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## Impact of Marketing Communication Strategies on Consumers' Acceptance and Brand Equity in Malaysian Fertilizer Industry

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### ABSTRACT

The agriculture sector has a profound effect on Malaysian people, economy and environment. Studies show that communication plays an important role in agricultural industry, helping agriculture businesses such as fertilizer manufacturers/suppliers to grow and prosper, builds relationships, strengthens the effectiveness of organization and allows farmers to learn about one another. Knowledge on agronomic factors is also one of the important factors for the farmers in increasing productivity. Farmers can be educated and valuable information can easily be transferred through accurate communication channels and it is important to educate farmers with up-to-date and relevant information. The fertilizer industry, on the other hand, is faced with numerous challenges with regard to communication. This conceptual paper is intended to look into the marketing communication strategies employed by the fertilizer industry in Malaysia in order to communicate with the farmers. This study also enhances the understanding on the relationship of marketing communication strategies on consumers' acceptance and brand equity. Several hypotheses are developed and recommendations for future studies are proposed.

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## INTRODUCTION

Agricultural sector is becoming knowledge intensive (Babu, Glendenning, & Asenso-okyere, 2011). Up to date knowledge helps farmers to be efficient and effective in managing farms and facilitate the adoption of latest technology in order to increase yields and improve farmers' livelihood. Such knowledge is typically communicated through extension services that help rural people to gain new knowledge, learn new skills, and adopt new attitudes. Good communication is the essence of good extension services (Leagan, 1963). However, the information such as new modern agronomic techniques to increase yields often fails to reach small scale farmers. This suggests that some information has not been communicated effectively through the extension services.

Recent developments in agriculture have expanded the role of extension services to include agro dealers, input suppliers and produce buyers as agents. This inclusion represents the growing importance of agricultural value chains (Syngenta Foundation, 2010). Freeman and Kaguongo (2003) as cited in Krausova and Banul (2010) there is an emerging need for the private sector-led development of agricultural input market. However these agents from different organizations often work in parallel in a particular area, without coordinating their efforts (Zhou, 2010). Thus, the private-led development in input market is needed in ensuring that knowledge and information are communicated to the farmers. This study will investigate how input suppliers (the fertilizer industry) communicate to the farmers.

In the case of fertilizer industry, communication is essential to the organizations in distribution network, building the rapport with consumers and to ensure sustainability of the organizations themselves. Communication by the fertilizer industry is important to create awareness of the role of fertilizers in food production. Moreover, effective communication skills are important in generating consumers' confidence.

Moorman *et al.* (1994) highlights that timely communication boosts trust by helping to resolve disputes and reconcile expectations and perceptions. Effective communication requires effective strategy - a coherent plan of action. These communication activities are important for proper functioning of the organization. By

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