DIGITAL MARKETING AND CRM AS STRATEGIC TOOLS FOR INCREASING BRAND EQUITY IN UZBEKISTAN'S LEATHER AND FOOTWEAR INDUSTRY

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The rapid development of digital technologies has significantly changed the way consumers discover, evaluate, purchase, and communicate about products. For leather and footwear enterprises, digital channels provide an opportunity to move beyond traditional product promotion and build long-term relationships with customers. Therefore, digital marketing should be considered not only as a communication tool but also as an important mechanism for increasing brand equity.

Uzbekistan's leather and footwear industry has significant potential for applying these mechanisms. In 2023, the industry included 501 enterprises, attracted approximately USD 307 million in investment, exported products worth USD 128.8 million, and produced 71.6 million pairs of footwear. These indicators demonstrate considerable production capacity. However, production capacity needs to be complemented by effective digital branding in order to convert economic potential into sustainable brand value.

Digital Marketing as a Brand Equity Mechanism

The proposed marketing mechanism can be represented as:

Brand Identity → Digital Marketing → Customer Experience → CRM → Customer Loyalty → Brand Equity.

The first element, **brand identity**, determines how an enterprise wants to be perceived by customers. For leather and footwear companies, brand identity may include product quality, design, reliability, national identity, innovation, and sustainability.

The second element is **digital marketing**. Enterprises should combine social media marketing, search engine optimization, digital advertising, marketplaces, content marketing, influencer marketing, and email communication. Digital channels make it possible to communicate directly with consumers and measure their reactions.

The third element is **customer experience**. A strong digital presence should be supported by convenient websites, detailed product descriptions, high-quality visual content, transparent prices, fast communication, and effective after-sales service.

The fourth element is **CRM**. Customer relationship management allows enterprises to collect and analyze information about purchasing behavior, product preferences, frequency of purchases, complaints, and customer interests.

Digital marketing and CRM represent important mechanisms for increasing brand equity in Uzbekistan's leather and footwear industry. The transition from product-oriented marketing to customer-centered digital branding allows enterprises to strengthen brand awareness, improve customer experience, increase loyalty, and generate additional financial value.

Ultimately, the competitive advantage of Uzbekistan’s leather and footwear industry will depend not only on how much the industry produces, but also on how successfully its enterprises transform product quality, customer relationships, and national identity into sustainable brand value.

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