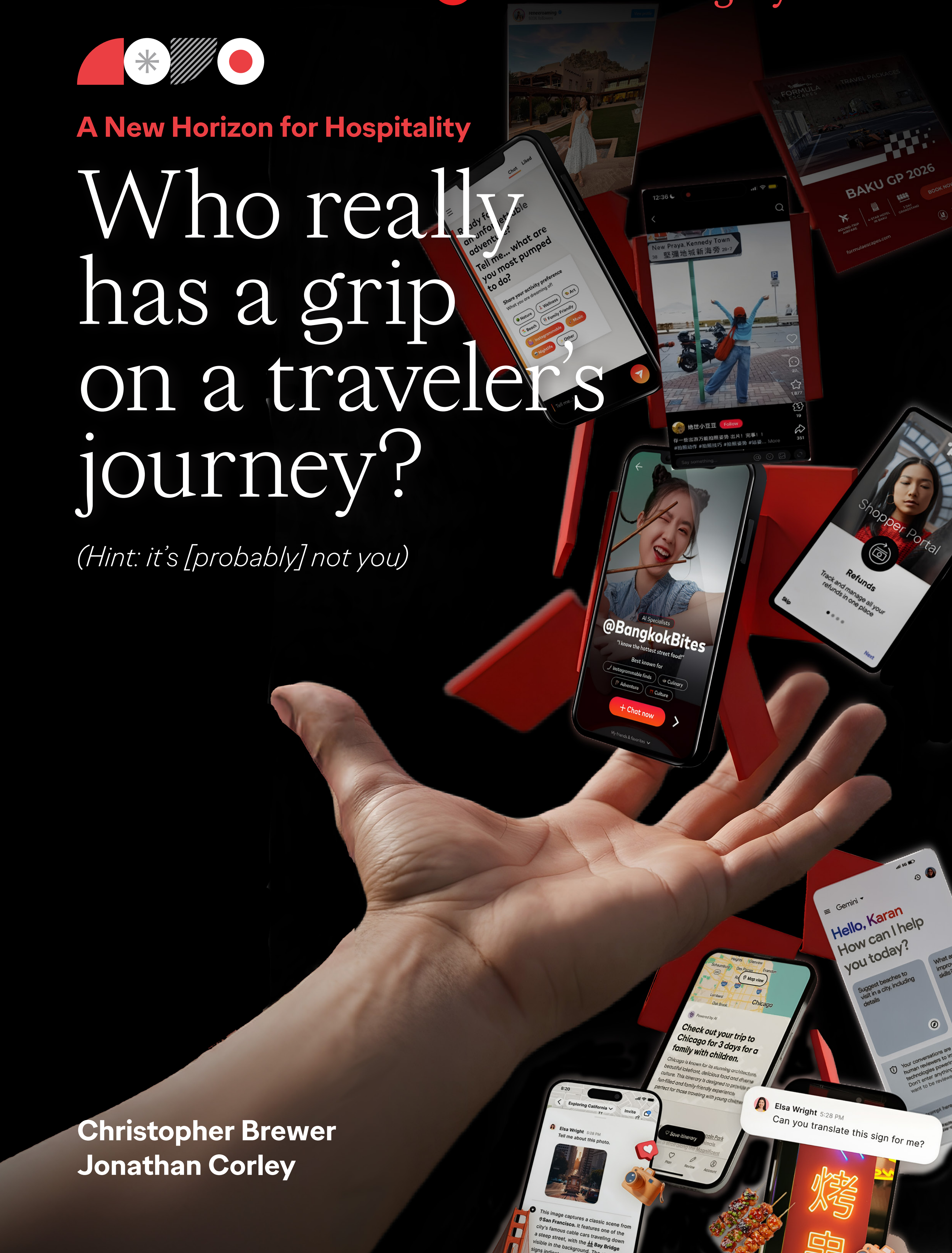
SITECORE × Ogilvy One

A New Horizon for Hospitality

Who really has a grip on a traveler's journey?

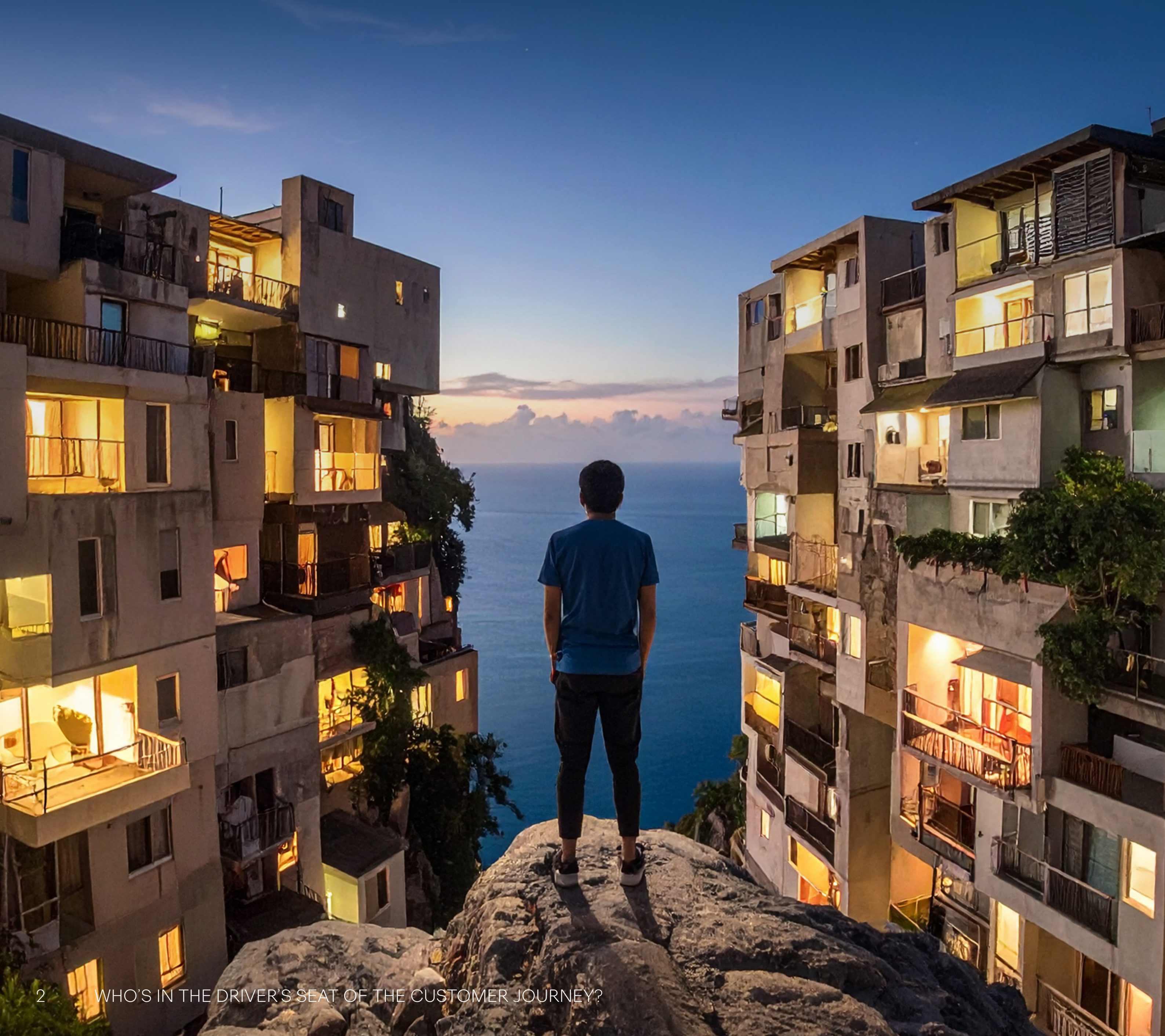
(Hint: it's [probably] not you)



Christopher Brewer
Jonathan Corley

The New Reality:

Navigating the Unfolding Horizon of Hospitality



For decades, the grand brands of hospitality operated on a simple, comforting belief: that you were in control. You owned the experience, you set the standards, you were the destination.

That era is definitively over.

While you have been polishing the silver and perfecting the thread count, the entire battle for the customer has moved upstream. The war for their attention and their wallet is now being won or lost in the digital ether, long before they even think of visiting your website.

Let's be brutally honest about who holds the keys today:

01 The New Tastemakers are the AI and the Influencer.

The most trusted travel agent is no longer a person; it is a powerful combination of algorithmic logic and social proof. The journey is sparked by the fleeting desire from an influencer's 30-second reel. The AI concierge then acts as the ultimate gatekeeper, instantly transforming that inspiration into a perfectly optimised, bookable itinerary.

02 The New Destination is a Cultural Moment.

Travellers are not just booking a city; they are booking a storyline. They're flocking to concerts, the filming locations of the latest streaming hit, making a pilgrimage to a viral TikTok restaurant, or chasing a fleeting aesthetic. Culture, not the concierge, now dictates the itinerary.

03 The New Benchmark for Experience is Frictionless.

Your competition isn't the hotel next door. It's the seamless, predictive, one-click standard set by the world's biggest technology companies. In a world of instant gratification, anything that requires more than a single tap feels irretrievably broken.

04 The New Asset Class is Your Data

The customer journey is no longer a linear path to your booking engine. It's a fluid, dynamic map drawn by algorithms. The data that fuels these engines— search histories, social media likes, past purchases—dictates what a traveller sees, what they desire, and ultimately, where they go.

In this new reality, you are no longer selling rooms; you are competing for a sliver of influence in an ecosystem you do not own. The gravest risk is not losing a few bookings. It is the slow, silent relegation of your brand to a commoditised utility—a bed for the night, a functional line item in an itinerary conceived, created, and controlled by someone else.

1

THE AI CONCIERGE AND THE INFLUENCER ITINERARY: A PARADIGM SHIFT IN TRAVELER INFLUENCE

Key Figures

25%
drop in traditional search volume by 2026

Gartner predicts AI-powered search will slash organic traffic by more than 50%, as consumers abandon traditional search.[1]

40%
of global travelers now use AI for trip planning

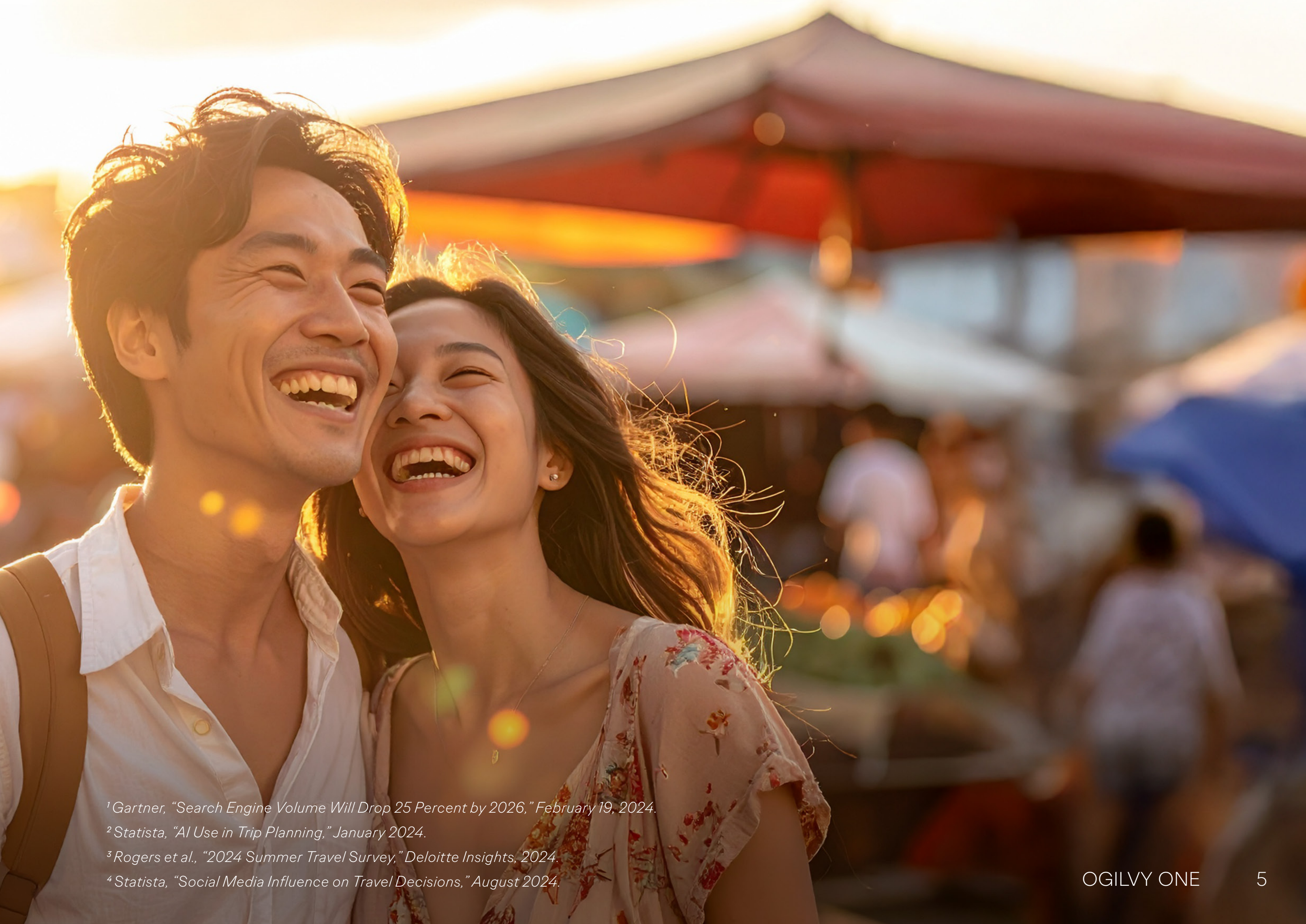
Adoption has hit 40%, and with 60% of travelers willing to try AI, the market has reached a tipping point for automated discovery.[2]

1 in 3
travelers book what AI recommends

This high conversion rate shows significant trust in AI, with one in three travelers now booking directly from its recommendations.[3]

43%
base travel decisions on influencer content

Influencer content is the most significant factor in travel decisions for 43% of social media users, proving its critical role in the path to purchase.[4]



[1] Gartner, "Search Engine Volume Will Drop 25 Percent by 2026," February 19, 2024.
[2] Statista, "AI Use in Trip Planning," January 2024.
[3] Rogers et al., "2024 Summer Travel Survey," Deloitte Insights, 2024.
[4] Statista, "Social Media Influence on Travel Decisions," August 2024.

THE TREND
— AND WHY IT MATTERS

A fundamental shift is underway in the travel and hospitality value chain. For decades, brands controlled the customer journey, from inspiration to booking and experience. That paradigm is now obsolete. The locus of control has decisively moved "upstream" to a fragmented ecosystem of AI-powered platforms and social influencers who now act as the primary tastemakers and travel architects.

This isn't a distant future; it's happening now. Gartner predicts that by 2026, traditional search engine volume will plummet by 25%, with organic traffic potentially being slashed by more than half as consumers flock to AI-powered search. This disintermediation presents a critical strategic challenge: the risk of brands being relegated to functional utilities within itineraries they neither create nor control.

The data substantiates the velocity of this shift. A 2024 study reveals that 40% of global travellers are already leveraging AI-based tools for trip planning (Statista, 2024). This is not mere exploration; the conversion from recommendation to transaction is significant, with one-third of these users proceeding to book what the AI suggests (Deloitte, 2024). Simultaneously, social influence has become a dominant driver of demand, with 43% of users citing influencer content as the most significant factor in their travel decisions (Statista, 2024). The implication is clear: the battle for the traveller is now a battle for influence within these new, powerful ecosystems.

PIONEERING THE NEW TRAVELER JOURNEY

Forward-thinking organizations are not resisting this shift but are instead developing strategies to integrate and influence within this new landscape. Real-world examples include:

- **Integrating commerce at the point of inspiration.** Expedia is embedding its AI-powered trip-planning tools directly within Instagram. This strategy intercepts customer intent at its nascent stage—social media discovery—and seamlessly converts it into a bookable itinerary, effectively shortening the path from inspiration to conversion and capturing the customer before they move to a competitor's platform.
- **Re-owning customer intelligence through proprietary influencer ecosystems.** Moving beyond transactional campaigns, Walmart has developed its "Walmart Creator" platform. This allows the company to directly recruit, manage, and analyse a network of influencer partners, transforming influence from a marketing tactic into a managed, data-rich business capability. This strategic control over its influencer network provides a significant competitive advantage in shaping consumer behaviour.
- **Reclaiming the Itinerary with AI.** Instead of ceding the customer journey to global tech giants, Tourism and Events Queensland (TEQ) built its own AI-powered "Generative Engine." This platform creates personalized, bookable itineraries using a deep library of vetted content from trusted local influencers and travel writers. Users to input their preferences (e.g., "family adventure", "luxury coastal escape") and receive a fully-customized, bookable itinerary. This "walled garden" strategy is a direct response

> "While connected data and applications of AI such as Agentic AI are obvious superchargers for efficiency, and where most companies look to be heading first, the long-term value is in how we can apply these superchargers to create true differentiation in our brand experience - ownable by us alone, and distinctly human in delivery. This humanistic approach to customer experience has guided every individual moment and touchpoint we've designed in the relationships with our guests; AI fits in where it amplifies, rather than replaces, that philosophy."
>
> **Andrew Cleary**
> VP of Global CRM & Customer Experience, Mandarin Oriental

to disintermediation, allowing TEQ to control the narrative, deliver a more authentic user experience, and ensure the economic benefits of AI-driven travel remain within the state.

- **The AI Financial Advisor for Travel.** Capital One Travel portal, powered by AI-native tech company **Hopper** isn't just another booking site; it's a travel ecosystem built inside a bank. Its unique AI functions as a financial advisor for travel, moving beyond just showing prices to giving predictive advice—telling customers whether to "book now" or "wait" for a better deal. It then deploys a suite of AI-powered fintech tools to eliminate the anxiety of booking, allowing customers to **freeze a price, cancel for any reason**, or get an **automatic refund if the price drops.** This powerful combination of predictive advice and financial de-risking wins the customer's trust and their booking long before a hotel even knows they are planning a trip.
- **Developing next-generation AI-driven curation.** A leading financial services provider is developing a proprietary AI travel platform that curates personalized itineraries based on social media trends. Critically, the platform is also designed to leverage AI-generated influencers tailored to individual user profiles, representing a move from simply reacting to influence to actively creating and deploying it at scale.

STRATEGIC IMPERATIVES

For hospitality leaders, navigating this new reality requires a fundamental re-evaluation of marketing, distribution, and data strategies. The objective is no longer to own the customer journey but to earn a privileged position within it. This necessitates a strategic pivot from destination marketing to ecosystem participation, where the primary goal is to become an indispensable and preferred ingredient in AI-generated and influencer-curated travel plans.

BIG QUESTIONS FOR THE FUTURE

01 How must your partnership strategy evolve beyond traditional marketing to cultivate and manage influence within the new creator economy?

02 What data and capabilities are required to ensure your brand is not just an option, but the preferred choice for AI-driven recommendation engines?

03 As the battle for influence moves to AI-driven ecosystems, how must you reshape a modern marketing team—shifting from a content factory to a center of excellence for orchestrating agentic AI workflows?

2

BEYOND THE ROOM: CAPTURING VALUE IN THE CULTURE ECONOMY

Key Figures

$2.5t

Projected global event tourism market by 2032

The global market for event-driven travel is projected to reach a staggering $2.5 trillion, highlighting its massive economic potential for destinations worldwide.[1]

$22b

Singapore's record tourism receipts in 2024

Fueled by a deliberate government strategy to attract marquee events like the F1 Grand Prix and major concerts, this record figure (S$29.8 billion) proves the power of state-backed cultural tourism.[2]

$1.2b

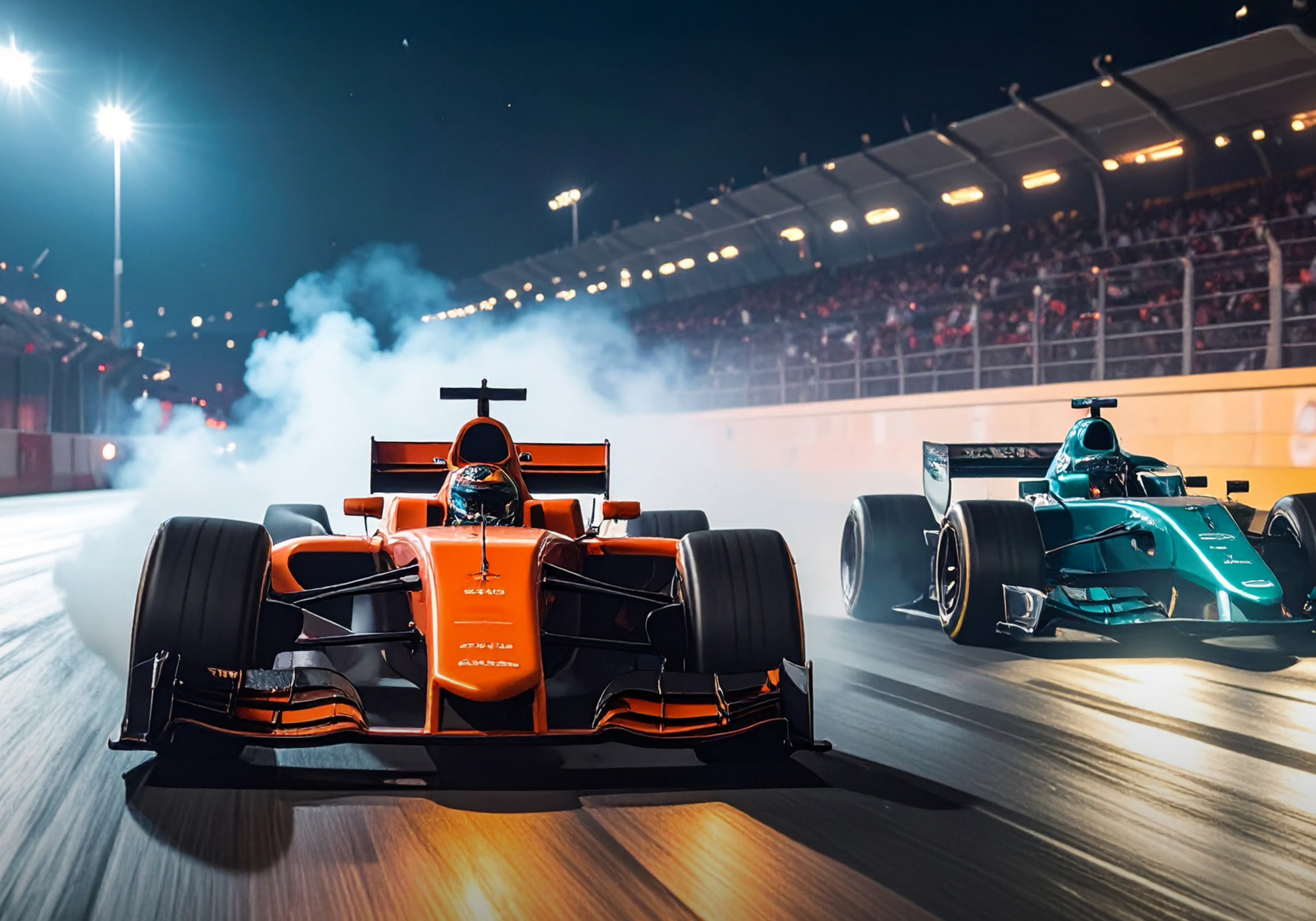
U.S. travel revenue from Taylor Swift's Eras Tour

Taylor Swift's Eras Tour alone generated $1.2 billion in incremental U.S. travel revenue, proving a single cultural phenomenon can reshape tourism spending.[3]

30%

spending surge during the Singapore F1 Grand Prix

The 2024 Singapore F1 Grand Prix triggered a 30% surge in tourist spending and a 20% rise in international visitors, showcasing the immense power of flagship sporting events.[4]



[1] *Allied Market Research, "Event Tourism Market Outlook," 2023.*
[2] *Travel Weekly Asia, "Singapore Tourism Goals," 2025.*
[3] *Skift, "The Eras Tour's Economic Impact on Travel," 2024.*
[4] *Visa, "Singapore Grand Prix Spending Analysis," 2024.*

THE TREND
— AND WHY IT MATTERS

When a single concert series is cited as a contributing factor to a nation's inflation, as Beyoncé's was in Sweden, it signals a profound shift in demand drivers. Travelers are no longer just visiting cities; they are chasing cultural phenomena. The destination is now the event, the festival, the concert, the championship match. This is not a fringe trend; it is now even central to national economic strategy. Look at Singapore: fresh off a record S$29.8 billion in tourism receipts in 2024, driven by major events like the Formula 1 Grand Prix and concerts by Taylor Swift and Coldplay, the nation has set an audacious goal of S$50 billion by 2040 (Travel Weekly Asia, 2025). This surge was no accident; it was the direct result of a deliberate government strategy to act as a global promoter, actively lobbying for these marquee events. This transforms the opportunity from a cyclical upswing into a state-backed pipeline of high-value customers, demanding a more sophisticated strategy than simply raising room rates. These cultural "tent-poles" generate enormous economic value—Taylor Swift's tour alone created an estimated $1.2 billion in new travel spending.

For the hospitality industry, this presents both a massive opportunity and a strategic risk. While hotels benefit from the surge, they often act as passive recipients, capturing only a fraction of the total value—in the case of the Eras tour, just 27% of the average traveler's spend went to lodging. The critical challenge is to move from being a "tax on culture" to an active participant that captures a greater share of the value chain and, crucially, converts transient, event-driven visitors into a lasting, loyal customer base.

PIONEERING THE
NEW VALUE CHAIN

Leading players are already moving beyond simply selling rooms during peak demand. They are actively integrating their brands into the cultural ecosystem.

- **Leveraging Global 'Tent-Pole' Events.**
  Hilton's partnership with Formula 1 demonstrates a sophisticated approach. Instead of just benefiting from race-day bookings, Hilton uses the event to activate its loyalty program. By offering exclusive, money-can't-buy experiences—like paddock access auctioned for loyalty points—it transforms its Honors program from a transactional discount system into an aspirational club. The record-breaking 7.4 million points redeemed for the Singapore GP auction shows a powerful new way to drive deep, emotional engagement with high-value customers.

- **Building a Resilient Local Ecosystem.**
  The most sustainable strategies, however, are often built closer to home. Accor Plus in the Asia-Pacific region is a premier example. It is a subscription-based dining and lifestyle program that turns the company's Food & Beverage portfolio from a hotel amenity into a primary, revenue-generating demand driver for locals. By offering high-frequency benefits like dining discounts, Accor creates a powerful loyalty loop with residents, building a resilient customer base that engages with the brand year-round, independent of volatile global travel trends.

- **Becoming the Epicenter of the Spectacle.**
  Marina Bay Sands demonstrates a masterclass in moving from a hotel at an event to becoming the event itself. During the F1 Grand Prix, they don't just sell "track view" rooms; they sell access. They bundle stays with entry to the most coveted experiences: rooftop parties at CÉ LA VI, dinners by celebrity chefs, and the legendary Amber Lounge after-party, where guests mingle with drivers and celebrities. This strategy decommoditizes their offering, allowing them to capture a massive share of the total "event-goer wallet" and justify a price premium, positioning the brand as synonymous with the peak excitement of the event itself.

STRATEGIC IMPERATIVES

The implication is that hospitality brands must adopt a dual strategy: actively tap into the immense energy of global cultural events while simultaneously building a durable, local customer base through non-room assets. This requires a strategic pivot from being a passive provider of accommodation to an active curator of experiences. Success depends on viewing internal assets (loyalty programs, F&B) and external partnerships (sports, arts, local culture) as a portfolio to be actively managed to unlock new revenue streams and build deeper customer relationships.

BIG QUESTIONS FOR THE FUTURE

01 Beyond sponsorship, how can you integrate your brand into the fabric of a cultural event to capture a greater share of the value chain?

02 The event brings thousands of new faces to your door. What is your data and loyalty strategy to convert these one-time, event-driven guests into long-term, high-value customers?

03 Which of your non-room assets—your restaurants, your bars, your spas—could be transformed from a hotel amenity into a primary, standalone driver of local demand?

3. THE SEAMLESS MANDATE: REDEFINING HOSPITALITY IN THE AGE OF PREDICTIVE SERVICE

Key Figures

86%

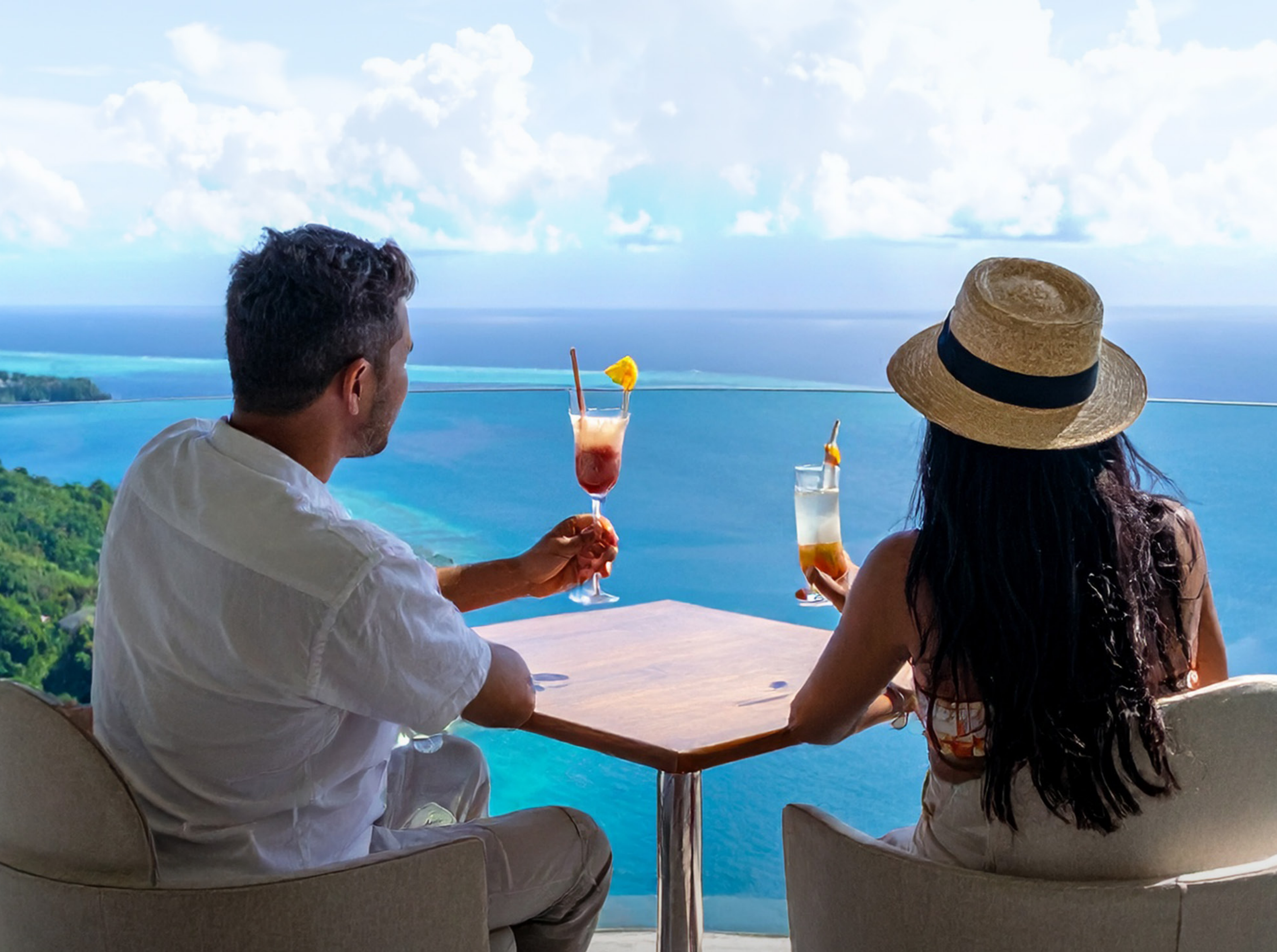
of consumers abandon brands after two poor experiences

Brand loyalty is fragile, with 86% of consumers willing to walk away after just two poor service interactions, making every touchpoint critical.[1]

52%

of consumers switch brands after one bad experience

The margin for error is shrinking, as over half of all consumers have switched brands due to a single bad experience, raising the stakes for service delivery.[2]



[1] *Emplifi, "State of CX," 2022.*

[2] *Emarsys, "Customer Loyalty Index," 2024.*

THE TREND
— AND WHY IT MATTERS

As Bridget van Kralingen of IBM famously stated, “The last best experience that anyone has anywhere, becomes the minimum expectation for the experience they want everywhere.” For the hospitality industry, this is no longer a theoretical concept; it is the new operational reality. The benchmark for a seamless, personalized journey is not set by a rival hotel, but by the frictionless, predictive ecosystems of global technology and retail giants. Consumer tolerance for friction has evaporated. The stakes are extraordinarily high: **86% of consumers** report they will abandon a brand after just two poor experiences; **52%** will leave after just one.

While the industry has made strides in digitizing touchpoints—such as using an app as a digital keycard—these are rapidly becoming table stakes. The more profound challenge lies in how to thoughtfully integrate technology and AI into an industry that is, at its core, about human touch. The goal is not simply to automate, but to augment—to use technology to deliver a level of personalization and proactive service that feels both magical and deeply human.

PIONEERING THE
NEW EXPERIENCE

Leading organizations are moving beyond simple automation to a more sophisticated model of technology-enabled service.

- **Transforming the Seatback into a Personalized Engagement Platform.** Emirates' “Sky Assistant” is an AI chatbot integrated into their in-flight information, connectivity and entertainment (ICE) system, transforming the passive seat-back screen into a proactive, personalized service and retail channel. It provides real-time flight information, on-demand service, in-flight commerce, and wellness support, enhancing the customer experience and driving ancillary revenue. This innovation reduces routine crew inquiries by 50% and boosts duty-free sales by 20%.
- **AI-Powered Service Orchestration.** Delta Airlines' “Concierge” is a prime example of using AI to manage the entire travel journey proactively. By integrating customer data with generative AI, the tool anticipates needs—from pre-trip passport notifications to real-time airport wayfinding—and seamlessly orchestrates solutions, including integration with ground transport partners. It represents a shift from reactive problem-solving to proactive, end-to-end journey management.
- **Data-Driven Predictive Luxury.** Mandarin Oriental's “Guest Experience Programme” (GXP) demonstrates how to leverage technology to enhance, not replace, high-touch service. Behind the scenes, GXP unifies CRM, guest communications, and on-property operations into a single data ecosystem. This allows the brand to deliver exceptional, predictive personalization that feels effortless to the guest, proving that the most powerful use of technology can be invisible, empowering staff to deliver a higher standard of personal care.
- **Rapid Innovation through Live Testing.** Recognizing the challenge of predicting guest preferences, MM:NT Berlin has launched the world's first “Hotel Laboratory.” This micro-hotel operates in a continuous beta mode, enabling the rapid testing and reconfiguration of digital interfaces, room designs, and service models based on real-time guest feedback. It is a strategic approach to de-risk innovation and discover which digital enhancements truly add value in a self-service environment.

> “The more of the guest experience we orchestrate and differentiate through a distinctively Mandarin Oriental feel, the greater the bonds in the relationship between guest and brand - not just functionally, but emotionally too. This is where real loyalty is created, and how lifetime value is realised for a luxury brand.”
>
> **Andrew Cleary**
> VP of Global CRM & Customer Experience, Mandarin Oriental

- **Real-Time Journey Orchestration.** Together with Sitecore, United Airlines has redefined the airport experience by deploying a composable digital signage system. This platform moves beyond static information, integrating real-time data like flight status and weather with personalized messaging and wayfinding. By empowering non-technical staff to instantly update content, United transforms a traditionally rigid touchpoint into a dynamic, context-aware guidance system, creating a frictionless and more predictable travel day for 36 million passengers.
- **The WeChat-Native Guest Journey.** The Peninsula's "Perfect Companion" WeChat Mini Program is a masterclass in deep ecosystem integration for its crucial Chinese traveler segment. Instead of forcing a separate app download—a major point of friction—The Peninsula meets guests where they live digitally. This Mini Program acts as a full-service digital concierge within the WeChat environment, enabling guests to make room and restaurant reservations, request in-room services, and communicate directly with staff. Critically, this is not just a service enhancement; it is a powerful commercial strategy. By building a direct sales channel within WeChat, The Peninsula reduces its dependency on third-party OTAs, lowers distribution costs, and directly owns the customer relationship in a key growth market.

STRATEGIC IMPERATIVES

The power of AI lies not in its ability to generate endless permutations of low-value personalization, but in its capacity to identify and deliver the specific interventions that matter most to the guest. This requires a disciplined, data-driven "test and learn" approach to innovation. For an industry built on human connection, the most effective use of AI will be to handle the predictable, logistical elements of the journey seamlessly, thereby freeing up and empowering staff to deliver the exceptional, high-touch human moments that build lasting loyalty.

BIG QUESTIONS FOR THE FUTURE

01 What is the critical guest data you are not yet capturing that could unlock the next level of predictive, personalized service?

02 As you invest in technology, where is the point of diminishing returns between enhancing the guest experience and simply adding complexity?

03 How do you re-skill your frontline staff to collaborate with AI tools, transforming them from service providers into sophisticated "experience orchestrators"?

THE ALGORITHMIC ITINERARY: UNLOCKING VALUE IN FIRST-PARTY DATA

Key Figures

$233b

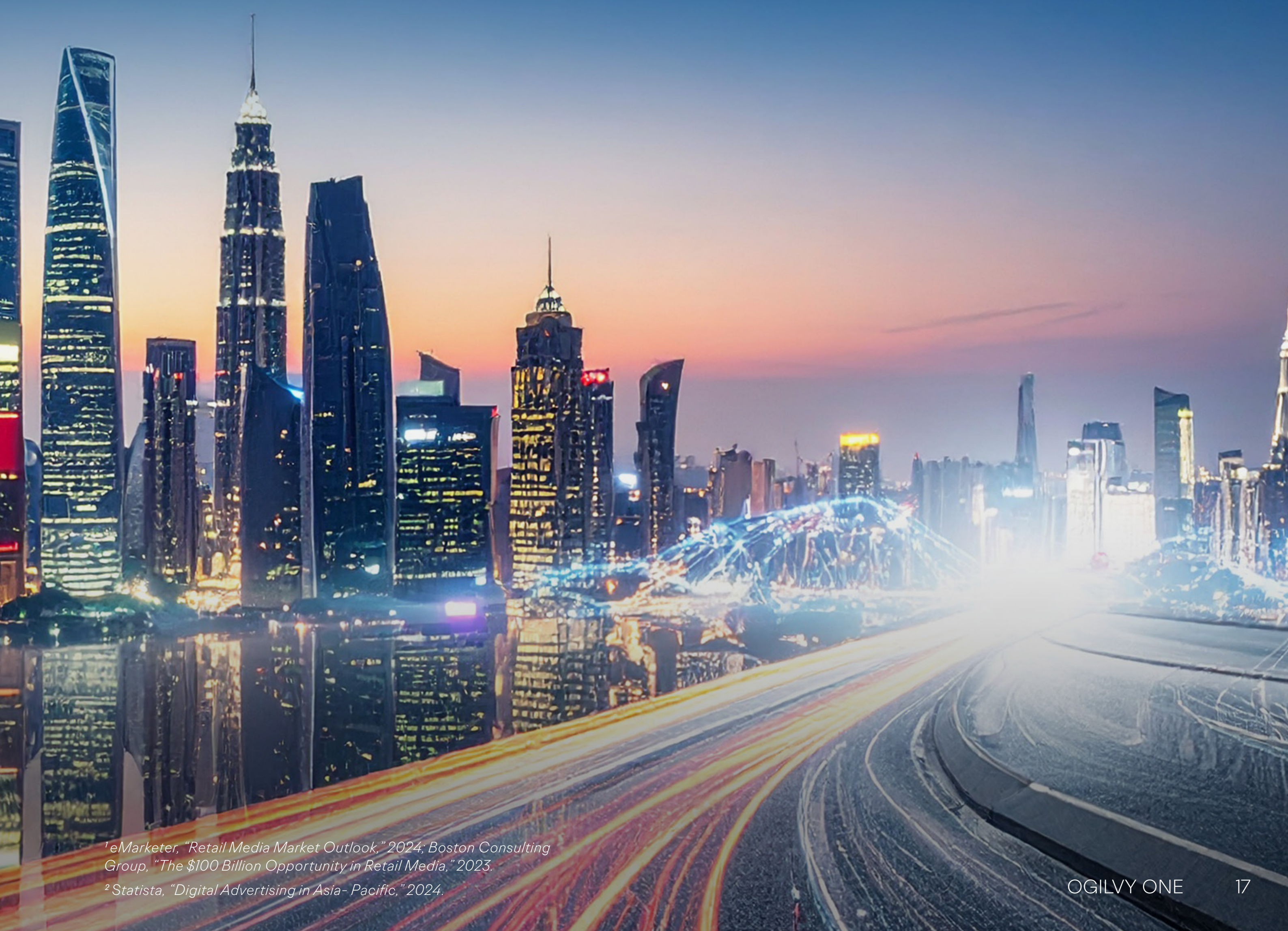
Projected size of the retail media market

The retail media market is set to explode to $233 billion, a space where leading companies are already seeing up to an 8x return on marketing spend by leveraging their first-party data.[1]

80%

Share of APAC digital ad spend that is programmatic

With 80% of digital ad spend in APAC now programmatic, automated, data- driven targeting is the new standard.[2]



[1] eMarketer, "Retail Media Market Outlook," 2024; Boston Consulting Group, "The $100 Billion Opportunity in Retail Media," 2023.

[2] Statista, "Digital Advertising in Asia- Pacific," 2024.

THE TREND
— AND WHY IT MATTERS

While retail and CPG companies are rapidly building a **$233 billion** retail media market, the hospitality industry has been largely sitting on the sidelines, leaving billions of dollars in high-margin revenue on the table. Hospitality brands possess one of the most valuable assets in the digital economy: a massive trove of first-party data on high-intent, high-value consumers. This data—who they are, where they go, what they spend—is the fuel for the modern advertising ecosystem, where **80% of digital ad spend** in a region like APAC is already programmatic.

The opportunity is not theoretical. Marriott's media network alone is estimated to be a **$662 million** revenue opportunity. For an industry facing margin pressure and commoditization, the failure to treat data as a strategic, monetizable asset is no longer a missed opportunity; it is a significant competitive and financial liability.

PIONEERING THE
DATA VALUE CHAIN

Leading players, both within and outside the travel sector, are demonstrating how to unlock this value.

- **Transforming Owned Channels into Media Networks.** Marriott and United Airlines are prime examples of turning "idle" digital assets into powerful revenue streams. By launching dedicated media networks like Marriott Media Network and Kinective Media, they are leveraging their vast loyalty member databases (196M+ and 100M+ respectively) to offer targeted advertising to external brands across their apps and in-flight entertainment screens. This transforms a cost centre (a mobile app) into a significant profit centre.
- **Monetizing Traveler Insight through Strategic Partnerships.** The value of travel data extends far beyond the travel ecosystem. The partnership between L'Oréal and Tripadvisor, designed to deliver "Beauty for all travellers," is a case in point. L'Oréal gains access to Tripadvisor's rich data on traveler behaviour to power its campaigns, demonstrating that a travel company's deepest asset is its 360-degree understanding of the consumer journey—an asset non-endemic brands will pay a premium to access.
- **Building Multiplier-Effect Data Alliances.** The most sophisticated strategy involves creating data ecosystems with non-competing partners. Accor's decision to join a data portal alliance with Pernod Ricard (spirits) and JCDecaux (out-of-home media) exemplifies this. By pooling anonymized data, these partners create a far richer, more holistic view of the high-value consumer than any could achieve alone, multiplying the value and utility of their data for all participants.

STRATEGIC IMPERATIVES

Hospitality leaders must undergo a fundamental mindset shift: they are no longer just in the business of selling rooms or flights; they are stewards of a high-value data asset. This requires developing the capabilities, technology, and organizational structures to manage and monetize this asset effectively, either through building a proprietary media network, forging data partnerships, or participating in broader data alliances. The choice is not if you will monetize your data, but how you will do so without compromising the trust and premium experience your guests expect.

BIG QUESTIONS FOR THE FUTURE

01 What is the current, untapped market value of your first-party data, and what specific capabilities in technology and talent are you missing to unlock it?

02 How do you design a high-margin media network that enhances, rather than degrades, the premium, seamless guest experience your brand promises?

03 What is the measurement framework that balances the direct revenue from your media network against its potential impact—positive or negative—on core business KPIs like guest lifetime value and brand trust?

Conclusion:

FROM UTILITY TO ARCHITECT —CHARTING THE UNFOLDING HORIZON OF HOSPITALITY, A MANDATE FOR LEADERSHIP

The map of the travel industry has been irrevocably redrawn. The four shifts we have explored—the rise of the AI concierge, the dominance of the culture economy, the mandate for seamless experience, and the untapped value of first-party data—are not isolated trends. They are interconnected, tectonic forces creating a new strategic reality. In this new world, the traditional levers of brand loyalty and operational excellence, while still important, are no longer sufficient to guarantee success. The power has shifted from the brand to the ecosystem, from the owned channel to the algorithm.

The overarching implication is stark: hospitality brands are at a critical inflection point, facing a potential future as commoditized, low-margin utilities. To simply react to these shifts is to accept this fate. The path forward, across **the unfolding horizon of hospitality,** requires a fundamental reevaluation of the role your company plays in the travel value chain. It demands a transition from being a passive provider of a service to an active architect of the experience; from being a stage for culture to a participant in its creation; and from being a manager of rooms to a steward of a high-value data asset.

This is a challenge of leadership, not just of technology or marketing. It requires a new level of strategic courage and organizational agility. The time for incremental adjustments has passed. The moment now is to ask the big, structural questions that will define your relevance for the next decade.

Your Mandate for Action:

The future of travel is being written, with or without you. The only question is whether you will be a co-author or merely a footnote. As you and your leadership team look to 2026 and beyond, consider the following:

01 **How will you move from being a passive stage for culture to an active participant in its creation, capturing value far beyond the room rate?**

02 **How will you re-architect your service model not just to meet, but to predict the seamless expectations now being set by the world's most advanced technology companies?**

03 **How will you redefine your data not as a byproduct of operations, but as a primary, high margin asset class, and build the capabilities to monetize it?**

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