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## From Recognition to Loyalty: How to Create Long-Lasting Relationships with Car Buyers

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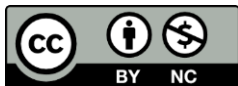
### ABSTRACT

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The article explores the mechanisms for forming long-term relationships between a brand and a car buyer against the backdrop of increasing digitalization and changing consumer behavior. Particular attention is paid to the role of customer experience as a strategic factor in forming loyalty and competitive advantages in the market. The aim of the study is to identify key stages, tools and behavioral determinants that influence the customer journey from the first contact with the brand to a repeat purchase. The object is the process of interaction between the automaker and the consumer, and the subject is loyalty management tools. The study uses content analysis, case analysis of the launch of a new model, statistical comparison of sales dynamics, customer journey modeling and observation of the use of CRM and CEM practices. Practical recommendations are offered for improving customer experience and strengthening the emotional connection with the brand at all stages of interaction. The results of the analysis show that customer experience is a decisive factor in building loyalty. The use of CRM and CEM systems allows you to personalize interactions, optimize communication, and create positive emotional connections. The launch of the Volkswagen Caddy V demonstrated sales growth thanks to an omnichannel approach, including online configuration, test drives, and after-sales support via mobile apps. The study showed that 70% of consumers consider experience to be key in making purchasing decisions, and the integration of digital tools such as chatbots and behavioral analytics increases the effectiveness of loyalty programs. Emotional interaction and process transparency promote trust, and repeat purchases increase thanks to personalized offers. The findings emphasize that successful loyalty in automotive marketing requires systematic customer experience management through omnichannel strategies, digital technologies, and emotional positioning. The Volkswagen Caddy V case study confirms that the integration of CRM and CEM ensures not only a successful product launch but also a lasting emotional connection with customers. It is recommended to adapt strategies to individual needs, use behavioral analytics, and maintain flexibility in response to market changes, which will help increase trust, brand value, and referral potential.

### KEYWORDS

customer experience, consumer loyalty, automotive marketing, digital communications, CRM, CEM, customer behavior, brand, repeat purchase.




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# СОЦІАЛЬНИЙ РОЗВИТОК: економіко-правові проблеми

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## Від розпізнавання до лояльності: як створюються довготривалі зв'язки з покупцями авто

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### СТАТТЯ

### АНОТАЦІЯ

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У статті досліджено механізми формування довготривалих зв'язків між брендом і покупцем автомобіля на тлі зростаючої цифровізації та зміни поведінки споживачів. Особливу увагу приділено ролі клієнтського досвіду як стратегічного чинника формування лояльності та конкурентних переваг на ринку. Метою дослідження є визначення ключових етапів, інструментів та поведінкових детермінант, що впливають на шлях клієнта від першого контакту з брендом до повторної покупки. Об'єктом є процес взаємодії автовиробника зі споживачем, предметом – інструменти управління лояльністю. У дослідженні використано контент-аналіз, кейс-аналіз запуску нової моделі, статистичне порівняння динаміки продажів, моделювання клієнтського шляху та спостереження за використанням CRM- і SEM-практик. Запропоновано практичні рекомендації щодо покращення клієнтського досвіду та зміцнення емоційного зв'язку з брендом на всіх етапах взаємодії. Результати аналізу свідчать, що клієнтський досвід є вирішальним фактором у формуванні лояльності. Використання CRM і SEM систем дозволяє персоналізувати взаємодію, оптимізувати комунікацію та створювати позитивний емоційний зв'язок. Кейс запуску Volkswagen Caddy V продемонстрував зростання продажів завдяки омніканальному підходу, включно з онлайн-конфігурацією, тест-драйвами та післяпродажною підтримкою через мобільні додатки. Дослідження показало, що 70 % споживачів вважають досвід ключовим у прийнятті рішень про покупку, а інтеграція цифрових інструментів, таких як чат-боти та аналітика поведінки, підвищує ефективність програм лояльності. Емоційна взаємодія та прозорість процесів сприяють довірі, а повторні покупки зростають завдяки персоналізованим пропозиціям. Висновки підкреслюють, що успішна лояльність у автомобільному маркетингу потребує системного управління клієнтським досвідом через омніканальні стратегії, цифрові технології та емоційне позиціонування. Кейс Volkswagen Caddy V підтверджує, що інтеграція CRM і SEM забезпечує не лише успішний запуск продукту, а й стійкий емоційний зв'язок із клієнтами. Рекомендується адаптувати стратегії до індивідуальних потреб, використовувати аналітику поведінки та підтримувати гнучкість у відповідь на ринкові зміни, що сприятиме підвищенню довіри, вартості бренду та потенціалу рекомендацій.

### КЛЮЧОВІ СЛОВА

клієнтський досвід, лояльність споживачів, автомобільний маркетинг, цифрові комунікації, CRM, SEM, поведінка покупців, бренд, повторна покупка.

## 1. Introduction

In today's environment of rapid digitalization, increasing competition in the automotive sector, and changes in consumer behavior, the formation of long-term relationships between a brand and a customer is of particular importance. Cars are no longer perceived as just a technical product – they are becoming a lifestyle element, a tool of social identification, and a source of emotional experience. In this environment, traditional marketing models focused solely on sales are losing their effectiveness, giving way to customer-centric strategies that involve systematic management of consumer experience throughout the entire interaction with the brand, from the first contact to repeat purchase.

According to global surveys, more than 70% of consumers consider customer experience to be a key factor in their purchasing decisions, ahead of price and product features. This trend is particularly important for the car market, as the cost of a car is high and the decision-making cycle is long. Within the Ukrainian market, an example of effective customer experience management was the launch of the new generation Volkswagen Caddy, which, according to Ukravtoprom, increased sales in the relevant segment. This demonstrates the impact of a pre-formed positive impression, digital communications and after-sales support on customer behavior.

Despite the existence of separate studies in the field of branding, loyalty and CRM approaches, the mechanisms that ensure a sustainable transition of the customer from initial brand recognition to the formation of emotional attachment and repeat purchases remain insufficiently understood. The lack of a holistic view of this process makes it difficult to develop effective marketing strategies for automakers and dealer networks in the face of growing competition and digital transformation.

Based on this, the hypothesis of the study is that the systematic construction of a customer journey involving digital channels, personalized services and loyalty programs significantly increases the likelihood of repeat purchase and contributes to the formation of a long-term relationship between the buyer and the car brand.

## 2. Literature Review

Current scientific research shows a growing interest in the problem of forming long-term relationships with customers in the context of digital market transformation. The textbook by Ivanenko L., Smerichevska S. and Smerichevskyi S. [1] provides an in-depth analysis of consumer behavior, including their motivations, brand perception and factors influencing the purchase decision. The works of Sopilnyk L. et al. [2] and Onishchenko S., Kalugina N. and Gerasymenko I. [3] substantiate the importance of omnichannel commerce as a factor in increasing competitiveness, and emphasize the need for coordinated interaction of offline and online channels in communication with customers.

The issue of strategic loyalty management in the digital environment is considered in the work of Holovan O. et al. [4], where the emphasis is placed on the use of CRM and CEM approaches in the systematic management of customer experience. In this context, the contribution of Vahonova O. and Ravlinko Z. [5; 6], who study the strategic justification of management decisions and the development of digital competencies of staff, is a prerequisite for the effective implementation of personalized service technologies.

International research deepens the understanding of behavioral factors of loyalty. In particular, Audrain-Pontevia and Garnier [7] analyze the role of emotional gratitude of customers as a determinant of the effectiveness of loyalty programs. Maree A. et al. [8] reveal how changes in brand identity elements (e.g., logo) affect brand attitudes and customer retention. Singh G. and Singh I. [9] propose the concept of “green loyalty”, emphasizing the importance of environmental brand positioning to strengthen long-term relationships with customers. The work of Chen Q. et al. [10] confirms the effectiveness of using artificial intelligence tools (in particular, chatbots) to support customer interaction and increase customer loyalty.

Thus, the analysis of scientific publications demonstrates that effective customer loyalty management is a multifactorial process that requires simultaneous consideration of behavioral, emotional, technological and institutional factors. The application of omnichannel strategies, development of digital services, personalization of interaction and focus on customer values are

recognized as key components of building long-term relationships in the modern marketing environment.

### **3. Problem Statement**

The purpose of the article is to study the process of forming long-term relationships between a brand and a car buyer by analyzing customer experience at all stages of interaction – from initial recognition to repeat purchase – taking into account modern digital, behavioral and emotional factors.

### **4. Methods and Materials**

The study used methods of analysis, synthesis and systematization of scientific publications, marketing reports and industry cases. The theoretical basis was the modern concepts of customer experience management, omnichannel communications and behavioral economics. The empirical part consisted of a case analysis of the launch of the Volkswagen Caddy V in Ukraine, with an assessment of the impact of digital services and CRM tools on customer loyalty. To visualize the process of building interaction, a customer journey model was used, defining the role of digital technologies at each stage. The analysis of the effectiveness of the strategy was carried out on the basis of statistical data and content analysis of the communication campaign.

### **5. Results and Discussion**

In modern marketing, customer loyalty is viewed not as the result of a one-time purchase but as a long-term process of building a relationship between the consumer and the brand based on a positive customer experience. In the context of the automotive market, this interaction covers a long-time scale, from the initial acquaintance with the brand to a repeat purchase or recommendation. The theoretical foundations of Customer Experience Management (CEM) are formed at the intersection of relationship marketing, behavioral economics, and service management. One of the basic assumptions is that the consumer is an active subject who reacts emotionally to all stages of contact with the brand: from the first impression to after-sales service.

Leading customer engagement models, such as AIDA, Customer Journey Map, and Loyalty Loop, reflect a multi-stage relationship structure where each touch point is important for the overall impression. The Customer Journey model allows tracing the customer journey as a sequence of steps: awareness, interest, intention, purchase, use, repeat purchase. Within this logic, it is important to ensure the continuity and consistency of experience that builds brand trust. A special role is played by an omnichannel strategy that ensures convenient transitions between online and offline interactions, allowing the brand to accompany the customer at every stage [2].

A key element in building loyalty is not only the functional characteristics of the product, but also emotional interaction based on personalized service, attention to customer needs, and the brand's ability to inspire a sense of trust and appreciation. According to studies by Audrain-Pontevia and Garnier, a sense of customer appreciation significantly increases the effectiveness of loyalty programs, especially in the context of constant communication through digital channels [7]. The integration of emotional marketing elements and gamified services also helps to deepen the connection between the brand and the consumer.

In automotive marketing, it is important to take into account the peculiarities of customer experience related to the length of the product life cycle, the high cost of purchase, and the importance of after-sales service. This requires the involvement of customer relationship management (CRM) systems and analytics tools that allow for personalized interaction, segment the audience, and optimize communication. The use of CEM approaches in combination with technological solutions such as chatbots, mobile applications, and online configurators allows to provide the client not only with convenience but also with an emotionally positive experience, which is the basis for building loyalty [4].

The process of building brand loyalty in modern automotive marketing is multi-level and technologically complex. It covers not only the stages of direct purchasing behavior, but also the preceding and subsequent phases, where digital support is of particular importance – from precise targeting to automated after-sales support. CRM (Customer Relationship Management) and CEM

(Customer Experience Management) systems play a leading role in ensuring the integrity of customer interaction (Table 1).

**Table 1. Key stages of consumer loyalty formation and the role of digital technologies**

Stage	The essence of interaction	Digital tools and support technologies
<b>Recognition</b>	The consumer learns about the brand or product for the first time; basic awareness is formed	Targeted advertising in Google, Meta, YouTube; use of CRM data to determine the target audience; retargeting; SEO-optimized landing pages; influencer marketing in TikTok/Instagram
<b>Involvement</b>	The client shows interest and starts actively researching the brand and assortment	Interactive online car configurators; AR/VR cabin reviews; model comparison platforms; personalized email newsletters; SMM campaigns; click-through and page view time analytics
<b>Purchase intent</b>	Consumers compare offers, study the terms of purchase and service	Online chat with a manager; systems for accounting for "warm" leads in CRM; generation of special commercial offers; tracking reactions to triggers (for example, the "add to favorites" button)
<b>Purchase</b>	Completion of the transaction, conclusion of the contract, transfer of the technical specifications	Integrated CRM forms in the dealer system; online payment/booking; SMS/E-mail confirmation; creation of a customer profile; launch of an after-sales support funnel
<b>After-sales support</b>	Warranty and technical service, feedback	Mobile applications with maintenance reminders, online service appointment function; virtual "personal manager" in the application; automated notifications about updates or promotions; car history tracking
<b>Satisfaction</b>	Emotional perception of the experience of using the product and service	Net Promoter Score (NPS) surveys; integration with Google Reviews and Trustpilot; chatbots with automatic feedback collection; triggered questionnaires after service or delivery
<b>Loyalty</b>	Formation of an emotional connection, participation in loyalty programs, readiness to repeat purchases	Loyalty programs with personalized bonuses; referral programs via QR codes; trade-in offers via CRM; segmented upsell campaigns; customer lifecycle tracking

Source: Systematized, summarized and grouped according to [3; 5; 6].

All stages of loyalty building – from initial contact to repeat purchase – are tightly integrated with digital tools that allow brands to create accurate, consistent, and emotionally engaging customer interactions. The use of CRM and CEM technologies ensures personalization of experience, automation of communications, and strengthening of the emotional connection with the consumer. This not only increases the likelihood of repeat purchases but also contributes to the formation of sustainable brand loyalty in the long term.

Over the past decade, consumer behavior in the automotive market has undergone significant changes due to digitalization, social change, and the growing role of individual experience. The modern buyer is not only focused on technical characteristics or price, but primarily on the integrity and convenience of interaction with the brand. Behavioral trends show a shift in focus to such aspects as personalization of offers, flexibility of communication channels, transparency of information and speed of response to requests. Consumer expectations are increasingly being shaped by experience in e-commerce and service industries, forcing automakers to adapt their interaction models to new realities [1].

One of the leading trends is the growing importance of omnichannel experience, in which consumers expect continuous, integrated interaction through online and offline channels. For example, the ability to start configuring a car online, continue a dialog with a dealer in a messenger, take a test drive by appointment in a mobile app, and then receive a personalized offer by email has become part of the expected norm. At the same time, the need for autonomy of choice is growing: customers want to have full control over information and the decision-making process, while receiving relevant support where it is needed.

Another important trend is sensitivity to the emotional aspect of communication. Car buyers are increasingly identifying themselves with the brand's values, its attitude to social responsibility, environmental safety, and customer focus. This creates a demand for personalized, meaningful and authentic messages – not only in advertising campaigns, but also in service communication. For example, CRM and CEM systems are increasingly being used to analyze behavior, preferences, and purchase history to create individual interaction scenarios adapted to the emotional and functional needs of the client [4].

Trust in digital assistants plays a special role in the behavioral model of the modern consumer. According to the study by Chen Q. et al., more than 60% of respondents expressed their willingness to interact with AI interfaces at the stages of model comparison, consultations, and after-sales support. This indicates a change in the communication paradigm – from live contact to a hybrid model, where automated services (chatbots, recommendation algorithms, virtual managers) do not replace humans, but significantly complement the customer experience [10].

Thus, current behavioral trends in the automotive market indicate the need for deep personalization, consistent omnichannel support, and the use of technology at all stages of the customer journey. This requires companies to be flexible, analytically adaptive, and able to form emotionally meaningful interactions with consumers at every point of contact.

In 2021, Volkswagen introduced the fifth generation of the Caddy model, implementing a comprehensive strategy focused on building long-term relationships with customers. The communication campaign focused on the digital benefits of the car: new multimedia features, mobile service connectivity, and security systems. The presentation was accompanied by informative materials in national media and online resources, including official websites and platforms with video reviews [11].

The key feature of the case was the introduction of an omnichannel approach. Potential customers could configure a car online, get an individual offer, sign up for a test drive, and get advice remotely. After the acquisition, the focus shifted to ongoing digital support through mobile apps, email communication, automatic service reminders, and participation in loyalty programs. This was in line with current trends in personalized interaction.

CRM systems were used to collect and process data on customer interests and behavior, which allowed us to tailor offers to meet the needs of each customer. After the purchase, CEM mechanisms were activated, including support through mobile interfaces, surveys on the quality of service, and personalized discounts on maintenance or accessories. This approach ensured not only the completion of the transaction but also the formation of an emotionally positive post-sale experience.

The effectiveness of the implemented strategy is confirmed by the growth in sales in the light commercial vehicle segment after the launch of the Caddy V. According to Ukravtoprom, in the summer of 2021, a positive trend was recorded compared to previous periods, which allows us to attribute this effect to the successful marketing and service support of the model [12].

In the intensely competitive automotive sector, customer engagement should cover not only the sales phase but also the entire cycle of brand contact, from the first introduction to after-sales service. Personalized solutions and digital tools that ensure the integrity and consistency of communications are of particular importance. The diagram below outlines the key areas for improving the customer interaction strategy, taking into account current market trends and the transformation of consumer behavior.

To ensure sustainable relationships with customers, it is advisable to use a multi-component model that combines an individual approach, multi-channel communication formats, effective post-purchase support, emotional positioning, and the latest technological solutions. This format of interaction contributes to the formation of a positive user experience, increased customer satisfaction and their willingness to choose the brand again. Implementation of such a strategy also creates the basis for increasing the level of trust, brand value and recommendation potential (Figure 1).

### 1. Introduction of multi-level personalization

- Create dynamic interaction models based on user behavior data, purchase history, preferences, and driving style.
- Apply CRM systems with algorithms for predicting customer needs and recommending products in real time.
- Offer customized service, financing, and insurance packages tailored to the customer's profile.

### 2. Strengthening the role of omnichannel platforms

- Ensure seamless communication across all channels (website, dealer, mobile app, social media).
- Develop mobile platforms with a full self-service cycle: car configuration, booking, service appointment, access to maintenance history.
- Implement end-to-end customer authorization (single sign-on) across all digital channels to create a holistic experience.

### 3. Integration of after-sales service into customer strategy

- Consider after-sales service not as the end of the interaction, but as the beginning of a new phase of emotional connection.
- Develop digital "after-purchase" support: reminders, educational content, operating tips, satisfaction surveys.
- Introduce differentiated loyalty programs focused on service regularity, brand community activity, etc.

### 4. Use of emotional and value marketing

- Communicate not only the rational benefits of the product, but also the emotional benefits: freedom, care, identity, community.
- Maintain the consistency of brand messages and its social and environmental responsibility in line with new customer expectations.
- Develop a brand-based community (online forums, owner clubs, exclusive events) to strengthen the sense of involvement.

### 5. Automation and AI customer support

- Implement AI tools (chatbots, voice assistants, recommendation systems) for fast, intuitive, and personalized support.
- Use Customer Journey Analytics to identify weak points and respond in a timely manner.
- Develop predictive models of loyalty loss risk with subsequent action triggers (retention offers, discounts, service bonuses).

## **Figure 2. Recommendations for improving the strategy of interaction with car buyers to ensure long-term loyalty**

Source: Based on [8; 9].

## 6. Conclusions

The study found that the formation of long-term relationships between the brand and the customer in the automotive marketing sector is a complex, multifactorial process that requires the coordinated work of digital, emotional and behavioral mechanisms of influence. The shift from a transactional to a customer-centric model of interaction necessitates systematic customer experience management, where personalization, omnichannel and after-sales support play a key role. Digital platforms, CRM and CEM systems provide the ability to tailor communication to individual customer requests, creating a positive emotional environment for building loyalty.

The Volkswagen Caddy V case study demonstrates that the strategic integration of digital tools into customer interaction not only ensures a successful launch of a new product but also creates the prerequisites for long-term brand loyalty. The use of behavioral analytics, personalized content, flexible service, and loyalty programs allows a brand not only to meet demand but also to create a sustainable emotional connection with the consumer. Thus, building loyalty in the automotive sector requires a

flexible, technologically advanced and customer-centric strategy that can adapt to constant market changes and consumer expectations.

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