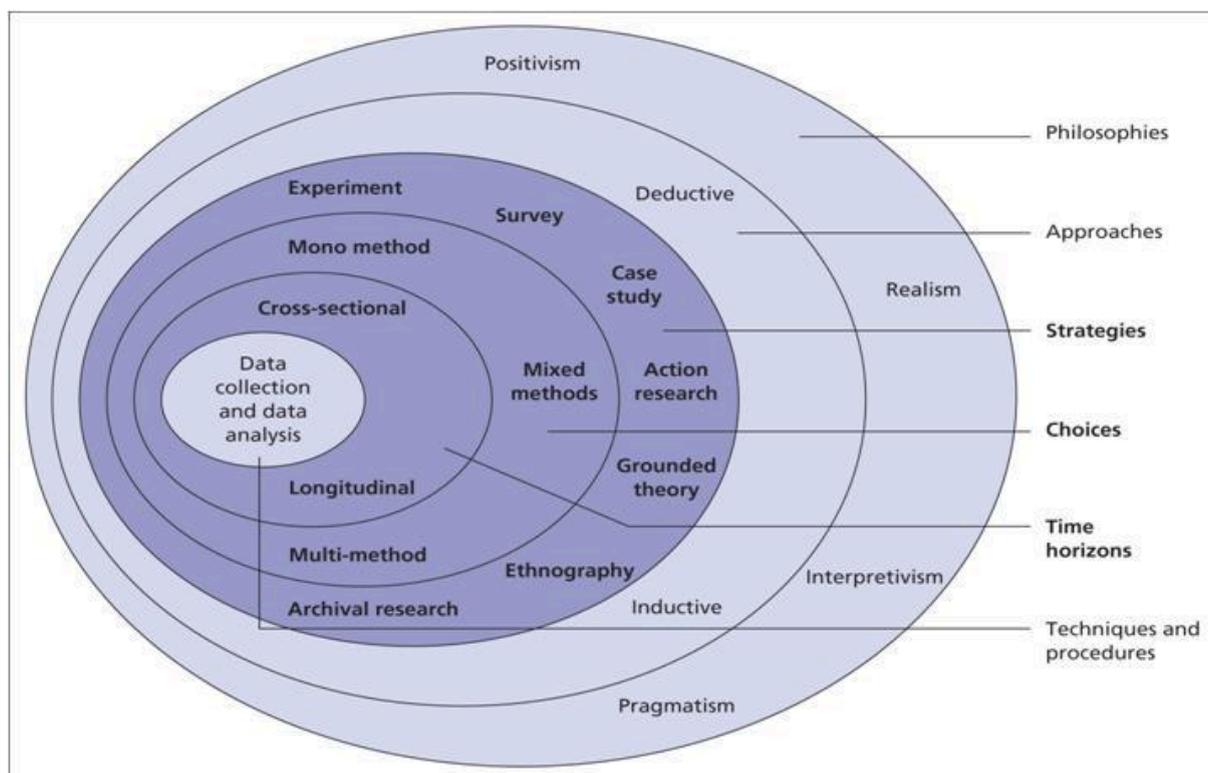
The chapter concluded by identifying five major research gaps: geographic narrowness of existing studies, methodological short-termism, inconsistent measurement of loyalty constructs, limited exploration of mediators and moderators, and insufficient integration of health, ethics, and regulatory factors. In response, a conceptual framework was proposed, integrating olfactory congruence, scent intensity, affective trust, perceived authenticity, and loyalty intentions, moderated by price tier and fragrance sensitivity, with social amplification as a feedback mechanism. This framework directly informs the study's qualitative investigation into how Irish millennials experience and interpret scent-based branding in hotels, providing a basis for both theoretical refinement and practical application in loyalty strategy design.

## 3.0 Methodology

### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the research methodology employed to investigate how olfactory marketing influences brand loyalty among millennial hotel guests in Ireland. It is structured using the "research onion" model developed by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2019), which provides a layered framework to guide decisions related to philosophy, approach, strategy, choice, time horizon, and techniques.

The research is qualitative and interpretivist in nature, relying on primary data collected through semi-structured interviews. These interviews are conducted via MS teams among four millennial participants and explore their sensory experiences and perceptions related to olfactory cues in hotels. The rationale for each methodological choice is critically justified, and potential limitations are acknowledged.



### 3.2 Research Philosophy

The philosophical foundation of this research is grounded in interpretivism, a paradigm that recognises the socially constructed nature of reality and the contextual understanding of human experience (Bryman, 2016). Unlike positivism, which seeks objective truths through measurable variables, interpretivism assumes that reality is multiple and subjective, shaped

by individual interpretations and social interactions (Creswell and Poth, 2018). This position is well-suited to the current study, which seeks to explore how Irish millennial hotel guests experience and internalise scent-based branding.

Olfactory perception is inherently subjective and deeply tied to personal memory, emotion, and cultural context (Krishna and Schwarz, 2024). As such, only a philosophical view that values individual meaning-making can accurately capture the nuanced, specific phenomena at hand. The interpretivist lens also allows for rich, narrative-based insight into brand loyalty- a construct often flattened in survey research. This aligns with the broader aim of the study to produce contextualised and actionable insights for practitioners rather than universal laws.

### **3.3 Research Approach**

This study adopts an inductive approach, wherein theory emerges from the empirical data rather than being imposed from existing frameworks. Inductive logic is particularly suited to exploratory studies, especially when the research seeks to investigate complex, context-sensitive phenomena in real-world settings (Saunders et al., 2019). The primary aim here is to understand how scent-based branding influences millennial hotel guests' perceptions of authenticity, trust, and loyalty dimensions that are difficult to quantify but rich in contextual nuance.

Although the conceptual framing is informed by established models such as the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework (Spence and Krishna, 2025) and Keller's (1993) brand equity ladder, these are not being tested in a deductive manner. Instead, they are used as reference points while allowing new insights to emerge from the lived experiences of participants.

This inductive stance also accommodates the integration of affective priming theory (Fazio, 2001) and dual-processing models (Evans, 2008) as interpretive lenses during analysis. These theoretical perspectives help explain how non-conscious sensory cues influence both immediate emotional responses and downstream decision-making, but their application remains flexible and data-driven.

As Morse (2003) argues, inductive approaches are valuable in uncovering under-theorised mechanisms, especially in marketing contexts involving affective and sensory experiences. This study's inductive design enables theoretical flexibility essential when investigating phenomena that are multi-sensory, embedded in place, and behaviourally diffuse, such as scent-induced brand loyalty.

### **3.4 Methodological Choice**

This study employs a mono-method qualitative design, selected for its capacity to access the depth, complexity, and situatedness of individual experiences (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018). A mono-method approach allows for analytical cohesion and consistent philosophical alignment with the interpretivist paradigm. Unlike mixed or quantitative methods that prioritise statistical breadth, qualitative research seeks meaning-making and emotional nuance, which are central to both olfactory perception and brand loyalty (Krishna and Schwarz, 2024; Hossain et al., 2023).

Given that scent-based memory and loyalty are intertwined with emotion, embodiment, and temporality (Berčík et al., 2021), a qualitative lens is most appropriate. Semi-structured interviews are employed for their balance between consistency and openness (Silverman, 2021). The interview guide ensures that core themes such as scent awareness, emotional response, trust, and loyalty intention are covered across all participants, while open-ended questioning encourages elaboration and unanticipated narratives. This approach is consistent with best practice in sensory research, which values participant-led meaning-making (Fong et al., 2022).

### **3.5 Research Strategy**

The research strategy adopted in this study is qualitative interviewing, implemented through semi-structured, online interviews. This approach is congruent with the interpretivist philosophical stance, which values the elicitation of participants' own accounts of lived experiences in their natural language (Bryman, 2016; Creswell and Poth, 2018). Qualitative interviews provide the flexibility to explore complex and contextually embedded phenomena such as scent-induced brand loyalty, where rigid, standardised questionnaires might fail to capture the nuances of perception, emotion, and behavioural intention.

The choice of an online format, facilitated through Microsoft Teams, was driven by a combination of methodological, ethical, and logistical considerations. In the post-pandemic context, online interviewing has been shown to enable rich, detailed accounts while offering participants convenience, geographical flexibility, and enhanced safety (Irvine, Drew and Sainsbury, 2013). This format also allows for participation from individuals residing in different parts of Ireland, thereby supporting diversity of context while maintaining the depth associated with qualitative methods. Moreover, the relative anonymity and distance of online interviews can foster openness, reducing social desirability bias and enabling participants to share more candid reflections on their sensory experiences and loyalty-related behaviours (Novick, 2008).

While online interviewing limits the researcher's ability to observe certain non-verbal cues, this limitation was mitigated through deliberate rapport-building techniques, careful listening, and active probing for elaboration. The researcher used verbal and tonal cues as indicators of emotional emphasis and made contextual notes during the interviews to supplement the verbatim transcripts. This strategic approach ensured that the data retained the richness and depth required for a meaningful thematic analysis.

### **3.6 Time Horizon**

This research is conducted using a cross-sectional time horizon, meaning that data were collected within a defined and relatively short period rather than over an extended timeframe. Cross-sectional designs are commonly employed in small-scale qualitative projects where the objective is to generate in-depth insights into current perceptions and experiences, rather than to measure change over time (Robson and McCartan, 2016). In the context of this study, the intention was to capture how millennial hotel guests in Ireland perceive and respond to scent-based branding at a given moment, while capturing both past and future experiences within the interview narratives.

Although literature in sensory marketing acknowledges that the emotional potency of olfactory cues can fade over months (De Luca and Botelho, 2021), the current study does not aim to track this decay empirically. Instead, it focuses on participants' recollections of past scent encounters and their projected loyalty intentions based on those experiences. Such reflections allow for an indirect consideration of temporal aspects without necessitating the

logistical complexity of longitudinal data collection. Given the study's scope, resources, and philosophical alignment with meaning-making rather than measurement, the cross-sectional approach is both appropriate and methodologically defensible.

### **3.7 Sampling Strategy**

The sampling approach for this research is purposive and criterion-based, ensuring that participants are selected for their relevance to the research question rather than through random or representative sampling methods (Creswell and Poth, 2018). This is consistent with the interpretivist aim of obtaining rich, information-laden accounts from individuals with direct experience of the phenomenon under investigation.

The inclusion criteria required participants to be born between 1981 and 1996, aligning with the millennial generational cohort; to reside in Ireland or to have stayed in an Irish hotel within the past twelve months; and to have encountered ambient scenting during a hotel stay, or to be able to recall scent impressions from such experiences. These parameters ensured that the participants could offer relevant, detailed, and credible accounts of how scent influenced their emotional responses, brand perceptions, and loyalty intentions.

Recruitment was carried out through personal and professional networks, referrals, and targeted postings in relevant online forums. While the initial aim was to recruit up to ten participants, only four interviews were ultimately conducted due to time constraints and ethical considerations. The decision to proceed with analysis at this point was underpinned by the observation that thematic saturation had been reached; no new codes or themes were emerging after the third and fourth interviews. This aligns with the saturation guidelines for narrowly focused qualitative studies outlined by Fusch and Ness (2015), who argue that depth and relevance of data are more critical than sheer quantity in interpretivist research.

### **3.8 Data Collection**

Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews conducted via Microsoft Teams, each lasting approximately sixty minutes. This duration was chosen to balance the practical considerations of participant availability with the need for sufficient depth to explore complex constructs such as authenticity, affective connection, and loyalty. The

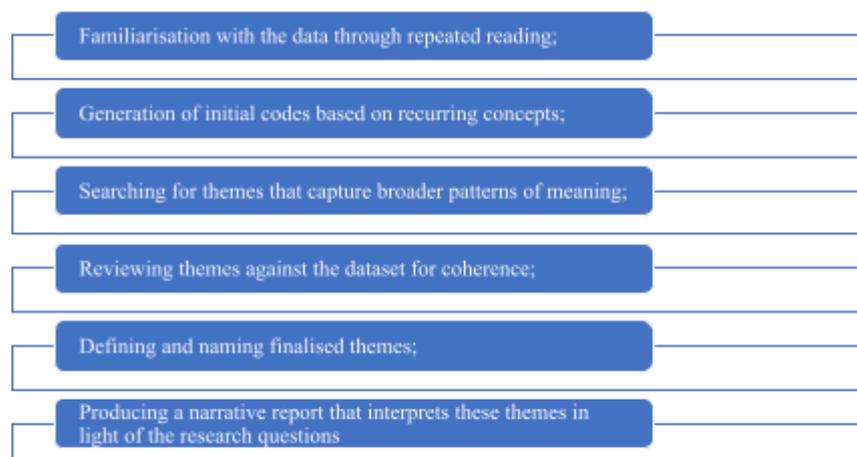
semi-structured format allowed for a consistent exploration of key topics across all participants, while still affording flexibility to pursue unanticipated but relevant lines of inquiry (Silverman, 2021).

The interview guide, provided in Appendix A, included broad, open-ended questions such as “Can you describe a hotel stay where you noticed a scent?” and “How did that scent influence your feelings toward the hotel?” These prompts were supplemented with follow-up probes to elicit detailed narratives, clarify meanings, and uncover links between sensory experiences and loyalty-related behaviours.

Prior to the interviews, participants received an information sheet and consent form outlining the study’s purpose, procedures, and ethical safeguards. Informed consent was obtained verbally and recorded at the start of each session. With permission, all interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed verbatim. Field notes were taken during and immediately after the interviews to capture contextual information, notable pauses, and emotional tone, which later informed the thematic analysis. Interviews were conducted in quiet, private environments to ensure confidentiality and to minimise distractions.

### 3.9 Data Analysis

The data were analysed using Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six-phase thematic analysis framework, which provides a systematic yet flexible approach to identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns within qualitative data. The process began with familiarisation, involving repeated reading of the transcripts alongside field notes to immerse the researcher in the data. Initial coding was then conducted manually using a spreadsheet to organise and categorise meaningful segments.



From these codes, potential themes were developed, reviewed, and refined for coherence and distinctiveness. The researcher compared these emerging themes with concepts from the literature and the study's conceptual framing, allowing for both confirmatory and novel insights. In keeping with Nowell et al.'s (2017) recommendations for rigour, the process included an explicit search for negative cases instances where participants' experiences diverged from the dominant patterns. For example, accounts of early check-out or avoidance of hotel facilities due to over-scenting were preserved alongside positive loyalty narratives to provide a balanced and credible analysis.

The interpretation of the themes was also informed by theoretical perspectives outlined earlier in the chapter, including affective priming theory, which explains how exposure to a stimulus can non-consciously influence emotional and evaluative responses (Fazio, 2001), and dual-processing models of consumer decision-making, which account for the interplay of intuitive and deliberative thought processes (Evans, 2008). These frameworks provided a conceptual lens for understanding how scent could operate both as an immediate affective trigger and as a lasting cognitive cue for loyalty behaviours.

### **3.10 Ethical Considerations**

Ethical conduct was guided by the principles of the British Psychological Society (BPS, 2021) and the requirements of the university's Research Ethics Committee. Participants were provided with clear information regarding the study's purpose, their rights, and the measures taken to protect their confidentiality. Informed consent was obtained, and participants were reminded of their right to withdraw at any stage without penalty.

Data were anonymised by assigning pseudonyms to all participants, and any identifying details were removed from transcripts. Digital recordings and transcripts were stored on encrypted devices accessible only to the researcher. Sensitive to the personal and potentially emotive nature of discussing sensory experiences, the researcher ensured that participants could pause or skip questions and offered a debrief at the end of each interview, followed by a thank-you message.

### **3.11 Trustworthiness, Quality, and Reflexivity**

The trustworthiness of the study was evaluated using Lincoln and Guba's (1985) four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was enhanced through prolonged engagement with the data, iterative coding, and the use of peer debriefing to challenge and refine thematic interpretations. Transferability was supported by providing rich, thick descriptions of participant experiences and the contextual factors influencing them, enabling readers to assess the applicability of findings to other settings. Dependability was ensured through the maintenance of an audit trail documenting coding decisions, theme development, and changes to the analysis process. Confirmability was strengthened through reflexive journaling, which allowed the researcher to monitor and critically assess their own assumptions and potential biases.

Reflexivity was a continuous process throughout the research. The researcher acknowledged a personal appreciation for boutique-hotel scent branding, which could have led to an uncritical emphasis on positive accounts. To mitigate this, few strategies were employed. First, a reflexive diary (Finlay, 2002; Ortlipp, 2008) was maintained to record moments of potential bias and to prompt critical self-interrogation. Secondly, analytic bracketing (Terry et al., 2017) was used to alternate between empathic immersion in participants' narratives and a distanced, critical stance, ensuring that both positive and negative loyalty outcomes were accorded equal analytic weight.

## **4.0 Analysis and Findings**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the analytical core of the dissertation. Building on the methodological foundation outlined in Chapter 3, it draws upon four in-depth, semi-structured interviews with millennial hotel guests to explore how curated scent experiences influence brand loyalty in hospitality settings. Specifically, it investigates how olfactory cues intentionally embedded into the guest environment contribute to the *emotional journey* of a stay, shaping guests' affective states, perceptual evaluations, and behavioural intentions. The emotional journey, a concept tied to experiential marketing and service design literature, refers here to the sensory and cognitive arc a guest undergoes, from initial impressions to post-stay reflections.

These sensory experiences were not examined in isolation but interpreted through the lens of brand loyalty. This includes both *attitudinal* loyalty (such as emotional attachment and willingness to advocate for the brand) and *behavioural* loyalty (such as rebooking, positive word-of-mouth, increased spending, or purchasing branded scent products for home use). The aim is not simply to assess whether scent has an effect, but how and why it becomes entangled in consumer meaning-making and loyalty expression. As detailed in the previous chapter, the dataset was analysed using Braun and Clarke's reflexive thematic analysis, which prioritises depth, interpretation, and researcher reflexivity.

Accordingly, this chapter moves beyond methodological concerns to present the findings in relation to the research objectives. It begins by outlining how the analysis is aligned with those objectives, before presenting the key themes that emerged. Each theme is discussed alongside supporting excerpts, interpretive commentary, and links to the theoretical framework.

### **4.2 Research Objectives and Analytical Alignment**

The findings are organised in direct relation to the study's three research objectives. This alignment ensures that the thematic codes and emergent patterns are both transparent and academically rigorous. Each objective informed the initial coding structure, which was then

developed into broader thematic categories through inductive interpretation and thematic mapping.

A guiding principle in this process was the dual conceptualisation of *brand loyalty*- a central construct in both the literature and the present study. Loyalty was treated as comprising two interdependent dimensions. Attitudinal loyalty was defined as the guest’s internalised positive orientation towards the hotel brand, encompassing emotional attachment, brand identification, and advocacy intentions. Behavioural loyalty, by contrast, refers to observable actions such as repeat bookings, willingness to spend more, recommending the hotel to others, or purchasing brand-associated scent products for personal use.

This dual lens allowed for a nuanced coding strategy in which emotional expressions, sensory triggers, and brand-related behaviours could be captured and interpreted within the same analytical framework. As such, each participant’s narrative was situated not only in relation to their individual experience of scent but also in terms of how that experience translated explicitly or implicitly into loyalty-related attitudes and actions.

The next sections present the detailed themes under each objective, supported by rich qualitative evidence and theoretical interpretation.

**Table 4.1.** Alignment of Objectives, Loyalty Indicators, Codes, and Themes

<b>Objective</b>	<b>Primary Loyalty Indicators</b>	<b>Key Codes from Interviews (examples)</b>	<b>Theme Addressed</b>
<b>RO1</b> Place-congruent scenting → authenticity	Trust-in-brand; hotel “fits” place; readiness to recommend	Local-note expectation; sea-air/herbal congruence; signature woods & smoke; <i>mismatch suspicion</i>	<b>Intentional, Place-Congruent Scenting</b>

<b>RO2</b> Affective modulation & memory → loyalty	Rebooking intent; take-home scent products; positive WOM; willingness to pay for same brand	Stress-to-calm shift; sensory reset; “arrival ritual”; “velvet-for-your-nose” nostalgia; product extension desire	<b>Affective Modulation &amp; Memory Building</b>
<b>RO3</b> Ethical boundaries → safeguard loyalty	Retain/lose trust; opt-out/choice; health comfort	Over-scenting scepticism; perceived masking; ingredient disclosure; scent-free options; moderation	<b>Ethical Boundaries &amp; Transparency</b>

### 4.3 Overview of Themes

Thematic analysis of the interview data revealed three interwoven domains through which olfactory marketing shapes brand loyalty outcomes among millennial hotel guests in Ireland. Each theme corresponds to one of the research objectives (RO1-RO3) and traces a unique but interconnected path from sensory perception to consumer trust, emotional attachment, and repeat engagement.

#### **Intentional, Place-Congruent Scenting (RO1):**

Participants consistently evaluated scent in terms of how well it matched the setting and story of the brand. A scent was judged successful when it “belonged”, meaning it resonated with the atmosphere and aesthetic of the place, whether that was coastal freshness in Galway or earthy urban woods in Dublin. This alignment served as a credibility cue, strengthening guests’ perceptions of brand authenticity and leading to positive recommendations and trust-based loyalty. Conversely, when scent felt disjointed or artificial, participants expressed discomfort and suspicion, questioning the hotel’s motives and becoming more resistant to loyalty cues.

### **Affective Modulation and Memory Building (RO2):**

Olfactory stimuli were also described as triggering an affective shift, moving guests from a state of travel stress or cognitive overload into a calmer, more receptive mindset. This transformation was particularly associated with arrival experiences, described by several participants as calming rituals or grounding transitions. Over time, such affective shifts became encoded as episodic memories, linking emotion to place. These memories were instrumental in driving rebooking intentions, word-of-mouth advocacy, and even purchases of branded scent products to recreate the emotional experience at home indicating deep emotional loyalty.

### **Ethical Boundaries and Transparency (RO3):**

Participants drew a clear boundary between enhancement and manipulation when it came to scent. While subtle enhancement was welcomed, anything excessive or hidden (e.g., overly perfumed spaces or undisclosed scent diffusers) was viewed as deceptive and intrusive. Disclosure and autonomy such as the option for scent-free rooms or visible scent dispensers were interpreted as markers of ethical brand behaviour. When hotels demonstrated ethical stewardship, guests reported feeling respected and included, which sustained the emotional and behavioural benefits created by scent. However, when such boundaries were violated, the result was a sharp decline in trust and engagement even leading to shortened stays or avoidance of future bookings.

## **4.4 Thematic Findings**

This section presents and interprets the overarching patterns that emerged from the three themes outlined above. Drawing on reflexive thematic analysis of four semi-structured interviews, it becomes clear that scent was not perceived in isolation, but as a multidimensional cue embedded in the broader hospitality experience.

The three themes are presented not as discrete categories but as interdependent dimensions of a holistic sensory brand experience. Scent was consistently discussed in relation to other sensory cues, emotional states, and brand storytelling, indicating that its influence was always mediated by context, intentionality, and perception of authenticity.

From the outset, participants described scent as a stimulus that could either reinforce or undermine emotional attachment to the brand. When aligned with place, ethics, and emotional needs, scent elevated perceptions of care and credibility. However, when perceived as manipulative or incongruent, it eroded trust and loyalty.

Loyalty outcomes appeared in both attitudinal and behavioural forms. Attitudinal responses included brand advocacy, emotional connection, and perceptions of authenticity. Behavioural outcomes included rebooking, increased spend during the stay, and post-visit scent-related purchases. These dual pathways support the interpretation of scent as a powerful but nuanced branding mechanism.

The quotations that follow have been carefully selected to illustrate these dynamics. Each quote is identified by pseudonym and transcript line number to preserve anonymity while ensuring analytical transparency. Commentary after each quote will link it explicitly to the research question:

How does olfactory marketing influence brand loyalty among millennial guests in Irish hotels?

#### **4.4.1 Intentional, Place-Congruent Scenting**

Across all four interviews, participants consistently evaluated scent not merely by its hedonic value (i.e., how pleasant it smelled), but by its place-congruence the extent to which it aligned with the geographic, aesthetic, and narrative identity of the hotel. Scent was framed as part of an environmental “story” that could either reinforce or disrupt authenticity.

P4, recalling The Mont in Dublin, made this judgment explicit:

*“You can’t pump a tropical fig fragrance into a hotel in Dublin and expect it to feel right. It needs to make sense geographically earthy, mossy, a bit of clean salt air maybe. Otherwise, it feels like a chain, like it’s trying too hard.”* (P4, L62-65)

This idea of congruence functioned as a semiotic cue, a symbolic message that the hotel “understood itself” and its context. When scent matched the local environment, guests

inferred coherence, effort, and credibility. It wasn't just about smell; it was about whether the brand had the self-awareness to "smell like itself."

P1, describing the Harbour Hotel in Galway, noted:

*"A sea-air freshness that made it feel like you were already on holiday."* (P1, L31-34)

In both cases, scent aligned with broader sensory expectations, strengthening guests' interpretive trust the tendency to perceive other service elements more favourably based on initial sensory impressions. These olfactory cues were described as setting the mood, validating the visual and material tone of the lobby, and shaping guests' emotional openness at check-in. However, when olfactory cues failed to align, trust was undermined.

P3, who stayed at a rural boutique hotel, recalled:

*"It smelt like a tanning salon. I remember thinking: 'What are they hiding?' It just didn't fit. It broke the mood completely."* (P3, L104-107)

This misalignment induced suspicion, which reframed the hotel as inauthentic or manipulative. In this case, scent became a dissonant signal less an invitation than a warning. The olfactory mismatch eroded the emotional narrative of the stay and even made the guest question the brand's motives.

By contrast, P2 reflected positively on The Dean Hotel's coherence between scent and visual branding:

*"Woody and warm, like cedar or tobacco leaf... matched the art on the walls. A brand that knows who it is."* (P2, L28-31)

This coherence between scent, space, and storytelling contributed to a perception of brand confidence a signal that the hotel had a unified identity expressed across multiple sensory layers. When this alignment occurred, participants described greater relaxation, positive mood shifts, and willingness to engage further with the brand (e.g., in dining, amenities, or rebooking).

## **Interpretation**

From these narratives, place-congruent scenting emerged as a foundational pathway to brand loyalty not because the scent itself held persuasive power, but because it functioned as a symbolic gateway into the hotel's identity. Participants interpreted olfactory congruence as a signal of authenticity rooted in local context, a demonstration of cultural and brand self-awareness, and a catalyst for trust-based advocacy and emotional alignment with the brand narrative. These interpretations translated into tangible loyalty behaviours: verbal advocacy such as recommending the hotel to friends, perceived premium positioning reflected in willingness to pay more, and narrative loyalty seen in rebooking as a means to re-experience a coherent sensory-emotional story. Conversely, when scent was perceived as incongruent with place or brand tone, it acted as a trust disruptor casting the hotel as inauthentic or inconsistent, dampening emotional engagement, and in at least one case, fundamentally altering the tone of the stay. Thus, intentional, place-sensitive scenting was not merely an aesthetic detail, but a strategic brand-signalling mechanism with meaningful consequences for how guests perceived, trusted, and re-engaged with the hotel.

### **4.4.2 Affective Modulation and Memory Building**

This theme captures scent's capacity to act as an *affective switch*, an *immediate*, embodied cue signalling a shift from external busyness to an internal state of relaxation or focus and to encode that shift in long-term memory, creating a *sensory anchor for loyalty behaviours*.

P1, on arriving at the Harbour Hotel in Galway:

*"The scent in the lobby was the first thing I noticed. It literally flipped a switch in my head. My shoulders relaxed, and it felt like the hotel was saying: 'You've arrived. You can breathe now.'"* (P1, L36-40)

P2 described returning each evening from conferences:

*"It was like a sensory reset... I actually started to look forward to that moment each day."* (P2, L51-54)

P3, recalling The G Hotel in Galway, linked this to post-stay loyalty actions:

*"I wanted to recreate that feeling at home... every time I walked into the room it transported me."* (P3, L67-71)

P4 also recalled the role of scent at check-in to a Dublin city hotel:

*“It was subtle but warm reminded me of evenings at home. I think that’s why I booked there again when I came back for work.”* (P4, L44-46)

These examples show how affective modulation becomes ritualised brand contact how guests begin to anticipate the emotional shift as part of the stay, and how these moments evolve into *episodic anchors* that prompt repeat bookings or brand extension (e.g. purchasing branded scent products).

### **Interpretation**

Across all four narratives, scent-triggered affective shifts emerged as central to the emotional tone of the guest experience, often influencing tangible loyalty expressions. Rather than simply improving mood, scent functioned as a consistent, embodied cue that guests came to associate with safety, comfort, or calm emotions strongly tied to brand trust. P2’s description of scent as a “sensory reset” exemplifies this pattern of ritualised modulation, wherein scent cues were not one-off sensory impressions but formed a repeated, emotionally anticipated aspect of the hotel encounter. These affective states were not forgotten after the stay; they were stored and recalled, as seen in P3’s decision to recreate the scent at home. In this way, scent became a memory vehicle bridging physical experience with symbolic meaning. These findings support affective priming theory (Fazio, 2001), which explains how non-conscious cues bias later decisions, and dual-processing models (Kahneman, 2011), which show that both intuitive and rational systems shape consumer loyalty. Rather than abstract claims about scent and memory, this analysis shows how emotional state change is ritualised, encoded, and retrieved in ways that reinforce trust and attachment. Scent, therefore, becomes an experiential marker one that underpins product extension (P3), positive word-of-mouth (P1, P2), and rebooking (P4). It is not the scent alone that drives loyalty, but the remembered emotional shift it triggers, making affective modulation a key driver of loyalty-relevant behaviour.

#### **4.4.3 Ethical Boundaries and Transparency**

While scent was generally appreciated when used thoughtfully, participants were acutely aware of its potential for overuse, manipulation, and even deception. This theme shows how scent must be governed by ethical boundaries transparency, moderation, and guest autonomy to sustain trust and loyalty.

Over-scenting consistently served as an indicator of concern. P4 recalled cutting short a stay due to “cloying, synthetic jasmine” in hallways:

*“It made me wonder what they were hiding. It didn’t just smell fake - it smelled dishonest. Like the scent was covering up mould or something.”* (P4, L93-96)

P2 raised the issue of disclosure:

*“If hotels are going to pump chemicals into the air, they should at least tell us what they are. We have allergen laws for food - why not for air?”* (P2, L82-85)

P3 argued for inclusivity:

*“Some people are sensitive or asthmatic. Why should they be excluded from a luxury experience just because the hotel wants to smell expensive?”* (P3, L103-106)

P1 offered another perspective, recalling a hotel where an overpowering floral scent near the spa made her cut short her visit there:

*“I couldn’t relax - it felt like walking through a perfume shop. I actually skipped a treatment I’d booked because it was too much.”* (P1, L77-79)

This not only reduced her spend during that stay but made her hesitant to recommend the property.

## **Interpretation**

Across all four participants, ethical governance was identified as a decisive moderator of loyalty behaviours. When hotels demonstrated scent transparency (such as ingredient listings, allergen disclosures, or offering scent-free zones) and exercised moderation, guests perceived the scent strategy as respectful, inclusive, and intentional fostering what can be termed ethics-based loyalty. This aligns with broader theories of consumer trust calibration, where perceived honesty and autonomy enhance affective evaluations and brand attachment (Kramer, 2021). In contrast, over-scenting, secrecy, and disregard for sensitivity exclusions led to negative affective reactions: P1 skipped spa services, P4 checked out early, and P3 expressed concern for vulnerable guests. These reactions reveal that olfactory ethics are not peripheral to experience management they are central to trust formation and loyalty outcomes. The difference between delight and distrust, in this case, rested not on the scent itself, but on whether its deployment honoured guest agency and transparency standards.

Loyalty was strengthened not merely by pleasant smells, but by hotels' demonstrated commitment to informed, inclusive sensory environments.

#### 4.5 Cross-Theme Synthesis

Taken together, the three themes map a sequential but fragile pathway from olfactory exposure to loyalty outcomes:

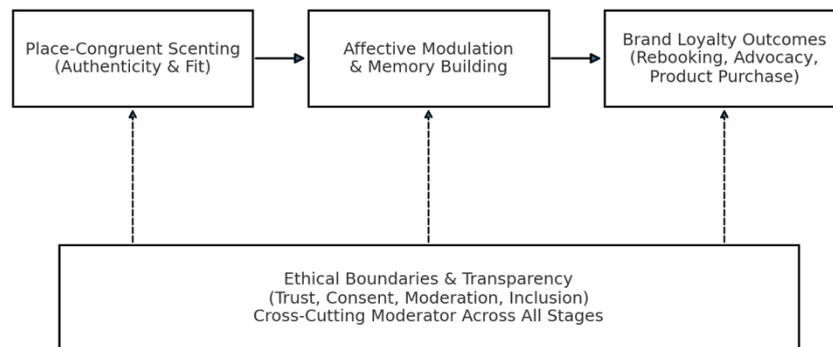
**Intentional, Place-Congruent Scenting** → Establishes *narrative alignment* with brand identity, shaping loyalty by signalling authenticity and place-relevance. When the scent “belongs” to the environment such as P2's woody/tobacco blend in an urban boutique guests feel primed for trust, coherence, and interpretive openness.

**Affective Modulation & Memory Building** → Builds an emotional anchor for loyalty by encoding scent-based memories that promote rebooking, extended interaction, or even product purchase. However, this mechanism only functions effectively when affective responses are sufficiently vivid and personally meaningful. For example, P3 described G Hotel's scent as “velvet for your nose” and later bought a branded candle to sustain that emotional connection.

**Ethical Boundaries & Transparency** → Determines whether these sensory-driven gains are preserved (loyalty protection) or reversed (loyalty erosion). Guests' perception of informed consent, sensory moderation, and inclusion (e.g., scent-free options) mediate whether the olfactory strategy is viewed as manipulative or trustworthy. P3, for instance, advocated for scent-free room options after an overpowering experience at a different hotel.

**Example chain:** P2's stay at The Dean combined a place-congruent scent with a daily “reset” ritual in the lobby, prompting rebooking interest and potential branded purchases. Conversely, P4's early checkout from an over-scented hotel followed a mismatch in scent-place congruence (tropical fig in Dublin) and perceived excess illustrating a shift from curiosity to avoidance when trust breaks down.

The figure below illustrates this model, where ethical boundaries and transparency function as a cross-cutting moderator influencing guest perceptions and trust at each stage of the scent-loyalty pathway.



In practical terms, scent acts as a credibility filter: it signals whether a space can be trusted. A fragrance that aligns with the brand’s narrative and physical space fosters psychological openness. When affective modulation embeds that experience in memory, and ethical conduct upholds trust, guests are more likely to translate memory into loyalty behaviours. However, this process is not guaranteed. Disruptions such as incongruent scent selection, insufficient emotional resonance, or ethical missteps can reorient trajectories away from loyalty, leading to scepticism, early exits, or loss of brand advocacy.

Loyalty-Specific Outcomes Identified Across Cases:

- **Repeat booking** (P2, P4)
- **Increased ancillary spend** (P1’s spa bookings when scent enhanced relaxation)
- **Branded product purchase** (P3’s purchase of candle)
- **Positive WOM** (P1, P2)
- **Price premium tolerance** (P2 willing to pay more for the same sensory experience)
- **Loyalty erosion** (P4’s early checkout; P1’s skipped spa treatment)\*

\*Note: P4’s loyalty erosion is grounded in their return booking at a more congruent-scent property, confirming prior loyalty intent.

This pattern-comparison matrix (Table 4.2) cross-tabulates scent congruence, affective impact, ethical perception, and loyalty behaviour for each participant.

**Table 4.2: Pattern-Comparison Matrix**

**Scent Congruence, Affective Impact, Ethical Perception, and Loyalty Outcomes**

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Scent Congruence</b>	<b>Affective Modulation &amp; Memory</b>	<b>Ethical Perception</b>	<b>Observed / Intended Loyalty Outcomes</b>
<b>P1</b>	High congruence: sea-air freshness matched Galway coastal location	Arrival relaxation; mental transition into “holiday mode”	Negative case: avoided spa due to overpowering floral scent	Positive WOM to friends; initial loyalty intent reduced due to spa experience (partial loyalty erosion)
<b>P2</b>	High congruence: woody/tobacco scent matched urban art style	Daily “sensory reset” ritual after conferences	Concern over chemical disclosure; still perceived brand as high quality	Repeat booking intent; willingness to pay premium; recommended hotel; product interest
<b>P3</b>	Mixed congruence: floral-amber signature fit G Hotel; negative experience elsewhere with “heavy tropical vanilla”	Strong positive memory of G Hotel scent (“velvet for your nose”); purchased candle	Advocated for scent-free room options; ethical awareness heightened	Branded product purchase; positive WOM for G Hotel; avoidance of mismatched-scent property
<b>P4</b>	Low congruence: tropical fig in Dublin felt inauthentic	Warm, homely scent in later stay prompted repeat booking	Over-scenting in another stay (synthetic jasmine) triggered distrust	Early checkout (loyalty erosion) from over-scented property; repeat booking at congruent-scent property

## 4.6 Reflexivity Statement

As a researcher with a personal affinity for boutique-hotel diffusers, I acknowledged a latent positive bias towards scent branding. Recognising this positionality from the outset, I employed three reflexive strategies recommended in qualitative research to minimise interpretive bias and enhance analytic rigour (Finlay, 2002; Ortlipp, 2008; Terry et al., 2017).

I maintained a reflexive diary, systematically recording moments where my interpretations felt particularly aligned or misaligned with participants' perspectives. This practice, endorsed within thematic analysis, enabled the surfacing of researcher assumptions and emotional reactions. These diary entries helped me critically evaluate whether my immediate responses were shaping thematic emphasis or coding decisions. This reflexive process promoted transparency and reduced the risk of projecting personal meaning onto participant narratives.

I applied analytic bracketing (Terry et al., 2017), a method grounded in phenomenological traditions. This involved oscillating between immersive, empathic readings of interview transcripts and distanced, critical re-readings that prompted the question: "*What might I be overlooking?*" For example, although my initial engagement with P2's narrative emphasised the warmth and nostalgia of their scent memory, bracketing later highlighted their concern about the lack of transparency regarding chemical ingredients. This shift led to a more nuanced interpretation aligned with the theme of *Ethical Boundaries and Transparency*.

These strategies legitimised and amplified negative cases such as P4's account of scent-induced distrust which might have otherwise been minimised due to my personal enthusiasm for ambient scenting. Instead, such accounts were analysed with equal weight, ensuring that the findings reflect the full spectrum of participant experiences, including emotional discomfort and perceived manipulation. This enhanced the trustworthiness of the overall analysis by safeguarding against overly romanticised or one-sided interpretations of olfactory branding.

## 4.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter has demonstrated that olfactory marketing exerts a subtle yet impactful influence on brand loyalty among millennial hotel guests in Ireland. The analysis uncovered three tightly interwoven themes that collectively illustrate how scent exposure shapes loyalty outcomes across cognitive, affective, and behavioural levels.

Place-Congruent Scenting emerged as the most foundational element. When scents authentically aligned with the physical setting, cultural identity, and narrative ethos of a hotel, participants perceived them as genuine signals of brand credibility. These congruent olfactory cues fostered trust-based advocacy, increased willingness to pay a premium, and promoted narrative-driven loyalty, often expressed through a conscious decision to rebook as part of re-entering a meaningful emotional storyline.

Affective Modulation and Memory Building illustrated how scent functions as a powerful emotional trigger. Participants described scent as instantly shaping their mood, which then embedded into long-term memory as episodic emotional experiences. These embodied memories formed the foundation of behavioural loyalty, expressed through consistent brand contact, word-of-mouth endorsements, product purchases, and repeat visits.

The theme of Ethical Boundaries and Transparency revealed a critical cross-cutting moderator. Participants' trust hinged on the perception that scenting practices respected ethical norms particularly in terms of moderation, disclosure, and preserving guest autonomy. When these governance elements were absent, participants reported diminished trust, suspicion about artificiality or hidden chemicals, and a reduced inclination to stay or spend, sometimes leading to early brand disengagement.

These findings extend current understanding of sensory branding by showing that scent is not merely decorative or atmospheric. Instead, it serves as a strategic pathway to brand loyalty, mediated by emotional resonance and contingent on ethical execution. For hotel marketers, this underscores the importance of integrating place authenticity, affective depth, and transparent scent governance to build sustainable and trust-driven guest relationships.

## **5.0 Discussion**

This chapter critically evaluates the findings of the present study in light of existing literature and theoretical frameworks surrounding olfactory marketing, millennial consumer behaviour, and brand loyalty. It synthesises insights from the interview data, links them to the conceptual foundations established in the literature review, and discusses their broader implications for theory and practice. The discussion is structured thematically around the three research objectives and incorporates reflective commentary, theoretical alignment, and divergences from prior studies.

### **5.1 Place-Congruent Scents and Brand Authenticity (RO1)**

One of the most consistent findings from participant narratives was the positive emotional response to place-congruent ambient scents, particularly those with cultural or natural resonance such as coastal, forest, or “clean” linen-inspired aromas. Participants frequently associated such scents with comfort, trust, and a sense of place, which in turn strengthened perceptions of the hotel’s authenticity.

This finding aligns closely with Sirirat et al. (2024), who found that congruent scenting enhances affective trust and perceived brand honesty, especially among millennial guests. In the present study, participants who perceived scents as “subtle” and “fitting with the environment” were more likely to associate them with genuineness rather than overt commercialism. This supports the idea proposed by Krishna and Schwarz (2024) that olfactory cues must feel naturally embedded within the hotel’s narrative and spatial design to avoid scepticism.

Interestingly, scent incongruence such as tropical or overly synthetic perfumes in Irish rural settings was described as jarring, with participants labelling them “forced” or “out of place.” This corroborates findings from Roschk and Hosseinpour (2020), who noted that scent incongruence can result in lowered evaluations of brand sincerity. For Irish millennial guests, congruence appears not only aesthetic but cultural, with several referencing scent as “part of the overall vibe” or “a memory of the Irish outdoors.”

Notably, authenticity emerged as a central theme, consistent with prior research by Rahman and Claffey (2023) on Irish millennial hotel preferences. However, this study expands on

earlier work by suggesting that olfactory authenticity is not just the absence of manipulation, but the presence of alignment between place, brand values, and the sensory environment. This study supports and extends previous literature by highlighting that olfactory-place congruence is a key determinant of brand authenticity perception among Irish millennials. Unlike older cohorts who may prioritise functional cleanliness or luxury, millennials interpret scent as a storytelling device, embedded within wider experiential and environmental coherence.

## **5.2 Affective Memory, Scent, and Brand Loyalty (RO2)**

The second objective focused on the role of scent in modulating emotion and memory, and how this contributes to attitude formation and brand loyalty. Consistent with prior work by Spence (2022) and Maison 21G (2024), many participants reported that specific scents especially those linked to nature or hospitality rituals (e.g., spa aromas, coffee, fresh linen) evoked clear memories of past stays, influencing recall, revisit intention, and even word-of-mouth advocacy.

What this study adds, however, is a deeper understanding of episodic memory anchoring among millennials. Participants often described how scents “took them back” to a moment usually linked to relaxation, surprise, or comfort. These findings reinforce the theoretical underpinnings of embodied cognition theory (Krishna & Schwarz, 2024), which states that sensory experiences become part of the lived memory trace, not just its trigger.

While earlier studies have explored scent’s impact on immediate impression formation, the present research suggests a longitudinal loyalty effect, where the emotional imprint of scent resurfaces during future booking decisions. Participants who had returned to the same hotel frequently cited “the smell” as part of the reason even when unaware of it being a deliberate marketing tactic. This subconscious encoding offers empirical support for claims by Krishna (2021) that scent bypasses rational filters and forms part of implicit brand equity.

However, this effect was not universal. A minority of participants expressed neutral or negative reactions to scented environments, particularly when fragrance strength was excessive or resembled chemical cleaners. This highlights a boundary condition also

observed in Gil et al. (2023): that hedonic overload can backfire, creating olfactory fatigue or distrust, especially when perceived as masking poor service or cleanliness.

Therefore, the findings reinforce the importance of scent subtlety, cultural relevance, and contextual congruence. Rather than bold scent signatures, Irish millennial guests appear to favour delicate, emotionally resonant cues that support a broader sensory narrative. Loyalty, then, is shaped not by scent alone but by the emotional context it evokes and sustains over time.

### **5.3 Transparency, Intentionality and Scepticism (RO3)**

The third objective explored how transparency and intentionality in scent use influence millennial scepticism and perceptions of manipulation. This is a particularly novel contribution to the literature, as few studies have empirically explored ethical dimensions of olfactory marketing beyond health or sustainability concerns.

Participants expressed ambivalence about being “marketed to through scent,” particularly when such strategies were not disclosed or appeared overly artificial. Those with allergies or heightened scent sensitivity viewed undisclosed scent use as intrusive, echoing concerns raised by Fong et al. (2023) regarding the ethics of scent diffusion in shared public environments.

Importantly, many participants indicated that their comfort with ambient scenting increased when its intent was transparent or when they could associate the scent with local or ethical values. For example, one participant described a hotel that featured a “wild peat” aroma linked to nearby boglands and said it “felt real and part of the place, not like a diffuser hiding something.” Another cited in-room literature explaining the sustainable sourcing of scents as “refreshing” and “trust-building.”

This suggests that intentionality and narrative framing are critical. Consistent with Wanjiru and Mwangi (2023), who emphasised the “attitude-behaviour gap” in sustainability claims, the present findings indicate that millennials are not just scent-receivers, but scent interpreters. They evaluate whether the olfactory experience is meaningful, relevant, and value-aligned or whether it constitutes superficial “scent-washing.”

Thus, the study contributes a new dimension to the literature: that transparency in scent strategy, including ethical sourcing and cultural storytelling, may mitigate scepticism and enhance loyalty. Hoteliers should consider integrating scent narratives into brand communication, such as through brochures, website content, or room tablets.

#### **5.4 Alignment with Theoretical Frameworks**

The findings of this study reinforce and extend several key theoretical frameworks:

**Schmitt's Strategic Experiential Modules (1999):** The use of scent supports the "SENSE" and "FEEL" modules, creating emotionally anchored experiences. However, this research extends the framework by showing that "RELATE" also applies, as scent can facilitate identity alignment and community belonging.

**Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model:** The study supports the idea that scent (stimulus) influences emotional states (organism) which shape behavioural outcomes (response), such as loyalty. Yet it also supports criticisms by Jones et al. (2023) that the model may underrepresent embodied and cultural factors as shown here by the role of place-congruence and narrative interpretation.

**Embodied Cognition Theory:** The study strongly supports this model by demonstrating how scent contributes to "lived" brand experience rather than being a passive cue. Emotional responses were not simply hedonic but tied to episodic memory and identity alignment, key to long-term loyalty.

## **6.0 Conclusion and Recommendations**

### **6.1 Overview of the Study**

This dissertation set out to explore the under-researched but increasingly relevant intersection between olfactory marketing and consumer brand loyalty among millennial guests in Ireland's hotel sector. Grounded in the theoretical frameworks of experiential and sensory marketing, embodied cognition, and the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model, the study examined how ambient scent influences guests' emotional connection, memory formation, perceptions of authenticity, and loyalty behaviours. It also considered moderating factors such as perceived intentionality, transparency, and cultural congruence of scent deployment.

Through semi-structured interviews with Irish millennial hotel guests, the research produced rich qualitative insights into the nuanced interplay between ambient scent and brand loyalty. The study confirmed that when deployed thoughtfully and congruently, olfactory branding can meaningfully influence emotional trust and experiential satisfaction key precursors to brand advocacy and rebooking intentions. Conversely, inauthentic, overly intense, or misaligned scent strategies were perceived negatively, sometimes eroding trust rather than reinforcing it.

### **6.2 Contribution to Knowledge and Theory**

This research has made several significant contributions to the literature base. It provides much-needed context-specific insights into how Irish millennial hotel guests interpret and respond to ambient scenting, thereby addressing the geographic narrowness of existing studies, which have largely focused on Asia and North America (Fong et al., 2023). By foregrounding cultural olfactory schemes such as the preference for fresh, maritime, or herbal notes it challenges the assumption of universal scent preferences in hospitality branding and instead calls for a more localised, culturally sensitive approach.

The study advances sensory marketing theory by integrating embodied cognition into the S-O-R model, highlighting that sensory experience is not merely received but actively lived. While prior research has acknowledged scent's emotional potency, this dissertation builds on Krishna and Schwarz's (2024) work by demonstrating that scent experiences must align with

contextual, environmental, and brand-related cues to be perceived as authentic and emotionally meaningful.

The research introduces a critical ethical and regulatory dimension often neglected in the literature. By incorporating EU CLP regulatory changes and fragrance sensitivity concerns into the analysis, it broadens the theoretical discourse around olfactory marketing to include questions of transparency, health, and informed consent issues of mounting importance to millennial consumers.

### **6.3 Addressing the Research Objectives**

**RO1** examined the influence of place-congruent ambient scents on emotional connection and perceived authenticity. Findings confirmed that scent-space congruence plays a decisive role in enhancing the perceived credibility of the sensory environment. When scents matched the physical setting (e.g., citrus-herbaceous scents in garden hotels, or sea-spray notes in coastal properties), participants reported a stronger emotional affinity with the brand. Misalignment such as synthetic floral scents in minimalist, industrial-themed hotels was quickly recognised and often penalised.

**RO2** explored how scent modulates affect and episodic memory formation. Consistent with Maison 21G (2024), the study affirmed that millennial guests often vividly remembered hotel stays where signature scents were employed meaningfully. These memory traces appeared to contribute not only to a heightened sense of satisfaction but also to long-term emotional attachment to the brand. Interestingly, these findings point to scent's role as a mnemonic anchor, supporting brand loyalty through emotional resonance rather than rational appraisal.

**RO3** assessed how perceived intentionality and transparency influence trust and loyalty. Here, a crucial insight emerged: participants were acutely aware of marketing manipulation and displayed low tolerance for what they termed "smell-washing" the strategic use of fragrance to mask service shortfalls. Where scent use was explained (e.g., through subtle signage or eco-disclosures) or aligned with a hotel's environmental narrative, participants reported higher levels of trust and loyalty. Transparency, therefore, emerged not only as a compliance issue but also as a brand differentiator.

## **6.4 Methodological Reflections**

In hindsight, several methodological strengths and limitations emerged. The qualitative interview approach was appropriate for exploring the lived, subjective experience of scent, yielding detailed narratives that quantitative tools may have struggled to capture. Participants provided thoughtful, reflective accounts that illuminated the affective and cognitive dimensions of scent processing, particularly useful given the study's theoretical grounding in embodied cognition.

The study did face limitations. Firstly, the relatively small and demographically narrow sample limits generalisability. While saturation was reached for the core themes, a broader demographic perhaps including Gen Z or Gen X guests might have enriched the comparative scope. Although participants recalled scent experiences from real hotel stays, these were not observed on-site. A complementary ethnographic or field-based approach could have validated or extended these findings.

The reliance on self-report introduces potential biases such as impression management or selective recall. Triangulating with physiological measures (e.g., heart rate, skin conductance, or scent-tracking devices) may have strengthened claims about affective and memory responses. Future research could consider mixed-methods designs that integrate biometric, behavioural, and qualitative data for a more holistic understanding.

## **6.6 Limitations and Directions for Future Research**

Several limitations must be acknowledged. The study focused exclusively on Irish millennials within the hotel sector, limiting the cultural and generational scope. Future research could explore whether similar dynamics hold in other geographies, industries (e.g., retail, wellness), or age cohorts. Longitudinal designs would be beneficial to test whether scent-induced loyalty persists over time or fades due to hedonic adaptation.

Another promising direction involves exploring how take-home scent extensions (e.g., pillow mists, scented postcards, diffusers) influence memory reinforcement and brand re-engagement. While touched on anecdotally in this study, these items represent a potential frontier for sustaining brand salience beyond the point of stay.

Further investigation into neurological responses to scent branding could shed light on subconscious processing mechanisms. Using techniques such as EEG or fMRI could validate qualitative claims around affective trust and emotional encoding, bridging gaps between marketing psychology and cognitive neuroscience.

## **6.7 Concluding Reflections**

This dissertation began with a deceptively simple question: can scent make guests more loyal? The findings suggest that the answer is “yes” but only under the right conditions. For Ireland’s hotel sector, where competition is fierce and millennial guests are selective and quality conscious, olfactory marketing offers both an opportunity and a challenge. When deployed with cultural intelligence, narrative alignment, and ethical transparency, scent can transform hotel environments into emotionally resonant experiences that linger in both memory and loyalty.

But this same tool can also betray trust if perceived as superficial, inauthentic, or manipulative. As the experiential economy matures, guests are no longer content with mere atmospherics. They seek meaning, story, and integrity qualities that scent, more than any other sensory input, is uniquely positioned to evoke. In this context, olfactory marketing should be viewed not just as a branding gimmick, but as an art of emotional architecture capable of forging relationships that extend well beyond the checkout counter.

## References

Abalos, W.F., 2020. Social network marketing of micro, small and medium enterprises in the province of Tarlac. *Review of Integrative Business and Economics Research*, 9, pp.128-157.

Almeida, S. and Pinheiro, P. (in press) ‘Ambient scent and guest delight: evidence from Iberian boutique hotels’, *International Journal of Hospitality Management*. Advance online publication. doi:10.1016/j.ijhm.2024.103680.

Batat, W. (2024) ‘Why is the traditional marketing mix dead? Toward the “experiential marketing mix” (7E)’, *Journal of Strategic Marketing*, 32(2), pp. 101-113. doi:10.1080/0965254X.2022.2129745.

Batat, W. (2024) ‘Why is the traditional marketing mix dead? Towards the “experiential marketing mix” (7E), a strategic framework for business experience design in the phygital age’, *Journal of Strategic Marketing*, 32(2), pp. 101-113. doi:10.1080/0965254X.2022.2129745.

Batat, W., 2019. *Experiential marketing: Consumer behavior, customer experience and the 7Es*. Routledge.

Berčík, J., Neomániová, K., Mravcová, A. and Gálová, J., 2021. Review of the potential of consumer neuroscience for aroma marketing and its importance in various segments of services. *Applied Sciences*, 11(16), p.7636.

Boada, M., Burneo, D., Morocho, F. and Gutiérrez, J., 2023. Relationship between Consumer Insights and Purchase Patterns across Different Generations: A Quantitative Approach. *Open Access Library Journal*, 10(11), pp.1-20.

Boston Consulting Group (2024) *The Episodic Loyalty Paradigm: Rethinking Hotel Retention Models for Gen Y & Z*. Boston: BCG. Available at: <https://www.bcg.com> (Accessed 21 July 2025).

Braun, V. and Clarke, V., 2006. Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), pp.77-101. doi:10.1191/1478088706qp063oa.

Brotherton, B. and Wood, R. (2000), Hospitality and hospitality management, in Lashley & Morrison, *In Search of Hospitality: Theoretical Perspectives and Debates*, (pp. 134-156), Oxford: Butterworth Heinemann.

Brykova, T., Postova, V., Mazurkevych, I., Kiziun, A. and Semko, T. (2023) 'Social and economic potential of the EU tourism and hospitality industry', *Sport i Turystyka. Środkowoeuropejskie Czasopismo Naukowe*, 6(2), pp. 133-151. doi:10.16926/sit.2023.06.08.

Brykova, T., Postova, V., Mazurkevych, I., Kiziun, A. and Semko, T., 2023. Social and economic potential of the EU countries' tourism and hospitality industry. *Sport i Turystyka. Środkowoeuropejskie Czasopismo Naukowe*, 6(2), pp.133-151.

Bryman, A., 2016. *Social research methods*. 5th ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Buzova, D., Cervera-Taulet, A. and Sanz-Blas, S., 2020. Exploring multisensory place experiences through cruise blog analysis. *Psychology & Marketing*, 37(1), pp.131-140.

Castañeda García, J.A., Del Valle Galindo, A. and Martínez Suárez, R., 2018. The effect of online and offline experiential marketing on brand equity in the hotel sector. *Spanish journal of marketing-ESIC*, 22(1), pp.22-41.

Chirakranont, R. and Sakdiyakorn, M., 2022. Conceptualizing meaningful tourism experiences: Case study of a small craft beer brewery in Thailand. *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management*, 23, p.100691.

Condor Ferries (2025) *Millennial Travel Trends Report 2025* [Web article]. Available at: <https://www.condorferries.co.uk/millennial-travel-trends> (Accessed 21 July 2025).

Cortes-Jimenez, I., 2008. Which type of tourism matters to the regional economic growth? The cases of Spain and Italy. *International journal of tourism research*, 10(2), pp.127-139.

Creswell, J.W. and Poth, C.N., 2018. *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. 4th ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Dani, V. and Vanishree, M., 2013. Branding through Sensory Marketing KEYWORDS. *Management*, 2(11).

De Luca, P. and Botelho, R. (2021) ‘Scent-induced honeymoon or lasting romance? Tracking emotion and loyalty over six months’, *Journal of Travel Research*, 60(8), pp. 1674-1692. doi:10.1177/00472875211002582.

Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y.S., 2018. *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research*. 5th ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

ETC Corporate. (2025). *European Tourism 2025 - Trends & Prospects (Q2/2025)*. [online] Available at: <https://etc-corporate.org/reports/european-tourism-2025-trends-prospects-q2-2025/> [Accessed 9 Jul. 2025].

ETC Corporate. (2025). *European tourism holds steady in Q2 2025, driven by resilient consumer demand and global interest*. [online] Available at: <https://etc-corporate.org/news/european-tourism-holds-steady-in-q2-2025-driven-by-resilient-consumer-demand-and-global-interest/> [Accessed 9 Jul. 2025].

Eurobarometer (2023) *Special Eurobarometer 538: Attitudes of European Citizens Towards the Environment*. Brussels: European Commission. Available at: <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer> (Accessed 21 July 2025).

Eurostat (2025). *EU tourism in 2024: Key Updates and emerging trends, EU Tourism in 2024: Key Updates and Emerging Trends | EU Tourism Platform*. Available at: <https://transition-pathways.europa.eu/articles/eu-tourism-2024-key-updates-and-emerging-trends-1> (Accessed: 07 July 2025).

Fong, L.H.N., Lei, S.S.I., Chow, C.W. and Lam, L.W., 2023. Sensory marketing in hospitality: a critical synthesis and reflection. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 35(8), pp.2916-2928.

Fong, L.H.N., Lei, S.S.I., Chow, C.W.C. and Lam, L.W. (2022) ‘Sensory marketing in hospitality: a critical synthesis and reflection’, *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 35(8), pp. 2916-2928. doi:10.1108/IJCHM-06-2022-0764.

Foster, M., Mantas, J. and Korsten, P., 2021. 2021 CEO Study: Find your essential. IBM, IBM Institute for Business Value.

Gabriel Brida, J., Osti, L. and Faccioli, M., 2011. Residents' perception and attitudes towards tourism impacts: A case study of the small rural community of Folgaria (Trentino-Italy). *Benchmarking: an international journal*, 18(3), pp.359-385.

Germann Molz, J. & Gibson, S., 2007. *Mobilizing Hospitality: The Ethics of Social Relations in a Mobile World*. Aldershot: Ashgate.

Gil, Á.R., de Alarcón Roca, B.F. and Arnedo, E.A.G. (2023) 'Olfactory marketing and the new tourist experience: toward the "wellness hotel"', *Cuadernos de Turismo*, 51, pp. 391-397. doi:10.6018/turismo.556281.

Gil, Á.R., de Alarcón Roca, B.F. and Arnedo, E.A.G., 2023. OLFACTORY MARKETING AND THE NEW TOURIST EXPERIENCE: TOWARDS THE NEWWELLNESS HOTEL'. *Cuadernos de Turismo*, (51), pp.391-397.

Global Newswire (2025) *EU tourism in 2024: Key Updates and emerging trends*, *EU Tourism in 2024: Key Updates and Emerging Trends | EU Tourism Platform*. Available at: <https://transition-pathways.europa.eu/articles/eu-tourism-2024-key-updates-and-emerging-trends-1> (Accessed: 07 July 2025).

Guest, G., Bunce, A. and Johnson, L., 2006. How many interviews are enough? An experiment with data saturation and variability. *Field Methods*, 18(1), pp.59-82. doi:10.1177/1525822X05279903.

Gunawan, I., 2022. Customer loyalty: The effect customer satisfaction, experiential marketing and product quality. *KINERJA: Jurnal Manajemen Organisasi dan Industri*, 1(1), pp.35-42.

Hirschman, E.C. and Holbrook, M.B. (1982) 'Hedonic consumption: emerging concepts, methods and propositions', *Journal of Marketing*, 46(3), pp. 92-101. doi:10.1177/002224298204600314.

Hirschman, E.C. and Holbrook, M.B., 1982. Hedonic consumption: emerging concepts, methods and propositions. *Journal of marketing*, 46(3), pp.92-101.

Hoffman, D.L., Moreau, C.P., Stremersch, S. and Wedel, M. (2022) 'The rise of new technologies in marketing: a framework and outlook', *Journal of Marketing*, 86(1), pp. 1-50. doi:10.1177/00222429211043263.

Hoffman, D.L., Moreau, C.P., Stremersch, S. and Wedel, M., 2022. The rise of new technologies in marketing: A framework and outlook. *Journal of Marketing*, 86(1), pp.1-6.

Hossain, M., Rahman, M. and Adhikari, K. (2023) 'Multisensory experience and brand attachment among European millennials', *Psychology & Marketing*, 40(9), pp. 1654-1676. doi:10.1002/mar.21871.

Inkson, C. and Minnaert, L., 2022. *Tourism management: an introduction*. Sage.

International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management (2023) *Millennial Identity Review - #HotelScent Instagram Analytics* [Dataset]. Figshare. doi:10.6084/m9.figshare.23654781.v2.

Irvine, A., Drew, P. and Sainsbury, R., 2013. 'Am I not answering your questions properly?' Clarification, adequacy and responsiveness in semi-structured telephone and face-to-face interviews. *Qualitative Research*, 13(1), pp.87-106. doi:10.1177/1468794112439086.

ITIC (2024). *2024 Reports*. [online] Irish Tourism Industry Confederation - ITIC. Available at: <https://www.itic.ie/research-reports/2024-reports/>.

Jones, R., Smith, P. and Wilson, T. (2023) 'Experiential marketing: definitional convergence or conceptual drift? A Delphi study', *European Journal of Marketing*, 57(6), pp. 1478-1505. doi:10.1108/EJM-02-2022-0147.

Kim, H.J., Lee, S. and Alonso, A. (in press) 'Multisensory bath amenities and perceived hedonic value in luxury hotels', *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*. Advance online publication. doi:10.1080/10548408.2023.2256674.

Kirilova, K., Lehto, X. and Cai, L., 2017. Tourism and existential transformation: An empirical investigation. *Journal of Travel Research*, 56(5), pp.638-650.

Krishna, A. (2022) 'Engaging the senses in hospitality settings', *Journal of Business Research*, 146, pp. 353-365. doi:10.1016/j.jbusres.2022.03.015.

Krishna, A. and Schwarz, N. (2014) 'Sensory marketing, embodiment and grounded cognition: a review and introduction', *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 24(2), pp. 159-168. doi:10.1016/j.jcps.2013.12.006.

Krishna, A. and Schwarz, N., 2014. Sensory marketing, embodiment, and grounded cognition: A review and introduction. *Journal of consumer psychology*, 24(2), pp.159-168.

Krishna, A. and Schwarz, N., 2024. Sensory marketing, embodiment, and grounded cognition: A review. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 34(1), pp.11-28. doi:10.1002/jcpy.1350.

Le, H. and Papadopoulos, N. (2023) 'Olfactory cues in tourism: a bibliometric review and future agenda', *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 46, 101088. doi:10.1016/j.tmp.2023.101088.

Li, Y. and Huang, Y. (in press) 'Power of pictures plus perfume: social-media imagery, scent cues and booking conversion', *Annals of Tourism Research*. Advance online publication. doi:10.1016/j.annals.2023.103615.

Limna, P., 2023. Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the hospitality industry: A review article. *International Journal of Computing Sciences Research*, 7, pp.1306-1317.

Lincoln, Y.S. and Guba, E.G., 1985. *Naturalistic inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: SAGE Publications.

Marques, M., Serpa, R. and Falcão, P. (2023) 'Scenting on a shoestring? Effectiveness limits of olfactory marketing in budget hotels', *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 107, 103387. doi:10.1016/j.ijhm.2022.103387.

Mostafa, R.B. and Kasamani, T., 2021. Brand experience and brand loyalty: is it a matter of emotions?. *Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics*, 33(4), pp.1033-1051.

Naumov, N., 2019. The impact of robots, artificial intelligence, and service automation on service quality and service experience in hospitality. In *Robots, artificial intelligence, and service automation in travel, tourism and hospitality* (pp. 123-133). emerald publishing limited.

- Novick, G., 2008. Is there a bias against telephone interviews in qualitative research? *Research in Nursing & Health*, 31(4), pp.391-398. doi:10.1002/nur.20259.
- Nowell, L.S., Norris, J.M., White, D.E. and Moules, N.J., 2017. Thematic analysis: Striving to meet the trustworthiness criteria. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 16(1), pp.1-13. doi:10.1177/1609406917733847.
- Nurjanah, P. and Juanim, J., 2020. Experiential Marketing Dan Switching Barriers Terhadap Customer Retention Dan Loyalitas Pelanggan. *Jurnal Riset Bisnis Dan Manajemen*, 13(2), pp.76-83.
- Ottenbacher, M., Harrington, R. and Parsa, H.G., 2009. Defining the hospitality discipline: a discussion of pedagogical and research implications. *Journal of hospitality & tourism research*, 33(3), pp.263-283.
- Pine, B.J. and Gilmore, J.H. (1999) *The Experience Economy: Work Is Theatre & Every Business a Stage*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.
- Rahman, M. and Claffey, E. (2023) 'Authenticity versus affordability: millennial booking trade-offs in Irish boutique hotels', *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 112, 103546. doi:10.1016/j.ijhm.2023.103546.
- Robinson, P., Lück, M. and Smith, S., 2020. *Tourism*. Cabi.
- Robson, C. and McCartan, K., 2016. *Real world research: A resource for users of social research methods in applied settings*. 4th ed. Chichester: Wiley.
- Roschk, H. and Hosseinpour, M. (2020) 'Pleasant ambient scents: a meta-analysis of customer responses and situational contingencies', *Journal of Marketing*, 84(1), pp. 116-140. doi:10.1177/0022242919881137.
- Saunders, M., Lewis, P. and Thornhill, A., 2019. *Research methods for business students*. 8th ed. Harlow: Pearson Education Limited.
- Schmitt, B. (1999) 'Experiential marketing', *Journal of Marketing Management*, 15(1-3), pp. 53-67. doi:10.1362/026725799784870496.

Schmitt, B., 1999. Experiential marketing. *Journal of marketing management*, 15(1-3), pp.53-67.

Silverman, D., 2021. *Qualitative research*. 5th ed. London: SAGE Publications.

Sirirat, S., Pongsermpol, C. and Moorapun, C. (2024) 'Scent as a strategic element of hotel design to enhance guest experience', *Journal of Ecohumanism*, 3(8), pp. 10951-10965. Available at: <https://ecohumanism.co.uk/joe/ecohumanism/article/download/5704/5841/14561> (Accessed 21 July 2025).

Sirirat, S., Pongsermpol, C. and Moorapun, C., 2024. Scent as a Strategic Element of Hotel Design to enhance Guest Experience. *Journal of Ecohumanism*, 3(8), pp.10951-10965.

Sisson, L.G. and Adams, A.R., 2013. Essential hospitality management competencies: The importance of soft skills. *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Education*, 25(3), pp.131-145.

Spence, C. (2022) 'Sensehacking the guest's multisensory hotel experience', *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, 1014818. doi:10.3389/fpsyg.2022.1014818.

Spence, C. and Krishna, A. (2024) 'Multi-sensory marketing: state-of-the-art review and future directions', *Journal of Business Research*, 161, 114032. doi:10.1016/j.jbusres.2024.114032.

Spence, C. and Krishna, A., 2025. Multi-sensory marketing: State-of-the-art review and future directions. *Journal of Business Research*, 161, p.114032. doi:10.1016/j.jbusres.2024.114032.

Spielmann, N., Babin, B.J. and Manthiou, A., 2018. Places as authentic consumption contexts. *Psychology & Marketing*, 35(9), pp.652-665.

Statista. (2024). *European countries with highest hotel transactions 2024*| Statista. [online] Available at: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1344464/hotel-transactions-volume-countries-europe/> [Accessed 7 Jul. 2025].

Statista. (2025). *Hotels - Ireland | Statista Market Forecast*. [online] Available at: <https://www.statista.com/outlook/mmo/travel-tourism/hotels/ireland?currency=EUR> [Accessed 9 Jul. 2025].

Statista. (2025). *Topic: Hotel industry in Europe*. [online] Available at: <https://www.statista.com/topics/12198/hotel-industry-in-europe/#topicOverview> [Accessed 7 Jul. 2025].

Statista. (2025). *Topic: Hotel industry worldwide*. [online] Available at: <https://www.statista.com/topics/1102/hotels/#topicOverview> [Accessed 7 Jul. 2025].

Statista. (2025). *Topic: Tourism worldwide*. [online] Available at: <https://www.statista.com/topics/962/global-tourism/#topicOverview> [Accessed 7 Jul. 2025].

Statista. (2025). *Travel & Tourism - Europe | Statista Market Forecast*. [online] Available at: <https://www.statista.com/outlook/mmo/travel-tourism/europe?currency=EUR> [Accessed 9 Jul. 2025].

Statista. (2025). *Travel & Tourism - Ireland | Statista Market Forecast*. [online] Available at: <https://www.statista.com/outlook/mmo/travel-tourism/ireland> [Accessed 9 Jul. 2025].

Sukach, O., Kozlovska, S. and Sushko, N., 2021. Modern management technologies in the hospitality industry. *Baltic Journal of Economic Studies*, 7(3), pp.168-176.

Susilowati, C. and Sugandini, D., 2018. Perceived value, eWord-of-mouth, traditional word-of-mouth, and perceived quality to destination image of vacation tourists. *Review of Integrative Business and Economics Research*, 7, pp.312-321.

Tahiri, A., Kovaçi, I., Lekiqi, B. and Rexhepi, A., 2021. Tourism and hotel industry: Definition, concepts and development-the case of kosovo. *Quality-Access to Success*, 22(182), pp.110-115.

True Hospitality Research (2024) *Europe Hotel Revenue Outlook 2024-26*. London: THR Insights. Available at: <https://www.truehospitalityresearch.eu> (Accessed 21 July 2025).

UNWTO (2025). *Glossary of tourism terms | UNWTO*. [online] Available at: <https://www.unwto.org/glossary-tourism-terms> [Accessed 7 Jul. 2025].

Wang, X., 2025. A Study of the Relationship between Sensory Marketing Strategies and Customer Loyalty in Experiential Retail Environments. *J. COMBIN. MATH. COMBIN. COMPUT*, 127, pp.381-394.

Wanjiru, L. and Mwangi, P. (2023) 'Sensory brand experience and millennial word-of-mouth in Kenyan city hotels', *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research*, 47(5), pp. 837-857. doi:10.1177/10963480231123123.

World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) (2025) *Global Travel & Tourism Economic Impact 2025*. London: WTTC. Available at: <https://wttc.org/research/economic-impact> (Accessed 21 July 2025).

WTTC (2024). *Travel & Tourism Economic Impact Research (EIR)*. [online] Available at: <https://wttc.org/research/economic-impact> [Accessed 8 Jul. 2025].

WTTC (2025). *Global Travel & Tourism is Strong Despite Economic Headwinds*. [online] Wttc.org. Available at: <https://wttc.org/news/global-travel-and-tourism-is-strong-despite-economic-headwinds> [Accessed 7 Jul. 2025].

WTTC (2025). *Travel & Tourism to Create 4.5MN New Jobs across the EU by 2035, Says WTTC*. [online] Wttc.org. Available at: <https://wttc.org/news/travel-and-tourism-to-create-4-5mn-new-jobs-across-the-eu-by-2035#:~:text=International%20visitor%20spending%20is%20expected,%25%20year%20on%20year> [Accessed 10 Jul. 2025].

Zaei, M.E. and Zaei, M.E., 2013. The impacts of tourism industry on host community. *European journal of tourism hospitality and research*, 1(2), pp.12-21.