





Designing a Competitive Digital Marketing Model in Mashhad Leather Industry

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Abstract: The present study aimed to design a competitive digital marketing model in Mashhad leather industry. This study employed a qualitative approach to research. The research population in the qualitative phase included experts and managers of leather industry in Mashhad, of whom ten were selected purposively and non-randomly. The main data collection instrument was a semi-structured in-depth interview. A qualitative data analysis was conducted based on the grounded theory. According to the paradigmatic model designed, the components of digital marketing in Mashhad leather industry could be divided into six categories: causal factors (digital marketing strategy, personalization and interactions), contextual conditions (participation, social media, human resources, digital marketing ecosystem), central phenomenon (digital marketing mix), strategies (digital culture, social and ecological factors, technological factors), intervening conditions (internal factors, external factors, competitive environment), and outcomes (customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, customer attraction and retention). The results show the significance of digital marketing mix in the leather industry for growth and development in the online market, which can potentially affect the success of leather industry, which requires digital marketing facilities and infrastructure.

Keywords: Competitiveness, Digital marketing, Leather industry, Mashhad leather

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1. Introduction

Digital marketing encompasses a broad array of tools and strategies aimed at engaging customers through digital platforms. Research emphasizes that strategic orientations, when aligned with adaptive marketing capabilities, can drive ambidexterity and enable firms to simultaneously pursue exploration and exploitation in competitive digital environments [1]. This is particularly critical for

industries like leather manufacturing, which must balance the preservation of traditional craftsmanship with the adoption of innovative digital practices. In this regard, the Mashhad leather industry's move toward digital transformation represents a strategic imperative for enhancing both performance and market positioning.

Digital marketing has transitioned from being an optional promotional tool to a strategic necessity for firms seeking competitive advantage. It empowers micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) to compete with larger corporations by leveraging cost-effective online platforms to increase visibility, engagement, and customer

loyalty [2]. Similarly, the development of digital marketing competencies is shown to enhance organizational performance, as firms that effectively integrate digital strategies with financial and operational systems can better respond to dynamic market conditions [3]. Such integration not only supports business growth but also fosters innovation-driven competitiveness, which is essential in sectors like Mashhad's leather industry.

Furthermore, the adoption of digital marketing technologies aligns with broader organizational goals by supporting sustainability, agility, and market responsiveness. Scholars have emphasized that digitalization and resource reconfiguration foster marketing agility and international platform success, enabling firms to respond quickly to changing consumer demands [4]. This is consistent with findings that the digitalization of marketing functions enhances firms' competitive advantage by facilitating the seamless delivery of value propositions to customers across borders [5, 6].

Attaining competitive advantage through digitalization requires firms to innovate not only in their products but also in their processes and customer engagement mechanisms. Digital marketing plays a pivotal role in driving innovation, which in turn shapes firms' ability to differentiate themselves in competitive markets [7]. For example, firms that embrace entrepreneurial orientations and product innovation alongside digital marketing strategies demonstrate superior competitive positioning and marketing performance [8]. This underscores the necessity for Mashhad's leather enterprises to integrate innovation into their digital marketing efforts to remain competitive.

Moreover, the integration of digital marketing into core business models enables firms to better understand customer preferences and personalize their offerings. Personalized marketing, supported by artificial intelligence (AI) and data analytics, can enhance customer trust, improve user experiences, and ultimately drive customer loyalty [9, 10]. As customer expectations evolve, personalization has become a critical determinant of marketing success, especially in luxury and niche sectors such as leather goods.

Digital transformation involves a fundamental realignment of organizational resources and processes to leverage digital technologies effectively. In the context of Mashhad's leather industry, this requires a holistic approach that includes not only technological adoption but also cultural and structural adjustments. Research highlights the mediating role of digital leadership in fostering self-efficacy, intercultural competence, and employability—factors that enhance firms' capacity to operate effectively in globalized digital environments [11]. Similarly, studies show that marketing leadership structures within top management teams significantly influence new product performance, further underscoring the strategic role of marketing functions in digital transformation [12].

Strategic orientations also play a critical role in ensuring that digital marketing initiatives are aligned with broader organizational goals. Strategic orientations guide how firms sense and respond to market dynamics, helping them to deploy adaptive marketing capabilities that support ambidexterity—the ability to exploit existing capabilities while exploring new opportunities [1]. This dual capacity is vital for Mashhad's leather firms, which must simultaneously optimize current operations and innovate for future growth.

The emergence of social media as a dominant marketing channel has revolutionized how firms engage customers. Social media platforms enable two-way communication, fostering trust, emotional connection, and co-creation of value. Research indicates that content marketing and customer engagement are powerful predictors of competitive advantage, particularly in industries reliant on brand image and customer loyalty [13, 14]. In the Mashhad leather industry, where brand heritage and product quality are central, leveraging social media to reinforce brand narratives and engage customers could be instrumental in sustaining competitiveness.

In addition, social media engagement contributes to positive electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), which enhances brand reputation and drives purchase intentions [15, 16]. Affective content in online reviews can

significantly influence perceived review usefulness, thereby shaping consumer decision-making processes [16]. This highlights the importance of designing emotionally resonant and value-driven content strategies for Mashhad's leather brands.

While the benefits of digital marketing are substantial, its deployment also entails ethical, regulatory, and cultural challenges. Data privacy concerns can hinder consumer trust, making it imperative for firms to adopt robust data protection policies. Evidence shows that data privacy positively influences digital marketing outcomes by fostering AI-driven trust among consumers [17]. Compliance with ethical marketing standards is especially crucial in culturally sensitive markets. For example, adherence to Islamic marketing ethics has been linked to improved performance in Islamic financial institutions, illustrating how ethical alignment can enhance market outcomes [18].

Furthermore, the success of digital marketing initiatives depends on the cultural readiness of organizations to embrace change. Firms that cultivate a culture of openness, collaboration, and continuous learning are better positioned to implement digital innovations effectively. Organizational culture has been shown to mediate the relationship between digital leadership and firm performance, highlighting the need for cultural alignment in digital transformations [19, 20].

Robust financial and infrastructural support is essential for successful digital marketing implementation. Studies demonstrate that digital marketing facilitates financial inclusion by bridging fintech solutions with consumer behavioral intentions, thereby enhancing firms' market reach and profitability [21]. At the same time, firms must develop digital infrastructures—such as secure platforms, data analytics systems, and AI-driven interfaces—that support scalable and resilient marketing operations [22, 23]. Without such infrastructural foundations, digital marketing initiatives are unlikely to achieve sustainable results.

Furthermore, effective integration of digital marketing channels with organizational operations requires cross-functional collaboration between marketing and IT units. Building such cross-functional capabilities fosters marketing agility, enabling firms to respond swiftly to market shifts [4]. This is particularly critical for the Mashhad leather industry, where timely responsiveness to fashion trends and consumer preferences can dictate competitive positioning.

Given these dynamics, developing a competitive digital marketing model tailored to the Mashhad leather industry necessitates a multidimensional approach that integrates strategic, technological, cultural, and customer-centric elements. The proposed model should encompass causal conditions such as digital marketing strategy, personalization, and customer interaction; contextual factors such as social media engagement, human capital development, and ecosystem collaboration; intervening conditions including internal capabilities and external regulatory frameworks; and outcome measures such as customer satisfaction, loyalty, and retention. This approach aligns with contemporary research that underscores the synergistic relationship between digital marketing, innovation, and competitive performance [24-26].

In conclusion, the digital transformation of Mashhad's leather industry represents both a challenge and an opportunity. By strategically harnessing digital marketing tools, fostering organizational agility, and prioritizing customer-centric innovation, leather firms in Mashhad can enhance their competitive edge and secure sustainable growth in the digital era. The present study aims to design and validate a comprehensive competitive digital marketing model that enables the Mashhad leather industry to navigate digital disruptions and achieve long-term competitiveness in both domestic and international markets.

2. Methodology

The present developmental research is descriptive in terms of purpose of study, and qualitative in research approach. It is considered applied research because the results of this research helps the organization identify the most effective factors that contribute significantly to the increased productivity of leather companies by applying the correct management method. Qualitative data analysis was conducted using the exploratory grounded theory method, with the data collection instrument being a semi-structured interview. The research population in the qualitative phase included managers and experts in Mashhad leather industry, including Novin Leather, Maral Leather, and other Mashhad leather brands that have a large sales market. Among them, a panel of 10 experts were selected purposively and non-randomly. The reason for choosing these brands was the ease of access to experts and data collection. The main data collection instrument in the qualitative section is a semi-structured in-depth interview. From these interviews, the components identified in the qualitative section were obtained. In response to the first and second research questions, which serve to identify the criteria and components of the competitive model of digital marketing in Mashhad leather industry, grounded theory was used. Grounded theory emerged in the 1970s against the dominant view that quantitative studies were the only form of systematic social scientific research, and served as a vanguard of the qualitative revolution and a critical point in the history of social sciences. Perhaps, if it were not for the capabilities of this method, we would not be able to witness the growth and flourishing state of qualitative research today. Grounded theory is an inductive methodology of theory discovery that allows the researcher to develop a theoretical account of the general characteristics of the subject, while simultaneously solidifying the basis of this account in empirical observations of the data. In other words, this theorization is a systematic and qualitative procedure to produce a theory to explain a process of action or interaction about a real micro-issue at the level of a general concept. According to the data-driven theory, the total data obtained from the interview are categorized and a theory about the phenomenon is presented in the form of open, axial and selective coding to obtain a paradigmatic model of the research.

3. Findings and Results

In the present study, the interview was used for data collection. The data coding stages are presented along with the results. According to the grounded theory, three stages of coding were followed. In the open coding stage, some raw data with common meanings and concepts are brought in the form of an initial code, which includes the raw data that composes it. Also, the codes belonging to each interviewee are given separately. After all the initial codes have been extracted, the codes that are common and in the same direction are placed in subcategories, and then the common subcategories that are in the same direction are also placed in the main categories. The results of open coding are presented in the table below.

Table 1: Open coding results

Primary categories	Secondary categories
Competitiveness in digital era	Digital Marketing Strategy
Creating a platform and infrastructure for digital activity	
Identifying and differentiating yourself from competitors in the online environment	
Developing online advertising strategies	
Identifying the target market	
Increased creativity and flexibility	
Increased competitive power	
Strategies for being active in social media	

Reliance on new technologies	
Reliance on new needs and intelligence	
Improved quality of digital services	
Sufficient resource expertise to provide digital services	
Providing customized services	Digital personalization
Preserving customer privacy	
Increasing customer digital security	
Gaining customer trust and confidence	
Customer-based services	
Dynamic website design	Digital content-based marketing
Instant transactions and fast liquidity	
Obtaining an E-namad	
Optimizing loading and displaying speed in different browsers	
Increasing site security	
Formatting and designing website template	
Creating attraction for users	
Ease of access to the website	
Responding to customer needs	Consumers' contact
Providing customers with diverse, interesting and instructive information	
Retaining current customers and attracting new customers	
10-hour website back-up	
Providing a valid warranty	
Establishing and maintaining relationships with customers	
Possibility of tracking the service status online	
Digital access - Product view	Digital marketing mix
Digital and online services	
Facilitating digital payment	
Internet advertising and introduction on social networks	
Applying discounts on digital and online transactions	
Market development	Digital marketing
Customer data analysis	
Human-based digital marketing	
Application marketing	Digital media marketing
Social media marketing	
Digital advertisement	Digital advertisement
Dramatic advertisement	
Information provision	Digital communication / cooperation
Facilitated communication	
Mastering digital marketing in the leather industry and appropriate advertising	
Effective communication channels between marketing staff and digital marketing network	
Interdepartmental meetings	
Cooperation of marketing and IT managers in digital marketing strategic planning	
Identifying strategic areas for using online programs in marketing	
Sharing information sources	
Strengthening the workforce and cooperation mechanisms between the marketing and information technology departments	
Digital and marketing departments' shared vision	
Short-term	Digital organization strategy
Long-term	
Functional value	Value of digital products and services
Expected value	
Service quality	Digital customer attraction
Social media content	
Customer satisfaction	Digital loyalty
Customer loyalty	

Social media technology	Digital media
Social media environment	
Interoperability	Digital customer status
Comprehensibility	
Software	Digital infrastructure quality
Hardware	
Flexible interchangeable structure	
Delegation of tasks to employees	
Task specialization	
Leather industry ecological costs	Digital marketing financial facilities
Joint ventures and production under reputable brands	
Lack of creativity and innovation in leather products	
Attention to quality and fashion	
Emphasis on aesthetic aspects, comfort, durability and pleasant touch	
High cost of products and export	
High costs of raw materials	
Increasing production capacity utilization and reducing leather costs	
Modernization and use of advanced devices	
New technologies	
Foreign colors increasing the quality and fineness of Iranian leather	
Using new and advanced technologies in the Information Technology department	Digital IT capabilities
Marketing staff's awareness and understanding of digital marketing	
Using data mining and other technologies to raise market intelligence	
Former IT achievements in marketing campaigns	
Reliability in meeting the needs of the marketing department	
Integration of digital marketing channels with other parts of the organization	
User-friendliness of digital customer communication channels	
Level of responsiveness and service of the IT department	
The attitude and commitment of the senior marketing manager in using the online strategy marketing program	Digital marketing CEO support
Managing changes in the use of information technology in marketing	
CMO Support to allocate marketing resources to digital marketing	
CMO trust in the digital marketing department	
Willingness to seek technological solutions to achieve marketing goals	
Developing a strategic digital marketing plan	Digital marketing qualifications
Developing digital marketing program implementation processes	
Existence of an innovative culture in the digital marketing department	
Developing customer-centric services based on digital marketing	
Marketing department success rate in using digital networks	
Developing training programs to improve marketing staff's understanding of digital marketing	Digital skill / human force
Developing training programs to improve digital marketing staff's understanding of marketing processes	
Upgrading the marketing department based on digital competence	
Up-to-date and competent marketing department in digital marketing	
Recruiting experienced staff in digital marketing	
Job rotation opportunity between the two marketing and digital marketing departments	
Digital customer pressure to use digital marketing channels	Digital competitive/environmental
Technology market trends in digital marketing	
Effective management of digital sales investments by the digital marketing department	Digital governance
Use of strategic committees consisting of the CMO and the Chief Digital Marketing Officer	
Monitoring the effectiveness of digital marketing in achieving marketing goals	
Proper prioritization of technological projects in the digital marketing department	
Use of mechanisms to resolve conflicts between digital marketing and marketing staff	
Assessing the correspondence between digital marketing strategies with marketing objectives	
Effective risk management of digital marketing projects in achieving marketing goals	

Regional line managers	Digital marketing ecosystem
Software development factors (digital currency, etc.)	
Database and artificial intelligence specialists	
Customer experience specialists	
Customer contact managers	
Branding and advertisement department	
Advertisement companies and service providers	Internal factors
Digital Marketing Agencies	
Attention to customers and consumers	
Competing firms and shareholders	
Government policy-making institutions, institutions associated with paid activities in digital marketing	External factors
Social media infrastructure providers, Google, etc. Content regulators, World Bank	
Cooperation and team work	Digital factors
Acceptance of innovation and creativity	
Open culture and strengthening organizational culture and agility	
Increasing expansion of digital channels due to the widespread popularity of the Internet	
Business partners of fintechs, startups and other innovators	Open innovation
Delegating part of the value chain activities to other actors	
Collaborative culture and willingness to share knowledge with other organizations in the networking ecosystem	
Increasing investment in digital technologies	Preparation for digitalization
Developing customer relationships in digital marketing	
Developing infrastructure and security services	
Knowledge development	Digital marketing awareness and training
Training and skill development	
Promoting a culture of continuous learning in society	
Supportive leader	Digital marketing leadership style
Supporting digital transformation	
Digital rules and regulations	Digital marketing legal factors
Rules to preserve spiritual rights of products and services	
Rules to preserve privacy in digital space	
Cooperation in ecosystem to develop the product	Social-ecological factors
Attention to low-income customers	
Providing environmentally friendly digital and electronic services	
Connecting social networks to mobile applications	Digital technological factors
Integration of bank payments with non-banking applications	
Quick to respond	
Human resource management systems	Digital system
Information integration process	
Using fast and secure standards in electronic data exchange	

Axial coding is the second stage of analysis in grounded theory. Strauss and Corbin defined axial coding as a stage in which the researcher compares, combines, and integrates related categories and concepts obtained from the open coding stage and, with his/her intellectual and abstract creativity, sorts the entire meanings obtained from the research into several connecting points or main axes, taking into account their connections. In fact, axial coding means sorting, combining, and organizing a mass of data. Based on the cyclical and spiral relationship of the three types of coding, in this stage, exploring the phenomenon clarifies the theoretical articulations and leads us to selective coding. These theoretical articulations are the axial phenomenon, causal causes, intervening factors, contexts, interaction strategies, and finally the consequences. After the open coding of qualitative data from interviews, axial coding was done, and the paradigm, main categories, and subcategories were presented in the table below.

Table 2. Research paradigm, primary and secondary categories

Paradigm	Primary category	Secondary category
Causal conditions	Digital marketing strategy	Competitiveness and differentiation
		Digital marketing infrastructure
		Advertisement
		Goal-setting
		Quality of services
		Innovation
	Personalization	Customization
		Security and privacy
		Easy access
		Design and attraction
	Interactions	10-hour website back-up
		Valid warranty
Central phenomenon	Digital marketing mix	Possibility of online tracking of order
		comprehensibility
		Quick to respond
		Digital distribution of product
		price
		Market development
	Contextual conditions	Advanced technology
		Variety
		Facilitated communication
		Joint meeting of marketing and digital staff
		Strengthening the teamwork of the marketing and information technology departments
		Sharing sources of information
Contextual conditions	Cooperation	Social media technology
		Social media environment
		Human force
	Social media	Manager commitment and support
		Online staff education and promotion
		Experienced work force employment
	Human force	Software development
		Database and AI experts
		Networking ecosystem
	Digital marketing ecosystem	Fintech and startup business partners
		Service providers and advertising companies
		Digital marketing agencies
Intervening conditions	Internal factors	Competing agencies and stakeholders
		Policy making state organizations
		Institutes associated with paid activities in digital marketing
	External factors	Social media infrastructure providers, Google, etc. Content regulators, World Bank
		Rules and regulations
		Technology market trends in the digital market
	Competitive environment	Cooperation and team work
		Open culture and strengthening organizational culture and agility
		Attention to low-income customers
	Strategic factors	Providing eco-friendly electronic services
		Connecting social networks to mobile applications
		Integration of bank payments with non-banking applications
Outcomes	Loyalty	Customer satisfaction
		Customer loyalty
		Customer attraction and maintenance

In the grounded theory, data integration is of a great importance. In the research process, after collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data, it is time to present a model, draw conclusions, and summarize the findings. In the first step, by examining the current situation, the data obtained are classified into 15 main categories. According to professors and experts, all the indicators obtained from the qualitative analysis of 10 interviews, including 6 main categories and 50 subcategories, are used to develop a competitive digital marketing model in Mashhad leather industry. The figure below shows the competitive digital marketing model of the leather industry in Mashhad.

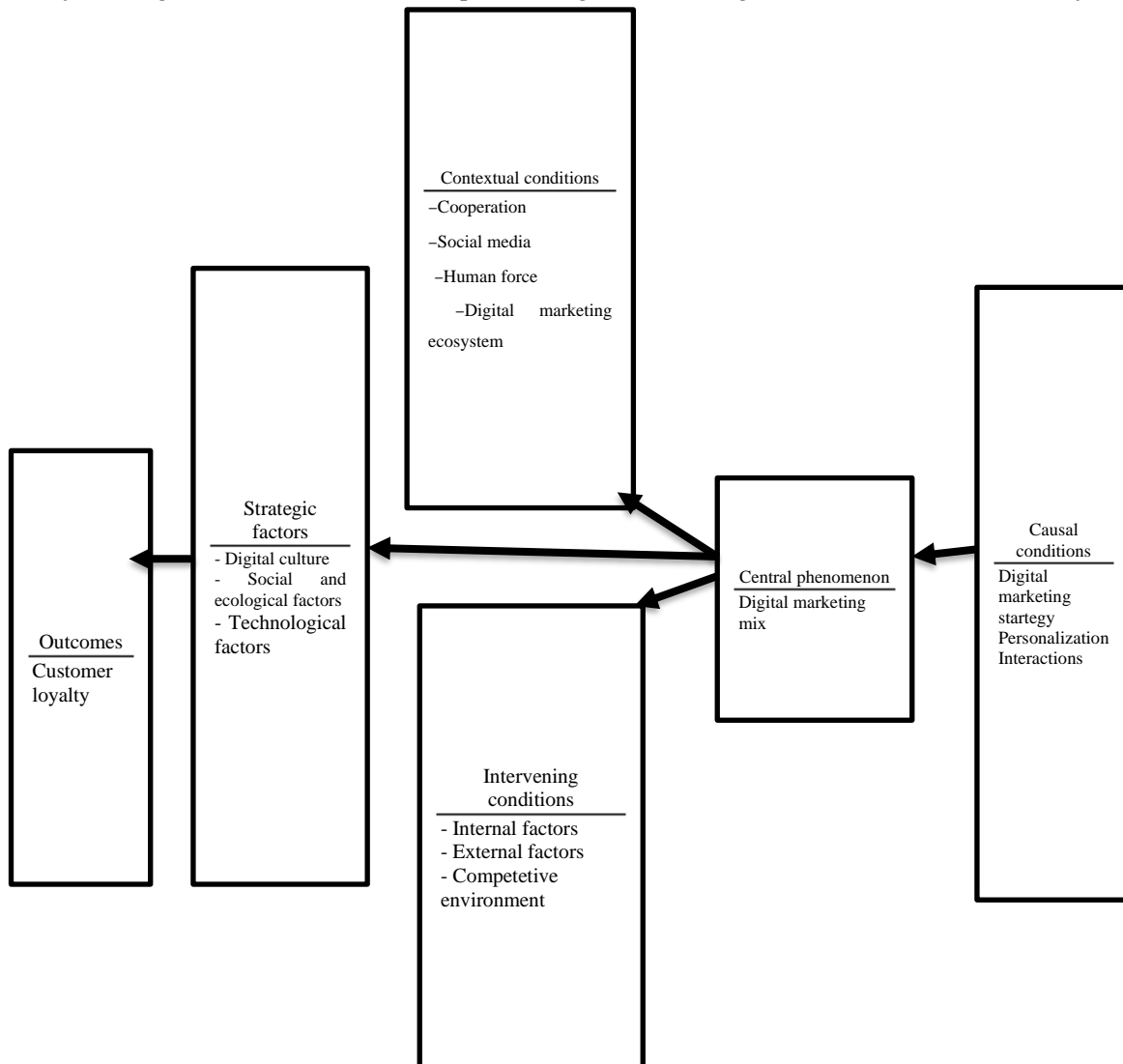


Figure 1. Digital Marketing Paradigmatic Model of Mashhad Leather Industry

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study sought to design a competitive digital marketing model for the Mashhad leather industry based on the grounded theory approach. The analysis of data from interviews with industry experts led to the identification of six main categories—causal conditions (digital marketing strategy, personalization, and interactions), contextual conditions (cooperation, social media, human force, and digital marketing ecosystem), central phenomenon (digital marketing mix), intervening conditions (internal factors, external factors, and competitive environment), strategic factors (digital culture, social-ecological and technological factors), and outcomes (customer satisfaction, loyalty, and retention). These findings provide a comprehensive framework

illustrating how leather enterprises can leverage digital marketing to achieve competitive advantage in an increasingly digitalized market.

The findings showed that digital marketing strategy, personalization, and interaction were key causal conditions underpinning competitiveness. This aligns with research indicating that strategic orientations play a critical role in linking adaptive marketing capabilities to organizational ambidexterity in digital services firms [1]. In particular, the ability to deploy targeted digital strategies allows firms to balance the exploitation of existing resources with the exploration of new market opportunities. Such ambidexterity is crucial for firms in traditional industries like leather, where the balance between craftsmanship heritage and technological modernization is delicate. Similarly, personalization emerged as a powerful element, which is consistent with evidence showing that personalization, supported by artificial intelligence and analytics, enhances customer experiences and drives loyalty [9, 10]. Interactions, including customer-centric communications and responsive online platforms, were also highlighted as drivers of customer engagement and trust, resonating with prior work showing that interactive digital touchpoints strengthen customer relationships and improve service satisfaction [13].

Moreover, the central phenomenon of the model—the digital marketing mix—underscored the importance of product digital distribution, pricing strategies, market development, technological advancement, and product diversity. These elements reflect the broader transition of marketing from traditional transactional modes to digitally enabled value creation. This finding supports earlier research suggesting that digitalization and resource reconfiguration enable marketing agility, thereby enhancing platform success and international market performance [4]. Similarly, digitalization of core business processes has been shown to enhance competitiveness and responsiveness to customer needs [5, 6]. In the context of the Mashhad leather industry, where global expansion is both a goal and a challenge, leveraging an optimized digital marketing mix can allow firms to reach geographically dispersed markets while maintaining cost efficiency and service quality.

The study also emphasized several contextual conditions, including cooperation between marketing and IT units, social media engagement, the development of human capital, and participation in the digital marketing ecosystem. These contextual elements are crucial for fostering the organizational agility and collaborative culture necessary for digital transformation. Prior studies have demonstrated that the integration of digital marketing into organizational routines is more successful when supported by strong internal collaboration and skills development [3]. Additionally, engagement in digital ecosystems, including partnerships with fintechs, start-ups, and technology providers, can enhance firms' innovation capacity and responsiveness to market trends [7]. Social media engagement was especially notable, reflecting its established role in shaping brand positioning and customer relationships [14]. By actively engaging consumers through social media platforms, firms can build brand equity, influence purchasing intentions, and encourage positive electronic word-of-mouth [15, 16].

Another critical finding concerns the intervening conditions of internal factors (e.g., digital marketing agencies, service providers, competing firms) and external factors (e.g., government regulations, content regulators, social media infrastructure providers), along with the competitive environment. These intervening conditions can either facilitate or constrain the implementation of digital marketing strategies. The need to consider regulatory and infrastructural factors is consistent with findings that data privacy and ethical compliance significantly influence digital marketing outcomes by building consumer trust [17]. Additionally, the competitive pressures within digital markets require firms to continuously innovate and differentiate their offerings, supporting earlier arguments that entrepreneurial orientation combined with digital marketing drives superior competitive performance [2, 8]. Such

environmental complexity necessitates a proactive governance approach and the strategic alignment of digital marketing initiatives with regulatory frameworks and market trends.

Strategic factors—digital culture, social-ecological orientation, and technological integration—also emerged as critical in enabling successful digital marketing. A supportive digital culture facilitates openness to innovation, collaborative knowledge sharing, and organizational agility, which are key for achieving sustainable competitive advantage [19, 20]. Furthermore, addressing social-ecological considerations such as inclusivity, accessibility, and environmental sustainability aligns with growing consumer preferences for ethical brands, which can reinforce trust and loyalty. Technological integration, including the adoption of artificial intelligence, blockchain, and data analytics tools, enhances the precision and efficiency of marketing campaigns [22, 23, 26]. These technological advancements also support financial inclusion and market reach, resonating with studies showing the mediating role of digital marketing in linking fintech innovations with consumer behavioral intentions [21].

The outcomes of the model—customer satisfaction, loyalty, and retention—underscore the ultimate goal of competitive digital marketing strategies. Customer-centricity has become the linchpin of successful marketing in the digital era, where empowered consumers expect personalized, seamless, and responsive experiences. Research has shown that customer engagement through content marketing and personalized communications enhances loyalty and advocacy [13, 25]. Furthermore, emotional resonance in digital interactions—such as affective content in reviews—has been found to shape consumer perceptions and decision-making, reinforcing the significance of customer experience management in competitive contexts [16]. In the Mashhad leather industry, where product differentiation is challenging, fostering strong customer relationships through digital platforms could provide a sustainable source of competitive advantage.

Collectively, these findings align with and extend the broader literature on digital marketing and competitive advantage. They illustrate that achieving competitiveness in the Mashhad leather industry requires an integrated approach that combines strategic planning, technological adoption, cultural transformation, and customer-centric innovation. This echoes evidence that digital transformation efforts succeed when they are strategically aligned with organizational goals and supported by capable leadership and marketing structures [11, 12]. Moreover, the study supports the argument that digital marketing not only drives operational performance but also enables firms to build resilient and adaptive organizations capable of thriving amid market turbulence [18, 24].

Despite its contributions, the present study is not without limitations. First, the study employed a qualitative design using grounded theory with data collected from a limited sample of ten experts and managers in the Mashhad leather industry. While this approach allowed for in-depth exploration of the phenomenon, the small and localized sample may limit the generalizability of the findings to other industries or regions. Second, the study relied on self-reported data from interviews, which may be influenced by personal biases or selective recall among participants. Third, the rapidly evolving nature of digital technologies and marketing platforms means that the identified model may require continual updating to remain relevant. Technological shifts, regulatory changes, and shifts in consumer behavior could alter the effectiveness of the proposed strategies over time. Lastly, the study did not incorporate quantitative validation of the model, leaving open questions about the relative weight or statistical significance of each identified component in influencing competitive outcomes.

Future research should aim to address these limitations by employing mixed-methods or quantitative approaches to test and validate the proposed model on a larger and more diverse sample of firms across different industries. Longitudinal studies would also be valuable to examine how the implementation of digital marketing strategies affects competitiveness and performance over time, particularly in fast-changing markets. Comparative

cross-national studies could explore cultural and regulatory variations that influence digital marketing effectiveness, thereby providing more generalizable insights. Furthermore, future studies could investigate the role of emerging technologies—such as generative AI, virtual reality, and blockchain—in enhancing digital marketing capabilities, and assess how these technologies can be tailored to traditional manufacturing sectors like leather. Research could also explore the behavioral dimensions of digital marketing adoption among managers and employees, including their digital literacy, attitudes, and resistance to change, which may moderate the success of digital transformation initiatives.

Practically, the findings suggest that managers in the Mashhad leather industry should adopt an integrated digital marketing approach that combines strategic planning, technological investment, and customer-centric innovation. Building cross-functional collaboration between marketing and IT departments is crucial for ensuring seamless implementation of digital initiatives. Managers should also invest in developing employees' digital competencies through continuous training and capacity-building programs to foster a culture of innovation and adaptability. Leveraging social media and content marketing to engage customers emotionally and enhance brand storytelling can help differentiate products in a competitive market. Firms should prioritize data privacy, ethical standards, and user trust to strengthen customer relationships and mitigate risks. Finally, participation in digital ecosystems and partnerships with technology providers, fintech firms, and start-ups can accelerate innovation and expand market reach, positioning Mashhad leather firms for sustainable growth in the digital era.

Authors' Contributions

Authors equally contributed to this article.

Ethical Considerations

All procedures performed in this study were under the ethical standards.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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