

Trends of Marketing Practices in Public Sector Fertilizers Companies

Meenu^a, S.K. Rastogi^{b*}

^aDepartment of Commerce, M.J.P. Rohilkhand University, Bareilly (U.P.) India

^bDepartment of Commerce, Hindu College, Moradabad 244001 (UP) India

Email Id: mrsanjayrastogi@gmail.com

Abstract

The agriculture presents a close combination of business and a way of life. The farmer as an entrepreneur is the organizer and operator of labor, land and capital. In order to achieve the basic aim of farming, he intends to use the fertilizer, a substance to increase the productivity and hence to increase the profits. There are many companies producing the fertilizer in public and private sector. In this research paper, the marketing practices used by the Hindalco Industries Ltd, New Delhi and National Fertilizers Ltd. Noida (U.P) have been reviewed. This study also reveals the role of distributors to support the public companies in achieving their targets. Moreover, through the study, an attempt is made to suggest some strategic measures that can be used by the public companies to foster their growth.

Keywords: Fertilizer, Agriculture, Marketing Practices, Public Sector Fertilizers Companies.

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1. INTRODUCTION

India is amongst one of the fastest growing economy. The population of India is 1.3 billion. 60% of the population of India depends on agriculture to eke out their livelihood. As per the CSO data, the overall growth rate of GDP is 7.6% in 2015-16. This Five year high growth rate is mainly contributed by good performance of manufacturing and farm sector. According to the concept of (Gross Value Added) GVA, the farm sector has shown a growth rate at 1.2% in 2015-16 as against contraction of 0.2% in 2014-15. India has achieved this growth with the use of appropriate fertilizers in the food production.

Besides, there are many challenges ahead of the growth of economy. Firstly, the burgeoning populations, which will lead to more consumption of foodgrains, henceforth, more demand of the same, which needs adequate use of fertilizers by the farmers. Secondly, the standard of living has increased as compared to the past years, which again lead to increased consumption patterns and the demand. All these predictions led to the growth of Marketing of fertilizers.

Table 1: Annual Household Demand of Commodities

Commodity	Annual household demand (million metric tonnes)				
	1991	1995	2000	2010	2020
Foodgrains	168.3	185.1	208.6	266.4	343.0
Milk	48.8	62.0	83.8	153.1	271.0
Edible Oil	4.3	5.1	6.3	9.4	13.0
Vegetables	56.0	65.7	80.0	117.2	168.0
Fruits	12.5	16.1	22.2	42.9	81.0
Meat, fish & eggs	3.4	4.4	6.2	12.7	27.0
Sugar	9.6	10.9	12.8	17.3	22.0

(Source: A P J Abdul Kalam, Y S Rajan, INDIA 2020 A Vision for the New Millennium, published in Penguin Books 2002, pg-63)

Vice-president M Venkaiah Naidu had convinced for strengthening agriculture by adopting the long-term structural changes by saying that the farming is the basic culture which provide the livelihood to nearly 60 percent of the population.

This issue of marketing of fertilizers by the private and public companies has shown a tremendous change in the trend of higher education. The aforesaid table proves the same showing a drastic upward shift in the demand of different commodities.

Fertilizer – An important component

“Just as a car cannot run on flat tyre, a crop also cannot give high yields if three tyres (NPK) are in good shape, but the fourth (s), is flat. Therefore, apply four (NPKs), grow more.”

In agriculture, organic matter is considered the backbone of cultivated soil. Fertilizers are plants food, not poisonous chemicals. It has been in use in the world for about 150 years. In India its use is more that 100 years old.

Fertilizer being a substance if it is applied to soil which improves its fertility. It is a supplement to the nutrition that plant gets from nature. This expression includes inorganic and organic and organic substances of any type. However, mineral and chemical products are referred to as fertilizers. Fertilizers can be classified on the basis of nutrients.

- Primary nutrients are nitrogen (N), Phosphorous (P) and Potassium (K).
- Secondary nutrients are calcium (Ca), Magnesium (Mg), Sodium (Na) and Sulphur (S).
- Micronutrients are iron, Zinc, Boron, Copper and Chlorine etc.

The government of India declared 'fertilizer' whether inorganic or mixed to be an essential commodity under the Essential Commodities Act, 1955 under sub clause (ix) of clause (a) of section 2. The government of India issued the fertilizer (control) order 1957, under section 3 of the essential commodities Act, 1955. It came into force from 15.5.1957. It provides inter alia, for, control of prices of Fertilizers; registration of dealers, registration of fertilizer mixtures; restrictions on manufacture, storage and sale of fertilizer, disposal of sub-standard fertilizers.

Fertilizer (control) order 1957 as a "Special Order" in order to have check on black-marketing and adulteration of fertilizers.

On 25.4.1973, the Government issued Fertilizer (Movement Control) order 1973, when it felt it was necessary and expedient to do so for making equitable distribution of fertilizer in the state of India. This order prohibits export of fertilizer from any State except by specified organizations and authorized agencies which include manufacturers, The Food Corporation of India, The Central Warehousing Corporation, State Warehousing Corporations and Indian Potash Limited.

Union Chemicals and Fertilizers Minister Ram Vilas Paswan said, "We will continue the policy of supplying fertilizers to farmers at subsidized rates. If the USA and Europe can subsidized their agriculture, why should we not offer subsidy on fertilizer. He also affirmed supplying subsidized fertilizer to the farmers, currently costing about 12,500 crores annually to central government."

Commerce and Industry Minister Suresh Prabhu has emphasized on the innovation in the fertilizer area. He suggested that innovation is of vital importance to reduce the wastage, increase the production and to cut the use of fertilizer to enhance the soil fertility.

Takashi Yamano and Ayumi Arai has compared the use of inorganic fertilizer in three East African countries as they used several policies in fertilizer i.e. Kenya, Ethiopia and Uganda. The use of fertilizer is market-driven in Kenya, whereas in Ethiopia it is policy-driven. It is also clear from the author's view that Kenya the one of the African countries that is using fertilizer with the substantial increase as compared to past years. (**Takashi Yamano and Ayumi Arai, 2010**)

The production and the productivity can be increased by the use of chemical fertilizer. The chemical fertilizer and high quality seeds caused a tremendous increase in the production of fertilizer (**Badrinathan, 1978**). Fertilizer and the irrigation play an important role in the agriculture productivity. The optimum use of fertilizer has pushed up the production of wheat, cotton and paddy (**Zha S.K. Raheja, 1990**).

Centre has approved the creation of a common electronic platform which will allow farmers and traders to sell their produce to buyers anywhere in the country. Rs. 200 crore has been allocated over a period of 3 years for the scheme to set up an online national agriculture market by integrating 585 wholesale mandis across India. The move aims at providing farmers free market access to realize better price. Currently, Agriculture Produce Marketing Committee (APMC) acts in different states and permit the first sale of crops after harvesting by farmers only in regulated market. Multiple licences are required at present to trade in different mandis within the same state.

Fertilizer Marketing: Fertilizer marketing is the marketing of the different fertilizers produced by a fertilizer company. In the marketing of fertilizer, the marketer is supposed to know the needs of farmers in relations to fertilizer their availability, quality, packaging etc. The marketer has to analyze the market segments with a view to know the market potential in different geographical market. Product formulation and product quality have to be compatible with the 'price sensitiveness'. Advertising strategies can be made more effective by examining the media.

"Agricultural marketing in a broader sense is concerned with the marketing of farm products produced by farmers and of farm inputs required by them in the production of these farm products. Thus, the subject of agricultural marketing includes product marketing as well as input marketing."

Marketing channels are routes through which agricultural products move from producers to consumers. A marketing channel may be defined as "the chain of intermediaries through whom the various food grains pass from producers to consumers constitutes their marketing channel as alternative routes of product flows from producers to consumers.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Review of literature is an in-depth investigation of the previous work done on a topic. It provides an insight to the topic of similar concern. Considerable literatures are available on fertilizer marketing in India and overall. Mentioned below are some of the literatures available in context to the present study.

Awasthi (1997) in his seminar paper outlined the role of IFFCO in fertilizer scenario of the country. The author traced on the relationship between IFFCO and farmers of the country. The marketing setup of the company was found to be significant to meet the sales performance. IFFCO being a cooperative sector made a valuable contribution to the fertilizer marketing in India to enhance the productivity in agricultural output.

Razzak et al. (2004) in their article outlined use the recommended fertilizer, in recommended dose and at recommended time essential for getting maximum advantages, determined difficulty faced by farmers in Pakistan in the procurement of fertilizer. The author suggested policy measures to enhance the productivity in the farm land through farmer's education, price reduction, improved storage and transportation facilities, improved administrative facilities etc.

Singh (2013) in his research paper highlighted the role of Chemical fertilizers in making the country self-reliant in food grain production. Attempts have been made to study issues like demand and supply position, consumption trends, growth factor of fertilizer in India. The author mentioned that there are various determinants like price factor and non price factor (better seeds, irrigation, and credit) which influence the demand of fertilizers. The study revealed that non-price factor (better seed, irrigation, credit) play more important role in increasing demand of fertilizers as compared to price factor.

Patel (2014) in his research article discussed that chemical fertilizers have played an important role in making the country self reliant in food grain production. The fertilizer sector is adorned with many opportunities, problems and challenges. The entire framework has been discussed in the lights of porter's five forces affecting market competition. This is a framework for industrial analysis, determines the competitive intensity and attractiveness of market.

Soni and Singh (2013) in their research paper discussed about cooperative society for efficient distribution of fertilizer, to ensure that the right products are available to the farmer at the right time and at the optimum price, consistent with the provision of a reliable service. Authors analyzed key performance of Chhattisgarh MARKFED. MARKFED is now successfully handling and distributing agricultural fertilizer and pesticides. They function as a bridge between producers and consumer farmers. It was also found that Shortage of Funds, Insufficient warehouses, Lack of Transport Facilities, Malpractices, Untrained Personnel, Lack of Coordination and Supervision, Poor Management are some problem across efficient fertilizer marketing. The paper ends with effective suggestions to overcome these problems.

Roy in his article stressed the importance of market research in fertilizer Industry. Market research helps to understand fertilizer market, need of farmers, demand and supply of fertilizer, problem and opportunity of fertilizer market, which help to make appropriate marketing strategy and actions to make growth of fertilizer industries as well agriculture development.

Gupta found that fertiliser products are distributed to village level cooperative society by manufacturer through direct supply system and the supply through federation system. Village level society get direct supply from manufacturer in U.P., Bihar and Rajasthan state but get supply through federation only in Gujarat, M.P., W.B., Tamil Nadu and H.P. Supply both through federations as well as direct supply to the societies in the states of Punjab, Haryana, Maharashtra, Orissa, A.P., Karnataka and Kerala. In direct supply system village level society get higher margin due to elimination of mediator. The author made a comparative study of both systems (direct supply system and supply through federation system) for effectiveness, financial health, efficiency of the village level cooperative fertiliser distribution system.

Rao (2011) in his article discussed policy reforms (RPS 1970-1990, reform initiatives 1992-2003, NPS regime and FMS 2003-2009, nutrient based subsidy scheme 2010) objectives and its impact on fertiliser marketing in India. He identified various challenges and opportunities of fertiliser marketing. He emphasised on identifying and understanding consumer behaviour to success in competitive market.

Kaleem and Dibaba (2012) identified that the marketing system has to carry out the function of storage, transportation and sales to the farmers spread throughout the country. They discussed the need of information technology in fertiliser marketing. Information technology can play an important role in improving the efficiency and effectiveness of marketing personnel. Future applications of information technology in fertilizer marketing can bring a valuable change in the entire marketing system.

Kavitha (2010) in her research thesis made comparative analysis of fertiliser marketing of semi-arid zone and a delta zone of Tamil Naidu. Study identified the major problems, issues and hindrance of farmers and dealers of both areas. Study revealed that farmers were not aware about authorised dealers of fertiliser brand in their area which is one of the reasons to get fertiliser products in higher price. Most of the farmers belonging from delta zone were purchasing fertiliser from cooperatives but the same was not done for semi-arid zones. The author focused to develop an efficient marketing mix model to strengthen the Fertilizer Marketing of a semi-arid zone and delta zone of Tamil Nadu.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- a. To describe the marketing practices used by public companies.
- b. Role of dealers and sub dealers.
- c. To suggest strategic measures to make the marketing of fertilizer’s more effective of the firms selected for study.

4. HYPOTHESIS OF THE STUDY

- H₁ There is no role of dealers and sub dealers in the marketing practices used by public sector fertilizers companies.
- H₂ There is no correlation between Brand and Sales.

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Sampling Design

Sampling Technique- Convenience Sampling

Sample Size- two fertilizer companies: Hindalco Industries Ltd, New Delhi, National Fertilizers Ltd, Noida (U.P) and 15 distributors who are engaged in distributing the fertilizer of these companies.

Source of data- The study is essentially based on primary data collected via survey. The tool used for collecting the data is a structured questionnaire consisting of 14 questions. The secondary data is also used for the successful completion of project.

6. DATA ANALYSIS

Marketing Practices used by Public Companies

6.1 Use of Brand Name

The brand is a name, symbol or logo used by a producing company to differentiate its product from the other producers. The satisfaction towards a particular brand makes the customer loyal. The study reveals that different marketing practices are being used by the company. The public companies choose their brand name based on different selection criterion. The following table shows the reason for selecting a particular brand name with the respective weights assigned to the reasons.

Table 2: Reasons for selecting a particular Brand Name

Reasons for Selection of a particular Brand Name	Public Sector
	WS
Easy to Pronounce	03
Easy to Remember	04
Signifies Uniqueness	02
Companies name becomes more familiar	01
Total	10

Source: Primary Data

WS: Weighted Scores

The weights to ranks have been assigned in the following manner:-

Ranks	Weights
I	04
II	03
III	02
IV	01



The table 2 shows the reason behind selecting a particular brand. In the study the weights are used to indicate the reason for their priorities. It is very much clear from the table that the least weight is scored by the name of company, that has its own goodwill in the market and in order to take the advantage of the name and fame of the company, it is choosing the name of the brand same as the name of the company. While the highest weight is gained by the reason that it is easy to remember the particular name.

6.2 Promotional Tool

Promotion Mix is the combination of different promotional tools that are used by the manufacturers to inform the prospective customers about a product and persuading them to buy it. There are four major tools, or elements of promotion mix which are:

(i) Advertising, (ii) Personal Selling, (iii) Sales Promotion, and (iv) Publicity. These tools are used in different combinations to achieve the goals of promotion. Various public companies are using different promotional tool to increase their sales in the fertilizer market. Public sector companies are using the advertising, sales promotion, personal selling as their main promotional tools. However, these companies are also using publicity and good public relation in their promotion mix.

Table 3: Promotion Mix in Fertilizer Companies

Promotion Mix Variables	Public Sector
Advertising	✓
Sales Promotion	✓
Personal Selling	✓
Publicity	✓
Public Relations	✓

Source: Survey Data

6.3 Distribution of Fertilizer

The Marketing channels for fertilizers are:

1. Fertilizer Marketing through Private Trade.
2. Fertilizer Marketing through the Cooperative System.
3. Fertilizer Marketing through Agro Industries Corporation.
4. Fertilizer Marketing through Service Centres.

The distribution and marketing of fertilizer is controlled according to the prescribed rules and regulations of Central Government. There are certain principles that should be followed. For example:

1. To supply the required fertilizer among the farmers at a reasonable price in different parts of the country.
2. To enhance the balanced use of the fertilizers.
3. To develop the measures for the appropriate distribution of fertilizers.
4. To distribute the fertilizer in all the places of our country according to Essential Commodities Act of the government.

India has been divided into four regions for the benefit of distribution of fertilizers as follows:

Table 4: Distribution of Fertilizers Zones

Regions	State or Organizations Included
(i) Eastern Region	Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Bihar, Meghalaya, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland, Orissa, Sikkim, Tripura, West Bengal, Tea Board
(ii) Western Region	Dadra and Nagar Haveli, Gujarat, Goa, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan.
(iii) Northern Region	Chandigarh, Delhi, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh
(iv) Southern Region	Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Pondicheri, Tamil Nadu, Tea Board, Coffee Board, Planters Association (South India)

(Source: Das. P.C., (2008) *Manure and Fertilizers*, Kalyani Publishers p-219)

The marketing channel used for distribution by the public companies is the distributor. Public companies select their distributors keeping in mind different factors.

6.4 Selection of Distributors

The companies have different distributors around the state. The distributors extend their help to the companies to spread awareness among the farmers regarding the fertilizers and hence help to increase the sales. The public companies use different criterion to select their distributor. The factors are trust and knowledge, the financial position of the distributor, the goodwill of the dealer in the market, the experience of the distributor in the field of selling the fertilizer, the sales potentials, present storage capacity and the education of the dealer. The factors are shown in the following table with the assigned weight:

Table 5: Companies as per factors affecting in Selection of Distributors

Factors	Public Sector
	WS
Trust and Knowledge	01
Financial Position	05
Dealer's Reputation	06
Experience in the line	03
Sales Potentials	02
Storage facility and Dealer's Education	04

Source: Primary Data

The table 5 clearly states that the dealer's reputation is the most important factor that a public company considers while selecting a distributor. Whereas, the trust and knowledge of the distributor seems to be the least important is the selection criterion.

7. ROLE OF DEALERS AND SUB DEALERS

The middlemen help the companies in different ways likewise providing the credit facilities and discount. The following tables show the contribution of the dealers by offering various such types of facilities.

Classification of Distributors on the basis of various discounts offered to farmers:

Table 5(a) indicates that 67 percent of the sample respondents offer quantity discount to the farmers. The amount of discount ranges between Rs. 0.50 to 1 per bag whereas 33 percent of the sample respondents offer quantity discounts ranging between Rs. 2 to 3.

Table 5 (a): Quantity Discount

Amount of Discount	Number of Distributors	Percentage of Distributors
Rs. 0.50-1	4	67
Rs. 1-2	--	--
Rs. 2-3	2	33
Rs. 3-4	--	--
Total	6	100

Source: Primary Data

The table shows that only 40% (6 out of 15) of the total respondents offer quantity discount.

Table 5 (b): Cash Discount

Amount of Discount	Number of Distributors	Percentage of Distributors
Rs. 0.50-1	2	67
Rs. 1-2	--	--
Rs. 2-3	1	33
Rs. 3-4	--	--
Total	3	100

Source: Primary Data

Table 5(b) reveals that (3 out of 15) i.e. only 20 percent of the total respondents offer cash discount to the farmers. Out of which, 67 percent offer discount ranging between Rs. 0.50 to 1. Whereas 33 percent of the respondents offer discount ranging between Rs. 2 to 3.

Table 5 (c) Off Season Discount

Amount of Discount per bag	Number of Distributors	Percentage of Distributors
Rs. 0.50-1	--	--
Rs. 1-2	2	67
Rs. 2-3	1	33
Rs. 3-4	--	--
Total	3	100

Source: Primary Data

Table 5(c) shows that 3 out of 15 i.e. only 20% of the total respondents offer off-season discount. Out of which 67 percent of sample respondents offer discount ranging between Rs. 1 to Rs. 2. Whereas, 33 percent of the sample respondents offer discount ranging between Rs. 2 to 3.

8. STRATEGIC MEASURES TO BE USED BY THE FERTILIZER COMPANIES

1. The registration for fertilizer producer for producing the fertilizer is must. It should be renewed on time.
2. The fertilizer producer should produce the particular grade as mentioned in the registration.
3. The quality of the fertilizer should be given due importance.

4. The packing of the fertilizer product should be done as per the directions of the government. The fertilizers that are hygroscopic in nature should be packed in the gunny bag having lining with pitch or ploythene.
5. The particular of the fertilizer should be mentioned on the container. For example, the name of the producer, trade mark, name of the fertilizer, Nutrient percentage, Gross and Net weight in Kilogram etc.
6. No deceptive word anywhere on the label of fertilizer can be used.
7. Pricing of the product should be reasonable keeping in mind the pocket size of the farmers.
8. The storage of the fertilizer is very vital. The fertilizers should be stored in a cool, dry and damp proof godown. The rain water must not get entered in the godown and there should be proper ventilation for regulating for exit of the gases from the store. The ventilators should be sealed in rainy season.
9. The fertilizers that are fire hazardous such as Ammonium Sulphate must be handled very carefully.
10. The balanced use of the fertilizer should be encouraged.
11. The distribution of fertilizer should be done according to the Essential Commodities Act of the Government.
12. The promotional activities should be undertaken in such a way that the fertilizer dealers and farmers can have access to these activities.

9. CONCLUSION

This study reveals that both the public companies have strong distribution channel and have maintained a record in promoting the fertilizer use for the farmers and private dealer network is increasingly rapidly. The study has two key conclusions. Firstly, It is observed during the study that the brand name plays a crucial role the marketing of a product. Both the companies, therefore, generally adopt and promote the brand names produced by them. Product differentiation is also considered as one of the major purpose of popular branding. It is observed during the study that many times they use the brand and then become brand loyal. Hence, it can be said that there is strong correlation between the brand and sale.

Secondly, it is found that distributors are taking active participation to increase the sales of fertilizer by providing quantity discount, cash discount etc. The marketing practices are chosen by the company and these practices are used by the distributors. Hence, there is no role of dealers and sub dealers in deciding the marketing practices. On the other hand, they have a great role in the implementation of these practices. Therefore, about the distribution channels adopted by the sample companies, it has been noticed that the distributors are giving their best to increase the sales by providing different discounts to the farmers. .

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