



**IMPROVING MARKETING STRATEGIES TO
ENHANCE THE COMPETITIVENESS OF NATIONAL
LEATHER AND FOOTWEAR BRANDS**

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ABSTRACT

The development of Uzbekistan's leather and footwear industry has created favorable conditions for expanding domestic production and export potential. However, increasing production volumes alone do not ensure the competitiveness of national brands in domestic and international markets. The purpose of this study is to improve and systematize marketing strategies aimed at enhancing the competitiveness of national leather and footwear brands. The study employs content analysis of scientific literature, comparative and systematic analysis, grouping of marketing indicators, cause-and-effect analysis, logical evaluation, and conceptual modeling. The results indicate that brand identity, digital marketing, customer experience, customer relationship management, brand loyalty, and perceived quality should be integrated into a unified strategic marketing system. Based on these findings, an integrated marketing model for strengthening national leather and footwear brands is proposed. The study also develops a system of strategic indicators for assessing brand competitiveness and identifies priority directions for digital transformation, customer-oriented marketing, brand positioning, and export-oriented promotion.



INTRODUCTION

The competitiveness of national brands has become increasingly important under conditions of globalization, digital transformation, and growing competition in international consumer markets. For manufacturing industries, competitiveness is no longer determined exclusively by production capacity, product quality, or price. Brand recognition, perceived value, customer experience, digital communication, service quality, and the ability to establish long-term customer relationships increasingly influence consumer choice and market position.

The internationalization of Uzbekistan's leather and footwear enterprises also creates new opportunities for brand development. In 2024, enterprises associated with "Uzcharmsanoat" participated in 20 international exhibitions and concluded export agreements with companies from China, Russia, Turkey, and Italy. Such activities demonstrate that international promotion and market expansion are increasingly important components of industry development.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Brand competitiveness is closely associated with the concept of brand equity. Aaker considers brand equity as a set of brand-related assets and liabilities that can increase or decrease the value provided by a product or service to both the company and its customers. The major dimensions include brand awareness, perceived quality, brand associations, and brand loyalty [1]. Keller develops a customer-based approach to brand equity and emphasizes that brand value is formed through consumers' knowledge, associations, and perceptions of the brand. Strong, favorable, and unique brand associations create a basis for positive consumer responses to marketing activities [2].

These approaches are particularly important for the leather and footwear industry because consumers evaluate footwear not only according to durability, comfort, and quality, but also according to design, brand reputation, emotional associations, social status, and purchasing experience. Therefore, competitiveness should be assessed through both objective product characteristics and value perceived by consumers.

Kotler and Keller [5] emphasize segmentation, target-market selection, value creation, and clear positioning as core elements of effective marketing strategy. Porter [7] highlights differentiation and the creation of superior value as sources of sustainable competitive advantage. These approaches suggest that national footwear brands should not compete only through price; they should develop distinctive product and brand propositions.

Digital marketing has changed the mechanisms through which brands communicate with consumers. Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick [9] emphasize the strategic integration of digital channels, content, search, analytics, and electronic commerce. For national leather and footwear brands, social media, e-commerce, influencer marketing, online reviews, and data-driven personalization can reduce geographical barriers and strengthen direct communication with target audiences.



Customer experience and relationship management complement digital communication. Lemon and Verhoef [7] show that customer experience is formed throughout the customer journey, while Payne and Frow [8] conceptualize CRM as a strategic process for managing customer relationships and creating long-term value. Yoo and Donthu [10] and Agarwal and Rao [11] also demonstrate the usefulness of consumer-based measures in assessing brand strength. The literature review reveals an important research gap. Existing studies provide strong theoretical explanations of brand equity, competitive advantage, digital marketing, customer experience, and CRM, but these elements are frequently analyzed separately. Their integration into a unified marketing strategy specifically designed for national leather and footwear brands in Uzbekistan remains insufficiently systematized. The present study addresses this gap by combining brand identity, product value, digital marketing, customer experience, CRM, customer loyalty, and export-oriented promotion within one conceptual framework.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study applies a conceptual and analytical research design aimed at identifying and systematizing marketing mechanisms for strengthening the competitiveness of national leather and footwear brands. The methodological framework combines theoretical analysis with the development of a practical strategic model. Content analysis was used to examine scientific literature related to brand equity, brand competitiveness, marketing strategy, customer experience, digital marketing, and CRM. Comparative analysis was applied to distinguish traditional product-oriented marketing from integrated customer-oriented marketing approaches. Systematic analysis was used to classify the major components of brand competitiveness into interconnected strategic dimensions.

The study is based primarily on secondary information, scientific literature, and official industry materials. Therefore, the proposed model should be considered a conceptual methodological framework rather than an econometric estimation of causal relationships. The proposed indicators and National Brand Competitiveness Index (NBCI) require empirical validation through consumer surveys, enterprise-level data, and statistical testing.

The analytical logic can be expressed as follows: Marketing resources → Strategic marketing instruments → Customer response → Brand loyalty → Brand competitiveness. This approach interprets competitiveness not simply as the result of production efficiency, but as an outcome of coordinated marketing activities.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Marketing potential of the national leather and footwear industry

The development of Uzbekistan's leather and footwear industry indicates substantial opportunities for building competitive national brands. The production of 82.5 million pairs of footwear in 2024 demonstrates a considerable domestic production base. However, production scale does not automatically translate into brand competitiveness. A company may possess significant production capacity while remaining relatively unknown to consumers. Production



competitiveness primarily depends on cost efficiency, production capacity, product quality, technological equipment, labor productivity, and supply-chain efficiency.

Accordingly, national leather and footwear enterprises should develop production and marketing capabilities simultaneously. The strategic objective is not merely to increase output, but to build recognizable brands capable of generating repeat purchases, stronger distribution relationships, and sustainable export demand.

Key marketing factors affecting brand competitiveness

Table 1. Key marketing factors influencing the competitiveness of national leather and footwear brands

Dimension	Main factors	Expected marketing effect
Brand identity	Name, logo, design, positioning, brand values	Recognition and differentiation
Product value	Quality, comfort, design, durability, innovation	Perceived product value
Digital marketing	Social media, content marketing, e-commerce, SEO	Brand awareness and market reach
Customer experience	Service quality, communication, purchasing convenience	Customer satisfaction
CRM	Customer database, personalization, feedback	Relationship development
Brand loyalty	Repeat purchase, recommendation, emotional attachment	Long-term competitiveness

The proposed classification demonstrates that competitiveness is not determined by a single marketing instrument. Product quality creates the basis for value, brand identity gives the product meaning, digital marketing creates visibility, customer experience converts visibility into interaction, CRM supports relationship management, and loyalty contributes to long-term market performance.

Brand identity as the foundation of competitive positioning

Brand identity represents the strategic foundation of national brand competitiveness. For leather and footwear enterprises, brand identity should communicate a clear and differentiated value proposition. Merely emphasizing country of origin or affordability is insufficient for international positioning. A competitive national brand should answer three strategic questions: What does the brand represent? Why should consumers choose this brand? What makes the brand different from international competitors? For Uzbekistan's leather and footwear brands,



potential positioning can be based on product quality, national design characteristics, craftsmanship, modern technology, sustainability, and competitive value. The integration of national cultural elements with contemporary design may create a distinctive brand identity.

Digital marketing as a mechanism for increasing brand visibility

Digital marketing is one of the most important mechanisms for increasing the competitiveness of national brands. Digital channels allow enterprises to target specific consumer groups, communicate brand values, monitor customer reactions, and measure campaign effectiveness.

Relevant instruments include social media marketing, search engine optimization, content marketing, influencer marketing, video marketing, e-commerce, email marketing, online customer reviews, digital advertising, and data-driven personalization.

Digital marketing should not be considered merely an advertising instrument. It should function as an integrated system of brand communication and customer relationship development. The proposed sequence is: Content → Engagement → Experience → Trust → Purchase → Loyalty → Recommendation.

Customer experience and CRM

Customer experience represents another important component of national brand competitiveness. In the footwear market, consumers interact with a brand at multiple stages: information search, product comparison, purchase, delivery, after-sales service, and repeat purchase. Enterprises should therefore manage the entire customer journey rather than focus only on the point of sale.

CRM systems can support this process by collecting and analyzing customer information, purchase history, preferences, feedback, and communication responses. Their integration with digital marketing provides opportunities for personalized offers, segmentation, repeat-purchase campaigns, loyalty programs, feedback management, targeted communication, and prediction of customer needs.

CRM should consequently be viewed as a strategic component of brand competitiveness rather than merely an information technology tool. Its practical value lies in transforming individual transactions into long-term relationships and measurable customer lifetime value.

Integrated marketing model for strengthening national brand competitiveness

Based on the theoretical analysis, an integrated marketing model is proposed. The model connects brand identity, digital communication, customer experience, CRM, and customer loyalty in a continuous process of value creation and competitive positioning.

BRAND IDENTITY



DIGITAL MARKETING



CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE



CRM TECHNOLOGIES



CUSTOMER LOYALTY



BRAND COMPETITIVENESS

Figure 1. Integrated marketing model for increasing the competitiveness of national leather and footwear brands.

Monitoring, feedback, and continuous improvement connect all stages of the model. Brand identity determines the strategic meaning of the brand; digital marketing communicates this identity to target audiences; customer experience transforms communication into interaction; CRM supports systematic relationship management; and loyalty reflects the cumulative result of positive experiences and effective communication.

The feedback mechanism is essential because market expectations, consumer preferences, digital technologies, and competitive conditions continuously change. Therefore, the model is a cyclical management framework in which customer data and market results are used to refine positioning, communication, service, and product decisions.

Strategic indicators for assessing brand competitiveness

Table 2. Indicators for assessing national brand competitiveness

Dimension	Key indicators
Brand awareness	Recognition rate; search interest; social media reach
Brand positioning	Differentiation; clarity of value proposition
Perceived quality	Quality perception; durability; comfort
Digital effectiveness	Engagement rate; conversion rate; website traffic
Customer experience	Satisfaction; service quality; purchase convenience
CRM effectiveness	Personalization; retention; communication response
Brand loyalty	Repeat purchase; recommendation intention
Market performance	Market share; sales growth; export growth
International competitiveness	Foreign markets; export contracts; international recognition



The indicators can be normalized and combined into a composite assessment framework. A conceptual National Brand Competitiveness Index (NBCI) may be expressed as:

$$\text{NBCI} = w_1\text{BA} + w_2\text{PQ} + w_3\text{BP} + w_4\text{DE} + w_5\text{CX} + w_6\text{CRM} + w_7\text{CL} + w_8\text{MP} + w_9\text{IC}$$

Here, BA denotes brand awareness; PQ, perceived quality; BP, brand positioning; DE, digital marketing effectiveness; CX, customer experience; CRM, CRM effectiveness; CL, customer loyalty; MP, market performance; IC, international competitiveness; and $w_1...w_9$ represent weighting coefficients.

The proposed index is conceptual and requires empirical validation before being used as a standardized industry indicator. In future research, weights may be estimated using expert assessment, factor analysis, structural equation modeling, or other appropriate statistical techniques.

Directions for improving marketing strategies

First, enterprises should move from product-oriented marketing toward customer-oriented marketing by systematically studying consumer needs, purchase motives, price sensitivity, style preferences, and service expectations.

Second, national brands should develop a clear and differentiated brand positioning strategy. Positioning should be reflected consistently in product collections, visual identity, packaging, digital content, and customer service.

Third, digital channels should be integrated into the overall marketing strategy rather than used as isolated promotional instruments. Enterprises should connect content, e-commerce, social media, analytics, and customer databases.

Fourth, enterprises should strengthen CRM systems and customer data analytics to improve personalization, retention, loyalty programs, and customer lifetime value.

Fifth, greater attention should be given to customer experience throughout the entire purchasing journey, including information search, ordering, payment, delivery, exchange, warranty, and after-sales communication.

Sixth, export-oriented brands should adapt communication and positioning to the cultural and behavioral characteristics of target foreign markets. Market-entry decisions should consider local competitors, price levels, certification requirements, distribution structures, and consumer expectations.

Seventh, international exhibitions and B2B activities should be integrated with digital brand communication. Leads and business contacts should be transferred into CRM systems and followed by targeted communication.

Finally, national brands should continuously monitor brand awareness, perceived quality, customer loyalty, digital engagement, sales performance, and export indicators. Marketing budgets should be allocated according to measurable contribution to sales, margin, retention, and long-term brand value.



CONCLUSION

The development of Uzbekistan's leather and footwear industry creates substantial opportunities for the formation of competitive national brands. However, increasing production capacity and export volumes alone are insufficient to establish sustainable brand competitiveness in domestic and international markets.

The study demonstrates that the competitiveness of national leather and footwear brands should be considered as a multidimensional outcome of coordinated marketing activities. Brand identity, product value, digital marketing, customer experience, CRM, and customer loyalty form an interconnected system that determines the ability of a national brand to create and retain customer value.

The main scientific result is the development of an integrated marketing model based on the sequence: brand identity → digital marketing → customer experience → CRM → customer loyalty → brand competitiveness. The model provides a methodological basis for integrating previously fragmented marketing activities into a unified brand development strategy.

The practical significance of the proposed approach lies in its applicability to leather and footwear enterprises seeking to strengthen domestic market positions and enter international markets under their own national brands. Future empirical research should test the model using enterprise-level data and consumer surveys, determine the statistical significance of individual marketing factors, estimate NBCI weights, and compare Uzbek brands with international footwear brands.

Thus, the transition from production-oriented competition to integrated brand-oriented marketing represents an important strategic direction for increasing the international competitiveness of Uzbekistan's leather and footwear industry.

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